Leaking letters: The case of Harriot’s *report* and six letters of englishmen
Mohammed Ghazi Alghamdi

Abstract: This paper attempts a new historicist reading that scrutinizes the nature of Thomas Harriot’s “A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia” by juxtaposing it with six letters written after the publication of Harriot’s Report in 1588. To step outside Harriot’s text as a travel narrative, this paper examines how his report, which may have contributed to the migration of the English to New England, and how six personal letters ranging from 1623 to 1639—three by Richard Frethorne, one by John Baldwin, another by George Calvert, and the last one by an anonymous writer—challenge Harriot’s account as imaginary and redefine the migration journeys to New England. The findings of this paper may be familiar to scholars of transatlantic literature; however, its significance lies in its methodology of comparing Harriot’s report to six personal letters, thus asserting the prominence of reading letters against travel narratives. In doing so, personal letters, as a genre, can be a valuable apparatus to study the nexus between any text (literary fore-ground and history (political/social background)—personal letters being the historical accounts that correspond to other texts.

Subjects: American & Canadian Literature; British Literature; 17th Century Literature; Literary/Critical Theory; Literary Genres

Keywords: Thomas Harriot; travel narratives; new historicism; transatlantic literature

1. Introduction
What leaks when personal letters are published? What do we gain from comparing travel narratives such as that of Thomas Harriot’s “A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia” (2007), which portrays a utopian view of New England, to letters that were written during the seventeenth century, which mainly discuss personal matters? As an explorer, scientist, and writer, Thomas Harriot (1560? –1621) is the first English traveler to publish a document about the New World. Therefore, Harriot is an expert traveler who has already been to New England before writing his report, which perhaps is one of the document many English people have read or heard of before migrating to Virginia. Timothy Sweet (1999) states:

Beginning in the 1570s, promotional writers grafted [commodity] emergent mercantilist ideology onto the existing agrarian theory of colonization … in order to articulate, in a new literary genre, a new practice that would account for the import of ‘silks, wine, and spice’ that was troubling England’s economy. Their first and most obvious step was to identify

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Mohammed Ghazi Alghamdi is an assistant professor of Comparative Literature at King Saud University and the author of *Writers and Nations: The Case of American and Saudi Literatures* (2021). He obtained his M.A. in English from Creighton University and his Ph.D in English from Middle Tennessee State University.
specific new sources of inputs, a point of no concern to More's Utopians … Colonial promoters were reluctant to give up their goal of replicating Old World commodity environments, even as they gained more experience of America. Thomas Harriot's A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia (Hariot & Royster, 2007) is a case in point. Having spent some time in Virginia, Hariot could attend more closely than the Hakluyts to the specificity of the environment. (403-404)

Consequently, this paper attempts a new historicist reading that scrutinizes the nature of Thomas Harriot’s “A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia” by juxtaposing it with six letters written after the publication of Harriot’s Report in 2007. To step outside Harriot’s text as a travel narrative, this paper examines how his report, which may have contributed to the migration of the English to New England, and how six personal letters ranging from 1623 to 1639—three by Richard Frethorne, one by John Baldwin, another by George Calvert, and the last one by an anonymous writer—challenge Harriot’s account as imaginary and redefine the migration journeys to New England. The findings of this paper may be familiar to scholars of transatlantic literature; however, its significance lies in its methodology of comparing Harriot’s report to six personal letters, thus asserting the prominence of reading letters against travel narratives. In doing so, personal letters, as a genre, can be a valuable apparatus to study the nexus between any text (literary foreground) and history (political/social background)—personal letters being the historical accounts that correspond to other texts.

In reference to how new historicism encourages critics to examine texts that correspond with other texts, Stephen Greenblatt argues in his “Towards a Poetics of Culture,” that in order to situate texts within their historical backgrounds, we must find a way to measure the relationship between art and society. In doing so, Greenblatt (1987) asserts how “the work of art is not itself a pure flame that lies at the source of our speculations” but rather

the product of a set of manipulations, some of them our own (most striking in the case of works that were not originally conceived as ‘art’ at all but rather as something else—votive objects, propaganda, prayer, and so on), many others undertaken in the construction of the original work. That is, the work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society. (13)

In this paper, art is represented by the travel narrative of Hariot and society is represented by the six personal letters of four Englishmen. These letters are part of the practices of the society that not only demarcate a reading outside a text, but also allow us access to the “communally shared repertoire of conventions,” thus situating Hariot’s travel narrative within its historical and social contexts.

