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Theatre and Power in Bacon's Rebellion: Virginia, 1676–77

On 22 April 1677 Charles II's commissioners, Sir John Berry, Colonel Herbert Jeffreys and Francis Moryson, visited the colony's governor, Sir William Berkeley, and his wife, Frances, at Green Spring House. The three men had been sent to Virginia with a large armed force to suppress Bacon's Rebellion and discover its causes by hearing the people's grievances. The commissioners' purpose was to bid farewell to the governor, whom the king had summoned to England. Colonel Jeffreys, who commanded the English troops, was designated to replace Berkeley during the latter's absence. However, Berkeley was old and frail and unlikely to return to the colony.

When the commissioners were about to leave, 'my Lady Berkeley with great forwardness often profesd the making ready of the Coach for us', they recalled later. She pressed them to ride, instead of walking down to the river where their barge was moored. As the commissioners left the house, they saw an African come forward and 'boldly' replace the postillion, taking the latter's place astride one of the horses. The commissioners declined to ride in the coach, but nonetheless it trundled behind them down to the James. Later they learned that the new postillion was one of the colony's hangmen. In the report of the incident the commissioners wrote to England, they asserted that the incident 'looks more like a Woman' s than, [*sic*] a Man's malice'.[1]

Historians have treated this incident as an insignificant part of the history of the Rebellion. The commissioners themselves subsumed it under the category of female behaviour of the kind which occurred when a woman was momentarily unrestrained by rational male authority. But what went on at Green Spring House *should* be understood as female behaviour because Frances Berkeley, like other gentry women in seventeenth-century England, stood ready to defend her husband's cause in a time of political crisis.

The story of the black postillion deeply underscores the power of English culture in Virginia. Virginians like other English people understood what historians have lost sight of: the capacity of their countrymen and women to understand public affairs as drama. To interpret political dramas like 'The

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Scandalous Postillion', English people drew on their culture and history. Directors could stage the performance of others, as Frances Berkeley did in this case, or self-stage their own dramas, as her husband did in his performance outside the state house in Jamestown when he faced the rebel, Nathaniel Bacon. This paper focuses on Sir William Berkeley, the governor, and Nathaniel Bacon, the rebel, but it also pays attention to Berkeley's wife, Frances, a shadowy figure in history, who possessed abilities we have not suspected.

Bacon's Rebellion is well known to students of colonial America, although no-one has succeeded in writing a convincing account of it. The first question historians asked was who was responsible for the widespread anarchy that followed the breakdown of government authority in the colony between 1676 and 1677. One historian attributes the rebellion to Nathaniel Bacon, and describes Governor Berkeley as a man doing his best to implement sensible policies. Another sees the Rebellion as prefiguring the American Revolution, with Bacon as an early George Washington, already defying British authority. Historians writing more recently explain that neither the rebel nor the governor could have controlled the dangerous economic situation in Virginia where people suffered because of the low price of their staple, tobacco, and simultaneously from Indian attacks on frontier settlements. Historians look also to struggles within the emerging Virginia aristocracy, and to the significance of common action by black and white workers participating in the revolt.[2]

Because this paper does focus on the Berkeleys, it reverts to the earlier historiography, which attended more to leaders than to lesser men. But, on the basis of more recent research, one can say that Sir William Berkeley's faults did not cause Bacon's Rebellion. He struggled to give the colony a stable central government by introducing bicameralism, but his power was severely limited by local officials who made local tax assessments, and meted out justice. As the population spread, new counties required new officials so that many more men had a stake in local government, accelerating further devolution of power from Jamestown.

Sir William turned to the Assembly to support him in making two more obvious and important reforms, one aimed at curbing local officials' powers of taxation, the other addressing the intractable fact that Virginia's well-being depended on the international price of tobacco. First, he tried and failed to change the unfair poll (or head) tax system, whereby poor planters paid the same tax as their rich neighbours. Second, he tried to end his colony's dependence on its staple crop. The over-production of poorly prepared tobacco decreased prices by causing a glut on the English market, leading to widespread indebtedness: the poorer planters owed money to the richer, and the latter to tobacco merchants in England. The governor planned to diversify Virginia's crops (Berkeley favoured silk, hemp and flax production). These failures to achieve tax reform, or find a cure for the problems

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endemic in an unregulated staple economy, were serious ones which played their part in causing Bacon's Rebellion, but they cannot be attributed to the governor.[3]

Sir William came from a dedicated royalist family. Before going to Virginia in 1642, he had fought beside Charles I in the Civil War. While he governed Virginia, his brothers served the royalist cause in England. John Berkeley fought with the royal armies, going into exile after the defeat of the royalist forces. Subsequently, he became responsible for the education of the Duke of York, and was made a peer by Charles II. William Berkeley showed his loyalty to the crown by proclaiming Charles II king when news reached Virginia of his father's execution. In addition, Berkeley welcomed royalist refugees to the colony. And, in 1651, when the Commonwealth parliament excluded the Dutch from the colonial carrying trade, thereby limiting Virginia's trade to English ships, merchants and sailors, Berkeley, with that fine mix of loyalty and economic interest typical of the Virginia gentry, stirred up the Assembly to resist parliament's 'paper bulletts'. He told the Assembly:

> But that which I woud have you cheifly consider with thankfullness is: That God hath seperated [*sic*] you from the guilt of the crying bloud of our Pious Souveraigne of ever blessed memory: But mistake not gentlemen part of it will yet staine your garments if you willingly submit to those murtherers hands that shed it.[4]

He held the colony as long as he decently could against the commissioners that parliament sent to depose him, retiring to private life in Virginia for the remainder of the Interregnum. In the same spirit of loyalty to the Stuarts, he attributed the Great Fire of London in 1666 to 'the anger of God for the murther of the blessed Martir the king'.[5]

