

2023

Towards a Literary History of Quaker Writing in the Atlantic World

Jay David Miller

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/eng_fac



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Toward a Literary History of Quaker Writing in the Atlantic World

Quakerism in the Atlantic World, 1690–1830

ROBYNNE ROGERS HEALEY, EDITOR

Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021

278 pp.

Quakers, Christ, and the Enlightenment

MADELEINE PENNINGTON

Oxford University Press, 2021

242 pp.

Quakers in the British Atlantic World, c. 1660–1800

ESTHER SAHLE

Boydell Press, 2021

206 pp.

Among eighteenth-century Quaker writers, John Woolman was idiosyncratic, as illustrated by the fact that in his journal he recorded an account of his own death. Needless to say, this was not usually done. Instead, it was conventional for posthumously published Quaker journals to include not only an autobiographical narrative of spiritual development but also additional material written by qualified Friends offering further testimony and giving details about how and when the author died. The first printing of Woolman's journal in his posthumous *Works* (1774) is accompanied by such material about his 1772 death in York, England, but this was not the mortification of which he wrote. Rather, at the end of Woolman's journal in an entry written just over a month before he would die of smallpox, he recollected how, back on his farm in Mount Holly, New Jersey, "in a time of sickness with the pleurisy a little upward of two years and a half ago, I was brought so near to the gates of death that I forgot my name" (185).¹

Perplexed, Woolman felt "desirous to know who I was." He then saw "a mass of a dull gloomy colour . . . and was informed that this mass was

human beings in as great misery as they could be and live, and that I was mixed in with them and henceforth might not consider myself as a distinct or separate being” (185). Hours after entering this state, Woolman heard what sounded like an angel in heaven saying, “*John Woolman is dead*,” and this caused him to remember, “I was once John Woolman, and being assured that I was alive in body, I greatly wondered what that heavenly voice could mean” (186). He was then “carried in spirit to the mines, where poor oppressed people were digging rich treasures for those called Christians” (186). Such Christian hypocrisy and the suffering it caused others grieved Woolman, and upon waking the next morning he remained “very desirous to get so deep that I might understand this mystery” of what the angel had said and what he had seen in his vision (186).

Lying in his sickbed, contemplating the angel’s words, Woolman “felt divine power prepare my mouth that I could speak,” and the words of Galatians 2:20 came to his lips: “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” The mystery was now clear to the Quaker mystic and reformer, who realized that “*John Woolman is dead* meant no more than the death of my own will” (186). Regarding the element of the vision occurring at the mines, Woolman understood this to confirm the injustice of the silver extraction industry, and he subsequently began to refuse food and drink offered via silver vessels in the homes of other Quakers.

What is to be made of this vision? Woolman himself waited years before finally deciding to write about his crucified will, as ailing health made true passage through the gates of death imminent. To frame the question more generally toward the purposes of this essay, what resources do we have for understanding moments such as this in Quaker literary history? Using Woolman to raise this question carries risk because his idiosyncrasies have often caused him to be viewed as an exemplary prophetic figure when in fact, as recent scholarship has shown, he was very much enmeshed in the cultures of eighteenth-century Quakerism and the British Atlantic world.² But it remains a fitting point of departure because the strangeness of his vision conveys a larger truth about Quaker literary history in early America: we have not yet begun to comprehend it.

It may seem bold to say this, but I believe a moment’s reflection will prove my point. Suppose a student asked you to recommend the best recent

overview of Quaker literature in early America or the Atlantic world. What book would you suggest? How many come to mind? I am not talking about books on early American Quaker history (there are several), or individual articles and chapters about Quaker literature (there are quite a few), but monographs that could be characterized as literary history or criticism that give sustained attention to Quaker writing in North America from introduction to conclusion. My answer to this hypothetical student? No such overview exists. If I had to pick, I would choose Brycchan Carey's *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery, 1657–1761* (Yale UP, 2012), a book notable for its Atlantic scope, relatively longue durée, and use of both literary and historical methods. But I would add the qualification that it is primarily focused on the development of Quaker antislavery rhetoric, and not the wider literary production and culture of Friends. Carey's book would certainly help this student begin to make sense of something like Woolman's vision, but further reading would be required.

