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Prophets, Friends, Conversationalists: Quaker Rhetorical Culture, Women's Commonplace Books, and the Art of Invention, 1775–1840

Beth Ann Rothenmel

This essay examines the rhetorical significance of commonplace books kept by twenty-two Quaker women. Artifacts of remembrance, these books provide us with a detailed portrait of Quaker rhetorical culture during that era. The women who keep these books do more than just catalog and copy rhetorically significant texts. They participate in and help shape their rhetorical culture by reenacting invention practices central to the creation of powerful Quaker discourse. More specifically, they reveal the potential of three practices—prophecy, friendship, and conversation—to function as sites of rhetorical invention. As they weave into their books texts where prophecy, friendship, and conversation frequently give rise to powerful discourse, they affirm the value of these practices to their community, but they also provide insight into the particular purposes and processes at work when a creator engages in such practices. In this essay I analyze these frequent occurrences of prophecy, friendship, and conversation, arguing that early Quakers, especially Quaker women, understood successful invention not as a private and autonomous endeavor, but as a social process. Furthermore, their beliefs about invention have implications for later generations, influencing the rhetorical practices of women both within and outside the Quaker community.

In 1775 a young woman from Philadelphia named Catherine Haines began a commonplace book, transcribing on the first page a poem celebrating the power of writing “to give shape to reason wisely found.” Including poems and prose about nature, faith, and virtue, Haines’s commonplace book seems at first much like that of other eighteenth-century women and men, a space for self-improvement exhibiting polite learning of the day. Yet Haines was a member of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, and also copied into her book deathbed prophecies, eulogies for lost friends, and letters of testimony written by and to

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members of the Quaker community. Quakers believed that their words, like their lives, were a means for doing God's work in the world. In the words of Isaac Pennington, to be a Quaker was to constantly look for ways to be "a witness for God and to propagate His life in the world" (186). Given this core Quaker belief, Haines's commonplace book may be read not only as a private undertaking meant to give shape to reason, but as a tool for connecting with others and witnessing to the truth.

This essay explores the rhetorical significance of commonplace books kept by twenty-two Quaker women during the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Artifacts of remembrance, these books provide us with a detailed portrait of Quaker rhetorical culture during that era. By rhetorical culture, I mean that body of explicit and implicit rhetorical values, habits of mind, composing processes, themes, and conventions important to a certain group of people and their construction of discourse. The women who keep these books create, for example, a record of the genres, authors, and topics that define the rhetorical cannon important to their culture. However, they do more than just catalogue and copy rhetorically significant texts. They participate in and help shape their rhetorical culture by reenacting invention practices central to the creation of Quaker discourse. More specifically, they reveal the potential of three practices—prophecy, friendship, and conversation—to function as sites of rhetorical invention. As they weave into their books texts where prophecy, friendship, and conversation frequently give rise to powerful discourse, they affirm the value of these practices to their community; however, they also provide insight into the particular purposes and processes at work when a creator engages in such practices. In this essay I analyze these frequent occurrences of prophecy, friendship, and conversation, arguing that early Quakers, especially Quaker women, understood successful invention not as a private and autonomous endeavor, but as a social process. Furthermore, their beliefs about invention have implications for later generations, influencing the rhetorical practices of women both within and outside the Quaker community.

By focusing on Quaker women's commonplace books, I add a new resource to current scholarship on early Quaker rhetoric, which has tended to draw on sermons, tracts, and testimonies in its discussions of Quaker rhetorical culture (Bauman, Graves). I also show that commonplace books are valuable sources in our analysis of rhetorical history, especially women's contributions to that history. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century commonplace books like those of Quaker women have only recently begun to receive attention from rhetorical scholars, who previously tended to view them as merely showcases for the writings of others, and not tools for significant intellectual development. For instance, Ann Moss has explored the central role commonplace books played during the classical and Renaissance periods in helping young men to develop their powers of invention, but she has also asserted that by the eighteenth century, they played no such role, instead functioning as catalogs of loosely linked texts of interest to the individual keeper.

My essay takes a different position on the role of invention in commonplace-book keeping, resting on assumptions like those articulated by Susan Miller in *Assuming the Positions: Cultural Pedagogy and the Politics of Commonplace Writing*. Miller argues that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century commonplace books offer more than just “elitist jottings.” She examines a large collection of commonplace books kept by upper-class Virginia women and men, linking their use to the ancient art of *Pedaeia*. Commonplace writing, she explains, might be understood as

ongoing constitutive teachings, a continuous process of cultural pedagogy. Society’s “workings” become visible in the purposes, imagined audiences, content, and outcomes of the texts that specific cultures make possible, even those already canonized. From this rhetorical, not semiotic perspective, it is acts of writing, not interpreted texts, that warrant analysis by humanists interested in revealing the texture of a culture. (4)

In other words, students of a culture construct that culture by using such equipment as commonplace books. Makers of commonplace books do not merely transmit “schooling perceptions” from one to another but engage in “participatory policy making through cultural continuities and social inventions” (7). It follows that the commonplace books Miller’s subjects created say much about the discourse mechanisms of self and social construction crucial to their specific culture, both past and present.

Like Miller, I believe that commonplace-book keeping helps to foster particular habits of mind and domains of rhetorical knowledge crucial to a particular culture. By studying books like those kept by Quaker women, we may learn a great deal about how their culture constructed its discourse. In their books these women “mak[e], remak[e], and enscon[e] in memory” complex acts of discourse that reveal “the texture of their culture” (Miller 4). I read their transcriptions not as copies but as *reenactments* of powerful rhetorical activity—a means by which they could fulfill George Fox’s admonition to let their “life, actions, words, and conversation preach” (*Works*, 106). Rewriting the words of others was a way to reinvent that text, sharing in the processes of its construction and dissemination. In this essay I argue that through these reenactments they teach themselves and others the arts of Quaker invention, specifically, the power of prophecy, friendship, and conversation to lead to compelling discourse. Prophecy, friendship, and conversation are more than reoccurring themes, functioning rather as *signifying practices* crucial to Quaker construction of discourse. In her work on invention, Janice Lauer defines signifying practices as “those inventional strategies that are typical of particular peoples and communities” (10). By weaving these three “inventional strategies” throughout, the women give their books shape and meaning, but they also give shape and meaning to Quaker rhetorical culture, especially to foundational beliefs about invention.