William Berkeley may have been naive enough to expect Charles II's particular favour for Virginia when he was restored to the throne in 1660. But king and parliament wrote a new Navigation Act injurious to Virginia's interests. Tobacco, again one of the enumerated products, had to go through an English port and pay customs before it was sold on home or foreign markets. Foreign ships were prohibited from trading in the English colonies, thereby preventing Virginians from continuing their profitable trade with the Dutch. Virginia's principal crop stood in danger of additional taxation because of the Crown's urgent need for revenue, and because the English at home were incorrigibly reluctant to pay the true cost of maintaining their government.[6]

In 1661, Governor Berkeley set off for England to see what he could do to improve Virginia's situation. The colonists wanted free trade, which amounted to a request that the Navigation Act not apply to Virginia. Clearly, they were deluded if they thought they could bilk the king of his customs revenue and English merchants of their profits. Since tobacco was being overproduced in Virginia and Maryland, the governor also wanted an enforceable cessation of planting, again potentially depriving the king of his customs revenue. Further, Berkeley wanted a tax increase, either in England

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in the form of increased customs duties on tobacco, or in Virginia by an increase in the two shillings per hogshead of tobacco exported. The money collected would be used to finance the diversification of the colony's agricultural production by paying the wages of men knowledgeable in the growing and processing of flax, silk, and hemp. Berkeley also asked for English bounties on these crops to encourage Virginians to grow them. Since the king was perilously short of money, and the English tobacco merchants pressed their interests strongly, Berkeley had to return home with very little. It must have become clear to him that Virginia's needs were not central to the king. But the governor was a determined man: on his return, he started to grow the crops that could diversify his colony's agriculture himself, hoping to persuade other planters to follow suit.[7]

During the Second Anglo-Dutch War, Berkeley laboured to make his vulnerable colony defensible with a plan to deploy local militia forces and merchant ships against enemy forces. He also abandoned the fort at Point Comfort at the opening of the James River. Refusing to consider Berkeley's explanation that the fort was useless because the James River was so wide at that point that enemy ships could sail through out of the range of English cannons, the king and the Privy Council ordered the governor to rebuild the site to defend the tobacco fleet.[8] That Virginia was attacked in both the Second and Third Dutch Wars by enemy fleets must have been deeply frustrating to Berkeley, who naturally saw his own colony's defence as important, and who might be forgiven for believing that he knew best. Then, in 1672, Charles, pressed on all sides by greedy, well-connected supporters, gave his revenues from Virginia's land as a gift to Lords Arlington and Culpeper for thirty-one years.[9] In order to start costly and time-consuming negotiations in England to undo the grant, the Virginia government was forced to impose a new tax on overtaxed, impoverished people. Clearly, Virginia was little more than a source of revenue, and, therefore, its governor was powerless in the face of the king's determination to extract money from it.

In early 1676 other Virginians, frustrated by inequitable taxes and low tobacco prices, found that they had also to endure violent Indian attacks on frontier regions. To one of those regions, the upper James River, new settlers, Nathaniel Bacon and his wife, had come in 1674. A young man in his twenties, belonging to a gentry family, Bacon had made the grand tour and attended the Inns of Court. But he left England under not one, but several clouds: he was extravagant and unstable; he had married a woman without her father's consent, and had dabbled in fraud. In Virginia he was advantaged by possessing enough capital to buy a large plantation. Governor Berkeley favoured him with a seat on the council and a licence to trade with the Indians.[10]

Local leaders and militia men, determined to respond to the Indians vigorously, asked Bacon to take command and lead them in an attack. Although Berkeley warned Bacon against becoming a mutineer by taking command of the forces without official permission, Bacon did lead them in an attack,

unfortunately on the wrong Indians, the friendly Occaneechees. The frontier people's strategy of direct attacks indicates that Bacon's supporters were willing to defy the governor who insisted on dealing with Indians by means of the best contemporary strategy, which was to build frontier posts and use them as bases for flying squadrons.[11]

To face these troubles, Sir William had a helpmate in his wife. For his second marriage, Berkeley chose Frances Culpeper Stephens. Born in Kent in 1634, Frances Berkeley was the daughter of Katherine St Leger and Thomas Culpeper.[12] Her father had fought vigorously for the royal cause in the Civil War. Culpeper was probably with the royalist army at Colchester in 1648, when it had endured a ghastly eleven-week siege. In 1649 the king rewarded Culpeper and six other royalists with a patent making them proprietors of all the land between the Potomac and the Rappahannock Rivers in Virginia, known as the Northern Neck. Culpeper came with his family to Virginia and died there intent on exploiting his share of the king's magnificent grant.[13]

Frances Berkeley envisioned a role for herself in the governor's affairs that, in the crisis brought on by Bacon's Rebellion, encompassed his public as well as his private life. She came to Virginia with her parents when she was sixteen, and two years later married Samuel Stephens who became Governor of Albemarle County (part of present-day North Carolina) in 1667.[14] When Stephens died in 1670, she married Sir William: she was thirty-six; he was sixty or sixty-two. The marriage appears to have been a satisfactory one: in his will he not only left almost everything he owned to her, but added 'And I doe further make this declaration, that if God had blessed me with a far greater estate, I would have given it *all* to my Most Dearly beloved wife'.[15]

From the beginning of Bacon's Rebellion, Frances Berkeley took political action in defence of her husband's honour.[16] She gave an account of her activities in an undated document, without salutation, found among the papers of Sir Henry Coventry, the English secretary of state. She started with a flourish, 'Being not borne of a family that hath taught me to lie'. She went on to explain that Bacon's would-be supporters believed that he had the financial resources to 'maintain the wives and children of all those that would goe out with him'. Having what she believed was credible evidence that the heavily indebted Bacon was having difficulty getting his bills of exchange honoured, she spread the damaging news everywhere.[17] In so doing, she was behaving like the rebel women – Sarah Grendon is one example – who spread news and propaganda around the colony on Bacon's behalf.[18] Continuing her statement, Lady Frances denied that she had stooped to calling Bacon a 'parliament captain', a member of the hated armies of Cromwell. Her statement was probably written before the June Assembly met in 1676.