2. The literary foreground and the political background of Harriot’s report
According to Greenblatt’s introduction to The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance, New Historicism “challenges the assumptions that guarantee a secure distinction between ‘literary background’ and ‘political background’ or, more generally, between artistic production and other kinds of social production” (1445). The other kinds of social production, although not specified by Greenblatt, I argue, should include personal letters. These letters, which will be read against Harriot’s Report in the second part of this paper, redefine the concept of migration to New England. Nonetheless, the accounts of the political background of Harriot’s travel narrative will be used here to reveal its literary foreground, thus asserting Harriot’s writings as an interlocked “complex network of institutions, practices, and beliefs” (1445).

Sabine Schülting argues that Harriot’s association with Raleigh’s political motives “has a decisive function for [his] travelogue. Having neither found the legendary El Dorado nor explored more than the fringes of Guyana, and considering that he had offended the Queen when he had secretly married one of the Queen’s chamber women, Raleigh is under pressure to emphasize the success
of his voyage” (1). This pressure of impression is also recognized in the writing of his employee Harriot; however, unlike Raleigh, Harriot was not under the burden of the Queen but of his employer—Raleigh—to keep his position as a voyager. Knowing this political context about Harriot, readers may begin to speculate about the content of Harriot’s Report and his absolute authorship.

Donald Pease (1995) begins his essay “Author” by asking a series of prevailing questions about the nature of authority; “Is an individual self-determined or determined by material and historical circumstances? Is the human self-infinite or finite? . . . What is the basis for human freedom? Can any artist claim absolute originality?” (105). The worth of writing, and equally significant, the role of the writer in creating a piece of art is directly related to the answers to these questions. If, as Pease claims, an author is simply a product of a political, economic, social, and intellectual context, then regardless of its sophistication, writings such as Harriot’s Report are only an expression of these fundamental influences. Therefore, keeping this in mind, it is known that Thomas Harriot’s Report serves a mercantile and political purpose rather than a true report of New England—an implication that is not original to transatlantic and postcolonial critics. Yet, it is significant to examine Harriot’s promotional narrative before juxtaposing it with personal letters.

Harriot’s Report is divided into three parts expounding upon the advantages of migrating to Virginia, which “will rise as great profit in time to the Virginians, as thereof doeth now to the Persians, Turkes, Italians and Spaniards” (50). In his report on life in Virginia, Harriot claims that it is an opportunity for the English to travel to the New World and immerse in a better environment than that of other nations. Harriot forefones wealth as the prominent theme by extolling the abundance of trees, food, and housing. To highlight how Harriot’s Report functions as a colonial promotion, each division of Harriot’s “Marchantable Commodities” is examined below to illuminate its publicizing significance of Virginia for the English before stepping outside the text and reading how personal letters depict a different image of New England.

The first “Marchantable Commodities” division in Harriot’s narrative deals with trees in Virginia as a source of profit, health, shelter, food, and clothes. The “silk of grass” growing in Virginia is as what “growth in Persia” and “if it be planted and ordered as in Persia, it cannot in reason be otherwise, but that there will rise in short time great profite to the dealers therein; seeing there is so great use and vent thereof as well in our country as elsewhere” (50). Harriot compares the growth of flax silk in Virginia to the flax growing in Persia for two reasons: first, many English traveling to Islamic countries at that time became converts in order to have a better life than that of England. Nabil Matar states that “Christians, seeking to improve their fortunes or end their enslavement, converted to Islam and joined Muslim society and enterprise” (9). The second reason is that Islamic countries were rich because of the silk trade between the East and the West. Therefore, this comparison divulges that Virginia is also rich, as Matar (1999) asserts; “the goal of going to America was to grow rich by trade or pillage, and then return home. In this respect, as Britons went to North America in quest for opportunity and fast wealth, so did they see North Africa. In fact, the attraction in North Africa was stronger than that of North America . . . . In North Africa there was the certainty of gold . . . . in America, none had been found” (86–87). Harriot also constantly reminds his English audience that Virginia is not an alien country where everything is different from England. In doing so, Harriot attempts at persuading his audience that they do not have to adapt themselves to a new culture as this is an England-like country but much better as everyone can be richer than a Persian, a Turk, a Moor, an Italian or a Spaniard as “there is so much ground” to plant flax silk and hemp as well as trees that can bring a lot of money to their owners (52). Harriot’s audience admire and trust an authoritative report by someone who has actually been to New England. However, to what extent should they trust his report? Jonathan Sell states that, “where there was no authority or appeal to (as the traveler-writer had bodily gone where no man had gone before), he could proverbially ‘lie with authority,’ how on earth was the traveler-writer to get anyone to believe his representations unless he pandered to their expectations? Those expectations may be false, but, because intelligible, convincing” (26).
Therefore, with dreams of great possibilities, the English, and especially the poor, dreams of the abundance of plants in Virginia that can bring both wealth and health, with the Wapeih tree being used “very much for cure of sores and wounds” (51). In sixteenth century England, people struggling with poverty and diseases felt that these issues would no longer be a problem in the New World extolled in Harriot’s Report. Vic George (2010) writes that in England at that time:

