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Mary Mollineux's *Fruits of Retirement* (1702): Poetry in the Second Period of Quakerism

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Abstract

Fruits of Retirement, a volume of poetry by the Lancashire Quaker Mary Mollineux, was published posthumously in 1702 by her husband and other Friends; it was well received and republished five times in the eighteenth century. Yet the early Quakers, like most Protestants of the time, rejected creative endeavour as impinging on the prerogative of the Almighty to create. This article considers why Mollineux's poetry might have been so well received, notwithstanding Quaker strictures against the creative arts. It begins by reviewing the case against the arts, and argues for the importance of understanding the style, form and acceptance of Mollineux's poetry in the light of the second period of Quakerism in which it was written and received.

Keywords

Mary Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, poetic form, style, heroic couplet, early Quakerism, second period

At the end of his influential article of 1956, Jackson Cope devotes a few sentences to what followed the demise of the distinctive literary style of first-generation Quakers. For Cope, the enthusiasm, energy and innovation of the early writing was both stylistic and theological. Indeed, he found the former to have been a linguistic and rhetorical embodiment of the latter, and consequently, the decline of one necessarily entailed the end of the other: 'the theology and style of the First Publishers died together'.¹ What followed in the writing of the second period

1 Cope, J. I., 'Seventeenth-Century Quaker Style', *PMLA* 71 (1956), pp. 725–54 (p. 751).

of Quakerism—extending from approximately 1660 to 1720—was to Cope a comprehensive etiolation and impoverishment of all that had been distinct and powerful in the writings of the first Friends.² ‘The age of plainness had come’, he concluded, ‘and Quaker style henceforth was to be distinguished only by a few pathetic anachronisms of diction’.³ His dismay is palpable. The Quaker stylistic golden age was over, to be superseded by a thoroughly leaden one.

While Cope’s sense of loss and disappointment at the changes characterising second-generation Quakerism—changes he sees as accommodation and retrenchment—were shared by many early twentieth-century historians and critics, Quaker scholarship is now revisiting this evaluation, intent on developing a more nuanced and less judgemental account of this period and examining it in its own terms and context rather than only in detrimental contrast to the early years. Thus far, this work has been largely historical, charting developments in Quaker faith and practice in the final third of the seventeenth century, examining the advent of and interplay between the new currents of Quietism, rationalism and evangelicalism of the second generation and across the eighteenth century, considering the evolution of the relationship between ‘the world’ and the Meeting, and mapping local, national and international variations in custom and discipline.⁴ In this scholarship, attention to ‘style’ tends to focus on Quaker modes of dress, speech and architecture, for example, as well as of worship.⁵ This

2 On the chronology of the second period of Quakerism, see Allen, R. C., and Moore, R., ‘Introduction’, in Allen and Moore, *The Quakers, 1656–1723: the evolution of a community*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018, pp. 1–7 (pp. 1–2). For earlier discussions of the second period, see Braithwaite, W. C., *The Second Period of Quakerism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 1961; Jones, R., *The Quakers in the American Colonies*, New York: Norton, 1966. More recent discussions include: Mack, P., ‘Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: reflections on eighteenth-century Quakerism’, *Signs* 29 (2003), pp. 149–77; Newman, E. and Jennings, J., ‘New Perspectives on Eighteenth-Century Quaker Women’, *Quaker Studies* 14 (2010), pp. 159–77; Allen, R. C., ‘Restoration Quakerism’, in Angell, S. W. and Dandelion, P. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 29–46; Dandelion, P., ‘Guarded Domesticity and Engagement with “the World”: the separate spheres of Quaker Quietism’, *Common Knowledge* 16 (2010), pp. 95–109; Endy, M. B., ‘William Penn’s Contribution to Early Quaker Thought’, in Angell, S. W. and Dandelion, P. (eds), *Early Quakers and their Theological Thought, 1647–1723*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 239–55; Healey, R. R., ‘Quietist Quakerism, 1692–c.1805’, in Angell and Dandelion, *Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, pp. 47–62; ‘History of Quaker Faith and Practice: 1650–1808’, in Angell, S. W. and Dandelion, P. (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Quakerism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 13–30; ‘Into the Eighteenth Century’, in Allen and Moore, *The Quakers, 1656–1723*, pp. 287–312; Pryce, E., ‘“A New Order of Things”: Benjamin Furly, Quakers and Quietism in the seventeenth century’, *Quaker Studies* 23 (2018), pp. 191–218; Allen and Moore, *The Quakers, 1656–1723*.

3 Cope, ‘Quaker Style’, p. 754.

4 The evolution of the tone of second-period scholarship can be traced through the sources cited in note 2.

5 Discussions of Quaker style include: Tolles, F. R., ‘“Of the Best Sort but Plain”: the

article seeks to contribute to this debate by examining second-generation Quaker style through the lens of literary analysis, in order to ask whether Cope's sense of the diminishment of written style in the hands of second-period Quakers might also need to be reviewed and revised. In order to examine the relationship of literary form and style to second-generation Quakerism, it takes as its focus Mary Mollineux's *Fruits of Retirement* (1702).⁶ It asks, first, how this poetic work articulates with longstanding Quaker strictures against the creative arts, and second, in what ways analysis of the poetic forms, styles and tempers of Mollineux's work might contribute to the recent scholarly interest in and understanding of the currents and impulses of second-generation Quaker belief and practice. In short, it asks to what extent we might read Mollineux's work as both indicative and constitutive of Quakerism towards the end of the seventeenth century.

First-generation writing was a hard act to follow. Generated in the febrile political culture of the 1650s and beyond, it was driven by a sense of urgency in its admonitions to turn away from the snares of the carnal world and accede to the Light Within, and in its fearless challenges to the forces of darkness. It is bold, forthright and unapologetic, and unafraid to offend. As N. H. Keeble wrote of William Penn, though it is perhaps a characterisation even more apt for Fox, 'He who speaks in the voice of God has few qualms'.⁷ This writing's rhetorical style is also distinctive. Typically, it is steeped in the language and imagery of scripture, proceeds through the rehearsal and adaptation of central motifs and phrases, and often addresses its interlocutor directly and bluntly. Keeble characterises early Quaker style as 'incantatory, repetitive, evocative, a style in which to enthuse but not to argue, a manner so rapt that the self may become one with the divine'.⁸ This style is found most obviously in the writings of George Fox, but it also characterises the work of Edward Burrough, William Dewsbury, Margaret Killin and Barbara Patison, and countless others. Indeed, Cope concluded that "'incantatory" style is ubiquitous in early Quakerdom'.⁹

The writing of the second-generation Mary Mollineux evinces a quite different Quaker style. Far from being incantatory, ecstatic or zealous, it is meditative and contemplative. Rather than urging the inhabitants of villages and cities, or even

Quaker esthetic', *American Quarterly* 11 (1959), pp. 484–502; Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 2 vols, London: Friends Historical Society, 1999; Stillion Southard, B. F., 'The Plain Style in Early Anti-Slavery Discourse: reassessing the rhetorical beginnings of Quaker and Puritan advocacy', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 102 (2016), pp. 286–306; Roads, J., 'Quaker Prophetic Language in the Seventeenth Century: a cross-disciplinary case study', *Religions* 9 (2018), p. 227.

