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Abstract Review of *Nauvoo Polygamy: ". . . but we called it celestial marriage"* (2008), by George D. Smith.

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Review of George D. Smith. *Nauvoo Polygamy: ". . . but we called it celestial marriage."* Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008. xix + 672 pp., with bibliography, appendixes, and index. $39.95.

> Lamentably, the field of Mormon history is saturated with those whose productivity far outstrips their ability and preparation. Even more regrettable, those who are least qualified frequently write on the most technical, sensitive, and difficult topics, with scandalous, highly publicized, and completely erroneous conclusions the inevitable result. —Andrew H. Hedges and Dawson W. Hedges[1]

The First Page

One cannot, it is said, judge a book by its cover. After reading George D. Smith's *Nauvoo Polygamy*, however, I've found that one can sometimes judge a book by its first page.[2] "Readers can judge for themselves," promises the book's dust jacket. Why it was felt

1. Andrew H. Hedges and Dawson W. Hedges, "No, Dan, That's Still Not History," review of *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, by Dan Vogel, *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 208 n. 2.

2. Given that Joseph, George D., and I all share a surname, I will refer to the author as "G. D. Smith" where necessary for clarity. Readers can take comfort in an adage of my grandfather's: "There's two kinds of people in the world—Smiths and those that wish they was."

necessary to state the obvious becomes clear upon reading the first page: this book needs judging, and as that hasn't been done by the author or the editor or the publisher, we, the poor readers (who must pay for the privilege) are obliged to do it ourselves. Fortunately, it isn't hard. Unfortunately, the author won't like it.[3]

Nauvoo Polygamy begins with an odd introduction to plural marriage—G. D. Smith makes Napoleon Bonaparte a Joseph Smith *doppelgänger* by quoting a letter from the future Emperor to Josephine about their first night together: "I have awakened full of you. The memory of last night has given my senses no rest. . . . What an effect you have on my heart! I send you thousands of kisses—but don't kiss me. Your kisses sear my blood" (p. xi).

It is neither immediately nor ultimately clear what this has to do with Joseph Smith, except that we quickly learn that Joseph Smith also once wrote a letter to a lady. G. D. Smith informs us that "Joseph Smith . . . proposed a tryst with the appealing seventeen-year-old, Sarah Ann Whitney." By now he had my attention—a new primary source about plural marriage perhaps? The text of this titillating document followed: "Come and see me in this my lonely retreat . . . now is the time to afford me succour. . . . I have a room intirely by myself, the whole matter can be attended to with most perfect saf[e]ty, I know it is the will of God that you should comfort me" (p. ix).[4]

Shocking! Not only has G. D. Smith proved at once that Joseph's spelling hadn't improved much since he allegedly made up the several-hundred-page Book of Mormon, but also that Joseph wrote this to his wife! Imagine, a man writing that to his wife! If the book's title had not alerted us, we are certainly on notice that this is about plural marriage. (G. D. Smith hopes, one suspects, that we will emphasize the word *plural* rather than *marriage*.)

Alas, this document is merely a specimen of the hoary art of selective citation and textual distortion. One must admire G. D. Smith's bravado.

3. My thanks to Robert B. White for generous feedback and to Blair Hodges, Edward (Ted) Jones, David Keller, Roger Nicholson, and Allen Wyatt for help locating some sources and drawing connections. Any mistakes and the conclusions herein remain my own.

4. Here and elsewhere original spelling has been preserved where not bracketed.

In his haste to firmly fix some naughty thoughts to Joseph's character, he neglected to include much of the letter. He didn't burden us with the fact that Joseph wrote to three people: "Brother and Sister, Whitney, and &c." Now, this is a serious omission by G. D. Smith on two counts.

First, it is a lost opportunity to show that Joseph is a bit dimwitted in the seduction business, not having figured out that an invitation for Sarah to a steamy tryst should perhaps not include her parents.

Second, from the main text we would not have learned to whom this letter was sent. (One hundred and fifty pages later, G. D. Smith admits that "Joseph judiciously addressed the letter to 'Brother, and Sister, Whitney and &c.'" but still insists that the letter is an example of Joseph "urg[ing] his seventeen-year-old bride to 'come to night' and 'comfort' him—but only if Emma had not returned" (p. 142). So G. D. Smith must have realized that this is an important bit of information. The entire letter has been available for decades. In fact, it was printed in full by Signature Books in 1995.[5]

Not content to rely on the reader's memory of 1995, I include the entire letter below. Joseph begins:

> I take this oppertunity to communi[c]ate, some of my feelings, privetely at this time, which I want **you three Eternaly to keep in your own bosams; for my feelings are so strong for you since what has pased lately between us**, that the time of my abscence from you seems so long, and dreary, that it seems, as if I could not live long in this way: and <if you> three would *come and see me in this my lonely retreat*, it would afford me great relief, of mind, **if those with whom I am alied**, do love me; *now is the time to afford me succour*, in the days of exile, for you know I foretold you of these things.[6]

G. D. Smith's distortion is apparent. Joseph does not ask Sarah to come for a tryst, but asks "if you *three*" would come. Joseph also makes it

5. Joseph Smith, *The Essential Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 166–67. I use here the version published earlier in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 538–42.

6. Italics indicate the portion quoted by G. D. Smith. The boldface text indicates my emphasis.

clear that he is not seeking romance or relief of passion, since "it would afford me great relief, *of mind*" to see those "with whom I am alied." The Prophet requests "you *three* . . . to keep in your own bosams; for my feelings are so strong for *you* [i.e., you three] since what has passed lately between us" (emphases added). One suspects Napoleon was less keen on having the whole family there for blood-searing kisses.

Joseph's letter continues:

> **all three of ~~y~~ you ~~come~~ <can> come and See me in the fore part of the night**, let Brother Whitney come a little a head, and nock at the south East corner of the house at <the> window; it is next to the cornfield, *I have a room inti=rely by myself, the whole matter can be attended to with most perfect safty, I <know> it is the will of God that you should comfort <me> now in this time of affliction*, or not at[ta]l now is the time or never, but I hav[e] no kneed of saying any such thing, to you, for I know the goodness of your hearts, and that you will do the will of the Lord, when it is made known to you; the only thing to be careful of; is to find out when Emma comes then you cannot be safe, but when she is not here, there is the most perfect safty: only be careful to escape observation, as much as possible, I know it is a heroick undertakeing; but so much the greater frendship, and the more Joy, when I see you **I <will> tell you all my plans**, I cannot write them on paper, burn this letter as soon as you read it; keep all locked up in your breasts, my life depends up=on it**. one thing I want to see you for is <to> git the fulness of my blessings sealed upon our heads, &c. you ~~wi~~ will pardon me for my earnest=ness on <this subject> when you consider how lonesome I must be**, your good feelings know how to <make> every allow=ance for me, I close my letter, I think Emma wont come tonight if she dont dont fail to come to night. I subscribe myself your most obedient, <and> affectionate, companion, and friend.[7]

7. Again, italics indicate the text cited by G. D. Smith; the boldface is my emphasis.

G. D. Smith misleads us even further when he insists (on a later page, unsourced) that "when Joseph requested that Sarah Ann Whitney visit him and 'nock at the window,' he reassured his new young wife that Emma would not be there, telegraphing his fear of discovery if Emma happened upon his trysts" (p. 65). Yet Joseph does *not* tell Sarah to knock at the window—he tells her father to do so. G. D. Smith makes the same claim again elsewhere—insisting that "writing to his newest wife," Joseph declared that "my feelings are so strong for you . . . now is the time to afford me succour. . . . I know it is the will of God that you should comfort me now" (p. 53).

G. D. Smith also uses "Comfort me now" as the subtitle for chapter 2, "Joseph's Wives" (p. 53). He later hints that Emma would have to sneak up on Joseph to check up on him, as evidenced by "his warning to Sarah Ann to proceed carefully in order to make sure Emma would not find them in their hiding place" (p. 236). Joseph's hiding place from the mob and instructions to the Whitneys have been transmogrified into a hiding place for Joseph and Sarah Ann.

G. D. Smith eventually provides the full text of this letter (150 pages after its comparison with Napoleon) but precedes it with the claim that by

> the ninth night of Joseph's concealment . . . Emma had visited him three times, written him several letters, and penned at least one letter on his behalf. . . . For his part, Joseph's private note about his love for Emma was so endearing it found its way into the official church history. In it, he vowed to be hers "for evermore." Yet within this context of reassurance and intimacy, a few hours later the same day, even while Joseph was still in grave danger and when secrecy was of the utmost urgency, he made complicated arrangements for a visit from his fifteenth plural wife, Sarah Ann Whitney. (p. 142)

Joseph's behavior is then pictured as callous toward Emma and also as evidence of an almost insatiable sexual hunger since G. D. Smith elsewhere tells us that Joseph's "summer 1842 call for an intimate visit from Sarah Ann Whitney . . . vividly substantiate[s] the

conjugal relationships he was involved in" (p. 185). G. D. Smith follows his reproduction of the Whitney letter with the claim that *Sarah Ann* was to "comfort" Joseph "if Emma not there," further reinforcing his reading (p. 147). He later uses the supposed fact that "Joseph sought comfort from Sarah Ann the day Emma departed from his hideout" as emblematic of Joseph's treatment of his first wife (p. 236). G. D. Smith's distortion of this letter to the Whitneys provides the book's *leitmotif*; it recurs throughout.

Yet, despite G. D. Smith's efforts to control how the reader sees this text, Sarah is not the only invitee or addressee: Joseph repeats himself in asking that "all three of you can come and see me." G. D. Smith hammers his view repeatedly, telling us elsewhere that "Joseph . . . pleaded with Sarah Ann to visit him under cover of darkness. After all, they had been married just three weeks earlier" (p. 53). "Elizabeth [Whitney] was arranging conjugal visits between her daughter, Sarah Ann, and [Joseph] . . . in 1842, as documented in chapter 2" (p. 366). A photograph of the letter is included, perhaps to convince us that this tale is genuine, with a caption that claims Sarah is to visit Joseph "with her parents' help, in a nighttime visit" (p. 144). Once again, there is no hint from G. D. Smith that the letter insisted all three be present for the visit.

"Did Sarah Ann keep this rendezvous on that humid summer night?" asks G. D. Smith archly. "Unfortunately, the documentary record is silent." But "the letter survives to illuminate the complexity of Smith's life in Nauvoo" (p. 54). The documentary record is not silent, however, as to why Joseph sought a visit with his plural wife *and* her parents: to "tell you all my plans . . . [and] to git the fulness of my blessings sealed upon our heads, &c." Small wonder that Joseph didn't want a hostile Emma present while trying to administer what he and the Whitneys regarded as sacred ordinances. And, it is unsurprising that he considered a single private room sufficient for the purposes for which he summoned his plural wife and her parents. Napoleon's full letter, one suspects, had far earthier priorities than Joseph's. It is a shame that G. D. Smith bemoans fragmentary documentation while simultaneously twisting the available documents.

There are more clues of Joseph's intent than G. D. Smith admits. Richard Bushman points out that the letter is "a reference perhaps to the sealing of Newel and Elizabeth in eternal marriage three days later."[8] Todd Compton notes that "this was not just a meeting of husband and plural wife, it was a meeting with Sarah's family, with a religious aspect."[9] G. D. Smith, however, never indicates that such a view is possible, much less likely.

G. D. Smith knows that the letter is addressed to all three Whitneys, and he admits as much in a later reference to the same document (p. 31).[10] Yet the full text of the letter does not appear until G. D. Smith's version has been urged at least four times (pp. ix, 53–54, 65, 142), and he returns to it again later (pp. 236, 366). And no analysis of the letter, save the small sliver of expurgated text favored by G. D. Smith, ever occurs. He has, in short, posed a passionate love letter from Napoleon with a carefully pruned text to give the false impression that Joseph was speaking in the same vein. And we are only on page 1.

8. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 473.

9. Todd M. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 350.

10. G. D. Smith reproduced *Nauvoo Polygamy*'s introduction, with minor edits, in the Council for Secular Humanism's flagship publication, *Free Inquiry*. The absence of references and the relative unfamiliarity of most of that audience with Latter-day Saint historiography assure us that his deception will be undetected, especially as most secular humanists will be ideologically predisposed to accept his account since it accords with their biases. Apparently, secular humanists tolerate distortion from authors rather more willingly than their rationalist stance would have led me to believe. See George D. Smith, "Nauvoo Polygamy: We Called It Celestial Marriage," *Free Inquiry* 28/3 (April–May 2008): 44–46, available on-line at http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=library&page=smith_28_3 (dated 4 November 2008, accessed 2 November 2008). For Smith's long-standing links to the secular humanist movement, see Louis Midgley, "George Dempster Smith, Jr., on the Book of Mormon," review of *On the Barricades: Religion and Free Inquiry in Conflict*, ed. Robert Basil, Mary Beth Gehrman, and Tim Madigan, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 5–12; and Midgley, "Atheists and Cultural Mormons Promote a Naturalistic Humanism," review of *Religion, Feminism, and Freedom of Conscience: A Mormon/Humanist Dialogue*, ed. George D. Smith, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 229–97. On Signature Books' ideological atheism, see Louis Midgley, "The Signature Books Saga," *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 361–406. Much of the work here under review is explicable, though not excusable, when G. D. Smith's evangelizing atheism and hostility to the truth claims of the Church of Jesus Christ are recognized.

Prejudicial Language

It is unfortunate that G. D. Smith succumbs to inflammatory, prejudicial, or loaded language in his account. He tells us, for example, that "Mormon communal practices extended to property as well as to marriage" (p. 11). Yet Mormon wives or husbands were not held "in common," nor were members permitted unfettered access to any and all sexual partners. This analogy confuses rather than illuminates.

G. D. Smith's biases shine through as he describes Joseph's "unsettling conversations with angels" and his "trial" for glass-looking (p. 25).[11] Joseph is said to "translate" (quotation marks in original) the plates by "use of magic stones" (p. 7). (It seems doubtful that Joseph would have labeled his seer stones as "magic," whatever a modern agnostic academic might think. G. D. Smith makes uncritical use of D. Michael Quinn's view of "magic's" role in Joseph's beginnings. Smith gives no hint of the challenges that have been raised to Quinn's speculation, its problematic areas, or even the dubious nature of the very label of "magic"—one would think there had been no discussion at all on such points. Those familiar with the literature on these points will not be misled.)[12]

11. The extant evidence demonstrates that the 1826 court case was a hearing, not a trial. While such terminology may have been appropriate in the past, the current state of the data makes it misleading. See Russell Anderson, "The 1826 Trial of Joseph Smith," FAIR Conference presentation, 2002, http://www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2002AndR.html (accessed 2 November 2008). For other references available at FAIR, see http://en.fairmormon.org/Joseph_Smith%27s_1826_glasslooking_trial (accessed 2 November 2008). G. D. Smith refers to the court visit as "a hearing" earlier on the same page, a more appropriate characterization.

12. See, for example, Richard L. Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," *BYU Studies* 10/3 (1970): 283–314; Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984): 489–560; Anderson, review of *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*, by Rodger I. Anderson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3/1 (1991): 52–80; Benson Whittle, review of *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 1st ed., by D. Michael Quinn, *BYU Studies* 27/4 (Fall 1987): 105–21; Ronald W. Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (Fall 1984): 429–59; Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (Fall 1984): 461–72; Stephen E. Robinson, review of *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 1st ed., by D. Michael Quinn, *BYU Studies* 27/4 (1987): 94–95; Stephen D. Ricks and Daniel C. Peterson, "Joseph Smith and 'Magic': Methodological Reflections on the Use of a Term," in *To Be Learned Is Good If . . .* , ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 129–47; Richard L. Bushman, "Joseph Smith's Family Background," in *The Prophet Joseph: Essays on*

G. D. Smith characterizes Joseph's refusal to allow Isaac Hale to see the gold plates as "clumsy subterfuge" (p. 27). He describes Joseph's reported revelation as coming from "an otherworldly being Smith called 'the Lord'" (p. 48) and tells us that Joseph "interrupted other activities for secret liaisons with women and girls" (p. 55). This version of Joseph is "haunted by the suspicion . . . that he crossed moral boundaries in his friendship with other women" (p. 28).

In announcing that he will vote for politicians most friendly to Latter-day Saint interests, G. D. Smith's "Joseph" is merely "feigning impartiality" before going on to practice "undemocratic block voting" (p. 68). Latter-day Saint temple rituals are stripped of context and labeled as "private meetings involving Masonic-like handshakes, oaths, and special clothing" (p. 76), featuring "vows of secrecy and threats of

the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith, ed. Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 1–18; Janet Thomas, "Magic," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, Macmillan, 1992), 2:849–50; Davis Bitton, review of *The Refiner's Fire: the Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844*, by John L. Brooke, *BYU Studies* 34/4 (1994–95): 182–92; William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton, review of Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*, *BYU Studies* 34/4 (1994–95): 167–81, and *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 3–58; John Gee, "Abracadabra, Isaac and Jacob," review of "The Use of Egyptian Magical Papyri to Authenticate the Book of Abraham: A Critical Review," by Edward H. Ashment, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 19–84; Gee, "'Bird Island' Revisited, or the Book of Mormon through Pyramidal Kabbalistic Glasses," review of *Written by the Finger of God: A Testimony of Joseph Smith's Translations*, by Joe Sampson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 219–28; Gee, "'An Obstacle to Deeper Understanding,'" review of *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, revised and enlarged edition, by D. Michael Quinn, *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 185–224; Matthew Roper, "Unanswered Mormon Scholars," review of *Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism Raised by Mormon Defenders*, *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997): 87–145; William J. Hamblin, "That Old Black Magic," review of *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View, revised and enlarged edition*, by D. Michael Quinn, *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 225–394; Rhett S. James, "Writing History Must Not Be an Act of 'Magic,'" review of *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* revised and enlarged edition, by D. Michael Quinn, *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 395–414; Mark Ashurst-McGee, "A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet" (master's thesis, Utah State University, 2000); Ashurst-McGee, "Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian," *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 34–100; Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 41–52; Larry E. Morris, "'I Should Have an Eye Single to the Glory of God': Joseph Smith's Account of the Angel and the Plates," review of "From Captain Kidd's Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni: Changing *Dramatis Personae* in Early Mormonism," by Ronald V. Huggins, *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 11–81.

blood penalties" (p. 85). Brigham Young's belief in an embodied deity means he had a "materialistic theology," a term open to misunderstanding (p. 276).[13] Parley P. Pratt's plural marriages are "theological philanderings" (p. 334). Through marriage to his first wife, Orson Hyde "acquired his own lustful spirit in Marinda Johnson" (p. 327). G. D. Smith is apparently trying to be cute, since he tells us that Hyde's 1832 journal described the Cochranites' "wonderful lustful spirit" (pp. 327, 532). What G. D. Smith does not tell us is that Hyde's attitude to the Cochranites' free love was wholly negative, as his source for the journal indicates.[14] *Wonderful* is here not being used in the sense of "excit[ing] . . . admiration" but, rather, "strange; astonishing."[15] Elsewhere anxious that we not misunderstand Victorian idiom, G. D. Smith here provides the reader no help (pp. 41–42). It is not clear that Hyde would have agreed that his marriage partook of the same "lustful spirit."

Even modern leaders are not immune to G. D. Smith's verbal shading. Ezra Taft Benson is characterized as "a correspondent of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover" (p. 351). It is not clear what relevance this has to Benson, plural marriage, or anything else, save perhaps that it associates the church president with a figure now regarded as repressive, megalomaniacal, and something of a sexual deviant.[16]

A particularly inapt metaphor compares Joseph to King David and Uriah the Hittite since Joseph "occasionally . . . sent the husband away on a mission which provided the privacy needed for a plural relationship to flower" (p. 81). Unmentioned—but perhaps not unimplied—is

13. Compare with a more informed treatment, which displays a proper grasp of the nuances in both Latter-day Saint and non–Latter-day Saint applications of the term, in Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 419–21.

14. G. D. Smith (p. 532 n. 151) quotes Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 8. Van Wagoner indicates that Hyde's journal "disdainfully described" the Cochranites' practice. Elsewhere Van Wagoner likewise notes that Hyde was "worried" by the practice: "Mormon Polygamy at Nauvoo," *Dialogue* 18/3 (Fall 1985): 69–70.

15. See Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. "wonderful," available online at http://1828.mshaffer.com/d/search/word,wonderful (accessed 4 December 2008).

16. For a biography in this vein, see Anthony Summers, *Official & Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1993).

the fact that David had already committed adultery with Bathsheba and sought to have her husband killed so he could marry her (see 2 Samuel 11). This metaphor imputes motives to Joseph where no textual evidence exists, but perhaps G. D. Smith has acquired some of the mind-reading powers vouchsafed to Fawn Brodie or Dan Vogel that have brought their opinions into question.[17]

Suppression of History?

Given the opening volley of distortion on page 1, it is no small irony that G. D. Smith then complains of the church's "suppression of information" (p. xiv)[18] about polygamy, most notably in the *History of the Church*. He argues that "[Joseph] Smith's wives remain unacknowledged in the official *History*" (p. xiii). He returns to this point repeatedly, often noting that the *History of the Church* or Joseph's diaries contain no mention of a marriage or meeting with a plural wife.[19]

G. D. Smith presumes that this official silence is due to the fact that "when polygamy went underground again, it became difficult to access records. Church leaders were less than pleased to find historians or journalists investigating this peculiar relic of the past which had become an embarrassment and was considered an obstacle to missionary efforts" (p. xvi). He thus sees a design and desire to hide or suppress the truth.

