

DOROTHY GOTT (c. 1748–1812) AND
'GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE': A DISOWNED PROPHET'S QUEST
FOR QUAKER RECOGNITION IN LATE GEORGIAN ENGLAND*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the psychological implications of Quaker membership, corporate identity and disownment in late Georgian England through analysis of the life and writings of Dorothy Gott (1748/9–1812), a curious ex-Quaker prophet who published three pamphlets of apocalyptic warning about the second coming of Christ at the turn of the eighteenth century. Through recovery research and analysis of her publications, it retrieves the story of her Quaker upbringing, disownment for exogamous marriage, subsequent attempts to gain readmission into the Religious Society of Friends, and calls to her contemporaries to return to the primitive Christianity of early Friends. It investigates the impact of her Quaker religious upbringing on her visionary prophetic emergence and writing; particularly her employment, and privileging, of religious practices and beliefs associated with early Friends, such as the enactment of corporeal prophetic signs and assertion that Christ's second coming would be within the heart rather than in person.

KEYWORDS

Dorothy Gott, second coming, disownment, prophecy, signs.

In recent years, Dorothy Newberry Gott (1748/9–1812) has been a forgotten personage in Quaker studies. An ex-Quaker (she was disowned for exogamous marriage in 1773) who self-published three prophetic pamphlets at the turn of the eighteenth century, her association with the Religious Society of Friends was recognised in her own time. David Rivers identified her in his *Literary Memoirs of Living Authors of Great Britain [...]* (1798) as 'a quaker lady who has been peculiarly favoured with heavenly visions and the converse of inhabitants of invisible regions', and the Quaker diarist James Jenkins noted her interment at the Friends burial ground at Whitechapel in his *Records and Recollections, Respecting Himself, and Others from 1761 to 1821 [...]* (1822).¹ In the Victorian era, two of her three publications were also included in Joseph Smith's formidable undertaking *A*

Descriptive Catalogue of Friends' Books (1862). More recently, however, on the rare occasions when Gott has been subject to critical attention, mostly in relation to women's and millenarian history, her Quakerism has not been considered a defining feature of her identity.

In women's history, Gott has been interpreted as a plebeian rebel who engaged in a kind of self-imposed exile from oppressive society: Lynn Abrams describes her as a woman 'who renounced housework for the work of the soul' and Donna Landry as one who resisted the 'constraints of religious community'.² Such interpretations, which have read Gott's narratives through the lens of twentieth- and twenty-first-century secular feminisms as assertions of the self and search for independent autonomy, have not always taken into full account the religious dimensions of her agency regarding her emergence as an ecstatic visionary. In fact, as this essay will demonstrate, Gott's early Quaker learning was deeply formative in the development of her mature religious thinking; she understood Quaker membership as being among God's chosen people and desired to return within the fold of the Religious Society of Friends for the rest of her life.

Among scholars of Revolutionary-era prophecy, it has been presumed that Gott's theology was most analogous with those of her contemporary visionaries and millenarians. This belief has been encouraged by evidence of her movement in radical religious circles; for instance, Gott met the visionary poet William Blake (1757–1827) and the popular London millenarian Samuel Best (1737/8–1825), author of *Poor Help's Warning to All* (1795), early in her prophetic ministry.³ As a prophetess, she has most often been likened with Joanna Southcott (1750–1814), the notorious Anglican heterodox millenarian who, in 1792, was 'strangely visited by day and by night concerning what was coming upon the whole earth...[and] ordered to set it down in writing'.⁴ Southcott claimed a special role in Christian redemption history declaring most notoriously at the age of sixty-four that she would give birth to a messiah—the Shiloh—a king who would rule in preparation for the return of Jesus. Overshadowed by the more famous pretender, Gott has been understood as a minor visionary in the mould of Southcott. Accordingly, G.R. Balleine's assumption made in 1956 that Gott 'published little books [...] with teaching so like Joanna's, that some were dividing their allegiance between the two prophetesses'⁵ has prevailed; for instance, Susan Juster mistakenly asserts in *Doomsayers* (2003) that Gott, like Southcott, suspected that she was destined to become the woman 'clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet' (Rev. 12:1) who would give birth to a 'man child' (Rev. 12:5), the saviour of the Jews.⁶ In fact, analysis of her writings reveals that, unlike Southcott, Gott did not have any such revelation or see herself as a messianic figure.⁷ Instead, her eschatology was most closely aligned with Quaker beliefs—most surprisingly with those of early Friends rather than her contemporary Quietists. For instance, unlike Southcott who foretold of the physical materialisation of Christ at the End Times, Gott was preaching a 'realising' eschatology of christopresentism along the lines of early Quaker thought.

That the heavily Quaker-influenced nature of Gott's religion has been overlooked is probably related to the fact that scholars have most often turned to her first publication, *The Midnight Cry, Or, 'Behold, the Bridegroom Comes!'* [...] (1788), when trying to decipher her religious thinking. Despite its foreboding apocalyptic title, Gott rarely explains the nature of her eschatological beliefs, or any other theology, in this text. Instead, this 103-page pamphlet, which was published just two years after she started seeing visions and hearing God's voice, is a confessional spiritual autobiography confusingly structured and perplexingly entwined with numerous competing stories about Gott's Quaker upbringing, disownment, married life, employment history, visionary experiences, and association with a wayward ex-soldier and -sailor named John Murray who she tried to reform. Mining this confusing multi-stranded narrative alone, the details of Gott's theology have been difficult to ascertain. In fact, her beliefs are expounded in greater depth in her subsequent publications—*Christ the Standard of Truth Set Up, by the Light of the Morning Star, the Principle of Truth* [...] (c. 1798) and *The Noon-Day Sun; A Revelation from Christ to Make an End of Apostacy* [...] (1811)—texts which abandon life writing and offer more methodical expositions of her beliefs regarding redemption history.⁸ By focussing on *The Midnight Cry*, and assuming that Gott's beliefs were in the mould of her contemporary visionaries—especially the heterodox Anglican Southcott—the impact of her Quakerism on her prophetic mission has been overlooked.

In fact, despite—or, more likely, because of—her disownment, Gott retained a complicated relationship with Friends for the rest of her life. *The Midnight Cry*—a complex text that is a confessional spiritual autobiography, vindication narrative and record of her 'sufferings'⁹—is deeply inscribed with the pain of her disownment, and repeatedly speaks of her enduring desire to be accepted back into the group. Moreover, this sense resonates in her subsequent texts written several decades after her disownment. Close analysis reveals the abiding influence of her early Quakerism in her use of Quaker language and, very unexpectedly for the late eighteenth century, enactment of corporeal prophetic signs—an early mode of ecstatic behaviour which was performed most prevalently by Friends a century earlier. As an author, she owes a debt to the long traditions of Quaker spiritual autobiography and pamphleteering, as well as to Quaker eschatology and proto-feminism. Indeed, historical records further affirm her life-long connections with Friends; for instance, a report for the 1788 Yearly Meeting names Gott as an annuity holder for Ackworth School (the Quaker school founded by John Fothergill and others in 1779),¹⁰ and digest records confirm Jenkins's note that she was interred in the Whitechapel Friends burial ground four decades after her disownment.¹¹

That Gott retained deeply ingrained feelings of injustice, and an accompanying desire to have her reputation restored among Friends, is revealed in her admissions in *Christ the Standard of Truth* that she delivered *The Midnight Cry* to the Peel Quarter—presumably in 1788 (fifteen years after her disownment) 'but they gave me no answer'¹²—and that she delivered 'an account of the Lord working in me [...] to Friends at their yearly meeting in London, 16 May 1795, but they gave

me no answer'.¹³ Evidently, twenty-two years after her disownment, Gott was still trying to vindicate herself to Friends. However, Gott's writings have not previously been examined in order to ascertain the extent of the impact of her early Quakerism and subsequent expulsion on her extraordinary transformation as an ecstatic visionary at the turn of the eighteenth century.