Poverty was endemic in all the early capitalist societies and evidence shows that it was increasing during the 16th century for a variety of structured reasons. Bearing in the mind the rise in population during this time, poverty was numerically an even greater problem. Not unexpectedly, the poor came to be increasingly seen by the authorities as the ‘thriftless poor,’ and conventionally associated with filth, disease, crime and sedition. (66)

Knowing of this situation, Harriot refers to the trees as a source for wealth and the Wapeih tree as the source of health for travelers, and he also comforts his audience by describing the Sassafras trees as being “the cure of many diseases” (51). Virginia is not an alien country but a promising wealthy, healthy country with many “apothecary drugges” which “men of skill” might use as medicine to cure many diseases.

Consequently, Harriot promises his audience wealth, health, and a prestigious life, with the cedar tree being able to be used to make furniture such as “bedsteads, tables, deskes, lutes, virginalles & many things else.” Harriot implicitly highlights jobs for carpenters and demonstrates that Virginia has every necessity needed from cash to “plates” (52), claiming also that iron is everywhere—to complete the need for shelter—oil and berries are also available as a source of food, and it does not only have English wine, but also a “farre greater and … lushing Sweet” wine (51). Therefore, he introduces to the English audience a new kind of wine, yet they still can have their own English wine. English travelers do not need to worry about their clothing because Virginia has many “furres” and “deer skinnes” that the inhabitants use as clothes. In addition, Virginia has many dyes “for divers sorts of red: theyr goodness for [their] English clothes” (53), which appeal to the English people’s appreciation of exotic clothes of unique colors. Vic George (2010) states that “People with low or no wages and with ‘no capital of their own except their bodies’ find it difficult to meet even their basic needs—house rent, clothes, furniture, food and ‘the wood to keep a fire going’” (35). Therefore, the dream presented by Harriot is that these poor English can leave poverty behind and climb the social ladder the moment they reach Virginia.

After giving a detailed description of the Virginian trees, in the second section of his report, Harriot begins a description of Virginian food stating that “Pagatowr, a kinde of graine so called by the inhabitants; the same in the West Indies is called Mayze: English men call it Guinney wheat or Turkie wheat, according to the names of the countreys from whence the like hath bene brought” (55). To bridge the gap between England and Virginia and reduce what is known today as a culture shock and homesickness, Harriot’s rhetoric is very persuasive as he declares that even the food in New England is the same as in England but is given a different name. Harriot emphasizes the idea that beans such as pagatowr, okingier and wickonzowr are “not much different in forme and shape” from these known in England. This emphasis assures the readers that he has seen and tasted this food as he is able to make easy comparisons with English “graine” (55). However, as reporting that the grain is similar to the English grain may not have been enough to motivate the readers to migrate to Virginia, he then states that: “It is a graine of maruellous great increase; of a thousand, fifetene hundred, and some two thousand fold. There are three sortes, of which two are ripe in an eleuen and twelve weakes at the most: sometimes in ten, after the time they are set, and are then of height in stake about sixe or seuen foote” (55). Harriot is not only ensuring the abundance of food but also claiming that there is unlimited food that can also be a source of income by planting and harvesting in a shorter time than usual, that is, migrating to Virginia will bring both health and wealth. When speaking of the poor in London, historian Tim Lambert claims that “the poor food remained plain and monotonous. They subsisted on food like bread, cheese, and onions. Ordinary people
also ate pottage each day. This was a kind of stew. It was made by boiling grain in water to make a kind of porridge. You added vegetables and (if you could afford it) pieces of meat or fish” (Lambert). Probably, like the accounts of Richard Hakluyt and John Smith of the New World, after reading or hearing of Harriot’s description of the abundance of food in the New World, everyone, including the poor, would have been encouraged to travel to this new paradise away from home.

