Why Historians Should Examine Shaker Novels and Short Stories:
Exposing Century-Old Misconceptions of Shaker Life

Richard Marshall

How will the Shaker *experiment* be remembered? Many readers of a journal dedicated to communal societies might balk at the word *experiment,* preferring the term *success* because they have read Shaker journals, letters, theological treatise, copybooks, diaries, and especially biographical ledgers that list members who lived fifty, sixty, or seventy years as Believers, in many cases most or all of their adult lives.[1] For those dedicated adherents it *was*, and for the few Shakers in Maine today, it still *is*, hardly an *experiment* but instead a rich and fulfilling life both religiously and secularly, as journals and letters often express. The general public, however, ignorant of such documents and the Shakers who wrote them, has for centuries viewed Shaker communities as anything but successful. As the accounts in Glendyne Wergland's two volumes and other narratives have recorded, visitors to the villages often broadcast cautionary tales in late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century publications, tales that are remarkably similar to those of many authors of novels and short stories that appeared concurrently. Unfortunately, similar stories whose authors purport them to be *historical novels* continued to be disseminated in the twentieth century and indeed into the twenty-first century, well after most Shaker villages had closed. Thus a remarkably unvarying voice of anti-Shakerism has been kept alive for over two hundred years, a voice that threatens to obscure the legacy of the Shaker success in communal living.

Perhaps the visitors' accounts engendered the novels and short stories, or possibly readers of these fictions perceived when visiting Shaker villages what the novels and stories encouraged them to see. Whatever the original source, the public perception of the Shakers coalesced around some common misconceptions, some of which were quite sensational: a Shaker elder who abducts a nubile sister and imprisons her in a cage in the woods, flocks of mindless Shaker automatons, and ghost-like women whose very existence seem endangered by their residence in a Shaker village. Although

many visitors wrote objective and quite positive narratives, other accounts, written by those who probably only witnessed a single worship service or talked to a single Believer, established many erroneous stereotypes. Three predominant false perceptions, which this essay will address, appear in both novels and short stories as well as in the visitors' descriptions: first, they blithely claimed that Shakeresses were "unnatural" women who often resembled walking corpses; second, they also characterized Shakers as browbeaten, mindless automatons; and third, unsympathetic visitors and novelists alike often described the children in Shaker villages as being held there against their will. Because these sojourners and novelists authors were often well-known figures, their published reports helped created enduring popular, but specious, stereotypes. One early visitor, for instance, who arrived at Watervliet in last few years of the eighteenth century, St. John Honeywood, was a poet of enough renown to be included forty-four years after his death in the anthology of the prominent editor, Rufus Griswold, *The Poets and Poetry of American*.[2] When Honeywood observed a worship meeting of "forty or fifty dancing" Shakers, he described the men in a brief sentence but dwelled with consistent censure on the women: "Mostly dressed in white, they suggested the idea of a throng of discontented ghosts hovering round the gloomy shores of the Stygian lake, or a council of *Lapland* hags performing their nocturnal orgies on enchanted ground."[3] Another famous visitor, James Fenimore Cooper, saw African-Americans' acceptance into "the faith as clear, visual evidence of the intellectual inferiority of" Shakers.[4] Edward Duyckinck, influential publisher and friend of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, explained the anomaly of children in a celibate community by accusing the Shakers of emulating Hansel-and-Gretalesque witches who kidnapped children.[5] Such tales, which undoubtedly had been bruited about decades before Duyckinck published his accusation, probably helped fuel the passion of mobs like the one that attacked Turtle Creek (Union Village) in August 1810,[6] or the violent horde that beleaguered Pleasant Hill in June 1825, seeking "to release [sixteen-year-old] Lucy Bryant from bondage."[7]

Pervasive are such rumors about the Shakers' mistreatment of children, their mere existence in a celibate community being a red flag for a skeptical public. Duyckinck's "The Shakers at Lebanon," appearing in the weekly magazine *The Literary World,* exemplifies the casual, yet scurrilous, tales told about the Shakers' harsh management of their youth. While describing a dance worship, Duyckinck finds himself mentioning the role children took

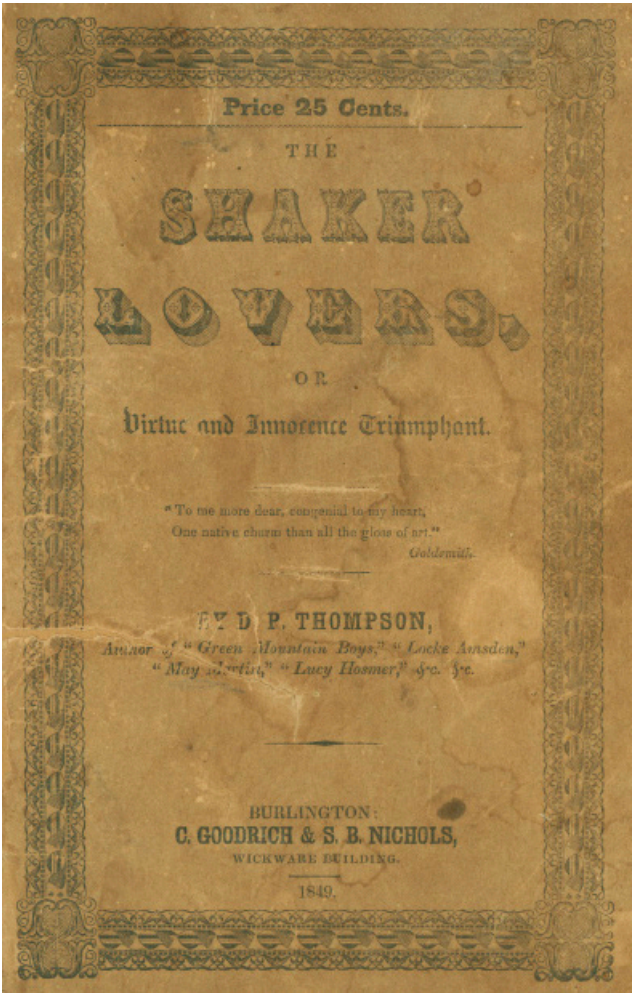
in it and apparently felt the need to explain their anomalous presence, so he offhandedly asserts in parentheses "(for children they get possession of, like the supernatural hags of old)."[8]

Such comments reflect popular suspicions that the Shakers not only kidnapped children but mistreated them while they were incarcerated in the villages. As Wergland states in her introduction to a New York state senator's account of his visit to Watervliet, "the state had dealt with frequent allegations of abuse from the virulent anti-Shaker movements in the early nineteenth century." But this senator, Levi Beardsley, having himself visited the Shakers in 1838, discounted the validity of the following statement made in front of an investigative committee of the senate: "One of the witnesses testified that the society was strict, and often abused children."[9] This witness claimed that "he had been flogged once [by the Shakers] for an alleged offence of which he was not guilty" and that "at the age of fifteen he was stripped on a cold day and severely flogged."[10] After the committee visited Niskayuna, however, "the committee came to the conclusion, that so far as the charges preferred against them were concerned, the shakers 'were more sinned against than sinning.'"[11]

Nonetheless, many in the general public still found credence in such defamatory tales. Catherine Maria Sedgwick's novel *Redwood,* published fourteen years before the New York state senate's investigation, undoubtedly helped establish the fears that the Shakers might be guilty of kidnapping, an accusation that Duyckinck reiterated in his mid-century visitor's account. Although in Sedgwick's tale a Shaker leader abducts a girl *away from* not *into* a Shaker village, readers of the novel still see the danger that a Shaker village portends for the juveniles. Knowing that a young sister, Emily Allen, has recently received a letter from a worldly admirer, the licentious Shaker elder, Reuben Harrington, lures her away from the village by pretending he has arranged a meeting for her with her young lover. Emily, true to her role as a clueless and victimized innocent, "does not … doubt the sincerity of his kindness," never questioning why the leader of a celibate group would assist in such an assignation.[12] Harrington instead takes her to a "sequestered road" and later to a "cage and keeper," a drunken "old Indian."[13] Sedgwick presents Emily as the helpless damsel, like so many stereotypical ingénues of nineteenth-century melodramas, tied up to the railroad track, or in this case, imprisoned in a cage, until she agrees to her persecutor's demands. Since social mores did not allow in a novel an open discussion of sexual exploits, audiences of the time understood that

such a demand for marriage was indeed a veiled rape scene. Sedgwick's depiction of the nefarious Shaker elder is shocking enough, but her racist characterization of a debased Native American, Harrington's accomplice, is just as stunning. In another novel written just three years later, *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick staunchly defends the Pequot tribe's attempt to maintain its culture and dignity in the face of genocidal white aggression, a bit of progressive thinking for which she was roundly criticized in the press.[14] The Native American in Sedgwick's Shaker novel, however, possesses no dignity. While he lies in a drunken stupor outside Emily's cage, she "in vain … explored his long face … for some sign of humanity, some signal of compassion."[15] Apparently, writing fictional stories about the Shakers brings out the worst in a novelist. It certainly did in the case of *Redwood* by Sedgwick who in other contexts was known for her unbiased and sympathetic depictions of marginalized people.

Even when writers of fiction and some visitors have not accused Shakers of kidnapping, they often depict the children in a Shaker village as desiring to "escape," as though the community were a prison. Such is the case for the young Sister Martha in Daniel P. Thompson's "The Shaker Lovers," who, like Emily Allen, has attracted the leering attention of the Shaker elder who received her confession "in one of the most secluded rooms in the building."[16] This suggestion that a Shaker dwelling has dark recesses in which the young are sequestered accords with the observations of a doctor who toured New Lebanon in 1860. He observed that there are "almost no Shaker children to be seen in the streets. They keep them close and watch them narrowly for fear of losing them."[17] An English minister, F. H. Williams, who recorded mostly positive comments about his sojourn at New Lebanon in 1870, nonetheless recounted a scene at a nearby "railway-station" that probably convinced many who witnessed it that the Shakers were jailers and the children inmates. He related that while he was waiting for his train, two siblings, a girl and a "boy of about eleven years of age, in Shaker dress, entered." The girl explained that she was trying "to get him away from the Shakers" and had succeeded after many attempts. When they noticed the arrival outside of two Shaker brothers, the minister and other sympathetic onlookers urged the boy not to go back, and finally the "ticket-seller kindly" took him into his office and hid him. Only later "while conversing with a gentleman" did Williams discover that the boy was probably "bound to [the Shakers] in a kind of apprenticeship, and that … in seeking for the boy they were merely endeavoring to take him back to fulfil his [legal] engagement."[18]



Daniel P. Thompson, The Shaker Lovers
(Burlington, Vt.: C. Goodrich & S.B. Nichols, 1849).

