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# Anne Rutherford's "Quaker Women Passing: Deathbed as Pulpit in the Memoirs of Susanna Lightfoot" and "Martha C. Thomas" - Book Review

Elaine Hobby

*Loughborough University, England*

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William Penn used Native American, not biblical, metaphors when he described the Conestoga Indians and the European settlers in Pennsylvania as sharing a single heart and head. Joanne Pope Melish, discussing white Americans' fascination with and fear of 'white negroes', mentions in passing the part played by Quaker businessman and anti-slavery advocate Moses Brown in the furore surrounding Henry Moss, an American man of African descent whose dark skin turned white in early middle age. None of these incidents is pursued very far by the authors, whose central concerns are not with Quaker studies; but there are archival details and references to related secondary material.

It is fortunate for Quaker studies, then, that two of the most interesting essays in the volume are also those that most squarely address matters of interest to the history of Friends. Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Lise Tarter both discuss religious conversion, Lindman focusing on eighteenth-century Baptists, Tarter on seventeenth-century Quakers. The account Lindman gives of the experiences of potential Baptist converts, who 'wept "bitter tears", shook uncontrollably, flailed their limbs, ... "tremble[d] as if in a fit of the ague"' resonates with the same intense inter-relationship of body and spirit that characterised Tarter's Quakers during conviction, 'base quaking sluts' who were subsequently punished with stripping and whipping. Part of Tarter's theoretical framework is unhelpful, I think: Kristeva's 'semiotic realm' of polymorphous erotogenic zones, where infantile drives are at play, is not the state described by Dorothy White in the 1659 pamphlets that Tarter alludes to. White's prophecy concerns the feared return of kingly power, a much more specific and material problem than Kristeva's abstract 'symbolic order'. Despite the distraction provided by the intrusion of this twentieth-century model, though, Tarter makes a convincing case for the need to reinstate 'the quaking body of Friends' at the centre of early Quaker history. As Lindman explains, 'religious faith and practice occurred in the body': present-day analyses of both spirit and body distort early-modern culture if they try to separate one from the other. *A Centre of Wonders* provides much stimulation, and many examples of careful scholarship, to anyone interested in the history of bodies.

Elaine Hobby  
Loughborough University, England.

*Quaker Women Passing: Deathbed as Pulpit in the Memoirs of Susanna Lightfoot (1720-1781) and Martha C. Thomas (1805-1836)*, intro. Anne Rutherford (Cambridge, MA: Rhwymbooks, 1999), pp. x + 74. ISBN: 1-889298- 33-6 (paperback) \$10.95.

Anne Rutherford's brief introduction to these biographical accounts of an eighteenth- and a nineteenth-century woman Friend explains that Rhwymbooks is committed to bringing back into print life-writings by Quaker ministers that have long been unavailable. The pairing chosen here encourages the hope that their selection of texts will be diverse.

*An Account of the Religious Experience and Some of the Trials of that Faithful Servant and Minister of the Gospel, Susanna Lightfoot* (1844) follows Susanna Lightfoot from her early life in Ireland in the 1740s when, as a young mother of twins, she kept a huckster's shop to sell goods produced by her linen-weaver husband, to her emigration to Pennsylvania in 1764 with her second husband. From the age of 17 until her death, we are told, she travelled and preached widely. In a tradition that goes back to Quakers' first deathbed narratives in the 1670s and 1680s, her story is told in a series of voices: most of the description of her sufferings in the three-months' long illness that ended her life is provided by Thomas Lightfoot, her second husband, and appears to have been reassembled by him, or by an editor, from a journal he kept at the time. In addition, to this, though, an unnamed Friend tells the story of her early life, recording the financial help provided to Susanna by other Irish Quakers, providing the implicit suggestion that her first husband was more a hindrance than a help to her; and Susanna's own voice is recorded, or recalled, as she urges her friend Nancy Emlen not to allow great sums of money to be wasted on her laying-out and funeral. This pamphlet ends with brief anecdotes about Pennsylvania Friends (William Penn and the otherwise unknown William Porter) not associated with Susanna Lightfoot, both offered to the reader, as is Susanna's story itself, as examples of moral behaviour. This goal has of course acted as a filter on what the text includes and excludes, but there is still much here about Quaker community and economic networks, about the survival of Irish connections in the New World, and about the process of holy dying.

The *Memoir* (1837) of Martha C. Thomas that contributes the second pamphlet in *Quaker Women Passing* indicates a religious community that could hardly be more different. This nineteenth-century wife of a Baltimore doctor is praised by the anonymous author of her biography for her 'unusual timidity and diffidence'. What follows this opening gambit, though, is tantalising. The moral imperative of the tale reveals the expected qualities of a respectable Baltimore Quaker in the early nineteenth century: she insists on the importance of plainness of dress; she is at first afraid to go to sea for her health, but once on board ship her faith in God makes her fearless in a storm; she visits grand cities in Europe, and laments the wastefulness of wealth. At the same time, she is seen travelling widely for the sake of her health, visiting not only England, Ireland and France, but also Florida and the Keys. The great majority of her story is told by an unnamed author who is not puzzled at all by features of her tale that have more in common with early Baptist conversion narratives than they do with the written accounts of earlier Friends: Martha Thomas is grief-stricken in her inability to believe that her redeemer will save her, full of doubt about the validity of her conversion, fearful that she is one of the reprobate and cannot hope for heaven. When her words are quoted, they call a Friend to the foot of the Cross, or consist solely of the text of hymns. The reader is left wanting to know more about the purpose behind the writing and publishing of this text: how typical of the beliefs of early-nineteenth-century American Quakers is this?

The frustration of the Rhwymbooks project is the lack of information available for readers to begin to answer these questions. No information is given about the originals of these pamphlets, other than their place and date of publication. The appearance of these texts should prompt research. It would have been helpful if the publishers had, at the least, indicated where the originals can be found, whether they have changed such features as spelling and punctuation, and whether any other copies or editions of these texts are known.

Elaine Hobby  
Loughborough University, England.