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William Byrd II of Westover, Assertions of Status, and the Paradox of Control in Colonial
Virginia, as seen in his 1709-1712 Secret Diary

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*Submitted for Consideration of Partial Completion of the Bachelor of Arts, With Honors, in the
Department of History at Trinity College*

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Trinity College History Department: Senior Thesis

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Acknowledgements

I had never considered whether I would write a thesis or not. It always seemed inevitable given my deep interest in early American and British imperial history that I should research and write something that would be the culmination of my undergraduate years at Trinity. I remember clearly, however, what daunted me the most in attempting such a project: writing to such an extent not close to anything I had previously.

First and foremost, then, I must thank Professor Thomas Wickman for his advice and support. Were it not for his early guidance, I would have surely struggled to find and propose a topic that suited my unique interests. I am especially thankful for the time he set aside in meeting with me weekly while I was abroad at the University of St. Andrews despite the time difference and continuing to do so once I arrived back at Trinity College for my final semester in the spring. Those meetings kept me to account in producing work worthy of his time. Much gratitude is owed in particular for his encouraging me to explore aspects of the diary and William Byrd's life that I had never previously considered.

I must of course thank my parents for their steadfast devotion through all the trials and tribulations of fostering my research and work in the midst of a pandemic. Without their encouragement, I would have never developed my love of history, much less enrolled at Trinity. Their support has never wavered, and for that I am most grateful.

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Introduction. “I dreamed I saw a flaming star in the air at which I was much frightened”¹: Dreams, Death, and the Diaries

Routine is one of the most central characteristics of William Byrd II of Westover’s diary. Kenneth Lockridge asserts in *The Diary and Life of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* that it was borne out of Byrd’s status insecurities but, regardless, it seems to have served a purpose of keeping Byrd grounded and emotionally secure in a volatile environment at a time when stoicism was prized as a tool for maintaining authority and control over the self and others. It also served as a record of how he asserted his status to others, as well as to himself, and thereby reveals the nature of his relationships with, and the extent to which he had control over, individuals.

Although Byrd could have used the diary to confess his internal emotions while physically maintaining a stoic exterior, he chose not to. Because of this, Lockridge suggests that the diary served to reassure Byrd of his own equanimity and status. He could look back with satisfaction to see how he reacted to the events which would have tested the limits of his emotional control. As Lockridge states, “Equanimity was the key to a uniform social behavior free of unreliable extremes and unreconcilable differences. Such equanimity had to be kept on the most trying occasions, or it would have meant nothing.”²

The entry on February 12, 1709, typifies Byrd’s routine throughout the entire 1709-12 period. He wrote:

I rose at 6 o’clock and read a chapter in Hebrew and 200 verses in Homer’s *Odyssey*. I said my prayers and ate chocolate with Mr. Bland for breakfast. He went away this morning. I read law. Tony came to tell me all was well at Appomattox, and also that the hogs were ready. I ate nothing but hashed beef for dinner. In the evening I walked round

¹ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 194 (June 21, 1710).

² Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 55.

the plantation. I said my prayers. I had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, and good understanding this day, thanks be to God Almighty. Daniel came to let me know the sloop was almost loaded.”³

On a relatively uneventful day, Byrd kept to the tasks that shaped his routine. He almost always rose early, read classical texts, and prayed. Removed from any strenuous work, he occasionally exercised for health, and recorded it as ‘dancing my dance.’⁴ He frequently hosted visitors and managed business on his many plantations. He tried to eat only one dish at dinner, perhaps an effort to restrict himself from the sin of gluttony. He walked around the plantation, said his prayers, and recorded that he had ‘good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.’

Fascinated by the routine as being formed by an idealized gentry emotional code, Lockridge writes that “The events which fall between the parts of the behavioral routine and in the end that routine itself are cast in the emotional code of the eighteenth-century gentleman, emphasizing moderation, balance, and acceptance in all things.”⁵ In other words, events that did not occur daily were recorded in such a way to only further emphasize Byrd’s tranquility. Byrd intentionally wrote entries in his diary in such a way to reflect the stoicism expected of his class, whether recording a momentous event or a simple daily task.

The entries that do not fit into this mold are those where he recorded dreams. Entries reflecting on or otherwise simply discussing dreams were among the most descriptive part of the diaries, apart from formal events such as militia musters or court days that confirmed the status of Byrd and other white elite slaveholding planters. Byrd’s dreams frequently centered around

³ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 3 (February 12, 1709).

⁴ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 263.

⁵ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 6.

death and his fear of it reveals a rare insight into his mindset and what he valued. Dreams both challenged him to maintain his faith and served to reinforce it. In doing so, they also reveal the paradox of control. Whereas Byrd sought to maintain control over every aspect of his life, his faith and fear of death required submission to things beyond the reach of his power.

Winters in Virginia were harsh and rife with disease. The season of 1709-1710 was particularly dangerous in the eyes of William Byrd as a ‘distemper’ spread according to Lockridge.⁶ Byrd saw the miscarriage of his wife and the death of his friend Doctor Oastler to be in part a result of the distemper. On Christmas Day, Byrd chose to take Communion, a rare occurrence. Rhys Isaac describes in *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* how planters seldom expressed their piety beyond church attendance, stating that they “generally did not affect postures of grave piety and that on Sunday at church they took for granted the close proximity of the profane to the sacred.”⁷

He noted in his diary his attempts to prevent the spread of the distemper. On January 7, he wrote, “In the evening I gave the rest of the servants a vomit to prevent the distemper which is come as far as G-l-s Ordinary.”⁸ The next day he noted that “Colonel Hill told me the distemper was at his house and that five people had it. I took a walk about the plantation. In the evening I read in Terence and gave Nurse a vomit, and likewise to Suky Ware.”⁹ Byrd never recorded whether his slaves opposed his medical treatments though it’s unclear whether he ever gave them a choice to do so. On January 20, he noted that, “An express came from my brother Custis with the news that they had lost four negroes of the distemper and desired me to send more ipecac.”¹⁰

⁶ Lockridge, *William Byrd II of Virginia*, 43.

⁷ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 60-1.

⁸ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 127 (January 7, 1710).

⁹ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 128 (January 8, 1710).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 132 (January 20, 1710).

When he attended church at nearby Westover Parish on January 22, “Mr. Harrison’s horse ran away with his coach and broke down my mother’s tombstone.”¹¹ He arrived home later that day to find that “My daughter was indisposed and had a fever.”¹² The stress of this omen became apparent on the 24th, when he claimed that “I could not sleep all night for the disturbance my daughter gave me.”¹³ One is led to believe he was more stressed over the omen of his mother’s tombstone being damaged, as he did not mention his daughter’s condition on the interim day of the 23rd. His stress was to such an extent that he was unable to maintain his composure and recorded that “I settled accounts with Mr. M-r-s-l. I fell out with him very much about his accounts and other management.”¹⁴ He struggled to maintain his routine and did not read or pray. And while only his mother’s tombstone was damaged, Byrd recorded that “I had my father’s grave opened to see him but he was so wasted there was not anything to be distinguished.”¹⁵ Despite his distant relationship with his father, with whom he was never close due to his education in England, he nevertheless looked to him for advice or comfort.

The moments when Byrd was unable to keep his routine reveal his deep fear of death. One can only suggest reasons behind this fear. Perhaps he feared the absence of a legacy, whether it was in the form of his children or his political career. Perhaps he feared particular judgement by God. Byrd was largely aware of his own sins, and recorded them, such as on October 6, 1709, when he recorded how “I went to the capitol where I sent for the wench to clean my room and when I came I kissed her and felt her, for which God forgive me...I had good health but wicked thoughts, God forgive me.”¹⁶ That the woman was subjected to such treatment

¹¹ Ibid., 132 (January 22, 1710).

¹² Ibid., 133 (January 22, 1710).

¹³ Ibid., 133 (January 24, 1710).

¹⁴ Ibid., 133 (January 24, 1710).

¹⁵ Ibid., 133 (January 24, 1710).

¹⁶ Ibid., 91 (October 6, 1709).

is a testament to their powerlessness compared to power of William Byrd. Byrd may have nevertheless feared judgement for his sins but his position in society meant he was nevertheless readily able to sin in Virginia without consequence.

The distemper was a frequent feature of Virginia winters, though it was particularly deadly in the 1709-10 season. Even in April 1709, the distemper remained. On the eighth of that month, he wrote in his diary that Mr. Custis “told us that the distemper continued to rage extremely on the other side the Bay and had destroyed abundance of people.”¹⁷ Byrd then was unable to control himself and recorded that “I did not keep my rule of eating but the one dish.”¹⁸ The very same day, Byrd recorded that “The Indian woman died this evening, according to a dream I had last night about her.”¹⁹ Presumably enslaved, it’s unclear what this Native American woman’s role was on the plantation and whether she worked within the household because there was no mention of her in any previous entry. Byrd evidently believed in the validity of his dreams that concerned death whether it was the death of those on the periphery of his diaries and thereby his life or close to him. On July 15, 1709, he noted in his diary that “I had a bad dream this morning which seemed to foretell the death of some of my family. I thought I saw my yard full of people and when I came into the house I could not find my wife. God avert her death.”²⁰ Clearly, his belief was so strong that upon finding that his wife was not in their house at that moment he appealed to God to prevent her death.

Byrd’s dreams also centered around other subjects, but his strong belief in his dreams and omens of death meant that he also considered the possibility that unrelated dreams could prove true. He notes on January 5, 1710, that “About 4 o’clock this morning I dreamed that my sloop

¹⁷ Ibid., 19 (April 8, 1709).

¹⁸ Ibid., 19 (April 8, 1709).

¹⁹ Ibid., 19 (April 8, 1709).

²⁰ Ibid., 60 (July 15, 1709).

was arrived from Barbados. God send it may prove true as sometimes dreams have been true.”²¹ Byrd’s dreams provide a rare insight into his unfiltered mindset. Because dreams were deeply personal, Byrd had no ‘gentlemanly’ template, whether from English publications such as the *Tatler* or planters in Virginia, from which he could draw inspiration on how to deal with dreams that scared him. This is clear from his inconsistent, unsure, and emotional reactions. Given how stoicism and the moderation in expression of emotion was valued, Byrd would not have expressed emotion unless it so deeply touched him. As Kathleen Brown states, “Gentlemen on both sides of the Atlantic associated emotional restraint with class position, race, and gender identity...Through control over self, gentlemen reminded themselves, they would have control over others.”²²

On May 6, 1709, Byrd recorded that “In the afternoon Colonel Ludwell returned and brought us the bad news that Captain Morgan had lost his ship in Margate Roads by a storm as likewise had several others. My loss was very great in this ship where I had seven hogsheads of skins and 60 hogsheads of heavy tobacco. The Lord gives and the Lord has taken away—blessed be the name of the Lord.”²³ Instead of reflecting on his emotions, Byrd stoically expressed his ultimate submission to the will of God. By omitting any recording of emotion, whether he reacted or not, only served to reinforce that he could control himself. Later, on April 21, 1711, Byrd merely recorded that “I recived [sic] an account from England that two ships were lost in which I lost 60 hogsheads of tobacco. God’s will be done.”²⁴ One conundrum of the diaries is that the more Byrd affected a stoic exterior within the diaries, the less he recorded. Not only did

²¹ Ibid., 126 (January 5, 1710).

²² Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 324.

²³ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinsling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 31 (May 6, 1709).

²⁴ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 333 (April 21, 1711).

he omit his reaction or any sort of emotion, but he also refrained from reflecting at-length piously.

Byrd seemed to be uniquely concerned with dreams among male Virginia planters as he did not record discussing his dreams with other males of his rank. He did, however, record his interest in the dreams of others, with planters' wives seemingly to discussing it more than their husbands. When his friend and neighbor Benjamin Harrison of Berkeley was on his deathbed, he recorded with great interest the dream of Mrs. Burwell on March 31, 1710, "It is remarkable that Mrs. Burwell dreamed this night that she saw a person that with money scales weighed time and declared that there was more than 18 pennies worth of time to come, which seems to be a dream with some significance either concerning the world or a sick person."²⁵ On April 10, 1710, he wrote that "I sent early to inquire after Mr. Harrison and received word that he died about 4 o'clock this morning, which completed the 18th day of his sickness, according to Mrs. Burwell's dream exactly."²⁶ His belief in the validity of others' dreams seems to have only reinforced his concern with his own dreams and the possibility that they might become true.

In line with his attempts to maintain stoicism at all times throughout the diaries, Byrd recorded his interactions with other planters dispassionately. Though he would opine on the hospitality of other planters, he did so to imply and assert his own superiority. When he remarked on January 2, 1712, that the father of his neighbor Benjamin Harrison of Berkeley, also named Benjamin Harrison, but of Wakefield,²⁷ came "in his best clothes, because he happened to come yesterday in his worst,"²⁸ he was commenting not on his superiority to others of lower station but implying his superior dress compared to his peers.

²⁵ Ibid., 159 (March 31, 1710).

²⁶ Ibid., 163-4 (April 10, 1710).

²⁷ Ibid., 19.

²⁸ Ibid., 463 (January 2, 1712).

The relative and personal nature of dreams however meant that Byrd could not discuss them and simultaneously maintain a stoic exterior. The diary itself served to reinforce his stoicism only further. Because it was written in shorthand code, Byrd nevertheless confessed in limited ways to the diary and revealed that his stoicism was not a permanent exterior. This is clear when he recorded the death of his friends or his own illness.

When his friend Doctor William Oastler fell ill in October 1709 with the ‘ague,’ Byrd noted his condition daily between October 2-13. But, when the Doctor fell “very ill so that I thought he would die”²⁹ on October 9, 1709, Byrd described how:

Captain Stith came to see the Doctor and [f-r f-r-m s-k] came to see me. He stayed and dined with us, and Mr. Dennis likewise. In the afternoon I sent for the parson and Mr. Harrison to see the Doctor and they were both of the opinion he would die. Mr. Anderson stayed all night and about 7 o’clock his fever began to go off. We prayed by him. We gave him Dr. Goddard’s Drops, which seemed to do him great service. We had sent for Dr. Blair but he could not come because of Mrs. Ludwell who was very ill. The Doctor [extremely] much better and took the bark.³⁰

The descriptiveness and length of the entry is indicative of how Byrd cared for the Doctor, given how he broke his routine to stay with and care for him.

When the Reverend Charles Anderson similarly fell ill, William Byrd again broke his routine and visited him after receiving the news. He wrote in his diary that “I went to Isham Eppes’ house where I found the Colonel and Frank Eppes. I stayed with them about half an hour and then went over the river and found Mr. Anderson much better and learned that Dr. Cocke had been with him and that he was gone to my house.”³¹ He similarly noted his condition and recorded “I sent to know how Mr. Anderson did and received word that he was better.”³²

²⁹ Ibid., 91 (October 9, 1709).

³⁰ Ibid., 91 (October 9, 1709).

³¹ Ibid., 486 (February 16, 1712).

³² Ibid., 486-7 (February 17, 1712).

Byrd's stoic exterior broke most clearly when he fell ill himself and could not maintain his routine. Doctor William Cocke, who was at Felsted School in England with Byrd, but unlike him was native born, arrived in Virginia with the newly appointed Governor Alexander Spotswood in 1710. Historians have noted that Byrd rarely discussed his education at Felsted except when noting his relationship to Cocke, with Lockridge in particular arguing that he did not fit in as a colonial.³³ It would explain why Byrd took pleasure in hosting him at Westover on July 11-2, noting that "We took a walk together about the plantation and the Doctor seemed to be well pleased with the place,"³⁴ and that "The Doctor, who is a man of learning, was pleased with the library."³⁵

Byrd's attempts to impress the Doctor took an awkward turn when he asked him to tip the Governor's servants. In addition to subjugating him to act on his behalf, Byrd also sought to impress him with the exorbitant amount. He recorded on December 12, 1710, how "I desired the Doctor to give six of the Governor's servants £3 and returned to my lodgings and said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty."³⁶ It only turned more awkward when Byrd attempted to prank the Doctor. Cocke was the only individual who was recorded in the diaries as being pranked and teased by Byrd. He wrote on November 15, 1710, that "we went to the coffeehouse where I wrote a sham letter to Dr. Cocke under the name of Mary F-x. Soon after he came and the letter was delivered to him."³⁷ When the Doctor's

³³ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 62.

³⁴ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 203 (July 11, 1710).

³⁵ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 203 (July 12, 1710).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 271 (December 12, 1710).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 258 (November 15, 1710).

horse foundered, Byrd recorded that “Our diversion was chiefly in laughing at the Doctor about his horse and he was at last a little angry.”³⁸

Such jokes and pranks at Cocke’s expense ended when Byrd became seriously ill in July 1711. Byrd later wrote in the entry for July 10 how “My cold fit lasted four hours and the hot fit [...]. It was much the most violent I ever had in my life.”³⁹ Unable to maintain his routine, his stoic exterior collapsed. Byrd was bedridden for days and Cocke stayed at Westover, neglecting his other patients to nurse Byrd through most of his illness. Byrd’s assertions of status over Cocke disappeared as Cocke took charge of Byrd’s treatment. By the end, his relationship with Cocke changed, and he no longer sought to display his superiority over him and was content with his friendship. Not yet well enough to resume his exterior stoicism and routine in the diaries, Byrd noted that:

I found myself better this morning though my jaundice was full on me. The Doctor saw me in a good way and so took his leave but he took nothing for all his trouble which amazed me. However the Doctor did not go till after dinner. I gave him a million of thanks since he would take nothing else and his man led a horse to Williamsburg for Tom who was perfectly recovered.⁴⁰

William Byrd’s wife Lucy Parke’s dreams were particularly notable. Not only did Byrd record them in detail but that they discussed them to begin with should be considered in light of their troubled relationship. He recorded on June 18, 1710, that:

In the afternoon my wife told me a dream she had two nights. She thought she saw a scroll in the sky in form of a light cloud with writing on it. It ran extremely fast from west to east with great swiftness. The writing she could not read but there was a woman before her that told her there would be a great dearth because of want of rain and after that a pestilence for that the seasons were changed and time inverted.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., 320 (March 28, 1711).

³⁹ Ibid., 372 (July 10, 1711).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 373-4 (July 13, 1711).

⁴¹ Ibid., 193 (June 18, 1710).

The nature of their discussion is unclear, however. Byrd did not include how she may have interpreted her own dream. Nevertheless, that she revealed her dreams to her husband could be taken as an indication that she may have viewed her dreams in the same light as William Byrd. That he recorded them at-length is an indication of how seriously he took her dreams as opposed to her opinions on other matters.

This is notable given how Byrd was dismissive of his wife's desires to be more autonomous. Control and authority for Byrd were central to his position as a planter. He viewed the entire household, including his wife, children, and slaves, as extensions of himself which must be controlled. Lucy Parke Byrd challenged him by not being the submissive wife he expected but instead desiring independent control over the household as mistress of the plantation. William Byrd, however, saw both the household and the plantation as all being under his control. This was clear in entries such as on June 4, 1709, when he recorded being "out of humor with my wife for not minding her business."⁴² While his wife attempted to carve out a realm of authority over the household independent of her husband, he saw the household as being under his authority just as the plantation. As he saw it, her authority was merely delegated, and her power derived from his position as patriarch.

When she punished the household slaves, her husband objected to the passion with which she beat the slaves. While it's unclear if he objected to the method of punishment, her emotion conflicted with his ideal of a tranquil household where discipline was administered dispassionately. Lucy Parke challenged her husband's authority to intervene both privately and publicly to his great frustration. As Byrd recorded on December 31, 1711, "My wife and I had a terrible quarrel about whipping Eugene while Mr. Mumford was there but she had a mind to

⁴² Ibid., 43 (June 4, 1709).

show her authority before company but I would not suffer it, which she took very ill; however for peace sake I made the first advance towards a reconciliation which I obtained with some difficulty and after abundance of crying.”⁴³ This interaction displays one of the most common characteristics of their arguments. Byrd almost always recorded making the first step towards reconciliation after an argument with his wife. He did not in any sense ‘submit’ to his wife, but rather simply made the gesture to display his equanimity and ability to overcome his emotion.

On December 31, 1710, Byrd wrote at the greatest length in the diary about dreams, while mentioning his wife’s. He recorded that:

Some night this month I dreamed that I saw a flaming sword in the sky and called some company to see it but before they could come it was disappeared, and about a week after my wife and I were walking and we discovered in the clouds a shining cloud exactly in the shape of a dart and seemed to be over my plantation but it soon disappeared likewise. Both these appearances seemed to foretell some misfortune to me which afterwards came to pass in the death of several of my negroes after a very unusual manner. My wife about two months since dreamed she saw an angel in the shape of a big woman who told her the time was altered and the seasons were changed and that several calamities would follow that confusion. God avert his judgement from this poor country.⁴⁴

William Byrd evidently believed not only in his own dreams and attributed the death of his slaves to the bad omen he received, but also carefully considered his wife’s dreams and what omens they might entail. It’s unclear, however, whether William Byrd discussed his own dreams with his wife. Given that he felt insecure enough with her to write his diary in code and restrict her from his library by having locks installed,⁴⁵ it’s uncertain whether he would have shared something so deeply personal as his fears with his wife. Byrd often interpreted dreams, whether his own or others’, with death in mind, and it should be considered whether his wife interpreted her dreams in the same manner.

⁴³ Ibid., 462 (December 31, 1711).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 280 (December 31, 1710).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 469 (January 14, 1712).

It's notable that Lucy Parke Byrd's dreams are consistently gendered, and how her husband described her dream of a woman on June 18, 1710, as well as of "an angel in the shape of a big woman"⁴⁶ on December 31 in the same year. Given that she was living in a predominantly agricultural society, it is perhaps not surprising that she dreamt about the environment and the importance of crops. Her fears may be deeper however given that her husband described seasons and time changing with "several calamities" following "that confusion."⁴⁷

Fear of death, whether his own or someone connected to him, is a frequent interpretation if not theme of William Byrd's dreams. Whereas other dreams might be recorded at-length, some were recorded more succinctly. Death in Byrd's dreams, when not ambiguous in nature, tended to focus around those enslaved on his plantations. It's clear, then, that Byrd thought in racial terms both explicitly in the diary and in his dreams. On July 21, 1710, he recorded that "About eight nights ago I dreamed that several of my negroes lay sick on the floor and one Indian among the rest and now it came exactly to pass."⁴⁸ His record that his dream proved true was done so almost with resignation, a rare acknowledgement given how idealized stoicism was for 'gentlemen.' In nearly every other dream, Byrd expresses grave concern over matters outside of his control despite the ideal of equanimity and submission to God.

Byrd more often implied a stoic acceptance of an event and used it to express his submission to God. By omitting any recording of emotion, whether he actually reacted or not, only served to reinforce that he could control himself. Byrd recorded on April 21, 1711, that "I recived [*sic*] an account from England that two ships were lost in which I lost 60 hogsheads of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 280 (December 31, 1710).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 280 (December 31, 1710).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 207 (July 21, 1710).

tobacco. God's will be done.”⁴⁹ Not only did he omit his reaction or any sort of emotion, but he also refrained from any reflection that he did previously, such as on May 6 when he noted that “My loss was very great in this ship.”⁵⁰ The deaths of those enslaved, however, meant nothing to Byrd in personal terms and only in monetary terms, akin to losing tobacco on a ship, given how he did not always record their names. It is likely that he did not even interact with them daily and thus they were probably not household slaves.

Byrd's diaries do not reveal any unique treatment of those enslaved on his plantations, though it is illustrative of the planter mindset in the justification of cruel punishment. Slaves at Westover could be punished for any perceived infraction. A young slave named Eugene was punished frequently over several days because he was unable to control his bladder at night. Byrd recorded each time how “Eugene was whipped for pissing in bed and Jenny for concealing it.”⁵¹ Byrd perhaps only made Eugene more unable to control his bladder. His entry, however, reveals how he reacted when his slaves worked together to conceal things from him. Like other slaveowners, he deeply feared a conspiratorial uprising from those he enslaved and to that end, treated any instance of slaves protecting one another as a threat to his power. Thus, Jenny was whipped for protecting young Eugene.

If he recorded their names and interacted with them on close to a daily basis indicates then they were likely household slaves as opposed to those farming tobacco. Byrd also noted atypical aspects of those he interacted with. Peter, an enslaved Native American, was recorded in the diaries as ‘Indian Peter’⁵² or ‘Redskin Peter.’⁵³ William Byrd's interactions with Native

⁴⁹ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 333 (April 21, 1711).

⁵⁰ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 31 (May 6, 1709).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 112 (November 30, 1709).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 253 (November 3, 1710).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 468 (January 10, 1712).

Americans more broadly were limited. He joined Governor Spotswood in his role as commander-in-chief of the Charles City and Henrico County militias on an expedition to Nottoway Town in the fall of 1711 but, apart from military exercises, only recorded how they “took a walk about the town to see some Indian girls, with which we played the wag,”⁵⁴ “At night some of the troop went with me into the town to see the girls and kissed them without proceeding any further,”⁵⁵ and how “Jenny, an Indian girl, had got drunk and made us good sport.”⁵⁶ The lack of regard for Native Americans is clear from Byrd’s treatment of indigenous women, viewing them as useful only for ‘sport,’ and recording them as such.

Byrd also relied on indentured servants, one of whom, Billy Wilkins, went through the process of being indentured in the diaries. Billy Wilkins is where I first began to utilize the index in tracing the stories of those on the periphery of the diaries. It also became useful in following those with whom Byrd interacted with on a more equal basis such as Benjamin Harrison of Berkeley and Doctor William Cocke. For indentured servants and enslaved individuals, however, the entries in which they are mentioned are often of them being punished or being treated for an illness. Wilkins is a rare case in which something can be gleaned beyond their treatment and punishment. His father appears under the name Will Wilkins, and on February 24, 1711, Byrd recorded that “Mr. Wilkins came to bind his son.”⁵⁷ When looking through the index, it became clear that the editors of the diaries failed to distinguish between Will Wilkins and his son who shared his name. On June 4, 1711, for example, Byrd recorded that “I threatened Will Wilkins for stealing the apples and denying it when he had done, but I forgave him.”⁵⁸ After this entry,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 423 (October 18, 1711).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 424 (October 19, 1711).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 425 (October 20, 1711).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 305-6 (February 24, 1711).

⁵⁸ Ibid., 355 (June 4, 1711).

the son of Will Wilkins is referred to as Billy Wilkins, as he is when Byrd recorded nursing him between July 29 and August 1, 1711.⁵⁹ Thereafter, he is only recorded in the diaries when Byrd punished him for not practicing his writing well, which seems to indicate that indentured servants at Westover were given opportunities to learn skills before gaining their freedom unlike enslaved individuals, though they were subject to similar if not the same punishments.

While the number of indentured servants is clearer given that Byrd recorded their names, the number of enslaved is far more opaque. And while one can estimate the number of enslaved individuals in the household, the number of slaves working in the fields of Westover itself is not clear in the diaries. Moreover, Byrd owned several plantations separate from Westover. The editors list fifty individuals in the index as servants.⁶⁰ They do not always, however, mention their position or race, further obscuring the picture. Nevertheless, the scale of Byrd's wealth then is evident, since he likely only interacted with a small circle of those enslaved given the vastness of his landholdings. Additionally, while there was at least one married couple enslaved by Byrd, it's unclear how they were married and how Byrd's slaves participated in religion in Virginia overall. As Rebecca Goetz notes in *The Baptism of Virginia: How Christianity Created Race*, "Many seventeenth-century habits of the planter class, including the exclusion of Africans and Indians from marriage, baptism, and other Christian rites and rituals persisted in the eighteenth century as markers of the importance of hereditary heathenism."⁶¹

Byrd wrote on June 21, 1710, that "About five nights since I dreamed I saw a flaming star in the air at which I was much frightened and called some others to see it but when they

⁵⁹ Ibid., 381-3 (July 29-August 1, 1711).