Such a scene, however, undoubtedly gave rise to even more dire rumors about the Shakers' imprisoning of children since many of the other witnesses were probably not privy to information about apprenticeships and bound children provided by the gentleman to Rev. Williams. And other stories, many of which lack even this connection to an actual incident, accused the Shakers of some outlandish and wicked deeds. Another tale published in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* in 1860, with its wide circulation

in New York city and beyond, must have exacerbated public fears, even though the article states that the Shakers obtained "possession" of the children legally. The magazine's editor, George William Curtis, after touring New Lebanon, wrote that the Shakers "mainly recruited from the poor-houses, from which they take the children and mould them, telling them that if they venture beyond Shaker bounds, the earth will yawn and swallow them." Curtis related how one girl "persuaded some of her companions to run with her to the edge of the domain." When "away she went, skimming the ground, flying for liberty and life and love," the other "appalled children watched her expecting to see the angry earth open and engulf the swift sinner." Seeing that it did not, "with one impulse, the eager children sprang forward and followed after," maybe having to clamber over the village's stone walls to escape. Curtis concluded his account, or his tale, with a diatribe against the Shakers: "Mother Ann Lee lost the tender younglings, but … let us hope that somewhere, in happy homes, they themselves are mothers now, and are teaching such little girls as they once were, that the earth nowhere opens to engulf children who are flying from so harsh and unkindly a slander of nature … as that which underlies the Shaker system."[19]

That Curtis labelled Shaker life a "slander of nature" would have been for the Shakers, and those who knew them well, a poignantly ironic choice of words because his story of the children's mass escape is an unsubstantiated tale, or a slander. Nowhere does he explain whether he only heard rumors of this mass breakout or witnessed it personally; he provides no names of those involved, dates when it took place, or any other supporting details. Unfortunately, this uncorroborated image of imprisoned Shaker children has survived for a century and a half as evidenced in a spate of young-adult novels published in the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first. The protagonists or significant supporting characters in all of these stories are adolescent girls who desperately want to leave their Shaker confines, and in three of them they pointedly label the village a *prison*.

Rosemary Elizabeth Lipking in Lynda Durrant's *Imperfections* initially finds the Shaker village a welcome refuge for her mother and siblings from an alcoholic and abusive father, with a clean room and a plentiful table. So far, so good, and there is historical evidence that Shaker villages so served as sanctuary for children in an abusive situation.[20] She soon discovers, however, the Shaker demands for perfection: an extremely regimented

life which includes such misperceptions of the sect as that all Shakers take new names after they join the community, that they celebrate every member's birthday on Ann Lee's, that is on February 29th or in non-leap years, on March 1st, and that no men or women ever speak with each other, a prohibition which includes eldresses' conferring with elders.[21] The exaggerations do not stop there; Rosemary Elizabeth feels that the Shaker worship resembles "what a battlefield must be like [with] the noise, the confusion … the crush of flying bodies" and the worshippers "twirling and shrieking" out "More love, more love, Mother Love."[22] It is no wonder that near the plot's conclusion, the protagonist and driving force of the novel tells her brother, a minor figure in the story who has come to enjoy his Shaker life, "Issac, … we can't stay here among the Shakers. Don't you feel it—that relentless Shaker perfection, crushing the life right out of you? Pleasant Hill is like a prison. Why should we remain here if we haven't done anything wrong?"[23]

Hope Douglas, the title character in Louann Gaeddert's young-adult novel set at Hancock, also feels incarcerated. Gaeddert does present many positive images of the Shakers. They take in Hope and her brother John when their mother dies and their father is prospecting gold in the West. They also treat the children fairly, inflicting no harsh punishments on their "captive" children. They even offer Hope the chance to attend "medical school" and become a healer in the society.[24] Despite this very attractive opportunity, Hope longs desperately for her father's rescue, and the entire plot revolves around Hope's wish to leave. In the first chapter she comforts a girl who is crying because of her separation from her mother.[25] In the third chapter, she upbraids the Shakers with an oft repeated accusation of their "keeping children away from the people who love them."[26] In the fourth chapter, she tells her brother John, "I hate living with the Shakers."[27] Bristling at all the Shaker restrictive rules which have prohibited her from reading short stories by Hawthorne or from "the pleasure of walking miles, alone," she laments that "unless [Pa] came for her and John, she would spend all the years until she grew up in this Shaker prison."[28] Even in the last chapter when Hope's father has written and she is preparing to travel to California, Hope brings up the age-old suspicion that the Shakers held children against their will. When the Shakers decide that it is too dangerous for her asthmatic brother to accompany her, Hope erupts: "Pa has built a house for us.… What would he think if I told him I'd left my brother behind? You don't care about me; you only want John.

Have you locked him up?"[29] Even though Hope admits as she departs that "perhaps nowhere else in the world will I find such kind people," the novel still concludes with the title character's escape from what that character steadily describes as a Shaker prison.[30] And Hope's final brief recognition of the Shakers' kindness does little to attenuate her consistent criticism throughout the story.

The Shakers in Janet Hickman's novel *Susannah* suffer even harsher criticism. Neither the protagonist, Susannah, nor any of the other prominent characters wish to remain in the Shaker village because their life there shares many similarities to a Dickensian workhouse: full of hard work, poor housing, and corporeal punishment. In two different scenes, Susannah worries that the caretaker of the children, Sister Olive, will strike her. After Susannah one day raises the ire of the caretaker, Sister Olive in exasperation exclaims that in praying for "your soul, child, I do not know which way to turn to help you save it." The threat of violence arises when Susannah audaciously responds: "I beg you, Mrs. Gatwood, leave my soul alone.… It would be the saving of me if I could go away from here."[31] Although Susannah shows a lot more temerity than the meek Oliver Twist in his classic "please, sir, I want some more" request of Bumble, in both cases the children's boldness sparks a violent reaction in the children's wardens. Dickens' Bumble "gazed in astonishment at the small rebel" and sputtered out "`what!' … in a faint voice," before aiming "a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle."[32] Similarly, Hickman's Sister Olive is momentarily struck speechless, by Susannah's impudent response:

> Sister Olive made a sound in her throat.… Horror and satisfaction mingled in her voice. "I knew you were willful. But I never before thought you to be ungodly.…
>
> When she jerked my elbow and pulled me out of the house, I wondered if the stories told by the world's people could be true. It was whispered among the children that visitors said the Believers whipped and beat their young charges. Although I had seen no such thing, the very thought of it made me ill at ease all the while we trudged the mile and more … to the Elders' Family dwelling.[33]

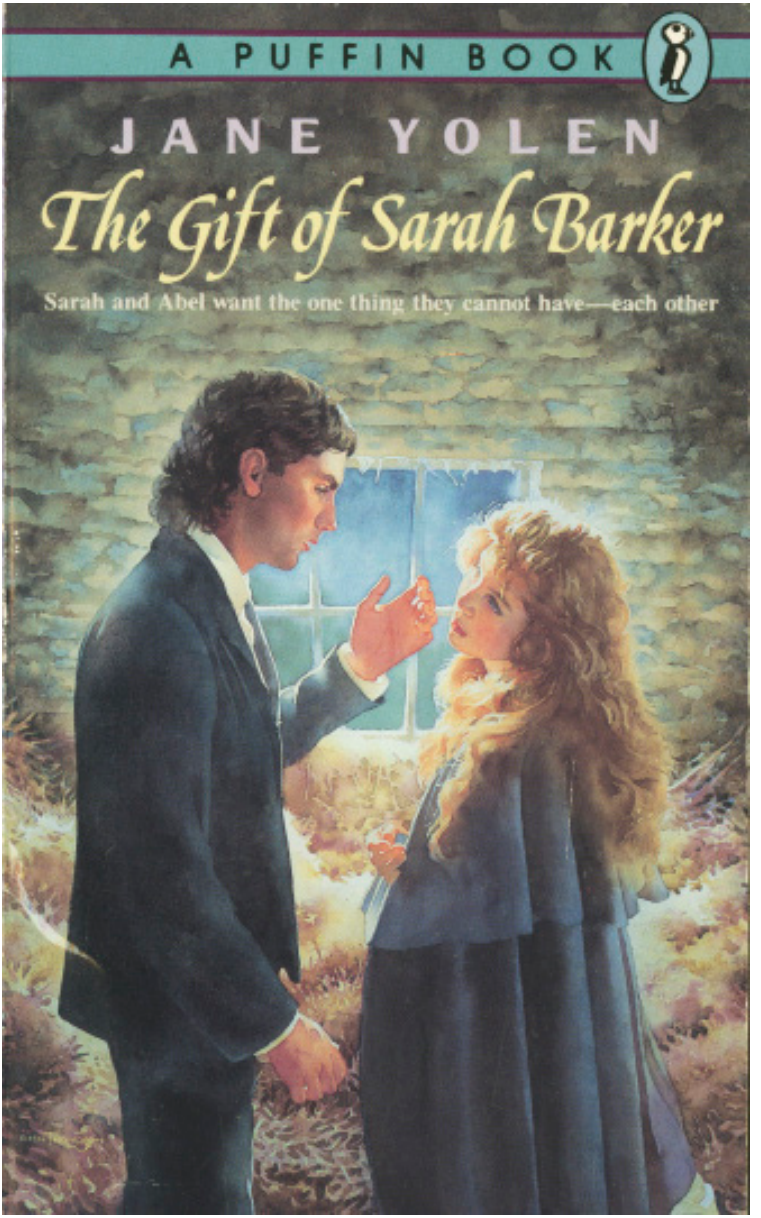
Hickman does insert in her sentence's dependent clause a passing mention that the Shakers did not beat their children, an assertion supported by many historical documents, but the main clause emphasizes Susannah's

Janet Hickman, Susannah
(New York, N.Y.: Greenwillow Books, 1998).

worry that they might at times resort to corporal punishment. Hickman, knowing that Shakers did not approve of such physical reprimands and possibly wanting to maintain a patina of historical accuracy, does not allow the caretaker to strike the girls, but the fear that it might happen hovers in the consciousness of the young protagonist. What most likely remains with the novels' readers is the perspective of Susannah, the story's narrator, specifically her lingering fear that the rumored tales of Shaker whippings are indeed true.