6 Mollineux, M., *Fruits of Retirement: or, miscellaneous poems, moral and divine*, London: T. Sowle, 1702.

7 Keeble, N. H., 'The Politic and the Polite in the Quaker Prose: the case of William Penn', in Corns, T. C. and Loewenstein, D. (eds), *The Emergence of Quaker Writing: dissenting literature in seventeenth-century England*, London: Frank Cass, 1995, pp. 112–25 (p. 115).

8 Keeble, 'The Politic and the Polite', p. 115.

9 Cope, 'Quaker Style', p. 736.

entire nations, to conviction by submission to the Light Within, it is more modest in its ambitions, following two main paths: typically, it either re-narrates sweeping Old Testament narratives such as those of Daniel or Solomon, for example, or else its address is small scale, local and intimate, often to her cousin F. R. or to a friend.¹⁰ It seeks to define what characterises friendship; it rehearses the common inheritance of human sinfulness; and it commends a life lived in the Light, where reflection might be cultivated in solitude. It is also distinctive because it is written in verse rather than prose.

Most of what is known of Mary Mollineux's life is gleaned from the published volume.¹¹ She was born Mary Southworth in around 1651, probably in Lancashire. As a child, her weak eyesight made her 'unfit for the usual Imployment of Girls', but being of 'a large Natural capacity, quick, witty, and studiously inclined, her Father brought her up to more Learning, than is commonly bestowed on our Sex', wrote her cousin Frances Owen in her prefatory testimony to *Fruits of Retirement*.¹² She learnt Latin, Greek, arithmetic, 'Physick and Chyrurgery, the Nature of Plants, Herbs and Minerals ... delighting in the Study of Nature'.¹³ According to Owen, her cousin had 'loved the Blessed Truth ... from a Child, being early Convinced thereof'.¹⁴ In 1684, aged about 33, she was arrested for attending a Meeting for Worship in a private house in Warrington and imprisoned in Lancaster Castle; there she met Henry Mollineux, also imprisoned for attending Meeting. They married the following year and had two sons. Henry underwent further imprisonment, and Mary's 'dispute with the Bishop of Cheshire and Lancashire in 1691, in which she took issue with Henry's incarceration, has its own detailed narrative in *Fruits of Retirement*, written by Henry and in which his wife outmanoeuvres the Bishop with her challenge to his imprisonment for non-payment of tithes.¹⁵ She died in Liverpool in February

10 Frances Owen was Frances Ridge until her marriage to Nathaniel Owen of Reigate; see Green, J. J., 'The Quaker Family of Owen', *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* 1 (1903–04), pp. 28–39, 74–82, 111–16 (p. 112).

11 On Mollineux's life, see Gill, C., 'Mollineux [*née* Southworth], Mary (1651?–1696)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-45818>> [accessed 08/02/20]; Ferguson, J., 'Mary Mollineux – Quaker Poetess', *The Friends' Quarterly* 24 (1987), pp. 377–82; Mortimer, J. E., 'An Early Quaker Poet: Mary (Southworth) Mollineux, d.1696', *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* 53 (1972–75), pp. 125–47. On the specifics of Lancashire Quakerism in the second generation, see Morgan, N. J., 'Lancashire Quakers and the Tithe, 1660–1730', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 70 (1988), pp. 61–75.

12 Owen, F., 'A Testimony Concerning My Dear Friend and Cousin Mary Mollineux, Deceased', in Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, sig. A4r–A6v (A4r).

13 Owen, 'A Testimony', sig. A4r, A4v.

14 Owen, 'A Testimony', sig. A4v.

15 Mollineux, H., 'A Testimony Concerning my Late Wife', and 'The Following Relation', in Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, sig. A8v–B4r; B7r–B8e.

1696, aged about forty-four, following a period of illness during which she spoke to her husband in Latin ‘when Company was present’, so that only he would understand her words.¹⁶ Her life was therefore characterised by the distinctive combination, for a woman, of a humanist education of sufficient duration to have resulted in her acquiring a conversational ease with Latin (and this was clearly a facility that her husband shared); a well-developed vernacular medical knowledge typical of many women householders of the time; and the life of an early Quaker, standing fast in the faith across the span of her life, and engaging in the public disputes and enduring the incarceration so common in the early decades of the movement.

Mollineux’s education, whether formal or informal, included the reading of poetry, and she herself wrote verse from childhood: the earliest poem in *Fruits of Retirement* was written when she was about twelve years old. Her poems circulated in manuscript among Friends during her lifetime; a fellow Quaker, Tryall Rider, whose testimony is also included in the volume, recalled reading them and feeling ‘such Unity of Spirit with them, that I said, I thought they might be of Service, if made Publick in Print; but she was not then free, that her Name should be exposed; she was not seeking Praise amongst Men’. After her death, Rider was emboldened to publish them, anticipating them to be ‘to the Benefit of all Moderate Readers’.¹⁷ Such sentiments—the unwillingness of an author, particularly a woman author, to publish her work, the encouragement by others to do so, the posthumous publication for the edification of others—are entirely conventional. But the prefatory testimonies go beyond the conventional in their justifications, because they have to address not just the writing or its appearance in print, but also its form. As Frances Owen noted, ‘Verse is not so commonly used in Divine Subjects, as Prose’; nevertheless, for Owen Mollineux’s chosen form was justified because it was not like the ‘dross’ of worldly poetry; rather, she ‘made use of her Gift ... [to] raise the Soul upon Wings of Divine Contemplation’.¹⁸

Owen’s sense of the need to justify the form of Mollineux’s writing indicates Friends’ inheritance of the objections to poetry so thoroughly rehearsed by Protestants over the previous century or more. Of particular concern for this readership is the sense that poetry manipulates language into a form unsuitable for contemplating the divine. It is not sufficiently plain, leaving both poet and reader in danger of being seduced by the delights of the work’s wit or skill, and misled

16 Mollineux, H. ‘A Testimony’, sig. B3v.

17 Ryder, T., ‘A Testimony Concerning my Dear Friend M. Mollineux’, in Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, sig. A7r–A8r (A7v). Tryall Rider was, according to Thomas Allen Glenn, a flax-dresser from Wrexham, which is some thirty miles from Liverpool, where Mollineux lived towards the end of her life. See Glenn, T. A., *Merion in the Welsh Tract: with sketches of the townships of Haverford and Radnor*, Norristown, PA, 1896; new edn Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1970, p. 32.

