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Reviewed by Richard Lyman Bushman

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women in Rwanda and South Africa. Amy recently completed a longitudinal ethnographic study of American Latter-day Saint women and is preparing her findings for publication.

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MARTHA BRADLEY-EVANS ENCAPSULATES ONE SALIENT THEME of her engaging account of Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo years in the title, *Glorious in Persecution*. Her Joseph is a storyteller, and one of his narratives is about prophethood emerging from persecution. The more he was battered by his enemies, the greater the glory of his calling. “Insults became badges of honor, confirmation that his life was playing out on a mythic stage of opposition” (p. x).

Persecution was not Joseph’s only story. The King Follett sermon, Joseph’s grand account of God and humankind, was another of his captivating tales. Wrapped in these marvelous narratives, people were transported to another realm. The city of Nauvoo became far more than a commercial entrepôt on the Mississippi. The city’s buildings—the temple, the Masonic hall, the Nauvoo Mansion—“became ritualized spaces in but not of the profane world” (pp. 603–4). *Glorious in Persecution* tries to re-create the spell cast by Joseph’s tales of himself and God, and through them, the elevation of the mundane to the spiritual and supernal.

In the preface, Bradley-Evans tells us that she has relied on the Nauvoo volumes of the classic seven-volume *History of the Church*, an unusual choice these days. The *History* has been discredited because it consists of a blend of many sources, including other diaries and letters, as if they were entries from Joseph Smith’s personal journal. In defense of the

History, Bradley-Evans notes that it “achieves the purpose of presenting Joseph’s prophet-narrative,” the stories that colored everything in Nauvoo (p. xix). But she has another reason for relying on these volumes. She anchors her story in the *History of the Church*’s chronology. In places, her account follows the *History* day by day, adding commentary and drawing on other sources to expand the *History*’s daily entries. When she departs from chronology to discuss polygamy, she calls the chapters an “Interlude.”

To tell her story, Bradley-Evans calls into service a host of eminent theorists from the social sciences, literature, and philosophy. The first footnote in the introduction is to Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*. From there the footnotes go on to R. G. Collingwood, Harold Bloom, Len Oakes, Max Weber, Peter Berger, Yi-Fu Tuan, and Victor Turner, just in the first twelve pages. The epilogue is partly a riff on Walter Benjamin and Italo Calvino. In between, we hear from Paul Ricoeur, Clifford Geertz, and R. Ruard Ganzevoort. Such notables are not commonly cited in histories of Mormonism. In Bradley-Evans’s account, they are vital to the analysis.

What the theorists add was not immediately clear to me at first. For one thing, there are so many of them. They offer such a flood of insights that one cannot decide what to hold on to as they come rushing by. Moreover, Bradley-Evans often follows a practice common in historical and literary works: gathering the theoretical references into a single, dense conglomeration preceding the historical narrative that follows. The result is that theory and the historical sources are separated from one another. We are not quite sure if the evidence supports the theory or what light theory sheds on the evidence. Turner and Berger arouse the reader, but when we go back to the sources themselves, the excitement dims. We come out from under the spell that the theorists cast and are not sure if Nauvoo was as magical as the theorists lead us to think.

As I tried to figure out how the book works, I fastened on the paintings of J. M. W. Turner, the proto-impressionist English painter famous for his dazzling seascapes, an efflorescence of foam, light, and clouds, with looming shapes of hulls and masts emerging from the din of color.

Atmosphere is more important to Turner than form. In Bradley-Evans's hands the theorists serve as dabs of paint blending into an evocation of the scene. No one is definitive; she is not giving a Peter Berger or a Walter Benjamin reading of the documents. But together they create an effect. Victor Turner and Paul Ricoeur help us to sense that more was happening in Nauvoo than a straight narration allows for, something powerful, elevating, and ominous. In Bradley-Evans's hands, we see things at Nauvoo that were never visible before. She explains herself quite explicitly in the opening pages: "I have written this account of Joseph's final years as if peering through a series of layers, struggling to see what is clearest on the surface, what is hidden behind the lines of propriety or privacy, and what is intentionally obscured" (pp. vi-vii). *Glorious in Persecution* uses the theorists to evoke a prophetic personality and a communal mood. Her aim is to uncover depths of meaning that a purely narrative history could not convey.

Lots of things in the Nauvoo story interest Bradley-Evans. She devotes many pages to plurality, as she terms polygamy. Joseph Smith's wives receive individual attention and are not just footnotes to the history. She does not give us a lustful Joseph driven by libido to capture young women. "More was at stake for him than boredom with his civil wife or a mid-life crisis that took the form of testing his virility with young women" (p. 217). She is more intrigued by the movement into a liminal space where ordinary restraints on sexual behavior were released. Joseph and his partners could step across boundaries others dared not cross. Of Joseph and Louisa Beaman, Bradley-Evans writes that their "plural marriage sealing . . . cast them forward beyond time and space, suspended them above the mundane tasks of domestic life and permitted them to glimpse heaven" (p. 118).

