

STAGING QUAKERISM IN AMERICAN THEATRE AND FILM

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ABSTRACT

Arguing that Quakers have been used as influential stock characters in American performance culture, this essay profiles several examples of Quakers as represented in American theater and film: John Murdock's play *The Triumphs of Love* (1795), Harry F. Millarde's lost silent film *The Quack Quakers* (1916), and the Academy Award winning film *High Noon* (1952). Paradoxically, in each of these productions, which range from farce to serious drama, Friends are shown as either claiming or as striving for unattainable moral and religious human ideals, but also as an exemplary community of individuals against which other Americans might and should be measured.

KEYWORDS

American Friends; silent film; cinema; theater; comedy; *High Noon*

*Oh we're plain and sober folks as you may see,
With the world we've naught at all to do!
Yes we pass the time away quite soberly
And our quiet life pursue.*

*We care for nothing but the simple joys,
Nor a smile and joke like other girls and boys!
O, the very modes things for us suffice,
As for dancing, Oh, it's naughty but it's nice.*

*Yet I'd like to shake a toe my dear,
Yea verily, dear! Yea verily, dear!
O, I'd like to dance with you my dear,
For it's naughty, yea it's naughty but it's nice.*

*When the spirit moveth us what can we do?
We must only willingly obey!
O, I think we're doing wrong now love don't you?
Shall we to sports give way?*

*There can't be harm in only doing thus,
So why should we incline to make a fuss?
O, we trip the 'light fantastic' once or twice,
Tho' it's naughty, very naughty, yet it's nice.*¹

QUAKERESSES WORE MASKS

*A very unique reception was given on Wednesday evening by the Unique Euchre club of Prospect Heights. It took place at the home of Mr. and Mrs. J. Perry, 676 President Street. The women were dressed as Quakeresses and wore masks.*²

The use of Quaker characters on stage as stock characters in English drama began soon after the establishment of the Religious Society of Friends in the middle of the seventeenth century, and their deployment as both comic and serious dramatic types in the theater in many ways resembled the ways that stereotypical Quaker characters were eventually used in fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, especially in novels produced in the United States.³ For a variety of reasons, the American context would prove to sustain the use of Quakers as stock characters in theatrical and cinematic representation over the course of nearly two centuries. Some of the reasons for this are fairly obvious, such as the complex relationship between Quaker pacifism and abolitionism in an American national setting defined by Revolutionary War and the economy of slavery. Because of the growing radicalism of Quaker attitudes on such issues, Friends came to be of considerable interest not only to policy-makers but also to dramatists and fiction writers of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Much of this interest in the Religious Society of Friends can be indexed by examining the way Quakers were deployed in stereotype within popular entertainments such as novels, theater, and cinema. For subsequent generations, as film decisively took the place of legitimate stage performances as the most popular dramatic medium for American audiences, Quaker characters were given substantial roles in the development of early twentieth-century American cinema, ranging from now-obscure films made in the silent era (about 1900–1920) to popular, big-budget Hollywood films of the mid-twentieth century.

A durable tradition of stock characterization beginning with seventeenth-century Anglo-American dramatic representations of Quakers and continuing with American twentieth-century cinematic depictions of Friends probably was sustained as a result of Quaker commitment to plain attire and avoidance of worldly pursuits and materialism: the very aspects of public Quaker identity that constituted their social 'peculiarity' in relation to the citizenry at large. Moreover, American social and political circumstances contributed to the various ways that Quakers were represented in various media. Alongside the development of Quakers as comic stage-theatrical types in both England and America, the increasingly intense nineteenth-century politics of slavery abolition prompted American Friends to make forays into the public sphere, where they became visible within the civic theater of abolitionist oratory. But Quakers came into public view for reasons unrelated to contemporary political issues. To make our judgments about Quaker theatricality more complicated, a kind of daily and commonplace theatricality was frequently associated with the religious

world of Friends, whose adherents distinguished themselves not only doctrinally, but also in far more visible and dramatic ways: the peculiar dress and speech of Friends set them apart in the quotidian theatre of daily social exchange. So it was that religious and political radicalism, along with unconventional appearance and stereotyped demeanor, combined to create an irresistible stock character for American theatrical appropriation. The following discussion, which provides examples of Friends as characters in eighteenth-century Anglo-American theatre, early American silent cinema, and twentieth-century Hollywood film, aims at suggesting the persistence and range of these representations of Quakers as durable stock types in Anglo-American performance culture.⁴

The tradition of using Quakers as characters in English theater appears to have been initiated by their inclusion in plays such as Thomas Lodge's *Lady Alimony* (1659),⁵ Thomas Duffett's *The Mock-Tempest* (1675),⁶ John Leonard's *The Rambling Justice* (1678),⁷ and Thomas D'Urfey's *The Richmond Heiress* (1693).⁸ Later playwrights, who were witness to a new generation of Quakers for whom plain dress was beginning to set them apart, were presented with an obvious visual advantage for their productions because Quaker clothing made them instantly recognizable on stage. Some playwrights even began to use Quaker attire as a form of comic disguise. Susanna Centlivre (1669–1723) is especially notable for the development of Quaker stock characters in her dramatic works, as well for her use of Quaker clothing as a useful disguise for certain of her characters, as in *The Beau's Duel* (1702), in which one Mrs Plotwell masquerades as a Quaker in order to advance her marriage opportunities.⁹ A decade after George Fox initiated the movement in 1648, as Quakers came to be more widely recognized as a viable organization, with an increasingly consistent theology, ethos, and social practice, their utility as stock characters apparently also increased. The world of performance comedy welcomed the addition of the Quaker as a new theatrical type, whose comic potential lay in the lampooning of her or his unusual appearance and speech, but also in the testing of a whole set of relatively austere Quaker proscriptions against oaths, violence, marriage outside the faith, materialism, and dishonesty.

