

portant role in missionary life and in building a hierarchy of difference and evaluation among missionaries. But this cannot be clearly understood unless gender is brought firmly into the analytical frame. Though many missionaries are women, *Mormon Passage* does not consider their experience at all. Meanwhile, it is certainly not a given that, even in some of its most basic aspects, a woman's experience of a mission is the same as a man's. Moreover, what role does gender play in envisioning relationships between missionaries and converts? So pervasive a determinant in other carefully researched areas undoubtedly plays a role here. But how? These, I think, are critical questions.

This leads to another criticism of this very fine book, though it is less a criticism of the work than of Anglo Mormonism. The book takes place in Mexico, but we get very little understanding of Mexican society and culture through the lens of these journals. Clearly the missionaries love many people and are loved in return. And at one point Gordon does tell of being scolded for blindness and a patronizing attitude

toward Mexican missionaries, but because the authors do not tackle such issues in depth, Mexico remains little more than an exotic place in which they spent two years. This relationship between missionaries and converts and missionaries and the cultures in which they serve, a relationship of legitimate caring which nonetheless enables social and cultural blindness, may model a kind of uncomprehending intimacy characteristic of Mormon life in general, love as a relationship of power, discipline, hierarchy. The question is worth looking deeply into.

I see the self-absorption of Anglo Mormon culture as the principal failing of this book and, indeed, as one of the major failings of Mormon studies in general, even if it is explainable in terms of LDS norms and practices. But whatever concerns I've raised about such matters, *Mormon Passage* is an excellent book and a surprisingly good read. It captures the humanity as well as the closure of missionary life, and together, the diaries and letters often have an understated lyrical quality.

Bringing Balance to our Historical Writing

From Mission to Madness: Last Son of the Mormon Prophet. By Valeen Tippetts Avery (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 368 pp.

Reviewed by William D. Russell,
Professor of Political Science and History,
Graceland University.

DAVID HYRUM SMITH WAS Joseph Smith's last child, born several months after the assassination of his father. He followed

his oldest brother, Joseph Smith III, and his mother, Emma, into the RLDS Church and became a member of the First Presidency. Students of Mormon history should welcome Valeen Tippetts Avery's sensitive biography of the son Joseph never knew.

Avery has consulted virtually all of the primary sources available as well as the most relevant secondary sources. She came to this task well prepared by virtue of her earlier work on Emma—

the 1984 biography *Mormon Enigma*, written with Linda King Newell—and her Ph.D. dissertation on David. This reviewer thought readers could detect a slight pro-Mormon bias in *Mormon Enigma*, because it seemed the authors were sometimes kinder to Joseph than the evidence warranted. But I think readers of this biography of David won't be able to tell whether the author is Mormon, or, if so, of what faction of Mormonism. Too often that is not true in Mormon history.

Both works are helpful in shedding light on the lives of the women and children who are in the prophet's family but do not inherit the mantle of leadership. In LDS writings Emma has been largely ignored and not looked upon favorably when noticed. (For example, Milton Backman's major book on Mormonism in Ohio in the 1830's mentions Emma Smith only three times, not particularly favorably.) She did not go west and did not like Brigham, and the feeling was mutual. David has not been very well known to Mormons, either RLDS or LDS. He is largely ignored in LDS history. David is also downplayed in the RLDS history, for during most of the time he was a member of the First Presidency he was resident in what was then called an "insane asylum." As one nineteenth-century reader of the LDS *Deseret News* wrote sarcastically, "insanity and confinement in an asylum for an indefinite time does not disqualify a member of the [RLDS] first presidency from retaining his office" (267). This book thus raises a sensitive issue for RLDS members who, in effect, must admit that God called an insane man to the First Presidency.

This book is also sensitive because of the issue of polygamy. The RLDS Church vehemently denied for more than a century that Joseph Smith was a polygamist. But both this book and *Mor-*

mon Enigma make it clear that he was. Despite this, many RLDS still hold to the traditional RLDS view that Brigham Young instituted this nefarious doctrine in Utah. (My late mother, for example, knew that Joseph was not a polygamist because her father heard it from Joseph III's own lips: "My father was not a polygamist!") The more informed RLDS, however, have accepted reality. I have taught a course on Latter Day Saint history at Graceland for the past five years. When my students read the biography of Emma, which I always assign, most accept Joseph's polygamy without much stress.

Ironically, some LDS historical publications now omit Brigham Young's own polygamy, just as Mormon biographers have tended to leave out his racism and sexism. Even Dennis Lythgoe's article and review of Avery's book in the *Deseret News* (July 11, 1999) reflect the LDS downplaying of our polygamist past. His article contained only a four-word phrase mentioning polygamy, his review just one short paragraph. Yet polygamy obviously was so significant a problem that it may have driven David insane. Perhaps the LDS and RLDS can switch positions for the next century and continue the great debate, with the LDS denying that Joseph Smith was a polygamist while the RLDS vigorously contend that he was. (Maybe we could even schedule a debate between W. Grant McMurray and Gordon B. Hinckley, or Paul Edwards and Boyd K. Packer.)