⁶⁰ Ibid., 593-620.

⁶¹ Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 10.

came it disappeared. I fear this portends some judgement to this country or at least to myself.”⁶²

This entry was one of the most candid entries in Byrd’s diaries. He directly acknowledged his fear over his fate. It should be noted that Byrd did not always record dreams exactly after they occurred, leading one to wonder if Byrd largely only recorded the dreams that turned out to be true and if only when they became relevant to a particular situation or event. The large disconnect between Byrd’s dreams and his relationship with God is also notable. Here he directly references his fear of ‘judgement,’ but, if not by God, then who else? The dream came shortly after the death of his infant son Parke Byrd and the arrival of the new governor Alexander Spotswood. Perhaps he feared his fate at the hands of God, and the death of his son was a sign of only worse things to come, whether that be in form of a tense relationship with the Governor or the death of those enslaved on his plantations.

When William Byrd discovered that the estates of his father-in-law, Daniel Parke, Jr., were more saddled with debt than he had assumed in late 1711, he felt his status under threat as he struggled to figure out the extent of the debts and how he could pay them off. Lockridge notes that his aspirations to the governorship of Virginia and Maryland were conceptualized within his dreams.⁶³ He recorded on August 29, 1710, that “I dreamed last night that the lightning almost put out one of my eyes, that I won a tun full of money and might win more if I had ventured, that I was great with my Lord Marlborough.”⁶⁴ As he realized the burden the Parke debts would hold over his life and as his aspirations were dashed, he began to dream of death in increasingly personal terms. On January 16, 1712, he recorded in his diary that “I dreamed a coffin was

⁶² Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 194 (June 21, 1710).

⁶³ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 75.

⁶⁴ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 223-4 (August 29, 1710).

brought into my house and thrown into the hall.”⁶⁵ This was the first time that Byrd dreamed or at least recorded death within the context of a spatial dimension. On January 19, 1712, he recorded that “I dreamed a mourning coach drove into my garden and stopped at the house door.”⁶⁶ That the dream occurs at Westover reveals Byrd’s fixation with death as symbolized by a coffin and mourning coach literally being on his front doorstep and in the main hall of his home.

On the days his dreams grew darker and more personal, Byrd consistently prayed every night leading one to wonder at the nature of Byrd’s diary and his piety. Lockridge states that “The compulsiveness of Byrd’s early diary could be read in part as a need to hold off the fear of death, of literal body dissolution as well as dissolution of a proper gentleman, by consulting a rigid code of behavior and by maintaining emotional balance in the face of the imminence of death.”⁶⁷ Indeed, given the highly regimented nature of Byrd’s diaries and how his routines faltered under stress or remained resolute indicates that the structure of the diary and his piety were tools used towards maintaining the stoicism expected of his class.

Assertions of status are prevalent throughout the diaries. That Byrd held himself to such a strict routine and recorded his events dispassionately are in itself self-conscious displays of status. Byrd’s routine to him testified to his position in society, that he and only he dictated how he set about his day, while his stoicism asserted his control over his own emotions. While he assiduously stuck to these habits when writing an entry in the diaries, the events and thoughts that caused him the most grief and reflection, whether the real death of a friend or imagined

⁶⁵ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 471 (January 16, 1712).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 472 (January 19, 1712).

⁶⁷ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 65.

death of a family member, reflected his inner most thoughts given how they caused him to break from his routine and stoicism.

Chapter 1 explores William Byrd's relationship with his wife Lucy Parke Byrd and how their tumultuous marriage was rooted in how they conceptualized their respective realms of authority. In her role as mistress over the plantation, Lucy Byrd viewed a household that functioned under her control. She expected her husband to respect her realm of authority and decisions regarding the punishment of household slaves. Her husband, however, sought to establish his control over every aspect of life on the plantation, including the household. His wife's autonomous actions were perceived as challenges to his authority as patriarch and so he frequently intervened and challenged not just her decisions in the household, but decisions over her own body, such as plucking her eyebrows.

The second chapter examines Byrd's interactions with those enslaved and indentured on his plantations as well as Native Americans, both enslaved and free. His treatment of slaves, and engagement in the slave trade is noted. Bent on the assertion of control and thereby status, Byrd punished slaves for the slightest of reasons and in some cases, tailored the severity of the punishment to suit the seriousness of the perceived infraction. His interactions with Native Americans enslaved at his seat of Westover and how he engaged with different tribes such as the Meherrin, Nansemond, Nottoway, and Pamunkey is discussed. Byrd's management over his plantations is explored through his relationship with an overseer while his use and recording of indentured servitude is explored through one particular servant, Billy Wilkins.

Chapter 3 looks at William Byrd's relationship to those who ranked below him socially. It first looks at his interactions with Doctor William Oastler as recorded in his diaries. The stoicism expressed by Byrd as a mask of emotion means that the closeness of their relationship is

clear only when Oastler was on his deathbed, which Byrd recorded in uncharacteristic detail. His relationship with the Reverend Charles Anderson is similarly examined. When Anderson fell ill, Byrd expressed a concern for him similar to Oastler. The third chapter also examines the nuances of his relationship with Doctor William Cocke. While he otherwise would've ranked below Byrd socially, his connection with Governor Alexander Spotswood meant that Byrd was unsure how to treat him. He alternated between seeking to impress and then assert his status over Cocke and their relationship only turned into a friendship once Byrd fell seriously ill and Cocke stayed at Westover and took charge of his treatment while refusing payment.

Chapter 4 examines Byrd's relationship with a relative equal, Benjamin Harrison of Berkeley Plantation. It also looks at more broadly how Byrd prized hospitality and used it to remark on the deficiencies of others of equal status as if in comparison to his own superiority. The nature of Byrd's relationship to Harrison isn't clear beyond merely a social one in the diaries but the way he recorded his illness and eventual death reveals the extent to which he valued and respected him as a peer.

The fifth and final chapter explores William Byrd's piety and relationship to the Church of England in Virginia. The texts he read concerning religion are discussed while how he reflected upon and confronted his own sins are explored at-length. His seeming lack of interest in the baptism or conversion of those he enslaved is noted. His piety in the diaries is primarily expressed internally. Byrd's prayers, asking for forgiveness, and sins, all speak to his desire for control over himself, his wife, his servants, and his slaves as extensions thereof. His attempts to accept the will of God then speak to how he used the diary express his equanimity in the face of events outside of his control.

Chapter I. Lucy Parke Byrd: Competing Visions of Authority and Hierarchy at Westover

William Byrd asserted his status as husband and planter to his wife Lucy Parke Byrd throughout their marriage in the 1709-12 diaries, often to the detriment of their relationship. In doing so, he sought to consolidate his dominance over every aspect of his life. She was not what Byrd considered a proper housewife and plantation mistress because she challenged his authority both privately and publicly. Their arguments always centered around authority and power because they conceptualized their realms of authority in markedly different ways. Whereas William Byrd frequently grew angry with his wife for seemingly overstepping her bounds by punishing household slaves without his permission, Lucy Parke fought to maintain every bit of power she had and refused to yield to her husband over matters that she believed were solely under her control as mistress of the plantation.

Planters saw themselves in classical and biblical terms. Byrd wrote in a letter to the Earl of Orrery on July 5, 1726, that “I have a large Family of my own, and my Doors are open to Every Body, yet I have no Bills to pay, and half-a-Crown will rest undisturbed in my Pocket for many Moons together. Like one of the Patriarchs, I have my Flocks and my Herds, my Bond-men and Bond-women, and every Soart of trade amongst my own Servants, so that I live in a kind of Independence on every one but Providence.”⁶⁸ Rhys Isaac notes in *The Transformation of Virginia: 1740-1790* that another planter and contemporary of Byrd, Robert Beverley, Jr. consistently compared Virginia to the garden of Eden.⁶⁹ By imagining their lives as independent

⁶⁸ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 40.

⁶⁹ Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 14.

from crass commercialism, Byrd and his contemporaries attempted to emphasize their positions as landholders in perpetuity rather than newly rich colonials whose fortunes and land originated from a generation ago.

In *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, Kathleen Brown describes how “The patriarch’s power as husband, father, master, and head of household in colonial Virginia derived much of its strength from his attempts to inscribe meaning—sexual, economic, medical, and punitive—on the bodies of the women, children, and bound men in his household.”⁷⁰ Within Byrd’s household and plantations, everyone had a clearly defined role. Kathleen Brown is slightly incorrect when stating that “Women, however, had no direct relationship to other individuals in the chain but rather existed in subordinate positions to men of their rank”⁷¹ because, at least in the case of the Byrds, Lucy Parke Byrd had direct relationships to the household slaves she oversaw due to her responsibilities in managing the household.

Complete submission was required by her husband because her authority in managing the household was derived from his authority as patriarch. Within a hierarchy, the household slaves were under her authority while she was under the authority of her husband. The only way in which she wouldn’t have had any direct relationships to others in the chain besides with her husband would have been if she was not responsible for managing the household. Byrd only placed a higher importance on Lucy Parke’s ability to provide him with children and restricted her duties when she was pregnant, as Brown remarks “The bulk of her duties, however, revolved around bearing and raising children and making the household ready for guests. William Byrd’s

⁷⁰ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 5.

⁷¹ Brown, *Good Wives*, 15.

attempts to restrict her activities during her pregnancies revealed the degree to which he valued her reproductive duties over her household chores.”⁷²

When not pregnant, Lucy Parke was responsible, as Brown put it, for ensuring “Cleanliness, sweet-smelling bed linen, and an abundance of fine food at the table” because it “revealed to visitors a plantation mistress’s good character, even when such tasks were clearly being performed by female slaves and servants.”⁷³ ‘Good character’ is euphemistic for authority; if tasks were performed poorly, it reflected poorly on the mistress of the plantation for being unable to exert discipline over their servants and slaves.

Authority was central to William Byrd maintaining his household to the extent that his wife’s tendency to assert her role as mistress as outside the realm of his authority as patriarch resulted in constant arguments throughout their marriage over both significant and minor matters. Byrd recorded on June 4, 1709, being “out of humor with my wife for not minding her business,”⁷⁴ clearly envisioning a household where the role of matriarch was separate from the patriarch with no overlap or shared responsibility, only subordination. When Lucy Parke “broke open Will Randolph’s letter”⁷⁵ on January 15, 1712, Byrd recorded being “out of humor” because he saw the female role within the household as exclusive and subordinate to the male. By opening the letter, she ‘invaded’ Byrd’s patriarchal domain. Byrd’s domain was physically manifested in his library, where he had locks installed so that no one else besides himself would have access.⁷⁶ Evidently, he had no desire to let his wife or others intrude in his space and as

⁷² Ibid., 263.

⁷³ Ibid., 270.

⁷⁴ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 43 (June 4, 1709).

⁷⁵ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 470 (January 15, 1712).

⁷⁶ Ibid., 469 (January 14, 1712).

such “was out of humor because I missed a book out of the library which I thought my wife had taken for Mrs. Dunn without my knowledge, but she denied it.”⁷⁷

Lucy Byrd spent freely, to the consternation of her husband seemingly because she neither informed nor requested permission from him. On July 14, 1709, Byrd discovered that his wife had placed orders for goods from England without his knowledge and recorded “In the evening the boat returned and brought some letters for me from England, with an invoice of things sent [for?] by my wife which are enough to make a man mad. It put me out of humor very much.”⁷⁸ In William Byrd’s view, he was the only person in the household who earned money and thus any expenses should have been made with his permission. It must be noted that while Lucy did not earn money in the same manner as her husband, she still contributed to Byrd’s wealth through her dowry and inheritance. Kathleen Brown overextends when stating that, “Unable to appreciate the symbolic value of a commodity that did not reflect upon him directly, William Byrd II urged his wife to sort through her clothing so that he could make ‘an invoice of the things [she] could spare to be sold.’ Byrd, meanwhile, spent weeks rearranging his enormous collection of books and made several expensive trips to Williamsburg where he lost money playing cards.”⁷⁹ Although William Byrd is unfair and spendthrift in curbing the spending of his wife while gambling away money, Brown’s statement that Lucy Parke’s clothes do not reflect directly upon her husband is simply not true. Byrd would not have his wife appear in public in rags because she did directly reflect on him and his generosity as a husband and master of the household.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 472 (January 21, 1712).

⁷⁸ Ibid., 48 (July 14, 1709).

⁷⁹ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 294.

The most common arguments between William Byrd II and his wife Lucy Parke centered around how they viewed their roles as master and mistress of the plantation. Lucy Parke saw all household slaves under her sole authority as mistress while her husband saw his wife and the household slaves, in addition to the field slaves, as under his control. Thus, when his wife would punish slaves, Byrd recorded his astonishment at her cruelty and interceded on the basis that his authority superseded hers. Byrd recorded on July 15, 1710, that “My wife against my will caused little Jenny to be burned with a hot iron, for which I quarreled with her.”⁸⁰ Byrd recorded one of their most significant quarrels on March 2, 1712, stating:

I had a terrible quarrel with my wife concerning Jenny that I took away from her when she was beating her with the tongs. She lifted up her hands to strike me but forbore to do it. She gave me abundance of bad words and endeavored to strangle herself, but I believe in jest only. However after acting a mad woman a long time she was passive again.⁸¹

Lucy Parke’s exasperation with constantly being ordered about by her husband is clear, though whether her attempt at self-harm reflects her temperament or the frustration at her situation in life and relationship with her husband is less so.

In Byrd’s eyes, the only thing worse than his wife transgressing his authority was his wife transgressing his authority publicly. He wrote on December 31, 1711, that “My wife and I had a terrible quarrel about whipping Eugene while Mr. Mumford was there but she had a mind to show her authority before company but I would not suffer it, which she took very ill; however for peace sake I made the first advance towards a reconciliation which I obtained with some difficulty and after abundance of crying.”⁸² As Kathleen Brown states, Lucy Parke Byrd as well as her sister Frances Parke Custis:

⁸⁰ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 205 (July 15, 1710).

⁸¹ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 494 (March 2, 1712).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 462 (December 31, 1711).

resented any interference from husbands on the issue of disciplining servants and slaves, although this was an issue about which their father had tried to advise them in their youth. Most important, both women openly voiced dissent against their husbands' decisions and, when need be, flagrantly disobeyed them. The authority of the male head of household was not sacred to them, and they frequently challenged their husbands' attempts to control them.⁸³

While William Byrd frequently intervened whenever his wife sought to punish slaves under her authority, the extent to which he defended them against his wife because he was horrified by her cruelty is unclear since Byrd took no issue to cruelly punishing field and household slaves himself. It seems more likely that Byrd frequently intervened to re-assert authority over his wife; if he did so from a place of insecurity, then that only further reveals the extent to which patriarchal norms were valued by Byrd. Kenneth Lockridge similarly states in *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* that Byrd's "objection was always to the violation of his authority as master and to the irrational passion and severity with which Lucy inflicted punishments rather than to the idea of corporal punishment itself."⁸⁴

Although Byrd did not attempt to respect the boundaries of authority of his wife in her role as mistress over the plantation, if a slave did the same Byrd was firmly behind his wife. In the hierarchy of the plantation, Byrd's wife was always considered more important despite how volatile he viewed her to be. He recorded on September 12, 1712, that "My wife had a good a great [*sic*] quarrel with her maid Prue and with good reason; she is growing a most notable girl for stealing and laziness and lying and everything that is bad."⁸⁵ Neither Byrd nor his wife consider that Prue could be exhausted from laboring for hours daily and starving. There were

⁸³ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 339.

⁸⁴ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 68.

⁸⁵ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 583 (September 12, 1712).

moments even when Byrd wholeheartedly supported his wife, recording on February 27, 1711, that “In the evening my wife and little Jenny had a great quarrel in which my wife got the worst but at last by the help of the family Jenny was overcome and soundly whipped.”⁸⁶

Household slaves, however, could be caught in the crossfire between William Byrd and his wife. Most household slaves seem to be women. He recorded on May 22, 1712, how:

“My wife caused Prue to be whipped violently notwithstanding I desired not, which provoked me to have Anaka whipped likewise who had deserved it much more, on which my wife flew into such a passion that she hoped she would be revenged of me. I was moved very much at this but only thanked her for the present lest I should say things foolish in my passion...My wife was sorry for what she had said and came to ask my pardon and I forgave her in my heart but seemed to resent, that she might be the more sorry for her folly...I said my prayers and was reconciled to my wife and gave her a flourish in token of it.”⁸⁷

By beating slaves to anger the other, Lucy Parke and her husband challenged each other’s authority: William Byrd as patriarch over the entire plantation and Lucy Parke as mistress of the household. Byrd recorded himself as refusing to react and ‘say things foolish in my passion’ yet exhibited no such control by beating Anaka in order to antagonize his wife. Brown notes how:

For colonial gentlemen like Byrd, authority was a delicate project, much like a house built upon an unstable foundation. To keep such a structure standing, the owner had to be extremely sensitive to fine cracks and imperfections, shoring up the edifice to prevent the entire house from tumbling down...Maintaining authority thus required constant vigilance against even small usurpations of power...for tiny fissures not only indicated larger weaknesses in the construction but constituted a nagging reminder of contradictions inherent in colonial masculinity.⁸⁸

For Byrd then, any form of insubordination from his wife required an affirmation of his mastery and superiority over her. If he sensed that she was not entirely submissive to him, then he would affirm it, if only to himself, by noting not just his ‘reconciliation’ with his wife through sexual

⁸⁶ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 307 (February 27, 1711).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 533 (May 22, 1712).

⁸⁸ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 319.

intercourse, but also recording it in language that signaled mastery, affirming his position as patriarch.

As Kathleen Brown describes, “Domestic tranquility became the ideal of planters who dreamed of hegemonic authority over compliant wives, children, and slaves and of unquestioned political leadership over less privileged men. An appropriate emotional lexicon for men aspiring to self-mastery, domestic tranquility also promised to detach power from coercion, delivering authority on a silver platter to men who need never raise their voices in anger or life the lash to inflict punishment.”⁸⁹ Lucy Parke and her sister Frances uniquely “refused to be restrained by ideals of domestic harmony, disrupting husbands’ efforts to maintain calm authority with temper tantrums and violence. That historians have come to dismiss the Parke sisters as spoiled and temperamental may be the most compelling evidence of patriarchy’s success in draping itself in the velvet mantle of domestic tranquility.”⁹⁰

William Byrd himself described the importance of authority. While deemphasizing the commercial foundation of his role as a tobacco planter to maintain the veneer of independence as a gentleman, he nevertheless described later in the same letter to the Earl of Orrery that “However this Soart of Life is without expence, yet it is attended with a great deal of trouble. I must take care to keep all my people to their Duty, to set all the Springs in motion and to make every one draw his equal Share to carry the Machine forward.”⁹¹

Lucy Parke Byrd, as her husband saw it, was prone to many of the bad qualities he deemed common to women. The ideal of domestic tranquility was not reached in his eyes solely because of his wife’s temperamentality and had nothing to do with his attempts to stamp out any

⁸⁹ Brown, *Good Wives*, 321.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 341.

⁹¹ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 40.

of her singlemindedness. He recorded that, on March 31, 1709, “My wife was out of humor for nothing. However, I endeavored to please her again, having consideration for a woman’s weakness.”⁹² Byrd rarely recorded ways in which he compromised to make the marriage ‘tranquil’ but when he did, they are in the most miniscule of interactions, such as on January 24, 1711, when he “ate some oysters and then played at piquet with my wife to oblige her, notwithstanding it was against my inclination.”⁹³

In some cases, Lucy Parke’s capriciousness is readily apparent, such as when Byrd recorded on January 31, 1711, that “My wife quarreled with me about not sending for Mrs. Dunn when it rained to [lend her John]. She threatened to kill herself but had more discretion.”⁹⁴ Though her threat could reflect the closeness of her friendship with Mrs. Dunn and the escalation of the argument, the casualness with which Byrd treats her threat perhaps reveals the frequency and the lack of sincerity in her threats of self-harm and suicide. While Byrd interpreted the frequency of her threats of self-harm as evidence of insincerity, it could also have reflected how Lucy Parke was deeply unhappy with her husband intruding on what she saw as her domain. Given that most arguments seem to take place within the house and what she saw as her domain, her husband’s constant overruling her not only restricted her authority but also what she saw as her autonomy. Her autonomy then was valued to such an extent that if she lost it, she may have possibly no longer saw a future for herself.

Byrd’s anger at his wife spilled over into the diary in entries such as on May 31, 1712, when he wrote that “I was out of humor with my wife for her foolish passions, of which she is

⁹² Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 15 (March 31, 1709).

⁹³ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 291 (January 24, 1711).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 294 (January 31, 1711).

often guilty, for which God forgive her and make her repent and amend.”⁹⁵ This entry is the first instance where Byrd referred to his wife argumentativeness as sinful, possibly because it constantly challenged his authority. Even cases in which his wife’s temperament may be through no fault of her own, William Byrd recorded it as such. On June 25, 1712, he wrote that “My wife was often indisposed with breeding and very cross.”⁹⁶ While Byrd attributes her ‘crossness’ to her being pregnant, he did not make the connection between his sexual desires and how they affected his wife.

Kathleen Brown explains the contradictory nature of how Byrd viewed women and pregnancy. He wrote in his commonplace book, akin to a notebook, that “Women are most Lascivious about the time their terms begin to flow, because of the irritation which the flux of blood and spirits gives their Parts at that time.”⁹⁷ He took notes to abstain from sexual intercourse when a woman was pregnant, and yet, she writes, “On several occasions, he reported ‘rogering’ her while she was pregnant, including at least two incidents in which ‘she took but little pleasure in her condition.’”⁹⁸ Evidently, Brown concludes, Byrd willfully disregarded not only his pregnant wife’s condition but also her desires, to fulfill his own.

Byrd was frequently dismissive of her in other matters as well. He wrote on December 1, 1711, that “My wife and I had a small quarrel about nothing.”⁹⁹ In his mind, clearly the argument was petty and trivial, and it is this impression that in turn has in part given historians the view that Lucy Parke was temperamental; of course, to his wife the matter of concern may have meant a great deal but it’s unclear what was in contention because William Byrd simply dismisses it as

⁹⁵ Ibid., 537 (May 31, 1712).

⁹⁶ Ibid., 548 (June 25, 1712).

⁹⁷ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 330.

⁹⁸ Brown, *Good Wives*, 330.

⁹⁹ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 447 (December 1, 1711).

‘nothing.’ While Byrd remarks in this instance that it was a small quarrel, he recorded earlier on October 12, 1710, that “After we were in bed my wife and I had a terrible quarrel about nothing, so that we both got out of bed and were above an hour before we could persuade one another to go to bed again.”¹⁰⁰ Here Byrd still insists the argument was about ‘nothing’ and yet both clearly felt strongly enough about what was in contention that they got out of bed to argue with each other for over an hour.

Historians’ views of Lucy Parke have been influenced through Byrd’s perception and biases. When Byrd wrote on March 20, 1712, that “My wife [was] a little better, thank God; however she complains sometimes of a pain in her side but could by no means be persuaded to be bled, so much her fear prevails over her reason,”¹⁰¹ historians may have been inclined to believe that Lucy Parke was irrational rather than having a justified distrust of bloodletting. When Byrd wrote on July 13, 1712, how “When I returned I spoke kindly to my wife but she would not answer me; however I considered her weakness and bore it,”¹⁰² Byrd recorded himself as behaving calmly and rationally and with no record of what his wife was angry about, historians assumed she instigated the standoff and put it down to her mercurial temperament and ‘weakness,’ neglecting the possibility that Byrd was not emotionally mature enough to admit his own mistakes and instead constantly put the fault on his wife. Lockridge refers to their arguments as the result of Lucy Parke’s tantrums¹⁰³ rather than say, Byrd’s constant desire for complete control, though he does accurately characterize Byrd’s relationship with his wife as “a daily struggle for the upper hand.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 242 (October 12, 1710).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 503 (March 20, 1712).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 557 (July 13, 1712).

¹⁰³ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 54.

¹⁰⁴ Lockridge, *William Byrd II of Virginia*, 66.

Kathleen Brown aptly summarized how Byrd dismissed his wife without any later self-reflection and how their differences amounted to more than just the temperament of Lucy Parke when she states:

Lucy Byrd worried about the gossip she had repeated concerning two good friends of hers, Mrs. Stith and her cousin Harrison; Byrd trivialized the incident, attributing it to women's tendency to talk too much and saw no parallel several months later when a derogatory remark he made about the governor was repeated in the governor's hearing (Byrd worried himself sick over the political repercussions of the remark). Whereas Byrd insisted on strict regimens of medicine taking and dietary restriction in cases of illness, Lucy Byrd would 'forget' to give her children nasty-tasting medicine, distrusted and refused many of the cures her husband believed in, and sneaked food to her sick children behind her husband's back.¹⁰⁵

The manner in which William Byrd recorded arguments with his wife also provide an insight into how patriarchs combatted their own insecurities over the limits of their authority. A simple example takes place on April 9, 1709, when Byrd wrote that "My wife and I had another scold about mending my shoes but it was soon over by her submission."¹⁰⁶ By literally recording his wife's 'submission' Byrd attempts to affirm his power in the diary even if the realities were different. Whereas his wife may have simply not cared enough to continue arguing over something so minuscule as the repair of shoes, Byrd felt compelled to keep track of the argument and its conclusion, never failing to record his 'victory.'

Byrd recorded at length the various quarrels with his wife, almost never failing to record either his wife's submission, him attempting a reconciliation, or both. He wrote on May 23, 1710, that "I had a great quarrel with my wife, in which she was to blame altogether; however I made the first step to a reconciliation, to [which] she with much difficulty consented."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 304-5.

¹⁰⁶ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 19 (April 9, 1709).

¹⁰⁷ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 182 (May 23, 1710).

Domestic tranquility as outlined by Kathleen Brown is the ideal of what it meant to be a patriarch. To have authority so absolute that one's voice need never be raised. This ideal obviously could not be reached in Byrd's eyes with his wife. If he could not rule as patriarch quietly, then he would do so vocally. If he could not reach tranquility, he would settle for submission from all those below.

