

Individual Experience, Community Control, and Gender: The Harvard Shaker Community During the Era of Manifestations¹

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Introduction

During the 1830s and 1840s, waves of intense spiritualism swept through Shaker villages of New England, New York, and the Midwest. This period, known as "The Era of Manifestations," began in the Watervliet, N.Y., Shaker community on August 16, 1837, when young sisters reported that they were taken into the spirit world. At first, the manifestations took the form of visions, dreams, or "possession" states that usually occurred during worship. These "operations," as the Shakers called them, took a variety of forms: some believers shook violently, others jumped and jerked, a few received "gifts" of songs and drawings, some spoke in tongues. The revival of spiritualism rapidly spread to other communities, and by the 1840s, visits from spirits who brought messages of admonition and encouragement were commonplace. The Era of Manifestations culminated in 1841-42 with the appearance of Holy Mother Wisdom, whom Shakers believed was the divine counterpart to God the Father, and with the development of elaborate rituals on a holy ground set aside in each Shaker community.

Taken out of context, the Era of Manifestations seems to corroborate a view of the Shakers as a peculiar people who adhered to a

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1. Part of this paper was originally presented at the October, 1990 meeting of Communal Studies Association at Lebanon, N. Y. Some of the material on William Leonard is forthcoming in *The Shaker Quarterly*, "Not Such a Simple Life: The Case of William Leonard." I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities Travel to Collections grant which made it possible for me to do research on the Harvard community at the Fruitlands Museums Shaker Collection.

religion profoundly at odds with American life and culture. Psychological interpretations, which explain the spiritual manifestations as mass hysteria resulting from sexual repression, tend to reinforce this view. Lawrence Foster cautions that scholars must go beyond "such primarily psychological approaches and must place the Shaker spiritual manifestations into their larger social context, showing how the phenomena were related to the social challenges and tensions faced by the group."² Additionally, as Foster has noted, the Shaker spiritual manifestations reflect tensions in American society as a whole. They arose at a time of economic failure and of increasing social and political division. Many spiritual messages echo the religious rhetoric of the abolitionists, predicting apocalyptic judgments on the American nation for the sin of slavery. Others focus on the religious significance of Native Americans in ways reminiscent of the *Book of Mormon*, which was first published in 1830. The millennial emphasis of Shaker spiritualism appealed to a number of William Miller's Adventist followers as well as others who were convinced that a new age was imminent. During these years, spiritualism also came into vogue among both intellectuals and members of mainstream religious groups, many of whom were attracted to Emmanuel Swedenborg's writings which had been republished in English. When, in 1848, the "Rochester rappings" began in Hydesville, N. Y., many Americans were prepared to believe that spirits were communicating with the Fox sisters. Spiritualist periodical publications proliferated.³

2. Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), p. 45.

3. The following works help situate Shaker spiritualism within religious and historical context: Slater Brown, *The Heyday of Spiritualism* (New York: Pocket Books, 1973); Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1950); and Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987). For recent interpretations of the Shaker manifestations, see: Priscilla J. Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (Hanover, N. H.: Univ. Press of New England, 1986), pp. 115-38; Lawrence Foster, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-56; and Daniel Patterson, *Gift Drawing and Gift Song* (Sabbathday Lake, Maine: United Society of Shakers, 1983). For Shaker accounts see: Paulina Bates, *The Divine Book of Holy and Eternal Wisdom* (New Lebanon, N. Y.: United Society Called "Shakers," 1849); Henry Clay Blinn, *The Manifestation of Spiritualism Among the Shakers, 1837-1847* (East Canterbury, N. H.: N.p., 1899); Hervey Elkins, *Fifteen Years in the Senior Order of Shakers* (Hanover, N. H.: Dartmouth Press, 1853); Jean McMahon Humez, ed. *Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress*. (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1981); David Lamson, *Two Years' Experience Among the Shakers* (West Boylston, Mass.: The Author, 1948); Philemon Stewart, *A Holy, Sacred and Divine Roll and Book* (Canterbury, N. H.: United Society, 1843); and Anna White, and

Thus, although Shaker spiritualism was particularly intense, it would be a mistake to view it as merely an aberrant form of American religious culture.

This article focuses on the Harvard Shaker community during the Era of Manifestations, examining the social and institutional context of spiritualism within a particular Shaker community. Using Harvard as a case study, it explores the effects of individual spiritual inspiration on political power. I have chosen to focus on the Harvard Shakers because they preserved an unusually large number of manuscripts from this period. These manuscripts reveal complex interpersonal and political relationships among community members, and they suggest how gender and individual personality affected the efforts of leaders to maintain hierarchical control. The evidence from Harvard supports the conclusions of scholars like Marjorie Proctor-Smith who have demonstrated that Shaker belief in spiritual equality was no guarantee of economic and political equality.⁴ Although the Harvard materials also bear out Priscilla Brewer's claim that in the Era of Manifestations Shaker women attempted to gain "primary control over the direction of the sect,"⁵ they also suggest that the manifestations were fueled by the needs of many members to participate more fully in all facets of Shaker religion and life. Thus, in one sense, the Shaker spiritual manifestations constituted a movement toward more democratic government, offering opportunities for less powerful Shakers—whether male or female—to become actively involved in shaping community life. Although, at first, the Shaker ministry encouraged communal revitalization through spiritual inspiration, it learned to fear inspiration that defied hierarchical control. Consequently, as Stephen Stein has argued, the Shaker leadership sought both "to support *and* to control the course of the revival itself, using it as a tool to reform, to discipline, and to order the members of the society. . . ." Although Stein concludes that the

Leila S. Taylor, *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message* (Columbus, Ohio: Fred J. Heer, 1904). For more information on the Harvard Shaker community, see Edward R. Horgan, *The Shaker Holy Land: A Community Portrait* (Harvard, Mass.: Harvard Common Press, 1982); and Clara Endicott Sears, comp. *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals* (Harvard, Mass.: Fruitlands Museum, 1916 and 1944).