17. On Fawn Brodie, see Hugh Nibley, *No Ma'am, That's Not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie's Reluctant Vindication of a Prophet She Seeks to Expose* (1946, reissued 1959); reprinted in Hugh Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young*, ed. David J. Whittaker (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 3–45, esp. 33–35. See also Louis Midgley, "F. M. Brodie: 'The Fasting Hermit and Very Saint of Ignorance': A Biographer and Her Legend," review of *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, by Fawn McKay Brodie, *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 147–230. See also Charles L. Cohen, "No Man Knows My Psychology: Fawn Brodie, Joseph Smith, and Psychoanalysis," *BYU Studies* 44/1 (2005): 55–78. On Dan Vogel's "clairvogelance," see Hedges and Hedges, "No, Dan, That's Still Not History," 205–22; see also Larry E. Morris, "Joseph Smith and 'Interpretive Biography,' review of *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, by Dan Vogel, *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 321–74.

18. See also "suppressed history" (p. xv) and complaints that "official church texts have ignored polygamy's role in the death of the prophet and the westward migration that was forced upon the church" (p. 5).

19. For example, pp. 55, 57, 88, 99, 137, 201, 205, 209, 216.

Yet this claim is nonsensical as it applies to the *History of the Church*. Prepared mostly by secretaries and scribes, by 1854 this history had been completed up to 1 March 1843.[20] George A. Smith completed the work by 1856.[21] Although some reticence might have been expected before the public announcement of plural marriage on 29 August 1852, it makes little sense to claim that those compiling the history were trying to hide plural marriage during a historical period in which they trumpeted it.

G. D. Smith even points out that Joseph Smith's journals—which he concedes are the source for six of the history's seven volumes—contain only one mention of plural marriage, dated April 1842.[22] He complains that "the *History of the Church* deleted even that one citation" (pp. 452–53). What coherence that lone citation might have had without further primary sources is not explored. Smith also ignores the fact that the 1842 material was written well before the announcement of plural marriage, and so a lone mention of plurality would be less likely to be included. (On 16 November 1845, Willard Richards sent a letter requesting information about the period from 1843–1845, saying "I would say, that the history is written up to the year 1843."[23] Broadcasting plural marriage in 1845 Nauvoo would have been hazardous.) Richards further indicated that "important items of history have frequently been presented at too late an hour to gain an insertion" in the *History of the Church*. This suggests that its compilers saw the published history as neither complete nor exhaustive of all

20. Howard C. Searle, "History of the Church (History of Joseph Smith)," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:647–48.

21. Dean C. Jessee, "The Writing of Joseph Smith's History," *BYU Studies* 11/4 (Summer 1971): 458.

22. Some other material was used as well. For example, twenty-five entries prior to Joseph's death derive from William Clayton's diaries. See James B. Allen, review of *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton*, ed. George D. Smith, *BYU Studies* 35/2 (1995): 168.

23. Willard Richards, "An Epistle to the Saints" (16 November 1845); cited in Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, ed. Brigham H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 7:526 (hereafter *History of the Church*). My thanks to Ted Jones, master of sources, for bringing this to my attention.

important elements. But G. D. Smith provides his readers with no such perspective.[24]

G. D. Smith eventually notes (after hundreds of pages in which the absence of a given plural marriage datum from the *History of the Church* is repeatedly mentioned) that even by 1875, church leaders were aware that they had few if any supporting documents for Joseph's plural marriages. Joseph F. Smith wrote to Orson Pratt that a "few years ago [I] tried to get affidavits regarding Joseph Smith and 'celestial marriage.' . . . I was astonished at the scarcity of evidence. I might say almost total absence of direct evidence upon the subject as connected with the prophet Joseph himself."[25] If the church had scant evidence in 1875, what evidence did those compiling the history more than twenty years earlier have?

Rather than belaboring the absence of plural marriage details in the *History of the Church*—a noncontroversial point, save for those unfamiliar with Latter-day Saint historiography—it would be more useful if G. D. Smith had provided the historical or compositional context for polygamy's exclusion from that history. G. D. Smith's theory of suppression of information by an embarrassed post-Manifesto church is clearly inapplicable in the case of the *History of the Church*, since it was written before the Manifesto. Furthermore, G. D. Smith admits that only one item from Joseph's journal mentioning plural marriage was excluded. There was little to suppress.

If G. D. Smith can think of no reason to exclude an entry besides malicious intent to deceive, perhaps he can explain his own editing decision when he published the William Clayton diaries. James Allen observed that "in his abridgement, however, Smith kept only about one-sixth of the total entry. . . . By including only the somewhat

24. G. D. Smith also admits later that "efforts to suppress the story of Nauvoo until the 1852 announcement restricted the breadth and depth of the records that were kept" (p. 356). If this was true until 1852—or in 1872 for Joseph F. Smith (see below)—how much more so in 1842? It is likely that few documents were available to those compiling the *History of the Church*.

25. Joseph F. Smith to Orson Pratt Sr., 19 July 1875, Joseph F. Smith Letterbooks, Joseph F. Smith Collection, Church History Library and Archives (hereafter LDS Church Archives), p. 455; see also pp. 447–48.

titillating material and leaving out the much more important information about Clayton and what he was doing as a missionary, this 'abridgement' does little but distort the day's activity."[26]

"Like [Joseph] Smith's diaries," grouses G. D. Smith, "the official history ignored Nauvoo's increasingly public secret and was never revised" (p. 415). But the diaries were the main *source* for the *History of the Church*—thus the relative absence of details about Joseph's plural marriages is not surprising. It is unfair, then, to editorialize that polygamy "is not found in [the] official . . . expurgated *History of the Church*." One cannot expurgate what was never in the sources to begin with. The repeated mention of the history's silence is particularly disingenuous because it occurs over the course of hundreds of pages before the penultimate chapter's discussion of sources, where the raw material for an explanation of plural marriage's absence from the *History of the Church* is found—though G. D. Smith seems oblivious to the obvious answer and never connects the dots for his reader.

G. D. Smith's treatment of the *History of the Church* gives an unwarranted air of suppression to something that is unlikely to be sinister. He claims that "Mormons accepted as sufficient the explanation that Joseph Smith's death was due to an angry mob, without caring to know specifically what those Illinois neighbors had been angry about" (pp. 5, 499). Yet even B. H. Roberts's editorial introductions to the *History of the Church* (composed 1902–1932) discuss plural marriage.[27] After detailing the many factors that contributed to animosity between Illinois and the Mormons, Roberts concludes that events were "awaiting only the spark. . . . The spark came." The spark was the *Expositor*, according to Roberts, since it involved "the new marriage system, involving the practice, within certain limitations and under very special conditions, of a plurality of wives, [which] constituted a ground of appeal to popular prejudices and passions that would have been absolutely resistless if the paper had been allowed to proceed. In the presence of such difficulties, what was to be done? In addition to declaring the existence of the practice of plural marriage, not yet

26. Allen, review of *An Intimate Chronicle*, 166.
27. *History of the Church*, 5:xxix–xlvi.

announced or publicly taught as a doctrine of the Church, and agitating for the unqualified repeal of the Nauvoo charter, gross immoralities were charged against leading citizens which doubtless rendered the paper grossly libelous."[28]

This frank admission of polygamy's role in the Illinois troubles seems odd if suppression was the church's intention, especially since Roberts's edition was published *after* the disavowal of plural marriage: the period during which, G. D. Smith wishes us to believe, even acknowledging plural marriage's role in Nauvoo history was taboo (pp. 411, 499).

G. D. Smith also complains that Danel Bachman and Ron Esplin's *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* entry on plural marriage "briefly mention[s] the 'rumors' of plural marriage in the 1830s and 1840s but only obliquely refer[s] to the 'teaching [of] new marriage and family arrangements'" (p. 5). This is not a fair characterization. Bachman and Esplin note that "evidence for the practice of plural marriage during the 1830s is scant. . . . [P]erhaps the only known plural marriage was that between Joseph Smith and Fanny Alger. Nevertheless, there were rumors, harbingers of challenges to come."[29] So "rumors" are mentioned as G. D. Smith reports, but only after frankly admitting a marriage between Joseph and Fanny in the 1830s.

Bachman and Esplin then discuss further sealings for Joseph and other men during the 1840s. They also point out that "the *Nauvoo Expositor* [aimed] to expose, among other things, *plural marriage*, thus setting in motion events leading to Joseph Smith's death."[30] In addition, the cross-referenced entry for "Nauvoo Expositor" notes that the paper was published by those who

> rejected what they termed Nauvoo innovations, *notably plural marriage*. . . . The dissenters set out . . . to expose the Prophet's supposed false teachings and abominations. . . . [The destruction of the paper] played into the hands of the opposition . . .

28. *History of the Church*, 6:xxxvii–xxxviii.

29. Danel W. Bachman and Ronald K. Esplin, "Plural Marriage," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1092.

30. Bachman and Esplin, "Plural Marriage," 3:1093, emphasis added.

> and provided substance for the charges used . . . to hold Joseph Smith in Carthage Jail, where he was murdered.[31]

The entry on the martyrdom likewise argues that "other 'unorthodox' doctrines, such as . . . plural marriage, further intensified political and economic rivalries" in Nauvoo preceding the martyrdom.[32]

Finally, the plural marriage entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* provides further references for those seeking more information, including Danel Bachman's landmark master's thesis and Signature Books' anything-but-friendly *Mormon Polygamy*.[33] G. D. Smith's complaints and insinuations are neither accurate reflections of the texts he critiques nor fair.

Footnotes that aren't

"Mormons accepted as sufficient the explanation that Joseph Smith's death was due to an angry mob, without caring to know specifically what those Illinois neighbors had been angry about," writes Smith, citing five works from 1888 to 1979 (pp. 5, 449–50, n. 105). These references provide a textbook example of footnotes that do not support one's claims.

1. Contrary to G. D. Smith's claim about Roberts's *Comprehensive History*, Roberts described plural marriage, concluding, "Bearing this situation in mind, I am sure the reader will better appreciate the many complications which follow in this Nauvoo period of our history."[34] Roberts's discussion of the *Expositor* reminds the reader of "the introduction of the practice of the new marriage system of the church, permitting under special conditions a plurality of wives," and notes that the dissident paper had "charged the Prophet with exercising illegal

31. Reed C. Durham Jr., "Nauvoo Expositor," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:996–97, emphasis added.

32. Joseph I. Bentley, "Martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 860.

33. Bachman and Esplin, "Plural Marriage," 1095. See Danel W. Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Polygamy before the Death of Joseph Smith" (Purdue University, 1975); Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986).

34. Brigham H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 1965), 2:93–110.

authority, both in ecclesiastical and civil affairs; with the introduction of the plural wife system, and other supposed doctrinal heresies; with gross immoralities; and malfeasance in the administration of the affairs of the church." Roberts did not deny that errors by the Saints played a role:

> This bitterness had been created in the public mind in large part through the misrepresentations that had been made of the purposes and designs of the church leaders; in part by the unwisdom of church members, for whom no claim is made of impeccability, either in word or action; nor is absolute inerrancy in judgment and policy claimed for even the leaders of the church.[35]

2. For his claim that plural marriage was ignored as a cause of Joseph's death, G. D. Smith also cites Joseph Fielding Smith's *Essentials of Church History*. Yet Joseph Fielding Smith both admits the introduction of plural marriage by Joseph Smith and writes that the Prophet was arrested on a charge of polygamy.[36]

3. G. D. Smith's appeal to William E. Berrett's *The Restored Church* for the suppression thesis is likewise unpersuasive. In a section titled "Causes of the Conflict in Illinois," Berrett argues that one of the new doctrines that set the Saints apart

> was especially responsible for bringing persecution upon the Church. That was the doctrine of plural marriage by divine sanction. . . . In 1840, the doctrine was taught to a few leading brethren who, with the Prophet, secretly married additional wives in the following year. This secrecy could not be long kept, yet the doctrine was not openly discussed. This state of affairs gave rise to serious slander outside the Church. . . . He was convinced that the practice of the doctrine would bring

35. Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, 2:221, 227–28.

36. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History: A History of the Church from the Birth of Joseph Smith to the Present Time (1922), with Introductory Chapters on the Antiquity of the Gospel and The "Falling Away"* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1922), 282, 300–301.

> bitter persecution upon the Church and eventually cause him to lose his life. . . . The Prophet was aware that the social order he contemplated would arouse bitter opposition in Illinois. . . . *And this not because the Mormons were hard to get along with, or because non-Mormons were wicked, but because the teachings of the Church and the existing social orders were so directly in conflict.*[37]

That Berrett's work was originally published by the church's Educational Department in 1937 (a fact not noted in G. D. Smith's footnote) is significant.

4. G. D. Smith's footnote also suggests that Orson F. Whitney's biography of Heber C. Kimball supports his view. Whitney's biography tells the well-known story of Joseph requesting Vilate Kimball as his wife and introduces the martyrdom by declaring that "w*ithout doubt*, the revelation of the great principle of plural marriage was a *prime cause* of the troubles which now arose, culminating in the Prophet's martyrdom and the exodus of the Church into the wilderness."[38]

5. Finally, G. D. Smith appeals to Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton's *The Mormon Experience*. These authors again note the contribution of polygamy that G. D. Smith insists Mormon histories ignore. The following language contradicts his thesis: "An additional element [that] contributed to the Mormons' problems in Illinois—as if more were required—were the rumors of plural marriage that began to circulate in Nauvoo," and "paradoxically, continuing revelation . . . contributed to the divisions of Nauvoo because of the development during this period of certain unusual doctrines, . . . especially plural marriage." "From the first, polygamy was an explosive issue," according to Arrington and Bitton. "A scandal to non-Mormon neighbors, it also caused a number of defections within the Mormon camp even

37. William E. Berrett, *The Restored Church: A Brief History of the Origin, Growth and Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Department of Education of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Deseret Book, 1958), 247–48, 251, emphasis in original.

38. Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball, An Apostle; The Father and Founder of the British Mission* (Salt Lake City: Kimball family, 1888), 323–29, emphasis added.

before the death of Joseph Smith. . . . By the fall of 1843 the subject of plurality was on every tongue in the city." Arrington and Bitton also point out that the *Expositor* "contained inflammatory allegations about the sex lives of Mormon leaders and members."[39]

In works stretching from 1888 to 1979, and in B. H. Roberts's introduction to the *History of the Church*, the role of plural marriage in Nauvoo's troubles and Joseph's death is routinely mentioned. The cover-up is in G. D. Smith's imagination, not these volumes.[40]

Godfrey's 1967 PhD dissertation

G. D. Smith even goes so far as to claim that "one LDS Educator in 1967 wrote about the 'causes' of conflict in Nauvoo and mentioned Joseph's death as a watershed moment . . . without mentioning plural marriage." He cites the seventh chapter of Kenneth W. Godfrey's 1967 PhD dissertation for this claim.[41] This chapter is actually entitled "Plural Marriage." "As early as 1836," wrote Godfrey, the "Saints were accused of believing in plural marriage. But it was not until the Nauvoo period . . . that this doctrine and practice became a major source of non-Mormon resentment."[42] Godfrey discusses the first hints of plural marriage in 1831, the Fanny Alger marriage, and Oliver Cowdery's angry reaction.

When he treats the Nauvoo period, Godfrey notes that "by 1841 or 1842 plural marriage was secretly being practiced with increased frequency." Godfrey even follows, without comment, Brodie's exaggerated estimate of forty-nine wives for Joseph.[43] He also details

39. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-Day Saints*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1992), 55, 69, 77–78.

40. Other histories that include mention of plural marriage as contributing to the problems in Nauvoo include *Church History in the Fulness of Times, CES Manual for Religion 341–43*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 2003), 256, 263, 268, 274; Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2002), chap. 13; and Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 529.

41. See Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Causes of Mormon Non-Mormon Conflict in Hancock County, Illinois, 1839–1846" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1967). G. D. Smith's footnote (p. 450) mistakes the title, citing "Non-Mormon Conflict" instead of "Mormon Non-Mormon Conflict." Thanks to Blair Hodges for helping me locate this source.

42. Godfrey, "Conflict in Hancock County," 91.

43. Godfrey, "Conflict in Hancock County," 95.

the secrecy surrounding plural marriage and the deception used to maintain it:

> Possibly Joseph Smith, partly because of Gentile opposition, kept the doctrine as secret as possible. . . . It was kept so secret that many members of the Church denied that it was even taught. . . . Even though some members of the Church denied the existence of plural marriage, there are a number of documents to support the view that, among the faithful, many such marriages were being performed.[44]

Contrary to G. D. Smith's claim that polygamy's impact was ignored by Latter-day Saint historians, Godfrey wrote that "gradually rumors became more and more persistent regarding the Mormon matrimonial system," adding that one author "argues that 'spiritual wifery was *one of the leading causes* of the Mormon-Gentile trouble in Hancock County.'"[45] John C. Bennett and Oliver Olney had published about polygamy, and Godfrey argues that "such extensive publicity appears to have aroused the public against Mormonism and its marriage system."[46] Bennett's claim about a Cyprian order of women "available to any Mormon who desired her . . . was . . . not true but nevertheless it was somewhat effective in arousing the public mind against Mormonism."[47]

Godfrey also quotes extensively from the 25 April 1844 edition of the *Warsaw Signal* to demonstrate the animus in which polygamy was held.[48] As his narrative approaches Joseph's death, Godfrey argues that "one of the reasons for the publication of the *Nauvoo Expositor* was to publicly proclaim opposition to the plurality of wives doctrine as taught by the Prophet."[49]

> The *Warsaw Signal* listed spiritual wifeism as one of the major reasons for its opposition to the Mormons, and many claimed

44. Godfrey, "Conflict in Hancock County," 97–98.
45. Godfrey, "Conflict in Hancock County," 99–100.
46. Godfrey, "Conflict in Hancock County," 103.
47. Godfrey, "Conflict in Hancock County," 108.
48. Godfrey, "Conflict in Hancock County," 92 n. 93.
49. Godfrey, "Conflict in Hancock County," 106–7.

> that the Prophet . . . was a licentious seducer of young women. Such declarations played their role in arousing public indignation against the Mormons and their marriage system. If polygamy was not the main reason for the Mormon expulsion, at least it can safely be said that it aroused the moral indignation of many people.[50]

I risk belaboring the obvious. Contrary to what G. D. Smith asserts, Godfrey dealt with polygamy as a cause of the hostilities towards the Saints in Nauvoo. His abstract and conclusion summarize his views:

> Peculiar religious beliefs held by Latter-day Saints caused some of the difficulties they experienced in Illinois. Such doctrines as plural marriage . . . led to further hostility. . . . Perhaps in retrospect both Mormons and non-Mormons were to blame for the disharmony. . . . The Mormons . . . engaged in a marriage system held by Gentiles to be adulterous. . . . Since polygamy was unannounced yet practiced, credance [*sic*] was given to the claims of former Mormons which cast even more doubt upon the Prophet's character. It become [*sic*] almost impossible to overstress the role exscinded Mormons played in arousing people against leaders of the Church.[51]

The claim that an "LDS educator" discussed the Illinois troubles "without even mentioning plural marriage" is false. Perhaps G. D. Smith hopes his readers will not be familiar with Latter-day Saint historiography.

Progress denied

In G. D. Smith's account, plural marriage scholars have an Indiana Jones quality, being intrepid adventurers who "locat[e] primary documents—diaries and affidavits—in dusty attic spaces and from the shelves of church archives which were tended by wary gatekeepers" (p. 409). He makes use of many documents that detail Joseph's plural marriages—documents that happen to have been both preserved and

50. Godfrey, "Conflict in Hancock County," 108–11.
51. Godfrey, "Conflict in Hancock County," 2–3, 215.

published under the auspices of the church. But since these results have not been added to an updated "official" church history, this does not seem to count in G. D. Smith's ledger.[52]

Thus Andrew Jenson's *Historical Record* and his list of Joseph's plural wives give the Saints little credit since this "appeared on the downside slope of the historical peak in polygamy . . . [and] Woodruff complained to Jenson." G. D. Smith quotes Woodruff to the effect that "we do not think it a wise step to give these names to the world at the present time in the manner in which you have done. . . . Advantage may be taken of their publication and in some instances, to the injury, perhaps, of families or relatives of those whose names are mentioned" (p. 447).[53] What is not explained or acknowledged is that Woodruff's paramount concern was not to hide history or deny plural marriage (the Manifesto was three years in the future: polygamy was hardly a secret). Rather, Woodruff likely feared the very real risk of spies and government agents using the information to prosecute members of the church. At this period, women were jailed for refusing to testify against husbands; hundreds of men were in hiding or in prison. "Words are inadequate to convey the feelings of those times—the hurts to individuals and families, to the church. . . . Families were torn apart, left to provide as best they could."[54] Jenson's material, coming when it did, could have put members in danger. But G. D. Smith makes it appear that Woodruff was trying to hide the practice of plural marriage in 1887.

