
Thomas J. Little’s study of religious revivalism in the low country of colonial South Carolina provides a necessary and important corrective to the scholarship on evangelicalism in the lower South. Challenging traditional research arguing that evangelical religion emerged in the South during the latter half of the eighteenth century, he asserts that “Protestant evangelicalism had much earlier beginnings in prerevolutionary southern society than historians have traditionally understood” (p. ix). He avers that “some of evangelicalism’s key originary moments” began in South Carolina and that compared to the Chesapeake, the low country had a “stronger evangelical background” in part because of its “cosmopolitan diversity” (p. xiii). As Little shows, a wide variety of Protestant settlers made the colony multiethnic and pluralistic from the beginning: Anglicans, Congregationalists, Pietists, Lutherans, Moravians, Presbyterians, Baptists, Huguenots, Quakers, plus obscure sects such as the Dutartres and Weberites. The author’s intent is to move the religious history of the Lower South more fully into the mainstream of early American and Atlantic historiography by showing how South Carolina revivalism developed along the same lines as revivalism in the northern colonies. (p. x)


For all the strengths of this monograph, it prompted several questions. First, Little contends that Protestant dissenters were “instrumental” in creating a “sort of religious empiricism (apprehending God through touching, feeling, experiencing)” but does not develop this assertion, offer evidence to support it, or demonstrate how it impacted religious revivalism (p. 113). Second, the term evangelical is never defined nor its specific application to the religious diversity of the early low country discussed. Not all dissenting Protestants became evangelical or participated in the Great Awakening, just as the presence of dissenters does not guarantee the success of evangelical revivalism. As my research has shown, areas known for religious diversity—such as colonial Pennsylvania—did not garner the same success with revivalism as those known for religious persecution, such as colonial Virginia, where dissenters suffered under a state church. Virginia, not South Carolina, had the largest number of evangelical Protestants by the end of the eighteenth century. Lastly, while slavery is discussed in some parts of the book, how racial politics may have been a factor in this diverse religious marketplace is not addressed in any substantive manner. In an effort to establish the centrality of religion in the lower South, the author missed an opportunity to integrate his narrative on low-country Protestantism into the more developed scholarship on race and slavery in colonial South Carolina.

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doi: 10.1093/jahist/jau613


The observations of William Byrd II (1674–1744) appear in virtually every scholarly treatment of colonial Virginia. Byrd was one of only two important Virginia diarists (the other was Landon Carter), and he was also a prodigious letter writer and long-serving government functionary. In 1728 Byrd was one of three commissioners who, along with two surveyors, represented Virginia on an expedition to establish a permanent boundary between that colony and North Carolina. Byrd produced two manuscripts loosely based on his experiences as a commissioner. Kevin Joel
Berland presents a new edition of those well-known and often-cited texts in this impressive volume.

Written and revised in the decades following the 1728 expedition, Byrd’s “The Histories of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina” and “The Secret History of the Line between Virginia and North Carolina” were not published during his lifetime. Although historians typically treat his narrative as a true account of the expedition—at least from Byrd’s perspective—Berland argues persuasively that both histories are, in fact, hybrid texts that “combine field observations (of surveying detail, natural history, topography, and personal character) with a copious supply of other material” (p. viii), including historical references and literary allusions that are “not always apparent to a modern reader” (pp. viii–ix). In “The Histories of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina” Byrd (as narrator) presents himself as a capable observer of the same people and events that a less circumspect alter ego mercilessly satirizes in “The Secret History of the Line between Virginia and North Carolina.” Both forms—first-person reportage and the “secret history” that “expose[d] vice and folly for the common good”—were well-established literary genres (p. 344).

Seen in this light, the worldly, witty, and classically educated Byrd was an accomplished man of letters. Historians often cite Byrd’s histories as evidence of the self-consciously elitist, misogynist, and more generally patriarchal identity of Virginia’s colonial gentlemen; “The Histories of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina” is also a standard source for the political, social, and natural history of the southern colonies. Without discounting the texts’ usefulness as historical documents, Berland emphasizes their significance as literary creations, situating them in a much broader cultural context. His objective is twofold: to provide authoritative texts of Byrd’s histories and to use an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical contexts and close textual readings to reveal “cultural assumptions and language instrumental to Byrd’s narrative” (p. ix).

To that end, Berland supplies footnotes that meticulously document discrepancies between various versions of the texts, along with extensive and exhaustively researched endnotes, for which he draws on Byrd’s impressive library and other sources that would have been familiar to him and his contemporaries. By recreating Byrd’s intellectual universe, Berland teases new meaning out of virtually every paragraph.