4. Marjorie Proctor-Smith, *Women in Shaker Community and Worship: A Feminist Analysis of the Uses of Religious Symbolism* (Lewiston, N. Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1985). Priscilla J. Brewer's recent article, " 'Tho' of the Weaker Sex': A Reassessment of Gender Equality among the Shakers," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1992, 17, no. 31, pp. 609-635, nicely summarizes this scholarship.

5. Brewer, "Gender Equality . . .", p. 622.

Shaker Ministry ultimately retained its dominance,⁶ the Harvard Shaker experience suggests that, despite the efforts of the Central Ministry at Lebanon and the local bishoprics to bring the spiritual manifestations into "order," prophetic utterance remained unpredictable and, to some extent, outside political control.

Harvard during The Era of Manifestations

In December, 1838, Grove Blanchard, who headed the Ministry at Harvard and Shirley, recorded in his *Journal*:

4 girls are taken under operations by jerking twisting and shaking, and before the time came for exercise some of them began to stomp and jump— . . . Exercise commenced with life and zeal and operations increased, and the numbers of supernatural agent increased, until nearly one half seemed to be moved in this way—some barking, some talking and singing in tongues, some turning, others in vision gathering gold chains and putting on to others necks, so the meeting continued 2 1/2 hours, one sister staid in vision nearly one hour more. About 20 spectators.⁷

For almost a year, the Shaker communities at Harvard and Shirley had experienced such spiritual "operations." At first, the states of possession were "unsolicited" either by the recipient or by other members of the community.⁸ No one could foresee who might experience a manifestation or when it might occur. Both the message that might be spoken and the spiritual standing of the visionist were unpredictable, as Harvard learned when Edwin Myrick, shortly after receiving some of the community's earliest visions, left the Shakers "clandestinely."

From the very first, the Shaker Central Ministry at Lebanon carefully controlled access to accounts of spiritual experiences by appointing scribes to transcribe oral accounts, and by mandating that written

6. Stephen Stein, "Shaker Gift and Shaker Order," *Communal Societies*, 19 (1990), p. 112.

7. Elder Grove Blanchard, *Journal*, MS, OCIWHi*, V:B-42, December 16, 1838. *OCIWHi is used throughout this paper to refer to the Western Historical Society, whose Shaker collection contains large numbers of manuscripts from Harvard and Shirley.

8. Throughout this paper, I draw upon I. M. Lewis's distinction between "solicited" and "unsolicited" states of possession. See *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*. Second edition. (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 49. Lewis also uses the terms "controlled" and "uncontrolled" possession. Lewis defines trance as an "altered state of consciousness" which may include possession by spirits, but does not require it. Trance is open to "different cultural controls and to various cultural interpretations." However ". . . all conditions in which spirit possession is postulated" do not "necessarily involve trance," p. 39.

texts be submitted to the society's leaders who, after examining and editing them, either approved them for dissemination or rejected and suppressed them.⁹ Within a few weeks after the first visions at Watervliet, the Lebanon Ministry had officially sanctioned written accounts which were distributed to the leaders of other bishoprics.¹⁰ On September 24, 1837—less than six weeks after the first Watervliet manifestation—Elder Grove Blanchard noted in his *Journal* that the Harvard Ministry had read to the Elders "some visions that came from Watervliet."¹¹

By the year's end, members at Harvard and Shirley had also begun to experience similar visions. The manifestations quickly spread among rank and file members. At Harvard, over a quarter of the community took an active role in the revival, but few of the "instruments" who received spiritual messages were community leaders.¹² Consequently, the outpouring of spiritual revelations raised the question of authority on many levels: What status did such communications have? Who was to judge them? And on what basis?

The Harvard communications also reveal a tension between Shaker belief in equal male/female authority and the predominance of male power in practice.¹³ Since, in the 1840s, two-thirds of the adult population at Harvard was female, it is not surprising that female visionaries outnumbered males by two to one. However, both the content of spiritual messages and the process of receiving them differed for male and female "instruments." Women's visionary ex-

9. This points to a major methodological problem: the extant texts are, of course, those approved by the leadership. With a very few exceptions (the case of Rebecca Jackson comes to mind), scholars do not have records of spiritual experiences as communicated directly without the mediation of the Ministry. Nevertheless, many extant texts reveal an underlying tension over the possibilities and limits for female power within Shakerism.

10. The evidence from Harvard suggest a much speedier dissemination of visionary activity than previous scholars have assumed.

11. Grove Blanchard, *Journal*, MS, OCIWHi, V:B-42. Elder Grove's journal begins on November 9, 1836, but does not record any visionary activity at Harvard prior to fall 1837.

12. For example, in the Church Family at Harvard, 26 members, almost 1/3 of those over age 15, were either appointed as an official instrument (or medium) for the manifestations or received spiritual revelations independent of official sanction.

13. Linda A. Mercadante, *Gender, Doctrine & God: The Shakers and Contemporary Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990) > p. 69, notes that the Harvard and Shirley Shaker communities in the 1840s used female imagery for God more often than did other communities. Harvard was generally more attuned to feminist thinking than other Shaker communities and might therefore have been more sensitive to unequal power between men and women.

periences tended to occur without solicitation, often outside the normal channels of ministerial approval, while men usually received communications in response to a Ministerial request. Most Harvard Sisters who were appointed by the Ministry to act as official "visionists" had previously experienced spiritual "operations." In contrast, most male appointees had no prior experience with spiritual "gifts." In general, Sisters whom the Ministry chose as mediums performed their roles with ease. Brethren, even after official appointment, often failed to receive inspiration.¹⁴

The fact that women's visionary activity at Harvard was often not "in order" posed a dilemma for the Harvard Ministry. Should the Ministry give official appointments to Sisters who claimed an ability to communicate directly with the spirit world? Or would such appointees be difficult to control? Because they readily received divine inspiration, female mediums at Harvard challenged the authority of Shaker leadership more often, and in different ways, than did male mediums. Consequently, the Ministry looked primarily to the male mediums to bring the revival under control. At the same time, some Shakers, whether consciously or unconsciously, used visions as a vehicle to explore the limits of individual freedom and the power of the spiritual imagination.

