

LIFE: THOREAU'S WORLDLY TRANSCENDENTALISM (*Cornell University Press, 2004*).

*Shakers, Mormons, and Religious Worlds: Conflicting Visions, Contested Boundaries.* By Stephen C. Taysom. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. Pp. xvi, 260. \$35.95.)

In his comparison of nineteenth-century Shakers (The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing) and Mormons (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), Stephen Taysom focuses less on doctrine than on how "boundary markers" became vital to each group's religious self-definition (pp. 2–3). These boundary markers—Shaker celibacy and Mormon polygamy, for example—are defined as practices that "set [Shakers and Mormons] apart from the broader culture" (p. 203). Ultimately, Taysom argues, the two groups developed separate and distinct models of "outsiderhood," which served to promote and strengthen internal bonds and religious identities. Nineteenth-century Mormons, he claims, aggressively sought out conflict with mainstream America because their leaders relied on an "episodic crisis-driven tension model." By means of this approach, leaders fostered communal cohesion by (1) adopting doctrines that would elicit a strong negative response from "the host culture," then (2) ramping up tensions with belligerent rhetoric, thereafter (3) capitulating to external demands in the moment of crisis, and eventually starting the process all over again (p. 199). Shakers, on the other hand, adopted a "stable high-intensity moderate-risk tension model" by selecting boundary markers that would generate manageable tensions short of crises, and then encoding mainstream American culture's less extreme negative responses into their self-understanding as a persecuted and chosen people of God (p. 200). Although Taysom's focus on boundary markers addresses an important and often neglected element of religious identity formation, his models are nevertheless flawed because they are largely based on inconsistent and overly narrow analyses.

In the first two chapters, Taysom compares the physical boundaries of nineteenth-century Shaker and Mormon communities. In chapter 1, he conceptualizes Shaker space in terms of a "culturally postulated world" and an "experienced world" in order to explain the differences between Shaker rhetoric, which posited the outside world as evil, and Shaker practice, which negotiated ways in which

guests from that unclean world might penetrate sacred Shaker villages without transgressing the sect's sanctified boundaries. In chapter 2, however, Taysom abandons this useful dichotomy of postulated versus experienced worlds; focusing almost exclusively on Mormons' spatial rhetoric, he traces the concept of Mormon Zion through four phases, largely neglecting the reality of actual space. As with the Shakers' "culturally postulated world," Mormon rhetoric emphasized the sacredness of their settlements, but in this latter case study Taysom tells us nothing about how Mormons dealt with nonenemies who penetrated these sacred places. He does not discuss, for example, how the residents of Nauvoo, an early Mormon settlement in Illinois, responded to assimilating converts or nonhostile visitors, nor does he mention that the Nauvoo House was to be a boarding place for guests. Having revised his methodology for chapter 2 to focus primarily on rhetoric and conflictual relationships, Taysom finds, almost necessarily, that Mormons were a belligerent sect bent on creating cycles of crisis, but he does so at the expense of offering a true comparison between Mormon and Shaker communities. More surprising, however, is that in a chapter preoccupied with the Mormon notion of Zion, Taysom fails directly to address the 1833 foundational statement in Mormon scripture that "This is Zion—THE PURE IN HEART" (Doctrine and Covenants, 97:21); that is, the LDS concept of Zion cannot be strictly defined in any geographic or physical sense but is also a spiritual condition.

Unlike the first chapters, the latter chapters are not divided by sect but treat Mormons and Shakers under specific themes. Chapter 3 compares marriage policies, and chapter 4 contrasts Shaker and Mormon boundary strategies during specific crises. Polygamy and celibacy, Taysom asserts in chapter 3, differed in the types of tension they generated as well as in their potential to be reformulated in the face of serious challenges. Shaker celibacy inevitably led to a decline in membership. As a universal and constitutive element of Shaker identity, however, this requirement could not be modified. Plural marriage, on the other hand, was not universally practiced among Mormons, and so this boundary could be more easily altered at a time when the community was being threatened. As this summary suggests, when dealing directly with religious practices, Taysom's investigation can be insightful and illuminating. His analysis, however, all too frequently assumes that opposition to these and other religious tenets was primarily dictated by Shakers and Mormons, as if mainstream detractors, for their own cultural

and historical reasons, were not also creating and amplifying tensions.