The church also had a large role in the production of such resources as Joseph Fielding Smith's *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* (1905), various *Deseret News* and *Women's Exponent* articles published throughout the nineteenth century, and even the modern

52. He does, however, acknowledge his debt to the church's extensive primary records and to the "highly professional team of archivists" employed there (xviii). The paradox of this acknowledgement juxtaposed with his complaints is never explained.

53. G. D. Smith cites Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 135, which includes a letter from Wilford Woodruff to Andrew Jenson, 6 August 1887.

54. S. George Ellsworth, "Utah's Struggle For Statehood," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 31/1 (Winter 1963): 66.

International Genealogy Index (IGI) and FamilySearch (pp. 447, 457). Surely none of these were suppressed after 1890.

G. D. Smith describes a sequence of plural marriage studies: Danel Bachman's Purdue thesis (1975), Lawrence Foster's *Religion and Sexuality* (1981), Van Wagoner's *Mormon Polygamy* (1986), Carmon Hardy's *Solemn Covenant* (1992), D. Michael Quinn's *Mormon Hierarchy* (1994), Todd Compton's *In Sacred Loneliness* (1997), Lyndon W. Cook's *Nauvoo Marriages, Proxy Sealings* (2004), Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera's *Nauvoo Endowment Companies, 1842–1846* (2005), and Lisle G. Brown's *Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings* (2006). "The present discussion," concludes G. D. Smith, "benefits in many ways from the entire preceding outpouring of scholarly documentation and analysis" (pp. 471–72). What he does not acknowledge, however, is that much of this "outpouring" is due in large part to the church's willingness to grant access to its archives.[55] One suspects that these authors did not get their data on Nauvoo temple work out of dusty diaries forgotten in attics. They drew extensively on the church's holdings. But this goes unacknowledged in G. D. Smith's account. Nothing seems to expiate the sin of failing to publish it all in the *History of the Church* during the mid-1800s.

G. D. Smith caricaturizes and oversimplifies a complex set of issues. The unwary reader would never know how much of our current information—including that in *Nauvoo Polygamy*—comes straight from the church archives.

Cargo Cult History—Source Problems

The forgoing lapses, beginning on page 1 and running throughout the book, even when G. D. Smith mentions scholarly work or documents that might undercut his thesis, are exemplary of a problem that plagues his work—namely, G. D. Smith does not fairly represent the sources. Richard Feynman has discussed what he calls "cargo cult science"—activities that are draped in the trappings and aura of

55. Danel Bachman told me in 2007 that he was not forbidden permission to see any document he requested in during his research on his 1975 thesis.

science but that lack the methodological rigor of true scientific investigation.[56] Smith offers what might be called "cargo cult history"—sources are appealed to and references are cited, but key points are omitted, vital assertions are undocumented, and one has the impression (but not the reality) of a careful review of the textual data. Such lapses can occur even in the work of the most careful authors. When they skew an account, we are entitled to suspect that either an author's biases are blinding him or we are being misled.

Joseph as adolescent

G. D. Smith clearly follows the Brodie tradition in painting Joseph as motivated by sexual needs. He assures us that "an examination of Smith's adolescence from his personal writings reveals some patterns and events that might be significant in understanding what precipitated his polygamous inclination" (pp. 15–16). The reader is advised to buckle her seatbelt and put on a Freud hat.

Joseph, we are told, claims that "he confronted some uncertain feelings he later termed 'sinful' [a]t a time when boys begin to experience puberty" (p. 17).[57] G. D. Smith argues that this "leav[es] us to suspect that he was referring to the curious thoughts of an intense teenager" (p. 17). G. D. Smith presumes that Joseph's later "cryptic words" describing how he "fell into transgression and sinned in many things" refer to sex.

As Sigmund Freud demonstrated, *any* narrative can be sexualized. In this case, the only evidence for a sexual component to Joseph's sins is G. D. Smith's presumption and mind reading.

He presumes that the Book of Mormon reflects Joseph's mind and preoccupations, suggesting that "an elaboration *might be* found in the Book of Mormon expressions about 'the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein' (2 Nephi 2:29)" (p. 17). Or it might not. The Book of Mormon reference to "the will of the flesh" can hardly be restricted to

56. Richard P. Feynman, "Cargo Cult Science," *Engineering and Science* 37 (June 1974): 10–13.

57. G. D. Smith cites Joseph's 1832 account in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Autobiographical and Historical Writings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:1–6.

sexual matters. $Nephi_1$ notes that if he errs in what he writes, "even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh, I would excuse myself" (1 Nephi 19:6). Surely this does not imply that Nephi's mistakes in record keeping stem from sexual sin. "By the law," we find in the chapter cited by Smith, "no flesh is justified . . . , no flesh . . . can dwell in presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah" (2 Nephi 2:4, 8). Clearly, "flesh" refers to unregenerate man, not specifically or merely to sexual sin.

The King James Bible, which inspired Book of Mormon language, likewise describes a Christian's rebirth as son of Christ as "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). Clearly, the "will of the flesh" does not refer only to sexual desire, but to any carnality of the "natural man," who is an "enemy to God" (Mosiah 3:19; 16:5). Such usage has a venerable history in Christianity; it is difficult to imagine that G. D. Smith could be unaware of this.

G. D. Smith notes that Joseph admitted to being guilty of "vices and follies" and concludes, after an exegesis from Webster's *American Dictionary*, that this phrase implied "sins great and small, which conceivably involved sex but were not limited to it" (pp. 17–18). His treatment of Webster is less than forthright. He quotes Webster's second definition of *vice* as "'every act of intemperance, all falsehood, duplicity, deception, lewdness and the like' as well as 'the excessive indulgence of passions and appetites which in themselves are innocent'" (p. 17). The first definition, however, reads simply "a spot or defect; a fault; a blemish."[58] Smith likewise characterizes folly as "an absurd act which is highly sinful; and conduct contrary to the laws of God or man; sin; scandalous crimes; that which violates moral precepts and dishonours the offender" (pp. 17–18). Yet, again, Smith has ignored an earlier definition in Webster, which describes vice as merely "a weak or absurd act not highly criminal; an act which is inconsistent with the

58. Webster, *American Dictionary*, s.v. "vice."

dictates of reason, or with the ordinary rules of prudence. . . . Hence we speak of the follies of youth."[59]

For Smith's interpretation to be viable, we must accept that in his personal histories Joseph was admitting serious or gross moral lapses. Yet there are other contemporary definitions for the terms that Joseph used—especially as applied to youth—that connote only relatively minor imperfections. Nonetheless, this dubious argument is the "evidence" that G. D. Smith adduces from Joseph's personal writings.

It is a pity that G. D. Smith did not go further in analyzing Joseph's histories. The 1838 account makes the Prophet's intent transparent:

> I frequently fell into many foolish errors, and displayed the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature; which, I am sorry to say, led me into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God. In making this confession, *no one need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins. A disposition to commit such was never in my nature*. But I was guilty of levity, and sometimes associated with jovial company, etc., not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God as I had been.[60]

Joseph explicitly blocks the interpretation that G. D. Smith wishes to advance. Why ought we to accept Joseph's 1832 witness—as warped by G. D. Smith's interpretive lens—as useful evidence while ignoring an alternative explanation supported by Joseph's other statements? G. D. Smith all but concedes this point two pages later, when he cites Joseph's characterization of his "vices and folleys" as including "a light, and too often vain mind, exhibiting a foolish and trifling conversation" (p. 20). If this is so, why attempt to sexualize Joseph's admitted imperfections? But within a few pages it has become for G. D. Smith an established fact that "another revelation, almost seeming to recall [Joseph] Smith's teenage concerns about sinful thoughts and behavior, reiterated . . . 'Thou shalt not commit adultery; and he that commiteth adultery, and repenteth not, shall be cast out' (D&C 42:24)" (p. 49).

59. Webster, *American Dictionary*, s.v. "folly."

60. Joseph Smith—History 1:28, emphasis added.

But such an analysis depends entirely on what G. D. Smith has failed to do—establish that the teenage Joseph struggled with sexually sinful thoughts and behavior.

G. D. Smith's other evidence from Joseph's teen years consists in a brief reference to the Hurlburt-Howe affidavits. Here again a lapse into a kind of cargo cult history is manifest; Smith cites works from the Signature stable of writers, with no gesture to source criticism or acknowledgement of the problematic elements in these later, hostile accounts.[61]

Joseph as early womanizer: Eliza Winters

Nauvoo Polygamy makes repeated reference to charges that Joseph attempted to seduce Eliza Winters (p. 18 n. 42, pp. 29, 232). Here again there is little effort by G. D. Smith to interact responsibly with the primary documents.

One affidavit that makes this claim was provided by Levi Lewis, Emma Hale Smith's cousin. Lewis was the son of the Reverend Nathaniel Lewis, a well-known Methodist minister in Harmony, Pennsylvania.[62] Lewis's charges came five years after Joseph's departure, insisting that both Joseph and Martin Harris had said "adultery

61. G. D. Smith cites Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990); Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994); Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003); Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004); and Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed* (Painesville [Ohio]; Ann Arbor, Michigan: printed and published by the author, 1834). There is no mention of or interaction with such critiques as Hugh W. Nibley, *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961); Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*; Richard L. Anderson, "The Reliability of the Early History of Lucy and Joseph Smith," *Dialogue* 4 (Summer 1969): 15–16; Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," *BYU Studies* 10:3 (1970): 283–314; Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," *BYU Studies* 24 (Fall 1984): 492–94; Anderson, review of *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*, by Rodger I. Anderson, *FARMS Review of Books* 3/1 (1991): 52–80; and Thomas G. Alexander, review of *Early Mormon Documents, Vol. 2*, ed. Dan Vogel, *Journal of Mormon History* 26/2 (Fall 2000): 248–52.

62. A. Brant Merrill, "Joseph Smith's Methodism?" letter to the editor, *Dialogue* 16/1 (Spring 1983): 4–5.

was no crime," with Harris purportedly admitting "he did not blame Smith for his (Smith's) attempt to seduce Eliza Winters."[63]

A look at Lewis's complete affidavit is instructive. He claimed, among other things, that

- he heard Joseph admit that "God had deceived him" about the plates and so did not show them to anyone;
- he saw Joseph drunk three times while writing the Book of Mormon;
- he heard Joseph say "he . . . was as good as Jesus Christ; . . . it was as bad to injure him as it was to injure Jesus Christ."

There are serious problems with these claims. It seems extraordinarily implausible that Joseph "admitted" that God had deceived him and thus was not able to show the plates to anyone. Joseph *had* shown the plates to people, and the Three and Eight Witnesses all published testimony to that effect. Despite apostasy and alienation from Joseph Smith, none denied that witness.[64]

63. See "Mormonism," *Susquehanna Register and Northern Pennsylvanian* 9 (1 May 1834); reprinted in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 268, and Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:296–97. Hiel Lewis (Levi's brother) repeated the same tale thirdhand decades later: Hiel Lewis, "Mormon History," *Amboy Journal* (6 August 1879); cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:314, and in Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 64.

64. For in-depth examination of the witnesses, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Attempts to Redefine the Experience of the Eight Witnesses," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/1 (2005): 18–31; Anderson, "The Credibility of the Book of Mormon Translators," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds and Charles D. Tate (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982), chap. 9; Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981); Anderson, "Personal Writings of the Book of Mormon Witnesses," *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), chap. 3; Kenneth W. Godfrey, "David Whitmer and the Shaping of Latter-day Saint History," in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Richard Lloyd Anderson, Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 223–56; Kirk B. Henrichsen, "How Witnesses Described the 'Gold Plates,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/1 (2001): 16–21; Matthew Roper, "Comments on the Book of Mormon Witnesses: A Response to Jerald and Sandra Tanner," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 164–93; Milton V. Backman Jr., *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1983); John W. Welch, ed., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2005), 76–213.

If Joseph *were* drunk during the translation of the Book of Mormon, this only makes its recovery even more impressive. But this sounds like little more than idle talk designed to bias readers against Joseph as a "drunkard." Joseph's letters and life from this period make it difficult to believe that he would claim he was "as good as Jesus Christ." His private letters reveal him to be devout, sincere, and painfully aware of his dependence on God.[65] Three of the charges that are unmentioned by G. D. Smith's account thus seem implausible.[66] They are clearly efforts to paint Joseph in a bad light: they make him a pretend prophet who also thinks he's better than Jesus, who admits to being deceived, and who gets drunk.

What can we make of the claim that Martin Harris and Joseph claimed that adultery was no crime and that Joseph attempted the seduction of Eliza Winters? Recent work has expanded our knowledge of Winters. She was a young woman who attended a meeting on 1 November 1832 in Springville Township, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. While on a preaching mission with his brother Emer, Martin Harris announced that Eliza "has had a bastard child." Eliza sued Martin for slander, asking for one thousand dollars for the damage done to her "good name, fame, behavior and character" because his words "render her infamous and scandalous among her neighbors." Martin Harris won the suit; Eliza did not prove slander, likely because she had no good character to sully.[67] This new information calls the Lewis affidavit into even greater question. We are to believe that Martin, who risked and defended a defamation suit for reproving Eliza for fornication, thinks that adultery is "no crime"?

G. D. Smith claims much later that Eliza Winters "perhaps did not" resist Joseph's advances "but apparently talked about it all the same"

65. See remarks in this vein in Paul H. Peterson, "Understanding Joseph: A Review of Published Documentary Sources," in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, the Man*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 110.

66. G. D. Smith is not the first to report Lewis's claims of seduction without addressing the problems in his other statements. See Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 4–5.

67. Mark B. Nelson and Steven C. Harper, "The Imprisonment of Martin Harris in 1833," *BYU Studies* 45/4 (2006): 113–17. My thanks to David Keller for bringing the article to my attention in this context.

(p. 232). But there is no record of Eliza talking about it at all, and she had ample opportunity to do so. Eliza clearly has no reason to like Joseph or the Saints. Why did she not provide Hurlburt with an affidavit regarding Joseph's scandalous behavior? Around 1879 Eliza gave information to Frederick Mather for a book about early Mormonism.[68] Why did she not then provide testimony of Joseph's attempt to seduce her?

It seems more likely that Eliza was known for her low morals and that her name became associated with the Mormons in popular memory since she had been publicly rebuked by a Mormon preacher and lost her court suit against him. When Levi Lewis was approached by Hurlburt for material critical of Joseph Smith, he seems to have drawn on this association.

Joseph as womanizer: Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde

G. D. Smith continues his efforts to paint Joseph as a womanizer. He reports that "rumors may have been circulating already as early as 1832 that Smith had been familiar with fifteen-year-old Marinda Johnson. . . . Smith was dragged out of the house by Marinda's brothers, who tarred and feathered him. No contemporary documentation explicitly attributes this violent act to an insult against the girl's virtue, but this was the explanation that was later given to it" (p. 44). Once again, G. D. Smith does not reveal the full extent of the available data. This was not *the* explanation given, but *an* explanation. G. D. Smith tends to cache caveats in his footnotes; he uses the same tactics as Van Wagoner, who admits in his endnotes that it is "unlikely" that "an incident between Smith and Nancy Johnson precipitated the mobbing," while his main text simply tells the mobbing story as evidence for Joseph's early women troubles.[69]

G. D. Smith's equivocating note admits that "Van Wagoner . . . and Compton . . . argue that the mobsters . . . reacted to financial

68. John Phillip Walker, ed., *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence and a New History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 242 n. 42; Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:297, 345–60. The original is Frederick G. Mather, "The Early Mormons. Joe Smith Operates at Susquehanna," *Binghamton Republican* (29 July 1880).

69. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 4 n. 4. In a later work, he argues that Sidney was the main focus of the attack. See Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 108–18.

shenanigans, not to indiscretions with their sister. In defense of this position, Van Wagoner and Compton point to the fact that Sidney Rigdon was also tarred and feathered that night" (p. 44 n. 100). Once again, however, G. D. Smith fails to mention the strongest arguments advanced by those who disagree with him. He provides no citation for the explanation that he adopts. The roots for this kind of thing are in Brodie, who relied on a late, secondhand account from Clark Braden. A member of the Church of Christ, the "Disciples," Braden was clearly a hostile witness seeking to attack the Reorganized (RLDS) Church.[70] The account is further flawed because Marinda apparently didn't have a brother named Eli, contrary to Braden's account.[71]

G. D. Smith also fails to disclose that there are two other late anti-Mormon sources that do not agree with the "Joseph as womanizer" version. Symonds Ryder, the leader of the attack, said that the attack occurred because of "the horrid fact that a plot was laid to take their property from

70. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 230–32. Compare Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2d. ed. rev. (New York: Knopf, 1971), 119. Brodie's other reference is an error; she cites Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 9:3–4 (15 November 1864); the correct citation is George Albert Smith, "Historical Discourse," reported by G. D. Watt, *Journal of Discourses*, 11:4–6 (15 November 1864). There is nothing in this account about an insult to Miranda's honor. The full citation for Braden's claim is Clark Braden and E. L. [Edmund Levi] Kelley, *Public Discussion of the Issues between the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Church of Christ (Disciples), Held in Kirtland, Ohio, Beginning February 12, and Closing March 8, 1884, between E. L. Kelley, of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and Clark Braden, of the Church of Christ* (St Louis, MO: C. Braden, 1884), 202.

71. Compton notes this, as does Van Wagoner in a footnote. Ronald V. Huggins, "Joseph Smith's 'Inspired Translation' of Romans 7," *Dialogue* 26/4 (Winter 1993): 180–81 n. 59, relies on Van Wagoner but argues that Joseph's own account (found in William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, eds., *Among the Mormons* [New York: Knopf, 1969], 67) mentions an Eli being present at the attack. *History of the Church*, 1:260; the *Times and Seasons* 5/15 (15 August 1844): 611–12; and *Journal of Discourses*, 11:4, all mention Eli Johnson but do not identify him as related to Miranda. Johnson is not present in any of the scholarly versions of Joseph's papers such as Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*; Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*; or Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1987). It is not clear to me what the origin of Eli's inclusion is; the *Times and Seasons* version was published after Joseph's death and seems to be the source for subsequent versions. Perhaps Eli was not Miranda's brother—there are almost as many Johnsons as Smiths. Brodie may have simply presumed a blood relationship where there was none.

them and place it under the control of Smith."[72] The Johnson boys are not portrayed either as leaders or as particularly hostile to Joseph. It is also unlikely that the mob would attack Sidney Rigdon as well as Joseph if the issue was one of their sister's honor, yet as Rigdon's son told the story, Sidney was the first target and received much harsher treatment:

> the mob came and got Rigdon first. He was a man weighing about 225. As they draged [*sic*] him some distance over the frozen ground by his heels bumping the back of his head so that when they got him to the place where they were to put the tar and feathers on him he was insensible. They covered him with tar and feathers and pounded him *till they thought he was dead* and *then* went to get J. Smith. . . . The mob covered him with tar and feathers and pounded him *till they got tired* and left them both on the ground. J. Smith soon after the mob left got up and went home not very badly hurt.[73]

Sidney was attacked until the mob thought he was dead; Joseph seems almost an afterthought in this version: someone they will pound until they are tired, while Sidney was beaten until thought dead.

Finally, G. D. Smith neglects to mention Marinda's own witness about Joseph's behavior. She had had difficulties with plural marriage, but many years later she would still testify: "Here I feel like bearing my testimony that during the whole year that Joseph was an inmate of my father's house I never saw aught in his daily life or conversation to make me doubt his divine mission."[74]

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72. Symonds Ryder, "Letter to A. S. Hayden," 1 February 1868, in Amos S. Haydon, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve* (1876); cited by Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 114–15. A second account is also cited by Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 692: S. F. Whitney [a reverend, he was the brother of Newell K. Whitney], in Arthur B. Demming, ed., *Naked Truths About Mormonism* 1 (January 1888): 3–4.

73. John M. Rigdon, "Lecture Written by John M. Rigdon on the Early History of the Mormon Church," 9; transcript from *New Mormon Studies CD-ROM*, Smith Research Associates, 1998 (emphasis added). See also John Wickliffe Rigdon, "The Life and Testimony of Sidney Rigdon," *Dialogue* 1/4 (Winter 1966): 18–42, esp. 25–26.

74. Marinda Hyde interview, cited in Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (New York: 1877), 404. G. D. Smith mentions Joseph's residency in the Johnson home on page 116 but likewise says nothing of Marinda's testimony regarding Joseph's behavior.

Joseph as womanizer: Fanny Alger

G. D. Smith's thesis is that Joseph was sexually driven since his teen years. This makes the Fanny Alger case a particularly juicy data point. "Todd Compton has assembled the most complete documentation regarding Joseph and Fanny's relationship," notes Smith in a footnote. "However, I hesitate to concur with Compton's interpretation of their relationship as a marriage" (pp. 38–39 n. 81).

