Women, Family, and Utopia
Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons

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Oneida women engaged in a bag-making bee. A man is reading aloud to the group. Note the distinctive bloomer-style dresses and short hair worn by the community women. Courtesy Oneida Community Mansion House.
BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Plural Marriage and the Experiences of Mormon Women in Illinois During the Early 1840s

Efforts to introduce a form of polygamy among the Mormons at their primary church settlement in Nauvoo, Illinois, during the early 1840s created intense controversy, both at the time and subsequently. Records of the main body of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints indicate that the first plural marriage sanctioned by a ceremony occurred there on April 5, 1841, between the church's thirty-five-year-old prophet-founder, Joseph Smith, Jr., and the twenty-six-year-old Louisa Beaman. On July 12, 1843, formal written sanction was given to the practice when Smith privately dictated a revelation calling for a restoration among the Latter-day Saints of polygamous marriage practices similar to those of the Old Testament patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These new practices were set within the context of a conception of marriage, growth, and development—a "new and everlasting covenant"—which was to continue throughout all eternity. Presentation of this revelation within the following month to many in the church's leadership cadre led to a crisis in the young church. Little more than a year later, on June 27, 1844, Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were murdered in a jail in Carthage, Illinois, while awaiting trial on charges arising in part from the dissatisfaction of some of their followers with the new polygamous beliefs and practices.¹

This brief and turbulent effort by Joseph Smith and some of his associates in Nauvoo to introduce plural marriage among the Latter-
day Saints has led to bitter and often unproductive debate for more than a century. Critical accounts generally have attacked Joseph Smith and his alleged failings, while apologetic treatments have represented the practice as a response to divine command and have attempted to downplay apparent inconsistencies in early polygamy practice. Until the past several decades, few scholarly analyses have attempted to place this period of Mormon development in Nauvoo into its larger social and cultural context. Even fewer studies have systematically addressed the responses of Mormon women to the controversial new beliefs and practices. 2

This chapter suggests the larger social and intellectual context within which polygamy in Nauvoo developed, and then explores the differing responses of Mormon women to these developments. Special attention is devoted to the complex and ambivalent reactions of Joseph Smith’s first wife, Emma, which have been reconstructed in a major biography by Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery. 3 During this period, Smith and many of his followers were caught “between two worlds,” between an old order that was dying and a new order that was yet to be born. The result—particularly for those who could not bring themselves to accept the sincerity of Smith’s efforts to introduce the new order, including polygamy—was often intense anguish and bitterness. (The early Mormon experience suggests new insights about both the promise and the pitfalls of efforts to achieve radical social change.)

I

Before the origins of Mormon polygamy can be understood in context, we must briefly consider the early development of the Mormon movement and four partially inadequate earlier efforts to explain the later development of polygamy practice in the 1840s. At the outset, it must be emphasized that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was one of the most complex and extraordinary of all the religious groups to develop in the Burned-over District of western New York State. Joseph Smith, though poor and largely unlettered, was by any estimation a religious and organizational genius who evoked strong reactions, both positive and negative, from those with whom he came in contact. His supporters became convinced that he had discovered and “translated” an ancient Scripture, the Book of Mormon, that supplemented and went beyond the Old and New Testaments, and that he had been specially chosen by God to “restore” true Christianity and, indeed, produce a synthesis of all previously valid human truth in preparation for the coming of the millennium.

Critics were equally convinced that Smith had fabricated the Book of Mormon as a hoax and that he was a dangerous megalomaniac and con man who took advantage of his gullible followers. Critics were particularly disturbed that Smith claimed to be receiving continuing revelation from God, as had the biblical prophets, and that his well-organized church was attracting so many people away from more established denominations. Mormon economic and political cohesiveness also proved threatening to their neighbors, contributing to tensions that forced the Mormons during less than a decade to move from New York to Kirtland, Ohio, and thence to two locations in Missouri, and finally to Nauvoo, Illinois.

Although many people assume that polygamy was the major element leading to early persecution of the Mormons, for the first decade of the movement’s development, the issue of polygamy was of little importance in the controversies that swirled around the young church. Only during the early 1840s, when Joseph Smith had established a secure power base in Nauvoo, Illinois, did allegations of plural marriage become a major disruptive factor within the Mormon movement. (And not until after Smith’s death, the exodus to Utah, and the public announcement of the practice in 1852 in Salt Lake City did plural marriage become a major focus of non-Mormon hostility toward the group.)

After that public announcement of the controversial new practice, four major approaches were put forward to attempt to explain why it had developed. Those four approaches have continued to dominate explanations of polygamy to the present. To those who hold these views, each provides the obvious and complete explanation for the development of the practice. Yet none of these hypotheses alone can explain all the phenomena associated with the introduction of polygamy among the Mormons.
Most obviously inadequate is the view, held by the smaller Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), with headquarters in Independence, Missouri, that polygamy was not introduced into the Mormon church by Joseph Smith at all but was instead a corruption of the church resulting from actions by Brigham Young or by other unspecified individuals after Smith's death. Overwhelming and historically conclusive evidence refutes this argument. Available historical records leave no doubt that Joseph Smith not only introduced polygamous beliefs into the Mormon church but that he also engaged in polygamous practice himself.5

Also partially inadequate is the "commonsense" non-Mormon view that polygamy was introduced because Joseph Smith was an oversexed individual—a lusty, good-natured libertine, perhaps—who was simply trying to rationalize his amorous propensities. Although sexual impulses undoubtedly were a part of the reason for the introduction of polygamy, the sexual-impulses argument fails to explain why formal polygamous relationships rather than informal extramarital relationships should have been introduced by Smith, or why his formulation of polygamous beliefs as early as 1831 should have preceded by a decade any clear attempts to introduce the practice.6

Similarly incomplete is the believing Latter-day Saint viewpoint that Joseph Smith was commanded by God to introduce plural marriage and that he was just being obedient in carrying out the inscrutable will of the Lord. Even if one accepts such a belief in divine revelation, one still is faced with the question of why Smith came to the Lord with a question about polygamy when he did—what the social and intellectual context was for his revelatory process.7

A final limited approach suggests that Joseph Smith was a psychologically disturbed individual and that his psychological problems were a key factor contributing to his attempt to introduce polygamy. Although a case can and will be made for a sophisticated variant of this argument later in this chapter, most previous arguments for psychopathology have tended to be reductionistic. They generally have presumed that no sane, rational person could possibly want to introduce polygamous practice as the norm for a society. Such a view might have seemed convincing in a more ethnocentric environment, but in our pluralistic modern world one cannot casually assume, without a careful consideration of evidence, that efforts to introduce alternative ways of life into a society are necessarily a sign of psychopathology.8

II

If none of these four approaches appears fully adequate to account for the origin of Mormon polygamy, then how can its introduction best be explained? Rather than attempting to find the explanation for Joseph Smith's introduction of polygamy, let us instead consider three closely interrelated preconditions that help account for the development of the practice.

The first necessary-but-not-sufficient factor contributing to the introduction of polygamy was Joseph Smith's strong sex drive. Surely it is hard to imagine polygamy being introduced and practiced by a eunuch, and Smith was definitely no eunuch. He was a handsome, dynamic leader with great physical and intellectual vitality—a man not afraid to break with convention. Many of his statements reveal a basically positive attitude toward sexual expression, as well as the difficulty he sometimes had in keeping his impulses in check. He was idolized by many of his followers as a prophet of God, and he had to deal with a host of personal and practical problems he and his followers faced. Like any public figure under such circumstances, he faced a greater than average number of temptations that might have made him susceptible to unorthodoxy in personal behavior. Yet men respond in a variety of ways to strong sex drives. Many resist or find socially acceptable channels for such impulses. Very few individuals attempt to deal with those impulses by introducing a formal system of polygamy among their followers. Something more was obviously necessary.

A second precondition for the introduction of polygamy was religious. Central to Joseph Smith's sense of mission was his millennial vision of a corrupt, diseased old order tottering inevitably toward destruction. That corrupt old order would eventually be replaced by a glorious restoration of the true religious and social practices of the veritable kingdom of heaven on earth. The Bible provided the key model for this restored order. Like many of his con-
temporaries, Smith immersed himself in the Bible and conceived of the whole of human history within the context established by the biblical record. Under the circumstances, he could hardly have helped but wonder why the Lord apparently approved of the taking of plural wives by the Hebrew patriarchs whom he admired so much. If the millennial dispensation was to be a “restoration of all things,” might it not also include a restoration of polygamous marriage? Although the biblical and prophetic concerns reflected in early Mormon writings certainly did not make the reintroduction of polygamy inevitable, such concerns did provide a context within which the possibility became at least intellectually conceivable.\textsuperscript{10}

A final key precondition for the introduction of Mormon polygamy was related to the social disorder with which Joseph Smith had to try to deal. The poverty and high mobility of many Mormons before they joined the church was exacerbated by intense persecution that led Mormons to move repeatedly during the decade that followed the founding of the movement. Active missionary efforts also brought in numerous new converts who had to be integrated somehow into the new society that was being created. At least as early as 1835, the Mormon church began to take responsibility for the marriage and divorce practices of its members, increasingly ignoring the plethora of contradictory state laws on the subject and sometimes even directly violating those external regulations.

Not feeling able to achieve redress of their grievances from the larger society, Mormons, in attempting to create their “new Israel,” increasingly turned in on themselves and depended on family and kinship ties to secure loyalty to the group. Polygamy could make possible a far greater extension of such ties than could monogamy. For example, by the time of his death at age eighty-eight, the Mormon patriarch Benjamin F. Johnson was related by blood or by marriage to more than eight hundred people and presumably had greater power and security than those with less extensive kinship networks. The Mormon concern for extending family ties and for controlling their own marriage practices was part of a larger effort to establish an autonomous, self-sufficient organization separate from an evil and corrupt world, an effort to create a “political kingdom of God.” Church autonomy in supervising the marriage and divorce practices of its members did not necessarily lead to polygamy, but such inde-

pendent control clearly was a prerequisite if marriage and kinship practices such as polygamy—which violated existing moral and legal standards—were to be introduced.\textsuperscript{11}

III

The contradictory tensions and potential of the Mormon movement came to a head during the crucial transition years between 1839 and 1844 that the Mormons spent in Nauvoo, Illinois, under Joseph Smith’s leadership. Nauvoo marked the climax of an earlier phase of Mormon development and set the pattern for new doctrinal, social, and political approaches that would be further developed and tested in Utah. In Nauvoo, Smith made his most concerted effort to realize his conception of the kingdom of heaven on earth. No aspect of life was left untouched.\textsuperscript{12}

A variety of factors made possible the introduction of plural marriage on a limited scale in Nauvoo. The key emotional thread running throughout the period, without which events cannot be understood, was a sense of increasing tension and imminent crisis. This emotional atmosphere encouraged self-sacrifice, intellectual and practical isolation conducive to excess, and an almost compulsive emphasis on unquestioning loyalty to the Mormon priesthood as the cardinal virtue. The Mormons started over again in Illinois after fleeing attacks in Missouri that surpassed in brutality even the outrages that would later be perpetrated on “Bleeding Kansas.”

Determined not to be pushed around any more, the Mormons secured a city charter that, if freely interpreted, made Nauvoo almost autonomous from the state. An all-Mormon militia of more than two thousand men called the Nauvoo Legion was established, provoking fears in nearby non-Mormon areas. And a tightly organized church, presiding over a city second in Illinois only to Chicago in size and appearing to hold the balance of power in the state, managed to alienate both political parties. Within this context of increasing tension and experienced separateness, the inhibitions that normally discourage radical innovation in the larger society became less significant and major doctrinal and social changes could occur.\textsuperscript{13}
The plight of yet another woman, whose husband was absent for the exceptionally long period of five years, was tellingly described as a period of temporary "widowhood." Under such conditions, the marital and sexual dissatisfaction of both men and women must have pressed for resolution.

Thus there may well have been a relationship between the significant expansion of the Mormon missionary program, represented by the founding of the English mission in 1837 and by revived and expanded missionary activities from Nauvoo, and the subsequent effort under Joseph Smith's leadership to introduce new marriage and family beliefs and practices. Nor is it surprising that the major leadership faction that supported Smith in these efforts and that eventually oversaw the introduction of polygamy into the Mormon church was the twelve apostles, who ran the missionary program. Faced with long separations from their wives and families, such leaders might understandably have been attracted to the idea of eventually formalizing and consummating other emotional attachments that they had made with the young women they had encountered in their work. They also may well have idealized marriage and been attracted to the idea of establishing permanent family ties that would survive throughout eternity, a concept that would become a key element in the beliefs that were used to introduce polygamy.

