Formal matters

Reading the materials of English Renaissance literature

Edited by Allison K. Deutermann and András Kiséry

Manchester University Press
Manchester and New York
distributed in the United States exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan
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Published by Manchester University Press
Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9NR, UK
and Room 400, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA
www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk

Distributed in the United States exclusively by
Palgrave Macmillan, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York,
NY 10010, USA

Distributed in Canada exclusively by
UBC Press, University of British Columbia, 2029 West Mall,
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z2

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for

ISBN 978 07190 8533 6 hardback

First published 2013

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Hakluyt as translator

Richard Hakluyt is well known to early modernists, of course, for his *magnum opus*, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffics, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, published in London in one volume in 1589 and then again in a revised and expanded three-volume edition from 1598 to 1600. Despite the fact that the name 'Hakluyt' has become synonymous with the *Principal Navigations*, the work was in no sense a work of his own 'authorship.' Hakluyt's art was rather the art of the fragment, and the *Principal Navigations* reminds us how important *editing*, or the *collection* of texts (etymologically a gathering together in one place), remained as a mode of textual authority at the turn of the seventeenth century. But the *Principal Navigations* also opens a window onto how important the work of the translator could be, for Hakluyt was also a remarkable translator, in several ways, all of which are important to understanding the forms of writing that he favoured, his place in the history of scholarship, and his role in English colonialist projects.

Perhaps the simplest place to begin any assessment of Hakluyt as a translator is to ask a two-fold question: what does it mean, in general, to 'translate'? And what specifically did it mean to translate in late sixteenth-century England as an ordained member of the Church of England, as an employee of the Crown, and as a man of letters invested in New World ventures, as Hakluyt was? England has always been a stepchild in the historiography of European humanism, especially the England of the late sixteenth century; and if we can consider Hakluyt as a species of humanist—a question that is no doubt open to debate, depending on one's definitions and frames of reference—then he is a type that I will conveniently but unoriginally call a 'material humanist.' I offer the label to strike a contrast from our usual sense of humanist scholarship in the period, in order to remind us how insubstantial, how deracinated from substance and from concrete institutions, the history of humanism has often been in historiography. Even a humanism defined narrowly and 'correctly' around problems of philology, the archival recovery of classical Greek and Latin, and the *studia humanitatis*—what Kristeller loosely described as a 'literary' tradition distinct from theology or natural philosophy—was always more material than we tend to remember, a method concerned with the physical substance of manuscripts, books, and documents, of historical reconstruction through archaeological artefacts and other objects, of universities and desktops and instruments and other intellectual hardware. This sense of 'material humanism' was central to Hakluyt's translation work and indeed to his entire life project, whether through the physical documents he laboured to collect or through the globes and navigational instruments that he famously introduced to the study of geography at Oxford. But a notion of 'material humanism' was central, too, in a more familiar and more modern sense of the term, in that Hakluyt's particular area of expertise was, after all, the history of English international travel and trade, which even he recognized as a moment of proto-mercantilism and which we are apt to regard as the inauguration of a modern world system. So when we ask 'what does it mean to translate in the sixteenth
century,’ we must also ask what it means to translate as a scholar caught up in this moment of wild enterprise and fascinated by an emerging ‘global’ imaginary.

Before pursuing the suspicion that in speaking of Hakluyt I am really speaking about ourselves, let me return to a conventional sense of translation and to Hakluyt’s considerable skill as a translator of languages. On the basis of his own comments, modern scholars have attributed to him an advanced written knowledge of Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, most of which he could probably also speak with some fluency. While in Paris as Chaplain to the English Ambassador, Hakluyt was friendly with French botanists, travellers, instrument makers, and geographers, and he is known to have met with Don Antonio, the pretender to the Portuguese crown, and to have discussed matters pertaining to New World navigation directly with Portuguese pilots and captains. Hakluyt himself translated, either in whole or in part, five separate editions of works from French, Portuguese, and Latin, including a book of dialogues that had first been translated into Latin from Malay, which Hakluyt probably undertook for the East India Company. A single copy of Hakluyt’s English translation of the Latin edition of Hugo Grotius’s *Free Seas*, undertaken sometime between 1609 and 1616, also probably on behalf of the East India Company, survives in manuscript and was never published in his lifetime. The *Principal Navigations*, meanwhile, and his long unpublished manuscript ‘Discourse of Western Planting’ both include assorted passages that Hakluyt translates from many of the aforementioned languages.

