

BOOK REVIEWS

SIM, S., *Manifesto for Silence: Confronting the Politics and Culture of Noise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 205. ISBN: 978-0-2591-8, Hardback, £23.99.

It is notoriously difficult to write about 'silence' in general—perhaps as difficult as it would be to write about 'sound' in general. Silences take their character from their contexts—social, intentional, political and environmental contexts, as well as the words and sounds that surround them. As readers of *Quaker Studies* will be well aware, even 'Quaker silence'—which often features as a single example in wider discussions of silence—has itself multiple forms and meanings. Many of the key works on silence in recent years have offered complex taxonomies of silence in an attempt to come to terms with this multiplicity—or have simply chosen to focus on a narrow range of silences. Stuart Sim, by contrast, attempts to cover as many contexts, forms and experiences of silence as possible within a single argument for the value of silence. A whistle-stop tour (or the silent equivalent thereof) takes us through Western and Eastern religious traditions, philosophy, film, visual arts, music, literature, psychotherapy, everyday conversation—not to mention an exploration of the evils of excessive noise in marketing, modern warfare, city planning and popular culture, to name but a few. The result is an entertaining and provocative read, not so much a coherent manifesto as a collage of silences.

Sim is at his most eloquent and persuasive in the first part of the book, 'The Politics and Culture of Noise', where he surveys a range of evidence concerning the increasing ambient noise levels suffered by contemporary urban dwellers (in particular) and the negative effects this has on physical and psychological health. Noise, he argues, is the 'forgotten pollutant', often trivialised and thus allowed to go unchallenged. The use of noise as a weapon, for example in 'Shock and Awe' attacks, is rarely recognised as what it in fact is, a serious assault on (very often) civilian populations. Sim's appeal, in this context, for a greater awareness of noise and a refusal to tolerate excessive noise is hard to gainsay.

Perhaps unexpectedly, his case is less clear when he comes to the positive aspects of his manifesto—a defence of the 'virtues of silence'. The main problem is that he lumps together so many different accounts of silence and how it functions that it

becomes difficult to do justice to any of them, and numerous misrepresentations and debatable claims creep in. This is apparent in his extended and laudatory account of Quaker worship, in which—to give a few examples—he equates silent worship with ‘a form of therapy’ (p. 67), states that for Quakers in general ‘God himself is Silence’ (p. 69—the quotation, of course, is from Pierre Lacout, but Sim appears to assume that it represents a Quaker orthodoxy), and claims that Samuel Beckett would have ‘approved entirely’ of Quaker worship (p. 69). He also claims (p. 41) that William Law was a Quaker—which no doubt made Law turn silently in his grave.

A glance through this book will provide much to stimulate thought—but anyone seeking a thorough and coherent treatment of silence in any of its forms would do better to consult Sim’s bibliography than to spend much time on the details of his presentation.

Rachel Muers
University of Leeds, England

Woolman, J., *John Woolman and the Affairs of Truth* (ed. James Proud; San Francisco: Inner Light Books, 2010), pp. xl + 310. ISBN: 978-0-9797110-7-7, Hardback \$45.00, Paperback \$25.00.

John Woolman and the Affairs of Truth is the fourth publication from the Quaker publisher Inner Light Books, which began in 2009 to republish Quaker texts from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in editions that are simultaneously rigorous in scholarship and accessible to a modern reader. So far they have achieved their aim admirably.

Many of Woolman’s writings were published and widely distributed during his lifetime, but only some have been reprinted in modern editions. This book brings together all of the non-*Journal* writings, the essays, epistles and other works which Woolman intended for general readers, together with a short collection of manuscript ephemera including notes, letters and an account of a dream. Appendices include reprints of ten Yearly Meeting epistles in which Woolman was involved as co-author, and his memorial to his brother Abner.

Proud has produced an impeccable edition of these writings. The transcriptions are accurate and punctuation and spelling have been modernized but not grammar or citations. Each text has a short introduction giving contextual information and an account of its original publication. The book itself has a solid biographical introduction, which relates Woolman’s writings to his life and times. There are two indices, a subject index and one of scriptural citations; a history of Woolman’s involvement with the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting epistle-writing committee; and a comprehensive guide to the locations of the manuscripts of Woolman’s literary works, personal business records and epistles.

Texts are printed in chronological order, which usefully enables a reader to trace the development of Woolman’s theological and political thought. The essays range widely in subject matter, including spiritual issues, slavery, poverty, war and

international trade. Readers of these essays will often be startled by their contemporary relevance and by the elegance of Woolman's prose. Eighteenth-century scholars will be grateful for the appearance of this well-edited and attractively produced volume, and for the tools which Proud has provided which will enable further scholarship on this significant writer and thinker.