I begin with a sketch of the eighteenth-century Quaker context in which the women's commonplace-book keeping occurred, discussing some of the reasons women in their community kept commonplace books. I also examine Quaker views on language that lead me to read their transcriptions as reenactments. I then turn to the invention practices embedded within these reenactments—prophecy, friendship, and conversation—exploring what they reveal about the nature of Quaker invention. I show, for example, how the books represent prophecy, friendship, and conversation as practices that require the creator to listen and respond to both outer and inner voices; that may be employed to explore both secular and religious concerns; and that are fruitful for any individual who uses them. My final section asserts that well into the nineteenth century, prophecy, friendship, and conversation continue to be understood as powerful sites of invention, especially among Quaker women activists of that era, many of whom were educated in Quaker schools where commonplace books were widely in use. Women such as Lucretia Coffin Mott would, for example, employ similar strategies in constructing their own discourse on issues such as abolition and women's suffrage. In using these strategies to produce discourse for a wider audience than the Quaker community, women like Mott suggest the influence that Quaker women's commonplace-book keeping may have had on the public rhetoric of later generations of American women.

By showing the contributions Quaker women made to understandings of invention, both within and outside the Quaker community, I add to current feminist scholarship, particularly recent work on conceptions of invention as a social process. In "Rhetoric in a New Key: Women and Collaboration," Andrea Abernathy Lunsford and Lisa Ede propose a "polyphonal model of communication," one where discourse grows out of "dialogic and relational acts." They assert that to bring this mode better "into focus," we need both historical and present day models, histories, but also "herstories." They also note that recent scholars have begun to tell those stories, finding traces of contemporary social invention practices in the rhetorical cultures of specific communities, such as nineteenth-century African-American women (261). This essay argues that late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century Quaker women also have a significant "herstory." Through their commonplace books, they teach themselves and others how engaging in social invention practices such as prophecy, friendship, and conversation might lead to powerful discourse on matters of both secular and religious concern.

"Piece Books" and the "Teacher Within": A Quaker Context

As noted, research on Quaker rhetoric has tended to focus primarily on sermons, tracts, and testimonies of well-known Quakers. My analysis draws instead on twenty-two commonplace books kept by Quaker women between

the years of 1775–1840.¹ Among them is Milcah Martha Moore's commonplace book, which she compiled in the late 1770s, and which Catherine Le Courreye Blecki and Karin Wulf published in 1997.² The books I examined are primarily copy books, or "piece books" as Quakers called them, comprised of transcriptions of poetry and prose written by authors other than the makers of the books themselves. Many, but not all, of these texts are written by Quakers, both men and women. Some come from published sources, such as newspapers or miscellanies, while others are unpublished texts circulated by hand around the community. On some pages, makers practice their penmanship, copying letters and words multiple times. A few of the books kept after 1810 include detailed drawings alongside texts, and a few from later in the century do include some original writings, such as journal entries, drafts of letters, and essays. Most of the books include entries made over one or two years, while a few appear to have remained in use over the course of several decades.

But what else do we know about the women who kept these books, the general uses to which they put them, and the cultural and social milieu they inhabited? As Quakers, these women belonged to a community that is often celebrated for having regarded women and men as spiritual equals; such equality did not extend, however, to economic, domestic, or political realms. Additionally, most of the keepers were likely white. Although they would eventually play an active role in abolitionism, Quakers seldom welcomed people of color into their religious communities. We know, furthermore, that Moore, who created her commonplace book while in her thirties, came from an economically elite Quaker family. Yet many of the books were kept by young adult women attending Friends schools, which served students from varied economic backgrounds; one was kept by a preacher, who left behind family relationships and worldly comforts to do the work of her faith.³

Preachers may, in fact, have been among the first Friends to make consistent use of commonplace books, using them to record materials useful to their work. Early Quaker women preachers such as Margaret Askew Fell have attracted the interest of feminist rhetorical scholars, who have explored underpinning beliefs in spiritual equality between men and women and the opportunities afforded women to

¹These commonplace books are housed at the following archives: American Antiquarian Society; The Brown University Archives; Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College; The Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Quaker and Special Collections, Haverford College Library. A special thanks to Christopher Densmore, Curator at Swarthmore College, and to Ann Upton and Diana Peterson, Librarians at Haverford College.

²The Quakers disowned Moore for marrying a first cousin, but she remained very close to Quaker friends and relatives, and her commonplace book circulated among Quakers. In the 1780s she opened a school and in 1787 published an anthology of texts to be used by teachers, *Miscellanies, Moral and Instructive* (Wulf 18–22).

³Most of the Quaker commonplace books available in archives were kept by women. The ones kept by men tend to date back to the early eighteenth century.

participate in rhetorical culture. As Linda J. Webster has asserted, “Quaker women preachers were part of a historical, radical tradition” (202). With the blessing of fellow Quakers, seventeenth-century women preachers traveled through England and New England working to convert non-Quakers through both spoken word and written materials. Although they have received less scholarly attention, historian Rebecca Larson shows that Quaker women of the eighteenth century continued to become preachers, even as the Society of Friends entered a period of “quietism,” having achieved wider acceptance and established itself in England and the Colonies (7). They directed much of that preaching at other Quakers, as concerns about excessive materialism and war prompted calls for reform within the sect.

Well-known eighteenth-century preachers such as Catherine Payton and Sophia Hume published their exhortations, providing scholars with rich examples of original Quaker compositions by women.⁴ But eighteenth-century Quaker preachers, both men and women, also employed commonplace books or shared journals as part of their training and missions, including in them testimonies, descriptions of their travels, and letters, some of which recounted dreams and visions, written both by themselves and other “weighty” or well-known Friends (Larson). Among the books I analyze is one by Rebecca Jones (1739–1818), one of the few commonplace-book keepers whose biography is known.⁵

Yet most of the commonplace-book makers were not preachers, as eighteenth-century commonplace-book keeping became a more widespread practice, one linked to Quaker views on the importance of education for both men and women. In her introduction to Moore’s commonplace book, Wulf asserts that among late-eighteenth-century Quakers, especially women, commonplace books were part of a “specifically Quaker tradition that encouraged literacy for women and created a circulating library of Quaker materials” (24). Manuscripts helped to spread “inspirational materials among a broad constituency” and supported women’s self-education (25).

