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THE NARRATIVES OF ANN LEE AS A CORE COMPONENT OF SHAKER THEOLOGICAL EVOLUTION

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Abstract

The United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing, or the Shakers, are a small progressive communal religious group founded in the mid-eighteenth century by a woman named Ann Lee. This thesis follows the stories told about Ann Lee by the Shakers throughout their history and documents how the changing narratives reflect the changing culture of Shakerism.

As a result of being both a progressive and a communal religious society, the Shakers faced the dilemma of maintaining their religious core while maintaining a progressive stance that was consistent with the dominant culture from which they strived to separate themselves. This thesis argues that the Shakers used the static form of the written narrative to balance and maintain the essential nature of Shakerism, threatened by increased interaction with American mainstream society.
Documenting social and cultural changes within Shakerism through the mid-twentieth century through published and unpublished Shaker documents, the investigation explores core concepts in folk studies’ examination of narrative to convey how the Shakers perpetuated their progressive nature, while maintaining what it meant, and means, to be a Shaker.
Introduction

Shakerism is a still-active and very progressive religion that lives by the three primary tenants of celibacy, confession of sin, and living a communal life. I was drawn to the study of Shakerism through the study of the architecture of the Centre Family Dwelling at the South Union Shaker site in Kentucky. Through the analysis of the architecture of a building that now houses a Shaker museum I was inevitably exposed to Shaker history and culture. My study of the architecture evolved into regular volunteer work, which eventually turned into a job. The study of Shakerism became a regular topic of study in graduate school. My interest led me to research at multiple institutions, internships at several Shaker museums, a visit to the still active Shaker community at Sabbathday Lake, Maine, and ultimately into an interest in how Shaker narratives evolved in conjunction to the culture itself.

Narratives played a very important role in Shakerism from the very beginning. Trying to attain credibility with a non-Shaker, and often hostile public, the early Shakers relied on tradition to support their theological ideas. The medium by which tradition found itself being implemented was narrative. Through the narrative form the Shakers developed a way to validate their own cultural views while not isolating themselves from the influences of the outside world.
Very progressive from the beginning, the Shakers often allowed themselves to be influenced by the non-Shaker world in a very controlled way. The progressive nature of Shakerism created a dilemma for the Shakers. How to maintain a core of Shakerness while adapting to popular American movements became a question that would be resolved through the narrative form and the theological idea of divine reinterpretation. Divine reinterpretation is the act of reinterpreting the past in the present according to divine revelations, and has been a theological tradition that has been a part of Shakerism before its official establishment. The theological notion of divine reinterpretation revolves around the idea that things are always changing according to God’s plan; and that plan is revealed through vision or a divine manifestation. Often visions put new spins on older ideas, new rules were put in place based on the content of a vision, or the general way of life could slightly change based on divine manifestations.

Throughout the course of Shakerism, one can observe a struggle between the static and dynamic elements of the culture. The static implies what it means to be a Shaker, and the dynamic implies and makes room for the progressive tradition within Shakerism. My argument then is that with the influences of broader American society and the need to stay culturally current the Shakers used the static form of the written traditional narrative to balance and maintain the Shakerness that was threatened by the dynamism that resulted in staying culturally current with American society via the act of Divine Reinterpretation, and also the notion of unquestioned tradition.

I will make this argument by showing how Shakerism changed in parallel with the American society that they ironically struggled to separate themselves from. Where each
of the changes are implemented through the use of divine reinterpretation I show that there is a traditional narrative to be found maintaining core Shaker beliefs. The analysis of my argument begins with a broad look at how Shakerism, narrative, and tradition intermingle to create a balanced religion that adapts easily to its environment without losing its substance. I then look at two specific examples. First, I look at a single narrative example to show how the idea behind the earliest types of narrative tradition, as a form of validation, grew into a static form of defined Shakerism that worked in unison with the theological notion of divine reinterpretation to better allow the cultural evolution of Shakerism. I then look at how Shakerism early on relied on Biblical tradition to validate itself in a very Christian, but non-Shaker environment. Shakerism early on relied on Biblical tradition to validate itself in a very Christian, but non-Shaker environment. I then look more specifically. Lastly the examples are pulled together to draw upon the larger theoretical idea of the role of narratives and tradition within the cultural group known as Shakers. But, in order to understand the central role of narrative, tradition, and the ever developing nature of Shakerism in mediating change in Shaker life and belief, it is first necessary to examine the history of the religious group.
The Shakers find their beginnings in England. Although some historians, including the Shakers themselves, have tried to trace Shakerism back to the Camisards, also known as the “French Prophets” (Garrett 1987: 11; Stein 1992: 5-6), in Great Britain in the mid-18th century, their history begins with an English couple named James and Jane Wardley. Living just outside present day Manchester, England, this couple broke off from the Quaker sect and began holding their own services in their home. Differing from the Quaker emphasis on silence until moved by the spirit, the newly formed Wardley Society emphasized ecstatic worship as dictated by the spirit by all participants. Their charismatic worship services did not go unnoticed by the Manchester public: hence they early on received the derogatory title of the “Shaking Quakers”. This title eventually evolved into simply “Shakers”, a vernacular name by which they eventually came to be known by, to both themselves and the outside. Although they adopted the name ‘Shakers’ their original name; still today their official name, is the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing.

In this small group was a young woman named Ann Lee, who, under the influence of the Wardley’s, eventually became the leader of the small band and ultimately brought them to America where they would take root in New England. Ann Lee was born on February 29, 1736 (Francis 2000: 3). As she was often compared to Jesus, her birth
falling on this particular day might even lead one to argue that she herself had a special and unusual birth. According to personal experience narratives told by Shakers who knew her, she battled with issues of spirituality from early in her life (Wells 1816: 2-3). In September 1758, at the age of twenty-two, Ann Lee joined the Wardley Society. The society continued informally through the late eighteenth century. After having a vision of the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden while in prison, Ann was thereafter called Mother of the small band, and took on the new role of leader.

America, a country that in the 1770s was beginning to thrive, was seen by the Shakers as the place where they could create their heaven on earth. They by no means believed that coming to America would eliminate the persecution they faced so harshly in England, but they did see America as a tabula rasa on which they could more freely write their history as a religious group. Their hope was that a more firm establishment could be made in America because the dominant religious institutions were not quite as firmly entrenched into the cultural landscape as the Anglican church was in England. For the Shakers, like many religious groups, persecution was, and is, a source of strength. The persecutions they faced in both England and America became central to the narratives that Shaker theology was to be later built on. With the validation of many visions by those in the small group, they made the decision to depart for America.

The small and condemned ship named “Mariah” left Liverpool, England, on May 19, 1774 (Francis 2000: 81; Wells 1816: 6; Barker 1985: 2) and landed in New York Harbor on August 6, 1774 after making the treacherous voyage across the Atlantic (Wells 1816: 6, Mace 1907: 30). Once in America, the Shakers began to travel, making converts
where possible; for several years they were without a place to call their own. Another obstacle to establishment at this time was the Revolutionary War. With the religious and political turmoil facing America at this time, after landing the Shakers began to experience the persecutions of being both different in terms of religion and worship, and also being British.

It wasn’t until a small tract of land near Albany, called Niskeyuna, was purchased in 1775 that they made their first home in America (Filley 1975: 11). It should be remembered that Ann Lee did not institute communal living; this later became a requirement under the leadership of Joseph Meacham. Ann Lee insisted upon celibacy and confession of sins. As a child “she had great light and conviction concerning the sinfulness and depravity of human nature, and especially concerning the lusts of the flesh, which she often made known to her parents,” and often “in early youth, she had a great abhorrence of the fleshly cohabitation of the sexes, and so great was her sense of its impurity, that she often admonished her mother against it, which, coming to her father’s ears, he threatened, and actually attempted to whip her; upon which she threw herself into her mother’s arms, and clung around her to escape his strokes” (Wells 1816: 2-3). In Thankful Barce’s testimony concerning her conversion she says that in a conversation with Ann Lee the following dialogue took place:

Mother Ann asked her if she was sick of sin? She answered, that she though she was. Said Mother, ‘Tell me what you call sin, that you May be instructed; for the way to Heaven is to leave the flesh behind, and be married to Christ’ (Wells 1816: 30).

The purchasing of the land at Niskeyuna, which later became the Watervliet community, gave them a place to stay and live. Early on, the Shakers remained rather
nomadic in nature. Ann Lee spent time at Watervliet, New York; Hancock, Massachusetts; New Lebanon, New York; Ashfield, Massachusetts; Enfield, Connecticut; Shirley, Massachusetts; and Harvard, Massachusetts (Stein 1992: 20-21). Later Ann Lee and her small following settled down at Watervliet. Unrest inevitably arose in the small community, as the conversion of members seemed to have stalled, and those who were part of the community began to wonder if they had really given everything up in vain. But Ann Lee continued to exhort them that she saw in the near future the day when their number would rapidly increase.

Ann Lee conducted several mission trips over the New England landscape, eventually settling down in Watervliet, New York. Ann Lee would die after only ten years in America on Sept. 8, 1784 at the age of forty-eight (Francis 2000: 320; Campion 1990: 145; Mace 1907: 27). Her successor, James Whittaker, was one of the original nine English Shakers that made the voyage to America from England. His leadership lasted only a few years, until his death in 1787. The death of Whittaker ended the era of the original founders from England (Stein 1992: 36-37). Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright soon took over leadership after the death of James Whittaker; it was during this time that the organizational genius of Joseph Meacham brought the Shaker converts into communal societies, and thereby created the third major tenet of Shakerism - communal living. Under his first year of leadership, the community of New Lebanon, New York was established, and that same year he took the land first purchased in upstate New York at Niskeyunya and created the Watervliet community.
Between 1787 and 1794 eleven societies were established, all under the authority of Meacham. Those were Watervliet, New York; Mount Lebanon, New York; Hancock, Massachusetts; Harvard, Massachusetts; Enfield, Connecticut; Tyringham, Massachusetts; Alfred, Maine; Enfield, New Hampshire; Shirley, Massachusetts; Canterbury, New Hampshire; and Sabbathday Lake, Maine. Meacham also wrote the first attempt at creating a formal theology for Shakerism. This attempt, one that later Shaker theologians in the early 1800s drew upon heavily, is found in *A Concise Statement of the Principles of the Only True Church According to the Gospel of the Present Appearance of Christ. As Held to and Practiced by the True Followers of the Living Saviour, at New Lebanon, &c. Together with a Letter from James Whittaker, Minister of the Gospel in this Day of Christ’s Second Appearing to His Natural Relations in England*, published in 1790 in Bennington, Vermont. It was Meacham also who, following the teachings of Ann Lee, established the dual leadership of the community. Communalism for the Shakers implied an equality that included both gender and race. Rooted in the theological principles that God has a dual nature, both male and female, dual leadership roles were instituted. As a result every community had an Elder and an Eldress, Deacon and Deaconess, etc. He also continued Ann Lee’s conviction that public confession of sins was crucial to salvation. Here Meacham formally set up the primary tenets of Shakerism: communal living, confession of sins, and celibacy - the first being instituted by him, and the others by Ann Lee.

After Meacham’s death in 1796 Lucy Wright, who was already the Eldress, became the first in the order of the Shakers (Stein 1992: 48; Brewer 1986: 28). Meacham
would say just before his death, referring to Lucy Wright, “Your Mother will have the
gifts of God for you after I am gone” (Stein 1992: 49). Aware that the first Great
Awakening around 1790 in New England had been key to their current success, Lucy
Wright made the decision to send out three missionaries to what was then the western
U.S. in an attempt to take advantage of what came to be known as the Second Great
Awakening. On January 1, 1805 three Shaker missionaries: John Meacham, Benjamin
Seth Youngs, and Issacher Bates were dispatched from New Lebanon, New York, to the
states of Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. The trip was a long and dangerous one, but on
March 3, 1805 the three missionaries arrived at Matthew Houston’s home at Paint Lick in
Garrard County, Kentucky. On March 7th they revealed the Shaker gospel to the west at
the Paint Lick meeting house; and on Wednesday March 27th Malcham Worley confessed
the faith, making him the first Shaker of the western country. Nearly a month later on
Tuesday April 24th Richard McNemar, who was instrumental in the shaping of the
Kentucky Revivals, converted to Shakerism, later becoming the most influential advocate
for Shakerism in the west. The beginning of Shakerism at the Pleasant Hill Shaker
community, originally called Shawnee Run, was on Friday August 16, 1805. During this
time Elisha Thomas, and Samuel and Henry Bonta converted to Shakerism, the first from
the locale that very soon afterwards became the Shaker community at Pleasant Hill. It
was on December 3, 1806 that Elisha Thomas donated all the land he owned there to the
Shaker cause. On this date, Thomas along with other converts in the area created a
family covenant at Pleasant Hill, officially establishing the community. The community
of South Union was established two years later in 1807 (Eads 1872: Journal A).
The westward expansion of 1805 capitalized on the Kentucky revivals taking place in the area that began some five years earlier. By 1805 the revivals had spread from south-central Kentucky up through Ohio. Cincinnati would be the central hub for the western Shaker communities. Union Village, just north of Cincinnati in Lebanon, Ohio, served as the mother community for the western societies the same way that the society at New Lebanon, New York, served as the mother community for all the societies. Eventually seven communities would be established in the states of Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana.

The Shakers experienced both a positive and negative reception in the west. Persecution came in many forms. According to Benjamin Seth Youngs’ recording, “Savage Brutality - At midnight, last night, our horses ears and tails were cut off!” He would also record that “Barton W. Stone [early leader of the new light movement in Kentucky], the great preacher of a spurious gospel, shut his door against us” (Eads 1872: Journal A)

Journal entries often record Shaker meetings whose descriptions spiritually coincide very closely with descriptions of spiritual manifestation at early camp meetings. For example, at a Shaker meeting in Ohio at Richard McNemar’s home, a journal records,

Believers met at Rich’s McNemars – The house crowded as usual with rude people – Richd. Spoke to them – After speaking & dancing exercises were very extraordinary with many till midnight – Such as 6 or 8 at once putting their heads together about a foot from the floor chattering as with unknown tongues, while their fingers were engaged drawing figures on the floor then rise up in tranquility – Others wrestling (chasing) with their utmost strength! In one meeting they all sat in a circle and played button (Eads 1872: Journal A).
The charismatic nature of Shakerism was exactly what many of the participants in the Kentucky Revivals had been awaiting for many years.

The experiential nature of Shaker spirituality that had persisted from its inception was very attractive to the participants who found themselves immersed in the geographical, social, and spiritual environments of the Kentucky Revivals. The whirling, dancing, trances, and speaking in tongues for which the Shakers had been persecuted for many years was a close parallel to the shakes, jerks, barks, and visions and prophecies that often accompanied the participants who were taken by the spirit of God during the revivals (Boles 1976: 27). Here the Shakers found a place where they fit in spiritually.

During one of the Revival camp meetings in 1804, a young girl named Betsy Berry had a vision which she related to John Rankin, then one of the foremost leading ministers in Logan County, Kentucky to witness the beginnings of the Kentucky Revivals. As he records it, “Betsy Berry, aged 18 years, being frequently entranced said she saw in vision, the kingdom of Christ near at hand, but that we revivalists were not in it, but that the people of the kingdom would come to me, John Rankin. That I would join them, & would have much tribulation & pass through in safety” (Eads 1872: Journal A). On October 15, 1807 Shaker Elders Issacher Bates, Richard McNemar, and Matthew Houston left Bullitt County, Kentucky and travelled to Gasper, Kentucky. On Saturday, October 17th, they arrived at John Rankin’s house and were “received with a measure of kindness.” In Shakerism, Rankin found an environment of spontaneous, living religion that did not wait for revivals to spark their ecstatic worship. He joined almost immediately after their arrival. The South Union community journal records that on
Wednesday, October 28th, “John Rankin opened his mind to all three of the Messengers elder Issacher Bates, Matthew Houston, and Richard McNemar” (Eads 1872: Journal A). In the mind of John Rankin, the young Betsy Berry had been correct in prophesying that the people of the kingdom of heaven would come to him, and he would join.

