Abstract

Standard histories of nineteenth-century Quakerism note that fiction reading was prohibited or strongly discouraged in the Religious Society of Friends, and multiple public documents from the period indicate that pronouncements against reading fiction, especially for young people, were ubiquitous until almost the end of the century. However, records found in minutes kept by Quaker-only reading groups or in the library holdings of Quaker reading societies show that, in private or semi-private settings, Quakers were regularly acquiring fiction as early as the 1820s. Through an examination of some of these records and the histories of some Quaker reading groups, this article complicates our historical understanding of how the Religious Society of Friends adapted to a new information technology, engaging a powerful tension between their testimony of integrity and their belief in continuing revelation.

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Bibliography of scholarship on Nineteenth-Century fiction. New Books in Nineteenth-Century British Studies ("This site offers complete publication information for scholarly works on the British Romantic and Victorian periods. Here you can find authors, titles, publishers, prices, ISBN numbers and publishers' descriptions for new and forthcoming critical works, anthologies, and critical editions of nineteenth-century British materials. In addition, original reviews are available for selected works." Maintained by Kirsten L. Parkinson, University of Southern California.) Nineteenth-century literature and culture have proved a rich field for interdisciplinary studies. Since 1994, books in this series have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, gender and sexuality, race, social organisation, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought - in short, culture in its broadest sense. In the nineteenth
century, no assumption about female reading generated more ambivalence than the supposedly feminine facility for identifying with fictional characters.