Descriptions of hard work and the threat of violence certainly make readers pity the imprisoned Susannah, but the most pitiful scenes in the novel involve the five-year-old Mary Bay's oft-repeated desire to be with her mother, especially her refrain, "I want my mam."[34] Indeed the novel's theme is the trauma caused by the Shaker belief "that children must live apart from their parents." In addition to Mary's whimpering, Susannah explains seven pages into the story that this separation was the reason "the other little girls cried at night, sometimes, long after they should have grown accustomed to the lumpy pallets where they slept."[35] To ensure that readers approach the story with this theme in mind, Hickman (or the publisher) excerpts Mary's pitiful "I want my mam" refrain in an unnumbered page inside the book's front cover, just before the title page. Little Mary's heart-rending plea falls all the more poignantly on the ears of her constant companion and protector, Susannah, because her own mother has recently died. Hickman presents the whole Shaker experience through the medium of Susannah's grief-stricken consciousness. When the sanctimonious Lydia, another teenage girl also under the care of the overbearing Sister Olive, reminds the girls who are frightened by a gathering mob to "remember Mother Ann," Susannah thinks to herself that Mother Ann "was not the mother I wanted to remember."[36] After she secretly talks in the woods to Mary's "Mam," who is trying to take her daughter away from the village, Susannah imagines that if Sister Olive heard about their meeting, Susannah "would be no better off than a bird in a cage."[37]

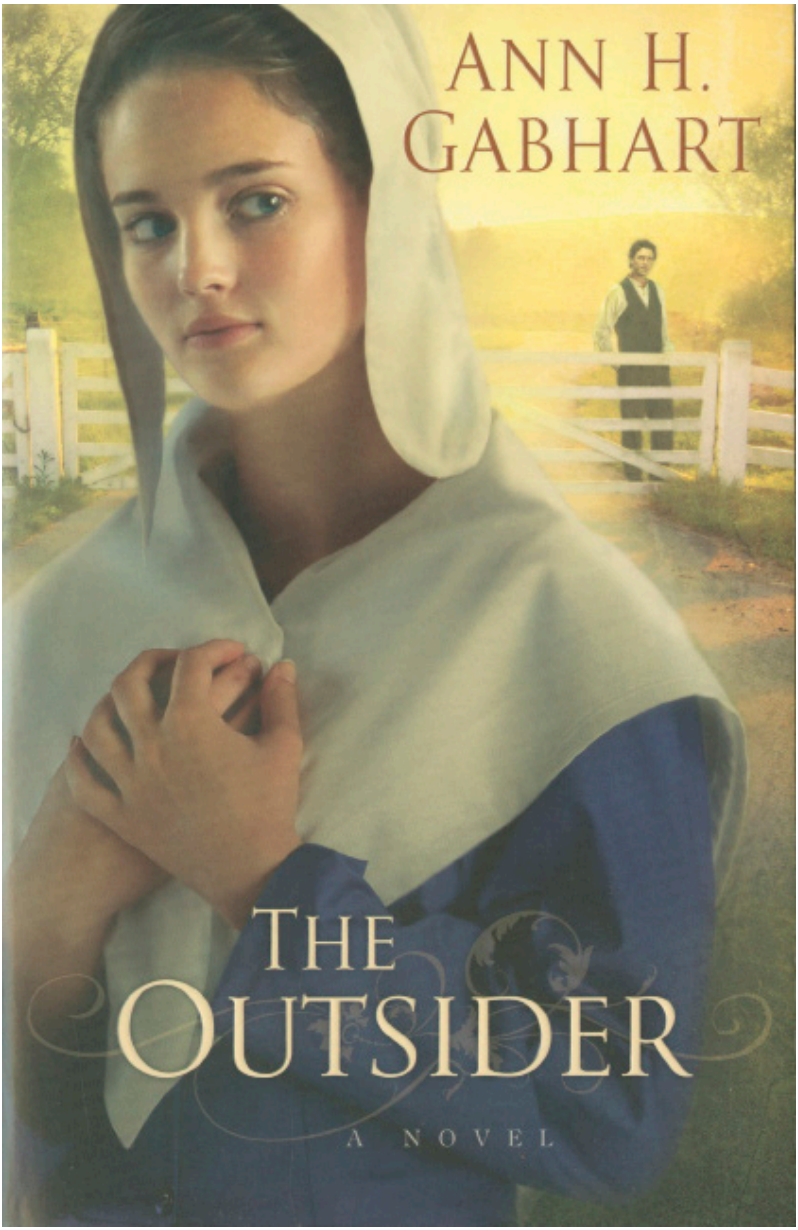
Three other novels for children or young-adult readers do not specifically state that the children are caged or imprisoned, but the depiction of their lives in the village conjure up the age-old suspicions of the Shakers' mistreatment of their youth. The main plot in these novels concludes with the protagonist's departure, or escape, from the Shaker village. And in the lengthy subplot of one of these three novels, Shaker rules cause the death of a young girl.



Jane Yolen, The Gift of Sarah Barker
(New York, N.Y.: Puffin Books, 1992).

In Joan Holub's *Doll's Hospital: Charlotte's Choice,* a minister takes Daisy, whose whole family has died in a cholera epidemic, to the Shakers, telling her as they arrive that the "Shakers have many rules.… But they're kind people and they like children."[38] Although two of the sisters are indeed quite kind because Daisy "has lost her entire family," the problem of the doll in an 1830s Shaker village eventually determines the story's resolution.[39] On the day Daisy arrived clutching her doll, Charlotte, the rule-spouting Brother Zeke tells her that "Shakers must give up all their worldly possessions when they come to live with us."[40] Although two kind sisters intervene, their sway holds only temporarily, as seen in the story's denouement as described by the doll, Charlotte: "Brother Zeke came to tower over us. 'You have been here a month now,' he said in a bossy tone. 'We have waited for you to tire of your doll, but you haven't. So the village leaders and I have decided it is time you gave up your toy.'"[41] Daisy runs off into the woods into the arms one of her mother's friends who had secretly met with her at the village's edge—rules prohibited non-relatives from visiting children—and told her that she would wait there for one day if Daisy decided to leave the Shakers. Brother Zeke's confrontation helps the indecisive Daisy to select her mother's friend over the Shakers.

The title character in *The Gift of Sarah Barker* by Jane Yolen, an award-winning writer of children and young adult books, is also driven out of a Shaker village under the lash of harshly inflicted Shaker rules.[42] Although Brother Zeke in *Doll's Hospital* seems to be merely a spokesman for the leaders, the village's central elder himself banishes Sarah and her soon-to-be husband, Abel. Although Yolen knows enough about historical Shaker governance to include an eldress as co-leader, Father James is the moving force in the adolescent couple's exile. And his denouncing of Sarah's mother leads to Sarah's exile-precipitating infraction of rules. Agatha Barker sees herself as another Mother Ann Lee because all of her children except Sarah died at birth or shortly thereafter. She asserts her semi-divinity during a worship meeting and during it lifts her skirt in front of Father James to emphasize her abhorrence of sexual pleasure.[43] Even a mild-mannered elder would have trouble maintaining composure at such a display. But Father James is anything but even tempered, being "as rigorous as any prophet in seeking out sins of others."[44] Although many historical Shakers were married before joining the sect, Father James strangely thunders at Agatha: "Do not show yourself to me, woman.… You have *known* a man. But we took you in anyway." He then commands her to leave the village.[45]



Ann H. Gabhart, The Outsider
(Grand Rapids, Mi.: Revell, 2008).

She shortly thereafter hangs herself from the rafters of the Hancock's round barn. The distraught Sarah, upon hearing the news of her mother's suicide, seeks the comfort of Brother Abel, and it is their public holding of hands that leads to another eruption by Father James against Abel: this doctrine-spouting Shaker leader lets loose a vitriolic attack on worldly love: "'Is *this*, then, … the culmination of our years of selfless care? The raising up of a poor orphan has given rise to this, this greasy union, this fleshy, soft love.'" And then Father James cruelly stoops to torturing Abel with a painful childhood memory in his continuing harangue. He resurrects the long-buried memory of when young Abel wet himself during dinner, leaving a "puddle steaming under the table" and how the other young boys had then teased him, calling him "Brother Unable." Father James concludes his tirade by saying, "I am not surprised. No, no, I had already suspected that you would be Brother *Un*able. Your old name, I recall. Prophetic, was it not? Brother Unable. Unable to live the *un*sullied life." [46]

The Shakers' relentless, and heartless, pursuit of "the unsullied life" is also central to the plot of Ann Gabhart's numerous twenty-first-century Shaker novels, but such a life is particularly cruel for one child in *The Outsider.* The Shakers' strictness causes the death of this young girl, Becca, and her mother, Sister Esther, who commits suicide when her daughter dies. Although the novel opens with the protagonist, Gabrielle, as a stalwart member of the community, her nightly witnessing of young Becca's sobs causes her to begin questioning Shaker rules: "At first she'd wailed fiercely, determined somehow to make her mother appear by her bedside. Her cries had pierced Gabrielle. She had wanted to run for Becca's mother, but Sister Mercy wouldn't allow it."[47] Becca pines away and dies because she believes her mother is dead. Although reassured by Gabrielle that her mother, Sister Esther, has just been assigned to work at the distant Shaker mill—sent there to prevent her "from visiting the school [and Becca] without permission"—, Becca begins to focus on heaven, believing it to be a place of "angels" with whom her mother now certainly resides.[48] To make sure that readers blame the Shakers for the death of Becca and her mother, Gabhart has Sister Esther explain to the good-hearted and motherly Gabrielle the mistake she has made in believing in the Shaker ways concerning the young members of the community: "I've seen your concern, your caring, but you've only borrowed these children. It's different when you've borne them and suckled them."[49] Becca's death and her mother's subsequent suicide reiterate a standard accusation against

Shakerism: substitute parents, especially Shaker mothers, cannot replace real ones. An attempt to do so, often leads to heartrending results for the child.

