

REVIEWS

Bodies of Life: Shaker Literature and Literacies

ETTA M. MADDEN

Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. 1998. [Contributions to the Study of Religion, Number 52] Preface, Introduction, Works Cited, Index. 191 pp. ISBN 0-313-30303-7 (cloth, \$55.00)

Many students of Shakerism have offered explanations for the post-bellum decline of the movement. Changing opportunities for women, a marked decrease in the quality of new recruits, increasing secularization and urbanization of the non-Shaker world, and the rise of social service agencies to care for those who might have previously joined the Shakers are a few components identified as key in this complex historical situation. In *Bodies of Life*, Etta Madden suggests that an additional factor in the decline of Shaker membership is to be found in the increase in literacies among Believers.

While on the one hand this increase fragmented Shaker communities by introducing and emphasizing individualism, on the other hand, this same increase provided tools to help Shakers reimagine their own history and, in doing so, Shakers like Anna White and Leila Taylor saw their situation as one of continued spiritual growth rather than numerical decline.

Drawing largely from literacy studies, Madden offers a detailed, qualitative analysis of the Shaker uses of reading and writing in order to see how literacy enhanced Shaker lives. Building on previous scholarly studies of Shaker literature including Diane Sasson's *The Shaker Spiritual Narrative* (1983) and Jean M. Humez's *Gifts of Power* (1981) and *Mother's First-Born Daughters* (1993), Madden takes a broader view of literacy than her predeces-

sors and examines a wide variety of works including doctrinal texts, personal testimonies, spirit messages, sentimental verse, and obituary journals. In particular, Madden is interested in the relationship of physical bodies to the acts of reading and writing, for example, in looking at the way Shakers wrote about and "read" body language and dress as signs to understand ideas about gender, race, and class.

The introductory chapter offers a chronological overview of Shaker writing and reading, describing a shift in Shaker literacy from Bible reading and a primarily oral tradition to communication via reading and writing in multiple genres. In Chapter Two Madden demonstrates the illiterate Ann Lee's literacy, arguing that the manner in which Ann Lee "read" bodies and minds as "uninscribed texts" is a form of literacy. Thus, as the subtitle of her book indicates, Madden does not restrict her study to written texts, but rather examines a wide range of materials.

Chapters three through seven present case studies of the Shaker uses of reading and writing. Several Shaker authors and works are considered including doctrinal works (McNemar's *Kentucky Revival* and Dunlavy's Manifesto), the 1816 *Testimonies*, the *Canterbury Obituary Journal* and funeral rituals, and White and Taylor's *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message*.

In each chapter, Madden utilizes an interdisciplinary approach with an analysis strengthened by insight drawn from literacy and cultural studies, as well as from the recent scholarship of print culture.

Etta Madden's exploration of Shaker literature and literacies reaffirms the importance of the role of the Spirit in Shaker theology and lived experience and as a unifying force between mind and body. *Bodies of Life* demonstrates the diversity of Shaker literacies and provides a reassessment of the argument that greater literacy always equals progress. As this work suggests, with literacies come opposing tensions that both pushed Shaker communities apart and pulled them together. By complicating our understanding of literacy, Madden challenges the static view of the homogeneous Shaker and asserts that multiple kinds of reading and writing acts reinforced beliefs of individual Shakers as well as reinforced the Shaker faith as a whole. Those interested in the Shakers, in the connections between reading, writing and religion, and in the role of literacies in community will find much to consider in Madden's thought-provoking and well-executed *Bodies of Life*.

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Les Icariens: The Utopian Dream in Europe and America

ROBERT P. SUTTON

Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1994. Acknowledgments, notes, bibliography, index. 199 pp. \$26.95 (cloth).

Les Icariens is a welcome addition to the field of communitarian studies. The Icarian colonies, founded by the French social philosopher Etienne Cabet, constitute a significant chapter in the history of Utopian experiments in the United States, but they have been surprisingly neglected until the publication of this book. Sutton's exhaustive research has made it possible for him to describe the ideas, the people, and the events that make up the story of Icaria. He is to be commended for his elegant telling of this tale of Utopian dreams and an often dystopian reality.

The Icarian colonies in the United States were based on Cabet's didactic novel, *Voyage en Icarie*, published in 1839, in which he described an egalitarian, propertyless society free of crime, immorality, poverty, and misery. His followers, and Cabet himself, hoped to turn this fiction into reality. Cabet was not the only French writer to dream of a world in which men and women could be liberated from the travails of the industrialism that was then unfolding. Better known today are the earlier writers Charles Fourier and Claude Henri de Saint Simon. Cabet, however, appealed to French artisans and to the newly emergent working class in a way that these two men did not, and, in the 1840's Cabet's followers achieved some political importance. Following the reactionary triumph of 1848, in 1849 Cabet led a group of his followers to the United States. Like many before them, the Icarians believed that the United States offered an opportunity for social experiment not possible in the corrupt Old World.

As Sutton shows us, the tenacity of the Icarians was truly remarkable, as they endured repeated external setbacks and constant internal schisms. The first proposed colony, located in Texas, was a disaster. Isolated, barren, unhealthy, and unbearably hot in summer, with holdings that were not contiguous, this was not the place for French Utopians. Cabet and his followers were reduced to scratching out a living in New Orleans. Their demoralization came to an end when they heard of the sale of Nauvoo, Illinois, built by Mormons

and recently vacated by them when they were forced to leave Illinois. Nauvoo was an orderly ready-made settlement complete with well-built houses and outbuildings with much land cleared and ready for farming. What is more, although local people were extremely hostile to Mormons, they were welcoming to Icarians. It seemed ideal, and the Icarians voted to remove themselves to Nauvoo. Adding buildings of their own, such as a common dining room, they speedily completed their physical Utopia and wrote a constitution.