Likewise, the dissatisfied wives of missionaries must also have felt frustrated at having absentee husbands. Many wives must have longed for permanent and satisfying marital relationships with their husbands, while others may have wanted to abrogate unsatisfactory relationships and start over again. The "new and everlasting covenant" that Joseph Smith formally introduced to his closest followers in July 1843, partly as a justification for plural marriage, indicated, on the one hand, that marriages that were properly "sealed" under the authority of the Mormon priesthood would continue for "eternity." On the other hand, the revelation also included the corollary idea that existing temporal arrangements were not binding until sealed for eternity and that such unsealed temporal arrangements could, if unsatisfactory, be terminated and replaced by other, more desirable "eternal" ones with new partners. Whether as a result of such logic or as part of more pragmatic efforts to resolve marital dissatisfactions, a substantial number of individuals in Nauvoo eventu-

Social tensions within Mormon Nauvoo also added to the volatile mixture there. Nauvoo was a boom town, growing within five years from a sleepy backwater settlement of a few hundred people to a city of more than eleven thousand inhabitants. Like many such boom towns, it was plagued by a host of problems attendant upon rapid growth. Visitors commented on the extremes of wealth and poverty in the city, as well as on Mormon efforts to overcome those problems. Inducting thousands of new immigrants into Mormon cultural and social patterns also posed a major challenge. In addition, the city was close to the marshy, marshy bottoms along the Mississippi, and according to one historian as many as fifteen hundred to two thousand people may have died during the six years that the Mormons lived in Nauvoo. Although this estimate is undoubtedly too high, few families in the area were not intimately acquainted with disease and death.

The most important dislocations probably were the unintended side effects of the Mormon missionary effort itself. While bringing in vitally needed convert-settlers and capital, this program placed great strains on marital relationships. On the one hand, men were frequently called with little or no notice to go "without purse or scrip" on extended missionary trips that amounted to long periods of voluntary celibacy. The emotions of many such men were expressed by Parley P. Pratt when he wrote his wife, Mary Ann, from England in 1840: "Why must we live separate? Why must I be forever deprived of your Society and my dear little Children? I cannot endure it, and yet I must." Only extreme personal commitment to the larger Mormon enterprise could make possible such sacrifice.

Wives of absent missionaries faced even more severe problems. Of necessity they were left behind, often pregnant or with young children to care for, and faced the problem of trying to support themselves. The trials and hardships of such women were typified by the case of Eunice Shurtleff. She wrote her husband, Luman, in 1842 that she was four months pregnant, had been severely sick for three months, and could not get credit to purchase food at the store. "I have no husband to talk with or comfort me these long nights. . . . You know when Jane was born and you were gone from home . . . I had to get along the best I could. Luman, I do not think it is your duty to leave me under such circumstances. Come without fail."
ally found new marital partners during the last turbulent years there or during the exodus to Utah. 19

IV

All the contradictory pressures in Nauvoo eventually seemed to become fused within Joseph Smith as he sought to deal with the complex problems of the city. Uncertain of the loyalty and reliability of even some of his closest associates, especially after the devastating apostasy of his close associate John C. Bennett in 1842, Smith increasingly attempted to concentrate all positions of power in his own hands. He served simultaneously as prophet and president of his church, mayor of the city, head of the Nauvo Legion, chief economic planner for the church, and in many other capacities. He was also faced with problems of counseling and trying to help provide economic support for many women whose husbands were away on missions.

During this period, Smith moved vigorously to present new doctrines that had long been germinating in his mind, doctrines designed to reestablish social cohesion not only on earth, but also throughout all eternity. 20 Basic to these new doctrines was an elaboration of church authority through ceremonies believed to link indissolubly the living and the dead. Smith claimed the keys of St. Peter, with the power to bind and to loose, on earth and in heaven. This was the basis for the doctrine of baptism for the dead, which was designed to allow dead relatives to accept the Mormon gospel in the afterlife. The material and spiritual worlds were described as a closely linked continuum. God was seen in anthropomorphic terms—once a man, he had progressed to godhood, as men could too.

Perhaps most important were special marriage-sealing ceremonies designed to give permanence to earthly marriage after death. Marriage and the social cohesion provided by family and kinship ties were declared to be the basis for all progression in the afterlife. Earthly marriage was an ephemeral state; unless marriages were properly sealed by the Mormon priesthood in the light of eternity, they would not continue after death. Those who were not married for eternity would be the lowest class in the afterlife—solitary "minister-

ing angels," a sort of perpetual servant class unable to progress further. [Sealings for eternity, by contrast, made possible progression toward godhood, as men became great patriarchs who ruled over an ever-increasing posterity and moved on to settle whole new worlds. There was a sense of the awesome power of sexuality and procreation in human development.]

This much was known, at least in embryonic form, to many of the knowledgeable Mormons who worked so hard to build the Temple, where the sealing ceremonies would be conducted. Only to his most trusted associates, however, did Smith convey the final corollaries to these sealing doctrines. To them he explained that polygamous marriage was a particularly exalted form of eternal or celestial marriage. If marriage with one wife, sealed for eternity under the authority of the Mormon priesthood, could bring ultimate godhood for men, then having more than one wife merely accentuated the process, in line with God's promise to Abraham that his seed eventually would be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore. Furthermore, polygamy made possible the reuniting of all family members around their patriarchal leaders in the afterlife. Even if a man had lost his wife and remarried, she would be his again after he died.

Although little was said about exactly how polygamy was to be practiced on earth, the revelation on plural and celestial marriage repeatedly stressed that any liaisons outside the bounds of churchly supervised law were heinously sinful and required drastic measures for atonement. [Total loyalty to the church was emphasized repeatedly as the supreme principle. 21]

V

Joseph Smith may have developed an internally consistent rationale for plural marriage, but the practical development and workings of the new polygamous system were much more problematic, both for men and for women. Even under ideal circumstances, polygamous practices could hardly have been introduced into nineteenth-century Illinois without provoking severe misunderstandings and conflicts.
Most people were already suspicious of individual immoralities or deviance. To go farther and claim that a deviant practice such as polygamy, which was illegal in Illinois, was authorized and indeed commanded by God seemed to undercut the very basis of moral authority itself.

The complex political controversies over polygamy in Nauvoo need not be treated in detail here. Suffice it to note that the opposition to polygamy was formidable. That opposition included not only Joseph Smith's capable and strong-willed wife, Emma, who bitterly hated polygamy and almost left her husband several times because of its practice, but also many of Smith's closest associates, who came to the reluctant conclusion that he had become a "fallen prophet," unfit to lead the church he had founded. Perhaps most devastating of all was the defection of the colorful adventurer John C. Bennett. In his meteoric eighteen-month career with the Mormons between 1840 and 1842, Bennett rose from the rank of a virtual nobody to become mayor of Nauvoo and Joseph Smith's right-hand man, only to fall from favor and write a lurid 1842 book exposing alleged Mormon misdeeds, including polygamy.22

The defection of the second-best-known Mormon in Nauvoo, an intimate friend of Joseph Smith, precipitated a severe crisis for the young church. Bennett charged the Mormon hierarchy with almost every imaginable sin and presented a detailed and highly inflated account of the problems of the early development of polygamy, the first such to appear. Convinced that Smith had threatened to kill him if he would not publicly make statements about the purity of Smith's character that he felt to be false, Bennett devoted the next two years of his life, in turn, to trying systematically to expose and secure the death of his former friend. Not only did he continue to maintain contact with Mormon leaders such as Orson Pratt and Sidney Rigdon who were disaffected with polygamy, but he also cooperated closely with hostile external sources such as The Warsaw Signal, an anti-Mormon newspaper that delighted in printing gossip and allegations from disaffected Mormons. Only Bennett's own equivocal character and tendency for polemical exaggeration, together with a carefully orchestrated church campaign to blacken his reputation and neutralize his influence, enabled the Mormons to weather the storm his apostasy stirred up.23

More revealing than such predictable opposition were the reactions of individuals who accepted polygamy. Even the leading men who eventually supported the practice most vigorously stated that they initially expressed shock when introduced to the idea. Brigham Young, who oversaw the introduction of plural marriage after Smith's death in Nauvoo and in Utah, declared that when he first heard the revelation and thought of all the troubles that would ensue, "it was the first time in my life that I desired the grave."24 Heber C. Kimball, always implicitly loyal, was so distraught after receiving the command to take another wife without the knowledge of his first wife, Vilate, that he begged Smith to remove the requirement lest he apostatize and forfeit his salvation.25 And Benjamin F. Johnson, later patriarch of an extensive plural family in Utah, said that he had been horrified when Smith explained plural marriage to him and told Johnson to ask his sister Almera to become Smith's plural wife. Recovering from the shock, Johnson remembered telling Smith that he would try to do as he had been asked but that "if ever I know you do this to degrade my sister I will kill you, as the Lord lives."26 As we shall see below, women who received polygamous overtures faced an even more difficult and essentially untenable situation than did men.

The acceptance and practice of plural marriage increasingly represented one of the chief tests of the total loyalty that Smith was coming to demand of his closest followers. Men or women who engaged in polygamous practice were in no position to apostatize because if they did so the air would be made blue with stories of their supposedly licentious behavior. Likewise, if a man's sister or daughter were sealed as a plural wife to Joseph Smith or another leader of the church, effective opposition to the practice became exceedingly difficult. To oppose polygamy under such circumstances would be tantamount to disowning one's own children or relatives, as well as everything to which one had previously committed one's whole life.

VI

HighlyWomen faced by far the greatest emotional and practical difficulties in coming to terms with the new polygamous beliefs and practices, yet seldom have women's responses to early polygamy been systemati-
cally explored. Until recently, most attention has focused on Joseph Smith’s relationships, with much of that simply an effort to make head counts of his alleged plural wives. The Mormon historian Andrew Jenson listed twenty-seven probable plural wives, Fawn Brodie claimed forty-eight, and Stanley S. Ivins identified eighty-four possibilities. These speculative lists do not adequately distinguish between different types of wives, particularly between those who actually sustained connubial relations with Joseph Smith and those who probably were only sealed to him for “eternity.”

To go beyond such head counts and begin to reconstruct the human dimension behind early polygamy, the remainder of this chapter will look at three different types of women’s perspectives on polygamy. The first is that of the women who accepted plural marriage overtures. The second is that of the women who rejected such overtures. And the last is the complex and ambivalent case of Joseph Smith’s first wife, Emma Hale Smith, whose love for her husband and hostility toward his polygamy posed severe problems for his efforts to introduce the practice.27

The frank and detailed personal statement of Lucy Walker, who became a plural wife of Joseph Smith and later of Heber C. Kimball, shows many of the characteristic features of Smith’s relationships for which we have extensive information.28 Lucy was born on April 30, 1826, in Peacham, Vermont. Her family joined the Latter-day Saints shortly after the church was founded, moved frequently with the Mormons, suffered intense persecution in Missouri, and eventually settled in Nauvoo. The family developed a close personal relationship with Joseph Smith. When Lucy’s mother died in Nauvoo in 1842 leaving ten motherless children, Lucy’s father’s health seemed to give way under the strain. Joseph Smith stepped in, suggesting the father seek a change of environment. Then Smith temporarily adopted the four eldest children as part of his own family and household, going out of his way to help them in any way he could.

Early in 1843, when Lucy was a lively and attractive sixteen-year-old, Joseph Smith had a private interview with her. He told her that God had commanded him to take her as a plural wife. Her “astonishment knew no bounds.” She felt that he was insulting her. Smith asked her if she believed him to be a prophet of God. She said that she did. He explained “the principle of plural or celestial marriage” to her. He said that it was being restored for the good of the human family and that it would “prove an everlasting blessing to my father’s house, and form a chain that could never be broken, worlds without end.” Lucy was told to pray and that she would receive a personal testimony of the correctness of the principle, but her mind was filled with darkness. She had no father or mother to give her counsel, and she was deeply distraught.

