In addition to the Puritans of New England, there was another literary tradition in the New World. This literature came from the Southern planters, a group of people whose background and social views varied considerably from those of the Puritans. Many reasons can be suggested for the differences. One factor may have been climate. The Southern climate was kinder; it was warm and soft and the land was enormously fertile. The Northern climate was harsh; springs and summers were brief and winters were long and cold. Even the land in New England was hard; its outcroppings of granite and bedrock broke plows and made farming difficult.

But economic and religious factors were even more important. The land holdings in New England were small for the most part; many colonists were small farmers or tradesmen who lived in villages and owned very little land. But the Southern planter was an aristocrat and the virtual ruler of a huge territory. He maintained this area by keeping a large number of slaves (though there were slaves in New England in those days too).

In religion, most Southerners belonged to the Church of England. In general, they were much more interested in the outside world—in literature, music, art, politics, and the world of nature—than they were in the scrupulous examination of their own souls. But the Puritans, who had rejected the established church, were constantly looking inward and questioning themselves. Where the Southerner saw the world as something to be conquered and enjoyed, the Puritan—who loved the world as much as anyone else did—feared that its beauties were lures and sources of temptation.

The Southern planters shared the world view of the English Renaissance, with its emphasis on classical literature and the growing spirit of scientific inquiry. Thus, when the Southerners wrote about the New World, they were apt to write about it in traditional ways. Characteristically, the first purely literary work of the South was a translation of a Latin classic, Ovid’s collection of myths called the *Metamorphoses*. Even a work as original as *The Sotweed Factor* (1708), Ebenezer Cooke’s humorous tale of a tobacco merchant, was written in bouncy couplets, the popular form for satirical verse in England.

In many ways, William Byrd is a representative figure for the Southern writers of the Colonial Period. Born in Virginia more than fifty years after the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth, Byrd was truly a Renaissance man in the New World. He translated Greek and Latin works, composed original poetry (mostly satiric verse), and wrote about mathematics and medicine. Writing a generation before Thomas Jefferson, Byrd displayed the same intellectual curiosity that his fellow Virginian would so strongly exemplify later.

Byrd described the pleasures of the life of the Southern planter: “I have a large family of my own, and my doors are open to everybody, yet I have no bills to pay... I live in a kind of independence of everyone but Providence... I must take care to keep all my people to their duty... But then ‘tis an amusement in this silent country.”
It is worth remembering that Jamestown, Virginia, was named for James I, the king who vowed to harry the Puritans out of England. Virginia itself was named for Elizabeth I, the "Virgin Queen." These place names—and many others in the South—remind us of an important difference between Virginia and the colonies of New England. New England was settled largely by those in conflict with British intellectual, theological, and social life; Virginia was settled by those in harmony with that life. By and large, the fervent, short-haired puritanical Roundheads went to New England; the aristocratic, long-haired, worldly Cavaliers went to Virginia.

William Byrd, a man of exceptional intellect and accomplishments, was a thorough Cavalier—worldly, sophisticated, and gentlemanly. Byrd was born in Virginia, the son of a wealthy landowner and merchant, but he was educated in England, where he spent half his life. In London, he acquired a passion for the theater, which the Puritans had once outlawed as immoral. Byrd had many scientific interests: He was even a member of the Royal Society, that pillar of the British scientific establishment.

Byrd alternated between living in England and Virginia. He preferred London, with its elegant homes, witty conversation, and gambling tables. During his visits to Westover, his 26,000-acre home in Virginia, he tried to keep alive both his social and intellectual life. Westover’s gardens are still renowned, and its library of 3,600 volumes was rivaled in Byrd’s time only by Cotton Mather’s library in New England.