As Sutton notes, the ink on the new constitution was scarcely dry when bickering began, and bickering was to characterize the trajectory of Icaria from 1849 almost until its end. Nevertheless, Icarians at Nauvoo could find pleasure in music, dance, theater, and festivals. In fine weather, they promenaded along the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River, complete with orchestra. A library was created and the books in it debated; a free system of education was begun; public debates and lectures were held. Unfortunately, such events could not compensate for dissension and for increasingly desperate financial affairs. When Cabet, in the hope of settling matters, instituted stricter rules, he found himself with a mutiny on his hands. Each side hurled mutual recriminations at the other. After months of hostilities, in 1856 Cabet and his followers left Nauvoo for Saint Louis. In less than a month, Cabet had died.

Eventually the Nauvoo colony, short of funds and manpower, relocated to Corning, Iowa, while the Saint Louis contingent formed a small community at Cheltenham. The Cheltenham colony, never numerous, was destroyed by loss of manpower caused by the Civil War. The larger Corning colony, however, was saved by the war, when the federal government purchased their grain and other products. By 1870, the colony was prospering, and life was good for its members. By the middle of the decade, however, dissension and factionalism once again appeared, once again each side accused the other of betraying their ideals, and once again a schism resulted. The colony divided in 1878. One group eventually relocated to Cloverdale, California, naming their new home Speranza. Never prosperous, it was dissolved in 1886. The Corning Icaria survived, but it withered away as old members died and no new ones were recruited. It was formally dissolved in 1895 with eight remaining members.

As Sutton makes clear, the Icarian Utopia was never found. Reality involved hard work, drudgery even, often a lack of the finer things, discomfort, and compromise, something Icarians in particular seem not prepared to do. Nevertheless, the Icarian dream was often sufficient for many to struggle on. Dissension was not over physical discomforts, as it often was in Robert Owen's New Harmony, but over the failure of leaders to be just and of followers to be moral. When communities dissolved, it was not the "community of goods" that was denounced, but rather the failure of the colony to live up to the ideal.

As a result, each faction recreated its own community. The determination of these French idealists is remarkable. When reality failed to match the ideal, it was not the ideal that was questioned; instead, they tried to improve reality, although, with each division, in increasingly smaller numbers. Such dedication to an ideal is rare. Perhaps, as Sutton surmises, it was the expectation of success that drove them: "The voyage itself counted most."

In spare and elegant prose, Robert Sutton has seamlessly woven a great variety of historical resources into a fascinating story of human ambition and idealism, failure and success, an epic quest by an intrepid band who pursued an ideal from one continent to another and across that second continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific. For the Icarians, like others who have searched for a holy grail, the object of their desire was forever receding into the distance, and it was its pursuit that made life worthwhile.

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Against the Wind: Eberhard Arnold and the Bruderhof

MARKUS BAUM

Farmington, PA: The Plough Publishing House. 1998. Foreword, Preface, Postscript, Endnotes, Time line, Bibliography, Index. 303 pp. ISBN 0-87486-9536 (pb, \$14.00)

This book is a biography of a founder of the Bruderhof, Eberhard Arnold (1883-1935). It offers a chronological narrative of Arnold's life, interspersed with discussions of persons (e.g. Gustav Landauer) or movements (eg the German Youth Movement) of importance to an understanding of Arnold's life that might be new to some readers. It is the first biography that deals with Arnold's life as a whole. Previous biographical material has appeared, but not in a dedicated biography. As such, and given Arnold's central role in the formation of the Bruderhof, this book fills a major gap in the literature on the movement.

Indeed, one of the book's strong points is that it devotes significant attention to Arnold's pre-Bruderhof life. Roughly one half of the book is devoted to the period prior to the founding of the movement at Sannerz, Germany, in the early summer of 1920. The book gives insights into the family background and education of Arnold, along with some of his crucial experiences before and during the years of the First World War.

The story of the Bruderhof years is told competently. This material is perhaps familiar to readers interested in the Bruderhof, previously published works such as *A Joyful Pilgrimage* (formerly entitled *Torches Together*) by Arnold's wife Emmy, and *Brothers Unite* (concerned with Arnold's trip to the North American Hutterites) dealing with aspects of it. Perhaps the strength of the book here is that it places this material into the context of Arnold's life and intellectual history as a whole.

The book is not without its weaknesses, however. Perhaps the most significant is its relatively short length of around 300 pages. This is on the short side for a life as interesting and full as Arnold's. A contrast here is a recent biography of another, comparable, founder figure of a communal movement, Karl König, by Hans Müller-Wiedemann (Camphill Books, 1996). This biography of the founder of the Camphill Movement is 550 pages long. Why is

this issue of length significant? A fuller biography would have allowed for a more adequate treatment of some of the "background" issues that Baum touches upon.

If we take his treatment of Gustav Landauer as an example perhaps this point may become clearer. Baum has a pithy, brief section dealing with this important theorist of communal living. However, he seriously distorts Landauer's thought by failing to register its Jewish aspect, clumsily reducing Landauer's communal vision to a sort of early Christianity without references to Christ. Writers such as Michael Lowy (in his *Redemption and Utopia*, Athlone Press, 1992) have shown the importance of Landauer's relationship to Christianity. However, to fail to register the importance of Judaism in Landauer's thought is misleading. Rather more space than the page or so devoted to Landauer would have been required to point the reader to some of the issues and debates raised and perhaps to some of the commentators on these issues.

Having said this, it is only fair to say that this book is a substantial new resource for those interested in the Bruderhof and its history. It is primarily a celebratory biography, and is published by the movement's own publishing house. The provenance of the book is, however, clear, and in the field of Communal Studies material produced by communities themselves is, of course, a source of material of prime importance.

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