Joseph Smith could see her unhappiness. He said that although under the present circumstance he could not publicly acknowledge her as his wife, she would eventually be “acknowledged and honored as my wife.” He also told her that if she rejected this message “the gate will be closed forever against you.” This threat made her angry. Lucy felt that she was being asked “to place myself upon the altar a living sacrifice—perhaps to brook the world in disgrace and incur the displeasure and contempt of my youthful companions.” Unless she knew that God approved her course of action, she would rather die. Smith said she would receive a personal testimony of the truth of the principle. Lucy earnestly desired such a testimony. Shortly before dawn, after a sleepless night of fervent prayer, she felt as though her room were “lighted up by a heavenly influence.” “Supreme happiness took possession of me, and I received a powerful and irresistible testimony of the truth of plural marriage.” On May 1, 1843, she was sealed to Joseph Smith “for time and all eternity” by Elder William Clayton, Smith’s personal secretary.29

Even more telling as a description of the pressures and emotional disturbance that Smith’s plural marriage overtures could bring to women who accepted them is the account of Helen Mar Kimball, daughter of Heber C. Kimball. Although Helen supported plural marriage strongly in books such as Why We Practice Plural Marriage, privately she vividly recalled the emotional strain that the introduction of plural marriage caused her and her mother, Vilate, when she became Joseph Smith’s plural wife at age fourteen (in her “fifteenth summer”):

Just previous to my father’s starting upon his last mission but one, to the Eastern States, he taught me the principle of Celestial marriage. & having a great desire to be connected with the Prophet, Joseph, he offered me to him; this I afterwards learned
from the Prophet's own mouth. My father had but one Eue Lamb but willingly laid her upon the altar; how cruel this seemed to the mother whose heart strings were already stretched until they were ready to snap asunder, for he had taken Sarah Moon to wife & she thought she had made sufficient sacrifice but the Lord required more. I will pass over the temptations which I had during the twenty four hours after my father introduced me to this principle & asked me if I would be sealed to Joseph who came next morning & with my parents I heard him teach and explain the principle of Celestial marriage—after which he said to me, "If you will take this step, it will insure your eternal salvation & exaltation and that of your father's household & all of your kindred." This promise was so great that I willingly gave myself to purchase so glorious a reward. None but God & his angels could see my mother's bleeding heart—when Joseph asked her if she was willing, she replied "If Helen is willing I have nothing more to say." She had witnessed the sufferings of others, who were older & who better understood the step they were taking, & to see her child, who had scarcely seen her fifteenth summer, following in the same thorny path, in her mind she saw the misery which was sure to come as the sun was to rise and set; but it was all hidden from me.30

The backgrounds and experiences of Lucy Walker and Helen Mar Kimball are typical of those of many of Joseph Smith's other plural wives. Women who were approached by Smith or his close associates to become plural wives usually were of proven personal and family loyalty to the church. Frequently they were dependent upon the church for economic support and had a variety of strong ties to Smith and other leaders. Enormous pressure—including, in Helen Mar Kimball's case, the promise that simply by marrying Joseph Smith she would secure salvation for herself, her ancestry, and her posterity—was used in many of the known cases. In an analysis of various relationships among Smith's wives, Vesta Crawford noted that at least eleven of Smith's plural wives were related to prominent church leaders, five were orphans or otherwise dependent, and seven lived at some time in Smith's home, with some overlapping among these categories.31

In almost all recorded cases, initial presentation of the belief in plural marriage to either men or women produced shock, horror, dis-

belief, or general emotional confusion. Those who eventually accepted the principle almost invariably went through a period of inner turmoil lasting from several days to several months. During this period, they might go without adequate sleep, food, or normal social contacts, fervently praying that God would reveal the truth of the new beliefs to them. Those who eventually accepted plural marriage almost invariably had a compelling personal experience revealing the truth of the new standards. Such a drastic step away from established norms demanded more than purely intellectual assent.32

Few contemporary documents have survived that show the reactions of supporters of plural marriage within the Mormon community before Joseph Smith's death. One is found in a postscript of a letter of Vilate Kimball to her husband, Heber C. Kimball, dated "Nauvoo June 24th 1843." She wrote:

June 27th Since writing the above, I have had a visit from brother Parley [Pratt] and his wife, they are truly converted; it appears that J. ... h has taught him some principles and told him his privilege, and even appointed one for him, I dare not tell you who it is, you would be astonished and I guess some tried. She has ben to me for council, I told her I did not wish to advise in such matters. Sister Pratt has been raging against these things, she told me her self that the devil had been in her until within a few days past, she said the Lord had shown her it was all right. She wants Parley to go ahead, says she will do all in her power to help him; they are so in engaged I fear they will run to fast. they asked me many questions on principle I told them I did not know much and I rather they would go to those that had authority to teach. Parley said he and J were interrupted before he got what instruction he wanted, and now he did not know when he should have an opportunity. he seemed unwilling to wate, I told him these were sacred things and he better not make a move until he got more instruction. —I have a secret to tell you, but I am almost afraid, it was committed to Sarah and she was requested not to tell me, but she said she considered me a part of her self and she would tell me, and I might tell you for it was just what you had prophesied would come to pass. now if you know what you have said about Sarah Ally then you have got the secret, for it is even so, and she is
tickled about it, and they all appear in better spirits than they did before. How they will carry it out, is more than I know. I hope they have got more faith than I have. Brother nobles folks all send love to you.

In her concluding remarks, Vilate wrote, “I think you had better burn this, as soon as you can after reading it. I should not dare to send it by mail, but I trust it will go safe. If Brigham should go I will write by him. I am as ever your affectionate wife Vilate Kimball.”

This letter clarifies a number of important points suggested by other sources. It shows clearly that polygamy was taught and practiced before the formal recording of the revelation on plural and celestial marriage, as the revelation itself also indicates. As late as 1843, however, polygamy was practiced only on a very restricted scale, even in the top echelons of the church, with the exception of Joseph Smith himself, who may eventually have had as many as fifteen or more women with whom he sustained conubial relations. Research by D. Michael Quinn and others on wives of church leaders suggests that before Smith’s death only about thirty of the top male leaders were polygamonously married with Smith’s sanction and that most leaders had taken at most two or three additional wives. The taking of large numbers of wives by a few of the early Mormon leaders would occur largely between Smith’s death and the exodus to Utah that began in 1846. This was a complex period when the transition to plural marriage was beginning to take place in the church as a whole.

As Vilate’s letter also indicates, a tendency to go to extremes could easily develop once earlier patterns of behavior were broken down. Furthermore, the impossibility of finding time and privacy to give detailed instructions even to the twelve apostles, Smith’s closest associates, suggests how difficult it must have been for the general membership to translate such beliefs into practice. Excesses and confusion were almost certain to follow. Interestingly, the letter hints that one of the plural wives, Sarah Ally, was pregnant. Her child, George Omer Noble, was born on February 2, 1844, and is generally described as the first child born into Mormon polygamy. Finally, there is the concluding suggestion that the letter should be burned. Probably most such documents actually were.

One controversial issue suggested by the letter is the question of how pregnancies of plural wives and children born to plural wives was handled in Nauvoo. Although many of Joseph Smith’s plural wives testified explicitly that they had had full sexual relations with him, most women who claimed to have been married to him consistently refused, in the face of repeated questioning, to affirm or deny that they or other women had borne his children. Such reticence was entirely understandable. If information about Smith’s children by plural wives were brought into the open, the line of questioning adopted by often hostile interrogators would have been even more insulting, and other individuals’ names would have been dragged into the discussion. Even if children by Smith’s plural wives lived in Utah—as oral and written traditions there suggest—they probably would have borne the names of the family who reared them. Detailed demographic work in progress on the Nauvoo and early Utah periods suggests that some children became part of families in which they were not born, under puzzling circumstances.

Evidence for children Smith may have had by plural wives is based largely on oral and family traditions. Mary Rollins Lightner, one of the most articulate and knowledgeable of Smith’s plural wives, said: “I know he had six wives and I have known some of them from childhood up. I know he had three children. They told me. I think two are living today but they are not known as his children as they go by other names.” Lucy Merveze Smith recalled that her husband, George A. Smith, told her of going to see Joseph Smith and finding him washing his hands after he had helped Emma—who had served as the midwife— deliver a child by one of his plural wives. Josephine R. Fisher signed an affidavit in 1915 that, when her mother was on her deathbed, she told her she was Joseph’s child, but admonished her to keep her knowledge a secret. Persistent but probably embellished family tradition suggests that Eliza R. Snow conceived a child by Joseph Smith and suffered a miscarriage. The Nauvoo Expositor of June 7, 1844, published by a schismatic faction of the church which was attempting to oust Smith from power, alleged that “in order to avoid public exposition from the common course of things,” pregnant plural wives “are sent away for a time until all is well; after which they return, as from a long visit.”
It is less difficult to explain the apparent lack of children born to the plural wives of Joseph Smith's followers before his death because most of them were married for a shorter time and to fewer women during this period. One account of how pregnancies of high church officials were handled was given by Kimball Young, the late sociologist of Mormon polygamy and a descendant of Oscar Young, the first acknowledged child by any of Brigham Young's plural wives. According to Kimball Young, plural wives who became pregnant, including Oscar Young's mother, Harriet Cook, went into seclusion in the second floor of the Erastus Snow home in Nauvoo. The second floor had an entrance that was separate from the rest of the house. The Snow family was small enough to live entirely on the first floor. Food and other necessities were discreetly brought to the wives who lived on the second floor.  

The original construction of the Erastus Snow house does correspond with this account of Kimball Young. In addition, the fact that an unusual 1846 holograph letter from Brigham Young to “Mrs. Harriot Cook” was sent in care of the Erastus Snow home suggests that she may have been living there at the time as well.  

Quire possibly other arrangements were made in cases of other plural wives, but these examples at least suggest some of the possibilities. Even under the best of circumstances, the acceptance and practice of plural marriage by some women in Nauvoo must have caused exceptional emotional and practical difficulties for them.

VII

At least as interesting as the cases of women who accepted polygamy in Nauvoo are the cases of women who rejected polygamous overtures by Smith and his associates. No doubt many women simply refused such proposals and remained silent. For example, when Smith approached Hiram Kimball’s wife, Sarah Melissa Granger, she rejected his request. “I asked him to teach it to someone else.” She kept her own counsel in the matter except to warn a friend, who then refused to meet with him. Other women who refused Smith’s proposals, such as Sidney Ridgon’s daughter Nancy and Orson Pratt’s wife Sarah, had the misfortune to find their cases publicized in the apostate John C. Bennett’s 1842 exposé of polygamy. Although these women appear to have been highly respected before the exposé appeared, they soon found their names and reputations thoroughly blackened as part of an effort to discredit Bennett and protect the reputation of the Mormon prophet.

By far the most detailed and straightforward account from a Mormon woman who rejected polygamous overtures in Nauvoo was furnished by Martha Brotherton, an attractive young English convert, whose detailed affidavit of her experiences, dated July 13, 1842, was published in the St. Louis Bulletin on July 15, 1842, and in the Sangamo Journal on July 22, 1842, and was subsequently reprinted in Bennett’s exposé. Brotherton and her family had been in Nauvoo only three weeks when Brigham Young approached her to become his plural wife. She stalled him and then at the earliest possible time left Nauvoo and swore out an affidavit describing her experiences. Her account is particularly valuable as a basis for comparison with later reminiscences of women like Lucy Walker and Helen Mar Kimball, who had accepted such overtures. It also provides one of very few statements written in the immediate aftermath of the proposal that gives a woman’s personal reactions to such an experience.

According to Brotherton’s affidavit, on the day that the proposal occurred she had joined Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, at their request, for the day. After some intervening activities, she and Kimball walked together to Joseph Smith’s store, ostensibly to allow her to meet the prophet Joseph Smith for the first time. En route Kimball asked her:

"Sister Martha, are you willing to do all that the Prophet requires you to do?" I said I believed I was, thinking of course he would require nothing wrong. . . . "Well," said he, "there are many things in these last days that the world would laugh and scoff at, but unto us is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom." He further observed, "Martha, you must learn to hold your tongue, and it will be well with you. You will see Joseph, and very likely have some conversation with him, and he will tell you what you shall do."

After arriving at the store, Martha eventually was taken to an upper room by Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kim-
ball. After she was seated, Smith and Kimball soon left, leaving her alone with Brigham Young, who rose, locked the door, and drew the curtain. He first observed, "This is our private room, Martha." Then he said he wanted to ask her a few questions, and he requested that she promise not to mention them to anyone. She agreed. He asked her what her feelings were toward him, and she replied, "My feelings are just the same towards you that they ever were, sir." He replied, "But to come to the point more closely, have not you an affection for me, that, if it were lawful and right you could accept of me for your husband and companion." Martha's feelings at that moment were "indescribable"; she wondered if these men she had admired so much were base deceivers. But how was she to get out of the fix she was in? She decided that the best strategy would be to ask for time to think and pray about the matter, so she replied, "If it were lawful and right, perhaps I might; but you know, sir, it is not."

Young's response was that brother Joseph has had a revelation from God that it is lawful and right for a man to have two wives; for as it was in the days of Abraham, so it shall be in these last days, and whoever is the first that is willing to take up the cross will receive the greatest blessing; and if you will accept me I will take you straight to the celestial kingdom; and if you will have me in this world, I will have you in that which is to come, and brother Joseph will marry us here today, and you can go home this evening and your parents will not know anything about it.

Martha said she was not interested in doing anything without her parents' knowledge. The conversation with Brigham Young continued, with more pressure for Martha to make an immediate decision. Young then unlocked the door, went out, and locked Martha back up. Ten minutes later, he returned with Joseph Smith.