At the same time that the Shakers were dramatically increasing their numbers in terms of both members and communities, they also felt compelled to create an official theology. It was Joseph Meacham who organized Shakerism socially, but it would be Benjamin Seth Youngs who would organize Shakerism spiritually. Youngs was one of the original missionaries sent out from New Lebanon, New York, to open the Shaker gospel in the west. Soon after his arrival in the west he would become the leading elder at the newly established community of South Union, in Logan County, Kentucky. It was here that he began writing The Testimonies of Christ’s Second Appearing, eventually published in 1808. This began a trend that quickly led to many books written and published by the Shakers concerning their spiritual beliefs.

Youngs’ Testimonies was meticulously and logically set forth, and published in four more editions with the last published in 1856. The work can be considered a precursor to the way Shaker theology was logically presented in the next few decades. It is especially important in that it preceded the 1816 Testimonies, which included a compilation of narratives about the life of Ann Lee. The 1816 Testimonies were republished, drastically edited, rewritten, retold orally, and used as literary devices in Shaker literature up through the present - the foundation on which following theologies would be written.
By the 1830s the move to create a theology had lost its zeal. Shakerism was at its peak with several thousand members in all, each community seemed to be thriving financially as independent entities, and, thanks to the established theology, there was now a feeling of spiritual communion as a whole. This consolidation did not result in complacency however. Instead, the organization moved almost directly into what historians have called the “Era of Manifestation”.

Beginning at Watervliet, New York the spirit manifestations spread to New Lebanon and on to the rest of the communities. During this time words of wisdom were reported from departed Shakers, personifications such as Holy Mother Wisdom (the feminine nature of God), the departed spirits of Mother Ann and the other original founders, and even non-Shaker spirits such as American Indians. Although the regular occurrence of manifestations only lasted approximately a decade, they continued intermittently on up through the 19th century. Predating the general outbreak of Spiritualism in the 1850s the Shakers latched onto this era as a primary form of validation, and an example of spiritual reinterpretation according to divine revelation.

The “Era of Manifestations” was an instrument of change for the Shakers. The validating figures of Mother Ann and the first elders, were present, but the character and implications of their teachings were drastically different from the Shakerism of the early 1800s. Change was seen as necessary, and it was crucial to have a figure of authority to validate the change taking place. The early years of Shakerism became a template for validation for later generations of Shakers. The character of Ann Lee and the other founders transitioned into a form of tradition meant to be accepted without reflection.
With apparent validation from these early figures, the “Era of Manifestations” led the Shakers into the liberal movements of the second half of the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth century, while providing them with a new tool to implement their progressive nature.

As the Shakers negotiated the “Era of Manifestations” and the general American liberal movements emerging in the mid to late nineteenth century, they found themselves having to deal with the Civil War, especially those communities located in Kentucky. Although the war in general had a negative impact on the Shakers, it would give them fuel to not only keep the liberal fire going, but fuel to help it spread into other arenas of dialogue. The idea of revelation and vision that accompanied the “Era of Manifestations” continued to a lesser degree into the Civil War. With all the stress that accompanied the Civil War for the Shakers, especially the communities located further south, the supernatural became a form of comfort. References found in the South Union community journal and the journal of Eldress Nancy E. Moore, suggest that supernatural occurrences at South Union, the southernmost Shaker community during the Civil War, increased from the few years of lag between the “Era of Manifestations” and the breakout of the Civil War. Julia Neal, one of the foremost scholars on the history of South Union writes that “undoubtedly the general war disturbance, felt more keenly by the Kentucky Shakers than by their northern kindred, increased the many outward expressions of mysticism, such as trances and prophetic inspirations” (Neal 1947: 143).

After the Civil War the engagement with the supernatural world that had been a central component to Shakerism since the mid-1830s began to fade. In its place this
period gave rise and validation to the more intellectual liberalism advocated by many Shaker theologians following the Civil War. Isaac Newton Youngs records in his *Church History*, “a day of much free thinking and freedom of investigation, every man may judge for himself, &c and this spirit, where there is so much freedom as now unavoidable exists between Believers and the world, insinuates itself powerfully among Believers, which is very injurious to their adjacent [sic] in the gospel” (Stein 1992: 200). It is obvious that not only did Youngs see the changes taking place during, and just after the Civil War, but was also pessimistic concerning the outcome of such changes.

The Shakers were in the beginning stages of a transition from strict sectarian isolation to living a communal life with frequent interaction with the outside world. The “powerful voices [that] celebrated new ideas and called for abandoning the radical sectarianism of the past” began to be heard in more numbers and more forcefully throughout the second half of the nineteenth century (Stein 1992: 205). The earliest and most influential leader of the progressive movement was Elder Fredrick W. Evans. Evans during this time was the Elder at the North Family at New Lebanon, New York. Evans, an early convert to socialism, joined the Shakers, became an Elder, and soon became the primary spokesperson for the Shakers on liberal issues such as women’s rights, abolition, and vegetarianism.

Although the general trend in post-Civil War Shakerism was toward progressive liberalism, there were a number of prominent conservative Shakers who opposed the progressive movement by hearkening back to an earlier Shaker past. One of the most respected of the conservative faction was Elder Harvey Lauderdale Eads. Eads came into
the Shaker community at South Union, Kentucky at the age of six months in 1807. He
died at South Union on February 18, 1892 at the age of eighty-four (Blinn 1892: Vol. 22).
For approximately the eighteen years prior to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1860, Eads
resided at Union Village, Ohio, serving in many capacities. Upon his return to South
Union he was promptly installed in the Ministry as Elder. He would hold this position
until his death.

Stein describes Eads as “the most articulate and forceful spokesperson for
conservative Shaker values” (Stein 1992:205). A running dialogue occurred between
Elder Eads and Elder Evans that was represented in the Shaker Manifesto, a Shaker
periodical published in the second half of the nineteenth century by the Shakers. Eads
got on to publish one of the letters written to Elder Evans concerning his liberal and
progressive ideology. The publication was titled “A Discursive Letter,” and called out
Evans on certain issues along with providing solutions created from Eads’ more
conservative viewpoint.

In the end Shakerism swung heavily toward progressive liberalism, especially in
the eastern societies, as many of the upcoming elders and eldresses at prominent
communities like Canterbury, New Hampshire and New Lebanon, New York began to
publish extensively on the topics that were circulating not only in the Shaker
communities, but issues also at large within American society. The liberal and
conservative divisions that existed in Shakerism during the second half of the nineteenth
century eventually came back to haunt the Shakers in a much more devastating way a
century later.
As the speakers for the conservative factions began dying out in the late 1800s, and the progressive liberals continued to add numbers to their ranks, the ideas became more and more generally progressive, and ecumenical in nature. Now mixed with progressive ideology the literal interpretation of the idea of the “Christ spirit” that existed from the beginning, that “Christ” was not a being, but a being anointed by the spirit of God, led the Shakers into the claim, during the transition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that Ann Lee and Jesus were not the only ones who had been anointed, or possessed with the Christ spirit. Aurelia Mace articulated this concept as follows:

Jesus was a perfect man, who gave his whole life to do good. And the Christ spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove and remained with him.

The same beautiful spirit came to his disciples as the Comforter at the day of Pentecost.

Jesus was a man without fault, inspired by the Christ.
Ann Lee was a woman without fault, inspired by the Christ.
Any one can become the Christ, by subduing every animal passion and rising to a high and pure life.

They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

When I say ‘Christ’ I mean the Spirit.
When I say ‘Jesus’ I mean the Man (Mace 1907: 141).

In a less fanciful fashion H.L. Eads wrote,

It is said that Christ is declared to be ‘the resurrection and the life,’ and if Ann Lee has manifested His second coming is she also the resurrection and the life? Most certainly; and so are all who are resurrected by coming into the life of Christ. To be resurrected is to be raised from spiritual death into spiritual life… The simple truth is this: Christ is not a foreign spirit, but the ‘Lord’s Anointed.’ Jesus was pre-eminently the Christ, because He was anointed and appointed to lead in the work of the regeneration and salvation of the human race. Other anointed persons, appointees and successors in Christ’s church, imbued or clothed with the same powers, are his vicegerents (Eads 1872:90).
The Shakers referred to Buddha, and even Leo Tolstoy, as possessed by the Christ spirit. The ecumenical nature of Shakerism extended beyond the borders of mainstream Christian denominations into the larger religious picture as a whole. They were progressive in other ways: women’s rights were of concern from an early date. They picked up where Elder Evans left off. Each published their works on the topics at hand, and each, like Evans, recited the early narratives about Ann Lee found in Youngs’ 1808 Testimonies, the 1816 Testimonies, and the 1827 Testimonies.

Antoinette Doolittle, was Eldress at the North Family at New Lebanon, New York, during the same time that Fredrick Evans stood as Elder in the same family. Doolittle led the way for women in the publishing arena. In the last half of the nineteenth century the Shakers published a periodical that began titled as the Shaker, it later became the Shaker and Shakeress, and was called in its final years The Manifesto. In this periodical, which had an obvious liberal social bias, women were free to publish their articles or poetry on most any topic. This call was filled enthusiastically by the Shaker sisters from Maine to Kentucky. The original editor of the Shaker was Elder Evans. It was he who later changed the periodical name to the Shaker and Shakeress and placed Eldress Doolittle in the position of co-editor.

Anna White and Leila S. Taylor of New Lebanon, New York, and Aurelia Mace of Sabbathday Lake, Maine, became the primary spokeswomen for women’s rights and the ecumenical nature of Shakerism during the early 1900s. In one of her short biographies of Ann Lee, Aurelia Mace ended the letter with,
We would have all who advocate the rights of women understand that our Mother gave unto her daughters, equal rights with their brothers in all the offices established for the government of the Shaker order.

That Scripture is being fulfilled before our eyes: ‘The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,’ etc. ‘And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks,’ and they shall learn war no more (Mace 1899:28).

The end of this passage recalls the increasing integration of the Shaker societies with the outside world they had some century earlier strived so hard to avoid. The use of the image "the wolf will dwell with the lamb" indicates that although there was increasing integration between the Shakers and the outside world, the Shakers continued to recognize, and in some manner separate, or at least distinguish themselves, from the world around them. Echoing Mace, Leila S. Taylor and Anna White wrote that,

Ann Lee first declared and maintained Woman’s Freedom and Equality, suffered for it at the hands of a raging and envenomed public, embodied it in spirit and letter in the organization that is founded upon her teachings. The principle of freedom to man and woman alike has, for over a century, made the Shaker Sister the freest woman in the world - the free woman in Christ - and a sweeter, happier, more womanly woman does not exist (White 1905: 386).

Although White, Taylor, and Mace were the leaders in the women’s movements in Shakerism there were others who spoke out loudly and explicitly concerning the matter.

Paul Tyner recorded in the Manifesto:

A fourth cycle of divine illumination, it is held, was opened in the person of Ann Lee. In a very large and very true sense, Ann Lee, the founder of Shakerism, may be considered the pioneer New Woman. Nearly a century before our women pioneers lifted up their voices for woman’s political emancipation, this Manchester blacksmith’s daughter - this woman of the people - began a valiant battle for woman’s moral emancipation. As the revolt of Luther sowed the seeds of American independence and the French Revolution, so the revolt of this simple and fearless daughter of God, this Anglo-Saxon Joan of Arc, against woman’s moral slavery sowed the seed
which the closing years of this century sees ripening into a recognition of woman’s true place beside her brother in every field of human effort and advance (Blinn 1896: 96).

During the turn of the century the Shakers were experiencing a dramatic decline in membership numbers. The elders were dying off and there were no youth capable or dedicated enough to take their place. At South Union, Kentucky, Elder Eads wrote at the age of 67,

Appointment at Pleasant Hill—Elder Benjamin B. Dunlavy was appointed first in the Ministry at Pleasant Hill on Monday the 1st Inst to fill the Vacancy occasioned by the resignation of Elder James M Rankin now in his 82 year. & Elder Benjamin in his 70th year—Elder Thos Shain is appointed Elder in Center in his 82 year—He moved from the Eldership in the East family & Elder George Runyon is re-appointed Elder for the Junior Order in his 80th year I think—70 or 80th—Old Battle-scarred Veterans—why don’t you all resign? Why not, & then simply hold up & support some younger ones & see them prospering before God suddenly calls you away when the young will be compelled to go forward without your support—How silly all this seems to this writer—I may also be so foolish when I arrive at this age—75 or 80 certainly should close the 1st Eldership of any one—H.L. Eades—now 67 (Eads 1972: Journal C).

Approximately ten years later Eads comments on this passage saying, “I am just that foolish now nearly 78 & cannot find any one to take my place yet, Sorry I am--------H.L. Eades” (Eads 1972: Journal C). This period saw a rise in the number of females in positions of power. Indicating the liberal movements taking place in Shakerism, the simple statistics showed that more than half of Shakers were female; a case in which there was certainly power in numbers. Although the numbers had almost always indicated that there were more females than males in the overall numbers, during this time period there were so few brothers that the sisters were not only given the
opportunity to step up to power, but were by necessity forced to step up, which they
eagerly did.

Historian Stephen Stein dates the last period in Shaker history beginning in 1948.
It is during this time that the Shakers begin to not only experience, but also find ways to
deal with the dramatic decline in numbers taking place. From 1900 through 1960 the
Shakers saw fifteen of twenty-four societies close their doors. In 1960 the society at
Hancock, Massachusetts officially closed leaving only the communities at Canterbury,
New Hampshire and Sabbathday Lake, Maine active (Morse 1980: xii-xiii).

The Shakers had already been divided once into liberal and conservative factions,
a debate that eventually led to the liberal ideology overcoming the conservative. But now
in the second half of the twentieth century these same divisions made themselves
manifest again, tearing apart the central ideas of union that the Shakers had so long relied
on. The division and debate escalated between the societies at Canterbury and
Sabbathday Lake. Sabbathday Lake had always been somewhat isolated from the central
ministry; indeed, it was often referred to as “the smallest of mother’s communities.” On
the opposite end of the spectrum, Canterbury had always been very closely allied with the
central ministry at New Lebanon. The aforementioned liberal Shaker periodical The
Shaker, along with its various other titles, was published at New Lebanon during its early
years, and at Canterbury during its later years.

Canterbury had always been more in tune with the liberal and progressive
ideologies that often originated from the North Family at New Lebanon where Elder
Evans and Eldress Doolittle resided. On the other hand the community at Sabbathday
Lake, Maine, being somewhat estranged from the central ministry, always seemed to cling to the more conservative ideologies. The clash between the two societies was the result of the debate not on the present situation of Shakerism, but concerning the future of Shakerism. Stephen Stein writes that “Canterbury was content to separate the ultimate fortunes of the society from its institutional forms. For them the society’s legacy involved the principles and ideals of the Believers as well as their past accomplishments.”

The Shakers at Sabbathday Lake, by contrast, rejected that view, insisting that “communal structures would continue to carry the tradition into the future” (Stein 1992: 385). Ultimately the debate was over whether to close the doors to new members, or to keep them open.