During the eighteenth century, Quakers in stage plays permeated theatrical culture on both sides of the Atlantic. For instance, Susanna Centlivre's comedy of Quaker life, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718),¹⁰ was popular not only in England but also in American cities like Baltimore, Annapolis, and Boston. Along with the transatlantic influence of Susanna Centlivre, who frequently used Quakers as comic characters in her plays,¹¹ colonial American audiences were probably aware of English productions like Charles Shadwell's *The Fair Quaker of Deal; or, the Humours of the Navy* (1715)¹² and Richard Wilkinson's *The Quaker's Wedding: A Comedy* (1723),¹³ which perpetuated the tradition of using the imagined social world of Quakers as the locus for farce and romance. In addition, transatlantic audiences were able to attend performances in which Quakers were featured prominently thanks to the work of renowned English actor, dramatist, and prolific singer-songwriter Charles Dibdin (1745–1814), whose romantic comedy *The Quaker: A Comic Opera* (1774) had apparently been staged in London and Dublin and soon in Boston and other American cities.¹⁴ Performances in the colonies sometimes included sketches of Quakers even if

the play did not deal directly with the lives of Friends, as in English poet/playwright Moses Mendez's comedy *The Chaplet* (1749), which in its 4 June 1767 performance at the Southwark Theatre in Philadelphia included a scene called simply 'Quaker Man and Quaker Woman'.¹⁵ Even the Irish stage had taken advantage of the popular interest in comic representations of Quakers, as evidenced by John O'Keefe's *The Young Quaker: A Comedy* (1784). When it was eventually staged in Boston in September 1797, O'Keefe's play was published with the slightly different title, *The Young Quaker; or, The Fair American*, thus revealing a deft sense of nationalistic marketing for American audiences. We can guess from its scenario that it involved a certain amount of sexual innuendo, since the same broadside advertisement also mentions the opening play of the evening at the Haymarket Theatre, a pantomime in two acts called *Don Juan; or, the Libertine Destroyed*.¹⁶

A look at Dibdin's *The Quaker: A Comic Opera*, a fairly conventional romantic comedy, gives a sense of how Quaker stage characters figured in theatrical performances of the eighteenth century. The play features a young woman named Gillian torn between her commitment, on practical grounds, to a prosperous old Quaker farmer named Steady, and her authentic and passionate love for a handsome young man named Lubin. Its dramatic representations of Quakers follow the tradition set out by earlier Anglo-American efforts to show Quakers as inordinately peculiar people who are made ridiculous in their efforts, based largely on their traditional insularity as a sect, to resist the forces of romantic love. Steady the Quaker farmer, though, is not shown as a cuckold or a dupe. Instead, he is gently led by his firm moral principles to act virtuously, but against his own interests as a passionate (if aging) lover in pursuit of the beautiful, young Gillian. As the play concludes, old Steady renounces his love for Gillian and grants the happy couple his sincere blessing: 'Verily, my heart warmeth unto you both: your innocency and love are equally respectable. And would the voluptuous man taste a more exquisite sensation than the gratifying of his passions, let him prevail upon himself to a benevolent action'. Having abandoned or outlived his personal desire for companionship and the pleasures of the flesh, the elderly Friend grants a life of unmolested happiness to the non-Quaker couple, asking only that their 'pleasures of the flesh' be leavened with the kind of benevolence and virtue that his own Quaker principles exemplify.¹⁷

By 1794, in postcolonial Philadelphia, where only a few years before a lapsed Quaker writer named Charles Brockden Brown had begun to compose some of the first important early American novels, the comic dramatist John Murdock (1748-1834)—a professional hairdresser and sometime playwright—was busy writing about Quakers for theatrical audiences. As we shall see, his representation of Quakers on the American stage extended the tradition established decades earlier among English playwrights. However, before turning to the details of Murdock's work, it is important to establish the context in which his ideas about American Quakers would have been received. In writing for the theater at the end of the eighteenth century, Murdock was, to a certain extent, the beneficiary of a fragile new climate of official tolerance for stage plays in Philadelphia. As Heather Nathans has shown, however, as an artisan and a member of the Philadelphia mechanic class, Murdock's political allegiances—which he expressed as strongly sympathetic toward Quakers and the

abolitionist Democratic-Republican party—made his success as a playwright highly unlikely. And indeed Murdock experienced only the barest of successes with his first play, *The Triumphs of Love* (1795), as it closed after only a single performance.¹⁸ For a variety of reasons, theatrical productions had been highly controversial and even outlawed during the American colonial period, and variations in local ordinances often meant that plays staged in one city could be censored as inappropriate or unlawful in others. The theater in Philadelphia had, during the early years of the colony, been perceived as a troublesome, rabble-rousing, immoral, and licentious institution, and both the Pennsylvania colonial assembly and the Philadelphia authorities of the early eighteenth century had attempted repeatedly to prevent the staging of any sort of theatrical event in that important city. Later, as the Federalist elites solidified their power and began to control theatrical productions in Philadelphia, they used this influence to verify that plays staged in the city would generally hew to the ideology of the dominant classes. Additionally, a number of circumstances caused stage plays to meet with colonial disapproval during these years, not least of which, as Jeffrey H. Richards has observed, was the fact that the colonial theatre was associated with British culture and therefore was inevitably controversial during the pre-Revolutionary decades. By 1790, though, Federalists and other Philadelphia elites gave their support so that stage productions could be mounted without serious objection. Indeed, the difficulties faced by Murdock in staging *The Triumphs of Love*, with its inclusion of the first slave emancipation scene in American theatrical history and funded in part by Philadelphia civic leaders like Tench Coxe and Benjamin Rush (both of whom opposed slavery), is one sign that theatrical power was being recognized with some anxiety by elites with political agendas.¹⁹