This article will examine Gott's mystical and prophetic emergence at the end of the eighteenth century in the context of her ambivalent relationship with the Friends who disowned her, and the influence of Quakerism on the development of her personal theology. Unravelling the tangled strands of her writings through close-reading, revisionist historicism and recovery research, the formative nature of Gott's Quaker upbringing and expulsion on the development of her prophetic identity will be demonstrated. It will be established that, through her publications, Gott sought to win the sympathy of Friends and regain her elected position within the Quaker community. More than this, it will be argued that Gott's writings, which painstakingly recorded her extraordinary experiences as a prophet of God, were open manifestations of resistance in which the author sought to hold herself up as more chosen and blessed than the members of the religious community that had painfully rejected her. In opposition to late eighteenth-century Quietist Quakerism which she found unsympathetic and oppressive, through the publication of her ecstatic and corporeal prophecies Gott was seeking to draw her contemporaries back to the spiritual roots of early Friends' primitive Christianity, to a radical religion without legalistic rules (such as the enforcement of endogamy which had led to her expulsion). This essay, the first to evaluate in depth the nature of Gott's Quakerism and its impact on her prophetic writings and ministry, will allow for greater understanding of the psychological implications of Quaker membership, corporate identity and disownment in late Georgian England. It will also offer intriguing insights into how Quaker modes and beliefs previously believed to have died out in the seventeenth century—specifically, the performance of corporeal signs, preaching of an eschatology of christopresentism, prophesying as a universal spiritual 'Mother in Israel', and writing (and self-publishing) her divine motions from God—still persisted at the end of the eighteenth century.

QUAKER ORIGINS

Dorothy was born to Nicholas Newberry, a farmer of Monks Kirby, Warwickshire, and his wife, Mary, around 1748.¹⁴ Although it has not been possible to establish the parents' membership to a specific Meeting House, it is likely that they were Friends as digest records demonstrate that at least three of their daughters (Hannah, Mary, Elizabeth) married in Quaker ceremonies.¹⁵ These documents support Gott's statement at the beginning of *The Midnight Cry* that she was of Quaker parentage; opening her text with the ambiguous salutation, 'Dear Friends and Neighbours'—which seems intentionally to encompass both the Friends who rejected her and the friends who currently support her—she explains that her religious convictions were realised through Quaker teachings and faith practices:

I was early convinced of this, (having my birth among the people in scorn called Quakers), and that there was no other way for me to obtain rest, but by labouring in silence before the living God, who says 'Be Still and know that I am God'. And I can tell you, these 'silent meetings', as people term them, for so they outwardly appear to be, were the happiest moments I ever enjoyed in fallen nature.¹⁶

Thus, Gott's Quakerism is integrated into her discourse from the onset of her career as a prophetic writer. At the same time, her wistful confession that silent meetings 'were' the most joyful times in her life provides an immediate signal to her painful loss.

At the beginning of her second work, *Christ the Standard of Truth*, Gott offers further elucidation about her Quaker upbringing, explaining that her mother had a formative role in the cultivation of her faith:

My first consideration of principles, was, as near as I can remember, when I was about seven or eight years of age; when my mind was struck with the different manner of worship between Friends and Church-people, the one waiting in outward silence, the others preaching, praying, or singing all the time. This I mentioned to my mother, wishing to be informed; and she related to me the manner of Friends' first convincement, and told me, that it was by being truly silent before God, and waiting at his feet, God would manifest himself to our understandings; according to his declaration in Scripture—'*My sheep know my voice, and a stranger they will not follow*'. This took such deep root in my heart, as will never be rooted out.¹⁷

Gott thus acknowledged the significant role of her mother in cultivating her spirituality and religious identity. In particular, her mother's instructions about the importance of silent worship and being one of God's sheep, taken from John 10:27, seem to have become foundational in the development of Dorothy's religion. Her words led Gott to understand her Quaker membership as being among God's elect—'I believed they were his chosen people'¹⁸—and accompanying this conviction was a psychological reassurance derived from belonging to this especially favoured group. Gott's narrative correlates with Phyllis Mack's observations made about the seventeenth century that the female 'visionary's spiritual transformation was often triggered by and nourished by her experience as mother or daughter'.¹⁹ That Gott's faith was indeed rooted in her mother's teachings is evidenced by her citing and exposition of the same gospel passage in *The Noon-Day Sun*, her third and final publication, which was written in her sixties and published only a year before her death. Of this text, she explains: 'Here is a point to be considered; if you do not know the voice of the living God, you must do the works of the stranger, the devil, that has set himself up in man's heart, and is worshipped as God'.²⁰ Gott evidently safeguarded her pious Quaker mother's spiritual advice as a precious legacy and clung to it as the cornerstone of her religion for the rest of her life.

DISOWNMENT NARRATIVE

Having been raised by a pious Quaker mother, Gott writes that she aspired to Christian service in her youth: ‘at the age of seventeen or eighteen: a great sight of the ministry was brought to my view’.²¹ She initially desired to become a dress-maker—an occupation that would grant freedom to attend meetings and develop her spirituality—but, after a bout of small pox which damaged her eyesight, she entered into domestic service in London instead.²² In this position, she found little opportunity to pursue God’s service despite working in a Quaker household and becoming a ‘Member in Servitude’ of the Peel Quarter Friends Meeting House at Clerkenwell.²³ She recalls that the circumstances of the position were not conducive to Quaker adherence: ‘Though a friend’s family, perhaps your fellow-servants are not friends; which was my case: and they seldom like you to go out, except to meeting, and that no often than they can help’.²⁴ Isolated from Quaker society, her faith and religious ambitions became frustrated. Such spiritual dislocation in service seems to have been a common experience among plebeian Quaker women at the turn of the eighteenth century; reflecting on Gott’s words about ‘the disadvantages Friend servants labour under’,²⁵ Isabel Grubb observes that:

[The] life of a Quaker maid in domestic service was hardly an enviable one... Mary Peisley felt that drudgery of domestic service deprived her of full liberty to exercise her gift as preacher; Sarah Lynes also found her gift hampered under similar circumstances.²⁶

In a lonely and spiritually displaced state, Dorothy met Abraham Gott (c. 1732–1785), a non-Quaker footman in her employers’ household. She eventually married him in an Anglican ceremony at St George’s Church, Hanover Square, on 4 February 1770, despite her fears that she would be disowned for exogamous marriage. Gott’s circumstance was common among plebeian women who migrated to London for work at the turn of the eighteenth century, as Anna Clark observes: ‘Single women who wandered far from their homes in search of work became free from patriarchal control, but no longer could return to the protection of village communities’.²⁷ Separated from the guidance of her family and Friends, Gott entered into a contract that she would soon regret.

Marriage to Abraham quickly became a source of social trouble, emotional turmoil and spiritual crisis for Gott. Since the mid-eighteenth century, Friends on both sides of the Atlantic had been engaged in a system of institutional reform to be achieved through strict discipline. This process had emerged in response to the persecution suffered by English Friends after the Restoration of Charles II. Countering defamatory accusations and harsh discriminations, Friends sought, as Jack Marietta observes, to ‘effectively deny and disprove their oppressors’ slander of them’ through ‘reasonably uniform conduct based upon their religious professions’; within this context, ‘Friends believed endogamy to be the foundation of Quaker theology, and the foundation of all other ethical behavior and the security

of the faith for future generations'.²⁸ With this reformation came, as Mack elucidates, 'increase[d] family visits to monitor Friends' morality and behavior, [and...] stricter adherence to strictures against marrying outside of the Quaker community'.²⁹ Women's meetings were given particular power to enforce endogamy during this period as marrying out seems to have been perceived as more problematic among females; as Sarah Fatherly has established, women were more often disciplined for marrying out than men:

Theoretically women and men were held to the same behavioral code in Quakerism and therefore were open to the same type of courtship scrutiny from their Meetings. In practice, however, young women found themselves answering courtship questions from fellow Quakers far more often than men did... In focusing on women's behavior, rather than men's, Quakers demonstrated just how important they believed women's courtship power to be. Certainly the Society benefited from endogamous, rather than exogamous, marriages; when members married one another, the group kept these members and gained new ones as couples raised their children within Quakerism. Women's power to accept or reject suitors thus affected the overall well-being of the Society.³⁰

In keeping with these disciplinary procedures, within a year of marriage to non-Quaker Abraham, three women from the Peel Quarter Women's Monthly Meeting (Sarah Snowdon, Mary Lamb and Sarah Corbyn) were appointed to visit Dorothy Gott with the threat of disownment for her delinquency.³¹ Gott was rebuked by the women's meeting members; *The Midnight Cry* vividly recalls their disapproval in traumatic terms:

I never can forget that meeting for I can say my soul was broke down before God: I intreated [*sic*] him on the bended knees of my heart, with bitter cries and groans that I cannot utter, to forgive me, and condescend to speak in me, that they might not disown me, as I believed they were his chosen people: and when we met after meeting, we had no sooner sat down, than they repeated how wrong I had done; and I soon answered, without knowing what I was going to say, that passage in Scripture, 'He that is without fault, let him cast the first stone'. They soon told me that it was vain for me to say so. I cried very much, and could make no further confession.³²

It is noteworthy that Gott explains her distress as emanating specifically from her conviction that Quakers were 'his chosen people', and that, by extension, expulsion would mean being cast out from God's favour. As previously observed, Gott seems to have absorbed a deeply ingrained sense of specialness regarding being one of 'his chosen people' from the formative teachings of her mother.³³ Her belief in Quaker 'chosenness' was, in fact, closely related to eighteenth-century Friends' understandings of themselves as a separate people who should endeavour to remain uncorrupted by outside forces. Such an understanding had developed as a result of the differentiation Friends had consciously enacted in their manners in accordance with their religious convictions; from the seventeenth century, Friends' refusal to swear oaths, pay tithes, and remove their hats to social superiors had set them apart socially:

Their maintenance of an internal equality by use of the familiar ‘thee’ and ‘thine’, the religious equality of men and women within the sect, and the ‘fixed price policy’ can all be seen as part of a ‘separatist complex’, reinforcing a sense of ‘chosenness’ and separateness from the world.³⁴

Gott did not wish to lose her exceptional position as a member of the Religious Society of Friends, or her connection with the distinguished group.

After more interviews at which she failed to satisfy her examiners, Gott was eventually rejected by the Peel Quarter Friends: the *London Six Weeks Meeting Minutes* details that, on 25 August 1773, ‘Dorothy Gott, late Newberry’, was disowned

for want of submitting to the holy Restraints, and keeping within the Limits of Truth, suffered her mind to be led aside and was married to one not of our Society by a priest.—She was thereupon several times invited by Appointments from our Women’s Meeting, and afterwards from this, being Laboured with in much Tenderness; but has not appeared sufficiently sensible of her Outgoing.

Therefore we are engaged to declare that we cannot have Unity, or religious Fellowship with the said Dorothy Gott, late Newberry, until she manifest a true Sorrow for her disorderly Walking, and a steadier Adherence to the Principles she professed, which is our sincere desire for her.³⁵

The fact that Gott was deemed insensible of the gravity of her misdemeanour is significant. As evidenced in her own account in *The Midnight Cry*, even in her state of shame and sorrow Gott did not submit without protest to her religious superiors; instead, she made an attempt to defend herself and seek discharge from her offence by referring to the scriptural precedent of Christ’s compassion towards the woman caught in adultery. Unfortunately, her appeal for mercy was perceived as pride; the Peel Quarter’s minutes record of the final meeting between Gott and the women sent to visit her states that ‘She appeared very high [haughty] & not Duly Sensible of her Outgoings’.³⁶ As Jack Marietta elucidates, ‘Friends expected humility in an offender who petitioned for pardon, an awareness that he indeed was a petitioner’,³⁷ and Gott’s responses were not deemed sufficiently penitent. In fact, it will become evident that Gott’s defence of herself as a lowly outcast deserving of justice, and her resolute belief in God’s favour towards the broken, were to become key features of her theology.

Gott herself came to view her marriage as an act of disobedience to God—as she phrased it, an instance of ‘my own going against the light’³⁸—which led her to lose the privileges of her birth among the chosen people. Poignantly, she identified with Esau who made an unfavourable exchange of his great heavenly inheritance for a poor earthly substitute: ‘I often thought I had digged a pit, and fallen into it by that marriage; for I can say, I lived a life of mourning, or had sold my birth-right for a mess of pottage’.³⁹ Gott is, here, referring to the story of Genesis 25:27–34 which was later typologically reinterpreted by St Paul in Hebrews 13:14–17:

Follow peace with men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby may be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator,

or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when we would have inherited the blessing he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

Gott's application of the scriptural story to her self is more in keeping with the Hebrews account, which asserts that Esau lost his holy inheritance because of his earthly appetites—for being 'a fornicator'—rather than the Genesis version which, alongside the story of Jacob obtaining Isaac's blessing in Genesis 27, infers that Esau lost his birthright through the deception of Jacob. Although there is no evidence that Gott engaged in premarital sexual relations with Abraham, the marriage was a fleshly impulse rather than a spiritual one. Indeed, Gott's attempt to defend herself using the example of Christ's mercy shown to the woman caught in adultery above may intimate that she perceived of her sin as a carnal one.

The story of Esau's loss of birthright is further illuminating in expounding Gott's disowned condition. Insight may be specifically gained from Vera Camden's hermeneutical analysis of John Bunyan's privileging of the same Hebrews account of Esau's dispossession in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, when he repeatedly links his most 'grievous and dreadful temptation... to sell and part with this most blessed Christ' with the story of Esau who "for one morsel of meat sold his Birth-right; for you know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected"⁴⁰ As Camden enlightens: 'In Christian typology, this narrative is without exception understood as a model of God's prophetic and predestined choice of his people'.⁴¹ Gott is thus not only commenting on her fleshly weakness, but engaging in discussions about being spiritually chosen. After marrying Abraham, she felt that she had, like Esau, irrevocably lost her position—and blessing—as one of God's people; this explanation helps elucidate why Gott felt so broken and distressed regarding her disownment.

GOTT'S TYPOLOGY: A FEATURE OF THE EARLY FRIENDS' WRITING

Gott's use of typology is of further significance in determining the nature of her Quakerism. As Peterson observes, English autobiographers have 'traditionally [and self-consciously] appropriated their patterns and principles of interpretation from biblical hermeneutics (originally from biblical typology)'.⁴² For instance, turning again to *Grace Abounding*, a prototype of English spiritual autobiography, in his Preface, Bunyan applies the biblical type of Moses to justify his publication and treats the wandering of the Israelites as a prefiguring of his own experiences:

Moses (Numb. 33.I.2) writ of the Journeyings of the children of Israel, from Egypt to the Land of Canaan;... Wherefore this I have endeavoured to do; and not only so, but to publish it also; that, if God will, others may be put in remembrance of what he hath done for their Souls, by reading his work upon me.⁴³

Gott extends this same trope throughout *The Midnight Cry*; for instance, she states that her husband 'proved an Egyptian master',⁴⁴ thereby insinuating that he was cruel and oppressive, and conveying the sense that she, like the Israelites (God's chosen original people), was in exile—excluded from her birthright and unable to

live freely while under another's law—during the course of her marriage, but also suggesting that she would eventually return to God's Promised Land.

However, what is most striking about Gott's application of typology in terms of assessing her Quakerism is that the practice of using biblical stories to describe one's own life was a common feature of early Friends' writings. For instance, Francis Howgill's confessional narrative is entitled *The Inheritance of Jacob Discovered after his Return out of Egypt* (1656), and Thomas Green's spiritual autobiography is called *A Declaration to the World, of my Travel and Journey out of Aegypt into Canaan through Wilderness and through the Red Sea, from under Pharaoh, and [who] now hath a Sure Habitation in the Lord where Rest and Peace are Known* (1659).⁴⁵ As Luella Wright has argued, such language was the result of

Intense and minute study of the Scriptures [which] affected the life, thinking, and writings of the sectaries [in the seventeenth century]. Hebraic phraseology, patriarchal greetings, and prophetic utterances became a part of everyday speech and aided materially in forming the texture of their verse and of their prose. Life, for instance, was metaphorically defined by one Friend as a long travail from the Babylon of this world to the Bethel of the one to follow.⁴⁶

Gott's employment of such biblical language and typologies in her turn-of-the-eighteenth-century writings firmly aligns her with the religious customs and practices of early Friends.

