

Book Reviews

FOSTER, LAWRENCE. *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981. 363 pp. \$19.95.

KERN, LOUIS. *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias—the Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981. 430 pp. \$24.00 hardbound. \$12.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Steven L. Olsen, Ph.D. candidate in anthropology, University of Chicago, and researcher in Mormon studies living in Salt Lake City.

With the simultaneous publication of Lawrence Foster's *Religion and Sexuality* and Louis Kern's *An Ordered Love*, we have an unusual opportunity to compare a single historical subject from two widely differing theoretical perspectives. The subject in this case is the alternative marriage practices of the Mormons, Oneidans, and Shakers in nineteenth-century America. Foster and Kern both attempt to place the respective institutions of polygamy, complex marriage, and celibacy into the wider social and psychological context of Victorian America. While Foster derives his theoretical framework primarily from anthropology, Kern's analysis depends heavily upon principles of psychoanalysis. In the end, Foster's analysis does not go far enough while Kern's goes much too far. This characteristic is as much a reflection on the respective theoretical frameworks as on the scholars themselves.

Foster's most conscious theoretical influence comes from the work of anthropologist Victor Turner, whose greatest insights have come from his study of peripheral social groups and actions. Because they are out of the mainstream of society, these phenomena (which Turner calls "liminal") are not constrained by many of the sanctions governing ordinary social life. Liminal phenomena may include events such as a New Year's Eve celebration or an initiation rite, places such as a monastery or pilgrimage site, people such as hippies or mystics, or periods of time such as the French Revolution or the Hebrew Year of Jubilee. Because they are exceptions to or

interruptions of normal social life, liminal phenomena serve as a kind of cultural counterpoint, a mirror of society's most deep-seated concerns, and can thereby convey truths about a "social drama" not readily apparent to its principal actors.

Foster contends that the Mormons, Oneidans, and Shakers occupied a liminal position in nineteenth-century America. Between the Revolutionary War and the close of the frontier, Americans were exploring the meaning of their "brave new world." During this cultural transition, few social institutions and cultural ideologies escaped a thorough review by the millions of Americans seeking to establish a distinctive national identity. According to Foster's theory, the numerous liminal movements spawned by "freedom's ferment" should provide a contrapuntal perspective into the nature and process of the establishment of the American character.

The liminal institution serving as the focus of this "social drama" is kinship, specifically Mormon polygamy, Shaker celibacy, and Oneida complex marriage. The origin, ideology, practice, and eventual decline of each of these alternatives to the monogamous practices of mainstream America are documented thoroughly. Foster also examines the lives of those who participated in these institutions, particularly their prime movers, to illuminate the personal as well as the social sides of the practices. He reviews the relevant secondary literature and corrects it where he feels corrections are needed. He also interprets primary sources in ways that have escaped the numerous previous researchers of these "burned-over" topics.

His unpretentious narrative style combines with an elegant interpretation to produce a remarkable piece of scholarship. One may quibble with this or that conclusion, but Foster's overall analysis is powerful. Not only do his individual studies of the respective marriage institutions stand on their own merits, but his synthesis of this material in the final chapter is alone worth the price of the book.

Among all these virtues, however, appear several sins that concern the book's theoretical orientation. Although the concept of liminality provides the entrée into these "communal experiments," the analysis is more a comparative description of liminal institutions than the "social drama" Turner would have expected. We learn more about the specific characteristics of polygamy, complex marriage, and celibacy than about the dynamic tension between these liminal groups and mainstream America. The analysis neither logically depends upon nor further elaborates the concept of liminality. In short, the substantive portions of the study are considerably stronger than its theoretical contributions. Since Foster is not an

anthropologist, he perhaps should not receive too many stripes for this omission, but an otherwise fine study remains incomplete because of it.

The direction Foster's study does take makes it more relevant to a different and more significant tradition in anthropology. Many anthropological studies have focused on the cultural definition of kinship components such as sex roles, marriage practices, procreation, childrearing, and personhood. Foster's substantive analysis shares more with this theoretical tradition than with the "social drama" tradition. Unfortunately, he did not consciously pursue these theoretical issues. The observation that Foster's study could have been theoretically more significant points only to the need for continued research. It does not diminish the solid contribution he has made to the study of nineteenth-century utopian societies.

However, Louis Kern supplies some of the pieces missing in Foster's study. He is more concerned than Foster with the broader cultural context of American utopianism. He examines more thoroughly the sexual and psychological revolutions in Victorian America; he reviews more completely America's reactions to communitarian responses to these revolutions; and he also explores more deeply the impact of utopianism on the concept of the individual.

In contrast to Foster's anthropological orientation, Kern approaches utopian marriage practices from a psychoanalytical perspective. He shows that institutions of polygamy, celibacy, and complex marriage come from the psychological makeup and emotional concerns of their respective founders. His thesis is that the supposed sexual ambivalence of Joseph Smith, Ann Lee, and John Humphrey Noyes led them to found alternative marriage systems.