But this is only to speak of Hakluyt’s own translation work – he was twice as active as a sponsor of foreign translations by others, often contributing to the costs of publication himself. Three examples will illustrate Hakluyt’s networks of translation and commercial publication especially vividly, and in doing so they will indicate to us the signal role that the physical book played in what I am calling Hakluyt’s ‘material humanism.’ In 1586, while living in Paris, Hakluyt arranged for a French translation from Spanish by Martin Basanier of Antonio de Espejo’s voyage to New Mexico, a book that Hakluyt had himself paid to have published in a new Spanish edition in Madrid in that same year, with ‘a la costa de Richardo Hakluyt’ displayed prominently on its title page. Basanier dedicated his new translation of Espejo to Hakluyt, who promptly arranged to have Basanier’s French translated into English, publishing it in London in 1587. Also in 1586, Basanier and Hakluyt collaborated on an edition of René de Laudomienne’s *L’histoire notable de la Floride*, printed from a manuscript borrowed from the French geographer André Thévet and issued with a dedication from Basanier to Walter Raleigh and a Latin poem in praise of Raleigh by Hakluyt himself. Hakluyt then translated Basanier’s French into English, publishing the work in London in 1587. The last example is a famous one: in 1587, Hakluyt met the engraver Theodor de Bry, who was on a visit to England, and introduced him to John White, the illustrator who had accompanied Thomas Harriot as a scientific observer on Raleigh’s Virginia voyages and who would subsequently return to the New World as first Governor of the ill-fated Roanoke colony. Hakluyt suggested to de Bry a grand international edition of Harriot’s account of Virginia, which had been published alone in 1588. This new international edition (1590) was to be illustrated by De Bry’s engravings of White’s drawings and published simultaneously in Frankfurt in Latin, English, French, and German editions. The notes to the edition were to be translated into Latin from English by the botanist Charles de l’Ecluse – notes which Hakluyt himself then subsequently translated back into English from Latin for the English edition.

The works that Hakluyt commissioned suggest how energetically he pursued geographical writing in other languages and how widely informed he became about the topic, through a network of authors, translators, editors, publishers, diplomats, pilots, merchants, factors, friends, and acquaintances that radiated from the centres of the European book trade: London, Paris, Frankfurt, and even Madrid – an unlikely place for a minister in the Church of England to publish, especially in 1586. In this sense, Hakluyt is positioned at the node of two distinct macro-networks of translation, one extending across and within Europe, the other extending outward much more broadly on a global scale, to the Far East as well as to the Northwest. Of the many separate translations to which we know that Hakluyt contributed in some way, we find three Dutch originals (somewhat surprisingly, Hakluyt does not seem to have known Dutch); John Florio’s 1580 English translation of Jacques Cartier’s voyage to Canada, from Ramusio’s Italian translation out of French; Leo Africanus’s *A Geographical Historie of Africa* (1600), translated by John Pory from Italian into English, and a translation from Israël Abu al-Feda’s (1273–1331) thirteenth-century *Geography*, which a letter from Ortelius to William Camden tells us that Hakluyt was planning to arrange. Even more remarkable is the example of the Codex Mendoza, a manuscript of Nahuatl pictographs produced in Mexico City in the early 1540s, probably by native scribes, which Hakluyt purchased from Thévet in 1587 while in Paris. The Codex eventually passed to Samuel Purchas, who claimed that Hakluyt had ‘procured Master Michael Locke in Sir Walter Raleigh’s name to translate it’ but that ‘it seems that none were willing to be at the cost of cutting the Pictures, and so it remained among his papers till his death.’ When we add to these books and manuscripts the many partial translations and word-lists collected in the *Principal Navigations*, the list of languages with which Hakluyt came into contact expands to global proportions: Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Syriac, Malay, Nahuatl, Anglo-Saxon, Turkish, Russian, Inuit, or ‘the language of the people of meta incognita,’ Algonquin, the languages of the Saami people (Lapland), the native languages of Canada or ‘New France,’ the languages of Trinidad, and the ‘natural language of Java.’ I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that Hakluyt’s desktop was probably the single most polyglot surface on the sixteenth-century planet. And it owes this extraordinary polyglot quality in no small measure to the form of the book: to the physical object, in all its variety and all its parts, that allowed him to collect in one place such a diversity of materials and such a complex network of mediating authorities.

But Hakluyt’s involvement in translation does not stop here. For he was more than
a practitioner of translation: he also had a modest theory, as his dedication to Robert Cecil of his edition and translation of Antonio Galvao, The Discoveries of the World from the first originall unto the yeares of our Lord 1555 (London, 1601; STC 11543), explains:

For whereas a good translator ought to be well acquainted with the proprieetie of the tongue out of which, and of that into which he translated, and thirdly with the subject or matter it selfe: I found this translator [an anonymous version that Hakluyt has reworked] very defective in all three; especially in the last. For the supplying of whose defects I had none other remede, but to have recourse unto the originall histories, (which as it appeareth are very many, and many of them exceeding rare and hard to come by) out of which the authour himselfe drew the greatest part of this discourse. And in very deepe it cost me more travaile to search out the grounds thereof, and to anexe the marginall quotations unto the work, then the translation of many such bookes would have put me unto. (A3v)

Hakluyt presumes as a norm expertise in the original language of a document as well as expertise in what we now call the target language. But above all he assumes expertise in what he calls the ‘subject or matter it selfe’ – I do not want to lean too hard on the appearance of the term ‘matter’ at this point, since it functions as a fairly straightforward synonym (itself a kind of translation) for the notion of subject matter, from the common Latin res or ‘thing’. And yet it is clear that for Hakluyt, as for us, translation involves a kind of passage or transfer of material from one form to another: that some word or figure is necessary to describe this process, and that, however conventional Hakluyt’s terminology may be, it is nonetheless inscribed in a long history of philosophical concepts and determinations of concepts, through which translation is defined as a transaction between form and matter, as a process of giving form to matter and of re-matterizing the form of language by transcribing it into new letters and new words. And in this particular instance we may hear an additional material and even technological emphasis, since Hakluyt has in mind specifically the technical vocabulary necessary for describing very particular things-in-the-world: concrete objects, ingredients, textures, tools, all the myriad things that a traveller might encounter when talking to other people in other places. People interact with the world; they use language to refer to the world while doing so; and a translator must become familiar with the specific words they use when they interact with the world in significant ways.