By the late-eighteenth century, commonplace books were also part of the curriculum at various Quaker schools, schools led by women such as Rebecca Jones (Wulf 30). Although boys and girls were often taught separately, Quakers were among the earliest groups in the colonies to set up both primary and secondary schools open to all, and women taught in those schools from the early eighteenth

⁴Catherine Payton, 1726–1794, a preacher from England who made frequent trips to the colonies, addressed the Pennsylvania Legislature in 1775, urging members to resign rather than sacrifice pacifist principles by supporting the French and Indian Wars (Larson 50–54). Sophia Hume was the daughter of an Anglican official who “returned to the faith of her Quaker grandmother Mary Fisher” and who was famed for both her oral and written exhortations (Larson 85).

⁵In 1784 Jones left the school she ran to travel and preach in England. She was part of a contingent of women preachers arguing that a women’s monthly business meeting be established in London (Larson 230).

century (Bacon, *Mothers*, 59–62). Young women attending such schools kept many of the books I reviewed. Catherine Haines (1775–1776) was, for instance, one of Jones’s students (Wulf 31). Although she kept her book until 1837, Lydia Rathbone notes that she began copying texts while attending a Friends school in Smithfield, Rhode Island. Rebecca Yarnall (1802) and Elizabeth Hewes (1816) kept their books while at Westtown Boarding School, a well-known Quaker school still in existence today. Commonplace books were used at such schools to help students learn the rudiments of writing. Westtown Boarding School describes its early “writing school” as requiring essay writing, dictation, and the “copying of favorite texts into a student’s personal ‘Piece Book.’”⁶

However, commonplace books were not just spaces for dictation and transcription of texts important to the keeper and community. “Piece books” functioned as one of the curricular tools for providing students with a “guarded education.” Internal reforms within the faith including shifts towards quietism motivated late eighteenth-century Quakers to create a curriculum that would reconnect the community with what Quakers call the “Inward Light of Christ.” Quakers were no longer mostly converts, “convinced” by the word of God spoken through Quaker preachers. Concerns that religion had become for Quakers a formality rather than a deep and personal experience fueled a belief that the next generation needed a formal education steeped in Quaker values (Larson 199). As Quaker scholars Mary Finn and Christopher Densmore report, such an education did not mean schools should teach religion “directly. Children, instead, were to be constantly exposed to religious influence.” This meant educating them “in civil and useful matters while protecting them from dangerous influences that might cause them not to hear or heed the Divine Guidance of the Teacher Within” (147). By copying texts embodying Quaker values and beliefs into their “piece books,” students would hopefully find themselves immersed in such Divine Guidance.

Quaker views on the connection of faith to language suggest, furthermore, how transcribing other writers’ texts into a commonplace book could awaken the “Teacher Within.” Keeping a commonplace book might be fruitfully compared to the process of attending Quaker worship, where members gather together in silence to await the “apocalypse of the word of God” (Graves 16). This word could come from any member of the community, as all Quakers have the capacity, and the responsibility, to serve as channels for the Holy Spirit. Quakerism has historically been an experiential faith, and not one reliant on systematic doctrine; thus,

⁶Other Quaker schools included the Nine Partners Boarding School in New York (opened in 1796, now called Oakwood) and the prestigious New England Friends Boarding School in Rhode Island (opened in 1819, now called the Moses Brown School) (Bacon, *Mothers*, 82). Specific monthly or yearly meetings often supported Quaker schools, but they were also often small and individual operations, begun in the homes of Quakers, and open to boys and girls of varied denominations (Bacon, *Mothers*, 59–62). Also mentioned in the commonplace books are Concord School, Elmvale, J and J School, and Woodbury.

Quakers have turned less to the Bible and more to the message of God coming from living members. As scholar of Quaker rhetoric Richard Bauman notes, for early Quakers “persuasion” was achieved not merely “through the faculties of the intellect or the emotions.” Powerful discourse occurred when a Friend paid attention to “the Light within” and *acted* “according to its leadings,” testifying before others to “the Truth.” Such rhetorical “behavior would arouse the Spirit of God in those who witnessed it” (“Aspects,” 73–74); as long as listeners believed the speaker’s words emanated from the Inward Light of Christ, those “words would reach to the Spirit of God in those who received them because the Spirit was the same in all people” (Bauman, *Let*, 130). I would argue that through their transcriptions, the women creating these commonplace books would have felt themselves deeply implicated in this experience of discovery and expression as they reenacted the “leadings” of others.

In the next section I will show how through these reenactments, commonplace-book keepers bear witness not just to powerful *words* but to behaviors—to a specific set of signifying practices crucial to the process of rhetorical invention. Whether kept by students, women at home, or preachers, these practices—prophecy, friendship, and conversation—reoccur over and over again throughout the books, as the women teach themselves and others about the purposes and processes that give rise to powerful discourse. By reenacting texts that reveal the generative capacity of prophecy, friendship, and conversation, they share in the experience of helping their community to hear the Light within; they also provide us with crucial insight into specific ways of knowing and being central to Quaker rhetorical invention.

Quaker Invention Practices

“Sweet is the Harp of Prophecy”

Quaker women’s commonplace books are linked to one another through their choice of genres (testimonies, poems, letters, deathbed accounts, published and unpublished); the selection of writers (both public and nonpublic Quakers, many of whom are women); and through their similar uses (as part of a guarded cultural pedagogy both at home and in schools). Yet as I have argued, the commonplace books do more than transmit texts and topics from one generation to another. Their makers also weave into them portraits of specific practices with heuristic power, such as the art of prophecy.

For Quakers all proper religious speech was “prophetic” in nature (Bauman, *Let*, 83), so it seems natural that in their books the women would bear frequent witness to the power of *prophecy*, both as a theme for exposition and as a process leading to discovery. Prophetic preaching played a crucial role in spreading their faith and establishing their communities, as Quakers took to heart that famous Biblical teaching quoted by Margaret Askew Fell: “your sons and your daughters

shall prophecy [sic]" ("Women's").⁷ But the commonplace books also represent prophecy as a practice important to the construction of other types of texts besides preaching, including letters and poems. These prophetic texts often take the world to task for falling into disbelief and worldly preoccupations. In *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, James Darsey explores the marks that an Old-Testament-based prophetic tradition left on American reform discourse from the Revolutionary War forward. Like the Old Testament prophets that Darsey describes in defining that prophetic tradition, Quaker prophets cast themselves as messengers from God and "commanded the people to use their senses," drawing on vivid symbolism to correct others' "defective vision" (19).