These restrictions on American theatrical productions have been interpreted by some as being related to the perceived threat on civic authority—whether legitimated by British or American identity—posed by plays that sometimes called the fragile authority of the colonies into question. In his survey of the colonial theatre scene, historian Jeffrey H. Richards describes resistance to plays as stemming from religious concerns, as with the strong opposition to the theatre in Puritan Massachusetts, which did not enjoy a professional theatre season until 1794. Additional concerns related to the theatre's association with petty crime and the staging of immoral behavior, and the staging of political ideas was met with resistance of various kinds during the tumultuous years bracketing the American Revolution.²⁰ Much of the concern about theatrical regulations in Philadelphia also grew out of Quaker power in the Pennsylvania colony; although Quaker characters were both praised and lampooned in the theater of the early republic, Quaker authorities viewed such entertainments with a goodly measure of consternation. Detailing the legal struggle over the colonial Philadelphia theater, historians Odai Johnson and William J. Burling describe a flurry of laws passed by the Quaker-dominated Pennsylvania assembly, laws that were repeatedly struck down by Parliament:

In 1700 the Assembly of Pennsylvania passed a law prohibiting 'stage plays, masks, revels'. In 1705 it was repealed by Parliament. The following session, the prohibition against playing was once more enacted in the Pennsylvania assembly. In 1709 it was again repealed in Parliament. In 1711, the Quaker Assembly in Pennsylvania passed

their prohibition for the third time, which in 1713 was a third time repealed in Westminster.

When, during the middle decades of the eighteenth century, censorship loosened and it finally became possible to present stage plays for Pennsylvania audiences, actors and playwrights occasionally aimed their darts at some of their favorite targets: the very Quaker authorities who had once denied them the right to provoke Philadelphia's citizens with theatrical performances. As theater historian Heather S. Nathans has shown, Quaker influence in the public and performative sphere continued even after they relinquished political offices in 1756, as evidenced by their alliance with German Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Baptist citizens in collecting 200,000 signatures for anti-theatrical petitions submitted to the Pennsylvania government in 1759.²¹

The Anglicans, who by 1766 dominated the Federalist elites and controlled access to its new and important Southwark theatre—the largest in the American colonies—only rarely allowed playwrights to aim criticism directly at elite power in Philadelphia, which arranged itself according to the British model of landed aristocracy. Thus, it comes as a surprise that Murdock would succeed in staging a play in which the rights of servants and slaves were considered, albeit in a comic light. Perhaps the authorities were swayed by the play's comic treatment of the very Quaker authorities whose standards of public morality and political control had for years opposed the right of playwrights to provoke Philadelphia's citizens with theatrical performances of any kind.²² Quaker withdrawal from political activities during the mid-eighteenth century had also reduced any influence they might have had over the production of theatrical events in Philadelphia, but had also created new reasons for non-Quakers to represent Friends in a comic or satirical light.

In *The Triumphs of Love*, for example, Murdock eschews treatment of the Federalist elites and instead explores the world of Quakers, servants, soldiers, and slaves. The Quaker families of George Friendly, Sr, and Jacob Friendly, Sr, provide the domestic setting. The problems that these Philadelphia Quaker families confront are treated in comic fashion, but the seriousness of the issues they face is plain, because they are the problems spawned by a Revolutionary War that had established a tenuous system of representative government, rule by law, and declaration of the equality of citizens under the law. Young Irish servants named Patrick and Jenny shed bright light on the circumstances of recent immigrants in the new republic, chafing under the harsh rule of their Quaker employers, while providing a class-based counterpoint to the circumstances of the slave servant 'Sambo', who is eventually freed by his Quaker master. That the elder Friendly brothers have so little control over the daily activities and marriage choices of their children highlights the fragility of a social order in the process of transforming itself from a paternalistic model of authority to a new model of secular, republican authority.

A profligate Quaker youth (George Friendly, Jr) and his dutiful Quaker cousin (Jacob Friendly, Jr) illustrate these tensions as they venture into new roles in the early American republic. Lapsed from his Quaker traditions to the dismay of his father, George Friendly, Jr, scoffs his family's Quaker principles, preferring a rakish life of carousing, seductions, masks, farces, and slapstick impersonations (some of them cross-dressed). Marriage outside the faith lies at the center of the play as George, Jr, opts to

marry a non-Quaker, thus disappointing his father, but ironically, his marriage outside of Meeting also has the salutary effect of curing him of his dissipated and rakish habits in the process of his being married. A similar matrimonial quandary is faced by George, Jr's sister Rachel, who must defy the paternal authority of her Quaker father in order to wed Major Manly, a non-Quaker military hero.

Murdock uses his play as a comic treatment of the issue of social class, a theme that the fledgling American dramatic tradition had inherited from its English theatrical forebears. To these class battles, Murdock adds new themes such as slavery (in the person of Sambo) and a small cohort of Irish working class immigrants (Patrick and Jenny). The play thereby suggests that class divisions were some concern among prosperous Quakers, who by the post-Revolutionary period held considerable power in the Philadelphia area. Late eighteenth-century Quakers, like Murdock's good citizens George Friendly, Sr, and Jacob Friendly, Sr, figure as part of a dominant class, whose financial privilege and marital boundaries are under siege at the hands of immigrants, slaves chafing under their servitude, and attractive non-Quakers (like the dashing and courageous Major Manly) who assault the Quaker tradition of marital endogamy. Membership in the Religious Society of Friends, while understood by this period of American history as conferring to the individual Quaker a distinctive moral and social status—pacifist, anti-slavery, scrupulously honest, and sober—is besieged by doubts as to its generational durability (young George Friendly, Jr, is a rake and a frivolous trickster), its astringent social habits (Friend Peevish is a man every bit as humorless as his name would suggest), and its threatened superiority as an organization presumed to be filled with surpassingly virtuous members (Major Manly, an authentically virtuous non-Quaker, is the truly exemplary man in the play).