In his fourth and final chapter, Taysom asserts that the “Shaker Era of Manifestations” and the “Mormon Reformation” were reactions to boundary crises. The Era of Manifestations, which began in the late 1830s and lasted until the early 1850s, was a period of intense spiritual revival in Shaker communities. During this time, Shakers experienced a flurry of visions, divine communications, and other spiritual manifestations. Many of these revelations, often originating from lay individuals, emphasized communal and personal purity. This, Taysom argues, was a response to a real crisis, which came about as Shaker villages, struggling to sustain themselves in the face of their declining populations, began admitting orphans and economic refugees who had not wholeheartedly accepted Shaker doctrine. The Mormon Reformation of the mid 1850s was likewise a period in which spiritual purity and repentance were being emphasized. But unlike the Era of Manifestations, Taysom insists, the Mormon Reformation was an invented crisis, generated by the Mormon leadership, who worried that a lack of opposition in newly settled Utah was eroding the commitment of their followers. Once again, the absence of a consistent comparative framework leads Taysom to predetermined conclusions. His choice of Rosabeth Kanter’s benign concept of “communities of negation” to describe Shakers who were seeking to identify and expel the wicked and unclean from their villages (p. 153) alongside Mary Douglas’s broad definition of “witch hunts” to explain the motivations of Mormon leaders who were urging their followers to show increased religious devotion (p. 181) is a clear example of how Taysom sometimes selectively applies social theory and employs suggestive language to support his hypotheses.

In the end, Taysom’s models may generate a useful vocabulary for comparing different religions, but they are not truly explanatory. Indeed, the need to preserve the integrity of his models at times forces him to blur the evidence. Taysom’s assertion that the identities of Mormons, Shakers, and other religious groups were constructed and experienced in relation to a larger culture is undisputed. But his models and his inconsistent application of the social theories that underwrite them tend to distort his analysis. As is frequently the case in both religion and politics, tensions arising from conflicts over specific issues created strongly felt differences that eventually evolved into definitive elements of personal and communal identity. Whatever “models” nineteenth-century Shaker and Mormon

communities did or did not follow, that much nevertheless remains clear.

Ethan Hawkey, a *Ph.D. candidate in history at Northeastern University, is studying global Christianity.*

*The Man with the Branded Hand: The Life of Jonathan Walker, Abolitionist.* By Alvin F. Oickle. (Yardley, Pa.: Westholme, 2011. Pp. xiv, 298. \$28.00.)

One of the most daring attempted slave escapes in American history began on 22 June 1844. Under cover of darkness, seven fugitives set sail from Pensacola, Florida, bound for the British Bahamas, eight hundred miles away, in a small boat piloted by a hardy Yankee sailor named Jonathan Walker. Their odyssey took them along the entire Gulf Coast of Florida, around the tip of the peninsula, and up the east coast. After seventeen days at sea, short of water, hungry, and ravaged by the sun, they reached Biscayne Bay, the future site of Miami, ninety miles from Nassau, just a half-day's sail from safety. There they were discovered and recaptured.

The fugitive slaves were quickly returned to their masters. Some, though not all, were flogged (no slave owner wanted to do lasting damage to valuable human property). Walker's tribulations, however, would be so memorably cruel that he would become, briefly, one of the most famous men in America.

Even though freedoms of speech, press, and assembly were routinely denied to critics of slavery, and violence against dissenters was commonplace in the South, southern paranoia wildly exaggerated the ability of abolitionists to operate in the region. Walker was the incarnation of their fears. Hailing originally from Cape Cod, thrice shipwrecked, and more than once left for dead, Walker had made a hardscrabble living in the coastal trade, carrying odd shipments between the Gulf ports. He was also a devoted abolitionist who had toiled alongside black sailors and willingly shared his table with black guests, shocking the mores of antebellum Pensacolans. He utterly loathed slavery and was dedicated to its destruction. "I am ashamed to acknowledge," he wrote, "that while enjoying the greatest social and religious privileges of any nation upon the earth, boasting of our liberal and free institutions . . . yet we cherish in our midst the most heinous, unjust, oppressive, and God-provoking system that ever cursed the dwellers of the earth" (p. 146).