GOTT'S PROPHETIC EMERGENCE IN WIDOWHOOD

In the interpretation of her spiritual journey, Gott came to view her husband as an instrument by which God refined her spirit. Returning to the idea of being one of His sheep, she wrote, 'My Husband was made an instrument to strip me of man and the love of this world. [...] I plainly saw that sheep want a dog to drive them into the true fold' (*CST*, 10). She also protested that

I found no other way than to submit, and to shut my mouth; doing the best I could which was to work night and day... [He] was a very sober man, and spent very few hours out of his own house, nor never suffered me [allowed to go on without interference]; that I can say, during the sixteen years we were married, we were very few hours apart.⁴⁷

Gott's text articulates deepening resentment towards the ever-present odious spouse whom she blamed for her loss of Quaker membership. Indeed, Gott describes her marriage as a business contract to which she was legally bound rather than a union of love. Although a burial record documents that the couple had one child—Mary (who may have been named after Dorothy's esteemed mother)—who died when only 'about six weeks old' on 24 February 1771,⁴⁸ Gott never mentions her daughter in her writings.⁴⁹ Instead, she talks of her marriage in commercial terms stating that the couple first ran a haberdashery, a trade which she worried 'was not consistent with a plain friend',⁵⁰ and then, after unspecified financial failure, an even more morally dubious business: 'we took a public house;

the business laid chiefly on me; it seemed no hardship, if we got a living'. This venture led to further social disapproval; she writes that the couple's decision to become publicans 'stagger[ed] most of our acquaintances'.⁵¹

Tied to an overbearing husband who was evidently not a capable businessman, and required to make a living from unquakerly trades which may well have exacerbated her feelings of moral and religious failure, Gott was far removed from 'the sight of the ministry' to which she had aspired in her youth. Yet, she felt reassured that she would be accepted back into the Religious Society of Friends: 'I intreated [*sic*] the Almighty to give me a sense that he had forgiven me, that I might ask to be a member: and I can say, glory be to the Name of my God, who condescended to give me a sense, "That time is not yet come, but it will come, and when it is come, I will give thee a writing they shall not refuse"'.⁵² This experience of holy validation is pivotal to Gott's understanding of herself as a prophet in the Quaker tradition; here, God speaks to Gott, and she, in turn, records this encounter in her divinely inspired, prophetic and self-published tract. In this process, Gott is inscribing herself as a prophet, following the practice of writing as a direct link to God's Word, upholding primitive Christianity among Friends, and emphasizing that God will give her '*a writing they shall not refuse*' (my italics).⁵³ In effect, through her writing, Gott is inscribing herself—and thereby seeking to secure her place—in the larger Quaker tradition and historiography.

Abraham Gott died on 13 June 1785. At this point, Dorothy let out her house and went to look after a sick sister in Tottenham.⁵⁴ As Karin Wulf has shown, during this period, single women 'seldom lived alone',⁵⁵ and it was common for widows to move in with their siblings. According to digest records, this sibling was Elizabeth Newberry who married Thomas Broadbank at the Tottenham Meeting House in 1776. As the couple were Friends, this move represented Gott's return to a Quaker household. At this time, she believed that she would soon regain her Quaker membership: 'now I was comforted, I should return again, and this appeared to be the time: then I cried unto the Lord once more to accept an unworthy prodigal, and bring me to that beautiful spot that I had many views of'.⁵⁶ She perceived herself as a wounded outcast, like the haemorrhaging woman of the gospels (Mt. 9:20; Mk 5:25; Lk. 8:43) who was restored by Christ for her faith: 'I cried, "O that I might get hold of the hem of thy garment as with my right and left hand, and hold thee till thou hast healed me"'.⁵⁷ It was at this liminal time in her life, making the transition to life as a widow and shifting her identity from the relatively high worldly position of a businesswoman occupying the public sphere to the low rank of an unfortunate relation—effectively returning to the role of a domestic servant within a private home—that Gott emerged as a visionary of God. Abraham's death represented the end of the marriage, which she had described as being like the period of the Israelites' bondage in Egypt, and widowhood her entrance to the Promised Land. It was the turning point at which Gott could claim agency to attempt to reclaim her spiritual status. As Phyllis Mack elucidates, eighteenth-century 'Quaker women and others defined agency not as the freedom to do what one wants but as the freedom to do what is right [in the eyes of God]'.⁵⁸ Gott could only enact such holy agency after the death of the

husband whose ‘life was not consistent with friends principles’,⁵⁹ and who had bound her to commercial and domestic drudgery ‘night and day’.

As a widow, Gott’s social status had changed from that of *feme covert* to that of *feme sole*: that is, she was no longer placed under the legal wing of her husband under the English common law of coverture, but could act as an individual in her own right without legal hindrance; for instance, she could hold property, make contracts and collect her husband’s debts. As Karin Wulf illuminates:

Widowhood was no doubt a time of grief and uncertainty for women. But it also represented a fundamental change in women’s status. An early English tract, *The Law’s Resolutions of Women’s Rights*, urged widows to appreciate their new capacity: ‘Why mourn you so, you that be widows? Consider how long you been in subjection under the predominance of parents, of your husbands; now you be free in liberty, and free ... at your own law.’⁶⁰

Released from marital bondage and yielding freely to God, Gott perceived of herself ‘as a bare bone in the valley’⁶¹—alluding to the apocalyptic images of Ezekiel—to whom God would ‘put sinews and flesh’ and ‘breathe a new life into the dry bones’.⁶² Of this statement, Mack’s observation that the operation of agency within people of faith requires ‘a conception of agency in which autonomy is less important than self-transcendence and in which the energy to act in the world is generated and sustained by a prior act of personal surrender’ seems particularly pertinent.⁶³ Gott understood her prophetic emergence to be less about becoming independent and asserting herself than giving herself over to God and rising spiritually above the unhappy limitations of her married life as a disowned delinquent. By 1786, she had left her spiritual barrenness behind and believed that she was being favoured with divine visions and communications:

I no sooner sat down in the meeting but I was brought near to my great Master: I saw myself as laying at the Beautiful-gate, full of sores or wounds: it seemed a spacious building: it appeared to me I could not rise till Christ came and healed me: I had great power given me to beg to be healed. After some time, it seemed as if a great light (to the view of my mind) came out at the gate, and raised me up on my feet. I saw quite another scene, as an army of followers, clean and neat, with their fire-arms ready to march... Then I had another view, as a sheep fold, with sheep in it, and a voice said, ‘Come and see where I make my sheep to lie down, as at noon day. That moment the light came in: I cannot express the joy I felt; my heart was quite warmed, and my soul seemed to run over with joy.’⁶⁴

This mystical vision provides both comfort in the present and hope for future reward. The images described, such as the Beautiful Gate of the Temple of Jerusalem mentioned in Acts 3 and the highly prized sheep mentioned several times throughout the gospels, are scriptural and, by extension, conventionally Christian. However, in the context of her mother’s formative instruction about the importance of being one of God’s sheep and being able to recognise His voice, the vision clearly relates to Gott’s specific psychological condition as it dramatically conveys her feelings of social rejection, worthlessness and yearning to return to the familiar, sanctified community.

The vision also has a rhetorical function within Gott's tale as it also operates to justify herself to Friends by announcing that she has been forgiven by, and is beloved of, God. Indeed, the reverie is reminiscent of a wish-fulfilment dream in which Gott's desire to return to the fold of God's chosen ones has been wondrously met. It represents the kind of homecoming described in the Parable of the Prodigal Son; indeed, it is no coincidence that Gott used the word 'prodigal' twelve times in *The Midnight Cry*; she perceived herself as 'the prodigal daughter come home'.⁶⁵ The vision seeks to communicate that she has been accepted by God and is, therefore, deserving of being reinstated within the Religious Society of Friends.⁶⁶

The co-incident of Gott's visionary identity with her widowhood is intriguing. The passing of her husband may be read as a kind of rite of passage which enabled transformation from a worldly married businesswoman to a holy widowed prophetess, like Anna from the story of Christ's presentation at the Temple (Lk. 2:36-38). Specifically, the marriage was interpreted as a time of trial and suffering which enabled spiritual refinement—perhaps in the pattern of Christ's own suffering. As Mack has observed, faithful women throughout Christian history have viewed the model of Christ's passion on the cross 'as both the condition of their salvation and the model or touchstone of their own spiritual growth'.⁶⁷ In fact, religion offered many women a means of personal transformation in the eighteenth century; as Wulf suggests, religion allowed for *femes soles* 'the development of a feminine model of individualism based on corporeal possession and spiritual independence, as opposed to the developing masculine notion of materially based individualism'.⁶⁸ Through the claiming of her prophetic identity, Gott could undertake actions which would ordinarily be considered culturally unacceptable or socially reprehensible. Her conviction about her chosenness as a prophet of God certainly gave her the agency to rise above the weighty feelings of humiliation and disgrace that had developed regarding her disownment. When, within a few months of her move to Tottenham, she found herself in another oppressive and unhappy domestic situation, working effectively as a maidservant again caring for her sick and irritable sister, she heard God claim her as His own: 'The Bridegroom is come, and this is my bride'.⁶⁹ Empowered by her belief that she was God's beloved and that He called her to special work, she found the self-confidence to relinquish the loathesome duties she had been performing in her sister's home:

I said, 'Brother and sister, I have looked on my self, as your servant, but now I have a great Master, and must do his work, and I receive my orders only for the day: and this is my message to you... [W]ill you give me leave in your house? which they both agreed to. I withdrew, and took no further notice of the household affairs.'⁷⁰

As Wulf notes, women in this period 'quite often counter-posed the demands of the spirit with those of the household. Many women found in religion not just a source of authority but a reason for authority; their theology demanded of them more than their society was willing to let them have'.⁷¹ This assessment certainly correlates with Gott's account: her belief in her prophetic chosenness, which

coincided with her entrance into widowhood, gave her the power to claim autonomy, to escape another position of worldly bondage and social disadvantage, and enter, instead, into a state of spiritual freedom to pursue her heart's desire of devotion to God.