Here again, while G. D. Smith mentions an alternative view and *some* of the evidence used by those with whom he disagrees, he omits what I consider the strongest arguments. He cites Warren Parrish, Oliver Cowdery, William McLellin, Chauncey Webb, Andrew Jenson, Heber C. Kimball, and Joseph F. Smith (p. 39). He virtually ignores, however, the data that Compton clearly considers the most important—the Mosiah Hancock autobiography, in which Hancock reports that "Father gave her [Fanny] to Joseph repeating the Ceremony as Joseph repeated to him."[75] In addition, he ignores other data cited by Compton, including Ann Eliza Young's report that Fanny's "parents . . . considered it the highest honor to have their daughter adopted into the Prophet's family, and her mother has always claimed that she [Fanny] was sealed to Joseph at that time."[76] In a private letter, Ann Eliza reiterated her conviction that such relationships were formally sanctioned: "I do not know that 'sealing' commenced in Kirtland but I am perfectly satisfied that something similar commenced, and my judgement is principally formed from

75. Mosiah F. Hancock, Autobiography, MS 570, LDS Church Archives, 61–62; Todd Compton, "Fanny Alger Smith Custer: Mormonism's First Plural Wife?" *Journal of Mormon History* 22/1 (Spring 1996): 189–90. G. D. Smith says only (in a footnote) that "Compton, *Sacred Loneliness*, 33, 646, draws from a late reminiscence by Mosiah Hancock to suggest that Smith married Alger in early 1833" (p. 41 n. 90). This neither engages nor does justice to Compton's argument. See Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 25–42, 643–45, and discussion in Richard L. Anderson and Scott H. Faulring, "The Prophet Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives," *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): 67–104. G. D. Smith also ignores Hancock in his first footnote, arguing that there is no "documented" marriage before Louisa Beaman (p. 1 n. 1).

76. Ann Eliza Young, *Wife No. 19, or the Story of a Life in Bondage, Being a Complete Exposé of Mormonism, and Revealing the Sorrows, Sacrifices and Sufferings of Women in Polygamy* (Hartford, CT: Custin, Gilman & Company, 1876), 66–67. G. D. Smith cites page 72 of this work but ignores the material at p. 61 n. 14 that bears on Fanny.

what Fanny Algers [*sic*] told me herself concerning her reasons for leaving 'sister Emma.'"[77] These are secondhand accounts since Ann Eliza was not born until Nauvoo, but so are both of the McLellin accounts cited by G. D. Smith (pp. 42–43).

While he spends considerable time on the McLellin letters, G. D. Smith never comes to grips with some of the difficulties identified by Compton and others.[78] These issues are worthy of consideration in some detail.

With a lone exception, there is no account after Joseph's death of Emma admitting Joseph's plural marriages in any account.[79] The reported exception is recorded in a newspaper article and two letters written by excommunicated Latter-day Saint apostle William E. McLellin.[80] McLellin addressed the letters to Emma's son, Joseph Smith III. The former apostle claimed to have visited Emma in 1847 and to have discussed Joseph's relationship with Fanny Alger.

77. Ann Eliza Webb to Mary Bond, letter (4 May 1876) in Myron H. Bond Collection, P21, f11, RLDS Library-Archives; cited in Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 645.

78. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 26–36, 642–46; and Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 225 n. 227.

79. D. Michael Quinn says that this account was "her only post-1844 admission of her husband's polygamous arrangements." As will be seen, I believe Quinn (like G. D. Smith) gives it far too much credence. See D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1994), 147. Quinn also neglects to mention a possible second reference to Joseph's marriages by Emma. "Joseph Coolidge, onetime executor of Joseph [Smith]'s estate, told Joseph F. Smith that Emma 'remarked to him that Joseph had abandoned plurality of wives before his death.' Smith said that Coolidge told her she was wrong. 'She insisted that he had, Coolidge insisted that he . . . knew better.' Coolidge told Joseph F. Smith that at this news Emma responded, '[Then] he was worthy of the death he died!'" This is a thirdhand source at best; if accurate it suggests that Emma was admitting that she knew of Joseph's practice, even if she believed he had eventually discontinued it. Joseph F. Smith interview with Joseph W. Coolidge, Joseph F. Smith diary, 28 August 1870; cited in Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 292. See also Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 238.

80. In a disturbing example of failing to adequately characterize a source, Newell and Avery describe McLellin as "a member of the Twelve [who] wrote in an 1872 letter" about Fanny. These authors fail to inform the reader that McLellin was excommunicated for apostasy and immoral behavior and had not been an apostle for more than thirty years. See Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 65.

Letter No. 1—1861

McLellin's first letter to Joseph Smith III arrived soon after he assumed the duties of RLDS Church president on 6 April 1860.[81] Joseph Smith III began his tenure as president by declaring that his father could never have been involved with plural marriage.[82] When McLellin heard of his stance, he wrote the new leader:

> I do not wish to say hard things to You of your Father, but Joseph, if You will only go to your own dear **mother**, she can tell You that he believed in Polygamy and practiced it long before his violent death! That he delivered a revelation sanctioning, regulating, and establishing it. . . . Your Mother told me these items when I was in Nauvoo. I am not dealing in fictions, nor in ill founded slanders.[83]

McLellin wanted Joseph III to confront Emma and seemed to hope he would learn the truth from her.

Letter No. 2—July 1872

Eleven years later, McLellin wrote Joseph Smith III a second letter, asserted Joseph's polygamous teachings, and urged him to ask his "own dear Mother for the truth." McLellin claimed that Emma would confirm his story, "if you ask her," for "Can you dispute your dear Mother?" To believe otherwise, insisted the former apostle, "I would have to believe your Mother a liar, and that would be hard for me to do, considering my acquaintance with her." McLellin recounted a story that he attributed to Frederick G. Williams, an excommunicated member of the First Presidency. McLellin claimed that Joseph had

81. Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 271–72; Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 115–22.

82. Joseph Smith III, *True Latter Day Saints' Herald* 1 (May 1860): 103; cited in Launius, *Pragmatic Prophet*, 199. (The occasion was Joseph III accepting leadership of the RLDS Church on 6 April 1860 at Amboy, Illinois.)

83. William E. McLellin to Joseph Smith III, letter, Linden, Genesse Co., Michigan (10 January 1861): 2, in RLDS Library-Archives; reproduced in William E. McLellin, *The William E. McLellin Papers, 1854–1880*, ed. Stan Larson and Samuel J. Passey (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007), 441–42 (emphasis in original); portions also cited in Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 274.

been caught in immoral behavior with a "Miss Hill" in late 1832.[84] According to McLellin, Emma called Williams, Oliver Cowdery, and Sidney Rigdon to help settle the matter. McLellin insists that "she told me this story was true!!"

McLellin also reported a tale he had heard about Joseph and Fanny Alger. He claimed that Fanny and Joseph were in the barn and Emma "looked through a crack and saw the transaction!!! She told me this story too was verily true."[85] In this letter, McLellin upped the ante, adding disturbing details that he claims Emma verified in 1847. He wanted Joseph III to confront his mother about at least two women with whom he claims the Prophet was involved.

Newspaper—October 1875

McLellin also repeated his charges to a newspaper reporter who claimed that McLellin described how "[t]he 'sealing' took place in a barn on the hay mow, and was witnessed by Mrs. Smith through a crack in the door! . . . Long afterwards when he visited Mrs. Emma Smith . . . she then and there declared on her honor that it was a fact—'saw it with her own eyes.'"[86]

It is interesting that McLellin's account here refers to the Fanny Alger incident as "where the *first* well authenticated case of polygamy took place."[87] Gone is McLellin's claim that a "Miss Hill" existed and caused problems prior to Fanny. "Miss Hill" is otherwise unmentioned in either friendly or hostile sources, and some authors—like G. D. Smith—try to paper over this discrepancy by suggesting that McLellin got confused in his "old age" and mistook "Fanny Hill" in John Cleland's 1749 novel for "Fanny Alger."[88] This is unpersuasive

84. McLellin told Joseph Smith III that it happened "at your birth," that is, around 6 November 1832.

85. William E. McLellin to Joseph Smith III, letter, Independence, Jackson County, Missouri (July 1872): 1–2, in RLDS Library-Archives; reproduced in McLellin, *McLellin Papers*, 483–95; portions also cited by Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 291.

86. McLellin to *Salt Lake Tribune* (6 October 1875); cited in Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 66; also cited in part by Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 5.

87. McLellin to *Salt Lake Tribune* (6 October 1875), emphasis added.

88. Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 66; Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 41 n. 90.

since McLellin tells *both* stories in the 1872 letter.[89] His accounts are mutually contradictory on this point.

This discrepancy calls McLellin's accuracy into question. In 1872 he told Joseph Smith III that Emma had confirmed both accounts, but in 1875 he described the second account as "the first well authenticated case." One suspects that McLellin's authentication may be lacking overall. McLellin is a late (second- or thirdhand), antagonistic witness whose story seems to vary in the telling. Can anything else help us assess other parts of the story?

Examining the witness: McLellin

McLellin insisted that Emma Smith confirmed these tales in 1847. Yet this is a strange occurrence—there is virtually no other record of Emma admitting, following Joseph's death, that he even taught plural marriage. Emma and Joseph Smith III would go to their graves denying that Joseph had anything to do with the practice. But we are expected to believe that she confirmed these events to McLellin, who had no personal knowledge of them but was misled, merely repeating secondhand gossip. Emma did more (in McLellin's retelling) than confirm that Joseph practiced plural marriage—she verified a version of events that would have been intensely shameful for her personally and that sullied her dead husband's memory.

Was McLellin the sort of man to whom she would have unburdened herself? To begin to answer this, we must briefly revisit McLellin's history in and out of the church. McLellin was baptized 20 August 1831 and was ordained an elder four days later.[90] On 25 October he received a revelation via Joseph Smith in which he was warned: "Commit not adultery—a temptation with which thou hast been troubled."[91] McLellin did not take this advice and was excommunicated in December 1832 for spending time with "a certain harlot"

89. See Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 5 n. 7.

90. Unless otherwise noted, biographical information on McLellin is from Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith: A Historical and Biographical Commentary of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Seventy's Mission Bookstore/Deseret Book, 1985).

91. Doctrine and Covenants 66:10; *History of the Church*, 1:219–21.

while on a mission.[92] Rebaptized in 1833, he was ordained an apostle on 15 February 1835. His problems continued. He was disfellowshipped in 1835 for writing a letter that "cast . . . censure upon the [first] presidency." Reinstated on 25 September 1835, he attended the Kirtland Temple dedication but had lost confidence in the church leadership by August 1836. At his 11 May 1838 excommunication hearing, "he said he had no confidence in the presidency of the Church; consequently, he had quit praying and keeping the commandments of the Lord, and indulged himself in his sinful lusts. It was from what he had heard that he believed the presidency had got out of the way, and not from anything that he had seen himself."[93]

It seems that McLellin had difficulty with adulterous behavior. He also frequently disagreed with church leaders and did not hesitate to criticize them publicly. His penchant for believing and acting on secondhand information—as in the report about "Miss Hill" from Frederick G. Williams—was already apparent, since he attacked the First Presidency for what he had *heard,* not for what he personally had witnessed.

McLellin's later life found him bouncing from one Mormon splinter group to another. He gave early support to James J. Strang but later distanced himself when it became clear that he would not get a leadership position. In a public debate with Strang, McLellin denied ever having been friendly with Strang or well-disposed toward his claims. In response, Strang produced three letters written by McLellin, which he proceeded to read. The letters "ended the debate quickly, and McLellin never mentioned these matters again, even in his own publications. . . . In their debate Strang exploited the content of those letters to demonstrate that McLellin's verbal and other published statements were at total variance with the reality suggested in the letters."[94] Clearly, then, McLellin was perfectly willing to fib to others in furtherance of his

92. Quinn, *Origins of Power*, 44.

93. "History of William E. McLellin," *Millennial Star* 26 (1864): 808; see also *History of the Church*, 3:31.

94. See Richard P. Howard, "William E. McLellin: 'Mormonism's Stormy Petrel'," in *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History*, edited by Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1994), 86–8.

religious goals. He lied about conversations he had had with Strang only to have his own letters prove his duplicity.

Emma Smith and McLellin

Following his excommunication, McLellin played an active role in mobbing and robbing the Saints. Joseph was taken to Liberty Jail, and Emma returned home to find that she had been robbed of everything. A contemporary journal records that McLellin "went into brother Joseph's house and commenced searching over his things . . . [and] took all his [jewelry] out of Joseph's box and took a lot of his cloths [*sic*] and in fact, plundered the house and took the things off." When Emma asked McLellin why he did this, McLellin replied, "Because I can." This theft affected Emma profoundly. She received word that Joseph was suffering greatly from the cold in Liberty Jail, and he asked her to bring quilts and bedding. "Sister Emma cried and said that they had taken all of her bed cloths [*sic*] except one quilt and blanket and what could she do?" Emma sought legal redress but recovered nothing.[95]

McLellin's offenses against Joseph extended beyond robbing his family:

> While Joseph was in prison at Richmond, Missouri, McLellin, who was a large and active man, went to the sheriff and asked for the privilege of flogging the Prophet. Permission was granted on condition that Joseph would fight. The sheriff made known to Joseph McLellin's earnest request, to which Joseph consented, if his irons were taken off. McLellin then refused to fight unless he could have a club, to which Joseph was perfectly willing; but the sheriff would not allow them to fight on such unequal terms.[96]

If we accept the late, secondhand accounts of McLellin as reliable, we must accept that Emma made her (only?) admission of Joseph's

95. Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 77–8; citing Journal of John Lowe Butler, LDS Church Archives, 20; punctuation added and tense changed by authors to accommodate dialogue; see also *History of the Church*, 3:286–88.

96. "History of William E. McLellin," *Millennial Star* 26 (1864): 808.

plural marriages to a man who had robbed her and her family and had saucily insisted that he did so merely because they could do nothing to stop him. While her husband froze in Liberty Jail, Emma had to worry about her children going cold because McLellin had stolen their bedding.

It seems an enormous leap of faith in McLellin—who clearly does not deserve such faith—to presume both that he was truthful and that Emma disclosed humiliating details about Joseph and Fanny to him of all people. Todd Compton acknowledges that McLellin may have "'bent' the truth in this case," but if the account is false, the truth has not been bent but shattered.[97]

It is worth noting that some, such as Michael Quinn, have argued that after Joseph's death Emma had a high opinion of McLellin. Quinn writes that "[i]ronically between his receipt of these two letters, Emma . . . wrote Joseph Smith III on 2 February 1866 and highly praised McLellin."[98] Quinn reads too much into his source or does not represent it properly. Emma's exact words were "I hope that Wm. E. McLellin will unearth his long buried talents, and get them into circulation before it is everlastingly too late . . . for he is certainly a talented man."[99] This does not strike me as high praise. It sounds instead as if Emma is claiming that McLellin had great potential but that he has squandered it or left it untapped.

Other hostile accounts

There is another version of the relationship between Fanny and Emma. It relies on a much later account attributed to Chauncey G.

97. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 35. See also Compton, "Fanny Alger Smith Custer," 197 n. 170: "In the aggregate, these stories [Fanny Brewer, cited in Bennett's *History of the* Saints; McLellin's 1872 account of Miss Hill; and Martin Harris's posthumously published and attributed claim in *Ten Years Before the Mast*] establish only that three individuals were willing to publish their belief that Joseph Smith had been sexually involved with a woman other than his wife during the Kirtland period; but no one story is completely convincing."

98. Quinn, *Origins of Power*, 147, footnote text.

99. Emma Smith to Joseph Smith III, 2 February 1866, RLDS Library-Archives; cited in Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 291. Newell and Avery likewise believe this "reinforced McLellin's credibility." As noted in the main text, I disagree.

Webb,[100] whose account was first given in the notoriously anti-Mormon Wilhelm Wyl's 1886 work. Wyl had Webb claim that Joseph "was sealed there [in Kirtland] secretly to Fanny Alger. Emma was furious, and drove the girl, who was unable to conceal the consequences of her celestial relation with the prophet, out of her house."[101] Webb's daughter, Ann Eliza, added a few details, claiming that "it was with a shocked surprise that the people heard that sister Emma had turned Fanny out of the house in the night."[102]

As a source, Wyl cannot be used without the greatest care. On the same page as Webb's account, Wyl has another witness imply that Joseph concocted the idea of plural marriage while consorting with Latter-day Saint females at a brothel. Such a claim is absurd. Compton insists that although Webb might be mistaken about the pregnancy, "this seems unlikely, if Fanny lived in his home after leaving the Smith home."[103] Compton does not acknowledge that Webb need not have been mistaken—he might have simply lied, and he had reason to do so. By contrast, G. D. Smith, after quoting Webb, says only that "there is no evidence to corroborate the claim that Fanny was pregnant,"

100. As noted above, Webb's daughter, Ann Eliza Webb Young, made similar claims, but she should not be regarded as an independent witness—born in 1844, she can be a witness only to what her family later said about Joseph and Fanny. Compton claimed that Ann Eliza "was nevertheless an eyewitness to the latter part of the Smith/Alger story" (Compton, "Fanny Alger Smith Custer," 192). Ann Eliza's birth in 1844, well after Fanny's remarriage to a non-Mormon and settlement in Indiana in November 1836, precludes her being anything but a secondhand witness of her parents' account. See Young, *Wife No. 19*, 33. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 645, corrects this error. By contrast, Smith cites Ann Eliza for events that occurred in 1842 and then adds a footnote claiming that "some of the events she related depended upon the 'experience of those so closely connected with me that they have fallen directly under my observation.'" Smith does not explain how events two years prior to her birth qualify as being under her observation (Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 263 n. 254).

101. Wilhelm Wyl [Wilhelm Ritter von Wymetal], *Mormon Portraits Volume First: Joseph Smith the Prophet, His Family and Friends* (Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing and Publishing Co., 1886), 57. This reference is used by G. D. Smith on p. 42 of *Nauvoo Polygamy*.

102. Young, *Wife No. 19*, 66.

103. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 35. See also discussion of Webb's testimony in Compton, "Fanny Alger Smith Custer," 194–95.

but this soft-pedals the evidence (p. 42). There is reason to *doubt* this claim, not merely to regard it as unconfirmed.

Webb was in a position to know about Fanny's pregnancy, so why does he tell us nothing else? Why do we hear no tragic tale about the despoiled maiden's child being stillborn or the heartrending scene of the mother required to give up the Prophet's bastard offspring for someone else to raise in secret? Either scenario would have suited the tone and tastes of the late-nineteenth-century exposé in which Webb's words appeared. The opportunities for him to use his "knowledge" are legion, and yet Webb simply teases his audience with a sly hint and drops the matter.

Even Ann Eliza, who should have known if Webb knew, leaves the explosive matter of a child by Joseph unmentioned—a curious omission since the purpose of both accounts is to attack Joseph's character. Her account is also questionable because it portrays Oliver Cowdery as a staunch ally in Joseph's deception, while Oliver's hostility on the subject of Fanny is based on contemporary documents.[104] Ann Eliza's version does not agree with McLellin's "Miss Hill" account in his 1872 letter either—McLellin claimed that Cowdery, Frederick G. Williams, and Sidney Rigdon were all called in to help calm Emma. But in McLellin's version, both Emma *and* Oliver eventually "forgave him,"[105] implying that both had to be placated, while Ann Eliza has Oliver worried about his own polygamy being exposed. Even if we assume that "Miss Hill" existed—an existence attested to by no other source and contradicted by McLellin's other accounts—why would Oliver be upset about "Miss Hill" and worried about exposure in the case of Fanny?

Despite the use made of him by G. D. Smith and others, McLellin is clearly a witness who cannot be accepted without great caution. At

104. Young, *Wife No. 19*, 66–7. Oliver Cowdery to "Dear Br. Warren [Cowdery]," letter (21 January 1838), Cowdery Letterbook, 80–3, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California; transcript in "Letters of Oliver Cowdery," *New Mormon Studies CD-ROM: A Comprehensive Resource Library* (Smith Research Associates, 1998).

105. William E. McLellin to Joseph Smith III, letter, Independence, Jackson County, Mo. (July 1872): 2 in RLDS Library-Archives; reproduced in McLellin, *McLellin Papers*, 488–89.

best his report likely draws on second- or thirdhand gossip. I doubt that Emma ever confirmed the stories he tells. The Webbs are likewise hostile witnesses—as members in Ohio, they took Fanny Alger into their home and yet said nothing about these events (including Fanny's supposed pregnancy) to anyone for decades. These supposedly scandalous events were not enough to keep Chauncey Webb from following Joseph to Nauvoo and the Saints to Utah.

Is there, then, no truth at all to these accounts? One corroborated detail comes from Benjamin F. Johnson, who repeated Warren Parrish's claim that Oliver Cowdery and Parrish had known that Joseph was involved with Fanny since "they were spied upon and found together."[106] This version says nothing about Emma and contains none of the details contained in McLellin's or the Webbs' accounts.

G. D. Smith avoids labeling Fanny a wife since this weakens his thesis that Joseph was sexually driven. He quotes Johnson as saying that Joseph had "Fanny Alger as a wife." Anxious to protect his theory, G. D. Smith informs his readers that this phrase "employs a Victorian euphemism that should not be construed to imply that Fanny was actually married to Joseph" (pp. 41–42). Yet it is not clear why we should not so construe it. G. D. Smith does not tell us that Johnson then insisted that "without a doubt in my mind, Fanny Alger was, at Kirtland, the Prophet's first plural wife."[107] G. D. Smith provides no evidence or citation to enforce his reading over Johnson's clear view of the relationship. The various accounts are compared in the table on the following page.

