“Spiritually Unsexed”: Believers, Critics, and Early Histories of the Publick Universal Friend, 1776-1835

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Abstract

In October 1776, in Cumberland, Rhode Island, a young woman named Jemima Wilkinson claimed that after falling ill, dying, and being resurrected by the Spirit of God, they had been thus rendered a spirit called the "Publick Universal Friend." If this claim was not peculiar enough, what is far stranger is that in a society where scholarship has constantly postulated the adhered limits and expectations between man and woman, the Friend did not. Despite the increased knowledge in the subfields of sex and gender, attention from historians concerning the Friend has continuously confined their experiences and transgressions within a gendered binary lens, further portraying them as a woman who combined female with male categories rather than as an ambiguous spirit. I intend to contribute a new outlook that questions how historians have perceived the Friend's changing relationship with sex and gender. Thus, I contend that the Friend's sense of self is "spiritually unsexed"–an indeterminate understanding that is neither in-between nor revolves around male or female prescriptions. To effectively support this argument, this paper is divided into three thematic chapters that analyze sources by the Friend, their believers, and critics from 1776 to 1835. In doing so, this thesis in itself offers a reconfiguration of a moment within Early American history through a queer and trans lens, thus augmenting the obscure significance of the American Revolution period–both during and after–promoting an impact *beyond* the values of a binary system of man and woman.

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Introduction

Reanalyzing The Publick Universal Friend

In October 1776, at Cumberland, Rhode Island, a young woman named Jemima Wilkinson claimed that the Spirit of God resurrected her after falling ill and dying. Wilkinson asserted that through this transformation, they had been rendered a spirit called the "Publick Universal Friend." If this claim was not peculiar enough, what is far stranger is that in a society that, according to recent scholarship, constantly postulated limits between and specific performances of the notions of man and woman, the Friend did not. The Friend's existence occurred during significant transatlantic and regional developments. Attempts by the British Empire to reassert control over its North American colonies enforced a colonial attitude toward independence, which fostered a new American republic along with the challenges over the new nation's social and political identity. The War for Independence dramatically influenced Early America's "political practices and political rhetoric, its class structure and modes of social relations."[1] At the core of these dramatic alterations, pre- and post-revolutionary America emphasized a culture that promoted ordinary citizens to make their own choices according to their political, religious, and social interpretations.

The Friend faced great stress amid these broader developments, leading to their resurrection. By August 1776, they had been disowned by their Quaker congregation for attending New Light Baptist meetings, along with their sister Patience for bearing an illegitimate child and their brothers, Benjamin, Stephen, and Jeptha, for engaging in military service.[2] Both

[1] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Red, Black and Female: Constituting the American Subject," *Social Science Information* 30, no. 2 (1991): 342.
[2] Paul Benjamin Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend: Jemima Wilkinson and Religious Enthusiasm in Revolutionary America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 15.

were surrounded and influenced by the religious overtones of their upbringing. Their obstacles included pre- and post-war discussions of religious revivalism that diversified American Christianity and understandings of religious liberty. The rise of new religious denominations signified what Scott Larson has described as a "gender-disruptive experience," where preachers and followers alike utilized a mixture of both "male dominance" and feminine qualities of "weeping, crying out, and 'delivering' the new birth."[3]

As such, eighteenth-century views of revivalism were seen as dangerous, especially concerning the relationship between man and woman. The merging of religious and secular languages of which the Friend would be a part during and after the struggle for independence promoted a level of religious tolerance, individuality, and skepticism that enabled them to call categories of man and woman into question. On a societal level, a similar situation occurred. The environment created by these ongoing developments sparked concern about disrupting performative gender roles for men and women in public. More specifically, the American Revolution's emphasis on individuality and liberty provided opportunities for white women to perform outside their assigned roles and engage in political discourse, whether through published writing, leading economic boycotts of British goods, or taking over the management of family farms and businesses.[4] Within both the religious and societal realms, people sought to reconfigure the application of Revolutionary values upon a set patriarchal system of man and woman.

As this process played out, the Friend spent their time preaching across New England about repentance and devotion to Christ before the Final Judgment. By the end of 1787, the Friend had become well-known in Philadelphia, where people gathered out of faith and

[3] Scott Larson, "Histrionics of the Pulpit: Trans Tonalities of Religious Enthusiasm," *TSQ* 1 August 2019; 6 (3): 317, https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7549428.
[4] Smith-Rosenberg, "Red, Black and Female," 347.

suspicion. The adverse reactions to the Friend's presentation and self-declared understanding as an entity responded to how they transcended beyond the boundaries "between living and dead, body and spirit, divine and human, and male and female."[5] As a result of constant mistreatment, by 1780, the Friend and their followers, the Society of Universal Friends, resigned themselves to settling outside society to avoid further persecution. Correspondingly, post-war discussions shifted from liberal cultural and political experimentation, inciting extensive changes to national and regional identities. In the early nineteenth century, the United States cemented itself as a modern representative democracy with a new national culture. At the same time, Americans sought to outline the nation's democratic principles and change their society and institutions to match them. Over the course of the early nineteenth century, discourse on what and who constituted the nation's principles became increasingly understood in comparison between masculine and feminine constructs. This meant that people like the Friend who operated outside these rigid categories were subjected to greater scrutiny and control.

Discourse increasingly highlighted a national identity integrated with masculinity in hopes of *regulating* and *promoting* the dichotomy that limited the female sex in the public sphere. In return, these discussions would prove crucial for critics of the Friend. In western New York, the Friend established the religious community, Jerusalem, where they would spend the rest of their life until they died in 1819, but never out of sight from the public eye. Discussions about the Friend persisted for decades, nationally and internationally, regarding the ambiguity of their sense of self and actions. Despite the impact of the American Revolution's democratic and republican ideals during and afterward, sex and gender underwent a simultaneous process of

[5] Scott Larson, "'Indescribable Being': Theological Performances of Genderlessness in the Society of the Publick Universal Friend, 1776–1819," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 12, no. 3 (2014): 576, doi:10.1353/eam.2014.0020.

operating as a barrier that limited individuals to the full advantages of American freedom. Or at least, in the case of the Friend, the constructs of sex and gender attempted to.

Historiography: Reinvention of the Friend through a Queer Lens

Despite increased knowledge in the subfields of sex and gender, attention from historians concerning the Friend has continuously confined their experiences and performances within a binary lens.[6] Starting from the late twentieth century and onward, a majority of historians have addressed the Friend by the name of Jemima Wilkinson, portraying them as a woman who combined female with male categories rather than as a spirit that did not conform directly within those categories.[7] For example, in a gendered fashion, Clair Barrus and Lillian Faderman postulate that the Friend assumed a male identity to combat the patriarchy.[8] Susan Juster goes even further, labeling the Friend's presentation as an enactment of "female transvestism."[9]

Most of these historians still contend that the American Revolution's influence on politics and ideology resulted in limitations on sex and gender. What can be gathered from this selection of scholarship is how historians and scholars are still primarily confined to a heteronormative outlook, especially concerning the life and actions of the Friend. Most historical works that discuss the Friend rely heavily on Herbert A. Wisbey's biography, the *Pioneer Prophetess:*

[6] Binary refers to the system or structure of involving or relating to two things. Concerning both sex and gender, it is the idea that these two parts–male or female, man or woman–are absolute and fixed, thus denouncing the validity of identities outside it.

[7] Documentation on the Publick Universal Friend from both followers and critics had noted that after the death of Wilkinson, the former no longer responded to the name, Jemima Wilkinson. They also no longer responded to any type of gendered pronouns. Out of respect, I will address them as the Friend. As for pronouns, I intend to use they, them, or theirs.

[8] Clair Barrus, "Religious Authority, Sexuality and Gender Roles of the Elect Ladies of the Early Republic: Jemima Wilkinson, Ann Lee, and Emma Smith," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 38, no. 2 (2018): 112–139, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26614538; Lillian Faderman, "Woman, Lady, and Not a Woman in the Eighteenth Century," in *Woman: The American History of an Idea* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 36–61, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2bfhhfs.5.

[9] Susan Juster, "'Neither Male Nor Female': Jemima Wilkinson And The Politics Of Gender In Post-Revolutionary America," in *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America,* ed. Robert Blair St. George (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 357-379, https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501717864-018.

Jemima Wilkinson, the Publick Universal Friend, further retaining modern historians' analyses within a binary scope. Most prominently, Paul B. Moyer relied on Wisbey's scholarship, identifying the Friend's experience and ambiguous sense of self as a "persona" (mask) for Jemima Wilkinson.[10] Based on Moyer's analysis, Bronski and Chevat contend that the Friend's "gender-free" position constituted a shade of gender rather than something beyond the ideology itself.[11] Using strict interpretations to make more stringent interpretations, primarily through the lens of a binary structure, distorts rather than illuminates historical understandings of the Friend.

This thesis offers a new interpretation of the Friend that questions how historians have perceived their changing relationship with sex and gender. Rather than give attention and validity to binary gender structures, this thesis revisits the Friend through a queer lens to offer a historical outlook of their life that takes their gender presentation seriously. Instead of relying solely on scholarship central to the Friend, this thesis incorporates recent historical analyses that pertain to the following concepts: feminist critiques, trans-gender theory, religion, gender, and sexuality. Recent literature, including Susan Stryker, Jen Manion, Sharon Block, and Greta Lafleur, contextualizes and enables me to conduct research that challenges the binary structure's validity. It is through Stryker's research in trans-gender studies to keep in mind when conducting my analysis on the Friend that "our culture today tries to reduce the wide range of livable body types to two and only two genders," not just in the present, but in historical narratives as well.[12]

It is also within this same vein that it creates an ongoing issue in a historical dimension where this outlook is provided in a way "that must be established, asserted, and reasserted over

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[10] Herbert A. Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess: Jemima Wilkinson, the Publick Universal Friend* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1964); Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend*, 13.
[11] Michael Bronski and Richie Chevat, *A Queer History of the United States for Young People* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2019), 28-32.
[12] Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York, N.Y.: Seal Press, 2017), 17; Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore, "Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3/4 (2008): 13, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27649781.

and over again for it to remain 'true.'"[13] According to Block and Manion, these notions of the "binary narrative" extend into historical research, which plays a direct role in the erasure of historical knowledge concerning the convoluted nature of early America and its social constructs.[14] With these notions in mind, the framework of my research and analysis takes into account what Lafleur argues is "a wide vocabulary for describing and experiencing variation in sexual behavior and self-presentation," where even "incoherent or contingent gendered behaviors and presentation" were not considered controversial or limited to the binary.[15] Most importantly, my research wants to align itself in a way that does not outright reject historical continuities on the instability of gender but rather ones that "[permit] the simultaneous consideration of eighteenth-century gender politics within their own moment."[16]

Structure & Guiding Questions

Rather than taking a biographical approach, this paper looks at three specific periods of the Friend and the reactions of those they encountered in the Early United States. Chapter One outlines the background and origin of the Friend from 1776. More specifically, the first chapter dissects the experiences and writings of the Friend and their followers to discern the hidden nuances of the Friend and the development of American cultural and religious ideologies of sex and gender. The analysis of documentation by the Friend and their followers reveals a spiritual understanding that validates the Friend's gender-nonconforming identity on both a physical and metaphysical plane. Chapter Two examines the reactions and responses of contemporaries

[13] Stryker, *Transgender History*, 16.
[14] Sharon Block, "Making Meaningful Bodies: Physical Appearance in Colonial Writings," *Early American Studies* 12, no. 3 (2014): 547, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24474869; Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 10.
[15] Greta Lafleur, "Sex and 'Unsex': Histories of Gender Trouble in Eighteenth-Century North America," *Early American Studies* 12, no. 3 (2014): 469, 482-483, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24474867.
[16] Lafleur, "Sex and 'Unsex'," 498.

toward the Friend based on manuscripts and newspapers between 1776 and 1801, during which they preached extensively. Unlike the Friend's followers, critics met the former's claims with skepticism and opposition. However, despite their attempts to effectively judge the Friend within contemporary gender and sex norms, these defined parameters posed obstacles for critics in discerning the Friend and a new possibility to conflate these inclusivities as threats to American development. Lastly, Chapter Three examines periodical discussions after the Friend's passing in 1819. This final chapter shows how outside discussions about the Friend did not stop with their death, and narratives continued to spread in the press over the next few decades. Without the presence of the Friend and their followers, there would be no one to defend the Friend's life and their community against those narratives. As a result, the narrative and understanding of the Friend became reconfigured by critics, reinforcing the validity of the system and cementing the memory of the Friend as the deceitful and delusional woman by the name of Jemima Wilkinson.

Through this thesis, I address four central questions by examining the Friend: First, how was their theological knowledge significant in constructing a personal and public sense of self outside social constructs for themselves and others? Second, in what ways does the Friend's understanding of their sense of self reveal an encompassing perspective beyond a gendered reality that was neither male nor female? Third, in what ways do critics' responses differ or change over time in response to the Friend? Finally, concerning the significance of the American Revolution and post-Revolution ideologies on society and religion, what can the experiences and documentation about them reveal about the relationship between the concepts of sex and gender nationally and internationally? Chapters One and Two shall primarily address the first three questions, whereas Chapter Three shall revolve around the third and final questions.

Each chapter will rely on over twenty primary sources related to the Friend. My methodology is centered on a close textual analysis of sources from the United States and Britain. First and foremost, I will consult and analyze the amassed manuscript collections by Cornell University titled the Jemima Wilkinson papers #357 and #621. These primary source collections provide insight into the intimate reactions and relationships regarding sex, religion, and gender from the Friend and those who encountered them. More specifically, this source includes deeds, journals, sermons, and accounts about the Friend, their followers, the development of their settlements, and their religious life. I also consult published works by the Friend and contemporary critics Ezra Stiles, David Hudson, and Duke of La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt.