Dreams and visions serve as one crucial resource for Quaker prophets in generating powerful symbolism.⁸ These dreams and visions do play a corrective role, but they also show a Quaker desire to generate prophecies that affirm the already extant faith of members of the community. For instance, Sarah Potts, who began her book in 1809, provides a vivid account of an apocalyptic dream had by Samuel Fothergill. In the dream "the trumpet sounded with a distinguishing energy" and while the unbelievers were left behind with "chains" "fastened about your necks," he "beheld the multitudes arise." Other entries made by the women represent prophetic visions and dreams as a resource for Quakers at times of intense oppression. Elizabeth Richardson transcribes a letter from William Leddra, "written the day before execution in Boston for being a Quaker and refusing exile." In his letter, Leddra presents himself as a passive recipient of God's message, the Spirit coming upon him as a "morning star, like a flood," filling him with the "joy of the Lord." He then turns his critical gaze on the world, asking: "What can the wrath and spirit of men that lusteth to envy . . . do unto one that is hid in the secret places of the almighty?" Richardson's transcription reveals Leddra employing prophecy to condemn those who would kill him, but also to provide comfort to himself and to those Friends he leaves behind, as he compares himself to a "dove" at the window of the Ark awaiting freedom.

While these visionary prophecies come from weighty friends, the women also include prophecies with their roots in more personal interactions, such as when Catherine Haines (1775), Jane Mott (1781), Margaret White (1787), and Rebecca Yarnall (1801) record the early-eighteenth-century prophetic poem, "Sarah Perrin's Vision . . . after the Death of her Mother." Julie Sutherland identifies certain rhetorical choices made by Quaker women engaged in vision-based prophecy, such as exhorting the listener and writing in a dual voice, both of which are represented by Perrin's poem. Written in carefully rhymed couplets by an English Quaker woman and originally published as a Quaker broadsheet, the poem urges listeners to take note of the momentous nature of the "Heav'nly" vision. It also

⁷Joel 2:28.

⁸The rest of Joel's verse reads: "your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions."

employs a dual voice, as the narrator “overcomes her awful fear” to listen to the “solemn message” delivered by her now celestial mother: “If love divine on Earth we gain, / knowledge in Heaven we soon obtain.” Such a dual voice mirrors the internal dialogue practicing Quakers aimed to have with the Inward Light of Christ—dialogue that would lead to moving prophecies. The vision ends as abruptly as it begins with an “unutterable light” conveying “the vision out of sight.”⁹ But even as it is now out of sight, the narrator, like each woman transcribing the poem into her commonplace book, may prophesy for all those left behind the comfort and knowledge she has gleaned from her vision.

The makers of the commonplace books include visions that prophesy the outcomes of important social issues as well. For Quakers, issues of social justice have always been intertwined with issues of faith, leading eighteenth-century Quakers to seek spiritual solutions for political and social problems such as war, consumerism, and slavery. In 1788 Rebecca Dudley fills six pages with an anonymous account of a dream from 1777, in which the dreamer warns of the “deplorable state of the ungodly” and chastises America for failing to “remember the cruel Bondage and oppression of the poor Blacks which shall now Return upon your own heads.” In 1781 Abigail Mott shares a “day dream” of an American Army Officer in which peace, “the Quaker’s theme/ Pervaded through the Earth” and “the promis’d day took birth.” Similarly, Milcah Martha Moore includes a number of political poems employing prophetic exhortations, such as Hannah Griffitts’s poem “Wrote on the last Day of Feby. 1775. Beware of the Ides of March,” which invokes the soothsayers attempting to warn Caesar as a way of describing the increasingly hostile rhetoric preceding the Revolutionary War (246–247). Moore also transcribes “Wrote by the Same upon Reading a Book entitled Common Sense,” a poem where Griffitts critiques Thomas Paine for extremism and envisions him as “the well guess’d snake beneath the grass” (255–256). Through such entries the women represent prophecy as a visionary space for generating outward looking social critique—for turning Quaker beliefs into worldly action.

Just like the Old Testament prophets Darsey describes, Quakers give themselves credibility by drawing on visions, as their words seem to emanate from somewhere other than the conscious self. Yet as Bauman notes, when engaging in prophecy, Quakers needed to ensure that their words came from God and were not an “expression of human will.” They also needed to examine their words to ensure that they were “intended for others and not just for one’s own spiritual nurturance” (*Let*, 128). Such beliefs are reflected in Catherine Morris’s 1816 transcription of a verse from Cowper’s *The Task*: “Sweet is the harp of prophecy, too sweet / Not to be wronged by a mere mortal touch / Nor can the wonders it records be sung / To meaner music, and not suffer loss” (lines 747–750). Morris’s

⁹Available as a broadsheet at the Library of the Society of Friends, London (Perrin).

transcription reminds readers that prophets must critically examine their leadings, ensuring that those leadings reflect “properly motivated religious speaking” (Bauman, *Let*, 25). Such expectations may explain why Quakers of this period sometimes commented that self-doubt inhibited them from speaking (Webster 218). But Morris suggests that such doubts may be put to rest, weaving into the pages that follow numerous examples of “properly motivated” prophecy from varied men and women of her community. These include exhortations about the consequences of excessive ambition and the inevitability of physical death. By including these prophetic texts, she affirms the sense of responsibility Quakers felt to generate discourse through prophecy—to listen for and share their inner leadings with the community.

The commonplace books also suggest an important element of Quaker prophecy that may distinguish it from models such as the one Darsey describes, which emphasizes the “exclusivity” of the prophet—the need to be “set apart from the people” (18). Granted, Quakers were especially drawn to the words of Friends whose gifts had been “acknowledged” by the community, and they sought to distinguish themselves from a world falling into corruption; however, they also believed that since all had the Inward Light within, every individual could and should “give voice to God” (Larson 58). The Quaker prophet is not seen as exceptional, but rather aims to set an example for others—to help others envision in themselves their capacity to belong to the “sons and daughters who shall prophecy.”