18 Owen, ‘A Testimony’, sig. A6r.

by its formal ingenuity.¹⁹ It proceeds too much by ‘fancy’, or the imagination, rather than by divine truth. As the Church of England priest and poet George Herbert so famously put it in the second of his two ‘Jordan’ poems addressing poetry and faith, when first he wrote of ‘heav’nly joyes’, he ‘sought out quaint words, and trim invention; / My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell, / Curling with metaphors a plain intention.’²⁰ The pleasures of poetic composition meant that he lost his focus on the heavenly joys themselves. His intention might have been plain, but it had become obscured by the act of writing: the quaint words, the trim invention, the curling metaphors became themselves the point of the writing, rather than a means to an end. Nevertheless, Herbert averred, the solution was simple: all that was needed, he concluded in ‘Jordan [I]’, was to ‘plainly say, *My God, My King*.’²¹

Such concerns about the snares of poetry were shared by the first generations of Quakers. As James Hood has recently written, Friends’ rejection of artistic endeavour derived, like Herbert’s, from a distrust of ‘fancy’ or imagination, but also from its usurpation of the role of the Creator.²² Hood illustrates this through reference to a 1671 text by Fox which exemplifies the early movement’s antipathy to acts of artistic representation:

all Friends and People pluck down your Images, your Likenesses, your Pictures, and your Representations of things in Heaven, things in the Earth, and things in the Waters; I say pluck them out of your Houses, Walls and Signs, or other places, that none of you be found Immitators of his Creator, whom you should Serve and Worship; and not observe the idle lazy mind, that would go invent and make things like a Creator and Maker ... For mind, while man was in the Image of God, and his likeness, and the woman, they did not make any Likenesses, or Images of things in Heaven, or Earth, or Water. But when man lost this Image of God, then they did begin to make such things.²³

19 On Protestantism and plainness, see Dyrness, W. A., *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: the Protestant imagination from Calvin to Edwards*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Hart, T., ‘Protestantism and the Arts’, in McGrath, A. and Marks, D. C. (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, pp. 268–86; Carruthers, J., ‘The Aesthetics of Simplicity’, in Knight, M. (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion*, London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 156–66.

20 Herbert, G. ‘Jordan [II]’, in *The Temple*, Cambridge: Thomas Buck and Roger Daniel, 1633, p. 95.

21 Herbert, G. ‘Jordan [I]’, in *The Temple*, p. 48.

22 Hood, J. W. ‘Introduction: Quakers and literature’, in Hood (ed.) *Quakers and Literature*, vol. 3 in ‘Quakers and the Disciplines’ series, Philadelphia, PA: Friends Association for Higher Education, 2016, pp. 1–10 (p. 3). Other discussions of early Quakerism and the creative arts include: Pointon, M., ‘Quakerism and Visual Culture 1650–1800’, *Art History* 20 (1997), 397–431; Cho, N. J., ‘Literature’, in Angell and Dandelion (eds), *Cambridge Companion to Quakerism*, pp. 69–87. See too Carroll, K. L., ‘Singing in the Spirit in Early Quakerism’, *Quaker History* 73 (1984), pp. 1–13.

23 Fox, G. *Iconoclastes: or a hammer to break down all invented images*, 1671, p. 4.

Fox's focus here is on visual representations, but his objection to artists as 'makers' also extends to the literary arts, for, as Sir Philip Sidney had remarked in his literary manifesto *The Defence of Poesy* a century earlier, poets too are makers. The word 'poetry' itself, Sidney noted, 'cometh of this word *poiein*, which is "to make": wherein, I know not whether by luck or wisdom, we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him "a maker"'.²⁴ While Sidney celebrates the poet as a maker, Fox repudiates such acts of artistic representation: they are to him expressly the work of fallen humanity, never undertaken until they 'lost this Image of God'. Furthermore, in inventing and making things 'like a Creator and Maker', the poet presumes on the divine prerogative to create, rather than simply directing his words to the service and worship of the divine creator.

Beyond this objection to the distractions and pitfalls inherent in 'making', however, Hood notes a more fundamental Quaker distrust of all acts of representation because of 'the base falsity of representation itself, the substitution of one thing for another'—in other words, its fundamentally metaphorical character.²⁵ A suspicion of metaphor and allegory was also shared by other Protestant radicals of the seventeenth century. The Baptist John Bunyan, for example, acknowledges the characteristic Puritan fear of this as he addresses the allegorical character of his own work in the preface to *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). He anticipates that critics will reject his method on the grounds that 'metaphors make us blind'. He offers this reply to such objections:

But must I needs want solidness, because
By metaphors I speak; was not God's laws,
His Gospel-laws in olden time held forth
By types, shadows and metaphors?²⁶

Holy Writ deploys metaphor, 'where the cases / Doth call for one thing to set forth another: / Use it I may, then', Bunyan concludes.²⁷

Metaphor or allegory, with its use of 'one thing to set forth another' is what exercises Bunyan the most, but even more fundamentally and unavoidably, any language addressing itself to the divine finds itself in this territory. As the critic Debora K. Shuger observes, the issue of metaphoricity or linguistic substitution lies at the heart of 'the ancient dilemma': that is, the problem of finding 'a way to bring that which is remote and yet most worth knowing into some kind of relationship with what we can more accurately grasp'.²⁸ In *Paradise Lost*, Milton

24 Sidney, P. 'The Defence of Poesy', in Sidney, *Selected Writings*, ed. Dutton, R., Manchester: Carcanet, 1987, pp. 102–48 (p. 106).

25 Hood, 'Introduction', *Quakers and Literature*, p. 3.

26 Bunyan, J., *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965, p. 34.

27 Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 36.

28 Shuger, D. K., 'Sacred Rhetoric in the Renaissance', in Plett, H. F. (ed.), *Renaissance Rhetoric*, Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993, pp. 121–42 (p. 135). Shuger attributes

articulates this problem through the voice of the angel Raphael. Adam has asked him for an account of the war in heaven, and Raphael replies: ‘how shall I relate / To human sense th’ invisible exploits / Of warring spirits ... ?’ He then answers his own question:

what surmounts the reach
Of human sense I shall delineate so
By lik’ning spiritual to corporal forms,
As may express them best.²⁹

Raphael’s method—the likening of spiritual to the bodily forms known and understood by Adam, his interlocutor—is also the solution to Shuger’s ‘ancient dilemma’: ‘The invisible things of God can only be known or loved by being made flesh’.³⁰ Any understanding of the immaterial, invisible or spiritual is itself constitutionally metaphorical or analogical, and it is therefore the task of sacred rhetoric to follow suit and make ‘the excellent but remote object present to the senses and imagination’.³¹ However, while it might be possible to avoid the dangers posed by fancy, allegory or metaphor and to strive, with Herbert, to ‘plainly say, *My God, My King*’, this can ultimately only be undertaken in the always flawed, approximate and inherently analogical form of fallen human language. And, incidentally, it is also worth noting that even in his attempt at pithy plainness, Herbert cannot avoid analogy, but names God as ‘King’.