This, of course, is always the case, and the suggested further reading could be quite rich, as there *is* significant work being done on Quaker literary history in early America. Two recent winners of the *Early American Literature* Book Prize for first books, Caroline Wigginton and Lindsay DiCuirci, both dedicate chapters to insightful analyses of the manuscript culture of eighteenth-century Quaker women and the reception history of Quaker literature in the early nineteenth century, respectively. A chapter in Lisa Brooks's *Our Beloved Kin* (Yale UP, 2019), winner of the *Early American Literature* Book Prize for a second or subsequent book, is not focused on Quaker literary history per se, but its argument hinges on a manuscript written by the Quaker and deputy governor of Rhode Island John Easton to offer a new history of King Phillip's War.³ Along with Brooks, Marie Balsley Taylor's contribution to the edited volume *Quakers and Native Americans* (Brill, 2018) shows the fruitfulness of examining Quaker texts from a Native American and Indigenous Studies perspective. Research on Quaker women in the Atlantic world continues apace with another edited volume, *New Critical Studies on Early Quaker Women, 1650–1800* (Oxford UP, 2018), and an essay from Ean High updating a long-standing field. Scholarly editions of understudied Quaker texts are being published as well, in the form of *The Writings of Elizabeth Webb* (Pennsylvania State UP, 2019) and *The Francis Daniel Pastorius Reader* (Pennsylvania State UP,

2019). My contention, therefore, is not that research on Quaker literature is absent from early American literary studies. I am instead observing that while good work is being done, it has yet to be integrated into monographs focusing exclusively on Quaker literary history. Monographs such as these are sorely needed for students and researchers to move the field—and early American literary studies generally—forward in a substantive way.

None of the books under review here remedy the lack of monographs on Quaker literature in early America that I have identified as a problem, nor should this be expected of them. As primarily historical works, they do not engage directly with questions of literary criticism and history, but they do evidence the continued growth the field of Quaker studies has experienced in the past decade or so, growth that scholars of early American literature are well positioned to draw on and contribute to.⁴ Taken together these studies provide much of the theological, socioeconomic, and political background required for understanding John Woolman and the broader tradition to which he and many other Quaker writers in early America belonged. The purpose of each book is distinct, but they all share in trends that have been common in recent Quaker studies publications: thinking about Quakerism in the context of the Atlantic world, and reconceiving the ways the movement has been previously periodized.

While the concept of a “Quaker Atlantic” was first formulated by Frederick B. Tolles in *Quakers and the Atlantic Culture* (Macmillan, 1960) and put to good use by Rebecca Larson in *Daughters of Light* (Knopf, 1999) and Jonathan Beecher Field in a chapter of *Errands into the Metropolis* (Dartmouth College P, 2009), only of late has it become the primary paradigm for the study of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Quakerism, as several recent publications attest.⁵ This wider geographic framework has made the significance of Quakerism in the Americas for Quakerism in Britain and Ireland clearer, forcing scholars to rethink classic periodizations. For example, William Braithwaite’s foundational works divided early Quaker “beginnings” from a “second period” at the time of the Restoration in 1660 and went up to around 1700, suggesting an abrupt transition from a more radical early movement to a more cautious and institutional later one. But all three books under consideration here find more connections between either early Friends and later generations or between the seventeenth century and the eighteenth. In *Quakers, Christ, and the Enlightenment*, Madeleine Pennington argues persuasively for theological continuity amid

change from the time of George Fox's initial preaching up to the Keithian schism, which began in Pennsylvania during the 1690s. While Esther Sahle takes the Restoration as an approximate point of departure in *Quakers in the British Atlantic World, c. 1660–1800*, her study of Friends merchants and business ethics through the end of the eighteenth century argues that the most significant changes to Quakerism took place in the later century rather than the earlier one. The most ambitious temporal framework for the study of Quakers in the period is found in the “long eighteenth century” approach of *Quakerism in the Atlantic World, 1690–1830*, edited by Robynne Rogers Healey. Like Pennington's book, Healey's collection appreciates the importance of the 1690s; like Sahle's, it explores how matters of the seventeenth century endured and transformed well into the eighteenth and even the nineteenth.

Along with taking up Atlantic frameworks and capacious periodizations, these books also engage, to varying degrees, a conceptual line of inquiry pursued in Quaker studies of late: a reassessment of what has come to be known as “quietism.” Dovetailing with Braithwaite's division of early Quaker history into radical beginnings and a more institutional second period, the designation of much of eighteenth-century Quakerism as quietist has undergirded a declension narrative about Friends most famously articulated by Rufus Jones. In Jones's characterization, Quaker quietism stressed that the only way to encounter God was self-abnegation: “the silence of all flesh, the suppression of all strain and effort, the slowing down of all the mechanism of action, [and] the hushing of all the faculties of thought . . . as the true preparation for receiving the divine Word” (63). For Jones, such self-abnegation was negative, grounded in a fundamental distrust of human nature. Recent scholarship, however, has called this negative construal of Quaker quietism into question, noting, contra Jones, that the intense inwardness of eighteenth-century Quakerism coincided not with a complete withdrawal from human society but with renewed social engagement.⁶ This more paradoxical interpretation of Quaker quietism makes sense of the two main features of John Woolman's vision introduced at the outset of this essay: the simultaneous death of his will and heightened social concern for the suffering and the exploited.

