

CHAPTER TWO

Naturalizing Power: Land and Sexual Violence along William Byrd's Dividing Line

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The border surrounds us
without clarity.
There is no certain way to see,
to cross into the good revolution
from the diseased heart of power.
—Karen Connelly

Colonialism is about asserting dominance over far-flung lands; colonialism is about asserting dominance over far-flung peoples. These statements are commonplaces, though the connection between them is not. William Byrd's *History of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina* and its companion *Secret History* reveal this interrelationship at work in the colonial South. Hailed as "the most literarily and historically valuable of southern colonial memoirs" and a "double masterpiece," these chronicles of the 1728 survey are unusually rich sources for exploring the workings of links between human beings and their environments.¹ Byrd planted sex and scandal liberally throughout the *Secret History*, intended only for the eyes and ears of close friends. He weeded these lurid details out of his public *History*, replacing them with accounts of the region's flora and fauna. Through his own "creative censorship," Byrd replaced sex with nature.²

The relationship between these aspects of the two *Histories* is crucial to Byrd's works, yet it has long been overlooked. Although scholars have paid homage to Byrd's invaluable record of natural history, they have given his descriptions of sexual encounters literary rather than historical treatment, viewing them as superior examples of eighteenth-century satirical wit. Attempts, such as Kathleen Brown's, to treat Byrd's sex life as a historical rather than a literary event have prompted calls to return our attention to his narrative multiplicity and strategies of literary emplotment.³ This literary perspective has diverted attention away from the disturbing issues raised when we admit the sexual encounters as historical fact, for in his *Secret History*, Byrd chronicled a series of repeated sex-

ual assaults on local women. The victims of these incidents varied from a "Dark Angel" who "struggled just enough to make her Admirer more eager," to a "Tallow-faced Wench . . . disabled from making any resistance by the Lameness of her Hand," to a farmer's "tal straight Daughter of a Yielding Sandy Complexion," to a kitchen maid who "wou'd certainly have been ravish't, if her timely consent had not prevented the Violence."⁴

Byrd addressed his account of these events to contemporaries of his own class. The *Secret History* was "designed for reading aloud around a colonial fireplace, where congenial gentlemen and ladies accustomed to ribaldry engaged the talk of a western adventure by people they knew."⁵ These were stories colonial elites told themselves about themselves and as such belong within a broader context of colonial politics, power, and culture. The image of Byrd and his peers reading the *Secret History* at a party or as part of a fireside chat confronts us with an elite culture where such acts were part of young men's training. For the elite women among the fireside audience, hearing about such acts must have reinforced both their sense of vulnerability as women and their sense of racial and class distance from the female victims of male "ribaldry."⁶

Byrd's accounts provide a privileged glimpse into the culture and ideology of an elite colonial class, a class for whom the manipulation of sex and nature, or more broadly of people and the environment, was not so much interchangeable as intertwined. His assumptions about class, sex, gender, and the environment combined to mandate joint manipulation of land and society. In his natural history, Byrd did more than itemize flora and fauna; he naturalized the power structures of colonial domination. He framed the *Histories* within a dual enclosure of environmental and human potential, evaluating the land and its inhabitants in terms of their susceptibility to colonial improvement and increased productivity.⁷ Throughout the *Histories*, Indians and settlers, as much as swamps and forests, were features of the landscape along the dividing line. Byrd described women in particular as akin to nature, not unlike soil or trees or animals, even describing them in similar terms. The assaults on women were closely associated with Byrd's other colonial goals, not aberrations from them. The social reform and social control that he craved necessitated transformations of landscape. At the same time, his vision of changes in the land necessitated human transformations. In the *Histories*, Byrd candidly displayed the ideological tools that men of his class used to create a dialectic of justification and necessity for their New World domination of land and people.

Byrd's own roots were deeply sunk in a landscape of class, race, and gender privilege. Born into the Virginia planter class in 1674, he was sent to school in England in the wake of Bacon's Rebellion. He subsequently

alternated his home between England and Virginia until, in his early fifties, he settled in the colonies for good in 1726, residing there until his death in 1744. In 1728, he accepted an appointment as chief commissioner for Virginia on the survey expedition organized to settle a long-standing border dispute between his home colony and North Carolina.⁸ The survey party consisted of representatives from both sides of the border and totaled between forty and fifty men, organized into a strict hierarchy. The boundary commissioners, three from Virginia including Byrd and four from North Carolina, perched at the apex of the pyramid. All were men whose pedigree, education, political involvement, and landholdings imbued them with the status and authority of gentlemen. Below the commissioners were the four surveyors. Their status rested upon their technical knowledge of surveying, their familiarity with the landscape, and, for some, their large landholdings. These formally trained surveyors commanded the "woodsmen" who performed technical roles marking and measuring the land and handling the instruments. All three tiers rested upon the "base" of the pyramid: the black and white servants who toiled at the most physical and menial work. The hierarchy of the survey team replicated southern society at large, in which status, privilege, and landholdings were closely linked. At Byrd's insistence, the assembled party was large enough to ensure that this social hierarchy survived the trials of travel over the unfamiliar territory from the north shore of Currituck Inlet through the Great Dismal Swamp to the foothills of the Appalachian mountains, two hundred and forty-one arduous miles west of the coast. In his survey team, Byrd assembled a microcosm of the social and political order he sought to extend to the unsocialized and, he was convinced, uncivilized people along the dividing line.⁹

Sometimes the links between Byrd's assessments of land and people are buried beneath the surface of his natural history entries. To find the connections, we have to dig a little. For Byrd, good land was either along a riverbank or wooded with large, deciduous trees. He wrote, for example, that the lands between Fountain Creek and the Roanoke River and between Cascade/Casquade Creek and the Dan River were especially fertile.¹⁰ In several other instances, he used "the largeness of the Trees," particularly walnut, poplar, hickory, and white oak, as "certain Proofs of a Fruitful Soil."¹¹ These two standards were sometimes at odds with one another within Byrd's text as well as with what we now know about the natural and human history of the area surveyed. Although his first standard resonates with current notions of land fertility, the second does not. Byrd's preference for large deciduous stands was consonant with the contemporary English exaltation of the solid "heart of oak," national symbol of English colonial power, liberty, and identity.¹² Yet it was inconsistent

with the fact that much of the most fertile land would have been kept clear of deciduous stands by Native American agricultural and hunting practices, which included frequent burnings. This tendency was especially true along the coastal plain.

