

Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Lise Tarter (eds), *A Centre of Wonders: The Body in Early America* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. x + 284. ISBN: 0-8014-3601-X (hardback); 0-8014-9739-0 (paperback). £17.95.

This collection of fifteen essays makes for a fascinating read as it explores, from various theoretical and disciplinary perspectives, the experiences and cultural meanings of bodies in America between the sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Each essay also has its own list of references, providing a comprehensive indicator of the range of related research completed during the last twenty years. Much of the best work in the book is social-historical: Kathleen M. Brown writes with energetic clarity about Elizabeth Emerson's execution for infanticide in 1693, and about Cotton Mather's use of her story in his attack on 'sexual uncleanness'; Jennifer M. Spear analyses the idea of racial 'blood purity' in the social status and inheritance practices of 1770s Spanish Louisiana; Alice Nash explores what is at stake in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English representations of Native American dancing as 'antic', and works to establish what can be known about those dances themselves; there are provocative essays on the history of health and eating by Martha L. Finch, Trudy Eden, and Jacqueline C. Miller. Less convincing are several of the contributions by literary critics. For instance, Susan M. Stabile, though working with a fascinating mid-eighteenth-century epistolary journal which records Esther Edwards Burr's religious conversion and pregnancy, is hamstrung by a belief in Thomas Laqueur's concept of a 'one-sex' early modern body, a concept thoroughly debunked by medical historians. A similar problem haunts Elizabeth Maddock-Dillon's exploration of the cross-gender language used by Puritan converts, and Teresa A. Toulouse's analysis of Cotton Mather's *Decennium Luctuosum*. These critics seek to work historically, but they are not fully informed about the range of ideas about the body, and its relationship with the soul, that circulate in the period.

New World Quakers pop up unpredictably. Robert Blair St. George, for instance, in his account of late-seventeenth-century incidents that today might be attributed to poltergeists – objects flying up and down chimneys, windows being suddenly and mysteriously broken by rocks – tells of attempts made by 'a group of Quakers living in George Walton's Portsmouth house' to see off the attacks. They 'did set on the Fire a Pot with Urine, and crooked Pins in it, with [the] design to have it boil, and by that means give Punishment to the Witch, or Wizard (that might be the wicked Procurer or Contriver of this Stone Affliction)'. Teresa A. Toulouse quotes Cotton Mather's paralleling of Native Americans and Quakers: 'If the Indians have chosen to prey upon the Frontiers, and Out-Skirts of the Province, the Quakers have chosen the very same Frontiers, and Out-Skirts, for their more Spiritual Assaults; ... they have been Labouring incessantly... to Enchant and Poison the Souls of poor people, in the very places, where the Bodies and Estates of the people have presently after been devoured by the Salvages'. Nancy Shoemaker convincingly suggests that

William Penn used Native American, not biblical, metaphors when he described the Conestoga Indians and the European settlers in Pennsylvania as sharing a single heart and head. Joanne Pope Melish, discussing white Americans' fascination with and fear of 'white negroes', mentions in passing the part played by Quaker businessman and anti-slavery advocate Moses Brown in the furore surrounding Henry Moss, an American man of African descent whose dark skin turned white in early middle age. None of these incidents is pursued very far by the authors, whose central concerns are not with Quaker studies; but there are archival details and references to related secondary material.

It is fortunate for Quaker studies, then, that two of the most interesting essays in the volume are also those that most squarely address matters of interest to the history of Friends. Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Lise Tarter both discuss religious conversion, Lindman focusing on eighteenth-century Baptists, Tarter on seventeenth-century Quakers. The account Lindman gives of the experiences of potential Baptist converts, who 'wept "bitter tears", shook uncontrollably, flailed their limbs, ... "tremble[d] as if in a fit of the ague"' resonates with the same intense inter-relationship of body and spirit that characterised Tarter's Quakers during conviction, 'base quaking sluts' who were subsequently punished with stripping and whipping. Part of Tarter's theoretical framework is unhelpful, I think: Kristeva's 'semiotic realm' of polymorphous erotogenic zones, where infantile drives are at play, is not the state described by Dorothy White in the 1659 pamphlets that Tarter alludes to. White's prophecy concerns the feared return of kingly power, a much more specific and material problem than Kristeva's abstract 'symbolic order'. Despite the distraction provided by the intrusion of this twentieth-century model, though, Tarter makes a convincing case for the need to reinstate 'the quaking body of Friends' at the centre of early Quaker history. As Lindman explains, 'religious faith and practice occurred in the body': present-day analyses of both spirit and body distort early-modern culture if they try to separate one from the other. *A Centre of Wonders* provides much stimulation, and many examples of careful scholarship, to anyone interested in the history of bodies.

Elaine Hobby  
Loughborough University, England.

*Quaker Women Passing: Deathbed as Pulpit in the Memoirs of Susanna Lightfoot (1720-1781) and Martha C. Thomas (1805-1836)*, intro. Anne Rutherford (Cambridge, MA: Rhwymbooks, 1999), pp. x + 74. ISBN: 1-889298-33-6 (paperback) \$10.95.

Anne Rutherford's brief introduction to these biographical accounts of an eighteenth- and a nineteenth-century woman Friend explains that Rhwymbooks is committed to bringing back into print life-writings by Quaker ministers that have long been unavailable. The pairing chosen here encourages the hope that their selection of texts will be diverse.