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**Carolina Fernandez Rodriguez, *American Quaker Romances: Building the Myth of the White Christian Nation* (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 2021), pp. 198. ISBN 9788491349082. Paperback, £13.30.**

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Book review: Carolina Fernandez Rodriguez, *American Quaker Romances: Building the Myth of the White Christian Nation*.

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Carolina Fernandez Rodriguez's *American Quaker Romances* is a fascinating work, offering insights into the ways in which Quakers, particularly Quaker women, have been depicted in published works in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It forms part of a wider North American Studies collection which focusses on social sciences, arts, and humanities and is produced by the University of Valencia. In the initial chapter of five, 'The Commodification of History', she outlines the volume of books published in the area she selects for study – representations of the past, including Friends, set in the USA. This leads to her analysis of 31 romances published in the twenty-first century and a few in the twentieth, with distinction made between Quaker, evangelical (the majority) and secular romances; overall, she suggests, Christian romances sell well. She offers a sensible literature review of recent works although rather oddly defines one of the two works published in 2009 as decades old, although not the other (pp. 19, 37). Certainly, though, a good case is made for further research into how a majority depicts a minority and why.

In the following chapters, her study very much focusses on the content of the works rather than readers' responses to them, although, citing Rebecca Barrett-Fox, she argues that such works, as part of the culture of modern Christian readers in the US, should be considered (p. 63). Certainly, it seems likely that if romanticised Quaker history were not a popular topic, the range of books and the high volume of sales would not be possible. She also considers, and includes some evidence, of the works' authors' intentions as they use, especially in the case of non-Quaker authors, the religious 'other' 'to metabolize ... cultural or religious anxieties' although these may 'ultimately do a disservice to the represented group' (p. 9, quote from Weaver-Zercher). In this instance, she sees Friends in earlier historical eras as being commodified and experiencing 'cultural appropriation' by non-Friends (p. 89) The author's use of this term is interesting given its far more frequent use in considering the use and misuse of culture from the 'Global South' or minoritised groups in the 'Global North'. To use it of Friends as a religious minority is not entirely convincing, especially given her argument that Quakers in the USA, in which the novels she is considering are mainly set, are culturally privileged as white Christians (in the main) (pp. 110–111) with demonstrable historical links to nation building (p. 43). They are therefore especially celebrated by (white) evangelical authors seeking to offer a past with little or no links to the present. As the author notes, slavery is recognised although is rather disturbingly used as a plot device (p. 168), and in some works is almost justified in the narrative, much as the Holocaust is too (pp. 170–171). She does though note the frequent use of 'thee and thou' in Quaker characters' speech as a means to distinguish them and to suggest 'a deluge of personality traits' (p. 99), and here reference to Seymour Chatman on flat characterisation would have been very interesting.

Although the focus on Quaker women is in many ways unsurprising, as such novels offer the stereotypical female reader the opportunity to imagine themselves in an at least partially idealised past, certainly more could have been included about Quaker men, and for that matter about gender more broadly. Ideals of the masculine and feminine differed between Quakers and other groups, certainly in the earlier chronological periods represented in the novels, and although the peace testimony is clearly referenced both in the novels analysed and in the study being reviewed, the implications of refusal to bear arms for Quakers, especially men, is not really unpicked. This absence may have led to interesting insights into the type of idealised masculinity on offer in such works. Similarly, the study's focus on race is very timely, and there is some analysis (although it is not unpicked as far as it could be) of the representation of the sexualised racial other viewed through the eyes of the white female protagonist, although such relationships are rarely depicted as reaching marriage (p. 57). Overall, this may well form part of what the author sees as the novels' response to, in the eyes of white evangelical female readers, 'unsettling changes... to their national identity' (p. 174). However, the authors of such novels do not necessarily reflect on this (p. 41), even though it may have influenced their narratives about the USA as a 'White Christian Nation' and its related myths.

Overall, then, the work offers fascinating insights, although in a couple of areas more context would have been welcome. For example, references to the representation of Quaker women marrying non-Quakers, and indeed the fetishisation of Quaker women (see pp. 101–103) might have benefitted from a wider context of this sort of plot device in earlier works including plays such as Susannah Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718). That is not to suggest that this should have been a substantially different analysis, rather that there is a chronologically broader Anglophone context to the representation of Friends, especially women, in the novels analysed, which may have had a more directly negative effect upon the lives of Quaker women in the past than the representations of Friends in recent novels have on the lives of Friends in the present. That too should not be forgotten.

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**Competing Interests**

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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