The larger Indian (and later settler) population in eastern North Carolina ensured that burnings were more frequent there than elsewhere, and the sandy soils and extensive peat bogs of the coastal plain meant burnings were more extensive and harder to control.¹³ Although many Native American agricultural fields and villages had been abandoned by Byrd's time because of disease and warfare, such sites would not yet have reverted to large deciduous forests. They would instead have been characterized by the fire subclimax of longleaf pines. Byrd himself recognized that "Indian Towns . . . are remarkable for a fruitful Situation," yet he still lauded the hardwood forests as superior land.¹⁴ The inconsistencies of his categorization are apparent again in his declaration that "the Land . . . had all the Marks of Poverty, being for the most Part Sandy and full of Pines. This kind of Ground, tho' unfit for Ordinary Tillage, will, however, bring Cotton and Potatoes in Plenty."¹⁵ Clearly, Byrd measured "good" land by more than mere fruitfulness.¹⁶

When Byrd assessed land, he also implicitly assessed the inhabitants and their way of life. Indians situated their towns in fertile locales, he concluded, because "being by Nature not very Industrious, they choose such a Situation as will Subsist them with the least Labour."¹⁷ He pronounced similar judgments upon the white and black inhabitants of these sandy pine-covered regions. Byrd claimed that land suited for growing potatoes and cotton was land suited for those who were "easily contented, and like the Wild Irish, find more Pleasure in Laziness than Luxury."¹⁸ In this assessment, Byrd ignored the labor-intensive nature of cotton farming. And in his judgment of the potato, an archetypal New World product, he referenced widespread colonial associations between potatoes and Irish savagery.

In the hands of "uncivilized" inhabitants, laziness was the lamentable by-product of natural bounty. "Surely there is no place in the World where the Inhabitants live with less Labour than in N Carolina," wrote Byrd. "It approaches nearer to the Description of Lubberland than any other, by the great felicity of the Climate, the easiness of raising Provisions, and the Slothfulness of the People."¹⁹ According to him, laziness was literally in the air. Simply living in the environs of the Great Dismal Swamp produced in settlers "Agues . . . which Corrupt all the Juices of their Bodies, give them a cadaverous complexion, and besides a lazy, creeping Habit, which they never get rid of."²⁰ Swamp "Borderers" subsisted on free-range cattle and hogs, a diet that Byrd believed left them ridden with yaws and "hoggish in their Temper" to the

point that many "seem to Grunt rather than Speak in their ordinary conversation."²¹ Like many aspects of his natural history, these observations were gendered. He placed the blame for ill health on the men whose lazy dispositions, he believed, led them to locate their families in unhealthy locales.²² Although certain illnesses were linked to environmental conditions of the southern lowlands, Byrd's fear of disease was less reflective of actual biological threats than of his condemnation of land-use practices that he deemed inadequately rigorous.²³ Just as Spanish colonists could believe the savagery of the South American rain forest was contagious, so English colonists feared the contagion of southern swamps and pocosins.²⁴

Byrd's fear that environmentally induced laziness would infect settlers was compounded by his worry that the temperate climate and bountiful environment actually attracted indolent individuals: "To Speak the Truth, tis a thorough Aversion to Labor that makes People file off to N Carolina, where Plenty and a Warm Sun confirm them in their Disposition to Laziness for their whole Lives."²⁵ Thus, for Byrd, land could be poor because it had too much rather than too little fertility; environments could be problematic because of the human behavior they facilitated.

But why should Byrd have been so preoccupied with the work ethic of backcountry settlers? In fact, laziness was not the issue in and of itself. The real problem lay in the social relations of power signaled by the possibility of a "lazy" existence. Byrd worried that New World abundance might pose a serious obstacle to elite attempts to harness others' labor. Like most Virginia planters, he realized these people who had "filed off to North Carolina" were primarily former Virginia indentured servants, overworked and underrewarded, who had headed south when faced with a lack of available land and an officious gentry class at home. As in other colonial settings, the labor shortage resulted not from a scarcity of laborers, but from an abundance of those who would scarcely labor; the failure to work "appropriately" was a sociopolitical and cultural issue rather than a demographic one.²⁶

Byrd had good reason to be preoccupied with labor issues. He needed people to work his own vast landholdings, which included twenty thousand acres of the most fertile borderlands surveyed by the dividing-line commissioners.²⁷ Dubbing this tract the "Land of Eden," Byrd boasted that it was "as fertile as the Lands were said to be about Babylon, which yielded, if Herodotus tells us right, an Increase of no less than 2 or 300 for one."²⁸ He later claimed in his 1737 promotional tract, "New found Eden," that Indian corn "yields the planter in good soil seven to eight hundred fold or still more."²⁹ But planters needed laborers in order to reap this spectacular yield. Byrd, who self-identified as Adam in this newfound Eden, feared that the bountiful New World environment

might produce a new social world. Would poor white and enslaved African-American men still submit to working his Eden if they believed they could become Adams of their own gardens?³⁰

Byrd's Eden required not only laborers but also laborers who produced for commercial surplus rather than personal subsistence. "Valuable" land for Byrd was land that supported trade and commerce. As he wrote, the border region contained land that "would be a Valuable Tract of Land in any Country but North Carolina, where, for want of Navigation and Commerce, the best estate affords little more than a coarse Subsistence."³¹ His perspective was representative of contemporary mercantilist values that saw commercial people as the final products of "the natural advancement of human society."³² If England and Virginia were to display this superior state of civilization, workers had to be persuaded to produce goods to fuel the engine of colonial commerce.³³ Poor immigrant settlers, whom elite colonialists such as Byrd judged to be inferior, incapable of self-discipline, and barely civilized, were in particular need of persuasion.³⁴