While Brown emphasizes the significance of marital tranquility, it's important to note that tranquility could only be reached on the patriarch's terms. Thus, when Byrd made the first step towards reconciling with his wife, he was confirming his authority and superiority by demonstrating a willingness to forgive, even if that willingness was false. Reconciliation was taken very seriously by Byrd, however, and not just as a way of maintaining mastery. Moments when Byrd genuinely attempted to reconcile himself and his wife are rare and not always obvious. Lockridge notes that "the night after the worst scene of all, when Lucy had beaten Jenny with the tongs and then tried to strangle herself, 'we drank some cider by way of reconciliation and I read nothing.' Here as elsewhere, Byrd's routine could be discarded when reconciliation was at stake."¹⁰⁸

Control over one's emotions was so highly idealized in Byrd's time as one of qualities of a gentleman that Byrd constantly recorded his stoicism, especially in the face of what he saw as his wife's emotional outbursts. While William Byrd criticized and tried to change his wife's tendency for strong expressions of emotion, he also viewed it to be a common female weakness. If marital tranquility could not be reached, he would settle for firmly asserting his authority as patriarch but only within the bounds acceptable for a gentleman. Thus, he recorded on July 9, 1710, that "In the afternoon my wife and I had a terrible quarrel about the things she had come in

¹⁰⁸ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 67-8.

but at length she submitted because she was in the wrong. For my part I kept my temper well.”¹⁰⁹

Byrd was angry not only that his wife overspent but also because he only discovered her expenses once the goods arrived from England. When he recorded their reconciliation, he wrote that his wife ‘submitted’ and that he kept his ‘temper well.’ On June 13, 1712, he wrote that “I had a small quarrel with my wife concerning the [nastiness] of the nursery but I would not be provoked.”¹¹⁰ Byrd’s control over his emotions, according to Lockridge:

served him as it served them [other gentlemen], to place him as a citizen of a cultural world in which he belonged. Thus, when he recorded that he had ‘kept his composure’ during one of Lucy’s tantrums, he was maintaining emotional credentials which identified him as successful and not a pathological gentleman... This, too, was a way to guarantee a common standard of social behavior within which eighteenth-century gentlemen could deal with one another.¹¹¹

Occasionally, Byrd recorded how he literally asserted his authority in the face of his wife’s insubordination, such as on February 5, 1711, when he recorded that “My wife and I quarreled about pulling her brows. She threatened she would not go to Williamsburg if she might not pull them; I refused, however, and got the better of her, and maintained my authority.”¹¹² Here Byrd is not merely satisfied with recording that he ‘won’ the argument but instead felt compelled to record additionally that he ‘refused’ to concede, ‘got the better of her,’ and ‘maintained his authority.’

The possibility that he might be in the wrong never seemed to once enter the mind of William Byrd, much less his diary. On July 2, 1711, he recorded in his diary that “I ate veal for dinner, but gave my wife none, which bred a mortal quarrel when the company was gone. I

¹⁰⁹ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinsling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 202 (July 9, 1710).

¹¹⁰ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 543 (June 13, 1712).

¹¹¹ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 54.

¹¹² Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinsling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 296 (February 5, 1711).

endeavored to reconcile myself to her and to persuade her to eat but she plagued me a great while before she would.”¹¹³ To admit any wrongdoing would be to court further acts of insubordination from his wife; thus, Byrd can only admit that he “endeavored to reconcile myself to her.” That Lucy Parke Byrd did not argue with her husband until their guests left indicates that she was not entirely the uncontrolled emotional woman that Byrd and most historians have by and large assumed her to be.

Lucy Parke served another role for William Byrd but only within the diary. For Byrd to remain the stoic and constantly in control of his emotions, instead of recording how he felt about a particular situation he would instead impart his feelings onto his wife since, not only did Byrd view all women in general to be more emotional but, he particularly viewed it as one of his wife’s greatest weaknesses. When his son was born, Byrd recorded on September 6, 1709, how:

I went to bed about 10 o’clock and left the women full of expectation with my wife...About one o’clock this morning my wife was happily delivered of a son, thanks be to God Almighty. I was awake in a blink and rose and my cousin Harrison met me on the stairs and told me it was a boy. We drank some French wine and went to bed again and rose at 7 o’clock. I read a chapter in Hebrew and then drank chocolate with the women for breakfast.¹¹⁴

Rather than discussing his own emotions at having a male heir, Byrd instead projected onto his wife by noting that she was “happily delivered of a son.” The projection is clear because Byrd considers the birth of an heir to be a momentous occasion such that he breaks from his routine of reading classical texts alone to congregate ‘with the women for breakfast’ as equals.

Their son was christened Parke,¹¹⁵ presumably after his father-in-law Daniel Parke, Jr., who was rumored to have died several months prior in his position as Governor of the Leeward

¹¹³ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 369 (July 2, 1711).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 79-80 (September 6, 1709).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 87 (September 28, 1709).

Islands.¹¹⁶ Byrd did not mention in his diary how the name was chosen, whether he alone made the decision, or his wife was given any input. Nevertheless, it's clear that they desired a tangible connection with Daniel Parke, Jr. Lucy Parke Byrd may have desired a closer connection with her father during his absence and for her father's name to continue given that no other male member of the family lived in Virginia while he was serving as governor. William Byrd may have shared a similar desire though for different reasons as a social aspirant who eyed the governorship of Virginia and Maryland. Perhaps Byrd sought to connect his son with the only native Virginian to ever govern a royal colony in his own right.

Parke Byrd, however died in infancy on June 4, 1710. William Byrd again projected his emotions onto his wife when he wrote in his diary, "My wife had several fits of tears for our dear son but kept within the bounds of submission."¹¹⁷ While reinforcing his authority as patriarch by noting his wife 'kept within the bounds of submission' to both him and to God, his own feelings are revealed at the end of the day when he recorded his health as 'indifferent.' Byrd's emotions aren't always clear given the era's emphasis on control over one's emotions, but Lockridge writes that "as he was to do all his life, he then projected his feelings [about his son's death] onto his wife. 'My wife was much afflicted to His judgement better, notwithstanding I was very sensible of my loss, but God's will be done.'" As Lockridge writes, "'Very sensible of my loss' spoke volumes of agony for an eighteenth-century sensibility."¹¹⁸

While William Byrd did not always explicitly express his emotions, when not projecting onto his wife, his emotions were evident in the way he reflected in the diary at the end of his day on his health, humor, and thoughts. Lockridge provides an example from the diaries, illustrating

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 16 (April 1, 1709).

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 187 (June 4, 1710).

¹¹⁸ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 57.

how Byrd's dissatisfaction or upset was reflected in different ways, stating that after Byrd was omitted as a councilor in Governor Spotswood's instructions for a ceremony, "Only a sour stomach, a failure to enjoy the governor, and a polite but early departure, all of which even to himself he blamed on the wine, showed his upset."¹¹⁹ Lockridge further explains that "Only one familiar with the diary and William Byrd's psychosomatic illnesses could see in his recovered health by evening that his heart and not his stomach had been hurt. Only one familiar could know that his neglect to pray was for him a characteristic of psychic upset."¹²⁰

Although historians tend to focus on the many arguments between Byrd and his wife, they seldom focus on the moments between them where they expressed affectionate feelings for one another. Byrd seems to have seldom recorded these moments simply perhaps because they were uncommon or perhaps even because those feelings of love for his wife made Byrd uncomfortable in an era where passion was downplayed except in romantic poems or letters. The moments recorded in the diaries are at their greatest emotional intensity when his wife was ill, so he recorded on July 12, 1709, that "My wife was very melancholy, but I comforted her as well as I could and was troubled to see her so"¹²¹ and on March 20, 1710, that "I was amicable with my wife in her sickness."¹²² Byrd even recorded a rare instance of him crying on June 25, 1711, writing that "My wife grew very ill which made [me] weep for her."¹²³

Lockridge describes the importance of their almost daily walk, weather permitting, that Byrd and his wife took around the plantation alone, but even in these moments he cannot refrain from criticism of his wife. He wrote on February 16, 1711, how "In the afternoon I took a walk

¹¹⁹ Lockridge, *William Byrd II of Virginia*, 57.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹²¹ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 59 (July 12, 1709).

¹²² Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 155 (March 20, 1710).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 365 (June 25, 1711).

with my wife who was melancholy for her misfortunes and wished herself a freak for which I rebuked her.”¹²⁴ Not only did Byrd neglect to record her ‘misfortunes,’ but he criticized her while she wallowed in self-pity.

The complexity of their emotional attachment is never more evident than when Lucy Byrd’s father Daniel Parke, Jr. was killed during his governorship of the Leeward Islands.

William Byrd recorded in his diary on April 12, 1711, how:

I received a letter this morning from Mr. C-s in Barbados which told me the sad news that my father Parke was shot through the head in the Leeward Islands. He told me no particulars because it was a melancholy subject. I told it my wife as gently as I could and it affected her very much but I comforted her as well as I could by telling her that his enemies killed him because he should not make their villainy appear in England.¹²⁵

It’s interesting that, in reacting to the political instability in the Leeward Islands, Byrd sympathized with the governor and royal policy while in Virginia Byrd, along with other planters, stood in opposition to the royal governor. Several days later April 16, 1711, Byrd wrote that “I sent my man Tom home with a letter to my wife to comfort her for her father’s death. I found the news came not only from Barbados but also from Jamaica and Bermudas by which it appeared that he was murdered after a most barbarous manner.”¹²⁶ Evidently, even the death of his wife’s father was not enough to keep Byrd away from his business in Williamsburg.

Lucy Parke Byrd envisioned herself in a role far more independent than what her husband William would allow. Throughout their relationship, her desire for power and agency competed with his desire for recognition of his authority and supremacy. Though she occasionally showed consideration for it, she frequently challenged his authority publicly to his deep frustration because of his utmost desire for control and tranquility or at least the appearance of it. William

¹²⁴ Ibid., 302 (February 16, 1711).

¹²⁵ Ibid., 328 (April 12, 1711).

¹²⁶ Ibid., 330 (April 16, 1711).

Byrd would not settle, however, for tranquility at the expense of his authority, and so challenged his wife's authority to punish the household slaves under her management as mistress of the plantation. He could not, would not, and did not stomach his wife's desire for independence, and rode off every opportunity she took to challenge his vision for a submissive wife.

Chapter II. “Moll was whipped for a hundred faults”¹²⁷: Enslavement, Servitude, and Power

Although the dichotomy between William Byrd, his wife, and his slaves is unique, his direct interactions with his slaves are on its face typical for his position in Virginian society. Like other planters, Byrd’s position was built on his ability to control enslaved people. Whether applied to Virginia society at-large or to a single plantation, racial and gendered hierarchies played a role in the daily lives of Virginians. Because the position of planters at the top rested on their ability to control enslaved individuals, Byrd sought to both assert and confirm his status as a member of the planter class in his daily interactions with those enslaved on his plantations.

Although the exact number of slaves that Byrd owned isn’t clear from the diaries, just under fifty individuals are listed in the index by the editors of the diaries, who inconsistently alternated between describing their roles and their race. Their names, along with the descriptor given to them by the editors, are Abraham (servant), Anaka (maid), A-g-y (maid), Betty (maid), Betty (negro), Billy (servant), Bob (servant), Caesar (negro), C-l-y (negro), C-n-g-y (servant), Eugene (servant), Frank (servant), George (servant), Gilbert (coachman), Harry (Indian), Henry (servant), Jack (servant), Jacky (mulatto), old Jane (servant), Jane (servant), Jenny (maid), little Jenny, Jimmy (servant), John (servant), L-s-n (servant), Tom L-s-n (servant), Moll (cook), Betty M-l-ng, little M-n-g-y, Indian Ned, Nurse, Ben O-d-s-n (servant), Peter (servant), Little Peter, Redskin Peter, Prue (servant), old P-r-s-n, P-t-s-n (negro), Robin (servant), Si (negro), Sue (servant), S-n-y (negro), S-r-y (negro), S-r-y (servant), S-r-y (negro), S-r-y (negro), Tom

¹²⁷ Ibid., 38 (May 23, 1709).

(servant), and Tony (servant).¹²⁸ Byrd throughout his lifetime likely owned hundreds of slaves dispersed throughout his many plantations.

In *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race*, Rebecca Goetz writes about how households were conceptualized in Virginia and how the planters' attempts to enforce a status quo of enslaved laborers by restricting Christian rites led to the creation and entrenchment of racial hierarchies. The differences between lived experiences in England and in Virginia led to a chasm of understanding of how open Christianity should be. Goetz describes how a seventeenth-century Anglican minister, Morgan Godwyn, "came from a world that emphasized the universality of Christianity. He believed, along with most Englishmen who had been born in England and lived out their lives there, that any person could convert to Christianity, regardless of their origin. The colonial experience had corrupted that understanding of Christianity. In the New World, Godwyn found, planters believed enslaved blacks were inherently incapable of becoming Christian. This notion apparently extended to native people as well. This new belief was convenient for settlers; dehumanizing Indians and enslaving Africans helped settlers marginalize and control them."¹²⁹ While the title of Goetz's work is misleading by suggesting that Christianity alone created race rather than a Christianity adapted to social and economic colonial circumstances, her description is accurate. Indeed, differences between those born in England and born in Virginia would carry through to Byrd's lifetime in the eighteenth-century, for the Governor Alexander Spotswood continually encouraged the education of Native Americans at the Indian School at the College of William & Mary despite the lack of enthusiasm from native planters. On October 19, 1711, Byrd recorded that "I rose about 6 o'clock and drank

¹²⁸ Ibid., 593-620.

¹²⁹ Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 2.

tea with the Governor, who made use of this great opportunity [while on the Nottoway Expedition] to make the Indians send some of their great men to the College, and the Nansemonds sent two, the Nottoways two, and the Meherrins two. He also demanded one from every town belonging to the Tuscaroras.”¹³⁰

Rebecca Goetz described how the differing theological outlooks were most obvious in churches, where ministers were nearly always educated in England to accept the notion that anyone could convert to Christianity. As she writes “Anglican ministers who came to the colonies to minister to their flocks found colonial attitudes toward enslaved blacks and Indians not just misguided but also offensive and incomprehensible.”¹³¹ Rhys Isaac, however, found that tensions between the vestry, of which the planters were members, and the clergy were centered around pay and recognition of each other’s status, with the gentry expecting obedience and the clergy desiring to reduce their financial dependence on the vestry. Isaac states that “They aspired not only to win secure possession of their livings but also to gain recognition for themselves as a corporate body...To accomplish this it seemed essential that their annual salaries be converted as far as possible into the inviolable legal right of property, analogous to the tithes of beneficed clergymen in England.”¹³² Although these controversies were at their height before and after Byrd’s life, it is nevertheless notable then that neither of these issues are reflected much in William Byrd’s diaries. The closest the diaries get to revealing any conflicts between the gentry and the clergy are when the clergy flatter the person and office to which most planters stand in

¹³⁰ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tining, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 424 (October 19, 1711).

¹³¹ Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 106.

¹³² Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 147.

opposition to. Byrd wrote on November 19, 1710, that “Mr. Wallace preached this day but flattered the Governor and recommended the College which did not please at all.”¹³³

Byrd was in Virginia when one of the most significant laws regulating slaves and servants was passed, and although he was no longer a member of the House of Burgesses by that point while he waited to be appointed to the Governor’s Council, many of his acquaintances had a hand in the passage of the law. Rebecca Goetz mentions how An Act concerning Servants and Slaves, which was passed in 1705, “reiterated that baptism of ‘servants’ could not result in freedom at any age. Only the English could be truly Christian—a New World innovation that would have profound consequences.”¹³⁴ Jonathan Bush wrote in “The British Constitution and the Creation of American Slavery” that the Act “formed the basis of all subsequent Virginia slave law and is widely considered the legislative consolidation of slavery in Virginia.”¹³⁵

Bush summarizes how “[t]he act lists, under four dozen more or less random titles, the activities that slaves and indentured servants cannot do, must do, or cannot do with whites, the things that whites cannot do for slaves, and that blacks cannot do even if free. Among the topics are the correction of slaves, slave flight, weaponry in the possession of slaves, illegitimacy and intermarriage, and the baptism of slaves.”¹³⁶ When William Byrd recorded several years later on November 13, 1710, that Mungo Ingles, grammar master at the College,¹³⁷ “had a child burnt to death by fire taking hold of its clothes,”¹³⁸ he was no longer recording a crime if the child was

¹³³ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 260 (November 19, 1710).

¹³⁴ Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 111.

¹³⁵ Jonathan A. Bush, “The British Constitution and the Creation of American Slavery,” in *Slavery & the Law*, ed. Paul Finkelman (Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 392.

¹³⁶ Bush, “The British Constitution,” 392.

¹³⁷ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 30.

¹³⁸ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 257 (November 13, 1710).

enslaved. Section XXIV of the Act states that “if any slave resist his master, or owner, or other person, by his or her order, correcting such a slave, and shall happen to be killed in such a correction, it shall not be accounted felony; but the master, owner, and every such other person so giving correction, shall be free and acquit of all punishment and accusation for the same, as if such incident had never happened.”¹³⁹

Kathleen Brown wrote extensively about relationships between slave owners and those enslaved, stating that it “more frequently featured coercion than did other social relations involving elite planters.”¹⁴⁰ She describes how planters preferred:

persuasion and personal ties to physical punishment, but the paternalism they envisioned was quite different from that of their slaves. Whereas enslaved people advanced a moral economy in which reasonable work conditions, adequate provisions, and respect for family ties all became part of a concept of just treatment within slavery, planters sought docile, respectful, and efficient obedience that confirmed their sense of righteous mastery.¹⁴¹

The tool used in maintaining ‘righteous mastery,’ was, Rebecca Goetz notes, “violence within undefined but generally accepted limits was commonplace and expected. Masters and mistresses kept children, indentured servants, and slaves in their proper subservient place through strategic and controlled beatings.”¹⁴²

William Byrd’s treatment of his slaves does not seem to differ from the norm. The only distinction lies in how he treated his household versus his field slaves, a distinction which is not always clear. Given that the field slaves are managed by overseers rather than Byrd himself, their names are seldom if ever recorded in the diaries. Even when he visited their quarters, he seldom

¹³⁹ General Assembly, “An Act Concerning Servants and Slaves’ (1705),” in *Encyclopedia Virginia* (Virginia Humanities, June 1, 2021), <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/an-act-concerning-servants-and-slaves-1705/>.

¹⁴⁰ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 350.

¹⁴¹ Brown, *Good Wives*, 350.

¹⁴² Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 113.

recorded their names. Although the household slaves fall under the authority of his wife, they were the slaves who Byrd had the most face-to-face interactions with and thus incurred his wrath more often. In addition to recording the names of household slaves, Byrd also tended to record aspects that were generally atypical of enslaved people. One slave for example, was Native American, and Byrd recorded this with terms such as ‘Indian’ or ‘Redskin’ in addition to his name Peter. He recorded on November 3, 1710, that “Indian Peter brought me a letter from home [which] told me that my wife was not like to come down because my daughter was sick,”¹⁴³ and wrote on January 10, 1712, that “Redskin Peter pretended he fell and hurt himself.”¹⁴⁴

While it’s unclear how an indigenous individual came to be enslaved at Westover, the demand for labor was insatiable as plantation owners first turned to indentured servants before relying almost entirely on slave labor. Alan Galloway notes in *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* that, by the late 17th century, Virginia traders desired, besides pelts, slaves. Tribes such as the Westo “had warred with the Cherokee and with Indians to the south like the Cuseeta, and they had probably sold captives from both groups to the Virginians”¹⁴⁵ because:

[t]he Virginians offered trade goods to the Westo in exchange for captives. It made more sense to the Westo to devote their energy to enslaving Amerindians than to hunting and processing pelts. Instead of killing their enemies or intimidating them to flee, the Westo sold them to the English, which not only removed their foes but gained them something in return.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 253 (November 3, 1710).

¹⁴⁴ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 468 (January 10, 1712).

¹⁴⁵ Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 56.

¹⁴⁶ Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade*, 41.

The only record of an enslaved Native American being brought to Westover is on February 3, 1710, when Byrd wrote that “My man Tony brought me an Indian boy named Harry.”¹⁴⁷ In the diaries, William Byrd seems to have only interacted with the Meherrin, Nansemond, Nottoway, Pamunkey, Saponie, Tributary, and Tuscarora tribes; however, it’s unclear where from what tribe Harry belonged to or if he was even from Virginia.

His interactions with Native Americans were far more limited than his father, the first William Byrd, who was well-known for trading with them.¹⁴⁸ As the colony expanded westward, Westover was no longer ideally sited for trade with Native American tribes. To the second William Byrd, they were far more foreign, and apart from those enslaved on his plantations, he recorded them as such. During an expedition to Nottoway Town in 1711 to “show some part of our strength to the Indians,”¹⁴⁹ Byrd recorded how his personal interactions were restricted to merely observing and, in his view, ‘playing’ with women. On October 18, he wrote that “About break of day we were waked with the reveille and rose about 6 o’clock and then took a walk about the town to see some Indian girls, with which we played the wag.”¹⁵⁰ On October 19, he wrote “At night some of the troop went with me into the town to see the girls and kissed them without proceeding any further,”¹⁵¹ while on October 20, “Jenny, an Indian girl, had got drunk and made us good sport.”¹⁵² Nevertheless, Westover occasionally served as a setting for trade, as Byrd recorded on August 13, 1709, “Twelve Pamunkey Indians came over. We gave them some

¹⁴⁷ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 138 (February 3, 1710).

¹⁴⁸ Martin H. Quitt and Dictionary of Virginia Biography, “William Byrd (Ca. 1652-1704),” in *Encyclopedia Virginia* (Virginia Humanities, December 22, 2021), <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/byrd-william-ca-1652-1704/>.

¹⁴⁹ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 418 (September 8, 1711).

¹⁵⁰ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 423 (October 18, 1711).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 424 (October 19, 1711).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 425 (October 20, 1711).

victuals and some rum and put them over the river.”¹⁵³ Established by the 1646 peace treaty ending the Third Anglo-Powhatan War, the Pamunkey reservation continues to lie less than fifty miles north of Westover.¹⁵⁴

Generally, Byrd recorded the punishment of his slaves and the reasons why dispassionately, signaling a normalization of corporal punishment of enslaved individuals without second thoughts. This dispassionate nature is clear in how Byrd did not write long drawn-out descriptions of punishing his slaves. A typical entry might appear like the one on May 23, 1709, where Byrd recorded “I read news till the evening and then I took a walk about the plantation. Moll was whipped for a hundred faults. I said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty. I danced my dance.”¹⁵⁵ The distinction between house and field slaves is clearer in entries such as on October 9, 1710, when Byrd recorded that “I went to my lodgings but my man was gone to bed and I was shut out. However I called him and beat him for it. I neglected to say my prayers but had good thoughts, good health, and good humor, thank God Almighty.”¹⁵⁶ It is interesting that Byrd did not record the name of the slave that accompanied him to Williamsburg and watched over his rooms; it is a rare instance which suggests that this was a field slave because Byrd was perhaps not familiar enough with the slave to either know his name or bother recording it. His reference to him as ‘my man’ was consistently applied to those under his authority, whether enslaved or not.

William Byrd’s conflicts with his wife Lucy Parke as previously discussed frequently centered around his assertion of control over slaves under his wife’s authority as mistress of the

¹⁵³ Ibid., 70 (August 13, 1709).

¹⁵⁴ “Pamunkey Tribe,” in *Encyclopedia Virginia* (Virginia Humanities, December 14, 2020), <https://encyclopedia.virginia.org/entries/pamunkey-tribe/>.

¹⁵⁵ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 38 (May 23, 1709).

¹⁵⁶ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 241 (October 9, 1710).

plantation. Byrd took issue with not only his wife using physical punishment but also the passion with which she beat slaves under her authority, an anathema to Byrd as someone who prized equanimity.

Kathleen Brown remarks on Lucy Byrd's challenges to his authority, stating that:

Byrd correctly perceived that physical contests between Lucy Byrd and the female slaves in his household did nothing to enhance white authority and much to diminish it, threatening to turn the exercise of discipline into a brawl. The subjection of enslaved people to Lucy Byrd's intensely corporal exercise of authority also disrupted his own attempts to achieve peaceful order in the household. Although Byrd himself had sometimes resorted to cruel punishments of enslaved people, he had done so as an expression of will, a flexing of patriarchal muscle that underscored more genteel manifestations of power.¹⁵⁷

Byrd would have preferred to rule over a tranquil household maintained by strict discipline rather than through reactive emotion. While he took no issue with his overseers, perhaps because he was not always around to witness how they maintained authority, he frequently bore witness to his wife's, as Brown refers to it, 'uncontrolled outbursts of violence' which "undermined his attempts to rule effortlessly over household members, disturbing his calculus of persuasion, warning, and inflicted pain."¹⁵⁸

In the diaries there is a clear lack of understanding on the part of Byrd for how slaves thought of and perceived the world around them. This lack of empathy is clear in entries such as on June 9, 1709, when Byrd recorded that "My Eugene ran away this morning for no reason but because he had not done anything yesterday."¹⁵⁹ Apart from his tone of confusion, Byrd did not seem to make the connection that Eugene feared punishment for his inability or refusal to work. And yet, the following day on June 10, 1709, Byrd recorded that "George B-th brought home my

¹⁵⁷ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 361.

¹⁵⁸ Brown, *Good Wives*, 361.

¹⁵⁹ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 46 (June 9, 1709).

boy Eugene...Eugene was whipped for running away and had the [bit] put on him.”¹⁶⁰ In this entry, Eugene’s fear was confirmed. The editors of the diary, in their footnote, wrote that “This shorthand symbol may stand for bit or boot. This is one indication of occasional harsh punishment meted out to servants.” That they describe the bit only as an occasional harsh punishment characterizes the type of scholarship when the diaries were first translated in the early 1940s. While Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling do not reveal any explicit racism, their description subjectively borders on apologetic as if to say that Byrd was a humane master and that whippings, which were far more common, were not harsh at all.

Brown notes Byrd’s use of “special punitive devices and tailor-made cruelties to control his enslaved laborers. Slaves on his plantation who repeatedly ran away might be treated to the ‘bit,’ a metal device similar to the equipment of the same name placed in a horse’s mouth and that had been used in early modern England to silence women. Byrd also used ties and chains to prevent escapees from repeated their offense and branded individuals he believed might be faking an illness.”¹⁶¹ She remarks that “Byrd’s punishments smacked of both his scientific approach to controlling members of his household and his biblical sense of justice.”¹⁶²

Byrd’s punishment of those enslaved in his household were often recorded but would give little clue as to what the slave did ‘wrong.’ Take Byrd’s entry on July 31, 1709. He wrote that “I threatened Moll with a good whipping again tomorrow for her many faults.”¹⁶³ In using the term ‘faults,’ Byrd seems to imply that the faults in her character are the reason she was whipped rather than because of any actual action. Interestingly, Byrd did not seem to

¹⁶⁰ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 46 (June 10, 1709).

¹⁶¹ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 352.

¹⁶² Brown, *Good Wives*, 352.

¹⁶³ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 65 (July 31, 1709).

differentiate between when slaves made mistakes or were willfully defiant of his authority. This is perhaps surprising given how status-conscious Byrd was. On January 3, 1711, he “gave Anaka a good scolding for letting Billy Brayne [his nephew] have a hole in his stocking.”¹⁶⁴ Byrd was keenly aware of how his position rested on his ability to control others and seems to have concluded that anything that did not meet his expectations deserved punishment. Most entries recording the punishment of a slave were similar to his entry on September 3, 1709, where he wrote that “In the afternoon I beat Jenny for throwing water on the couch.”¹⁶⁵ Sometimes, Byrd did not bother to write why a slave was punished, such as on July 30, 1712, when he simply recorded that “Moll was strapped this morning and so was Jenny.”¹⁶⁶

One series of entries in Byrd’s diary stands out for his cruelty. Eugene, at the time a young slave though his exact age is unclear, was unable to control his bladder at night. Byrd’s punishment likely only exacerbated Eugene’s inability. Over several days in late November and early December 1709, Byrd recorded how:

“Eugene was whipped for pissing in bed and Jenny for concealing it.”¹⁶⁷

“Eugene was whipped again for pissing in bed and Jenny for concealing it.”¹⁶⁸

“Eugene pissed abed again for which I made him drink a pint of piss.”¹⁶⁹

“Eugene had pissed in bed for which I gave him a pint of piss to drink.”¹⁷⁰

With the laws of Virginia empowering him to arbitrarily impose any punishment, Byrd occasionally, as in this instance, cruelly tailored the punishment to ‘suit the crime.’ This series of entries also provide a window into how Byrd reacted when slaves threatened his ultimate

¹⁶⁴ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 464 (January 3, 1711).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 79 (September 3, 1709).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 564 (July 30, 1712).