One of the primary causes of this dilemma faced by the Shakers in both societies was the commercialization, and to an extent what Roger Abrahams would call “romanticization” of the religious group (Abrahams 1993: 4). The media was beginning to notice the Shakers, but as so often happens it was the growing rarity of the Shakers that induced the media to focus their attention on them. The more media attention the societies received, the more inquiries the communities got concerning membership. Although this would seem to be exactly what they would be looking for, it was obvious that many of these inquiries were the result of someone’s hopes to inherit a Shaker material or monetary fortune that may or may not exist. As the Shakers numbers continued to decline more and more attention was focused on them. It was in 1965 that Canterbury officially decided to close the doors for prospective members. For Eldress Emma B. King and the last remaining sisters at Canterbury, the future of Shakerism lay
not in a revival of the future, but in the traditions and accomplishments of the past. Sister Ethel Hudson, the last remaining Shaker sister at Canterbury died in 1992, officially ending the community’s history.

For Sabbathday Lake there was hope for the future. They chose to keep the doors open. One of the prominent members that joined the society during the same time period that Canterbury was deciding to close their doors, was brother Theodore Johnson. Johnson was an educated man, having a Master’s degree from Harvard. As will be seen, Johnson fittingly took Shaker theology to its logical conclusion placing a new postmodern spin on the Shaker theology of old. Yet another aspect of the progressive nature of Shakerism that relied on the relationship of narrative and tradition to pull its weight.

After the closing of Canterbury in 1992, Sabbathday Lake was the only remaining community. Today Sabbathday Lake remains the only Shaker community in existence, with only three Shakers residing in the community - Brother Arnold Hadd and Sister Francis Carr - the community leaders, and Sister June Carpenter. Although no published work on theology has come out of Sabbathday Lake, Brother Arnold does do some lecturing. He joined the Shakers and learned under Brother Theodore Johnson, and continues today in the same capacity. Francis Carr signed the covenant in 1948 and continues today as the communities Eldress (Stein 1992:385). The Shakers continue to let the general public attend their worship meetings, and occasionally has the interested person who tries it out. The Red Wagon Press at Sabbathday Lake has continued to republish old works such as the 1816 Testimonies, Aurelia Mace’s The Alethia, and Anna
White and Leila S. Taylor’s *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message*, along with many pamphlets and other smaller booklets concerning writings from the Shaker past. Stephen Stein ends his excellent and comprehensive history of the Shakers on an optimistic note saying, “there is no longer any doubt that there will be Shakers in America for many years to come” (Stein 1992: 442). His book was published in 1992, and as of today fifteen years later he stands correct.
Chapter 2: Narrative, Tradition, and Progressive Shakerism

The earliest forms of the narratives told about Ann Lee were for the most part oral. Benjamin Seth Youngs records in the Preface to the 1810 edition of the Testimonies.

Sixty years have now passed, since the beginning of this work in England - Twenty-eight years since it began in America - Twenty years since the gathering of the Church - and sixteen years since the Church was established in her present order and spirit of government. And in all this time of sixty years, the testimony has been verbal, and those who were faithful in it, have increased in further light and understanding, and in power and harmony from time to time, without any written creed, or form of government relating to themselves, or any written testimony in defence of their cause, or for the public information of others (Youngs 1810: xiii).

It is no coincidence that the written record of the narratives began at the same time that Shakerism became theologically organized. These narratives have survived primarily through later generations of Shakers attempts at preserving the narratives through the written form. Oral accounts of Ann Lee’s life persist among the Shakers up to the present; however, fieldwork can only reveal the oral histories of the present, which cannot be assumed to accurately reflect earlier narrative traditions. Within the lengthy historical span addressed here it is necessary to look primarily at the written accounts of Ann Lee’s life as the source for the data, comparing their dynamic and static qualities.

Written accounts come in two different forms. The first includes the published narratives about Ann Lee; the second includes the unpublished narratives. This
difference is significant: most often the unpublished accounts more accurately reflect the oral narrative itself since there may be less bias involved in recording a personal journal entry than a published work whose purpose is to shed a positive light over Shakerism through the use of the narratives of Ann Lee. The small amount of data found in private journals and unpublished manuscripts will be used in relation to the much more substantial cache of data found in published Shaker works.

In the early years of Shakerism, writing was a task only a privileged few were capable of doing. It is almost a certainty that in any given period, especially prior to 1850, oral recounting of these narratives would have been much more common than the written accounts. Written accounts, however, are what has survived. It is evident in journals that not only were narratives concerning Ann Lee’s life often told, but the major publications that collected these narratives, such as the 1816 Testimonies, were read aloud during worship services. On Sunday December 27, 1818 the South Union community journal records, “Mother’s Sayings - read again in meeting about 2 hours - & is the same in the Evening meeting.” Then on March 3, 1819 the same journal records, “Society Meeting - The last reading of Mother’s sayings - this being the 10th reading” (Eads 1872: Journal A). The book being read from here is the Precepts of Mother Ann Lee edited by Seth Youngs Wells and Rufus Bishop, first published in 1816.

These narratives, both written and recited orally, are the basis of my contention that Shakerism required something to mediate between its static and dynamic nature. These narratives mediated early on, then began to serve as the object of interpretation, and finally served as strictly an object of validation according to their traditional qualities.
I will trace the use of narrative and its relationship through the following text in order to reveal the flexible nature of Shakerism in respect to the large American social movements. In order to better understand this argument it is necessary to analyze the progressive nature of Shakerism.

In comparison with other religions, Shakerism is unique in many ways. Shakerism is a religion that believes in ideas of progressiveness both temporally and spiritually. Temporal progressiveness is often noted by scholars looking at Shaker innovation in their material culture. The novel approach the Shakers took in respect to their material culture ranges from small functional items like the clothes pin, to improvements like the flat broom, to massive masterpieces of architectural engineering, like the round stone barn at Hancock, Massachusetts. The commercialization and romanticization that has surrounded Shakerism in the second half of the twentieth century has revolved around a cult of Shaker material culture, in many cases ignoring the progressive nature of Shaker spirituality.

The progressive nature of Shaker spirituality is less well documented than that of Shaker material culture. Historians have often noted the progressive nature of Shaker spirituality, most notably Stephen Stein (1992), but as a comprehensive history is typically the goal, the stabilizing factors of progressive Shaker spirituality have not been looked into in any depth. The most useful information concerning the specifics of this topic are writings and inquiries conducted by the Shakers themselves.

Over time the Shakers began to view theology as something that is constantly evolving within the present. Something totally new could not come out of this
progressiveness since each new revelation was based on Shaker tradition in some way. The term “theological evolution” is the appropriate term here. Shakerism emerged as something new in the mid-eighteenth century in England. After that time, no radically new spiritual ideas took hold of Shakerism. Instead, there was a gradual progression from the Shaker theology of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to the Shakerism we find today at Sabbathday Lake, Maine. What is being referred to here as “Shaker theology” refers to the social and ideological organization of Shaker culture based on the spiritual beliefs and values of morality held within the community within any given period. Theology in this sense has room to change, and did indeed change. Bear in mind that what is here called “theology,” is not the same as what present day Shakers would refer to as “theology.” “Theology” for contemporary Shakerism implies a constant or static nature of spiritual beliefs and moral values (Johnson1869: 3).

Shaker spiritual progression is based on the reinterpretation of past values and beliefs systems. Paul Tyner recorded in his third installment of his article *The Christ Ideal in Shakerism* that “Shakerism... being based on continuous revelation is in its very nature progressive” (Blinn 1896: 127). Although this pattern can be seen in early Shakerism, it was rarely referred to explicitly. One of the few mentions of it explicitly from the early theological works is found in Seth Youngs Wells *Summary View*. Referring to the “united capacity” or the “Society of Shakers” the *Summary View of the Millennial Church* records that,

Many have become convinced that this is the ultimate destiny of mankind, and that they never can enjoy that happiness for which their Creator designed them, in any other way than in such united capacity. This is true; but this
united capacity must be built on the true foundation, which is nothing less than divine revelation, or it cannot stand (Wells 1823: 2).

An example of the role of divine revelation for the early Shakers can also be found in an extract from the Millennial Church. It is as follows: “The second manifestation or revival of the system of a united interest was given, in this our day, by Divine revelation, and has been, thus far, maintained in its purity, being supported by the true principles of self-denial and chastity; nor can all the exertions of human nature ever sustain it on any other principle” (Wells 1823: 5). It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that Fredrick Evans, Elder at the North Family at New Lebanon, began to explain Shaker theology, both past and present, using this model. According to Evans, Shaker theology progresses according to the reinterpretation of the past values and belief systems, through divine revelation in the present.

In 1859 Elder Fredrick Evans stated in his Compendium that,

“It being, as stated in all previous publications by the Society, the settled faith of the Church, from the beginning, that its foundation was Divine REVELATIONS; and that the records of past Dispensations, and their revelations, can be understood and interpreted aright only by means of a present living revelation; we therefore feel ourselves untrammeled by the letter of yesterday, and write and express our views in accordance with the increasing light of to-day, as we hope and trust, subject to the dictates of “the Comforter,” or “Spirit of Truth,” dwelling and abiding in the Church, which is gradually, but surely and safely, leading it into the knowledge of “all truth” (1859: iii - iv).

This progressive nature allowed the Shakers to use tradition more efficiently to their advantage. The Shakers faced the problem of being both progressive and maintaining something that could consistently be called Shaker theology over any given period. While change not only happened, but was somewhat instituted and implied within the
theology, the Shakers had to focus on not only what would change theologically, but they also had to focus on what would stay the same. Maintaining cultural identity, while fulfilling an inherent social progressive nature, lay at the heart of the dilemma. Solving this dilemma, mediating the ground between the dynamic and static aspects of Shaker theology, was tradition.

Early Shakerism often used traditionalized verbal artifacts, such as narratives, as a method of progressing spiritually without acknowledging it openly. This method of instituting change did not go overlooked though by future generations of Shakers looking to institute their own changes. The perceived authenticity of the early changes instituted according to divine revelation, whether recognized at the time or not, validated the methods of change to occur at later dates. With “Divine Revelation” devised as a form of tradition, change was easily instituted if revelation could only be found, and when needed, divine revelations are not that hard to come by. The danger, of course, is that another divine revelation can overturn the instituted change just as easily as the change occurred in the first place.

The center for reinterpretation according to divine revelations in the present was the community located at New Lebanon, New York. This community was known as the “central ministry.” Given the power of revelations, it is no coincidence that the social center for the majority of spiritual activity also happened to be the center of temporal power. As the community that issued all the instituted rules and regulations to the other communities, New Lebanon was as well the primary center for the spiritual validation for the changes being made.
New Lebanon was the center, but by no means the only community in which reinterpretation of divine revelation took place. As geographically dispersed as the communities were by the 1830s, their ability to reinterpret what was considered divine revelations helped give each community a spiritual sense of place within the larger whole of Shakerism. The most obvious example of this is the period historians have labeled “Mother Ann’s Work.” The exact dates have been disputed, but it is safe to say that this period, also known as the “Era of Manifestations,” spans from the mid-1830s to the mid to late-1840s. It was this period of time when the Shaker lifestyle and theology was most dramatically changed according to divine revelations and spiritual manifestations within each community.

Shaker social structure is very hierarchical in nature. From the time of Joseph Meacham, the social structure of Shakerism required two Shakers as leaders of each community, one male (Elder) and the other female (Eldress). Each community often had a dual leadership in the role of trustees for the community. Just as it was the duty of the Elders to tend to the community’s spiritual needs, it was the role of the trustees to tend to the community’s temporal needs. Both sides strove for progress. The Elders strove for spiritual progress, and the Trustees for material progress. It was most often the elders who had social control over the interpretations of spiritual manifestations, allowing them to better control the direction of Shakerism. It is no secret in Shakerism that the trustees, although not always successful, strived for financial thriftiness. The Shakers, although humble, realized that temporally, the bigger the bank account the more socially comfortable they would be, separated or not from the outside world.
The Shakers realized that financial prosperity could not be achieved without some interaction with the non-Shaker world. The issue of how they would maintain both separation and interaction with the outside world was answered with the role of the trustees. The trustees would have been elected according to their financial thriftiness, honesty, and their strong spiritual dedication. The Shakers were looking for trustees who could both interact with, and maintain a spiritual distance, from the outside world.

Over time with technological advancements and growth of cities, travel, and consequently, interaction with the outside world became perceived as less and less challenging for common Shakers. As this progression took place the trustees gradually became the community accountants, as opposed to the sole mediators between the community and the outside world. As a consequence of this growing interaction with the outside world the influences of the world began to take a visible effect upon the general Shaker way of life.

Prior to the Civil War, the world often visited the Shakers out of curiosity; after the Civil War it was the Shakers who began to visit the world. With this transition the Shakers would begin looking for ways to justify an increased interaction with the world. The 1830s and 40s “Era of Manifestations” was considered a prelude to the onset of Spiritualism with the Fox Sisters in 1850; and subsequently, America during the Civil War was growing increasingly engrossed in issues such as civil and women’s rights. Preceding these movements the Shakers had held that dual, equal leadership of both a man and woman was the appropriate method of rule since Joseph Meacham instituted it in the early 1790s. And Ann Lee is recorded as having stated in the 1770s or 80s that “I
have seen the poor negroes, who are so much despised, redeemed from their loss, with
crowns on their heads” (Wells 1816: 33). The Shakers considered themselves to be
ideologically ahead of the American way of life - as they often were, and it is very
possible that they found encouragement as they witnessed America beginning to adopt
social concepts in the second half of the nineteenth century that they had held for many
decades. As the Shakers began to watch Americans accept the values and principles that
they had long held, they also began to see the world as a field of souls ripe for the
harvest.

Many of the leading intellectuals among the Shakers in the east went on lecturing
tours. The general American public was becoming aware that not only were the Shakers
in full support of the new progressive ideologies emerging in American society, but that
they had already held these ideas for many years prior. Fredrick Evans published on
Spiritualism and went on lecturing tours with personalities like J.M. Peebles and others.
Evans began to lead Shakerism toward the idea that separation from the world was no
longer sufficient. Instead it was the Shakers duty to reform the world, and because
America was already reforming in the liberal direction, Shaker access to, and credibility
in, the non-Shaker world became less of a challenge to overcome.

Popular notions of tradition are often described as something static. But more
contemporary studies of tradition have shown it to be a dynamic process of change in the
present according to the past (Handler 1984: 276). Within an event in the present, the use
of tradition both maintains and changes the event itself. Sometimes this change is
necessary to the present, and sometimes the change is just more appropriate to the
present. For the Shakers, tradition was the mediating tool that allowed them to maintain a Shaker past in the present while adapting their theology to certain historical movements such as spiritualism, feminism, and abolitionism.

This increased interaction with the non-Shaker world raised new issues that the Shakers had to solve. The one that is of most concern here is the issue of how they would maintain their “Shakerness” while adapting their way of life to be more accepting of the outside world. Reinterpretation of traditions “as beliefs with a particular social structure” and as “a consensus through time”, as defined by Edward Shils (1971: 126), allowed post-Civil War Shakers to increase activity among the non-Shaker world. The narratives concerning the Shaker founder Ann Lee served as both a stable source for the context and as an emergent traditional form according to its consensus through time. The Ann Lee narratives, as a stable form regardless of the period, allowed the Shakers to evolve theologically, while also maintaining their “Shakerness”. Tradition, narrative, and divine revelation were woven together to create a tool by which the Shaker elders were able to validate change post-1850.

The processes and directions of the evolution of Shaker theology over time are revealed through the analysis of Shaker theology from different periods in respect to its related context. Context will be used as “any frame of reference constituting and governing the interrelations of parts and wholes” around which the Shaker culture is built (Hufford 1995: 528). This approach will be taken in close connection with Edward Shils discussion of “tradition”. An analysis of the two together will show what I have referred
to here as the connection between the use of traditional narrative and social adaptation to the larger movements in the non-Shaker world.