Harriot’s description of food does not stop at the introduction of beans, but also adds fruits and herbs, such as “Mulberies, Applecrabs, Hurts or Hurtleberies, [which Englishmen] have in England” (61). He is very conscious of comparing everything in Virginia to something similar in England but his skill lies in adding content that uplifts the production quality in Virginia. For instance, he introduces the metaquesünnauk fruit, describing it as “a kind of pleasaut fruite almost of the shape & signes of English peares, but that they are of a perfect red color as well within as without” (61).

Harriot then discusses the main dishes that are classified as “Of Beasts,,” “Of Foule” and “Of Fish”, including birds, fish, deer, conies, saquenuckot, squirrels, bears and “eight and twenty several sorts of beasts which [Harriot] heard of to be here and there dispersed in the country, especially in the maine: of which there are only twelve kinds that we have yet discovered.” (62–63). By offering this array of meats, Harriot is inviting and even perhaps persuading the hungry English to move to the New World.

After offering this list of options of delicacies that will insure health and wealth, Harriot offers his third informative section on “commodities for building and other necessary uses” (64), which in addition to a healthy and wealthy life promises safety. Andrew Slyuter asserts:

Land is certainly an appropriate and adequate category to signify the environment that natives and Europeans struggle over, the resources such as soil, vegetation, animals, minerals, and water. Yet, more than simply control over environment, the struggle revolves around control over space, over territories-over landscapes. In some cases that struggle is for control over a contiguous area of resources, as in the agricultural colony of New England. (414)

Many English at the end of the seventeenth century were only hoping to have their own house to live in, but most English “poor people's homes [were] very small and crowded. Most of the poor lived in huts of 2 or 3 rooms. Some families lived in just one room” (Lambert). When promised a house or more rooms to live and abundant food, neither of which were within reach in England, many of them would take the risk and journey to New England. Harriot reports that “Those other things which I am more to make rehearsal of, are such as concern building, and other mechanick necessarie uses; as divers sorts of trees for house and ship timber, and other uses els: Also lime, stone, and brick, least that being not mentioned some might have bene doubted of, or by some that are malicious reported the contrary” (65). Harriot asserts that there are various kinds of trees such as “Okes, Walnut, Firee, and Cedar” which are resourceful for building houses and ships. Many English people in the early seventeenth century lived in wooden houses, but in Virginia they could live in houses that they could build on any land and occupying any space, that is, they would not have to live in huts of only one room. Moreover, building their houses is not a problem as Harriot asserts that there will be easy access to useful building tools, asserting that “in some of [their] voyages [they] have seene divers hard raggie stones, great pebbles, and a kinde of gray stone like unto marble, of which the inhabitants make their hatchets to cleeve wood” (66). Therefore, the job of finding tools to build houses and cutting trees can be an easy job with the Indian hatchets made of a stone that could also be used to “to cracke Nuttes, [and] grinde shelles” (66). Again, Harriot’s narrative reminds the readers that food and tools needed to survive are available, thus marking New England as habitable.
While Harriot builds up the image of a healthy and wealthy life in Virginia, he also predicts that there may be some fear of non-English dwellers, and understands his audience’s desire to know more about the inhabitants in Virginia. Therefore, he reports on his experiences with the “nature and manners of the people” (67) of Virginia. Jean Jacquot (1952) states that Harriot’s “third section deals with the aborigines. As a good colonist, Harriot notes first the Virginians’ inferiority in arms, and their ignorance, which can be turned to commercial advantage. Yet, on the whole, his attitude is one of sympathy. He uses technical superiority as a means to inspire an almost superstitious veneration” (173). Being as detailed as possible, Harriot describes the local inhabitants’ appearance, language, religion, and lives. The “Indians”, Harriot writes are “people clothed with loose mantles made of Deere skins, and aprons of the same round about their middles; all els naked; of such a difference of statures only as wee in England; having no edge tooles or weapons of yron or Steele to offend us withall, neither know they how to make any” (67). Harriot portrays the indigenous people as barbarous and harmless “savages” who do not know how to make weapons. Harriot’s cleverness in conveying this picture of the indigenous people further represents New England as a safe environment, which is a major factor, along with food and health, for any settler. Harriot also promises comfort and political power to the people who desire to travel to Virginia that “If there fall out any warres between us and them, what their fight is likely to bee, we having advantages against them so many manner of wayses, as by our discipline, our strange weapons and devises els; … by the experience we have had in some places, the turning up of their heeles against us in running away was their best defense” (68). It will only take someone’s first and last labors to build the house of their dreams and live safely, healthily, and wealthily.