Lady Frances's words attest to her convictions as well as her willingness to act politically. At the time, too, Berkeley and the men around him were desperate to absolve themselves from future accusations that they had provoked

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Bacon's followers into rebellion. Frances Berkeley's statement was witnessed and signed by Sir William, Sir Henry Chicheley, a member of the Council of State, the Reverend John Clough, rector of James City Parish, and Captain James Crews. The latter's presence at Green Spring is puzzling.[19] Crews had urged Bacon to take the illegal action of leading armed men against the Indians without a commission from Berkeley. He was executed at Green Spring in January 1677 for his part in the rebellion. Crews may have visited the Berkeleys after his election to the June Assembly, 1676, perhaps to try and bring about some resolution of the struggle between Berkeley and Bacon. He might also have been trying to defend Bacon by pointing out Lady Berkeley's partisanship – hence the angry words that open her statement. But her husband, too, may have found Lady Berkeley's zealous support embarrassing, as well as politically dangerous, and have urged her to make her statement, perhaps under some duress. To her husband her political actions must have been especially offensive. Berkeley detested the speech and writing of other Virginia women who, in the years following his resumption of the governorship of the colony in 1660, had freely and publicly aired their religious and personal discontents. Even before Bacon's Rebellion, Kathleen M. Brown argues, the patriarchal order of the colony was threatened by women's assertive and challenging behaviour.[20]

Frances Berkeley's behaviour during Bacon's Rebellion does not fit the model of female passivity which Western European culture in the early modern period prescribed for women.[21] Nor does she appear to have been a victim of the 'restrictive patriarchalism'of seventeenth-century England where women lived in subjection to their parents, and then their husbands.[22] But nor does the behaviour of other seventeenth-century women of the English upper classes fit the model. Very frequently, husbands called on their wives to manage the family's business affairs and estates, calls to which women successfully responded. Linda Pollock has pointed out the contradiction between these realities and the public prescriptions for women's behaviour. Her explanation, arrived at after analysing a very large number of biographies and letters, is that women were always expected to run households and estates when necessary, and were trained to do so by observing their mothers, and by other informal experiences. At the same time young women were constantly admonished by parents, particularly their mothers, to accept and adopt the required submissive behaviour toward their husbands. Linda Lee Sturtz has found the same pattern of behaviour in Virginia. Mary Cary Ambler, widowed in 1766, advised her daughter to be passive. However, Ambler herself made strenuous efforts to administer her estate competently. Upper class women's lives, then, embraced a contradiction which their education prepared them to live out.[23]

It is likely that in chaotic Virginia women's situations were less restricted than in England. For example, Peter Laslett writes of the profound importance of first marriages to the social structure in England, but they must have

been less so in a colony where life was often very short. There is evidence that, because of the diminished life chances of Virginians generally, together with the shortage of women, the latter gained social power. Like many Virginians Frances Berkeley belonged to a family disrupted by death and absence. After her father Thomas Culpeper's death, her mother and brother returned to England, leaving Frances to begin her career of wealthy widowhood. Widows were a well-known phenomenon on the Chesapeake: they often possessed and sometimes accumulated money and land, and were much sought after as wives.[24]

During Bacon's Rebellion Frances Berkeley found herself in the middle of an acute political crisis which led to the overthrow of her husband's government, a crisis analogous to the Civil War in England in the 1640s. The English Civil War offered royalist women opportunities for political expression, just as Bacon's Rebellion offered them to Frances Berkeley. N. H. Keeble has examined the autobiographies of three English women of the upper classes which describe those women's experiences during the Civil War. All were royalists: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle; Anne, Lady Halkett; and Anne, Lady Fanshawe. In the troubled times of the Civil War and Interregnum, women were often in danger. Margaret Cavendish's mother, Elizabeth, Lady Lucas, was driven from her plundered home, and Anne Fanshawe, alone in hostile Cork, injured and pregnant, escaped and saved her husband's valuable papers from the enemy. In the three biographies, the women stress the conservative cultural values which defined female behaviour in their time, but Keeble notes how joyfully they responded to the opportunities for independent action that wartime provided them. Each woman emphasized her loyalty to the king, and implied that if others had shown the same loyalty, England's troubles might have been prevented. But each woman seized on 'the prospect of female indomitability, of women who can act on the public stage independently of men'. Anne Halkett engineered the escape of the Duke of York (in disguise) from the custody of the Earl of Northumberland: this was the kind of act that put the women in 'the role of dynamic and initiating protagonists'.[25] Bacon's Rebellion allowed Frances Berkeley, urged on by loyalty to her husband and, at the same time, eager to act on the political stage, to initiate similar behaviour.

Sometime in June 1676, Frances Berkeley left Virginia and sailed to England. Presumably she intended to mobilize the support of her brother, Alexander Culpeper, and Berkeley's brother, John, to persuade the king to send aid to her husband in Virginia. It turns out, though, that even establishing when she arrived is difficult. Possibly she was aboard one of the two ships from Virginia that arrived at Deal on 10 August 1676. The information gleaned from people aboard those ships was both pro-Berkeley and up-to-date: someone aboard complained to the intelligence collectors that the 'natives are not so troublesome as the English planters' and that the planters mutinously refused to send the governor the soldiers he required, thereby aiding the Indians.[26]

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Timing is important because, since there is little direct evidence of Lady Frances's activities, something can be surmised by examining the decisions that the king and the Privy Council made about Virginia's troubles. She was in contact with the Virginia agents in London: a letter from Philip Ludwell, a member of the Virginia Council, written on 5 June 1676, is addressed to her at their lodgings. The letter's purpose was to update her on the Rebellion. It is a terse political document, written by one deeply involved person to another, with no sign of Ludwell's treating her as other than an equal.[27]

