THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD THOMAS SAVAGE arrived in Jamestown in January 1608. Before Thomas had even had a chance to settle in, the fleet’s admiral, Capt. Christopher Newport, gave him to Wahunsenaca, who ruled over most of the tribes in the English colony’s vicinity. In turn, Newport received a boy named Namontack. Living in Werowocomoco, Wahunsenaca’s capital, Thomas met Pocahontas, who was ten or eleven, and she could help Thomas adjust to life with her people. Pocahontas had participated in a ceremony involving Capt. John Smith, who had been brought to Werowocomoco as a captive not long after the colony’s founding in 1607, and she came to Jamestown accompanying official embassies. Smith wrote that she was “a child of ten years old” and that not only was she the most beautiful of Powhatan’s people “but for wit, and spirit the only Nonpareil of his Country.” Smith demonstrated his sophistication in using a word borrowed from French, and he meant that no one equaled Pocahontas for her intelligence and personality. She was certainly curious about the English and their lives and apparently liked coming to Jamestown, but she was not just a casual visitor. She actually played a very significant role. Pocahontas always came with a small party of her father’s men, and her presence signaled their peaceful designs. A female presence was a well-established sign of benign intentions in Native missions.

As the paramount chief in the region, Wahunsenaca ruled over and protected more than thirty client tribes along the rivers that feed into Chesapeake Bay. The name of the land that the English called Virginia was Tsenacomoca. Jamestown was on the James River,
A ten-year-old Roanoke girl and her mother. Engraving by the workshop of Theodor de Bry from a painting by John White. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.
and Werowocomoco was on the York River just north of the James. Wahunsenaca was a Pamunkey. Because he ruled over many tribes, the English referred to him as “king” or “emperor,” and “The Powhatan” was his title. All the people over whom he ruled were known collectively as “the Powhatans,” and the English called him “Powhatan.” All the tribes that he ruled spoke Algonquian languages.

Youths, both Native and English, were absolutely essential in these new transatlantic relationships. Four boys, including one named Samuel Collier, sailed in the very first fleet. One of the four ran away early on, and the chief of the Paspaheghs, who lived just northwest of Jamestown, returned him. But later in 1608, the same year Newport left Thomas with Powhatan, Capt. John Smith left Samuel with the chief of the Weraskoyacks, who lived east of Jamestown on the same river. Fourteen-year-old Henry Spelman came the next year, and Smith gave Henry to Parahunt, the Powhatan’s son, a few weeks after his arrival. Parahunt ruled over the town of Powhatan, the paramount chief’s birthplace, farther inland on the James River near modern Richmond.

The records tell us nothing about Samuel’s or Thomas’s origins or about who decided that they should go to America. Richard Savage sailed on the same ship as Thomas Savage, so Thomas may have traveled with his father or brother. We do know about Henry Spelman’s family, partly because he wrote about his experiences but also because he had very prominent relatives. His uncle Sir Henry Spelman had been a member of Parliament and was the sheriff of Norfolk and a founder of the Society of Antiquaries, an elite group of historians. Robert Poole arrived in Jamestown in May 1611, and he traveled with his father, also named Robert, and brother John. They were on the Starr with the new governor, Sir Thomas Dale, and the Reverend Alexander Whitaker. Robert was sent to live with Opechancanough, the Powhatan’s kinsman, in 1614.

Why were so many boys on the ships, and why did colonial leaders just dump them with Native people they hardly knew? Part of the an-
swear lies in English theories of child rearing. As English kids entered their teens, they entered a transitional stage of life. Most writers termed this stage “youth,” but it was also called “nonage” and sometimes “adolescence.” Youth lasted until girls and boys reached adulthood, which some writers put well into their twenties.

English parents relinquished control over their children as they entered nonage, perhaps because parents did not consider themselves able to exert the strict discipline required to shape their sons and daughters in this “dark and dangerous” stage of life. The solution for most families was putting sons and daughters into servitude, where good masters or mistresses would exercise a kind of parental control but without the sentimental attachments a true parent might feel. In seventeenth-century England, most boys and girls were servants in another family’s home by the time they were thirteen or fourteen. Even families that could afford servants sent their own children into servitude. Fortunate children would have learned some basic skills—reading, writing, maybe arithmetic—at their village school. Many remained illiterate.