Harriot also writes that the indigenous people will be “in short time be brought to civilities, and the imbracing of true religion” (68). Harriot not only informs his audience of their imagined life but also adds a humane and religious note to it by civilizing the “savage people” (53) and converting them to Christianity, which implicitly asserts how, as Nabil Matar argues, “Britons imposed themselves on the Indians” (103). Harriot prepares his targeted audience for the gracious plan of converting the indigenous people to Christianity and civilizing them.

In his conclusion Harriot writes:

Now I have as I hope made relation not of so fewe and small things but that the countrey of men that are indifferent and well disposed may be sufficiently liked: If there were no more knowne then I have mentioned, which doubtlesse and in great reason is nothing to that which remaineth to bee discovered, neither the soile, nor commodities ….we found the soyle to bee fatter; the trees greater and to growe thinner; the grounde more firme and deeper mold; more and larger champions; finer grasse and as good as ever we saw any in England; in some places rokke and farre more high and hillie ground; more plente of their fruiets; more abundance of beastes; the more inhabited with people, and of greater policie and larger dominions, with greater townes and houses. (74)

Harriot’s final note is a reminder of all he has been promising, starting with the statement that New England will be loved by his audience. Why will Virginia not be favored by the English who live in London when they are promised everything they wish for: freedom, health, delicious food, housing, and the ability to serve Christianity. Is this not better than being a Moor or a Turk, which means losing their English and Christian identity? To what extent is Harriot’s description of New England and the call of migration true, when personal letters are summoned to the table?

3. Six letters versus Harriot’s report

According to Pease, when dealing with the author and their art, “the critic can do what the author cannot; that is, expose the rules that structure the language games productive of the textual environment” (114–16). Using six personal letters written between 1623 and 1639 after the publication of Harriot’s Report in 2007, I will expose rules beyond the text of Harriot and closely examine
each letter and then compare it to Harriot’s Report. These letters function as the social background that will be used here to reveal a different view of the migration to New England than that of Harriot.

In contrast to Harriot’s report, Richard Frethorne’s personal letters convey sincere feelings and information that were not written to be published and read by the English public. Therefore, they do not carry with them the political and mercantile purpose as that of Harriot’s report. Frethorne traveled to Virginia in 1622, after which he sent three letters to his parents on March 20th, and April 2nd and 3rd in 1623, which were the only record of his life. He was a member of a party sent to help increase the number of the colonists as 78 settlers had already been lost to the Powhatan Indians in the “Great Massacre” of 1622.

In the first letter from Virginia in March of 1623, Frethorne outspokenly expresses his feelings about his life in Virginia. He begins his letter by describing the nature of Virginia saying that “the nature of the Country is such that it Causeth much sickness [including scurvy and ‘the bloody flux’] … and when we are sick there is nothing to comfort us” (Kingsbury 1935, 124). This account contradicts Harriot’s Report by describing Virginia as a very dangerous environment that sickens Frethorne and his friends. The inhumane part of the sickness is that there is no medicine that treats the ill, which indicates that Virginia does not have the Wapeih trees that Harriot describes as being used “very much for cure of sores and wounds” (51).

Furthermore, Frethorne describes the food stating that: “for since I came out of the ship, I never ate anything but peas, and lobollie (that is water gruel) as for deer or venison I never saw any since I came into this land there is indeed some fowl, but We are not allowed to go, and get it, but must Work hard both early, and late for a mess of water gruel, and a mouthful of bread, and beef [and] must serve for 4 men … ” (124). Frethorne’s depiction, as if to refute Harriot’s Report, denies the existence of the menu described by Harriot.

In addition, Frethorne’s first letter reveals the status of health, availability of food and the lack of safety:

For we live in fear of the enemy every hour, yet we have had a combat with them on the Sunday before Shrovetide, and we took two alive and made slaves of them. But it was by policy, for we are in great danger … we came but twenty for merchants, and they are half dead just; and we look every hour when two more should go … our Lieutenant is dead, and [also] his father and his brother. And there was some five or six of the last year’s twenty, of which there is but three left, so that we are fain to get other men to plant with us; and yet we are but 32 to fight against 3000 if they should come … when the rogues overcame this place [the] last [time] they slew 80 persons. How then shall we do, for we lie even in their teeth? (124)

Frethorne’s question challenges Harriot’s Report and experience in Virginia. Harriot reports, “by the experience we have had in some places, the turning up of their heeleys against us in running away was their best defense” (68). Frethorne paints a horrifying picture of the dangers that the new settlers are facing—the image of the indigenous people slaughtering 80 Englishmen.