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 112 (November 30, 1709).

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 113 (December 1, 1709).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 113 (December 3, 1709).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 117 (December 10, 1709).

authority as patriarch by closing ranks against him; in this case, it was Jenny attempting to protect Eugene. Kathleen Brown remarks that:

Confronted with the considerable power of planters, enslaved people repackaged and redirected patriarchal authority, making absolute dominance impossible. As a young planter, William Byrd frequently found himself foiled by his slaves' collaboration, despite his attempts to reinforce his authority with harsh punishments. Byrd's slave Jenny, for example, tried twice to save the slave Eugene from further punishment for bed-wetting by concealing the soiled linens; a whipping from Byrd, moreover, did not discourage her from making the second attempt. Byrd's maid Anaka, who had herself stolen rum from the liquor cellar, collaborated with the white woman 'Nurse' to give the black maid Prue access to the cellar.¹⁷¹

Perhaps fearful of a conspiracy or uprising against him, William Byrd treated any instance of secret relations between slaves as a threat to his authority. Whereas with other incidents in which a slave behaved in such a way as to contravene his authority and Byrd would merely record that he or someone else punished the slave, Byrd would detail his search in discovering the relations of slaves. On February 22, 1709, he wrote, "I threatened Anaka with a whipping if she did not confess to the intrigue between Daniel and Nurse, but she prevented by a confession. I chided Nurse severely about it, but she denied, with an impudent face, protesting that Daniel only lay on the bed for the sake of the child."¹⁷²

William Byrd not only disliked when his slaves closed ranks against him but also when they turned against each other for the same reason that it all interfered with his ideal of domestic harmony and tranquility. He wrote on June 17, 1710, that "In the afternoon I caused L-s-n to be whipped for beating his wife and Jenny was whipped for being his whore."¹⁷³ Brown remarks that "Planters like Byrd occasionally involved themselves in the conflicts of enslaved people at

¹⁷¹ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 356.

¹⁷² Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 7 (February 22, 1709).

¹⁷³ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 192 (June 17, 1710).

the request of one of the parties in an effort to restore peace” but his “deeper motive for enforcing tranquil relations—the maintenance of his own authority—surfaced in his dealings with enslaved people.”¹⁷⁴ By “curbing their rights to vent anger against each other and forbidding them to leave the premises of Westover to visit spouses,”¹⁷⁵ Byrd was asserting his own authority. Byrd so detested the disruption of his ideal of domestic tranquility when his slaves turned against each other that on June 30, 1712, he recorded how “I caused Johnny to be whipped for threatening to strike Jimmy and caused Moll also to be whipped and made them renounce one the other. Prue and Jenny were also whipped.”¹⁷⁶

Byrd expected the utmost loyalty from his slaves in every way. In managing his various plantations, William Byrd delegated his authority to overseers to manage his plantations while he remained at his seat at Westover. While he expected his overseers to maintain his authority, he notably also expected his slaves on these various plantations to report to him whether the overseer managed the plantation well. One overseer, Joseph Wilkinson, a landowner in Henrico County, is first mentioned in the diary on August 1, 1709, where Byrd recorded that “Joe Wilkinson came and gave me an account of the tobacco that he had raised this year and I agreed with him to be my overseer at Burkland.”¹⁷⁷ Later, on May 29, 1710, Byrd recorded that “I agreed with Joe Wilkinson to be my overseer four years.”¹⁷⁸ On July 8 in the same year, however, Byrd wrote that “Two negroes of mine brought five of the cows that strayed away from

¹⁷⁴ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 360.

¹⁷⁵ Brown, *Good Wives*, 360.

¹⁷⁶ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 550-1 (June 30, 1712).

¹⁷⁷ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 66 (August 1, 1709).

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 184 (May 29, 1710).

hence and told me all was well above, but that Joe Wilkinson was very often absent from his business.”¹⁷⁹

Following up on the reports of his slaves, Byrd discovered the next day that “my two overseers above fought and that Joe Wilkinson was to blame for desiring Mr. G-r-l to bid for somethings at the outcry and before anybody could bid above him Joe gave him the goods.”¹⁸⁰ On September 6, Byrd “scolded him for neglecting his business. He excused all with the good crop which indeed he showed me everywhere.”¹⁸¹ By December 20, however, Byrd had had enough when he found that:

Joe Wilkinson was not on the plantation but was gone with Mr. Laforce to look after his hogs. He had spoiled all the tobacco by house burn and carried several things that belong to me home to his house, for which reasons I wrote to him to forbear coming any more to my service and appointed Tom Turpin to take care of everything till I sent an overseer. I walked to all the plantation on that side the river and the tobacco was most of it spoiled.¹⁸²

Not content with firing him, Byrd filed suit the following year on April 4, 1711, and recorded in his diary that “In the evening came Mr. Clayton and Tom Jones. I employed him in my action against Joe Wilkinson.”¹⁸³ The case was heard on April 21 with the result in Byrd’s favor, as he recorded, “About 9 o’clock I went to court and my case against Joe Wilkinson came on and the jury found for me and 3000 pounds of tobacco damages.”¹⁸⁴

Byrd rarely recorded his slaves running away and it is perhaps because of the relative infrequency that he allowed his slaves to travel between his plantations in his service. He would even bribe or reward them if they reported the misdoings of their overseers. On February 20,

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 202 (July 8, 1710).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 202 (July 9, 1710).

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 227 (September 6, 1710).

¹⁸² Ibid., 274 (December 20, 1710).

¹⁸³ Ibid., 324 (April 4, 1711).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 333 (April 21, 1711).

1709, he recorded that “I sent away Frank who yesterday brought down an ox from the Falls. He told me of the faults of his overseer and I advised him to tell me any faults of him for which I gave him two blankets.”¹⁸⁵ Given the living conditions of those enslaved, it’s unclear if slaves ever lied to Byrd in an effort to ameliorate their conditions.

Though enslaved individuals were allowed to travel, it was only ever in Byrd’s service. Indentured servants were similarly restricted. On August 27, 1709, Byrd recorded that “I denied my man G-r-l to go to a horse race because there was nothing but swearing and drinking there.”¹⁸⁶ Yet several months before, Byrd had no qualms about attending a horse race, and recorded on April 24, 1709, how “Mr. W-l-s ran two races and beat John Custis and Mr. [Hawkins]. He likewise jumped over the fence which was a very great jump.”¹⁸⁷ While Byrd differentiated between drinking to excess and drinking moderately, he evidently believed that planters privileged were above others in being able to partake in what others were not able to. Isaac notes the how:

In April 1752, the governor exhorted the gentlemen of the legislature to exert themselves to curb the growing evil and its associated vices when they returned to their counties: “I...recommend to you, as far as possible, to discourage Gaming, Swearing, and immoderate Drinking, particularly at the County Courts. The first of these Crimes, I am informed, has been pretty general in this Country, and is now much practiced among the lower Class of our People: I mean Tradesmen and inferior Planters, who...follow the Examples of their Superiors.”¹⁸⁸

Although written decades later, the status of those attending and racing horses did not change in the interim, though the races would become formalized following English fashions after 1750.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 6 (February 20, 1709).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 75 (August 27, 1709).

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 25 (April 24, 1709).

¹⁸⁸ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 100.

¹⁸⁹ Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 100.

Although William Byrd seems to have rarely distinguished between the mistakes of his slaves versus their willful defiance of his authority when punishing them, Byrd was also forgiving of his slaves, if somewhat arbitrarily. On July 8, 1710, Byrd wrote that “I was out of humor with Bannister and G-r-l for spoiling the curtains of the bed”¹⁹⁰ and yet never recorded punishing them. He recorded on June 4, 1711, that “I threatened Will Wilkins for stealing the apples and denying it when he had done, but I forgave him.”¹⁹¹ Byrd’s punishments could also be doled out arbitrarily. On March 15, 1712, he wrote that “My man Redskin Peter pretended again to be sick, for which I put him [on the bit] and Billy Wilkins pretended also to be sick but I believed he dissembled.”¹⁹²

It could be that Byrd attempted to balance between asserting his authority and forgiving, at least for minor infractions. Whether he did this out of a religious zeal or perhaps more likely didn’t see it as warranting an assertion of authority, records of Byrd forgiving slaves are still rare even with minor incidents.

Occasionally, the intervention of someone else might cause Byrd to forgive. On May 1, 1711, he wrote that:

I forgave Anaka, on my wife’s and sister’s persuasion, but I caused Prue to be whipped severely and she told many things of John G-r-l for which he was to blame, particularly that he lost the key of the wine cellar and got in at the window and opened the door and then because he had not the key the door was left open and anybody went in and stole the beer and wine &c.¹⁹³

It is unclear whether Lucy Parke Byrd intervened on behalf of Anaka since she was a maid and household slave, and Byrd simply reframed her intervention as a suggestion or whether in this

¹⁹⁰ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 202 (July 8, 1710).

¹⁹¹ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 355 (June 4, 1711).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 501 (March 15, 1712).

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 338 (May 1, 1711).

case his wife had finally recognized that his authority superseded hers and thus, along with his sister, sought to ‘persuade’ Byrd to forgive Anaka. It is nevertheless notable that he listened to her input, or perhaps he simply did not want to quarrel with her in front of a guest.

Kenneth Lockridge describes the ways in which William Byrd would record the punishment of his slaves. He states that:

at times even more measured forms of corporal punishment were a reality he preferred to keep at a distance. The third entry in the diary, for February 8, 1709, records that ‘Jenny and Eugene [house servants] were whipped.’ Though on occasion he ‘had’ slaves whipped, Byrd preferred the impersonal ‘were whipped.’ Whipping was something his overseers did and he could pretend simply happened.¹⁹⁴

Lockridge is incorrect. Byrd took no issue punishing slaves himself and it is not difficult to find examples throughout the diaries, often for trivial reasons.

Byrd could not have ‘pretended’ that whipping was simply something that happened. Authority was valued to such an extent that Byrd was aware of and valued the tools used to maintain control over those beneath him. If an overseer whipped a slave, he did so because he was granted the authority to do so from Byrd, not because he independently chose to punish a slave without Byrd’s knowledge. On August 4, 1711, he recorded that “I beat Prue for staying with my milk at the cowpen and telling a lie about it.”¹⁹⁵ On June 6, 1712, he wrote that “I took a walk about the plantation and returned some time before it was dark out of pure discretion, and found Prue with a candle by daylight, for which I gave her a salute with my foot.”¹⁹⁶ On September 18 in the same year, Byrd recorded that “Mr. Catesby and I took a walk and I found Eugene asleep instead of being at work, for which I beat him severely.”¹⁹⁷ Byrd’s use of the term

¹⁹⁴ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 69.

¹⁹⁵ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 384 (August 4, 1711).

¹⁹⁶ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 540 (June 6, 1712).

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 585 (September 18, 1712).

‘severely’ also provides two insights into his frame of mind. First, he was acutely embarrassed in front of a guest that his slave Eugene was sleeping because it reflected that his authority was not absolute. Slaves did not fear him enough such that they could fall asleep. Second, this insecurity resulted in the emotion and passion with which Byrd beat Eugene, which stood in contravention to his ideal of equanimity.

Lockridge is correct that when Byrd states only that slaves were ‘whipped,’ this:

evaded the turbulent realities of his household, in which slaves frequently fell victims to his or more likely to Lucy’s ire, but it did mean that for Byrd mastery was not always to be found in the direct act of whipping a slave or even in the act of ordering a whipping. As often, he found it in being the center of a system of authority in which slaves “were whipped.” His own involvement in acts of mastery over his slaves was limited to smaller cruelties. “Eugene pissed abed again for which I made him drink a pint of piss.”¹⁹⁸

However, in referencing the forced drinking of urine to be a ‘smaller’ cruelty, Lockridge’s contention is problematic. There is little historical value in arbitrarily measuring the ‘amount’ of cruelty. Additionally, Byrd’s various punishments were generally suited to what he believed was the extent to which the slave disobeyed him. When Eugene ran away, Byrd viewed Eugene as akin to a wild horse that must be subdued and is suitably forced to wear a bit. When Eugene urinated in his bed at night, he must be suitably forced to drink urine as if to remind him of the filthy nature of his action.

Somewhat surprisingly, Lockridge does not mention another reason as to why Byrd might have occasionally preferred to record having his slaves whipped’ as opposed to doing the punishing himself. He spends a great deal discussing the various texts that Byrd read and kept in his library, such as Henry Peacham’s *Compleat Gentleman*, Sir Thomas Elyot’s *The Boke Named the Governour*, and Richard Brathwait’s *The English Gentleman*. As Lockridge puts it, “Both

¹⁹⁸ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 69.

Brathwait and Elyot recommended above all else moderation, temperance, and self-control. For both, the great enemy is passion.”¹⁹⁹ Byrd would likely have taken their advice to heart given his social aspirations, and indeed taken it over into every aspect of his life, including how he treated his slaves. Authority over the plantation had to be absolute, but on an individual level, perhaps Byrd may have preferred to delegate punishment lest he become ‘passionate’ in punishing his slaves and lose control of his emotions like his wife Lucy, who took no issue to punishing slaves herself and according to the diaries, never delegated punishment.

Although Byrd never described the living conditions of his slaves, he did occasionally record clothing them. On August 31, 1712, he simply wrote that “This day I gave shirts to the negroes at the quarters.”²⁰⁰ His slaves seem to have been no more well-treated in terms of shelter and clothing than what was typical for the time. Byrd never recorded giving them trousers or any other article of clothing, which suggests that his slaves perhaps had to make their own clothes.

While the labor force in colonial Virginia had long shifted to reliance on slaves imported from Africa, indentured servitude still existed in a limited scope, and it seems that Byrd had several indentured servants whose names recur throughout the diary: Bannister, G-r-l, and Billy Wilkins. Wilkins provides the clearest view of indentured life on Byrd’s plantation. He first appears in the diary on February 17, 1711, when Byrd recorded “writing two [memoranda] for Will Wilkins,”²⁰¹ and later on February 24, when Byrd wrote that “Mr. Wilkins came to bind his son.”²⁰² It seems here that Will Wilkins is binding his son in servitude to William Byrd.

¹⁹⁹ Lockridge, *William Byrd II of Virginia*, 24.

²⁰⁰ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 577 (August 31, 1712).

²⁰¹ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 303 (February 17, 1711).

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 305-6 (February 24, 1711).

However, there is some confusion because the editors of the diaries failed to distinguish Will Wilkins and his son, who shared his name, for on June 4, 1711, Byrd recorded that “I threatened Will Wilkins for stealing the apples and denying it when he had done, but I forgave him.”²⁰³ This Will Wilkins is thereafter referred to as Billy Wilkins, as Byrd wrote about his trying to cure his sickness between July 29, 1711, and August 1, 1711.²⁰⁴ Billy Wilkins doesn’t appear in the diary for nearly a year until March 3, 1712, when Byrd wrote that he “beat Billy Wilkins for telling a lie.”²⁰⁵ Billy Wilkins only appears three more times in the rest of the diary, all for the same reasons: either not writing well or not writing at all. It is unclear whether instruction in writing was part of the indenture contract or whether Byrd had a particular reason for having him learn. Nevertheless, Byrd’s entry on August 21, 1712, encapsulates certain aspects of indentured servitude. Byrd wrote that “I beat Billy Wilkins for lying and writing ill.”²⁰⁶ Subject to punishment similar to slaves, indentured servants nevertheless had opportunities to learn before gaining their freedom.

William Byrd recorded in great detail when his slaves were ill and how he attempted to nurse them back to working health. For Byrd, their illness meant not only a potential monetary loss especially if they worked in the field, but they also provided an opportunity for him to display his medical knowledge. The potential for monetary loss was considerable to the extent that slaves knew they could escape work if they claimed to be sick and were duly punished if Byrd believed them to be liars. However, he could also punish them for not reporting their illness, a rare occurrence. He recorded on June 27, 1709, that “Tom was whipped for not telling

²⁰³ Ibid., 355 (June 4, 1711).

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 381-3 (July 29, 1711-August 1, 1711).

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 495 (March 3, 1712).

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 573 (August 21, 1712).

me that he was sick.”²⁰⁷ One is led to wonder if Tom sought to avoid Byrd’s medical ‘treatments.’

In late May 1709, Byrd described nursing his slave Jack to health over several days. On May 25, he recorded that:

I discovered that Jack had a rheumatism which made me resolve not to have him salivated according to Mr. Harrison’s advice, but had him let blood and put [c-ler leaves] to his joint, by which means he grew much better. I gave him nothing to eat but very thin [diet] to cool the heat of his blood and parsley boiled in it.²⁰⁸

The next day, he “went to see Jack and found that he had slept very well without pain, for which reason I caused him to let blood again and continued the same medicine.”²⁰⁹ By the following day, “Jack was much better this morning and I gave him a gentle purge of syrup of roses, which did not work at all but made him hot all day.”²¹⁰ Evidently, Byrd’s treatments did not always work, though it’s not clear whether Byrd’s at-times experimental treatments directly resulted in death. On May 28, Byrd recorded that “My man Jack was better and began to walk.”²¹¹

The editors of *The Commonplace Book of William Byrd II of Westover*, Kevin Berland, Jan Kirsten Gillian, and Kenneth Lockridge, describe how Byrd “studied medical texts, he acquired extensive knowledge of medicinal plants, he accumulated considerable practical knowledge of physick, and he wrote and published anonymously a learned treatise on the plague.”²¹² Byrd’s membership in the Royal Society was not merely a symbol of his status and connections but also reflected his genuine interest in science. Byrd recorded in detail his encounter with an albino slave on November 13, 1710, writing “Colonel Digges sent for a white

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 53 (June 27, 1709).

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 39 (May 25, 1709).

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 39 (May 26, 1709).

²¹⁰ Ibid., 40 (May 27, 1709).

²¹¹ Ibid., 40 (May 28, 1709).

²¹² Kevin Berland, Jan Gilliam, and Kenneth Lockridge, eds., *The Commonplace Book of William Byrd II of Westover* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 56.

negro for us to see who except the color was featured like other negroes. She told us that in her country, which is called Aboh near Calabar, there were many whites as well as blacks.”²¹³

The slave trade in Virginia was well-established in Virginia by Byrd’s lifetime, though not always obvious from his diaries. William Byrd was primarily occupied with the tobacco trade and slaves were in his mind merely a tool to which a better harvest might be achieved. Not just any tool, however, slaves were viewed to be vital to the production of tobacco and yet costly enough to constantly replenish that discipline could not be enforced beyond a point that resulted in the death of slaves. That Byrd didn’t not record constantly replenishing his labor force is a minor indication of the conditions on his plantations. Nevertheless, the diary is not devoid of transactions involving slaves.

On June 1, 1710, he recorded that “In the evening I took a walk and met the new negroes which Mr. Bland had bought for me to the number of 26 for £23 apiece.”²¹⁴ The scale of his purchase provides an insight into Byrd’s wealth as one of the richest planters in Virginia and his ability to purchase 26 slaves in a single transaction. The prices for slaves could vary widely, as Byrd described on June 2, 1710, “Robin Hix asked me to pay £70 for two negroes which he intended to buy of John [Evans] which I agreed to in hope of gaining the [skin] trade.”²¹⁵ Though he is instead fronting the cost for Robin Hix to buy two slaves to possibly enter a skin trade relationship with him, the cost is indicative of how costs could vary widely depending on what skills the slaves might have.

With exception to his role as colonel of the Charles City and Henrico County militias, Byrd’s seems to have rarely interacted with free Native Americans or Africans. In his role as

²¹³ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 257 (November 13, 1710).

²¹⁴ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 186 (June 1, 1710).

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 186 (June 2, 1710).

colonel, Byrd frequently met with Native Americans and his interactions with them are notably different than those he enslaved. On September 14, 1711, he described how “I stayed to see them about an hour and then returned home, where I found Captain Webb and nine of his troops who had brought with them six Indians that were found [hunting] on patented land. I threatened them and sent them away after they had victuals given them. We gave the troops victuals also.”²¹⁶ Although Byrd threatens them because they have in his view trespassed and thereby transgressed the authority of the Virginian government, he seemingly treats them as equals by giving them food and provisions in the same manner as his own troops. His description of them is devoid of any prejudice. His descriptions of his slaves, however, are similarly devoid of any racial prejudice, rather, any ‘deficient’ qualities he describes are ascribed to individuals.

This does not mean William Byrd was uniquely not racist for his time. Rather, his beliefs may have been so ingrained that he felt no need to comment on them in his diaries. Rebecca Goetz notes that “Many seventeenth-century habits of the planter class, including the exclusion of Africans and Indians from marriage, baptism, and other Christian rites and rituals persisted in the eighteenth century as markers of the importance of hereditary heathenism.”²¹⁷ Except for not working on holidays, Byrd seems to have not allowed any of his slaves much leeway in anything. There are no descriptions of his slaves accompanying him to church or undergoing baptism. The only description of enslaved marriage is when Byrd remarked on causing “L-s-n to be whipped for beating his wife.”²¹⁸ Though likely that enslaved men and women were married during their ownership by Byrd, it’s unclear how they were married.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 405 (September 14, 1711).

²¹⁷ Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 10.

²¹⁸ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 192 (June 17, 1710).

Rhys Isaac succinctly summarizes what long informed personal beliefs and government policy at-large in colonial Virginia when he states:

Power—the capability of determining the actions, even the destinies, of fellow members of society—is most generally institutionalized in the control of valued resources and the distribution of the products of labor. In Virginia the domination of masters over slaves was the fullest manifestation of social power. The claims of the slave owners were limited only by a few constraints: the difficulty of supervision, the interest of the master in preserving his property, and the real though tenuous barriers of customs such as the right of slaves to be relieved of labor on Sundays and certain religious holidays.²¹⁹

The scale of Byrd's wealth and control over others is clear. That his interactions with them are largely restricted to those not only at Westover but within the household itself is a testament to the vastness of his landholdings which were labored upon by so many enslaved individuals. The subjection of Africans and Native Americans to bondage in a racial hierarchy is so enmeshed within Virginia planter culture that Byrd rarely remarks on race. What's clear, nevertheless, in his interactions with enslaved individuals and those indentured to him is the nature of power and authority on the plantation. Assertions of authority abounded over the tiniest of infractions.

²¹⁹ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 132-3.

Chapter III. Hierarchy v. Friendship: Relationships with those outside of the Planter Class

Though Byrd was perhaps more insecure over his status than other planters, his relationship with others seems to have not differed widely from his peers. Lockridge maintains that “Byrd was capable of genuine friendship, as well, and here too, his feelings frequently attained expression in spite of the laconic nature of his diary.”²²⁰ He points to the “convivial physician [Dr. William Oastler] and the sturdy parson [Reverend Mr. Charles Anderson]” as “stock figures straight out of any country gentleman’s retinue. But Byrd clearly cared for both men...When each passed from his life, Byrd looked after his dead friend’s affairs.”²²¹ However, Byrd was accustomed to asserting his status over Oastler and Anderson such that he was unsure of how to navigate his relationship with his former schoolmate Doctor William Cocke. While Byrd would ordinarily have ranked above Cocke, Cocke’s connection to the Governor caused Byrd to confusingly alternate between seeking his praise and subjugating him through jokes at his expense. It was only after his illness and treatment by Cocke did Byrd come to respect him.

Byrd addressed Doctor William Oastler in the diaries formally, merely writing his title of ‘Doctor.’ As the editors of the diary note, “Dr. William Oastler, who lived in Westover Parish until his death on December 14, 1709. Byrd mentions him by name only once, on December 17, 1709.”²²² While Byrd addressed his close acquaintance formally, he similarly did so with all individuals who carried a title, whether it was because it was their military rank or their profession as a doctor or reverend. If they had no such title, he addressed them with the honorific

²²⁰ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 59.

²²¹ Lockridge, *William Byrd II of Virginia*, 59.

²²² Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 4.

‘Mr.’ Byrd only addressed an individual by their first name if they were younger or were otherwise on the lower rungs of society.

Oastler’s relationship with Byrd seems to have confirmed Byrd’s own superiority as a planter and landowner over a doctor. Besides visiting the sick, he frequently carried out tasks for Byrd, carrying letters as Byrd recorded on February 21, 1709, “In the afternoon the Doctor came from Williamsburg and brought me a letter from the President, who informed me that Mr. Burwell was by the Council made naval officer of York River in the place of Colonel Cary deceased.”²²³ William Byrd frequently hosted him at Westover for billiards and for playing piquet with his wife and him. However, he rarely hosted him for dinner, describing on a rare occasion how on March 4, 1709, “The Doctor came drunk to dinner.”²²⁴

The only evidence for the closeness of their relationship is the concern Byrd expressed in the diaries when the Doctor was ill. In early October 1709, the Doctor became ill with ‘an ague’ that was spreading around the region. William Byrd briefly described his condition and any changes between October 2-13 and wrote along the lines of either “I went to see the Doctor, who was something better”²²⁵ or “The Doctor had been very sick and continued so.”²²⁶ When the Doctor was “very ill so that I thought he would die”²²⁷ on October 9, 1709, Byrd described how:

Captain Stith came to see the Doctor and [f-r f-r-m s-k] came to see me. He stayed and dined with us, and Mr. Dennis likewise. In the afternoon I sent for the parson and Mr. Harrison to see the Doctor and they were both of the opinion he would die. Mr. Anderson stayed all night and about 7 o’clock his fever began to go off. We prayed by him. We gave him Dr. Goddard’s Drops, which seemed to do him great service. We had sent for Dr. Blair but he could not come because of Mrs. Ludwell who was very ill. The Doctor [extremely] much better and took the bark” which the editors describe as “Cinchona bark, the source of quinine.”²²⁸

²²³ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 6-7 (February 21, 1709).

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 (March 4, 1709).

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 89 (October 3, 1709).

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 91 (October 8, 1709).

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 91 (October 9, 1709).

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 91-2 (October 9, 1709).