Here is another statement of Hakluyt’s translation method, found now in a dedication to the reader in the 1589 first edition of the Principal Navigations:

Concerning my proceeding therefore in this present worke, it hath bene this. Whatsoever testimonie I have found in any authour of authoritie appertaining to my argument, either stranger or naturall, I have recorded the same word for word, with his particular name and page of booke where it is extant. If the same were not reduced into our common language, I have first expressed it in the same terms wherein it is originally written, whether it were a Latine, Italian, Spanish or Portingall discourse, or whatsoeuer else, and thereunto in the next roome have annexed the signification and translation of the wordes in English. (p. 6, sig. *3v)
Within the polite gestures of patronage and praise, Hakluyt has embedded an entire political theory of translation, which now consists of more than a linguistic facility. This kind of translation requires the exercise of analogical comparison across sites and enterprises: Florida is like Virginia, in its geographical location, its geo-political encumbrances, its possible military and commercial benefits, its risks and dangers. This translation invites a kind of structural thinking, a grasp of co-ordinated efforts and complex integrations of men and materials, goals and wills. In Hakluyt’s view, translation is valuable not for individual, personal gain but for the common good; it facilitates the organization of collectives directed toward a common purpose; by preventing conflict, it assists in the benevolent rule over other men.

Philology as materialism

If we return to the linguistic and technical dimension to Hakluyt’s comments on translation, it is possible to locate him on the spectrum of humanist commentary on the subject and to begin to outline what I will now call a ‘materialist’ theory of translation lying at the core of Hakluyt’s project. Broadly speaking, we may say that humanist theories of translation developed around several opposing terms, each of which enjoyed a rich history of elaboration and each of which tended to spread outward into other textual, ethical, and philosophical attitudes. For the sake of clarity, we may identify on the one hand a philological and grammatical attitude toward translation, one that concerned itself with the problem of literal semantic meaning and that took as the object of its operations the word or verbum, considered as an individual morphological and denotative unit. On the other hand we find a rhetorical and oratorical approach to translation that attempts to capture an overall sense and to express it in an artful style; its concern is not merely with verba but with res, the ‘content,’ ‘thought,’ or ‘matter’ (a somewhat misleading term) of a larger compositional unit, which it apprehends as a dense, energetic texture of associations, figures, and ornaments. These work together across several levels to communicate the idea in its full presence, an approach to translation that is at once Structural and Orphic, as Glyn Norton has perceptively put it, and that is signalled by the long-standing technical humanist term for translation, interpretatio.

Even in this second, ‘oratorical’ approach to translation, however, the notion of the literal continues to play a fundamental role; indeed, translation proper had long been distinguished from exegesis precisely on the basis of its literalist ambitions, and nowhere more so than in translations of Scripture, from Jerome forward. Translation was emphatically not a commentary or a supplemental addition; it was a faithful rendering through which all the resources of the source language lived anew in different clothing, and even the most accomplished humanist presumed that a propaedeutic immersion in the technicalities of philology – grammar, usage, historical morphology – would be necessary to produce a good or rhetorically ‘full’ translation. This required a full awareness of the physicality of the word, its particulate force and seed-like potential, which could be scattered across into new sentences or ignited like a firework: these are the metaphors of Coluccio Salutati, writing at the end of the fourteenth century. For Cicero, the translator was a kind of banker who could either count out his translation word for word, like coins, or pay the entire thing at once, as if by weight. Cicero himself preferred the latter approach, pointing out that this was the course he had followed in his own translations of Demosthenes and Aeschines, in which he worked, he claimed, as an orator more than as an interpres or translator in the word-for-word sense.

It would be fair to say that Hakluyt shows little interest in the rhetorical or stylistic dimension of the texts that he translates but instead emphasizes their practical purpose – under the category of the ‘practical’ I would include the ultimate political effects of the act of translation which I have indicated above, as well as his concentrated interest in what we could call the text’s ‘informational’ content. Something is being communicated by the word, and for Hakluyt it is vital that this something be captured and rendered as clearly as possible. In this regard we could characterize Hakluyt as an extreme literalist, a linguistic attitude that was of a piece with his empiricism, his overall historical purpose, his methodological fascination with the archive, and his general interest in technical details and particulars of all kinds. We have seen him declare this interest in his preface to Cecil in his translation of Galvao, above; and this same literalism manifests itself in those moments when Hakluyt begins to approach translation degree zero, collecting foreign morphemes and lexemes and arranging them in tabular form, much the way the botanists and mercantile agents collected specimens of natural substances and compiled lists of commodities (see Figures 6.1–6.4).

