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REVIEW OF *NEW CRITICAL STUDIES ON EARLY QUAKER WOMEN, 1650-1800,* EDITED BY MICHELE LISE TARTER AND CATIE GILL (OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2018)

JAY MILLER

Scholarly interest in early Quaker women is not particularly recent, but the research gathered in the edited volume *New Critical Studies on Early Quaker Women, 1650-1800* shows that this area of inquiry remains vital and continues to be reassessed. While the editors gesture to Mabel Richmond Brailsford's *Quaker Women, 1650-1690* (1915) as a "pioneering work" (1), the scholarship on early Quaker women began in earnest during the 1990s as a part of the broader growth in the field of women's studies—although this was preceded by the books of Margaret Hope Bacon, especially *Mothers of Feminism* (1986). Studies such as Phyllis Mack's *Visionary Women* (1992), and Hilary Hinds's *God's Englishwoman* (1996) treated Quaker women as integral to understanding seventeenth-century radical religious women generally, and Elaine Hobby and Michelle Lise Tarter authored important stand-alone articles solely focused on women Friends. Entire monographs dedicated to the subject soon appeared in the form of Rebecca Larsons's *Daughters of Light* (1999) and Catie Gill's *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community* (2005). Yet, as Tarter and Gill—the editors of the new volume—point out, their edited collection is "the first of its kind," that is, a book "bringing together a community of scholars in religion, history, and literature to assess the dynamic impact of these women within their society and throughout the transatlantic world" (1).

While edited collections often inaugurate the emergence of a nascent topic or methodology, *New Critical Studies on Early Quaker Women* seems to indicate the field's maturity. On the merits of its extensive twenty-five page bibliography alone, this book offers an excellent point of entry into research on early Quaker women both for those new to the area and experts wishing to update their knowledge. Furthermore, some of its basic assumptions indicate its congruence

with maturation in the broader field of Quaker studies, even as the book extends these developments. For example, while the classical periodization for early Quaker history follows William Braithwaite's division of the period of "beginnings" from "the second period" at the time of the Restoration in 1660, some of the latest Quaker studies publications have begun to think of early Quakerism as persisting into the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Also works with multiple contributors, *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought, 1647-1723* (2015), and *The Quakers, 1656-1723* (2018) both stretch from the mid-seventeenth century to 1723, the year of George Whitehead's death. *New Critical Studies on Early Quaker Women*, however, takes this impulse and pushes it further, to 1800, essentially making early Quakerism a term encompassing the whole of the Quaker community prior to the major and enduring schisms of the nineteenth century. This *long durée* approach to early Quakerism is matched by an equally ambitious geographic scope that, as the editors emphasize in the quotation above, takes in the lives of Quaker women "throughout the transatlantic world." This ambitious periodization and geography signal the volume's aspiration to gather into one place advances in the scholarship on early Quaker women that otherwise might exist in more specialized isolation.

Drawing attention to these overarching themes in *New Critical Studies of Early Quaker Women* runs the risk of minimizing the significant heterogeneity of the chapters that make up the book. I will not attempt to recount every argument here (they are given sufficient overview in the introduction), but rather draw attention to the volume's high points, beginning with those foregrounded by the editors. Tarter and Gill advance three main findings that the collection makes: historical retrieval, analysis of the role of sex and gender in society, and exploration of how religious belief shaped the lives and perceptions of individuals.

All three findings appear in the book's first chapter by Hilary Hinds. In it she attempts to recover the work of Sarah Jones, known only as the author of the short pamphlet *This is Lights Appearance in the Truth* (1650). Scrupulously acknowledging how little we know about Jones or her pamphlet, which has the reputation of being an "early pre- or proto-Quaker" text (14), Hinds employs an historicist method of close reading to elucidate the work's potential affiliations with various theologies of the day that harmonize well with Quakerism. Hinds goes further by framing this method as one that is

"sympathetic to, or legible within, the schema of Quaker values and practices," in that it reads for continuity between the words of the text and the wider world, while practicing patience and attentiveness as a means for illumination (21). This approach offers a helpful alternative to the hermeneutic of suspicion often associated with historicist close readings, but it also reframes debates about Quaker origins. By recognizing the extent to which Quakerism gradually emerged from a broader religious milieu on which it was dependent as much as distinct, "work[s] such as Jones's" can "be revalued as fully Quaker, rather than simply a herald of Quakerism proper" (30). Just as some scholars have looked to Elizabeth Hooten's importance to the early formation of Quakerism as a way of getting away from an origins narrative centered on George Fox, we might look to writings like those of Jones for their capacity to "undo—even queer," our assumptions about Quaker beginnings (24). Strikingly, for a book focused on sex and gender, Hinds reference to queering here is the sole instance in the entire volume, one of several reasons to note her chapter as one of the strongest and most original.