Gabrielle eventually chooses her heart over Shaker rules, and so like almost all other protagonists, departs the Shaker village at the conclusion of the novel. Those who remain in Shaker communities, suggest many of the short stories and novels, are deluded fanatics or too blunt in intelligence to see the whole picture as clearly as Gabrielle and other right-thinking people do. Many visitors made the same claim. One of the earliest accounts, was written by an anonymous author who supposedly witnessed Mother Ann Lee's mesmeric interaction with her followers:

> The mother would walk around them, … stroke their arms, lay her hand on their heads; … all the while she would be singing and chanting forth a strange bewitching kind of incantation, until … they [would] affirm that all their former views of things were strangely obliterated; they could recollect nothing of their former notions of religion; … the new system now before them wholly swallowed up all their attention, and their souls were irresistibly borne away by its bewitching energy."[50]

That the Shakers were genuinely under some sort of enchantment and not in their right minds was reiterated by one of the more famous persons to witness their dance worship, James Fenimore Cooper: "It is scarcely possible to conceive any thing more ludicrous, and yet more lamentable. I felt disposed to laugh, and yet could scarcely restrain my tears. I think, after the surprise of the ludicrous had subsided, that the sight of so much miserable infatuation left a deep and melancholy regret on the mind."[51]

Shaker communal worship, and communal life outside the meeting house, too, has dispossessed the Believers of their autonomous minds, at least so suggest many casual observers of actual villages as well as the novelists describing fictional Shaker communities. One 1798 visitor to New Lebanon from Poland, Julian Niemcewicz, appreciated the increased production that "the people in a common society" could take from their farm fields, but felt the common gain came at too high a cost, that some benefitted but most suffered. He claimed that the community's leaders knew "how to turn to their own advantage the fanaticism, the ignorance and blind obedience in which the flock is kept."[52] Similarly, in numerous

fictional stories Believers appear as brainwashed automatons, servilely and silently obeying a manipulative ministry, their dun attire matching the monochromatic and oppressive village atmosphere. Sedgwick describes a Shaker dance in *Redwood:* "A small knot of brethren and sisters … moved on with a uniform shuffling step, as if it was composed of so many automatons, their arms rising and falling mechanically; and their monotonous movements, solemn, melancholy, or stupid aspects, contrasting ludicrously with the festive" zeal of their dance.[53] Almost the exact same image of the deluded and ludicrous Believers appears in the short story, "Shaker Lovers," by Daniel Pierce Thompson, well known Vermont politician and famous author of *The Green Mountain Boys*. Near the beginning of his tale, he describes the Believers as:

> Engaged in gathering the rare fruit of their extensive orchards.… The almost exact uniformity in the fashion … produced a singular sameness in the appearance of them all [especially] … the females, whose neat, prim dresses of never-varying slate color … and … plain bonnets, from which peeped their thin, pale visages, all seemingly marked with the same demure, downcast and abject expression. [This scene] might have disposed an ordinary spectator, as they were moving about the field as silent and gestureless as a band of automatons, to look upon them with sensations … we experience in beholding a flock of wild fowls, where an inspection of one is an inspection of the whole. [54]

Whether in a fictional story or an unsympathetic visitor's account, the language of anti-Shakerism hardly varies from decade to decade, century to century. One winter Shaker, (a non-committed short term resident) who stayed with the Shakers for four months, nonetheless failed to perceive, as Wergland notes in the preface to his account, that the "communities operated by consensus" and that most Believers were not deluded fanatics but had consciously "weighed the advantages of Shaker life against the disadvantages of living" in the outer world.[55] This winter Shaker's language indicates that he bought into the stereotyped perceptions of the sect. His wording matches the description of visitors, Cooper and Niemcewicz, and the writers of fiction, Sedgwick and Thompson: the Shakers "are bound together by precisely the same means as the Catholics. The Catholic … believes as he is taught by the priest …. The Shaker must not exercise his

reason upon his religion, but must abide by the word of his Elder, and be obedient to the Shakers' rules. 'Carnal reason' is called sinful. The Shakers are mere automatons, having no mind of their own—mere passive slaves to the … control of their superiors."[56]

Other visitors' narratives and fictional authors' descriptions during the remainder of the nineteenth century, through the twentieth, and into the twenty-first accord with this general perception that the Shakers forbid any sense of selfhood and that a subsuming, rigid oneness with the group is enforced. To become a dutiful Shaker, one must become a thoughtless person. And of course, so the stories go, the Shakers also welcomed those to whom such dichotomies would never occur and whose blunt brains could not process such refined thoughts. Hawthorne in "The Canterbury Pilgrims" describes a poet who seeks to escape the world in a Shaker village: He seems to be "a kind, gentle, harmless, poor fellow enough, whom Nature … had sent into the world with too much of one sort of brain, and hardly any of another."[57] Similarly, an account written about a visit to Watervliet and published in 1868 declared that "the Shakers are notably thrifty, charitable, and simple minded."[58] A Harvard professor, after a brief visit to Hancock, similarly denigrated the inhabitants: "All the folks I have seen are evidently of American birth, and few carry the stamp of much intelligence."[59] The portrayal of one character in Eva Wilder McGlasson's novel *Diana's Livery* accords with that visitor's observation. McGlasson describes the mentally shortchanged Brother Jerome, a deficiency that Shaker spiritualism conveniently, but rather pitifully, obscures: "In a sitting position, his knees looked … padded with fat, as if nature had adapted them to prayerful ends, a conformation in harmony with Jerome's devout expression of face, which was that of a man whose mental machinery has stopped in the midst of a thought, but who regards the consequent blankness as a direct proof of miraculous grace."[60]

Rachel Strachey's novel *Shaken by the Wind* (1928) presents the most alarming picture of communalism's supposed undermining of an individual's identity and intellectual capabilities. Strachey, well known as a liberal British politician and author of the forward-thinking feminist tract *The Cause,* is, however, not at all progressive in her attitude toward experiments in collective living. As do many authors of Shaker fiction, Strachey suggests that "simple people" are more susceptible to the lure of a communal group.[61] The well-read but devout son of protagonist Sarah Sonning, who has taken her family into a Shaker-like community, questions

his mother about the menace of a broad education:

> "Don't you think a cultivated, intellectual life is likely to endanger the spiritual?" Edmund would ask. "What ought I to do about reading books of literature, well written, standard works by infidel or skeptical authors, or by writers who are not in the least degree Christian? You know there are a great many of that kind who have printed books which are beautifully written, and which every cultivated man should know about. What shall I do about these?"[62]

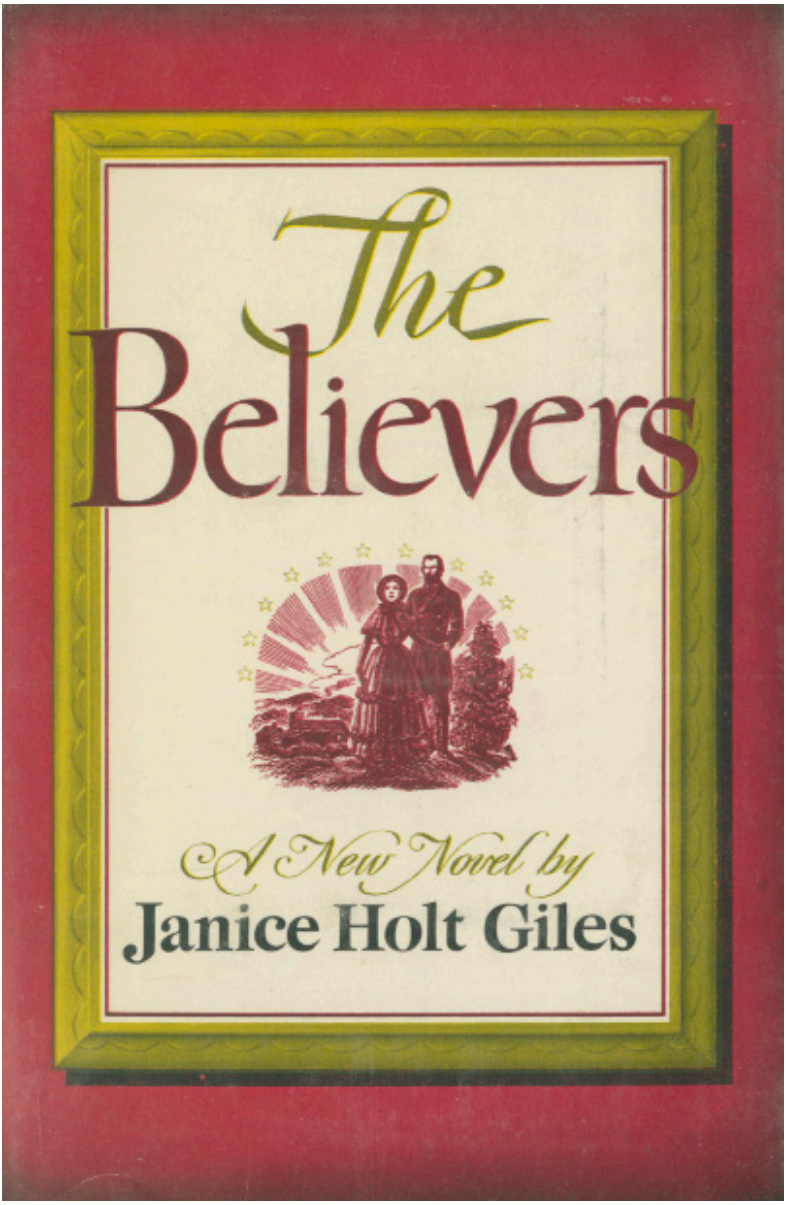
Sarah's response affirms Edmund's suspicions about secular knowledge: "I think the Holy Spirit is the best guide to your reading.… If He makes us feel uneasy about anything we *must* give it up, whatever it is."[63]