"Well, Martha," said Joseph, "it is lawful and right before God—I know it is. Look here sister, don't you believe me? . . . "I know it is lawful and right before God, and if there is any sin in it, I will answer for it before God; and I have the keys of the Kingdom, and whatever I bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever I loose on earth is loosed in heaven—and if you will accept Brigham, you will be blessed—God shall bless you, and my blessing shall rest upon you, and if you will be led by him you will do well; for I know Brigham will take care of you, and if he don't do his duty to you, come to me and I will make him—and if you do not like it in a month or two, come to me and I will make you free again; and if he turns you off I will take you on."

Martha responded rather warmly, "Sir, it will be too late to think a month or two after. I want to think first." Considerable pressure was then placed on her again to make an immediate decision. Young asked he if she had ever seen him "act in any way wrong in England," and Martha said no. "Well, then," Joseph Smith said, "what are you afraid of, sis?—come let me do the business for you." "Sir," Martha said, "do let me have a little time to think about it, and I will promise not to mention it to anyone." Eventually they seemed willing to let her go, and she rose, whereupon Joseph Smith "commenced to beg of me again—he said it was the best opportunity they might have for months, for the room was often engaged." She finally was allowed to go. "The next day being Sunday, I sat down, instead of going to meeting, and wrote the conversation and read it to my sister, who was not a little surprised." As soon as she could, Martha left Nauvoo for the nearby town of Warsaw, and thence she went to St. Louis, where she swore to her full statement before DuBouffay Fremon, justice of the peace for St. Louis County, on July 13, 1842.

This affidavit by Martha Brotherton is exceptionally valuable, both because of its striking similarities with later detailed reminiscences from women such as Lucy Walker, Helen Mar Kimball, and others who became plural wives of Joseph Smith and because Brotherton's statement also includes other information that was generally excluded from or downplayed in accounts from women who had committed themselves to living in plural marriage. Both the Lucy Walker and Martha Brotherton statements show that an appeal to the revelatory authority of Joseph Smith was the key factor used in trying to get women to accept polygamous overtures. In both instances, the women involved experienced shock and wondered at first if their commitment to the Mormon faith had been misguided. Furthermore, in these and other cases, direct and indirect coercive pressures were
placed on the women to become plural wives. They were told that to become a plural wife would link them indissolubly with the new order and to fail to accept the proposal would lead to their being cast into the outer darkness.

The differences suggested by the Brotherton case and other cases of women who rejected plural marriage also are revealing. At the most obvious level, a key reason that Martha Brotherton was able to reject the polygamous overtures and make public her experience was that she was not yet so firmly committed to the Mormon cause that even as a seventeen-year-old female in a strange environment she felt she had no other options. Interestingly, her sister Elizabeth remained in Nauvoo and eventually became a plural wife of Parley P. Pratt, a situation that was alluded to in Wilate Kimball's note of June 27, 1843. Martha clearly had a mind of her own and was not afraid to go public about a situation she found outrageous.

Two other aspects of the Brotherton report differentiate it from most testimonies believing Mormons gave of their introduction to plural marriage. One is the suggestion that Joseph Smith himself may have had some doubts about the correctness of his course in introducing polygamy. Brotherton quotes Smith as declaring decisively, "I know it is lawful and right before God," but in the next breath he appears to qualify that statement by saying "if there is any sin in it, I will answer for it before God" (emphasis added), suggesting that the thought had at least occurred to him that God might not fully approve his actions. Although most believing Mormon accounts did not convey such ambivalence, Joseph Lee Robinson, a devout supporter of the Mormon cause, recalled Smith saying to him "that God had revealed unto him that any Man that Ever Committed Adultery in Either of his Probations that that man could never be raised to the highest Exaltation in the Celestial Glory, and that he felt anxious with regard to himself that he enquired of the Lord, that the Lord told him that he Joseph had never committed Adultery."51

Perhaps the most striking element in Brotherton's affidavit and in other accounts from women who rejected polygamous overtures is the almost casual tone with which Mormon leaders are represented as tendering their offers of plural marriage. This tone is suggested throughout the Brotherton affidavit but is most evident in Smith's alleged statement that he would make other arrangements for Martha in a few months if Brigham Young did not do his duty by her or if she found she did not like being his wife. Smith in these reported statements seems to imply that he would be prepared to take her on as a plural wife in such a situation if she so desired.

The apparent casualness of some of the early polygamous overtures is suggested over and over again by other accounts from Mormons, both male and female, who rejected plural marriage in Nauvoo. Perhaps the most vivid example is the statement, acknowledged by Latter-day Saints as coming from Joseph Smith, which can all but conclusively be identified as a letter sent from Smith to Nancy Rigdon, pressing his suit to her after she had initially rejected his overtures. That statement, which was originally published in Bennett's exposé but which also subsequently was printed in volume 5 of the History of the Church,52 begins by saying that "Happiness is the object and design of our existence" but that this can only be achieved through "virtue, uprightness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God. But we cannot keep all the commandments without first knowing them... That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another."

The letter continues:

A parent may whip a child, and justly too, because he stole an apple; whereas if the child had asked for the apple, and the parent had given it, the child would have eaten it with a better appetite; there would have been no stripes; all the pleasure of the apple would have been secured, all the misery of stealing lost.

This principle will justly apply to all of God's dealings with his children. Everything that God gives is lawful and right; and it is proper that we should enjoy his gifts and blessings whenever and wherever his is disposed to bestow; but if we should seize upon those same blessings and enjoyments without law, without revelation, without commandment, those blessings and enjoyments would prove cursings in the end... Our heavenly Father is more liberal in His views, and boundless in His mercies and blessings, than we are ready to believe or receive; and, at the same time, is more terrible to the workers of iniquity, more awful in the executions of His punishments, and more ready to detect every false way, than we are apt to suppose Him to be... He says: "... no good thing will I withhold from them
who walk uprightly before me, and do my will in all things—
who will listen to my voice and the voice of the servant whom
I have sent; . . . for all things shall be made known unto them
in mine own due time, and in the end they shall have joy.”

Such statements usually were viewed as pure sophistry by oppo-
nents of plural marriage. Even more disturbing to such critics were
allegations that Joseph Smith asked already married women to be-
come his plural wives. [The most controversial such allegation, also
reported initially by Bennett, involved Sarah Pratt, wife of the Mor-
mon apostle and intellectual leader Orson Pratt, who served as a
missionary to England during 1841 and 1842. According to Bennett’s
account, Joseph Smith wanted Sarah Pratt to become his spiritual
wife, and he tried to seduce her while her husband was away on that
mission. Bennett indicated that Smith had asked him to serve as his
go-between with Sarah and that he warned her of the intrigue. Mrs.
Pratt would not believe such a thing, but he told her that Smith’s
ture character would soon be revealed. Thereafter, Smith allegedly
took Bennett to the Pratt home and immediately broached the sub-
ject with her. Sarah was outraged at his advances, and when he per-
sisted she finally threatened to tell her husband. According to
Bennett, Smith begged not to be exposed.53

This explosively controversial allegation and others like it have
seldom been convincingly analyzed and placed into context by schol-
ars. Most Mormon writers have either ignored such charges or denied
their accuracy. Others have focused primary attention on the supposed
unreliability of those making the charges. And still other writers
such as Fawn Brodie and Richard S. Van Wagoner, who apparently
accept some of the charges, have rather naively suggested that a form
of “polyandry” was practiced in Nauvoo.54 Dan electro also re-
fers to Smith’s ties to “previously married women” as “polyandrous,”
although his analysis suggests the existence of a much more complex
phenomenon.

What is one to make of such statements? Published Latter-day
Saints accounts, in the first place, document beyond cavil that,
whatever his motives, Joseph Smith did ask some of his followers’
wives to become his plural wives.55 According to these sources,
Smith’s goal in such cases was simply to test the loyalty of the women
and of their husbands (if the husbands knew of the proposal). Such
an argument cannot explain all reported cases, however. Most of the
remainder could be accounted for if one keeps in mind that, at some
level at least, Joseph Smith and his closest associates in Nauvoo be-
lieved that no earthly marriage was fully valid unless it had been
sealed by the Mormon priesthood, then led by Joseph Smith, for “et-
ernity” as well as for “time.” In effect, therefore, wives who had not
yet been married under those ceremonies could still be seen as being
in some sense eligible to become plural wives of someone else.56

Nevertheless, some cases remain that cannot be explained by
this line of argument either. In a careful analysis of the data in Reli-
gerion and Sexuality, I suggest that in early Mormonism there may well
have been a very limited practice of appointing “proxy husbands” for
wives of absent or infertile husbands. Such a practice was clearly san-
tioned (without the use of the term proxy husband) by Brigham Young
in a letter of March 5, 1857, and the practice may well have dated
back to Joseph Smith himself. Such a practice, if it existed in Nau-
vo, would not have been viewed as polyandrous by its practitioners
but rather as part of the developing patriarchal polygamous system.57

On this point, the comment of Mary E. Rollins Lightner, wife
of Adam Lightner and a plural wife of Joseph Smith, is tantalizing.
In a letter to John A. Smith in 1892, she wrote: “I could explain
some things in regard to my living with Mr. L. after becoming the
Wife of another, which would throw light, on what now seems misteri-
ous—and you would be perfectly satisfied with me. I write this;
because I have heard that it had been commented on to my injury.”58

Whatever the rationale behind Joseph Smith’s requests that
women already married to his associates become his plural wives,
such actions were extremely controversial when they were reported
publicly to Mormons, most of whom did not even know about the
church leadership’s commitment to plural marriage. The leadership
felt that at all costs the Prophet’s name must be kept unbesmirched
and thus they resorted to extraordinary measures of “damage con-
trol.” To destroy the credibility of the stories of women such as Mar-
tha Brotherton, Nancy Rigdon, and Sarah Pratt, their characters
were verbally dragged through the mud, using remarkably similar al-
legations. The Wasp, one of the church’s newspapers in Nauvoo, re-
ferred to Martha Brotherton as a “harlot” associated with John C.
Bennett, while her sisters Mary and Elizabeth (who later became a plural wife), as well as her brother-in-law John McLirrick, swore to an affidavit indicating that Martha was a liar and had been seen in a compromising situation with a young man.\(^5\)\(^9\) Stephen Markham swore to an affidavit that he had seen Nancy Rigdon and John C. Bennett in a compromising situation and was convinced that they were "guilty of unlawful and illicit intercourse with each other."\(^6\)\(^0\) And Mormon stalwarts suggested that John C. Bennett, not Joseph Smith, had been having an affair with Sarah Pratt. Zeruiah Goddard claimed that he had once caught Bennett "taking his hands out of her [Mrs. Pratt's] bosom" as they lay on a bed.\(^6\)\(^1\)

The publication of literally hundreds of such scurrilous allegations and counterallegations in Mormon and anti-Mormon newspapers and pamphlets between 1842 and 1844 can cause even the most hardened scholar to feel sickened by the bitterness the exchanges reveal. Furthermore, some of these allegations are demonstrably false. For example, Zeruiah Goddard's affidavit stated that Bennett had visited Sarah Pratt every night with one exception for a period of nearly a month in October 1840, yet during that same time Bennett was living almost one hundred miles away in Springfield, where he was fully occupied in lobbying for measures desired by the Mormons.\(^6\)\(^2\) Even if some of the other allegations against individuals such as Martha Brotherton, Nancy Rigdon, and Sarah Pratt should have been true (which this author feels is unlikely), it is very disturbing that the characters of the daughter of Joseph Smith's first counselor Sidney Rigdon or of the wife of his apostle Orson Pratt (who then stood next only to Brigham Young in seniority in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles) should have been publicly defamed in such an explicit manner. Joseph Smith also appears to have been deeply disturbed by the bitterness that resulted. He declared in a speech on February 21, 1843, "This biting and devouring each other I cannot endure. Away with it. For God's sake stop it."\(^6\)\(^3\)

One indication of the level of bitterness associated with these events and of the success of the Mormon leadership's efforts at damage control during this period is the confusion surrounding the phrases **spiritual wives** and **spiritual wife** system, which were widely used in discussions of polygamy in Nauvoo. As part of their skillful efforts, so ably analyzed in Charles Shook's *True Origin of Mormon Polygamy*, to avoid premature public exposure of their polygamous beliefs and practices, leaders of the Mormon church, both at the time and subsequently, vigorously denied that they ever advocated or practiced "spiritual wifery." That terminology is, instead, used to refer to the corruptions introduced by John C. Bennett and other licentious individuals who were thrown out of the church.

Although this line of argument has been almost universally accepted by subsequent Mormon scholars, it is almost certainly false. As Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, a plural wife of Joseph Smith, declared in her 1882 pamphlet *Plural Marriage as Taught by the Prophet Joseph*, "At that time [in Nauvoo] spiritual wife was the title by which every woman who entered into the order was called, for it was taught and practiced as a spiritual order and not a temporal one though it was always spoken of sneeringly by those who did not believe in it."\(^6\)\(^4\) The events at Nauvoo were so painful that many individuals subsequently experienced what amounted to a kind of partial amnesia. When the Mormon church finally admitted in 1852 that it had been practicing polygamy (which it had vehemently denied earlier), the church evidently decided to replace the terms **spiritual wife** and **spiritual wife system with celestial marriage**, which also had a spiritual sound but lacked the intense negative baggage associated with the earlier expressions.