Early Quaker language and practice navigated this ancient dilemma in ways that sought to move beyond the pitfalls of an endlessly fallen language in multiple ways. These included: the validation and contemplation of the godliness of the silence towards which all utterance leads; seeking to ensure the godly genesis of any utterance by speaking only when assured that the potential speaker was genuinely moved of the Lord to do so; the refusal of the bipartite character of metaphor and insistence on understandings its two terms as inhabiting the same unbounded territory (as when, during his trial, William Dewsbury erased the distinction between the spiritual and material realms by claiming that ‘I live in the Lord, and I have a Wife and three Children at *Wakefield*, in *Yorkshire*’); and an active recognition of the power of communication beyond language

the phrase ‘the ancient dilemma’ to Wesley Trimpi who, like Shuger, is concerned to analyse the difficulty of the relation between knowledge and representation; see Shuger, ‘Sacred Rhetoric’, p. 134. See too Shuger, ‘The Philosophical Foundations of Sacred Rhetoric’, in Jost, W. and Olmsted, W. (eds), *Rhetorical Invention and Religious Inquiry: new perspectives*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 47–64 (p. 57), and Trimpi, *Muses of One Mind: the literary analysis of experience and its continuity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 97–129.

29 Milton, J. *Paradise Lost*, ed. Teskey, G., New York: Norton, 2005, Book 5, lines 564–66, 571–74.

30 Shuger, ‘Sacred Rhetoric’, p. 136.

31 Shuger, ‘Sacred Rhetoric’, p. 136.

through quaking, the refusal of hat honour, and the enactment of signs such as going naked—signs that, of course, ultimately proved as opaque and as open to competing interpretations as any linguistic utterance.³²

In such a discursive context, both in the broader culture and in the more immediate Quaker movement, poetry presented special problems which its religious character (claimed as a validation of Mollineux's verse by Frances Owen) only went some way to answer. First, as Herbert found, in being wrought from language, it was impossible to move to a state of absolute plainness in poetic formulation. Representation necessarily involved the invocation of one thing to set forth the character of another, especially when seeking to make present that which was remote and immaterial, as was the case with religious poetry. Second, the formal qualities of poetry—its emphasis on rhyme, on metre, on linguistic and aural patterns and echoes—required attention to the poem as a construct or artifice, as a thing made of language and, consequently, to the poet as maker or creator. To be moved of the spirit to write in iambic pentameter and rhyming couplet left the writer expressing the directly spiritual in a cultural form that had been—as Frances Owen also noted—'too much abused by the extravagant Wits of the Age'.³³ If the first Quakers had the advantage of developing a discursive style of their own which marked them out as members of a distinct and separated speech and faith community, Friends who wrote in verse might find themselves adopting a form whose associations were in danger of being seen as at best social and at worst profane.

In short, the beliefs informing the Quaker distrust of poetry and the other creative arts were manifold. They encompassed the fallen character of human language and a consequent distrust of its ability adequately to approach the divine; the fundamental falsity of representation, as it set one thing forth in the form of another; a concern about the usurpation of the power to create, belonging properly only to God; the failure of reformed religious injunctions to plainness and simplicity of language; and—with regard to poetry in particular—its tendency to attract readers by appealing to the seductive charms of the intellect, and, in its capacity to distract from a proper contemplation of the divine, an overinvestment in the craft of writing and the patterns of language and metrical form.

Notwithstanding the multiple dimensions of the Quaker suspicion of poetry and other creative arts, Mary Mollineux was neither the first nor only early Quaker to write verse. In her study *The Literary Life of the Early Friends* (1932), Luella M. Wright notes that despite the 'distrustful attitude of the Friends toward "the learning of the world"', Quaker verse between 1650 and 1725

32 Besse, J., *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers*, 2 vols, London: Luke Hinde, 1753, vol. 1, p. 519. I discuss Dewsbury's words in Hinds, *George Fox and Early Quaker Culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011, pp. 48–50. On going naked as a sign, see Carroll, K., 'Early Quakers and "Going Naked as a Sign"', *Quaker History* 67 (1978), pp. 69–87.

33 Owen 'A Testimony', sig. A6r.

was 'surprisingly plentiful'.³⁴ She finds instances of verse written by (among others) Edward Burrough, William Penn and Humphrey Smith, but she also identifies six printed volumes of verse, of which Mary Mollineux's was one. Some of this verse shared the ecstatic tone of early prose writings, but much of it, as Wright observes, shows 'the manifest interest that their authors had in following the general trend of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century literature'.³⁵ Mary Mollineux was among them. Two questions follow from this. First, was this conformity to the general trend of contemporary literary modes testimony simply to the dilution of the separatist zeal of the first generation and a new accommodation of 'the world'? Second, and following Cope's yoking of style, belief and practice in first-generation writing, might we discern a similar correspondence between the literary style and form of the second generation, on the one hand, and the transformation of the movement's characteristic modes and disciplinary practices under the changed social, cultural and political formation, on the other?

Of the eighty-eight poems by Mollineux included in *Fruits of Retirement*, the overwhelming majority (about eighty per cent) are written in what had become the dominant poetic metre of the latter years of the seventeenth century, namely, the rhyming (or heroic) couplet in iambic pentameter.³⁶ These, for example, are the opening lines of Mollineux's 'A Letter to Cousin F. R.':

In secret Yearning for thy Preservation,
 Endeared Friend, I send the Salutation
 Of Love unfeign'd, and heartily desire
 Its pure Refining Flame may ne'er expire,
 Or be extinguish'd: for 'twas said of old,
*Iniquities abound, when Love grows cold.*³⁷

The overall effect of the heroic couplet is generally understood to be one of formal control, and this is certainly the case here. Many of Mollineux's couplets are closed, the end of the line coinciding with the end of a sentence or clause. But even where there is enjambment, the new line is typically divided by a strong caesura to conclude the syntactical unit, as in the third line above. The rhyme also works to generate a series of closed or contained units, whereby the first line of the couplet prompts the anticipation of its completion in the terminal rhyme of the second. No sooner is a new unit opened with the promise of a new rhyme than

34 Wright, L. M., *The Literary Life of the Early Friends*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1932, p. 131.

35 Wright, *Literary Life*, p. 134.

36 For an agenda-setting discussion of gender and form in women's poetry, see Clarke, D. and Coolahan, M.-L., 'Gender, Reception and Form: Early Modern Women and the Making of Verse', in Scott-Baumann, E. and Burton, B. (eds), *The Work of Form: poetics and materiality in early modern culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 144–61.