Such views of numinously out-of-touch or anti-intellectual Shakers persist in fiction through the rest of the twentieth century and into the next, but similar stories also appeared in the first half century of the Shakers' existence. They often suggest that mysticism and lack of intelligence go hand in hand. In Thompson's "The Shaker Lovers," the young couple not only violates the Shakers' prohibitions against the mingling of the sexes, but Seth Gilmore, the hero, draws the ire of Elder Higgins because he has the audacity "to think for himself," which is "a very great error he was taught to believe by the Leaders, who hold that 'ignorance is the mother of devotion.'"[64] The lack of intelligence of Shaker *hoi polloi* described in Thompson's story is matched by the less-than-acute Shaker leadership depicted in the stage play with the same name and almost same plot as Thompson's short story, though Samuel D. Johnson claims authorship. This melodrama shows the Shaker ministry completely duped by the villain, Elder Higgins, himself a Shaker leader. He easily deceives his fellow leader, Elder Moses. Higgins thinks he has killed the melodrama's hero, William, who is his rival for the hand of Martha. He even gleefully exclaims, "Ah, ha! he is no more!" after he strikes William with an oar,[65] but Higgins tells the gullible assembled Shakers that he is "compelled by a clear conscience to accuse the maiden Martha" of killing William. This baldly contrived accusation instantly convinces Elder Moses, who immediately calls for her trial and condemnation by "worldly judges of the law."[66]

Johnson's drama portrays the Shakers as either conscienceless murderers or unworldly innocents who can be fooled by such villains. William Dean Howells in *The Undiscovered Country* does present the Shakers

more sympathetically, but he still describes them as unsettlingly removed from the real world. When the father of the protagonist, himself a spiritualist who conducts séances, asks his daughter, "would you like to live always among the Shakers?" she immediately responds quite negatively, even though she has always in the past acquiesced to her father's rather impulsive plans. She bases her reason for rejecting the Shakers on the belief that they are not in touch with reality: "They try all the time to make the other world of this world."[67]

Although many outsiders believed that Shakers were naïve, deluded mystics and malevolent throngs mobilized under the dubious assumption that Shakers imprisoned children, it was the supposed plight of women that most attracted authors' attention. And this focus appears in both novels and short stories as well as in many visitors' accounts of Shaker communities. Countless narratives, historical and fictional, describe wan and pallid women who suffer an almost lifeless existence in the villages; thus they warn of the danger facing any female who joins the sect. One of the earliest short stories in 1839, Caroline Hentz's "The Shaker Girl," portrays dancing Shakeresses with images that eerily match the one evoked by St. John Honeywood, who visited a real Shaker village four decades earlier. The hero of Hentz's story is equally disquieted by the otherworldly appearance of the women Believers: They are "cold and colourless" and "so still and ghastly mid their shroud-like garments, … [that] he almost imagined himself attending the orgies of the dead, of resuscitated bodies, with the motions of life, but without the living soul."[68] Similarly, Thomas Hamilton, a Scottish author who visited Watervliet, N.Y., in 1833, characterized the Shakeresses as "the veriest scarecrows I had ever seen in the female form … old and cadaverous."[69] In the same spirit—excuse the pun—Nathaniel Hawthorne concludes one of his two Shaker short stories, "The Shaker Bridal," with the death-like swoon of his female protagonists. As the story's title implies, the ceremony that installs Martha and Adam, her longtime fiancé, as village leaders seems a sort of Shaker marriage that ironically becomes for the woman both a worldly divorce and a funeral. After the dying village patriarch pronounces the two to be new elder and eldress, Adam withdrew "his hand from hers, and folded his arms with a sense of satisfied ambition" while "paler and paler grew Martha by his side, till, like a corpse in its burial clothes, she sank down at the feet of her early lover; for, after many trials firmly borne, her heart could endure the weight of its desolate agony no longer."[70]



Janice Holt Giles, The Believers
(Boston, Mass. : Houghton, Mifflin, 1957).

Hawthorne's story ends here, so he does not reveal whether Martha had just swooned or actually died. But her fate suggests the unsettling edge-of-death predicament of Shaker women described by so many visitors, as recorded in Wergland's two volumes: One visitor in 1835 described Shaker women as "all dress[ed] in white, and what with their … their ghost-like figures, and ghastly, mad spiritual dance, they looked like nuns in 'Robert the Devil.'"[71] Another in 1839 saw Shakeresses as "so pallid, so unearthly in their complexions, that it gave you the idea that they had been taken up from their coffins a few hours after their decease."[72] An 1850 visitor to New Lebanon viewed Shaker women as "attired almost like shrouded corpses, sitting on benches placed along the wall, rigid and immovable as mummies."[73] And an observer in 1855 described that "each [woman was wearing] a white muslin cap of the plainest make, which made them look as if they were … dead folks come up to Shaker meeting in their grave cloths."[74] Another description was published just before the Civil War by a physician who, as Wergland explains, "thought the Shakers religious convictions were evidence of mental illness." This doctor's account, published in 1860, claimed that "the women were for the most part, thin and sallow, and looked with their spotless white collars more like walking corpses, giving thus a sort of Dance of Death."[75]

Another visitor's narrative, published in the same decade as Hawthorne's tale, described that "the women were dressed in white from head to foot, and the exquisite cleanliness of their short waisted and long skirted dresses and net caps … made them look like a swarm of saints who had just alighted for a little rest and would fly away if any noise were made."[76] Here at least the Shaker women, though still primed for otherworldly flight, are given the attractive appellation of saints. In many works of fiction, however, the predicament of Shaker women is very much of this world and much more dangerous. They do not just appear corpse- or ghost-like. They actually die. And it is indeed their association with the Believers that causes their demise. Two young women, in McGlasson's and Giles's plots, commit suicide, frustrated in love by the Shakers' forced separation of men and women. In Yolen's Shaker novel and in Gabhart's *The Outsider* two other women commit suicide because they are denied the traditional roles of motherhood. In McGlasson's novel, the prettiest sister in the Shaker village, Laura, secretly marries its longtime elder, Laban, but must live away from him since he still maintains his position as a leader in the celibate community. However, witnessing "her lover's gloom …

aroused a terrible humiliation in Laura's soul."[77] Feeling guilty for having led Laban to an earthly marriage for which his Shaker temperament was not prepared, she chooses to throw herself in "the black, … cold" river as a solution to their predicament.[78] In Giles's *The Believers*, a young Shakeress, Sabrina Arnold, lives at South Union, not by choice but brought there by her father. When she elopes with Lucien Brown, the Shaker leaders feel responsible for her since her father is travelling to sell Shaker seeds, and thus they pursue the young lovers and bring them back to the village.[79] Shortly thereafter, Sabrina drowns herself in the river and leaves a suicide note, in which she directly blames her death on the Shakers: "Dear Lucien … I do not want to live without you, and they will never let us live together."[80]

Strachey's *Shaken by the Wind* is one of the most frightening tales about the danger for a woman in a communal village. In the plot a young convert to Rufus Hollins' flock of New Believers dies in childbirth after she is seduced and impregnated by the spiritual leader. In a disturbing scene, Hollins lays his hands on Lottie, whom he "singled out to be the first fully instructed disciple."[81] The young woman feels "a sensation which was part fear and part delight [run] through all her nerves," and tells Hollins that she is "frightened." He reassures her that the feeling comes from "the Lord [who] has both of us in His power."[82] Strachey skillfully, but quite alarmingly, conflates the sexual and spiritual in her description of both Hollins's advances and Lottie's own submission. With the Master's prompting, Lottie attributes her feelings to spiritual sources. In the earlier tales by Sedgwick and Thompson, vulnerable young female victims escape from the lecherous Shaker elder, but in Rufus Hollins's machinations, Strachey describes intricately, chillingly, yet credibly, the seduction and rape of a terrified, yet entranced, young Believer. And since the rape results in her death at childbirth, it is tantamount to murder.

In other novels, when the women do not actually die, they often do so figuratively, as does the protagonist in Giles's *The Believer*, the loss of sexual love and motherhood causing her lifeless existence. After Becky has been put aside by her husband but discovers a new partner in the non-Shaker village school teacher, she exclaims: "To be loved—to love, it is life to a woman. Without it she dies … , shrivels away, and becomes sterile and brittle. I felt every pulse of my blood, every beat of my heart, new and more living than they had been in years. I felt alive again."[83] Many novels about Shaker women focus on this very unShaker belief: a woman is incomplete, or even almost dead, if not connected to a man.

Visitors' accounts suggest a similar conclusion about the Shaker women. Some who toured an actual village might not have characterized the women as half-alive, but they nonetheless viewed them as half-women, unnatural, unwomanly, hardly recognizable as females, in short, unattractive in appearance and in personality. After he witnessed a worship meeting in 1852 at New Lebanon, "the historian and novelist J. E. A. Smith" opined that Shaker women suffered a "melancholy lot" because in the celibate community "love—'the first necessity of woman's nature'—is dwarfed … to most unnatural ugliness. She must renounce the natural affections; she must love none but her own unlovable associates."[84] A British visitor's accounts accorded with Smith's, focusing on the unnatural state of Shaker women, especially their disagreeable appearance. Margaret Hall, who toured America for fourteen months in the 1820s with her sea captain husband, Basil, declared that the Shakeresses she encountered at New Lebanon were "the ugliest set of females I ever saw gathered together."[85] A similar image appeared in the humorist Artemus Ward's 1861 *Vanity Fair* letter to readers, which is probably a fictional account of a visit to a Shaker community because Ward never entered an actual village but had to acquire his information second-hand.[86] In his supposed visit, Ward mockingly flirts with "a solum female, looking sumwhat like a last year's bean-pole stuck in a long meal bag."[87]

Clearly, the voice of anti-Shakerism is still vibrant. The vituperative accusations made by nineteenth-century novelists and casual visitors alike live on in twentieth- and twenty-first-century novels: Shaker women were unnatural or corpse-like; most Shakers, men, women and children, were brainwashed automatons, and Shaker children were imprisoned. So why worry about such slanderous stories? The Shakers seldom did, even acquiescing to the originally disparaging appellation of Shaking Quakers. "Come … see how we're enjoying / Our Peaceful Shaker Home," wrote one Pleasant Hill poetess.[88] "Come Shaker life, come life eternal" sang many Shakers from Kentucky to Maine.[89] One exception to such acquiescence, though, is Seth Y. Wells' three-page refutation of the portrayal of Shakers in Sedgwick's *Redwood*.[90] Wells and other Shakers probably realized that when stories escalate to a certain intensity, danger could ensue. Christian Goodwillie and Glendyne Wergland observe how published stories sometimes led to real problems: "The popular outrage resulting in part from James Smith's [anti-Shaker] publications finally resulted in a mob action against the Shakers at Union Village, Ohio on

Monday, 27 August 1810."[91] Elizabeth De Wolfe also notes how the "print culture played an important role" in the formation of an 1818 mob that "brought violence to the Shakers" at Enfield, New Hampshire.[92] Stories, in short, can lead to real harm.