If tradition is a belief or system of beliefs that are accepted without really thinking about it, then how does this apply to the Shakers? The Shakers published pamphlets and full theologies in book form for both themselves and the outside public. The fact that these early works on theology were meant to serve both insiders and outsiders is an indication that the Shakers were not only looking to make converts, but also intended to establish a form of theological social control within the communities. Although, for the early Shakers, pacifying the spiritual needs occasioned by belief was most likely the primary reason for establishing these narratives, and theological social control was probably not the recognized function; the result was the establishment of a tradition that could be manipulated and used in various ways by future generations of Shakers. When the 1816 Testimonies were being read in 1818 at the meetings at South Union, the primary purpose was instructional, but unrecognized at the time, these narratives, by their reading in the most spiritually important and formal environment, were firmly entrenching themselves into a Shaker tradition that would be some fifty years later indisputable.

Although the Shakers of the second half of the nineteenth century pulled from a vast Shaker past, many of the stories that they pulled from were stories concerning the life of the founder of Shakerism, Ann Lee. Little is known about her life, except for what the Shakers recorded early on about her. Her history, by the Shakers, consists of events occurring in her life prior to her joining the Wardley Society, and events that occurred
during her life after starting the Shaker movement. Her history, along with the life she lived, and the change in the social structure of Shakerism spawned an effort to organize Shakerism theologically.

Ann Lee had instituted confession of sins and living the celibate life from the beginning of her ministry, but the third tenet of Shakerism, communal living, was instituted by Joseph Meacham. Joseph Meacham was the organizational genius behind the creation of the industrious and well-organized Shaker communities known today. This change in the structural makeup of Shakerism eventually, around a decade later, resulted in a movement in theological organization. One of the first works on Shaker theology was the Testimonies of Christ's First and Second Appearing by Benjamin Seth Youngs, first published in 1808. The following decades saw a proliferation of Shaker theological literature. Three of the primary works were the 1816 Testimonies, the 1823 Summary View of the Millennial Church, and the 1827 Testimonies.

All four of the publications were instrumental for setting the tone of early Shaker theology for both the Shakers and the curious public alike. The life of Ann Lee was at the core of all the publications except for the 1808 Testimonies. The 1808 Testimonies did not revolve around the life of Ann Lee, but a significant portion of the text was certainly dedicated to the life she lived. Ann Lee died in 1884, and so had been dead for almost twenty-five years before any real attempt at organizing Shaker theology took place. The 1816 Testimonies represented a collection of testimonies collected from Shakers who had known Ann Lee and the original Elders before their passing on. It is this single work on which the majority of later theological writings were based on. The 1816 Testimonies
makes no bold theological claims; what it does do is set a foundation on which later theological ideas would be based. Also the importance of this publication later gave the narratives it contained the credibility they needed to serve in the capacity of tradition. The 1823 Summary View of the Millennial Church hearkened back to the organizational style of Youngs’ 1808 Testimonies. The Summary View drew out Shaker history back to Biblical times giving it a more persuasive foundation as a Christian church. And lastly, the 1827 Testimonies would be a sort of revision of the 1816 Testimonies.

The early years of Shakerism saw several apostate narratives published concerning the Shakers that were derogatory, and in many cases blatantly false (Rathbun 1781, Marshal 1780). Many of the narratives used passages from the 1816 Testimonies against the Shakers. For example, the 1816 Testimonies records that Ann Lee walked hand in hand with Jesus as a lover. The 1827 Testimonies recorded the same narrative, except that Ann Lee walked hand in hand with Jesus as a friend. One of the primary purposes of the 1827 Testimonies was to rewrite the 1816 Testimonies with a more watered-down approach to presenting the content.

Early Shakers created their theology with a style of writing meant to be rationally convincing to both Shakers and non-Shakers. The compilations of narratives were written primarily for the Shakers themselves, but the 1808 Testimonies and the Summary View were both meant to convince the outside public of the legitimacy of Shaker theology. It is also important to note that the 1827 Testimonies was published in response to accusations by the outside world concerning the 1816 Testimonies. The preface to the 1827 Testimonies states,
Perhaps there is more said respecting Mother Ann's moral character than was necessary; but as there has been such a flood of slander poured out against it, the witnesses, generally, having had perfect knowledge of her character, felt it their duty to say something in contradiction of such base and unjust slanders. But we are confident that every candid person will readily perceive, by the testimony of her works, that there could be no foundation for charges of such a nature (Wells 1827: 3).

Later theological publications put out by the Shakers continued to be logically argumentative, but from what evidence that we have from personal and community journals and unpublished manuscripts it does appear that within the isolated Shaker community there was less emphasis on logic and straightforward argument. Instead what needed to be known was stated, implying that there was no reason for the solely Shaker audience not to believe what was being said. This is an indication that many of these early works were meant, not only for the Shakers themselves, but also for non-Shakers.

Another interesting aspect of the use of tradition in Shakerism that parallels with Shils' definition is that the theological evolution of Shakerism based on narrative tradition outlined previously was exceptionally rapid within the Shaker culture compared to other religious cultures. Shils states that the traditions that are likeliest to evolve the most rapidly are the traditions that are on the periphery of the dominant traditions. The Shakers were certainly on the periphery of the dominant American religious traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Steady change is evident in Shaker theology, occurring over approximately a two-hundred year span. This is a short period compared to many other religions, but the amount of change that has occurred over that time has been significant. Historians can easily note the progress from the creation and total acceptance of theological belief to the opposite stance of denial of the existence of a
Shaker theology that began occurring at Sabbathday Lake, Maine in the mid-twentieth century.

The first significant cultural transformation within Shakerism began as the late 1830s brought about the “Era of Manifestations” that sent revivals through the Shaker communities from Maine to Kentucky. These revivals placed Shakerism in a social and theological context that made validating theological and social changes less challenging. The revivals sustained the Shakers through the Civil War and guided them into the socially evolving post-Civil War America. It was during this time, the 1860s up through the 1940s, that change occurred in the arenas of feminism and abolitionism.

Leading the liberal movements within Shakerism was Elder Fredrick Evans. He wrote and published articles in the name of Shaker theology that argued for women’s rights, vegetarianism, abolitionism, and other progressive changes. For the most part, the new ideas of Elder Evans were well accepted among the Eastern Shakers. But for the western Shakers located in the states of Kentucky and Ohio, his ideas were a little more foreign. Harvey Lauderdale Eads was Elder at South Union, Kentucky after the Civil War, as well as a leader of Shaker conservatism. As such, Eads led the Conservative Shaker movement in opposition to Elder Evans. A division was created between the liberal and conservative ideologies within Shakerism, at the time socially reflected through published material, as well as, to some degree, geographically. The most interesting thing that occurs between these debates is not merely what each side promoted, but how each side used what is, on the surface level, nearly identical narratives to support their very different conclusions. It is at this point in the history that it becomes
evident that the only reason this worked is that the narratives were understood within the
Shaker culture to be traditional at the least, if not sacred in many cases. Again this
hearkens back to the use of the narratives in early Shaker history such as reciting them in
formal meetings, and the general importance that surrounded the original publications.

Even with conservative opposition, the Shaker liberal movement continued in full
force for around half a century, and never really died out. As Shaker communities
continued to close through the 1960s two communities were left to represent Shakerism
in the second half of the twentieth century. These communities were Canterbury, New
Hampshire and Sabbathday Lake, Maine. As the numbers declined so did the
publications and adaptations of past values and ideas. In the second half of the twentieth
century liberal ideas continued to dominate in the two remaining communities, but to a
lesser extent.

The 1960s led Shakerism into a place where they no longer termed the values and
teachings that guided their way of life as a “theology.” Taking the notion that if theology
is a static source of morals and teachings, they maintained that the Shakers cannot
possess theology, since change is part of the instituted practice, and indeed it was at this
point in the history. The fact that this is the direction that contemporary Shakerism chose
to go is appropriate in that it takes theology to the next level, but takes it to the end of its
logical road.

Early Shakerism used Aristotelian logic to formulate their theology. Along with
edited narrative compilations, other works, such as Benjamin Seth Youngs’ Testimonies,
approached Shakerism from a historical and explicit premise/conclusion style. Later,
during the “Era of Manifestations” the rational approach to Shaker theology would fade away to an extent, but be revived after the Civil War by H.L. Eads; appropriately since Eads learned Shaker theology under the mentorship of Benjamin Youngs. Although contemporary Shakerism took the prior ideas concerning their theology to a logical conclusion, logic was not the primary influence in taking it in this particular direction. The fact is that the Shakers prior to the 1960s could have also taken Shaker theology to the same conclusion of eliminating it as a title or label. But they didn’t.

Instead, Shakers of the 1960s developed an attitude consistent with the prevailing postmodern attitude. As the outside world was busy rejecting the metanarratives of the past, the Shakers found a clever way of rejecting their metanarrative without giving up the content. The Shakers did not reject the principles by which they lived for more than two centuries such as celibacy and communal living; but they did stay in tune to their progressive nature by giving up what many called “theology.” By rejecting the title of “theology” that implies the grand narrative of Shakerism within this context, the illusion is created that they have rejected the metanarrative itself.

Shils discusses the rejection of tradition in the modern world. In rejecting the metanarrative by eliminating the label, the Shakers have also given the illusion of giving up tradition in its static sense. Paradoxically however, tradition is used to create and validate the illusion generated by the elimination of the use of theology. Brother Theodore Johnson of Sabbathday Lake, Maine, led the anti-theology movement for the Shakers in the 60s. He published several pamphlets, many of which denied the existence of theology in Shaker tradition. Johnson wrote in a pamphlet titled *Life in the Christ*
Spirit that “the Shaker way never produced a theology, if by theology we mean a formal, organized body of thought in regard to the godhead, his relation to man, and man’s place in His scheme of history” (Johnson 1969: 3). He made these arguments based on the easily perceived discontinuity of the Shaker past. It was not uncommon for him to recite a narrative or two concerning the life of Ann Lee. More often than not, the content of these narratives had little to nothing to do with the content on which he was writing: the purpose of the narrative was a tool of validation. Johnson was not unaware of the power of tradition. Even if a narrative is irrelevant in relation to the context, Johnson knew that a single narrative’s status as tradition was powerful enough to validate.

In Shakerism, the history is clear enough to easily see a progression of theological validation through the writings and publications alone. Shakerism began by striving to create a theology on which to base their values and validate their way of life. The theology developed in the early 1800s endured, but not without the periodic dynamism created through revivals and efforts to establish themselves within a world that the Shakers were ultimately trying to separate themselves from. The change, and reference to the necessity of change, that began to work its way into common dialogue for Shaker theologians after the Civil War would ultimately lead to the rejection of theology by Shaker theologians of the 1960s. The transition is smooth and gradual, and knowing where it eventually led to, one can look at the progression of Shaker theology over the course of the nineteenth century and predict that if taken to its logical conclusion the theology on which Shakerism was founded would be denied through the total acceptance of change.
What the Shakers have left us is a history documented well enough that in most cases the social contexts, in which theological and social ideologies changed within the group can be recreated with sufficient accuracy to reveal the processes of cultural evolution. When these changes were instituted, the Shakers were looking for one thing — validation. Careful reading of their meticulous documentation concerning the use of the narrative traditions reveals that it is tradition that is most often found subtly lingering behind the texts; not so shadowed as to be neglected, but present enough to have the power to validate. And for the Shakers the narratives that were considered traditional was the compilation of narratives recorded in the early history of Shakerism concerning the life of Ann Lee.

The content of these narratives remain static over the course of Shakerism, but the status or change they are validating within any particular contexts varies from situation to situation: the narratives are plugged into the formula as the immovable stone. This process creates an environment in which, if the change in instituted policy is challenged, the narrative, sacred and traditional in quality, is also being challenged. This would have been enough to prevent most Shakers from questioning the changes taking place. It also revealed that those who do challenge the policies, challenge them using the same narratives as their weapon of choice, just with a different interpretation.

From an objective point of view, the narratives’ meaning was never really set in stone, but what was set in stone was its proper place and use. Certain narratives are consistently used as devices of validation, but as such, their meaning varies from context to context. Just as Brother Johnson would use the apparent discontinuity of the Shaker
past to support the absence of a Shaker theology, or just as H.L. Eads would use the Shaker past to reinforce his arguments to maintain continuity, intended here is to show that despite the discontinuous past there were static elements present that without the changes taking place could have never been validated. Also intended is to show that it was a combination of the static text, which was most often the narratives concerning Ann Lee, the dynamic context, here concerned primarily with feminism and postmodernism, and tradition as defined by Edward Shils that allowed the Shakers to successfully manage a discontinuous past through the changing present. As Dell Hymes used the word “tradition”, the Shakers traditionalized the static text that validates the adaptation to the present contexts (Hymes 1975: 354).

These narratives are told over and over, and rarely are they told merely for the sake of telling an interesting story. The contexts in which these narratives find themselves is almost inevitably theological. There is evidence that these narratives were not only used within the oral portions of their worship services, but also that narratives from books like the 1816 Testimonies were often read aloud word for word during worship. It is clear that over time these narratives began to serve their original intended purpose, and that was to create a narrative foundation on which a theology could be built. But as a foundation they inevitably gained importance, and over time quickly became traditional. Like the stories of Jesus that most often serve to validate certain Christian values and morals, the Ann Lee narratives also came to serve in that same capacity for the Shaker culture.
These narratives of the life of Ann Lee were used over the course of Shakerism into the present. Reflecting both the static and dynamic qualities of Shakerism, these narratives became the stabilizing factors holding both qualities together. The next chapter will follow a single narrative through the course of Shakerism and analyze how it validated and traditionalized novel changes within Shakerism by maintaining an important static nature.
Chapter 3: The Creation of Tradition Through Narratives

The narratives concerning the life of Ann Lee were not published with entertainment in mind, although it is possible, if not likely, that the narratives told orally could have been told to entertain, as well as to educate. In the first half of the nineteenth century the narratives were recorded to lay a foundation on which to base certain Shaker principles such as celibacy and the confession of sins. The narratives served this purpose prior to being recorded in 1816, but existed during this time only in oral tradition. The Shakers realized that the dynamic quality that these narratives eventually took as generations passed could come back to haunt the legitimacy of their theology in the future.

Three factors came into play concerning the choice to record the testimonies of those who knew Ann Lee. Because no two tellings of the same story are ever exactly the same, the Shakers needed to create stable and official forms of these narratives, which they did by recording them in formal theological publications. It was also likely a form of “eleventh hour ethnography”, a phenomenon described by Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett as ethnography that takes place on the brink of a culture’s extinction (1998: 300). In 1816, when the Testimonies were written, many of those who were sources for the Testimonies were becoming elderly. An issue that had to be dealt with before the inevitable death of these sources was the possibility of faulty memory. Even in 1816,
many of these narratives actually took place as much as forty years prior to the telling. The lack of any collection of these narratives until 1816 brought up the issue of faulty memory. On the positive side, however, the editors were able to present the sources as dedicated Shakers who had stood the test of time, adding more legitimacy to the narratives themselves. Finally, the narratives could be better distributed to the outside public in written form. Although the non-Shaker world was most likely not the intended primary audience for any of these four publications, the writers knew that these works would make their way into the public, which was not a bad thing. The Shakers knew that they had nothing to hide: the only negative that could come out of the situation was exactly what happened with the 1816 Testimonies. They drew criticism from the public, provoking the publication of the 1827 Testimonies as a rebuttal to those accusations.

These written narratives became deeply entrenched in Shaker narrative tradition - so much so that the narratives on the surface level would attain an authority that could not be challenged within the later generations of Shaker culture. The inherent authority that these narratives attained through formal publication and formal usage in worship meetings combined with the Shaker notion of divine interpretation through present revelations would allow the Shakers of the second half of the nineteenth century up through the present to use these narratives as tools of validation. Before digging too deeply into how these narratives were used by later generations of Shakers as traditional forms, it’s important to first look at how these narratives were first established.