While perhaps theoretically more elaborate than Foster's analysis, Kern's psychological model is inherently weaker than Foster's anthropological approach. For example, it is much more problematic to generate social institutions from psychological states than to view psychology from a social perspective. To claim that marriage practices come from their founders' supposed sexual anxieties forces Kern to use an excessive number of qualifiers and conditions, e.g., "it is likely that," "apparently," "evidently," "could only have," "might have," "perhaps," "there is little reason to doubt that," "Although it is impossible to prove anything . . . it is [still] quite possible that," and so on. In the end, one wonders whether Kern has clearly established *any* psychological foundations of these social institutions.

Kern's psychoanalytical orientation also exaggerates the utopian concern with the reform of the individual. Kern suggests that while "the general method of reform [in America] . . . was social or organizational in emphasis," utopian societies "emphasized that social reform could only be achieved through the prior reformation of individuals" (p. 299). Such a conclusion flies in the face of the major scholarship on utopianism, which overwhelmingly concurs that utopians viewed individual reform as a natural consequence of institutional reform. This is precisely *why* Mormons, Shakers, and Oneidans took great pains to generate and maintain alternative social orders. In the absence of a thorough discussion of this major departure from the established literature, we must seriously question Kern's conclusion. Although Kern impressively lays out his theoretical framework, he ignores its limitations for the study of social groupings. As a result, he must make excessive statements and draw radical conclusions to complete his argument.

While on the subject of familiarity with established literature, I must consider Kern's analysis of Mormon polygamy. Frankly, it is an embarrassment. Kern's general ignorance of Mormon history and culture is reflected in his bibliography. His entire corpus of manuscript sources on Mormonism is three, all in the Princeton University Library. His primary source material is mostly nineteenth-century polemical literature frequently cited uncritically in the text. His secondary sources include nothing more recent than 1976, and his acknowledgment page mentions not one authority on Mormon polygamy. If students of Mormonism are to take this study seriously, Part III, "Celestial Marriage: Mormon Sexuality and Sex Roles in Ideology and Practice," will have to be extensively revised.

Because Kern's work is less concerned with utopian kinship than with sexual revolutions, his intended contribution lies in the field of sexual studies more than in communitarianism. He may have advanced the scholarly study of sexuality, but from the point of view of social systems research, his theoretical framework is inadequate and his substantive analysis seriously flawed.

These two studies of utopian kinship allow a comparison not only of their respective theoretical orientations but also of their respective research methodologies. With respect to Mormonism, Foster extensively reviewed relevant manuscript holdings as well as primary and secondary materials. He consulted at length with the most knowledgeable authorities and invited their criticism while his study was yet unpublished. Kern did none of this, and as a result his analysis in this area is totally inadequate. Kern's study then suggests a possible

type of future scholarship on Mormonism if continued professional dialogue between students of Mormonism and the wider scholarly community does not take place or if relevant literature is not seriously examined. Although such dialogue and research is the responsibility of the researcher, we as Mormon scholars need to make ourselves and our works easily accessible to the scholarly community at large.

FOX, FRANK W. *J. Reuben Clark: The Public Years*. Provo and Salt Lake City, Utah: Brigham Young University Press and Deseret Book Company, 1980. 689 pp. \$10.95.

Reviewed by Robert E. Riggs, professor of law, J. Reuben Clark Law School, Brigham Young University. A longer version of this review was published in *Brigham Young University Law Review*, no. 1 (1981), pp. 227-45.

In the field of legal education, J. Reuben Clark, Jr., is identified with a vigorous young law school established in his name at the Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Among students of diplomatic history he is recognized primarily as the author of the *Clark Memorandum on the Monroe Doctrine*, which presaged the renunciation of U.S. military intervention in Latin America during the 1930s. By Utahns, and Mormons generally, he is still well remembered as a towering figure in the Church—counselor to three Church Presidents from 1933 until his death in 1961. Many yet living were once moved by his powerful sermons, inspired and enlightened by his New Testament scholarship, and stimulated (or provoked) by his strong, oft-expressed views on political and social questions. To members of the Church his most important work occurred after 1933. To the country at large, however, his most significant legacy may be nearly three decades of distinguished public service rendered prior to accepting the call of his church.

This biography of J. Reuben Clark, Jr., focuses on the public years outside Utah—from his matriculation as a thirty-two-year-old law student at Columbia University in 1903 to his resignation as United States ambassador to Mexico in 1933. The book, some six-hundred pages plus bibliography and footnotes, is the first part of an official biography authorized by the Clark family and trustees of the Clark estate. Besides a volume by D. Michael Quinn scheduled for publication in 1982 and covering President Clark's service as a General Authority of the Church, the biographical set will also