The Leading Characters at Harvard

Four main characters, two men and two women, stand out in the story of the manifestations at Harvard. The two men are well-known in the history of the community: Grove Blanchard was head of the Harvard and Shirley Bishopric for more than 40 years. He was re-

14. Out of ten male instruments appointed at Harvard, three, the Myrick brothers Samuel, Elijah, and Daniel, failed to receive any revelations whatsoever. John Cloutman, Jr., Second Elder in the Church Family, and Lorenzo Grosvenor received spiritual communications only on rare occasions. Two appointees, Arthur Meacham and Joseph Parker, each received "a gift of marching," a very insignificant "gift" which would probably not have been noted had they not been officially designated "instruments." Thomas Holden, who turned 21 on May 29, 1842, occasionally spoke for the spirits, especially in the rituals enacted on the Holy Mount, after he was appointed to this role. Of these ten instruments, Alfred Collier was the only one to have received spiritual manifestations prior to his appointment by the Ministry. However, Collier's role was limited by his youth: in 1842, at the height of the Manifestations, Collier was only 18 years old—too young and untried as a Believer to be trusted with major ritual responsibilities. Of the Brethren appointed as instruments at Harvard only one, William Leonard, played a role at all comparable to that played by major female instruments.

sponsible for implementing directives from the Lead Ministry at Lebanon; it was he who selected the members to fill positions of temporal and spiritual authority, and it was he who needed to maintain the balance between "order and gift" at Harvard. William Leonard, although not as prominent as Elder Grove, was a well-known member of the Harvard community. He often traveled into "the world," buying and selling stock for the Shaker orchards, and his name appears on advertisements for Shaker agricultural products. From the late 1840s until his death, Leonard served in a series of official offices, as an Elder in all three Harvard families, and briefly as second in the Ministry of the Bishopric.

Minerva and Mary Hill did not hold important leadership positions at Harvard, and their stories have not been rehearsed by Shaker historians. The sisters, Minerva and Mary, came to live with the Shakers as young children, brought to Harvard by their mother, Roxalana, who joined the community in 1818. Minerva Hill died in 1844, at age 31, just after the Era of Manifestations had peaked. Mary survived her sister by many years, but never again did she achieve the prominence that she enjoyed during the 1840s.

Of these four leading characters, all except Elder Grove Blanchard were "instruments" who received "manifestations" from the spirit world. William Leonard distinguished himself as the leading male recipient of spiritual revelations. And in an important series of communications Mary Hill became the voice for the views of the Central Ministry at Lebanon. However, it was Minerva Hill, who, despite ill health and lack of political status, was designated "*the Visionist*" by the Harvard chroniclers.

On December 30, 1837, Sister Minerva, then twenty-five years old and living in the South Family, Gathering Order, experienced the first of many visions reported at Harvard during the Era of Manifestations.¹⁵ In a vision, Hill sees Elder John [Hocknell], his body covered in swords, who tells her that each Believer must take a sword.¹⁶

15. Minerva Hill was born on December 15, 1812, in Cumberland, Rhode Island. She was 25 years of age when she received her first vision. Most Harvard visionists were not adolescents. It is true, however, that many were "young Believers," or members of the "Gathering Order." Rather than resulting from adolescent imagination (fired by hormonal changes), visions were more common among Shakers who had not, for whatever reason, fully internalized Shaker hierarchical control. Although Hill's visions are similar to the early Watervliet visions, there is no evidence of direct borrowing.

16. Minerva Hill, [untitled dream], MS, OCIWHI, VIII:B-24, 33-34. Throughout this paper I have tried to distinguish between historical events (described in the past tense) and actions that occur in visions (described in the present tense).

When, two months later, Elder Grove visited Minerva Hill's home at the South Family, he assembled believers and read to them a vision sent from Lebanon. That night after she fell asleep, Sister Minerva experienced a second vision.

In this dream, or "vision of the night,"¹⁷ she hears movement in the Brethren's rooms. Asked by another sister to investigate, Sister Minerva leaves her room and sees Jesse Myrick, a deceased Believer, coming in the front door, wearing a "great coat" and looking "heavenly." Removing herself from the hearing of other sisters, Minerva Hill, in her vision, questions Myrick:

. . . I then asked him if there could not be that power manifested in the line of vision which no one could doubt. I requested him to ask the living spirits in another world to give me that eternal power that would enable me to banish the spirit of unbelief forever. At which time the morning bell awoke me from my slumber.¹⁸

Here, in one of the earliest recorded visions of the manifestations at Harvard, Minerva Hill posed the most important issues facing Shaker visionaries: What is the authority of individual spiritual experience? Will Shaker leaders credit the spiritual claims of those low in the institutional hierarchy? Could visions, even those of a young sister in the young believers order, be so convincing that no Shaker could doubt them? If the truth of the visions themselves was granted, would the visionary achieve power? These questions were important not only to Minerva Hill, but to the many visionaries who subsequently experienced spiritual manifestations.

Minerva Hill herself denied any personal desire to become a visionary. She wrote, "I was naturally given more to the care of worldly things, than to that which was spiritual . . . and to be inspired to speak for the spirits . . . was not what I, of my own self, would have chosen." But, she claimed, when the Savior chose her for a special work, she could not refuse. To overcome her reluctance, the Savior promises temporal blessings and, in the vision, assures Sister Minerva that the articles she makes at Harvard will sell. Although the Savior never addresses his assurances directly to the Elders, he nevertheless anticipates their concerns and reassures them that Minerva Hill's spiritual activities will not interfere with her other duties. Indirectly, then, Minerva Hill and other visionists, both male and female, claimed that by heeding the spirits whose authority

17. Shakers distinguished between visions, or states of possession, that occurred while waking, and dreams, or "visions of the night."