In 1623 and on the second of April, Frethorne wrote a second letter to his parents stating, “for this day we hear that there is 26 of [the Englishmen] slain by the Indians. And they have taken a pinnace of Mr. Pountis, and have got pieces, armor, [and] swords, all things fit for war; so that they may now steal upon us and we cannot know them from [the] English till it is too late—[till the time] that they be upon us—and then there is no mercy” (60). To further verify Frethorne’s report, Virginia Bernhard (1985), an American historian, asserts that “while Bermuda grew and prospered in its early years, Virginia, after a decade of settlers, still suffered periodic food shortages and remained a place of isolated fortress-like households. In fairness to the Virginia colonists, however it must be remembered that they had another problem that never troubled Bermudians: Indians”
(60). Therefore, when comparing Frethorne's letters to Harriot's report, the latter appears to be imagined rather than visited.

Frethorne's third letter also emphasizes the struggles and the difficulties immigrants encountered in Virginia during the 17th century. Henry William Elson, an American historian, claims:

Arriving too late to plant springs crops, and finding little cleared land fit for cultivation, the men were soon reduced to short rations. The allowance to each man for a day was a pint of worm eaten barley or wheat, made into pottage. Governor Wingfield lacked the ability to rule the men, and there were constant quarrels among them. To their other misfortunes was added a continual fear of Indian attacks; and owing to their exposure in the swamps and their lack of proper food, they were attacked by fevers. They died sometimes three or four in a night, and before the end of September half of the little colony, including Gosnold, had found a grave in the wilderness. (Elson)

Elson's description is very similar to the contents in Frethorne third letter, which states; “On the third day of April … these rogues … had taken all furnitures [such] as pieces, swords, armor, coats of mail, powder, shot and all the things that they had to trade withal,” (62). The indigenous people had overrun the colonizers, that is, the colonizers had become the colonized. They “threaten Accomack, that is the next plantation. And now there is no way but starving … For we have but two hogshead of meal left to serve us this two months … and that meal is but three weeks bread for us, at a loaf for four [men] about the bigness of a penny loaf in England—that is but a halfpenny loaf a day for a man. Is it not strange to me, think you?” (62). Reading Frethorne's inquires about food against Harriot's promises, we realize that what is described by Harriot as abundant food that “is used very much by the inhabitants,” cannot be consumed by Englishmen. (60). Frethorne asserts: “But what will it be when we shall go a month or two and never see a bit of bread, as my master doth say we must do? And he said he is not able to keep us all. Then we shall be turned up to the land and eat barks of trees or molds of the ground (62).” Reading Frethorne's account on food, exposes Harriot's unrealistic description of food by one of his own contemporaries.

Harriot claims that the Virginian plants are a source of wealth, health, shelter, food, clothes, and a luxurious life as Virginia has pearls of “very fayr and rare” (53). Harriot finishes his “Marchantable Commodities” section by assuming that new plants can be discovered that could grow in any climate at any time of the year. The first section of Harriot's treatise conveys what the English need to hear in order to leave England for a better place. Harriot's narration on the Virginian plants assures the English audience health and wealth, thus encouraging them to migrate to Virginia. However, Frethorne's first letter, which is the longest of the three, complains about the lack of food and health. He writes lamentably to his parents that “if you did know as much as [I do], when people cry out day and night—Oh! that they were in England without their limbs—and would not care to lose any limb to be in England again, yea, though they beg from door to door” (124). His second letter also begs for a return to England, “Therefore if you love or respect me as your child, release me from this bondage and save my life. Now you may save me or let me be slain with infidels. Ask this man—he knoweth that all is true and just that I say here. If you do redeem me, the Company must send for me to my Mr. Harrod; for so is this master's name. April, the second” (60). Frethorne's appeal to return to his hometown is indicative of the miseries he encounters every day. Unlike, the portrayed pictures of Harriot, his letters negate the possibility of a safe and healthy life in Virginia. In his third letter, Frethorne states;

Therefore with weeping tears I beg of you to help me. Oh, that you did see my daily and hourly sighs, groans, and tears, and [the] thumps that I afford mine own breast, and [the way I rue and curse the time of my birth, with holy job. I thought no head had been able to hold so much water as hath and doth daily flow from mine eyes … But this is certain: I never felt the want of father and mother till now; but now, dear friends, full well I know and rue it, although it were too late before I knew it. I pray you talk with this honest man. He will tell you more than now in my haste I can set down. (62)
To further reveal the historical and social background of Harriot’s Report, let us test Frethorne’s letters by comparing his report to one historical fact from his time before examining three more letters written by three different men in Virginia; John Baldwin (1623), George Calvert (1629), and an anonymous writer (1639).