Byrd transformed these class-specific economic values into universal moral ones by invoking the biblical flood. He explained that "there is no climate that produces every thing, since the Deluge Wrencht the Poles of the world out of their Place, nor is it fit it shou'd be so, because it is the Mutual Supply one country receives from another, which creates a mutual Traffic and Intercourse amongst men." Trade and commerce were not only natural but also necessary aspects of the postdiluvial world. "And in Truth," he continued, "were it not for the correspondence, in order to make up for each other's Wants, the Wars betwixt Bordering Nations, like those of the Indians and other barbarous People, wou'd be perpetual and irreconcilable."³⁵ Byrd thus naturalized the production of commercial surplus, conflating it with the Christian duty to prevent a Hobbesian war of all against all. Fertile land and independent folk whose self-sufficiency hindered the execution of this duty would have to be civilized, or coerced, into working.

Biblical precedent was a useful way for Byrd to promote his own commercial ventures, such as his plan to drain the Great Dismal Swamp.³⁶ Though it could only be done at great expense to the "Publick Treasure," he claimed that the drainage project would improve the health of settlers and "at the same time render so great a Tract of Swamp very Profitable, besides the advantage of making a Channel to transport by water-carriage goods from Albemarle Sound into Nanismond and Elizabeth Rivers, in Virginia."³⁷ Casting industriousness and trade as inherent moral goods allowed Byrd to argue that the general population would benefit from planting the colonial garden adjacent to a major transportation route under his control.

Byrd's personal concerns and interests mirrored those of the planter

class at large. From the beginning, colonial settlements in Virginia and North Carolina failed to reproduce some of the most important structures of English ruling class authority. The refusal of backcountry residents to marry formally through the church was but one example.³⁸ Dispersed settlement patterns undermined effective centralized control, a problem the English upper class had confronted in Ireland.³⁹ Still more problematic, as one historian has shown, was the fact that the poor settlers who were excluded from the benefits of elite English civility "did not accept the arguments of English social and cultural superiority that were expounded by their betters."⁴⁰

The experiences of the survey team reproduced in microcosm the difficulties that this lack of deference caused for elite colonists in general. In these, as in other, colonial borderlands, elite knowledge was hopelessly inadequate. Unable to survive in the backwoods without the assistance of knowledgeable locals, the survey party was dependent upon local people for everything from directions to sustenance.⁴¹ Colonial elites who succeeded in establishing their authority relied on the appropriation rather than the replacement of indigenous knowledge to a far greater degree than men such as William Byrd would have been willing to admit. Much of the information he included in the *History* about medicinal herbs and plants, the uses of "Dogwood Bark" and "Seneca Rattle-Snake-Root," for example, probably originated with indigenous and other local sources including African slaves.⁴² But many local residents were notably reluctant to share their hard-won knowledge of the terrain and environment with Byrd and his cohorts. When pressed for directions, residents sometimes fled and sometimes pleaded an unlikely degree of ignorance of local geography.⁴³ Both strategies could be risky, as Byrd's party threatened the uncooperative with imprisonment.⁴⁴ Local inhabitants were aware that Byrd could use the knowledge they shared against them, just as he was aware that their lack of cooperation was symptomatic of larger issues of social control.

Rejection of elite superiority and resistance to elite domination were closely linked to the style of agriculture that took root on the colonial frontier. Dispersed settlement patterns that facilitated the evasion of elite control went hand in hand with the practices of extensive agriculture and free-range grazing. To elites, landscapes marked by such practices looked more like "barbaric" Native American or even Irish patterns than the English tradition of intensive agriculture and enclosed pastures.⁴⁵

Byrd knew how to read the human relations imprinted upon physical landscapes. Swidden agriculture and free-ranging livestock bespoke the presence of independent (and, from his perspective, uncooperative), backcountry inhabitants, settlers who produced for personal subsistence rather than commercial surplus. Byrd's New World Eden, by contrast,

would require neatly planted orchards, crops in orderly monoculture fields, and enclosed livestock. Land would be brought under control through "Ordinary Tillage."⁴⁶ Forests could (and indeed should) be cleared to obtain pastures or fields or wood products because after all Eden itself had only two trees.⁴⁷ Domesticated animals—cattle, sheep, and goats—were an integral component of his pastoral vision. Just as ordered, agricultural fields represented "civilized" land, so sheep, goats, and cattle represented "civilized" animals.⁴⁸ Of course, this re-created Eden was to be planted not in virgin soil, but on top of an age-old Native American landscape, whose inhabitants presented still other obstacles to colonial domination. Eden would have to be very carefully constructed and managed.⁴⁹

Changes in the land were integral to the process of civilizing and controlling its inhabitants. Byrd's vision required reorienting the relationship not only between people and land but also between men and women. He wanted to transform the Virginia and Carolina wilderness into a garden comparable to the one where Adam delved and Eve span. In this endeavor, women had less distance to travel than men. Byrd noted that local women "Spin, weave and knit, all with their own Hands, while their Husbands, depending on the Bounty of the Climate, are Sloathfull in every thing but getting of Children."⁵⁰ Throughout the *Histories*, he largely exempted women from the environmentally induced infection of lassitude, claiming that "the Distemper of Laziness seizes the Men oftener much than the Women."⁵¹ The fact that women worked hard was less a sign, for Byrd, of their own virtue than it was of the savagery and laziness of the men who forced them into this unnatural role.

Judging men by how they treated women, Byrd wrote that "the Men for their Parts, just like the Indians, impose all the work upon the poor Women."⁵² Male lassitude and female drudgery inverted his view of the natural order and were therefore signs of savagery. Although men were savages if they didn't work enough, women were savages if they worked too much or if they worked at "male" tasks such as agriculture. Byrd inherited the dual images of the "squaw drudge" paired with that of the "indolent brave" from his seventeenth-century Virginian predecessors.⁵³ Countless colonizers before him used this stereotype to attack Native American rights, and many others would continue to draw upon it as a "prime index of savagism" through the turn of the twentieth century.⁵⁴ In Byrd's Eden, landscape and humscape would be mutually transformative; civilized inhabitants would be producers *and* products of the civilized environment.