"Artemus Among the Shakers": 'Yay," they sed, and I yay'd." in Artemus Ward, Sandwiches by Artemus Ward *(New York, 1870.)*

But what harm can novels of today do; why bother exposing these false stories? Serious students of the sect might be inclined to disregard Shaker fiction entirely, feeling that historians should not worry about narratives clearly labeled as imaginative. Readers know that fiction is not history, so why should any researcher worry about what novels and short stories portray? Many readers of this essay can offer contradictory examples to these disparaging stereotypes and can cite documents that demonstrate how children often found a welcome refuge in Shaker villages, how most Shakers were hardly deluded fanatics, and how many Shaker women were not deprived of life in a Shaker village but offered opportunities denied them outside. (See Appendices A, B, and C respectively for historical refutation of the fictional images of children, deluded fanatics, and women in Shaker communities.)

Unfortunately, many readers today still cannot distinguish between fact and fiction and thus know nothing of the positive legacy of the Shakers' often successful experiment in communal life. Read, for instance, Amazon reviews of Gabhart's novels, which contain some of the most outlandish plot circumstances—a child willing herself to death because she is separated from her mother, a misbehaving sister literally tied with a string to a personal guard—and you will be surprised by such comments as the following made by readers on Amazon: "Gabhart did a fantastic job of portraying the society as they really were"; "the Shaker culture and society are so realistic I felt like I was there." Even one reader, who did not like the "very predictable" plot of *The Outsider,* "loved [the] book for the details it provided into the life of the Shakers."[93] Docents at Shaker restored villages have also heard such notions from gullible visitors. A few years ago, an archivist at Pleasant Hill related that one woman arrived at the village seeking information on relatives, a mother and two children, who had dwelt with the Shakers for a few years. Even after the staff had given her information on the activities of her ancestors, the woman continued asking questions about Giles's *The Believers* as if her relative had lived the Shaker life depicted in it.[94]

Why is the average reader, such as this woman, drawn to a novel instead of to the facts recorded by the Shakers themselves? One answer is that novels give more answers, as imaginative and spurious as they might be, about people's motives. Carol Medlicott in the introduction to her biography of Issachar Bates offers one deficiency in Shaker studies that might explain why so many readers accept without question the stories

they read in the novels. She observes that "biography has played … an insignificant role in Shaker scholarship to date." Why are biographies important? They provide narratives, as Medlicott suggests, that explain "the question of why," in particular, "why individuals would renounce spouse, children, sexual love, personal wealth, and property to join a radical, celibate, and persecuted religious order." Medlicott argues that until more biographies are published and such questions are answered, "the study of the Shakers" will be pushed "to America's cultural margins."[95]

Unfortunately, most novels about Shakers answer the obverse "why" question, that is, why a person would *not* renounce "spouse, children, sexual love, [and] personal wealth." They use a fabricated Shaker history to advance their own agenda, include a few incidental trappings of Shaker life, and dupe many readers. Another reason so many readers are deceived by scandalous Shaker stories is that readers in other fields have enjoyed novels that can justifiably be labeled historical. Many novelists have engagingly, but quite accurately, fleshed out actual events and have educated the general populace about authentic people, and many of these works of historical fiction have been quite popular. In the last seventy years while novels have reinforced centuries-old prejudices against the Shakers and against communal living experiments in general, historical novelists in other fields have both impressed scholarly reviewers and enlightened the general public. Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror*, a *New York Times* best seller, reanimated the people of fourteenth-century Europe for millions of average readers. At the five hundredth anniversary of Henry VIII's coronation, Hillary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* vivified life in the Tudor king's reign for an eager twenty-first century audience. Michael Shaara's *Killer Angels* educated the reading public on the intricacies of military battle strategies. Even the very popular film *Casablanca* informed the viewing audience on the complicated diplomatic issue of Vichy France. Specialist historians in their respective fields have acknowledged that these fictional accounts have contributed to a commendable understanding of the historical events behind the imagined narratives. Fiction about the Shakers, conversely, has more vilified than vivified Shaker life.[96]

What can Shaker historians do to help the Shaker experiment be remembered more as a success than a failure? It might seem an impossible task to draw the general populace away from such exciting but highly contrived tales about the Shakers, but in this day of electronic database searches and library/bookseller's "if-you-like-this-book-then-you-might-

like-these" prompts, the task might not be as difficult as it was a decade or two ago. Granted, many devoted readers of pulp fiction want nothing more than diverting, light reading, the farther from any substantiated facts the better, but others, like the Pleasant Hill visitor described above, possess a level of interest above the casual. She had taken the time to travel to a restored community in search of information on Shaker ancestors but was distracted away from the historical documents the staff had gathered for her by a fictional account of what she assumed her relative had witnessed. If Shaker historians mention that their studies debunk particular stereotypes of fictional Shakers *and* name the titles of fabricated stories, they might attract such readers to more verifiable accounts of Shaker life. Those who have read Shaker novels but who want to know something about authentic Shakers will see the titles of well-researched and documented histories appear in library and bookseller's lists of related works.

Some historians might consider such references to fictional accounts beneath their scholarly endeavors. If historians do not reach out, however, to such interested audiences, the canyon that separates the historical and fictional Shaker will never shrink. The Shakers' rich history of communal life will be remembered not only as an experiment but as one that failed miserably. And many readers who are eager to learn about the Shakers but who would never even think of searching for a historical text will be left to accept all of the fabricated stories as truth. The pervasive and tenacious stereotypes will persist.

Appendix A
Historical Documents that Refute the Fictional Image of Children as Inmates in a Shaker Prison

Because the intended audience of the preceding essay is historians who know of the lives of actual Shaker children, this appendix will only briefly touch on some historical examples that contradict the stereotype created by the fiction and visitors' accounts. The life of Shaker children was neither more harsh nor rule-dominated than the life of their counterparts in the world, a context that no writers of novels about Shaker children ever consider.[1]

Village journals often cite the reluctance or even vehement protest of children whose parents wished to take them away. A Center Family journal at Pleasant Hill records that on April 8, 1839 an apostate, "Abijah Pendergast, after leaving, came and took his family all except Levi[;] he would not go being old enough to chuse for himself."[2] Eldress Lucy Woodward in the 1870s explained the practices of her predecessors at White Water regarding bound children in the antebellum decades when indentures were more common: "It was their rule to allow all children free choice, after they came to be old enough to judge of the manner of life in the society, and if they chose to go, the society would not hinder them, no matter whether they were bound or not. There was no imprisonment here."[3] Stephen Paterwic observes that when questions arose about an indenture and children responded that they desired "to stay with the Believers instead of parents or relatives," it "was a shock to sheriffs and court officials, but not to the Shakers," who witnessed "heart-wrenching scenes of children clinging to the sisters as officials dragged them off."[4] One of the most famous, or infamous, stories of a custody battle in the Shaker west was that of Lucy Bryant at Pleasant Hill who "had been bound [there] by her Father." Her mother, presumably estranged from her husband, organized two mobs that accosted the village. During the first attack "a number of Brethren and Sisters were inhumanly beaten," but the mob departed after a few of the more level-headed men of the horde had "an interv[i]ew with the girl" and "found her ste[a]dfast and determined to Stay." Unfortunately, the next day the mob, fortified with "whiskey" by Lucy's mother, forcibly removed the girl.[5]

According to Priscilla Brewer and Hervey Elkins, children in eastern villages also had reason to wish to remain with the Shakers. Brewer describes

a father who had indentured two of his daughters: one day he "burst into the Church Family dining room" and dragged the girls off even though they "screeched, begged and cried with all their might" that they would "rather die" than leave.[6] These two girls, dragged off and maybe abused in other ways by their father, had every reason to prefer the Shakers who seldom resorted to whippings, a common practice in the outside world.[7] Although Hervey Elkins' account of his Shaker life did criticize some practices of the sect, he staunchly defended its gentle approach to children: "I affirm, without any bias for any principle but truth, that a stringent, religious law, positively forbids any corporeal punishment whatever, except the use of small twigs applied to extremely contumacious children under a dozen years of age; that moral suasion and moral rebuke be the only expedients employed in the training of youth."[8]

Appendix B
Evidence that the Shakers Were not the Deluded Fanatics Portrayed in Fiction

Since most readers of *American Communal Societies Quarterly* know details about the intellectual capabilities of many actual Shakers, this appendix will only briefly touch on some historical examples that contradict the stereotype displayed in the fiction and in visitors' accounts. Giles's *Believers* is representative of the many novels that mock the Shakers' practice of communicating with the dead without ever mentioning that the practice was also quite popular in the outside world during and after the Shakers' Era of Manifestations. According to Fran Grace, spiritualism by the 1870s "claimed to have a million adherents."[9] Giles's novel also characterizes Richard McNemar and Benjamin Seth Youngs as men who are not "reasonable," both as "superstitious as the most ignorant savage."[10] Undoubtedly, almost all readers of Giles's story know only this fictional version of the men. Stephen Stein describes the historical McNemar and Youngs as displaying an "aggressive intellectual style," and great "erudition" in their theological treatises.[11]

Numerous stories about the Shakers mention the absence of learned books in the village, claiming the Shaker leadership rigidly removed such a belief-dampening influence from the sight of brethren and sisters. Historical documents, however, reveal that those interested in reading could do so. Sandra Soule in her examination of Aquila Massie Bolton, a Shaker for about seven years and a proponent of uniting Swedenborgian ideas and Shaker theology, observes that "the Shaker leaders in Union Village … had indulgently allowed Bolton to retain his books containing Swedenborg's writing."[12] Although they did intervene when Bolton continued "secretly" to distribute these books "among young Believers in the Gathering Order where he lived" even after he promised to lock them up, they initially allowed his study of them, to the sect's eventual benefit.[13] Indeed, in 1845, some twelve years after Bolton's apostasy, one prominent Shaker, Robert White Jr. valued so much what this thinking and reading Believer had produced in his pro-Shaker poetry that he "appropriated the best Bolton had to offer Shakerism and published Bolton's poetic recruiting letters in *Some Lines in Verse About Shakers*."[14]