The commonplace books affirm this belief that all souls, regardless of age and gender, as well as race and ethnicity, have the capacity to prophesy on behalf of the Spirit. In 1779 Ruth Hoskins, of Burlington, NJ, records in her book a poem “said to be composed by Catherine Payton when about 18 years of age,” in which Payton proclaims the wisdom of a God that “gave to all things birth.” Catherine Haines (1775) includes non-Quaker Philis Wheatley’s poem “Atheism,” which is full of prophetic exhortations on the “consequences” of “unbelief.” Although the poet is not identified by name, Haines notes that it was “compos’d by a Negro girl of above Fifteen years of age in the space of two hours.” While such a comment calls attention to the unusual nature of the work for having been written by someone of color, it also demonstrates that powerful invention is not limited to white Anglo-Saxons. Its presence in Haines’s book acts, perhaps, as a critique of those Quakers who allowed people of color to attend meetings, but opposed their membership.

Ultimately, the women’s commonplace-book reenactments of such texts reveal prophecy to be a central invention strategy, one drawing on foundational Quaker beliefs. Through their many entries, they construct and disseminate a view of prophecy as an experience available to all who listen carefully to the Inward Light of Christ, and as a means for generating discourse addressing social as well as religious concerns. To engage in powerful prophecy, furthermore, means consulting one’s dreams and visions for knowledge, participating in an inner

dialogue with the Light, and examining one's "leadings" critically to ensure their authenticity.

Friendship: A "Heavenly Treasure"

The commonplace books suggest a second practice central to Quaker rhetorical invention: *friendship networks* that give rise to acts of writing and speaking. Inscribed onto these books are the kinship and community networks Quaker women inhabited on a daily basis, networks that they represent as crucial to the creation of discourse.

Scholars have explored the role of sociability in eighteenth-century American culture more widely. However, as Albert Classen and Marilyn Sandidge emphasize in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, the term had a more radical meaning for Quakers, representing "spiritual relationships." Friendship meant a "shared belief in the Light within" and a movement towards an "ideal community of 'friends/Friends.'" Since they were said to experience the same Inward Light as men, the soul being gender neutral, Quaker women were able to participate more fully, forming networks of Friends that "helped foster a culture of active women preachers and missionaries" (110). Friendship meant the fulfillment of teachings like Askew Fell's exhortation that "we are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love, and unity" ("Letter"). Such friendships had also sustained various Quakers when facing persecution in the faith's early years.

The keepers of the commonplace books represent the practices of friendship as important sites of invention, experiences that provided Quaker women in particular with motivation for and occasions for their rhetoric. For example, the Quaker commonplace books distinguish themselves from others of the period in their inclusion of a network of women's voices. We hear these voices loudly in the frequently transcribed poems of Quakers Hannah Griffiths and Susanna Wright, and in testimonies from women preachers like Catherine Payton, the networks of women who consistently made themselves visible in the Society of Friends. But also evident are the networks that sustained Quaker women in their everyday lives. Elizabeth Hughes, for example, includes an address heard at her own 1793 yearly meeting in which Hannah Cathrall shares various concerns with her "[d]early beloved sisters." Such networks are also evident in a commonplace-book practice that becomes common among young women in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, whereby they transcribed in their commonplace books favorite verses chosen by friends and peers. In 1802 Westtown student Rebecca Yarnall devotes a whole volume to the choices of her friends, who often include the note "copied for Rebecca Yarnall" along with their own names and the date. Phebe Peirce (1821) begins her book with a meditation on friendship followed by selections from friends on the same theme.

The power of friendship experiences is also an explicit theme for investigation in both the poetry and prose works included. Margaret White (1787) transcribes the

poem “Real Friendship” and Susanna Lownes (1796) the poem “On Chusing a Friend.” Rebecca Yarnall (1801) copies several extracts on the virtues of friendship, while in 1824 Elmvale student Elizabeth P. Wright includes a parable about the dangers of friendlessness, where “rabbits fight over trifling details” and, thus, die in the clutches of “the hounds” who chase them. While death and sorrow are frequently referenced, engaging in friendship helps one to discover answers to that pain, as evident in lines recorded by Anna Marsh Chandler in 1828 while attending Westtown: “Friendship to every generous mind, / opens a heavenly treasure, / There may the sons of sorrow / show sources of real pleasure;” or in the poem “consolatory Lines to a Friend in Affliction” recorded by Susanna Lownes in 1796. In 1789 Rebecca Dudley includes Quaker preacher Elizabeth Jacobs’s “Epistle in True Love, containing A Farewell Exhortation to Friends Families,” underscoring the belief that friendship is not merely a private matter, but rather a resource for inventing material that will speak to the larger community.

The commonplace books also reveal the power of friendship to serve as a source when creating eulogies for both well-known and less-known Quakers. Like Milcah Martha Moore, Catherine Haines devotes a section of her 1775 commonplace book to eulogies written by Hannah Griffitts, copying “To the memory of my much Esteemed Friend Daniel Stanton, who exchanged this life for a better,” “On the Death of a belov’d Mother,” and “To my Friend HM on the death of TM her son.” Such eulogies emphasize the community’s social connections. They begin, for instance, by describing the deceased’s relationships within the community (sister, friend, parent, preacher). After praise for both “afflictions and virtues,” they end with the poet imagining the deceased’s movement into a new realm, and with advice to the still living on how to follow the virtuous to that realm where friendship will be renewed. Catherine Haines’s book shows the potential effects of these rhetorical events on their intended audiences in its inclusion of both Hannah Griffitts’s poem on the loss of Susan James, and a response to that poem from one of James’s loved ones; Rebecca Dudley (1788) also reveals the power these events have in the face of more public tragedy, including “Verses made on the Death of Six young women and a boy who were Drowned.” Running through these various transcriptions is the familiar exhortation among Quakers “to let their lives speak,” “that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them” (Fox, *Journal*, 263). The eulogies join members of the community in friendship, giving voices to the lives of those who are no longer present; their reproduction by commonplace-book makers reenacts and disseminates the power of those lives throughout the community.¹⁰

¹⁰Quaker eulogies resemble the nineteenth-century deathbed accounts of Methodist women described by Lisa J. Shaver in *Beyond the Pulpit: Rhetorical Roles in the Antebellum Religious Press* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2012).

Addressing one another as “Friend” was one tool used by early Quakers to create a nonhierarchical community where members work together to spread the faith. The commonplace books reveal that friendship also functioned as a site of rhetorical invention. The women’s transcriptions reenact friendships that help creators invent both private and public discourse, and they assert that the discourse generated through interactions with friends will intellectually and emotionally nurture the creator and the audience.