Byrd had little in common with the New Englanders. The contrasts between Byrd and the Puritans are instructive. For example, Byrd kept a diary, as many Puritans did. But the Puritans’ diaries are primarily records of spiritual examination. Byrd’s diary records the pleasures and practical concerns of a man of the world. Dinners, flirtations with women, literature, and natural science were of greater interest to him than matters of the spirit. In London in 1719, for example, he recorded a typical day:

May 28. I rose about 7 o’clock and read a chapter in Hebrew and some Greek. I neglected my prayers, but had milk for breakfast. The weather was still warm and clear and very dry, the wind north. About eleven came Annie Wilkinson but I would not speak with her. I was disappointed in the absence of Mrs. B—s who wrote me word she would come and breakfast with me, so I read some English and ate some bread and butter because I was to dine late and about 3 o’clock went to dine with Sir Wilfred Lawson and ate some mutton. After dinner we talked a little and about 6 o’clock went to Kensington in Sir Wilfred’s coach where there was a ball in the gardens and several ladies and among the rest Miss Perry whom I stuck most to and she complained I squeezed her hand. Here I stayed till 1 o’clock and then came home and neglected my prayers.

In 1728, Byrd joined a survey expedition of the disputed boundary line between Virginia and North Carolina. *The History of The Dividing Line* is far more than a simple record of that expedition. Witty and elegantly written, it is filled with philosophical observations and barbed comments on American Colonial life.
FROM THE HISTORY OF THE DIVIDING LINE

In the first extract from the History, Byrd ironically describes the “modish frenzy” of early travelers to America, a fashionable craze which he compares to a “distemper” or illness. Notice immediately how Byrd’s tone differs from Bradford’s, even though both men were writing about the same topic. Which writer do you think sounds more “modern”?

Early Virginia Colonies

As it happened some ages before to be the fashion to saunter to the Holy Land and go upon other Quixote adventures, so it was now grown the humor to take a trip to America. The Spaniards had lately discovered rich mines in their part of the West Indies, which made their maritime neighbors eager to do so too. This modish frenzy, being still more inflamed by the charming account given of Virginia by the first adventurers, made many fond of removing to such a Paradise.

Happy was he, and still happier she, that could get themselves transported, fondly expecting their coarsest utensils in that happy place would be of massy silver.

This made it easy for the Company to procure as many volunteers as they wanted for their new Colony, but, like most other undertakers who have no assistance from the public, they starved the design by too much frugality; for, unwilling to launch out at first into too much expense, they shipped off but few people at a time, and those but scantily provided. The adventurers were, besides, idle and extravagant and expected they might live without work in so plentiful a country.

These wretches were set ashore not far from Roanoke Inlet, but by some fatal disagreement or laziness were either starved or cut to pieces by the Indians.

Several repeated misadventures of this kind did for some time allay the itch of sailing to the new world, but the distemper broke out again about the year 1606. Then it happened that the Earl of Southampton and several other persons eminent for their quality and estates were invited into the Company who applied themselves once more to people the then almost abandoned Colony. For this purpose they embarked about a hundred men, most of them reprobates of good families and related to some of the Company who were men of quality and fortune.

The ships that carried them made a shift to find a more direct way to Virginia and ventured through the capes into the Bay of Chesapeake. The same night they came to an anchor at the mouth of Powhatan, the same as James River, where they built a small fort at a place called Point Comfort.

This settlement stood its ground from that time forward, in spite of all the blunders and disagreement of the first adventurers and the many calamities that befell the Colony afterward. The six gentlemen who were first named of the Company by the Crown and who were empowered to choose an annual president from among themselves were always engaged in factions and quarrels, while the rest detested work more than famine. At this rate the Colony must have come to nothing had it not been for the vigilance and bravery of Captain Smith, who struck a terror into all the Indians round about. This gentleman took some pains to persuade the men to plant Indian corn, but they

1. Quixote adventures: foolish adventures, after the madcap hero of Cervantes’s novel, Don Quixote (1605–1615).
2. reprobates (repəˈbāts): people lost to all sense of duty or decency.
looked upon all labor as a curse. They chose rather to depend upon the musty provisions that were sent from England; and when they failed, they were forced to take more pains to seek for wild fruits in the woods than they would have taken in tilling the ground. Besides, this exposed them to be knocked in the head by the Indians and gave them fluxes [dysentery] into the bargain, which thinned the plantation very much. To supply this mortality, they were reinforced the year following with a greater number of people, along which were fewer gentlemen and more laborers, who, however, took care not to kill themselves with work. These found the first adventurers in a very starving condition but relieved their wants with the fresh supply they brought with them. From Kecoughtan they extended themselves as far as Jamestown, where, like true Englishmen, they built a church that cost no more than fifty pounds and a tavern that cost five hundred.