A year after the Indian massacre of 1622, when “natives killed over three hundred colonists” (Armstrong 2007, 25), Frethorne states in his first letter that “this is the 20th day of March. And the sailors say that there is two-thirds of the 150 dead already” (59). The famous engraver, Matthaeus Merian, made a woodcut of the 1622 Indian massacre, which is now in the Mariners Museum, Virginia. Therefore, it is no surprise that as reported by Frethorne, 80 Englishmen were slaughtered a year later.

John Baldwin’s letter was also sent in 1623, which was the same year that Frethorne wrote and sent his three letters to his parents. Baldwin writes “all our company is living but there, William Lanes, William Smith were killed with the Indians goeinge to worke in the wood. They lay in a tree that was newlie felled where they killed them” (Kingsbury 1935, 126). Therefore, both Baldwin and Frethorne document several raids and attacks on the settlers. Baldwin also confirms Frethorne’s accounts by saying that “It hath been a verye hard tyme with all men they had like to all starve this yeare; there was them; that paid fortye shillings a bushel for sheld corne. But howsoever, they dye like rotten sheepe, noe man dies but he is as full of maggots as he can hould. They rott aboue ground” (126). Both settlers agree that the colonists were close to starvation; however, Baldwin portrays the picture of death in a more horrific way, that is, the Englishmen are either dying of hunger or dead—rotting like dead sheep.

Furthermore, six years after Frethorne’s letters, George Calvert, a politician and a government official working for the King, sent a letter in 1629 to his Majesty King Charles I in his role as the 1st Baron Baltimore, in which he complains;

I met with greater difficulties and encumbrances here, which in this place are no longer to be resisted … no plant or vegetable thing appearing out of the earth until it be about the beginning of May, nor fish in the sea, besides the air so intolerable cold as it is hardly to be endured. By means whereof, and of much salt meat, my house [the Mansion House] hath been an hospital all this winter. Of 100 persons 50 sick at a time, myself being one and nine or ten of them dyed. Hereupon I have had strong temptations to leave all proceeding in plantations and, being much decayed in my strength, to retire myself to my former quiet. (Kingsbury 1935, 127)

Calvert’s ranking might, for some readers, have made him a trustworthy man. Although he is addressing the King, Calvert is ready to tell the truth about the difficulties he has faced every day in Virginia. Unlike Harriot, Baldwin and Frethorne, Calvert’s letter is addressed to King Charles I urging him to stop sending people to this inhabitable place. He states that there is a high incidence of illness at fifty percent of the population.

To further confirm the reports in Frethorne’s letters, let us examine one last letter written by a young New England settler to his father, William Pond, in England in 1631—eight years after Frethorne’s letters. It is a letter from a young married settler. It is worth quoting most of the letter to demonstrate its correspondence to the previously examined letters:

New England is where we live. Here are but few [Indians], a great part of them died this winter, it was thought it was of the plague …. Spring cattle thrive well here, but they give small store of milk …. people here are subject to diseases, for here have died of the scurvy and of the burning fever nigh too hundred & odd; beside as many lie lame & all Sudbury men are dead but three and three women and some children …. the Governor telleth me of a hundred weight of cheese the which I have received part of it. I humbly thank you for it. I did expect two cows, the which I had none, nor I do not earnestly desire that you should
send me any, because the country is not so as we did expect it. Therefore, loving father, I would entreat you that you would send me a fercheine of butter & a hogshead of malt unground, for we drink nothing but water, & a coarse clothe of four pound price so it be thick ... Here is no cloth to be had to make no apparel ... So I pray, father, send me four or five yards of cloth to make some apparel. (128)

As in the five previous letters, this letter also asserts that living in New England is both difficult and terrifying. There are many diseases, people have very weak immune systems, and are unable to fight ailments such as scurvy because of the lack of food. This letter also reports that the death rate was still high eight years after the reports in Frethorne’s letters. Therefore, this young man needs two cows rather than cheese so that he can have his own cheese and milk. Yet, he hesitates as Virginia is not as he has expected and is not good for owning cows. It is obvious from this letter that the young man is perplexed because of the difficulties that he and the other settlers have encountered in Virginia. As a result, he asks his father to send him butter and malt. The young writer is so poor he cannot afford to return to his father. He is as much a victim as Frethorne, Baldwin, Calvert, and many other English settlers are.