Hervey Elkins also addresses the common misconception that the Shakers are illogical mystics. Although many fictional narratives describe

the benumbing effects of the Shakers' isolated communities, Elkins opines that by removing themselves "from the follies, customs, and associations of the world," the Shakers experience an "expansion of the human mind."[15] Elkins addresses the general prejudice that the Shakers are unlearned: "Many theologians denounce [the Shakers'] religion as unscriptural, and willingly engage them in an argument founded on biblical data." But Elkins cautions those who "encounter them in logical debate. For there are among them, profound thinkers, and those who are deeply read in ecclesiastical truths." He then lauds numerous Shaker writers who continued the scholarship of McNemar and Youngs, namely Frederick Evans and Hervey Eads, to mention just two of his long list. These Shaker writers continue to "hurl argumentative defiance to all philosophers and divines," but Elkins concludes his tribute to Shaker intellectuals by focusing not on a national figure but an affable polymath, John Lyon, "an elder of the Novitiate Order at Enfield, N. H.," a quite elderly man but still "as profound and vivacious in intellect, as amiable in character, and as agreeable in manners, as any one of middle age."[16]

Appendix C
Historical Evidence that Shaker Women Were Not the Wraiths Portrayed in Fiction

Since the intended audience of the preceding essay is historians who know details about the lives of actual Shaker women, this appendix will only briefly touch on some historical examples that contradict their ghostly image in tales told by visitors and in Shaker fiction. Those stories seldom explore in depth the notion that Shaker villages offered women of the nineteenth century (and later) a secure home, prospects for accomplishments, and influence unknown in the outside world. Women with large families and no husbands often came to Shaker villages because they had few opportunities for employment in the outside world. Stephen Stein explained that in his search through numerous Shaker journals, he noticed a certain pattern in a family's departure from a community. If over the years certain members of a family apostatized, they would leave in the following order: oldest son, other male children, father, daughters, and finally the mother if she would depart at all.[17] Reasons for the mother staying longest are many, but one advantage must have been that in a celibate Shaker village women could, in the words of Majorie Procter-Smith, escape the "dangers of childbearing" and could gain "a measure of control over their own bodies that existing patriarchal family structures did not allow."[18] In many communities women had not just control over "their own bodies" but control over other people as well, that is, governmental powers. And even though each Shaker family and village ostensibly was administered by a dual leadership made up of women and men, women often held the dominant sway in the lives of numerous men and women. The most prominent example is Lucy Wright who, at Joseph Meacham's death in 1796, became the sect's acknowledged national leader. Procter-Smith describes the preeminence of Wright over the male elders who were ostensibly co-leaders with her: "Henry Clough, who succeeded Meacham as Elder, was apparently not equal to Wright's strength of leadership." She quotes the apostate Thomas Brown who observed that the elder who followed Clough, Abiathar Babbit, "also was in submission to the Mother Lucy Wright."[19] During her quarter-century tenure, Wright occasionally pursued policies even though male leaders advised other approaches. Brewer observes that a prominent elder, Freegift Wells, urged that all rules be written out. Wright believed that such codification would only foster contention between

leaders and congregants.[20] Stephen Stein describes Wright as "perhaps the most influential leader in all of Shaker history."[21] Stephen Paterwic, in the *Historical Dictionary of the Shakers*, amplifies Stein's conclusion on Wright's prepotency. In recording the death of Giles Avery in 1890, Paterwic asserts that he was only the "de facto head of Shakerism.… There had not been a real leader of Shakerism since 1821," the year of Lucy Wright's death.[22] In the early nineteenth century Pleasant Hill's leadership was also female dominated. Similar to Mother Lucy Wright's firm decision-making for the entire sect, Lucy Smith at Pleasant Hill initiated action that helped free the society of a serious debt. The economic crisis arose when deacons "went unbeknown to anyone but themselves," invested money in grain futures, but lost it when the bank holding the society's money failed. Mother Lucy organized a campaign to sell "such things as they had on hand." They collected "basket, pipes, carpets" and in about one year had cleared a $6,000 debt.[23] Shaker theology also elevated women. Jean Humez explains that Shaker beliefs in a Mother god, much of it formulated by early *male* leaders, serves as a counterpoise to "the Father god of Jewish and Christian tradition. One of the functions of the 'second appearing in the female [Ann Lee]' of the Christ spirit had been precisely to reveal for the first time the existence of the nature of this Mother Spirit."[24] Glendyne Wergland observes that very few visitors to Shaker villages could grasp "the gender-balanced nature of Shaker theology," but one sister, Anna Matthewson, in an attempt to describe Shaker beliefs from an outsider's perspective formulated the following explanation: most Christians easily accept that Eve was instrumental in precipitating the original fall of humans, "why then … should it be thought incredible that the agency of a woman [Mother Ann] should … [lead] the human race out of sin."[25] Support for the female side of the deity against the traditional male predominance was reinforced during the Era of Manifestation in the late 1830s and 1840s. The activities of a thirty-three-year-old "visionary instrument" at New Lebanon, Eleanor Potter, attests to this balancing. Potter was no rogue instrument espousing ideas not supported by the Central Ministry of the Shaker church. Jane Crosthwaite posits that Potter's spirit messages can be viewed as "summing up a conservative campaign in a set of [four] appreciative 'Notices,' designed to encourage, fortify, and commend her leaders."[26] That a strong female aspect of the godhead was countenanced by the church can be seen in the details of one of the messages of Potter. It was accepted and recorded along with her other instructions from beyond,

all of which seemed to be an effort in "shoring up the old terms [and principles of Shakerism] for the future good of the society"[27] Crosthwaite summarizes the significance of one spirit "gift" that Holy Mother Wisdom sent through Potter to Eldress Ruth Landon, "a winnowing fan" which was an "instrument of discernment," helping the eldress separate the "wheat from chaff … and truth from falsehood": "Particularly notable in this case, the instrument of discernment was a gift from … the Divine Mother to the [senior] female minister" of the four members of the Central Ministry. "It was not bestowed by the Heavenly Father who might be supposed to embody judgment …; nor was it given to Elder Ebenezer, the senior male leader. Once she was encountered in the Era of Manifestation as the female expression of God and as the companion of the Heavenly Father, Holy Mother Wisdom was recognized as the divine agent of knowledge, judgment, and discernment."[28]

Notes

1. "Biographical Register" [Book C] *Church Record, Kept by Order of the Trustees, In Three Books, A. B. & C: Book C,* Pleasant Hill, 1845. Original in Archives of Shaker Village at Pleasant Hill, Harrodsburg Historical Society, Harrodsburg, KY [copy in Pleasant Hill Library]. Just a few examples of long-standing Shakers are the following: "Sarah Pool, Jr., believed May 1808, deceased Feb 1879"; "Levi I, believed Jan. 1806, deceased 1881"; "Betsy Spaulding, believed Jan. 12, 1836, deceased Jan. 14, 1905"; "Hortency Hooser, believed Oct. 1809, deceased Dec. 29, 1884"
2. Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *The Poets and Poetry of America*. (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart 1842).
3. St. John Honeywood, "The Shaking Quakers." *Poems by St. John Honeywood, A. M. with Some Pieces in Prose.* New York: T. and J. Swords, 1801, 146.
4. Brian L. Bixby and Jill Mudgett. "Daniel Pierce Thompson and 'The Shaker Lovers': Portraying the Shakers in Fiction and on the Stage." *American Communal Societies Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (2012): 79.
5. Evert A. Duyckinck, "The Shakers at Lebanon." *Literary World*, Sept. 13, 1851, 202-3.
6. Stephen Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 61-62.
7. Lucy Smith, "Letter to Eldress Ruth [Mary Langdon], National Ministry, New Lebanon, August 12, 1825." The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection, Winterthur Library, Winterthur, DE, No. 1044, SA1215.8.
8. Duyckinck, 202.

9. Glendyne Wergland, ed., *Visiting the Shakers, 1778-1849: Watervliet, Hancock, Tyringham, New Lebanon* (Clinton, NY: Richard W. Couper Press, 2007), 58.
10. Ibid., 59.
11. Ibid., 63.
12. Catherine Maria Sedgwick, *Redwood: A Tale*. Author's Revised Edition [2nd ed]. (1824; repr., New-York: George P. Putnam, 1850), 279.
13. Ibid., 285.
14. Mary Kelley, "Introduction," in *Hope Leslie; or, Early Times in the Massachusetts*, by Catherine Maria Sedgwick (1827; repr., New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), x.
15. Sedgwick, *Redwood,* 287.
16. Daniel Pierce Thompson, "Shaker Lovers," *Evergreen* 2, no. 4 (April 1841): 171.
17. Glendyne Wergland, ed., *Visiting the Shakers, 1850-1899: Watervliet, Hancock, Tyringham, New Lebanon* (Clinton, NY: Richard W. Couper Press, 2010), 205.
18. Ibid., 253.
19. Ibid., 197-98.
20. See Appendix A for examples of historical children who sought sanctuary with the Shakers.
21. Linda Durrant, *Imperfections* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 18 (about names), 50 (birthdays), 88 (speaking prohibition).
22. Ibid., 27.
23. Ibid., 135.
24. Louann Gaeddert, *Hope* (New York: Atheneum, 1995), 135.
25. Ibid., 18.
26. Ibid., 41.
27. Ibid., 69.
28. Ibid., 102.
29. Ibid., 147.
30. Ibid., 156.
31. Janet Hickman, *Susannah* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 56.
32. Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 56.
33. Hickman, *Susannah*, 57-58.
34. Ibid., 14, 124, 162 (oft-repeated desire); 37, 158 (refrain).
35. Ibid., 7.
36. Ibid., 149.
37. Ibid., 44.
38. Joan Holub, *Doll Hospital: Charlotte's Choice* (New York: Scholastic, 2004), 60.
39. Ibid., 70.
40. Ibid., 62.
41. Ibid., 89-90.