For a few youths, servitude meant going abroad. Some signed on as soldiers in the European wars. All of Jamestown’s leaders had been educated in what the colonial official John Pory called the “university of war” in the conflicts between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Europe. Others went to sea. Ship’s boys were a standard part of the crew in this new ocean world, so no one would have been surprised to see boys aboard. After all, there were four boys in the first Jamestown fleet. Most of the Virginia-bound youths remained within the fort or its environs and worked as servants; relatively few were placed with Native leaders. All the boys on the ships had experienced the pain of separation from their families, and they lived with the knowledge that they might never see friends and family again.

The Powhatans had very different ways of incorporating young teenagers into their societies as they emerged from childhood. Powhatan boys of thirteen or fourteen went through a long and elaborate ritual called the Huskenaw, which marked the end of their childhood and...
prepared them to take up adult roles. Early English accounts described the Huskenaw as human sacrifice. Henry reported that the Powhatans’ gods demanded a sacrifice of children in this religious ceremony, which was held deep in the forest. The men gathered in a circle around a fire built by the priests. As the ceremony progressed, a voice came out of the fire indicating the sacrifice that the gods required. Henry made a mistake when he wrote that the boys were ritually sacrificed. Reports such as Henry’s fed the notion that the Chesapeake Algonquians were savage, but later English observers corrected the early reports when they found out that those who were supposedly sacrificed were alive years later.

The true story was that boys who were ready for adulthood went into the woods for a long ordeal that marked the transition. As part of the ceremony, they consumed a drink, probably Jimsonweed, that made them appear temporarily insane. The English had been misled by the mothers weeping as the children were taken away. They wept, it turned out, for the loss of close ties with their children, who were now becoming men and would no longer stay with their mothers. Girls also took up adult roles as they entered their teen years. Girls joined the women as the agriculturalists of their society, and boys joined the men as hunters, fishermen, and warriors.

Powhatan youths entered adult life, but English adolescents were neither children nor adults. Because people in their nonage were not yet fully formed, they were flexible and full of possibilities. As Lafeu in Shakespeare’s play *Alls Well That Ends Well* remarked, youths are “unbaked and doughy.” Sir William Vaughan put it this way: “youth is like unto moist and soft clay.” The boys’ doughiness made them more capable of adjusting to new circumstances and more able to learn new languages, and their youth made them less threatening. Therefore, they were the ideal colonists to be placed with Natives throughout Tsenacomacah.

Most of the boys on the ships quickly disappeared from the records; some died, but most were not doing anything that officials saw as
important enough to record. But Thomas, Henry, and Robert played crucial roles. The boys soon came to understand how important their knowledge was and what a strong position it gave them. And because of the way they were treated, they came to like and respect the Native people they lived with.

Pocahontas, Thomas, Henry, and Robert spent the rest of their lives caught between cultures. They were the only people who could understand the goals of the Chesapeake Algonquians as well as the English, and they often faced hard choices. They knew they were being used by both sides, but they also cared about the outcomes. As tensions between the colonists and the people on whom they had intruded erupted into conflict, the go-betweens’ very lives were sometimes at risk. Because they were so young, they had little control over what happened to them and to everyone involved, but they understood the stakes better than anyone.

The conflicted loyalties faced by Pocahontas, Thomas, Henry, and Robert are exemplified by the experiences of a Paspahegh boy named Paquiquineo, who was taken by a Spanish vessel on the Carolina coast in 1561. Paquiquineo lived with the Spanish for a decade—he lived in Havana, in Mexico City, and in Spain—and they treated him as a prince. He was baptized in Mexico City, and the Spanish named him Don Luís de Velasco after the viceroy of New Spain, who became his godfather.