Conversation: Speaking Truth to Power

The women keeping these books exhibit these extensive friendship networks in ways that reveal their potential to give rise to powerful discourse, but they also call attention to a third and interrelated practice, *conversation*. While Quakers are often better known for their use of silent worship, Friends must also use their outward senses to convey spiritual life through “speaking, praying, praising.” A larger community of Friends will be achieved when we “hear and see one another” (Robert Barclay, qtd. in Bauman, “Aspects,” 73). Testifying during meeting is one way to achieve this goal. Yet as Bauman asserts “any conversation in which the truth was spoken could serve the religious ends of Quakerism, whether or not it dealt with specifically religious matters. . . . [S]peech of whatever nature, was not a special and separate faculty in the Quaker view, but essentially a kind of action, to be considered for rhetorical purposes together with every other living act” (74). Conversation both during and outside of Quaker meetings provided members with a chance to “test” and develop their ideas and beliefs within a group.

In keeping with these beliefs, the voices reenacted through the commonplace books are not solitary and fragmentary, but represented as in conversation with varied audiences. All the books contain epistolary prose and poetry on religious, historical, and social themes, representing writers addressing both groups and individuals. Milcah Martha Moore places Susanna Wright’s poem imagining Ann Boleyn’s letter to King Henry the Eighth near the beginning of her book. Catherine Haines (1775) transcribes a letter by Catherine Payton to “the students who attended the Quakers meeting on the 7th and 8th of the 3rd mo, 1759, at Oxford.” Margaret White (1787) offers a translation of “a letter from Quakers in France to Edward Fox in consequence of an advert from him,” offering to compensate those who suffered imprisonment for the faith. Although she gives no author, in 1823 Anna Marsh Chandler includes verses “written on hearing a sermon preached by Elias Hicks.”¹¹ These transcriptions represent the roots of

¹¹Chandler’s 1823 commonplace book lists Concord as her school, but the 1828 book lists Westtown. Elias Hicks, a controversial preacher known for his abolitionist work, helped found the Nine Partners School in New York.

powerful rhetoric in dialogic interactions with other members of the community at specific times and places.

Keepers of the books also juxtapose texts to audiences with responses, such as in 1781, when Elizabeth Hughes records Elizabeth Webb's letter to Anthony William Boehm, a chaplain in the court of England, along with his reply. Several other women include a document that suggests that Quaker conversations often involved logic-driven disputation. Quaker scholar Michael Graves writes that although Quakers considered reasoning as secondary to the "Spirit" speaking within, they highly valued knowledge generated through it (72). Although twenty years apart, Catherine Haines (1775), Elizabeth Hughes (1781) and Lydia Rathbone (1816) include Mary Morris Knowles's letter exchange between an Anglican "clergyman," called Clericus, and Lavinia, "a woman among the people called Quakers," who argues for her faith. As Judith Jennings reports in her book about the English Quaker Knowles, Lavinia employs her knowledge of the scriptures to defend her Quaker faith with confidence. The repeated transcriptions of Knowles's work, with her "knowledge of Quaker theology and her commitment to Christian liberty" (14), provide examples of the emphasis Quaker invention practices placed on intellect as well as intuition—more specifically the principles of reason and debate as tools for their faith and their discourse.¹²

While Quaker conversation rests on the assumption that there is an ultimate shared truth to be found, the commonplace books suggest that conversation is not intended to be "uncritical." The commonplace-book keepers represent argument as an essential tool for bringing both women and men into the Light through belief and action. Contemporary Quakers have made the command to "speak truth to power" a central cornerstone of their way in the world, attributing this phrase to such eighteenth-century Quakers as John Woolman. Not surprisingly, Moore includes a now well-known poem by Hannah Griffiths, "The Female Patriots," that strongly asserts the superiority of conversations marked by negotiation to prevent armed conflict, but that does not shy away from strongly-worded critique. A "woman of honest invention" is one who joins other "daughters" "united in this," using pen and voice to "puzzle" the schemes of warring generals. A similar conviction that meaningful conversation does not shy away from debate appears when Rebecca Jones transcribes "Virtue and Good Order," which is a letter to preacher Sophia Hume. The letter praises Hume's writing for its "true poetical Fire," but then critiques her preaching, noting that it possesses "too much Tautology" and that it has been "long & tedious," thus leaving little room for conversation or debate. The commonplace books affirm that bringing peace, love, and unity to the world are rhetorical goals important to their community, and yet

¹²The dialogue was published in the 1770s and then reissued in 1805 as a *Compendium of a Controversy on Water Baptism* (Jennings 156).

speakers and writers will only achieve these goals if they listen critically to their own and others' discourse.

Other transcriptions stress the power of conversation to build knowledge on varied subjects. Moore includes a poetic exchange between Hannah Griffitts and Susanna Wright about the pre-revolutionary war pressure to abstain from tea, along with an exchange written on the occasion of Wright's sixty-fourth birthday, both of which show one writer using conversation to build on the other's ideas. In 1779 Ruth Hoskins transcribes the same birthday dialogue in her book. In her part of the dialogue, "To Susa. Wright," we see Griffitts praising the elder poet Wright for her "Distinguish'd view." Indeed Wright's view may have stimulated Griffitts's own invention processes, as Griffitts went on to write many poems throughout her life, and Hoskins may have been similarly encouraged through her transcription of Griffitts's poetic praise. Late eighteenth-century teachers such as Rebecca Jones, in fact, had their students frequently copy poems by Griffitts and Wright (Wulf 30), as evidenced by the eighteenth-century books kept by Ruth Hoskins, Catherine Haines, and Elizabeth Hughes.

The commonplace books represent conversation, then, as another powerful tool for invention. In their research on collaborative writing, Lunsford and Ede describe two particular modes of collaborative communication, both present in the transcriptions. Some of the commonplace-book conversations, such as the one Lavinia has with Clericus, seem highly goal oriented, about solving a problem through argumentation, suggesting Lunsford and Ede's "hierarchical mode." But other conversations, like those in Griffitts's and Wright's poems, represent a "dialogic mode," one where invention arises out of more loosely structured and "fluid" interactions, where "articulating and working together to achieve goals is as important as the goals themselves" (257). As the women keeping these commonplace books reenact both types of collaborations, they depict conversation as a source of inspiration and a means to develop, revise, and refine one's ideas. Their reenactments likely also gave them confidence, a sense of themselves as fellow creators in a supportive, socially and spiritually engaged, and expressive network.