VIII

The complex and ambivalent reactions toward polygamy of Joseph Smith's first wife, Emma Hale Smith, provide exceptionally revealing insights into plural marriage at Nauvoo and women's reactions to it. Until the appearance in 1984 of *Mormon Enigma*, the first full-length scholarly biography of Emma, written by Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, many doubted that her full story and reactions could ever be convincingly reconstructed. Now, based on this important biography and on other sources, it is possible to know with considerable confidence precisely how and why Emma reacted in certain ways to her husband's polygamous beliefs and practices. Her story also sheds new light on the overall development of plural marriage. Here only the outlines of her experiences can be suggested. Those
interested in further details should consult the biography itself or turn to the longer manuscript version of the biography, which provides the most comprehensive discussion of the relationship between Joseph and Emma now available.\textsuperscript{65}

At the outset, it must be emphasized that Emma was in many ways every bit as remarkable a person as her better-known husband. She was, as the authors of \textit{Mormon Enigma} note,

a capable, articulate, and influential individual in her own right who profoundly affected the development of the religious movements with which she was associated. From her initial elopement with the young would-be prophet Joseph Smith in 1827, through seventeen years of marriage and repeated moves through five states, she became a force to be reckoned with, especially in financial and other practical matters affecting the Mormon church. Deeply in love with her husband, she quietly but vigorously opposed the polygamous beliefs and practices which he sought to introduce into Mormon practice in Illinois in the early 1840s. Following her husband's assassination in 1844 and the migration westward of the main body of Mormons under Brigham Young in 1846, Emma remained behind in the nearly deserted town of Nauvoo, Illinois. There she continued to live thirty-two more years as the wife of Lewis C. Bidamon, who never embraced Mormon doctrines. When a group of individuals dissatisfied with Brigham Young and polygamy founded a church which Emma's son Joseph Smith III would lead after 1860, she gained new status.\textsuperscript{66}

Ultimately only one factor weakened and threatened to destroy the powerful bond between Emma and Joseph. That was Joseph's tendency toward polygamy. Hints that a problem might exist date back to the early days of their marriage, when, after Joseph and Emma left Pennsylvania in 1830, Emma's cousin Hiel Lewis, accused Joseph of improper conduct with a woman whom, fifty years later, he identified as "E. W. [Eliza Winters]."\textsuperscript{67} Joseph was also connected in some manner with indiscreet behavior toward Nancy Marinda Johnson during the period when he lived with her father and mother in Kirtland, Ohio. Her brothers joined the mob that tarred, feathered, and apparently threatened to castrate him in March 1832, and their anger appears to have been kindled by concerns about Joseph and their sister.\textsuperscript{68} A letter from Oliver Cowdery, one of Joseph's closest early associates, accuses him of improper conduct with a servant girl named Fanny Alger in 1836.\textsuperscript{69} And a gossip in Kirtland commented about Joseph and Vienna Jacques.\textsuperscript{70} Finally, the names of Lucinda Huntington Buell and Lucinda Morgan Harris were linked to Joseph's at some point during the period of time the Mormons were in Missouri.\textsuperscript{71}

Not until after 1839, when the displaced members of the church arrived in Illinois to settle the town that would become Nauvoo, however, would Joseph begin to take clear steps to begin to introduce polygamous ideas and practices. Although there is evidence that he may have thought about the possibility of introducing polygamy among his followers as early as July 17, 1831,\textsuperscript{72} and although rumors of such practices go back at least as early as 1835, when the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants made a point of denying that the church sanctioned "polygamy,"\textsuperscript{73} no solid evidence of polygamous relationships sanctioned by a formal marriage ceremony survive before Joseph's marriage to Louisa Beaman on April 5, 1841. The majority of Joseph's identifiable polygamous unions, and his problems with polygamy, occurred during the years between 1842 and 1844. George A. Smith estimated that before the formal dictation of the revelation on polygamy on July 12, 1843,\textsuperscript{74} probably no more than one to two hundred individuals in Nauvoo (out of a population then numbering more than seven thousand) were aware that the church's leaders privately taught and engaged in the practice.\textsuperscript{74}

Although Emma never knew the full extent of her husband's polygamous activities, she had inklings of his leanings in that direction at least as early as the spring of 1841, when Joseph gave a public speech that was recognized and attacked by Emma and other women at the time as implying the possibility that polygamy might be practiced in the future.\textsuperscript{75} According to \textit{Mormon Enigma}, Emma's eventual knowledge of at least seven of her husband's plural wives can be documented conclusively.\textsuperscript{76} Eliza R. Snow asserted that it was a "fact that Sister Emma, of her own free will and choice, gave her husband four wives . . . [and] she not only gave them to her husband, but she taught them the doctrine."\textsuperscript{77} Emma felt profoundly ambivalent about the situation she was in. Repeatedly, she would try to resign herself to support her husband, hoping evidently to contain his activities,
but almost immediately she would regret her cooperation and give vent to her anger at the situation. As Orson Pratt recalled, Emma "at times fought against him [Joseph] with all her heart; and then again she would break down in her feelings . . . and would then lead forth ladies and place their hands in the hands of Joseph."

To understand Emma’s reactions, perhaps the best approach is briefly to identify how her knowledge of Joseph’s polygamy practice gradually developed and how she reacted at each stage of her growing knowledge. Emma’s first clear knowledge of her husband’s polygamy practice in Nauvoo came in April 1842 as the opportunistic and licentious John C. Bennett was being eased out of the church. Someone evidently told her about Joseph’s plural marriages. She was furious, and he had to spend the better part of a day to calm her down, perhaps by saying that he had neither sanctioned nor participated in Bennett’s spiritual wife doctrine. In the meantime, the Nauvoo Female Relief Society, the rapidly growing women’s organization in the church, increasingly became the forum for a subtle sparring between Emma and Joseph over the polygamy issue. Emma would speak strongly against sin and iniquity, while Joseph would warn the women equally strongly against excessive zeal or meddling in matters about which they did not know. Women in the Relief Society, who, unbeknownst to Emma, were already plural wives of Joseph or of his associates found themselves in the middle of a curious and disconcerting verbal crossfire.

Matters became substantially more complicated early in February 1843, when Emma discovered that Eliza Snow, her close friend, who had lived in the large Smith mansion house-hotel for seven months, was a plural wife of Joseph’s. Emma was furious at what she took to be a personal betrayal, and some sort of physical confrontation evidently ensued between the two women, causing Eliza to move out on February 11. At this point, Emma could no longer believe that Joseph was not involved with polygamy, and he could no longer deny it. He nevertheless continued secretly to pursue the establishment of polygamy in spite of Emma’s strong negative feelings. In March 1843, unbeknownst to Emma, he married two sisters, Emily and Eliza Partridge, who were then living in his home. At the same time, he continued to try to prepare the way to introduce new endowment ceremonies, which he taught were essential for exal-tion, to women as well as to the select men who had first participated in the ceremonies nearly a year earlier. Joseph wanted Emma to serve as a model to other women and to lead the way in introducing the ceremonies to other women, but he would not let her do so until she became obedient to him and agreed to give him plural wives.

By the spring of 1843, Emma finally came around, briefly, to an acceptance of plural marriage. Apparently convinced that the practice was necessary for her salvation and essential to their continued relationship, she agreed in May 1843 to give Joseph other wives if she could choose them. (At this point, Joseph Smith’s plural wives numbered at least sixteen.) Emma chose two sets of sisters then living in their house, Emily and Eliza Partridge and Sarah and Maria Lawrence. Although the Partridge sisters had already been married to Joseph two months earlier, Emily indicated that “to save family trouble Brother Joseph thought it best to have another ceremony performed.” This was done in Emma’s presence on May 23, 1843. Almost immediately, however, Emma regretted her action and became even more bitter than before “and kept Joseph up till very late in the night talking with him.” Thereafter, Emma showed exceptional vigilance in trying to prevent Joseph from meeting with his plural wives. The situation was difficult for all concerned. As Emily wrote, Emma “had, as it were, bound us to the ship and carried us to mid ocean, then threw us overboard to sink or swim as the case might be.”

As Newell and Avery note:

Joseph’s choice of women as plural wives gradually put a wedge between Emma and her friends as long as she remained either ignorant of the practice or opposed it. By late summer 1843 most of Emma’s friends had either married Joseph or had given their daughters to him. Her sister-in-law, Agnes Coolbrith, was married to Joseph; another sister-in-law, Mary Fielding, had consented to the marriage of her husband Hyrum Smith and her sister Mercy. At least five women in her own household were Joseph’s plural wives. Whether Emma knew about them or not, the women would not have been sympathetic to Emma while she opposed plural marriage. As a result, she became isolated from her friends and associates, and through the next four years this isolation would become more and more acute.
A major turning point in the development of polygamy and in Joseph's relationship with Emma came on July 12, 1843, when, at the request of his brother Hyrum, Joseph dictated the revelation on plural and celestial marriage, while his personal secretary William Clayton took it down sentence by sentence. Hyrum then took the revelation to Emma, saying, "I believe I can convince her of [the] truth, and you will thereafter have peace." When he returned, he reported "that he had never received a more severe talking to in his life, that Emma was very bitter and full of resentments and anger." Joseph quietly replied, "I told you she did not know Emma as I did." He spent the better part of the following day in conversation with Emma.90

Although much of the revelation may have dated back to the Kirtland period of 1830-31, fifteen of the sixty-six verses are clearly directed to Emma and relate to his immediate problems with her.91 It declared, for instance, "Let my handmaid, Emma Smith, receive all those that have been given unto my servant Joseph, and who are virtuous and pure before me." It went on, asserting that Joseph would receive from the Lord "an hundred-fold of this world, of wives" if she would not obey. Under the "law of the priesthood" a man "cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth to him and to no one else. And if he have ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him." "If any man have a wife ... and he teaches unto her the law of my priesthood, as pertaining unto these things, then she shall believe and administer unto him, or she shall be destroyed, saith the Lord your God."92

And what if the wife refused to allow other wives under such circumstances? "It shall be lawful in me, if she receive not this law, for him to receive all things whatsoever I, the Lord his God, will give unto him, because she did not believe and administer unto him." The revelation thus exempted a man from the "law of Sarah," which apparently required a husband to ask his wife for permission to take another wife. If the first withheld her consent for any plural marriage, the revelation authorized the husband to proceed without it.92

The formal recording of the revelation and its subsequent presentation by Hyrum Smith before the High Council of the church on August 12, 1843, caused the lines of division on the issue to harden. It now became obvious to Joseph Smith's associates that he was intent on carrying through with his policy on polygamy, and they would either have to support or oppose him.93 Emma, in the meantime, remained deeply ambivalent about the entire situation. Perhaps in part to assuage her anxiety that his support of polygamy might result in his death and leave her and her family unprotected, on July 14, 1843, Joseph deeded to Emma half his share in the steamboat Maid of Iowa and also sixty city lots.94 He also may have destroyed or allowed Emma to destroy the original dictated version of the revelation, although an exact copy of that revelation upon which the published form is based had previously been made by Joseph C. Kingsbury.95

Matters became further complicated by August 16, 1843, when William Clayton recorded in a diary entry: "This A.M. Joseph told me that sin[cle Emma came back from St. Louis, she had resisted the P[ri]nciple] in toto, and he had to tell her he would relinquish all for her sake. She said she would give him Eliza and Emily Partridge but he knew if he took them she would pitch on him, & obtain a divorce & leave him. He however told me he should not relinquish anything."96 As the authors of Mormon Enigma note: "In the most serious crisis of their marriage, Joseph backed down. But he confided to Clayton that he did not intend to keep his word."97

By the end of the summer, matters seemed to ease somewhat. Several accounts suggest that Emma temporarily resigned herself to the situation. Perhaps this was connected, in part, with her receiving her endowments sometime between May 28 and September 28, 1843, when she received the highest ordinance of the church, the second anointing. "In the language of the ordinance, she was Joseph's queen. She was the first woman to receive the ordinances and Joseph administered them to her. Emma then initiated other women, who in turn initiated others, until Mormon women today trace their own endowments back to Emma Smith."98 It must be noted that neither Joseph nor Emma linked the endowment directly with plural marriage. Because opponents of plural marriage such as William Marks and Sidney Rigdon were included in the inner circle of Smith's followers who experienced the early endowments, the issue of polygamy was not raised directly in that context.99

Despite the many tensions, Emma and Joseph maintained an outwardly warm and loving relationship. Privately, however, matters soon became stormy again. Emma worked vigorously within the Relief
Society to try to get it to oppose plural marriage. George A. Smith's wife, Bathsheba, remembered Emma saying, "Your husbands are going to take more wives, and unless you consent to it, you must put your foot down and keep it there." A young woman who visited Nauvoo from nearby Carthage asked, "Mrs. Smith, where does your church get this doctrine of spiritual wives?" Emma's face flushed scarlet, and her eyes blazed as she replied, "Straight from hell, madam."