Family turmoil serves as an index to Quaker social instability in *The Triumphs of Love*. For instance, both Friendly brothers (and both of the sons, who are cousins) are nominally Quakers, but only one part of the family—Jacob, Sr, and Jacob, Jr—conforms assiduously to Quaker discipline. When Jacob, Sr, objects on religious grounds to the possibility of brave Major Manly marrying his daughter, Rachel Friendly, George Friendly, Sr, admonishes him: 'Is it because he is not one of us? I'd maintain it, Jacob... it is a dev'lish arbitrary law of your society, that you won't permit a connection with other sects of Christians'. Hearing this, Jacob Friendly, Sr, who is described throughout the play as fighting against outsiders threatening to taint the purity of Quaker family and culture, responds tartly that, 'It is vain to reason with thee, brother—thou art so violent in what thou dost undertake: our society has had its rules of long standing; which have kept the church together, from generation to generation'. Here, Murdock's script appears to suggest a fracture within the Religious Society of Friends initiated by its own memberships, rather than any besetting or persecuting force outside the religious fold that might erode the stability of a formerly close-knit Quaker community. The final salvo in this debate is left to be launched by George Friendly, Sr, a birthright Quaker, but one of only moderate piety and relatively relaxed attitudes about social mingling with worldly others. After listening to his brother's pious views about the need to remain separate from the world, George Friendly, Sr, responds: 'Psha, psha—don't tell me about your generations and generations: you are a virtuous, valuable people; but you should not set yourselves

up, in opposition to other people, so much', thus laying bare one of the enduring objections to Quaker values: from outside the Society, Quaker discipline, with its strong moral code and separatist ethos, appears not only virtuous but also smug, self-satisfied, and overly convinced of its own good conduct.²³

Perhaps the most ambivalent critique of Friends in *The Triumphs of Love* appears with regard to the African American character, Sambo, who is enslaved by the George Friendly, Sr, family, but is eventually freed because of the idealism of George Friendly, Jr. Murdock himself displays an ambivalent attitude toward Quakers and their increasing reluctance to hold slaves—a nascent abolitionist position for Friends that had been inspired by the New Jersey Quaker writer and early abolitionist John Woolman. Woolman's arguments against those who believed Africans incapable or unworthy of independence as free citizens might have been on Murdock's mind as he created the memorable Sambo to play his important part in *The Triumphs of Love* in a scene that allows both for the expression of African aspirations and a view of Quaker benevolence that is quickly revealed to be naive. The crucial scene in which Sambo is finally freed by George Friendly, Jr, opens with George, Jr, secretly observing Sambo as the black servant examines his own face in a mirror and thinks aloud about the state of his life. This scene is also notable for Sambo's use of exaggerated language and comic manners that in subsequent decades would become standard fare on the blackface minstrel stage: 'Why black foke sold like cow or horse[?] He tink de great somebody above, no order tings so. —Sometimes he tink dis way—he got best massa in e world. He gib him fine clothes for dress—he give him plenty money for pend; and for a little while, eh tink himself berry happ. Afterwards he tink anoder way. H pose massa George die; den he sold to some oder massa. May be he no use him well. When Sambo tink so, it mos broke he heart'.²⁴

Concluding that he must act on Sambo's behalf, George Friendly, Jr, does so immediately, even though he doubts the wisdom of his decision when seen against the backdrop of a larger social scene: 'Yet how many thousands of the poorer class of whites are there, whose actual situation are vastly inferior to [Sambo's]; he has no anxious cares for tomorrow, no family looking up to him for protections—no duns at his doors'. Moreover, George, Jr, wonders about Sambo's ability to conduct himself properly without the supervision of strict, watchful, and temperate owners like the Friendly's, whose Quaker values had long been imposed on their servants and slaves as well as themselves. As becomes apparent in subsequent scenes, George, Jr's, concerns about Sambo's self-control are well-founded, as at his first opportunity Sambo (not unlike George, Jr, himself earlier in the play) drinks heavily at a local pub and appears on stage to be completely drunk (albeit still happy about his new freedom). George Friendly, Jr, remains steadfast in his commitment to Sambo's new life, however, and does not try to reverse his decision—driven by Quaker religious principles—to liberate his slave.²⁵

On the one hand, Quakers in Murdock's early American farce are depicted as being comical or even ridiculous because the elder generation of Friends is by turns cynical and rigid about the traditional discipline that limits their social choices, and because the younger generation as a whole is driven by romance, not religious principle. On the other hand, it is the lapsed Quaker George Friendly, Jr, a birthright

Quaker converted away from piety to the rakish life of a boulevardier, who makes the decision to free Sambo. Quaker values thus sponsor Sambo's liberation, while secular, non-Quaker values definitively shape the moral and social world of both George Friendly, Jr. and the life of freedom that Sambo is beginning to experience not as a Quaker but as a church-less free man of color.