37 Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, p. 111.

it is delivered, completed and closed. It is a kind of decorous call and response or, as the critic Shira Wolosky glossed it, an act of linguistic containment whereby 'Each two-line unit is a polished frame in which words are carefully set'.³⁸ The couplet so constructed formally creates a sense of crafted orderliness, predictability, equilibrium and measure. The form itself is reassuring, even consolatory: it promises that that which is begun will be soon and satisfactorily completed; the reader will not be left in the lurch. The form is also prominent, even intrusive; in particular, the rapid resolution of each rhyme makes the form dominate the reading experience in a way, for example, that the blank verse of Shakespeare or Milton does not. The rhyming couplet's formal qualities, therefore, shape, direct and contain the poem's subject, informing and inflecting the poem's subject matter. Its formal ethos of balance and control works dynamically with (or potentially against) the subject.

Strikingly, moreover, in these lines the rhyming couplet requires Mollineux to modulate and subdue not only the complex of thoughts and feelings comprising her subject matter to her chosen metre, but also those she draws from scripture. Here, she takes Matthew 24.12 ('And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold') and rewrites it in ten iambic syllables: '*Iniquities abound, when Love grows cold*'. The words of the apostle are appropriated and restructured to serve the purpose of the poet in chastising her cousin for not having written to her recently. The divine is remade in the service of the social and familial.

Mollineux chose to write in the predominant verse form of her age, thereby aligning herself not only with poetry but with its most fashionable kind, and thereby positioning her still further as working with the cultural grain rather than against it, as first-generation Quaker writers had done. This sense of her affiliation with an expanded cultural network beyond her family and fellow Quakers is enhanced by her writing's explicit and implicit acknowledgement of the work of other poets. In a postscript to a prose Epistle to her cousin F. R. seeking her convincement, and in which she sets out the grounds for the Quaker use of the second-person singular 'thou', the refusal to call months by their pagan names, and so on, Mollineux quotes not only the Bible but also the words of the Royalist poet Katherine Philips, the most celebrated contemporary poet of women's friendship:

The Lord can and will preserve those that Love and Depend upon him, and Love the Light, bringing their Deeds to it, that they may be made manifest; as it is written, *Eph. 5. 13. Whatsoever makes manifest is Light*, and that within Revealed, even in the Heart. And as one of our own Sex hath notably said or writ, several Years since:

He that commands Himself is more a Prince,
Than he that Nations keeps in Awe;

38 Wolosky, S., *The Art of Poetry: how to read a poem*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 160.

Who yield to that which doth their Souls Convince,
Shall never need another Law.³⁹

The verse lines by Philips are invoked to endorse Mollineux's commendation of the inward power of the Light; perhaps, indeed, the lines evince a special sensibility that appealed to those schooled in Quaker thought, for the schismatic John Pennyman later also quoted them.⁴⁰ However, Mollineux slightly misquotes Philips' words: the lines should read 'Then he who Nations keeps in awe; / Who yield to all that does their Souls convince'. This slight inaccuracy suggests that these were lines not copied from a book but drawn from memory and whose sentiment had struck a chord with her. For Mollineux, furthermore, it is noteworthy that she draws attention to the fact that she is quoting from the writing of 'one of our own Sex', thereby bringing herself into correspondence with the small community of contemporary women poets, as well as citing approvingly a poetic expression of an ethic of self-governance founded in allegiance to 'that which doth their Souls convince', rather than to outwards laws or precepts. In so doing, she affiliates at once to her sex—in early Quaker writing, a category associated with the fallen world—and to her faith community, harnessing the former to the service of the latter.⁴¹

While this is the only time that Mollineux directly quotes Philips, her work nonetheless elsewhere echoes other work by her and other poets. This stanza, for example, is by Mollineux:

As Winters tedious Nights to weary Eyes,
As nipping Cold to chirping winged *Flocks*,
Until the welcome Day-Star do arise,
And lights the Trees to shake their dewy Locks:⁴²

In their common depiction of a long and wearisome night during which birds yearn the arrival of the 'tardy Sun', the lines seem to have learnt from Philips' 'Orinda to Lucasia':

Observe the weary birds e'ere night be done,
How they would fain call up the tardy Sun,
With Feathers hung with dew,
And trembling voices too.⁴³

39 Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, p. 3. The stanza she cites is from Philips, K., 'The Soul', in *Poems by Mrs. Katherine Philips, the Matchless Orinda*, London: J. M. for H. Herringman, 1667, p. 117. There were two editions of Katherine Philips' poetry published in the 1660s: an unauthorised edition appeared in 1664, an authorised one in 1667. In this instance, while the spelling differs, the wording of these two versions of this poem is the same.

40 John Pennyman, *Multum in Parvo: or, some useful sayings, in verse and prose collected by a lover of virtue and goodness in whomsoever*, London: Samuel Manship, 1687, p. 5.

41 For early Quaker refusals of conventional meanings of and affiliations to gender, see Cotton, P. and Cole, M., *To the Priests and People of England*, London: Giles Calvert, 1655, and Fell, M., *Womens Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures*, London: 1666.

42 Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, p. 126.

43 Philips, *Poems*, p. 153.

Nor are these merely localised nods to the work of Philips on the part of Mollineux. Rather, Philips' focus on friendship and on retirement—her great themes—provides a model for Mollineux's entire collection: many of the poems to her cousins address the subject of friendship, and nine poems include the term in their titles. Furthermore, Mollineux's many poems entitled 'A Meditation' or 'Contemplation', as well as the titles of four poems directly addressing retirement or retreat, reference not only Philips' work but a tradition of devotional commendation of retreat whose popularity would endure throughout the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ Again, her poetry's focus aligns her with the predilections and preoccupations of her contemporaries.

Differing religious affiliations were no barrier to Mollineux's field of poetic reference. Philips worshipped in the Church of England, and George Herbert—an Anglican priest—was another of Mollineux's influences, despite the distance of his religious practice from her own. These stanzas, for example, are from Herbert's 'Denial':

When my devotions could not pierce
 Thy silent eares;
 Then was my heart broken, as was my verse:
 My breast was full of fears
 And disorder:
 ...
 O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue
 To crie to thee,
 And then not heare it crying! all day long
 My heart was in my knee,
 But no hearing.⁴⁵

Herbert's lines provide a model for Mollineux's 'Meditation':

Ah, shall not Sighs and Groans prevail to move
 Unto Compassion? Shall
 My drooping Spirit call
 And cry, but find no Ear,
 No Entrance, no Access,
 To ease my Heart in great Distress?
 Ah Lord! How long canst thou forbear to hear?⁴⁶

Mollineux not only borrows the visually ragged (though metrically regular) form and variable line lengths from Herbert, she also addresses his subject matter:

44 Edson, M., "A Closet or a Secret Field": Horace, Protestant Devotion and British Retirement Poetry', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35 (2012), pp. 17–41. See too Price, B., 'Verse, Voice, and Body: the retirement mode and women's poetry 1680–1723', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 12.3 (January 2007), <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/12-3/priceve2.htm> [accessed 08/02/20].