Woolman describes his vision as an experience of being “crucified with Christ” (186). While this reflects a broadly Christian imagination, the theological ground covered by Pennington in *Quakers, Christ, and the*

Enlightenment makes clear the distinctly Quaker character of what Woolman was describing, suggesting his continuity with the message of early Friends while explaining how and why that message changed over time. That message, Pennington stresses, was a Christological one. Eschewing the clichéd—albeit true—observation that Quakerism emerged in England during a time of great upheaval, variations of which can be found in almost every account of the early Quaker movement, Pennington opens her study with the claim that “in the late 1640s and early 1650s, the first Quakers began to gather in the North of England, professing their belief in the immanent presence of Christ dwelling in the individual” (xiii). This relentless conviction of Christ’s immanence is what set early Quakerism apart and, according to Pennington, what drove the development of the movement for half a century. By focusing on theology, Pennington seeks to correct sociopolitical analyses of change in Quakerism that lend themselves to declension narratives about Friends trading radicalism for social respectability. Instead, Pennington contends that Quakerism changed as part of a “quest for ‘theological reputation’” that sought to explain their unique emphasis on the immanence of Christ to a broader Christian milieu (45).

This theological focus is welcome. Quaker theology is not as well understood or well studied as, say, the theology of Puritanism, for reasons astutely identified by Pennington.⁷ On the one hand, given that many scholars working on Quakerism are themselves Friends who sometimes harbor “principled suspicion of theology, as a human rationalization of what is ultimately beyond words,” the theological character of early Quaker writers is often downplayed (xvi). On the other hand, while the reticence of Quaker scholars to elucidate Quaker theology is ironic, this is not the sole reason this dimension of Quakerism has been understudied. In response to the confessional bias of much research on Friends, non-Quaker scholars have tended to stress the political and social dimensions of the movement at the expense of theology in ways that continue to perpetuate a declension narrative. Whether in the Marxist tradition of Christopher Hill and Barry Reay, who viewed Quakers as compromised radicals, or the Weberian tradition used by H. Richard Niebuhr to tell a story about the routinization of charisma from dynamic sect to staid church, Pennington argues that the theological core of the movement has been overlooked (xvii–xix). More broadly, she claims the conventional sociopolitical story of Quaker declension in the seventeenth century is part of a much wider

failure in intellectual history to engage with the thought of nonconformist Christians. This may be because scholars have taken at face value nonconformist self-presentation as figures of “rural dissent” who “contrasted their own humble piety with the aloof intellectualism of the university-educated established ministry” (xx). But the Reformation era, as Pennington rightly notes, set in motion “fundamental reconfigurations of [Christ’s] nature and relationship with the created world” that raised serious intellectual questions for every group of Christians, whether magisterial or nonconformist (xxvi). She goes on to argue that attending to the development of Quaker Christology throws into relief not just the animating energy within Quakerism but “the neglected importance of Christological themes in the broader intellectual life of the period” (xxviii).

The early Quaker encounter with Christ as immanent, often described as an experience of the Light within, was undoubtedly radical and had significant consequences.⁸ According to Pennington, “Christ himself was present; he dwelt within the individual as the agent and enabler of righteous action, and the believer could therefore assume perfection insofar as they had subsumed their own identity under Christ” (9). Elsewhere she uses the language of “extinguishing the self and leaving only Christ as agent,” or “offering the complete sacrifice of one’s own identity to the measure of Christ within” (11, 12). This early Quaker experience of Christ’s immanence accords with Woolman’s vision about the death of his own will. Likewise, Woolman’s report that “divine power prepare[d] my mouth that I could speak” tracks with early Quaker ideas about language, for if Christ fully inhabited the believer, then a person’s language might be purified from the fallen language of Babel into a divine language in which “‘nature’ and ‘name’ were linked” (12). Here the relevance of early Quaker Christology to literary scholars comes into view, as Pennington points out how “metaphor was not merely a tool of expression” but the very medium through which the collapse of distinctions between God and self, word and thing was achieved (12).