The survey team was the vanguard of this mission to "civilize" the savage along the dividing line. In this respect too, it was a microcosm of broader colonial experience. The labor force Byrd sought to recruit through

his rhetoric of human and environmental "civilization" was primarily male, and the lessons he derived from the Garden of Eden were purely patriarchal. The implications for women were chilling. Local women felt the impact of this civilizing mission through sexual violence; they experienced the dividing line as a frontier of sexual fear.

Members of the survey party assaulted women at least nine times during the expedition. Byrd took obvious pleasure both in observing and recounting the sexual assaults on white, African-American, and Native American women. His *Secret History* often made the dividing-line expedition seem like one great sexual romp, more reminiscent of soldiers pillaging a captured city by assaulting its women and girls than anything as high-minded and officially sanctioned as a survey mission.⁵⁵ On March 9, for example, members of Byrd's party occupied a man's house without permission and "endulg'd themselves so far as to ly in the House. But it seems they broke the Rules of Hospitality," he continued, "by several gross Freedoms they offer'd to take with our Landlord's Sister."⁵⁶

Two days later Byrd and another member of the party were surprised by the "Charms" of a "Dark Angel" who "struggled just enough to make her Admirer more eager." Byrd described the encounter: "Her Complexion was a deep Copper, so that her fine Shape & regular Features made her appear like a Statue en Bronze done by a masterly hand. Shoebrush [Byrd's pseudonym for John Lovick, commissioner for North Carolina] was smitten at first Glance, and examined all her neat Proportions with a critical Exactness."⁵⁷ This woman was a member of a mulatto family, whose "Master" avoided the survey party, perhaps fearing they would doubt his free status, as indeed they did. In the *History*, Byrd expressed a measure of sympathy for the family, implying that their neighbors took economic advantage of their tenuous claim to freedom, "well knowing their Condition makes it necessary for them to Submit to any Terms."⁵⁸ But the sexual assault in the corresponding entry of the *Secret History* reveals that Byrd's party likewise took advantage of vulnerable backcountry residents. Being forced to submit to "any Terms" also meant enduring sexual violence at the hands of men like Byrd, against whom local people had no hope of recourse.⁵⁹

The following day Byrd's party took advantage of another woman who was both injured and intoxicated.

In the Gaiety of their Hearts, they invited a Tallow-faced Wench that had sprain'd her Wrist to drink with them, and when they had raise'd her in good Humour, they examined all her hidden Charms, and play'd a great many gay Pranks. When Firebrand [Byrd's pseudonym for Richard Fitz-William, commissioner for Virginia] who had the most Curiosity, was ranging over her sweet Person, he pick't

off several Scabs as big as Nipples, the Consequence of eating too much Pork. The poor Damsel was disabled from making any resistance by the Lameness of her Hand.⁶⁰

On March 15, a farmer's daughter became the next victim. Byrd described her in the *Secret History* in terms much like those used for the natural environment. She was "tal" and "straight" rather like the pine trees that took root in the region's sandy soils, of which her "Yielding Sandy Complexion" was reminiscent.⁶¹ Byrd's writings imply that it was more than the girl's complexion that was "yielding." He claimed it was her own curiosity that led to her encounter with Puzzlecause (William Little, commissioner for North Carolina), who took her inside one of the tents where the Parson (the Reverend Peter Fontaine) also awaited "to keep him honest, or peradventure, to partake of his diversion if he shou'd be otherwise."⁶² Byrd alluded to this incident in the *History* by stating simply that at this locale, the men in his party "were furnisht with every thing the Place afforded."⁶³ Read in conjunction with the corresponding portion of the *Secret History*, this comment suggests Byrd's inclination to include women among a region's natural resources. He counted women and nature alike among the things "the Place afforded."

On March 25, Firebrand, dissatisfied with the supper he received, "endeavour'd to mend his Entertainment by making hot Love to honest Ruth, who wou'd by no means be charm'd either with his Perswasion, or his Person. While the Master was employ'd in making Love to one Sister, the man made his Passion known to the other, Only he was more boisterous, & employ'd force, when he cou'd not succeed by fair means."⁶⁴ Master and servant alike attempted to exercise sex privileges along the dividing line. And on April 1, Byrd seemed to interpret the smile of his "Landlord's" daughter as indication that she would welcome his kisses: "I discharg'd a long Score with my Landlord, & a Short one with his Daughter Rachel for some Smiles that were to be paid for in Kisses."⁶⁵

Byrd described an assault on a kitchen maid in both histories. In the *History*, he recounted how brandy caused some men to be "too loving; In-somuch that a Damsel, who assisted in the Kitchen, had certainly Suffer'd what the Nuns call Martyrdom, had she not capitulated a little too soon."⁶⁶ He elaborated in the *Secret History*: "A Damsel who came to assist in the Kitchen wou'd certainly have been ravish't, if her timely consent had not prevented the Violence."⁶⁷ Feeling similarly threatened, the landlady of the house hid in her bedroom, armed with a chamberpot of "Female Ammunition."⁶⁸ Byrd claimed not to know the assailant's identity, though "Firebrand & his Servant were the most suspected, having been engag'd in those kind of Assaults once before."⁶⁹

On still another occasion, Byrd described how Meanwell (William

Dandridge, commissioner for Virginia) and Captain Stith "pretended to go a hunting, but their Game was 2 fresh colour'd Wenches, which were not hard to hunt down."⁷⁰ This rhetoric of women as game again reflected Byrd's conflation of the natural and female resources along the dividing line.