Betty Hagglund
Centre for Postgraduate Quaker Studies
University of Birmingham, England

MYLES, A.G., 'Border Crossings: The Queer Erotics of Quakerism in Seventeenth-century New England', pp. 114–43 in Thomas A. Foster (ed.) *Long before Stonewall: Histories of Same-sex Sexuality in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 2007, pp. x + 406. ISBN: 978-0-8147-2750-8, Paperback, \$26.00, £16.00.

Taking as her starting point the interconnection of religious, social and sexual order characteristic of early modern society in general, and of Puritanism in particular, Anne G. Myles considers early Quakerism's threat to contemporary sexual norms. Her argument is that the Quaker challenge to marital and sexual orthodoxy can be seen as a harbinger—at least imaginatively—of same-sex networks and of what we, in theoretical terms, might identify as a 'queer' identity.

In exploring the nature of Quaker spirituality and its consequences for the bodily, Myles is on familiar ground. The ways in which early Friends rhetorically disrupted the meaning of gender is already well-attested, as for example in Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole's redefinition of 'weak' priests as 'women' and in the blurring of narrative voices in pamphlets written collectively by mixed-sex groups. Their disruption of gender identity went, of course, much further than mere verbal trope, being enacted—to their neighbours' horror—in practices which unsettled sexual conventions. Contemporaries were scandalized, for example, by Friends' disruption of familial and marital stability, their promotion (at least in New England) of celibacy, their travelling in same-sex (sometimes quasi-marital) pairs, and their enactment of what Myles calls 'the erotics of martyrdom'. While her identification of the bond between Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer as 'a specifically female kind of queerness' is not entirely convincing, her suggestion of a 'queer' discursive (rather than material) space is compelling. Fully acknowledging the gulf between seventeenth-century constructions of gender identity and our own, Myles sees early Quakers' transcendence of difference as analogous to what today's theorists define as a 'queer' identity. Early Quakers, then, experienced their own kind of 'coming out'.

In discussing contemporary attacks on 'Quaker perversions', however, Myles perhaps gives rather more weight to occasional accusations of sodomy than they deserve. Sexual slurs were (and are) a common enough way of defending the status quo against the threat presented by any group of 'others', whether the outsider group be racial, social or religious. Some of the printed material unearthed by Myles is

indeed startling and even sensational, but she surely overstates the case. In fact, her claim that ‘the discourse of buggery... is woven throughout anti-Quaker writings’ (p. 119) is blatant exaggeration for effect. The ballad account she adduces of the Quaker’s act of sodomy with a mare is best known for its appearance (twice) in the Royalist volume *Rump: or An exact collection of the choicest poems & songs, relating to the late times...* (1662, edited by Alexander Brome). One of the ballads, *News from Colchester*, also appears in volumes of works by Sir John Denham (*Poems*, 1668) and John Cleveland (*Works*, 1687); and both also appear as broadsides. The context of the ballads’ reproduction is thus rather more that of royalist witticism and ‘news’ than of anti-Quaker tract. Curiously, given Myles’s claims, ballads about Quaker sexual deviance seem to have been surprisingly few. A search of the English Broadside Ballad Archive (<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>), currently containing early 4,000 items, returns only 18 ballads with ‘Quaker’ anywhere in the text. Often the Quaker reference is incidental and few of the ballads involve Quakers and sex (one on incest involving a ‘pretended’ Quaker). The predominant sexual theme seems to be the incontinence of Quaker wives and the doings of their cuckolded husbands (the startling recourse of cutting off his own ‘Ding-Dangs’ occurring repeatedly).

In fact sexual impropriety was much more often attributed to female Quakers than to males, as Myles herself later acknowledges in describing ‘female-gendered sexual deviance’ as ‘such a prominent category in fears about Quakerism’ (p. 120). Myles covers much ground in an engaging and lucid essay. Her research can perhaps tell us little directly about sexuality in early America, but her suggestion that, at a more theoretical level, there is evidence here for work on identity formation in the seventeenth century is well demonstrated. Important, too, is her reminder that ‘religion’s historical role has not universally been that of a force of social and erotic control: religious communities have equally been contexts for the expression of transgressive allegiances and forms of affect’ (p. 132).

Maureen Bell
Centre for Postgraduate Quaker Studies
University of Birmingham, England

Calvert, J.E., *Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. xiv + 382. ISBN: 978-0-521-88436-5. Hardback, £59.00, \$104.00.

For students of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Quakerism, colonial mid-Atlantic North America, the American Revolution and the early American Republic, Jane Calvert’s *Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson* is a must read. Calvert’s study addresses two important but neglected questions: How did Quaker theology influence their civic engagement? And did this theology result in a unique Quaker civil expression in colonial Pennsylvania with lasting effects on United States civic polity?