CLAIMING THE IDENTITY OF A 'MOTHER IN ISRAEL'

Gott continually presented herself as a poor exiled widow raised up to be God's holy messenger. The paradox of finding power in weakness is, of course, scriptural: it is related to the humility of God revealed in the incarnation; Christ's promise that 'the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen' (Mt. 20:16); and St Paul's declaration that 'my strength is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor. 12:9). Gott's narrative intimates that God raised her up all the more wondrously given her former status as a lowly outcast widow; in *The Noon-Day Sun* (1811), she conflated her identity with the barren widow of Isaiah 54, a biblical female figure who poignantly mirrored her own condition:

as John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ, so is the letter doctrine of the married wife; yet all are called to the valley of humiliation. 'Sing, O barren thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud that thou didst not travail with child, for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife', saith the Lord, 'all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children'.⁷²

Her typological self-fashioning attempted to construct a respectable female spiritual identity, authenticate herself as a true prophet to the general public, and regain credibility among Friends who deemed her a reprobate.

Intriguingly, it appears that Gott's establishment of herself as a universal spiritual mother in *The Noon-Day Sun* was conceived within the Quaker tradition of the 'mother in Israel', 'a socio-religious position created by [George] Fox',⁷³ which had been particularly utilised during the seventeenth century to designate Quaker female leaders. The title had, for instance, been applied to Margaret Fell, as a female who expressed nurturing love and spiritual guidance to the community of believers. Gott took on this title herself when she ended her swan song with the words:

I am commanded to pray for you, waiting for the Lord's power, as a mother in Israel, waiting for the nursing Fathers, that we may give glory at the throne of mercy together, and sing praises to God and the Lamb for the redeeming love, for ever and ever Amen.⁷⁴

Here, Gott is, again, linking herself to the primitive Christianity of early Friends who, as Tarter has expounded, 'celebrated the feminization of worship and situated women in authoritative roles as "Spiritual Mothers in Israel", bearing anew the promise of salvation for Friends as they nourished the growing religious family with the "Milk of the Word of God"'.⁷⁵ Indeed, as Tarter further reminds us, early Friends' identification of themselves as 'the Children' or 'Children of the

Light' was related to their desire to enter infantile states where they could eradicate the voice of 'Reason' and open themselves, instead, to the inner voice of God.⁷⁶ In this context, Gott's taking on of the identity of a 'Spiritual Mother' called to nourish 'the Children' may also be understood as part of her attempt to call her contemporary Quietist Friends, whom she believed to have fallen from their original religious profession, back to the radical truths of the early Society. Indeed, when reflecting on the legalistic Friends who had disowned her for exogamy, Gott wrote that it was made 'clear to me that she [the woman caught in adultery; that is, the typological analogue of herself] stood more justified before the Lord than they who accused her, and I have to say, in the love and fear of God, that the Elders in your Society have sold their birth-right for a mess of pottage'.⁷⁷ Gott was accusing contemporary Friends of having forfeited God's favour through self-righteousness and lack of compassion, and was calling them back to be vulnerable 'Children' again rather than judgmental adults.

At the end of her life, remaining unacknowledged by the Religious Society of Friends, Gott bore witness to her own singular ministry when she granted herself the outmoded honorific title of 'mother in Israel'. The radical significance of this act is illuminated by Mack's observation that eighteenth-century Quaker women 'had no conception of the...celebration of cosmic motherhood invoked by working-class messiahs like Ann Lee or Joanna Southcott'.⁷⁸ Gott, whose spirituality was so heavily influenced by the religious teachings of her own mother, was one eighteenth-century working-class (ex)Quaker woman who did claim the identity of universal spiritual motherhood.

GOTT'S ENACTMENT OF CORPOREAL SIGNS AND BELIEF IN CHRISTOPRESENTISM

Gott's repeated attempts to convey her special spiritual status to Friends communicate much about the depths of her desire for vindication. Recalling her attendance at a first-day meeting in the year of her prophetic emergence (she had continued to attend Quaker meetings after her disownment), Gott relates how God ordered her to undertake a shameful act as a prophetic sign of her sanctification: 'On the first day, the 16th of the 7th month, 1786, my orders were to put a rose and a rose-bud in my bosom, which is uncommon with plain friends;... This seemed an exercise, as all the people would notice me...'⁷⁹ With the flower positioned on her breast acting an indicator of holy favour and visionary difference, Gott perceived herself as set apart and raised above the Friends who had not experienced a religious fall. This narrative about her chosenness may be viewed as another attempt to declare to Friends her entrance into a time of inheritance from a previously dispossessed state.

The enactment of prophetic signs is another unexpected example of Gott's continuance of early Friends' religious practices. The performance of striking non-verbal actions had been utilised by seventeenth-century Quakers, mostly in the 1650s and early 1660s, as a means of attracting attention to their cause. Sign behaviours, most of which were expressions of reproof and prophecies to the

world, were performed in public locations such as at markets, fairs, streets, churches and other locations visited by Quaker missionaries who sought to plant the seed of Truth in others.⁸⁰ On one occasion, Gott enacted a version of the most common and controversial of Quaker sign performances: ‘going naked as a sign’. This exercise involved appearing publicly in a state of undress in order to proclaim an explicit ideological message. In *The Midnight Cry*, she explained how she was woken up one night and ordered by God to stand at the window in her nightclothes:

I was directed to the closet, or dressing room adjoining, the door of which I had left open when I went to bed. There was a box under the window. I was desired to sit down and face all the men that passed. I had no clothes on but what I slept in. I had a handkerchief around my neck, which I thought a great favour; for it was often repeated, ‘Naked ye came into the world, and naked ye must return: and this is going into Paradise by command’. I was commanded to sit till there the sun rose. ‘So sure as thee sit here till the sun rise, so shall I come in the body, in the body of all men and women, as in thee’.⁸¹

It cannot be established if Gott had heard about such seventeenth-century modes of Quaker practice from her mother, read about them in meeting house libraries, or encountered them elsewhere. However, the performance of corporeal signs was an outmoded practice to be undertaking in the late 1780s and is likely to have been a stumbling block for any readers despite her explicit explanation of the sign. As Bauman has expounded, even when early Friends were not entirely unclothed and wore undergarments or sackcloth, by the standards of their time they were considered naked and, thereby, shocking.⁸² Gott’s account is likely to have been anathematic and misconstrued by the late Georgian reading public as well. Bauman has even suggested that displays of nakedness were so scandalous in the seventeenth century that they actually impeded the onlooker’s ability to read the hidden prophetic meaning; indeed, Friends’ nakedness was widely condemned by anti-Quakers as immodest, obscene and uncivilised.⁸³ Gott was misguided if she believed that her enactment of prophetic signs would resonate with contemporary Friends. Instead, it seems probable that her performance of signs would have seemed alien, at best anarchic, and unhelpful for the Quaker cause. Gott was enacting a seventeenth-century mode of Quaker being, which had all but disappeared by the mid-1670s, at the end of the eighteenth century. Unfortunately for Gott, even accounts of her mystical visions, common enough in eighteenth-century popular and radical religion, are likely to have been deemed suspicious by the predominantly Quietist Quakers at this time.