Although these authors do not comprise the total amount of the Friend's critics, these selected authors produced the most detailed descriptions of either their encounters with the Friend or their thought processes regarding the Friend's gender ambiguity. In addition to contemporary critics, I will also rely on manuscripts by American evangelist George Whitefield and American Congregationalist clergyman Charles Chauncy to provide insight into the evangelical development and effects of the First Great Awakening on a general scope. Lastly, I will call upon the colonial newspapers: *The United States Magazine, The Columbian Magazine, The American Museum, The Freeman's Journal, Baltimore Patriot, Winyaw Intelligencer, Star*, *Palladium of Liberty, American Watchman, The Pilot*, *The Geneva Gazette, and General Advertiser*, *The American Journal*, and the *Macon Weekly Telegraph*. In particular, I will mainly consult *The Freeman's Journal* and *The American Museum,* given that these Philadelphia magazines contained the most articles about "Jemima Wilkinson." I will also call upon outside periodicals from Britain, including *The New Annual Register*, *The Monthly Visitor*, *The Weekly*

Entertainer, and *La Belle Assemblée: Or Court and Fashionable Magazine*. One can sufficiently examine the social and religious context of sex and gender, particularly surrounding the experiences of the Friend, their followers, and contemporaries, to discern the hidden nuances of the Friend and the development of American ideologies.

Through these chapters, I contend that the Friend's sense of self was "spiritually unsexed"–an indeterminate understanding that was neither in-between nor revolved around male or female prescriptions. This is illustrated not only by their religious perspectives but also by the accounts of their followers and critics outside their sect, which balances the written rhetoric of secular and non-secular perspectives. In doing so, this thesis in itself offers a reconfiguration of a moment within Early American history through a queer and trans lens, thus augmenting the significance of the American Revolution period–both during and after–promoting an impact *beyond* the values of a binary system of man and woman.

Chapter One

A Spiritual Self Sense, Spiritually Unsexed, 1776-1820

This chapter examines the published and private writings of the Friend and their believers. It argues that these sources illustrate an understanding of the Friend's gender nonconformity — at the corporal and metaphysical levels — as "spiritually unsexed." Inspired by historian Greta Lafleur's use of the term "unsex," which captures those who relinquished "the typical qualities associated with what eighteenth-century speakers would have termed 'the masculine gender' or 'the feminine gender,'" this statement allows us to understand how the Friend's religious resurrection was a phobic reaction to sex and gender.[17] For the Friend and their believers, the Friend's theological knowledge created a space where each could experiment with gender and religion outside standard norms, focus less on the bodily form, and emphasize malleability. The Friend occupied a space where their gender nonconformity was accepted by themselves and their supporters which suggests a more expansive and convoluted understanding of sex and gender than historical studies have described.

Over the Friend's lifetime, from 1776 to 1819, there was a proliferation of Protestant denominations that were moving toward either rationalism or religious enthusiasm.[18] In other words, there were contrasting shifts of denominations that emphasized "the natural and material world" compared to denominations that emphasized the abstract and ability "to experiment with the sexual licenses" of this period.[19] Historian Catherine A. Brekus suggests that this period of transition mixed ideas of "free choice, rationality, and moral sentiments."[20] As a result, gender

[17] Lafleur, "Sex and 'Unsex'," 498.
[18] Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Attitudes Toward Sex in Antebellum America: A Brief History with Documents*, 1st ed. (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 8.
[19] Horowitz, *Attitudes Toward Sex*, 8.
[20] Catherine A. Brekus, "Contested Words: History, America, Religion," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2018): 33, https://doi.org/10.5309/willmaryquar.75.1.0003.

played an influential role in the formation of "men and women's religious identities, shaping institutional structure, and influencing images of God, Jesus, and the church."[21] Erik R. Seeman adds that this was possible because these changes enabled both the general public and religious seekers such as the Friend "to explore new spiritual possibilities."[22] Such possibilities within the evangelical movement, Susan Juster notes, limited the "importance of structure" and "resurrect[ed] the androgynous nature."[23] Yet, as Scott Larson states, this also led opponents of these changes to assert that individuals like the Friend and their believers undermined the "social and political orders to drive the masses 'out of their senses,' and to throw gender norms into chaos."[24]

To understand the Friend's "spiritual unsexing," this chapter begins with them and their writings. Specifically, this chapter asks what role the Friend's religious knowledge played in their efforts to live a personal and public life removed from rigid definitions of manliness and womanliness. Further, how can this stance be applied to their believers? Finally, what interpretations can be made when putting the Friend into conversation with religious developments in early America? To answer these questions and help make sense of the Friend's "spiritual unsexing," the first section examines three sources written by the Friend between 1776 and their death in 1819**.** Found initially tucked in the Friend's personal Bible, the first source, "A Memorandum of the Introduction of that Fatal Fever, in the Year 1776," written sometime after 1776, provides readers with direct insight into their origins and how the Friend not only understood themselves, but the religious foundations in which they went beyond masculine and

[21] Brekus, "Contested Words," 13.
[22] Erik R. Seeman, "Revelations and New Denominations," in *Speaking with the Dead in Early America* (Philadelphia, P.A.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 160, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv16t67zb.10.
[23] Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics & Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 21.
[24] Larson, "Histrionics of the Pulpit," 315.

feminine categories and qualities.[25] Also pulled from collection #357, the Friend's Will, documented on May 22, 1820, establishes their firm stance on their gender nonconformity and also the paradox of relating and authenticating their understanding through physical manuscripts. This first section finally relies on Herbert Wisbey's 1964 biography, *Pioneer Prophetess, Jemima Wilkinson, the Public Universal Friend,* and the printed copy of the Friend's 1784 religious handbook, *The Universal Friend's Advice, to Those of the Same Religious Society*. For the Friend, this source acted as a rule book for the Society of Universal Friends, outlining their beliefs and customs. Together, these sources reveal that the Friend's nuanced sense of self did not conform to the increasingly rigid sex and gender norms of the early Republic.

Section two examines the records of some of the Friend's believers from inside and outside their community of nearly 300, who were receptive to their religious teachings and gender nonconformity. Among the Wilkinson papers collections #357 and #621 are letters from two believers, former Albany lawyer William Carter and one of the Friend's closest believers, Sarah Richards; a religious poem by an unnamed supporter; and a letter from Quaker and retired merchant, Christopher Marshall, who encountered the Friend at one of their preachings in Philadelphia. A close reading of these materials reveals that the Friend's religious teachings and support of their gender non-conformity were closely linked. The chapter concludes by asking whether the Friend and reactions to them were novel in late eighteenth-century America**.** This section reveals that there were others like the Friend and that the Great Awakening provided opportunities for people to live lives outside of the gender binary, reinterpret religion, and reconfigure previous notions of the individual and the body.

[25] Publick Universal Friend, *A Memorandum of the Introduction of the Fatal Fever, undated*, Manuscript, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #357, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

In the third section, the writings of the British evangelist cleric George Whitefield, who preached in North America in the mid-decades of the eighteenth century, and Congregationalist Minister Charles Chauncy, from Massachusetts in the mid-eighteenth-century, reveal the mixed religious discourses of the Great Awakening. Whitefield and Chauncy emphasize a reconfiguring and loosening of strict sex and gender hierarchies within religious spheres. Finally, I examine articles from *The United States Magazine* and *The Columbian Magazine*. Both were published in Philadelphia (the former in 1779 and the latter in 1788), and accounts from the alias Philo-Aletheias (which can be translated as the love or preference for truth) and the former Episcopal Minister of Charleston, Alexander Garden, discuss the effects of religious enthusiasm on society. These final two sources show the gradual interconnection of religious arguments used in public debates on the direction of early American cultural and national development. Such debates would later prove crucial for critics when discussing the Friend in the press.

The Publick Universal Friend's Sense of Self

In their brief, two-page manuscript, "A Memorandum of the Introduction of that Fatal Fever, in the Year 1776," the Friend located the start of their spiritual unsexing when they were "a certain young woman, known by the name of Jemima Wilkinson" and were "seized with this mortal disease."[26] This unknown disease left Wilkinson severely ill, "the heavens were open'd And She saw too Archangels descending from the east, with golden crowns upon their heads."[27] The two angels related to her that with her spirit's passing, the Holy Spirit of God "was waiting to assume the Body which God had prepared" to warn the world of the Final Judgment.[28] The description of the Friend's origins clearly illustrates their understanding of themselves through religious

[26] Publick Universal Friend, *A Memorandum*, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #357.
[27] Publick Universal Friend, *A Memorandum*, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #357.
[28] Publick Universal Friend, *A Memorandum*, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #357.

interpretation. Within this interpretation specifically, they have the self-perception that they were no longer the "young woman, known by the name of Jemima Wilkinson."[29] In this way, the Friend separated themselves from the individual once known as Jemima.

To refer to Jemima Wilkinson in the third person was a tactic the Friend used intentionally to remove themselves from an identity defined within the confines of the two-sex system. The Friend's account continued: "And then taking her leave of the family between the hour of nine & ten in the morning dropt the dying flesh & yielded up the Ghost. And according to the declaration of the Angels — the Spirit took full possession of the Body it now animates."[30] What replaces "her," Jemima Wilkinson, is "the Spirit," the Publick Universal Friend.[31] Notably, within this account are the pronouns used to distinguish one another, and perhaps, in this case, an idea into the Friend's self-perception. To explain, Jemima Wilkinson is referred to by the pronouns "she" and "her," while the Friend is referred to by the pronoun "it."[32] It is crucial to recognize that they did *not* provide any indications of perceiving themselves as a man, either. Instead, their sense of self is left ambiguous, but not ambiguous enough to see that their sense of self is under religious guidelines ("the Spirit") than under corporeal ones ("the Body").[33]

These beliefs are further detailed in their handbook, *The Universal Friend's Advice*. This eight-page source published in 1784 was a rule book for the Society of Universal Friends. It outlined their beliefs and customs. Concerning the Friend themselves, the rulebook reveals aspects they had taken from Quaker and New Light Baptist evangelism. Both sects embraced prophetic visions, which the Friend articulates is crucial when coming together.[34] Under the same roof, the Friend outlines that one must "gather in all your wandering thoughts, that you may sit

[29] Publick Universal Friend, *A Memorandum*, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #357.
[30] Publick Universal Friend, *A Memorandum*, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #357.
[31] Publick Universal Friend, *A Memorandum*, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #357.
[32] Publick Universal Friend, *A Memorandum*, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #357.
[33] Publick Universal Friend, *A Memorandum*, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #357.
[34] Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend*, 73.

down in solemn silence, to wait for the aid and assistance of the HOLY SPIRIT, and not speak out vocally in meetings, except ye are moved thereunto by the HOLY SPIRIT, or that there be a real necessity."[35] Based on this idea of receiving direct communication and authenticity with the Friend, there are specific points where they diverge from the Quaker values they grew up under.

Although both Quakers and New Light Baptists engaged in prophetic visions, Jack Marietta states that Quakers did not fully subscribe "to a liberal understanding of human nature and society," as once believed.[36] Instead, they advocated for strict adherence to the church over "freethinking."[37] When further comparing the beliefs behind visions and freethinking, the Friend relied more on New Light Baptist values, which "emphasized individual inspiration and enlightenment through the Holy Spirit, rejecting all authority except the Bible."[38] To a certain extent, however, the Friend takes New Light Baptist values even further, attesting "that the kingdom of GOD" and the Gospel "may begin within you."[39] In other words, this concept addressed by the Friend allowed freethinking and interpretations reflective of the individual that validated their sense of self as truth. Moreover, it is through this religious rhetoric that their encounter of "aid and assistance of the HOLY SPIRIT" for both the Friend and their believers is part of the basis of how they perceive themselves.[40]

This handbook was also a way for the Friend to inspire believers to engage in possibilities and perspectives outside standard norms. The Friend uses language similar to describing their sense of self towards the perspectives of their believers: "Labor to keep yourselves unspotted from the world, and possess your vessels in sanctification and honor,

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[35] Herbert A. Wisbey, "Appendix II," in *Pioneer Prophetess: Jemima Wilkinson, the Publick Universal Friend* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1964), 199.
[36] Jack D. Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748-1783* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 82-83.
[37] Marietta, *The Reformation*, 82-83.
[38] Barrus, "Religious Authority, Sexuality," 115.
[39] Wisbey, "Appendix II," 204.
[40] Wisbey, "Appendix II," 199.

knowing, that ye ought to be temples for the HOLY SPIRIT to dwell in; and, if your vessels are unclean, that which is holy cannot dwell in you."[41] Again, this quotation further identifies the concept of separation between the body and the spirit and emphasizes believers adopting the importance of one's soul as the basis of self-perception over the body. In a way, the Friend not only asked of their believers but of themselves to "let your adorning not be outward, but inward."[42]

A final source that provides insight into their nonconforming sense of self can also be seen in their Will. Dated on May 22, 1820, the signed will of the Friend left all lands, household items, animals, and Jerusalem to believers Margaret Malin and Rachel Malin. Margaret and Rachel were the second closest believers after Sarah Richards, the Friend's deceased believer and trustee. Moreover, for the Will to be official, the Friend was required to sign their legal name. They signed the document in the following manner:

> I hereby ordain & appoint the above named Rachel Malin and Margaret Malin executors of this my Last Will and testament in witness whereof I once the person called Jemima Wilkinson but in & ever since the year 1777 known as & called the Publick Universal Friend hereunto set my name.[43]

The Will could only be verified through their legal name, yet they still found a way to avoid subjecting themselves to being reduced to the "young woman, known by the name of Jemima Wilkinson."[44] For over forty years, the Friend had no longer been using that name and understanding themselves as Wilkinson. Underneath the final paragraph, where the Friend wrote out their legal name, the Friend signs one last time with the name: "The Publick Universal Friend."[45] Alongside the argument of the Friend viewing themselves through a metaphysical

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[41] Wisbey, "Appendix II," 199.
[42] Wisbey, "Appendix II," 199.
[43] Publick Universal Friend, *Will of Publick Universal Friend, May 22, 1820*, Will, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #357, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
[44] Publick Universal Friend, *Will of Publick Universal Friend,* Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #357.
[45] Publick Universal Friend, *Will of Publick Universal Friend,* Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #357.

lens, their Will also brings up the paradox of relating their understanding through physical manuscripts. Given that they believed in their self-perception, both sources act as more of a public than a personal document to show, explain, and prove who they are. In that case, their stance of a self that originated in a spiritual realm remained valid and operable in the physical world, too.