Consider the many ways in which we could consider these lists to be forms of translation. Even at the level of the phoneme, the most literal moment of translation we could identify, we slip beneath the level of the signified to the ‘matter’ of language only to find that ‘translation’ has already begun its silent work. For the lists render sounds into words; they create the formal integrity that distinguishes a meaningful phonemic unit, and they do so, furthermore, in a visual or graphic and not an oral form – it is, after all, impossible to tell from the page how these words are to be pronounced. Before translation in its rhetorical and humanist sense can begin, even in the simplistic, literal, ‘word-for-word’ sense that Cicero rejects, the form of the word itself must first be stabilized. This invites a large question: for the humanist accustomed to working closely with languages, texts, and manuscripts, was the ‘word’ a coherent formal unit in the New World? Could the methods of philology apply on foreign terrain? Hakluyt seems fascinated by the virtual presence of strange sounds, by the act of rendering those sounds in new form and by the implications of what he glimpses through the process: the sheer fact of other languages, other systems of linguistic expression, complete and flourishing just over the horizon. At the same time, however, a peculiar effect of the list is to present the native word denuded of grammar and syntax, not to mention of inflection, connotation or other nuance: the signs stand for the idea of language, for a language that has been left behind, trailing roots clotted
Tober all certaine words of their language, which
I thought it good to set downe for their use, this here,
after shall have occasion to continue
this voyage.

O, Oghehoone, what calle you?
only, a faer.
Raddi, a man.
Syte, a man.
Tsurti, a man.
Oxen, oxens.
Saddo, a horse.
Dooma, a horse.
Sorretse, a horse.

Ors, a man.
Nounigen, a man.
Teem, a man.
Nelis, a man.
Vitt, a man.
Cove, a man.
Keedum, a man.
Kittis, a man.
Ooghdu, a man.
Loke, a man.

Oiletonblocke, a man.
Cowgtonblocke, a man.
Colimtonblocke, a man.
Nellisnomblocke, a man.
Vititsnomblocke, a man.
Cowonblocke, a man.
Keydemonblocke, a man.
Kittisnomblocke, a man.
Ooghonblocke, a man.
Colimlocke, a man.
Nylool, a man.
Cowtonlocke, a man.
Nelislocke, a man.
Vitlocke, a man.

Oghchellocke, a man.
Cowtonlocke, a man.
Nelislocke, a man.
Vitlocke, a man.

Ooghchellocke, a man.

Figure 6.1 The language of the 'Lappians', *Principal Navigations* (London, 1598–1600), Vol. I, p. 293. (Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University)

Figure 6.2 The language of 'Meta Incognita', *Principal Navigations* (London, 1598–1600), Vol. III, p. 32. (Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University)

Figure 6.3 The language of 'New France', *Principal Navigations* (London, 1598–1600), Vol. III, p. 211. (Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University)
with the dirt of foreign shores. If the lists record grammatical units and provide English grammatical equivalents for their semantic meaning, in other words, they also transport the word from its native setting back to an English reader; the effect is one of textual capture, retrieving for a culture captivated by the written sentence the guttural sounds of speech and clothing the native tongue with the modesty of a Roman letter. 26

Hakluyt, of course, never collected the language specimen himself: he relied on the expertise of others, often commercial agents and factors who were themselves positioned at an epistemological threshold in which competing systems of value jostled together. And as we can see from these examples, the matter of language and the matter of the world have begun to collapse into one another, as we enter another layer of the translation process. Strictly speaking, we find no natural things here, only deracinated names for objects that have in some sense already become—that are on their way to becoming—commodities. Certainly the word lists include the names of substances that are not yet commodities: flora, fauna, body parts, even social relationships. But these are paradigm classes for a series of as-yet-unrealized functions: to the mercantilist eye, everything depends on whether the objects can be functionalized, as substances are identified and enduring chains of commodities assembled across extremely long distances (see Figure 6.5). We could say that the lists are poised precisely at the point where the index passes over into sign, as the flat, descriptive record of the fact—the bare word—begins to shimmer with a potential significance that catches the European eye. 27 To translate these foreign words is to assist in the act of commodification, therefore, but it is also to grasp commodification itself a translation process, an alienation of substance through transfer and the addition of a supplementary form. Hakluyt understood the problem clearly enough, since his Discourse of Western Planting recommends, among scores of other interventions, the erection of sawmills that can convert the fantastic and even overwhelming varieties of trees that the English found in the New World, so that 'wee may with spee possess infinite masses of boordes of these sweete kindes, and those frame and make ready to be turned into goodly chests, cupboorde, stooles, tables, deskes &c.' 28 And should the natives resist, he suggests ominously to the Virginia Company adventurers, they must 'handle them gently, [for] while gentle courses may be found to serve, it will be without comparison the best: but if gentle polishing will not serve, then shall we not want hammerers and rough masons, snow,
I mean our old soldiours trained up in the Netherlands, to square and prepare them to our Preachers hands. 19

Somewhat surprisingly, it suddenly appears that translation was always one of the best ways back to the problem of materialism, an observation I make for several reasons. First, because the primary relationship between word and meaning, or word and sense, that structures humanist approaches to translation takes, in Hakluyt’s case, a distinctly substantialist turn; we could say that Hakluyt’s encounters with foreign words accentuates a more general orientation toward language in humanist thought that emphasizes the concreteness and portability of meaning, the dense ‘opacity’ of the word, as Norton has put it, the kernel surrounded by a mystical shell. 30 Translation was, in other words, an important area in humanist thought where the relationship between sense and letter, or word and thing, or language and world became the subject of scrutiny and of philosophical elaboration – these are fundamental oppositions that we have inherited and that still structure many of our arguments about representation and epistemology, especially in literary and cultural studies and especially in their historicist varieties. Consider this comment from Thomas Norton’s 1578 edition of his translation of Calvin’s Institutio Christianae:

I consdered how the author thereof had of long time purposely labored to write the same most exactly, and to packe great plenty of matter in small room of wordes, yea and those so circumspecket and precisely ordered, to avoid the caviations of such, as for emnity to the truth therein contained, woulde gladly seeketh and abuse all advantages which might be found by any oversight in penning of it, that the sentences were thereby become so full as nothinge might well be added without idle superfluity, & againe so niely pared that nothinge could be minimis without taking away some necessary substance of matter therein expressed. 31

To Norton the word is freighted with meaning, and the translation is an unpacking – not in our colloquial, classroom sense, but a close reading or an analytic commentary, but in a physical sense: someone needs to unload the ship of words, take account of its stock of sense, and then reassemble the sentences in new forms, laying them into the book like a treasure chest in a stronghouse.

So when another humanist, George Chapman, announces that he ‘hardly dare referre’ his translation of Homer ‘to reading judgements,’ I don’t think we are listening too hard when we hear in Chapman’s complaint about excessive literalism a whisper of anxiety about commercial publication and disdain for the common commerce of merchants and their dirty hands:

how I have in my conversion prov’d,
I must confesse, I hardly dare referre
To reading judgements; since, so generally,
Custome hath made even th’ablest Agents erre
In these translations; all so much apply
Their paines and cunninges, word for word to render
Their patient Authors. 33

‘Custom,’ ‘Agents’: these technical mercantilist terms pepper the pages of Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations, and they are apt figures for the theory of word-for-word translation that Chapman is dismissing, as Cicero had dismissed before him as a kind of money payment. To translate word for word is to grub along in the substance of language, blindly ignorant of the spirit of meaning:

To the Reader.
Least with foule hands you touch these holy Rites;
And with prejudices too profane,
Passe Homer, in your other Poets sleights;
Wash here; in this Porch to his numerous Phane,
Heare anncient Oracles speake, and tell you whom
You have to censure.

(A3r)

In Chapman’s severely idealist vision of translation as a kind of prophecy or even as a type of metempsychosis, none are more guilty of profanitie than the ‘great Clerks’ who can ‘write no English verse’: blinded by their own prejudices against English as a poetic language, they embrace a parochial translation style that conceals the full soul of the classical originals – and this despite their ostentatious and pretentious defence of the ancients as the source of all poetry:

But, as great Clerks, can write no English verse;
Because (als! great Clerks) English affords
(Say they) no height, nor copie; a rude tongue,
(Since is their Native): but in Greek or Latine
Their words are rare; for thence true Poesie sprung;
Thowgh them (Truth knows) they haue but skil to chat-in,
Compar’d with that they might say in their owne;
Since thither the’others full soule cannot make
The ample transmigration to be shewe
In Nature-loving Poesie: So the brake
Thaye Translators sticke in, that affect
Their word-for-word traductions (where they lose
The free grace of their natural Dialect
And shame their Authors, with a forced Glose[]),
I laugh to see; and yet as much aborre
More licence from the words, then may expresse
Their full compression, and make cleere the Author.

(sig. A4r–v)

The indictment is severe, and richly expressed: the clerks are at once fatuous, myopic, hypocritical, ignorant, foolish, and tragic – if only they would look up from their dusty pages and savour the English language that rolls in their own mouths! One man’s ‘native’ is another man’s poetry: the uncanny mirror of translation suddenly throws its light to reveal an English that is, at least in the eyes of the clerks, little better than
Inuit or Algonquin or the ‘natural language of Java,’ as one word-list in the Principal Navigations describes it. Chapman steps forward as a kind of smirking satirist-priest, rescuing the transcendent glory of true poesy by clothing it in the vestments of the mother tongue.

This is not Hakluyt’s mode of translation. He is much closer to the customers and merchants, the agents and factors who collected the precious language-samples, transcribing them with painstaking effort and concentration. Imagine it: sixteenth-century seamen, months at sea, shivering in freezing temperatures, exhausted from epic battles with icebergs that surge up suddenly and batter the fleet, now standing on a craggy shoreline that is further north than they ever imagined travelling in their wildest dreams, straining to understand the speech of an Inuit chief dressed in seal-skin who is understandably agitated about the fact that his dogs have been stolen, his people captured, and his village scattered. Who among them had the presence of mind to listen to the chief’s language? Where did they carry the ‘pen, yncke, and paper’ to which the accounts refer? It is incredible to think that these words were inscribed on to fragile substances in such extreme conditions, much less that they survived the seas, the floods, the shipwrecks that punctuate the English accounts. This is Hakluyt’s translation: the sheer accident of fragile substances combining together under extraordinary circumstances to somehow endure their way back to London, to Hakluyt’s desk, to the press, to archive and library and from there to microfilm and to our illuminated digital projections.