"Words from Friends": Quaker Commonplace Legacies

These women's commonplace books provide us with a compelling portrait of Quaker beliefs about rhetorical invention. Read alongside each other they suggest the social nature of invention for practicing Quakers. Their very reasons for keeping commonplace books support this assertion, as the women use them to reenact the voices of others and in doing so awaken the "Teacher Within." Furthermore, their frequent representations of prophecy, friendship, and conversation show that they believe that all people could fruitfully engage in the arts of invention, and that the most powerful creators would do the following: seek divine revelation by listening closely to and dialoguing with the Inward Light of Christ; draw knowledge from dreams and visions and share that knowledge spontaneously through vivid

discourse; find inspiration in friendship and employ language to sustain and create both personal and social ties; test out, further develop, and revise one's thinking by engaging in both unstructured dialogue and debate with fellow friends as well as those outside the community; and employ all of these practices to develop discourse that addresses both social and religious issues.

Some might argue that the absence of their own original compositions from these books weakens their contribution to rhetorical culture. Given the Quaker belief that anyone at any time might be moved by the Inward Light to speak, we should not conclude that because they include no original writing, the women did not employ prophecy, friendship and conversation as invention strategies for their own speaking and writing. Evidence suggests that along with creating commonplace books, Quaker women had opportunities to compose their own discourse. After all, the books are full of exemplars from varied female Friends, weighty and non-weighty—Friends who likely kept commonplace books as well as writing and speaking their own texts. For example, Hannah Griffiths used a commonplace book both for collecting and composing (Blecki 64), and Hannah Callender Sansom kept both a commonplace book and a diary (4).

Similarly, many of the commonplace books include texts with no authors, and some of these are short verses that might have been composed by the recorders themselves. These might be school assignments, since Quaker schools required students to do their own writing as early as 1750. In that decade educator and abolitionist Anthony Benezet had his female students composing “short literary pieces” (Bacon, *Mothers*, 62), and “essay writing” was a part of the Westtown curriculum from its earliest days (Westtown). Lydia Rathbone (1816) includes in her book the poem “On the Death of Mercy E. Read,” which she notes was “composed by” Catherine Hazard, from the Nine Partners Boarding School, in 1815. It is also worth noting that Quaker women would have had opportunities to put these invention strategies to work through their own personal letter writing, by speaking or writing correspondence for women's business meetings, and by speaking when gathered for worship. In her diary, Hannah Callender Sansom notes the names of various women speaking each week at meetings.¹³

Regardless of whether they do actually use these strategies when composing their own discourse, I would argue that by sharing their books with friends, family, and schoolmates, they help to create and disseminate their beliefs about invention, beliefs that remain important to Quakers, especially women, well into the nineteenth century. Commonplace books remain in use among nineteenth-century Quaker women, some of whom would become well-known abolition and suffrage activists. Although their books often blur the lines between journals, scrapbooks, diaries, and anthologies, they continue to represent prophecy, friendship, and

¹³For example, Sansom mentions Rebecca Jones and Ann Moore (88), Grace Fisher and Betsey Morris (91), and Priscilla Davies and Marget Ellis (123).

conversation as activities crucial to powerful rhetorical invention. Consider Quaker Abigail Field Mott, an early nineteenth-century activist and author of *Observations on the Importance of Female Education and Maternal Instruction with their Beneficial Influence on Society*, a text that blends the “sentiments” of others with the author’s own reflections.¹⁴ No commonplace book from the early years of her life exists, but one she kept in the 1820s and ‘30s is available. It contains materials that she later would blend into her published text, suggesting the influence that commonplace-book keeping may have had on her own invention process. Her commonplace book also contains texts that enact moments of prophecy, friendship, and conversation. These include prophetic stories about the intellect of Biblical women, a piece on “Kindness in Conversation” from the *Christian Advocate*, and an extract from Lydia Sigourney’s “Letter to Young Ladies.” Tucked into the back of her commonplace book is also an account of a “vision” she had while ill. In the vision she finds herself in the meeting house, her head resting in the lap of a “dear friend,” listening to another female friend speaking: “All was delivered in the most pleasing language, and in the tones of sweetest sound I ever heard.”

Likewise, in the late 1820s Elizabeth Buffum Chace, a former student at the New England Friends School who later became president of the American Suffrage Association, used her commonplace book to record biblical teachings important to her. She also made diary entries, describing her approaches to parenting her children in their early years, as well as her experiences of loss when these children died. As she wrestles with these losses, her entries often read as conversations between herself and the Inward Light. She also kept scrapbooks, pasting into them published letters she wrote to newspaper editors about abolition, suffrage, and prison reform. Included is her 1843 letter quitting the New England Yearly Meeting because of its “continued proslavery position,” in which she critiques in prophetic language its members’ “apathy and indifference concerning the crying sins of a world lying in wickedness.”

In her notebooks, Lucy Chase, a student at the New England Friends Boarding School in the 1830s who went on to teach in freedmen’s schools, juxtaposes her own original compositions with copied texts and lectures. Her compositions on issues like slavery warn of a “passive submission” to “ridiculous doctrines,” weaving dreams and visions as well as dialogue into the narratives. Friendship is also an impetus for her writing, especially in a book she kept in the 1870s, as she highlights her own personal network with several pages of “words from friends,” most of whom are women.

¹⁴ Abigail Field Mott was a member of the Nine Partners Boarding School Committee in the early nineteenth century (Faulkner 31). In 1826 she also published *Biographical Sketches and Interesting Anecdotes of Persons of Colour*.

Margaret White's 1787 commonplace book, which I have already cited several times, also shows how women of later generations continued to use these books to disseminate such practices as prophecy, friendship, and conversation. White uses her book to transcribe many of the texts described above and to compose some short verses of her own. Eighty years later, in the 1860s and 70s, it serves as a scrapbook, perhaps for a daughter or granddaughter, with various newspaper clippings pasted into it. These never cover up the transcriptions of the eighteenth-century texts, but instead are found on the pages where White had practiced her penmanship. Like the texts White includes, they highlight Quaker beliefs about invention. Noteworthy for the keeper are the efforts of Quaker teacher-turned-preacher Sarah Smiley to win an audience through prophetic discourse, descriptions of the impassioned anti-slavery arguments of Anna Dickinson, and an article about the efforts of Lucretia Coffin Mott to use logic-based argument as well as prophetic language to convince Quakers to admit members of color.