News of the Rebellion began to arrive in England in June of 1676.[28] However, Philip Ludwell's definitive account was not received until September. Ludwell reported that on 23 June, Bacon had drawn up his forces outside the assembly house at Jamestown, demanding the governor's commission for himself as 'General in command of all the forces in Virginia against the Indians'. Without the commission Bacon threatened that he 'would pull down the house and have their blood'.[29] Although Bacon's demand trespassed directly on the legal powers of the governor, Berkeley was forced to give way. The commissioners' report, written later, described the scene in front of the assembly house. Berkeley acted out the theatrical gestures English culture made appropriate. Leaving his 'chair of judicature', he came down to Bacon and, 'uncovering his naked Bosome before him [Bacon], required that some of his men might shoot him, before ever he would be drawne to signe or consent to a commission for such a Rebell as Bacon'. When Bacon refused to order his men to shoot, the governor offered to settle their differences by single combat. He offered to fight a duel with Bacon: '"lett us first try and end the difference singly between ourselves" and offer'd to measure swords with him'.[30] What was going on here was an act of self-staging which allowed Berkeley to express his fury.

Berkeley's decision to purge his humiliation by duelling with Bacon indicates that he had decided to defend his personal honour rather than maintain his official position, as signified by the commissioners' mention of his 'chair of judicature'. However, since Tudor times, the Crown had sought a monopoly on violence, although men still resorted to personal battles when they believed that no satisfaction for an insult could be obtained in the courts. At Jamestown, Berkeley confused official and private violence, although he was the colony's upholder of official violence. His choice indicates the depth of his fury with Bacon: he stepped from one role to another, becoming a private person rather than the governor of Virginia.[31]

Since Ludwell's report indicated that Berkeley had lost control of the colony, Charles recalled the governor to England.[32] He also ordered troops to Virginia to suppress the rebel forces, and appointed three commissioners to hear the people's grievances.[33] Frances Berkeley must have been gratified by Charles's decision to send troops; it is possible that she played a small part in that decision. Probably she found unnecessary the commissioners' charge to conduct hearings into the reasons why so many Virginians rebelled. Nevertheless,

the governor's recall to London must have been a serious blow. Apparently lacking the power to persuade the king to change his decision, she was forced into the demeaning posture of petitioning him for the small privilege of allowing her husband to remain in the colony long enough to settle his affairs. There is no indication that the king replied. Frances Berkeley then left England for Virginia aboard one of the commissioners' ships.[34]

But the rebellion was over and Bacon had died of dysentery by the time she and the Commissioners arrived. It was a cruel stroke of fate for the governor because, instead of a victory over the rebels, he had to deal with commissioners who set about talking to the rebels about their discontents instead of their crimes, and with English soldiers he no longer needed. By the time Sir William was forced to obey the king and leave Virginia, he and the commissioners had quarrelled seriously over his interpretation of the king's instructions, over Berkeley's hanging too many rebels, and over his plundering the estates of defeated rebels. In the face of these humiliating quarrels, the Berkeleys could respond in terms of a deeply-embedded characteristic of their culture: they could dramatize their understanding of their political predicament: they could mask their politics in theatre. To such a response Sir William was especially attuned since, as well as being a colonial administrator, he was a playwright.

His first play, a tragi-comedy, *The Lost Lady*, was probably written about 1637 while he served as a gentleman of the privy chamber.[35] The play was performed at court by the King's Men, sometime before February 7th, 1638; in public at Blackfriars' playhouse in 1638; and again on March 26th at the Cockpit-in-Court at Whitehall.[36]

When Berkeley came to London in 1661 to protest against the Navigation Act, his visit gave him the opportunity to become attuned to the changed emphasis of Restoration drama. Characteristic of that drama was a 'highly developed engagement with the history of its own times'.[37] Masques, Lord Mayor's shows, as well as plays were 'explicitly political'.[38] No play was more political than Charles II's coronation pageant in 1661. He witnessed four dramatic interludes whose meanings were obvious to the onlookers for whose political instruction they were written. On the other hand, Restoration authors of other theatrical productions had court censorship to fear. Therefore, they wrote with 'enough ambiguity to allow for maneuvre should the issue of the author's intentions be broached publicly'.[39] Sir William, was, then, newly attuned to the perils and pleasures of writing formal dramas or of staging impromptu ones. At the same time he understood that theatre offered a way of saying what could not be said directly.

The stage was now set for the performance of 'The Scandalous Postillion'. The scene was Green Spring House. Sir William had built this mansion over a long period of time, but the house the commissioners saw was probably the way Berkeley wanted the completed building to appear. Its central core, a small manor house, was started in the 1640s, soon after he had arrived in the colony

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and purchased his estate, also called Green Spring. A new west wing was started in the late 1650s but probably was not completed until the early 1670s. In the makeshift world of seventeenth-century Virginia, Green Spring House stood out as an imposing construction. A crude drawing of the house as it appeared in 1683 survives. The porch was decorated with what Benjamin Latrobe called 'some clumsy ornamental brickwork . . . of the stile of James the 1st'. Neither the porch nor the flight of stairs appear in the 1683 drawing, but Latrobe's attribution of the style of the brickwork to the early seventeenth century suggests that both porch and stairs existed in 1677. Although the garden at Green Spring House has not been excavated, it is likely that Berkeley, a fervent crop experimenter, also laid out a fitting garden for his mansion. One mile from the James River, Green Spring House stood on a small hill.[40]

The three commissioners came to Green Spring House to take their leave of the governor, a 'Civil Complement . . . paid, as due to the Honour of Your Character' as they put it.[41] But both Berkeleys seethed with anger and malice. Sir William was likely to be ruined by the Rebellion. The very arrival of the commissioners in Virginia implied that he was an incompetent leader whose mismanagement of the colony had caused the rebellion and, not incidentally, had thereby disrupted the flow of revenue from the heavily taxed tobacco into the royal coffers in England. Nevertheless, the commissioners expected to be welcomed with some ceremony and to have their departure marked with another.