**Translation as assemblage**

By now it should be clear that I find in Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations a somewhat different notion of ‘translation’ from what we might expect, one that has been proposed by the sociologist of science Bruno Latour, who has launched a materialist methodology of great subtlety and potential. For all the recent interest in Latour’s work, the signature concept of his method is not, in my view, the notion of the ‘hybrid,’ or the non-modern, or the network, or even the strange ‘agency’ of things: it is the notion of translation that his work as a whole elaborates. We could even say that Latour’s notion of ‘translation’ finds its root in a specifically early modern sense of the word, one that was utterly commonplace in Hakluyt’s period. To early moderns, translation was a change of shape, as when a tailor or a Glover re-uses the leftover fabric to fashion a new pair of gloves, or when Shakespeare—a Glover’s son—employs the term in a Midsummer Night’s Dream to describe a weaver who has been transformed into a man with an ass’s head: ‘Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee. Thou art translated!’

No doubt many readers will be familiar with the arguments of Latour, whose fascinating case studies examine the many fine networks, assemblages, and collectives that compose the fabric of our world. These assemblages and their links happen at the level of basic chemistry—atoms and molecules—and at the level of tools: the hand that holds the hammer simply is a different entity from the hand without it; the hand with the sword different from the open palm (as the Inuit learned all too quickly). This juncture of hand with tool is a ‘translation.’ And translation creates assemblages among laboratory equipment and devices, too, and the networks of cities and ecosystems and of global commerce. Here is one of Latour’s definitions:

Instead of opposing words and the world, science studies, by its insistence on practice, has multiplied the intermediary terms that focus on the transformations so typical of the sciences; like ‘inscription’ or ‘articulation,’ ‘translation’ is a term that criss-crosses the modernist settlement [that philosophy or worldview that creates false oppositions, separating words from things, humans from non-humans, nature from ‘society’ and ‘culture’]. In its linguistic and material connotations, it refers to all displacements through other actors whose mediation is indispensable for any action to occur. In place of a rigid opposition between context and content, chains of translation refer to the work through which actors modify, displace, and translate their various and contradictory interests. (Pandora’s Hope, 311)

Latour has a striking image for the translations that enable a scientific network: ‘scientific facts are like frozen fish,’ he argues, since they stay good only as long as the chains that transport or translate them from site to site and purpose to purpose remain unbroken. For a stem cell to become a specimen, it must thrive in a growth factor and form physical, chemical bonds with other cells; for it to become evidence, it must enter into an enduring relation with a microscope; to become fact, computers, calculators, statistical equations, and many other actors must be added to the assemblage; to become theory, citations and sentences must climb aboard; to become polemic, politicians must wave their arms, polish their rhetoric, and broadcast their soundbites across the globe.

So what does this current notion of ‘translation’ have to do with Hakluyt, with the problem of form, and with early modern studies? In my view, Hakluyt practises a version of this translation, and all the evidence that he collects pertains to it. The Principal Navigations consists of innumerable reports generated by the enormous trading corporations of his day, reports that trace the long, rhizome-like networks that extended from outpost to ship, from factor to agent to merchant and finally to Hakluyt back in London. These networks are composed through many small translation points: points of intervention and mediation—points of giving form—in which one substance is joined to another, or modified, or combined. Agents and factors are deputized:

for the whole body of this companie, to buy, sel, trucke, change and permute al, and every kind and kindes of wares, marchandizes and goods … the same to utter and sell to the best commodite, profit and advantage of the said corporation.

The infinite variety of the world must be translated through the formal categories of number, weight, and measure; physical substances must be combined and compacted into a single coherent ‘masse’ and then transported through a network of distribution in which differing zones of value must be reconciled with one another. It is exactly like the process of verbal composition and translation that Thomas Norton has described.
We find in the *Principal Navigations* inventories of commodities and of the industrial processes necessary to produce them—fishes, furs, flax, hemp, honey, and wax, the perfect emblem of the metamorphic translation process—lists of geographic points of origin and distances to other trading sites, accounts of the many substances, men, and skills, and instruments necessary to the physical construction of the fleets.

I have written elsewhere in some detail about how travel narratives tend to work in Hakluyt, concentrating on the principle of 'value' that drives these narratives, a term that we can understand in both narratological and economic terms.\(^{39}\) Perhaps it is going too far to ascribe to Hakluyt a version of the 'translation' theory I am describing, although as we have seen Hakluyt was an unusually self-conscious translator and the *Principal Navigations* seems to me to offer a perfect archive in which to work. And in a sense Hakluyt's 'art of the fragment,' as I have called it, could serve as a model for our own efforts. For we find in the many fragments that constitute the *Principal Navigations* all the many procedures of formal appropriation, of figurative transposition, of physical change and transformation that characterize the translation process and that come to constitute the early modern global imaginary as both an economic and a political system for modern writers. This is Hakluyt's 'materialism,' a materialism of force and enduring chains of association, and of the networks of forms that give those translations meaning. And although Hakluyt is exemplary, he is by no means unique: we find in Bacon's work, for instance, another extremely subtle and complex engagement with the category of form, in several different senses, and we should remember that, when Bacon calls his new inductive method an 'Interpretation of Nature,' he is proposing science not merely as an active form of reading and writing or as a kind of formalism but precisely as a mode of 'translation'—*interpretatio est his term, too, and one that shouldn't merely be rendered as the 'interpretation of Nature,' as is commonly done.\(^{40}\)