This radical experience of unity with God in the early Quaker movement did not last. While Quakers continued to affirm that complete surrender to the immanent Christ within was possible, they also began to recognize that the putative divine inspiration claimed by certain individuals could be false (18). By the end of the seventeenth century, “Christ was now conceived as the believer’s most intimate companion rather than

eclipsing their agency altogether” (23). Pennington attributes this shift to a strengthening of group identity through new institutions and a loss of individual prophetic vocation. The former resulted from a process of what Richard C. Allen has aptly described as “Foxian centralization,” the creation under George Fox’s leadership of a hierarchical structure of monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings (92, 94), and the formation of a shared literary culture overseen by the publication committee known as the Second Day Morning Meeting, established in 1673. Pennington characterizes the loss of prophetic vocation as a movement away from prophecy toward moral purity—and here we can begin to see the makings of eighteenth-century Quaker quietism (41). In the remainder of her book, Pennington argues that this shift toward quietism was part of a Quaker attempt to develop their theological reputation among other Christians while maintaining their distinct emphasis on Christ’s immanence.

The six chapters Pennington dedicates to tracing the Christologically inflected transformation in Quakerism are closely argued and deeply contextualized within seventeenth-century intellectual history, and I can offer only the broadest outline of her argument. In the 1650s, the Quaker emphasis on the immanent presence of Christ was so extreme as to create suspicion that the movement disavowed the historical, incarnate Jesus and focused on Christ as solely spiritual. By the 1660s Quakers began to affirm that they were in accord with conventional Christian belief about Jesus’s death and resurrection, but they offered little evidence of trying to reconcile these beliefs with their unique emphasis on immanence. The 1670s were a significant time of theological innovation for Quakers, as they began to explain that the Light within was derivative from Christ rather than his full expression, a tendency embodied in Robert Barclay’s systematic treatise on Quaker theology, *An Apology for True Christian Divinity* (1678). Barclay’s title illustrates one of Pennington’s central points: that Quakers, despite their radicalism, wanted to be understood as Christians and as the true church, thus their quest for theological reputation. Even Barclay, however, was unsuccessful in resolving the metaphysical problems Quakers faced in trying to describe the relationship between Christ’s historical body, his immanent spirit, and the Light within. To return to matters of language raised above, Friends, Pennington observes, possessed “a strong preference for metaphorical reasoning” rather than careful metaphysical arguments (168).

This aversion to metaphysics came to a head during the Keithian schism of the 1690s, which began in Pennsylvania but soon crossed the Atlantic. Aside from the general contours of early Quakerism, the Keithian schism is likely the event in Pennington's book with which early Americanists will be most familiar. In the memorable words of Gary Nash, "So combustible was the atmosphere in Pennsylvania in 1692 that it took only the spark of a single Quaker metaphysician to spread the flames of civil controversy to the religious sphere" (144). Whereas Nash offered a sociopolitical interpretation of the conflict, Pennington unsurprisingly emphasizes theological subtleties, calling the schism "a coming of age for the Quaker movement" (185). In essence, Keith, an associate of Barclay, grew dissatisfied with Quakerism's persistent confidence in the metaphor of the Light within and claimed that a more exclusive focus on the historical, incarnate Jesus was needed. In response, Quakers attempted to affirm their belief in the incarnation while also maintaining that the Light within was sufficient for salvation. This was not enough for Keith, who eventually became an Anglican priest, while Quakerism settled, for the time being, into their unique counterpoise of affirming conventional Christian beliefs while also giving special emphasis to Christ's immanence.

Quakers, Christ, and the Enlightenment is probably the best study to date of Quaker intellectual history in the seventeenth century. For those working on projects related to the theology of Quakerism, it will be invaluable. While Pennington's polemic against sociopolitical interpretations of Quaker change is not meant to exclude politics and society from her analysis, I did find myself wanting further reflection on the convergence of a more orthodox Christology with more robust colonial undertakings by Friends in North America. Barclay and Keith, for examples, were close associates of William Penn not just theologically but also socially and economically, as they both received posts as colonial administrators in East Jersey. Pennington's study helps us to understand the theological energy that animated Quakerism, but returning to the questions raised by Woolman's vision, we need to understand not only Quaker Christology but also how this Christology related to colonial American politics and economics.⁹

As a work of economic history, Esther Sahlé's *Quakers in the British Atlantic World, c. 1660–1800* provides ample sociopolitical information that complements Pennington's work in interesting ways. Just as Pennington contests the predominance of declension narratives about seventeenth- and

eighteenth-century Quakerism, Sahle questions the common view that Quaker merchants in the Atlantic world were successful due to a unique convergence of business ethics, discipline, and endogamous marriage (21). This view, Sahle shows in her initial chapters, has not been substantiated as much as asserted, and the goal of her study is to take an empirical approach to meeting records and the papers of Quaker merchants to develop a more dynamic picture of how Friends approached business during her chosen period. She too tells a story of institutional change, in this case change marked by the efforts of reformers like Woolman who would ultimately exert more disciplinary power over merchants than had been previously done.