There is little that agrees between the accounts. The facts seem to be that Emma became aware of the marriage at some point, probably involved Oliver and perhaps other church leaders, and was upset enough to eventually insist that Fanny leave her home. Todd Compton argues that these accounts can be harmonized since regardless of "whether Emma saw her husband in the barn or discovered

106. Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to George F. Gibbs, 1903, transcript in *NMS CD-ROM* .

107. Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to George F. Gibbs, 1903, transcript in *NMS CD-ROM* .

108. Cowdery Letterbook, 80–3; Lyndon W. Cook and Donald Q. Cannon, *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 163 (12 April 1838).

Accounts of Joseph Smith's Alleged Plural Marriage in Ohio

	Oliver Cowdery, 1838	Emma Smith via William McLellin, 1861	Frederick G. Williams via McLellin, 1872a	Emma Smith via McLellin, 1872b	Emma Smith via McLellin, 1875	Chauncey Webb (?) via Ann Eliza, 1876	Chauncey Webb via Wilhelm Wyl, 1886	Levi Hancock via Mosiah Hancock, 1896	Warren Parrish via Benjamin Johnson, 1903
Identity of woman	Fanny Alger		Miss Hill			Fanny Alger*		Fanny Alger	Fanny Alger
How discovered			Emma, no circum-stances described; around Joseph III's birth (6 Nov 1832)	In the barn	In the barn	Emma, repeatedly sees them together	Pregnancy		"Spied upon"
Emma's reaction			Called other(s)			Called other(s); eventually evicted Fanny	Evicted Fanny when pregnancy discovered		
Others involved			Oliver, Williams, Sidney Rigdon			Oliver			Oliver and Parrish
Oliver's Reaction	Hostile		Joseph Smith begged his forgiveness			Oliver fears exposure of himself			Hostile?
Nature of relationship	Affair**					Sealing	Sealing	Marriage	Marriage***

* Fanny's identity is confirmed in a private letter by Ann Eliza.

** Oliver called it a "dirty, nasty, filthy affair." Oliver's excommunication hearing charged him with "insinuating that [Joseph] was guilty of adultery."[108]

*** The characterization as a marriage is Johnson's, not Parrish's.

evidence of Fanny's pregnancy, her reaction was the same."[109] This stance glosses over a key point—it may well be that *both* the Webbs and McLellin are either mistaken or lying.[110] That Emma was upset is certain. But the contradictions and problems with these two hostile accounts give us no reason to conclude that the truth must be that Emma discovered either Joseph and Fanny in the barn or a pregnancy. Above all else, one's attitude toward Joseph, the church, and plural marriage will influence how such contradictory and biased testimony is interpreted.

Emma would later give her permission for Joseph to marry two sisters who also lived in the Smith home—Emily and Eliza Partridge. Yet Emma was soon to change her mind and eventually compelled these wives to leave her home. It is thus consistent with her later behavior for her to have agreed (if only reluctantly) to a marriage with Fanny only to have second thoughts later.

The evidence seems to show that Fanny and Joseph were regarded as married. It seems likely that their involvement became more widely known when someone (perhaps Parrish?) spied on Joseph and Fanny and when other church leaders then became involved. We can say little with confidence of the circumstances surrounding their discovery and nothing of Emma's knowledge (or lack thereof) beforehand, though she almost certainly became hostile if she did not start out that way. I suspect that the bare bones tale to which Johnson alludes—perhaps no better than gossip itself—is the kernel around which McLellin and the Webbs embroidered exaggeration, drama, and even outright fabrication. The textual evidence deserves more attention and care than G. D. Smith has given it. His analysis is superficial and inadequate, and it contributes nothing new.

109. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 35.

110. The failure to consider other possibilities is an example of "the fallacy of false dichotomous questions" since it suggests "a false dichotomy between two terms that are neither mutually exclusive nor collectively exhaustive." See David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1970), 9–11.

Eliza Snow and the stairs

Evidences that "Eliza had conceived Joseph's child and miscarried," G. D. Smith tells us, are "fragmented" and "questions cloud the story." Despite this, "the secondary sources are convincing in their own right" (p. 130). Here again, G. D. Smith's representation of the data and references to those who disagree leave much to be desired. He cites other authors while giving no indication that they disagree with his reading. For example, from an essay in *BYU Studies* he cites the Charles C. Rich version of a pregnant Eliza "heavy with child" being shoved down the stairs by a furious Emma. Nowhere does he tell the reader that these authors concluded that the story given the present evidence was untenable.[111] G. D. Smith also quotes Newell and Avery's biography of Emma but ignores their argument:

> The statement that Eliza carried Joseph's unborn child and lost it [due to an attack by Emma] is brought into question by Eliza's own journal. While her Victorian reticence probably would have precluded mention of her own pregnancy, if she were indeed carrying Joseph's child, other evidence in the journal indicates that she may not have been pregnant. Eliza's brother Lorenzo indicated that by the time she married Joseph, she was "beyond the condition of raising a family." Also if she was "heavy with child" as the Rich account states, she would not have been teaching school, for even legally married women usually went into seclusion when their pregnancies became obvious. Eliza continued to teach school for a month after her abrupt departure from the Smith household. Her own class attendance record shows that she did not miss a day during the months she taught

111. "But where are we? Faced with a folk legend, with genuine documents that tell no tales, and dubious ones that contradict themselves and the contemporary accounts, perhaps it is best for us to respond as we must to many paradoxes of our history: consider thoughtfully and then place all the evidence carefully on the shelf, awaiting further documentation, or the Millennium, whichever should come first." Maureen Ursenbach Beecher et al., "Emma and Eliza and the Stairs," *BYU Studies* 22/1 (Fall 1982): 86–96. Compare Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 131 n. 195.

> the Smith children, which would not have been probable had she suffered a miscarriage.[112]

G. D. Smith may disagree, but he must address these issues, not simply proceed by assertion. The award for most humorously ironic use of a source in this section goes to his citation of Richard Price. G. D. Smith argues that "most convincing of all is to think that these stories were circulating widely and Eliza never considered to clarify or refute them." He attributes this insight to Price (p. 134 n. 207). He believes that the "most convincing" aspect of the story is that Eliza never rebutted it. Uncorrected rumor or gossip is more convincing than the absence of diary or behavioral evidence for a pregnancy as outlined by Newel and Avery? If I do not rebut an unfounded rumor, does this mean I give it my consent? This seems a strange standard. Joseph and the members of the church tried to rebut the rumors spread by the Hurlburt-Howe affidavits, yet G. D. Smith treats *them* as valuable insights. The Saints, it seems, are damned if they do and damned if they don't.

G. D. Smith's citation of Price might lead the reader to believe that Price agrees with Smith's reading—that Eliza Snow never rebutted the story because it was true. But Price claims exactly the opposite, writing with feeling, "Why did Eliza allow the rumor to circulate throughout Utah Mormondom and the world, that Emma had beaten her in the Mansion House?" It was "because Eliza was a devoted and favored wife of Brigham Young while in Utah and a woman of great influence, and therefore she chose to uphold Brigham's doctrine of polygamy. . . . She could have stopped the malicious lies about her being a plural wife of Joseph Smith. Instead, she chose to feed the fires of untruth for over a quarter of a century by not publishing that those stories were false. She supported Brigham Young's false dogma that polygamy was introduced by Joseph the Prophet in order to keep Brigham's Rocky Mountain empire from crumbling."[113]

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112. Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 136. Compare Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 132 n. 201.

113. Richard Price and Pamela Price, "Eliza Snow Was Not Pushed Down the Mansion House Stairs," in Richard Price, chap. 9 of "Joseph Smith Fought Polygamy: How Men

In addition to the indignity of having his work cited for a view that is the reverse of his own, Price suffers further. An RLDS conservative, Price is committed to the stance that Joseph did not teach or practice plural marriage.[114] Far from endorsing Smith's view of the stairs incident, Price is adamant that the story is false. Though G. D. Smith spends a page explaining why Joseph and Emma may have moved to the Mansion House earlier than thought (as the stairs story requires), he ignores Price's diagram and argument for the story's impossibility based on the Mansion House's layout.[115] G. D. Smith can hardly have been unaware of it since the same Web page contains the argument to which he makes reference. I do not agree with Price on all points—his dogged insistence that Joseph did not practice plural marriage cannot be sustained by the evidence, which often leads him to make unwarranted leaps—but G. D. Smith ought to at least engage Price's critique and fairly represent his views.

If the stairs story is true, why did Eliza not make use of it? The argument from silence cuts both ways: Eliza went to considerable lengths to defend plural marriage and to insist that Joseph Smith had practiced it. Why did she never offer her pregnancy and miscarriage as evidence? Eliza was not afraid to criticize Emma Smith for what she regarded as the latter's dishonesty. Following Emma's death and her sons' publication of her last denial of plural marriage, Eliza wrote:

> I once dearly loved "Sister Emma," and now, for me to believe that she, a once honoured woman, should have sunk so low, even in her own estimation, as to deny what she knew to be true, seems a palpable absurdity. If . . . [this] was really her testimony she died with a libel on her lips—a libel against her

Nearest the Prophet Attached Polygamy to His Name in Order to Justify Their Own Polygamous Crimes." (n.p.: Price Publishing Co., 2001), http://restorationbookstore.org/articles/nopoligamy/jsfp-vol1/chp9.htm (accessed 5 November 2008).

114. On Price's break from the RLDS (now Community of Christ) mainstream, see: William D. Russell, "Richard Price: Leading Publicist of the Reorganized Church's Schismatics," in *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History*, ed. Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 319–37.

115. Compare Price and Price, "Eliza Snow Was Not Pushed," with G. D. Smith's opinion in *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 133.

> husband—against his wives—against the truth, and a libel against God; and in publishing that libel, her son has fastened a stigma on the character of his mother, that can never be erased. . . . So far as Sister Emma personally is concerned, I would gladly have been silent and let her memory rest in peace, had not her misguided son, through a sinister policy, branded her name with gross wickedness.[116]

Emma was safely dead; Eliza had no need to spare her feelings. Why not offer her miscarriage or Emma's angry assault as evidence if it were true? This scenario seems at least as plausible as G. D. Smith's weak claim that silence equals agreement. Yet more than a hundred pages later, G. D. Smith asks us to "assume . . . that LeRoi Snow's account was accurate" before asking leading rhetorical questions. Yet again, no links to the other side of the story are provided (p. 236).

Finally, those who read for amusement should not miss G. D. Smith's opening argument for Emma, Eliza, and the stairs: "Historian Fawn M. Brodie thought the documentation was strong enough to include it in her biography of [Joseph] Smith" (p. 131).

To Censor: To Make Appear Absurd

Lord Byron once observed that "the proper way to *cut up* [censor] is to quote long passages, and make them appear absurd."[117] G. D. Smith's errors and textual distortions suggest that he had two target audiences. The first would be the unwitting Latter-day Saints who approach this book as their first introduction to plural marriage. Without considerable legwork, such readers might be vulnerable to his approach. The second audience is likely those for whom G. D. Smith provided a prepublication excerpt of his Napoleonic Joseph with Sarah Ann Whitney fiction: the secularists. G. D. Smith often presents material (some of which is tangential to plural marriage at best)

116. Eliza R. Snow, *Woman's Exponent* 8 (1 November 1879): 85; cited in Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 307–8.

117. "Letter 18: To Miss Elizabeth ——," in Thomas Moore, *The Works of Lord Byron: with His Letters and Journals and His Life* (London: John Murraym, 1835), 1:176.

that serves to paint the Saints as unenlightened, ignorant, morally corrupt, or ridiculous. At times he appeals to his audience's presentist assumptions, which he does nothing to dispel. In other instances, he relies on distortion of the textual record. I will here provide several examples.

Brigham Young as young earth creationist?

Perhaps hoping to capitalize on readers' disdain for young earth creationism, G. D. Smith tells us that Brigham Young "ridiculed geologists who 'tell us that this earth has been in existence for thousands and millions of years'" (p. 277).[118] The source cited says nothing of the kind. Brigham begins by remarking that he is not surprised that unbelief prevails, since apostate "religious teachers of the people advance many ideas and notions for truth which are in opposition to and contradict facts demonstrated by science." To Brigham, this state of affairs creates a conflict in which men of science must reject truths discovered through science if they are to accept creedal Christianity. He then proceeds to give an example: "You take, for instance, our geologists, and they tell us that this earth has been in existence for thousands and millions of years. They think, and they have good reason for their faith, that their researches and investigations enable them to demonstrate that this earth has been in existence as long as they assert it has."

There is no ridicule here: Brigham points out that geologists "have good reason" to believe that the earth is extremely old. "If the Lord, as religionists declare, made the earth out of nothing in six days, six thousand years ago," Brigham has the geologists reply, "our studies are all vain; but by what we can learn from nature and the immutable laws of the Creator as revealed therein, we know that your theories are incorrect and consequently we must reject your religions as false and vain." Concludes Brigham, "In these respects we differ from the Christian world, for our religion will not clash with or contradict the facts of science in any particular. You may take geology, for instance,

118. G. D. Smith quotes *Journal of Discourses*, 12:271, for this assertion. He gets the citation wrong (it is at 14:115) but might benefit from reading 12:271—it provides Brigham's insistence that plural marriage had little to do with early persecution of Joseph and the church.

and it is a true science; not that I would say for a moment that all the conclusions and deductions of its professors are true, but its leading principles are."[119]

Far from mocking those who accept an earth greater than six thousand years old, Brigham gives this idea his provisional approval and insists that while young earth creationism (as we would call it) may be a problem for traditional Christians, it is not a problem for the Latter-day Saints. It would have been hard to distort Brigham any further than G. D. Smith has done. But accustomed to religious zealots who insist that radiometric dating is a sham (while trying to get such ideas into the science classroom), most secular readers will not think to question whether a nineteenth-century fanatic would say the words G. D. Smith puts in Brigham's mouth.

Polygamy—going beyond bounds?

"Sometimes Joseph phrased the matter [of polygamy] in terms of being free to go beyond normal 'bounds,'" G. D. Smith announces. As evidence, he presents Brigham Young's account of being taught plural marriage. Brigham worried out loud that he might marry a second wife but then apostatize, leaving his plural family "worse off." In Brigham's account, Joseph replied, "'There are certain bounds set to men, and if a man is faithful and pure to these bounds, God will take him out of the world; if he sees him falter, he will take him to himself. You are past these bounds, Brigham, and you have this consolation.' But Brigham indicated that he never had any fears of not being saved" (p. 364).[120]

Joseph's point is clear—men, like Brigham, who have reached a certain degree of faithfulness may be asked to do even more difficult things. They need not fear that they will lose their eternal reward if they falter in these Abrahamic tasks, for God "will take him to himself" before they reap damnation. But G. D. Smith seems to be reading "bounds" in the sense "a limit by which any excursion is restrained;

119. Brigham Young, "Attending Meetings—Religion & Science—Geology—The Creation," in *Journal of Discourses*, 14:115–16 (14 May 1871).

120. Citing Brigham Young Manuscript History, 16 February 1849, LDS Church Archives. The quoted material is on pp. 19–20.

the limit of indulgence or desire."[121] This is why he conceives of it as being "*free* to go beyond normal bounds"—that is, beyond normal *limits* or restrictions. This is clearly not Brigham's meaning. *Bounds* should be understood as "the line which comprehends the whole of any given object or space. It differs from *boundary*."[122] These bounds are not a *limit* beyond which one *may not* go—they *encircle* and enclose all that one *must* do. Before polygamy, Brigham had already striven to be faithful to the whole of his duty to God. Having done so, he would not be damned. But he was now being asked to fulfill a task not asked of most. The circumference of his bounds—or duties—was enlarged.

Unfortunately for G. D. Smith's reading, polygamy cannot be "the bounds" referred to since Joseph told Brigham that he was *already* (before practicing polygamy) "past these bounds"—that is, the duties required of all men by God—and thus "you have this consolation." Brigham was thus past the bounds because he had done all that God required and more, not because he would violate moral limits. He had crossed the finish line; he had not gone "out of bounds" or offside.

G. D. Smith argues that Brigham gave "a telling concession that the normal rules governing social interaction had not applied to [Joseph] Smith as he set about instigating polygamy." But Brigham is not conceding anything like this. His "bounds" are not limits beyond which one may not go, but duties that one must fulfill before anything else might be asked. The bounds are divine duties, not social rules. G. D. Smith caps his argument by citing Brigham's belief that Joseph "passed certain bounds . . . before certain revelations were given" (p. 365). Thus G. D. Smith wants to paint Brigham as admitting that polygamy required one to transgress social or moral boundaries.

Brigham was clearly making the same claim about Joseph that Joseph made about Brigham. In Brigham's view, Joseph had not been challenged by the command to practice plural marriage until he had proved sufficiently faithful to guarantee his salvation. For its first

121. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828; republished in facsimile edition by Foundation for American Christian Education, 7th ed., 1993), s.v. "bound."

122. Webster, *American Dictionary*, s.v. "bound"; compare the definition for *boundary*.

practitioners, the challenge of plural marriage was such that a merciful God would not, in Brigham's mind, require it of those whose salvation would be at risk in the event of their failure.

Immediately preceding the language quoted by G. D. Smith, Brigham tells an apostle that

> the spiritual wife doctrine came upon me while abroad, in such a manner that I never forget. . . . Joseph said to me, "I command you to go and get another wife." I felt as if the grave was better for me than anything, but I was filled with the Holy Ghost, so that my wife and brother Kimball's wife would upbraid me for lightness in those days. I could jump up and hollow [holler?]. My blood was as clear as West India rum, and my flesh was clear.[123]

In this passage, Brigham sees the matter as a command that he does not *wish* to fulfill—he would prefer to be dead—but that God confirms as his will. His bounds are duties to fulfill, not limits that he is now free to exceed.

That this reading is correct, and that G. D. Smith is in error, is confirmed by Heber C. Kimball's similar doubts and reassurance: "Finally [Heber] was so tried that he went to Joseph and told him how he felt—that he was fearful if he took such a step [to practice plural marriage] he could not stand, but would be overcome. The Prophet, full of sympathy for him, went and inquired of the Lord. His answer was, 'Tell him to go and do as he has been commanded, and if I see that there is any danger of his apostatizing, I will take him to myself.'"[124]

Kimball's bounds—the commandments given him—had increased. But having already proved his faithfulness, he would not be damned for failure. Kimball apparently clung to this promise and would soon write to his wife that "my prayer is day by day that God would take me to Himself rather than I should be left to sin against Him, or betray

123. Church Historian's Office, *History of the Church, 1839–circa 1882*, DVD 2, call number CR 100 102, vol. 19 (19 February 1849), 19.

124. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 325–26.

my dear brethren who have been true to me and to God the Eternal Father."[125]

The Kimball data is absent from Smith's analysis, but one wonders if it would have helped. To accept it would require a modification of the thesis that polygamy was driven by lust and a violation of barriers, and that Joseph knew it.

William Clayton—"unlawful intercourse with women"?

G. D. Smith edited and published some of William Clayton's journals—including material taken from Andrew Ehat and republished, without authorization, by Jerald and Sandra Tanner.[126] He should know of Clayton's history and might even be expected to view him with sympathy. But Clayton receives the same treatment that G. D. Smith gives to Joseph—loaded language stalks him in *Nauvoo Polygamy*: Joseph and Clayton are "conspiring to amend . . . [the] marital status" of Clayton's first wife, and Clayton's journal "disclosed his own extracurricular romances" (pp. 244, 247).

Joseph instructed Clayton to send for Sarah Crookes, a close female friend he had known in England, to which Clayton replied that "nothing further than an attachment such as a brother and sister in the Church might rightfully entertain for each other" occurred between them. "But in fact," G. D. Smith editorializes darkly, "Clayton's journal recorded the depth of emotional intimacy he had shared with her" (p. 244). G. D. Smith argues that Clayton was deceiving himself or Joseph and that his own journals prove it. Clayton's journal noted of Sarah, "I don't want Sarah to be married. I was much . . . tempted on her account and felt to pray that the Lord would preserve me from impure affections. . . . I certainly feel my love towards her to increase but shall strive against

125. Heber C. Kimball to Vilate Kimball, "My Dear Vilate" (23 October 1842), cited in Augusta Joyce Crocheron (author and complier), *Representative Women of Deseret, a book of biographical sketches to accompany the picture bearing the same title* (Salt Lake City: J. C. Graham & Co., 1884). Online transcript available at http://www.archive.org/stream/representativewo00crocrich/representativewo00crocrich_djvu.txt (accessed 2 December 2008).

126. Cecelia Warner, "The Tanners On Trial," *Sunstone: Review* 4:4/6 (April 1984); Lawrence Foster, "Career Apostates: Reflections on the Works of Jerald and Sandra Tanner," *Dialogue* 17/2 (Summer 1984): 48 and n. 28; Allen, review of *An Intimate Chronicle*, 165–75.

it. I feel too much to covet her and afraid lest her troubles should cause her to get married. The Lord keep me pure and preserve me from doing wrong."[127] Others have read the account quite differently.[128]

G. D. Smith then notes that "instead of waiting for [Sarah's] arrival, [Clayton] married his legal wife's sister Margaret on April 27. This was before Sarah's ship had even set sail from England" (p. 245). He strives to paint Clayton as unfaithful to both his first wife (having already had an inappropriate level of emotional intimacy with another woman before "conspiring to amend" his marriage) *and* the woman with whom he conspired to cheat.