"Time and Eternity": Believers' Rendering of the Publick Universal Friend

The Friend and their believers did not comprehend the Friend's nonconforming sense of self as resting in the bodily form of a man or a woman. The position that they took and how they viewed themselves correlated to a spiritual understanding beyond sex and gender, while at times transferring that spiritual truth into tangible expressions of documentation. A closer analysis of letters and poetry by their believers also supports the authenticity of the Friend's spiritual ambiguity both physically and metaphysically. For the Society of Universal Friends, Larson concludes that on a religious front, the period development of "a new syntax in gender" promoted "the possibility of future existence beyond the categories of male and female, even if that was only possible in a state after death."[46]

An example beyond the categories of male and female can be seen in a letter dated January 8, 1790, by believer William Carter. Once an Albany lawyer, Carter originally intended to visit the Friend's settlement to obtain land; instead, he came back declaring himself a member of the Society of the Universal Friends. In this letter, Carter details his concerns regarding his faith and belief that the Friend has the authority to secure his success faithfully:

[46] Larson,"'Indescribable Being'," 594.

> I want to see the Friend but I am so reduced by —-that it is not in my power to be there. Though the distance is great, I hope and believe I may receive benefit from the Friend and ask forgiveness for all wrong and to be remembered in the Friend's prayers at the throne of grace for everything I need, and that I may be filled with the Spirit of Jesus and know his resurrection power to raise me from a death of sin to a life of holiness. I have taken up many times a full resolution (?), but after walking in that way a long time have fallen again, but I still hope and pray for the day when I may receive power from on high to keep my Vows. I intend coming to see the Friend as soon as the Lord pleases to open the door that it may be in my power.[47]

Carter's belief in the Friend is to express his anxiety and resolve for them. In other words, he established that following the Friend would allow him entry into heaven *and be* resurrected for all eternity, neither of which included the existence of man or woman.

Like the Friend, believers faced ridicule yet stayed firm in their beliefs. The following year, on February 25, 1791, William Carter wrote to the Friend from Albany, reporting that "after returning home and declaring my life a Friend, those who had been my most intimate friends became my enemies."[48] Although Carter did not spiritually unsex himself, just becoming a member of the Society and associating with the Friend was enough to have his reputation, sex, and accompanying qualities questioned.[49] Despite the ridicule Carter faced, he remained adamant that "it may be the divine will to permit me soon to leave this wicked country and find my residence among a people whom I consider the people of God."[50] Both letters depict the Friend as having a direct conduit or connection to the Lord. It is also implicitly acknowledged through these letters part of the Friend's indeterminate self-perception is religiously connected. However, paradoxically, Carter's desire to *physically* live amongst those in the religious community of Jerusalem also validates the Friend's sense of self in the physical world as by dedicating himself

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[47] William Carter, *William Carter to the Universal Friend (by Friend Ingraham) Letter, January 8, 1790*, Letter, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #621, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
[48] William Carter, *William Carter to Universal Friend, February 25, 1791*, Letter, Jemima Wilkinson papers, #357, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
[49] Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend*, 46.
[50] Carter, *To Universal Friend*, Jemima Wilkinson papers, #357.

to the latter's community. In this manner of documentation, for Carter to implicitly validate the Friend's story and who they are, he also brings *himself* into the conversation, where "early Americans imagined the possibilities of gender beyond strict categories of male and female."[51] Historian Paul B. Moyer best describes this occurrence as a result of the Friend's spiritual emphasis that "served to ease, if not erase, hierarchies of class, race, and sex."[52]

This description that Moyer provides is also found in the collection of writings by Sarah Richards; however, there was more hostility and more significant attempts to regulate female-assigned believers. As one of the Friend's closest believers, Richards maintained a detailed record of the Friend's influences on her dreams and visions. On an unknown night, possibly near the time Richards joined the sect, an angel visited her in her dreams, commanding that she leave her home and marriage plans and follow the Friend. Still in her dream, Richards was trapped by a mob who "brought with them warrants signed by human authority indicting me for the breach of the marriage Covenant," while "others declared me to be a delirious person."[53] Only when an angel rescued her and flew her into the sky did Sarah continue on a journey to escape persecution from the mobs, until the Friend put the mob "into a deep sleep."[54] The dream concerning the physical world stemmed back to the real-life situation of Richards getting married, but her vision gave her all the more reason *not* to pursue a life of marriage. Looking back at her dream, she saw the Friend as holding the power to stop the mob who brought her the "warrants" for breaching "the marriage Covenant."[55] Those like Richards who practiced unorthodox religious beliefs or sought anything outside sex and gender norms faced great difficulties and dangers. However, as a woman escaping the societal expectation of heterosexual

[51] Larson,"'Indescribable Being'," 594.
[52] Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend,* 78.
[53] Sarah Richards, *Sarah Richards' Dream Book, undated*, Manuscript, Jemima Wilkinson papers, #357, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
[54] Richards, *Dream Book*, Jemima Wilkinson papers, #357.
[55] Richards, *Dream Book*, Jemima Wilkinson papers, #357.

marriage, Richards created a more tangible and specific threat that critics in later chapters would point to consistently in hopes of undermining both the Friend and believers. Yet, like William Carter, Richards continued to follow the Friend.

A poem written possibly in the early nineteenth century by an unknown believer titled "Time and Eternity: Or the difference Between ToDay and Tomorrow" sheds more light on the significance of Richards's decision to escape marriage through religious understandings. The author writes the following:

> Today the saint with time things has to do
> Tomorrow joyful bids them all adieu
> Today he darkly sees us (?)
> Tomorrow views his Jesus face to face
> Today corrected by a hastening rod
> Tomorrow solaced with the smiles of God
> Today he's burden'd with the weight of sin.[56]

Here, the juxtaposition between the words "today" and "tomorrow" perhaps indicates the difference between lengths of time.[57] The poem evokes the contrast between finitude and eternity, earth and heaven, and the secular versus the nonsecular. As seen in the first two lines, the saint has chores to finish *today*, but *tomorrow,* they will no longer have any work. The following four lines further expand on the concept, connecting to when the saint meets Jesus "face to face," who takes all those loyal to him in heaven for eternity.[58] Through the saint's actions of staying faithful to God, they achieve salvation. After all, it is the Friend that argues to "forget the things that are behind" and "work out your salvation."[59] Compounded in a literary sense, one interpretation of the poem's word choice could be the symbolization of today as the past and tomorrow as the future that does not end. So, what Sarah Richards adds to this

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[56] *"Time and Eternity: Or the difference Between ToDay and Tomorrow," undated*, Poem, Jemima Wilkinson papers, #621, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
[57] *"Time and Eternity,"* Jemima Wilkinson papers, #621.
[58] *"Time and Eternity,"* Jemima Wilkinson papers, #621.
[59] Wisbey, "Appendix II," 201.

conversation that the decisions made, regardless of the person or the believer, held a greater sense of permanence that would endure far longer than corporeal sex- and gender-based expectations.

Even outside the Friend's religious community, those who encountered the Friend could find truth in their beliefs and teachings. On January 28, 1789, the Philadelphia Quaker and retired merchant Christopher Marshall wrote a letter to the Friend. In this letter, Marshall questioned the Friend about a sermon they had delivered during a prior encounter. Although the sermon is no longer extant, the discussion between the two is not one to denounce the latter's beliefs but to pursue theological conversation. Part of Marshall's willingness to openly discuss with the Friend can perhaps allude to his background. His Quaker community also disowned him for his beliefs against limiting multivocal expressions in religion. When the Friend first came to Philadelphia around 1782, he offered his home as a place for the former and their believers to stay and safely preach and navigate away from critics.

Marshall opens the letter to assure the Friend that he has no reservations "of thy appearance," and at the "same time confer that we are born under the Law of Love and that in our wisdom to find it out" God's plan.[60] He even goes on to provide a theological validation of who the Friend is: someone who is "perhaps hidden for the most part from the world" for not conducting in "a more familiar and intimate manner."[61] Within this structure, Marshall's quote returns to Richards's and Carter's physical and spiritual validation, but this time with a direct reference to the Friend's self-perception. The letter also explains the Friend's sense of self, which naturally fits in both polarities as a person and a spirit. Marshall best summarizes this analysis in the following section:

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[60] Christopher Marshall, *Christopher Marshall to Friend Letter, January 28, 1789*, Letter, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #621, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
[61] Marshall, *Marshall to Friend*, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #621.

> And as thou my good Friend in conjunction with your other friends are I hope labouring to establish Piety and Virtue on the earth. Let the Spirit of ye prevail with God: and the everlasting gospel day dawn upon you, and those of you that make [such glorious](?) of the Name [and kingdom] of the Lord. Keep not silence, give him no rest until he make Jerusalem a place upon the earth: even till 'the New Jerusalem descends from heaven,' and the church (?) become the universal church triumphant, and both together sing the song of victory over Death, Hell, and the grave![62]

The earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem bring together the perspective of others alongside the Friend's declaration of their nonconforming sense of self. Their settlement and self-understanding in the outskirts of New York would end as it began–the Society of Universal Friends and the Publick Universal Friend in heaven. Despite their theological origins, their sense of self and understanding navigated both the tangible and intangible realms of early American society and its people.

Religious Debates in Comparison to the Friend

Of course, not all religious communities received the developments of the Great Awakening openly or the opportunities for experimentation it allowed. Opposition to the effects of religious enthusiasm before and during the Friend's life in certain religious circles proved significant to contemporary critics' arguments against the Friend. American religious professor Ann Taves asserts that the coexisting developments of the Enlightenment and the Great Awakening allowed religious believers "to reinterpret the Christian myth and remap the way in which the bodies of individual Christians and the collective Christian body as a whole were constituted."[63] As surmised by Larson, this reinterpretation is often labeled "religious enthusiasm" and saw new forms of engagement from both preachers and religious believers where they participated in

[62] Marshall, *Marshall to Friend*, Jemima Wilkinson Papers, #621.
[63] Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 47.

"potent, penetrative, and loud public speech associated with masculinity and male dominance, and at the same time performed feminized surrogate motherhood by weeping, crying out, and 'delivering' the new birth."[64] For religious critics, "enthusiasm was above all the result of an overactive imagination," thus claiming that believers "with bad temperaments, weak minds, or melancholic dispositions were ultimately the most susceptible to delusion."[65] What was not explicitly stated by critics, however, was how "normative gender expectations were being challenged" rather than mixed "by these religious practitioners."[66]

One preacher in particular whom observers commonly highlighted was evangelist George Whitefield. His 1746 publication *Five Sermons on the Following Subjects* conveys the change in tonality between the lines of the gender binary that troubled observers:

> Canst thou not remember when, after a long struggle with unbelief, Jesus appeared to thee, as altogether lovely, one might and willing to save? And canst thou not reflect upon a season, when thy own stubborn heart was made to bend; and thou wast made willing to embrace him, as freely offered to thee in the everlasting Gospel? And canst thou not, which pleasure unspeakable, reflect on some happy period, some certain point of time….thou could say in a rapture of holy surprise, and ecstasy of divine love, *My Lord and my God; my Beloved is mine, and I am his; I know that my Redeemer liveth;* or to keep to the words of our text, *My Maker is my Husband.*[67]

Whitefield's language depicts religious men and women as the wives of the Lord. Not only does this conflate and reconfigure male and female gender performances, but it also implies the implicit change to the institution of Protestant Christianity regulated under strict sex and gender hierarchies. Whitefield's preaching was based on enthusiastic religious experiences that produced negative and positive responses. To explain, proponents would have access to assert a

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[64] Larson, "Histrionics of the Pulpit," 317.
[65] Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions*, 23.
[66] Larson, "Histrionics of the Pulpit," 320.
[67] George Whitefiled, *Five Sermons on the Following Subjects: Viz. I. Christ the Believer's Husband. II. The Gospel Supper. III. Blind Bartimeus. IV. Walking with God. V. The Resurrection of Lazarus*,Vol. no. 5885 (Philadelphia, P.A.: Printed and sold by B. Franklin, 1746), 18.

direct and emotional connection to God and the concept that religion did not have to be formal and institutionalized but could and should be personal.