By the late nineteenth century, stage performances gave way in part to the dissemination of motion pictures, first in the form of silent films, and by the 1920s with soundtracks added for enhanced realism. What is known of the titles and scenarios of some of these early American films can shed some useful light on the perpetuation of Quaker culture as a source of archaic religious character types and anachronistic cultural curiosity during a period of rapid modernization in the United States. A number of silent films took Quaker life as their subject, among them *A Quaker Mother* (1911); *The Quakeress* (1913);²⁶ *Bred in the Bone* (1915);²⁷ *The Dancing Girl* (1915); and *Beauty's Worth* (1922).²⁸

Somewhat more is known about *The Quack Quakers* (1916), an American film by the prolific director Harry F. Millarde (1885–1931) that has been lost to viewers but which survives in a scenario published soon after its release. *The Quack Quakers* is a comedy hinging on the premise that a Broadway actor named Tom Perkins is searching desperately for a beautiful dancing showgirl—'a queen to lead the bunch'—in a musical called 'Peaches and Cream'. Having surveyed all the showgirls currently at work on Broadway, his gruff stage manager Morris sends him off to find the perfect leading lady, insisting that Tom Perkins scour the city in order to 'Find...a girl that's pretty enough and that can dance like a tornado!'²⁹

Embarking on a star search at the local beach, Perkins soon discovers a stunningly beautiful young woman named Rosie Pinkham, who admits her desire to become an actress and invites him to see her dance that day. When Tom Perkins and his stage manager arrive that evening at the Pinkham residence, they discover Rosalind and her father Peter are now dressed in traditional, plain Quaker garb and in the company of Rosalind's Uncle Ezra, a devout Quaker who is paying the family a visit. Instead of the scantily-clad bathing beauty of the previous day, they are presented with Rosalind in a completely different light, as she appears to be entirely transformed, 'standing in the full glare of a great chandelier, a demure, gray-gowned, white-kerchiefed Quaker maiden, who cast her eyelids down, folded her hands in an attitude of meekness and dropped them a demure courtesy'. The explanation for the Pinkham's sudden transformation into Friends is soon revealed, but not before Morris and Perkins stand amazed at the thought of an upright Quaker family having anything to do with the stage. The first instinct of his stage manager, is to scold Perkins for having been so obtuse as to believe that a Quaker girl would be a candidate for stardom: 'You thought a Quaker was going on the stage? That's your Peach? Tom, my boy, the heat has gone to your head. You lead me up here on a wild goose chase to meet a family of Quakers!' To which, Perkins can only muster a befuddled protest that: 'But they weren't Quakers this afternoon...they were just regular folks, just as I told you'.

Fortunately for Perkins, a phone call to Rosie Pinkham later in the evening reveals that Ezra Pinkham, their wealthy visiting uncle, had for the previous 20 years not

visited the Pinkhams in their New York home and that the Pinkhams's Quaker costuming had only been a calculated performance meant to deceive their relative. Uncle Ezra—a devout Quaker who expected the same kind of piety from his relatives—had no inkling that Rosie and her father during those years had strayed far from the Quaker faith: so much so that they had been allowing themselves worldly indulgences like sunbathing, theater-going, and art collecting (the Pinkham painting and statuary collection had been hastily draped with covers when they learned of Uncle Ezra's impending visit). As Rosie explains to a relieved Tom Perkins during their conversation that evening, the Pinkhams had only been trying to maintain appearances so as to deceive Uncle Ezra into believing that their Quaker faith remained intact: 'Well, we just scurried around to get ready. We hid all the cards, and covered the pool table, and screened the pictures and draped the statuary, and dressed ourselves up [in Quaker clothes] and got it all done just in time... Besides, [Uncle Ezra's] awful rich!'

As a performer, Rosie Pinkham surpasses all expectations. An instinctive actress, she so convincingly performs the part of a devout Quaker for her rich Uncle Ezra that not even Perkins and Morris—who are shrewd veterans of the theater—understand at first that she is merely acting a part. When the truth of her performance is revealed to Tom Perkins, he is stunned: 'And that little scene was all acting!... Why, you never flickered and eyelash. You looked like the real article, all right'. Part of the irony in this scene is connected to the erotic charge produced in the men (and by extension the audiences that they imagine) when the presumably chaste Quakeress is revealed to be merely playing a part. When the stage manager Morris discovers Rosie's ploy, he 'was at first incredulous, but when he was convinced that the Quakerism had been a clever bit of acting he was both highly amused and genuinely excited'. In conceding his excitement, Morris rehearses the logic of representing Quaker faith as embodying a repressed sexual response: one that is all the more alluring once it is released from the grip of faith. This logic can be traced to its conclusion as Rosie's parlor audition with Perkins and Morris continues and they observe her abilities as a dancer, noting that 'Demure and quiet as Rosie had been as a Quakeress, as a dancer she was a veritable whirlwind'. Admitting to a dramatic expertise that she had used for deluding her wealthy uncle, Rosalie had previously told the men demurely but revealingly that 'I'm of Quaker blood, you know', thereby suggesting that skill at acting could have its uses on the stage (for entertainment of audiences) or in the family (for cynically keeping up appearances about religious devotion). Her gift for deception also suggests the potential for a broader cynicism within the Quaker movement, especially as its well-known traditional practices encounter the decadent urban scene that is represented in *The Quack Quakers* by the fast-moving world of twentieth-century musical theater. The film seems to imply that, given the magnetic appeal of musical theater and other urban pleasures, perhaps even Uncle Ezra himself (who had traveled from Missouri for his surprise visit to the ex-Quaker Pinkhams and insists to them that he has 'no desire to see more of thy city or thy friends') might have been persuaded eventually to set aside his plain clothes, peculiar talk, and old-fashioned piety in favor of a worldly, hedonistic adventure on Broadway.