When the Doctor fell ill in early December of the same year, Byrd continually checked on his condition by either asking acquaintances such as Captain Stith (with whom the Doctor resided), sending his slave Tom, or visiting the Doctor himself. On December 13, Byrd wrote that:

About 12 o'clock Mr. J— [Mr. Gee?] came and dined with me. He told me the Doctor was extremely ill, which made me resolve to go there in the afternoon. I ate fish for dinner and as soon as I had dined I rode with Mr. J— to Captain Stith's where I found the Doctor in a very weak condition. We prayed by him and I took my leave, committing him to God, before whom he was likely to appear very soon.²²⁹

The following day, Byrd wrote that "I sent Tom to know how the Doctor did and he brought word he died about 5 o'clock last night." From there, Byrd uniquely described at-length the circumstances of his death, something that he did not do for family members such as his father-in-law or his uncle Thomas, whose death he merely recorded on March 13, 1710, and wrote "I received news about my uncle Byrd's death; he [died yesterday] morning a little before day."²³⁰ This is just as much an indication of how distant Byrd was from his own family members due to his education in England as it is an indication of how close Byrd considered his acquaintance Oastler to be. He recorded that:

His distemper was first a fever, of which he recovered but went too soon to Major Allen's and was sick again there but made a shift to get back again and recovered again, and then he went to Captain Stith's where he got what strong drink he pleased and lay in the house [n-l-y p-l-s-t-r] and got cold and that brought intermittent fever and short breath.²³¹

William Byrd's dedication of nearly an entire entry to the death of the Doctor is notable though the bluntness with which he describes the Doctor is somewhat shocking for what Lockridge characterizes as a close friendship. Byrd wrote merely that "He was a good natured man but too

²²⁹ Ibid., 118 (December 13, 1709).

²³⁰ Ibid., 152 (March 13, 1710).

²³¹ Ibid., 118 (December 14, 1709).

much addicted to drink.”²³² Byrd’s description of the Doctor is more paternalistic in tone and does not resemble a friendship on equal terms. Though he may surely have valued the Doctor’s company and medical wisdom, Byrd does not seem to have viewed him as an equal.

Nevertheless, the number of times the Doctor is mentioned in the diaries following his death is unique and suggests that their relationship was close if still paternalistic. The Doctor does not seem to have had any children or other heirs. After his funeral on December 17, 1709, the Doctor is mentioned in the diaries for two more years, until January 6, 1711. Whether out of paternal care for the Doctor or personal interest in his medical goods, Byrd throughout this period described how he settled his affairs. On February 8 of the following year, William Byrd recorded how “I settled some accounts and then Mr. Harrison and Dr. Blair came, the first to sell me the Doctor’s things and the last to buy some of the medicine. About 11 o’clock they went away again. Then I surveyed the Doctor’s things and found them not so many as I expected.”²³³

Byrd had previously described on January 9, how “About 10 o’clock Mr. Harrison came over as I thought to surrender the Doctor’s things to me for 30 pounds but we could not agree.”²³⁴ He somewhat benevolently attempted to resolve the Doctor’s affairs, describing on February 15, 1710, how “About 10 o’clock Mrs. Hamlin came and soon after her Mrs. Bolling, the widow. She came for some physic which the Doctor had prepared for her and would have paid me for it but I would not take it.”²³⁵ Byrd also described sorting the some of the Doctor’s clothes in his own closet while maintaining separate storage for the rest and wrote how “I set the Doctor’s closet in order”²³⁶ or how “I settled the Doctor’s closet.”²³⁷ One wonders if Byrd was

²³² Ibid., 118 (December 14, 1709).

²³³ Ibid., 139-40 (February 8, 1710).

²³⁴ Ibid., 128 (January 9, 1710).

²³⁵ Ibid., 142 (February 15, 1710).

²³⁶ Ibid., 150 (March 9, 1710).

²³⁷ Ibid., 161 (April 4, 1710).

reminiscing about his relationship with the Doctor when looking through and organizing his belongings or just re-purposing in a non-throwaway culture, considering that Byrd continued to ‘set the Doctor’s closet’ for over a year after his death until writing his last similar entry on January 6, 1711.

The Reverend Charles Anderson, who was the minister of Westover Parish²³⁸ is mentioned far more frequently in the diaries than Dr. William Oastler and yet his relationship with William Byrd appears to be more distant. In the first entry of the 1709-1712 diaries on February 6, 1709, Byrd recorded that “We went to church, from whence Mr. Anderson, Captain Stith and his wife, Captain F-c and Mistress Anne B-k-r came [with] us to dinner, who all went home in the evening.”²³⁹ It is in this context that the minister is most frequently mentioned for Byrd often hosted Mr. Anderson and other guests following the church service. When describing Anderson presiding over the service itself, Byrd often simply recorded that “I went to church and was devout and heard a good sermon of Mr. Anderson.”²⁴⁰ Interestingly, William Byrd never referred to the minister as ‘Reverend,’ instead using ‘Mr.’ Similar to Oastler, Anderson performed tasks for Byrd, as he recorded on February 16, 1709, “In the afternoon Mr. Anderson came to see us and promised to make me some [pulleys] for my windows.”²⁴¹ He would also deliver letters on behalf of Byrd, as he noted on April 26, 1710, “I wrote to my wife by Mr. Anderson.”²⁴²

William Byrd would frequently visit the parson of Westover Parish while journeying to and from his various plantations, often one called Falling Creek. He wrote that on March 28,

²³⁸ Ibid., 1.

²³⁹ Ibid., 1 (February 6, 1709).

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 79 (September 4, 1709).

²⁴¹ Ibid., 5 (February 16, 1709).

²⁴² Ibid., 170 (April 26, 1710).

1709, “About 10 o’clock I got on horseback and rode to Mr. Anderson’s on my way to Falling Creek,”²⁴³ and on March 30, that “I ate milk for breakfast and about 10 I returned from Falling Creek to Mr. Anderson’s, where I ate some fish for dinner, and about 4 o’clock came home in the rain where I found all things in good order.”²⁴⁴ Even when Anderson wasn’t home, Byrd would stay, as he recorded on May 11, 1709, “About 11 o’clock I went to Falling Creek, and called at Mr. Anderson’s by the way but he was not at home, but his lady was, with whom I stayed about an hour.”²⁴⁵

Though the Rev. Charles Anderson was not invited to Byrd’s estate at Westover following every single church service, he was consistently invited more than most. The relationship between him and Byrd extended beyond merely that between a parson and member of the vestry, for Byrd would often invite him during the week, as Byrd wrote on April 12, 1709, that “Before noon Mr. Anderson and his wife and Mistress B-k-r came and dined with us.”²⁴⁶ William Byrd would even invite him when he did not go to the church service. He recorded on August 7, 1709, that “It was so hot I could not go to church, but ordered G-r-l to desire Mr. Anderson and his wife and Mr. C-s to come and dine with me, which they did accordingly.”²⁴⁷ Byrd would also dine with him in Williamsburg, where it seems that Anderson occasionally gave sermons at Bruton Parish Church. Byrd recorded on a visit to the capital on April 23, 1710, that “I went to the President’s where I found some of the Council; then we went to the church, where Mr. Anderson told me all was well at my house, thanks be to God Almighty. He gave us a good sermon. After church we went and dined with the President.”²⁴⁸

²⁴³ Ibid., 14 (March 28, 1709).

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 14 (March 30, 1709).

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 33 (May 11, 1709).

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 20 (April 12, 1709).

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 68 (August 7, 1709).

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 169 (April 23, 1710).

Anderson was tasked with ministering to the needs of his congregation at Westover Parish and he did so for Byrd. It should be noted that Westover Parish was not a private chapel and was separate from the Westover plantation. William Byrd did not retain the right to appoint whomever he desired as the gentry who owned private chapels did in England, though he did exercise influence as a member of the vestry. Shortly after Byrd's son Parke was born, he noted in his diary on September 28, 1709, that "About 11 o'clock Mr. Anderson came and soon after Mr. Harrison, his wife, and daughter. About 12 o'clock our soon was christened and his name was Parke. God grant him grace to be a good man."²⁴⁹ Byrd recorded on May 17, 1710, that "My son was a little worse, which made me send for Mr. Anderson. My express met him on the road and he came about 10 o'clock. He advised some oil of juniper which did him good."²⁵⁰

The minister would even provide medical advice for Byrd's slaves. Byrd wrote on January 7, 1711, that "Mr. Anderson gave us a sermon. After church I carried him home with me to dinner and to see my sick people. I ate fish for dinner. Mr. Anderson advised me to give my people cordials since other physic failed, which I did."²⁵¹ The Rev. Charles Anderson seems to have ministered to his parishioners equally or at least from the appearance from the diaries, accorded Byrd no special favors despite his status as a planter. Byrd was evidently offended by this treatment when "Mr. Anderson came to the next house and would not be so kind as to call to see the [sick] child [Evelyn]"²⁵² on August 4, 1710. The following day, Byrd wrote that "I scolded at Mr. Anderson for not coming to see the child, but I was satisfied with his excuse."²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 87 (September 28, 1709).

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 179 (May 17, 1710).

²⁵¹ Ibid., 284 (January 7, 1711).

²⁵² Ibid., 213 (August 4, 1710).

²⁵³ Ibid., 213 (August 5, 1710).

Although the Reverend Charles Anderson was likely closer to William Byrd than most of his other acquaintances, he did not reach a closeness equal to that of Dr. William Oastler in the 1709-1712 diaries. When the parson's son died, Byrd recorded on August 30, 1712, that "In the afternoon came Mr. M-r-s-l who told me that Mr. Anderson had lost his son who died Thursday night."²⁵⁴ The following day, Byrd "sent to know how Mr. Anderson and his wife did and condoled with them on their loss and learned that he could not come to church."²⁵⁵ When Byrd's own infant son Parke died two years earlier on June 3, 1710, however, "Mrs. Harrison and Mr. Anderson and his wife and some other company came to see us in our affliction."²⁵⁶ Byrd did not give his parson the same courtesy Anderson did when his own son Parke died. The death of the parson's son or a funeral is not mentioned in the diaries following Byrd's entry on August 31, 1712. On September 1, 1712, Byrd merely recorded that "I received a letter from Mr. Anderson that told me Mr. T-r-t-n was very sick and desired some Spanish flies and some bark which I sent him."²⁵⁷

Nevertheless, when the parson fell ill, William Byrd treated him the same as Oastler and visited him. The seriousness of Anderson's compared to Oastler's illness was different, however, and this is reflected in how Byrd recorded it in the diaries. Upon learning from Captain Drury Stith "that Mr. Anderson was very sick of a fever"²⁵⁸ on February 11, 1712, Byrd visited a few days later on February 16, and wrote that:

I went to Isham Eppes' house where I found the Colonel and Frank Eppes. I stayed with them about half an hour and then went over the river and found Mr. Anderson much better and learned that Dr. Cocke had been with him and that he was gone to my house.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 577 (August 30, 1712).

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 577 (August 31, 1712).

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 187 (June 3, 1710).

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 578 (September 1, 1712).

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 484 (February 11, 1712).

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 486 (February 16, 1712).

Just as he did with Oastler, he also periodically checked-in on his condition, and recorded that “I sent to know how Mr. Anderson did and received word that he was better.”²⁶⁰

Friendship for Byrd often intersected with his roles as a politician but also as commander of the Charles City County, where Westover is located, and the Henrico County militias. Persons with which he interacted as equals suddenly become his inferiors in wartime. Although Queen Anne’s War was occurring during the period covered by the diaries, Virginia was largely isolated from the conflict, with the French north in Canada and the Spanish south in Florida. New England and colonies such as South Carolina effectively served to buffer Virginia from conflict. Nevertheless, there were heightened fears, as Byrd recorded on August 15, 1711:

In the afternoon I received a letter from the Governor with orders to exercise all the militia under my command because we were threatened with an invasion, there being 14 French men-of-war designed for these parts. I immediately [sent] to Colonel Eppes to get the militia of this county together and sent orders to Colonel Frank Eppes to do the same in Henrico County.²⁶¹

Though a false alarm, Byrd took care to note how he acted decisively in his diary, by ‘immediately’ ordering his friends Colonel Eppes and Colonel Frank Eppes to prepare for invasion.

Perhaps the most intriguing friendship that William Byrd had was with Doctor William Cocke. When Byrd first met the incoming Governor Alexander Spotswood arriving from England, he also was reunited with Cocke on June 22, 1710. He wrote in his diary how “I complimented the Governor who seemed to be a very good man and was very courteous to me and told me I had been recommended to him by several of my friends in England. I met likewise

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 486-7 (February 17, 1712).

²⁶¹ Ibid., 389-90 (August 15, 1711).

with Dr. Cocke, my old school-fellow.”²⁶² In both his diaries in Virginia and in London, Byrd did not otherwise mention his education at Felsted School in England.

Lockridge conjectures that William Byrd never fit in among his peers at Felsted due to his status as a colonial. He writes that, “urged on by his distant father, and without significant attachments, what young William Byrd does seem to have done most in his school years was learn languages and read books. The Greek and Latin, possibly also the Hebrew, French, and Italian, he read all his life were learned as far as can be known at school.”²⁶³ Kenneth Lockridge also points to how Byrd “identified himself in the [Middle Temple] book listing new entrants as the ‘son and heir apparent of William Byrd of Cree Church, London, Esq.’ He was his father’s son and, in emphasizing his father’s English origins, was casting himself emphatically as an Englishman.”²⁶⁴ Significantly, his closest friend during his time at the Middle Temple was Benjamin Lynde of Massachusetts, and as Lockridge notes:

his identification of himself as an Englishman with no reference to his colonial status, and his choice of a fellow colonial for his first true friendship untainted by clientage after eleven years in England suggest that Byrd had encountered rejections at school on account of his colonial origins. After school, Byrd hid those origins, but sought his best friend among his own kind.²⁶⁵

Given that both Byrd and Cocke attended the same school and do not seem to have maintained contact prior to their reunion in Virginia is a testament that, even if Byrd had friends at Felsted, Cocke was likely not one of them. Their relationship at Felsted is unclear, but Lockridge argues that “Byrd’s nervous attempts to impress and then to subjugate his old

²⁶² Ibid., 194 (June 22, 1710).

²⁶³ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 19-20.

²⁶⁴ Lockridge, *William Byrd II of Virginia*, 17.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 17-8.

schoolfellow suggest once again that he had felt slighted as a colonial boy at Felsted,”²⁶⁶ though their relationship would eventually grow into a friendship.

Soon after Doctor William Cocke arrived in Virginia, William Byrd hosted him at Westover. Byrd wrote in his diary on July 11, a little over two weeks after Cocke’s arrival, and noted how “In the afternoon we went to work again till the evening, when Mr. Clayton, Dr. Cocke, and Mr. Bland came over. We took a walk together about the plantation and the Doctor seemed to be well pleased with the place. We gave them some supper but it was [late first] and I ate some roast veal with him.”²⁶⁷ The next day, Byrd showed him his prized library at Westover and recorded that “The Doctor, who is a man of learning, was pleased with the library. Mr. Clayton and Mr. Bland went to Prince George court, but the Doctor stayed here...Dr. Cocke and I played at piquet and I won...We had a hash of lamb for supper and drank a bottle of claret.”²⁶⁸ Not content with showing Cocke his main plantation, Byrd also later showed the Doctor his sawmill on March 27, 1711, which “the Doctor was much pleased with.”²⁶⁹

Byrd hosted Cocke frequently, and not just at Westover. They would frequently ride together to Williamsburg or Byrd’s other plantations. Byrd recorded a typical day on December 23 in the same year and wrote that:

About 12 o’clock Dr. Cocke came to me in order to go to Queen’s Creek and we got on horseback about one and rode there and [found] them pretty well. The weather was cold and had hindered them from going to church likewise. We waited till 3 o’clock for dinner and then I ate some turkey and chine and after dinner we sat by a fire and chatted and were merry, without much scandal to our [talk]. The Doctor was very pleasant company, as he commonly is. We had some roast apples and wine, with which we diverted ourselves till about 10 o’clock and then we retired to our lodgings where I said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 62.

²⁶⁷ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 203 (July 11, 1710).

²⁶⁸ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 203-4 (July 12, 1710).

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 319 (March 27, 1711).

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 457-8 (December 23, 1711).

Occasionally, Cocke wouldn't be able to visit Westover every time Byrd called for him. On August 4, 1710, he recorded one such instance, "I sent for Dr. Cocke, but a gust hindered him from coming and me from taking a walk."²⁷¹

Dr. Cocke was not just higher in social stature than Byrd's other acquaintances by virtue of his connection with the Governor. He was also an individual that Byrd craved respect from, to the extent that he would do favors for him that he would not do for other doctors such as Oastler. On September 11, 1711, Byrd wrote that "In the afternoon Mr. Bland went over the river in my boat, and I went to Mrs. Harrison's. I found her at home and offered her £17 10s for her coach in the name of Dr. Cocke which she was willing to take if it be made sterling."²⁷² Some favors that Cocke asked, however, were too much for Byrd as he noted in the diaries on July 13, 1712, "I received a letter from Dr. Cocke in which he desired me to pay Posford £25 but in my answer I excused myself."²⁷³ While Byrd occasionally did favors for him, their relationship was not close in the beginning. Byrd recorded when Cocke was sick and sent to know his condition, but he never deigned to visit him.²⁷⁴

Naturally as a doctor Cocke frequently visited others in that capacity. William Byrd frequently sought his advice, such as when his wife fell ill in late June of 1711. He wrote in his diary on June 30, 1711, how "My wife slept very well and was much better this morning. The Doctor ordered her nothing but a bitter drink made of chamomile flowers and ginseng root, which she was made to drink morning and evening."²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ Ibid., 213 (August 4, 1710).

²⁷² Ibid., 404 (September 11, 1711).

²⁷³ Ibid., 557 (July 13, 1712).

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 230 (September 13-4, 1710).

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 367 (June 30, 1711).

Byrd de-emphasized commercialism in Virginia, when it was considered rude to pay for something that wasn't explicitly a good. Just as it would have been rude for a traveler to pay a hosting planter, it was rude to pay the doctor for something other than the medicine itself in theory. On July 1, 1711, Byrd wrote in his diary how "In the afternoon I gave the Doctor four pieces of gold for his trouble in taking care of my wife, but I gave it him and desired him to give my service to Suky and give her the money."²⁷⁶ The editors of the diary describe in a footnote how Suky was "Dr. Cocke's maid. Apparently this was Byrd's indirect way of paying his friend, Dr. Cocke, for professional services without offending him."²⁷⁷ This is the first indication in the diaries that Byrd paid visiting doctors; however, perhaps he sought to impress Doctor Cocke with his wealth by not only paying him directly 'for the maid' but also paying him in gold rather than tobacco or pounds sterling. Lockridge additionally argues that:

"Byrd tried determinedly to turn his old schoolfellow into a replacement for his previous retainer, Dr. Oastler, by repeatedly forcing payment for medical assistance upon him. Cocke tried to render this help out of mere friendship, but Byrd pressed money upon him."²⁷⁸

This awkward interaction is only more so when Byrd attempted to both impress and subjugate the Doctor. On December 12, 1710, he wrote how "I desired the Doctor to give six of the Governor's servants £3 and returned to my lodgings and said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty."²⁷⁹ On January 31, 1712, he recorded that "I desired the Doctor to give the servants 5 shillings each for me."²⁸⁰ Not only did

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 368 (July 1, 1711).

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 368.

²⁷⁸ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 61.

²⁷⁹ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 271 (December 12, 1710).

²⁸⁰ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 478 (January 31, 1712).

Byrd seek to impress the Doctor with the amount of money he is tipping the Governor's servants, but he also implicitly put down the Doctor by asking him to tip the servants on his behalf.

Their complex relationship is only further revealed by how William Byrd played pranks on and made jokes at the expense of Doctor Cocke. He never recorded doing this with others in his diaries. On November 15, 1710, Byrd wrote that "we went to the coffeehouse where I wrote a sham letter to Dr. Cocke under the name of Mary F-x. Soon after he came and the letter was delivered to him."²⁸¹ While the contents of the letter and Cocke's reaction weren't recorded, it's clear that Byrd is toying with the newly arrived Cocke. On November 11, 1711, he recorded that "We put a trick [on] the Doctor who left 10 shillings on the table and we took it when he turned his back and left it for the cards when we had done."²⁸² Though this can reveal the material comfort to which Cocke was accustomed that he did not notice the missing money, it also reveals Byrd's insecurity. Byrd recorded that 'we' tricked the doctor rather than himself but it's unclear who else was playing cards at the time, something that he typically recorded. Similarly, on March 28, 1711, he recorded how "The Doctor's horse was foundered so that he could not go; however he would not believe it. After I supper I took a little walk about the plantation, which is level."²⁸³ Byrd recorded that "Our diversion was chiefly in laughing at the Doctor about his horse and he was at last a little angry."²⁸⁴ Byrd refers to the joking as collective, but Cocke grows tired at being the center of the joke. While the joking and pranking by Byrd were not frequent, it nevertheless became even less frequent as the diaries go on.

The Doctor was politically important for Byrd, as he would often serve as an intermediary between him and the governor, Alexander Spotswood. They were frequent

²⁸¹ Ibid., 258 (November 15, 1710).

²⁸² Ibid., 431 (November 11, 1711).

²⁸³ Ibid., 320 (March 28, 1711).

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 320 (March 28, 1711).

companions of the Governor, and Byrd would frequently stay later than others to ingratiate himself with the new royal administration. He recorded on March 24, 1711, that “After supper all the gentlemen went home and the Governor and the Doctor and I drank two bottles of French wine and talked of many things.”²⁸⁵ On June 12, he wrote that “About 8 o’clock all the company went away except myself and I stayed till 12 with the Governor and we drank about two bottles of French claret but the Doctor was very dull all the time.”²⁸⁶

Cocke’s role as intermediary would become all the more important as the political differences between the planters and the Governor emerged. Byrd wrote on April 25, 1711, how:

About noon we went to court and sat till about 4 o’clock and then the governors of the College met and chose five new members and the Governor was chosen Rector but he was displeased that we did not turn Mr. Blackamore out of the school and Mr. Le Fevre in. He also showed abundance of disorder because we did not choose Dr. Cocke one of the College but we excused ourselves because he was not an inhabitant.²⁸⁷

It is interesting that Byrd wrote collectively of the Board of Governors as if to focus Spotswood’s displeasure on the Board rather than on himself in the diary; moreover, he wrote in a self-justifying way, which is notable since only he would have access to and be able to read the diary at this time. It is also notable that Byrd’s justification for not admitting Cocke as a member of the College is because he ‘was not an inhabitant’ when the professors and masters mostly came from England. Not only did Byrd hide himself behind the actions of the other governors of the College in the diary but he may have done so outside of it as well.

The greatest point in which his relationship with the Governor would be tested was when he remarked publicly that no governor should be trusted with exorbitant amount of £20,000. Spotswood evidently assumed this was directed at him and took offense, as Byrd noted in his

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 318 (March 24, 1711).

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 359 (June 12, 1711).

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 335 (April 25, 1711).

diary on January 29, 1712, “The Doctor came to me at the capitol and we talked about the Governor being out of humor with what I had said concerning the £20,000.”²⁸⁸ Though the Governor and his mistress Mrs. Russell would receive him coldly on several occasions, Byrd attempted to ignore what had occurred and it eventually came to pass.

Spotswood worked to install his own allies in the government of Virginia and Cocke was one of them, such was Spotswood’s trust in his physician. William Byrd noted in his diary on April 23, 1712, “About 9 o’clock came Captain Isham Randolph and Captain Posford and brought me some letters from England, by one of which I learned that Dr. Cocke was Secretary of this colony.”²⁸⁹ Byrd’s relationship with the Governor evidently grew closer through Cocke when the Governor admitted his own doubts to Byrd. Byrd wrote that “The Governor exposed an anxiety about his double dealing with the Doctor about his commission of secretary...At night the Doctor was sworn secretary.”²⁹⁰

Despite Byrd playing jokes on Cocke, their relationship was evidently close enough that Cocke preemptively advised Byrd on his dealings on the governor. On September 21, 1712, Byrd noted that “In the evening my brother Custis’ boy brought me letters from the Doctor to desire me to meet the Governor and come to Pamunkey Town with Mr. Catesby because Mrs. Russell had told him I only gave myself an air in pretending to wait on the Governor.”²⁹¹ In order prove the mistress’ allegation to be untrue, the Doctor warned Byrd to ride and meet the governor. Byrd took the Doctor’s advice, and the next day, “rose about 6 o’clock and read a little Hebrew and nothing in Greek because I prepared to go to Mr. Lightfoot’s on the Pamunkey River in

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 476 (January 29, 1712).

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 519 (April 23, 1712).

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 542 (June 10, 1712).

²⁹¹ Ibid., 586 (September 21, 1712).

order to meet the Governor next day at the Pamunkey Indian town.”²⁹² He wrote in his diary on the following day that “About 12 o’clock they came by and then notwithstanding the rain was violent we went over the river where the Governor received me very kindly and so did all the rest of the company, except Mrs. Russell.”²⁹³

William Byrd finally recognized his relationship with Dr. William Cocke as a friendship when he fell ill beginning in early July of 1711. Byrd recorded his symptoms and his own treatments as well as the Doctor’s treatments in detail. On July 8, he wrote that:

I went to bed and had a very severe fit. I took more snakeroot and sweated very much with it, but it made my hot fit the worse and last the longer. I was not very dry nor did my head ache at all, or my back. I drank sage tea and some apple drink. At night came Dr. Cocke out of pure friendship and not as a doctor. He gave me some comfort but said little to me that night because he would not disturb me. Only he did not approve of the sweats that I took. I sweated all night and could not sleep but in the morning the fever went off and left me very weak.²⁹⁴

While Cocke frequently visited the ill, Byrd’s interpretation of his presence reveals the extent to which the Doctor took care of Byrd; the next day, Byrd recorded that:

This day I was so weak I could not rise but I was without a fever, but the Doctor would not give me the bark because there would not be time before next fit to take quantity enough to prevent the next fit and if it did not prevent it, it would make it worse. I could eat nothing and took little or nothing but sage tea. The Doctor told me he would stay with me till I was safe, notwithstanding he neglected a great deal of other business. Several came to see me but the Doctor would let nobody to me because when people are weak company do them mischief. The Doctor assured me I should have but one fit more which pleased me much in my weak condition...The Doctor comforted my wife so that she was very easy, thank God almighty.²⁹⁵

Byrd’s illness was so severe that the Doctor’s relationship with him transformed beyond merely being homosocial as Cocke moved to comfort Byrd’s wife.

²⁹² Ibid., 587 (September 22, 1712).

²⁹³ Ibid., 587 (September 23, 1712).

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 372 (July 8, 1711).

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 372 (July 9, 1711).

This was no ordinary illness, as Byrd wrote on July 10 that “My cold fit lasted four hours and the hot fit [...]. It was much the most violent I ever had in my life. The Doctor said he had not seen such a one and if I had another he believed it would turn to the quartan fever.”²⁹⁶ Whereas he often treated his slaves’ illnesses, Byrd in this case as well as others chose to put his faith in other doctors rather than himself when he fell ill. He recorded on the following day that the Doctor “gave me barley cinnamon water to stop the purge and it succeeded very well. I swallowed the bark like milk and took two ounces...In the evening I began to look very yellow which the Doctor took for a good sign that the medicine had taken effect.”²⁹⁷

Another sign that this was no ordinary illness for Byrd was the manner in which Doctor Cocke took charge of his treatment and refused to allow others to see Byrd in his own house. On July 12, he noted that:

I was a little better this morning and the bark had thrown the distemper into my skin and I had the yellow jaundice in a great degree for which the Doctor prescribed turmeric...Mr. Clayton came this morning, but the Doctor would not let him or anybody else come up to see me...The Doctor ordered the bark to be mixed with turmeric without my knowledge so that I took three ounces of bark in all.²⁹⁸

After notable improvement, Byrd was astounded that the Doctor refused any sort of payment and took it to mean that their relationship was more than politically and socially transactional. He recorded that “The Doctor saw me in a good way and so took his leave but he took nothing for all his trouble which amazed me...I gave him a million of thanks since he would take nothing else and his man led a horse to Williamsburg for Tom who was perfectly recovered.”²⁹⁹

Byrd was so impressed by Cocke’s goodwill that, on July 30, when “Dick Hamlin came to ask me whether Dr. Cocke would come to his brother [if] sent for to him, who had the

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 372 (July 10, 1711).