45 Herbert, 'Deniall', in *The Temple*, pp. 71–72.

46 Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, p. 81.

the (apparent) failure of God to hear the entreaties of his unworthy petitioner. Elsewhere, she also echoes Herbert's misgivings about the pitfalls of poetry as a mode in which to contemplate the divine: while he wrote of 'curling with metaphors a plain intention', she concludes that she may not 'in curled Strains Hyperbolize, / That innate Vertue, which in thee doth lye'.⁴⁷ Such echoes indicate the extent to which she has learnt from celebrated practitioners of her art, including from the work of poets of other religious persuasions, such as Herbert, and from Philips, whose work was largely secular, promulgating an ideal of Platonic friendship. These intertextual resonances, both formal and thematic, announce Mollineux as not only concerned to communicate her thoughts on matters 'Moral and Divine' (as her title page states), but also as a writer speaking in an explicitly poetic idiom. The social and cultural affiliations that such intertextual echoes suggest, therefore, extend beyond a shared gender identity, with Philips, to include too a community of poets. Mollineux writes avowedly, this suggests, as a woman and as a poet, as well as a Quaker.

What are the implications of this in the context of the faith community in which Mollineux lived? How are we to understand her work in the light of the continuing strictures against poetry, voiced not just by Fox in the early days of the movement but reaffirmed by the most influential voices of the second generation, such as William Penn and Robert Barclay?⁴⁸ Was her poetry seen as anomalous or problematic in identifying her with the profane pastimes and pursuits of the world? Was she perhaps a poet who was also a Quaker, or a Quaker who was also a poet, but one who kept these incommensurate parts of her life separate from each other? Or are there ways in which her late-century Quakerism might be understood to be inflected in and by the poetry?

Beyond the conventional prefatory apologies of her cousin Frances Owen and fellow Friend Tryall Rider, there is no sense that Mollineux's poetry was seen in the movement as compromising her Quakerism. Accounts of her life are entirely recognisable as sitting within the literature of sufferings: she was imprisoned for her faith for attending Meetings for Worship; in familiar Quaker fashion, she took public issue with the Bishop of Cheshire and Lancashire, challenging his imprisonment of her husband as contrary to Scripture; she lived and married in her faith community; and the testimonies prefacing her collection unequivocally celebrate her life as that of a faithful Friend.

If her life was uncontroversial in her community, what of her writing? Three factors suggest that, despite the continuing warnings against the literary arts, not only was Mollineux's life read as uncontroversial and compatible with her faith,

47 Herbert, 'Jordan [II]', in *The Temple*, p. 95; Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, p. 171.

48 See Hood, 'Introduction', *Quakers and Literature*, pp. 3–4; Keeble, 'The Politic and the Polite'. Pink Dandelion notes the continuing 'avoidance of the arts, literature, and anything that was fictional or might excite the natural emotions' in the eighteenth-century movement; Dandelion, 'Guarded Domesticity', p. 101.

but so too was her poetry. First, it was approved for publication by the Second Day Morning Meeting, the committee charged with accepting or rejecting all Quaker writings submitted for publication, and intent on 'preventing the publication of enthusiastic or politically dangerous works which would have compromised the Quaker movement'.⁴⁹ While Mollineux's work could hardly be construed as enthusiastic or politically dangerous, its form potentially rendered it open to charges of hypocrisy, given the continuing warnings against the literary arts. Secondly, it was published by Tace Sowle, who from 1691 was printer for the Religious Society of Friends, and the volume was subsequently republished five times in the course of the eighteenth century by the Sowle publishing house and its successor. There were also three editions published in Philadelphia. It was, therefore, a volume that was found to be fully compatible with Quaker publication criteria; it was published alongside other Quaker texts, many of which are advertised for sale on the final pages of *Fruits of Retirement*; and it was enduringly popular with readerships constituted within these publishing trajectories. Finally, Mollineux's collection incurred the opprobrium of the veteran writer of anti-Quaker diatribes, Francis Bugg, in a pamphlet called *The Quaker's Charm Discover'd* (1702). While much of his ire is directed against her challenge to the Bishop of Cheshire and Lancashire, he also comments on her poems:

tho' they [Quakers] have with great dexterity, cried down the Singing of *David's* Psalms yet the Songs and Divine Poems (as the Quaker calls them) of this *Mary Mollineux* (if they were her writing, which I almost as much question, as that *G. Fox* was the Author of his *Journal*, and other Books) and the Disciples sing them with great Devotion, there being more than a hundred and fifty Pages of these *Quaker* Psalms: To which something might be said.⁵⁰

For Bugg, the Quaker acceptance of her poems is indeed seen as an instance of Quaker hypocrisy: how can they 'cry down' David's Psalms yet embrace these 'Songs and Divine Poems'? For Second Day Morning Meeting, for Quaker publishers and for anti-Quakers, therefore, there was no question but that Mary Mollineux's volume was to be understood and accepted as a fully Quaker publication.

Was Bugg right? Was there a hypocrisy, or at least a willingness to tolerate inconsistency, in the Quaker acceptance of Mollineux's volume of verse despite the continuing warnings against the dangers of worldly recreational pastimes? As William Penn put it in *No Cross, No Crown* (1669), 'How many plays did Jesus Christ and his apostles recreate themselves at? What poets, romances, comedies,

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

50 Bugg, F., *The Quaker's Charm Discover'd*, London: J. Taylor, 1702, p. 14. On Bugg, see Leachman, C. L., 'Bugg, Francis (1640–1727)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/3890> [accessed 08/02/20].

and the like, did the apostles and saints make or use to pass away their time withal?’⁵¹ Penn’s objections might, of course, be countered by the justification mobilised by Frances Owen: namely, that Mollineux successfully differentiated her work from that of ‘poets, romances, comedies, and the like’ by means of her divine subject matter. This, however, simply omits from consideration the associations of the form of her verse and its intertextual references to other poets, both of which tie her into cultural networks beyond those whom the poetry addresses: her own faith community. I want to consider, therefore, whether this is more than an example of a selective and pragmatic apology, and a consistency might be discerned between Mollineux’s subject matter and the form it takes that is indicative of the Quakerism of its time, just as had been the case with earlier Quaker writing. If so, this might go some way towards allowing us to understand both the verse’s acceptance and its continuing popularity through the eighteenth century.

In her apology for her cousin’s poetry, Frances Owen offers three arguments that seek to persuade her readers that Mollineux’s verse does not transgress Quaker precepts.

And tho’ Verse is not so commonly used in Divine Subjects, as Prose, and but too much abused by the extravagant Wits of the Age; yet she, like a Skilful Chymist, had learned to separate the Purer Spirits, and more Refined Parts of Poetry, from the Earthly, Worthless Dross;⁵²

Owen praises Mollineux’s poetic skill as having been developed morally as well as technically: ‘she, like a Skilful Chymist, had learned to separate the Purer Spirits, and more Refined Parts of Poetry, from the Earthly, Worthless Dross’. In other words, she has learned what elements of the poet’s art are fit for her subject matter and avoids the rest. This involves skilful attention to form (the ‘parts of poetry’) as well as to purity of poetic spirit. Next, Owen praises the godly purpose of the poetry: her cousin has ‘made use of her Gift, rather to Convince and Prevail upon the Mind, to affect and raise the Soul upon Wings of Divine Contemplation, than to Please the airy Fancy with Strains of Wit, and Unprofitable Invention’.⁵³ The poetry engages the mind as well as the soul, but in so doing it aims not be clever, nor to please through its inventiveness, but to be part of the continuing work of conviction and of staying true to the faith.