I have long been critical of the explanations for polygamy given by the Saints. In his 1983 watershed article in the *John Whitmer Journal*, RLDS historian Richard Howard seemed to portray polygamy happening in Nauvoo as an accident. LDS people tend simply to explain it as a revelation. For example, one LDS bishop admitted to my students

that he cannot defend polygamy by rational argument and simply accepts it "because God said so." God, however, forgot to tell Emma, whom he should have known would require lots of persuasion. My freshman students are much more realistic about polygamy than the historians, it seems to me. They assume Joseph's sex drive had something to do with it and draw parallels between the relationship of Emma and Joseph and that of Hillary and Bill Clinton. Bill Clinton probably wishes he had figured out a theological justification for his own activities.

Why did the martyr's son, who showed great potential, go crazy? Some RLDS thought that David was poisoned by Brighamites while he was doing missionary work in Utah. For many that was a very attractive theory. But Joseph III told the Saints not to believe it, and his skepticism was probably well placed. Another theory had David "infected" through his contact with Amasa Lyman's spiritualism in Utah. Mormons of the Utah church found it natural to speculate that David, a sensitive young man, went insane over learning that his father was indeed a polygamist—despite the denials of his mother and his older brother, the prophet.

The LDS view seems the most likely to this writer. Imagine that a person believes his church is the only true church. Imagine that his father was its founding prophet. Imagine that the son is adored by the saints and expected to accomplish great things for the faith. Imagine that his oldest brother is the current prophet. Imagine that this "one and only true church" began out of opposition to polygamy, a social practice that is reviled in the western world. Imagine that his mother and brother are publicly committed to the proposition that his father, the founding prophet, was not a polygamist. Imagine that the

young man goes to Utah and discovers that, in fact, he was, and actually meets some of his wives! Imagine that this is a subject he cannot possibly discuss with his brother or mother. Imagine that just as he discovers this truth, his brother, the prophet, calls him to become a member of the First Presidency of this church committed to the historical fiction that their father was a monogamist. It seems understandable that a young man like David might crack under these circumstances.

David's marriage to Clara Hartshorn will seem extremely patriarchal from our twenty-first-century perspectives. Clara is an attractive, young woman who has the apparent good fortune to marry the son of Joseph, the Martyr, and brother of the prophet Joseph III. But David is never the provider that a nineteenth-century husband is supposed to be. He never provides a home of their own for his wife and child and is often absent, doing church work and going on missions to Utah. When he begins to show signs of insanity, he accuses Clara of being unfaithful. Institutionalized for the last 27 years of his life, he seems to forget her. Yet Clara, despite his mental instability and inability to support her, remains faithful to David until his death in 1904. Would we expect that level of faithfulness of a man—then or now? Would a society that valued women expect them to wait like this?

Church history has often been the recitation of the lives of the brethren who guided the church, with little attention to the women and children. The feminist movement of the last thirty years has made us more sensitive to that bias, and Avery has contributed mightily to a much-needed balance in our historical writing. Most other Mormon historians would also neglect the long friendship David enjoys with Charles Jensen. "Charley" is single, a fact he and

David discuss in their letters. David gives Charley some pointers about how to land a wife. Eventually, Charley suggests to David that he has decided that he will never marry. David accepts this and no longer encourages Charley to find a mate. From the letters that have survived, it appears that Charley is homosexual. It also seems clear that David can talk more freely with Charley than with his mother or older brother. It is to

Avery's credit that she addresses this relationship in an informed, reasonable, and sensitive manner. Church leaders today, from bishops to presidents, could learn from David's non-judgmental understanding of Charley's struggle with his sexuality.

From Mission to Madness is a touching story of a gifted but tragic figure in Mormon history, told very skillfully by a talented writer and historian.

Evidence without Reconciliation

The Creation of the Book of Mormon: A Historical Inquiry. By LaMar Petersen (Salt Lake City, Utah: Freethinker Press, 1998), 283 pp.

Reviewed by Polly Stewart, Professor of English, Salisbury State University, Salisbury, Maryland.

ONE CANNOT READ OR WRITE about the Book of Mormon without acknowledging a position with respect to its truth claims. Even to profess no stake in any such claims is to take a position. People who write about the Book of Mormon are generally, in LaMar Petersen's words, "violently partisan" (p. 103) because the Book of Mormon is something about which it is impossible to be neutral. While Petersen's book is wholly about the Book of Mormon's truth claims, its approach is nonviolent, presenting evidence and letting the evidence speak for itself—a technique that ultimately gets us no nearer the truth than the most exquisite theological argumentation, because on this question a reader's mind is, cannot help being, already made up. The value of Petersen's

approach in this compelling but thankless endeavor is that it presents evidence about Joseph Smith's whereabouts and activities during the crucial years between the First Vision (1820 or 1823) and the establishment of the official record of the revelations authorizing the foundations of the faith (1839-41), not from on high, but from the scullery, as it were—a documentary account of insider perceptions of the Book of Mormon's development within its folk-cultural milieu. Petersen documents, for instance, how Joseph had his visions just at a time when many people were having visions; found a seer-stone just when the finding of seer-stones was rather common; and put the stone to the same use (finding precious metals) as did others of his day, for treasure-digging was something of a national pastime. Joseph and his father and brothers dug for treasure as a family enterprise conducted under the folk assumption that buried treasure, whether you find it by seer-stone or by other means, will slip away, sinking farther into the earth and out of reach, if you are not morally fit to attain it.