18. Minerva Hill, [untitled], March 5, 1838, MS, OCIWHI, VIII:B-24, 34-36.

supersedes the Ministry, they would bring both spiritual and temporal blessings to the Society of Believers.¹⁹

During the Era of Manifestations, the Shaker leadership as a whole found itself in the uncomfortable position of either accepting such circuitous arguments, or of doubting the verity of spiritual revelations—and thus undermining Shaker belief in ongoing revelation. Additionally, since the spiritual manifestations had been sanctioned and encouraged by the Central Ministry at Lebanon, the leadership at individual communities was compelled to welcome "spiritual gifts" among their members. During the early years of the movement, the Harvard leadership had been particularly concerned that its members were not contributing sufficiently to the revival. One visionist put it this way: "That seed that was brought from Lebanon, did not take root here. . . . The expression has often been used here, There dont seem to be any thing for poor Harvard.'"20

By 1839, following directives from the parent Society at Lebanon, the Harvard Shaker Ministry sought ways to control both the form and the content of spiritual manifestations. In July of that year, for the first time, the Ministry appointed official visionists. While still encouraging members to receive "gifts of the spirit," the Harvard Ministry also asked that they submit all gifts to the leadership for approval before they could be revealed to other members of the community. The need for such control can be understood by examining the development of Minerva Hill's spiritual revelations. In the year and a half that elapsed since the beginning of the revival in December 1837, Sister Minerva's visions had become increasingly elaborate, and spirits who appeared in them had increased in authority. Her narratives expanded, and—to the distress of the Ministry—her visions became judgmental and prescriptive.

On Sabbath, March 12, 1838, she envisioned what may be the first recorded instance of the famous "sweeping gift"—a message of both liberation and purgation. Sister Minerva sees "a woman . . . dressed in a light colored habit. Her hair and eyes were black; she had a white broom in her hand" six times as large as a common floor brush. "She repeated the following words from *Isaiah*, The spirit of the Lord God is upon me. . . . [H]e hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening

19. At this time, Minerva Hill was living in "the office" of the Gathering Family, where she played some role in the management of family business. I have not found any text that directly states that she is a deaconess or trustee of the family.

20. Mary Hill, June 4, 1841, "Mother Hannah's Address to the Ministry and Elders," MS, OCIWHI VIII:B-34, 7.

of the prison doors to them that are bound.' " From house to house, the spirit, through the instrument of Sister Minerva, proclaims: "If souls will get out of the dirt they can be saved, but if not, they will be swept aside, for I must cleanse this house."²¹ The woman gazes at Minerva Hill "with pity" and says: "Be faithful and stand let what will come; there is power enough for everyone, but you must honor the way of God."²² Power is once again at issue: power, so the vision implies, is not granted on the basis of Shaker order, but only to those who are pure. Such spiritual power is available to "everyone," irrespective of their power within the earthly community.

By early 1839, Hill's visions had begun to explicitly "expose" evil among Believers. On February 1, she sees "a very large man, wearing a white robe and a crown," who she later realized was Christ.²³ His arm extends into the Shaker meeting room and the house trembles "like a leaf in the wind." Carnal thoughts, he says, must be purged: the wolves who are trying to destroy the lambs must be expelled. He proclaims that "nothing shall be hid, every thing impure shall be purged out," and he instructs the Elders "to go into the rooms of a sudden, and see what the Brethren and Sisters are about."

In his *Journal*, Grove Blanchard noted this "extraordinary gift." He expressed particular concern because William Clapp had been "wholly cut off" by the visionist, who had "sentenced" him "to the world." Although Elder Grove did not mention her by name, evidence strongly suggests that Minerva Hill was the visionist who condemned Clapp. The visionist's assertion of the right to determine the spiritual state of another Believer and to decide who should be removed from the community directly challenged the authority of the Harvard Ministry.²⁴ On February 17, 1839, Sabbath, in meeting, the

21. "Then," reports Minerva, "I . . . saw a path . . . swept thro' stumps, stones, trees, hills and hollows, as level as a railroad." It was just about this time that the first railroad was under construction near the Harvard community.

22. Minerva Hill, "A Vision. No. 1." March 12, 1838, South Family, Harvard, MS, OCIWHi, VIII:B-23. The vision concludes as the woman sings in "a low solemn tone of voice":

"The sweeping work has commenced, O how solemn!

Twill purge the soul from every sin, and bring it home to God." She repeated these words four times, and then went around to the Brethren and Sisters, saying, "I have come to sweep this house, do you know it? I *must* sweep, for God will have a pure church." She then left the room, and my vision ended.

23. Later, Minerva claims that Christ appeared to her many times, but that believers did not record all her visions.

24. In another interesting example, Fidelia Grosvenor reproofs her brother Augustus through a spiritual message which implicates him for engaging in improper behavior,

instruments Abial Crosby and Minerva Hill called out the names of other Shakers who they said must "put away the doubting spirit." Those named probably included a number of prominent members of the Harvard society, including Minerva Hill's younger natural sister, Mary.²⁵ Christ, through his instrument, accuses these leaders of doubting the spiritual manifestations.²⁶ At this juncture, the visionists have assumed the authority to define "sin." They have identified skepticism about spiritual revelations, along with the "lust of the flesh," as the major abominations that must be purged from Zion.²⁷

The Ministry at Lebanon was keenly aware of the tension between "order and gift," and it quickly understood the need to centralize control of the manifestations. At the same time, after initially welcoming the revival, it sought ways that the spiritual gifts could be used to strengthen commitment to Shakerism. Consequently, in the summer of 1839, Lebanon proclaimed that visionists should be designated by the Ministry in each society.²⁸

During the first year and a half of the manifestations at Harvard, Elder Grove Blanchard had reacted to the unusual spiritual activity with a mixture of awe and bafflement. He had taken little active role in directing the revival, and had not attempted to use it for his own purposes. However, on July 6, 1839, following the directive of Lebanon, Elder Grove had "a gift of appointing us some visionists." He designated three men and five women for these positions: Lorenzo Grosvenor, Alfred Collier, Samuel Myrick, and Lucy Clark, Susan Channel, Eliza Babbitt, Elmira Adams, and Louisa Blanchard.²⁹ It is notable that there is little evidence linking any of these instruments to previous spiritual communications. Of those appointed,

evidently with a woman whose initials were "CK." As a result, Augustus was removed from the Church Family and placed with the Second, or North, Family at Harvard. See Blanchard, *Journal*, September 9 and 14, 1844.