The survey party treated Native American women similarly. Describing a visit to a village of Nottoway Indians, Byrd reported that the survey team "visited most of the Princesses at their own Appartments, but the Smoke was so great there, the Fire being made in the middle of the Cabbins, that we were not able to see their Charms."⁷¹ Again linking women with the natural world, he explained that he "could discern by some of our Gentlemen's Linnen, discolour'd by the Soil of the Indian Ladys, that they had been convincing themselves in the point of their having no furr."⁷² Byrd's words suggest that he and the survey team viewed these women as akin to animals and that they treated them accordingly. The "Volley of small Arms" fired at Byrd's party when they "march't out of the Town" suggests that Nottoway communities knew the difference between sexual assault and their own traditions of "trading girls."⁷³

In several instances, Byrd claimed to have stepped in at the last moment to save the women from rape, a contention that seems incredible when set in the context of his own sexual history.⁷⁴ He was a man accustomed to having power over the lower classes. Repeatedly rejected by women of his own class, Byrd lorded sexual power over women of lesser status long before the dividing-line expedition. His London diaries include explicit descriptions of nonconsensual sexual encounters. Describing a morning visit to a friend, he recalled that he "committed uncleanness with the maid because the mistress was not at home," then "when the mistress came I rogered her."⁷⁵ According to one of Byrd's admiring editors, he "was not above picking up a stray wench in St. James's Park and consummating the affair in the weeds nearby."⁷⁶ From the days of his youth, Byrd had struggled to control his sexual urges.⁷⁷ As he aged, his sexual encounters were characterized more frequently than not by gross imbalances of class position and power, and toward the last years of his life, his sexual partners regularly included female slaves.⁷⁸

The expedition's sexual violence sheds disturbing light on Byrd's exemption of women along the dividing line from the immoral indolence of men. The inverted sexual division of labor seems part of a twisted rationale for a different form of "civilizing" action for women than for men. Byrd's acceptance of the "squaw-drudge" stereotype provided ideological justification for assaults on "savage" women supposedly in need of European rescue from Native American men. A vocal advocate of intermarriage between white men and Native American women, he argued that "a sprightly Lover is the most prevailing Missionary that can be sent

amongst these or any other Infidels."⁷⁹ Byrd may have been aware that these views echoed those previously espoused by other prominent southern colonists, including his brother-in-law, Robert Beverley II, and John Lawson; he did not know how well they anticipated the assimilation policies proposed for Alaskan Natives by Catherine the Great and for Native Americans by Thomas Jefferson.⁸⁰

Regardless, Byrd was blunt in linking sex with colonial policy. Perhaps recalling the legendary story of John Rolfe and Pocahontas, he wrote that "the poor Indians would have had less reason to Complain that the English took away their Land, if they had received it by way of Portion with their Daughters."⁸¹ Although not official policy, intermarriage between white traders and Indian women was commonplace on the eighteenth-century southern frontier. The specter of sexual violence in the *Secret History* complicates our picture of these relationships, problematizing the notion of consent between colonizer and colonized.⁸² It suggests the need to locate intermarriage along a continuum of sexual interaction that includes sexual assaults and rape. And it suggests the need to bind our understanding of the appropriation of land to the appropriation of women.

Sexual relations served Byrd as a justification not only for land appropriation but also as further means to coerce labor from the male inhabitants along the dividing line. The threat of sexual violence demonstrated to fathers, sons, brothers, and husbands alike the value of voluntarily conforming to the prescriptive vision for land and society that men like Byrd propounded. Men feared that the cost to their families would be more than economic if they chose to forgo the surplus goods Byrd urged them to produce. The sexual threat ensured a human cost for environmental inadequacy. Here again, Byrd's frontier paralleled other colonial settings. Colonizers employed gendered coercion to obtain labor in the pelagic sea otter trade in Russian Alaska and in the rubber industry in Colombia, where traders took women and children hostage until the men returned with pelts or rubber.⁸³ One anthropologist has identified a "culture of terror" in Colombia, where indigenous men as well as women were subjected to horrific sexual and other physical violence in the name of procuring rubber.⁸⁴ Although the records do not suggest a "culture of terror" of the same degree in Virginia and North Carolina, the sexual violence detailed in Byrd's *Secret History* begs a reassessment of commonalities across colonial frontiers. And it again complicates our notion of consent: the consent not only of women but of men who gave their labor under conditions tainted by the perverse coercion of sexual fear.⁸⁵

Through acts of sexual violence elite men reaffirmed their power not only over women but also over entire classes and races of people they deemed beneath them as well as over vast tracts of land they deemed un-

finished country.⁸⁶ Acts of sexual violence in colonial settings are not just personal but are deeply political as well.⁸⁷ Violence and abuse against women were inseparable from Byrd's colonial project of subjugating land and people. Here again, Byrd was not unique; this constellation of power, land, class, and sex extended far beyond the dividing line. Authors of other colonial texts may well have exercised the same sort of self-censorship that Byrd did when he wrote his public *History* hoping to promote land sales and settlement.⁸⁸ Although accounts of sexual violence were accepted and understood around elite fireplaces, Byrd could not have been certain of their reception in other circles, particularly among the families he hoped to attract to domesticate his vast holdings of back-country land.

Historically, colonial ruling elites have attempted to legitimate their power with precariously balanced justifications of the imperial enterprise and its suspect alignment with their personal wealth and status. Byrd's paradoxical concern that natural overabundance would encourage human underproduction is but one example of such a justification. The object of his discourse was not to render a plentiful environment less so but rather to ensure that it would yield its plenty to an elite class of which he was, of course, a member. This undertaking involved altering the human and natural landscapes in ideological and material ways. In his natural history, Byrd erected specific environmental values as fortifications around his Eden; he established particular configurations of land and power as entrance requirements. His invocations of Eden and the flood naturalized his self-interested definitions of the proper relationships between people and nature and between men and women. Biblical metaphors cast political questions of power in moral terms. The laziness that seeped from the swamps and pocosins into the men of the colonies justified both the physical alteration of the land itself and attempts to instill among settlers the work ethic required to effect such alterations. The drudgery inflicted upon women by uncivilized men appeared as further proof of these people's savagery, even as it served to sanction the abuse of women.