As the Colony grew, violence frequently erupted between the settlers and the Indians. Byrd offered his solution to the conflicts between the two cultures.

**Interruption**

They had now made peace with the Indians, but there was one thing wanting to make that peace lasting. The natives could by no means persuade themselves that the English were heartily their friends so long as they disdained to intermarry with them. And, in earnest, had the English consulted their own security and the good of the Colony, had they intended either to civilize or convert these gentiles, they would have brought their stomachs to embrace this prudent alliance.

The Indians are generally tall and well proportioned, which may make full amends for the darkness of their complexions. Add to this that they are healthy and strong, with constitutions un-
tainted by lewdness and not enfeebled by luxury. Besides, morals and all considered, I cannot think the Indians were much greater heathens than the first adventurers, who, had they been good Christians, would have had the charity to take this only method of converting the natives to Christianity. For after all that can be said, a sprightly lover is the most prevailing missionary that can be sent among these or any other infidels.

Besides, the poor Indians would have had less reason to complain that the English took away their land if they had received it by way of a portion with their daughters. Had such affinities been contracted in the beginning, how much bloodshed had been prevented and how populous would the country have been, and, consequently, how considerable! Nor would the shade of the skin have been any reproach at this day, for if a Moor may be washed white in three generations, surely an Indian might have been blanched.

The French, for their parts, have not been so squeamish in Canada, who upon trial find abundance of attraction in the Indians. Their late grand monarch thought it not below even the dignity of a Frenchman to become one flesh with this people and therefore ordered 100 livres for any of his subjects, man or woman, that would intermarry with a native.

By this piece of policy we find the French interest very much strengthened among the savages and their religion, such as it is, propagated just as far as their love. And I heartily wish this well-concerted scheme doesn’t hereafter give the French an advantage over His Majesty’s good subjects on the northern continent of America.

*Byrd’s History touches on other colonies besides Virginia. Here he presents a Cavalier’s view of the Puritans of the northern colonies.*

**The New England Colonies**

About the same time New England was pared off from Virginia by letters patent bearing [the] date April 10, 1608. Several gentlemen of the town and neighborhood of Plymouth obtained this grant, with the Lord Chief Justice Popham at their head.

Their bounds were specified to extend from 38 to 45 degrees of northern latitude, with a breadth of one hundred miles from the seashore. The first fourteen years this company encountered many difficulties and lost many men, though, far from being discouraged, they sent over numerous recruits of Presbyterians every year, who for all that

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had much ado to stand their ground, with all their fighting and praying.

But about the year 1620 a large swarm of dissenters fled thither from the severities of their stepmother, the church. These saints [the Puritan dissenters], conceiving the same aversion to the copper complexion of the natives as that of the first adventurers to Virginia, would on no terms contract alliances with them, afraid, perhaps, like the Jews of old, lest they might be drawn into idolatry by those strange women.

Whatever disgusted them I can't say, but this false delicacy, creating in the Indians a jealousy that the English were ill affected toward them, was the cause that many of them were cut off and the rest exposed to various distresses.

This reinforcement was landed not far from Cape Cod, where for their greater security they built a fort and near it a small town, which, in honor of the proprietors, was called New Plymouth. But they still had many discouragements to struggle with, though by being well supported from home they by degrees triumphed over them all.

Their brethren, after this, flocked over so fast that in a few years they extended the settlement one hundred miles along the coast, including Rhode Island and Martha's Vineyard.

Thus the Colony throve apace and was thronged with large detachments of Independents and Presbyterians who thought themselves persecuted at home.