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 373 (July 11, 1711).

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 373 (July 12, 1711).

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 373-4 (July 13, 1711).

smallpox. I told him he would.”³⁰⁰ As Lockridge describes, with smallpox being the “most dreaded contagious disease of the early eighteenth century,” Cocke was put in an awkward position and would have had to consider “risking his life to confirm his friendship with Byrd.”³⁰¹

Around a month later, Byrd fell ill again and immediately sent for Doctor Cocke. He wrote on August 7, that “I began to have a small looseness which made me a little weak. However, I came down and walked about till about 12 o’clock and then my ague came which, notwithstanding it was short, disordered me extremely and made me vomit all I had eaten and drunk that day. This alarmed me so much that I sent for Dr. Cocke.”³⁰² The next day, Byrd recorded that “About 5 o’clock came the Doctor who expected to find me very ill. However he pronounced me worse than I thought myself and began to recommend the bark to me which I refused to take because I thought I should get well without it.”³⁰³ When he failed to get better by the following day, Byrd finally recognized Cocke’s expertise. He recorded that:

About 12 o’clock I found myself very uneasy and went up into my chambers and vomited a little and then I was better but had a little fever. About 2 o’clock I came down stairs again. The Doctor shook his head and told me I was in a bad condition and believed I could not get well without the bark. However he would not insist on it since I had so much aversion to it but would prescribe me a bitter draught which possibly might cure me but he doubted it. I told him I was better than he thought but that I would take his bitter draught.³⁰⁴

Byrd’s illnesses allowed him to realize that only his insecurity held back his relationship with William Cocke from developing into a far more useful friendship. Whereas he once attempted to put down the doctor by paying him and otherwise patronizing him, he now supported and trusted Cocke. Byrd no longer criticized him as ‘dull,’ and instead wrote on

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 381 (July 30, 1711).

³⁰¹ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 62.

³⁰² Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 385-6 (August 7, 1711).

³⁰³ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 386 (August 8, 1711).

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 386-7 (August 9, 1711).

February 17, 1712, that “We were very merry as we always are with the Doctor.”³⁰⁵ According to the editors of the diary, Byrd even initially served as security for Cocke’s appointment as Secretary of the colony.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 487 (February 17, 1712).

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 542.

Chapter IV. “Wine and cake were served plentifully”³⁰⁷: Contempt, Indifference, and Respect for Equals

Society in colonial Virginia was broadly structured and viewed as hierarchical by male slave-owning tobacco planters at the top such as William Byrd. Among planters themselves as supposed equals there also existed norms to which they were expected to uphold. If they did not meet Byrd’s standards, say for hospitality, he looked upon them as inferiors. Nevertheless, whether their hospitality met his exacting standards or not, Byrd and other planters congregated with each other in mutual recognition of their superiority over the white lower classes of the colony because of their political power, land, and slave ownership.

The occasions in which William Byrd’s status is most frequently displayed typically involved hospitality between elite white men in some form, whether Byrd was hosting or being hosted by others. He recorded on August 10, 1709, that “I ate some roast goose for dinner, and we were served very well, but Colonel Ludwell’s boy broke a glass.”³⁰⁸ One may recall when Byrd wrote on September 18, 1712, that “Mr. Catesby and I took a walk and I found Eugene asleep instead of being at work, for which I beat him severely.”³⁰⁹ Although the entries differ slightly, both incidents result in embarrassment for a slaveowner in front of another slaveowner. For Byrd, it reflected that he did not maintain enough discipline over his slaves to make sure that they were always working. For Colonel Ludwell, it reflected that his hospitality was poor because his slaves were unable to serve guests correctly. As with Byrd, it similarly reflected that his control over and discipline of enslaved individuals was lacking; if he ‘truly’ was the master of his slaves they would not make a mistake such as dropping a glass.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 165 (April 14, 1710).

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 69 (August 10, 1709).

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 585 (September 18, 1712).

Kathleen Brown remarks on the same incident, stating that “During overnight stays in the homes of other planters, elite men continually evaluated their hosts. William Byrd II often recorded small glitches in the hospitality he received, implicitly comparing himself to his hosts. On at least two occasions, he found fault with the servants: once, an otherwise well-served dinner at Colonel Ludwell’s was marred when ‘Ludwell’s boy broke a glass.’ On a visit to his brother-in-law Custis, Byrd remarked laconically, ‘Here are the worst servants I ever saw in my life.’”³¹⁰ She describes at-length how:

Like many of his planter peers, Byrd interpreted hospitality as the most visible indication of gentility and domestic authority. When Byrd, Governor Spotswood, and a retinue of men descended upon the unsuspecting Major Nicholas Merriweather in 1711, Byrd expected the worst from Merriweather’s household and still found much to criticize...The major’s lack of preparedness stood in stark contrast to Byrd’s own contingency plan for beverages, just as the major’s lack of sociability set him apart from men like Byrd who spent the better part of some days visiting with friends and neighbors. In this terse entry, Byrd noted two other details that made the Merriweather house fall short: the major’s breach of etiquette in serving himself first and his wife’s absence from the company. By failing to appear, Mrs. Merriweather cast doubt upon the sincerity of her household’s hospitality. She also left her guests to wonder about her husband’s authority over her and her own suitability for company.³¹¹

It’s clear that the actions of a planter’s wife, as well as the absence thereof, reflected on the hospitality of the planter himself because, in this case, if Major Merriweather properly maintained control and authority over his wife, she would have joined him in hosting the company. Etiquette evidently governed social interactions and was expected by planters such as Byrd to the extent that he only commented on it when it was not followed.

Brown additionally notes that “Men who could not provide company with good quality beverages also received mention in Byrd’s diary. He commented after a visit to his father-in-law, Colonel Duke, whose house had just been torn apart by a storm, ‘He had no drink good so that I

³¹⁰ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 269.

³¹¹ Brown, *Good Wives*, 269-70.

was forced to drink thick cider.”³¹² Even among relative equals, Byrd found issues with which to record and distinguish himself as better than other planters, perhaps in order to satisfy his own insecurity over his social status.

Byrd was not, however, completely unaware of his own family’s shortcomings in the provision of hospitality. He recorded on November 11, 1709, how:

we returned in the dark to Arlington where we found some of the women sick and some out of humor and particularly my wife quarreled with Mr. Dunn and me for talking Latin and called it bad manners. This put me out of humor with her which set her to crying. I wholly made the reconciliation. The parson was more affronted than I, and went to bed.³¹³

As recorded later, this Mr. Dunn would later beat and leave his wife, who was a close friend of Lucy Parke Byrd. Although whether he assaulted his wife earlier than Byrd recorded and Lucy Parke was aware of this is unclear, if true it is perhaps no surprise that she would be offended by any part of his conduct. In William Byrd’s eyes, however, this was another public ‘outburst’ that reflected poorly on him and his hospitality to a guest. The parson Dunn was evidently offended by Lucy Parke’s poor etiquette and hospitality and retired early. Byrd never considered that his wife might be offended by and object to the exclusivity of their conversation given that she, like most if not all other women in colonial Virginia, was not learned in Latin.

As Rhys Isaac states, “The ideal of the home as a center of private domesticity was not familiar to Anglo-Virginians in the mid-eighteenth century. They lived or aspired to live in the constant presence of servants and guests.”³¹⁴ While Byrd maintained his library as a private space, Westover hosted numerous visitors and guests throughout the diaries. Byrd recorded

³¹² Ibid., 269.

³¹³ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 105 (November 11, 1709).

³¹⁴ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 71.

visitors formally, just as he did all others except servants or those otherwise below him socially. Even if engaged in reading as he often was in the mornings, he would alter his routine to accommodate guests. He wrote on August 23, 1709, that:

I began to read geometry but was interrupted by the coming of Mr. Will Randolph and his wife and Mrs. Cocke. I was as courteous as possible to them to give Mrs. Randolph a good impression of this part of the country. They dined with us and I ate blue wing for dinner.³¹⁵

On February 6, 1710, Byrd noted the shortcomings of his own hospitality in a rare, non-religious reflection, though brief. He wrote that “About 11 o’clock Mrs. Harrison, Mrs. L— and other gentlewomen came over and so did Mr. Bland. They all dined here, notwithstanding we had but an indifferent dinner. I ate boiled pork for dinner. In the afternoon the women played at billiards and Mr. Bland went away.”³¹⁶ Sometimes, the number of guests grew so large that William Byrd did not bother to record their names, and merely wrote, on June 4, 1712, for example, that “We had 11 people at dinner.”³¹⁷ Lockridge succinctly describes how “Retainers and neighbors danced the dance of society around the Byrds, and the diary was a record of these triumphs as well...In his diary he touched on their subsidiary performances as attendant lords to swell his scene. Neighbors came constantly to visit.”³¹⁸

William Byrd would even delay dealing with important military and political issues if he had a prior engagement. On October 7, 1711, Byrd recorded that:

I received a letter from the Governor by express by which I learned that 60 people had been killed by the Indians at Neuse and about as many at Pamlico in North Carolina and that he would meet me at Major Harrison’s. However, I could not go until tomorrow because I had invited company to dine with me.³¹⁹

³¹⁵ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 74 (August 23, 1709).

³¹⁶ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 139 (February 6, 1710).

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 539 (June 4, 1712).

³¹⁸ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 70.

³¹⁹ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 417 (October 7, 1711).

Christoph von Graffenried, Baron of Bernberg, was captured in a ‘revolt,’ according to the editors, by the Tuscarora along with John Lawson, surveyor-general of North Carolina, while attempting to settle New Bern.³²⁰ While the exact etiquette that governed hospitality in early eighteenth-century Virginia isn’t clear, there were clearly standards adhered to. Byrd wrote on June 17, 1709, that “We expected some company but they disappointed us.”³²¹ Although it’s clear that the expected company disappointed Byrd by not showing up, one wonders whether Byrd was simply disappointed at their lack of etiquette by not giving advance warning or whether Byrd was disappointed at a lost opportunity to assert his status and display his wealth.

In the diaries, the stark realities of colonial Virginia are perhaps most apparent in how William Byrd recorded treating his slaves. Other realities such as domestic violence, also appear in the diaries. Byrd recorded on March 31, 1711, that:

My wife told me of the misfortunes of Mrs. Dunn—that her husband had beat her, and that she had complained to Mr. Gee of it, who made Mr. Dunn swear that he would never beat her again; that he threatened to kill her and abused her extremely and told her he would go from her. I was sorry to hear it and told my wife if he did go from her she might come here.³²²

It is notable that Byrd expressed sympathy for Mrs. Dunn’s predicament by offering her rooms at Westover and yet he still abided by patriarchal norms by allowing her presence at Westover if and only if her husband abandoned her. If he did not, Byrd seems to have seen Mr. Dunn assaulting his wife as beyond his realm of authority however unfortunate since it was conducted in the Dunn household under the authority of the parson as patriarch.

Any relationships that Byrd maintained that spanned social classes reaffirmed his position. Even brief relationships reinforced his status as a planter in Virginia. Rhys Isaac writes

³²⁰ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 418.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 49 (June 17, 1709).

³²² *Ibid.*, 322 (March 31, 1711).

that “Indeed, most of the dominant values of the culture were fused together in the display of hospitality, which was one of the supreme obligations that society laid upon heads of households.”³²³ He notes that:

In 1705 Robert Beverley had written: The Inhabitants are very Courteous to Travellers.... A Stranger has no more to do, but to inquire upon the Road, where any Gentleman or good House-keeper Lives, and there he may depend upon being received with Hospitality. This good Nature is so general...that the Gentry when they go abroad, order their Principal Servant to entertain all Visitors.³²⁴

While it’s likely that only planters could afford to host strangers frequently, Beverley perhaps overemphasized this practice among the gentry when discussing where a stranger may find hospitality. Byrd, at least in the 1709-1712 period, only recorded once hosting strangers. On September 4, 1709, he only wrote that “Two [travellers] were entertained here this night.”³²⁵ While strangers were probably not entertained on the same scale as acquaintances of Byrd, this could have also depended on their social status. Hospitality to ‘strangers’ was thus restricted to only white people. It would have not occurred to Beverley that his description was inaccurate for he likely never considered Africans, whether enslaved or free, as being capable of understanding social rituals, much less being hosted as an equal.

While Byrd remarked on the deficiencies in others’ hospitality, he was not unable to comment on when he was welcomed well. On September 18, 1711, he recorded that “The Colonel [Duke] was very kind to me and very cross to his old woman according to custom. She was grown very deaf so that the Colonel conceives some hope of outliving her.”³²⁶ It’s unclear whether Byrd was directly referring to Duke being ‘cross’ with his mother as ‘according to

³²³ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 71.

³²⁴ Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 71.

³²⁵ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 79 (September 4, 1709).

³²⁶ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 407-8 (September 18, 1711).

custom' humorously. He also recorded good hospitality when the patriarch was not in residence, and wrote on March 7, 1711, that "He was not at home but my sister was and gave us a cast over the river and from thence we rode to Colonel Duke's where we came about 5 o'clock. He could tell us no news. He received us, according to custom, very courteously."³²⁷

The person to whom William Byrd was closest that was also of equal stature socially was Benjamin Harrison who lived at Berkeley Plantation, next to Byrd's plantation Westover. Lockridge describes how he "was if not a close friend certainly a constant one in the first years of the diary. The two families were frequently together and were, like most Virginia families, cousins by marriage. During Harrison's last illness in April 1710, Byrd and Lucy were foremost among the friends constantly at Berkeley plantation to keep watch with the dying man."³²⁸

As to be expected for neighboring planters, Byrd and Harrison frequently hosted each other at their respective plantations. While they were neighbors, their relationship doesn't seem to have been close in any emotional aspect but their physical and material proximity to each other led to their social acquaintance. Familial ties played the most important role, however, in their relationship. As the editors of the diary note in the introduction:

Byrd's expressions of kinship for some others are more puzzling. He apparently 'called cousin' with very remote relations, most of them being related to Lucy Byrd, whose grandmother, Lucy Higginson, married successively Lewis Burwell, William Bernard, and Philip Ludwell, by all of whom she had children. One of them, Jane Ludwell, married Daniel Parke. Byrd calls Philip Ludwell and his wife 'uncle' and 'aunt'; Elizabeth Harrison [wife of Benjamin Harrison of Berkeley] and Lucy Berkeley, daughters of Lewis Burwell, 'cousin'; Elizabeth Todd, daughter of William Bernard, 'cousin.' Probably 'brother' James Duke was related in this way.³²⁹

³²⁷ Ibid., 310 (March 7, 1711).

³²⁸ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 60.

³²⁹ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), xxiv.

Byrd had little familial roots in Virginia himself with the exception of his father and uncle, both of whom he was not close with due to his education in England. His reliance on his wife for providing roots and connections to Virginia then is apparent in the way Byrd referred to his wife's relations as his own.

Benjamin Harrison was most frequently hosted at Westover in the company of others as an acquaintance and relative rather than as an individual. Byrd wrote on April 4, 1709, that "While we were at dinner Mr. Bland came and told us abundance of news and particularly that our fleet was arrived safe home. Mr. Harrison, Captain Stith, and Will Randolph came likewise to see me. After dinner we played at billiards."³³⁰ Benjamin Harrison was not always with the same circle of friends when hosted by Byrd, as Byrd noted in the diaries on June 3, 1709, "About 11 o'clock Mr. Harrison, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Harwood came to see me, as did Captain Llewellyn and Colonel Eppes and stayed about half an hour."³³¹

As a neighbor, Harrison was present for significant occasions in the lives of Byrd and his family. Byrd wrote on September 28, 1709, that "About 11 o'clock Mr. Anderson came and soon after Mr. Harrison, his wife, and daughter. About 12 o'clock our son was christened and his name was Parke."³³² Any evidence of emotional connections between Byrd and Harrison are seen only when his wife miscarried on February 14, 1710. Byrd noted that "My cousin Harrison and Mrs. Anderson came to see my wife to comfort her in her affliction. They stayed and dined with me. I ate roast shoat."³³³ While Byrd may have assumed his wife's relations as his own by occasionally referring to Benjamin Harrison as his 'cousin,' the lack of any serious emotional friendship is evident in how Harrison 'came to see my wife to comfort her in her affliction.'

³³⁰ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 17 (April 4, 1709).

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 43 (June 3, 1709).

³³² *Ibid.*, 87 (September 28, 1709).

³³³ *Ibid.*, 142 (February 14, 1710).

While Byrd may have surely sought to emphasize his own stoicism by not discussing whether he was afflicted by his wife's miscarriage, it is nevertheless notable that he refers to Harrison as only visiting his wife, the only person in the Byrd household to whom he was related. However, Byrd may have also been projecting his emotions onto his wife by claiming that Harrison came only to comfort his wife and not himself as well.

The importance of familial ties by marriage were recognized by equals such as Benjamin Harrison, though it's unclear if other planters assumed and referred to their in-law relations as their own. This is clear in how Harrison recognized Byrd as a political and social equal despite Byrd's relative lack of roots in the colony and hosted him frequently at Berkeley Plantation. Byrd wrote on April 10, 1709, how "About 12 o'clock we went to my Cousin Harrison's, where we dined. I ate fowl and bacon for dinner only."³³⁴ Interestingly, Harrison seems to have invited Byrd to Berkeley more often than Byrd invited Harrison to Westover. Byrd was frequently hosted by Harrison with other company at Berkeley, as he noted in his diary on December 3, 1709, "In the evening Mr. Anderson and I walked to Mr. Harrison's where we found Frank W-l-s and James Burwell and Isham Randolph. Here I ate custard and was merry."³³⁵

While Byrd may have lacked familial roots in Virginia unlike Benjamin Harrison, what he lacked in roots he made up for in political weight. Whereas Byrd was appointed to the Governor's Council for life, the highest position Harrison attained was in the lower, elected house of the Virginia General Assembly as Speaker of the House of Burgesses. Harrison as such may have even recognized Byrd as a political and social superior; this is interpreted based how often Byrd hosted Harrison alone at Westover versus how often Harrison hosted Byrd alone at

³³⁴ Ibid., 19 (April 10, 1709).

³³⁵ Ibid., 114 (December 3, 1709).

Berkeley. Of the few times Byrd hosted Harrison alone at Westover, he did not record the sort of conversations he engaged in while alone at Berkeley. Byrd wrote on June 17, 1709, how:

In the afternoon we rode to my neighbor Harrison's where we stayed till the evening with Mr. [Gee]. Here I ate some apple pie. Mr. Harrison had the same bad account of tobacco in England and advised me to ship none by this ship. He told me that several gentlemen were extremely in debt with Mr. Perry.³³⁶

On September 3, 1709, Byrd recorded that "I took a walk to Mr. Harrison's who told me he heard the peace was concluded in the last month. After I had been courteously entertained with wine and cake I returned home, where I found all well, thank God."³³⁷ Both times, Byrd recorded the food offered as an indication of hospitality; in the second example, he clearly recorded how his status was recognized by being 'courteously entertained with wine and cake.' More importantly, Byrd described the serious subjects of their conversations. It's notable that Byrd never felt compelled to host Benjamin Harrison at Westover to discuss tobacco planting or foreign politics, though he may have simply not recorded it.

As relative equals, both William Byrd and Benjamin Harrison assisted each other in various ways, though what they did for each other it should be noted were favors among equals rather than those of differing ranks. Byrd recorded on April 11, 1709, how "I packed up my things to send to Williamsburg by Mr. Harrison's boat,"³³⁸ and on July 26, 1709, how "Mr. Harrison came home and sent me two letters from England which informed of the likelihood of peace."³³⁹ While Harrison did favors for Byrd, he also did so in ways that suggest that he wasn't beholden to Byrd either politically or socially. Nevertheless, Byrd never recorded carrying letters

³³⁶ Ibid., 49 (June 17, 1709).

³³⁷ Ibid., 79 (September 3, 1709).

³³⁸ Ibid., 20 (April 11, 1709).

³³⁹ Ibid., 64 (July 26, 1709).

and delivering them on behalf of others, though he may have also conveniently left it out of the record to reinforce his superiority, if only to himself.

On August 1, 1709, Byrd described how he had to seek permission from his neighbor on the James River to load his tobacco, writing “I rose at break of day and drank some warm milk and rode to Mr. Harrison’s, where I got a permit to load tobacco on board my sloop.”³⁴⁰ There seems to have been an informal code among the neighboring planters recognizing their authority over each other’s land. Byrd wrote on June 4, 1711, how his steer had broken into the cornfield on Berkeley Plantation and sent Benjamin Harrison’s wife “part of it to make her amends.”³⁴¹ Recognizing that he had intruded on not just a neighbor but also an equal, Byrd killing and sending part of the steer to Elizabeth Burwell Harrison was a way to non-verbally maintain and mediate a stable relationship through gifts.

When Benjamin Harrison was sick, Byrd checked on his condition either by sending a slave or visiting himself. His death, the days preceding it, as well as the funeral are described in great detail, much more so than his other acquaintances such as the Reverend Charles Anderson or the Doctor William Oastler. Lockridge accurately describes how “The final scene was recorded with care, something most unusual in the diary.”³⁴² In the days before his death, one can trace how Harrison’s condition worsened through Byrd’s diary entries. On March 22, 1710, Byrd wrote that:

I ordered Bannister to dispatch the sloop because S-k-f-r was well and then we rode to Colonel Hill’s where we found abundance of company, more than we expected and among the rest Mr. Harrison who was not well. About 2 o’clock we went to dinner and I

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 66 (August 1, 1709).

³⁴¹ Ibid., 355 (June 4, 1711).

³⁴² Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 60.

ate bacon and fowl. In the afternoon played at cricket, four of a side, and Mr. Harrison among us, who looked exceedingly red a great while after it.³⁴³

Byrd would remark on Benjamin Harrison's condition and appearance every day until his death on April 10. He would frequently visit Harrison at Berkeley, often in the company of others.

Sometimes, he would visit with a few others, such as on March 24, when he recorded that "Mr. Randolph and I took a walk to Mr. Harrison's who had been very sick but was something better, and young Drury Stith was sick there likewise."³⁴⁴

More frequently, however, he would visit with a larger group all coming from Westover. On March 27, he wrote "we played at shooting with arrows till about 4 o'clock when we [Dr. Blair, Mr. James Burwell and Major Nathaniel Harrison and Captain Henry Harrison] went all to Mr. Harrison's, whom we found better."³⁴⁵ The next day, he wrote "we [Major Harrison, Hal Harrison, James Burwell, Isham Randolph, Mr. Doyley, and Colonel Ludwell] walked to Mr. Harrison's, whom we found better."³⁴⁶ Some days, Byrd wanted to be kept aware of Harrison's condition so much so he would send a slave to check in the morning and then visit later in the day. On April 3, he did so, writing:

I danced my dance; then I sent to know how Mr. Harrison did and received word that he had slept badly this night, though he drank a great deal of the tea which I sent him. Colonel Eppes came about 11 o'clock and said Mr. Harrison was very bad. Mr. Parker came likewise; and then came Mr. Burwell, Colonel Hill, and Nat Harrison and they all gave a bad account of Mr. Harrison...In the evening we walked to Mr. Harrison's, with whom I had intended to watch but there were several that came for that purpose. He was very ill.³⁴⁷

³⁴³ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 155 (March 22, 1710).

³⁴⁴ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 156 (March 24, 1710).

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 157 (March 27, 1710).

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 158 (March 28, 1710).

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 160-1 (April 3, 1710).

He didn't always have to send a slave, for it seems that his illness had many individuals throughout the area concerned such that news spread quickly. On April 5, he recorded that:

I rose about 10 o'clock and read only a chapter in Hebrew, being interrupted by Mr. Bland who brought word my cousin Harrison continued bad and that Dr. Blair was with him and despaired of his life...In the afternoon Mr. Bland and I read some news till Mrs. Hamlin came and told us Mr. Harrison was still very bad. Mr. Bland went away and I walked to Mr. Harrison's where I found him better and broken out extremely but his fever still very high. Mr. Blair and his wife, with Colonel Harrison, was there.³⁴⁸

William Byrd would also occasionally visit with his wife. On April 7, he:

sent to inquire how Mr. Harrison did and received word that he was still worse. I sent him some spirits of saffron. My purge did not work much but made me hot and out of order...In the afternoon I played at cards with my wife and then ordered the coach to go visit Mr. Harrison. I found him better in appearance and everybody full of hope.³⁴⁹

Several days before on March 31, he visited Harrison at Berkeley twice, once with his wife, writing that:

Then about 8 o'clock we got a-horseback and rode to Mr. Harrison's and found him very ill but sensible...In the afternoon I went again with my wife to Mr. Harrison's who continued very bad so that I resolved to stay with him all night, which I did with Mr. Anderson and Nat Burwell. He was in the same condition till he vomited and then he was more easy. In the morning early I returned home and went to bed.³⁵⁰

While Byrd staying the night at Berkeley plantation puts Harrison on par with the Doctor Oastler, the number of detailed descriptions in the diary of Harrison's condition surpasses Oastler, giving an insight into how much Byrd may have cared for Harrison as beyond a peer planter but as a neighbor and friend. Byrd also stayed the night with Harrison more times than Oastler. The following morning on April 1, Byrd described visiting Berkeley alone later in the day, the first and only such time before his death, "Before sunrise I returned home and after

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 161-2 (April 5, 1710).

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 162 (April 7, 1710).

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 159 (March 31, 1710).

recommending myself and the sick man to the divine protection, I went to bed and lay till 12 o'clock at noon...In the afternoon I went to visit Mr. Harrison and found him a little better."³⁵¹

On April 4, Byrd displayed the most concern, detailing Harrison's condition and how they treated him, and wrote:

I sent to inquire how Mr. Harrison did and received word that he was no better notwithstanding he had slept much in the night by the help of laudanum...Mr. C-s came and told me Mr. Harrison continued extremely bad. About 5 I walked there with him and found him in a bad condition, sometimes dozing then waking with groaning and frenzy. I found Mrs. Hamlin and Mrs. Stith there and likewise Colonel Hill. I ate milk about 8 o'clock and then went into the chamber and sat up with him all night. His fever was very high and he began to break out in pimples but was very restless all night. We gave him tea with ten drops of spirits of saffron. I stayed till 5 o'clock in the morning and then returned home and went to bed.³⁵²

Byrd frequently sent to know Benjamin Harrison's condition. Whether he always used enslaved individuals is unclear, but it seems likely given that it is specifically recorded once, on April 8, when he wrote:

I rose at 6 o'clock and read nothing because I took physic, and Mr. Anderson came from Mr. Harrison's and told me that he was much better and that he had good hopes of him...In the afternoon I sent Nurse to Mr. Harrison's and he [*sic*] brought word Mr. Harrison was growing worse again, on which I ordered her to go watch with him all night.³⁵³

It is interesting that Byrd ordered a slave to stay the night in his stead because it reveals how slaves were used to maintain relationships between slaveowners. If something prevented him from leaving Westover, it is not mentioned in the diaries.