Matters came to a head at the Relief Society meeting of March 16, 1844, when Emma read the "Voice of Innocence," a statement defending the women of Nauvoo against allegations of loose morals, which had been passed unanimously at the March 9 meeting. Emma also read the church presidency's original letter to the Relief Society, written in 1842, stating, "We therefore warn you, and forewarn you... we do not want anyone to believe anything as coming from us contrary to the old established morals & virtues, & scriptural laws... all persons pretending to be authorized by us... are and will be liars and base imposters & you are authorized... to denounce them as such... whether they are prophets, Seers, or revelators, patriarchs, twelve apostles... you are alike culpable and shall be damned for such evil practices.

Emma went on to emphasize the importance of searching out iniquity, and she urged women to follow the teachings of Joseph Smith as he taught them "from the stand," implying that his private teachings should be disregarded.

As Newell and Avery observe:

The "Voice of Innocence" was published in the Nauvoo Neighbor March 20, but the Relief Society did not meet again in Nauvoo. In those last meetings Emma had reaffirmed the traditional Christian standards of marriage, using Joseph's public denials of polygamy, his own letter, and the "Voice of Innocence" to give every woman present a valid reason for avoiding plural marriage. When Emma had the women take a public oath with their hands raised in support of virtue, she caused enough consternation in the men's councils to stop the Relief Society meetings. The women would not have their own organization again for more than a decade.

Outside sources soon began to gossip in print about Emma and Joseph's domestic difficulties. When Emma left alone on a steamboat for St. Louis on April 19, 1844, Joseph wrote that she had gone to purchase goods, but the St. Louis Republican announced that "the Mormon prophet Joe Smith has turned his wife out of doors for being in communication with a gentleman of the sect which she hesitated or refused to disclose." Upon her return after a five-day visit to St. Louis, Emma was shocked to enter the main room of their mansion house/hotel and discover a bar, complete with counter, shelves, and glasses for serving liquor. She asked Joseph to explain himself, and he indicated that it was only a temporary arrangement for the benefit of his friend Porter Rockwell, who needed a place until a new building across the street was constructed to house his bar and barbershop. Emma told Joseph that either the bar must go or she and the children would move out. Faced with this ultimatum he did not want to accept, Joseph acquiesced and had the bar removed immediately.

The authors of Mormon Enigma ask whether Joseph may have similarly acquiesced to halting plural marriages:

He apparently did not take additional wives after November 1843, but evidence is conflicting as to whether he intended to abandon the practice, as Emma believed, or whether he found it expedient to let his opponents think he was abandoning it. William Marks, who had never embraced the principle, said that Joseph approached him one day in the spring [of 1844] and invited him to a secluded place to talk. "We are a ruined people," Marks quoted Joseph as saying. ["This doctrine of polygamy or Spiritual-wives System, that has been taught and practiced among us, will prove our destruction and overthrow. I have been deceived, in reference to its practice, it is wrong; it is a curse to mankind, and we shall have to leave the United States soon, unless it can be put down." Marks further stated that Joseph asked him to go to the High Council and prefer charges against all who practiced the doctrine, while Joseph would "preach against it, with all my might, and in this way we may rid the church of this damnable heresy."] But when Marks told others about these conversations with Joseph, rumors surfaced that he was about to apostatize. His statements "were pronounced false by the Twelve, and disbelieved."

The minutes of an 1867 meeting within the Reorganized Church refer to this issue. A man named Hugh Herringshaw
had “heard Joseph tell the 12 that they must abandon polygamy and turned to Brigham Young and asked if he was willing to do so. Young said he had been asleep. Then Joseph spoke upon the matter as only he could talk denouncing the doctrine of polygamy. Brigham replied that he and Taylor had determined what course they would pursue.” A year earlier, in 1866, Brigham Young had conceded, “Joseph was worn out with it, but as to his denying any such thing I never knew that he denied the doctrine of polygamy. Some have said that he did, but I do not believe he ever did.” Joseph's niece said he finally “awoke to a realization of the whole miserable affair [and] . . . tried to withdraw from and put down the evil into which he had fallen.” Sarah Scott, a young immigrant from Massachusetts, wrote home to her mother about the situation. “Mr. Haven [her brother-in-law] told me . . . that those doctrines tried his faith very much till he heard Hyrum Smith explain them and now or then he thought it was right. But . . . [in late May or early June] Hyrum denied that he and Joseph had the revelation concerning it but said that it referred to ancient times; and was published so in the Neighbor. After I saw it I said to Mr. Haven: ‘What do you think of that?’ . . . He said that he supposed Hyrum saw what a disturbance it was making and thought he would say it on account of there being such excitement.”

Whatever Joseph Smith may have intended, events began to move rapidly toward their tragic denouement on June 7, 1844, when a group of disaffected Mormons—including William and Wilson Law, Robert D. Foster, Austin Cowles, and Charles and Francis Higbee—published a newspaper, The Nauvoo Expositor, that decreed polygamy and included a number of straightforward affidavits about the practice in Nauvoo that were difficult to dismiss as mere slander. Knowing that the publication and circulation of such reports would undercut the faith of many members who were as yet unaware that the church sanctioned and advocated the new practices, Smith acted quickly to have the press of the Expositor and any remaining copies of the paper destroyed. Almost immediately this action brought outside hostility against the Mormons to a fever pitch. Rather than see outright civil war erupt, Joseph Smith eventually surrendered himself to the authorities in Carthage, Illinois, to stand trial. There, on

June 27, 1844, a mob in collusion with local militiamen entered the jail, shooting and killing Joseph and his brother Hyrum.

IX

Two knotty questions remain before the story of Joseph Smith and the polygamy he introduced in Nauvoo can be concluded. One is the perennial issue of what Joseph Smith's motivations could have been for devoting so much time and energy during his last years to introducing this highly controversial practice. Any simple explanation is probably impossible. The complexity of human genius and the psychological states associated with such genius should not be dismissed by reductionistic arguments. Yet there is one approach, which I shall suggest only as a hypothesis, that may help us come closer to understanding Joseph Smith’s remarkable actions.

Before considering this hypothesis, we need to recall William James's discussion of the psychology of religious genius, as it occurs in individuals for whom “religion exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever.” Genius in such individuals, according to James, is frequently associated with “symptoms of nervous instability.” Even more perhaps than other kinds of genius, religious leaders have been subject to abnormal psychic visitations... Often they have led a discordant inner life, and had melancholy during part of their career. They have known no measure, been liable to obsessions and fixed ideas; and frequently they have fallen into trances, heard voices, seen visions, and presented all sorts of peculiarities which are ordinarily classed as pathological. Often, moreover, these pathological features in their career have helped to give them their religious authority and influence.

James goes on to emphasize that even if religious inspiration may often occur in psychologically unstable or disordered individuals, that fact does not necessarily discredit the fruits of such inspiration. He quotes Dr. Henry Maudsley's statement:

What right have we to believe Nature under any obligation to work by means of complete minds only? She may find an incomplete mind a more suitable instrument for a particular purpose.
It is the work that is done, and the quality in the worker by which it is done, that is alone of moment; and it may be no great matter from a cosmical standpoint, if in other qualities of character he was singularly defective—if indeed he were a hypocrite, adulterer, eccentric or lunatic.\footnote{100}

James argues that the only ultimate test of the validity of religious inspiration is practical—in Jesus' words, "By their fruits ye shall know them." He concludes: "If there were such a thing as inspiration from a higher realm, it might well be that the neurotic temperament would furnish the chief condition of the requisite receptivity."\footnote{110}

One further caveat needs to be added before we briefly explore one possible approach to understanding Joseph Smith's psychological states. The line between health and illness, between normal mood swings and those that might be described as extreme, is very fine indeed. It is often difficult for a contemporary psychiatrist who has worked closely with a patient to make an accurate diagnosis. To diagnose with confidence someone long dead, even when extensive records exist on his or her life, is far more difficult and speculative. The observations that follow are therefore intended to be suggestive, not definitive. These observations will have served their purpose if they open up new possibilities for better understanding aspects of Joseph Smith's beliefs and behavior that might otherwise appear opaque or incomprehensible.

The psychological interpretation of Joseph Smith that I am proposing was first mentioned to me by a Mormon psychiatrist, Dr. Jess Groesbeck.\footnote{111} He suggested that Joseph Smith's behavior, especially during the last years of his life, is strikingly similar to behavior that psychiatrists associate with manic-depressive syndromes. Although one could understand that any individual under the pressures Joseph Smith faced might experience substantial mood swings, in the Mormon prophet's case those mood swings appear so severe that they may be clinically significant.

Groesbeck also pointed out that there is substantial evidence that tendencies toward manic-depression often are inherited. Although many people are aware that one of Joseph Smith's brightest and most appealing sons, David Hyrum, tragically lapsed into insanity and spent the last years of his life in a mental institution, few realize that at least six other male descendants of the Mormon prophet also suffered from psychological disorders, including manic-depression.\footnote{112} The possibility that Joseph Smith himself may also have been subject to similar tendencies cannot be discounted.

What are some of the characteristics of psychological mania and how do such states reflect themselves in behavior? According to Harold I. Kaplan and Benjamin J. Sadock's Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry/IV:

The critical clinical feature for a manic episode is a mood that is elevated, expansive, or irritable. The associated symptoms include hyperactivity, pressure of speech, flight of ideas, diminished need for sleep, increased self-esteem to the point of grandiosity, extreme distractibility, short attention span, and extraordinarily poor judgment in the interpersonal and social areas. . . .

The person speaks more rapidly, thinks more rapidly, or moves more rapidly. The person frequently requires much less sleep and has apparently limitless energy. Many people with a manic illness feel that they are highly creative during these attacks. The reason, in part, is because there is a flooding of consciousness with ideas and associations that at times are imaginative and creative but that at other times are idiosyncratic and of little artistic merit. . . .

Although the elevated mood is often described as euphoric and cheerful and having an infectious quality, it is characterized by an absence of selectivity and an unceasing driven quality. Mania is also characterized by an extremely poor frustration tolerance, with resulting heightened irritability. A manic patient may be quite humorous, good natured, and friendly until frustrated in some trivial way. The good humor then promptly disappears and is replaced by anger and even rage. . . .

The increased activity often takes the form of sexual promiscuity, political involvement, and religious concern. . . .

The manic episode may or may not include psychotic symptoms. The impairment of judgment may not be sufficiently severe to justify a psychotic diagnosis. Delusions and hallucinations are not unusual. The context is usually consistent with the dominant mood. It is quite common for the person to communicate with God and to have it revealed that he or she has a spe-
cial purpose or mission. Patients frequently describe themselves as an “organ” of God through whom God speaks to the world.\textsuperscript{113}

How do such characteristics of psychological mania square with Joseph Smith’s actions during the last three years of his life in Nauvoo between 1841 and 1844? To anyone who has worked closely with the records of the Mormon prophet’s life during those final years, the parallels are striking. Only a few key elements can be highlighted here, especially as they relate to his efforts to introduce both the belief and practice of polygamy among his most trusted followers.

Most obvious is the Mormon prophet’s extraordinary expansiveness and grandiosity during this period. During the last year of his life, to mention only the most well-known examples, Smith served as mayor of Nauvoo and head of his own private army, became “king” of his secret Kingdom of God that he anticipated would eventually encompass all of North and South America, ran for president of the United States (that effort was cut short by his martyrdom), and was the “husband” in some sense of dozens of wives.\textsuperscript{114} He commented during that period that excitement had become “the very core of his life.” Those who supported him during the period were impressed by his sense of divine mission and feeling that he was discovering the very secrets of the universe. Those who opposed him, including some of his previously most loyal lieutenants such as William Marks and William Law, thought instead that he had slipped his moorings and become a “fallen prophet,” unfit to lead the church he had founded.