*Byrd's surveying party is guided by an Indian named Bearskin. Here, Byrd records Bearskin's religious beliefs.*

**The Native Religion**

In the evening we examined our friend Bearskin concerning the religion of his country, and he explained it to us without any of that reserve to which his nation is subject. He told us he believed there was one supreme god, who had several subaltern deities under him. And that this master god made the world a long time ago. That he told the sun, the moon, and stars their business in the beginning, which they, with good looking after, have faithfully performed ever since. That the same power that made all things at first has taken care to keep them in the same method and motion ever since. He believed that God had formed many worlds before he formed this, but that those worlds either grew old and ruinous or were destroyed for the dishonesty of the inhabitants. That God is very just and very good, ever well pleased with those men who possess those godlike qualities. That he takes good people into his safe protection, makes them very rich, fills their bellies plentifully, preserves them from sickness and from being surprised or overcome by their enemies. But all such as tell lies and cheat those they have dealings with he never fails to punish with sickness, poverty, and hunger and, after all that, suffers them to be knocked on the head and scalped by those that fight against them.

He believed that after death both good and bad people are conducted by a strong guard into a great road, in which departed souls travel together for some time till at a certain distance this road forks into two paths, the one extremely level and the other stony and mountainous. Here the good are parted from the bad by a flash of lightning, the first being hurried away to the right, the other to the left. The right-hand road leads to a charming, warm country, where the spring is everlasting and every month is May; and as the year is always in its youth, so are the people, and particularly the women are bright as stars and never scold. That in this happy climate there are deer, turkeys, elks, and buffaloes innumerable, perpetually fat and gentle, while the trees are loaded with delicious fruit quite throughout the four seasons. That the soil brings forth cora spontaneously, without the curse of labor, and so very wholesome that none who have the happiness to eat of it are ever sick, grow old, or die. Near the entrance into this blessed land sits a venerable old man on a mat richly woven, who examines strictly all that are brought before him, and if they have behaved well, the guards are ordered to open the crystal gate and let them enter into the land of delight.

The left-hand path is very rugged and uneven, leading to a dark and barren country where it is always winter. The ground is the whole year round covered with snow, and nothing is to be seen upon the trees but icicles. All the people are hungry yet have not a morsel of anything to eat except a bitter kind of potato, that gives them the dry gripes [heaves] and fills their whole body with loathsome
are delivered over to huge turkey buzzards, like harpies, that fly away with them to the place above-mentioned. Here, after they have been tormented a certain number of years according to their several degrees of guilt, they are driven back into this world to try if they will mend their manners and merit a place the next time in the regions of bliss.

This was the substance of Bearskin's religion and was as much to the purpose as could be expected from a mere state of nature, without one glimpse of revelation or philosophy. It contained, however, the three great articles of natural religion: the belief of a god, the moral distinction between good and evil, and the expectation of rewards and punishments in another world.

6. furies: In Greek and Roman mythology, fierce avenging goddesses.

7. harpies: In Greek and Roman mythology, filthy, evil creatures with women's heads and birds' bodies.

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**Analyzing the History**

**Identifying Facts**

1. What reasons does Byrd suggest for the failure of the first Virginia settlement?
2. According to Byrd, did the first colonists have realistic expectations of life in the New World? Explain his point of view.
3. For what reasons is Byrd in favor of intermarriage with Native Americans? Are his interests here primarily moral or primarily practical? Explain.

**Interpreting Meanings**

4. Like many English writers of his time, Byrd excels at satire, the use of ridicule to expose the faults or weaknesses of people or institutions. From his scathing portrait of the early settlers of Virginia in the first passage of this selection, what personal qualities do you think Byrd admired?
5. What is Byrd's attitude toward the Puritans of New England? Tell how his diction, or choice of words, reveals this attitude.
6. According to his description of the native religion, what "articles," or elements, of religion does Byrd consider most important? Consider Byrd's attitudes toward religion as revealed in his remarks on intermarriage, on the New England colonists, and on Native American theology. How closely do his views accord with those expressed by Mary Rowlandson (page 24)?

7. Did you find Byrd a more or less interesting writer than the other Colonials? Support your position with references to the selections you have read.

**Writing About the History**

**A Critical Response**

1. **Contrasting Two Histories.** In a brief essay, contrast the selection from Byrd's *History of the Dividing Line* with William Bradford's account of the Puritan landing at Plymouth (pages 15-20). In your essay, consider specifically how the two accounts differ in purpose, tone, and style.

2. **Analyzing the History.** Examine the references to women in this selection from Byrd's history. In a paragraph or two, mention the references and discuss what they reveal about the position of women in Byrd's world.