The commissioners brought other men with them, possibly their secretary, Samuel Wiseman, and some of the military and naval officers who had accompanied them from England. As they went to leave in the evening, Frances Berkeley pressed them to make use of the Berkeleys' coach for their walk to the James River where their barge was moored. The commissioners pointed out that there were too many in their party to ride in the coach, whereupon Lady Frances impertinently urged them to take turns. As they left the house, she went to her chamber, while her husband and some members of the Council, watched by other bystanders, walked them to where the coach was waiting. The commissioners did not understand what was happening: no one in the crowd told them that the new postillion was one of the colony's hangmen, but surely the commissioners noticed grins and heard suppressed laughter. In their letter describing the incident, they wrote that the councillors present and the bystanders pretended not to understand the insult they had suffered. Joining that audience, Frances Berkeley, the commissioners subsequently remembered, peered at them through a 'broken quarrel' of the leaded glass of her chamber's casement window 'to observe how the show look'd'. 'But God be thanked' they wrote, 'wee had the grace and good luck, to go all the way [to the river] on foot'. Nevertheless, the coach followed behind them to the river.[42]

Someone must have explained the insult to the commissioners the next day by identifying the postillion as a hangman. Berry, Moryson and Jeffreys

wrote at once to the governor furiously complaining of the 'affront not onely agt. the Reverence due to His Majesties Great Seale, but to us in our private persons as Gentlemen'. They were, they said, 'Resolved to make His Majestie Himself a Judge of this High Indignitye offered to us His Majesties Commissioners'.[43] Further, they told Berkeley that they refused to believe that the colony's hangman was a menial servant in the governor's household, and therefore concluded that the man had been sent for specially to humiliate them. Clearly, the commissioners were persuaded by someone that the postillion was indeed a hangman.

Berkeley denied any knowledge of the identity of the hangman: 'I am as innocent in this as the blessed Angels themselves', he wrote. In the same theological mode, he associated himself with Christ's unmerited suffering in the face of false accusations and, in a political-cum-nostalgic mode, with Charles I, 'brought to his death by accusations he was not in the least manner guilty of'. Then, back to the theological mode, he asserted that his sin was one of 'insuperable ignorance, for I never saw the fellows' [*sic*] face but once before and did not know he was in my house'. Then with a reckless cruelty typical of some Virginians of the time, he proposed to send the African hangman-postillion to them so that they could have him 'Racked, tortured or whipt' to get the truth from him.[44] To Francis Moryson he wrote, 'I know not the man . . . nor can doe it [recognize him] if I saw him with two more of his age'.[45] Curiously, the plot of his play *The Lost Lady* depends on the notion that blackness disguises identity. Milesia, the heroine, disguises herself as Acanthe, 'a Moore'. Only when her disguise, which is her dark colour, is washed off, is she discovered to be the lost lover of Prince Lysicles: 'Bring some water here, she does but swound, soe chafe / her Temples, oh heauens what prodigie is heere /her blackness falls away my Lord looke on this miracle.'[46] In spite of his play, it is hard to believe Berkeley's claim on its face because he was involved in several executions, as well as ceremonies of humiliation during and after the Rebellion: one must assume he knew the executioner at least by sight. The Commissioners certainly thought so: they pointed out that the postillion was the same hangman 'that was every day at Green Spring, and put the Halters about the Prisoners necks in Court, when they were to make (in that posture) their submission for their Crimes at the Barr of Justice'.[47]

The commissioners certainly believed that the African in charge of the Berkeleys' carriage was a hangman. The man was not necessarily a slave, since at this time there were some free Africans in the colony. But the issue arises of whether an African slave, or an African free man, would have been the one responsible for executing Europeans. The institution of slavery in the American colonies before the eighteenth century was 'loose and relatively informal' because slaves were only a small percentage of the population. Until 1680 slavery was 'uncommon, strange, and even exotic in the British mainland colonies'. The great divide that separated the free and the unfree with its

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accompanying hostility only began to open in the eighteenth century.[48] These facts help to explain why an African could have executed Europeans.

County sheriffs were responsible for executions and received five hundred pounds of tobacco for performing the task. However, other Virginia sheriffs may have followed the example of the Northhampton official who forced John Gray, fourteen years old and guilty of fornication, to act as hangman. In the same way Christopher Leyfield of Bermuda, sentenced to die himself, avoided his fate by acting as hangman. Nor was it anomalous for an African to act as executioner. In seventeenth-century Bermuda, three enslaved Africans (one a woman, Black Moll) were forced to act as hangmen to avoid execution for their own capital crimes.[49] Possibly Berkeley had recognized the postillion as the hangman, but only as the commissioners' party left the house. Then he saw the African hangman thrust aside the regular postillion and mount one of the horses. It was impossible at that point for him to make a scene because, as it turns out, it was Frances Berkeley who had made the arrangements for the carriage. In a letter to the commissioners in which she denied that either of them knew who the postillion was, she asserted 'that the Governor gave no order for the Coach', but affirmed that she had.[50]

Frances Berkeley arranged this small drama herself. Its details were carefully contrived. The scene was the great house, the small audience gathered on the steps or around the carriage. The irony of having the commissioners play their parts without realizing what was going on must have given Frances Berkeley special delight: she could not resist watching the denouement from her window. To have the carriage follow after the commissioners was a brilliant arrangement: they were unable to escape her toils and, even without knowing what was happening, they were made to feel ridiculous. And then, after the commissioners wrote to complain, Frances Berkeley publicly denied the Berkeleys' involvement. By thus publicizing her drama, she made it possible for Berkeley loyalists not present at Green Spring to enjoy the performance. Impotent against the Berkeleys, the commissioners described 'the publique Odium and disgrace cast on Us, of wch himself and Lady (not Wee) have been the Divulgers and the whole country ring[s] of'.[51]