25. In his *Journal*, Blanchard gives the initials of those named: "AG, SB, WL, WH, TH and AC, MW, AH, and MH." These may have referred to Augustus Grosvenor, Seth Blanchard, William Leonard, William Hall[?], Thomas Holden, and Mary Ann Widdi-field. It is more difficult to identify AC and AH: presumably are both women.

26. This message is preserved in MS, OCIWHi, III:B-23, 6-8, "No. 3. A Vision."

27. Throughout the month of February 1839, Minerva Hill continued to receive visions of Christ who preaches about behavior. MS, OCIWHi, VIII:B-23, visions nos. 2 and following.

28. I base this assertion on the fact that the first appointments of instruments occurred on July 6, 1839, just two weeks after Blanchard's visit to Lebanon on June 21-23, 1839.

29. Blanchard, *Journal*, July 6, 1839.

only one, Alfred Collier, had previously experienced a spiritual manifestation, once having been "taken in a figt[sic] of turning" in a meeting.³⁰

Equally striking is the fact that those, like Minerva Hill, who had demonstrated a "gift" for visions were not among those who received official appointments.³¹ However, Elder Grove's preference for uninspired visionists makes sense in the context of the Ministry's desire to control spiritual communications. Almost by definition, inspiration breaks bounds, it challenges traditions, it lacks respect for rank and authority. Additionally, many of those who had received inspiration, including Minerva Hill, lived in the Gathering Order, perhaps indicating that they were not yet spiritually advanced. At this point, Sister Minerva surely must have realized that visionary power did not translate easily into political power within Shaker institutions.

Between May 30, 1839, and June 29, 1840, Minerva Hill paid five unusual visits to the Ministry's shop. The first visit occurred about three weeks before Grove Blanchard was to visit Lebanon in June 1839. At this time, ministerial handling of the spiritual manifestations was likely the most pressing issue, and shortly after his return to Harvard, Blanchard made his first appointments of visionists.

In her first four visits, Hill related visions to Elder Grove. However, on June 28, 1840, Elder Grove noted in his *Journal*: "much labor about moving Minerva Hill from the South Family to the Church." The following day, Hill and Susan Kendall visited the Ministry "on their return from a ride out," and nine days later, Blanchard recorded that Minerva Hill had been released from her office at the South Family, and Susan Kendall had taken her place. "It is a day of trials and tears," wrote Elder Grove.

The evidence is not sufficient for us to know Minerva Hill's motivation for lobbying the Ministry. It does seem clear, however, that she wanted to move to the Church Family. Her status among Believers would be increased by such elevation to the highest order among the Shakers; she would also live in the same family as her mother, Roxalana, and her sister, Mary. Additionally, Sister Minerva may have hoped that in the Church, the Ministry would pay more attention to the significance of her visionary gifts. While not resulting in official recognition, nevertheless, Minerva Hill's claim to special vi-

30. Blanchard, *Journal*, November 18, 1838.

31. Between the time of her first vision in 1837 and July 1839, Minerva Hill had received far more spiritual revelations than had any other member of the Harvard community.

sionary power gave her unusual freedom of movement within the community: when she felt the need to communicate with the Ministry without going through the prescribed channels, she was able to do so.³² Thus, the case of Minerva Hill presents a Shaker example of spiritual possession used as "oblique aggressive strategy" by those who "otherwise have few effective means to press their claims for attention and respect." As I. M. Lewis in *Ecstatic Religion* has pointed out, such a strategy permits "bargaining from weakness."³³ The evidence strongly suggests that Minerva Hill, through her "bargaining," had better positioned herself for an eventual role as an official visionist.

On January 10, 1841, some six months after Sister Minerva had moved to the Church, the beloved Harvard Believer, Abijah Wooster, died. His death seems to have offered Minerva Hill an occasion to display her gifts. At his funeral, she declared that she could see Brother Abijah with Mother Hannah, a founder of the Harvard community, and the Prophet Jeremiah. Through Sister Minerva, the spirits sent blessings to every room of the building, and then to the other Harvard families. When the spirits returned to the Church, they announced their intention to remain there for the winter and to speak through Minerva Hill. For several months thereafter, Sister Minerva was the instrument for a constant stream of messages from Jeremiah. Whether because she had moved to the Church Family and had relinquished her duties in the office of the South Family, or because she was ill and consequently carried a small load of work, during early 1841 Minerva Hill devoted much time to spiritual activities.

In May of 1841, some ten months after Minerva Hill had moved to the Church Family, her younger sister, Mary, received a series of communications directed specifically to Grove Blanchard. These messages reprimand the Harvard leadership for allowing "order" to be corrupted by giving up the "power of judgment" to inspired Believers who lack authority.³⁴ On June 6, Mary received a gift of healing for her sister Minerva. The accompanying message explained why some Believers take ill. Sickness, it asserts, is a sign of independence and a failure to subject the self to higher authority. "If souls do not get subjection from the Elders, they will get it from sickness," de-

32. Blanchard's journal notes other instances of visionists coming to see him at the Ministry's shop; however, Minerva Hill visited more frequently than any other Harvard instrument.

33. Lewis, p. 28.

34. Mary Hill, "Elder Grove's Book. Written by Elder John. The True Line of Order," June 10, 1841, MS, OC1WHI, VIII:B-35, 17-24.

clares the spirit through Sister Mary.³⁵ A few days later Mary Hill received a communication detailing a code of behavior for the Harvard mediums: "And now, those of you that have it in your power to go into another world, or talk with spirits, take care that you are not deceived." Visionaries, declares the message, do not have liberty to go into another world without permission of the Ministry and Elders; communications from spirits must be approved *before* they are received by the instrument:

If the inspired are required to speak for a true spirit, it will be made known to them time enough . . . to have the Elders and the Church give their consent; and it will be told the inspired, something what they are to say; so that the Elders may know that nothing is brot forward in meeting, only what is according to wisdom.