Finally, and perhaps most controversially, Owen contends that ‘tho’ Living Testimonies to the Truth are numerous, yet few extant in Verse, which hath an harmonious delighting Faculty in it, that Influences the Minds of some, more than Prose, especially Young People, and is more apt to imprint it self in the Memory’.⁵⁴ In other words, she suggests that the formal qualities of Mollineux’s poetry are to be celebrated rather than deplored or downplayed. While it would be unacceptable

51 Penn quoted in Hood, ‘Introduction’, *Quakers and Literature*, p. 4.

52 Owen, ‘A Testimony’, sig. A6r.

53 Owen, ‘A Testimony’, sig. A6r–A6v.

54 Owen, ‘A Testimony’, sig. A6v.

to seek to 'Please the airy Fancy', Owen suggests nevertheless that pleasure has its moral uses. Good (that is, godly) verse is so through its 'harmonious delighting Faculty'. Designating poetry's 'faculty' or power as 'harmonious' identifies it as arising in part from the nature of the subject matter: in 'Of the Rainbow', for example, she praises the orderliness and beauty of God's creation: 'Hath not each Visible a Mystery? / Doth not each Herb proclaim a Deity?'⁵⁵ But the reference is also to the harmony or tunefulness of the verse itself. The pleasures of metre and rhyme will also occasion delight, and these formal qualities will carry the work's 'moral and divine' purpose into the minds of some readers, especially the young, who might otherwise remain immune to it. The form therefore makes it a particularly powerful—living—testimony to truth in the work of conviction, and it also aligns it with the considerable body of anti-backsliding literature of the Quaker movement. Its 'moral and divine' power arises not only because of what it says, but because of how—in what form—it says it.

In so writing, Owen articulates an argument about the sacred power of poetic form in the work of faith that returns us to the broader early modern debates about the theory and practice of preaching. Shuger has mapped the shifts across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries between the liberal and the conservative sacred rhetorics of Protestantism. The liberal tradition—prevalent through to the Restoration—sought to persuade in part by appealing to the emotions through 'an aesthetic of vividness, drama and expressivity'.⁵⁶ This mid-century liberal ethos, in which prophetic zeal and millenarian immediacy set the tone of radical religious discourse, characterised first-generation Quaker practice as much as it did that of the Baptists, Fifth Monarchists or Independents. After the Restoration, however, the tide turned against such zeal and its attendant discourse. Preaching theory now advocated that the link between language and affect so characteristic of radical religion and politics during the revolutionary years was to be severed; it was too dangerous, too disorderly, too disruptive. Instead, reason should take precedence in sacred rhetoric, which should mobilise rational rather than passionate plainness. As the philosopher and clergyman Joseph Glanvill put it in 1678, preaching should be 'plain, practical, methodical, affectionate' instead of 'mysterious' and 'notional' as it had so disastrously been in recent times.⁵⁷

Such manifesto calls made their mark not only on the language of the Church of England, but also on that of Quakers. Indeed, as Robynne Rogers Healey reminds us, rationalism was one of three defining 'theological tendencies' of the post-Restoration and eighteenth-century movement, alongside Quietism and evangelicalism. Until the end of the seventeenth century, Healey suggests, these

55 Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, p. 95.

56 Shuger, 'Sacred Rhetoric', p. 126.

57 Glanvill, J., *An Essay Concerning Preaching*, London: A. C. for H. Brome, 1678, pp. 11, 19. By 'affectionate', Glanvill means the sense given in the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition 2c ('Eager, ambitious, earnest') rather than 2b ('Passionate, wilful; self-willed, headstrong, obstinate').

three tendencies ‘were able to function side by side’, bringing with them a recalibration of the tone and temper of Quaker discourse as well as of its theology.⁵⁸

Mollineux’s work, written in the last twenty to thirty years of the century, certainly manifests elements of these new tendencies. Her recurrent themes of retreat, solitude and contemplation are, most obviously, legible as articulations of this tendency. Alongside this, the faculty of reason is also invoked and commended, for example, and contrasted to the dangers of passion:

The true Noble Mind
Conquers a Wrong by Patience, is resign’d
For Vertue’s sake to bear, that Reason may
Be Re-enthron’d, and Passion pass away.⁵⁹

Reason for Mollineux operates on a continuum with nobility of mind, patience, endurance of wrongdoing, and a commitment to virtue. In other words, rather than being distinctive from the Quietist dimension of her work, it is of a piece with it, its repeated advocacy and praise of retirement, contemplation and modesty the optimum conditions in which reason can hold sway.

An advocacy of reason, a rejection of passion and the commendation of a retired life in Mollineux’s work is counterbalanced, however, by Owen’s suggestion that the verse’s ‘harmonious delighting Faculty’ will actively contribute to the work of convincement or encouragement, ‘to affect and raise the Soul upon Wings of Divine Contemplation’. Affect, in the form of pleasure, remains a recognised and accepted element in the discursive project, the verse’s power defined by both its harmonies and its capacity to delight. The harmonies work in concert with the spiritual matter, the form with the subject.

Affect coursed through the words and deeds of the first Quakers in multiple channels, discursive and corporeal, whether manifested in quaking, sighing and groaning or in the highly charged ecstatic rhetoric of early writers and Public Friends. Indeed, this was at the root of much of the disturbance the early movement occasioned in its adversaries. Mollineux’s verse, in many ways unrecognisable as operating in the same theological or discursive register—so measured, moderate and modest, so polite (in the sense of refined, cultured and restrained)—nonetheless also retains its own endorsement of the power of affect.

In one of the few instances of close literary critical engagement with Mollineux’s poetry, Sharon Achinstein has laid bare and examined the powerful affective dimension of her work.⁶⁰ In a language of desire generated in and expressed through the yoking of the erotic language of the Song of Solomon with the structural dynamics of the romance, Achinstein argues that the speaker’s yearning for God is powered by its own erotic charge. She discusses, for example,

58 Healey, ‘Quietist Quakerism, 1692–c.1805’, p. 48.

59 Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, p. 81.