In no area were Joseph Smith’s manic qualities more evident than in his efforts to introduce and practice polygamy during the last three years of his life. The point at which Joseph Smith began systematically to introduce polygamy to his closest associates has strong suggestions of mania. As Danel Bachman, summarizing the account by Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, wrote:

Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and John Taylor [key members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who were returning from England] arrived in Nauvoo on July 1, 1841. . . . Joseph Smith was waiting at the landing with a company of horsemen. As soon as the missionaries disembarked from the boat, he rushed them to dinner at his home, not even giving them time to visit their own families. Vilate Kimball thought that this discourtesy continued after dinner when Smith brought the entire party to the Kimball Home. The Prophet, wrote Helen Kimball, “seemed unwilling to part with my father and from that time kept the Twelve in Council early and late.” Helen said her mother “never dreamed that he was during those times revealing to them the principles of Celestial Marriage” or that her trials were about to begin.\textsuperscript{115}

If the initial systematic attempt to introduce the concept of plural marriage among his closest associates bespeaks possible manic enthusiasm on Joseph Smith’s part, his subsequent surge of sexual activity with the fifteen or more women with whom he may have sustained sexual relations as plural wives (the full number may have been much greater) is even more suggestive of the hypersexuality that often accompanies manic periods. Some earlier writers such as Fawn Brodie, who has closely investigated the evidence on Joseph Smith’s plural relationships, have suggested that he was in effect essentially a lusty, good-natured libertine giving vent to impulses that more cautious individuals keep under better control. I have increasingly come to the conclusion, however, as did Brodie upon later reflection, that this argument cannot adequately explain the extent of Smith’s sexual relationships and activities. Something more, surely, was involved.\textsuperscript{116}

Clinically significant manic episodes often alternate with correspondingly deep states of depression.\textsuperscript{117} Once again, it must be noted that many individuals experience mild depression and that such states of mind are not uncommon during periods of severe stress. Whether such periods of depression were clinically significant in Joseph Smith’s case remains debatable. That he did have periods of severe depression and discouragement during the last years of his life is, however, indisputable.

One such period was described by one of his plural wives, Mary Rollins Lightner. She recalled Smith saying:

I am tired, I have been mobbed, I have suffered so much, from outsiders and from my own family. Some of the brethren think
they can carry this work on better than I can, far better. I have asked the Lord to take me away. I have to seal my testimony to this generation with my blood. I have to do it for this work will never progress until I am gone for the testimony is of no force until the testator is dead. People little know who I am when they talk about me, and they will never know until they see me weighed in the balance in the Kingdom of God. Then they will know who I am, and see me as I am. I dare not tell them, and they do not know me.  

Although this was recounted many years later, it seems accurately to reflect the spirit of many of Joseph Smith's private statements during his last days. His sermon of April 7, 1844, at the funeral of Elder King Follett may appropriately serve as his own epitaph. In this sermon, he described his glorious vision of men progressing to the achievement of full godlike powers. He declared in his conclusion, which George A. Smith said referred to plural marriage, "You never knew my heart; no man knows my history; I cannot tell it. I shall never undertake it. If I had not experienced what I have, I should not have known it myself... When I am called at the trump of the archangel, and weighed in the balance, you will all know me then."  

Here, it seems to me, was a profoundly lonely man, poignantly aware of the inability of the world (or even himself) to understand the underlying significance of his ideas and mission and seeing with stark clarity that he was about to be overwhelmed by forces he had helped set loose but which were beyond his control. Throughout his life, Joseph Smith was painfully aware of his singularity and never able to escape it.  

Where does all this leave us with regard to understanding the dynamics of Joseph Smith's psychology and its impact on his beliefs and practices? I must emphasize again that the analysis presented here about Joseph Smith's possible tendencies toward manic-depressive mental states is not intended as anything but a hypothesis. It is in no way intended to reduce the mystery—and the greatness—of Joseph Smith's accomplishments. Even if this hypothesis be true, the ultimate question remains not the origin of Smith's genius but the fruits of that genius.

To restate one of William James's observations, "If there were such a thing as inspiration from a higher realm, it might well be that the neurotic temperament would furnish the chief condition of the requisite receptivity." It may well be that only individuals whose inhibitions are bypassed by various forms of mania may be able to convince themselves and others that their insights emanate directly from God or other higher spiritual powers. In this context, it is very interesting to note that both John Humphrey Noyes and Ann Lee also showed strong manic-depressive tendencies. Noyes's case could be described as an almost classic example of the syndrome, and Lee's extraordinary mood swings also are well documented. For Noyes and Lee, the self-assurance that accompanied the sense of direct communication with the divine contributed much to their ability to introduce new ideas to their followers.  

It must further be emphasized that individuals with manic-depressive tendencies can be extremely effective leaders, especially during times of crisis. One striking example is Oliver Cromwell, the great Puritan general and leader of England during the 1640s and 1650s, who dealt with a host of issues that would have destroyed any lesser person. Thus, even if manic-depressive psychological states may have provided much of the occasion for Joseph Smith's remarkable creativity, the validity of the product of that inspiration must be judged on its own merits. Nonbelievers no doubt will still see Joseph Smith's creativity as a product of his own fertile mind, but devout Saints may equally well see that creativity as emanation from the Divine.

One final question still remains, namely, how Emma Smith dealt with her husband's polygamy as she lived out the last thirty-five years of her life until 1879. The brief answer is that, with rare exceptions, she remained both publicly and privately silent on the topic, although she clearly believed polygamy was wrong. A proud and self-controlled woman with a strong sense of propriety and a hatred of scandal and notoriety, she maintained a dignified exterior even as controversies over Mormon polygamy continued to swirl, both within the two main branches of the Mormon church and between the Utah Mormons and the government of the United States, which increasingly attacked the practice.
Shortly before Emma died in 1879, her eldest son, Joseph Smith III, then the head of the antipolygamous Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, talked with her and finally, for the first time in his life, directly broached the topic with his mother. The statement, printed after Emma's death as "Last Testimony of Sister Emma" in the Saints' Herald of October 1, 1879, raises more questions than it answers. Apparently the questions had been carefully prepared in advance, with ambiguities in wording that, whether deliberate or not, allowed for "deniability." Before asking her the questions for the record, her son apologized for bringing up the matter.¹²⁴

Emma clearly faced conflicting loyalties to truth and to her sons. Her answers indicate that she chose her words carefully in an attempt to satisfy both. For example, when asked whether there had been a "revelation on polygamy" and about "spiritual wifery," she stated: "There was no revelation on either polygamy or spiritual wives," thus denying the old John C. Bennett terms. The question had not asked about "patriarchal marriage" or the "new and everlasting covenant" or any of the other code words for the system that early church leaders had used.

Significantly, Emma's comments that followed this apparent denial of a "revelation on polygamy" did admit that Joseph had talked with her about the idea: "There were some rumors of something of the sort which I asked my husband. He assured me that all there was of it was, that, in a chat about plural wives, he had said, 'Well such a system might possibly be, if everybody was agreed to it, and would behave as they should.'" Emma then went on to assert that "He had no other wife but me," which was true in a legal sense, for no plural marriage could have been legal under Illinois law.

Pressed further as to whether Joseph might nevertheless have had "marital relations with women other than yourself," she appears to have adroitly sidestepped the issue by saying, "he did not have improper relations with any woman that ever came to my knowledge." As the authors of Mormon Enigma note: "Years earlier Emma had established that she did not pretend to have knowledge of anything that she had not witnessed herself."¹²⁵

A month after the interview, the son of Thomas B. Marsh, an early leader of the church, stopped to see Emma. When he asked her if Joseph had been a polygamist, Emma "broke down and wept, and ex-

22. Bible Communism, [4].


25. Circular 1 (Aug. 29, 1852): 170. The capitalization of the original has been eliminated in this quotation from the "Theocratic Platform."


27. Most of the studies that deal with the breakup of the Oneida Community tend toward a monicausal approach. Foote, "Oneida Community," stresses the disruptive role of the stirrups in a religious experiment; Carden, Oneida, highlights sexual conflicts over the question of which men should initiate virgins into sexual experience; Parker, Yankee Saint, places considerable stress on external factors; Olin, "Instability of Charismatic Authority," employs Weberian theories of leadership. Each of these studies provides useful perspectives for the analysis that follows, but the only comprehensive, multicausal study of the breakup with full documentation is Robertson's Oneida Community: The Breakup.

28. For a brief treatment of the stirrups experiment, see Foster, Religion and Sexuality, 118–20.

29. Robertson, Oneida Community: The Breakup, 160.


31. On the changes following the end of the communal phase at Oneida, see Pierrepoint B. Noyes, A Godly Heritage (New York: Rinehart, 1958), and Carden, Oneida.

32. Foster, Religion and Sexuality, 120–22.


8. BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

1. For a fuller treatment of any of the topics discussed here, see Foster, Religion and Sexuality, 123–80. A complementary Mormon perspective is found in Bachman, "Plural Marriage." For sources describing the Louisa Beaman marriage, see Andrew Jensen's Historical Record 5 (May 1887): 232; and the composite account in Brodie, No Man Knows My History, 465.

2. For the earliest detailed apostate critique of Joseph Smith's polygamy, see John C. Bennett, The History of the Saints; or, An Exposition of Joe Smith and Mormonism (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842). Orson Pratt's periodical The Seer contains the most detailed early defense of Mormon polygamy. For some other key accounts, see notes 5–8 in this chapter.

3. Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma. The portions of this essay dealing with Emma Hale Smith's view are heavily dominated by his path-breaking and, in my view, definitive biology.


In attempting to convey the full complexity of early Mormon polygamous development, this analysis deliberately avoids any rigorously theoretical analysis. Any highly articulated analysis would omit consideration of data not directly related to the formal concepts within which the analysis was made. Theoretical perspectives are used here to suggest ways of better understanding the phenomena rather than to restrict the range of interpretations possible.


For LDS evidence that Joseph Smith was responsible for introducing polygamy, see Joseph F. Smith, Jr. [Joseph Fielding Smith], Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage: A Discussion (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1905); Andrew Jensen, "Plural Marriage," Historical Record 5 (May 1887): 219–34; and Bachman, "Plural Marriage."

6. Among the critiques that must be considered seriously in making a historical reconstruction of the early development of polygamy, see Bennett, History of the Saints; Oliver H. Olney, The Absurdities of Mormonism Portrayed (Hancock County, III: N.p., 1843); The Nauvoo Expositor, June 7, 1844; John Hyde, Jr., Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs (New York: W. P. Fertig, 1857): T. B. H. Stenhouse, The Rocky Mountain Saints: A Full and Complete History of the Mormons (New York: D. Appleton, 1873); John D. Lee, Mormonism Unveiled; or, The Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee, ed. W. W. Bishop (St. Louis: Bryan, Brand, 1877); and Wilhelm Wyl, Joseph Smith, the Prophet. His Family and Friends: A Study Based on Facts and Documents (Salt Lake City: Tribune, 1886).

Such accounts based on firsthand documentation should not be confused with the vast body of nineteenth-century anti-Mormon treatments that are semi-novelistic in character and usually historically valueless for understanding the early development of polygamy. For this latter genre, see Leonid J. Arrington and Jon Houp, "Intolerable Zion: The Image of Mormonism in Nineteenth Century Ameri-


9. If evidence be needed that Joseph Smith had a strong sex drive, starting points are Brodie, No Man Knows My History, and Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma.


13. O'Dea, The Mormons, 53–54. T. Edgar Lyon informed me, in a letter dated May 18, 1978, of his research showing that the population of Nauvoo was second to that of Chicago in 1845.


15. This informal estimate of the number of deaths in Nauvoo was made by Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Some Thoughts Regarding an Unwritten History of Nauvoo" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mormon History Association, Nauvoo, III., Apr. 1974). In.


17. Letter of Eunice B. Shurtleff, dated Dec. 24, 1842, as recorded in Luman Andros Shurtleff, Biographical Sketch, a typescript copied from the original by the Federal Writers Project of Ogden, Utah. Copy in the Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif., 58–59.


19. The Mormon leader John D. Lee, writing after he had apostatized, noted, for example, that when the doctrine of "sealing" began to be introduced in the early 1840s, Saints were told that "they were married to each other only by their own covenants (until they were sealed under the "new and everlasting covenant"). And that if their marriage relations had not been productive of blessings and peace, and they felt oppressive to remain together, they were at liberty to make their own choice, as much as if they had not been married." Lee, Mormonism Unveiled, 146. This statement is corroborated by the statement of Lucy A. Young, wife of Brigham Young's brother Phineas, who wrote: "With a sad heart I found all the married people at liberty to choose new companions if they so desired." Lucy A. Young to Joseph III, May 22, no year, RDLS Library-Archives, cited in Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, 172.

Significantly, the only public documentation of polygamy that was put out under official Mormon auspices prior to Joseph Smith's death combined a "biblical" justification for easy divorce for dissatisfied wives with a "biblical" argument for male polygamy. Udney Hay Jacob, An Extract, from a Manuscript Entitled The Peace Maker, or The Doctrines of the Millennium . . . (Nauvoo, III.: J. Smith, Printer, 1842). See Foster, "A Little-Known Defense of Polygamy;" For evidence that much divorce or desertion and remarriage occurred both during the last years in Nauvoo and during the period at Winter Quarters in 1846–47, see Bachman, "Plural Marriage," 124–36; Richard E. Bennett, Mormons at the Missouri, 1846–1852: "And Should We Die . . . " (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1987); and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "Women at Winter Quarters; Sun
stone 8 (July–Aug. 1983): 26–39. An extreme example of the extent of such marital shifting is furnished by Heber C. Kimball, who had forty wives, most of them taken in Nauvoo, ten of whom left him, while six others remain unaccounted for in Utah. Stanley B. Kimball, Heber C. Kimball; and Foster, "Reluctant Polygamists," 20.