Apart from its dramatic structure, the incident had several meanings. The commissioners were to be put in the hangman's charge. In early modern Western Europe, hangmen and executioners (one man often held both roles) were held in great contempt. Their very status involved infamy in the sense of vileness to the touch which, by contagion, could infect others. In 1630, Christopher Leyfield of Bermuda, forced like the black slaves described above to become a hangman, begged the Council 'for his freedome out of this soe infamous an office'. The Council declined to oblige until 'some other hainous malefactor may be put in his roome'.[52]

The commissioners had no recourse in their humiliation. They tried charging the governor and his wife with insulting the king' s seal, which authorized their commission. Frances Berkeley replied that she honoured the royal seal

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in whomsoever's hands she found it. And the price of her insult was so low. The commissioners did not make his Majesty himself aware of what had happened, as they threatened. Instead they wrote to Mr Watkins, who might inform Sir Henry Coventry, secretary of state, who might inform the Privy Council. As for Sir William, he could not avoid his humiliating return to England with the government of his colony left in the hands of Commissioner Jeffreys. He sailed from Virginia without his wife. Subsequently, she wrote to him that the Lieutenant Governor was betting £100 that the governor would not be received by the king, but would be dispatched to the Tower.[53] Herbert Jeffreys' bet came to nothing because the governor of Virginia died soon after landing in England, without setting eyes on 'His Sacred Majesty'.

In the summer and fall of 1677, Lady Frances had her hands full defending both the governor's seizure of rebel property and her own confiscation of rebel corn and tobacco.[54] Writing of her extreme misfortune in losing Sir William and of the ruin of his estate during the rebellion, she seems to have intended returning to live in England: 'to quit this country as fast as I can'. Instead she decided to marry Philip Ludwell, her third husband. As Ludwell's wife she was part of the Green Spring faction which led the opposition to Berkeley's successor, Lt Governor Herbert Jeffreys. Lady Frances died in Virginia in the 1690s.[55]

'The Scandalous Postillion' depended for its meaning on shared cultural understandings held by the English people present who easily read and understood the piece of theatre presented to them. Virginians might live across the Atlantic, but their minds and imaginations were conditioned by English culture. They easily decoded the piece of drama performed for them at Green Spring House.

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Notes

1 Sources for the incident are as follows: United Kingdom, Public Record Office (PRO), Colonial Office (CO), 1/40 and 5/1371. Commissioners to Mr Watkins, May 4, 1677, PRO, CO, 1/40: 130, 131. *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd edn (1945), s.v. 'postilion, postillion': 'One who rides as a guide the near horse of a pair or of one of the pairs attached to a coach or postchaise, esp. a coach or postchaise with a coachman.' It is not clear whether the Berkeleys' coach had a coachman as well as a postillion, or was driven only by a postillion mounted on a horse.

2 For works on Bacon's Rebellion, see Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Governor and the Rebel: A History of Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1957); Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *Torchbearer of the Revolution: The Story of Bacon's Rebellion and its Leader* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1940);

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Warren M. Billings, 'The Causes of Bacon's Rebellion: Some Suggestions', *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography (VMHB*), 78 (1970), 409–12; Stephen Saunders Webb, *1676: The End of American Independence* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1985); Bernard Bailyn, 'Politics and Social Structure in Virginia', in Stanley N. Katz and John M. Murrin (eds), *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development*, 3rd edn (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), pp. 207–30; T. H. Breen, 'A Changing Labor Force and Race Relations in Virginia, 1660–1710', *Journal of Social History*, Fall (1973), 3–25; Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, Norton, 1975).

3 Billings, 'The Causes of Bacon's Rebellion: Some Suggestions', pp. 409–12; J. M. Sosin, *English America and the Restoration Monarchy of Charles II: Transatlantic Politics, Commerce, and Kinship* (Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 1980), p. 2. For an analogy with Berkeley's power in Virginia, see Ronald Hutton's discussion of the extent of the devolution of power in England when Charles II was restored to the throne in *The Restoration*: *a Political and Religious History of England and Wales, 1658–1667* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 183.

4 *The Speech of the Honourable Sir William Berkeley Governour and Capt: Generall of Virginea, to the Burgesses in the Grand Assembly at James Towne on the 17. of March 1651* . . . (Hagh [the Hague], Samuell Broun, 1651), p. 6.

5 Quoted in Sosin, *English America*, p. 154.

6 Sosin, *English America*, pp. 55, 56–7.

7 Warren M. Billings (ed.), *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1606–1689* (Chapel Hill, Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1975), pp. 243, 258–61; *CSPC*, 1669–1674, nos. 1118, 1123; Sosin, *English America,* pp. 3–4; Sister Joan de Lourdes Leonard, 'Operation Checkmate: the Birth and Death of a Virginia Blueprint for Progress 1660–1676', *WMQ*, 3rd ser., 24 (1967), 49– 54. Leonard sees Berkeley's visit as a success.

8 William L. Shea, *The Virginia Militia in the Seventeenth Century* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1983), pp. 88–96.

9 *CSPC*, *1669–1674*, no. 769; Sosin, *English America*, pp. 157–9. The Lord Culpeper involved here was not Frances Berkeley's father, but a cousin. See David A. H. Cleggett, *A History of Leeds Castle and Its Families* (Leeds Castle Foundation, 1992), p. 245, for a version of the Culpeper family tree.

10 Washburn, *Governor and Rebel,* pp. 17–18, *American National Biography*, s.v. 'Bacon, Nathaniel'.

11 Washburn, *Governor and Rebel,* p. 36.

12 Birth record, Hollingbourne Parish, Kent, U.K., microfilm held by the Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, England; Edward T. James (ed.), *Notable American Women 1607–1950* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1971) s.v. 'Berkeley, Lady Frances', by Jane D. Carson. Unfortunately, not much direct evidence about Frances Berkeley survives. There is a small cache of her letters at the Centre for Kentish Studies, and another at the North Yorkshire County Record Office, Northallerton.