While Sahle writes briefly about the earliest Quakers, her account truly begins in the 1660s, when Foxian centralization began to provide a framework for organizing far-flung Friends across the Atlantic world, especially in the Caribbean (28). As in Pennington's study, the 1690s are important not for theological reasons but because this is when merchants began to make up a larger portion of the transatlantic Quaker community. According to Sahle's research on the occupations of Quaker bridegrooms, "the share of merchants increased from less than 0.5 percent in the 1660s to 6.5 percent by the mid-eighteenth century, from when it stagnated" (34-35). The reasons for this stagnation in the mid-eighteenth century will be discussed shortly, but the immediate point to be made is that the growth of Quaker involvement in commerce meant full participation in the plantation economy, which depended on the enslavement of Africans. Whether it was London Friends invested in the trade in enslaved persons and the goods their enslaved labor produced, or Friends in Barbados, Jamaica, and Philadelphia who personally enslaved Africans themselves, what should be obvious to any student of Quakerism still cannot be stressed enough: Quakers were willing participants in the slave economy long before they began to take the antislavery stances for which they are better remembered in the broader public imagination.¹⁰ Given the degree to which Quaker merchants were involved in profiting from enslavement just as any other British Christians would have been in the seventeenth century and much of the eighteenth, it is no surprise that Sahle finds "no sign that Friends possessed a distinctive [business] ethic" (75).

If the success and reputation of Quaker merchants cannot be attributed to their ethics, Sahle suggests the difference may have been the disciplinary

oversight of Quaker institutions. In what I found to be one of the strongest chapters of the book, Sahle scrutinizes the minutes of monthly meetings in both London and Philadelphia to show how Quaker meetings increasingly monitored and disciplined their members. Sahle shows that from the seventeenth century through the eighteenth, both the extent and content of Quaker minutes changes, skewing heavily toward disciplinary actions against Quaker merchants. In her study of London and Philadelphia minutes from the start of Quaker recordkeeping in the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth, Sahle found that “after 1750 both cities’ monthly meetings increased their sanctioning of offences against the discipline dramatically: 90.7 percent (752 cases) of London sanctions occurred between 1750 and 1800. In Philadelphia, 92.7 percent (354 cases) of disownments took place in the second half of the eighteenth century” (92).

Sahle’s general description of the Quaker disciplinary process and its prodigious increase in the eighteenth century will not be novel to anyone familiar with Jack D. Marietta’s essential work *The Reformation of American Quakerism* (U of Pennsylvania P, 1984), but whereas Marietta focused only on Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Sahle offers a transatlantic perspective and a more detailed focus on the disciplining of merchants. A crucial point about what Marietta terms the “reformation of American Quakerism” was, as Sahle observes, “that rather than individual Quakers behaving worse, it was the Society of Friends as a body that changed its attitude towards discipline” (98). In both London and Philadelphia, Friends were increasingly monitored, disciplined, and disowned for issues related to solvency, debt, and dishonesty. London was more scrupulous in disciplining debtors than Philadelphia was, but Sahle finds that this was nonetheless “an Atlantic-wide phenomenon” (134).

At the conclusion of Sahle’s study, which unfolds in a very inductive manner that makes its final direction unpredictable, she explores why the dramatic increase in Quaker discipline during the eighteenth century occurred by turning toward political contexts. Like Pennington, she explains changes to Quakerism as the result of “reputational worries,” although in this case Sahle does not have theological reputation in mind (155). Rather, it was the political crisis of the Seven Years’ War and the Paxton Boys massacres in Pennsylvania that specifically prompted transatlantic Quaker concern about their wider reputation. In Sahle’s words, because of the Quaker commitment to pacifism during a time of war and desire to

mediate between the propriety government and the Indigenous peoples of Pennsylvania, Quakerism in the broader public, which was more hostile to Native peoples, “had become equated with dishonesty, avarice, and violence” (171). While acknowledging that “the Quaker reformation was not merely a public relations exercise,” Sahle wants to suggest that positions associated with Quaker reformers, including antislavery, were “a promising form of virtue signalling” and that “through the intertwined religious and political developments of the mid-eighteenth century, honesty in business and pacifism emerged as central elements of Quakerism’s identity” (176). Returning to her original question about why Quakers developed a strong reputation for running successful and honest business, Sahle concludes that there is no evidence for such a reputation in the eighteenth century and that this only arises in the nineteenth century after Quaker attempts to repair the movement’s damaged reputation (177).