Finally, it is worth making an observation about the epistemological model that follows from Hakluyt's practice and theory of translation as a mode of truthful discourse. Under the cover of classificatory schemes and other objectivist gestures, we may discern an active process of handling linguistic materials, a process of transformation, of *making* truth. In Hakluyt, truth rarely is: 'truth' is something done, which in turn implies a certain opacity or ambiguity around the precise 'content' of this truth, of what 'is' truthful or what things, ideas, or phenomena may be described in 'truthful' terms. This active, or praxical, or 'verbal' mode of truth, as we could call it, would seem at first glance to be entirely opposed to another mode of truth that flourishes in early modern travel writing: an empirical truth predicated on accuracy and referential transparency. Many of the documents printed by Hakluyt survive in the first place because they depend on this notion of quasi-scientific 'truth,' as measured by the quanta of information they contain.\(^{41}\) But this active, praxical, or transformational notion of truth that we find in Hakluyt's translation procedures does not stand in opposition to proto-empiricist and scientific aspects of early modern travel writing: it is essential to it. It suggests that 'truth' is not something we should imagine as a depth beneath a surface or as a latent content that must be found or investigated or communicated more or less faithfully, as conventional theories of translation often imagine: the truth of a text or of a situation ("Virginia") emerges through and by means of certain ways of operating, acting, talking, thinking, and writing. Indeed, what we often refer to as the 'political' dimension to early modern writing about the Atlantic world could be described as the sum total of forces that bind or dissociate chains of translation, and in this way manufacture truth about the world; the 'political' is distinguished by the quanta and the ontological mode of force that is implied in any act of translation and by the modes of truth—philosophical, legal, technical, linguistic, scientific, practical—that give those translations meaning. This suggests further that modes of truth are as important in the definition of the 'political' as modes of power and legitimate violence, if not more so: the 'political' is that which negotiates among competing modes of truth and the systems of value upon which they depend. This definition for the 'political' is one that I believe Hakluyt would have accepted, albeit translated into his own terms.

It may be surprising to learn that Hakluyt never travelled beyond France: although he was a charter member and shareholder of the Virginia Company, he remained an armchair geographer who voyaged to the New World only by proxy. By 1606, the name 'Hakluyt' has become synonymous with his book, *The Principal Navigations*, which was carried physically on to the ships as a source of historical, navigational, cultural, and linguistic information. By 1608, English adventurers began naming landmasses after Hakluyt: 'Hakluyt's Headland,' so named by Henry Hudson in his 1608 voyage to Greenland; 'Hclyuits foreland,' cited in a 1614 dispute between the Dutch ambassador and the Muscovy Company over rights of trade in Greenland; 'Mount Hakluyt,' named by the captain of a Muscovy Company voyage to the same area in the Summer of 1615; 'Hakluyt's isle,' named by William Baffin in Baffin Bay in July 1616.\(^{42}\)

'Countreys new discovered where commoditie is to be looked for, doe better accord with a new name given by the discoverers, then an uncertaine name by a doubtfull Author': so wrote Master Dionise Settle in his account of Martin Frobisher's 1577 voyage in search of the North-west Passage.\(^{43}\) We could find no better epitaph for Richard Hakluyt: his name as a translation of the earth, inscribed on the maps of the world, and in the mouth of every seaman looking for a landmark.

**Notes**

I would like to thank Allison Deutermann and András Kaséry for their comments as this chapter developed, as well as Mary Bly, Julie Crawford, Mario DiGiorgio, Katherine Eggert, Will Fisher, Mary Fuller, David Glimp, Natasha Korda, David Loewenstein, and Scott Parrish for their thoughts and invitations to present earlier versions of the work.

1. I have developed some of the ideas that follow in more detail in Henry S. Turner, "Lessons from literature for the historian of science (and vice versa): reflections on "form"", *Ijs: Journal of the History of Science Society*, 101.3 (2010), 578–589, with additional bibliography.
of French into English by R. H.; Antonio Galvao, *The Discoveries of the World from the First Originalion unto the Year of Our Lord 1555, corrected, quoted, and newly published in English by Richard Hakluyt* (London, 1601; STC 11543), reworking a pre-existing anonymous translation 'by some honest and well affected marchant of our nation,' as the dedication to Robert Cecil puts it (sig. A3r); Anon., *Virginia Richly Valued ... Written by a Portugall gentleman of Elusia, employed in all the action, and translated out of Portugese [sic] by Richard Hakluyt* (London, 1609; STC 22938); and Grotius (below).


16 Theodore de Bry, *America. Part i. 'A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia ...* (Frankfurt, 1590; STC 12786). With 'the true pictures and fashions of the people in that parte of America now called Virginia ... Translated out of Latin into English by Richard Hakluyt. Diligently collected and drawne by Jhon White ... now cutt in copper and first published by Theodore de Bry att his wone [sic] charges.' On the translation of the notes see Rogers in *Hakluyt Handbook*, i, pp. 38–39.


18 Ibid., p. 294.

19 *Principal Navigations* (1598–1600), Vol. iii, p. 742.