13 Berkeley to Arlington, in W. Noel Sainsbury (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and the West Indies (CSPC)*, *1669–74*, no. 63; Fairfax Harrison,

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'The Proprietors of the Northern Neck: Chapters of Culpeper Genealogy', *VMHB*. 33 (1925), 343–8.

14 John W. Raimo, *Biographical Directory of American Colonial and Revolutionary Governors: 1607–1789* (Westport, CT, Meckler Books, 1980), p. 284.

15 William Waller Hening (ed.), *Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia,* 13 vols, reprint (Charlottesville, Jamestown Foundation by the University Press of Virginia, 1969), II, 559. Warren Billings argues that Berkeley's statements about his wife were conventional expressions derived from law books. However, neither the 1622 edition of the standard book which contains forms for wills, nor the 1632 one contain these expressions. See Warren M. Billings, 'Sir William Berkeley – Portrait by Fischer: A Critique', *WMQ*, 3rd ser., 48 (1991), 603–4; Raimo, *Biographical Directory*, p. 284; William West, comp., *The First Part of Symboleography* (London, Companie of Stationers, 1622), section 642; William West, comp., *The First Part of Symboleography* (London, Assignes of John More Esq., 1632), section 642.

16 Statement of Frances Berkeley, n.d., Longleat, Marquess of Bath, Coventry Papers, vol. 77, 41. Microfilm held by the British Library.

17 John Harold Sprinkle Jr.'s research indicates that, on the basis of inventories of rebels' estates conducted at the behest of the Commissioners between May and June, 1677, Bacon's estate was a creditor to the extent of 5,767 lbs of tobacco. However, Charles M. Andrews notes that after Bacon died, a suit to recover mortgaged estates was filed against his estate in the English courts. See Sprinkle, 'Loyalists and Baconians: the Participants in Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia, 1676–1677' (Ph.D. dissertation, The College of William and Mary, 1992), p. 89; Charles M. Andrews (ed.), *Narratives of the Insurrections 1675–1690* (New York, Barnes and Noble, 1915), p. 109, n. 1.

18 Susan Westbury, 'Women in Bacon's Rebellion', in Virginia Bernhard, Betty Brandon, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Theda Perdue (eds), *Southern Women: Histories and Identities* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1992), p. 38.

19 Thanks to Warren M. Billings for help decipering the signatures and identifying James Crews and John Clough. Private communication, 2.5.99.

20 *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1996), pp. 140–9.

21 For a description of the model, see N. H. Keeble, comp. and ed., *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-Century Woman : A Reader* (London and New York, Routledge, 1994).

22 Lawrence Stone, quoted in Margaret J. M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife : Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 4.

23 Linda Pollock, '"Teach Her to Live Under Obedience": The Making of Women in the Upper Ranks of Early Modern England', *Continuity and Change*, 4 (1989), 231–58; Linda Lee Sturtz, '"Madam & Co.": Women, Property, and Power in Colonial Virginia' (Ph.D. dissertation, Washington University, 1995), pp. 510, 564; *VMHB*, 9 (1901), 108; 33 (1925), 187.

24 Ezell, *Patriarch's Wife*, pp. 17–20; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, pp. 164–6; Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, 'The Planter's Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland', *WMQ*, 3rd ser.,

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34 (1977), 546–7, 550–1, 555.

25 N. H. Keeble, 'Obedient Subjects? The Loyal Self in Some Later Seventeenth-century Royalist Women's Memoirs', in Gerald MacLean (ed.), *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration: Literature, Drama, History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 205–7, 211.

26 Frances Berkeley's voyage is unlikely to have been as quick as the *Content*'s 20 days in 1682, but would likely have been close to the six and a half weeks averaged by the tobacco ships convoyed between 1676 and 1715. See Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic 1675—1740* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 50–1. In England the secretaries of state kept intelligence agents at the ports – customs officers and the like – who reported weekly on local weather, ships' arrivals and any news sailors and passengers offered. Frances Berkeley's arrival was not noted by any of the port intelligence officers. One may conjecture the time of her arrival on the basis of the information about Virginia's troubles that the intelligence officers picked up. She is most likely to have travelled on a ship whose captain had the latest news and told it from the Berkeleys' point of view. Richard Watts to [Secretary Sir Joseph Williamson], Deal, 10 August 1676, *CSPD, Charles II*, March 1–February 28, 1676–1677, pp. 271–2. Compare with the news gathered from another Virginia ship, *ibid*., p. 300; Peter Fraser, *The Intelligence of the Secretaries of State and their Monopoly of Licensed News, 1660–1688* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp. 1, 4, 29, 30.

27 Phillip Ludwell to Most Honoured Maddam [Frances Berkeley], 5 June 1676, Coventry Papers, vol. LXXVII,117–119.

28 Giles Bland to Secretary Sir Joseph Williamson; *CSPC (1675–1676)* , no. 906; 'The Virginians' plea . . . . , ' *ibid.*, no. 962.

29 Phillip Ludwell to [Secretary Sir Joseph Williamson], June 28th, 1676, *CSPC*, 1675–1676, no. 964. Noted as received in England on 3 September 1676.

30 'A True Narrative of the Late Rebellion in Virginia, by the Royal Commissioners, 1677', in Charles M. Andrews (ed.), *Narratives of the Insurrections: 1675–1690* (New York, Barnes and Noble Inc., 1915), p. 116. Another narrative account written by Thomas Mathew,who was present at the scene as the commissioners were not, confirms only that Berkeley asked Bacon to shoot him. See Thomas Mathew, 'The Beginning, Progress, and Conclusion of Bacon's Rebellion, 1675–1676, *ibid*., p. 29.

