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In Two Troubled Souls, Aaron Spencer Fogleman offers a compelling, deeply researched, and accessibly written microhistory of one couple’s journeys throughout the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. His study focuses on Jean-François Reynier, a French Swiss Huguenot, and his wife, Maria Barbara Knoll Reynier, a Lutheran from the German territories, both of whom became Moravian missionaries. Although they were in many ways exceptional, Fogleman narrates their story in order to “illuminate an underside of empire” (13), to demonstrate the complexity of social relations within the larger structures of the Atlantic world and the ways ordinary people navigated cultural boundaries and resisted control of those in power. In doing so, he explores both their spiritual and physical journeys and illustrates how individuals attempted to change the multiracial, multietnic worlds they encountered and were changed by them. Fogleman uncovers internal conflicts between husband and wife that we seldom encounter in the historical record as Reynier and Knoll sought to find their places in the Atlantic world.

Fogleman’s study is divided into four parts. In the first part, he follows Reynier’s journey from his childhood into the Atlantic world. Born in 1712 in Vevey, Switzerland, Reynier was the son of French Huguenot refugees who provided him with a privileged and well-educated childhood. Fogleman maintains that two factors from Reynier’s youth—growing up in a family of medical practitioners and the multiple waves of pietist reform that swept his hometown—shaped his later choices. Reportedly motivated by internal spiritual conflict and a thirst for knowledge, he migrated to Pennsylvania in 1728 at the age of sixteen. Although he began as an indentured servant, by 1734 Reynier had made his way to Ephrata, where he sought solace in the austerity and asceticism of the newly founded community. Reynier quickly became dissatisfied with the commune’s practice and went into the woods, where he lived in total isolation, meditating and fasting until he went mad. Members of the Ephrata community brought him back and treated him for his madness. But before long, Reynier left and...
traveled first to New York and then to Georgia in his quest to find spiritual satisfaction.

In Savannah, Reynier joined a newly arrived group of Moravians who intended to start a mission among local Yuchi and Creek communities. Here, he met and befriended John Wesley, with whom he worked at the Yuchi mission, practicing medicine, until he became critical of the Moravian leaders. In early 1739, after a brief stint in Purrysburg, South Carolina, working at a mission to educate the children of white colonists as well as their slaves, Reynier set sail again—this time on a return trip to Europe. Fogleman argues that Yuchi and slave women, who created working relations with the Moravians for their own purposes, were important to the early success of the Yuchi and Purrysburg missions. While both missions ultimately failed, they provided Reynier with important lessons on how to live and work with people from other cultures. According to Fogleman, Reynier’s first time in the British colonies was a period of transformation—one in which he “had tried and failed to change people in America; instead, the Atlantic system he entered had changed him” (70). It revealed his contentious, self-righteous personality but also his resilience and adaptability; “it changed him from an immigrant into a seeker ready to travel throughout the Atlantic World” (71). Upon returning to Europe, Reynier went first to England and then to see Count Nicolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf, the leader of the Moravians, in Wetteravia, in the German territories, the training center for Moravian missionaries. Here he joined the other single brothers in the community. By early 1740, Moravian leaders began to talk to Reynier about marriage and a calling to a mission in Dutch Suriname.