To opponents such as Boston Congregationalist Minister Charles Chauncy, "the cause of this *enthusiasm* is a bad temperament of the blood and spirits; 'tis properly a disease, a sort of madness."[68] Written in 1742, Chauncy's printed work, *Enthusiasm Described and Caution'd Against,* condemns revival enthusiasm by detailing its effects on individuals and the religious institution itself. Chauncy argued that his condemnation of religious enthusiasm was because of its impact on individuals. Those who believe they have received "divine communications" from God become "under no other influence than that of an over-heated imagination."[69] In another publication of 1743, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England, A Treatise in Five Parts*, Chauncy elaborated on those affected: "'tis among *Children, young People* and *Women*, whose passions are soft and tender, and more easily thrown into a commotion, that these things *chiefly* prevail."[70]

These ideas culminated in and are best exemplified by critiques of the Friend published in October 1779 in *The United States Magazine* and in April 1788 in *The Columbian Magazine*. In the article titled, "Some Remarks on the Nature, Causes, Dangerous Errors, and Infectious Spread of the Present Religious Enthusiasm in America," the author, writing under the penname Philo-Aletheias (the love or preference of truth), addressed the spread and perhaps the "truth" of religious enthusiasm. They were particularly concerned about how, if left unnoticed, it would

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[68] Charles Chauncy, *Enthusiasm Described and Caution'd Against: A Sermon Preach'd at the Old Brick Meeting-House in Boston, the Lord's Day after the Commencement, 1742: With a Letter to the Reverend Mr. James Davenport*, Vol. no. 4912 (Boston, M.A.: Printed by J. Draper, for S. Eliot in Cornhill, and J. Blanchard at the Bible and Crown on Dock Square, 1742), 3.
[69] Chauncy, *Enthusiasm Described and Caution'd Against*, 3.
[70] Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England, A Treatise in Five Parts... With a Preface Giving an Account of the Antinomians, Familists and Libertines, Who Infected These Churches, Above an Hundred Years Ago: Very Needful for These Days; the Like Spirit Prevailing Now as Did Then. The Whole Being Intended, and Calculated, to Serve the Interest of Christ's Kingdom. By Charles Chauncy* (Boston, M.A.: Printed by Rogers and Fowle, for Samuel Eliot in Cornhill, 1743), 105.

corrupt American society and values. According to Philo-Aletheias, widespread corruption prompted by religious enthusiasm could no longer be considered problematic solely in religious circles but throughout the country. Philo-Aletheias called for action to be taken against practitioners of religious enthusiasm, arguing, "ought not our clergy, under the characters of Shepherds and Watchmen, to recall their straying flocks, and warn them against such dangerous enemies of their souls, and their countries."[71] They then detail what aspects of American culture religious enthusiasts would specifically harm: "Though they pretend to charity and peace, and pray for all denominations, they are" capable of "dividing the visible churches by unhappy rents, and families too, as husbands and wives."[72] From this quote, what is of equal interest to the author is how the spread of religious enthusiasm and its practices would divide families — or, more precisely — husbands and wives. What aspect or dynamic between husbands and wives is threatened or overturned? Could this remark by Philo-Aletheias perhaps allude back to Scott Larson's analysis that religious enthusiasts undermined the "social and political orders to drive the masses 'out of their senses,' and to throw gender norms into chaos"?[73]

The Columbian Magazine's article, titled "A Singular and Fatal Instance of Religious Enthusiasm," looks into a family claimed to have been negatively affected by their practice of religious enthusiasm. Formerly the Episcopal Minister of Charleston, S.C., Alexander Garden relates a story about the family of Dutartes who came to South Carolina and their encounter with religious enthusiasm. According to Garden, the family of Dutartes encountered a Moravian preacher, and they slowly became acquainted. The preacher "infatuated himself into their family, and partly by conversation, and partly by the writings of Jacob Behman," a German theologian

[71] Philo-Aletheias, "Some Remarks on the Nature, Causes, Dangerous Errors, and Infectious Spread of the Present Religious Enthusiasm in America," *The United States Magazine; a Repository of History, Politics and Literature (1779-1779),* 10, 1779, 411, ProQuest.
[72] Philo-Aletheias, "Some Remarks on the Nature, Causes, Dangerous Errors," 411.
[73] Larson, "Histrionics of the Pulpit," 315.

and philosopher on Christian mysticism, "which he put into their hands…filled their heads with wild and fantastic ideas."[74]

Garden, like Philo-Aletheias, also discussed how these effects were no longer confined to a congregational level, but a societal one. These "fantastic ideas" drove the family to commit crimes that went against society's standards.[75] They believed that the eldest daughter's husband, Peter Rombert, was a prophet who claimed to have had divine revelations from God, specifically about the latter choosing "one family" from being destroyed by the large amount of "wickedness" in the world.[76] God told Rombert to take up his wife's youngest sister as his new bride to save the family. What followed was an outpouring of claims of adultery and incest within the family, which prompted authorities to come down to the house where a shootout occurred. Garden contends that based on the actions of the family of Dutartes, religious enthusiasts who "disclaim the power and authority of the civil magistrate, and mistake their own wild fancies" for God are some of the "most fatal consequences to society."[77] Better put by Philo-Aletheias, religious enthusiasts are dangerous to society because they are "distempered," "over-heated," *and* "ungovernable."[78] Those ideas and the arguments underlined by feminine stereotypes and related to religion and society would remerge later in the rhetoric used to criticize the Friend. However, this time, those notions were in discord with qualities that were not definitively determinate of a man or a woman.

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[74] "A Singular and Fatal Instance of Religious Enthusiasm which Occurred in the Present Century, Related by Alexander Garden, Formerly the Episcopal Minister of Charleston," *The Columbian Magazine (1786-1790),* 04, 1788, 195, ProQuest.
[75] "A Singular and Fatal Instance of Religious Enthusiasm," 195.
[76] "A Singular and Fatal Instance of Religious Enthusiasm," 195.
[77] "A Singular and Fatal Instance of Religious Enthusiasm," 195.
[78] Philo-Aletheias, "Some Remarks on the Nature, Causes, Dangerous Errors," 411.

Conclusions

This chapter has argued that the writings and rhetoric by the Friend and their believers reveal a spiritual understanding that validated the Friend's nonconforming sense of self on both a physical and metaphysical plane. Sources by the Friend suggest an understanding of their sense of self outside of the increasingly rigid hierarchy of sex categories and their roles. Similarly, the letters and manuscripts of believers such as William Carter, Sarah Richards, Christopher Marshall, and others not only demonstrate their acceptance of the Friend's sense of self but also convey how the latter's self-perception enabled them to reconstitute their perspectives, bodies, and selves outside strict categories of male and female, man and woman. For the Friend and their believers, theological knowledge created a space wherein they could experiment outside standard norms. The Friend accomplished this based on written language and rhetoric focused on the spiritual, thus integrating perspectives of fluidity. Although the Friend primarily postulated their self-perception within religious interpretations, this reexamination of the Friend's writing and preaching reveals their attempts to validate themselves on a worldly front. The subtle transfer of early American religious discourse to a societal one before and during the Friend's life in religious circles would prove significant to the arguments contemporary American critics commonly used against the Friend and are as addressed in detail in Chapter Two. To undermine the Friend's assertion of their gender nonconformity — their spiritual unsexing — critics transferred their notions of religious nonconformity to societal acts to raise questions about the Friend's sanity, trustworthiness, and femininity.

Chapter Two

The Sustained Effort, 1776-1801

Between 1776 and 1789, the Friend preached extensively across New England and became particularly well-known in and around Philadelphia. The Friend garnered people's attention as they traveled, leading to the publication of many manuscripts and periodicals about the Friend and their teachings. Unlike their believers, however, these documented reactions from outsiders who met the Friend tended to view their assertion of being "spiritually unsexed" and claims of resurrection with skepticism. In the early 1780s, following frequent comments from critics, the Friend and their believers, the Society of Universal Friends, moved to avoid persecution or what Jen Manion describes as a "forced surrender of one's gender expression."[79] As Manion states, this is a form of "punishment" and heteronormative reinforcement that forces one to conform "even if just momentarily until they were in a new town, outside the gaze of local authorities."[80] The Friend and the Society of Friends stopped preaching and resettled in western New York, and founded what would become known as Jerusalem. Though the Friend visited Jerusalem throughout the 1780s, they did not settle there permanently until 1790 and would continue to reside there until they died in 1819.

So persistent was this phobic reaction to the Friend and their believers that the periodical press about the Friend raged in the early nineteenth century and reached national and international audiences. Although the American Revolution provided increased opportunities to experiment with sex and gender, Elizabeth Reis adds that early America still tried to reassert the

[79] Manion, *Female Husbands*, 2.
[80] Manion, *Female Husbands*, 2.

incentive to "maintain a two-sex system."[81] In this sense, "ambiguous bodies" like the Friend meant that they would have to be defined in one way or another, male or female. As Sharon Block and Greta LaFleur remind us, this process also revealed that bodies "were described in far more multiplicities than any binary understanding of male and female can capture."[82] Thus, it is not surprising to see that a common feature among most critics was their attempt to overlook the Friend's creed and define them within the constructs of the binary system as either a man or a woman. Most observers continued to refer to the Friend as a "woman" as well as to use the pronouns "her" and "she," thus refusing to accept their claims to be neither male nor female nor "spiritually unsexed." Those who critiqued the Friend's gender presentation tended to focus on their ambiguous appearance and mannerisms, or what Paul Benjamin Moyer terms "male and female deportment."[83] Despite the attempts of critics to correct the Friend's "spiritually unsexed" self through the periodical press, this chapter argues that their attempts to define the Friend within rigid sex and gender parameters created less clarity for critics to discern the Friend's sense of self. Moreover, these criticisms at times inadvertently validated the Friend through their very judgments since the repetitive debates served to clarify the Friend's "true" sense of self.

This chapter examines contemporaries' reactions and responses to the Friend based on a close reading of published documents and newspapers published between 1776 and 1801. The Friend preached and traveled extensively over these years and continued to garner public attention. The focus here is on contemporaries' commentary located in the periodicals *The American Museum* and *The Freeman's Journal* in Philadelphia, *The New Annual Register*, *The Monthly Visitor*, and *The Weekly Entertainer* in London, England, as well as personal entries

[81] Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, M.D.: John Hopkins University Press, 2021), 53-54.
[82] Block, "Making Meaningful Bodies," 529; Lafleur, "Sex and 'Unsex'," 469.
[83] Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend*, 80.

from American Congregationalist Minister, Ezra Stiles, and French author Duke of La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt's *Travels through the United States of North America*. In analyzing contemporary reactions to the Friend, this chapter examines how critics' comments changed over time to ask what these responses reveal about the relationship between sex and gender in early America. To understand contemporary critiques of the Friend's "spiritual unsexed" self, this chapter begins by examining the writing of Congregationalist Minister Ezra Stiles. His diary entries attempt to define the Friend by describing the latter's appearance, including references to the Friend's life. Following Stiles, the two articles from the Philadelphia newspapers, *The American Museum* and *The Freeman's Journal,* similarly attempt to dissect the Friend and their sense of self. These sources illustrate that one tactic critics used to undermine the Friend's gender and spiritual non-conforming sense of self was to characterize them as a woman who was either deceptive or suffered from mental delusions.

Section two highlights a noticeable difference in how critics approached the Friend over the following years and began to focus less on defining their sense of self. Though periodicals started to acknowledge the Friend's ambiguity in 1787, they also began to characterize the Friend's gender non-conformity/ambiguity as a threat to American development. I specifically look at the French author Duke of La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt's accounts of his *Travels through the United States of North America* between the years of 1795-1797 and the following London press articles: *The New Annual Register*, *The Monthly Visitor*, and *The Weekly Entertainer*. This chapter documents a gradual shift in how critics reacted to the Friend's "spiritually unsexed self," from a local threat to a national threat that would undermine American development surrounding the relationship between sex and gender. Because critics conceived of the Friend as

a national threat, they used the Friend's existence to instruct others about desired gendered behaviors that strictly centered on men and women up until their death and decades after.

"Means Prepared For A Farther Deception"[84]

On a basic level, critics attempted to define the Friend's sense of self strictly. American educator, Congregationalist minister, and author Ezra Stiles dedicated a series of diary entries to the Friend's life. By 1779, Stiles had been the President of Yale for over a year. As he oversaw Yale's affairs, he continued to travel back and forth between New Haven, Connecticut and Newport, Rhode Island – his former residence – to give sermons and perform baptisms. While traveling, he kept a detailed record of his life from conversations, transactions, appointments, and sketches of the places he visited. In a town in Rhode Island, Stiles recorded that "When I was at Narraganset Sept. 24, 1779, I heard much about Jemima who calls herself the *Public Universal Friend.*"[85] Within this sentence itself, he already established a clear role for "Jemima" in the two-sex system: a woman merely acting under a different name. However, Stiles also noted that "Some difficulty arises as to the sex—a Woman claiming to be the Messiah the Son of God……Jemima has altered her apparel, & appears dressed like a Man in a long Habit or Vestment coming up round the neck and tied there with a Ribband."[86] This quote is unique based on the tone of Stiles's writing and his inclusion of the claim that the Friend was saying they were the Son of God. Based on sources I found by the Friend and their believers, neither group related the notion Stiles heard at Narraganset. Although Stiles conveys that he is uncertain, he is not uncertain from

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[84] *The American Museum, or Universal Magazine: Containing Essays on Agriculture, Commerce, Manufactures, Politics, Morals and Manners: Sketches of National Characters, Natural and Civil History, and Biography: Law Information, Public Papers, Intelligence: Moral Tales, Ancient and Modern Poetry.: V.1 1787* (Pennsylvania: Printed by Mathew Carey, 1787), 152; *The Freeman's Journal: or, The North-American Intelligencer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) VI, no. CCCIV, February 14, 1787: 3, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

[85] Franklin B. Dexter, ed., *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 3 v. (New York, N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 2: 380.

[86] Dexter, ed., *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 2: 382.

whom he had heard those claims. Instead, from those rumors, he believed that the Friend had claimed to be the Son of God. That level of certainty in the Friend, thus being a woman dressing as a man, is still juxtaposed with the phrase: "Some difficulty arises as to the sex."[87] Even with Sitles' subsequent description of whether their deportment indicated the Friend as a woman or a man, his *initial* rendering of them was not primarily viewed as male or female.

Although he admitted to being unsure about the Friend's sex, he nonetheless attempted to explain who the Friend was within the boundaries of either man or woman. Concerning deportment, he describes how "Jemima answers Questions with Dexterity and cautious Subtilty."[88] If that were not enough to persuade readers, Stiles further harkens back to previous religious notions upon the mental state of "Jemima Wilkinson," whose "preaching is founded in Delusion & Insanity!"[89] Yet, by openly acknowledging his uncertainty, Stiles offers us an idea between the differences and connections to sex and gender. It shows the connection to how one's sense of self manifests through appearance and actions, unlike basing it solely on one's *biological* distinctions or binary proportions (sex).

