

The Dividing Line Histories of William Byrd II of Westover. Edited by KEVIN JOEL BERLAND. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013. Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. 526 pages. \$59.95 (cloth).

Reviewed by Bradford J. Wood, *Eastern Kentucky University*

Few texts offer a more fascinating or revealing glimpse of colonial British America in the early eighteenth century than William Byrd's *History of the Dividing Line* and *Secret History of the Dividing Line*. However, scholars have not yet made full use of these distinctive texts. Many historians are aware of Byrd's writing and can readily refer to some of his more amusing anecdotes, but few of them give his writing about the dividing line much sustained attention or make it central to their arguments. Literary scholars have paid closer attention to the dividing line histories as texts, but they have often found them to be problematic, and one could still argue they have not paid enough attention to them compared to other more studied works of early American literature. Now, Kevin Joel Berland's well-crafted and illuminating new edition of the dividing line histories, *The Dividing Line Histories of William Byrd II of Westover*, makes them at once more accessible and easier to understand.

Berland shows why previous scholars have had difficulty with Byrd's histories and also suggests more promising approaches. Anyone who has paid attention to the two histories knows that they include a full complement of eighteenth-century humor, satire, and overstatement. Very few readers of Byrd's writing know very much about the specific historical context of the dividing line world between southern Virginia and northern North Carolina that he described. These factors make the histories difficult to interpret clearly or to connect to other texts or broader contexts. Many scholars who know the dividing line histories are also unaware of another issue that should influence how we read them. Byrd followed the common eighteenth-century practice of copying from other writers, and, while plagiarism carried no stigma in Byrd's culture, passages necessarily have to be interpreted differently when they originate with different authors and even in different times and places than readers might otherwise assume. Moreover, Byrd continued to add material, both of his own and from other writers, for at least another dozen years after the dividing line surveys. Consequently, the histories of the dividing line should not be considered as straightforward histories of the events they describe or as anything like eyewitness accounts of Byrd's travels. As Berland puts it, they are "hybrid texts," which include details from Byrd's experience on the surveys along with "a copious supply of other material" (viii) that he added after considerable time, study, and effort.

With this in mind, Berland's edition helps readers to understand the dividing line histories as the result of a prolonged and sophisticated process of literary and intellectual construction. The longer *History of the Dividing Line*, which Berland considers "Byrd's unfinished masterpiece," has to be considered in its full complexity because its method is "accretional" (x-xi) and because Byrd had a variety of intentions for it. Berland explains that Byrd's accretional methodology gradually incorporates diverse information and ideas from different sources without acknowledgment, making the author seem erudite. Clearly, Byrd wanted his *History of the Dividing Line* to demonstrate his expertise to a learned and metropolitan reading audience. He also hoped to persuade readers of many of his own views about early eighteenth-century Virginia and North Carolina. The fact that so many scholars have accepted Byrd's view of the relationship between these two colonies testifies both to Byrd's skill and to a widespread failure to appreciate the constructed and literary character of these works.

The Secret History of the Dividing Line shares many of these traits but functions somewhat differently. This shorter dividing line history was written for a much smaller audience but also participated in literary conventions associated with other "secret histories" (343), which often focused on potential scandals and private information. These differences underscore Berland's contention that the two dividing line histories must be considered as intimately related but ultimately separable and distinct texts. Along these lines, Berland dispels the notion that the *Secret History of the Dividing Line* served as a rough draft for the *History of the Dividing Line*, and he proposes a speculative but detailed and careful history of both texts. The two texts served different purposes for Byrd, and the significant but perhaps overstated stylistic differences between them do not necessarily relate to timing. Thus, Berland's edition does not follow William K. Boyd's well-known edition of the histories in arranging them side by side on different pages to facilitate comparison between them. While Boyd's arrangement might be more convenient for some purposes, from Berland's perspective it would be misleading.

However, even if one considers the preferences and quirks of different readers, there is no denying that Berland's edition is a much-needed improvement on all of its predecessors, and scholars interested in William Byrd's world are immensely in his debt. No other original edition of either of the dividing line histories has been published in nearly half a century, and it appears that no editor has transcribed the texts without continuing the transcription errors of previous editors since the middle of the nineteenth century. Berland's notes are even more useful than his careful editing. As he writes, the volume is "accompanied by and supported with copious annotation, commentary, and extensive sources and analogues,

designed” to introduce “the cultural, political, and scientific contexts in which Byrd lived and wrote” (x). This scholarly apparatus locates the literary sources for some of Byrd’s anecdotes and language, traces minor characters through the neglected local records of these borderlands, and contextualizes many of the broader concerns of early eighteenth-century colonial elites. Because of Berland’s comprehensive genealogy of Byrd’s textual influences, other scholars can now make full use of the dividing line histories to imagine the intellectual and literary world of learned colonists such as Byrd. The edition also includes much background information about Byrd and his writing, comments on Berland’s editorial method, an appendix with brief sketches of the key figures in the histories, and a discussion of illustrations that may have been commissioned by Byrd for the histories. Hopefully all of these resources will enable and encourage scholars to make the most of these fascinating and rich documents.