According to the testimony of Mary Hocknell, the 1816 Testimonies originally recorded the narrative of the moment Ann Lee received the indwelling of the Christ spirit.
In this prison, and at this time, Mother Ann received great revelations of God; many deep and important mysteries were there revealed to her; and by the power and authority of the Holy Ghost, she was there commissioned to take the lead of the society, which, until then, had rested with James and Jane Wardley. Though she had before received great manifestations of God, had discovered the root of human depravity, had taken up a full cross against the carnal gratifications of the flesh, and testified these things to the society, many of whom, through her testimony and influence, had walked in the same faith; yet she had continued to yield obedience to James and Jane Wardley, as her superiors, and was eminently useful to them in leading, teaching, strengthening and protecting the society.

But when she was released from this last imprisonment, she took Mary Hocknell with her, went to John Townley’s, collected the society together, and opened her revelations with the most astonishing power of God. Here it was seen, at once, that the candle of the Lord was in her hand, and that she was able, by the light thereof, to search every heart, and try every soul among them. From this time, Mother Ann took the lead of the society, and was received and acknowledged, by her followers, as the first pillar of God upon earth (Wells 1816: 48-49).

The editors of the same compilation of testimonies tell the story thus:

Though Ann was wrought upon in this manner, more or less, for the space of nine years, yet she had intervals of releasement, and was, at times, filled with visions and revelations of God. By this means the way of God, and the nature of His work, gradually opened upon her mind, with increasing light and understanding. At length, about the year 1770, after a scene of deep tribulation, and the most excessive sufferings and cries to God, she received a full revelation of the root and foundation of human depravity, and of the very transgression of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden. Then, she clearly saw whence and where in all mankind were lost and separated from God, and the only possible way of recovery.

By the immediate revelation of God, she henceforth bore an open testimony against the lustful gratifications of the flesh, as the source and foundation of human corruption. Her testimony was delivered with such power of God and accompanied with the world of prophecy in such a marvelous and searching manner, that it entered into the very secrets of the heart; by which means the most hidden abominations were brought to light! She testified in the most plain and pointed manner, that no soul could follow Christ in the regeneration, while living in the works of natural generation, and wallowing in their lusts.

The light and power of God revealed in Ann, and through her revealed to those who received her testimony, had such sensible effect in
giving them power over all sin, and filling them with visions, revelations, and gifts of God that she was received and acknowledged as the first spiritual Mother in Christ, and the second heir of the Covenant of Life in the New Creation. Hence she received the title of Mother; and hence those who received and obeyed her testimony found a great increase in the power and gifts of God; while those who rejected it lost all their former light and power, and fell back into a state of darkness, and into the common course of the world (Wells 1816: 5-6).

The same narrative is told twice in the same compilation, reinforcing both the perceived importance and power that this narrative would play in establishing a theology and the role it would play in the future as a traditional form.

These narratives from the 1816 Testimonies were the first to include the names of the eyewitness, or the original sources of the narrative, lending the narratives a concrete validity apart from the realm of theology. Portions of the 1810 edition of Youngs’ Testimonies would do the same, but this consisted of only a very small portion of the book overall. Youngs states in the Introduction to this edition after giving a little biographical information concerning Ann Lee:

It is unnecessary, however, to enlarge on this subject, or to state all the particulars of the abuse which Mother and the Elders, and the Believers in America received on different occasions, from lawless ruffians, who were taught by the false religion of their forefathers, to commit the most scandalous outrages upon a harmless people, under pretense of suppressing error. It may here suffice, simply to observe, that Mother was the principle object at which their rage was pointed; that during the time of her ministry, she frequently suffered such cruel and shameful abuse as modesty forbids to mention; and that her testimony was supported, and gained the ascendancy, amidst those scenes of trial and difficulty, which, to every outward appearance, were insurmountable, and under which she persevered, unshaken and immovable, with that patience and fortitude of mind which surpassed all human comprehension (Youngs 1810: xxxiv).
As this indicates, Youngs avoids dramatized narrative, and instead clings to a logical presentation of what he considered Shaker theology. Unlike later Shaker theologies, Youngs would base his theology on history and the Bible. Then beginning with the 1816 Testimonies the foundation becomes Ann Lee and the narratives related about her.

Nonetheless it should be remembered that the inclusion of the signatures of the eyewitnesses was nothing more than a narrative ploy. The underlying purpose of the 1816 Testimonies is to lay a narrative foundation on which to build a theology. The four gospels did much of the same thing in relating the stories of Jesus’ life; narratives that general Christian values and morals continue to be based upon to this day.

The first attempt at creating an established theology, was produced before the 1816 Testimonies. In 1808 Benjamin Seth Youngs wrote the Testimonies of Christ’s Second Appearing. In the 1856 edition the Testimonies Youngs records the same narrative as,

This testimony, in its fulness, she received in open vision from the Lord Jesus Christ, who appeared plainly, and clearly revealed the true nature and work of the everlasting Gospel of salvation to her. This was while she was in the public prison, where she was put by the malice of her enemies, through false accusations, because of the searching light and increasing power manifest through her. Thus she received her mission by the heavenly dove, or Divine Anointing Spirit of Christ in the order of the female. Her testimony was now increased in such mighty power of God, attended with the word of prophecy, and such energy of the Spirit, as penetrated into the secrets of the heart, and was irresistible, especially to those with whom she was united... And, from the light and power of God, which attended her ministry, and the certain power of salvation transmitted to those who received her testimony, she was received and acknowledged as the first Mother, or spiritual parent in the line of the female, and the second Heir in the covenant of life, according to the present display of the gospel. Hence, among Believers, she has been distinguished by no other name or title than that of Mother, from that period to the present day (Youngs 1856: 620).
It appears that this narrative is not located in either the 1808 or 1810 editions of Youngs’ Testimonies, but only in subsequent editions is the narrative added to the text. After the publishing of the 1816 Testimonies the importance of these narratives grew dramatically, probably leading Youngs to include more of these narratives in subsequent editions of the Testimonies. Even in the later editions, comparison of the 1816 Testimonies with Youngs’ Testimonies clearly reveals that prior to the publishing of the 1816 Testimonies the life of Ann Lee was very insignificant in the creation of a system of belief. This may have just been a difference of opinion between Benjamin Seth Youngs and Seth Youngs Wells, editor of the 1816 Testimonies, but it does show two very different approaches to the early establishment of Shaker theology. Even the Concise Statement written in the 1790s by Joseph Meacham never mentions Ann Lee.

These narratives from the 1816 Testimonies and the 1856 edition of The Second Appearing of Christ, are close to identical in structure and content. The narrative provided by Youngs took the story out of oral tradition and placed it in a more formal theological tradition. The fact that the attempt at theology came before the attempt to establish a theological basis could be further proof that Ann Lee herself never claimed to be the Second Coming of Christ. The lack of the presence of Ann Lee in the Youngs Testimonies also indicated this idea. It is likely that only in the early 1800s, after her death, was this role assigned to her. The early narratives seem to consistently show that she didn’t seem to be as popular as she was during and after the 1816 Testimonies were published.
The surmise that this role was assigned to her in the early 1800s is supported by both Shaker historians and the theological interpretations of the contemporary Shakers themselves. Brother Theodore Johnson wrote in his short pamphlet called *Life in the Christ Spirit* that, “Mother Ann was not the Christ, nor did she claim to be. She was simply the first of many Believers wholly embued by His spirit, wholly consumed by His love” (Johnson 1969: 7). This assertion shows the beginnings of the creation of her narratives to function in the capacity of validating theology. Comparing Youngs’ Testimonies with the Testimonies recorded in 1816 it becomes obvious that for Youngs Ann Lee is only a part of a much larger whole, but for the 1816 Testimonies Ann Lee is central, authoritative, special, and in many cases divine.

The 1823 *Summary View of the Millennial Church* also recorded the narrative. Longer and more detailed. This account is as follows:

While in deep exercise of mind concerning these things, she was brought into a state of excessive tribulation of soul, in which she felt her way hedged up, seemingly, on every side, and was constrained to cry mightily to God, to open some way of deliverance. In the midst of her sufferings and earnest cries to God, her soul was filled with divine light, and the mysteries of the spiritual world were brought clearly to her understanding. She saw the Lord Jesus Christ in his glory, who revealed to her the great object of her prayers, and fully satisfied all the desires of her soul. The most astonishing visions and divine manifestations were presented to her view in so clear and striking a manner, that the whole spiritual world seemed displayed before her. In these extraordinary manifestations, she had a full and clear view of the mystery of iniquity, of the root and foundation of human depravity, and of the very act of transgression, committed by the first man and woman, in the garden of Eden. Here she saw whence and wherein all mankind were lost from God, and clearly realized the only possible way of recovery. This revelation she received in the summer of 1770, in prison, where she was confined on account of her religious principles, under a pretense of her having profaned the sabbath.

The Ann had before received many extraordinary manifestations of God, tho she had received great light concerning the depravity of human
nature, and the effects of man’s loss from God, and tho she had taken up her 
cross against the carnal gratifications of the flesh, and had testified her faith 
to the society on this subject, many of whom, in consequence of her 
testimony, had walked in the same faith; yet, not having then received a clear 
revelation of the root of human depravity, and the cause of man’s fall, she had 
continued to yield obedience to James and Jane Wardley, as her superiors, and 
was eminently useful to them in leading, teaching, strengthening and 
protecting the society.

But when she was released from her imprisonment, and came to 
reveal to the society these last extraordinary manifestations, so great was the 
display of divine light with which her soul was filled, and so mighty the 
power of God which accompanied her testimony, and so keen the searching 
power of her spirit in discovering and bringing to light the hidden works of 
darkness, that every soul present was struck with astonishment and filled with 
fear and trembling. They saw at once that the candle of the Lord was in her 
hand, and that she was able by the light thereof, to search every heart and try 
every soul among them. From this time she was received and acknowledged 
as the first visible leader of the church of God upon earth (Wells 1823: 8-9).

The last of the four early major theological publications, the 1827 Testimonies, 
did not record the narrative. The 1827 Testimonies is nothing more than a compilation of 
testimonies by some of those who knew Ann Lee. Since these testimonies were primarily 
concerned with rebutting accusations made by the general public concerning the moral 
character of Mother Ann in America, the narratives are all post-1774, or after the Shakers 
arrived in America; leaving out this event, which occurred in 1770. This compilation, 
unlike the 1816 Testimonies, did not contain any edited biographical data concerning Ann 
Lee, and overall there was much less editorial work going into the publication. As the 
Introduction of this book indicates, the lack of editorial work lent authenticity to the 
narratives being recited. Editor Seth Youngs Wells writes,

A part of these testimonies have been written by the persons whose 
signatures they bear; but as a number of witnesses, either from age and 
infirmitiy or want of practice in writing, were unable to draft their own 
testimonies, they communicated the substance to some of their brethren or
sisters who were able to write it for them; and the manuscripts have either been examined by them, or carefully read to them, and wherever any thing occurred that was not stated exactly according to the sense and understanding of the witness who gave it, it was altered or amended agreeable to his or her feelings; so that nothing should be published or put on record but what should meet the sense and feelings of the subscribing witness (Wells 1816: 3-4).

The little bit of editorial writing that is in the book is concerned solely with refuting certain accusations and giving Shakerism a good name.

Popular narratives concerning the life of Ann Lee continued to be used over the span of Shakerism. Although remaining static, what the narratives conveyed and validated began to change. The first noticeable indication that this is taking place begins during, and mostly after the Civil War. The changes in the functions of these narratives parallels the social and contextual changes Shakerism was experiencing.

Post-Civil War Shakerism began to change dramatically, as did America during the same time period. Shakerism, whose goal had originally been to isolate itself from the outside world, began to view its role in society as the world’s salvation. This did not mean that they lost the communal aspect, but rather that their interaction with the world became more frequent and purposeful. Leading the activist and liberal movement in Shakerism was Elder Fredrick Evans who resided at the North Family at New Lebanon, New York. In this position he was the most powerful Shaker of any community. However, his liberal ideologies would not go unchallenged.

The Elder at South Union, Kentucky after the Civil War was Harvey Eads, who trained under the guidance of Benjamin Seth Youngs who wrote the Testimonies of Christ's Second Appearing in 1808. Eads adhered to the old way of Shakerism through
the separation of the Shaker and non-Shaker public, while Evans’ goal was to
revolutionize Shakerism by placing Shaker belief at the heart of the American activist
movements, and at the heart of Spiritualism. He did this by telling of how the Shakers
predated others concerning the abolition of slavery, how the Shakers had supported
women’s rights longer than anyone else, and how the Shakers predated the Spiritualist
movement in the 1850s. He accomplished much of this by making his argument and then
telling certain narratives of Ann Lee that had been by this point traditionalized and
embedded firmly in the Shaker lexicon. However, knowing that these narratives were
traditional for the Shaker culture only, Evans knew that for his arguments to make sense
with the outside public he would have to also argue the premise for why Ann Lee is
important in the first place. If Evans could convince the outside public of Ann Lee’s
importance and her role in progressive ideologies, then the narratives he told would have
that much more power to validate.

In 1869 Evans retold the same narrative of Ann Lee previously recited - not word
for word, but again nearly identical in structure and content. However, he qualified the
story throughout the book with passages of biographical information concerning Ann Lee
and her role as a spiritual leader, such as,

*Ann followed Jesus*, not as an imitator, but through being baptized with, and
led by, the same Christ Spirit that he was baptized with and led and guided
by. She became a Mother in Israel, and was thenceforth known to her
followers (or children) by the endearing name of *Mother*. Still it was the
principles that were the *foundation* of the second Christian Church, and not
man or woman, whether Jesus or Ann. Their importance is derived from the
fact of *their* being the *first* man and the *first woman* perfectly identified with
the principles and Spirit of Christ (Evans 1859: 82-83).

Prior to this passage he wrote,
Thus, out of the last of the ‘witnesses,’ the Quakers, the ‘forty-and-two months’ having expired, arose Ann Lee and her little company, to whom Christ appeared the second time, ‘without sin unto salvation,’ and made a new revelation to her of the seven principles, and of all the truths that had been revealed, in his first appearing, to Jesus; the practice of which constituted him the first Christian Church; and the same principles being reduced to practice by Ann Lee, constituted her the second Christian Church (Evans 1859: 81).

With the theological writings of Evans the role of Ann Lee moved in the direction of what she did, and not who she was. The individual here has been reduced to the principles by which that individual lived. Although there has occurred this shift in importance Ann Lee remains the figure by which Evans validates his changes. He is also the first to blatantly emphasize the link between divine revelation and the Shaker systems of belief. For the first time in a theological context, divine reinterpretation becomes central to explaining the evolution of Shaker belief systems.

Harvey Eads, Elder at South Union, Kentucky, didn’t question Evans’ use of Ann Lee’s role in theology as a figure of validation; he also used her similarly. Eads would question Evans’ interpretation of other Ann Lee narratives according to divine revelation. Shakerism had relied on revelation from the beginning, although rarely written about, until Evans. Eads would tell the story:

Thus it is seen that the second was the reappearing of the first; hence, as promised, Christ has appeared ‘the second time without sin unto salvation’ to all who will accept, believe and obey. The little handful continued to increase in light and power until the year 1770, when by special manifestation of divine light the present testimony of salvation and eternal life was fully revealed to Ann Lee, and by her made known to the society; and thus she rose above them and became the anointed and acknowledged leader of this faithful band. From this time forth Ann knew herself to be the Bride, the Lamb’s wife, being baptized with the spirit, and, by implicit obedience to the light received from God, she became conjoined to the Bridegroom, and was a coworker with Him in the regeneration and redemption of the race - He the Father and She the Mother in spiritual Israel (Eads 1979:112).
However, to make his argument he would qualify the story by quoting John Locke who stated, “If reason must not examine the truth of revelation or persuasion by something extrinsical to the persuasions themselves, inspirations and delusions, truth and falsehood, will have the same measure, and will not be possible to be distinguished” (Eads 69).