Beyond her detailed research on Quaker disciplinary procedures, Sahle’s claims are more provocative than they are convincing, if only because she begins to make them relatively late in the book without substantial development. As Pennington often points out in her study, sociopolitical explanations for Quaker change simply do not make sense on their own. While the Seven Years’ War certainly accelerated and strengthened the cause of the reformers, this work began well before the 1750s. Likewise, if Quakers were so concerned for their reputation, why did they continue to take unpopular stands in the eighteenth century? Sahle is right, however, to undermine the narrative of the exceptionalism of Quaker merchants as a fiction associated with the idealization of Quakers in the nineteenth century. Indeed, if the commercial undertakings of Quakers had been exemplary rather than conventional, reformers like Woolman would have had little cause for concern about Quaker involvement in the silver extraction industry and other forms of economic exploitation in the Atlantic world.

These complementary books by Pennington and Sahle aid in understanding both the theology that informed Woolman’s vision and the Quaker injustices that he and other reformers felt compelled to work against. But what of the broader Quaker culture in which Quaker writers lived and produced their work? Regarding this question, *Quakerism in the Atlantic World, 1690–1830*, edited by Robynne Rogers Healey, offers one of the only overviews of a wide swath of Quaker life in this period. Healey’s introduction and conclusion are the most valuable chapters for literary

scholars to consult initially. In them she emphasizes that eighteenth-century Quakerism was “an era of paradox,” marked by “the withdrawal into sectarianism, with more rigid adherence to Quaker discipline coupled with increased engagement with the world through social reform” (1, 5). Healey notes that the 1690s, where the collection begins, were marked not only by schism and increased merchant influence but also by the death of many of the Quaker movement’s initial leaders (including Fox) and the aftermath of the Act of Toleration in 1689, which began to ameliorate the relationship between Quakers and the state (2). In introducing a collection that attempts to examine Quakerism as a whole during the long eighteenth century, Healey offers a good account of the consolidation of Quaker institutions, the general functioning of the Quaker Atlantic, the effect of British imperial crises on Quakerism and the development of more radical social positions, and the eventual fracturing of the Friends community early in the nineteenth century due to the Hicksite-Orthodox schism.

The topics covered in the volume’s chapters are selective: readers will find good chapters on the development of Friends marriage practices, types of Quaker worship, the undertakings of Quaker industrialists in Wales, and a very fine, detailed study of two Canadian monthly meetings. There are no dedicated chapters, however, to Quakers and politics, Quakers and slavery, or Quaker women. This is purportedly because strong literatures already exist in these areas, but the fact that a book in a series titled “The New History of Quakerism” forgoes these topics is somewhat disappointing. I will touch on some of the highlights of the volume of relevance to early Americanists, which may be useful in developing a literary history of Quaker writing in the Atlantic world.

Two of the book’s early chapters can be read as genre studies of particular kinds of Quaker texts: memorial testimonies and books of discipline. To evoke Woolman’s vision once more, understanding these genres helps make sense of the way he approached writing about his own death for the edification of others and of the larger world of Quaker discipline that shaped him and other Friends. In their cowritten chapter on memorial testimonies, Erica Canela and Healey emphasize that changes in posthumously published testimonies about well-known Friends reflected larger changes among Quakers during the eighteenth century. They summarize that over time, the testimonial “focus of religious zeal had shifted from the state of the soul to the state of the meeting” (28). This meant that

testimonies came to encompass not just an individual Quaker's deathbed moments, but the entirety of their life as manifested in institutional activity. In a related chapter by Andrew Fincham on the development of Quaker disciplinary texts, a similar emphasis is placed on changes in the literature produced by Quakers. Based on very good archival research, Fincham's work serves as a reminder that although we generally understand Quakerism as becoming more institutional and centralized in the eighteenth century, it was a long and uneven process. What were to become printed books of discipline started as "advices" that were compiled by various quarterly and yearly meetings and kept in manuscript form. This was a very decentralized process, and it was not until 1735 that London Yearly Meeting sought to create an official manuscript volume that would circulate authoritatively (70). Further, it was not until 1783 that London Yearly Meeting produced a printed book of discipline that was easy to circulate (79). Taken together, these essays on unique genres of Quaker writing illustrate the extent of Quaker literature that has not been analyzed by literary critics, which might usefully inform readings of more regularly studied genres like the journal or prove valuable as objects of study in and of themselves.