An unknown author, printed in both *The American Museum* and *The Freeman's Journal* on February 14, 1787, took a similar approach to Stiles, first going into detail about the appearance of the Friend:

> The Universal Friend… appears to be about 30 years of age, about the middle size of women, not genteel in her person, and rather awkward in her carriage, her complexion good, her eye black and remarkably brilliant, her hair black, and waving in beautiful ringlets upon her neck and shoulders, her features regular, and the whole of her face thought by many perfectly beautiful; as she is not to be supposed of either sex, so this neutrality is manifest in her external appearance…Her outside garment is a loose robe, that resembles a morning gown, such as both men and women commonly wear. Under this, it is said, that her

[87] Dexter, ed., *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 2: 382.
[88] Dexter, ed., *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 2: 382.
[89] Dexter, ed., *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 2: 382.

> apparel is very expensive: and the form of it conveys the same idea, as her external appearance, of her being neither man nor woman.[90]

Despite the direct descriptions that firmly perceived the Friend as a woman, the repeating of the Friend's ambiguous appearance cannot support the argument that rhetoric by critics stands fully in line with just categories of man and woman. Of course, to uphold those categories, it is again not uncommon to see critics *attempt* to do so. At the end of the article, the author attributed the Friend's presentation as a "means prepared for a farther deception, which she well knows how to carry on."[91] Including the previous sources, each attempted to analyze the Friend as a woman, which purposefully applied contemporary sex norms to evaluate them.

In this case of the binary, women were capable of morality and dishonesty. As a result, this rendered the gossip of the Friend's "spiritually unsexed" sense of self moot and amenable to explanations that maintained the status quo. From the perspectives of critics, the ability the Friend had to enrapture people was because of their supposed womanhood and the stereotypes associated with it and, thus, could lie and manipulate through forms of gendered deception. This further undermined the authenticity of the Friend's expression and understanding. In other words, they attempted to argue that it was an artificial appearance made by human design, not nature itself. Strangely enough, *The American Museum* and *The Freeman's Journal* were located in Philadelphia, a time and place in the late eighteenth century when print culture promoted less adherence to sexual codes for white men and women. Nevertheless, based on this article, perhaps there is a *limit* to how loose sexual codes could be. The limit being that as long as those codes adhered to affirming the constructs of man and woman, or what critics commonly perceived as "the natural, not the constructed, world."[92]

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[90] *The American Museum, or Universal Magazine.: V.1 1787*, 152; *The Freeman's Journal* VI, no. CCCIV, 3.
[91] *The American Museum, or Universal Magazine.: V.1 1787*, 152; *The Freeman's Journal* VI, no. CCCIV, 3.
[92] Juster, "'Neither Male Nor Female'," 375.

In the final sentence of the quote, the article inadvertently acknowledges not only the possibility but also the reality in which other critics and themselves held a diverse understanding that surpassed feminine and masculine categories. Even though the author did not personally get to see the Friend, thus suggesting only other people viewed the Friend's appearance as ambiguous, they prefaced the description as something that "may afford some satisfaction to describe their persons."[93] Although the author's description of the Friend as "not to be supposed of either sex" has a skeptical tone, the author uses the determiner "their" for the Friend before going into detail.[94] As much as critics attempted to confine the Friend within strict sexual and gender constructs, Manion states that critics also showed through their "repeated instruction and social reinforcement" that "gender was malleable and not linked entirely to sex."[95] In that case, a world in which many desired simplicity was the complex and indefinite world of the late eighteenth-century United States.[96] Thus, rather than making the Friend's understanding of themselves known, critics made their gender expression less clear. As Manion argues, an unintended result of publishing newspapers and other print sources made "transing gender even more visible and normalized for eighteenth-and nineteenth-century readers."[97] Over the next few years of the late eighteenth century, there would be a noticeable difference in how critics approached the topic. Either directly or indirectly, subsequent periodicals began to acknowledge the Friend's gender nonconforming ambiguity and the effects beyond the Friend.

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[93] *The American Museum, or Universal Magazine.: V.1 1787*, 152; *The Freeman's Journal* VI, no. CCCIV, 3.
[94] *The American Museum, or Universal Magazine.: V.1 1787*, 152; *The Freeman's Journal* VI, no. CCCIV, 3.
[95] Manion, *Female Husbands*, 13.
[96] Reis, *Bodies in Doubt*, 35.
[97] Manion, *Female Husbands*, 8.

The Antithesis & Instruction of Ambiguity

A couple of years later, between November 18-26, 1787, Ezra Stiles attended a religious meeting of the Friend. Unlike his earlier entries, Stiles appeared to be stuck by what to make of the Friend, given that until that meeting, he "never saw her before."[98] In his diary, he wrote the following:

> She is about age 30, strait [sic], well made, light Complexion, black Eyes, round face, chesnut [sic] dark Hair. Wears light cloth Cloke with a Cape like a Man's–Purple Gown, long sleeves to Wristbands–Mans shirt down to the Hands with Neckband–purple handkerchief or Neckcloth tied round the neck like a man's–No cap–Hair combed turned over & not long–wears a Watch–Man's Hat. —Voluble Tongue—decent & graceful & grave.[99]

Unlike his previous entry, this specific one portrays a thought process where Stiles went back and forth between whether the Friend was decent or appalling to social norms. Despite referring to the Friend as a woman, Stiles's phrasing of comparing the Friend's appearance "like a Man's" calls back to a previous entry where "some difficulty arises as to the sex" of the Friend.[100] Here is where Stiles *indirectly* acknowledges the Friend's ambiguous self-perception. On the one hand, it could be something to do with imitation as a female or a comment that portrays Stiles as unsure about whether the Friend was even trying to conform to the male gender. Even stranger is that Ezra Stiles described the Friend's preaching as "decent & graceful & grave," which Scott Larson notes implies that the former did not "automatically find mixed-gender presentations sinful or inappropriate."[101]

Similarly, an unknown author in *The American Museum* around February 23, 1787, and *The Freeman's Journal* of March 14, 1787, concedes to the Friend's nonconformity from a religious approach. In response to the publication back on February 14, 1787, the author of the

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[98] Dexter, ed., *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 3: 289.
[99] Dexter, ed., *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 3: 290.
[100] Dexter, ed., *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 3: 290; Dexter, ed., *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 2: 382.
[101] Larson, "'Indescribable Being'," 590.

March article believed that the previous writer had provided "no proof but hearsay (I think) of all they have mention'd" of the Friend being an imposter driven by delusion.[102] For one, the author of March's article considered the Friend as a woman through the use of pronouns, yet stated that the previous author gave "such a strange account of her conduct and behaviour, with so many contradictions, that it is difficult for the reader to know what idea to form of her."[103] Yet it does bring up the question: Why were there so many contradictions in the first place if their sex identified them as a woman? Although the author still saw them as a woman, they paradoxically supported the Friend's claims of being revived by the Holy Spirit and thus rendered "spiritually unsexed." The unknown author relied upon religious backing to support caution in denying the truthfulness of the Friend.

For example, the author detailed stories about the biblical prophets Gamaliel and Nicodemus, who were "influenced by the holy spirit" and, if questioned, were raised as "instruments to preserve them from the rage of their enemies."[104] In response to those outwardly questioning the Friend, the author attests that "this shows clearly how cautious we should be in striving to suppress what we think out of the way, except we have an express warrant for so doing from heaven. Now, have these writers shown that they are so qualified? No."[105] In this respect, the author put out a rhetorical question of whether anyone had the right to make such statements that denied the Friend's claims. Without a sign from God, one should not deny the Friend's authenticity. Thus, doing so without verification not only denies the authenticity of the Friend but the authenticity of God themselves. In this light, this particular article brings up the possibility of a more nuanced narrative of reactions and perspectives toward the Friend. The

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[102] *The American Museum.:V.1 1787*, 218-219; *The Freeman's Journal: or, The North-American Intelligencer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) VI, no. CCCVIII, March 14, 1787: 2, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[103] *The American Museum.:V.1 1787*, 218-219; *The Freeman's Journal* VI, no. CCCVIII, 2.
[104] *The American Museum.:V.1 1787*, 219; *The Freeman's Journal* VI, no. CCCVIII, 2.
[105] *The American Museum.:V.1 1787*, 219; *The Freeman's Journal* VI, no. CCCVIII, 2.

narrative included a reality that other observers did not view inconclusive actions and appearances as unjustifiable or impossible.

Yet, the way later periodicals acknowledged the Friend's ambiguous self-perception evolved again over time. The acknowledgment of the Friend's sense of self, coupled with the inability to define them in the two-sex system effectively, enabled the inklings of a new form of written rhetoric by critics to elevate these ambiguities as threats to American development. However, doing so also inaugurated a change in focus by critics. As the subsequent sources show, debates were not so much focused on the Friend and who they were, but on how they negatively impacted those they encountered. American studies have consistently highlighted that the debates around political freedom during war and independence grappled with the balance of personal freedom and regulation over the people's character. Thus, in light of the apparent mobility within social constructs, Susan Juster contends that both political and social demands of the new republic deemed it necessary to reassert "the 'masculine' principles of order and hierarchy."[106]

In this respect, there was a gradual change in the way critics approached the Friend. Rather than focusing on determining the Friend, discussions increased around *their effects* or *significance*. The publication from *The American Museum* on March 28, 1787, attests that the role imbalance between man and woman influenced by the Friend threatened the values of the new nation and its people. Based on their lies about who they are and their death, the Friend has "separated men from their wives; wives from their husbands, and made confusion wherever they have been."[107] What this article reveals about their perspective on the Friend is how those under their leadership are dangerous to the status quo. This source's objective is to illustrate that the

[106] Juster, *Disorderly Women*, 135-146.
[107] *The Freeman's Journal: or, The North-American Intelligencer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) VI, no. CCCX, March 28, 1787: 2, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

latter was a form of disruption to the heteronormative institution of marriage. They threatened the new nation, undermining the binary and its assumed power dynamics between man and woman, thus giving way to other forms of expression and relationships for both "men" and "their wives."[108]

Looking back to the February 14, 1787 article from *The American Museum* and *The Freeman's Journal*, the unknown author hints at this concept by comparing and analyzing believers Sarah Richards and James Parker. For both, the author highlights how their character becomes corrupted under the Friend's instruction, and in doing so, implicates how such characters go against letting society operate effectively. For Parker, his character has become "artful, conceited, and illiterate," while Richards is "rather disfigured."[109] Would Sarah Richards be acceptable if she were "to dress as becomes her sex"?[110] The threat becomes further enlarged with the allegation that one of the Friend's believers, Abigail Daton, attempted to murder another believer named Sarah Wilson. On August 29, 1787, in an anonymous letter titled, "*To the Most Holy Sybil,* ABIGAIL DATON, *a Fool by birth, and a Prophetess by profession*," an unknown author in *The Freeman's Journal* responds to Daton's professed innocence. However, the anonymous letter is not focused on the act of the rumored crime but on the character of Daton herself. Referring back to Daton's published article defending her innocence, the unknown author recalls her account of going to the apothecary around the time of the attempted murder: "'—Now, what had you to do in that *apothecary's shop*, and what drugs were they that you wanted

[108] *The Freeman's Journal: or, The North-American Intelligencer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) VI, no. CCCX, March 28, 1787: 2.
[109] *The Freeman's Journal* VI, no. CCCX, March 28, 1787: 2; *The American Museum.: V.1 1787*, 392.
[110] *The Freeman's Journal* VI, no. CCCX, March 28, 1787: 2; *The American Museum.: V.1 1787*, 392.

to *use upon your own body?*'"[111] The intent is to mock Daton, but it also "reveals wider apprehensions over maintaining 'proper' gender norms in a republican society."[112]

Published in 1799, French author Duke of La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt's *Travels through the United States of North America* outlines his experiences while staying in the United States between 1795 and 1797, including his encounter with the Friend in their New York settlement, Jerusalem. What initially prompted his travels through the United States was to escape the effects of the French Revolution. Once a supporter of the monarchy, the Duke of La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt first fled to England and then to the United States, thus suspending him in exile up until 1799. Although his intentions had nothing to do with the Friend, it is clear that through his evaluation, he held great disdain for the crossing of boundaries. While there is the potential mistranslation of his entries by British translator and editor Henry Neuman, the underlying tone of his discussion of the Friend is negative and condemning: "She sows dissension in families, to deprive the lawful heir of his right of inheritance, to appropriate it to herself."[113] Rendering the Friend as a woman and called "Jemima Wilkinson," the lens chosen is no longer critical to understanding the Friend's sense of self. Instead, he is more focused on the general effect of the Friend on America, the political-cultural ideals regarding sex, gender, and its reinforcement. For one, part of the author's conclusions derives from his encounter as well as rumors from others on American soil:

> If we may believe common rumour, she dissuades the young women generally from marrying. In regard to those about her, this advice originates from motives of personal interest. I have little doubt, but that the pious devotion of there [sic] girls is fervent enough, to submit to all the caprices of the All-friend (which in their belief are inspirations). Another report is also handed about, that she has met

[111] *The Freeman's Journal: or, The North-American Intelligencer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) VII, no. CCCXXXII, August 29, 1787: 3, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[112] Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend*, 110.
[113] François-Alexandre-Frédéric Duc De La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America: the country of the Iroquois, and Upper Canada, in the years, 1796, and 1797; with an authentic account of Lower Canada*, ed. and trans. Henry Neuman, 2 v. (London: R. Phillips, 1799), 1: 113.

> with a male being, whom she fancies sufficiently purified, to unite occasionally with her own exalted society and convene. On this head: a story prevails, which, though somewhat ludicrous, may yet properly find a place in a work of the gravest complexion, especially as it affords an additional proof of the endless multiplicity of pious deceptions.[114]

Besides looking into the rights of property, the Duke of La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt also chose to dissect the sexual life of the Friend, including the practices they were to have supposedly conducted. One conjecture is that these rumors were a form of expression relative to the concern over the declining power relationship between male and female bodies or even as a form of instruction that reinforced those two categories. Concerning gender, the roles based on one's sex, the progression in America's ideals and innovations during the early nineteenth century enhanced the divide between gender roles, confining women further into the home and men into the outside world of society. Looking beyond the Friend as an individual but as an example, this excerpt reveals the re-imposing of the idea of a world of men and women. In other words, women's roles emphasized duty and obligations, not individual liberty or the ability to govern others. The rights reserved for women were nonpolitical, leaving political rights of consent, personal autonomy, sexual liberty, and control of property to men. In this light, it further confirmed the norm of responsibilities of political development and self-autonomy to be within man's domain, and if attempted by women, was not something they could efficiently execute or maintain.