During this time period, we have then, basically identical narratives relating Ann Lee as the Second Coming of Christ, used for opposite purposes: one to validate change, the other to validate continuance of the already established theology.

This is the first indication that these narratives do indeed have a static form that almost always hearkens directly back to the 1816 Testimonies. What reveals this is the dynamic interpretations that we see at play between these two very similar narratives. Neither narrative is being directly interpreted to verbally validate the arguments of either side. There is no need to interpret the content when the simple placement and existence of the narrative in the surrounding context of the argument is enough to give power to the argument itself without necessarily being directly relevant.

The debate between conservative and liberal Shakerism that began to be discussed during the second half of the nineteenth century, primarily between Fredrick Evans and Harvey Eads, continued into the following century. By the early twentieth century, Eads had passed away, and the conservative faction of Shakerism had fallen behind the liberal faction. At this point Shakerism is beginning to fall into the power of women, and as such women’s rights become a primary topic. Having the female founder in the person of Ann Lee, the narratives of her life became central to supporting the arguments of the women in power during this time.
The two primary theological works published at this time, both by women, were Aurelia Mace's *The Alethia* and Leila S. Taylor and Anna White’s *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message*. In 1901 Henry Blinn, elder at the community at Canterbury, New Hampshire, published in book form *The Life and Gospel Experience of Mother Ann Lee*. Blinn was the editor of the *Shaker Manifesto* during the last half of its life-span. It was in this periodical that Blinn first published this material in installments during the 1880s. The articles contained in *The Manifesto* during Blinn’s editorship clearly indicate that Blinn knew the power of these narratives, and what the Shakers would be able to accomplish if they were able to harness that power. Blinn, who was closely allied with the North Family at New Lebanon, and hence closely associated with the progressive and liberal reforms of the second half of the nineteenth century, rewrote the 1816 *Testimonies* in somewhat different words and style, primarily leaving out the form of divided eyewitness testimonies. His intention was to remind the Shakers of these narratives. In this book Blinn recorded the narrative previously discussed:

In 1770, through the inquisitorial spirit of the dominant English church, Ann Lee was cast into prison and in one instance nearly reduced to starvation, with the hope of suppressing the testimony which she held before the world. The dark and dismal cell became the illuminated abode of spiritual life and joy. In this place she received a deeper revelation of the Divine Presence, and the mysteries of the heavenly world were clearly opened to her understanding.

On her release from the prison, she made known the revelation which had been so wonderfully displayed. The society accepted it as light from God, and from this time acknowledged her as the first visible leader of the church of God upon the earth. The continued word which was now revealed to Ann and through her administered to those who received her heavenly mission, enabled them in a great measure to have power over sin, and filled them with visions and revelations to that degree, that they readily acknowledged her as their spiritual mother in Christ, and from this time she was known to them as MOTHER ANN LEE (Blinn 1882: 14-15).
In 1899 Aurelia Mace, a Shaker sister at Sabbathday Lake, Maine, published a series of letters she had written in book form. There is no central theme, or a single-strand narrative; instead she served as editor, compiling her own letters. In these letters, which often look at the rights of women, Ann Lee is more often than not a central character. Reflecting the writings and portraits of Ann Lee provided by Evans, Aurelia Mace records the narrative:

It was in the summer of seventeen hundred and seventy that our Mother was imprisoned in Manchester, being falsely accused by her enemies of breaking the Sabbath. After a scene of deep tribulation of soul, when her way was seemingly hedged up on every side, and she cried mightily to god for deliverance, the rays of Divine Light suddenly broke in upon her spirit and the Heavens of glory were spread before her in open vision. She saw the spirit of Jesus, and he spoke to her words of love and comfort, gave her a mission, assuring her of divine protection in its fulfillment, and revealed to her those principles upon which this Order has been founded, sacred, eternal and true… When she was released from prison and returned to the society, her Elders James and Jane Wardley, immediately saw that she had received light superior to theirs, and they and their people willingly acknowledged her as their leader. From this time onward she was called “Mother” by her faithful followers. It has been said that, when under the power of the Holy Spirit, her countenance shone with the glory of God, and her form and actions appeared divinely beautiful and very angelic. The power and influence of her spirit, at such times, was great beyond description; and no one was able to gainsay or resist the authority by which she spoke (Mace 1907: 51-52).

We see the reflection of Evans concerns, as she tends to focus on the principles embodied by Ann Lee, but she also tries to revive the center of the old narratives in portraying Ann Lee as powerful and divine: so much so that “her countenance shone with the glory of God”. She also places emphasis on the necessity of contemporary divine revelation in her work. She states that “Thus the evidence is brought to our senses that we exist after death and that there is a God, the Great First Cause and Creator of all things. Not because the Bible tells us so, but from present revelations” (Mace 1907: 31).
It is with the writings of Anna Taylor and Leila White that the narrative is taken in a new direction. They take the narrative and, like Evans, use it to reinforce their activist principles, especially that of women’s rights. However, unlike Evans they choose not to focus on Ann Lee as the embodiment of principles. Instead they hearken back to the 1816 Testimonies by presenting Ann Lee as a powerful individual. They tell her story:

Finally, goaded to distraction by her persistent rebukes and, perhaps, pierced by their own aroused consciences - they thought to silence her voice by prison walls, with what result we have seen. Ann Lee came forth from Manchester jail an instrument more finely attuned, keyed to a truer pitch than ever before, - a mouth-piece for the Divine voice, a presence charged with the live currents of truth, with the power of God to convict and to slay, with the love of God, also to pardon and to heal (White 1905: 22).

Taylor and White go on to quote Ann Lee as saying “I kill and I make alive.” Again, like Mace, here we have the powerful woman that we find in the earlier accounts. However, the significance of her power in the context of this narrative is not her divine status, but her power as a woman.

The feminization of Shakerism could not have had a better cache of traditional narratives to fall back on for support and validation. Ann Lee certainly was ahead of her time historically. Illiterate and of insignificant social standing, divine or not, Ann Lee transcended social boundaries in her lifetime that would not be crossed again until nearly a century later with the beginnings feminist movements. With White, Taylor, Mace, and Evans all writing on the issue of women’s rights during a time when many women were refuting the ideas of the ‘Cult of Domesticity’, it was natural that they would draw on the life of Ann Lee. The traditionalized nature of the narratives were a bonus in this particular context. With feminization, the narratives did have a direct connection with the
content of the issue at hand, and as such the narrative could be used in direct relation to
the issue of women’s rights, and at least within Shakerism it would become very difficult
to argue against it. For the Shakers, finding an argument against the topic would have
been the easy part, overriding the general importance of the narrative would have been
nearly impossible.

The fourth phase of Shakerism analyzed here in relation to traditional narratives
about Ann Lee concern contemporary Shakerism. The Shakers of the mid-twentieth
century up to the present have pushed Ann Lee as a person back to the sidelines and
stressed the emphasis back on the church. The example she set for Shakers by no means
is devalued or overlooked. Instead she loses her divine nature, and is reduced back to the
exceptional person that she was originally in the late-18th century.

The same narrative is presented by the Sabbathday Lake Shakers in a pamphlet
titled Shakerism for Today. It differs radically as far as content is concerned from the
previously presented narratives. However, in structure it is very similar:

The revival of apostolic Christianity as lived and taught by the Shakers
today results from the life and ministry of Ann Lee, a quite remarkable
English woman born at Manchester in 1736. The daughter of a humble
blacksmith, Ann was born and raised in the Church of England… In her
twenty-third year Ann came under the influence of James and Jane
Wardley, former Quakers…She readily submitted herself to the discipline
of the religious life of the little society. So clearly was Ann guided by the
spiritual experience of the ages in the way of prayer and perfection that
she was acknowledged by her religious family as their spiritual Mother in
remembrance of her special call and dedication to God (Shakers 1998: 4).

In this theological context Ann Lee is reduced once more to little more than
person and leader. The Shakers now take the idea of divine reinterpretation to its logical
conclusion, in their belief that divine reinterpretation leads directly to a lack of theology.
Implied in their definition is that theology is static and since theirs is ever evolving it cannot be considered a formal theology. This watered-down Ann Lee is perhaps more evident in the narrative provided by Brother Theodore Johnson in 1969: “To Mother Ann Lee was given the inner realization that Christ’s Second Coming was a quiet, almost unheralded one within individuals open to the anointing of His spirit. Mother Ann was not Christ, nor did she claim to be. She was simply the first of many Believers wholly embued by His spirit, wholly consumed by His love” (Johnson 1969: 7). Although the picture of Ann Lee has once more changed, contemporary Shakerism still places much emphasis on divine reinterpretation. Johnson also writes: “Revelation has been for Believers, a dynamic, on-going process. They feel that the static view held by so many that God has spoken for all time and is now silent is wholly erroneous, having been disproved again and again within the light of their own experience. God still speaks through his church” (Johnson 1969: 8).

The narratives here have changed slightly, but Johnson is using the same techniques as Shaker leaders a century prior to Johnson’s writing. For Johnson the narrative no longer validates theology. The sole claim of the narrative at this point is contained in its traditional qualities, and even in a short pamphlet where space is obviously limited, this short narrative still finds a place, even though its original intentions one-hundred and fifty years prior to Johnson’s writing, were intended to offer a theological foundation. Now with the theology eliminated, there is certainly no need for a foundation, but the narrative is retained. Why? Because over the course of one-hundred and fifty years the narrative has become traditionalized within the Shaker culture. It’s no
longer needed to support a theology, or a lack of theology, it has simply become a sacred origin story. It’s told as a representation of Shaker history. The narrative itself has reached a divine status for the Shakers.

Here, a single narrative has been traced through the history of Shakerism from prior to its formal beginnings up through the 1960s. Changes occur to the narrative, as with many other early Shaker narratives that have been omitted due to space constraints, but the narrative itself remains nearly static both structurally and in substance. What changes are the narratives functions that it provides over its course. Originally serving the practical function of providing a history on which to create a formal theology, the narratives would inevitably work their way into the Shaker heart to attain a special quality that few other narratives in Shakerism could boast of. When exactly these narratives became traditional is impossible to tell, but it is clear that by the 1860s its use is no longer practical in that its being used to validate directly. Instead it is told for the sake of telling. To create a context that is sacred in nature, and creating the illusion that it is in some way connected with the content itself. If the illusion is successful then the arguments will be accepted without being weighed.

It also becomes evident that if the content of a narrative does relate to the issue being debated the direct reference of the supporting content takes precedence over the traditional form. It is important to remember, however, that if the narrative were not traditional it would not be used to support the issue, relevant or not. Lastly, the narrative loses its practical importance, leaving it only with its sacred and traditional quality. Not all the narratives follow this same formula, because the text and context are so closely
integrated in this respect that even the slightest change in either could alter the situation to take on a whole new meaning. Nearly all the Ann Lee narratives discussed here begin the same way, but what direction and how they will be utilized in the future according to the broader social context cannot be known at the moment, but in all likelihood it is highly improbable that even two will take the same path through history or into the future.

The traditionalization of narratives within Shakerism lending validity and credibility to a newly established religion have been discussed, but how Shakerism managed to establish itself prior to having its own traditional foundation have not. The next chapter discusses just this. As most Christian denominations do, Shakerism early on borrowed from, and juxtaposed itself with, Biblical narratives. Already traditional, Biblical narratives gave early Shakerism the credibility it needed to further establish itself with its own lexicon of sacred narratives. Following will be an analysis of how early Shakerism managed to hold itself up to the Biblical narratives of Jesus, and how these narratives were used to temporarily ground them while their own history was made.
The narratives concerning the life of Ann Lee, over time, became traditional within Shaker culture. The traditional form of these narratives came about with repetition, imbedded sacredness, and the context in which the narrative was told. Although early Shaker theological literature became traditional in nature as time passed, before attaining traditional status, the earliest Shaker narratives needed something already traditional as well, in order to validate the legitimacy of those narratives that were unique and destined for tradition themselves. As a denomination of Christianity, the Shakers never left out the life of Jesus. Over the course of their history, the Shakers closely followed the theological notion that “it was with Ann Lee, who went through the same ordeal, setting the example for womankind, that Jesus did for men” (Eads 1879: 110). Sometimes the inclusion of Jesus was accomplished through explicit stories concerning His life, while other, more subtle, narratives of the life of Jesus were related through the analogy of the life of Ann Lee. The analogy was a two-edged sword, lending validity to the Ann Lee narratives through the already validated and traditionalized quality of Jesus narratives, while also offering a much needed traditional form to a theology still in its infancy.

Early Shaker writers, such as Benjamin Seth Youngs and Seth Youngs Wells, understood the importance of the narratives of Jesus in establishing a theology that would
define Shakerism for many years to come. Benjamin Youngs wrote in the preface to the 1808 Testimonies.

In the time of Christ’s first appearing, the Jews, who called themselves God’s chosen people, were looking for a Saviour to appear in royal splendor, surpassing all temporal monarchs; but behold, he appeared in a man, and took on him the form of a servant. Again, those who called themselves Christians, expected him to appear in the form of a man, far surpassing all earthly beings, in pomp and grandeur, and warlike power; and behold, the humble Saviour was manifested in the form and likeness of a woman, and assumed the appearance of an handmaid (Youngs, 1810: xii).

Youngs, writing more explicitly concerning the topic: “Therefore it need not seem strange, if the circumstances preceding the public opening of Christ’s second appearing, should be similar to those of his first appearing (Youngs 1810: ix).”

Of the earliest four Shaker publications on theology, two can be considered discursive treatises on theology, while the other two can be considered narrative foundations. “Treatise” simply refers to a discursive and systematic approach to Shaker theology, while the “narrative foundation” is not an approach to theology, but represents rather the basic building blocks of the theology. Youngs’ Testimonies fall into the logical treatise category. Youngs, who places much more emphasis on the life of Jesus than that of Ann Lee, did so not out of any disrespect to the life of Ann Lee, as the previous quotes from the preface indicate. Instead Youngs was establishing the validity of the Ann Lee narratives through the inclusion of the narratives concerning the life of Jesus, as well as other portions of well-known, and traditionalized, Biblical history. Youngs writes,

The greatest part that hath been published abroad in the world, by common fame, or through such preachers or writers as were either acquainted with the people, or actuated by a spirit of prejudice, is too ridiculous, absurd, and contradictory, to merit the least attention; nor has any thing, hitherto, been published that meets our approbation, except a small pamphlet, entitled, A
Acknowledging only two works on theology, Youngs also realized that these two works dealt little with Ann Lee. The earliest pamphlet, A Concise Statement, written by Joseph Meacham, never mentions Ann Lee. And Richard McNemar's The Kentucky Revival deals little with her life.

Youngs felt that it was his role to move Ann Lee more into the picture. The Testimonies deals little with the life of Ann Lee in comparison to the many other topics that the book covers. However, considering the overall length of the book at several hundred pages, even if only a small portion of the work is dedicated to Ann Lee, that small portion is still much more detailed and encompassing than any other written works at the time. The 1823 Summary View of the Millennial Church followed the same format as Youngs' Testimonies. The other two books, the 1816 Testimonies and the 1827 Testimonies would shun simple inclusions of narratives about Jesus. Instead these works often drew direct analogies between the lives of Jesus and Ann Lee through a comparison of narratives.