It should also be noted that Gott’s explanation of the performance is also significant for revealing how her theology also resonated with the beliefs of seventeenth-century Friends. The divine pronouncement that ‘I come in the body, in the body of all men and women, as in thee’⁸⁴ conveys a realising theology of christopresentism that was similarly held by early Quaker leaders, including George Fox, who wrote about the purifying effect of his personal religious transformation as an inner apocalypse of Christ’s Light.⁸⁵ Gott’s beliefs, published in

1798, were anachronistic in contrast with those held by mainstream Georgian Friends who maintained a realised eschatology.⁸⁶ As Dandelion explains, by placing emphasis on Robert Barclay's doctrine of a singular 'Day of Visitation' (which held that there is a day 'given to the Wicked, wherein they might have been saved, and which being expired, they are shut out from Salvation'),⁸⁷ rather than a continuous 'day' in which salvation could be sought,

[eighteenth-century Quietist] Friends could no longer choose to turn to the Light, opt and encourage others to opt for the transformation of the world. The universal and open invitation of God to the world had been replaced by a divine selection process, in which humanity could only, and indeed needed to, play a waiting role.⁸⁸

Instead of 'heaven on earth', Quietist Quakers came to conceptualise society as being separated into the natural and supernatural, the pure and corrupt; their calling as God's chosen people was to avoid the contamination of the world. It is easy to see that Gott—one who, in Friends' eyes, had tainted herself by marrying out of the Society—could reject this view and find an Arminian model preferable. While no record of contemporary Quaker responses to Gott's theology have been found, it is notable that the 'Irish New Lights' (1791–1801)—a radical group inspired by Hannah Barnard and led by Abraham Shackleton, which also denounced contemporary Quaker legalism and returned to the idea of the universal inner light—were condemned by contemporary Friends, who accused them of deism and mysticism.⁸⁹

CONCLUSION: WHY GOTT'S WRITINGS WERE REJECTED BY FRIENDS

Dorothy Gott's narratives offer intriguing insights into the psychological implications of corporate membership and disownment in the Religious Society of Friends at a period when Quakers were setting themselves apart through discipline as a holy and blameless people. It indicates that, if cast out from Quaker fellowship, those who had been raised with a formative belief in the specialness of the group could endure life-long feelings of loss and reduced self-worth. Intriguingly, for Gott, the psychological trauma of the disownment seems to have been intrinsically tied to—and even been a driving force in—her emergence as a prophet. Although assessments of her life in recent decades have often read her story as a feminist search for autonomy of the self, her texts reveal that many of her inscriptions were, in fact, specifically directed at Friends with the intention of restoring her religious position and reputation within the group. For Gott, her prophetic emergence in widowhood was a fortuitous means of achieving self-transcendence to rise above the domestic drudgery and spiritually oppressive experience of her unhappy marriage.

By submitting an account of her prophetic experience to the yearly meeting of 1795, Gott was following the usual pattern for the publication of Quaker spiritual autobiographies. As Kate Peters clarifies, 'the Second Day Morning Meeting regulated all Quaker publications from 1673 onwards, monitoring the content of new books, and ensuring that copies of each one were retained'.⁹⁰ This Meeting

authorised the publishing and distribution of Quaker books. Gott was evidently aware of this (Michele Tarter has asserted of Quaker autobiography, ‘eighteenth-century friends recognised the critical connections between reading, writing, and spiritual formation’⁹¹) and wanted her own religious transformation to be recognised within this tradition. However, she had failed to appreciate the contemporary cultural climate of the Religious Society of Friends in the submission of her ecstatic writings about divine indwelling at the end of the eighteenth century. As Mack elucidates:

Although the first Friends continued to be revered as heroes of the movement, the new generation of leaders no longer countenanced the traumatic physical and emotional violence of the early, ecstatic, quaking Friends, who preached naked and in sackcloth and whose words evoked the convulsive, apocalyptic language of ancient Hebrew prophets.⁹²

As early as 1672, the London Yearly Meeting of Friends had formally advised the avoidance of ‘all imagined, unseasonable and untimely prophesyings; which tend not only to stir up persecution, but also to the begetting airy and uncertain expectations, and to the amusing and affrighting simple people from receiving the Truth’.⁹³ The writings of ecstatic women were especially suppressed; as Wright records, Judith Bowlbie’s prophetic writings, such as *A Warning and Lamentation over England*, was deemed ‘not safe to print, as it is at present, nor at any time’, and Frances Donson’s *To Ye Lying* was deemed ‘not fit to be delivered’ and she was advised that ‘Friends, finding no satisfaction [*sic*] in it, desire her to be still and quiet’.⁹⁴ Although Gott sought to reclaim social credibility and personal integrity by delivering an account of her submission to God’s will to the Yearly Meeting, her writings, detailing her supernatural visions and including accounts of going naked as a sign, were submitted at a time when the Quietist Quaker community had become even stricter in enforcing religious practices and regulating their publications—as evidenced by her own disownment.

Ignored by Friends, and without the support of any other religious peoples, Gott self-published and self-disseminated her works. Engaging in this practice, Gott was, therefore, following in the footsteps of an impressive line of seventeenth-century Quaker prophetesses, who, when also censored by the Second Day Morning Meeting, likewise self-published their prophecies. For instance, although her works were rejected by the Second Day Morning Meeting, Bowlbie had copies of her writings in circulation, including *Following the Lamb*.⁹⁵ It is likely that self-publication would have entailed a considerable amount of personal cost for Gott as there is no evidence that she had adherents from whom to gain monetary support. The investment is likely to have been emotional as well as financial as she faced the possibility of further rejection and ridicule. Within this context, Gott’s self-publication and delivery of her works to the Peel Quarter and the 1795 Yearly Meeting are indicative of the depth of her desire to vindicate herself and gain recognition within the Religious Society of Friends.

It may also be suggested that Gott's repeated appeals for Quaker attention were serious attempts to regain agency. As Mack elucidates of the 'relational autonomy' theories of philosophers Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar,

a person needs certain qualities in order to achieve 'autonomy competency', a sense of self-worth, the capacity for moral judgement, the ability to be understood (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 3-31, esp. 17). [...] Agency itself is defined as the individual's ability to act according to her own best interests and to resist oppressive power relationships. The traumatized victim of rape may only be able to achieve a sense of restored selfhood with the help and sympathy of others, supported by an audience willing to hear and validate her story.⁹⁶

As a traumatised victim of disownment, Gott also desired the sympathy and understanding of others—particularly the Friends who had rejected her—in order to recover from the wound of her disownment and freely pursue her desired path as a handmaiden of God. After attaining freedom from the oppression of her husband, and regaining spiritual favour in her own eyes as a prophet of God, she thus made repeated attempts to exonerate herself from Quaker disapproval.

In fact, Gott's enthusiastic accounts are likely to have been perceived as unsound and potentially dangerous by Quietist Friends who carefully guarded their sober and upright reputation, living at this time as respectable, hardworking people engaged in trade, industry and commerce. Unlike the more restrained Quaker writings of her period, Gott's ecstatic writings were more in the spirit of the earliest Friends. As Michele Tarter elucidates, the 'Publishers of Truth' invited Friends

to transform spontaneous, divinely inspired prophesyings into print. [...] Suspicious of any form of intellectualisation, Friends who were prophesying and writing were encouraged to stay connected to the spirit and motion of language, rather than to formal, institutionalised rhetoric. In the primary experience of God, they were to inscribe their prophetic words as quickly as they felt them, trusting that the spirit of the language would be captured in the transcription and would ultimately move its readers. [...] Many individuals pronounced that it was the virtual 'command' of God to transcribe their divine motions into writing with urgency and immanent elocution.⁹⁷

Gott wrote in this pattern; describing her composition process, she explained: 'When I sit down to write, it appears but a few sentences; but, like the solar microscope [a popular contemporary optical instrument which used light and lenses to magnify images], it enlarges as I write: for I never know what I have wrote till I read it; so I have no need to study, and I think myself as happy as the queen of England'.⁹⁸ Gott's insistence that her writings were not the product of learning correlates with early Friends' belief that "'the learning of the schools" with its accompanying divinity training brought confusion into biblical interpretation',⁹⁹ and that scholarship was, therefore, undesirable.