However, the gradual shift of critics framing the Friend as an individual threat to being an example used for political-cultural instruction was not limited to American soil. In the years 1799 and 1801, the various British periodicals, including *The Weekly Entertainer*, *The Monthly Visitor*, and *The New Annual Register,* reprinted the excerpt of the Duke of La

[114] Duc De La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America*, 1: 116.

Rochefoucauld-Liancourt's encounter with the Friend.[115] Although the Friend's direct sphere of influence took place in the early United States, the context and information provided in these sources reflect the extent to which British critics took an approach similar to American ones. The first insight can be revealed through the analysis of the genre itself. Neither of the three journals included an original explanation or additional writing about why this excerpt was published. Yet, in a general sense, a periodical's fundamental purpose was to act as a container and disseminator of an assortment of information to which individuals could access and from which they could gain knowledge. In other words, periodicals were didactic–especially to those who had the finances and literacy to purchase those magazines.[116] People with that knowledge could act as bodies of enforcement that regulated the lower classes under published instruction.

The second insight points towards the context in which these sources were published, with specifically, Britain's debate with the ideals of the American project and the French Revolution. Part of the American connection woven into these sources stems back to what historian Wil Verhoeven describes as an American "rupture" that "released into the social imagination the possibility of alternative histories and experimental sociopolitical orders."[117] These possibilities would ultimately become implicated in Britain's French Revolution debate of the 1790s. The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 ignited debates concerning British intervention, the advantages of political expansion, and the effects of revolutionary principles spreading throughout Europe.[118] The Revolution Controversy, the discourse concerning French

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[115] "Anecdotes of Jemima Wilkinson," *The Weekly Entertainer: Or, Agreeable and Instructive Repository, Jan.6, 1783-Dec.27, 1819* 37, Feb 23, 1801, 151-154, ProQuest; "Anecdotes of Jemima Wilkinson," *The Monthly Visitor, and New Family Magazine* 12, January 1801, 25-32, ProQuest; "Anecdotes of Jemima Wilkinson," *The New Annual Register, Or, General Repository of History, Politics, and Literature, 1780-1820*, January 1799,45-49, ProQuest.
[116] Eve Tavor Bannet, "Discontinuous Reading and Miscellaneous Instruction for British Ladies," 40-41.
[117] Wil Verhoeven, *Americomania and the French Revolution Debate in Britain, 1789-1802* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 4-5.
[118] Katie Snow, " Violent discharges: the French breast in British revolutionary era caricature," *Women's History Review* 30, no.7 (2021): 1087-1088, https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2020.1815953.

uprisings, created a wave of conservative nationalist and radical reactions to political-cultural demands inspired by Revolutionary ideologies. According to Koenraad Claes, the Controversy occurred in the following phases:

> An initial phase (1789–92) revolving around the fundamental controversy between Dissenter Richard Price and 'Old Whig' Edmund Burke; a second phase (1792–5) characterised by a democratic and internationalist radicalisation under the influence of the tracts of Thomas Paine and a conservative nationalist reaction after Britain joined the First Coalition in its war against France; and a third phase or aftermath (1795–9) in which loyalist 'anti-Jacobin' rhetoric through government repression finally defines the terms of the debate in its favour.[119]

Although the notable points of the Revolution Controversy stemmed from religious tensions, it underscored broader questions about and debate over individual autonomy, human rights, and to whom it extended.[120] The dichotomy of conservative and radical responses, such as Burke and Price, to statements characterized by themes of personal liberty, autonomy, and civic virtue, as well as the critique of the monarchy, either represented potential reform within British society or a factor to its breakdown.[121] Periodicals provided a prominent location in which those matters were debated.[122]

Conclusions

Concerning the Friend, what can be deduced from these articles are the effects of Revolutionary thought on what Kathleen Wilson contends are sources that actively "reconfigure gender roles" and are "used to make sense of them."[123] In this case, however, the sources *reinforced* the sexual

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[119] Koenraad Claes, "Vindications and Reflections: The Lady's Magazine during the Revolution Controversy (1789–1795)," in *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690-1820s: The Long Eighteenth Century*, edited by Jennie Batchelor and Manushag N. Powell, 1 v. (Edinburgh University Press, 2018): 68, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv2f4vmmq.9.
[120] Snow, "Violent discharges," 1087-1088.
[121] Verhoeven, *Americomania and the French Revolution*, 13.
[122] Bannet, "Discontinuous Reading and Miscellaneous Instruction for British Ladies," 49-50.
[123] Kathleen Wilson, "Nelson's Women: Female Masculinity and Body Politics in the French and Napoleonic Wars," *European History Quarterly* 37, no.4 (2007), 562, https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691407.

or gendered categories of man and woman. The development of new reconfigurations and opportunities within Britain had been erasing the distinct lines between man and woman.[124] By using the words of the Duke of La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, the arguments in these periodicals were meant to be employed as a tactical response that defended systems of normativity comprised of men and women.

In the early years that the Friend began to preach and travel across early America, the reactions to them ranged from a mix of intrigue and support, to outright opposition. Those who opposed the Friend often took their opinions to the press and utilized a rhetoric that sought to confine the Friend to the categories of man and woman. Over time, we can see a slight change in critics' arguments, which now acknowledge the Friend's ambiguity as a threat to American cultural and national development. On a larger scale (nationally and internationally), the Friend symbolized everything the new republic was not. Critics depicted the Friend as a seducer with the power to persuade people to live beyond the binary of male and female, man and woman. Instead of continuing to focus on determining the Friend's sense of self, discussions increased around their significance on a societal front. The Friend and their story stood as the antithesis of the new republic while simultaneously utilized as a narrative enforcing the categories of man and woman before and after their death.

[124] Wilson, "Nelson's Women," 564.

Chapter Three

A Final Death, A Final Legacy, 1819-1835

On July 1, 1819, the Friend passed away peacefully in their home in Jerusalem. Out of respect for the Friend's final wishes, a funeral service did not occur, and instead, their believers held a regular meeting.[125] After the meeting, the Friend's body was placed in a coffin and sealed in a stone vault in the cellar of their house. Several years passed before their body was buried in an unmarked grave on the grounds.[126] The inability to attract new believers, combined with legal and religious disagreements over the next twenty years, led to the disbandment of the Society of Universal Friends by the 1840s.[127] Notably, the Friend's death did not mean discussions of them stopped. Instead, over the next few decades, narratives about the Friend continued to spread in the press. Without the presence of the Friend and their believers, however, no one was willing to defend the Friend's life and community. Articles about the Friend published between 1819 and 1835 were predominantly by non-believers, completely dismissed the Friend's beliefs, and often relied on the words of other critics at the time.

Chapter three analyses the afterlife of the Friend and seeks to address the following questions: What were the reasons that critics continued to discuss and ultimately reconfigure the narrative on the Friend? What were the effects of their continued discussions on the Friend? How do these discussions align with the Friend's "spiritually unsexed" sense of their self? Their religion? On a broader level, what can these reactions to the Friend after their death tell us about cultural developments in early America and internationally? This chapter argues that the reasons behind critics' continued discussions of the Friend revolved around their death, which was fueled

[125] Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess*, 161-164.
[126] Wisbey, *Pioneer Prophetess*, 171.
[127] Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend*, 197.

by profound changes to American values and its demographics. At the same time, the Friend's death and the decline of their community created a vacuum that offered critics greater opportunities to share their stories and assume a level of factualness. That the Friend claimed to have died once only to be revived by the Holy Spirit and then passed away permanently in 1819 made it difficult to defend their claims actively. As a result, accounts of the Friend were reconfigured into a popular memory that reinforced a two-sex system and characterized the Friend as Jemima Wilkinson, a female imposter. Unlike a "seducer" in Chapter Two that influenced those around them to perform outside the two-sex system, the label of an "imposter" further if not completely rejected the possibility of a sense of self *beyond* the binary and simplified their story that *aligned* with the categories of man and woman.

For both critics and citizens in the early United States, Elizabeth Reis surmises that in a world in which they desired simplicity, they also had to contend with "the real world of the nineteenth-century United States," which "was muddy and slippery" and "paradoxical."[128] The ongoing changes in technology, commerce, and the expanding borders of the United States provided various opportunities for people to react to and shape their world. However, for critics of the Friend, these changes created more significant challenges to enforce their narratives. One development in particular was the Second Great Awakening. As Erik R. Seeman explains, the post-Revolution outcome into the early nineteenth century "celebrated the ability of ordinary people to make choices based on their interests." For religious believers, this meant they "were freer than ever to explore new spiritual possibilities."[129] Further, Seeman also labels "the antebellum period's 'populist principle of theology,' the insistence that 'the unlearned, even more than the learned, could discern theological truth.'"[130] Similarly, Rodney Hessinger contends that

[128] Reis, *Bodies in Doubt*, 35.
[129] Seeman, "Revelations and New Denominations," 160.
[130] Seeman, "Revelations and New Denominations," 160.

the ideals surrounding man and woman, culturally, politically, and religiously, were at risk and, when deemed necessary, became an "ideological construct available" to suit particular demands.[131] This historical context is essential to understanding how the Friend's life was reframed after their death.

This chapter examines critics' responses to the Friend and their death, which were published in newspapers and other manuscripts between 1819 and 1835 from North America and the United Kingdom.[132] Section one begins with periodicals that notified readers of the Friend's death, such as Maryland's *Baltimore Patriot* and South Carolina's *Winyaw Intelligencer.* These offer a sense of initial responses to the Friend's death and the tone of the debate. The chapter then analyzes additional periodicals, including North Carolina's *Star*, Virginia's *Palladium of Liberty*, and Delaware's *American Watchman*. These illustrate how the Friend was used as a form of rhetoric to dispel the values of the Second Great Awakening that threatened the validity of strict male and female categories across multiple states. At the same time, these sources also worked as a tool to cement the Friend's story as a female imposter. The chapter concludes by examining periodicals and manuscripts from 1820 to 1835 that convey the Friend as a "tale" that offered cultural instruction about sex and gender, all the while labeling them and their history within a two-sex system.[133] These sources include the British periodical, *La Belle Assemblée: Or Court and Fashionable Magazine*, American author David Hudson's book, *History of Jemima Wilkinson: A Preacheress of the Eighteenth Century; containing an authentic narrative of her life and character, and of the rise, progress and conclusion of her ministry*, New York's *The*

[131] Rodney Hessinger, *Smitten: Sex, Gender, and the Contest for Souls in the Second Great Awakening* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2022), 63.
[132] Jen Manion's work in *Female Husbands: A Trans History* also explores reactions in both the United States and the United Kingdom in the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century. What their work also reveals is that individuals similar to the Friend held a great international interest as a form of judgment of the individual in question and reinforcement of societal expectations.
[133] Reis, *Bodies in Doubt*, 35.

Pilot, *The Geneva Gazette, and General Advertiser*, *The American Journal*, and Georgia's *Macon Weekly Telegraph*.

"Final Exit" & "Harbinger" of the Publick Universal Friend

Sixteen days after the Friend's death, Maryland's *Baltimore Patriot* and South Carolina's *Winyaw Intelligencer* each published an article notifying readers of the former's passing. They both start with a quote from Job 14:10: "'But man dieth, and wasteth away; yes, man giveth up the ghost and where is he?'"[134] In this quote, Job questions God about what will happen after someone dies, exemplifying the outlook where the sense of self was not interpreted in the physical sense, but rather the spiritual. Despite the implication, the question in itself, stated by Job and referred to in the article, shows lingering debates about what happens after death–or, in this case, the Friend's death. Yet, at the same time, this uncertainty also makes clear who the Friend was. Thus, in another sense, Job's quote is a rhetorical tool to invalidate the Friend's claims. Their first death answered Job's question: what happens after one dies? The Friend first died and was reborn again through the Holy Spirit. Now, however, they once again "gave up the ghost" and have *not* returned.[135] Furthermore, unlike the previous articles, these periodicals contain no section aimed at determining the Friend. Right after Job's quote, they refer to them as "Jemima Wilkinson, commonly called the '*Universal Friend*.'"[136]

The use of quotations around the Friend in both articles shows who they considered them to be and who they were not, as well as how they would be reframed. This "wonder" of sorts that

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[134] *Baltimore Patriot* (Baltimore, Maryland) XIV, no. 13, July 17, 1819: 3, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*; "Mortuary Notice," *Winyaw Intelligencer* (Georgetown, South Carolina) II, no. 188, July 28, 1819: 3, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[135] *Baltimore Patriot* XIV, no. 13, July 17, 1819: 3; "Mortuary Notice," *Winyaw Intelligencer* II, no. 188, July 28, 1819: 3.
[136] *Baltimore Patriot* XIV, no. 13, July 17, 1819: 3; "Mortuary Notice," *Winyaw Intelligencer* II, no. 188, July 28, 1819: 3.

the Friend symbolized, their claims of how they viewed themselves, their beliefs, and their religion, were considered more of a performance or a spectacle that held no validity. The article's discussion on the death of the Friend has a tone between fascination and pity, lamenting that "the second wonder of the western country has made her final exit."[137] In another sense, these sources reveal that many people were curious about the Friend and that they were even well-known, but not so much as a person, but again as the "wonder" that managed to deceive so many people.[138] The article claims that "much curiosity has been excited since her departure. The roads leading to her mansion were, for a few days after her death, literally filled with crowds of people who had been or were going to see the Friend!"[139] The article provided no further information about why so many spectators were present. It is likely that the ambiguity about the Friend drew huge crowds and increased the desire for outsiders to draw conclusions about the Friend.