G. D. Smith then describes Clayton's 1853 mission to England, during which, "instead of persuading the flock of the correctness of [polygamy], Clayton contributed to defections and was personally suspected of 'having had unlawful intercourse with women'" (p. 247).[129] Two hundred pages later, we learn that this suspicion was only because of his [Clayton's] "discussion of plural marriage" (p. 445), and his [Smith's] own introduction to Clayton's journals tell us that the charge was actually raised by an "apostate Mormon," whom Clayton claimed had maliciously distorted his words, leading to what he called his life's most painful experience.[130]

In the narrative environment that G. D. Smith has created, it would be easy to conclude that Clayton was as unfaithful in England as G. D. Smith has subtly made him out to be in Nauvoo. This is a good example of how an undercurrent of judgmental hostility dominates

127. William Clayton, *An Intimate Chronicle: The Diaries of William Clayton*, ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1991), 29.

128. "Clayton soon admitted to himself that the situation could easily develop into something more than he could handle. . . . Caught in a war between his tender feelings for Sarah, on the one hand, and his love for his wife and his personal integrity, on the other, Clayton thus met another test of discipleship. This one was perhaps the most difficult of all, for it involved the temptations of the flesh that too often destroy both the reputation and the marriages of those who weaken. The attachment between Sarah and William caused inward struggles for both, but they avoided the obvious temptation." James B. Allen, *Trials of Discipleship: The Story of William Clayton, a Mormon* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 33–4; see also 130–34.

129. Citing Clayton, *Diaries of William Clayton*, xlviii–l.

130. Clayton, *Diaries of William Clayton*, xlix, 488–489, 490 n. 444.

Nauvoo Polygamy. Clayton is disparaged through innuendo, and G. D. Smith puts crucial events in the worst possible light while withholding explanatory and exculpatory information until much later in the volume—if it appears at all.

Legal presentism

"Presentism" is an analytical fallacy in which past behavior is evaluated by modern standards or mores. Even worse than a historian's presentism is a historian exploiting the presentism of his readers. G. D. Smith does this repeatedly when he alludes to legal issues. "Presentism," observed American Historical Association president Lynn Hunt, "at its worst, encourages a kind of moral complacency and self-congratulation. Interpreting the past in terms of present concerns usually leads us to find ourselves morally superior. . . . Our forbears constantly fail to measure up to our present-day standards."[131]

Louisa Rising married Edwin Woolley "without first divorcing her legal husband," the dust jacket of *Nauvoo Polygamy* teases. We are reminded later that "though she was not divorced from her legal husband, she agreed to marry" (p. 345). Eleanor McLean also married Parley Pratt without divorcing her first husband (see discussion below in next section). It appears that G. D. Smith hopes to capitalize on ignorance about nineteenth-century laws and practices regarding marriage and divorce. "From the standpoint of the legal historian," wrote one expert who is not a Latter-day Saint, "it is perhaps surprising that anyone prosecuted bigamy at all. Given the confusion over conflicting state laws on marriage, there were many ways to escape notice, if not conviction."[132] To remarry without a formal divorce was not an unusual thing in antebellum America.

> Bigamy or, rather, serial monogamy (without divorce or death) was a common social experience in early America. Much of the

131. Lynn Hunt, "Against Presentism," *Perspectives* 40/5 (May 2002); available online at http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2002/0205/ (accessed 2 December 2008).

132. Beverly J. Schwartzberg, "Grass Widows, Barbarians, and Bigamists: Fluid Marriage in Late Nineteenth-Century America" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2001), 51–52. I appreciate Allen Wyatt pointing me to this reference and those of Harlog and Cott below.

> time, serial monogamists were poor and transient people, for whom the property rights that came with a recognized marriage would not have been much of a concern, people whose lives only rarely intersected with the law of marriage.[133]

The Saints were often poor and spent most of their time on the frontier, where the legal apparatus of the state was particularly feeble. Women who had joined the church and traveled to Zion without their husbands were particularly likely to be poor, and also unlikely to be worried about property rights. Nor, not incidentally, were their husbands available for a formal divorce.

Does this mean that marriage in America was a free-for-all? Hardly, notes Nancy Cott:

> When couples married informally, or reversed the order of divorce and remarriage, they were not simply acting privately, taking the law into their own hands. . . . A couple about to join or leave an intimate relationship looked for communal sanction. The surrounding local community provided the public oversight necessary. Without resort to the state apparatus, local informal policing by the community affirmed that marriage was a well-defined public institution as well as a contract made by consent. Carrying out the standard obligations of the marriage bargain—cohabitation, husband's support, wife's service—seems to have been much more central to the approbation of local communities at this time than how or when the marriage took place, and whether one of the partners had been married elsewhere before.[134]

It also should be remembered that because Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other Latter-day Saint leaders exercised exclusive jurisdiction over celestial or plural marriages, marriages conducted under their supervision had as much (or more) formal oversight as many tra-

133. Hendrik Harlog, *Man & Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 87.

134. Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 37.

ditional marriages in America during the first half of the nineteenth century. G. D. Smith tells us nothing of this—with the result that some credulous readers might be horrified by the "loose" marriage practices of the Saints.

G. D. Smith also makes much of how closely Latter-day Saint marriage partners were related. Of Rhoda Richards we are told: "That she was her husband Brigham's cousin was apparently secondary to the grander scheme of interlocking the hierarchy in marriage" (p. 205). Here again, he relies on presentism to provide a hostile interpretive lens. It was not unusual for first cousins to marry; notable first-cousin marriages include scientists Charles Darwin and Albert Einstein; composers Edvarg Grieg and Sergei Rachmaninoff; the founding prime minister of Canada, John A. Macdonald; and authors Edgar Allen Poe and H. G. Wells.[135] Nineteen of the present-day states permit unrestricted marriage between first cousins, and most countries have no restrictions at all on marriage between cousins.[136] In its exploitation of the presentist fallacy, G. D. Smith's remark is utterly irrelevant in its historical context.

Parley P. Pratt and Eleanor McComb McLean

Legal presentism can also be seen in G. D. Smith's description of the murder of Parley P. Pratt. Pratt's last wife, Eleanor, "was sealed to him without divorcing her legal husband, who fatally shot Parley near Van Buren, Arkansas" (p. 333). There is, however, much that we are not told. Eleanor's husband was a heavy drinker, which in 1844 resulted in separation. The couple was reconciled, and the family moved to San Francisco. While in California, Eleanor discovered the church. Her husband forbade her to join and "purchased a sword cane and threatened to kill her and the minister who baptized her if she became a Mormon." Eleanor attended meetings, and one Sunday at home, "while Eleanor was singing from a Mormon hymn book she

135. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_coupled_cousins (accessed 9 November 2008).

136. Joanna Grossman, "Should the Law Be Kinder to 'Kissin' Cousins'? A Genetic Report Should Cause a Rethinking of Incest Laws" (8 April 2002), http://writ.news.findlaw.com/grossman/20020408.html (accessed 9 November 2008).

had purchased, Hector tore the book from her hands, threw it into the fire, beat her, cast her out into the street, and locked the door."[137]

Eleanor lodged a complaint of assault and battery against Hector and planned to leave him until prevailed upon by local church members and her physician. At that point, said Eleanor, "I presume McLean himself would not deny that I then declared that I *would no more be his wife* however many years I might be compelled to appear as such *for the sake of my children*."[138]

Eleanor was not baptized until 1854, and she had the written permission of her husband to do so. However, he forbade her to read church literature or to sing church hymns at home. It is not clear, then, why G. D. Smith feels Eleanor owed an observance of all the twentieth-century legal niceties to a violent, abusive, tyrannical drunkard. Through it all, as a church leader, Parley Pratt had tried to help the couple reconcile.

Eleanor had her children baptized, and Hector responded by filing a charge of insanity against his wife so he could have her committed to an asylum. Hector sent her children by steamer to their maternal grandparents' home, confined Eleanor to the house, and again threatened to have her committed for insanity. Eleanor eventually found her children at her parents' home, but they refused to let her take them.[139] Eleanor went to Salt Lake City and married Pratt on 14 November 1855. As we have seen, she considered herself divorced from Hector from the time he violently threw her from their home in San Francisco. They never received a civil divorce, however.

From which authority, exactly, would G. D. Smith prefer that Eleanor receive a divorce? She was in Utah; Hector was in San Francisco. He had abused, beaten, confined, and threatened to institutionalize her. As we have seen, notions of divorce were also more fluid in the mid-nineteenth century, especially on the frontier. It is unlikely that most contemporaries would have insisted that Eleanor required a formal divorce.

137. Steven Pratt, "Eleanor Mclean and the Murder of Parley P. Pratt," in *BYU Studies* (Winter 1975): 226.

138. Pratt, "Eleanor Mclean and the Murder of Parley P. Pratt," 226, emphasis in original, citing *Millennial Star* 19:432.

139. Pratt, "Eleanor Mclean and the Murder of Parley P. Pratt," 228–31.

Pratt was arrested on trumped-up charges, freed by a non-Mormon judge, and pursued by Hector, who shot the unarmed apostle six times and stabbed him twice. He was left to bleed to death over the course of two hours.[140] In G. D. Smith's worldview, are men like Hector entitled to hold women emotionally or martially hostage, civil divorce or no? I suspect not. But in his zeal to condemn the church, he does not provide his readers with the facts necessary to understand the Pratts' choices.

Ignoring Relevant Data

G. D. Smith often does more than selectively cite evidence—he also ignores it completely. I will provide several examples.

Paternity of Oliver Buell

The consequences of a less-than-rigorous approach to sources becomes clear in the case of Oliver Buell, son of Presendia.[141] Huntington Buell, one of Joseph's polyandrous plural wives. Fawn Brodie was the first to suggest that Oliver Buell was Joseph's son, and she was so convinced (based on photographic evidence)[142] that she wrote, "If Oliver Buell isn't a Smith then I'm no Brimhall," which was her mother's name.[143] In a footnote, G. D. Smith notes that Todd Compton "considers it improbable that Joseph and Presendia would have found time together during the brief window of opportunity after his release from prison in Missouri" (p. 80 n. 63).[144]

140. Pratt, "Eleanor Mclean and the Murder of Parley P. Pratt," 241–48.

141. Presendia's name is also spelled *Presenda* or *Prescindia* in contemporary documents. I here use the spelling adopted by her autobiography, also followed by Compton and G. D. Smith.

142. Fawn McKay Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 301. Brodie includes the picture between 298–99.

143. Fawn Brodie to Dale Morgan, Letter, 24 March 1945, Dale Morgan papers, Marriott Library, University of Utah; cited by Todd Compton, "Fawn Brodie on Joseph Smith's Plural Wives and Polygamy: A Critical View," in *Reconsidering 'No Man Knows My History': Fawn M. Brodie and Joseph Smith in Retrospect*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1996), 166.

144. Citing Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 670, 673.

This slight nod toward an opposite point of view is inadequate, however. G. D. Smith does not mention and hence does not confront the strongest evidence. Compton's argument against Joseph's paternity does not rest just on a "narrow window" of opportunity but on the fact that Brodie seriously misread the geography required by that window. It is not merely a question of dates. Brodie would have Joseph travel *west* from his escape near Gallatin, Davies County, Missouri, to Far West in order to meet Lucinda, and then on to Illinois toward the *east*. This route would require Joseph and his companions to backtrack while fleeing from custody in the face of an active state extermination order.[145] Travel to Far West would also require them to travel near the virulently anti-Mormon area of Haun's Mill, along Shoal Creek.[146] Yet by April 22 Joseph was in Illinois, having been slowed by traveling "off from the main road as much as possible"[147] "both by night and by day."[148] This seems an implausible time for Joseph to be conceiving a child. Furthermore, it is evident that Far West was evacuated by other church leaders, "the committee on removal," and not under the Prophet's direction. Joseph did not regain the Saints until reaching Quincy, Illinois, contrary to Brodie's misreading.[149] Timing is the least of the problems with G. D. Smith's theory.

Despite Brodie's enthusiasm, few other authors have included Oliver on their list of possible children.[150] With so many authors ranged against him, G. D. Smith ought not to act as if Compton's analysis is merely about dates.

145. See Clark V. Johnson, "Northern Missouri," in *Historical Atlas of Mormonism*, ed. S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard H. Jackson (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 42.

146. Compton, "Fawn Brodie on Joseph Smith's Plural Wives," 170.

147. *History of the Church*, 3:320–21.

148. *History of the Church*, 3:327.

149. *History of the Church*, 3:315, 319, 322–23, 327.

150. The following all fail to include Oliver Buell as a potential child of Joseph's: Danel Bachman, "Mormon Practice of Polygamy," 137–38; Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 43–44 and 43 n. 43; Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 157–58; Gary James Bergera, "Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841–44," *Dialogue* 38/3 (Fall 2005): 49–50 n. 115.

G. D. Smith also soft-pedals the most vital evidence—the DNA.[151] He makes no mention in the main text that DNA testing has definitively ruled out Joseph as Oliver's father. This admission is confined to a footnote, and its impact is minimized by its placement. After noting Compton's disagreement with the main text's suggestion that Oliver might be Joseph's son, G. D. Smith writes, "There is no DNA connection," and cites a *Deseret News* article. He immediately follows this obtuse phrasing with a return to Compton, who finds it "'unlikely, though not impossible, that Joseph Smith was the actual father of another Buell child,' John Hiram, Presendia's seventh child during her marriage to Buell and born in November 1843" (p. 80 n. 63). Thus the most salient fact—that Joseph is certainly *not* Oliver's father—is sandwiched between a vicarious discussion with Compton about whether Oliver or John could be Joseph's sons. Since G. D. Smith knows there is definitive evidence against Joseph's paternity in Oliver's case, why mention the debate at all only to hide the answer in the midst of a long endnote? That Brodie is so resoundingly rebutted on textual, historical, and genetic grounds provides a cautionary lesson in presuming that her certainty counts for much.[152]

Two pages later, G. D. Smith again tells us of a Buell child being sealed to a proxy for Joseph with "wording [that] hints that it might have been Smith's child." "It is not clear," he tells us, "which of her children it might have been" (p. 82). In fact, what is clear is that he has not assimilated the implications of the DNA data. John Hiram, the seventh child about whom Compton is skeptical, is the only other option. Yet the only evidence for this child belonging to Joseph is

151. Carrie A. Moore, "DNA tests rule out 2 as Smith descendants," *Deseret Morning News*, 10 November 2007), http://deseretnews.com/article/1,5143,695226318,695226300.html (accessed 2 December 2008); Ugo A. Perego et al., "Resolving the Paternities of Oliver N. Buell and Mosiah L. Hancock through DNA," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 28 (2008): 128–36. For background information, see Ugo A. Perego and Scott R. Woodward, "Reconstructing the Y-Chromosome of Joseph Smith" (paper presented at the Mormon History Association Conference, 28 May 2005); Ugo A. Perego et al., "Reconstructing the Y-Chromosome of Joseph Smith Jr.: Genealogical Applications," *Journal of Mormon History* 32/2 (Summer 2005): 70–88.

152. Elsewhere G. D. Smith actually uses an appeal to the fact hat Brodie was persuaded by a tale as evidence! (p. 131).

Ettie V. Smith's account in the anti-Mormon *Fifteen Years among the Mormons* (1859), which claimed that Presendia said she did not know whether Joseph or her first husband was John Hiram's father.[153] As Compton notes, such an admission is implausible, given the mores of the time.[154]

Besides being implausible, Ettie's account gets virtually every other detail wrong—insisting that William Law, Robert Foster, and Henry Jacobs had all been sent on missions only to return to find Joseph preaching plural marriage. Ettie then has them establish the *Expositor*.[155] While Law and Foster were involved with the *Expositor*, they were not sent on missions. Jacobs had served missions but was a faithful Saint unconnected to the *Expositor*. He was also, contrary to Ettie's claims, present when Joseph was sealed polyandrously to his (Jacobs's) wife.

Even the anti-Mormon Fanny Stenhouse considered Ettie Smith to be a writer who "so mixed up fiction with what was true, that it was difficult to determine where one ended and the other began,"[156] and a good example of how "the autobiographies of supposed Mormon women were [as] unreliable"[157] as other Gentile accounts, given her tendency to "mingl[e] facts and fiction" "in a startling and sensational manner."[158]

Brodie herself makes no mention of John Hiram as a potential child, going so far as to carelessly misread Ettie Smith's remarks as referring to Oliver, not John Hiram. No other historian has argued that Buell was not the father.[159] There is no good evidence whatever

153. Nelson Winch Green, *Fifteen Years among the Mormons: Being the Narrative of Mrs. Mary Ettie V. Smith, Late of Great Salt Lake City; a Sister of One of the Mormon High Priests, She Having Been Personally Acquainted with Most of the Mormon Leaders, and Long in the Confidence of The "Prophet," Brigham Young* (New York: H. Dayton, Publishers, 1860), 34–35.

154. Compton, "Fawn Brodie on Joseph Smith's Plural Wives," 166.

155. Green, *Fifteen Years*, 34–35.

156. Mrs. T. B. H. [Fanny] Stenhouse, *"Tell It All": The Story of a Life's Experience in Mormonism* (Hartford, CT: A. D. Worthington & Co., 1875), 618; the footnote confirms the identity of the author as Ettie V. Smith.

157. Stenhouse, *"Tell It All,"* x.

158. Stenhouse, *"Tell It All,"* xi–xii.

159. See Bachman, "Plural marriage," 139; Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy,* 43–44 and 43 n. 43; Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and*

that any of Presendia's children were Joseph's. It is not clear why G. D. Smith clings to the idea.

G. D. Smith elsewhere tells his readers that "until decisive DNA testing of possible [Joseph] Smith descendants—daughters as well as sons—from plural wives can be accomplished, ascertaining whether Smith fathered children with any of his plural wives remains hypothetical" (pp. 228–29, cf. p. 473). This is true, but G. D. Smith fails to tell us that all those who have been definitively tested so far—Oliver Buell, Mosiah Hancock, Zebulon Jacobs, Moroni Pratt, and Orrison Smith—have been excluded. Would he have neglected, I wonder, to mention a positive DNA test?

Marriage to Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde

G. D. Smith's discussion of Joseph's polyandrous marriage with Marinda Hyde is likewise flawed. He cites only Ann Eliza Webb's version, which characterized Orson as "furious" (pp. 117–18). G. D. Smith makes no mention of three other hostile versions of this marriage, none of which accord with one other.

1. Sidney Rigdon claimed that Orson was unaware of the marriage before it occurred and refused to cohabitate with Marinda when he found out. This latter claim is certainly false.[160]

2. William Hall provided an implausible account in which Joseph demanded Marinda and all of Orson's money if the former apostle wished to be let back into the church. Hall claimed that as a result "many jokes were cracked at his [Hyde's] expense."[161] There is no other record of anyone mocking Hyde, and Hall is unreliable on other mar-

the Oneida Community (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 157–58; Compton, "Fawn Brodie on Joseph Smith's Plural Wives," 167; Gary James Bergera, "Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841–44," *Dialogue* 38/3 (Fall 2005): 49–50 n. 115.

160. J. GI SON DIVINE [Sidney Rigdon], "To the Sisters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," *Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate* (Pittsburgh) 1/10 (15 March 1845): 154–58.

161. William Hall, *Abominations of Mormonism Exposed; Containing Many Facts and Doctrines Concerning That Singular People, During Seven Year's Membership with Them; from 1840 to 1847* (Cincinnati: I. Hart, 1852), 113.

riages as well.[162] Orson's return to the quorum was in June 1839, putting Hall's account two years too early for the marriage.[163]

3. John D. Lee provided some gossip, noting that a "report said that Hyde's wife, with his consent, was sealed to Joseph for an eternal state, but I do not assert the fact."[164] The latter is false; Marinda was sealed for eternity to Hyde.[165] Students of Latter-day Saint history are well aware that Lee's writing was potentially altered by an anti-Mormon editor after his death.[166]

The Ann Eliza version chosen by G. D. Smith also has its problems, which he leaves unexamined. Ann Eliza was too young to have any firsthand knowledge of Nauvoo, and her intent was clearly to titillate with stories of polygamous intrigue. She claimed that Brigham Young told Orson that Marinda was only to be his wife for time and Joseph's for eternity—but this is false, since she was sealed to Orson in early 1846.

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162. See Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 239.

163. See *History of the Church*, 3:345; Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, 2:24–25 n. 12; *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:340 (25 June 1839). See also Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 238.

164. John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled; or, the Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee; (Written by Himself) Embracing the History of Mormonism . . . With an Exposition of the Secret History, Signs, Symbols and Crimes of the Mormon Church. Also the True History of the Horrible Butchery Known as the Mountain Meadows Massacre* (St. Louis: Bryan, Brand, 1877), 147.

165. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 243: "Marinda was sealed to Orson Hyde, not Smith, for time and eternity on January 11, 1846."