Specifically, visionaries are forbidden to "labor into the state of other souls, nor have any thing to do with their secret lives," or to call names in public or private unless by the request of the Elders. If a message is directed at the particular Believer, the name of the instrument must not be revealed. And, even if false spirits tell the truth, their message must not be communicated, because it is "out of order."³⁶ Although it is likely that these messages were prompted by the Lebanon Ministry, nevertheless, they seem to have been directed specifically at Mary's older sister, Minerva. Grove Blanchard, it appears, was confronted not only with bringing spiritual manifestations under control, but also with diffusing rivalry between natural siblings. On May 30, 1841, Elder Grove received a letter from "the First Holy Anointed on Earth" at Lebanon, informing him that Holy Mother Wisdom would make her first visit to Harvard in late July. In the last week of June the Lebanon Ministry visited Harvard, no doubt in preparation for the up-coming visit by Holy Mother Wisdom.³⁷

At this juncture Blanchard faced a dilemma. Although he needed mediums who would submit to the authority of the Ministry and who would produce visions "in order," it was crucial that the appointed instruments receive and communicate spiritual revelations. He could not risk visionary failure on such an important occasion. Blanchard's experience since appointing the first instruments in July 1839 did not bolster his confidence. Many instruments had received

35. Blanchard, *Journal*, June 6, 1841, and Mary Hill, June 6, 1841, MS, OCIWHI, VIII: B-34.

36. Mary Hill, June 9, 1841, "Three Addresses by Father Eleazer Mother Hannah and Father William," MS, OCIWHI, VIII: B-35, 3-16.

37. MS, OCIWHI, VIII, B-54.

no revelations at all, and others had received only brief, unremarkable communications.

Thus, it was no accident that the instruments appointed on July 25, 1841, included a number of persons who had shown talent for visionary activity, but who had never before received an official appointment. Among these were Minerva Hill and her sister Mary. Despite the Ministry's ambivalence toward Minerva Hill, it recognized her spiritual talent and sought a way to direct it towards the aims of the Ministry. During the late spring and early summer of 1841, Mary Hill had also demonstrated her willingness to communicate spiritual messages which tended to reinforce the authority of the Ministry.³⁸

Just as it was not mere chance that Mary and Minerva Hill were among the 12 instruments, 7 sisters and 5 brothers, named to officiate at Holy Mother Wisdom's visit to Harvard,³⁹ neither was it chance that William Leonard was also first designated as an instrument at this time. In appointing the Hill sisters, Elder Grove felt confident that visions would indeed be forthcoming; by appointing William Leonard, he hoped to ensure that visionary activity would be strictly "in order" and that it would be acceptable to Lebanon.

The actual appearance of Holy Mother Wisdom proceeded smoothly enough. Between July 25 and August 4, 1841, she visited Harvard. Through the instruments, she bestows presents, blesses the members, "marks them for her own and seals them with her seal."⁴⁰ The visit was a ritual enactment, orchestrated from Lebanon, not an occasion for unusual or striking spiritual communications.

In the fall of that year, Elder Grove asked Minerva Hill to examine spiritual communications and to determine which were truly inspired, a role usually reserved for those at high levels of spiritual authority.⁴¹ He also requested that she "seven" messages given at Lebanon, that is, she was employed at transcribing spiritual books or "rolls" through inspiration.⁴² During the rest of 1841 and 1842, Minerva Hill continued to receive a few spiritual communications, but

38. Curiously, after Mary Hill receives an official appointment as an instrument, her visionary activity almost ceases. Only one text is preserved from the second half of 1841; she receives three messages in January 1843, and a final one in August 1850.

39. Holy Mother Wisdom had visited Lebanon in March and April of that year, and had proclaimed upcoming visits to the other societies.

40. Blanchard, *Journal*, July 25, 1841.

41. Blanchard, *Journal*, November 23, 1841.

42. The word "seven" is used throughout manuscripts from this period. I have not been able to determine its origin.

the quantity decreased dramatically. Elder Grove had successfully channeled her gifts into private activities and had limited her public appearances to roles in predetermined rituals, such as the visits of Holy Mother Wisdom or, later, the pilgrimages to the Holy Fountain.

Although William Leonard prior to his appointment as an instrument in the summer of 1841 had never received spiritual gifts, the Harvard Ministry had previously asked him to write on its behalf.⁴³ He had spent his youth in the "world" and possessed greater verbal skills than many Harvard Believers, including Minerva Hill, who—though literate—was not a skilled writer.⁴⁴ Feeling considerable pressure to bring unsolicited oral communications under control and to produce a suitable body of inspired writings that could be sent to other Shaker communities, Grove Blanchard looked to Leonard to write theologically acceptable texts that would not embarrass Harvard.⁴⁵ Equally important to the Ministry was the fact that Leonard was a trusted Believer, one old enough to have weathered many of the temptations of youth and one with proven dedication to Shaker order. Thus, the Harvard Ministry consciously looked to William Leonard to bring the Era of Spiritual Manifestations under control and to transform the spiritual revelations from the unsolicited, oral forms current in the late 1830s to the deliberate, written communications prevalent in the 1840s.

An elaborate process evolved which ensured that the Ministry maintained strict control over spiritual communications. For example, on August 29, 1841, Elder Grove noted in his *Journal*: "[Sabbath] Morning Grove with the Elders in labors about the present work of God. Give William Leonard a Book to read taken from the box of sacred writings by the inspired." A "visionist," whom Blanchard called "the inspired," had discerned a book or roll brought to Harvard by a spirit. Since the Ministry had instructed visionists not to communicate spiritual messages orally without first gaining approval from the leadership, the instrument proclaimed that the message is

43. For example, on April 12, 1841, Elder Grove writes in his journal: "After dinner, the Ministry, Elders and Office Deacons meet at our shop to hear William Leonard read a reply to a libel in the Lowell Advertiser, which he has been preparing, and it gives pretty good satisfaction."

44. Most of Hill's visions have been preserved by scribes who took down her words. There are a couple of extant texts that may be in Hill's own hand: these contain numerous errors in spelling and grammar.