From Warrenton, Virginia's *Palladium of Liberty,* and Wilmington, Delaware's *American Watchman*, these sources took a less *wondrous* approach surrounding the Friend. Taken from the *Pittsburgh Mercury*, the piece, "Jemima Wilkinson, the Arch Imposter," in 1819 contrasts incredibly despite the few months since the publication from the *Baltimore Patriot* and the *Winyaw Intelligencer*. Instead of focusing on the Friend's death with a fascinating interest, an anonymous author under the pen name T.H. details how the Friend deceived the public and the lengths they took to enforce their image. The reprinted article is a secondary account detailing the attempted murder of their neighbor, "Mrs. S.W.," by "Jemima Wilkinson" in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Yet, an account published in *The Freeman's Journal* back on August 22, 1787, described an event precisely similar except with the following differences: instead of the Friend

[137] *Baltimore Patriot* XIV, no. 13, July 17, 1819: 3; "Mortuary Notice," *Winyaw Intelligencer* II, no. 188, July 28, 1819: 3.
[138] *Baltimore Patriot* XIV, no. 13, July 17, 1819: 3; "Mortuary Notice," *Winyaw Intelligencer* II, no. 188, July 28, 1819: 3.
[139] *Baltimore Patriot* XIV, no. 13, July 17, 1819: 3; "Mortuary Notice," *Winyaw Intelligencer* II, no. 188, July 28, 1819: 3.

and "Mrs. S.W.," a believer by the name of Abigail Daton was accused of trying to murder another believer named Sarah Wilson. Daton wrote this article to attest to her innocence and version of events. As for the Friend, they were in Rhode Island.[140]

According to T.H., during prayer, "Jemima Wilkinson" stated to "Mrs. S.W." that she had received "'a message from God unto thee'" that "'this night thy soul will be required of thee.'"[141] Believing this to be accurate, "Mrs. S.W." felt "such a terror….as tongue cannot describe," for "this was on account of their having implicit faith in her [Jemima] as a prophetess."[142] Later that night, "Mrs. S.W." went to her chamber to sleep with the rest of the members, but only to find herself awakened twice by "Jemima" hovering over her. The third time "Jemima" came into the room, "Mrs S.W." was awakened by her bedmate being choked, spooking "Jemima." Based on the two visits by "Jemima" and the interrogation of her bedmate, T.H. claims that "Mrs. S.W." connected the attack to "Jemima Wilkinson."[143]

T.H. is seen again one month later in Raleigh, North Carolina's periodical, *Star*, in an article titled "Miscellany," which further details what distressed the author. The author relates another account about the Friend who this time tried to prove their "divinity and power by walking on a certain river."[144] When the Friend could not do that, they spoke to the crowd about "the important subject of faith, and endeavored by argumentation, to persuade her hearers, that if

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[140] Abigail Daton, "To the Impartial Public," *Freeman's Journal; or, the North-American Intelligencer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) VII, no. CCCXXXI, August 22, 1787, 3, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[141] "From the Pittsburg Mercury. Jemima Wilkinson, the Arch Impostor," *Palladium of Liberty* (Warrenton, Virginia) III, no. 27, September 24, 1819: 1, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*; "Miscellaneous Selections. from the Pittsburg Mercury," *American Watchman* (Wilmington, Delaware) 3, no. 13, August 28, 1819: 2, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[142] "From the Pittsburg Mercury. Jemima Wilkinson, the Arch Impostor," *Palladium of Liberty* III, no. 27, September 24, 1819: 1; "Miscellaneous Selections. from the Pittsburg Mercury," *American Watchman* 3, no. 13, August 28, 1819: 2.
[143] "From the Pittsburg Mercury. Jemima Wilkinson, the Arch Impostor," *Palladium of Liberty* III, no. 27, September 24, 1819: 1; "Miscellaneous Selections. from the Pittsburg Mercury," *American Watchman* 3, no. 13, August 28, 1819: 2.
[144] "Miscellany," *Star* (Raleigh, North Carolina) XI, no. 38, September 17, 1819: 2, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*..

she did not perform her promise, it would be owing to their unbelief."[145] Soon after, the author claims that:

> This Anti-Christ, and her apostles, agreed to circulate a report, that one of Jemima's apostles was severely indisposed. After this his death was announced; the day appointed for his funeral obsequies; and that Jemima, having lost her favorite and beloved apostle, would only suffer him to sleep four days in death, and after that, raise him again. This account spread far distant, and the concourse which assembled to witness this solemn transaction, was represented to be immense.[146]

Like the previous plan, this one was unsuccessful, too. According to the author, an "officer" was present, and when the latter wanted to "run his sword through the coffin" to ensure the apostle was genuinely dead, the believer in the coffin "forced off the cover of the coffin and walked out."[147] It is unclear whether this did occur, for I did not locate any other sources that corroborated this story. It is also crucial to note that the author was not present at any of these situations, for they state that the numbers of people were "represented to be immense" and the previous article was from a "report which circulated."[148]

Although T.H. did not witness either of these events, it is clear that they intended to reveal the lengths of deception by the Friend through narratives, but to what extent? Similar to the *Baltimore Patriot* and the *Winyaw Intelligencer*, there are no discussions about the Friend's claims of being neither male nor female. What was discussed or implied were the religious dangers to the social and sexual hierarchy under the Friend who was a "female" and a "lunatic."[149] The Friend is identified as the woman, "Jemima Wilkinson" and the "Anti-Christ."[150] This label not only supports the religious undercurrent offered by T.H. but also

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[145] "Miscellany," *Star* XI, no. 38, September 17, 1819, 2.
[146] "Miscellany," *Star* XI, no. 38, September 17, 1819, 2.
[147] "Miscellany," *Star* XI, no. 38, September 17, 1819, 2.
[148] "From the Pittsburg Mercury. Jemima Wilkinson, the Arch Impostor," *Palladium of Liberty* III, no. 27, September 24, 1819: 1.
[149] "Miscellany," *Star* XI, no. 38, September 17, 1819, 2.
[150] "Miscellany," *Star* XI, no. 38, September 17, 1819, 2.

what Rodney Hessinger describes during this period: “the shape of social structure and the very ordering of human behavior were at stake as radical new religious visionaries pronounced their messages and founded new churches.”[151] This notion could explain why T.H. includes a description of the Friend that suggests the erasure of the social order between men and women, while at the same time giving a definitive answer to reinforce it. Part of what suggested the erasure and deception of the Friend was that “she was masculine by articulation and appearance. Her jet black hair, which she always kept moist by frequent washing, made it assume a glossy appearance, with black eyes and fair complexion, gave her an interesting appearance. She possessed a commanding and audible voice.”[152]

Even though the Society of Universal Friends was slowly diminishing, this coincided with the beginning of the Second Great Awakening, during which new religious denominations were increasing. Concerning T.H. addressing the Friend as a woman and one who blurred what appeared to be behaviors of femininity and masculinity, Hessinger adds that women enjoyed greater opportunities that enabled personal autonomy from joining new churches, church-affiliated service, and even preaching.[153] To T.H., it becomes clear that these developments were far too dangerous for maintaining a religious as well as a societal patriarchal hierarchy. They conclude with the following sentences: “Her hardihood and effrontery upon this, as well as upon all other occasions has never been surpassed. How she escaped the vengeance of an indignant and insulted public, I cannot fathom; but the presumption must be, that her being a female, and viewed as a lunatic, was her passport and protection.”[154]

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[151] Hessinger, *Smitten*, 6.
[152] “From the Pittsburg Mercury. Jemima Wilkinson, the Arch Impostor,” *Palladium of Liberty* III, no. 27, September 24, 1819: 1.
[153] Hessinger, *Smitten*, 33.
[154] G, “Jemima Wilkinson, An Extraordinary Imposter,” *La Belle Assemblée: Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* (02, 1820): 71-73, ProQuest.

A year later in London, an article titled "Jemima Wilkinson, An Extraordinary Imposter" from the *La Belle Assemblée* republished T.H.'s story, nearly word for word, of the attempted murder of their neighbor, "Mrs. S.W.," by "Jemima Wilkinson" in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. However, this article contained several differences. "Mrs. S.W." was now called "Mrs. Wilkinson." In contrast, the Friend was called "Jemima."[155] The most intriguing part was the change in the author, who now adopted the alias "G."[156] These changes are one of the reasons that led me to conclude that part of publishing this article was not focused on the accuracy around the Friend, which not only further depersonalizes them, but also supports the idea that the focus of "accuracy" was aimed towards the constructs of sex and gender on a societal level. Despite the few changes, the reprint provides a minimal description of the Friend that does *not* go beyond a woman adopting masculine traits. After all, as the title says, the Friend is "Jemima Wilkinson, An Extraordinary Imposter."[157] Moreover, the periodical itself also supports this notion.

La Belle Assemblée was founded in 1806 by John Bell, a significant figure in London printing who was also involved with other periodicals, including *The Morning Post*, *The World of Fashion,* and *Bell's Weekly Messenger*. Out of Bell's various periodicals, *La Belle Assemblée* was one of the most significant women's magazines of its time, primarily focused on publishing items on fashion and instruction. Added to this piece of information, Britain at this time was tumultuous. This piece was published near the end of the Napoleonic Wars, in which Britain witnessed the persistence of revolutionary and radical spirit from the late eighteenth century, bouts of economic depression, industrialization, and mass protests against the government for

[155] G, "Jemima Wilkinson, An Extraordinary Imposter," 71-73.
[156] G, "Jemima Wilkinson, An Extraordinary Imposter," 71-73.
[157] G, "Jemima Wilkinson, An Extraordinary Imposter," 71-73.

reform.[158] According to Kathleen Wilson, these factors "stimulated a consciousness and activism that shaped women's national and gender identities in innovative and imaginative ways," so much so that "the spread of 'levelling' principles and political and gender anarchy soon mobilized conservative forces to attempt to strengthen distinctions between the feminine private and the masculine public spheres."[159]

For the *La Belle Assemblée* being a women's magazine, Koenraad Claes states that conservatives took these "battles" to the press, "including those primarily marketed toward women."[160] Keeping in mind that Eve Tavor Bannet described periodicals as "didactic…especially on gender issues," underneath "proving" the Friend was a deceiver, or perhaps within that argument, are modes of implicit instruction of and warning to mainly its female-assigned readers on behaviors deemed acceptable and unacceptable in Britain.[161] These actions were transgressive to the point that they were published in a woman's periodical that primarily informed and instructed British women. Based on the analysis and underlying issues outlined beforehand, it becomes evident that the Friend was *not* an example for women to emulate.

This piece of instruction can be further corroborated by David Hudson's biography of the Friend titled *History of Jemima Wilkinson*. In 1821, Hudson outlined the early life of Wilkinson and their years after 1776 as the Friend until they died in 1819. Interestingly enough, David Hudson was an American politician, writer, and lawyer in New York. The Friend had been engaged in various lawsuits up to and past their death in 1819. Such lawsuits primarily involved disputes over the quantity of land ownership between believers. One example before their death

[158] Claes, "Vindications and Reflections," 79-80.
[159] Wilson, "Nelson's Women," 564.
[160] Claes, "Vindications and Reflections," 67.
[161] Bannet, "Discontinuous Reading and Miscellaneous Instruction for British Ladies," 49.

was that they dealt with an ejectment suit by believers Eliza Malin, Sarah Richards's daughter, and her husband, Enoch. Unable to directly own property without signing under their legal name, the Friend allowed Sarah Richards to handle property under her name until her death.[162] Concerning Eliza and Enoch, they argued that this meant the land, Jerusalem, transferred to them, labeling the Friend as a trespasser.[163] They were later found not guilty in court for trespassing and were able to stay on their property until they died.

The amount of negative language presented in Hudson's publication in 1821 is critical to understanding how the Friend as a person became further obscured as a piece of instruction that coincided with the new nation's cultural as well as political ideals regarding sex and gender. Given that Hudson was present in New York around the ongoing legal battles concerning the property rights of Jerusalem, it is not surprising to see his focus on the Friend's accumulation of land, its relation to power, and how this negatively disrupted the sexual constructs around them onto others. Hudson quickly asserts within the biography that the Friend was a woman named Jemima Wilkinson, who influenced people to their cause and accumulation of power by having "accordingly exerted all the powers of her masculine mind."[164] Based on his perception that the Friend utilized masculine behaviors to obtain a certain level of autonomy outside of feminine circles, he recognized that the former contradicted these standard principles, undermining the "natural" order of power between men and women. They were a "destroyer" not of themselves but to those they encountered, even to the point that Hudson states that the Friend made women abandon their homes, husbands, and children.[165] His view of property ownership also then coincided with the power dynamics structured in marriage. As Kara M. French correctly puts it,

[162] Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend*, 180.
[163] Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend*, 180.
[164] David Hudson, *History of Jemima Wilkinson: a preacheress of the eighteenth century; containing an authentic narrative of her life and character, and of the rise, progress and conclusion of her ministry* (Geneva, Ontario County, N.Y.: Printed by S. P. Hull, 1821), 59.
[165] Hudson, *History of Jemima Wilkinson*, 220-221.

the refusal "to adhere to normative definitions of marriage…openly challenged the white male privilege enshrined within the legal principle of coverture."[166] In that case, the Friend's refusal to be married and to obtain and manage property posed as a threatening case of success *without* benefit to the patriarchal constructs of coverture.