Narrative analogy is often used to create a sense of validity. Very complex narrative structure, easily allows surface level illusions that mislead the audience into believing assumptions that may or may not be false. The credibility of one narrative can lend its own credibility to another less credible narrative through the analogy of similarities between the structural or contextual content. Narratives have often been grouped and compared according to structural and contextual data.
similarities or differences, but what is of significance here is not the analogy, but what is accomplished through analogy.

Early Shaker theologians used this technique as a tool to create a more credible theology that would both separate them from the surrounding denominations of Christianity, while also allowing them to maintain the religious validity of being a Christian church. Narratives concerning the life of Jesus were either related within the context of telling the narratives of Ann Lee, or a direct analogy was made between two narratives concerning each of their lives. Youngs often used the method of simply relating the stories of Jesus within the context of the life of Ann Lee. For the most part the life of Jesus is not placed in direct parallel with the life of Ann Lee. Instead very minor similarities bring the two together into one section of the overall theology.

Youngs spent much of the earlier portion of his Testimonies laying a foundation on which to base the later information concerning Ann Lee. The foundation he created was strictly discursive and biblically historical. It was with this method that he built credibility for the last quarter of the book primarily concerned with Ann Lee. Narratives of Jesus are strewn through the book, as well as the narratives concerning other Biblical personalities. Although Youngs rarely uses direct analogy to lend credibility to the divine life of Ann Lee, it does create a sense of connection with the larger Christian body.

The importance of Youngs' Testimonies is that he clearly states the importance of both the narratives of Ann Lee and those of Jesus. He also makes it
clear that finding the similarities between the two was a very important task in the process of making clear a credible theology. Youngs, who approached this idea only partially, took the idea to its extreme with the publishing of the 1816 Testimonies by Calvin Green and Seth Youngs Wells. Here the structure of the four Gospels was mimicked structurally. The collection would discard logic in preference to pure narratives. Although the book does contain some editorial work that works through logic, the editorial work in the book most explicitly consist of re-recited narratives by the editors themselves.

Paralleling the Gospels in many ways, the 1816 Testimonies established credibility through their similarities with the already credible Gospels of Christ. One of the first methods used to attain this purpose was through the juxtaposition of the role of John the Baptist and Jesus, to that of the role of James and Jane Wardley and Ann Lee. Just as John the Baptist was a predecessor to Jesus opening up the way in which Jesus would follow, so did James and Jane Wardley open up the path for Ann Lee.

The narrative of both John the Baptist and Jesus, and James and Jane Wardley and Ann Lee are recounted throughout the 1823 Summary View of the Millennial Church and other theological works produced through the following century. Much like the narratives of the moment Ann Lee came to be known as “Mother,” or the Second Coming of Christ was recounted throughout the course of Shakerism, the narratives of the relationship between James and Jane Wardley and Ann Lee were also told throughout the course of Shakerism. What distinguishes
the narratives, however, is that the narrative of James and Jane Wardley bought into an already existing set of traditional narratives, while the narrative of the moment Ann Lee came to be known as Mother of the Church became traditional over time.

As far as tradition is concerned, it is the narrative of James and Jane Wardley that is most significant to early Shaker theology. The reason is that, while both narratives were explanations and interpretations for certain theological phenomena found within Shaker theology, the narrative of James and Jane Wardley piggy-backed tradition for the sake of its own existence. Like most redundant activities in life, tradition makes accomplishing those activities easier in that they simply get done without necessarily thinking about it. The Shakers were also looking for this, as well as credibility. The Millennial Church recorded the role of James and Jane Wardley as,

The preceding work in this society, under the ministration of James and Jane Wardley, was evidently preparatory to the ushering in of the second coming of Christ; and it may with propriety be compared to the work of John the Baptist, or the spirit of Elias, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus. When therefore Ann was baptised into the fulness of the spirit and work of that society, who was then prepared for the Baptism of the Holy and Divine nature, and was made a fit vessel to receive the true Spirit of Christ, and to revive and bring to light his perfect law of righteousness for the direction and salvation of all souls who were willing to obey her testimony; and here commenced the real manifestation of Christ’s second appearance (MC 16).

The narrative of the moment Ann Lee became “Mother” to the Church attained the inherent power to legitimate through its traditional qualities only after some amount of time. Up through approximately the Civil War, this particular narrative was little more than an explanation for the role of the Shakers’ leader and founder. In 1872 Harvey Lauderdale Eads, Elder at the Shaker community at South
Union, Kentucky reiterated the role of the Wardley’s role in Shakerism, and their relationship to Ann Lee recorded much earlier in the Summary View of the Millennial Church. He wrote,

Jesus could have no more have superseded John [the Baptist], without submission to the order of god in him, than Ann Lee could have superseded that of James and Jane Wardley, without confessing, acknowledging, and complying with the order of which they were the heads (Eads 1872: 108).

Concerning the same topic Eads also recorded:

These witnesses increased until about the year 1706, when a few of them went over to England, where many were united to them, and both their numbers and powers of ministration, like the sea, ebbed and flowed for forty years, when a small number of the most faithful were led by the spirit to unite themselves into a small society, near Manchester, under the ministry of James and Jane Wardley. These were the John Baptists of the second appearing of Christ, to whom the people came and were baptized into the spirit of repentance, confessing their sins; and Ann Lee was among the rest, and she came for the same purpose the rest did; and as Jesus confessed to the forerunner of the Second Advent, and came up through that order, as Jesus did through that of John. So that the forerunners declared her to be, first a woman ‘coming after them, but was preferred before them, for she was before them’ (Eads 1872: 112).

Different from this type of narrative, the story of James and Jane Wardley attained the power of tradition from the very beginning. Not because it has had the time to inherit that power, but because it borrows the power from another narrative that is similar in quality. And, as has been shown, the inherent traditional qualities that was implied in the narrative from its beginning continues to play an explanatory role for future theologians.

Making the parallels in the narrative concerning James and Jane Wardley as the predecessors to the Second Coming of Christ in Ann Lee, the early Shaker theologians created an environment where converts could maintain some semblance
of their religious past, considering that they were of the Christian faith, making the transition easier, and as a more important byproduct - more likely. There is no way of really telling whether or not the strategy worked or not. The early Shakers were successful in proselytizing the non-Shaker public. One of the obviously negative aspects of making this analogy public, is that the Shakers were setting themselves up for criticism by those whose own definitions of Christianity, which in most cases would have included the narrative of John the Baptist, but certainly not that of James and Jane Wardley.

The analogy melded Shakerism with general Christianity in this sense, but also in the same sense it created a black-and-white contrast in which they separated themselves as a separate denomination of Christianity. While there was the potential converts who might sympathetically view Shakerism based on its similarities to Christianity, others might unfeelingly view Shakerism based on the differences. While the analogy is meant to imply similarities, it inevitably and very literally implies the differences. By making this analogy, the Shakers were telling the public that while they were like general Christianity, they were also a little bit different.

Another example of an analogy found in early Shaker theology that continues to be recited up through contemporary Shakerism, is the narrative of how Ann Lee perspired blood. Concerning the prayer of Jesus the Biblical narrative reads as follows, “And, being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as if it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44).
The 1816 *Testimonies* records the narrative concerning Ann Lee as,

And under the most severe tribulation of mind, and the most violent
temptations and buffettings of the enemy, she was often in such extreme agony
of soul as caused the blood to perspire through the pores of her skin. (Wells
1816: 4).

The editors of the *Testimonies*, not only make the narrative analogy, but go on to follow it
up with a direct analysis of the similarities between the two narratives. They immediately
recorded: “Well might her sufferings and trials be compared to those of the Lord Jesus,
when he was in the wilderness, tempted of the devil” (Wells 1816: 4). Making a direct
connection between the two narratives, the editors were lending credibility to the Ann
Lee narrative through the well established credibility of the Jesus narrative. As such,
narrative analogy allowed the Shakers to make Ann Lee appear more legitimately as the
Second Coming of Christ as well as giving Christians of other denominations familiar
ground to tread as potential converts.

The two methods already discussed (telling of Biblical narratives and analogies
between Ann Lee narratives and Biblical narratives) reveal two ways that the Shakers
assigned legitimacy to their own newly created theology. The telling of Biblical
narratives went beyond reciting a narrative found in the Bible. The early Shaker
theologians often used certain Biblical motifs and characters within Shaker theological
narratives. Because so much of the life of Ann Lee was based on vision, Biblical
characters, primarily Jesus, could much more easily work their way into the narratives
that would, in a few decades, be traditionalized to the point of validating Shakerism’s role
in religious history for historians and non-Shakers, and as a method of attaining heaven
for Shakers.
Biblical prophetic interpretation often found its way into a narrative form through the testimony of Ann Lee. The 1816 Testimonies records her as preaching to a group of non-believers stating:

Even his own disciples, after he arose from the dead, though he had often told them that he should rise, the third day, because he appeared, first, to a woman! So great was their unbelief that the words of Mary seemed to them like idle tales! His appearing first, to a woman, showed that his Second Appearing would be in a woman (Wells 1816: 161).

Weaving Biblical narrative into prophetic interpretation made, presumably by Ann Lee, the Shakers validate themselves once again as a Christian church. Although it is not a clear-cut analogy, to an extent there is an obvious logic being used here. Because the first appearing of the Christ was to Mary (a woman) then the second appearing of the Christ would also be in a woman (Ann Lee). This creates the illusion of the Shakers continuing the Biblical narrative that initially ended with the Book of Revelations in the New Testament.

Validating themselves as an extension and progression of the early Christian church, it was important for the early Shaker theologians to establish their contemporary theological existence in relation to the past existence created through Biblical narratives of the New Testament. This extension is most obvious through the claim that Ann Lee is the Second Coming of Christ. The Shakers were not rewriting the Bible, they were adding to it; extending and fulfilling the prophecy made within the last book of the Bible - Revelations.
As validation for her role as the Second Coming of Christ, Ann Lee is recorded as
having claimed on several cases her closeness with the Christ spirit. In one instance the
editors of the 1816 Testimonies records:

Again, at the same place, Mother was under great sufferings, and travail of
soul, after which she said, 'The Lord, who brought me over the great waters,
has redeemed my soul. I hear the angels sing; I see the glory of God as bright
as the sun; I see multitudes of the dead, who were slain in battle, arise and
come into the first resurrection; I see Christ put crowns on their heads of
bright, glorious, and changeable colors. - I converse with Christ; I feel Him
present with me, as sensibly as I feel my hands together. My soul is married
to him in the spirit; - he is my husband; it is not I that speaks; it is Christ who
dwells in me (Wells 1816: 162).

“Christ”, for the Shakers refers not necessarily to Jesus as the man, but as the spirit in
which one becomes anointed, as Jesus had been. Eads relates this idea,

And now we here boldly testify that all the fruits shown forth by Jesus in His
anointed capacity did reappear, in the anointed Ann, and show that she was
baptized with the same spirit. Such, then, manifestly, was Christ’s second
coming. Thus are the two foundation pillars established, to whom the
Scripture types refer” (Eads 1879: 98-99).

Ann Lee metaphorically refers to Christ as her husband. In one way this is rather
contradictory in relation to the Shaker acceptance of celibacy, and as a result their
rejection of the nuclear family. On the other hand, this reference played a very important
role in establishing the notion of rejecting the physical in favor of the spiritual. Marriage,
in the case with the Christ spirit, in the spiritual sense is not only appropriate, but a goal
for which Shakers have strived for since the beginnings.

In another reference where her vision is more specific than just the “Christ”,
Mother Ann is recorded as stating, “I have often seen St. Peter and St. Paul, and
conversed with them, and with all the Apostles; and with Christ Jesus, - my Lord and
Head; for no man is my head but Christ Jesus; he is my Lord and Head (Wells 1816:165).” Here, much like the previous reference Ann Lee refers to her closeness with the Christ spirit. But in this case she draws not only a direct connection with the personality of Jesus, but with the larger context of the New Testament by making reference to St. Peter and St. Paul, as well as “all the Apostles”. Through vision, Ann Lee has established a connection with the New Testament, and as such established her own role as a carrier of the narrative, as well as creator of the narrative to follow.

Ann Lee also established the place of Shakerism in relation to Christianity through explicit references to Biblical narratives and characters. Job Bishop, an early American convert to Shakerism recalls Ann Lee conversing with him through the following dialogue:

‘Ah! James, these are great gifts of God; they are ministering spirits. I have often seen St. Peter and St. Paul, and conversed with them, and with all the Apostles; and with Christ Jesus, - my Lord and Head; for no man is my head, but Christ Jesus; he is my Lord and Head.’ Mother wept, and, turning to Job, said, ‘Job, though you are a young man, you are now called to go and preach a greater and purer gospel than St. Paul preached; for this day, requires a confession of every known sin; and a full cross against the flesh, with all its affections and lusts’ (Wells 1816:165).

The use of other Biblical characters, besides Jesus, helps open up the dialogue between Shakerism and Christianity by merging the two even closer to one another. Borrowed tradition is used here explicitly to validate the Shaker principle of celibacy instituted from the beginning by Ann Lee. To preach a “greater and purer gospel than St. Paul” is the call, and the “confession of every known sin” as well as “a full cross against the flesh” are the requirements.
Again drawing her beliefs closer to the belief systems that generally attach
themselves to the entity of Christianity through narrative forms, Mother Ann recited a
narrative whose content of characters and general idea draws itself from the Book of
Revelations. The 1816 Testimonies records the narrative as: “Again Mother said, ‘I have
seen Michael and his angels fight with the Dragon and his angels, and the Dragon was
cast down and there was no place for him; I saw it as plain before my eyes as ever I saw
any natural thing’” (Wells 1816: 182). Once again, through allusions to traditional
Biblical narratives, a certain amount of authority lends itself to her own narratives.

The Bible lent tradition to Shakerism not only through narrative form, but also
through, very literally, its physical presence. The simple act of using the Bible created
validity for many who were converts from other Christian denominations, by creating a
common link between the two. The Bible, already traditional for converts from other
denominations, retained the tradition, and as a result - validity, inherent in itself from one
denomination into Shakerism. Hence, a viable component of religion lends credibility, as
well as an element of comfort, across Christian denominations.

The Shakers used both Biblical narrative, as well as the Bible, as a physical
object, as ways of bringing themselves closer to and onto a more common ground with
the potential converts of the time and place. Cornelius Thayer relates the narrative of one
of his encounters with Ann Lee. He states that,

After he had confessed his sins, and received the promise of eternal life,
Mother Ann told him to read a chapter in the Revelations, concerning the
woman clothed with the sun. Elder James read, in the Epistle of Peter,
concerning the gospel being preached to those who were dead, that they
might be judged according to men in the flesh, and live according to god, in
the spirit. He said, ‘The gospel is preached to souls who have left the body.’
And Mother said, 'I see thousands of the dead rising and coming to judgment now, in this present time' (Wells 1816:186).

The role of the Bible here is, unlike the other passages, not an indirect reference, but a literal physical object, that plays the primary role in the narrative itself.

The last narrative form that should be discussed, that borrows tradition from Biblical narratives and history are the narratives of prophecies and their subsequent fulfillment found in early Shaker writings. The use of borrowed tradition through the use of prophecies is very indirectly related to Biblical narrative, at least as compared to other forms of borrowed tradition already discussed here. The thought of the fulfillment of religious prophecy hearkens the memory of many to the life of Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The life of Ann Lee was considered the fulfillment of New Testament prophecy in the same way that the life of Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

Well known Old Testament prophecies, such as “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (KJV Isaiah 7:14) or “A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God’” (KJV Isaiah 40:3) are believed to have been fulfilled through the birth of Jesus via the Virgin Mary, and the life of John the Baptist found in the New Testament. The fulfilled prophecies recorded in the early theological works by the Shakers would in-turn view those fulfillments in relation to prophecies made in the New Testament, primarily in the Book of Revelations.
New Testament prophecies found in the Book of Revelation that the Shakers viewed as being fulfilled according to their own history included the verse concerning the woman and the dragon that is as follows: “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars” (KJV Rev. 12: 1). For the Shakers the woman who gave birth to the son, who “would rule the earth with an iron sceptor” was Ann Lee. The Shakers even write concerning this Biblical passage relating it to the words of Ann Lee, when she tells Cornelius Thayer to read the “chapter in the Revelations, concerning the woman clothed with the sun” (Wells 1816:186).