45. The major "visionists" at Harvard were female. Although literate, most used simple, unpretentious language and demonstrated little interest in theology. During the visit of Holy Mother Wisdom, the leadership sought writers with a more lofty style akin to that produced by Philemon Stewart or Paulina Bates.

revealed in a book. At this point, Blanchard could decide whether to instruct an instrument to transcribe, or "seven," the contents of the book. Since communications were now written texts, not oral revelations, they were solicited by the Ministry who carefully chose "the inspired" writer. Because the transcription took place privately, only the writer and the Ministry knew the content of the message. Only after it had been approved by the Ministry was the communication read to the community. In effect, the Shaker Ministry had reinterpreted the meaning of "divine inspiration" in order to prevent a conflict between spiritual manifestations and hierarchical authority.

In his *Testimony*,⁴⁶ William Leonard describes how he became an inspired writer:

In the month of Sept that year [1841] being requested by the Ministry to do so I began to labor for the gift to write inspired messages and after receiving sufficient evidence of Divine approbation I commenced the labor. All I have written since that period has been by liberty or request of the Ministry and Elders and in every communication I wrote what I believed I was inspired to write.

During September and October of 1841, Leonard "labored" for the gift of divine inspiration. Let me quote at length from the preface to his book, *The Life and Sufferings of Jesus Anointed, Our Holy Savior and Our Blessed Mother Ann . . .*, which was written in the fall 1841:

For a number of weeks previous to writing the following work I was carried through scenes of deepest tribulation and the most severe mortification of spirit, that I had ever experienced. After retiring to rest one night, I dreamed that I was in a room, seated at a writing table with a paper before me, and that *Mother Ann* stood by me instructing me how to write a work in two parts, at which I seemed to be engaged. I saw the writing but did not understand the subject.

I awoke and the dream was as clear on my mind as an open vision, and left a strong impression upon my feelings the next day. The next night, my dream was continued. I appeared to be in a room with our *Holy Savior*, and beheld above me, a set of living figures I cannot describe, in lively motion; and which, as I viewed them, seemed to represent to me, the *sufferings of our Savior*. The presence of our *Lord and Savior*, the living figures and the light that filled the room, so overpowered me, that I awoke deeply affected and clearly impressed that the sufferings of *Christ and Mother* was to be the subject of the work. But for the six following days, the anguish of my spirit was such that I felt no liberty to write.

But when this preparatory travel had expired, my feelings became calm,

46. MS, OCIWHI, VI: A-5, "A Declaration of the faith of William Leonard in the Manifestations Revelations Visions prophecies etc that have been given in the Church of Christ."

and my sensation the most solemn and happy I had ever experienced. In this tender and happy state my subject opened before me; and under the direction of my Elders I commenced writing; and the following pages were written in the gift of Inspiration I then received.⁴⁷

Thus began William Leonard's calling as a spiritual writer at Harvard. As he worked, Leonard received additional messages of encouragement and comfort from Holy Angels. When, by late October, Leonard had produced a lengthy manuscript, Elder Grove's sigh of relief is almost audible. He wrote in his *Journal*:

Oct 22: [The Ministry] "read many pages of the Book of inspiration on the sufferings of our Blessed and Holy Saviour, and our ever Blessed Mother Ann."

Oct 25: "Grove inspecting a book containing the sufferings of Christ & Mother Ann, and assisted in preparing it for drafting"

November 16: "Much a doing about messages to send to the Ministry at Canterbury by Br. Truworth. . . . We read to him the Book containing the Lives and Sufferings of Christ and Mother Ann."

November 25: [Thanksgiving Day] "read the inspired book of Lives and Sufferings of Christ and Mother Ann to the Church family, from 10 am to 2 pm with a half hour break. This was the first reading of it to the people."

The following day, Christ's Angel of Compassion sent a message to Harvard confirming that the spirit world was greatly affected by the book. Leonard's writing had—after first passing the test of several readings by the leadership—received divine approbation. His production was deemed worthy of submission to the Central Ministry.

From this point on, words flowed from Leonard's pen. He was no longer troubled about whether his writing was divinely inspired: he accepted his status as one specially "chosen" for this work, and left the rest to his "Lead." He had discovered a genre of writing which he employed repeatedly: He recounted the experiences of religious figures, imaginatively reinterpreted through a Shaker lens. Beginning in December, 1841, Leonard produced works in rapid succession: A "Book from the Patriarch Joseph" was read to the Ministry and the Elders on December 6, 1841, and Elder Grove commented "and a precious book we found it to be."⁴⁸ During the remainder of December, Leonard completed "The Book of Moses,

47. There are two manuscript versions of this text in the OCIWHi collection, VIII: B-68 and VIII: B-71A, a typescript copy which has been edited to make some minor changes, including replacing Leonard's first person pronouns by the third person. It was published in 1904 at Mount Lebanon.

48. MS, OCIWHi, VIII: B-60, December, 1841.

Lawgiver to the Tribes of Israel," which begins and ends with poems written to the meter of broadside.⁴⁹

This book was followed by "The History of Job, the Ancient Servant of God," who provides a lesson in "the little dependence there is to be placed in earthly kindred."⁵⁰ At the end of December, Leonard wrote the "Life of Stephen,"⁵¹ then a "Solemn Warning from Father Eleazer" which says to avoid "wandering among the world for releasement"⁵²—a sin that tempted Leonard himself.

These writings were undoubtedly intended for the Ministry at Lebanon. Elder Grove wrote in his *Journal*, November 3, 1841, "We are all engaged preparing inspired writings to carry to Lebanon." On the evening of December 23, 1841, Grove Blanchard invited Leonard to his shop to examine "the ground of his gift of inspiration, find him engaged & progressing on in the line of duties etc." Well pleased with Leonard's work, the Ministry encouraged Leonard to continue writing.

For the next six months, Leonard produced manuscripts in rapid succession. In January, 1842, he wrote "The Life and Mission of John the Baptist," a text that never mentions Mother Ann or Jesus, but that has much to say about the need for submission. According to John, Satan tempts Believers by placing in authority leaders "who perhaps are people of more limited talents, and smaller in the creation of their spirits." John admonishes Shakers to remember that God's spirit "can be administered through any medium" and that "God often chooses as His spokes-persons those who appear weak and foolish, and even despised in the estimation of natural man."⁵³ It is tempting to ponder whether the Harvard Ministry had suggested that Leonard write about the need to submit to authority, and, if so, whether it was pleased with what he had to say!