In 1571, Paquiquineo was finally brought back to Virginia. He accompanied a small party of Jesuits who intended to found a mission on the York River, Werowocomoco’s river. The Jesuits’ goal was to begin the great work of converting all the American Natives to Christianity. They were so certain that Don Luís was completely converted to their faith that they refused to take any soldiers for protection. Their convert was all the protection they needed. But once Paquiquineo was back in his home territory, he was torn between his two loyalties. He returned to his own people, but he did come back and ask the priests to baptize his young brother, who was very sick, showing how much he valued Christianity. The priests, frustrated in their efforts to begin the mission,
kept sending messengers to Paspahegh to urge Paquiqueño to come back to them. Ultimately he dealt with the intolerable pressure to make a choice by leading a war party that wiped out the mission. Only one of the Spanish was left alive: a boy named Alonso de Olmos. Paquiqueño asked Alonso to show the Paspaheghs how to bury the priests properly in their own chapel, so he continued to honor their religious commitment even though he felt compelled to shun them and stay with his own traditions. Alonso lived with the Paspaheghs for two years until a Spanish war party rescued him.¹⁴

A surprising number of boys and girls were forced to live in multiple cultures as Europeans, Americans, and Africans turned their attention toward the Atlantic in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Leaving youths, usually boys, with Native communities was standard practice for Europeans. Pedro Álvarez Cabral’s fleet, which landed on the coast of Brazil in 1500, carried twenty young men who had been released from prison with the expectation that they would be left with Native people wherever the ships landed. The Portuguese left two of these *degredados* behind when the fleet departed from Brazil, despite the Brazilians’ clear indication that they did not welcome the newcomers. A second expedition to Brazil two years later, including Amerigo Vespucci, found at least one of the youths. The recovered *degredado* translated for the Portuguese and returned with them to Portugal, where his knowledge was a precious commodity.¹⁵

A few decades later, in 1554, English venturers left fifteen-year-old Martin Frobisher as a hostage as they attempted to initiate trade with an African king at Shamma on Africa’s west coast. When Portuguese ships threatened the English, they fled, leaving Frobisher behind. He was held by the Portuguese in their fort at Mina and later in Portugal but was allowed to return to England after about four years. Two decades later, in the 1570s, he led three major expeditions seeking a sea passage through northern North America to Asia; his ships brought back
what they considered to be rich gold ore, but it turned out to be worthless rock. His expeditions also brought several Inuit people to England, including a mother and her baby.\textsuperscript{16}

In the 1560s, when a French Protestant colony on the Carolina coast departed in a hurry under threat from a Spanish fleet, fifteen-year-old Guillaume Rouffin elected to stay behind because he thought the colonial leaders lacked the skill to cross the ocean. Guillaume then lived with the Guales for two years before he was discovered by Spanish agents and taken to Florida. As Guillermo, he became the principal interpreter for the Spanish in Florida.\textsuperscript{17}

Around the world, children were employed in different types of exchanges. Portuguese Jesuits working in Asia arranged to send four Japanese boys, all thirteen or fourteen years old, on an embassy to Europe, where they were received by the Spanish king Philip II and two popes. They set out in 1582, and their voyage spanned more than eight years.\textsuperscript{18}

As the Atlantic opened to myriad enterprises, it became a scene of self-invention. All kinds of actors were thrust into situations in which they had to make up new kinds of roles for themselves because their expectations were thwarted and survival required adaptation. Guillaume Rouffin began his American experience as a French boy who became a Guale and then a Spaniard. If someone had woken him up in the middle of the night and asked him who he was, how would he have replied? Would it depend on who was asking? Loyalty and identity were fluid, not absolute, in this new Atlantic world. If you did not adapt to whatever conditions you faced, you did not survive.

Some of the most dramatic cases of forced fluidity in the early English Atlantic are ones we know the least about: the various sets of lost Roanoke colonists. And these involve English, Native, and African characters. Sir Walter Ralegh, who had been given a patent to colonize North America’s east coast by Queen Elizabeth, sent a reconnoitering voyage in 1584 to look at the land and select a good site. That party returned with a site, Roanoke Island within the North Carolina Outer
Banks, and two young coastal Carolina Algonquians, Manteo and Wanchese. Over the winter of 1584–85, the two Americans worked with Thomas Harriot, a young recent Oxford grad. Manteo and Wanchese taught Harriot their language, and he taught them English.  