Other passages from the Bible that were used by the Shakers as prophecies fulfilled by their own history referred mostly to Biblical references concerning the second coming of Christ. For the Shakers, Ann Lee fulfilled this prophecy as the second coming of Christ. Although contemporary Shakerism does not view Ann Lee as the second coming of Christ, nor do they even claim that Ann Lee ever claimed to even be the Christ; early Shakerism did, not only explicitly refer to her as the second coming of Christ, but record her as saying that the Christ spirit dwelt within her. It is recorded in the Preface of the 1816 Testimonies that

Christ did, verily, make a Second Appearance in Ann Lee; that she was chosen, a Witness of God, to usher in a new dispensation of the Gospel; to rend the veil of the flesh, which separates the soul from God; to enter the Holy of Holies, and become the first spiritual Mother, of all the Children of the Resurrection (Wells 1816: vi).
Later in 1969, Brother Theodore Johnson wrote that “Mother Ann was not Christ, nor did she claim to be (1969:7). The juxtaposition of these two passages gives a brief, albeit an explicit, glimpse into the extremes of Shaker theological evolution.

What is important here, however, is the relationship between the literal life of Ann Lee and her role as the second coming of the same Christ spirit that dwelled with Jesus. It is this relationship that most explicitly both connects and separates the Shakers from the generic entity of Christianity. On the one hand the Shakers have claimed to have written the next Biblical chapter through the fulfillment of the New Testament prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ. But on the other hand they have also claimed what only a small minority of Christian religious denominations have claimed, and that is that Christ has already made His return. While this claim drew them a direct connection with Christianity, it simultaneously and drastically separated them from the remaining denominations. While this claim may have created an element of comfort and intrigue for some, it drew criticism from many others.

The prophetic fulfillment of the life of Ann Lee as the second coming of Christ, as well as both narrative analogy and direct narrative reference to Biblical contexts, allowed the Shakers to borrow tradition during a time when they themselves had not had the time to develop their own traditional forms. This borrowed tradition lent the Shakers the credibility that they needed to firmly establish themselves quickly within a predominantly Christian America. Although these forms of narrative and the beliefs they inspired and supported continued on into the following centuries, early on much of their role in Shaker theology was the traditional qualities that were inherent within them. Their presence
gave the Shakers a firm foundation on which to build their own theology that would become traditional itself in the years to come.
Shaker history provides a unique, appropriate, and convenient set of data to analyze in respect to the study of narrative and tradition and the role it plays next to cultural change. The interplay between cultural change and the social factors that influence it will differ from culture to culture, and the way this interplay occurs within Shakerism may or may not be unique. What this analysis does show is that there is a definite interplay between cultural change and the external factors like narrative and tradition. This study is not intended to compare this interplay cross-culturally, but to simply look at how the process works - how cultural and social change can be read through both the dynamic and static qualities of cultural narrative.

The key component of this study was the narrative. The narrative was analyzed in comparison and juxtaposition to the changes that Shakerism incurred over its course. And within this juxtaposition the tools by which that change occurred, reflected by narrative, was looked at. While the basic process of being able to read cultural change through narrative similarities and variations over the given period of change could be similar cross-culturally, the tools by which those changes occur will be different. In the case of the Shakers, the intent on maintaining what is considered to be “Shaker” and divine reinterpretation as a method of maintaining a progressive nature are the tools by
which the social changes occur. The tools by which these changes occur not only effect whether or not the culture changes, but also how it changes.

Because of the abstraction of these terms, placing them in a chronological order becomes complex. The complexity of culture and the multi-functionality of the varying elements at play in the scheme of things complicates a theoretical analysis of how the processes work specifically. What can be said though is that the process begins with a need to fulfill. In this analysis that need was the need to be progressive while not giving up the essence of Shaker culture. How could the Shakers be “Shakers”, but also evolve, sometimes drastically, with the world around them, and still be considered Shakers? In this analysis tradition became the necessary tool to establish something that could be called Shaker culture, and divine reinterpretation became the tool by which everything culturally outside of traditional Shakerism could evolve.

Yet, these two tools - tradition and divine reinterpretation - being radically different, and serving two very separate functions needed something else to link them together - one single entity that was capable of validating both. Fulfilling this role was narrative. As was shown with the Biblical narratives wielded by the Shakers, these earliest narratives gave them a foundation on which their own later narratives replicated in a very similar, and yet much more powerful way within their own cultural group. What gave these earliest Biblical narratives their power was that they came pre-saturated with tradition through hundreds of years of being worked into the quotidian lives of the majority. These narratives were real to anyone who accepted them, and the Shakers used this one single fact to establish the realness of their own beliefs and way of life.
The use of these earliest narratives as such, were just a hint of how the Shakers eventually used their own narratives as a form of validation. Narratives from without gave them the support they needed to get on their feet and establish what became traditional Shaker traits, but it was the narratives from within that gave them the power they needed to both change and stay the same. As was shown with the narrative of the moment Ann Lee came to be known as the “Mother” of the society, the narrative itself became a symbol of the static nature of Shakerism, and the interpretation of that narrative came to symbolize the progressive evolving nature of Shakerism. What the Shakers utilized was the ability to be socially dynamic based on the validation of a static element. As contradictory as the elements seem to appear, to the Shakers they were a method balancing and validating seemingly contradicting ways of life. If fulfilled the need to simultaneously be the same and different.

Tradition was at play in more than one way during the time of the earliest Biblical narratives. While tradition gave the emerging religion of Shakerism firm ground to grow on, it also appealed to an audience larger than the Shakers themselves. Fundamental Christian tradition becomes very appealing in a fundamentally Christian nation. Shakerism, whose beliefs legitimately believed and held to these traditions, also utilized them for their appeal. The earliest theological recording in the 1808 Testimonies, traces the bulk of Shaker history through the Bible; only in the last quarter of the book is contemporary Shakerism beginning with the life of Ann Lee really begin to be explained. The use of Biblical tradition made both the choice and conversion experience more elementary for the participant.
Shakerism advanced through their earliest years based on the dominance of tradition based on Biblical narratives and fundamental Christian belief systems. Early Shakerism is the most conservative portion of Shakerism. Here another connection can be made. The dominance of tradition of these earliest years led Shakerism in the conservative direction. It wasn’t until around the 1840s that a new concept begins to be introduced into Shaker culture. This was the idea that Shaker theologians a decade or so later would term divine revelation. Here I have discussed this idea as reinterpretation of the past according to divine revelation. The reason for describing it as such is that more often than not these divine revelations were methods of changing the culture of Shakerism. By this point in Shaker history enough history had been accumulated and worked into the cultural consciences of the Shakers that adaptation could safely occur without a breakdown within the culture. It is in this time period that the two main factors of progressive Shakerism begin to play a role in conjunction with one another.

During the time of manifestations during the 1840s the Shakers found narratives being given to them from their founder Ann Lee from beyond the grave. Visions and trance states revealed many narratives to the Shakers. Today those narratives are found recorded on manuscripts as well as in full-length books like Philemon Stewart’s *The Sacred Role* and Paulina Bates’ *The Divine Book of Holy and Eternal Wisdom*. The narratives contained within these books and others often invoke cultural change, often in the liberal direction. As these manifestations became more popular and often more outlandish the presiding ministry began to realize that they had to be controlled in some way. It was desired that Shakerism socially adapt to the new emerging ideological
movements in American society, but how much and how rapidly that change occurred had to be controlled.

The device of control that emerged was nothing new. The older narratives, at this point traditionalized, concerning the founding of Shakerism, and the life of Ann Lee, simply maintained their role within the culture of Shakerism. These traditional narratives became the stabilizing form needed to control the extent of adaptation that occurred within Shakerism. Using these two tools in conjunction with one another allowed the leading elders to allow Shakerism to progress socially, but not letting it get out of control, and more importantly maintaining what it meant to be a Shaker.

The emergence of reinterpretation of the past according to divine revelations gave new meaning to the traditionalized origin narratives. The narratives went from being the foundation of a conservative ideology to a tool of balance and stability in the wake of a more progressive frame of mind for Shakerism. Post-Civil War theologians noticed this change that occurred with the beginnings of the manifestations in the 1840s. There discussion and analysis of these changes caused them to fall, not in a well-balanced middle-ground, but either toward the conservative or the liberal progressive side. This divide brought about a resurgence in the earliest narratives within Shakerism on both sides. The conservative faction used these narratives according to their traditional and literal sense, and the liberal side used the narratives in the sense that they realized that regardless of how valid their liberal ideas were they were useless without a solid traditional basis on which to present them.
It is in this arena of dialogue that we see the use of narrative go through its third and final phase. Here the narrative itself becomes the object of reinterpretation. The narrative continues to maintain its inherent traditional authority to validate, but it simply comes to embody multiple or completely new ideas. Elder Fredrick Evans led the way for reinterpreting the ultimate meanings of traditional Shaker narratives. Evans use of narratives eventually overhauled the more traditional use of the narratives by the conservative faction. With this change in ideology, Shakerism made its final move to a primarily liberal and progressive culture. As this move occurred tradition finally fulfilled itself according to Edward Shils. Tradition became nothing more than a tool of validation; a method by which people were convinced of something.

The meanings of these narratives lost their stability, and it can be argued that it was the traditional qualities that allowed the narratives to find an ongoing place. Narratives maintained their literal structure so that the population the elders were trying to convince recognized that these were the same narratives that were saturated with tradition. Once recognized as traditional, no argument really needed to be made for why they now meant what they meant. Instead, the narrative’s meaning was now accepted according to its being traditional.

More was at play though. Narrative written styles became less logically informed and narrative meaning began to change, but what it meant to be Shaker was also changing. Shakerism was evolving in such a way that to be liberal and progressive was partially what it meant to be Shaker. This new social attitude also effected how these narratives were interpreted, and more especially how they were accepted by the general
Shaker population. This changing attitude, however, was not without its own source of validation. It is within these social changes that we see the same process taking place that we saw earlier in the 1840s. Over and over the leading elders and theologians are using traditional narratives and their new ability to place varying interpretation on their ultimate meanings to change the social course of Shakerism. The difference now is that the divine reinterpretation of the 1840s has now been replaced with traditional narrative reinterpretation. The process for Shakerism at this point has not really changed and the overall goal of what is being accomplished has not changed. All that has changed in this context are the tools by which the social adaptations occur. Generally, narrative and tradition are still at the heart of making the process work.

Besides concluding how the process of maintaining stability while socially adapting to broad American social movements generally worked for the Shakers, I will also take the time to summarize more specifically how Shakerism socially adapted via the process just described. The earliest decades of Shakerism was for the most part conservative in nature - religiously and socially, as was the majority of the American public during the same time. It's really not until the Civil War, and the social changes that it brought to America, that Shakerism can be really seen as evolving.

By the time the Shakers felt comfortable enough to begin invoking change, the function of narrative has already transitioned from a mediator and stabilizer between the static and dynamic aspects of Shakerism to a more direct tool of validation. Narrative reinterpretation was on the rise, and in this sense it is how Shakerism managed to socially adapt post-Civil War. In previous chapters I went into some depth with examples
concerning the use of narrative in supporting abolition ideology in the 1860s and 70s, and women’s rights movements that really began to be supported by Shakerism in the 1890s. The reinterpretation of traditional narratives allowed the Shakers during these periods of social adjustment to not only adapt, but also to maintain the core of their nature. There was something within these narratives that embodied what it meant to be Shaker. What that core was is difficult to say, but it was there, and it wasn’t questioned because its meaning was found in its being traditional. Over time, as social adaptation happened more frequently it became easier for those instigating the changes because soon being Shaker meant evolving in a very progressive manner.

The now-inherent Shaker quality of being progressive brings us to a review of the most recent social change within Shakerism. The 1960s found Shakerism in an awkward place. What it meant to be Shaker was in question, and as a result who were the Shakers was also in question. Once again Shakerism became divided, and both sides began validating their position on Shakerism with the same traditional narratives that have been present from the days of Ann Lee herself. The narratives continue to be a form of validation, but they are neither mediating or being directly reinterpreted themselves. Instead many of these narratives appear to be placed as both a source of history, but of more note they have become purely traditional. Their meaning at this point is based on their being traditional. Anyone can support anything just by being present in the surrounding written context.

At this point Shakerism is defined by the Sabbathday Lake Shakers as a “religion without theology.” Theology is defined, but defined as the opposite of what the Shakers
today contend to have. Theology is static. Shakerism is not. Once again we see the Shakers socially adapting to the larger American trends and ideologies. In this case the Shakers joined the modernist and postmodernist thinking by rejecting their own metanarrative. From the beginning the Shaker metanarrative was everything protected by the traditional origin narratives concerning Ann Lee discussed throughout this thesis.

But as it was discussed earlier, the Shakers didn’t really give up their metanarrative. Instead the rejection of theology was little more than the illusion of giving up any static notion of what it meant to be Shaker. Being Shaker still had a place. The narratives continue to be scattered throughout the writings by Shakers during this time. They continue to validate, just as they always had. And most important in maintaining the inherent Shaker core they continue to be traditional moreso than they ever had been up to this point. The Shakers lost the label of theology, but they by no means lost their basic system of beliefs.

As such, I have attempted to cover here little more than the process of social change within Shakerism over its course of more than 200 years. I make no attempt to define what it means to be a Shaker at any given period. Instead, I have attempted an analysis of how the Shakers maintained a Shaker essence while also adapting socially to the non-Shaker world they strived to separate themselves from. Whatever this essence of Shakerism is, it is most likely revealed in the narratives that became most traditional within their culture. These narratives did not become traditional because they’re old, or because they’re exciting and enjoyable to tell and hear. They became traditional because they were meaningful to the culture who was most directly connected to them. These
narratives embody the core of Shakerism, and as such they also contain the power to confirm. The narratives were used in multiple capacities. But whether they were mediating the static and dynamic, or a source of reinterpreting meaning, without being traditional they were useless in these capacities.

Future study could analyze the processes of cultural and social change within more than just Shakerism. A cross-cultural comparison could be made with not only other communal religious groups, or progressive religious groups, but in many cases with many smaller well-documented groups in general. Although fairly abstract and complex itself, this type of study does open up the added advantage of not needing to explain, or even find the meaning behind what makes a specific group. And lastly, future study could simply build upon the ideas presented here. This research could definitely continue further in the direction of the contemporary Shakers at Sabbathday Lake, Maine.

Present day Shakers have declined to only a few members, and as such their responsibilities are numerous. This has resulted in a decline in written works concerning the Shaker way of life. It is difficult to discuss these ideas within the present state of Shakerism. They have certainly not become void of meaning, they have simply just become less public about it. The lack of writing has also stemmed out of the fact that only one community remains at Sabbathday Lake, Maine. Early writings were often used as a form of social control over a widespread social group that extended from Maine to Kentucky. Now much more centralized and isolated, the Shakers control their actions and beliefs without necessarily putting it into writing and distributing it. I have chosen to neglect present day Shakerism because of a lack of information. I have by no means tried
to give the appearance that there are no more Shakers, and certainly not that contemporary Shakerism is devoid of opinions and meaning. I hope only that I have discussed one aspect of how social change occurred within Shakerism up through the 1960s, and how to view those changes in relation to the larger whole of American society.
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