Perhaps the most influential American film with the Quaker ethos at its center has been the frontier Western *High Noon* (1952),³⁰ which won the American Academy Award for Best Picture; perhaps more tellingly, in public remarks, former United States President George W. Bush has made mention of *High Noon* as his favorite film.³¹ This genre Western features a rugged frontier marshal Will Kane (Gary Cooper) who is preparing to retire from law enforcement after a long career of service in the fictional community of Hadleyville; he is also about to marry the beautiful, and much younger, Quakeress Amy Fowler (Grace Kelly), who has asked Kane to give up law enforcement in deference to her pacifism. Before he can turn in his badge for good, however, Kane learns that the criminal Frank Miller, whom he had sent to prison previously, has been paroled and is due to arrive in town on the high noon train. The suspense builds as the narrative unfolds according to the railroad clock, which indicates that about one and a half hours remain before the feared arrival of the criminal.³²

That Kane triumphs over the criminal gang, thereby making the town of Hadleyville safe once more for commerce and domestic life, comes as little surprise, but the presence of Amy Fowler Kane—an apparently devout Quaker—in the final scene is a crucial element in the symbolism of this mythic American tale. Miller is killed with a shot from Marshall Kane, but the deadly shot is fired while Miller himself is using the suddenly brave Amy Kane as a human shield. Just before the crack shot from Marshall Kane fells Miller permanently, however, Amy Kane is herself inspired by the heat of the moment to act violently and against her stated Quaker principles. This occurs during a crucial moment in the gunfight, when only Amy is in a position to fire a fatal shot at one of Miller's criminal accomplices; significantly, the film clearly shows that she not only kills the man instantly but does so instinctively and brutally, with a single shot into the man's back from very close range.³³

High Noon thereby perpetuates a centuries-long American conversation about the Quaker faith, which is embodied by Amy, a Friend whose moral transformation occurs in the heat of battle, when instinct apparently overrules her lifelong piety and she chooses to kill mercilessly in order to save the community and her husband. As with so many fictional narratives of American Quaker life since the colonial period, *High Noon* uses a Quaker stock character as both a moral beacon and an opportunity for converting the moral beacon to a new character who is willing to exercise power and violence, when necessary, in order to advance the American project (in this case, settling a frontier town for the sake of commercial stability). In a situation like the one in which the Kane family finds itself, violence trumps pacifism, with even the most devout of Friends—a young woman whose Quaker beliefs are seemingly unchallengeable—discovered in the end to have violent, retributive, and actionable impulses written into the core of her being.

Although they differ in many significant ways *The Triumphs of Love* (1795), *The Quack Quakers* (1916), and *High Noon* (1952) all deploy Quaker characters for purposes of visual convenience in theatrical representation; until recently, unlike most other American citizens, Quaker religious affiliation was immediately identifiable because of their distinctive plain attire and archaic patterns of speech. Their utility as a kind of convenient visual shorthand, however, is insufficient to explain the

persistence of Quakers as theatrical characters in American performance culture. Although separated by many decades and created in a variety of cultural contexts, these examples of Quaker theatricality in American drama and cinema share a great deal more than just a passing interest in the comic potential of Friends' clothing and manners. Comedy and peculiar habits constitute only the first layer of Quaker discourse mapped by the creators of these works. Each of these narratives presents Quaker religion and morality as situated in complex tension with dominant American norms and values.

Because the narratives discussed do not include any discussion of the fundamental theological distinctions between the Religious Society of Friends and other religious groups, such as the Quaker belief in the Inner Light, the evidence of these theatrical and cinematic artifacts constitutes something other than just a theological dispute. Taken together, the logic of these performances presents iconic American Friends in either comic or serious modes, but in every case implies the impossibility of full commitment to the weighty ideals of Quaker culture, such as equality, avoidance of worldly activities, and pacifism. In the Revolutionary-era staging of *The Triumphs of Love*, for instance, the viability of Quaker opposition to slavery in early America is placed at the center of the farcical events that occur on stage; ironically though, the most devout Quakers shown in that play are unable themselves to do what is necessary to free even a single slave. Similarly, traditional Quaker restrictions on the performing arts, theatrical amusements, and worldly attire are shown in the silent film *The Quack Quakers* to be an important marker of the distance between the moral world of Friends and that of the broader population of Americans. Traditional Quaker opposition to such increasingly popular amusements as musical theater, *The Quack Quakers* seems to suggest, marks not just Quaker cultural difference but also the apparent inevitability of Quaker absorption into the evolving moral norms of modern American popular culture. Finally, *High Noon* demonstrates the moral grandeur of Quaker pacifism and gives voice to that commitment through an attractive and eloquent spokesperson; nevertheless, the exigencies of frontier justice ultimately require her to concede—against her will and through an apparently justifiable homicide—the insufficiency of Quaker values in a violently expanding American nation. So it is that in each of these examples from American performance culture, Friends are singled out as distinctive social agents and admirable moral subjects, but the narrative trajectory in each case suggests that not even Quakers are able entirely to sustain the personal propriety and moral commitment that constitute the most obvious public dimension of their religious belonging.

NOTES

1. Pratt, C.E., 'The Dancing Quakers: Sung by Miss Lydia Thompson and Mr. Harry Taylor. In the Burlesque of Sinbad the Sailor', New York: Ditson & Co., C.H., 1873. In writing this popular tune for American audiences, Pratt was likely following the example of literary impresario James T. Fields (one of the founding partners in the literary publishing house of Boston, Ticknor & Fields), who composed the light-hearted song 'The Quaker Girls' (composed with an accompaniment for the piano forte by J.D. Beckel, Philadelphia: T.C. Andrews, 1858) and published it the same year as Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel that depicted Quakers in the more serious pursuit

of assisting escaping slaves. Fields, who before turning to a long career (1861–71) as editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine had written both songs and poetry, produced lyrics like the following, which in a number of ways set the tone of romantic comedy for the many popular songs and theatrical representations of Quakers that would appear over the following century: ‘Who loves not the Quaker girls! / I’m thinking of a fair one now, / With tresses dark, and sunny brow— / As stately as a nun’.