166. Lee's lawyer relied on the posthumous sale of Lee's confessions to pay his fees and told Lee that "I will at once go to work preparing it for the press adding such facts connected with the trial and the history of the case as will make the Book interesting and useful to the public." William Bishop to John D. Lee, 23 February 1877, Papers of Jacob Smith Boreman, 1857–1912, Huntington Library; cited in part in Robert D. Crockett, "A Trial Lawyer Reviews Will Bagley's *Blood of the Prophets*," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 213. In a later letter, the lawyer wrote, "Your confession given to Howard [the prosecutor of Lee's case, who was to publish them for free] is having a bad effect so far as the sale of your writings are concerned, but by giving me your history during your life in Utah I can make the thing work all right yet I think. Send me such other Journals and writings as you have to throw light on this work." Cited in Robert D. Crocket, "Re: Massacre At Mountain Meadows Review," *mormondiscussions* forum (15 October 2008, 4:20 pm), http://www.mormondiscussions.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?p=197199&sid=d29f0330e77056ce4140315ccb472cc2#p197199 (accessed 2 December 2008). Crocket and others have seen this exchange as evidence that not all of the published material came from Lee, and efforts may have been made to render the material more critical (and thus more saleable).

Ann Eliza's report of anger is also suspect. In the material cited by G. D. Smith, she describes Hyde "in a furious passion" because "he thought it no harm for him to win the affection of another man's wife, . . . but he did not propose having his rights interfered with even by the holy Prophet whose teachings he so implicitly followed."[167] Yet Orson did not begin practicing plural marriage until after he knew of Marinda's sealing to Joseph.

Despite the hostile reports of Orson Hyde's anger, there are no contemporary accounts of problems between Orson and Joseph, who repeatedly dined with the Hydes following Orson's return from Palestine. Orson himself was to marry a plural wife in early 1843, and another in September.[168] A second sealing ceremony between Joseph and Marinda was held in May 1843. This suggests to me that the best read on the conflicting accounts is that Orson did not know about the sealing initially, but soon accepted it and the doctrine of plural marriage upon his return. The second sealing ceremony allowed him to formally give his consent to the arrangement. While it is possible that his initial reaction was heated, this perspective derives entirely from authors writing scandalous exposés of the Mormons long after the fact.

Mrs. Durfee the wife?

G. D. Smith argues that Elizabeth Durfee was a plural wife. Her inclusion on the list of Joseph's wives has been challenged.[169] G. D. Smith argues that Wyl's Sarah Pratt material confirms Durfee's marriage to Joseph (p. 108). He follows Compton in misreading the Wyl data. Richard Anderson and Scott Faulring argue that *In Sacred Loneliness* misleads the reader by claiming that "Sarah Pratt mentions that she heard a Mrs. Durfee in Salt Lake City profess to have been one of Smith's wives."[170] But this changes the actual report of

167. Young, *Wife No. 19*, 326.

168. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 240–42.

169. See Richard L. Anderson and Scott H. Faulring, "The Prophet Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives," review of *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, by Todd M. Compton, *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): 73, 76.

170. Quotation from Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 260.

Sarah's comments on Mrs. Durfee: "*I don't think she was ever sealed to him*, though it may have been the case after Joseph's death. . . . At all events, she boasted here in Salt Lake of having been one of Joseph's wives."[171]

If anything these data argue that Durfee was aware of and involved in promoting and teaching plural marriage but was not necessarily sealed to Joseph in life. Compton ignores this point in his reply to Anderson and Faulring.[172] It should also be noted that Andrew Jenson's list of wives does not include Durfee, though she was a close friend of Eliza Snow and Jenson had access to Eliza as a witness.[173] Of Compton's list of thirty-three wives, this is the only inclusion I find unconvincing. At the very least, G. D. Smith's readers deserve an accurate presentation of the scanty evidence and links to those works that disagree with his reading.

Benjamin F. Johnson and the "mainstream"

G. D. Smith provides considerable statistical information, but he exaggerates even there. Benjamin F. Johnson, "representative of the mainstream in LDS practice," he tells us, "eventually married seven wives—a few short of the model of ten talents" (p. 166). Is seven wives *really* the "mainstream" for the Latter-day Saint practice of polygamy?

Both Stanley Ivins and Kathryn Daynes have made estimates of the number of plural wives with Utah polygamists. Their data are summarized in the table below:

171. Quotation from Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 701, emphasis added. See Anderson and Faulring, "Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives," 76.

172. Todd M. Compton, "Truth, Honesty and Moderation in Mormon History: A Response to Anderson, Faulring and Bachman's Reviews of *In Sacred Loneliness*," E-book, July 2001, http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/7207/rev.html (accessed 12 December 2008).

173. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 262. Compton elsewhere argues that Sarah Kingsley's reported marriage at Eliza Snow's home and her inclusion on Jenson's list of wives mandate acceptance (see Compton, "Truth, Honesty and Moderation.") I agree. For consistency's sake, it would seem that we should admit that Eliza could have also confirmed Durfee's marriage—but did not. Hence, I accept Kingsley but doubt Durfee's inclusion.

Number of Wives per Utah Polygamist Males

Wives	**Ivins (%)**[174]	**Daynes (%)**[175]
2	66.3	66
3	21.2	21.3
4	6.7	8
5	3	4.7
6+	<3	Included above

G. D. Smith's claim that seven wives represents some type of "mainstream" is erroneous—such prolific espousers were well below 5 percent overall. He later claims that "since institutional [LDS Church] histories have minimized the incidence and profile of polygamy . . . , it is easy to imagine that most men who entered polygamy did so in a cursory way. In reality, the typical Utah polygamist whose roots in the principle extended back to Nauvoo, had between three and four wives" (p. 289; see p. 286). G. D. Smith's analysis disguises, however, the fact that polygamists with Nauvoo roots were a tiny minority. "Most men who entered polygamy" had only two wives, and a large majority (>80%) had no more than three. Even these would probably not think of their participation as "cursory," since a majority of men never practiced plural marriage at all.[176] G. D. Smith even knows

174. Stanley S. Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," *The Western Humanities Review* 10 (Summer 1956): 229–30; reproduced "exactly as it appeared" in his "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 35/4 (Fall 1967): 313–14, 316. See the anonymously authored article "Tribute to Stanley S. Ivins," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 35/4 (Fall 1967): 307–9.

175. Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 130.

176. Probably 15 to 20 percent of Latter-day Saint families were polygamous, "with variations from place to place and from decade to decade." Davis Bitton, *Historical Dictionary of Mormonism*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 147. Excluding inactive men, "over a third of all husbands' time, nearly three-quarters of all women-years, and well over half of all child-years were spent in polygamy before 1880." Larry Logue, "A Time of Marriage: Monogamy and Polygamy in a Utah Town," *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 25; cited by B. Carmon Hardy, *Doing the Works of Abraham: Mormon Polygamy: Its Origin, Practice, and Demise* (Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark Co., 2007), 143–44.

about these data from Ivins (though he ignores Daynes) but places them several chapters away, in a completely different context.[177]

Johnson exceeded even the average of Nauvoo's "early adopters," who had far more wives, on average, than the vast majority of Utah polygamists. Johnson may have been "mainstream" among polygamists at Nauvoo—but polygamy was restricted to a relatively small core in Nauvoo. It was not "mainstream" for the entire church at all. And most Utahans never approached the number of wives achieved by those men who began the practice in Nauvoo. Any attempt to extrapolate patterns in Nauvoo to the rest of Latter-day Saint history is fraught with pitfalls. In short, Johnson was extraordinary except among the highly selected group of Nauvoo-era polygamists. G. D. Smith insists elsewhere that before 1890 "the number of [polygamy] practitioners had expanded exponentially." In support of this, we are told that Orderville, Utah, had 67 percent of its members in plural households (pp. 535–36). Mathematical quibbles about whether the adoption of plural marriage was truly "exponential" aside, this figure is misleading. G. D. Smith leaves unmentioned the study's observation that Orderville was somewhat unique because "one suspects that membership in Mormondom's most successful attempt to establish the United Order may have required a commitment to plural matrimony. Unlike the pattern that usually prevailed in Mormon towns, many young men of Orderville entered the celestial order when they first married or soon thereafter." Nearby Kanab was less successful in its communal economy and had less than half as many polygamists.[178] Furthermore, all of southern Utah was more likely to be polygamist than Utah as a whole, for similar reasons.[179] G. D. Smith's desire to correct underestimates in some Latter-day Saint publications should not be license to exaggerate the norm—whether in reference to groups or individuals (such as Johnson)—in the other direction.

177. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 535–36.

178. Lowell "Ben" Bennion, "The Incidence of Mormon Polygamy in 1880: 'Dixie' Versus Davis Stake," *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 34.

179. Bennion, "Incidence of Mormon Polygamy," 36.

Necessary for salvation?

G. D. Smith appears to relish pointing out that Latter-day Saint prophets taught that polygamy was essential for salvation and then contrasting this with the church's current stance (p. 356).[180] The irony, one guesses, is intended to be arresting.

While it is a simple matter to find nineteenth-century language extolling the necessity of plural marriage, G. D. Smith does nothing to address the nuances of Latter-day Saint preaching on this point. After all, even at its height the majority of members never entered plural marriage. Did the most of the church simply resign themselves to a lesser glory in the hereafter?

It would be difficult to find a more ardent polygamist than Brigham Young. Yet Wilford Woodruff reported that

> Brother John Holeman made a long speech upon the subject of Poligamy. He Contended that no person Could have a Celestial glory unless He had a plurality of wives. Speeches were made By L. E. Harrington O Pratt Erastus Snow, D Evans J. F. Smith Lorenzo Young. *Presidet Young said there would be men saved in the Celestial Kingdom of God with one wife with Many wives & with No wife at all.*[181]

G. D. Smith might reply that nonpolygamous males might yet be denied the highest degree of celestial glory, but Woodruff reported less than two years later that "Presidt Young spoke 58 Minuts. He said a Man may Embrace the Law of Celestial Marriage in his heart & not take the Second wife & be justified before the Lord."[182]

Endorsing the doctrine of polygamy as divine was the key; there was no expectation that all were required to practice it. The

180. Other critics of the Church of Jesus Christ also take this stance. For example, Richard Abanes, *Becoming Gods: A Closer Look at 21st-Century Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2005), 233, 422 nn. 47–49; Contender Ministries, "Questions all Mormons Should Ask Themselves," http://www.contenderministries.org/mormonism/questions.php (accessed 6 December 2008); Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 29, 258.

181. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898 Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 6:527, citing entry for 12 February 1870, emphasis added.

182. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 7:31, citing entry for 24 September 1871.

fundamental issue was always obedience to God and ongoing revelation, not a dogged insistence that polygamy was essential to exaltation for everyone. Still, that Brigham Young had to insist upon this point, and that Wilford Woodruff thought it important enough to write down, demonstrates how powerful the rhetoric encouraging plural marriage could be. There can be no doubt that the rhetoric for compliance often lost sight of the nuances underlined by Brigham Young—but when writing as a historian, G. D. Smith ought not to mistake rhetoric for the broader reality.

In another address, Brigham Young made clear the kind of polygamy he expected the Saints to embrace:

> We wish to obtain all that father Abraham obtained. I wish here to say to the Elders of Israel, and to all the members of this Church and kingdom, that it is in the hearts of many of them to wish that the doctrine of polygamy was not taught and practiced by us. . . . It is the word of the Lord, and I wish to say to you, and all the world, that if you desire with all your hearts to obtain the blessings which Abraham obtained, *you will be polygamists at least in your faith, or you will come short of enjoying the salvation and the glory which Abraham has obtained*. This is as true as that God lives. You who wish that there were no such thing in existence, if you have in your hearts to say: "We will pass along in the Church without obeying or submitting to it in our faith or believing this order, because, for aught that we know, this community may be broken up yet, and we may have lucrative offices offered to us; we will not, therefore, be polygamists lest we should fail in obtaining some earthly honor, character and office, etc,"—the man that has that in his heart, and will continue to persist in pursuing that policy, will come short of dwelling in the presence of the Father and the Son, in celestial glory. The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy.[183]

183. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:268–69 (19 August 1866), emphasis added.

All Saints had to be polygamists—in their faith. To deny the divine origin of the command or to wish the command rescinded because of worldly concerns was to court damnation. One could refrain and be "justified before the Lord," *if* one's reasons were pure.

Stanley Ivins understood years ago what G. D. Smith misses: "Although plurality of wives was taught as a tenet of the church, it was not one of the fundamental principles of the Mormon faith. . . . The Saints accepted plurality in theory, but most of them were loath to put it into practice."[184] If practicing polygamy was truly the only way to salvation, the relatively low percentages of polygamists is indeed bizarre. G. D. Smith apparently hopes that we will see it so, with former and present prophets in seeming contradiction. But when the full spectrum of contemporary teaching is presented, it is not surprising that many could remain polygamist in their faith only, with no fears about their salvation.

Sexuality in Joseph's plural marriages

"There is no reason to doubt," G. D. Smith tells us, "that [Joseph's] marriages involved sexual relations in most instances" (p. 227). There is, in fact, relatively little evidence with which to judge, which means that *some* doubt is prudent. There is good evidence of a conjugal relationship with Almira Johnson, Melissa Lott, Emily Partridge, and Eliza R. Snow. It is also reasonable to include Eliza Partridge, Maria Lawrence, and Sarah Lawrence. The evidence for their inclusion is persuasive, though they are not named specifically. There is late, hostile evidence of intimacy with Fanny Alger, and most intriguingly there is some evidence of both a physical relationship and a child with Sylvia Sessions Lyon.[185] This is only nine marriages out of Todd

184. Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," 321.

185. G. D. Smith ignores Brian C. Hales, "The Joseph Smith–Sylvia Sessions Plural Sealing: Polyandry or Polygyny?" *Mormon Historical Studies* 9/1 (Spring 2008): 41–57, which argues that Sylvia considered herself divorced prior to marrying Joseph polygamously, contrary to evidence misread by Compton. There is no evidence for sexuality in any other polyandrous marriage. I have outlined my reasons for believing that there are no other viable candidates for potential polygamous children (save Josephine Lyon) in Gregory L. Smith, "Children from Joseph's Plural Marriages?" draft chapter in *The Principle: A history of LDS plural marriage* (2007); available online at http://

Compton's list of thirty-three—or G. D. Smith's list of thirty-eight—plural marriages.

G. D. Smith is here following Compton's analysis. The latter concluded that

> though it is possible that Joseph had some marriages in which there were no sexual relations, there is no explicit or convincing evidence for this (except, perhaps, in the cases of the older wives, judging from later Mormon polygamy). And in a significant number of marriages, there is evidence for sexual relations. . . . [T]here is no good evidence that Joseph Smith did not have sexual relations with any wife, previously single or polyandrous.[186]

Compton here makes a large—and, to my mind, unwarranted—leap. But G. D. Smith's leap is even larger—he moves from Compton's "no good evidence" to "no reason to doubt." Compton and those who follow his lead extend evidence from a few marriages and then argue that all of the marriages—single and polyandrous—followed the same pattern. G. D. Smith commits this error, though in a less rigorous manner than Compton. One is tempted to ask what evidence of no sexual relations would look like.

Compton is somewhat inconsistent, however, when treating this issue. For example, he writes that "some conclude that Helen Mar Kimball, who married Smith when she was fourteen, did not have marital relations with him. This is possible, as there are cases of Mormons in Utah marrying young girls and refraining from sexuality until they were older. But the evidence for Helen Mar is *entirely ambiguous* in my view."[187]

Compton's first claim is that the data are "entirely ambiguous," that is, entirely "open to or having several possible meanings or

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en.fairmormon.org/Joseph_Smith_and_polygamy/Children_of_polygamous_marriages/Book_chapter (accessed 2 December 2008).

186. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 15, 21.

187. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 14, emphasis added.

interpretations."[188] When anti-Mormons Jerald and Sandra Tanner exploited this ambiguity to emphasize the possibility of a sexual relationship with such a young wife, Compton argued that there were likely *no sexual relations* in the marriage to Helen Mar Kimball. His reason is that "there is absolutely no evidence that there was any sexuality in the marriage, and I suggest that, following later practice in Utah, there may have been no sexuality. All the evidence points to this marriage as a primarily dynastic marriage."[189]

Compton thus softens his initial claim: he first insisted that the evidence was ambiguous—amenable to interpretation in multiple ways. When accepted at his word by the Tanners, he then insisted that "all the evidence points" to a nonsexual conclusion, which hardly sounds ambiguous at all. The jumbled thinking continues when Compton later insisted that his "position, actually, is that there is *no evidence, pro or con*, for sexual relations."[190] Compton's position has thus veered from considering the data "entirely ambiguous" to "no evidence" of sexuality in what was likely a "dynastic marriage" to "no evidence at all, pro or con"! Unsurprisingly, his resulting interpretive structure is rickety.

One wonders if the confusion on this point is due in part to the hand of an editor. In his response to some unfavorable reviews, Compton described how an editor approached this passage:

> My position, actually, is that there is no evidence, pro or con, for sexual relations. You cannot prove that there were sexual relations; you cannot prove that there were no sexual relations. Notice that I do not simply say "ambiguous"; I say "entirely ambiguous."
>
> But, the reader may ask, what is my best guess? I remember talking with my publisher Gary Bergera [of Signature Books] on the phone once during the editorial process and I restated

188. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*, version 1.1 (Random House, Inc.), s.v. "ambiguous," http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ambiguous (accessed 2 December 2008).

189. Todd M. Compton, "Response to Tanners," post to LDS Bookshelf mailing list (no date), http://www.lds-mormon.com/compton.shtml (accessed 2 December 2008). Compare with Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 198–202, 302, 362.

190. Compton, "Truth, Honesty and Moderation."

> the cautious "no evidence either way" position. But Gary pressed: "But what do you think? What is your best guess?" And I answered that my best guess was that there were no sexual relations, based on parallels from some marriages to underage women in Utah polygamy. [191]

One wishes that the editor at Signature Books had made Compton's point of view less ambiguous, though Compton's expression of his point of view has not lent itself to clarity. G. D. Smith's subsequent treatment of the evidence is even more garbled, concluding that a marriage for time "involv[ed] physical relations." He quotes Compton as a source for this claim, though such a conclusion is not made by Compton (p. 201).[192]

Despite clarifying the Helen Kimball matter after publication, Compton's treatment of sexuality remains muddled throughout *In Sacred Loneliness*. Of Zina Huntington, he writes, "Nothing specific is known about sexuality in their marriage, though judging from Smith's other marriages, sexuality was probably included."[193] Once again, we have him arguing from negative evidence—we don't know anything, but Compton argues that we should judge based on other relationships. Yet elsewhere we read that "it is probable that Smith did not have sexual relations with his older wives,"[194] which sounds like a claim about evidence *against* sexuality.[195]

G. D. Smith also cites an anti-Mormon account of Helen's supposed angry regrets about plural marriage. Compton discloses that this source is anti-Mormon and calls its extreme language "suspect." No such caveat appears in G. D. Smith or his other sources (pp. 201–2).[196]

191. Compton, "Truth, Honesty and Moderation."

192. Compare Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 500.

193. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 82.

194. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 281.

195. As in the matter of Helen Kimball's marriage, one is perhaps entitled to wonder if the clear hostility of Compton's publisher (George D. Smith's Signature Books) to Latter-day Saint truth claims affected the way in which this charged issue was edited.

196. Compare Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 501, versus Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 147, and Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 293. The source is Catherine Lewis, *Narrative of Some of the Proceedings of the Mormons: Giving an Account of Their Iniquities, with Particulars Concerning the Training of the Indians by Them, Description of the Mode of*

G. D. Smith likewise does not tell us that historian Stanley Kimball believed the marriage was "unconsummated."[197]

We should avoid the trap into which Compton falls and be clear when we are speculating. G. D. Smith's loaded language worsens the situation, describing Joseph's "amorous proposal," his "prolonged dalliance," "his continuing affection for young women," and "his insatiable addition of one woman after another to an invisible family" (pp. 198, 231, 237). Such language begs the question and asserts without proof that Joseph's motivation was sexual. As Richard Bushman notes, Joseph's offers of plural marriage were not even couched in romantic, wooing terminology.[198] G. D. Smith's thesis of a sexually driven, even compulsive, Joseph requires that he shoehorn the data to fit it.

The character of Joseph Smith

1. The *History of the Church* Has Its Uses . . .

Despite his disparagement of the *History of the Church*, G. D. Smith does find a use for it. At times he cites this history when other, more accurate accounts are available elsewhere. For example, in his treatment of the King Follett discourse, he uses the *History of the Church* version—he ignores the *Times and Seasons*, the version published by Signature Books in *The Essential Joseph Smith*, and Stan Larson's *BYU Studies* article compiling all versions into an amalgamated text.[199]

Endowment, Plurality of Wives . . . (Lynn, MA: The Author, 1848), 19. Newell and Avery tell us nothing of the nature of this source and call it only a "statement" in the Stanley Ivins Collection; Van Wagoner mirrors G. D. Smith by disingenuously writing that "Helen confided [this information] to a close Nauvoo friend," without revealing its anti-Mormon origins. To credit this story at face value, one must admit that Helen told others in Nauvoo about the marriage (something she repeatedly emphasized she was not to do) and that she told a story at variance with all the others from her pen during a lifetime of staunch defense of plural marriage. On Helen's authentic statements, see Helen Mar Whitney, *A Woman's View: Helen Mar Whitney's Reminiscences of Early Church History*, ed. Jeni Broberg Holzapfel and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1997), ix–xliii.

197. Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 98.

198. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 440, 445.

199. Smith, *The Essential Joseph Smith*, 238; Joseph Smith, "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 15/5 (15 August 1844): 614–15; Stan Larson, ed., "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *BYU Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 193–208.

G. D. Smith writes that "in defending his theology [during the King Follett discourse], Smith proclaimed, 'I am learned, and know more than all the world put together.'"[200] The period ending the sentence would imply that this completed his thought—and so it appears in the *History of the Church*. If the three versions cited above are consulted, however, they each demonstrate that the sentiment may have been quite different:

> Now, I ask all the learned men who hear me, why the learned doctors who are preaching salvation say that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. They account it blasphemy to contradict the idea. *If you tell them that God made the world out of something,* they will call you a fool. The reason is that they are unlearned but I *am learned and* know more than all the world put together—*the Holy Ghost does, anyhow.* If the Holy Ghost in me comprehends more than all the world, I will associate *myself* with it.[201]

In the *History of the Church* version, the statement about the Holy Ghost is placed in its own sentence. This allows G. D. Smith to exclude it with no ellipsis and portray Joseph as decidedly more arrogant than he was.

Daniel C. Peterson's remark is telling: "Amusing, isn't it, . . . that the very same people who vehemently reject the . . . *History of the Church* as an unreliable source when it seems to support the Latter-day Saint position clutch it to their bosoms as an unparalleled historical treasure when they think they can use it as a weapon against the alleged errors of Mormonism."[202]

2. Joseph Smith: Arrogant Aspirant to the Presidency?

That G. D. Smith intends Joseph to be seen as arrogant is clear; in the previous paragraph he quotes a letter from Joseph to James

200. Smith, *The Essential Joseph Smith*, 226.

201. Larson, "Newly Amalgamated Text," 203. The italic type (added by Larson) indicates material found only in Wilford Woodruff's account.

202. Daniel C. Peterson, "P. T. Barnum *Redivivus*," review of *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism*, by Ed Decker, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/2 (1995): 54–55.

Arlington Bennet:[203] "I combat the errors of ages; I meet the violence of mobs; I cope with illegal proceedings from executive authority; I cut the Gordian knot of powers, and I solve mathematical problems of universities, with truth . . . diamond truth; and God is my 'right hand man.'" G. D. Smith then editorializes: "With such a self-image, it is not surprising that he also aspired to the highest office in the land: the presidency of the United States" (p. 225). Here again, he serves his readers poorly. He neglects to tell us that Joseph's remark comes from a somewhat tongue-in-cheek exchange with James Bennet, who had been baptized in the East but immediately wrote Joseph to disclaim his "glorious frolic in the clear blue ocean; for most assuredly a frolic it was, without a moment's reflection or consideration."[204]

Bennet went on to praise Joseph in an exaggerated, humorous style: "As you have proved yourself to be a philosophical divine . . . [it] point[s] you out as the most extraordinary man of the present age." "But," cautioned Bennet,

> my mind is of so *mathematical* and philosophical a cast, that the divinity of Moses makes no impression on me, and you will not be offended when I say that I rate you higher as a legislator than I do Moses. . . . I cannot, however, say but you are both right, it being out of the power of man to prove you wrong. It is no mathematical problem, and can therefore get no mathematical solution.[205]

Joseph's claim that his religious witness can "solve mathematical problems of universities" is thus a playful return shot at Bennet,[206] who has

203. Bennet's name is also sometimes spelled *Bennett*.

204. *History of the Church*, 6:71.

205. *History of the Church*, 6:72, emphasis added.

206. Charles Mackay, though mistaking this Bennet for John C. Bennett, nevertheless realized what was going on: "'Joseph's reply to this singular and too candid epistle was quite as singular and infinitely more amusing. Joseph was too cunning a man to accept, in plain terms, the rude but serviceable offer; and he rebuked the vanity and presumption of Mr Bennett, while dexterously retaining him for future use." See Charles Mackay, ed., *The Mormons, or Latter-day Saints; with memoirs of the Life and Death of Joseph Smith, the American Mahomet,* 4th ed. (London, 1856); cited in Hubert Howe Bancroft and Alfred Bates, *History of Utah, 1540–1886* (San Francisco: The History Co., 1889), 151 n.

claimed a "so mathematical" mind that cannot decide about Joseph's truth claims since they admit of "no mathematical solution."[207] G. D. Smith may not get the joke, but he ought to at least let us know that there is one being told.

Bennet continued by suggesting that he need not have religious convictions to support Joseph, adding slyly that "you know Mahomet had his '*right hand man*.'" Joseph's reply that God is his right-hand man is again a riposte to Bennet and follows Joseph's half-serious gibe that "your good wishes to go ahead, coupled with Mahomet and a right hand man, are rather more vain than virtuous. Why, sir, Cæsar had his right hand Brutus, who was his left hand assassin." Joseph here pauses, and we can almost see him grin before adding: "Not, however, applying the allusion to you."[208]

Bennet had also offered Joseph a carving of "your head on a beautiful cornelian stone, as your private seal, which will be set in gold to your order, and sent to you. It will be a gem, and just what you want. . . . The expense of this seal, set in gold, will be about $40; and [the maker] assures me that if he were not so poor a man, he would present it to you free. You can, however, accept it or not."[209]

Joseph does not let this rhetorical opportunity go by, telling Bennet that "facts, like *diamonds*, not only cut glass, but they are the most precious *jewels* on earth. . . . As to the private seal you mention, if sent to me, I shall receive it with the gratitude of a servant of God, and pray that the donor may receive a reward in the resurrection of the just."[210] Joseph's concluding remark about the necessity of "truth—diamond-hard truth" plays on this same association with the proffered precious stone.

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112. Concludes Bancroft: "More has been made of this correspondence than it deserves," though G. D. Smith has seen fit to continue the error.

207. Joseph pursued Bennet's mathematical analogy for several paragraphs; see *History of the Church*, 6:75–77. Bennet was fond of the metaphor; in 1855 he was to privately publish *A New Revelation to Mankind, drawn from Axioms, or self-evident truths in Nature, Mathematically demonstrated*. See Richard D. Poll, "Joseph Smith and the Presidency, 1844," *BYU Studies* 3/3 (Autumn 1968): 19 n. 19.

208. *History of the Church*, 6:77.

209. *History of the Church*, 6:72.

210. *History of the Church*, 6:77, emphasis added.

The key point of Bennet's letter, after the sardonic preliminaries, was an invitation to use untruth for political gain—hence Joseph's insistence on "diamond-hard truth." Bennet closed his letter by asking to be privately relieved of his honorary commission with the Nauvoo Legion, noting that

> I may yet run for a high office in your state, when you would be sure of my best services in your behalf; therefore, a known connection with you would be against our mutual interest. It can be shown that a commission in the Legion was a Herald hoax, coined for the fun of it by me, as it is not believed even now by the public. In short, I expect to be yet, through your influence, governor of the State of Illinois.[211]

Bennet hoped to use Joseph without embracing his religious pretensions and was bold enough to say so.[212] However, Joseph was not as cynical and malleable as the Easterner hoped, for the Prophet then insisted at length on the impropriety of using "the dignity and honor I received from heaven, to boost a man into [political] power," since "the wicked and unprincipled . . . would seize the opportunity to [harden] the hearts of the nation against me for dabbling at a sly game in politics."

Joseph's fear in relation to politics is that to support the unworthy would be to corrupt the mission he has been given. "Shall I," continued Joseph rhetorically, ". . . turn to be a Judas? Shall I, who have heard the voice of God, and communed with angels, and spake as moved by the Holy Ghost for the renewal of the everlasting covenant, and for the gathering of Israel in the last days,—shall I worm myself into a political hypocrite?" Rather, Joseph hoped that "the whole earth shall bear me witness that I, like the towering rock in the midst of the ocean, which has withstood the mighty surges of the warring waves for centuries, am impregnable, and am a faithful friend to virtue, and a fearless foe to vice."[213]

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211. *History of the Church*, 6:72.

212. Lyndon W. Cook, "James Arlington Bennet and the Mormons," *BYU Studies* 19/2 (Winter 1979): 247–49.

213. *History of the Church*, 6:77–78.

It is at this point that he makes the statement quoted by G. D. Smith —a nice rhetorical summation of the word games he and Bennet were playing and a jovial but direct rejection of Bennet's politically cynical offer—but hardly evidence of someone with a grandiose self-image.[214]

To paraphrase G. D. Smith, small wonder, then, that *this* Joseph—the one revealed by the documents—decided to run for the presidency. The decision was natural since the Saints felt no candidate was worthy of their support—though they knew that a vote for Joseph could well be "throw[ing] away our votes."[215] Joseph's campaign was "a gesture," though one he took seriously. Experienced students of Mormon history will know this; G. D. Smith evidently counts on his audience not knowing.[216]

3. Joseph Smith: Financial Impropriety?

Not content with a portrayal of Joseph as an egomaniacal libertine, *Nauvoo Polygamy* also accuses him of shady financial deals. This is also done through a selective and incomplete presentation of the evidence.

Land speculation. G. D. Smith claims that "the Law brothers came into a . . . dispute with [Joseph] over his conduct as trustee-in-trust for the church. In that capacity, [Joseph] had appropriated church members' charitable donations for real estate speculation, buying low and reselling high to those immigrants who could afford to pay" (p. 423). In fact, Joseph had signed two promissory notes of $25,000 for Nauvoo, payable to Eastern land speculators. Yet the dispossession suffered by the Saints in Missouri made repayment difficult since many could not afford to purchase land.[217] "Joseph wanted to help," reports Richard Bushman, "but huge debts prevented him from simply giving away land. What could poor converts do?" Joseph's preference was "to give land to the poor, especially to widows and orphans. To finance these free gifts, he wanted others to pay generously. The high council priced Nauvoo lots from $200 to $800, leaving room for negotiation. All these judgments required patience and wisdom and exposed Joseph to criticism for

214. When Joseph's personal letters are compared with this letter, one suspects a large contribution by scribe and newspaperman W. W. Phelps.

215. "Who Shall Be Our Next President," *Times and Seasons* 5/4 (15 February 1844): 441.

216. See Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 512–17.

217. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 430.

gouging and unfair treatment."[218] In addition, "in June 1840, he asked the high council to appoint someone else to attend to 'the temporalities of the Church.' . . . [B]ut his appeal went unheeded, . . . leaving Joseph responsible for the debts and final disposition of land."[219]

Thus the charge that Joseph was involved in "real estate speculation" is not true. G. D. Smith's claim that Joseph was selling high "to those . . . who could afford to pay" is a bit of verbal legerdemain—it is true, while still managing to hide the fact that the Prophet was *giving away* land to those who could not pay. Joseph was already in debt for the land; land sold for higher prices did not benefit Joseph but did benefit those Saints too poor to afford land at all.

On what basis, then, were the Law brothers complaining? Their motives were not so pure as G. D. Smith suggests, just as Joseph's actions were not so venal as G. D. Smith's version implies. The Laws invested in lots in upper Nauvoo and on the outskirts while the church held title to the lower city. As Lyndon Cook has explained,

> By 1843 the fundamental economic interests of the [Laws] and the Mormon leader were in definite conflict. Brisk competition caused the Prophet to insist that the Saints purchase building lots from only the Church. Although most recognized this as a sacrifice which would assist in liquidating Church debts, to William Law it sounded too much like totalitarianism.[220]

The Laws' profits were harmed by Joseph's policy of giving land to the poor, and the Laws also resented his ability to influence buyers. G. D. Smith's account is a caricature of the facts. Few citations to the relevant literature are provided.

Maria and Sarah Lawrence. G. D. Smith twice mentions the Lawrence sisters, two of Joseph's plural wives who also boarded with him and for whom he was responsible following their father's death. William Law charged Joseph with

218. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 414, 417.

219. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 417.

220. Lyndon W. Cook, "William Law: Nauvoo Dissenter," *BYU Studies* 22/1 (Fall 1982): 62.

> fiduciary neglect of his teenage responsibility, Maria Lawrence. Reviewing his own actions forty years later, Law concluded that Joseph was not the only one who had taken advantage of a defenseless girl. Emma, he believed, was equally complicit. . . . With Hyrum Smith's death, William Law, the other bondsman for the Lawrences, felt acutely the responsibility he bore, ultimately reimbursing Joseph's $3,000 worth of expenses charged to the estate—the amount Joseph had claimed as the value of room and board. (pp. 438–39)

By accepting Law's account, G. D. Smith commits many of the same errors present in Todd Compton's *In Sacred Loneliness*. However, even before the publication of Compton's book, Gordon A. Madsen had presented data showing the falsity of Law's charges. Compton has the excuse that Madsen's material was unpublished when his book went to press and only available from a presentation made at the Mormon History Association in 1996. More than a decade later, G. D. Smith makes the same errors, though with no hint of the exculpatory evidence available from the primary documents.[221] He even cites Madsen's materials but tells the reader nothing about their contents.[222]

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221. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 475, 742–43; this is discussed in Anderson and Faulring, "Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives," 90. Compton replies in Compton, "Truth, Honesty and Moderation," noting the difficulties that he had in accessing Madsen's as-yet-unpublished findings. In preparation for this review, I spoke with Madsen, who told me that when approached by Compton, he felt his materials were not yet ready for distribution. Madsen believes a responder to his 1996 presentation at the Mormon History Association conference at Snowbird, Utah, placed some rough notes on the presentation in the library (personal communication, 21 November 2008).

222. G. D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 196 n. 137, cites "Gordon Madsen, 'The Lawrence Estate Revisited: Joseph Smith and Illinois Law regarding Guardianships,' Nauvoo Symposium, Sept. 21, 1989, Brigham Young University, copy in possession of Todd Compton; see *Sacred Loneliness*, 474–476." Strangely, this paper was *not cited* by Compton, nor is Madsen's work mentioned on the pages cited by G. D. Smith. Compton's actual discussion of Madsen's research is restricted to endnotes on pages 742–46: "Madsen, Gordon. 'Joseph Smith as Guardian: The Lawrence Estate.' Paper given at Mormon History Association, May 18, 1996. . . . I have followed Madsen as closely as possible from my notes, but do not have his written argument and citations." The *FARMS Review* (cited in main text above) also provided some of Madsen's data in a review of Compton's work, which G. D. Smith likewise ignores. G. D. Smith's reference to 1989 instead of 1996 may be related to an event reported in the *Ensign*: "William Law's recollection of how Joseph

G. D. Smith has apparently not paid attention to what the *FARMS Review* reported on this topic either, since

> most of what Law said about the estate itself was incorrect. . . . Madsen's paper quoted the will, under which Maria and Sarah would share equal parts of the estate with several siblings, but the distribution was not due during the life of their widowed mother, who was entitled to her share of annual interest on the undivided assets. . . . Between 1841 and early 1844, Joseph Smith charged nothing for boarding Maria and Sarah, nor did he bill the estate for management fees. Furthermore, in mid-1843, the probate court approved his accounts, including annual interest payments to the widow, as required by the will. . . . Gordon Madsen's overall point was that the Prophet met his legal responsibilities in being entrusted with the Lawrence assets. There is no hint of fraud.[223]

But rather than respond to this material or describe Madsen's conclusions, G. D. Smith merely follows the hostile William Law. Madsen further informed me that there was never any "cash" in the estate delivered to Joseph, and certainly not the "$8,000.00 in English gold" that Law would later claim.[224] The bulk of the estate was in promissory notes owed by fellow Canadians to the Lawrences. Law was well aware of this since he and his brother Wilson were hired by Joseph to collect some of these debts. Joseph's accounts provided the probate court list payment to "W. & W. Law" in such cases. At one point, Joseph "sent William Clayton to Wilson Law to find out why he refused paying his

Smith, as guardian of the Lawrence children, cheated them and him is full of errors, claimed Gordon A. Madsen. All the court records pertaining to the guardianship and Joseph Smith's management of the Lawrence estate still exist. They show that virtually all of Law's claims are mistaken" ("Nauvoo Symposium Held at Brigham Young University," *Ensign*, November 1989, 109–11). Madsen told me that he had never given an address about the Lawrence estate until his 1996 MHA presentation, while his 1989 talk focused on the Austin King hearing in Richmond, Missouri, *not* the Anderson estate. In any case, Madsen's research nowhere corroborates G. D. Smith's version.

223. Anderson and Faulring, "Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives," 91.

224. "Dr. Wyl and Dr. Wm. Law," *Daily Tribune* (Salt Lake City), 13 July 1887, 6; see also Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 742.

note, when he brought in some claims as a set-off which Clayton knew were paid, leaving me no remedy but the glorious uncertainty of the law."[225] It is not clear whether this was Law's own note or one owed to the Lawrences. Certainly the estate was never liquid, and it is likely that not all of the notes had been collected before Joseph's death.[226]

To portray Joseph as "us[ing] celestial marriage as a means to access . . . [a] fortune" (p. 439) is to ignore virtually all the primary sources. G. D. Smith gives an account by a bitter apostate—offered nearly forty-three years after the fact—exclusive precedence over contemporary court documents. We are back where we started—at cargo cult history.

A Grand Synthesis?

In his final chapter, G. D. Smith attempts to tie Latter-day Saint plural marriage to the broader history of polygamy, with a special emphasis on the Münster Anabaptists. The noted similarities are generally strained, somewhat superficial, and not argued but simply portrayed as parallels by assertion or suggestion. No attention is given to the many differences between elements that share superficial similarities. Given G. D. Smith's failure to do justice to the Latter-day Saint plural marriage data, I am reluctant to trust his more perfunctory treatment of three hundred years of polygamy and polygamist thought in the broader Christian world. This chapter feels and reads as something of an afterthought. It is, at least, an improvement to see Joseph's religious ideas tied to millennialist thought—though the claim that he might have gleaned them via the oral traditions of descendants of the Münster Anabaptists living near Emma Hale's family in the 1820s smacks of desperation (p. 529).

225. *History of the Church*, 6:350.

226. My thanks to Gordon A. Madsen, who was gracious enough to review a draft of my Lawrence material. He also provided me with the information in this paragraph. Any mistakes or misapprehensions remain my own, and he is not responsible for my conclusions. Madsen's manuscript on the Lawrence estate is currently in preparation for publication.

I say *improvement* because chatty Anabaptists are better than the bizarre claim with which the book opens, insisting that Joseph's religious impulses and ideas were due to a fascination with all things Egyptian. This is part of G. D. Smith's attempt to equate Joseph with Napoleon: "The French adventurer's finding . . . [of the Rosetta Stone] lit a fire in [Joseph] Smith that inspired even the language of his religious prose" (pp. x–xi). Mercifully, this line of analysis is quickly abandoned for the remainder of the book.

But, we are advised, the Anabaptist connection *does* have an "interest to Mormon history, [since] one of their [later] leaders was Alexander Mack, having *the same surname* as Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Mack Smith" (p. 528, emphasis added). As Dave Barry was wont to say, "I swear I'm not making this up." One can only imagine the riches that will be of interest to the Mormon historian once we realize that Joseph Smith's surname is likewise shared by even more historical figures than Hale's. Would G. D. Smith see this as fraught with meaning too?

Conclusion

More than a quarter century ago, G. D. Smith published Quinn's claim that

> writers are certainly "dishonest or bad historians" if they fail to acknowledge the existence of even one piece of evidence they know challenges or contradicts the rest of their evidence. If this omission of relevant evidence is inadvertent, the author is careless. If the omission is an intentional effort to conceal or avoid presenting the reader with evidence that contradicts the preferred view of the writer, that is fraud, whether by a scholar or non-scholar, historian or other specialist. If authors write in scholarly style, they are equally dishonest if they fail to acknowledge any significant work whose interpretations differ from their own.[227]

227. D. Michael Quinn, "Editor's Introduction," in *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), viii n. 5.

Quinn's standard, taken to extremes, is clearly unreasonable. No one can know everything. No researcher is infallible, and scholarship must involve judgments of what to include and exclude. Honest mistakes and omissions happen.

However, *Nauvoo Polygamy* is an example of failing to meet minimal scholarly standards. G. D. Smith leaves evidence that differs with his interpretation uncited or unengaged. In some cases he acknowledges an alternative viewpoint but leaves the strongest evidence for the differing view unmentioned. Often the selective citation and discussion of evidence is blatant.

Nauvoo Polygamy adds little that is new to the discussion of Mormon polygamy prior to the death of Joseph Smith.[228] In many ways his thesis is atavistic and advances no further than Brodie's 1945 effort—which was similarly driven by an ideology that was unfailingly hostile. I suspect that anyone moderately familiar with the extant literature will learn little; anyone who uses *Nauvoo Polygamy* as an introduction to the subject will be misled.

Why was this book published? To advance an agenda? The result often reads like the product of a vanity press rather than a serious attempt to synthesize the best available scholarship.

228. I do not consider myself familiar enough with the postmartyrdom literature to assess the novelty of G. D. Smith's contribution. I suspect that his statistical tabulation of Nauvoo polygamists and families (pp. 283–90, 311–22, 474–78, 573–656) is the book's most useful contribution. His errors in other areas, however, make it difficult to trust his work here without reservation.