In one of the strongest essays in the volume, Geoffrey Plank examines the shifting relationship between Quakers and Indigenous peoples in North America. Beginning with a discussion of the affinity early Friends had for the rural landscapes of England, Plank notes how this affinity overdetermined their views of Native peoples and how they should live (180–81). The use of European agriculture for the purposes of settler colonialism is an old story, and one not unique to Quakers. But given the popular myth of William Penn as the progenitor of peaceful relations with Indigenous peoples in Pennsylvania, it is an important one to examine. Plank draws attention to a Friend named Samuel Groom who was critical of Penn's plan for settling Pennsylvania and the way it would disrupt and displace Native forms of agriculture, but Groom was in the minority (186). Plank also analyzes the captivity narrative of the Quaker merchant Jonathan Dickinson as evidence of conventional Quaker views of Indigenous peoples as uncultivated people living in the wilderness. Despite reformers such as Woolman and Anthony Benezet who moved beyond valorization of European agriculture and became advocates for Native peoples in the eighteenth century—due in large part to their interactions with the Munsee leader Papunhank—by the nineteenth century Quakers were involved

in US government policies whose aim was for Indigenous peoples to adopt white ways of farming, and this earned these Quakers the praise and admiration of none other than Thomas Jefferson (193–95). Whatever their radical beginnings as figures of rural dissent, and whatever the achievements of certain Quaker reformers, by the nineteenth century Quakers were beginning to assimilate to the broader culture of the United States and its settler colonial agenda.

This state of affairs would no doubt have grieved Woolman, just as “being carried in spirit to the mines” had. Along with the various contexts for understanding the development of Quakerism provided by Pennington, Sahle, and Healey et al., Woolman’s vision is also a resource for pursuing a literary history of Quaker writing in the Atlantic world. As a lifelong Quaker myself, such a literary history needs little justification in my own mind. To use Woolman’s language, I am simply “desirous to know who I was,” or who my forebears were, “desirous to get so deep that I might understand this mystery” (185–86). But Woolman’s account of the death of his will ultimately makes clear, I think, that his personal literary history was not for himself, or even for his fellow Quakers exclusively, but for those whom he “henceforth might not consider myself as a distinct or separate being” (185). Generalizing from Woolman’s insight, I would venture that a literary history of Quakerism in early America need not be solely an exercise in accounting for literary output of one particular Christian tradition. Rather, as scholars cited at the outset are already showing, a better understanding of Quaker literature and culture, inclusive of its greatest achievements and even more so its failures, yields a deeper knowledge of the literature and culture of early America and the Atlantic world. As with the paradox of Quaker quietism, perhaps scholars drawing on the books reviewed here to produce new studies focused on Quaker literary history will find themselves more deeply engaged with the broader world in which that history took place.

NOTES

1. Woolman’s friend and fellow reformer John Churchman did not narrate his own death in his journal, but because he almost died in 1761 before fully succumbing to illness in 1775, two separate collections of his deathbed sayings were published, also an unusual occurrence but illustrative of the seriousness with which Quakers attended to the last moments of a person’s life (Plank 216).

2. For the best treatments of Woolman's historical and theological contexts, see Kershner; and Plank.
3. A typographic version of Easton's manuscript has been edited by Royster and is available online.
4. While Quakers have always received scholarly attention, I understand the institutionalization and growth of "Quaker Studies" as developments that started at the outset of the twenty-first century and have accelerated in the last decade. These developments are unimaginable without the work of Dandelion, who founded the Centre for Postgraduate Quaker Studies at the University of Birmingham in 1999 and whose many publications include field consolidating and building works such as *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies* (Oxford UP, 2013), edited with frequent collaborator Angell.
5. Tolles drew on Kraus's earlier claim in *The Atlantic Civilization* (Cornell UP, 1949) that "no religious group had closer transatlantic ties" than the Quakers (58). For more recent uses of the Quaker Atlantic paradigm, see Carey; Crabtree; High; Landes; and Pullin.
6. See Pryce; and Kershner 8–9, 29–30.
7. A notable exception is Underwood.
8. Pennington wisely avoids the term *inner light*, which tends to reify a complex and sometimes confusing set of Quaker ideas and terminology. Moore writes, "It must be emphasized that the phrase 'inner light,' often used by modern Quakers, never occurs in early Quaker writings, and that 'inward light' is rare" (81). For a good brief discussion of the matter, see Dandelion, who observes that "the 'inner Light' is mainly a twentieth-century invention along with much of normative Liberal Quakerism and has been wrongly imputed to earlier generations by countless scholars" (132–33).
9. An excellent overview of Quaker undertakings in seventeenth-century North America and the Caribbean has been written by Murphy and Weimer.
10. For a discussion of early Quaker efforts to reconcile their faith with enslavement, see Gerbner.