2. Pratt, C.E., ‘Quakeresses Wore Masks’, *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 1, 1896, p. 21.

3. For a discussion of Quaker representations in America fiction, see Ryan, J.E., ‘Imaginary Friends: Representing Quakers in Early American Fiction’, *Studies in American Fiction* 44 (Fall 2003), pp. 191–220 (191–201).

4. Theatrical representations of Friends presaged their use as stock characters in American popular fiction from the late eighteenth through the first half of the twentieth century. For a discussion of the complex use of Quaker themes in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* (1799), see Reid, J., “‘Not So Much Written as Dreamed’: Quaker Dream-Work in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly*”, unpublished MA thesis, Auburn University, 2006. A comprehensive discussion of Quakers in nineteenth-century American fiction is included in Ryan, ‘Imaginary Friends’, pp. 191–208; a more complete evaluation of Quaker representations in American media is included in Ryan, J.E., *Imaginary Friends: Representing Quakers in American Culture, 1650–1950*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009. This essay is adapted from and expands upon the discussion of Quakers and theatricality in that work. J. Peacock’s, ‘“What They Seek for Is in Themselves”: Quaker Language and Thought in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century American Literature’, *Quaker Studies* 12.2 (2008), pp. 196–215, also provides a useful examination of Quakerism in the work of important eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American writers and provides an important analysis of the ways that the relationship between Quaker silence and language creates for outsiders an ‘ironic failure of articulation’. Non-Quaker writers, in Peacock’s view, therefore are confronted with a ‘mystery at the heart of the Quaker’ and an ‘epistemological gap heightened by the perceived secrecy of the faith’ (p. 200).

5. Lodge, T., *Lady Alimony; or, the Alimony Lady*, London, 1659.

6. Duffett, T., *The Mock-Tempest*, London, 1675.

7. Leonard, J., *The Rambling Justice, or Jealous Husband; a Comedy*, London, 1678.

8. D’Urfey, T., *The Richmond Heiress; or, a Woman Once in the Right*, London, 1693.

9. Centlivre, S., *The Beau’s Duel: or, a soldier for the ladies. A comedy. As it is acted at the Theatre-Royal in Lincoln’s-Inn-Fields, by Their Majesties servants... 1702*, 4th corrected edn; London, 1736, pp. 47–72.

10. Centlivre, S., *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, London, 1718.

11. On Centlivre’s popularity and the discrimination against her as a woman playwright (at various times, she posed as a male writer or used a pseudonym), see Thomson, P., *The Cambridge Introduction to English Theatre, 1660–1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 97–98. Thomson has observed that Centlivre’s dramatic depictions of Quakers, while comic, are frequently negative: ‘[Centlivre] can be quirkily particular in her dislikes (of Quakers or Tory fathers who try to master their daughters)’ (p. 97). In a related discussion of Quakers and the theatre, Thomson notes further that the emergence in the late seventeenth century of women as actresses was in certain ways similar to the gender politics associated with women in the Quaker community. Citing the actresses Rebecca Marshall (b. c. 1640) and Elizabeth Boutell (b. 1648), he suggests that ‘Both might equally well be portrayed as women who achieved, through their talents and self-belief, a right of command over their own lives that was more available to actresses (and Quakers) than to almost any other women’ (p. 57).

12. Shadwell, C., *The Fair Quaker of Deal; or, the Humours of the Navy. A Comedy, As It Is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane*, London: James Knapton, 1715.

13. Wilkinson, R., *The Quaker’s Wedding. A Comedy. As It Is Acted at the Theatre-Royal by His Majesty’s Servants*, London: Bernard Lintot, 1723.

14. Although contemporary accounts of C. Dibdin's *The Quaker: A Comic Opera in Two Acts as Performed at the Theatre in Boston* (Boston: printed by P. Edes and S. Etheridge, for William P. Blake, no. 59, Cornhill, and William T. Clap, no. 90, Newbury-Street, 1794) being performed in these locations have not been discovered, the publication history of the play suggests that residents in all these cities had the opportunity to see Dibdin's comic treatment of Quakers. A Philadelphia edition of Dibdin's play *The Benevolent Quaker (the Benevolent Friend)* indicates it was performed in that city, and Hamilton, F. et al., *Opera in Philadelphia: Performance Chronology 1800–1824*, online: <http://frankhamilton.org/ph/phd.pdf> (accessed 12 March 2009), cites a performance of the play there in July 1802. It is also notable that his son Thomas Dibdin also created a Quaker character in his romantic farce, *The Naval Pillar: A Musical Entertainment, as Performed at the Theatre-Royal, Covent-Garden, London: Printed and sold by J. Barker, 1799*.

15. Johnson, O., and Burling, W.J., *The Colonial American Stage, 1665–1774: A Documentary Calendar*, Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001, pp. 277–78. According to Jeffrey H. Richards, the Southwark Theatre had been established in 1766; by the 1790s, its actors were mostly British-born, of the Old American Company, a New York troupe who garnered acclaim most prominently for its performances of Royall Tyler's highly popular *The Contrast* beginning in 1787. In performances staged in New York and Philadelphia, that company "occasionally offered a performance of a British or other foreign drama altered slightly to fit American situations or on rare occasions a complete play written by an American" (Richards, J.H., 'Sati in Philadelphia: The Widow[s] of Malabar', *American Literature* 80 [December 2008], pp. 648–75 [647]).