Byrd buttressed the exertion of elite, colonial power by a multifaceted appeal to nature. He presented his role as Adam in a restored Eden as part of the natural order of things while at the same time condemning those "contented with Nature as they find Her."⁸⁹ Human nature was intertwined with the natural environment in a way that facilitated their mutual redirection. But ultimately there was very little that was "natural" about either the landscape or humanscape that Byrd desired. Colonial elites did not rule naturally. They achieved and maintained dominance through the manufacture of ideological coercion and physical violence.

Byrd may well have been, as scholars have argued, a representative Virginia gentleman of his day.⁹⁰ The convergence of environmental and social policies apparent in his *Histories* was certainly characteristic of the colonial enterprise. This convergence masked, justified, and facilitated the brutality of colonialism in general and of Byrd's survey expedition in particular. The survey team was indeed a microcosm of colonial relations. We must move beyond viewing Byrd as a "sophisticated, satirical, man of letters"⁹¹ if we are to confront the unsettling implications of this violence for race, class, and gender relations in the colonial South, relations that characterized the public and political realms as much as the private and personal ones. Byrd's *Histories* offer powerful illustrations of how attitudes toward land and attitudes toward people can be mutually sustaining. In his colonial Eden, the environment was much more than a neutral assemblage of rock, water, and woods. It was the terrain in which he and men like him rooted their cultural identities, values, and human interactions. This fact is no more a relic of the colonial past than the acts of sexual violence that he described. Natural science and social science remain as inextricable today as when Byrd first traversed the dividing line.

NOTES

I would like to thank David Cecelski, Kirsten Fischer, Nancy Hewitt, Virginia Scharff, Daniel Levinson Wilk, Gwenn Miller, Peter Wood, and Susan Yarnell for their valuable encouragement and assistance with this chapter.

1. Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 901, 1438. Byrd used his detailed personal diaries as the basis for his *History of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina, Run in the Year of Our Lord, 1728*, which was first published in 1841 by the pioneering southern agronomist Edmund Ruffin. *The Secret History of the Line*, which Byrd actually composed prior to the *History*, remained unpublished until 1929. Hereafter, I refer separately to the *History* and *Secret History* where appropriate. When making statements applicable to both, I refer simply to the *Histories*. All citations come from the 1929 joint publication of the two histories. See William Byrd, *Histories of the Dividing Lines Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, ed. William K. Boyd (Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1929).

2. Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary and Life of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 136.

3. Douglas Anderson, "Plotting William Byrd," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1999): 701-22.

4. Byrd, *Histories*, 57, 59, 67, 149.

5. Davis, *Intellectual Life*, 1371; Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 679.

6. Here is powerful evidence indeed for Kathleen M. Brown's assertion that "in [Byrd's] life and in the lives of an unknown number of planters, power and sex were mutually reinforcing, especially when played out on the bodies of female subordinates" (*Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996], 334). In her discussion of American literature, Dawn Landner links the frontier's promise of sexual adventure for men with assumptions about white women's unfitness for frontier life: "Contrary to its surface appearance, America promises not a land of men without women, a Paradise without Eve, but a wilderness where the white man will have the best sex of his life. The assertion that wilderness life is too difficult for women, and the subsequent insistence upon the exclusion of white women, often assumes, unspoken, the retention of a non-white female sexual object (not peer or partner) and a sexuality which is without responsibility" ("Eve among the Indians," in *The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. Arlyn Diamond and Lee R. Edwards [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977], 201).

7. Byrd was typical in his use of categories of civilization and improvement to understand and control the "New World." On the seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century ideology and literature of improvement, see Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 26ff.

8. On William Byrd's life, see Lockridge, *Diary*; Kenneth A. Lockridge, *On the Sources of Patriarchal Rage: The Commonplace Books of William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson and the Gendering of Power in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); and Pierre Marambaud, *William Byrd of Westover, 1674-1744* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1971).

9. For the above characterization of the survey team I have drawn on David Smith, "William Byrd Surveys America," *Early American Literature* 11 (1977): 300-303. On Byrd's emphasis on order among the survey team, see Smith, "William Byrd," 303; and Brown, *Good Wives*, 280. On Byrd's concern with establishing a civilized order along the length of the dividing line, see A. James Wohlpart, "The Creation of the Ordered State: William Byrd's (Re)Vision in the History of the Dividing Line," *Southern Literary Journal* 25, no. 1 (1992): 3-18.

10. Byrd, *Histories*, 150, 210, 211.

11. *Ibid.*, 154, 166, 188.

12. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 163-64.

13. Harry Roy Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Historical Geography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 192.

14. Byrd, *Histories*, 208.

15. *Ibid.*, 102.

16. Here as along other colonial frontiers, the evaluation of land could not occur without an external benchmark. As a scholar of colonial Peru points out, "'good' and 'bad' environments are defined as such in terms of a given productive system" (Karen Spalding, *Huarochiri: An Andean Society under Inca and Spanish Rule* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1984], 298). Thus, for example, the Andes represented a "problem climate" for Spanish conquerors and colonialists be-

cause it was a landscape that presented "great difficulties to the technology developed by Europeans for the cultivation of their temperate, relatively flat agricultural lands" (p. 13). Since any productive system is tied to those who produce within it, Spalding's insight can be extended to the conclusion that judgments of land use were simultaneously judgments of land users.

17. Byrd, *Histories*, 208.

18. *Ibid.*, 102.

19. *Ibid.*, 92, 304.

20. *Ibid.*, 74.

21. *Ibid.*, 55, 152.

22. *Ibid.*, 74.

23. Hookworm, a parasite that can cause lethargy, dullness, and physical malformation, was likely prevalent among the population of the colonial South and may account for some of Byrd's observations. The impact of this "germ of laziness" should not be overstated, however, lest it become, as it did for some early-twentieth-century public health reformers, a "scientific" validation for long-established prejudices about the South. See Albert E. Cowdrey, *This Land, This South: An Environmental History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 133-34.

24. Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 76.

25. Byrd, *Histories*, 92.

26. Taussig, *Shamanism*, 54.

27. Byrd's landholdings began with an inheritance of some 14,000 acres in 1705. By 1744, when he died, he was the owner of 179,440 acres of land and had been negotiating for the Great Dismal Swamp. See William Byrd, *The Prose Works of William Byrd of Westover: Narratives of a Colonial Virginian*, ed. Louis B. Wright (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 28. Byrd was not alone in his acquisition of especially fine specimens of surveyed land. David Smith notes that "there was hardly a commissioner who did not return from the survey in possession of the rights to title of thousands of acres of choice real estate" ("William Byrd," 303).

28. Byrd, *Histories*, 268-270.

29. William Byrd, *William Byrd's Natural History of Virginia or The Newly Discovered Eden*, ed. Richard Croom and William J. Mulloy (Richmond, Va.: Dietz Press, 1940), 20; see also Byrd, *Histories*, 92. Here, Byrd seized upon the most outstanding symbol of overabundance in the colonial imagination. In 1588, Thomas Hariot had claimed that with less than twenty-four hours' labor, twenty-five square yards of land would yield enough corn for twelve months' sustenance; see *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (New York: History Book Club, 1951), C3.

30. Kenneth Lockridge, *On the Sources*, 93, notes Byrd's self-identification with Adam in the *History*. See also, for example, Byrd, *Histories*, 178.

31. Byrd, *Histories*, 52. The contrast between the accessible Chesapeake and the barrier of the Outer Banks was well known to colonial Virginians and North Carolinians alike. In Byrd's view, the natural impediments to extensive seaborne trade in North Carolina meant that North Carolinians needed to work harder to measure up.

32. Chaplin, *Anxious Pursuit*, 33.
33. *Ibid.*, 27.
34. Nicholas P. Canny, "The Permissive Frontier: Social Control in English Settlements in Ireland and Virginia, 1550–1650," in *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America, 1480–1650*, ed. K. R. Andrews, N. P. Canny and P. E. H. Hair (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 19.
35. Byrd, *Histories*, 270.
36. *Ibid.*, xxvi. See William Byrd, *Description of the Dismal Swamp and a Proposal to Drain the Swamp*, ed. Earl G. Swen, Heartman's Historical Series, no. 38 (Metuchen, N.J.: C. F. Heartman, 1922). George Washington would later invest some of his wealth and his slaves in the digging of the Dismal Swamp canal.
37. Byrd, *Histories*, 84–86.
38. Anderson, "Plotting William Byrd," 717; Byrd, *History*, 74.
39. Canny, "The Permissive Frontier," 40.
40. *Ibid.*, 34.
41. Byrd, *Histories*, 37, 50, 160, 220, 286, 312.
42. *Ibid.*, 145, 148, 152, 154, 155, 156, 160, 162, 163, 178, 242, 287. On the dependency of southern colonial culture and lifestyle on the unacknowledged appropriation of expertise and skill from African slaves, see Peter Wood, "It was a Negro Taught Them," *A New Look at African Labor in Early South Carolina*, *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 9, nos. 3–4 (July–October 1974): 160–89.
43. Byrd, *Histories*, 37, 50.
44. *Ibid.*, 50.
45. Susan Yarnell, "Half-Ploughed Fields: English Bias in Southern Agricultural Sources: 1580–1860" (master's thesis, Duke University, 1992), 17, 18, 23.
46. Byrd, *Histories*, 102.
47. Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 226.
48. About a pleasing view across a valley, for example, Byrd wrote that it "had a most agreeable Effect upon the Eye, and wanted nothing but Cattle grazing in the Meadow, and Sheep and Goats feeding on the Hill, to make it a Compleat Rural Landscape" (*Histories*, 296). See also Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 20.
49. Byrd's own plantation, of course, became a carefully constructed and well-managed English Eden, at least as he described it, though slavery certainly made it a "post-Fall" environment.
50. Byrd, *Histories*, 66.
51. *Ibid.*, 66, 92, 116, 304.
52. *Ibid.*, 92.
53. David D. Smits, "The 'Squaw Drudge': A Prime Index of Savagism," *Ethnohistory* 29, no. 4 (1982): 281. This trope was apparent in Australia too. See Patricia Grimshaw, "Maori Agriculturalists and Aboriginal Hunter-Gatherers: Women and Colonial Displacement in Nineteenth-Century Aotearoa/New Zealand and Southeastern Australia," in *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race*, ed. Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 32–38.
54. Smits, "The 'Squaw Drudge,'" 281–306.

55. "William Byrd," 305–7. Smith points out that the spring and fall portions of the survey expedition had markedly different characters. The accounts of sexual violence all occurred during the spring portion, which Smith argues had "something of the nature of a light-hearted group pilgrimage." The fall months of the survey, which traversed more westerly and less inhabited lands, had a more exclusively homosocial spirit akin to that of a great male hunting party.
56. Byrd, *Histories*, 53.
57. *Ibid.*, 57.
58. *Ibid.*, 56.
59. Douglas Anderson reads this passage from the *History* somewhat differently, identifying in it what he terms Byrd's "complex neutrality" ("Plotting William Byrd," 718). Byrd seems rather more complicit than neutral in my reading of the passage, however, as he himself was among those who dictated the terms to vulnerable escapees.
60. Byrd, *Histories*, 59.
61. *Ibid.*, 67.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*, 66.
64. *Ibid.*, 91.
65. *Ibid.*, 105.
66. *Ibid.*, 146.
67. *Ibid.*, 149.
68. *Ibid.*
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*, 151.
71. *Ibid.*, 123.
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*
74. Even if we were to accept Byrd's dubious claim that actual rape was usually averted during the survey expedition, it is clear that it was not by much. In several instances, he based his contention that rape did not occur on his assertion that the women ultimately consented. And if Byrd actually did intervene to prevent intercourse, he did so only after he had voyeuristically watched events proceed to the brink against the woman's will.
75. William Byrd, *The London Diary (1717–1721) and Other Writings*, ed. Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 180.
76. Byrd, *Prose Works*, 14.
77. Lockridge, *Diary*, 49.
78. Brown, *Good Wives*, 334, 355. For a graphic quantitative accounting of Byrd's sexual encounters as recorded in his diaries, see Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (London: Wiedenfield and Nicolson, 1977), 563–68. Byrd's sexual history must also be placed in the context of an elite culture in which marriage was a primary mechanism for acquiring and maintaining gentry status. Courtship was thus a period in which young elite women enjoyed an increased degree of social power; Brown, *Good Wives*, 249, 253–255. Byrd felt the sting of this superiority when women rejected him as a suitor, and male resentment of such power inspired misogyny in him and others. Lockridge,