All three were with the first colony that went in 1585; Manteo stayed with the English, but Wanchese, like Paquiquineo before him, immediately left them to return to his own people. This colony, like Jamestown, consisted of young men in a military regime. When Sir Francis Drake arrived with reinforcements that his fleet had collected in attacks around the Caribbean and on the coast of Florida in 1586, he found the colony in very bad shape and frightened of the Native Roanokes, whose chief they had killed, cutting off his head and mounting it on a pole. According to the reports, Drake had collected some three hundred Caribbean Natives and enslaved Africans, including Muslims from North Africa. Drake promised the colony’s leader, Capt. Ralph Lane, one of his ships for exploration in search of a better site for his people, but all plans were scuttled by a massive storm that sank many of Drake’s ships. Everyone who survived the storm, including the colonists, piled onto the remaining ships and returned to England, and Manteo elected to accompany them back to England. No one mentioned the people Drake had seized in the Caribbean; some probably died in the sunken ships, but the rest presumably were left behind and joined the Carolina Algonquians. Had Drake taken them to England, their arrival would have made a great stir, and no one mentioned it. Sir Richard Grenville arrived soon after the colonists departed with Drake, bringing new supplies from England. When he found the site deserted, he left fifteen men to hold the site.

Ralegh did not give up. The next year, he completely revamped his plan and decided to send families that were promised land, the kind of plan that would eventually be seen as the successful model. Manteo returned with this colony, but Harriot did not; and the new colonists did not see any of the people left behind in 1586. Ralegh left the colonists on their own for three years because events in England, including the
threat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, had made it impossible or inconvenient to send supply ships. When a ship finally did get through, the sailors found the site abandoned, and no English person ever saw the colonists again.

What had happened to these all these Roanoke colonists? The best guess is that they split up and joined Native communities that would accept them. Manteo’s role in helping the English families gain acceptance and make the transition must have been crucial. If this scenario is correct, they lived out the rest of their lives as American Natives and adopted wholly new identities. On the Jamestown colonists’ very first exploration “up the river,” George Percy saw “a Savage Boy about the age of ten years, which had a head of hair of a perfect yellow and a reasonable white skin.” How much better Jamestown’s early years would have been if they had been able to learn from surviving Roanoke colonists, but the colonists did not then have the linguistic skills to question the boy and his companions. This was the deficiency that Thomas, Henry, and Robert were supposed to rectify.

Ralegh soon turned his attention to what he considered better prospects, and this time he took personal charge. Ralegh conducted an expedition to Guiana on the South American mainland bordering on the Caribbean in search of the fabled golden city of El Dorado in 1595. Ralegh and the Native leaders exchanged boys. Topiawari, “the lord of Aromaia . . . freely gave me his only son to take with me into England . . . and I left with him one Francis Sparrow . . . (who was willing to tarry and could describe a country with his pen) and a boy of mine called Hugh Goodwyn to learn the language.”

Many young actors benefited from their own self-invention and their flexible identities. Several were in Jamestown from the beginning. William White, identified in the records as a laborer who was said to have “lived with the Natives,” gave testimony about the daily life and religious observances of his hosts. He was among the first to describe the Huskenaw as an actual sacrifice. George Percy, an “honorable gentleman” among the original colonists, conveyed some of White’s knowl-
edge in his *Observations Gathered out of a Discourse of the Plantation of the Southerne Colonie in Virginia by the English*, 1606. In the margin next to White's name, it says, “He was a made man,” which meant that his success was assured.²⁴

A young Irish sailor, Francis Magnel or Maguel, came in the first ships and was in Jamestown for much of the first year. By 1610, he was in Spain and was interviewed by the archbishop of Tuam, who forwarded his information to the royal court. Magnel described Virginia in the most glowing terms: precious metals, pearls, wine, furs, and the promise of silk and diamonds just to the west. He mentioned the boys who had been sent to live with the Natives and said that many of them already knew the language “perfectly.” Most important, he said that the English aimed to be “lords of the South Sea” (the Pacific Ocean), which the Powhatans assured them could be reached easily by a series of rivers. He certainly was now a made man, as he received a grant from the Spanish king Phillip III in September of that year.²⁵