60 Achinstein, S., ‘Romance of the Spirit: female sexuality and religious desire in early modern England’, *ELH* 69 (2002), pp. 413–38.

the affective trajectories driving Mollineux's 'Meditations in Trouble': 'How long, alas, my Love, my Life, / Wilt thou with-hold the Influence / Of thy Enam'ring Countenance'. Perhaps still more charged than these lines is the one with which the poem concludes, in which God makes her soul 'pant after thee, thou God of Love', the corporeal expression of her desire for God clearly marked as originating in the divine.⁶¹ As Achinstein observes, 'A lyric of a desperate lover, this poem demands, cries, groans: it is the expression of desire'.⁶² She concludes:

The development of the romance genre in relation to feminine eroticised sexuality, then, was a means for the early modern women writers investigated here to punctuate otherworldly aspirations by arousing the body in sanctioned ways, embedding desire in narrative and thus shaping its direction towards the otherworldly, but in discourse that could license physical arousal.⁶³

By this account, the Quaker body might no longer manifest the power of its opening to the divine through quaking but instead it does so through mobilising and articulating the conventional poetic signs of an aroused body, reframed to express the power of the speaker's desire for the Light.

Two observations follow from Achinstein's analysis of Mollineux's poetry as one of desire and arousal directed at the otherworldly but articulated in the erotic language of the body. First, it calls into question the characterisation of second-period Quakerism as a time of affective diminishment and enervation when compared with the first period. Here, Achinstein persuasively reads Mollineux's verse as highly charged with a passion and zeal for convincement and enlightenment, a dismissal of the 'vain transitory Toys' of earthly pleasures, just as earlier Quaker writing had been.⁶⁴ Secondly, if the impulse of the poetry remains that of an energetic zeal for a longed-for union with the 'Light of Life', how might we take account of its mediation by the polite and measured qualities of the poetic form in which the poetry is overwhelmingly articulated: the heroic couplet?⁶⁵

In writing verse in this form, Mollineux's work is, I have argued, actively constitutive of an ethos of measure, resolution and control. These epithets are strikingly contrary to Achinstein's characterisation of Mollineux's verse: 'this poem demands, cries, groans'. Quaker desire is here no longer expressed in the open and accretive forms of incantation, repetition or parataxis as it had been in the first period of the movement, in the prose of Fox and Burrough, Killin and Patison. Instead, the charged and passionate yearning of desire finds its promised end not so much in an immediate closing with the Light Within—for a poetry of wanting is necessarily in some sense also a poetry of waiting—but in its containment and completion by the dominant couplet form.

61 Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, pp. 71–72.

62 Achinstein, 'Romance of the Spirit', p. 430.

63 Achinstein, 'Romance of the Spirit', p. 435.

64 Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, p. 71.

65 Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, p. 72.

Mollineux's verse is productive of a Quaker ethos, therefore, that combines the future orientation of its expressions of desire and longing with a form that delivers on its metrical and rhyming promise in short order and repeatedly. In so doing, the shape of the verse and its characteristic impulses—whether those of the modesty and moderation found in the measure and promise of the rhyming couplet, or the language of desire found in the freer forms of the shorter lyric poems as well as the rhyming couplets – *together* form this second-generation voice. The rhyming couplet is not simply a popular poetic form of this time; rather, in Mollineux's hands it becomes constitutive of the desire—and also, variously, the anger and frustration, the patience, courage and love—articulated in the poetry. So, for example, while the rhyming couplet is more typically associated with the heroics of her contemporary Dryden's tragic verse dramas, Mollineux uses it to shape a new definition of Quaker heroics, very far from the staunch adversarialism of George Fox or Elizabeth Fletcher. In her work, heroism is not only to be understood as challenging the Bishop of Cheshire and Lancashire, or enduring imprisonment for one's faith. Instead, or as well, 'an Heroick Heart and Mind' is characterised as:

Sincerely Pious, Loyal, Chaste,
And with such Inward Peace possest,
That Blust'ring Storms could ne'er prevent
True Inward Solace and Content:⁶⁶

Mollineux's title page announces her poems as 'Moral and Divine'. In these four lines, the inwardness she valorises is rooted in the divine; nevertheless, the form it takes in the world is moral, concerned with living in this world, among Friends and family but also among those living outside the Light. This is in part a matter of accommodation, perhaps, with the new political, social and cultural realities of the post-Restoration years, but in part too a question of finding a form that can best—most convincingly—articulate the Light in this changed context, where ecstatic prophecy no longer has the ready endorsement it had in the early years of the movement. It is not that the first Friends had no concern with how to live under the current (revolutionary, millenarian) dispensation; they clearly did. Their incantatory, ecstatic prose had found a form attuned to the ears, eyes and spirits of those years. In the second period, with different exigencies concerning godly living in the here and now, the form of Mollineux's poems instantiates the temper of second-generation Quakerism: they admit of the pull of the social and the difficulty of living in the Light amidst the to and fro of human dealings: the friend who is neglectful, the backsliding of Friends, the deaths of parents, the solace of solitude.⁶⁷ Poetic form is turned to divine account by the jointly 'moral and divine' (social and spiritual) work it can undertake by affective means; in so

66 Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, p. 91.

67 Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, pp. 92, 102–06, 111, 112, 113.

doing, it addresses, in its own way, the ‘ancient dilemma’. The language of Quaker desire, Quaker anger or Quaker encouragement is now, necessarily as well as inevitably, articulated in new cadences.

For readers more familiar with the heat and passion of early Quaker writing, such accommodations of the polite and the measured can perhaps only ever be disappointing, representing a diminishment of the fire in the belly of the first Friends. The writing of Mary Mollineux might easily be seen to have sacrificed the power of the early ecstatic, incantatory rhetoric for the compromise, politeness and worldliness of poetic form. While Fox had wanted to ‘bring them [people] off from all the world’s fellowships, and prayings, and singings, which stood in forms without power’, it might be objected that Mollineux was too caught up in the world’s fellowships of friendships and ‘Visibles’, working with an etiolated rhetoric and newly conciliatory theology.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the Quaker endorsement of her voice, through its approval for publication, the many editions that followed in the eighteenth century and the opprobrium of that bellwether of anti-Quaker sentiment, Francis Bugg, suggests that there is more to Mollineux’s work than this allows. In the context of the second period, the separation of ‘form’ from ‘power’, and the setting of the one against the other, no longer answers the felt need of the times. Perhaps, therefore, the words of the second-generation Penn might answer the first-generation Fox, by suggesting another way of understanding Mollineux’s poetry: ‘This World is a Form; our Bodies are Forms; and no visible Acts of Devotion can be without Forms.’⁶⁹ This might be said to be Mollineux’s poetry’s reply to Quaker objections to the social and profane associations of verse. As a visible—and audible—act of devotion, her poetry took a form that allowed it to speak and be heard, to have effect through affect, in the changed world of late seventeenth-century England and beyond.

Author Details

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68 Fox, G. *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. John Nickalls, Philadelphia: Religious Society of Friends, 1997, p. 35. ‘Visible’ is the word Mollineux uses in ‘Of the Rainbow’ for the material phenomena of the world; see Mollineux, *Fruits of Retirement*, p. 95.

69 Penn, W., *Some Fruits of Solitude*, London: Thomas Northcott, 1693, p. 120.