31 Ronald Broude, 'Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 28 (1975), pp. 42, 44, 52. See also Markku Peltonen, 'Francis Bacon, the earl of Northampton, and the Jacobean anti-duelling campaign', *The Historical Journal*, 44, no.1 (2001), pp. 1–28.

32 The King to Sir William Berkeley, 5 November 1676, *CSPC*, 1675–1676, no. 1109.

33 The King's Commission to Herbert Jeffreys, Sir John Berry, and Francis Moryson, 3 October 1676, *CSPC*, 1675–1676, no. 1050.

34 Frances Berkeley to My Dear Lady, 30 November; Petition of Frances Berkeley 'To the Kings Most Excellent Majesty . . .', n.d. [30 November 1676], Coventry Papers, vol. 77, 307, 308.

35 Sir William Berkeley, *The Lost Lady* (Oxford, David Stanford at the University Printing House for The Malone Society, 1987).

36 R. C. Bald, 'Sir William Berkeley's *The Lost Lady*', *The Library*, 4th series, 17 (1936–37), 404. Few details about these performances survive. The records of Sir

Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, indicate only when and where the second performance at court took place. See Joseph Quincy Adams (ed.), *The Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert* (New Haven, Yale P.U.P., 1917), p. 76. Nor is there a record of the costs of the court performances in *The Dramatic Records in the Declared Accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber, 1558–1642* in the Malone Society, *Collections*, vol. VI, 1961 (1962). For descriptions of the Blackfriars Theatre and the Cockpit-in-Court, see G. E. Bentley, *Theatres* , vol. VI, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1941–68) , 4–45; 268–9.

37 Gerald MacLean, 'Literature, Culture and Society in Restoration England', in Gerald McLean (ed.), *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 6.

38 Andrew R. Walking, 'Politics and the Restoration Masque: The Case of *Dido and Aeneus*', in MacLean, *Culture and Society*, p. 52.

39 John Patrick Montano, 'The Quest for Consensus: The Lord Mayor's Day Shows in the 1670s', MacLean, *Culture and Society*, pp. 35–7.

40 Warren M. Billings, 'Imagining Green Spring House', *Virginia Cavalcade*, 44 (1994), 84–95. For Soane's drawing of the mansion in 1683, see page 89; for Latrobe's painting of it, see page 93. The 1683 drawing is a crude one, showing neither windows nor doors. Thomas Tileston Waterman and John A. Barrows, *Domestic Colonial Architecture of Tidewater Virginia* (New York, Dover Publications, Inc. 1969), p. 13; Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *The Virginia Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, *The Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe* (New Haven, Yale University Press for the Maryland Historical Society, 1976), I, 181–2.

41 Herbert Jeffreys, John Berry, Francis Moryson to the Governor Sir William Berkeley, 23 April 1677, CO 1/40, 61.

42 Commissioners to Mr. Watkins, 4 May 1677, CO, 1/40, 130, 131.

43 Herbert Jeffreys, John Berry, Francis Moryson to Sir William Berkeley, 23 April 1677, CO 1/40, 61.

44 The Governor to the Commissioners, 23 April 1677, CO 5/1371, 214. Compare Berkeley's words with the Reverend Samuel Gray's horrific treatment of his slave, Jack, in Darrett Rutman and Anita Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650–1750* (New York, Norton, 1984), p. 171.

45 The Governor to Colonel Moryson, 25 April 1677, CO 5/1371, 112; The Governor to Colonel Moryson, 25 April 1677, CO. 1/40, page not numbered.

46 Berkeley, *The Lost Lady*, p. 71.

47 Thomas Mathews, a Virginia planter, wrote that William Pressley, a member of the Virginia Assembly which met at Green Spring in February 1677, told him that so many men were executed that the Assembly petitioned the Governor to stop. 'Thomas Mathew's Narrative', in Andrews, *Narratives*, p. 39. In his own list of those executed, Berkeley admitted to a total of thirteen, including three at Green Spring. 'The names and short characters . . . from the governor's own hand', [June 1677?], *CSPC (1677–80*), 303. Commissioners to Mr. Watkins, 4 May 1677, CO 1/40, 130.

48 Jon Butler, *Becoming America: the Revolution before 1776* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 36, 37.

49 Philip Alexander Bruce, *Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century*, 2 vols (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), I, 617; J. H. Lefroy, *Memorials of the Discovery and Early Settlement of the Bermudas or Somers Islands*

1515–1685, 2 vols, reprinted ed. (n.p., Bermuda Government Library, 1932), II, 25, II, 35, II, 218, II, 345. I am indebted to Virginia Bernhard for this source.

50 Frances Berkeley to the Commissioners, 23 April 1677, CO 1/40, 63.

51 Commissioners to Mr Watkins, 4 May 1677, CO 1/40, 130.

52 Petrus Cornelis Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering: Executions and the Evolution of Repression: From a Preindustrial Metropolis to the European Experience* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 14, 15, 18; Lefroy, *Memorials*, II, 510–11.

53 F. Berkeley to 'My dear, dear Sir.' 9 August 1677. *Historical Manuscripts Commission,* Sixth Report, part 1 London, 1877, p. 465. The original of this letter has been lost; private communication from D. A. H. Cleggett, archivist and historian, Leeds Castle Foundation, 4/9/95.

54 Wilcomb E. Washburn, 'The Humble Petition of Sarah Drummond', *WMQ*, 3rd ser., 13 (July, 1956), 371, n. 58; Hening, *Statutes*, II, 558. Hening paraphrases the case brought against Frances Berkeley by Mrs Drummond.

55 Frances Berkeley to Mr Obstrupus Danby, 26 January 1678. Cunliffe Lister Muniments, North Yorkshire County Record Office, Northallerton, Yorkshire, U.K.; *Notable American Women: 1607–1950*, s.v. 'Berkeley, Lady Frances'; Warren M. Billings, 'Berkeley and Effingham: Who Cares?', *VMHB*, 97, no.1 (1989), 39–40.

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