Over time, he argues that the Friend exercised their "authority over her believers both male and female without opposition," which, as a result, did the following:

> This gave her an exalted opinion of the superiority of her own sex, and of their peculiar fitness to govern, and it is not improbable but in process of time, she reasoned herself into the belief that in some unlucky moment the order of nature had been reversed, that the empire of man was a mere assumption of power, obtained by force and fraud, and that under her happy auspices the fair sex were to be restored to those rights and dignities of which they had been thus despoiled.[167]

Here, the issue no longer revolves around the Friend as an individual who understood themselves outside masculine and feminine categories. There are no longer any debates about how their ambiguity threatens power hierarchies. The Friend is simplified as a woman but not a *proper* woman. As such, Hudson needed to rework the narrative of the Friend to do so effectively. As Carroll Smith Rosenberg states, "The American Republican, the Son of Liberty, the frontiersman, the empire builder had, obviously, to be male."[168] More centered around the development of early American society, "civic and liberal" thought "fused masculinity and republicanism."[169] Compared to the "irrational, extravagant, passionate, seductive, and dependent woman," the man "was 'independent,' 'enlightened,' 'commanding.'"[170] As Hudson himself instructs to readers, "It is not intended, neither is it necessary, to enter into an elaborate

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[166] Kara M. French, *Against Sex Identities of Sexual Restraint in Early America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 4.
[167] Hudson, *History of Jemima Wilkinson*, 165-166.
[168] Smith-Rosenberg, "Red, Black and Female," 354.
[169] Smith-Rosenberg, "Red, Black and Female," 354.
[170] Smith-Rosenberg, "Red, Black and Female," 345-347.

discussion" on the power dynamics between man and woman and its validity.[171] In fact, "it is very probable that more happiness is enjoyed…where these points are never made the subjects" of dispute.[172]

After the publication of Hudson's book, it becomes clear whose narrative on the Friend predominates in the early nineteenth century. Especially within New York periodicals – the state in which Hudson's work was published – most of those I found quickly praised Hudson's work for its *accuracy* concerning the Friend and their community. *The Pilot* in Cazenovia, New York, on March 14, 1822, provides an opinion from an unknown author who writes that Hudson's book "should be in every one's possession: it is a full exposition of the arts & frauds practised by that arch deceiver."[173] It also goes without question that this author believes Hudson's rendition of the Friend, saying his research "has been composed with industry and care, and style is far above the common order."[174] The account goes on to claim that Hudson deserves "great merit as a historical writer."[175]

The reconfiguration of the Friend's narrative in this source also utilizes it as a form of instruction and even a "history" that "is a useful lesson to all who survive."[176] Men specifically "cannot be too cautious in admitting the pretensions of those who make extraordinary claims to holiness and sanctity."[177] Like Hudson and previous authors, this author's claims and retelling of the Friend come down to the typical assessment of female deception. The author describes the Friend as "Jemima" whose "attacks upon the credulity of her followers were gradual and insidious, until at length, they were cheated to believe every thing she pretended."[178] To go as far

[171] Hudson, *History of Jemima Wilkinson*, 165.
[172] Hudson, *History of Jemima Wilkinson*, 165.
[173] *The Pilot* (Cazenovia, New York) XIV, no.709, March 14, 1822: 2, *NYS Historic Newspapers*.
[174] *The Pilot* (Cazenovia, New York) XIV, no.709, March 14, 1822: 2.
[175] *The Pilot* (Cazenovia, New York) XIV, no.709, March 14, 1822: 2.
[176] *The Pilot* (Cazenovia, New York) XIV, no.709, March 14, 1822: 2.
[177] *The Pilot* (Cazenovia, New York) XIV, no.709, March 14, 1822: 2.
[178] *The Pilot* (Cazenovia, New York) XIV, no.709, March 14, 1822: 2.

as to say for "men" to be wary further implies the author's intent to *reinforce* the power structure between men and women. However, for the author to have that intent shows that historical developments at this time were causing instability of hierarchies between men and women. On April 3, 1822, *The American Journal* in Ithaca, New York, published an advertisement for Hudson's work titled "Interesting Work."[179] In the column, the article provides the following description: "Just received, and for sale at the Journal Office Bookstore, *The History of Jemima Wilkinson, A Preacheress of the 18th Century; Containing an Authentic Narrative of Her Life and Character, and the Rise, Progress, and Conclusion of her Ministry,* by David Hudson."[180]

Even by 1829, David Hudson's story was still considered acceptable and truthful to the point that it became an advertised and referenced item to "understanding" the Friend. At the same time, the act of advertising and referring to Hudson's book further perpetuated the erasure of the Friend's narrative under one single perspective. For example, in *The Geneva Gazette, and General Advertiser,* on June 24, 1829, the periodical published a short travel column about traveling to the Seneca Lake and its border. Besides the unspecified "pleasurable reminiscences" to be found there, what one could "learn further" about "'Jemima Wilkinson' and her deluded followers."[181] Despite the threat the Friend imposed as articulated in previous sources, people still were curious to learn as much as they could about them, but a selective version of them. After all, the source *The Geneva Gazette* refers people to is the one and only "authentic and well written History published seven or eight years ago, by D. Hudson."[182] Similar to *The Pilot*, *The Geneva Gazette* places high value on Hudson's narrative over the Friend's own views through the word choice of "authentic" and "well written."[183]

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[179] *The American Journal* (Ithaca, New York) V, no.34, April 3, 1822: 3, *NYS Historic Newspapers*.
[180] *The American Journal* (Ithaca, New York) V, no.34, April 3, 1822: 3.
[181] *The Geneva Gazette, and General Advertiser* (Geneva, New York) XXI, no.3, June 24, 1829: 3, *NYS Historic Newspapers*.
[182] *The Geneva Gazette, and General Advertiser* (Geneva, New York) XXI, no.3, June 24, 1829: 3.
[183] *The Geneva Gazette, and General Advertiser* (Geneva, New York) XXI, no.3, June 24, 1829: 3.

The latest manuscript I could find from the online database within the nineteenth century was Macon Georgia's *Macon Weekly Telegraph* on January 1, 1835, and January 8, 1835. This two-part article titled "Jemima Wilkinson" brings together the religious and political-cultural debates regarding sex and gender with the Friend as an example. The author, with the pen name "Harbinger," has a goal similar to that of David Hudson. Harbinger cites Hudson's work in the second part of the article, stating that this work gives "a pretty full account" of "an instance of the facility with which many become the prey of the most extravagant imposters and wild delusions."[184] The Friend is discussed to a certain extent, but mainly as a point of instruction that when one person disregards acceptable constructs and behaviors, it causes others to follow. This "tale" starts with a young woman by the name of "Jemima Wilkinson," who has an "aversion to everything called labour," to which "no authority, persuasion, nor entreaty could overcome her dislike to domestic attention and industry."[185] The dislike is so great that they not only rejected the roles assigned to women but also neglected "the affairs of the family."[186] This example is what perhaps Harbinger refers to as the "facility" or means which might predispose one to delusion. For the Friend, leaving behind their appropriate roles guaranteed them to be influenced by "a sect of fanatics, called "New Lights" or "New Light Baptists" who were "these enthusiasts" who "went all for the Spirit, and received into their community none but those who fancied themselves to be constantly guided by an illumination directly from Heaven."[187]

The author claims that after repeatedly visiting the sect, "the Bible and religious books occupied her attention, which diminished her passions for dress and visiting" to the point where

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[184] "Jemima Wilkinson," *Macon Weekly Telegraph* (Macon, Georgia) IX, no. 29, January 8, 1835: 3, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[185] "Jemima Wilkinson," *Macon Weekly Telegraph* (Macon, Georgia) IX, no. 28, January 1, 1835: 3, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[186] "Jemima Wilkinson," *Macon Weekly Telegraph* IX, no. 28, January 1, 1835: 3.
[187] "Jemima Wilkinson," *Macon Weekly Telegraph* IX, no. 28, January 1, 1835: 3.

"she secluded herself from society."[188] This quote touches upon roles expected from women, but it also reveals its connections with religious debates of the Second Great Awakening. Rodney Hessinger touches upon how "enthusiastic religion, a mode of religious expression that relied on the arousal of believers, was seen as too hazardous," especially within the confines of male and female constructs.[189] Though it started with the Friend, people who were "poor and ignorant" became their believers, and soon after, "the better informed and wealthy."[190] Ultimately, the Friend became reduced to a "folly and madness to which men and women may be driven."[191] Nevertheless, taking what Harbinger said at the beginning of their article, "Great is the truth and might above all things and will prevail."[192]

Conclusions

Although we might think discussions would cease with the Friend gone, their passing allowed critics to share their stories with greater attention and claims to authenticity. Without the Friend and their believers, no one would be left within the inner circles to defend the Friend's life, values, community, and experiences. In conjunction with the Friend's death, ongoing developments in early America further fueled the continuation and reconfiguration of the Friend's story. Critics relied on concepts of the two-sex system in a way that not only reinforced the validity of the system but also cemented the memory of the Friend as the deceitful and delusional woman by the name of Jemima Wilkinson. These narratives of the Friend would take precedence over those voiced by the Friend themselves, coming back full circle in new variations from historians in the twenty-first century.

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[188] "Jemima Wilkinson," *Macon Weekly Telegraph* IX, no. 28, January 1, 1835: 3.
[189] Hessinger, *Smitten*, 8.
[190] "Jemima Wilkinson," *Macon Weekly Telegraph* IX, no. 28, January 1, 1835: 3.
[191] "Jemima Wilkinson," *Macon Weekly Telegraph* IX, no. 29, January 8, 1835: 3.
[192] "Jemima Wilkinson," *Macon Weekly Telegraph* IX, no. 28, January 1, 1835: 3.

Conclusion

In the last few decades of the nineteenth century, the wide range of responses and variance in sex and gender underwent another form of scrutiny and regulation. Jen Manion describes this form of scrutiny as a period of "scientific methods" being applied to "social problems."[193] The rise of scientific fields like sexology and criminology "sought to understand, classify, and label expression of gender or sexual desire that were deemed rare or abnormal."[194] Those who maneuvered outside the constructs of man and woman "would be classified and vilified by judges, doctors, and scientists in the name of law and order, in an effort to deter others from challenging the gender roles of their assigned sex."[195] Underneath this development, the act of regulation itself goes to show that expressions of sex and gender *beyond* the boxes of man and woman were not wholly new.[196] However, when comparing the change over time between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of America, Rachel H. Cleves thus contends that "Early American sex and gender variance was much more possible, and even much more accepted, than historians have tended to assume."[197] With respect to Cleves' statement, this study on the Friend has shown how dynamic sex and gender performances were in Early America. By solely looking at their critics, one might assume that variance in sex and gender performances were less accepted or less common; however, incorporating the views of the Friend's believers dismantles this assumption and replaces it with a view that sex and gender variance *beyond* the two-sex system were more common and acknowledged.

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[193] Jen Manion, "The Queer History of Passing as a Man in Early Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 16, no. 1 (2016): 11, https://doi.org/10.5215/pennlega.16.1.0006.
[194] Manion, "The Queer History of Passing as a Man," 11.
[195] Manion, "The Queer History of Passing as a Man," 11.
[196] Rachel Hope Cleves, "Beyond the Binaries in Early America: Special Issue Introduction," *Early American Studies* 12, no. 3 (2014): 459, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24474866.
[197] Cleves, "Beyond the Binaries in Early America," 467.

According to Susan Juster, the Friend "appeared at a particularly anxious moment in the history of American gender politics, a moment when…Americans had 'broken the line that divided the sexes.'"[198] At the time of the Friend's existence, transatlantic and regional developments within the North American colonies enabled new attitudes toward independence and created a new social and political identity. The discourse of liberty underscored by principles of the Enlightenment and the Great Awakening set forth a stage for colonists like the Friend to experiment and create new relationships within the political, social, cultural, and religious spheres. Most prevalent to the Friend was the result of the enhanced diversity of American Christianity and its concepts of religious liberty. However, the historiographical generalization of the unification of such spiritual and secular interests during and after the struggle for independence diverges under the examination of the Friend. These principles that historians have described as limited concerning sex and the inklings of gender paradoxically enabled the Friend to experiment beyond the binary categories of sex and gender and call into question human categories.

It is through this outlook, *beyond* the rigid categories of man and woman, that my research illustrates and argues the Friend's sense of self as "spiritually unsexed." This argument considers their beliefs and actively refutes outside narratives that have taken precedence over their story. At its core, this paper argues for taking the Friend seriously as themselves and the perceptions they have put forward of themselves as the starting point towards understanding their history. The analysis of the documentation by them and their believers reveals a spiritual understanding that validated the Friend's sense of self on a metaphysical plane and a physical one. As a result of this analysis, the Friend's sense of self is respected in which both believers and the former could experiment outside standard norms based on language, and teachings

[198] Juster, "'Neither Male Nor Female'," 360.

focused less on the corporeal form. Of course, the Friend was not accepted by all whom they encountered. Despite the attempts of critics to effectively judge the Friend within categories of masculinity and femininity, these defined parameters of sex are what also acted as obstacles for critics to discern the Friend's sense of self. Instead of critics providing proof of the Friend's self-perception within a two-sex system, critics would inadvertently validate the Friend through their judgment by the repetitive debates to clarify the latter's "true" sense of self as well as fears of a political structure that prescribed limits only inclusive of men and women. These discussions continued even after the Friend's death, but to a greater degree in validity and precedence. Without the Friend and their community, no one close could refute critics, thus cementing the narrative of the Friend under misinformed memories that reinforce the validity of the two-sex system and situate the Friend as Jemima Wilkinson, the female imposter.

By starting my analysis with the Friend's self-perception and ending with the narratives of their critics, I shift the emphasis from the words of non-believers to those of the Friend and their believers. Yet even beyond the Friend, what my work adds to United States history—regardless if it concerns religious, cultural, and political spheres—is the *integration* and *reminder* of how dynamic early America's notions of sex and gender were, the extent to which these notions maneuvered and overlapped, and how dynamic the lives people lived were as well. Queer history in America is not separate from U.S. history, nor are its discussions and the people a part of it. There is a need to incorporate and acknowledge that reminder, which can start with rethinking the Friend as "spiritually unsexed," but also by rethinking histories themselves. In other words, histories are made up of lives. The stories of men or women do not exclusively make histories. And that past lives that make up these histories were not solely desired, understood, or lived either as men or women.

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