On the Sources, 86, accepts Byrd's claims of sexual temperance and restraint, believing that his expressions of misogyny were limited to his commonplace book. Donald J. Siebert Jr., "William Byrd's *Histories of the Dividing Line: The Fashion of a Hero*," *American Literature* 47 (1975): 533-51, however, is less convinced by Byrd's self-descriptions as regular, ordered, and sexually restrained. The *Secret History* and Byrd's London diary certainly establish that his backlash was not limited to literary jibes. When elite women frustrated Byrd's attempts to fashion himself as a Virginian gentleman, separate from but equal to his English counterparts, he and men of his class could and did take recourse against the nonwhite, nonelite women to whom the power of courtship did not accrue.

79. Byrd, *Histories* 2, 4, 118, 120.

80. On Robert Beverly II and John Lawson, see, for example, Davis, *Intellectual Life*, 134, 163; Brown, *Good Wives*, 243; and Gary B. Nash, "The Image of the Indian in the Southern Colonial Mind," *William and Mary Quarterly* (3d ser.) 29 (1972): 227. On intermarriage between Russian fur traders and Native women, see Gwenn A. Miller, "'Handsome but Tattooed': Native Women and Russian Fur Traders at the Intersection of Cultures in Russian America, 1784-1819," (master's thesis, Duke University, 1997), 42. For Jefferson's ideas on assimilation and intermarriage, see Bernard J. Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 17; and Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1982), 5, 260. Support for the idea of intermarriage between whites and Native Americans was prominent enough to almost pass into Virginia law in the late eighteenth century. In 1784, Patrick Henry, supported by John Marshall, authored a bill proposing that incentives of cash, livestock, and clothing be offered to white men and women alike who married Native Americans. The bill also provided for mixed-race children to receive an education at the government's expense. It passed two readings but failed the third. See James Hugo Johnston, *Race Relations in Virginia and Miscegenation in the South* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 269-70.

81. Byrd, *Histories*, 4. For an analysis of racial attitudes in Byrd's *Histories*, see Dana D. Nelson, *The Word in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American Literature, 1638-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 29-37. Nelson argues that Byrd's call for intermarriage, far from being a liberal manifestation of racial tolerance, was, in fact, profoundly conservative.

82. Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives*, 356, similarly sees sexual relationships between masters and enslaved women as a case in which the gross imbalance of power renders the notion of "consent" extremely problematic, if not completely untenable.

83. For this phenomenon in Colombia, see Taussig, *Shamanism*, 25. For the Russian Alaskan example, see Miller, "Handsome but Tattooed," 32, 37.

84. Taussig, *Shamanism*, 30, 41, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 100, 121.

85. The implications of domination in Byrd's narrative have not gone entirely unnoticed by scholars. Historian Kenneth Lockridge recognizes that the *History of the Dividing Line* is not only an epic of running the line but is also "the epic of William Byrd's natural mastery over those around him," and he notes that "in the *Secret History*, much of the mastery is the shared mastery of men over

women" (*Diary*, 132). Ultimately, however, Lockridge treats the *Secret History's* "obsession with sex" as a flaw in the text's literary merit rather than as a key to understanding gender and power in colonial society; *ibid.*, 134. In this analysis, Lockridge is aligned with Byrd's many other editors and commentators who have treated his *Secret History* as a literary work of art, a "witty social satire" that is rich in racy humor" (Davis, *Intellectual Life*, 1372; Wilson and Ferris, *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 679). For a more recent literary take on Byrd that emphasizes his role in the production of a distinctly southern regional literature, see Susan Manning, "Industry and Idleness in Colonial Virginia: A New Approach to William Byrd II," *Journal of American Studies* 28, no. 2 (1994): 169-90. When historians have addressed the acts of sexual violence, they have most often treated them dismissively as an "eye for feminine charms" or as "amorous activities" (Byrd, *Histories*, xiv; Byrd, *Prose Works*, 15). More than twenty years ago, David Smith recognized that it was no longer enough to agree with such assured complacent judgments of Byrd. Smith, "William Byrd," 308-9, identified some of the complex questions regarding masculinity, sexuality, power, and colonialism raised by the *Histories*, though he left them unanswered.

86. For an extended look at the gendered dynamic of the discourses of discovery, conquest, and settlement in an earlier period, see Louis Montrose's analysis of Sir Walter Raleigh, "The Work of Gender and Sexuality in the Elizabethan Discourse of Sexuality," in *Discourses of Sexuality: From Aristotle to AIDS*, ed. Donna C. Stanton (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 138-84.

87. See Antonia Castañeda, "Sexual Violence in the Politics and Policies of Conquest: Amerindian Women and the Spanish Conquest of Alta California," in *Building with Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies*, ed. Adela de la Torre and Beatriz M. Pesquera (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 25; and Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 153.

88. On Byrd's intent in writing the *History*, see Davis, *Intellectual Life*, 59.

89. Byrd, *Histories*, 202.

90. Historian Richard Davis, *Intellectual Life*, 59, 1367, 1373, has argued, for example, that Byrd was representative of his age and that the survey expedition was emblematic of the American experience.

91. Byrd, *Prose Works*, 22-23.

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