Mid-nineteenth-century commonplace books like these provide us with a snapshot of how Quaker invention practices might have been carried forward. They have implications as well for our study of the rhetoric of influential nineteenth-century Quaker women active in the abolition and suffrage movements. Margaret Bacon and Glenna Matthews describe the influence Quaker women, among the first American women to engage in public discourse, have had on these movements. Linda J. Webster argues similarly that they have taken an "oratorical lead in social reform" throughout the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries (197), contributing some of the feminist movement's most influential rhetors, such as Lucretia Coffin Mott, Susan B. Anthony, and Alice Paul (18–20). I would argue that the legacy women like Coffin Mott bring with them into this movement includes invention practices like those disseminated through the commonplace books—practices they employ in constructing discourse for much larger and more varied audiences.

Although no commonplace books kept by Coffin Mott are currently available, she was a student and later a teacher at the Nine Partners Boarding School where piece book writing was part of the "guarded education" then commonly offered at Quaker schools. Carol Faulkner describes the rich array of Quaker and non-Quaker texts which Coffin Mott encountered while attending the school (29). Coffin Mott's own discourse reveals the possible influence that the signifying practices of prophecy, friendship, and conversation may have had on her contributions to public discourse on issues of pressing social concern. As Lucy Hogan and Martha Solomon assert, Coffin Mott's rhetoric grew out of a "deep" process that included "work[ing] out ideas," and "drawing on readings, conversations, and experiences" (44), the sort of deep reading promoted through the keeping of commonplace books. In their analysis of her 1849 "Discourse on Woman," Hogan and Solomon also identify "conversational" qualities in her rhetoric, linking them to her Quaker upbringing.

Similarly, Coffin Mott's discourse has been described as prophetic. Coffin Mott was both a minister to fellow Quakers and a public speaker, known for using a similar style of speaking for varied audiences (Hamm 249). In her "Discourse on Woman," she begins with a lengthy defense of women's right to "prophecy," and she exhorts her audience with that Old Testament teaching familiar to her from her Quaker upbringing: "the first announcement, on the day of Pentecost, was the fulfillment of ancient prophecy, that God's spirit should be poured out upon daughters as well as sons, and they should prophecy" (252). We might, in fact, add Coffin Mott to that list of social reformers who Darsey argues reveal a prophetic tradition in American public discourse. However, unlike many other early reformers employing prophecy, Coffin Mott was influenced by her specifically Quaker heritage. She also relied on networks of women, stressing the importance of friendship and collaboration in her work as an activist and setting an example for others in the movement (Faulkner).

The discourse of other nineteenth-century women activists with Quaker roots also suggests the influence of Quaker views on invention. Elizabeth Chandler (1807–1834) attended a Friends school in Philadelphia, writing her famous prophetic poem "The Slave Ship" at the age of eighteen. In the next decade she helped select, edit, and write articles for an abolitionist newspaper, arguing forcefully for female social activism (Faulkner 62). Abbey Kelley attended the New England Friends School and then taught in a Quaker school, where she likely honed her "sharp-tongued" debating skills that drew so much public attention to the abolitionist movement as well as women's right to speak publicly (Sterling 3), and which ultimately led her to leave the Quakers. Sarah Mapps Douglass, a progressive African-American educator and lifelong practicing Friend, attended Quaker schools. Douglass went on to develop close friendships with abolitionists such as the Grimké sisters, sharing with them in letters and conversations her critique of the ongoing racism people of color faced within the Society of Friends (Bacon, *Sarah*).

These women helped to influence the abolitionist and feminist movements, bringing with them specific beliefs and practices shaped by their Quaker heritage and important to the art of invention. While this essay has focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I conclude by suggesting that Quaker women's commonplace-book keeping may also have left its mark on contemporary feminist theories about invention. Several decades ago, Karen LeFevre helped us to understand more fully how invention could be viewed as a social act and not the act of an "atomistic individual." As part of her effort to "broaden rather than restrict the territory to which the term 'rhetorical invention' might apply," she asserted that invention was both implicitly and explicitly social. It is implicitly social in that it involves a "socially learned process of internal dialogue with an imagined other" as well as an "internal social construct of audience." It is explicitly social in that it often involves "other people as collaborators . . . 'resonators' who nourish the development of ideas." It is also explicitly social in that it is influenced by "social

collectives" (2). Scholars such as Lunsford and Ede have built on her work, identifying the possibilities that arise for us when we engage in invention processes that are "relational and dialogic" (261). This study suggests that by examining such sources as Quaker women's commonplace books, we might find in our past examples of cultural groups who voiced similar perspectives on the arts of invention, representing it and teaching it as both a relational and dialogic act.

These books may also help shed light on the roots of certain more specific invention practices that have come to make up the "commonplaces" of contemporary feminist rhetoric. In her work on invention, Janice Lauer surveys the field, identifying several invention strategies—signifying practices—that are highly social in nature and that are advocated by feminists today. Among them she lists collaborative planning and dialogue with others, as well as visionary thinking and drawing on intuition. Yet she also reveals how labeling these strategies as feminist may result in essentialisms, such as when scholars view them as exclusively women's special powers, or set them in opposition to other typically "masculine" powers such as disputation and debate (113). Whether our invention practices be liberating or limiting, investigating our past understandings of these practices, and the communities that shaped those understandings, helps us to see our practices in a new light. Within Quaker women's commonplace books, I see invention practices akin to these modern feminist commonplaces reenacted and disseminated. Close study of the particular cultural traditions in which such practices are situated reveals that they exhibit greater complexity than contemporary critique sometimes suggests. Quaker visionary prophecy draws on both physical *and* intellectual experience, making use of internal dialogue that is deeply probing; effective collaboration means developing elaborate personal and community friendship networks committed to similar convictions, but also able to use dialogue to explore, critique, and debate ideas in a search for social justice.

These invention practices have roots in a faith tradition that emphasizes the power of the Inward Light within all humans regardless of race or gender to invent and reinvent the self and the world around. To construct a commonplace book was to learn how to generate personally and publicly transformative discourse. Like the spacious meeting houses in which Friends still hold their meetings today, commonplace books served as spaces for invention, connecting participants to their history and providing foundations for inward and outward rhetorical action.

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