Indeed, Gott's narratological style of experiential rhetoric utilised in *The Midnight Cry* was at odds with authorised Quaker literature of the period. Sarah D'Eloia suggests that, when presenting an argument, women tend to utilise an

approach of ‘indirection’. She observes that women commonly ‘begin...with the feeling that their conclusions *are* likely to be written off, unless they can lead the audience through the line of reasoning and the felt nature of the experiences upon which they have based their conclusion’.¹⁰⁰ This ‘indirect’ mode of presenting argument may be developed into rhetoric, which contrasts with the logical rhetoric of men which appears more ‘framed, contained, more pre-selected, and packaged’: women who use this ‘indirect’ mode ‘lead the listener or reader through a set of experiences and/or a line of reasoning, holding off the conclusion until they have made it almost impossible to reject the validity—emotional or logical—of what they say’.¹⁰¹ Although educated women often discard the rambling experiential form, Gott, who was unschooled—‘I can say I am no scholar,... as I hardly learnt to read, and never learnt to write’¹⁰²—wrote in the mode of indirection. In fact, this style accords closely with the writing practices of the early ‘Publishers of Truth’, who, suspicious of intellectualism and eager to capture truthfully their experiences, wrote quickly as the spirit led them with the belief that their organic language would move its readers. However, by the late eighteenth century, Quaker writing had become disciplined and structured. These linguistic factors throw light on why contemporary Quaker readers found her work unacceptable; the narrative structure was digressive and irrational, and the ecstatic episodes were highly irregular for the period. For instance, James Jenkins’s *Records and Recollections* documents his opinion that the multi-stranded nature of *The Midnight Cry* was impenetrable, and that the eccentric episodes contained therein were ludicrous:

she caught a disorder which Authors call *Cacothes Scribendi*, and in consequence wrote and published a large Octavo, which was professedly religious, but really a mixture of many things.—I had it some time in my possession, but endeavors to read it, were ineffectual. It will doubtless be deemed sufficient if I quote from memory one passage, ‘—As I came out of Willm Darton’s shop (near the High Cross, at Tottenham) there stood near to me, two Irishmen, each with a stick in his hand; I felt, and saw (mentally no doubt) the evil spirit go out of *me* and enter into *them*, upon which, they went to fighting and sadly bruised each other with their sticks!’¹⁰³

Gott’s writings attempted to provide an experiential account of her visionary emergence as she recalled it;¹⁰⁴ however, what abided in Jenkins’s memory was a sense that her writings were incomprehensible and highly eccentric, and that she was mentally ill: ‘she caught a disorder...’

Jenkins’s response offers some indication of contemporary Quakers’ views about her writings. The ideal image of Quaker womanhood at this time was not one of ecstatic and apocalyptic power but of placidity and sobriety, which was believed to convey high-mindedness and respectability; as Phyllis Mack elaborates: ‘For later [eighteenth-century] Friends, who believed that salvation was expressed through calmness, moral clarity, and personal restraint, social behavior had to be both authentic and respectable—a model of public behavior rather than a challenge to it’.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, Mack follows this assessment with the substantiation that ‘So James Jenkins admired the minister Mary Ridgeway, ‘in whom were

united the seriousness of the minister, and the courtesy of the gentlewoman'.¹⁰⁶ The women that Jenkins, and other contemporary Friends, admired were antithetical to Gott whose manners were not like those of a sober cleric or refined lady. In such a climate, Gott was unable to convince Friends that her prophetic emergence was authentic and that she should be reinstated into the Religious Society of Friends.

Yet believing in her holy favour as a prophet and spiritual mother in Israel, Gott retained her faith that God would grant her full restitution on earth until the end of her life. As the penultimate sentence of her last work, *The Noon-Day Sun*, bears witness: 'As the Lord permitted us to fall, so will he bring to pass all the good he has promised to us; full redemption on earth, no more to go out'.¹⁰⁷ This message is, at one level, a universal prophecy at the end of her career that gives hope to all believers. Yet contextualisation of the last clause, an allusion from the book of Revelation (aptly, the last book of the Bible, which contains so many mysterious visions and prophecies), offers another far more personal interpretation of her words:

I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out... (Rev. 3:8-12).

While one can only conjecture that Gott was thinking specifically of Friends as the 'false Jews' (the mistaken chosen people) who will be forced 'to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee', this second imbedded reading would be consistent with her discussions elsewhere in her writings, as evidenced above. Even if this acerbic reading is eliminated, however, the further promises of the scriptural passage—that a door has been made ready which no human can shut, and from which there will be no more need to leave—seem to offer, at the very end of Gott's career as a prophet and spiritual writer, a healing balm for the author to soothe the prolonged pain of her Quaker expulsion. Gott's poignant final promise, therefore, demonstrates forcefully how the progress of her entire prophetic career was tightly bound with her disownment and subsequent desire to regain entry into the fold 'where I make my sheep to lie down, as at noon day'.¹⁰⁸

Gott's case study offers fascinating insights into the wider spectrum of Quaker thinking and practice in late Georgian England. It is particularly informative about the possible psychological impacts of disownment, and offers an intriguing glimpse

of the ‘other side’ of the disownment story. In many ways, Gott herself continued Quaker adherence despite her formal expulsion: she continued to attend Quaker meetings; privilege silent worship; maintain her practice of Quaker writing from divine inspiration and motions; and use Quaker language and phraseology. More remarkably for her period, she enacted practices and preached ideas associated with early Friends, which scholars have previously thought to have died out a century earlier. Gott’s anachronistic enactment of ‘going naked as a sign’, understanding of herself as a cosmic ‘mother in Israel’ and belief in realising eschatology in London c. 1800, significantly broadens our understanding of the shades of early Quaker beliefs and practices that survived into this period. They offer a variant rebellious and ecstatic model of female Quaker religious experience in the period traditionally associated with Quietist faith and practices, reinforcing Jeremy Gregory’s persuasive contention about religion in long-eighteenth-century Britain that ‘the Age of Reason’, so long understood as a period of increasing secularism, was, in fact, very much ‘an Age of Faiths’ with an ‘extraordinary number of different inflections and articulations’ of Christianity.¹⁰⁹ Gott is not alone in shaping this revisionist history: for instance, Tarter has demonstrated that Elizabeth Ashbridge (1713–1755) displayed enthusiasm in a manner more akin with early Friends earlier in the eighteenth century when Friends were already rejecting such behaviour;¹¹⁰ however, Gott’s accounts extend our knowledge of the survival of enthusiastic Quaker practices, and seventeenth-century Quaker theology, well into the nineteenth century as her final text was published in 1811. Perhaps two centuries on from her death, Dorothy Gott’s extraordinary and challenging writings, which so unexpectedly broaden our understandings of what it meant to be a member of the Religious Society of Friends in late Georgian England, may finally be accepted within the fold of Quaker history.

NOTES

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4. Southcott, J., *Strange Effects of Faith with Remarkable Prophecies (Made in 1792, &c) of Things which are to Come*, Exeter, 1801, p. 5.

5. Balleine, G.R., *Past Finding Out: The Tragic Story of Joanna Southcott's and her Successors*, London: SPCK, 1956, p. 50.

6. Juster, S., *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003, p. 66. See Cho, N.J., and Niblett, M., 'Daughters of Eve: The Millenarian Exegesis of Two Late Georgian English Prophetesses, Dorothy Gott (c.1748–1812) and Joanna Southcott (1750–1814)', forthcoming.

7. This was probably a consequence of her Quaker upbringing; as Margaret Fell asserted at the beginnings of the movement: 'prophecie came not in the old time by the will of man, but the holy men of God spoke as they were moved of the holy Ghost' suggesting that it was a mode available to all believers who were open to being 'moved' by God. Gill, C., *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community: A Literary Study of Political Identities, 1650–1700*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2005, p. 138.

8. Gott, D., *Christ the Standard of Truth Set Up, by the Light of the Morning Star, the Principle of Truth [...]*, London, 1796; Gott, D., *The Noon-Day Sun; A Revelation from Christ to Make an End of Apostacy [...]*, London: Plummer & Brewis, 1811.

9. I use 'sufferings' here as the early Friends did, as 'a term employed by Friends to indicate any infringement upon property rights, or loss of health or life incurred through adherence to their beliefs and practices'. Wright, L.M., *The Literary Life of the Early Friends*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1932, p. 87.

10. Ackworth School, *Yearly-Meeting, 1788: George Harrison, from the General-Meeting for Ackworth School, brought in a report;...as follows: ...*, London, 1788, p. 1.

11. Burial Record, National Archives, Kew, RG6/956.

12. Gott, *Christ the Standard of Truth*, p. 13.

13. Gott, *Christ the Standard of Truth*, p. 7.

14. The order for her interment in 1812 states that she was around 64 years old at her death. This record provides a death date of 2 January 1812. The exact date of her birth is yet unknown. Gott's parentage has been deduced from the Quaker Family History Society's London and Middlesex Digest Index CD as her name appears as witnesses to the marriage of Elizabeth Newberry to Thomas Broadbank at the Tottenham Friends Meeting House in 1776 in the section where the Newberry siblings are listed.