In the book’s brief second section, Fogleman traces Maria Barbara Knoll’s path into the Atlantic world and recounts the couple’s wedding. In contrast to Reynier’s early life, no extant records have been found to document Knoll’s origins prior to her acceptance into the Moravian community in 1740. Fogleman admirably relies on the stories of other women to contextualize Knoll’s life and decisions. Nevertheless, given the disparity of information and sources, combining both stories about their different journeys into the Atlantic world might have been a more compelling and elegant choice. Fogleman argues that, in contrast to Reynier, who chose migration, Knoll first encountered the Atlantic world inadvertently—as a result of her choice to join a spiritual community. Shortly after her arrival at Wetteravia, Moravian leaders relied on the lot to choose Reynier and Knoll for marriage. It is not clear that they knew one another before their wedding ceremony. The ceremony itself, conducted in March 1740, was an elaborate and lengthy celebration culminating in sexual intercourse, considered a sacrament by the Moravians and observed by the couple who had counseled them before their marriage.
From Wetteravia, Fogleman follows the Reyniers to the Caribbean, where the Moravians sent them as missionaries soon after they married. They went first to Dutch Suriname, where they participated in the third attempt to start a mission among the colony’s Caribs, Arawaks, and enslaved Africans. Relations between the Moravians and Dutch authorities were tense as religious conflicts in the Netherlands spilled over into the colony. Jean-François quickly became a leader and assisted the small group of missionaries in purchasing a plantation outside of Paramaribo in order to support themselves. He practiced medicine among the slaves of surrounding plantations. When the missionaries suffered from illness, Maria Barbara became an excellent nurse. The plantation and the mission failed, but the Reyniers continued working to convert and heal slaves on a plantation further inland. When Zinzendorf sent new leaders to replace the Reyniers, the couple set sail for Pennsylvania but not before a brief stay on the Danish island of Saint Thomas. While there, the Reyniers joined the Moravian mission, where Jean-François brought useful experience in sugar cultivation and Maria Barbara briefly found a spiritual community of women among the African women at the mission. During their stay in the Caribbean, the Reyniers honed their medical skills and gained valuable experience working with peoples from other cultures. In each of the places the couple lived, they were outliers—foreign subjects who belonged to a radical religious sect. As they discovered repeatedly, surviving and converting souls in the Caribbean required a constant struggle to navigate safely through the interstices of imperial powers.

The final section of the book focuses on the bizarre twists and turns of the Reyniers’ tumultuous marriage as Fogleman carefully analyzes the polemical documents that reveal their private lives. In June 1743, the couple traveled to New York and then to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where the tensions in their marriage began to emerge. Initially, Maria Barbara “was happy to be in a flourishing Moravian community again, with many other women and work and spiritual activities” (182). Jean-François, however, had become completely disillusioned with the Moravians. When he determined to leave Bethlehem and the Moravians’ communal style of living in favor of an individualist approach to spirituality, Maria Barbara refused to join him. What followed were periods of separation and indecision as they struggled to negotiate how they would fulfill both their spiritual needs and their marital commitments. They moved to Oley, Pennsylvania, where Jean-François wrote an autobiography that was both a narrative of his marriage and a polemic against the Moravians. Published by a printer in the free imperial city of Frankfurt am Main, the story was widely circulated throughout the Atlantic world. Now the center of public scrutiny, the couple continued to live in conflict. By 1762, Maria Barbara
convinced Jean-François to move to Ephrata, where the following year she “took the final step toward achieving the communal lifestyle for which she had longed and joined the Ephrata cloister” (221). She lived with the women in celibacy and he with the men. Unable to accept the cloistered, communal way of life, however, Jean-François shortly left and moved to the Shenandoah Valley. For two years they lived separately and faced the prospect of divorce. But in 1765 Jean-François returned to the cloister and convinced Maria Barbara to leave with him. They fled to Georgia, where they lived out the rest of their lives “away from the limelight of revival and public debate between competing religious groups and publishers” (233). In the last decade of their lives, they seem to have found a compromise in their living arrangements. Jean-François worked as a medical practitioner and Maria Barbara as a nurse. She joined the Lutheran congregation at Ebenezer and found, at last, a spiritual community of friends.

The Reyniers’ story is unusual in the extent to which it exposes the inner workings of a couple’s marriage and sexual relationship and their attempts to find spiritual fulfillment. Fogleman skillfully teases out the broader significance of their experience from the polemical literature to offer readers a journey through the eighteenth-century Atlantic world from the perspective of these two “troubled souls.” In doing so, he uncovers the “informal actuality” that Bernard Bailyn suggests lies beneath the formal legal structures Atlantic scholars have identified.¹ He successfully demonstrates the processes of resistance, negotiation, and adaptation individuals experienced as they navigated within and against social, religious, and political structures of power. He also offers us an unusual glimpse of the internal dynamics of one couple as they “alternatively resisted and accepted both the Atlantic system and each other” (259).