Sometimes overwhelming—121 pages of endnotes, in a smaller font, take up 269 pages of text!—the endnotes nonetheless are often fascinating reading in their own right. From them readers learn, for instance, that Byrd’s famous depiction of North Carolinians as slothful and disorderly inhabitants of “Lubberland” employs a satirical term used since medieval times to describe “an imaginary land of plenty where rivers flowed with beer and wine, [and] fruit fell from the trees into the waiting mouths of the people” (p. 277). Readers also learn that Byrd was something of a wordsmith: Berland concludes that he used the word pride to refer to testicles, which in the case of beavers, at least, contained liquid that could be extracted and placed in traps to catch these “sagacious Animals” (p. 134). Berland’s endnotes show, above all, that Byrd was remarkably well-read. “The Histories of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina” includes literary allusions and insights from ancient and modern writers on subjects ranging from religion, law, and politics to poetry and natural history.

Berland’s annotation for “The Secret History of the Line between Virginia and North Carolina” is more focused on identifying the people Byrd satirizes, using comic pseudonyms, in that often-hilarious narrative. Here, even more than in “The Histories of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina,” Byrd portrays North Carolinians as uncouth and venal, in marked contrast to the mostly admirable Virginians. Christopher Gale, North Carolina’s chief justice and head commissioner on the boundary expedition, becomes “Judge Jumble,” a drunken poser whose colleagues include Attorney General “Puzzlecase” and the plebeian “Shoebrush”—while Byrd casts himself as the reliable and respectable “Steddy.”
Besides footnotes and endnotes, Berland supplies incisive and readable introductions for each text and several useful appendices. Although he shrewdly notes that his work, like Byrd’s, is culturally inflected—in his case, from a twenty-first-century perspective—Berland has clearly set the new scholarly standard for these classic texts.

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doi: 10.1093/jahist/jau601


Prompted by the transnational turn and post-colonial histories, scholars are now revisiting the conflicted relationship of Great Britain and the early national United States. In this volume Jennifer Clark examines writing whose authors knowingly, purposely and explicitly discuss their understanding of England in order to make a deliberate statement about the Anglo-American intellectual and cultural world in which they lived. (p. 6)

Within this relatively narrow frame, Clark is able to discuss a broad range of texts, from ephemeral song lyrics to works by James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving.

Clark excels at identifying the complicated context in which these works were created. As she notes, both British and American identities were undergoing changes during this period, and a simple linear progression from “British” to “American” could not begin to describe the ambiguities and ambivalence in these texts. They express “a collective complexity that suggests post-revolutionary identity must be read as an ongoing process of engagement rather than the self-confident assertion of difference” (p. 20).

Chapters alternate between political writings and more typical literary works. An initial chapter on Anglophilic writing in the context of the political factionalism of the 1790s provides a useful departure point by emphasizing the political ramifications of culture. “Ideas of England,” Clark observes, “were nothing if not the politicized expression of the search for American identity and direction in an increasingly volatile Atlantic world” (p. 53). A chapter on political rhetoric and naval nationalism during the War of 1812 elaborates this theme, demonstrating “a nation actively negotiating its Anglo-American residual heritage and drawing upon it to determine a complex meaning for America” (p. 109).

Among the more literary chapters, Clark’s examination of changing images of “John Bull” (a stout, middle-aged, rural cartoon personification of Great Britain) in American writing is particularly creative in its use of works by Francis Hopkinson, Jeremy Belknap, and James Kirke Paulding. Eschewing a simple story of rejection of the John Bull symbol, she concludes that these works “reinforced the common determinants of the English and American identities, and progressed toward Paulding’s recognition of America as England’s heir” (p. 77). Another chapter chronicles the “paper war” between British travel writers such as Thomas Ashe, Richard Parkinson, and Isaac Weld, and American writers such as Charles Jared Ingersoll, Timothy Dwight, and Robert Walsh. Clark views this debate as “the expression of transatlantic intellectual discourse” and “a way for Americans to consider their national progress through self-examination and to discuss and reassess the continuing impact of their English parentage” (p. 112). Other chapters deal with fictional and nonfictional accounts of Americans traveling in England.

Clark succeeds in the details. Readers looking for insight into familiar and unfamiliar literary works will particularly enjoy this book. However, assessing Clark’s contribution to a broader understanding of the Anglo-American relationship is more difficult. Her avoidance of easy generalizations and her insistence that authors engaging England were looking inward as well as across the Atlantic Ocean is welcome and sensible. In the end, however, she might have done more to help readers gauge the broader representativeness of these works. Discussion of the collective background of the authors—they seem to skew toward Federalism and New England—might have helped determine whether this complex, ambivalent