Foster, Religion and Sexuality, 143–46. Five revelations—and four other statements now accepted as revelation by the Utah branch of the Mormon church—were given between January 19, 1841, and July 12, 1843. Printed today as sections 124 through 132 of the LDS Doctrine and Covenants, these revelations provided the doctrinal basis for a new worldview that made possible the introduction of plural marriage.

22. Bennett, History of the Saints. Bennett’s statements, as recorded in the affidavits of women whom he allegedly seduced under the pretext of the developing polyamous beliefs, are very similar to those reported in some later Utah testimonies and affidavits. Foster, Religion and Sexuality, 316, n. 147.
28. The chief source used here for Lucy Walker’s experience is a typescript copy of her account made by the Federal Writers’ Project in 1940. Also useful is the testimony in the Complainant’s Abstract of the Temple Lot Case (Lamon, Iowa: Herald, 1893).

Some of Joseph Smith’s other plural wives for whom extensive documentation exists include Eliza R. Snow, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, Sarah Ann Whitney, Emily and Eliza Partridge, Helen Mar Kimball, and Melissa Lott. See Bachman, "Plural Marriage," 144–56.

29. Because Lucy Walker’s accounts were written many years after the events she describes, her lack of clarity in giving dates is understandable. According to Joseph F. Smith, Jr., Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage, 55, William Clayton’s Private Journal for May 1, 1843, states: "At the Temple. At 10 married

Joseph to Lucy Walker." For an unauthorized typescript version of Clayton’s journal published by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, see Clayton’s Secret Writings Uncovered: Extracts from the Diaries of Joseph Smith’s Secretary, William Clayton (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1982).

31. Typescript analysis of various characteristics of Joseph Smith’s plural wives, as indicated in the Vestra P. Crawford Papers, University of Utah Special Collections. For a more systematic assessment, see Bachman, "Plural Marriage," 104–43.
32. Compare this type of experience to conventional rites of passage as described in Arnold Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), and Turner, Ritual Process.
34. See Quinn, "Mormon Hierarchy," 246–91.
35. Historical Record 6 (May 1887): 237.
36. See Foster, Religion and Sexuality, 156.
37. Typical of such statements in the Temple Lot Case (complete transcript), 96–97, 99, Melissa Wilkes denied that she had any children by Joseph Smith, but she refused to say anything about other children that he may have had because "I told you that I couldn’t swear to any body else’s children but my own."
38. Even Joseph Smith’s acknowledged plural wives were by the names of the men whom they remarried, or, as in the atypical case of Eliza R. Snow, who was remarried to Brigham Young but had no children by him, retained their maiden names. Children born to wives of Joseph Smith who had been sealed to him for eternity bore the names of their natural fathers even though Mormon theology taught that the children would belong to Joseph Smith’s family after they died. Thus it may be assumed that if Smith had children by any of his plural wives, they would have borne the surnames of the families that reared them.
39. Conversation with James L. Kimball, Jr., regarding cases of children who appear in early Utah census records but not in those from Nauvoo. Such discrepancies could be owing to errors by the census takers, various forms of “adoption” by Mormons, or factors connected with the early development of polygamy.
40. Mary E. Rollins Lightner, Remarks at Brigham Young University, Apr. 14, 1905, typescript in Brigham Young University Archives, 5.
41. Handwritten statement by Lucy Mervine Smith, dated May 18, 1892, in the George A. Smith Papers, University of Utah Special Collections.
44. This statement is fully compatible with other Mormon and apostate accounts.
46. This letter, dated June 23, 1846, was sent by Brigham Young to his plural wife “Mrs. Hariot [sic] Cook.” On the corner of the letter, its destination is indicated as “Snow House.” Reproduced in full in Fawn M. Brodie, “A Letter from the Camp of Israel, 1846,” Princeton University Library Chronicle 33 (Summer 1971): 67–70.
47. Sarah Melissa Granger affidavit in Jenson, Historical Record, 6:232.
48. For early published accounts of these cases, see Bennett, History of the Saints, 226–52.
49. Ibid., 236–40. The discussion of the Brotherton case that follows is based on this affidavit.
57. Ibid., 312–13, n. 13, cites the Brigham Young letter.
60. Stephen Markham affidavit, Aug. 29, 1842, in Affidavits and Certificates, quoted in Bachman, “Plural Marriage,” 240. Also see Shock, Mormon Polygamy, 64–71.
63. Joseph Smith, Jr., History of the Church, 5:286.
64. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, Plural Marriage as Taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith... (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), 15. Also see the discussion of this issue in Foster, Religion and Sexuality, 317–18, n. 159.
65. This study, especially in its full manuscript version, is a true breakthrough for understanding the relationship between Joseph and Emma. With the authors’ permission, the following discussion of Emma’s reactions draws heavily on Mormon Enigma, esp. 64–67, 95–118, 130–56, 170–82, and 296–303, compressing many of the key points of this truly extraordinary analysis. The longer manuscript version of this study is available in the libraries of the University of Utah, Brigham Young University, Utah State University, and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Independence, Mo. Newell and Avery’s work superseded all previous studies of Emma Hale Smith.
66. Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, xi.
68. Brodie, No Man Knows My History, 119; Hill, Joseph Smith, 146.
69. Cowdery Letterbook, esp. the letters for Feb. 24, 1838, and Jan. 21, 1838, copies in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Also see Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to George Gibbs, one of several typescripts with alternative pagination in LDS Church Archives; and the July 1872 letter of William E. McClellan to Joseph Smith III, the original of which is in the RLDS Archives in Independence, Mo.
72. A revelation dated July 17, 1831, that Joseph Smith allegedly gave to seven elders near the boundary, west of Jackson County, Missouri, mentions the possibility of Mormon leaders marrying Indian women. That revelation, in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps in the 1850s and 1860s, goes on to mention that Phelps, who recorded the revelation, asked Joseph Smith private about three years after it was given “how we,” that were mentioned in the revelation could take wives
of the natives as we were all married men. He replied instantly 'In the same manner
that Abraham took Hagar and Ketura; that Jacob took Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah;
bysubtile—the saints of the Lord are always directed by revelation.' For a full
discussion of this document, see Foster, Religion and Sexuality, 134–35.
73. Joseph Smith, Jr., Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-Day Saints . . . (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams, 1835), 251.
74. George A. Smith, discourse of Aug. 13, 1871, JD, 14:213, cited in Bachman,
ed.), 305, n. 75; Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, 95–96.
76. Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, 98.
79. Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, 114.
80. See the brilliant analysis, ibid., 106–18, based primarily on the minutes
of the Nauvoo Female Relief Society, LDS Archives.
81. Ibid., 134–37; Beecher, Newell, and Avery, "Emma, Eliza, and the
Stairs."
82. Emily D. P. Young, "Autobiography of Emily D. P. Young," Woman's Exponent
14:37–38; Emily D. P. Young, "Incidents of the Early Life of Emily Dow Partridge.
December 1876, Salt Lake City, typescript in University of Utah Archives;
Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, 137–39.
83. Ibid., 139–42.
84. Ibid., 142.
85. Ibid., 143.
86. Historical Record, 6:240.
87. Emily Dow Partridge Smith Young, "Testimony That Cannot Be Refuted,"
Woman's Exponent, 12:64–65.
88. Emily D. P. Young, "Early Life of Emily Dow Partridge," 5.
89. Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, 147. Other plural wives included
Eliza R. Snow, Alvina Coles, Sarah Cleveland, and Sarah Ann Whitney.
90. William Clayton's statement of Feb. 16, 1874, is printed in Jensen, His-
torical Record, 6:224–26, and is most readily available in Brigham H. Roberts,
A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Century I, 6
vols. (Provo: Brigham Young Univ. Press, 1965), 2:106–7. That statement is corre-
orated in a Clayton diary entry for that date, quoted in Lyndon W. Cook, The
Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith (Provo: Seventy's Mission Bookstore, 1981),
294. Joseph Smith, Jr., History of the Church, 5:509, is the most readily accessible
source for the Smith diary reference to spending most of the following day talking
with Emma.

For the most detailed assessment of the evidence relating to the dictation
and recording of the revelation, including a photocopy of part of the first part of the
manuscript version of the revelation in Joseph Kingsbury's hand, see Bachman,
"Plural Marriage," 204–16. The other manuscript version of the revelation held in
the LDS Archives is in the handwriting of Willard D. Richards. I have carefully
examined photocopies of both these manuscript versions of the revelation in the
LDS Archives, and they appear identical in wording to the text of the version as
published in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants, Section 132.
91. For evidence of the possible Kirtland origins of much of the revelation,
see Danie W. Bachman, "New Light on an Old Hypothesis: The Ohio Origins of
the Revelation on Eternal Marriage," JM 5 (1978): 19–32; and Bachman, "Plural
92. Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, 153.
93. For example, see the statement of Joseph Lee Robinson in his periodical
94. Diary of Joseph Smith for July 15, 1843, cited in Newell and Avery,
Mormon Enigma, 154.
95. The evidence about how the original revelation may have been destroyed
is analyzed, ibid., 153–55.
96. Diary of William Clayton, Aug. 16, 1843.
97. Mormon Enigma, 158.
98. Ibid. Also see Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordin-
ances," 94–96; and David John Buerger, "The Fullness of the Priesthood: The Sec-
ond Anointing in Latter-day Saint Theology and Practice," Dialogue 16 (Spring
1983): 10–44.
99. Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, 161. Also see D. Michael Quinn,
100. Affidavit of Bartholomew W. Smith, Nov. 19, 1903, LDS Archives, cited
in Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, 172.
101. Eudocia Baldwin Marsh, "When the Mormons Dwelt Among Us," The
Bellman, Apr. 1, 1916, p. 375.
103. Ibid., 175.
104. Ibid., 178.
105. Joseph Smith III, Joseph Smith III and the Restoration, ed. Mary Audientia
107. Nauvoo Expositor, June 7, 1844. On the martyrdom, see Dallin H. Oaks
and Marvin S. Hill, Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph
Smith (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1975); and Dean C. Jessee, "Return to
109. Ibid., 33
110. Ibid., 37.
111. I am grateful to Dr. Groesbeck for sharing with me some of his unpublished papers on this topic.
112. For discussions of David Hyrum Smith's case, see Valeen Tippetts Avery, "Insanity and the Sweet Singer: A Biography of David Hyrum Smith, 1844–1904'' (Ph.D. diss., Northern Arizona Univ., 1984); Valeen Tippetts Avery, "Irreconcilable Differences: David H. Smith's Relationship with the Muse of Mormon History," JMH 15 (1989): 3–14; and Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, 288–95. Of the six other male descendants diagnosed as having mental disorders, one committed suicide at about age forty-five after showing signs of manic-depression; and another, who had been diagnosed as schizophrenic (dementia paranoidia), also committed suicide. Documents in my possession from a living associate of the Smith family. Name withheld by request.
114. For a discussion of this period of Joseph Smith's life, see the treatments in Joseph Smith, Jr., History of the Church, vols. 4 and 5; Roberts, Comprehensive History, vol. 2; Brodie, No Man Knows My History; Hill, Joseph Smith: Flanders, Nauvoo; Hansen, Quest for Empire; Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma; Foster, Religion and Sexuality, and Bachman, "Plural Marriage."
116. Although this was the emphasis in the original edition of No Man Knows My History, Brodie's "Supplement" to the second, revised and enlarged edition in 1971, 405–25, increasingly emphasizes theories of psychological disorder in trying to explain the Mormon prophet's behavior.
117. The close connection between mania and depression is one reason that the syndrome is classed as a bipoaral disorder in the psychiatric literature.
118. Mary Rollins Lightner, Remarks at Brigham Young University, April 14, 1905, 5.
120. James, Varieties of Religious Experience, 37.
121. The documentary sources relevant to this argument are John Humphrey Noyes's Confessions; and G. W. Noyes, ed., Religious Experience and John Humphrey Noyes. For scholarly analyses bearing on this point, see esp. Barkun, "John Humphrey Noyes and the Rise of Millerism," and "Visionary Experiences of John Humphrey Noyes"; and Thomas, Man Who Would Be Perfect. For the most authoritative primary evidence of Ann Lee's extraordinary mood swings, see Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee. A scholarly analysis with bearing on this topic is Garrett, Spirit Possession.
123. For the best discussion of how Emma dealt with the polygamy issue during her last years of life, see Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, esp. 296–303. The remainder of this essay draws heavily on their analysis.
125. Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma, 301–2.

9. JAMES J. STRANG