4. Conclusion
In his mercantile report, Thomas Harriot never mentions the death rate or the risks of losing the promised commodities. Harriot claims at the end of his report: “I hope there remaines no cause whereby the action should be misliked” (76). Harriot mentions the word “hope” fourteen times in his report. His use of “hope” along with the other letters and reports on Virginia necessitates a further definition of Harriot’s hope as a “forlorn-hope,” which is defined by the The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language as either “an arduous or nearly hopeless undertaking [or] an advance guard of troops sent on a hazardous mission.” Harriot’s report, therefore, can be considered a forlorn-hope. As the English he is appealing to are being encouraged to undertake this hopeless mission to colonize Virginia, Harriot’s forlorn-hope is not clearly stated; rather, the report reflects the life both poor or rich dreamed of. I consider the letters as a useful apparatus for providing a new scope of Thomas Harriot’s Report. These letters expressed the explicit forlorn-hope for the English readers of the seventeenth century. However, as in the case of personal letters, they were not made public during that time. Is it possible to accept Pease’s reference to the product of artists as that which can be the product of another force other than the author to defend Harriot as a victim who is engaged to promote Raleigh’s voyages? Stepping outside the text, these six personal letters reveal the falsity of Harriot’s report by exposing Virginia as being far from the promised healthy and wealthy paradise expounded by 17th century propagandists.

Funding
The author received no direct funding for this research.

Author details
Mohammed Ghazi Alghamdi1
E-mail: malghamdi@ksu.edu.sa
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8685-2025
1 Department of English Language and Literature, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Citation information
Cite this article as: Leaking letters: The case of Harriot’s report and six letters of englishmen, Mohammed Ghazi Alghamdi, Cogent Arts & Humanities (2022), 9: 2093558.

References
Armstrong, C. (2007). Writing North America in the Seventeenth Century: English. Ashgate.
Bernhard, V. (1985). Bermuda and Virginia in the seventeenth century: A comparative view. Journal of Social History, 19(1), 57–70. Autumn. https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.19.1.57
Elson, H. W. Colonial Virginia. History of the USA. UHistory.org. www.usahistory.info/southern/Virginia.html. Accessed November. 2019
Forlorn Hope: The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. Houghton Mifflin Company, www.dictionary.com/browse/forlorn-hope. Accessed 15 Jan-Feb. 2020
George, V. 2010. Major thinkers in welfare: Contemporary issues in historical perspective. Policy Press. Print.
Greenblatt, S. (1987, March). Towards a poetics of culture. Southern Review, 21(1), 3–15 https://www.blogs.hss.ed.ed.uk/crag/files/2015/03/2awyqmpgbko.pdf.
Harriot, T. Royster, P. (2007). A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia (1588)* (1588). Electronic Texts in American Studies 20 Accessed 4 1 2019 https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/20/utm_source=digital commons.unl.edu%2Fetas%2F20&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages.
Jacquot, J. (1952). Thomas Harriot’s reputation for impiety. Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London, 9(2), 164–187. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsnr.1952.0012.
Kingsbury, S. M. (1935). Records of the Virginia company of London (Vol. 4). Government Printing Office.

Lambert, T. A history of England in the 17th Century. An Encyclopedia of World History. Galexia Creative Agency Ltd. www.localhistories.org/17thcent.html. Accessed 10 Oct. 2020

Matar, N. 1999. Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the age of discovery. UP. Print.

Pease, D. (1995). “Author” critical terms for literary study. (F. Lentricchia & T. McLaughlin, Ed.). U of Chicago P.

Schüting, S. Bringing “this monstrous birth to the world’s light”; Colonial mimicry in early modern writing. EESE, Erfurt Electronic Studies in English. January. 1996. Retrieved Jan.-Feb. 25, 2021, from webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/edoc/la/eesse/journal_frame.html

Sweet, T. (1999). Economy, Ecology, and Utopia in Early Colonial Promotional Literature. American Literature. American Literature, 71(3), 399–427 Accessed 3 11 2019 https://www.jstor.org/stable/2902734.