15. Elizabeth Newberry Broadbank's Quaker marriage record documents that her father was a farmer named Nicholas Newberry of Monks Kirkby, Warwickshire, and that her mother's name was Mary.

16. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 1.

17. Gott, *Christ the Standard of Truth*, pp. 7–8 (italics in original).

18. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 4.

19. Mack, P., *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, p. 113.

20. Gott, *The Noon-Day Sun*, p. 21.

21. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 2.

22. Digest records suggest that she followed several of her older siblings in this urban migration.

23. Peel Women's Monthly Meetings' Minutes from 3rd Mo 1768 to 12 Mo 1778, 11 5 b (Strong Room 1), LSF.

24. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 3.

25. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 3.

26. Grubb, I., *Quakerism and Industry before 1800*, London: Williams & Norgate, 1930, p. 167.

27. Clark, A., 'The Sexual Crisis and Popular Religion in London, 1770–1820', *International Journal of Labor and Working Class History* 34 (1988), pp. 56–69 (57).

28. Marietta, J.D., *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748–1783*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984, pp. 3, 72.
29. Mack, P. 'In a Female Voice: Preaching and Politics in Eighteenth-Century British Quakerism' in B.M. Kienzle and P.J. Walker (eds.), *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, c. 1998, pp. 248–66 (255).
30. Fatherly, S., *Gentlewomen and Learned Ladies: Women and Elite Formation in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia*, Cranbury: Associated University Press, 2008, p. 51.
31. Peel Women's Monthly Meetings' Minutes from 3rd Mo 1768 to 12 Mo 1778, 11 5 b (Strong Room 1), LSF, Mo. Meeting 12 Mo the 26 1770.
32. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 4.
33. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 4.
34. Zenner, W.P., *Minorities in the Middle: A Cross-Cultural Analysis*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991, p. 114.
35. The 14th of 9th Month 1773, Peel Monthly Meetings, pp. 63–64; London Six Weeks Meeting Minutes, vol. 14, 1773–78, p. 63: LSF.
36. Peel Women's Monthly Meetings' Minutes from 3rd Mo 1768 to 12 Mo 1778, 11 5 b (Strong Room 1), LSF, 25th 12 Mo 1771.
37. Marietta, J., *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748–1783*, Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2007, p. 8.
38. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 3.
39. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 7.
40. See Camden, V., '“That of Esau”': Hebrews xii.16, 17 in *Grace Abounding*', in N.H. Keeble (ed.), *John Bunyan: Reading Dissenting Writing*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002, pp. 131–63, (133–34, italics in original).
41. Quoted in Camden, '“That of Esau”', p. 144.
42. Peterson, L.H., 'Gender and Autobiographical Form: The Case of the Spiritual Autobiography', in J. Olney (ed.), *Studies in Autobiography*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 211–22 (213).
43. Bunyan, J., *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962, p. 2.
44. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 5.
45. See Wright, *Literary Life of the Early Friends*, pp. 205 and 137.
46. Wright, *Literary Life of the Early Friends*, p. 17.
47. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, pp. 4–5.
48. RG6/673, National Archives, Kew.
49. This may explain why and how Abraham and Dorothy Gott were buried at the Friends Burial Ground at Whitechapel. Mary was accepted for interment there while Gott was still a member of the Peel Quarter Meeting House, and presumably, the couple wished for the family to be buried together.
50. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 4.
51. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 5.
52. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 4.
53. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 4.
54. The address given on Abraham's burial record is Fort Street, Spitalfields.
55. Wulf, K., *Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia*, Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2000, p. 107.
56. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 7.
57. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 9.
58. Mack, P., 'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism', *Signs* 29/1 (2003), pp. 149–77 (156).
59. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 4.

60. Wulf, *Not All Wives*, p. 4; *The Law's Resolution of Women's Rights: or, The Law's Provision for Women* as quoted in Klein, J.L. (ed.), *Daughters, Wives, and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992, p. 29.

61. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 8.

62. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 9.

63. Mack, 'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency', p. 156.

64. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 17.

65. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 53.

66. Indeed, it is almost a visual re-enactment of God's concern for the outcast, rejected, orphans and widows (cf. Deut. 24:17-22).

67. Mack, 'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency', p. 154.

68. Wulf, *Not All Wives*, p. 22.

69. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 53.

70. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 57.

71. Wulf, *Not All Wives*, p. 73.

72. Gott, *Noon-Day Sun*, pp. 59-60.

73. Tarter, M.L., 'Quaking in the Light: The Politics of Quaker Women's Corporeal Prophecy in the Seventeenth-Century Transatlantic World', in J. Moore Lindman and M.L. Tarter (eds.), *A Centre of Wonders: The Body in America*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, pp. 145-62 (149).

74. Gott, *Noon-Day Sun*, p. 62.

75. Tarter, 'Quaking in the Light', p. 147.

76. Tarter, 'Quaking in the Light', p. 150.

77. Gott, *Christ the Standard of Truth*, p. 10.

78. Mack, 'In a Female Voice', p. 249.

79. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 64.

80. Bauman, R., *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, see Chapter 6, p. 84. See also Carroll, K.L., 'Early Quakers and "Going Naked as a Sign"', *Quaker History* 67 (1978), pp. 69-87, and Tarter, 'Quaking in the Light', pp. 145-62.

81. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 43.

82. Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few*, p. 88.

83. See Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few*, p. 92.

84. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 43.

85. See Gwyn, D., in Dandelion, B.P., Gwyn, D., and Peat, T. (eds.), *Heaven on Earth: Quakers and the Second Coming*, Kelso: Curlew Productions; Birmingham: Woodbrooke College, 1998, pp. 90-106 (102).

86. Gott taught that 'Heaven is a place, and when the Spirit of God purifies the heart, and dwells in the soul of man and woman, that will be the new Jerusalem'. *Christ the Standard of Truth*, p. 7.

87. Barclay, R., *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity, Being an Explanation and Vindication of the Principles and Doctrines of the People called Quakers*, New York: Samuel Wood & Sons, 1827, p. 157.

88. Dandelion, B.P., 'Fresh Light, Dimmer Hopes', in Dandelion, Gwyn, and Peat (eds.), *Heaven on Earth*, pp. 159-66 (162).

89. See Miller, K.A., Schrier, A., Boling, B.D., and Doyle, D.N. (eds.), *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1675-1815*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 201, and Mack, 'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency', p. 170.

90. Peters, K., *Print Culture and the Early Quakers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 10.

91. Tarter, M., 'Reading a Quakers' Book: Elizabeth Ashbridge's Testmony of Quaker Literary Theory', *Quaker Studies* 9 (2005), pp. 177-90 (186).
92. Mack, 'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency', p. 101.
93. Barclay, A.R., *Letters, &c of Early Friends*, London, 1841, p. 332. Quoted in Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few*, p. 94.
94. Quoted in Wright, *Literary Life of the Early Friends*, pp. 105-106.
95. See Wright, *Literary Life of the Early Friends*, pp. 104-107.
96. Mack, 'Religion, Feminism and the Problem of Agency', p. 151.
97. Tarter, 'Reading a Quakers' Book', p. 181.
98. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 92.
99. Wright, *Literary Life of the Early Friends*, p. 67.
100. D'Eloia, S., personal correspondence dated 1 December 1976 quoted in Farrell, T.J., 'The Female and Male Modes of Rhetoric', *College English* 40/8 (1979), pp. 909-21 (909).
101. Farrell, 'The Female and Male Modes of Rhetoric', p. 909.
102. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 87.
103. Jenkins, *Records and Recollections of James Jenkins*, p. 499.
104. Gott was perhaps making allusion to the story of Jesus casting out Legion (see Mt. 8:28-34 and Lk. 8:26-37).
105. Mack, 'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency', p. 164.
106. James Jenkins [1776] in Mack, 'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency', pp. 164-65.
107. Gott, *Noon-Day Sun*, p. 61.
108. Gott, *The Midnight Cry*, p. 17.
109. Jeremy Gregory, 'Introduction: Transforming "The Age of Reason" into "an Age of Faiths": Or, Putting Religions and Beliefs (Back) into the Eighteenth Century', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32/3 (2009), pp. 287-305 (287).
110. Tarter, 'Reading a Quakers' Book', pp. 177-90.

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