16. For alternate play titles, see O'Keefe, J., *The Young Quaker: A Comedy*, Dublin, 1784, and *The Young Quaker; or the Fair American* (1784), Boston, 1797. O'Keefe also used Quakers for comic relief in his later play *Wild Oats: or, The Strolling Gentlemen* (1793), Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1796.

17. Dibdin, *The Quaker*, p. 32.

18. For details on the production history of *The Triumphs of Love*, see Nathans, H.S., *Early American Theatre from the Revolution to Thomas Jefferson: Into the Hands of the People*, London: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 95–100.

19. On Rush and Coxe as supporters of Murdock's play, see Nathans, *Early American Theatre*, pp. 95–100.

20. Richards, J.H. (ed.), *Early American Drama*, New York: Penguin, 1997, pp. xii–xv. In describing the resistance to theatre in the American colonies, Richards conjectures that the English experience with theatre was an important factor: "English Calvinism set itself in opposition to the theatre for several reasons, but two are noteworthy: the first is that theatres drew criminals (and experience with pickpockets and prostitutes in the theatres south of the Thames in England showed this criticism had its merits); the second asserted that acting was merely a form of hypocrisy, a pretending to be someone a person was not, and therefore only encouraged youth to imitate bad behavior' (p. xii).

21. Johnson and Burling, *The Colonial American Stage*, p. 76; Nathans, *Early American Theatre*, p. 15. The leading theatre company performing in eighteenth-century Philadelphia was the American Company (1752–92), which performed throughout the American colonies and early republic as well as in Jamaica. In 1754, having overcome significant legal resistance to theatrical performances in Philadelphia, the American Company staged its first season of twenty-four plays in that city. American Company performances in Philadelphia's Southwark theater continued into the early national period, although the entertainment was sometimes interrupted by patriotic hecklers from the gallery, who objected loudly to some of the players as being Loyalists. Despite their evident popularity, civic opposition to stage plays remained strong; as late as 1787 the American Company was advertising its performances as 'lectures' and 'dialogs' in order to make their entertainments amenable to Philadelphia's laws against the theater (Durham, W., *American Theatre Companies, 1749–1887*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1991, pp. 10–19).

22. As Jason Shaffer suggests, even well after the theater was permitted to exist by order of royal decree, the colonial lawmakers themselves decided to discourage such activities. Shaffer notes that

Continental Congress of 1774 passed a 'broad non-importation, non-consumption, and non-exportation agreement that discouraged "every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse racing, and all kinds of gaming, cock-fighting, exhibitions of shews, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments"' (Shaffer, J., 'Making "an Excellent Die": Death, Mourning, and Patriotism in the Propaganda Plays of the American Revolution', *Early American Literature* 41 [2006], pp. 1-27 [1]).

23. Murdock, J., *The Triumphs of Love, or Happy Reconciliation*, Philadelphia: R. Folwell, 1795, p. 32.

24. Murdock, *The Triumphs of Love*, p. 52.

25. Murdock, *The Triumphs of Love*, p. 52.

26. This silent film was probably based on the popular Broadway play, 'The Quaker Girl', starring Louise Glaum and William Desmond Taylor, which saw 240 performances at New York's Park Theater in 1911 and 1912 (Internet Broadway Database: Online: <http://www.ibdb.com/> [accessed 22 March 2009]).

27. No scenario available, but several characters are described as Quakers. Starring Dorothy Gish. Online: <http://www.friendsmedia.org/quaker-film.htm> (accessed 1 March 2009).

28. According to www.friendsmedia.org, in this film, 'Marion Davies plays a Quaker girl raised by two very strict aunts. In this Pygmalion-like story Davies transforms from plain duck to lovely swan with lots of Hollywood glitz' (accessed 1 March 2009).

29. Perry, M., Summary of *The Quack Quakers* (B&W, 1916). Kalem Film. Dir. Harry Millarde. Scenario by Samuel J. Taylor. With H.L. Davenport [Peter Pinkham], Ethel Teare [Rosie Pinkham], Victor Rottam [Tom], Gus Leonard [Uncle Ezra]. *Moving Picture Stories* 8.187 (July 28), pp. 5-9 (5). Online: www.silentera.com/archive/movPicStories/1916/ (accessed 10 October 2009).

30. *High Noon*, directed by Fred Zinnemann, with Gary Cooper and Grace Kelley, 1952. Fiftieth Anniversary Collector's Edition dvd, 2002.

31. *High Noon's* screenplay, written by Carl Foreman, is based on the short story 'The Tin Star' by John W. Cunningham. Also prominent among the Quaker films of the period is William Wyler's popular and Academy Award winning *Friendly Persuasion* (1956), based on a sequence of short stories of the same name by the Quaker author Jessamyn West, who was a cousin of future US President Richard M. Nixon (also a birthright Quaker). For a thorough discussion of the political context of *Friendly Persuasion*, whose theme is similar to that of *High Noon* in that it shows the challenges offered to Quaker belief and social values by modern culture, see Cull, N.J., 'Richard Nixon and the Political Appropriation of "Friendly Persuasion"', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19 (June 1999), pp. 239-46 (240-41).

32. For a critique of the broader ideological implications of *High Noon*, see Slotkin, R., *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, New York: Atheneum, 1992, pp. 391-96.

33. Noting the importance of Amyh Kane's failing religious principles in the film, Richard Slotkin has observed that 'At the end, Kane's moral vindication is perfected, first by the "conversion" of his Quaker wife—who grabs a gun and shoots one of Miller's men in the back—then by a "captivity/rescue" in which Kane kills Miller while Miller is holding [Amy] Kane as a shield' (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, p. 395).

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