WORKS CITED

- Allen, Richard C. "Living as a Quaker during the Second Period." *The Quakers, 1656–1723: The Evolution of an Alternative Community*, by Richard C. Allen and Rosemary Moore. Pennsylvania State UP, 2018.
- Angell, Stephen W., and Ben Pink Dandelion, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*. Oxford UP, 2013.
- Barclay, Robert. *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*. London, 1678.
- Braithwaite, William C. *The Beginnings of Quakerism*. 2nd ed. Cambridge UP, 1955.
- . *The Second Period of Quakerism*. 2nd ed. Cambridge UP, 1961.
- Brooks, Lisa. "The Queen's Right and the Quaker's Relation." *Our Beloved Kin: A New History of King Phillip's War*. Yale, 2019, pp. 115–39.

- Carey, Brycchan. *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery, 1657–1761*. Yale UP, 2012.
- Crabtree, Sarah. *Holy Nation: The Transatlantic Quaker Ministry in the Age of Revolution*. U of Chicago P, 2015.
- Dandelion, Pink. *An Introduction to Quakerism*. Cambridge UP, 2007.
- DiCuirci, Lindsay. “The Letter and the Spirit: Materializing Quaker History and Myth.” *Colonial Revivals: The Nineteenth-Century Lives of Early American Books*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2019, pp. 121–52.
- Easton, John. “A Relation of the Indian War, by Mr. Easton, of Rhode Island,” edited by Paul Royster. U of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libraryscience/33>.
- Field, Jonathan Beecher. “Suffering and Subscribing: Configurations of Authorship in the Quaker Atlantic.” *Errands into the Metropolis: New England Dissidents in Revolutionary London*. Dartmouth College P, 2009, pp. 90–115.
- Gerbner, Katherine. “Quaker Slavery and Slave Rebellion.” *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2018, pp. 49–73.
- High, Ean. “The Devil and a Disease: Early Representations of Quaker Women in the Atlantic World.” *English Literary History*, vol. 87, no. 3, 2020, pp. 637–77.
- Jones, Rufus. *The Later Periods of Quakerism*. Vol. 1. Macmillan, 1921.
- Kershner, John. *John Woolman and the Government of Christ: A Colonial Quaker’s Vision for the British Atlantic World*. Oxford UP, 2018.
- Landes, Jordan. *London Quakers in the Trans-Atlantic World: The Creation of an Early Modern Community*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Marietta, Jack D. *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748–1783*. U of Pennsylvania P, 1984.
- Moore, Rosemary. *The Light in Their Consciences: The Early Quakers in Britain, 1646–1666*. Pennsylvania State UP, 2000.
- Murphy, Andrew R., and Adrian Chastain Weimer. “Colonial Quakerism.” *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions*, vol. 1: *The Post-Reformation Era, 1559–1689*, edited by John Coffey. Oxford UP, 2020, pp. 267–90.
- Nash, Gary. *Quakers and Politics: Pennsylvania, 1681–1726*. Princeton UP, 1968.
- Pastorius, Francis Daniel. *The Francis Daniel Pastorius Reader: Writings by an Early American Polymath*, edited by Patrick Erben. Pennsylvania State UP, 2019.
- Plank, Geoffrey. *John Woolman’s Path to the Peaceable Kingdom: A Quaker in the British Empire*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2012.
- Pryce, Elaine. “‘Negative to a Marked Degree’ or ‘An Intense and Glowing Faith’? Rufus Jones and Quaker Quietism.” *Common Knowledge*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2010, pp. 518–31.
- Pullin, Naomi. *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism, 1650–1750*. Oxford UP, 2018.
- Tarter, Michelle Lise, and Catie Gill, eds. *New Critical Studies on Early Quaker Women, 1650–1800*. Oxford UP, 2018.

- Taylor, Marie Balsley. "Apostates in the Woods: Quakers, Praying Indians, and Circuits of Communication in Humphrey Norton's New-England's Ensigne." *Quakers and Native Americans*, edited by Ignacio Gallup-Diaz and Geoffrey Plank. Brill, 2018, pp. 30–53.
- Tolles, Frederick B. *Quakers and the Atlantic Culture*. Macmillan, 1960.
- Underwood, T. L. *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War: The Baptist-Quaker Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England*. Oxford UP, 1997.
- Webb, Elizabeth. *The Writings of Elizabeth Webb: A Quaker Missionary in America, 1697–1726*, edited by Rachel Cope and Zachary McLeod Hutchins. Pennsylvania State UP, 2019.
- Wigginton, Caroline. "Unions of the Soul." *In the Neighborhood: Women's Publication in Early America*. U of Massachusetts P, 2016, pp. 109–33.
- Woolman, John. *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, edited by Phillips p. Moulton. Oxford UP, 1971.
- . *The Works of John Woolman*. Philadelphia, 1774.