Perhaps the lack of consideration of Quaker women and queerness is a consequence of the historical cast of many of the contributions. Subsequent chapters by Gill and Stephen Angell, for example, focus in great detail on the role of women Friends in different social developments. Making a move similar to the one made by Hinds, Gill considers the appeals made by Quaker women to rulers in Restoration England in the context of broader antinomian perfectionist theology. Drawing on the crucial work of David Como, Gill insightfully observes that in these appeals to rulers "feminine yielding and Antinomian self-annihilation were combined" (49). Angell's essay, the first in the volume to work within an Atlantic framework, looks at the various ways Mary Fischer, Alice Curwen, Abigail Allen, Sarah Lay, and Sophia Hume articulated testimonies to the Quaker family as they grappled with the realities of slavery and the difficulty of practicing endogamy in colonial North America. While Angell highlights the conundrums Quakers faced in the Atlantic world, Tarter's following chapter argues that migration across the Atlantic offered Quaker women a new space in which to continue their radical embodiment of prophecy. Building on previously published work, Tarter argues that poststructuralist feminist literary theory, particularly that of French feminists such as Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray, can aid our understanding of how Quaker women "established a revolutionary relationship to language based on the primacy of corporeality" (70). While the fluid semiotic

space characteristic of women Friends created a metaphorical new world, Tarter draws attention to how North America gave Quaker women alternative space in which to flourish at a time when oversight of print was on the rise among Friends in Britain.

Tarter's essay raises important issues for the rest of the volume. As I noted at the outset of this review, while *New Critical Studies on Early Quaker Women* takes an ambitious approach to periodization, how contributors characterize the period under consideration varies significantly. In the introduction, the editors opt for the relatively benign terms "evolution" and "transformation," but do gesture to 1660 as the beginning of a period of institutionalization (5-6). Tarter describes this as an "internal wave of conservatism and censorship" embodied in the "all-male censoring committee . . . the Second Day Morning Meeting" (70, 76). In this reading, the development of Quaker institutions stands as a threat to Quaker women. However, not all of the contributors adopt this approach. Naomi Pullin's chapter, for example, which treats themes developed at length in her recent book *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism* (2018), explicitly positions itself as a corrective to the line of argument that "the establishment of a hierarchical Meeting system reduced the role of women in Quaker religious life" (124). By foregrounding the experiences of "ordinary women Friends" rather than the somewhat exceptional ones of prominent women ministers, Pullin argues that the institutionalization of Quakerism "provided a recognized place for women beyond their function within the family" (123). Her final claim, that "no previous religious movement had provided women with the space to take such an active role in sustaining and supporting a community," caps a forceful argument that Quakerism's institutional developed *helped* Quaker women as much as it hindered them.

Pullin's chapter is one of the most important in the volume, but other contributors argue along similar lines. Sarah Crabtree's nuanced study of the itinerant ministry of Quaker women in the eighteenth century takes a position similar to Pullin's in that she thinks focus on "female Friends as pioneers who defied convention" during "an earlier, more ecstatic period" causes "scholars [to] mischaracterize" Quakerism in the eighteenth century as "quietist," when in fact it remained "public and corporeal" (129). Writing specifically about women's meetings, her ultimate assessment of Quaker institutionalization offers middle ground in the debate: "While women's meetings provided a space for women to wield influence and express their beliefs independently

from those of men, this same segregated space often resulted in the containment and restriction of women's authority and power" (141).

Women's meetings provided space for women but also arguably equipped them with practices that helped create other spaces, specifically literary ones. A pair of chapters, one by Desirée Henderson on Elizabeth Drinker's dairy and one by Rebecca Rosen on the manuscript poetry of Hannah Griffits, together give a marvelous picture of literary production by Quaker women in late eighteenth-century Philadelphia. In her discussion of the coterie circulation of poetry in which Griffits participated, Rosen considers her "widespread transmission as an outgrowth of the manuscript-copying conventions she would have learned as a Women's meeting member" (168). Both scholars discuss the growth of Quaker manuscript culture as a way of circumventing oversight committees (148, 168), as diaries like Drinker's became "fluid literary space[s]" similar to the semiotic space described by Tartar (147). Henderson's and Rosen's insistence that the manuscripts they study should be taken seriously as part of broader Quaker and British-American literary tradition is a consequential one that shifts attention away from more typical preoccupation with the writings of Quaker ministers and onto more ordinary lay participants in the Quaker movement.

This insight needs to be applied not only to the lesser-known Quaker women like Drinker and Griffits, but also, and perhaps surprisingly, to the mother of Quakerism herself, Margaret Fell. As Kristianna Polder argues, while Fell is no longer treated hagiographically, she is often thought of by scholars "as a sort of bourgeois, behind-the-scenes participant . . . who did not make real sacrifices" (190-191). Focusing on Fell's eschatological understanding of marriage, Polder shows how her convincement and later union with Fox made her "a Spiritual Mother over a type of alternative nonconformist church under her own roof, where her servants and children were under her divinely inspired leadership and guidance," a vocation that made her "a social outsider in her community" (192, 194). Like many of the subjects of *New Critical Studies on Early Quaker Women*—including settlers in West Jersey described by Jean Soderlund and eighteenth-century educators analyzed by Elizabeth Bouldin —Margaret Fell's status as a Mother of Israel was not limited to preaching and publishing, but working faithfully in many ways and in many different contexts that have not always been appreciated. In her contribution to the volume, Erin Bell considers how outsiders often viewed Quaker women

through a series of stock characterizations, and this has, unfortunately, sometimes been the case in scholarship as well. Thanks to the fine work done by the editors and contributors of the volume, maintaining these characterizations should be more difficult for future students of Quaker women.