Quaker theology and its distinctive influence on Quaker social and political action has been largely ignored as an approach to understand the shape of early Friends' institutionalization. The generalization that Quakers from the beginning were non-credal has led to a vague perception that they were also non-theological and so scholars have avoided connecting Quaker theological belief to larger Quaker motivations and praxis. Likewise, despite the fact that Quakers were the third largest religious group in the British North American colonies by 1750, scholars have overlooked the sizable Quaker thumb-print on the American Revolutionary and Constitutional discourse, focusing instead on Calvinist influences. Calvert addresses these gaps in research with a 'theologico-political' approach to Quaker history and Quaker influence in colonial Pennsylvania (pp. 1-2). In the first of two sections of Calvert's book she defines the emergence, theological roots and application of 'Quaker constitutionalism' from 1652-1763. The second section focuses on the Quaker-informed politics of early American Founder John Dickinson, highlighting the effects of Quaker civil polity on the American political tradition.

Calvert argues that her 'theologico-political' approach to Quaker thought is justified because early Friends viewed theology, and specifically ecclesiology, as 'largely indistinguishable from political theory and civil structures' (p. 2). In the 1660s-1670s, Calvert insists, Quakers adopted a 'federal system' of church governance whereby 'local meetings retained autonomy but the decision making process went to the top of the structure—to the quarterly and yearly meetings. These top level decisions were considered infallible and local meetings were asked to submit to them' (p. 41). Quakers believed, she argues, that this structure enlightened the individual and community to God's law, while it tempered potentially divergent interpretations of divine revelation in a way that maintained group unity (pp. 27-28, 37). Likewise, Quaker philosophy of civic action and theory for political improvement, appropriate forms of dissent, and obligation to work within the codified polity paralleled the 'form and function' of Quaker ecclesiology in their religious meetings (p. 6). This understanding of the linkage between ecclesiology and public theory, Calvert indicates, clarifies the early Quaker mission and illuminates their social agenda. That is, by modeling and embodying Quaker ecclesiology in the civic arena and attempting to generate social change, 'Quakers witnessed before the court of public opinion with the intent to persuade non-Quaker to their position. It was a form of proselytizing', which, Calvert argues, continued into colonial and early America (pp. 9, 37). Calvert identifies that within the political realm the peaceful discernment and execution of God's law, what William Penn called *synteresis*, was to guide civic policy as it did ecclesial polity: in a collaborative dynamic between humanity and God (pp. 52-53, 68, 70, 77).

In Pennsylvania, she argues, Quakers codified their theologico-political theory with 'missionizing' intent through enforced policies that they believed would 'help the population on their way to Quakerism'—most notable among these codified policies was religious liberty (p. 145). In fact, the Pennsylvania Quaker assembly institutionalized their values in a way that sought to 'embrace and absorb' non-Quakers and naysayers (140). The codified theologico-political civic polity governed

their belief that Pennsylvania's citizens could act like Quakers without necessarily joining a Quaker meeting (p. 140).

In the aftermath of the Seven Years' War, Calvert insists, three categories within colonial Quakerism emerged: withdrawing, radical, and traditional (p. 164). Most scholarship on this era has focused on the group Calvert calls 'withdrawing' Friends, assuming that this was the only strain of legitimate Quaker thought (p. 184). However, Calvert notes that members of all three groups were considered to be in good standing with their religious community up until the Revolution.

While Calvert deals with all three groups and their consistency or inconsistency with historic Quakerism she turns in the second section of her book to focus on John Dickinson, who she argues is only understandable 'within the stream of Quaker constitutionalism' (p. 17). This would seem like a difficult case to make since Dickinson was not a member of a Quaker meeting and, rather, a believer in defensive war who joined the Continental Army in the Revolutionary cause. Yet Calvert is convincing. Throughout *Quaker Constitutionalism* she analyzes the development of the often over-simplified Quaker peace testimony, which originally left more room for individual conscience than Quakers later understood to be consistent with their testimonies. As a result, she sufficiently places Dickinson in the 'traditional' Quaker context, though, she admits, he fits imperfectly (p. 195).

In the American political theorizing of the 1770s and 1780s, Dickinson advocated characteristics of Quaker ecclesial polity that had been standardized by the Pennsylvania Quaker Assembly since the 1701 Charter of Privileges: a strong Federal system to preserve unity; and, an amendable constitution to enable constructive dissent (pp. 21-22, 299). Calvert notes that since the ratification of the United States Constitution the radical, revolutionary philosophy of Thomas Paine has given way to a process of amendment and civil disobedience in line with Quaker theologico-political informed civic polity.

In conclusion, *Quaker Constitutionalism* is an admirable historical and theological achievement. In the course of describing Quaker theologico-political influence Calvert aptly problematizes generalizations of Quaker quietism, which have downplayed the missionizing thrust after the first generation of Quakers. This clarification, in turn, helps to bring the Quaker vision for Pennsylvania into focus by establishing a theory of civic engagement that is not artificially divorced from Quaker religious belief and goals. Similarly, by investigating the relationship of Quaker ecclesial polity and civic polity she illumines the complexity of eighteenth-century Quaker responses to events of the colonial era, the Revolution and the Constitutional Convention.

Jon Kershner
University of Birmingham, England