42. In 1988 Yolen won the Caldecott award for the text of *Owl Moon* from the Association for Library Service to Children. See http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/caldecottmedal/caldecottwinners/caldecottmedal In 2017 Yolen was "named the 33rd Damon Knight Grand Master for her contributions to the literature of science fiction and fantasy by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA). The award is given by SFWA for 'lifetime achievement in science fiction and/or fantasy.' Jane Yolen joins the Grand Master ranks alongside such legends as Ray Bradbury, Anne McCaffrey, Ursula K. Le Guin, Isaac Asimov, and Joe Haldeman." See: https://nebulas.sfwa.org/sfwa-announces-newest-damon-knight-grand-master-jane-yolen/ Maybe it is appropriate, in a Shaker context, that Jane Yolen has been received an award from The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. Although *The Gift of Sarah Barker* is a well written exploration of a young girl's coming of age and even displays a studied semblance of historical accuracy, the story line, especially the image of a vengeful Shaker elder expelling innocent children, fits nicely into the category of fantasy.
43. Jane Yolen, *The Gift of Sarah Barker* (New York: Viking, 1981), 128.
44. Ibid., 41.
45. Ibid., 128.
46. Ibid., 138.
47. Ann Gabhart, *The Outsider.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2008), 46-47.
48. Ibid., 119-21.
49. Ibid., 164.
50. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers, 1778-1849*, 23
51. Ibid., 47.
52. Ibid., 156.
53. Sedgwick, *Redwood,* 263.
54. Thompson, 169.
55. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers, 1778-1849*, 79.
56. Ibid., 94.
57. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Canterbury Pilgrims." *The Snow-Image, and Other Twice-Told Tales*. (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1852), 150.
58. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers, 1850-1899*, 34.
59. Ibid., 93.
60. Eva Wilder McGlasson, *Diana's Livery* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891), 28.
61. Rachel (Ray) Costelloe Strachey, *Shaken by the Wind: A Story of Fanaticism by Ray Strachey.* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), 13.
62. Ibid., 97.
63. Ibid. Although Strachey's novel does not particularly name the religious group as the Shakers, Mary L. Richmond in her *Shakers: A Bibliography* Vol.

II. (Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 1977), 122, states that "it is the story of a small communistic community whose doctrines and impulse have been identified as closely resembling Shaker practices."
64. Thompson, 170.
65. Samuel D. Johnson, "Shaker Lovers: A Drama in One Act." *Playbill CLXVI, Spencer Boston Theater.* (Boston: William V. Spencer, 1849, 1852, 1857), 7.
66. Ibid., 9.
67. William Dean Howells, *The Undiscovered Country*. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1880), 201.
68. Caroline Lee Hentz, "The Shaker Girl," *The Lady's Book* 18 (1839): 49-50.
69. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers, 1778-1849*, 51.
70. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Shaker Bridal." *Twice-told Tales*. (Boston: James Munroe and Co., 1842), 267.
71. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers, 1778-1849*, 235.
72. Ibid., 77-78.
73. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers, 1850-1899*, 135.
74. Ibid., 25.
75. Ibid., 204.
76. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers, 1778-1849*, 312.
77. McGlasson, *Diana's Livery*, 253.
78. Ibid., 256
79. Janice Holt Giles, *The Believers* (1957; repr., Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1989), 186.
80. Ibid., 192.
81. Strachey, 68.
82. Ibid., 66.
83. Giles, *Believers*, 203.
84. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers, 1850-1899*, 153; 161.
85. Margaret Hunter Hall, *The Aristocratic Journey, Being the Outspoken LETTERS OF MRS. BASIL HALL Written during a Fourteen Months' Sojourn in America 1827-1828* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), 42.
86. Richmond, 72, item 2375
87. Charles F. Browne, "Artemis Ward on the Shakers, Letter VIII," *Vanity Fair* (1859-1863) 3 (Feb. 23, 1861): 95.
88. Hortency Hooser, "School Roll Book Poems." *Shakers. United Society of Believers in Ohio Records, 1808-1904*. Manuscript 119, Box 8, Folder 6, The Ohio Historical Society Library and Archives, Columbus, OH.
89. Folger, Randy, *Gentle Words: Shaker Music* [and cassette cover/lyrics] (Americana Productions. Recorded at Indianapolis: Hirsch and Associates, 1993.)
90. Seth Y. Wells, "Redwood. A Criticism of a Novel of the Above Title Containing Some Chapters Relative to the Shakers." *Folder Description: 1818-*

1846. Seth Y. Wells. Writings on a variety of subjects, including matters of Shaker theology, militia laws, instruction of children, and disorder. Western Reserve Historical Society, VII, A-14, Microfilm Roll #53.

91. Christian Goodwillie and Glendyne Wergland, eds., *Shaker Autobiographies, Biographies, and Testimonies, 1806-1907.* (London; Brookfield, VT: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 1:207.
92. Elizabeth A. De Wolfe, *Shaking the Faith: Women, Family, and Mary Marshall Dyer's Anti-Shaker Campaign, 1815-1867* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 86.
93. See in respective order the following reviewers: Maria Bast, "Fantastic." *Amazon Customer Reviews, The Outsider: A Novel."* Sept. 2, 2009, April 17, 2013; Bobbi Rightmyer, "The Outsider." *Amazon Customer Reviews, The Outsider: A Novel."* Aug. 10, 2008, April 17, 2013; Anita [Utah]. "Delightful historical details." *Amazon Customer Reviews, The Outsider: A Novel."* Nov. 22, 2008, April 17, 2013.
94. Emálee Krulish, Archivist. Shakertown of Pleasant Hill. Personal Interview, 27 June 2016.
95. Carol Medlicott, *Issachar Bates: A Shaker's Journey.* (Hannover, NH: University Press of New England, 2013), xvi.
96. Charles T. Wood, Dartmouth Professor of History and specialist on the Middle Ages, asserts that Tuchman was "no ordinary medievalist" but one in *A Distant Mirror* who "displayed a remarkable capacity for bringing history to life"; see Charles T. Wood, Review of *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* by Barbara W. Tuchman. *Speculum* 54.2 (1979): 431. Oxford University historian, Diarmaid MacCulloch, gave his stamp of approval to Mantel's *Wolf Hall*: It is "not just a brilliant novel … but startlingly accurate on Henry VIII's England: I gasped at the details which Mantel knew and had woven into her story"; see quotation in Robinson Murphy, "Elizabeth Barton's Claim" *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 36* (2015): 157. Historians and military experts generally agree that Michael Shaara's *Killer Angels* "does … an excellent job of accurately portraying the facts and action of Gettysburg" (46-47). Kevin Grauke notes that James McPherson, Professor Emeritus of American History at Princeton, "praised" *Killer Angels* and "General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, the chief military officer of the Persian Gulf War" proclaimed it "the best and most realistic historical novel about war I have ever read"; see Kevin Grauke, "Vietnam, Survivalism, and the Civil War: The Use of a History in Michael Shaara's *The Killer Angels* and Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain.*" *War, Literature & the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities* 14 (2002): 51. In an article exploring the historical events behind *Casablanca*, Alan Sennett relates that the film actually helped correct a popular misconception that the United States opposed Vichy French officials in North Africa and supported whole-heartedly the Free-French forces. The film accurately showed in Captain Renault that many

"French officials [were] caught between the practical realities of the Vichy regime and their patriotic feelings." See Alan Sennett, "Play It Again, Uncle Sam," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 37, no. 1 (2009): 3 and 7.

97. About rules for children outside Shaker villages, see John S. C. Abbott, *The School-Girl; or, The Principles of Christian Duty Familiarly Enforced* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1840); and *The Well-Bred Boy and Girl; or New School of Good Manners* (Boston: B. B. Mussey, 1850).
98. Kitty Jane Ryan, "A Journal kept in the Center Family Commenced January 1st 1839-1860," Original in Pleasant Hill Collection, University of Kentucky Archives, Lexington, KY [copy in Pleasant Hill Library], 3. For other children who wanted to remain with the Shakers instead of leaving with blood relatives, see Ryan, 4, 20.
99. Thomas Sakmyster and James R. Innis, Jr, eds. *The Shakers of White Water, Ohio, 1823*-1916 (Clinton, NY: Richard W. Couper Press, 2014), 159.
100. Stephen J. Paterwic, *Tyringham Shakers* (Clinton, N.Y.: Richard W. Couper Press, 2013), 66.
101. Lucy Smith, "Letter to Eldress Ruth [Mary Langdon], National Ministry, New Lebanon, August 12, 1825." The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection, Winterthur Library, Winterthur, DE, No. 1044, SA1215.8.
102. Priscilla Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986), 149
103. Alice Morse Earle, *Child Life in Colonial Days* (1899; repr. Stockbridge, MA: Berkshire House, 1993), 204; and Richard H. Brodhead, *Culture of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 15
104. Hervey Elkins, *Fifteen Years in the Senior Order of Shakers: A Narration of Facts, Concerning That Singular People* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth Press, 1853), 30.
105. Fran Grace, *Carry A. Nation: Retelling the Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 53.
106. Giles, *Believers*, 142.
107. Stephen Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, 74.
108. Sandra A. Soule, *Independency of the Mind: Aquila Massie Bolton, Poetry, Shakerism, and Controversy* (Clinton, N.Y.: Richard W. Couper Press, 2010, 26.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid., 35.
111. Elkins, *Fifteen Years in the Senior Order of Shakers*, 120.
112. Ibid., 132.
113. Stephen Stein, "Presentation on William S. Byrd, Charles W. Byrd, and the Shakers." *Utopias in Literature and History Class* (University of Indianapolis, May 1996).
114. Majorie Procter-Smith, *Shakerism and Feminism: Reflections on Women's Religion and the Early Shakers* (Old Chatham, NY: Shaker Museum and Library, 1991), 6.

115. Marjorie Procter-Smith, *Women in Shaker Community and Worship: A Feminist Analysis of the Uses of Religious Symbolism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 50.
116. Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives*, 42.
117. Stein, *Shaker Experience in America,* 117.
118. Stephen J. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary of the Shakers* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2008), xxi.
119. "Letter of January 29, 1821, from Pleasant Hill ministry to Mount Lebanon ministry," Western Reserve Historical Society Microfilms, Section IV, A; reel 53.
120. Jean Humez, *Mother's First-Born Daughters: Early Shaker Writings on Women and Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), xxi.
121. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers, 1850-1899*, 65.
122. Jane F. Crosthwaite, *The Shaker Spiritual Notices of Eleanor Potter* (Clinton, N.Y.: Richard W. Couper Press, 2013), 8.
123. Ibid., 9.
124. Ibid., 8-9, 14.