The days in which he sent to know Harrison's condition but did not visit were rare, as he recorded on March 25, "I sent to know how Mr. Harrison did and received word that he was worse, but it rained so all day that I could not go to see him...In the evening I sent again to know

³⁵¹ Ibid., 160 (April 1, 1710).

³⁵² Ibid., 161 (April 4, 1710).

³⁵³ Ibid., 163 (April 8, 1710).

how Mr. Harrison did and received word that he was.”³⁵⁴ The days on which nothing prevented him from visiting Benjamin Harrison were the days in which his condition improved, as he recorded on March 26, “I received an express from Mr. Harrison that he was better and I sent him some read lead plasters,”³⁵⁵ and on April 6, “I sent to know how Mr. Harrison did and received word that he seemed to be a little better.”³⁵⁶

On the day prior to the death of Benjamin Harrison, William Byrd wrote somberly that:

“I received an account that Mr. Harrison was very ill and was confirmed in the same account...Mr. Harrison had a mind to partridge, which I sent him, and he ate one of them. We had nobody but our own family at dinner. I ate roast beef. As soon as we had dined we went to Mr. Harrison’s, who we found past all hopes, and a very melancholy family.”³⁵⁷

Besides doing what he could to ensure the comfort of his neighbor by sending him partridge, the seriousness with which Byrd treated the death of a friend is evident when they did not host anyone for dinner. On April 10, he recorded that:

I sent early to inquire after Mr. Harrison and received word that he died about 4 o’clock this morning...Just before his death he was sensible and desired Mrs. L— with importunity to open the door because he wanted to go out and could not go till the door was open and as soon as the door was opened he died. The country has lost a very useful man and [one] who was both an advantage and an ornament to it, and I have lost a good neighbor, but God’s will be done...My wife rode to Mrs. Harrison’s to comfort her and to assure her that I should be always ready to do her all manner of service.³⁵⁸

Whereas he only felt compelled to write briefly that Oastler was “a good natured man but too much addicted to drink,”³⁵⁹ he wrote with much more praise of Harrison’s life.

He also wrote in much more detail about Benjamin Harrison’s funeral relative to the Doctor. On April 14, 1710, he wrote in his diary how:

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 156-7 (March 25, 1710).

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 157 (March 26, 1710).

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 162 (April 6, 1710).

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 163 (April 9, 1710).

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 163-4 (April 10, 1710).

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 118 (December 14, 1709).

About 10 o'clock we walked to Mrs. Harrison's to the funeral, where we found abundance of company of all sorts. Wine and cake were served plentifully. At one o'clock the corpse began to move and the ship 'Harrison' fired a gun every half a minute. When we came to church the prayers were first read; then we had a sermon which was an extravagant panegyric or [eulogy]. At every turn he called him 'this great man,' and not only covered his faults but gave him virtues which he never possessed as well as magnified those which he had. When [the] sermon was done the funeral service was read and the poor widow trembled extremely. When all was over I put the widow, her daughter, and two sisters into my coach and Colonel Randolph, his wife, Colonel Hill, Mrs. Anderson, and the two B-r-k-s went home with us and I invited several others who would not come.³⁶⁰

The grandness of Harrison's funeral as befitting a planter and Speaker of the House of Burgesses is readily apparent, though the candor with which he criticizes the sermon is perhaps somewhat surprising. It's clear however that Byrd cared about Harrison to comfort his family through what means he could, even if it was offering his coach and hosting them at Westover following the funeral.

William Byrd was also close with his brother-in-law John Custis, who married Lucy Parke's sister, Frances. He referred to him as his 'brother.' Lockridge describes how:

"Byrd's closest friend for many years was to be his brother-in-law John Custis...In their letters he and Byrd were to commiserate over their extravagant and willful (as they saw it) wives and over the tangles of their father-in-law Daniel Parke's estate until long after 1714...Their letters also exchanged confidences on their common struggle against Alexander Spotswood. Custis's expertise as a tobacco planter was probably a source of great help to his novice brother-in-law."³⁶¹

When attempting to resolve the will of his father-in-law Daniel Parke, Jr. with John Custis on April 25, 1712, Byrd noted in his diaries that:

I rose about 6 o'clock and my brother and sister Custis came about 7 to perfect the deed between us. There were several little quarrels between my brother and his wife, and my wife could not forbear siding with her sister and they would fain make me believe that I

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 165-6 (April 14, 1710).

³⁶¹ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 60.

had promised that my brother should make my sister [easy], which was wrong and gave me a bad opinion [of] my sister.³⁶²

John Custis had an even worse relationship with his wife than Byrd did with Lucy Parke, enough to “cause John Custis to rejoice once Frances Parke Custis had died in 1715, and to note in his epitaph that his brief years of bachelorhood before he married in 1706 had been the only happy years in his life.”³⁶³

When it came to recording brief interactions with others in the diary, Byrd did so in ways that reinforced his own status as conceived by himself. When a ball was held in the capitol on February 6, 1711, Byrd went into great detail describing the various dances and partners but ended his entry by stating that “The President had the worst clothes of anybody there.”³⁶⁴

William Byrd rarely described clothes in the diary; indeed, based off the diaries alone it would be very difficult to imagine what they wore. Evidently, the President’s clothes did not reflect his status as a slaveowner, and Byrd commented with such smug satisfaction as if to suggest that his clothes were better. On January 2, 1712, Byrd remarked that “A little before dinner came Ben Harrison in his best clothes, because he happened to come yesterday in his worst.”³⁶⁵ Byrd’s remarks on clothing were restricted to those of his own class, revealing in his mind the nuances of social status within the planter class itself. As Kathleen Brown remarks, “The congregation of the colony’s most politically prominent men provided Byrd with the chance to compare his own wardrobe favorably to that of his peers.”³⁶⁶

³⁶² Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 520 (April 25, 1712).

³⁶³ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 67-8.

³⁶⁴ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 297-8 (February 6, 1711).

³⁶⁵ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 463 (January 2, 1712).

³⁶⁶ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 173.

With women that Byrd did not know well, he was instantly drawn to comment on their physical appearance rather than, say their personality or virtues. On February 9, 1711, Byrd recorded that “At Mr. B-s we saw a pretty girl called Mistress King who had £400 to her fortune.”³⁶⁷ Later, on March 11 of the same year, he wrote that “From hence we went to Mr. B-s where we drank cider and saw Molly King, a pretty black [brunette] girl.”³⁶⁸ It’s notable that Byrd, a married man, commented merely on her physical beauty and the amount of her dowry and nothing else. Byrd’s remarks were not confined to those of his own social status, as on December 16, 1711, he recorded that “I never had seen Mrs. Burwell, who is a pretty woman, nor did I ever see Suky the Doctor’s maid, who was not ugly but much gone to the flesh.”³⁶⁹

Byrd often dealt with those below him in business and he recorded their names unless they were not white. On October 10, 1711, he wrote that “Just after dinner came John Giles to receive the £20 I was to give him for his right to Falling Creek.”³⁷⁰ Though Byrd did not record his social status, it’s implicitly clear that Giles is lower than Byrd because he did not address him with any sort of military title, nor did he address him with the prefix ‘Mr.’ as he did with other planters not serving in the militia. Earlier that year, on September 29, Byrd recorded that “A mulatto man came to sell me a steer for 15 [shillings?] because he wanted three rights and I sent him to the master of the ship, who gave him 30.”³⁷¹ In the case of the mixed-race man, Byrd only referred to him by his race even though he was free, revealing that, in Byrd’s mind, his race prevented the man from being treated as an equal to other men Byrd conducted business with.

³⁶⁷ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 299 (February 9, 1711).

³⁶⁸ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 313 (March 11, 1711).

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 454 (December 16, 1711).

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 419 (October 10, 1711).

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 413 (September 29, 1711).

Kathleen Brown briefly discusses yeoman farmers in relation to planters, stating “Stonewalled by wealthy planters, smaller propertyowners helped themselves to resources they believed their rich neighbors should have shared willingly.”³⁷² In the case of Byrd, he:

recorded violations of his plantation by residents living near Westover. In 1709, he found ‘some of my good neighbors had dug down the bank of my ditch to let their hogs into my pasture, for which I was out of humor.’ When several neighbors appealed to him in 1711 to be allowed onto his property to catch their hogs, Byrd denied them this privilege ‘because they had bred them there.’ During subsequent annoying incidents of property theft, Byrd accused an old Frenchman who lived nearby of ‘being the most likely person to steal’ a possession of Byrd’s daughter’s and rounded up three men for stealing from his orchards.³⁷³

Brown’s statement that “Byrd was continually irritated by these acts not only because of the loss of property but because they revealed the actual feelings of neighbors toward an elite patron”³⁷⁴ is completely accurate. The notion of class separating large from small landowners was a sore point given how planters envisioned themselves as benevolent landowners. Whereas planters may have maintained friendly relations with their neighbors, property rights and lines were strict to the point that Byrd killed a steer that crossed onto and destroyed his neighbor Harrison’s property. Byrd’s lower-class neighbors clearly did not follow such rules of etiquette. Perhaps they sought more communal living as an ideal, or merely sought to take advantage of Byrd’s hospitality and desire to please.

Byrd’s household was large like any planter. He took care of his sister’s children, William, and Susan Brayne, who were sent to Virginia several months before her death on December 11, 1710. Byrd as patriarch did not take care of his nephew and niece on a day-to-day basis, though they do feature in the diaries occasionally. It’s unclear whether Byrd’s wife took care of them, or if a slave was charged with being responsible for them. They often only featured

³⁷² Ibid., 363.

³⁷³ Ibid., 363.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 363.

because they did not follow Byrd's instructions, notably resulting in him using corporal punishment. On July 14, 1710, he recorded that "Billy Brayne and I had a quarrel because he would not learn his books and I whipped him extremely."³⁷⁵ His treatment of his nephew stands in contrast to the narrative throughout the 18th century that the children and relatives of planters were spoiled at home, which frequently resulted in clashes with the masters and professors at the College of William & Mary.³⁷⁶ Byrd would like many other planters send male members of his family to the College. On September 1, 1712, he wrote that "I sent Billy Brayne to Williamsburg with Tom in order to go to the College and desired Mr. Bland to take care of him."³⁷⁷ As Billy Brayne's guardian, Byrd oversaw his care and yet seems to have cared little for him besides supplying him with the education as befitting his status as related to one of the most powerful men in Virginia. His niece received the same treatment as Billy, as on October 8, 1710, he recorded that "I whipped Sue Braynes for [sh-t] herself,"³⁷⁸ and on February 1, 1711, recorded that "I beat my cousin Susan for not learning to read."³⁷⁹ She did not, however, receive the same level of education. It's notable that the language Byrd used in punishing his nephew and niece is the same for when he punished his slaves. Though he would not have viewed them as property, he may have seen them as a drain on his resources.

³⁷⁵ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 204 (July 14, 1710).

³⁷⁶ Alan Taylor, *Thomas Jefferson's Education* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 28-30.

³⁷⁷ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 578 (September 1, 1712).

³⁷⁸ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 240 (October 8, 1710).

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 295 (February 1, 1711).

Chapter V. “I said my prayers. I had good thoughts, good health, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty”³⁸⁰: Internal v. External Expressions of Piety

In a colony whose elite prized an attachment to the established Anglican church, William Byrd retained a somewhat detached relationship. He consistently attended church a couple times a month, though not every week. For Byrd, it served to primarily build and maintain social and political relationships with both clergy and other planters. His piety was primarily expressed internally in the diaries in the form of prayer more so than externally in church. Sin was an issue for Byrd not just for its theological implications but also because it revealed his inability to control himself, which so concerned him because his authority was built on his ability to control others. His insecurity was borne out of the theory that, if he could not control himself, he could not control what he saw as extensions of himself: his family and those enslaved on his plantations. His position, however, allowed him to sin without facing the same level of consequences as others lower on the social ladder.

The most consistent characteristic that appears throughout William Byrd II’s diaries throughout his life, whether in 1709 or 1739, is his routine. How he started and ended his day is almost always the same, whether in Virginia or in London, such that he remarks on the reason if a particular day deviates from the norm. One need only look at the first entry of Byrd’s diaries from 1709-1712. He begins his day on February 7, 1709, stating “I said my prayers and ate milk for breakfast,”³⁸¹ and ends it stating, “I said my prayers. I had good thoughts, good health, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.”³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 1 (February 7, 1709).

³⁸¹ Ibid., 1 (February 7, 1709).

³⁸² Ibid., 1 (February 7, 1709).

Kenneth Lockridge is fascinated by Byrd's routine as formed by the ideal emotional code of gentlemen. He writes that "The events which fall between the parts of the behavioral routine and in the end that routine itself are cast in the emotional code of the eighteenth-century gentleman, emphasizing moderation, balance, and acceptance in all things."³⁸³ Lockridge notes that "God may or may not have cared whether Byrd had 'good thoughts, good humor, and good health' every night of his life, but it was vital to William Byrd's image of himself as a social being that he regard the world with this profound equanimity come what may."³⁸⁴ Though his invocation of God is unnecessary, he accurate in describing how Byrd's routine served to reinforce his control over his emotions and daily life.

Notably, in his biography of Byrd, Lockridge disregards the deeply grateful aspects of Byrd's piety that led him to thank God nightly for his thoughts, health, and humor. Yet in editing *The Commonplace Book of William Byrd II of Westover*, Lockridge oversaw an article that directly addressed Byrd's piety which states:

Although Byrd was not strong enough to resist some temptations, he was still troubled by what he perceived as his sinful nature. The nightly prayers registered in his diaries suggest a degree of repentance, although these records are so laconic that it is virtually impossible to tell what form these prayers might have taken.³⁸⁵

The ideals of stoicism and control so appealed to Byrd that his diaries are devoid of detail and emotion when compared to other Virginians, such as Landon Carter.

Lockridge writes that this "behavior seen in the diary is profoundly perceptual...The actions, their order, and the language in which they are described express a precise, narrow, unvarying conception of a set of highly specific events which have very nearly a ritual

³⁸³ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 6.

³⁸⁴ Lockridge, *William Byrd II of Virginia*, 6.

³⁸⁵ Kevin Berland, Jan Gilliam, and Kenneth Lockridge, eds., *The Commonplace Book of William Byrd II of Westover* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 61.

significance.”³⁸⁶ The diary served not only as a record but also as a way for Byrd to review his ‘ritual.’ Lockridge describes the general outline of Byrd’s day, along with the writers that Byrd was inspired by, stating:

A gentleman reads in the ancient languages (Elyot, Temple): ‘Read in Hebrew and some Greek in Lucian.’ A gentleman exercises (Elyot, Brathwait, Allestree): ‘said my prayers.’ A gentleman contemplates and then actively pursues acquaintance (Brathwait): ‘Ate milk for dinner. Visited Colonel Harrison whence we went to Falls Creek.’ A gentleman is composed with Christian heroism (Brathwait, Steele): ‘had good health, good thoughts, good humor thanks be to God Almighty.’³⁸⁷

Byrd kept in his library, in addition to Sir Thomas Elyot’s *The Boke Named the Governour* and Richard Brathwait’s *The English Gentleman*, Richard Allestree’s *The Whole Duty of Man*, and frequently sent for the latest editions of *The Tatler* from London. These authors all recommended pious moderation and self-control as the ideal qualities of a gentleman. Byrd’s attempts to meet these ideals is evident in the diaries according to Lockridge, where:

“[t]his tone [of moderation, balance, and restraint] could be obsessive when, for example, he felt obliged to reassure himself at the end of a perfectly ordinary day, as part of his ritual, that he had ‘good health, good thoughts, and good humor thanks be to God Almighty.’ But at other times, before he got to this formula or even by means of it, he could use the code of emotional restraint in a way which was entirely in keeping with its more normal uses by his contemporaries.”³⁸⁸

The repetitiveness of it serves to reinforce Byrd’s discipline and control over his routines and life, for which he acknowledges God directly.

William Byrd II’s piety was conceptualized based off his individual relationship to God. This was in no small part due to the rural nature of the churches as well as the deeply Protestant character of the Church of England in Virginia. The editors of Byrd’s commonplace book write admiringly of Byrd when they state that he:

³⁸⁶ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 50.

³⁸⁷ Lockridge, *William Byrd II of Virginia*, 50.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

appears to have been a conventionally devout Anglican gentleman, concerned with attaining balance through moderation and pious acts. He was a frequent communicant, he was habitually pious in his daily course of prayer, he often read sermons and other religious writings, still more often he read Scripture in the original Greek and Hebrew, and he was manifestly aware of the responsibility for the well-being of others, entailed by his position in society.³⁸⁹

While Byrd's responsibility might have been conceptualized by society, he nevertheless viewed it as his responsibility to 'care' for the well-being of others. The diaries do not reveal, except on the rare occasion that he donated to the poor after falling asleep in church, how the common people directly benefited.

Pierre Marambaud's biography *William Byrd of Westover, 1674-1744* is notable for his discussion of Byrd's religious creed, which was preserved on the first leaf of the 1709 diary. He notes that:

There is indeed in this creed what Professor Wright called 'a leaning towards the rationalism that characterized eighteenth-century intellectuals.' 'I believe that God made Man ... and inspired him with a reasonable soul to distinguish between good and evil; that the law of nature taught him to follow the good and avoid the evil because the good tends to manifestly to his happiness and preservation, but the evil to his misery and destruction.'³⁹⁰

Marambaud criticizes Wright's terming of Byrd's beliefs as 'deistic,' arguing that Byrd believed that Christianity did not contradict natural reason while deists believed that reason alone was sufficient. Christian revelation was unnecessary. Marambaud points out that, despite the variety of theological texts that Byrd read, all the authors were in line with Byrd's belief "in the Fall of Man, in Christ's mission to redeem Man, and in a future Resurrection when every man shall be

³⁸⁹ Kevin Berland, Jan Gilliam, and Kenneth Lockridge, eds., *The Commonplace Book of William Byrd II of Westover* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 58.

³⁹⁰ Pierre Marambaud, *William Byrd of Westover, 1674-1744* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1971), 62.

given his due. This is not deism, but the Christian rationalism of the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians.”³⁹¹

Unlike most other Virginians, Byrd was aware of how church practices varied between High and Low Church due to his upbringing and education in England and was aware of theological trends and events in London. One of the authors that Byrd read most throughout the 1709-1712 diaries is John Tillotson, who was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1691-4. Jacob Blosser’s “John Tillotson’s Latitudinarian Legacy: Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy, and the Pursuit of Happiness” in the *Anglican and Episcopal History* journal notes that he was a “well-known proponent of latitudinarianism.”³⁹² Blosser describes how:

“Wary of the esoteric dogmatism that had led to the inter-cine conflict, regicide, and Commonwealth government, latitudinarians rejected divisive confessionalism in favor of broad Protestant ecumenism. Seeking national and ecclesiastical unity, they introduced a faith rooted in rationality and morality, principles they thought would be agreeable to all religious parties.”³⁹³

Though briefly archbishop, his “sermons remained popular with readers” to the extent that Tillotson’s “sermons helped to create and define post-Restoration culture”; that he had an ‘enormous influence during the eighteenth century;’ and that ‘his sermons were the ethical handbook’ of the eighteenth century.”³⁹⁴

Byrd recorded reading Tillotson throughout 1709 and 1710 so frequently that the editors state in a footnote that he was “one of Byrd’s favorite authors.”³⁹⁵ He first recorded reading him on February 13, 1709, and wrote “I said my prayers devoutly, having read a sermon in Dr.

³⁹¹ Marambaud, *William Byrd of Westover*, 62-3.

³⁹² Jacob M. Blosser, “John Tillotson’s Latitudinarian Legacy: Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy, and the Pursuit of Happiness,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 80, no. 2 (2011): 146.

³⁹³ Blosser, “John Tillotson’s Latitudinarian Legacy,” 147-8.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

³⁹⁵ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 4.

Tillotson.”³⁹⁶ On May 21, 1710, he recorded how “I read two sermons in Tillotson, which edified me very much.”³⁹⁷ Although Byrd frequently recorded his reactions, he never recorded the subject of the sermon, except for on June 18, 1710, when he wrote “I read a sermon in Dr. Tillotson about angels.”³⁹⁸ More often, he wrote in his daily entry something along the lines of “I read a sermon in Dr. Tillotson which affected me very much.”³⁹⁹ Byrd’s entry on May 7, 1710, is the most notable. He wrote that “I read a sermon of Dr. Tillotson’s which affected me very much and made me shed some tears of repentance.”⁴⁰⁰ This is one of the clearest indications of the sincerity of Byrd’s piety as it’s the only instance where Byrd is emotional over his faith.

Another author that appears prominently in the diaries is Dr. Henry Sacheverell, a high churchman whose sermons Byrd read in the fall of 1710. He first recorded this on September 1, 1710, when he wrote “In the evening I read a sermon of Dr. Sacheverell.”⁴⁰¹ It’s unclear, however, whether Byrd was following reading Sacheverell out of any theological interest, interest in following London politics, or both as the editors note, “Dr. Henry Sacheverell, impeached in the House of Lords on March 20, 1710, for violent sermons attacking the religious tendencies of the Whigs. The sermons were printed, and in 1710 there appeared *The Answer of Henry Sacheverell, D. D. to the Articles of Impeachment*.”⁴⁰² Byrd recorded following Sacheverell’s trial on September 3, 1710, by reading the testimony of the Bishop of Salisbury, a Whig, “In the evening [I read] the speech of the Bishop of Sarum against Dr. Sacheverell.”⁴⁰³ The editors note the text was by “Gilbert Burnet, *The Bishop of Salisbury His Speech in the*

³⁹⁶ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 4 (February 13, 1709).

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 180 (May 21, 1710).

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 192 (June 18, 1710).

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 199 (July 2, 1710).

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 175 (May 7, 1710).

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 225 (September 1, 1710).

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 226 (September 3, 1710).

House of Lords on the First Article of Impeachment of Dr. Sacheverell (1710).”⁴⁰⁴ Byrd didn’t remark on the trial and conviction of Henry Sacheverell, and merely recorded on October 2 that “In the evening I took a walk about the plantation and then read some of the trial of Dr. Sacheverell,”⁴⁰⁵ and on October 5, that “I read a little in Dr. Sacheverell’s trial.”⁴⁰⁶

Byrd’s reading primarily centered around the classics, and other than reading sermons, he also attempted to educate himself in different ways. On December 23, 1711, he recorded that “I wrote out a chronology of the Bible which the Governor lent me and did not go to church, God forgive me.”⁴⁰⁷ On August 20, 1710, Byrd wrote that “In the afternoon I read in Grotius’ *Truth of the Christian Religion*.”⁴⁰⁸ The editors note that “There were many editions in both Latin and English of Hugo Grotius’ popular work,”⁴⁰⁹ though it’s unclear whether Byrd read this in the original Latin or an English translation. One is left to wonder whether Byrd may have encountered this text while in the Netherlands, where the text was first published in 1627, after leaving Felsted School.

Maria Antognazza edited an edition of the text. Aimed at those who might encounter non-Christians, Antognazza describes how “Grotius claimed the superiority of Christian doctrine and morality and their perfect conformity with the teaching of the most enlightened reason.”⁴¹⁰ She notes that with the contemporaneous Eighty Years’ War, “in an era of bloody and bloody and violent confrontations amongst the different Christian confessions, Grotius raised a forceful appeal ‘to mutual agreement.’ All Christians should remember that they ‘were baptized into the

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 226.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 238 (October 2, 1710).

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 239 (October 5, 1710).

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 457 (December 23, 1711).

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 220 (August 20, 1710).

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 220.

⁴¹⁰ Hugo Grotius, “The Truth of the Christian Religion with Jean Le Clerc’s Notes and Additions,” ed. Maria Rosa Antognazza, Project MUSE (Johns Hopkins University Press and The Sheridan Libraries, August 13, 2013), <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/25072>.

same Name,' that of Jesus Christ, and that 'therefore there ought to be no Sects or Divisions amongst them.'"⁴¹¹ Though it would be inaccurate to apply the term 'latitudinarian' to Grotius, there is a theme across Byrd's religious reading—that of a broad Christianity encompassed by different views. The context in which he read should be noted as well. Byrd read a text that proclaimed the superiority of Christianity overall, rather than a particular sect, in the face of those who did not believe. While Byrd never attempted to proselytize Native Americans himself, Grotius' text reveals that Byrd may have genuinely believed in the Governor's cause of converting the indigenous population whether through the Indian School at the College of William & Mary or otherwise.

The strength of his relationship with the Church as an institution somewhat pales in comparison to his internal piety. Marambaud asserts that Byrd was, "Like most Virginia planters...an Anglican and believed that the Established Church was essential to a civilized and polished society. He was a regular churchgoer, said his prayers devoutly even when out in the open, and read many books of divinity, of which he had about on hundred and fifty in his library."⁴¹² Byrd surely believed in the superiority of the Church of England and its important role in binding colonial Virginia society together. Byrd was frustrated by Quakers, in particular, because of their refusal to swear oaths and serve in the militia. He wrote in his diary on September 21, 1711, that "I was a long time in discoursing with the Governor concerning what should be done with obstinate Quakers."⁴¹³ At a militia court on October 4, 1711, Byrd recorded that "We fined all the Quakers and several others...I spoke gently to the Quakers which gave

⁴¹¹ Hugo Grotius, "The Truth of the Christian Religion."

⁴¹² Pierre Marambaud, *William Byrd of Westover, 1674-1744* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1971), 61.

⁴¹³ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 409 (September 21, 1711).

them a good opinion of me and several of them seemed doubtful whether they would be arrested or not in the future. I told them they would certainly be fined five times in a year if they did not do as their fellow subjects did.”⁴¹⁴ By this interaction, it seems that Byrd was only troubled by religious differences if it interfered with an individual’s ability to serve his community.

Byrd attended services consistently, though not as frequently as Marambaud or other historians have suggested in *The Commonplace Book of William Byrd II of Westover*. He would scarcely attend services weekly and tended to attend only twice a month, though it must be acknowledged that the distances between homes and churches resulted in sparse attendance among Virginians in general, especially if the weather made the journey difficult. The rules of the established church took this into account and did not require weekly attendance. Isaac notes in *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* that “All were required to attend divine service at least once in four weeks, under penalty of a fine of five shillings or fifty pounds of tobacco, for failure to comply.”⁴¹⁵

In December of 1709, a typical and atypical entry appears in the diaries. On December 11, 1709, Byrd wrote “About 11 o’clock we went to church, where Mr. Anderson gave us a sermon.”⁴¹⁶ This is typical of most entries in the diaries when he attended services held at Westover Parish near his seat of Westover. Byrd would also briefly comment on the quality of the sermons, if only to say that it was ‘good.’ The following Sunday in the Julian calendar, Byrd recorded himself merely playing billiards and walking around the plantation (December 18, 1709).⁴¹⁷ Indeed, Byrd did not attend any services for the rest of the month until Christmas Day,

⁴¹⁴ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 415-6 (October 4, 1711).

⁴¹⁵ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 58.

⁴¹⁶ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinning, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 117.

⁴¹⁷ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 120 (December 18, 1709).

which though celebrated is not remarked upon. Byrd only recorded on December 25, 1709, that “we went to church, notwithstanding it rained a little, where Mr. Anderson preached a good sermon for the occasion. I received the Sacrament with great devoutness.”⁴¹⁸ As the ‘distemper’ spread among Virginia in the winter season, it seems to have reinforced his faith and pushed him to take Communion, a rare external expression of piety by William Byrd while serving as a stoic acceptance of events beyond his control.