Certain points emerge sharply from the plurality story. For one, establishing polygamy led Joseph over and over again to outright deception. To figure out what was going on, his followers had to navigate "seas of lies" (p. 385). Another emphasis is on Emma's suffering, through which she somehow remained faithful. Joseph knew he had married a good woman. Both were confused and perplexed by this movement into forbidden territory. Around these central assertions rises up again

the Turnerian foam of light and motion. Bradley-Evans wishes to create atmosphere. Speaking of Nauvoo on the eve of plurality, she writes: “Underneath the surface of community-building and neighborly relations, however, ran an undercurrent of secrecy, power, and eroticism, ready to manifest in ritual” (p. 116). Or again: “Joseph’s movement into plurality created a new cosmos that transcended the ordinary space of human beings” (p. 219). The complexities, the layers, the potent mixture—these are what Bradley-Evans wishes to recover.

One method of portraying complexity is to move the reader through many layers of comment. On plurality, she gives us Joseph H. Jackson, William Law, William Clayton, Alexander Neibaur, Joseph Lee Robinson, Lucy Smith, and Heber Kimball, all of them offering differing accounts. She presents these one after the other without evaluation and with no effort to extract a single narrative line. We are left with impressions rather than firm conclusions. But this is exactly what she intends, for this is how she believes Joseph experienced the world. “For a human being who had experiences both of the earth and of heaven, who experienced the liminality and anomie that accompanies ritual, Joseph whirled through a kaleidoscope life promising infinite, divine potentialities” (p. 601).

She borrows the terms *liminality* and *anomie* from Victor Turner to explain why people would break away from commonsense, fact-based reason to accept rituals made up of “subtle secrets, codes, and subterfuges” (p. xvi). In a liminal state induced by ritual, ordinary rules do not apply. In the timeless world, plural marriage, the Council of Fifty, and Joseph’s anointing as a king all made sense. He wrapped the political kingdom, plurality, prayer circles, and the temple rituals in ever more layers of secrecy. The result was that “over time, a complex web of relationships and intrigues encased Joseph and his ritualized world of belief like a cocoon, impossible to unravel and understand in a single strand” (pp. 600–601). Those words apply generally to *Glorious in Persecution*. Readers are shown a many-layered world that cannot be unraveled and cannot be understood in a single strand.

Joseph Smith’s character fascinates Bradley-Evans. To a historian, she says, meaning herself, Smith is confusing and alienating. She thinks he was greedy for power, flirtatious, petty, irritable, and, when it came to

polygamy, an inveterate liar. On the whole, she puts herself on the side of those who have said Joseph Smith came off the rails in Nauvoo. He had himself ordained king and told people they could become gods. Adding to this common view, Bradley-Evans observes that he “he swung between exultation, defiance, and blood-spattered rhetoric at one extreme and despondency, despair and passivity at the other” (p. 598). In the final analysis, he brought the mob down on himself. His reckless destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor* press after arguing the city council into it, she claims, sealed his fate. By the end, his rhetoric and his actions got out of hand. It was fortunate, she says, that he did not actually return to address the Saints before his final departure for Carthage. He would likely have lost control and inflamed his people into some desperate, suicidal act.

But to see Joseph simply as an unstable, out-of-control personality, Bradley-Evans insists, fails to do him justice. *Glorious in Persecution* offers readers a more subtle Joseph than the standard caricature of the crazed prophet. She believes that Joseph built his religion on illusion, to be sure, but she also believes he was sincere. “Desire for life with God, desire to walk always with God became Joseph’s master-passion, a hungry constancy that colored all he did” (p. 602). His prophethood was a burden and a puzzle. “Joseph’s desire to understand what God wanted of him as a prophet, his passion to live the life of a prophet—to explain to others what that meant—was the central occupation of his life” (p. 602). His story entranced his followers. Joseph’s revelation of life’s meaning was for them “as compelling as the most powerful addiction.” They “sensed and desired that same uniqueness but . . . glimpsed its glory only in furtive, blinding glances” (p. 603). In her stunning evocation of Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo, Bradley-Evans calls upon her readers to marvel at—or deplore—that blinding glory.

Richard Lyman Bushman is the Gouverneur Morris Professor of History Emeritus at Columbia University. He serves on the national advisory board of *The Joseph Smith Papers*.