Book, list, word

Translations


22 Ibid., 182–183.


25 For a beautiful meditation on the list as a form, and especially as a form for the idea of the infinite, see Umberto Eco, The Infinity of Lists: An Illustrated Essay (New York: Rizzoli, 2009) esp. pp. 113–118 and 371–377. I would characterize Hakluyt’s lists as falling somewhere between the ‘practical’ and the ‘poetic’, in Eco’s terms, and their interest as forms of translation resides in the degree to which they are simultaneously both; I would also disagree with Eco’s characterization of the practical list as a finite form (p. 116).

26 As Hakluyt put it, in his dedicatory letter to Raleigh of his Latin edition of Peter Martyr’s De orbe novo ... (Paris, 1587; ‘labore & industriia Richardi Hakluyc’): ‘Not undeservedly, therefore, ought the memory of that outstanding man Peter Martyr Anglius of Milan to be particularly sacred and precious to every right-thinking individual. For he has published to the whole Christian world in his learned commentaries all that the Spaniards have achieved, whether praise- or blame-worthy, in a space of four and thirty years, on land and on sea ... Nor does he relate his facts disjointedly as most others have done, nor in a language, as most often happens, unknown to educated men, nor baldly or frigidly, but he depicts with a distinguished and skilful pen and with lively colours in a most gifted manner the head, neck, breast, arms, in brief the whole body of that tremendous entity America, and clothes it [indure] decently in the Latin dress familiar to scholars.’ Translated from Latin in E. G. R. Taylor (ed.), The Original Writings and Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakleys, 2 vols, Hakluyt Society 2nd ser. 76–77 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1935), Vol. II, p. 363.

27 See, for instance, Hakluyt’s comment in the Discourse of Western Planting that ‘they of Canada say that it is the space of a moon (yt is to say a moneth) to sail to a lande where Cynamon and claves are gathered, and in the frence orinall which I sawe in the kinges Library at Paris in the Abbaye of Saint Martines ye is further put downe that Donnacconna the kinge of Canada in his barke had travelled to that Contrie where Cynamon and claves are had, yea and the names whereby the Savages call those two spices in their owne language are there put downe in writinge’ (chapter 17, item 5; pp. 83.2002–84.2008).

28 Discourse of Western Planting, chapter 16, pp. 79.1883–1886.


30 Norton, ‘Humanist theories’, 178. Cf. Miles Smith’s introduction to the King James Bible: ‘Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel’ (qtd in Morini, Tudor Translation in Theory and Practice, p. 50). Smith draws on a long tradition of Christian hermeneutics, broadly Augustinian in orientation, one neatly captured in the Super Thesibaldum (attr. Fulgentius): ‘Not uncommonly poetic songs are seen to be comparable with nuts. For as in a nut there are two parts, the shell and the kernel, so also there are two parts in poetic songs: the literal and the mystical senses. The kernel lies hidden beneath the shell; beneath the literal sense lies the mystic understanding. If you wish to have the kernel, you must break the shell; if the figures are to be made plain, the letter must be shattered. The shell is tasteless; the kernel is flavorful to the taster.’ Qtd in Robert P. Miller (ed.), Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 5. My thanks to András Kisér for pointing me to these references.


34 See Christopher Hall’s, Dionisie Settle’s, and Thomas Ellis’s accounts of Martin Frobisher’s voyages (1576, 1577, 1578) in search of the North-West Passage, his encounter with the Inuit of ‘meta incognita’ (Nunavut province in northern Canada), and his battles with ice, Principal Navigations (1599–1600), Vol. III, pp. 29–32, 29, 3, 39–42; sigs C3r–C4v, C4v–D2r, and D2r–D4v.


38 Hakluyt, ‘Articles conceived and determined for the Commission of the Merchants of his company resiant in Russia ...’ (1 May 1555), Principal Navigations ... (1599–1600), Vol. I, p. 259.

39 Along these lines see Turner, ‘Corporate ego’, 103–147.

40 E.g. the title page to the second part of the Inauguratio Magna, ‘Novum organum, sive indicia vera de interpretatione naturae’ (Franciscus de Verulamii, summi Angliae cancellarii inauguratio magna (London, 1620; STC 1162), pp. 35; also pp. 42, 47, etc.)

41 We find in the Principal Navigations, and in an Atlantic context in particular—a pattern that is worth noting but that I am not yet able to explain—that the term ‘truth’ is often used as an intensifier to mark this empirical, referential gesture; the phrase ‘in truth’, for instance, is common throughout the documents that Hakluyt collects pertaining to North America in particular, including Florida. ‘In truth’ a certain shore is very dangerous, or a particular
bird has a white head, or a group of native people is very courageous, or a member of the expedition party had departed in a different direction, and so forth: the phrase is both an intensifier and a conjoining construction, one that allows a narrative or a report to continue while at the same time covering over the narrational movement, or the active narrational process: 'in truth' points toward a domain outside the narrative to which the report is presumed to refer, either the truth of an event or of the narrator himself as eyewitness or reliable mediator for the account. It is as if the fact of narration — the condition of reported speech, the epistemological burden of passing on an account of a state of affairs that is impossible to verify but that cannot be allowed to exist only in writing — generates a demand for 'truth' not as an assembled process but as an assertion, an invocation, even a tic of discourse.


Part III

The matters of writing