Isaac explains how this practice continued to be common among planters long after Byrd’s death. He describes how planters were so engaged in business that displays:

of prowess meant that religious piety was considered only appropriate for the old and those approaching death. An Anglican minister noted that ‘generally speaking, none went to the *table* [for communion], except a few more aged,’ and James Ireland ‘remembered of his youth that, ‘comparing [his] present pleasures’ with ‘confused ideas of the happiness of heaven,’ he had felt that he would not have foregone the former for the sake of the latter. He therefore ‘determined to pursue’ worldly engagements until he ‘arrived to such an advance in years that [his] nature would . . . enjoy no further relish.’ He persuaded himself that ‘a merciful God . . . would accept of a few days or weeks of [his] sincere repenting.’⁴¹⁹

Given the extent of Byrd’s piety as evidenced by his daily prayers, it’s unlikely that Byrd saw himself and his relationship to God as casually as James Ireland did. Nevertheless, what the Anglican minister described is noteworthy. While Byrd clearly revered the Sacrament, he also took no issue playing games or hosting guests at Westover in lieu of attending services at a church.

Isaac describes how “Custom and the law required attendance once in four weeks at church, but neither were strict concerning regularity, so that the cycle of the week—an important rhythm of life in Virginia—was marked more certainly by a seventh day of rest and conviviality

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 122 (December 25, 1709).

⁴¹⁹ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 120.

than by prayerful devotions.”⁴²⁰ Westover Parish was the church Byrd attended most frequently and his attendance was largely consistent. This can be seen in his attendance in the first few months of 1710. In January, he attended services on the eighth,⁴²¹ eleventh,⁴²² and twenty-second.⁴²³ In February, he attended services on the fifth⁴²⁴ and nineteenth.⁴²⁵ In March, he also attended services on the fifth⁴²⁶ and nineteenth.⁴²⁷ The Sundays Byrd did not attend church were spent reading, hosting guests, and drinking.⁴²⁸

When the General Assembly was in session, Byrd generally did not stay in Williamsburg for extended periods, preferring instead to make the journey back and forth between Westover every few days. When it came to choosing between Williamsburg’s Bruton Parish and his native Westover when the Assembly was in session, Byrd tended to choose Bruton Parish for social and political reasons. Even though he was not a member of the vestry, Bruton’s location in the capital of the colony meant that its rector was carefully chosen. Byrd recorded in his diaries how he exercised influence in the process on December 4, 1710, writing “I desired Mr. Bland to give his vote for the Commissary [James Blair] to be minister of Bruton Parish and he promised he would and accordingly his vote varied it at night against the inclination of Mr. President [Colonel Edmund Jenings].”⁴²⁹ Bruton Parish was also a setting for other politically tinged moments, especially around sermons if a Governor-aligned minister preached implicitly against the native planters. Byrd wrote of one such instance on November 19, 1710, a rare recording of Byrd being

⁴²⁰ Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 68.

⁴²¹ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 127-8 (January 8, 1710).

⁴²² Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 128-9 (January 11, 1710).

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 132-3 (January 22, 1710).

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 138-9 (February 5, 1710).

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 143-4 (February 19, 1710).

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 149 (March 5, 1710).

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 154 (March 19, 1710).

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 141 (February 12, 1710).

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 267 (December 4, 1710).

dissatisfied with a sermon. He wrote “Mr. Wallace preached this day but flattered the Governor and recommended the College which did not please at all.”⁴³⁰

While the services at Bruton may have differed in terms of the rector and the sermon, the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer was the same. Weather nevertheless could still hamper Byrd’s attendance. He noted in his diary on October 28, 1711, that “It continued to rain. However I went to church purely because I thought it my duty but I went in the President’s coach.”⁴³¹ Byrd may have not only felt a religious duty to attend services but especially in the case of Bruton, may have also felt social and political pressure to attend and be seen by others as a patron of the Established Church.

William Byrd did not attend Westover Parish and Bruton Parish exclusively. While checking in on his various plantations or visiting other planters, Byrd occasionally joined them in attending their church. While visiting Major Nathaniel Burwell on November 13, 1709, he recorded how:

About 11 o’clock we rode to the church of Abingdon Parish which is the best church I have seen in the country. We heard a sermon of Parson Smith. After church we returned to Mr. Burwell’s and Mr. Berkeley and his wife with us. We dined late and I ate boiled beef and pudding.⁴³²

While Byrd’s prayers are signals of his own individualized piety, church for Byrd was evidently as much a social function as it was a religious one. To that end, William Byrd’s relationship with clergymen signaled not just his piety but more importantly his social and political connections with leaders of the Established Church. In a social context, this is clear when Byrd recorded in his diary on April 22, 1709, that “I went to church, it being Good Friday, where the Commissary preached. After church I went with abundance of company to dine at the Commissary’s, where I

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 260 (November 19, 1710).

⁴³¹ Ibid., 428 (October 28, 1711).

⁴³² Ibid., 102-3 (November 13, 1709).

ate with moderation.”⁴³³ Within a political context, it’s clearer when Byrd recorded in his diary on December 5, 1710, that “Several were to see me this morning and particularly Mr. Commissary to thank me for my good offices in procuring him this [Bruton] parish.”⁴³⁴ Given how influential James Blair was both in Virginia and London as Commissary in the Virginia Colony for the Bishop of London, Byrd evidently saw it as necessary to move beyond a merely social and form a stronger political relationship with Blair by dining with him and exercising influence in his election as rector of Bruton.

While Byrd may have been exposed to High-Church practices during his education in England and residency in London, he does not seem to have been inclined either way as a matter of principle. To the low-church adherents of Virginia, Byrd’s aspiration to status as a gentleman meant he was partial to changing fashions of court politics and relatively High-Church. This is clear when William Byrd argued with his wife over the fashion of singing psalms on December 16, 1710. He wrote in his diary, “In the afternoon my wife and I had a quarrel about learning to sing Psalms, in which she was wholly in the wrong, even in the opinion of Mrs. Dunn who was witness of it.”⁴³⁵ On December 24, 1710, Byrd wrote in his diary how it became part of the liturgy at Westover Parish, though it’s unclear whether that was through his own influence. He recorded that “About 11 o’clock we went to church and took possession of the pew which the vestry gave us. We began to give in to the new way of singing Psalms.”⁴³⁶ Byrd even recorded having his indentured servants learn the new style, and wrote in his diary on January 25, 1711, that “My two boys, Bannister and G-r-l, began to learn to sing Psalms.”⁴³⁷ While it’s perhaps

⁴³³ Ibid., 24-5 (April 22, 1709).

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 267 (December 5, 1710).

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 272 (December 16, 1710).

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 276 (December 24, 1710).

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 292 (January 25, 1711).

expected that Byrd's servants would learn basic skills while apprenticed to him, it's interesting that Byrd would oversee what might be considered a religious education.

The diary is filled with William Byrd praying and asking for forgiveness such that one is led to wonder the extent to which Byrd's religiosity served as a crutch to help him maintain self-control. Kathleen Brown describes how:

By the eighteenth century, elite planters believed habitual self-control, rooted in rural plantation life, was the key to exercising power over others. Male planters diligently applied this maxim to their emotional lives early in the century and, with increasing difficulty as the century progressed, to their drinking, eating, spending, and gambling habits. With authority resting in the ability to control one's emotions, many planters placed great value on keeping anger and grief in check.⁴³⁸

The editors of Byrd's commonplace book note that, "as his diaries show, he often strayed from the path, so there were many occasions when in his evening prayers he felt compelled to ask forgiveness for some reprehensible action or another. These sins were usually sins of excess, failures to control his temper, or matters of sexual misconduct."⁴³⁹ Byrd's insecurity over his position drove him to maintain control over every aspect of his own life. His self-imposed rule to eat only one dish at each meal is a prominent example given that many planters served and ate many dishes at all meals to signal their wealth. Byrd struggled with refraining from the sin of gluttony and maintaining mastery over himself, particularly when he hosted others. He recorded on February 20, 1709, that "I went to church, where there was a very great congregation. After church Mr. Drury Stith and his wife and Captain Llewellyn came and dined with us. I did not observe my rule at dinner, for which God forgive me."⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁸ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 324.

⁴³⁹ Kevin Berland, Jan Gilliam, and Kenneth Lockridge, eds., *The Commonplace Book of William Byrd II of Westover* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 58.

⁴⁴⁰ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 6 (February 20, 1709).

It's clear that Byrd felt compelled to showcase his wealth by serving several dishes to guests, regardless of whether he would eat all of them. This indicates Byrd's own insecurity because instead of expecting his guests to bend towards and accept his habits and eccentricities, he valued their opinion of him and his hospitality. While it's possible that Byrd absentmindedly ate more than one dish because he was distracted by the company, he may have felt pressured to join his guests in eating several dishes to avoid making them feel uncomfortable by eating several dishes while he only ate one. If so, this only further supports the notion that Byrd felt insecure about his social position to the extent that he sought to provide the greatest hospitality, even by breaking his own rule to moderately eat only one dish, to make his guests feel comfortable and think highly of him.

However, most of Byrd's sins by his own admission in the diary are largely confined to sexual activity. Throughout the 1709-1712 diaries, and beyond, he meticulously recorded his actions and his recognition of them as a sin. On October 6, 1709, he recorded in his diary how "I went to the capitol where I sent for the wench to clean my room and when I came I kissed her and felt her, for which God forgive me...I had good health but wicked thoughts, God forgive me."⁴⁴¹ Entries of this nature reveal the 'secretness' of Byrd's diary. He was readily able to admit and record actions in the belief that his wife nor anyone else in his household would be able to translate the shorthand. This entry also reveals how Byrd perceived the nature of his sexual sin. The 'wench' is the victim of Byrd's inability to control his sexual desires but because she is enslaved, Byrd did not ask for her forgiveness and instead turns to God. On April 21, 1710, he noted in his diary that "About 3 o'clock I returned to my chambers again and found above a girl who I persuaded to go with me into my chambers but she would not...I said a short prayer but

⁴⁴¹ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 91 (October 6, 1709).

notwithstanding committed uncleanness in bed.”⁴⁴² ‘Uncleanness’ seems to a euphemism for ejaculation. He noted on October 29, 1711, “I returned home and I committed manual uncleanness, for which God forgive me.”⁴⁴³

Throughout most of his life, Byrd seems to have struggled with controlling his sexual urges. This was most troubling to him because, beyond its moral and theological implications, if he could not control himself, how could he control others? The position and security of planters was built upon their ability to control what they viewed to be their inferiors, which in turn was seen as an extension of their ability to control themselves, the superior class. If the superiors could not master themselves, how could they lord over the inferiors? Kathleen Brown describes how this philosophy extended into every aspect of a planter’s life:

The ideal of the gentleman planter’s having mastery over himself, his drinking, his divulgence of private business, his credit, and his emotions had great functional value in a society held together by the ethos of hospitality and floated on credit. It was, moreover, an ideal grounded in the implicit contrast between the authority of dominant individuals and the subversive and evasive tactics of subordinates. Masculinity and gentility required an authority that was deliberate rather than passionate, deriving its strength from being contained rather than unleashed.⁴⁴⁴

Byrd’s extramarital activity starkly contrasts with the internal piety expressed in the diaries though, as Kathleen Brown states, “During his first marriage, Byrd occasionally tried to win the favors of other women... There is no evidence during this early period of Byrd’s life, however, that he ever attempted to have a sexual relationship with any woman, black or white, who worked within his household other than his wife Lucy Byrd.”⁴⁴⁵ Instead, remarkably, Byrd’s acts of infidelity were committed publicly. On November 11, 1711, while staying with Frank

⁴⁴² Ibid., 168-9 (April 21, 1710).

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 429 (October 29, 1711).

⁴⁴⁴ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 327.

⁴⁴⁵ Brown, *Good Wives*, 331.

Lightfoot, Byrd recorded that, “In the afternoon we sent to Major Harrison to come to us and then took a walk and met a pretty girl and kissed her and so returned.”⁴⁴⁶ It’s unclear whether the girl is enslaved or not, though it seems likely. On November 2, 1709, Byrd wrote in his diary that:

I played at [r-m] with Mrs. Chiswell and kissed her on the bed till she was angry and my wife was also uneasy about it, and cried as soon as the company was gone. I neglected to say my prayers, which I should not have done, because I ought to beg pardon for the lust I had for another man’s wife. However I had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty.⁴⁴⁷

These two entries reveal the planter class’ overall attitude towards infidelity. Any extramarital action taken with the enslaved was overlooked by male slaveowners. Byrd did not record any moral compunction about his actions with the ‘pretty girl’ even though they were committed in front of others of equal stature. Indeed, he merely commented at the end of his entry on November 11, 1711, that “I neglected to say my prayers but had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty.”⁴⁴⁸ Extramarital actions committed with another man’s wife, in this case Mrs. Chiswell, were considered more serious by the slaveholding class as evidenced by both Mrs. Chiswell’s and his wife’s reaction. The way Byrd referred to infidelity as ‘lust for another man’s wife,’ reveals how he held true the notion that a wife is the property of her husband. Infidelity with another man’s wife, then, is a violation of his property, a grave concern given how occupied Virginians were with maintaining and expanding ownership of property rights, whether it was in the form of land or enslaving individuals. This notion is not consistently applied, however, because the girl that Byrd kissed is on the plantation

⁴⁴⁶ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 436 (November 11, 1711).

⁴⁴⁷ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 101 (November 2, 1709).

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 436 (November 11, 1711).

of Francis Lightfoot and thus presumably Lightfoot's property, and yet Byrd recorded no hesitation or scruple with 'violating' another man's property.

It is a testament to William Byrd's power and position in Virginia society that he faced no real consequences for his actions with Mrs. Chiswell. His wife Lucy Parke Byrd was clearly recorded as being uncomfortable but seems to have felt powerless to intervene. Though Byrd did not describe her in the diaries, the editors note how she was:

"Probably the wife of Charles Chiswell, appointed clerk of the General Court in 1706. On his 'progress to the mines' in 1732 Byrd visited the Chiswells at Fredericksburg, when he remarked, 'I had not seen Mrs. Chiswell in twenty-four years, which, alas! had made great havoc with her pretty face, and plowed very deep furrows in her fair skin.'"⁴⁴⁹

Evidently her beauty was memorable enough for Byrd to remark on 24 years later. It is not known how Mrs. Chiswell viewed Byrd. There is no indication that she consented to Byrd's kissing her, especially given that Byrd himself recorded her as angry.

Byrd next encountered her on April 18, 1710, and merely recorded that "Then I went to my brother Custis to Dr. [Barret's] where my sister was, Mr. Dunn and his wife and Mrs. Chiswell."⁴⁵⁰ He neither remarked on their previous interaction nor seems to face any consequences. There is also no indication that their relationship changed dramatically. Perhaps Mrs. Chiswell did not report or discuss his actions due to Byrd's influence and their status divide, with her husband being only a court clerk. Though Byrd may have felt guilty over his sin, his position in society enabled him to take advantage of others without consequence whether they were enslaved or not.

As Isaac describes in *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, expressions of piety among planters were rare. He states, "that Virginians, whatever their rank, generally did not

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 167 (April 18, 1710).

affect postures of grave piety and that on Sunday at church they took for granted the close proximity of the profane to the sacred.”⁴⁵¹ Byrd’s uniqueness in internally and externally expressing his piety is preserved in the diary. Most often written in reaction to an event, it could have been trivial or of great significance.

On April 24, 1709, he recorded that “We rode to Jamestown Church, where Mr. Commissary preached. When church was done I gave 10 shillings to the poor. Nothing could hinder me from sleeping at church, though I took a great deal of pains against it.”⁴⁵² Though certainly not the first to fall asleep in church in Virginia, his reaction is notable for several reasons, not the least being this is a rare occasion in which he falls asleep in church and donates money. His distribution of alms to the poor is notable, for Byrd seldom recorded his charity or any other external form of piety; indeed, there is little indication that Byrd was particularly or uniquely charitable to the lower classes. Byrd also did not ask for forgiveness, and instead recorded at the end of the day that “I had good thoughts, good humor, and good health, thanks be to God Almighty.”⁴⁵³ Because there was seldom an occasion for it, Byrd rarely displayed his piety publicly, except in situations where he had no other option. On the Nottoway Expedition, he recorded their living conditions, writing “At night some of the volunteers drank hard but I went to bed and said a short prayer and the Doctor lay with me.”⁴⁵⁴

Internal expressions of piety were far more common in the diary, and they are vital for better understanding William Byrd’s religiosity because they were the only mechanism for self-reflection that he employed. His diary entries are far more encoded than other diarists in

⁴⁵¹ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 60-1.

⁴⁵² Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 25 (April 24, 1709).

⁴⁵³ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 25 (April 24, 1709).

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 422 (October 16, 1711).

Virginia. On March 28, 1710, he recorded that “This was my birthday, on which I am 36 years old, and I bless God for granting me so many years. I wish I had spent them better. I neglected to say my prayers but had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty.”⁴⁵⁵ Byrd scarcely expressed regret. Even when he implicitly insulted the Governor, he attributed Spotswood’s offense to his being unreasonable. Despite the consequence of estrangement, Byrd never once recorded his regret.

Though he may have been more religious than many of his rank, Byrd did not record being any more interested than his contemporaries in baptizing or converting his slaves to the Christian faith. Whether he saw them as inhuman and incapable of truly being Christian or because he simply saw their baptism and conversion as a threat to his ownership of other humans is unclear, though Rebecca Goetz notes that “Planters preferred to keep their slaves ignorant of Christianity, even though Blair dangled the tempting possibility of tax breaks for baptisms. Planters repeatedly stymied efforts to encourage conversion.”⁴⁵⁶ While he did attempt to give them breaks on Sundays and holidays, Byrd could not maintain standard rest days for the enslaved on his plantations.

In the beginning of the 1709-1712 diaries, he recorded his attempts at allowing his slaves to rest by not inviting anyone to dinner following the church service on Sundays. Only July 23, 1710, he wrote “We invited nobody home because we would not make our people work too much of a Sunday.”⁴⁵⁷ The next time he attended a church service, however, on August 6, he wrote that “After church Mr. Bland came home with me and so did Drury Stith to draw Mr. C-s’

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 158 (March 28, 1710).

⁴⁵⁶ Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 148.

⁴⁵⁷ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 208 (July 23, 1710).

tooth. I ate roast veal for dinner. In the afternoon we ate some fruit and about 5 o'clock the company went away."⁴⁵⁸ That Byrd did not allow his slaves to consistently rest on the Sabbath is evidence that Byrd prioritized social interaction over the spiritual, not to mention physical, well-being of his slaves. He was clearly aware of the importance of rest on the Sabbath, yet the space that churches provided in rural Virginia for white social interaction was central enough that Byrd felt that he could not avoid participating in it.

Illness among his slaves was a consistent concern recorded by Byrd in his diaries. While he would generally only record how many were sick, he occasionally recorded their names. He would also occasionally take note of their symptoms and record the various remedies he would attempt. On December 29, 1710, he recorded an illness spreading among the enslaved at Westover, the manner of which reveals how he perceived his slaves in relation to himself. He wrote that "I had two more sick people come down. These poor people suffer for my sins; God forgive me all my offenses and restore them to their health if it be consistent with His holy will."⁴⁵⁹ He directly acknowledged his view that his slaves were an extension of himself, such that God punishes them to punish Byrd. This view is interesting because, while it dehumanizes those owned by Byrd because it takes away any semblance of agency, it also imparts responsibility on Byrd for their well-being. While their agency is stripped, Byrd clearly feels guilty that his slaves are made to suffer for his sins. In feeling guilt, however, Byrd in a sense acknowledges their humanity in an extremely limited way as beings capable of feeling pain and suffering.

William Byrd saw his household in the same way as his slaves, as an extension of himself, though not consistently. On January 2, 1711, he recorded that "My wife was a little

⁴⁵⁸ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 214 (August 6, 1710).

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 278 (December 29, 1710).

better and so was my child, thank God, but C-l-y was extremely ill and so was A-g-y. I tended them as much as I could but God is pleased to afflict me with his judgement for my sins. His holy will be done.”⁴⁶⁰ A year prior, however, on the death of his son Parke Byrd, he did not reflect on it as directly the result of his own sins. He wrote:

We went out and found him [Parke] just ready to die and he died about 8 o’clock in the morning. God gives and God takes away; blessed be the name of God...My wife was much afflicted but I submitted to His judgement better, notwithstanding I was very sensible of my loss, but God’s will be done.⁴⁶¹

Byrd was clearly torn between expressing his emotions while maintaining composure. He emphasized the emotional state of his wife in comparison to his own ‘better’ submission to God, yet remarks that ‘notwithstanding I was very sensible of my loss, but God’s will be done.’

Lockridge discusses at-length the importance of equanimity in Byrd’s life as a tool. He overlooks, however, the religious aspects of Byrd’s equanimity. He refers to Byrd’s statement that ‘God gives and God takes away; blessed be the name of God’ as merely formulaic, in line with his dismissive view of the rigid structure of the diary because it betrays what Lockridge interprets as an insecurity over Byrd’s ability to control himself. It reflects, however, the sincere nature of Byrd’s piety that he should submit to events that are outside of his control. Lockridge himself notes that stoicism and Christianity were blended, stating:

They had an explicit model for combining the two in Richard Steele’s *The Christian Hero*, published in 1701. In this essay Steele abandoned the Stoics’ faith in reason alone and rested the composure and benevolence of the gentleman in Christian faith. It is this exact philosophy which soon permeated the pages of Steele’s *Tatler*, which Byrd read, and which by 1709 was everywhere embodied in the Virginian’s diary.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 281 (January 2, 1711).

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 186-7 (June 3, 1710).

⁴⁶² Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 7.

Byrd reacted in the same manner when he lost shipments of tobacco sent to England. On May 6, 1709, he wrote:

“In the afternoon Colonel Ludwell returned and brought us the bad news that Captain Morgan had lost his ship in Margate Roads by a storm as likewise had several others. My loss was very great in this ship where I had seven hogsheads of skins and 60 hogsheads of heavy tobacco. The Lord gives and the Lord has taken away—blessed be the name of the Lord.”⁴⁶³

Byrd’s loss, for context, is extensive as Isaac notes, “Four hogsheads of tobacco were more than the whole cash crop a poor family could expect to earn in a year.”⁴⁶⁴

Byrd implied a stoic acceptance of the event and used it to express his submission to God. By omitting any recording of emotion, whether he reacted or not, only serves to reinforce that he could control himself. As Kathleen Brown states, “Gentlemen on both sides of the Atlantic associated emotional restraint with class position, race, and gender identity... Through control over self, gentlemen reminded themselves, they would have control over others.”⁴⁶⁵ Two years later, Byrd recorded on April 21, 1711, that “I recived [*sic*] an account from England that two ships were lost in which I lost 60 hogsheads of tobacco. God’s will be done.”⁴⁶⁶ Here, Byrd described even less. Not only did he omit his reaction or any sort of emotion, but he also refrained from any reflection that he did previously, such as on May 6 when he noted that “My loss was very great in this ship.”⁴⁶⁷

The nature of Byrd’s piety is far more apparent in comparison to the diary of another Virginian planter, Landon Carter (1710-1778). T. H. Breen notes:

⁴⁶³ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 31 (May 6, 1709).

⁴⁶⁴ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 100.

⁴⁶⁵ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 324.

⁴⁶⁶ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 333 (April 21, 1711).

⁴⁶⁷ Wright, *The Secret Diary*, 31 (May 6, 1709).

Landon Carter bore natural adversity with a certain stoicism, as if he thought he deserved better of nature. In 1771 he predicted that he would bring in a fine crop. But then came a ‘terrible dry spell,’ and the soil on his plantation baked ‘into a mere solid Mass.’ Carter responded to these conditions as best he could, but his efforts proved ineffectual. Fortuna had won. ‘Had I not been honestly sensible that no care had been wanting nor diligence neglected,’ Carter confided in his diary, ‘I should be uneasy more than I am; but as I have nothing of this sort to accuse myself with, I must and do submit.’⁴⁶⁸

While he reflected far more than Byrd, Carter did not in any sense attribute his bad crop to his sins and God. He did not view himself as ultimately responsible but instead reflected on how his stoicism prevents him from being more upset given the how drastic the crop failure is. While he recorded that he must submit, it’s not clear whether he is referring to God or nature, or both.

Rhys Isaac notes how:

“In 1766 the Rev. John Camm, a person whose clumsy efforts to strengthen the Episcopal hierarchy in Virginia had angered the gentry, reported to an English correspondent: ‘These honest discontented gentry, I am afraid, secretly murmur at the wise Disposer of events, and sometimes seem to give shrewd hints that his affairs would be better managed if they might be entrusted with the direction of them.’”⁴⁶⁹

Byrd’s piety also served as a crutch when he made personal resolutions. He wrote in his diary on November 24, 1711, and recorded that “Colonel Carter and several others came to my lodgings to laugh at me for my disorder last night... This day I make a solemn resolution never at once to lose more than 50 shillings and to spend less time in gaming, and I beg the God Almighty to give me grace to keep so good a resolution if it be His holy will.”⁴⁷⁰ A conundrum exists in this prayer, however. He asked for help to keep this resolution if it is the will of God. But if Byrd gambled again, he could simply interpret that God’s will is for him to not stop

⁴⁶⁸ T. H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 60.

⁴⁶⁹ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 60.

⁴⁷⁰ Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, eds., *The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1709-1712*, (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1941), 443.

gambling. His prayer is structured in such a way that he absolves himself of any responsibility for his actions as it relates to gaming.

With the church playing a minimal role in Byrd's relationship with God, Byrd had little incentive to refrain from sinning beyond his own internal piety. By virtue of his position as a slaveholder and planter, however, Byrd was capable of sinning by and large without consequence and he recorded doing so.

Conclusion. Submission & Control: The Paradox of Byrd's Faith and Status

William Byrd's encodement of his diaries obscures and yet reveals much more about how he approached his faith and sought to reflect his status as a member of the slaveholding elite. The shorthand indicates his own status insecurities and desire for privacy on a plantation which hosted guests so frequently that he went to the length of not only encoding his diary from his wife but also isolated and locked himself within the library nearly every morning. The repetitiveness and regimental structure of the diary reveals his deep desire for control and emphasis on the stability of his lifestyle. His routine served to regulate himself from recording his day in reflective and emotional terms.

Any deviation from his routine reveals the aspects of his life that he was unable to maintain complete control over despite the vast amount of power he wielded at the top of a gendered and racialized hierarchy in colonial Virginia. While Lucy Parke desired greater autonomy and control over the household, William Byrd expected complete control over and submission from his wife. He had similar expectations from his nephew and niece, indentured servants, and those enslaved on his plantations. His frequent use of corporal punishment over the smallest of infractions to enforce discipline is a clear indication of how he continually sought to affirm his status as a planter.

Because he was unable to exert complete control over both his peers and other white males such as Doctor Cocke and Benjamin Harrison, Byrd instead asserted his status internally within the diaries through comments about their dress and remarks on their hospitality. His faith too was expressed internally. The paradox is that William Byrd desired a stoic discipline over himself and his emotions as well as control of those around and below him while his piety required complete submission to God and an acceptance of things outside his control.

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