Capt. John Smith, early Jamestown’s most important leader, is an example of highly successful self-invention. Smith went to fight in the religious wars between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Europe at the age of sixteen, but, as he put it, he quickly tired of seeing Christians slaughter each other. So he decided to serve in the wars in eastern Europe, where Hapsburg armies tried to push back the advance of the Islamic Ottoman Empire. He gave a long account of how he prepared himself for his goal of becoming an officer, a status he achieved under the Hapsburgs. He was knighted on the field of battle, but after many heroic exploits he was captured and taken to Istanbul, where he served a highborn young woman. He escaped from captivity and traveled through Europe, finally reaching England again as the Virginia Company was making its plans.²⁶

Thomas Savage, Henry Spelman, and Robert Poole were supposed to learn the culture of the other from the inside and especially to learn the
language so that they could interpret. But this assignment involved a huge amount of innovation. Each language involves a different way of looking at the world. Translation never involves a one-for-one rendering of a concept from one language into another, because the two languages will inevitably not have words that convey exactly the same meaning. This can be true of closely related languages such as French and Italian. How much more true would it have been with languages and cultures so very different as English and Chesapeake Algonquian?

These youths must have been acutely aware that they were constantly changing meanings as they passed messages back and forth, but they had no choice. In that time, the word *traduce* meant both “to translate” and “to betray.” Betrayal was an integral part of translation, however hard the boys tried to be accurate.

For example, the English language has multiple meanings for the word *lord*. It could refer to a high-ranking man, such as Lord de la Warr, who later became governor of Virginia. So Henry, Thomas, or Robert might translate it as *werowance*, the Chesapeake Algonquian word for a leader. But *lord* was also a religious term, referring to Jesus as a spiritual figure. So how would the boys make clear which meaning pertained in any given exchange? And would they translate the spiritual meaning of *lord* by using the name of the Native God? That might imply a kind of equality between the Native religious figure and the Christian God, a terrible heresy. It was a minefield.

As the boys worked to convey the meanings of one group—their own original culture or their newly acquired one—to the other group, they had to improvise and try to make both sides understand. And they were so young themselves that they might not necessarily understand everything about their own culture and the deeper meanings attached to words and concepts.

The more successful among these intermediaries ended up feeling really trapped between cultures. The more they came to understand the viewpoint of the people they had been forced to live with, the harder it was just to disregard their interests. No one had foreseen these fluid
loyalties. Colonial leaders had assumed that youths who lived with the Natives would remain wholly English and completely committed to the English way of thinking. But that is not how it worked.

English and Chesapeake Algonquian leaders made use of this ambiguity. Sometimes they sent the boys with false messages that put them in serious danger. No wonder the boys' own sense of loyalty was ambiguous. And English leaders saw youths as more expendable than full-grown adults were. Smith casually mentioned that he had left his "page" Samuel Collier with the Weraskoyacks "to learn the language" in 1608. The records never referred to Samuel again until Smith recorded his death in the early 1620s. He wrote that Samuel was "one of the most ancientest Planters, and very well acquainted with their language and habitation, humors and conditions, and Governor of a Town."28

Samuel Collier's story shows how limited the flow of information was. He was governor of an English town but does not appear in the records except at the beginning and the end of his life in Virginia. Youths such as Pocahontas, Thomas, Henry, and Robert were mentioned in the records only when they were doing something official for the colony or when their activities were seen as somehow threatening to Jamestown's well-being. Everyone who wrote was trying to push his own viewpoint about what was going on or, especially in the case of official communications, to reassure investors that everything was fine and success was just around the corner.

Everyone wanted to claim friendship with Pocahontas, so we are not surprised to see her mentioned again and again. But it is amazing that Thomas's, Henry's, and Robert's names appear as often as they do in records and letters. The boys spent extended times in Native towns; and although Pocahontas did not stay with the English until she was captured and forced to live in the colony, her role was similar to the boys'. Their job was to understand the other from the inside and interpret the other's culture and language for their own people. And they carried messages from their own leaders to the other side. Leaders on both sides could accept what the go-betweens said and act on it, or they
might reject the messages. How leaders would react was always up in the air. Duplicity and double-dealing were always part of all these relationships, and the go-betweens themselves did not necessarily know whether the messages they carried were genuine. Sometimes they suspected that they were being asked to carry false information, and they had to decide where their true loyalties lay. They could easily be caught in the middle of developing hostilities. Often they were.