In many cases, Leonard's writings were a direct response to solicitations from visionaries or from the Ministry. For example, on December 4, 1841, Elder Grove recorded that a company of spirits appeared in meeting: "They are the ones whose relics were found in the western states and they will stay here 20 days, and you shall know more about them yet." On March 5, 1842, a visionist saw Father James place a book on William Leonard's head: within a few

49. MS, OCIWHI, VIII:B-84, 59-164, December 6, 1841. Leonard evidently had some knowledge of "the world's" music and poetry.

50. MS, OCIWHI, VIII:B-83.

51. MS, OCIWHI, VIII:B-85, 1-69, December 27, 1841.

52. MS, OCIWHI, VIII:B-63, 37-43, December 30, 1841, 43.

53. MS, OCIWHI, VIII:B-79, 92—93, January 18, 1842.

days Leonard had completed the writing of a "Sketch of this Continent . . ." ⁵⁴ which debates the identity of Native Americans and their place in the scheme of salvation. In this work, William Leonard reveals himself as a man of his times, holding many of the same prejudices and the same concerns as others living in the mid-nineteenth century. He displays anti-Semitic attitudes, blaming the Jews for the Savior's sufferings and for refusing the gospel in its first dispensation. His opinion of Roman Catholicism is no less biased. Yet he expresses deep sympathy for the sufferings that Europeans have caused Native Americans and African slaves, and he challenges the prevailing notion that in America, a better, higher civilization has been established. Ironically, it was "The Sketch of This Continent" that, among others produced by William Leonard, finally caught the attention of the Central Ministry at Lebanon. The consequences, however, did not augur well for the spiritual manifestations at Harvard.

Contrasting Forms of Inspiration

William Leonard's and Minerva Hill's roles as instruments culminated on August 29, 1842, when they both played a leading part in the first meeting of the Church Family on the Holy Ground. "At half past 12 o'clock this day, the Ministry and Elders, ten Instruments, five of each sex, five scribes and 63 Brethren and Sisters, 86 in all, commenced our march for the Holy Hill of Zion, to attend the first Feast of our Holy Holy Mother prepared by our Holy Savior [sic], on the holy Ground in Harvard." ⁵⁵ While both Leonard and Hill were designated as "instruments," their roles differed significantly.

William Leonard was the medium for the Holy Savior. He orchestrated the ritual, stood beside the instruments in order to verify their gifts, determined who could speak and what actions were permissible. The Angels from the Holy Hill of Peace at Shirley who alighted near the fountain, requested "liberty . . . to attend the feast" from William Leonard, spokesman for the Holy Saviour. It was Leonard, later in the afternoon, who called "an intermission of fifteen minutes" for the Brothers and Sisters to rest before resuming the pageant. The pacing and order of the ritual, even the spirits who are permitted to participate, were governed by Leonard.

In some respects, his role was of greater significance than that of

54. MS, OCIWHI, VIII:B-85, 141-239, March 1842.

55. MS, OCIWHI, VIII:B-91.

instruments who merely communicate messages from the spirit world. In effect, Leonard controlled the actions of the community. When an instrument revealed that seed has been given by an Angel, Leonard instructed Believers to form a circle and "our blessed Saviour[sic], in a very fatherly and affectionate manner, began at the Ministry and Elders, and fed his little flock with his own hand, with his most holy love, down to the least child."

In contrast, Minerva Hill played no role in the rituals during the march to the Holy Hill. She was not designated the instrument for any particular spirit. She did not "witness" the truth of the Savior's pronouncements. Rather, she stood apart from the other instruments. At the apex of the ceremony on the Holy Hill, Minerva Hill "saw" a vision that revealed an image of the spiritual Harvard, surrounded by gold posts, divinely chosen and protected:

I found myself taken under the operation of the Holy Spirit, and my sense suddenly withdrawn from the earth. . . . I was carried so high that I could not see the Brn and Sisters beneath me, who were then in their worship upon the Holy Hill of Zion. But when I looked upward, I beheld a very large hand above me, from which a light shone forth, that seemed to shine through the whole earth. . . . it was formed of pure, transparent light, so clear that I could see through every part of it. . . . When the fingers stretched [sic] out and opened apart, which they sometimes did, there went forth from them, blazing streams of light, that shone in every direction.

In this vision, Hill also saw new lands and buildings adjoining the present-day Shaker village, and she prophesied the expansion of the Harvard community. There is a specificity of image, a concreteness of detail to Minerva Hill's vision that sets it apart from the other spiritual communications received on the Holy Ground. Rather than resembling William Leonard's long, rambling discourses on biblical figures or the pronouncements of blessings and warnings that instruments commonly conveyed, Hill's visions are more akin to spiritual drawings than linear, written narratives. Shape and color predominate; the power of her visions is the power of dream images whose meanings cannot be fixed.

Outwardly William Leonard possessed greater authority in the Harvard community than did Minerva Hill; yet despite the fact that she never held any official post within the Shaker organization, Minerva Hill possessed a power that could transcend Shaker order. Although Leonard had access to the Ministry, consulting with Grove Blanchard on both secular and religious topics, he was nevertheless limited as an instrument in ways that Hill was not. It was at the Ministry's prompting, not his own inner direction, that Leonard pro-

duced inspired writings that are neither prophetic texts nor carefully thought out apologetics. Consequently, it is no surprise that Leonard's writings, as literature or history or theology, are of limited significance.

The End of the Manifestations at Harvard

On November 12, 1842, when William's Leonard role as an instrument was at its peak, Seth Wells, a prominent member of the parent society at Lebanon, penned a letter to the Lebanon Ministry criticizing many of the inspired writings produced during the manifestations. Eight years earlier Wells had been called upon to determine which books were suitable to be read by Believers.⁵⁶ Now he turned his attention to the spiritual writings that had been sent from outlying communities:

[I]t appears necessary that great care should be taken to examine, closely & critically, all these inspired writings, before they are permitted to circulate, and, if possible, before the gift of inspiration ceases; lest we should hand down to future ages & generations, writings said to be given by divine inspiration, which are found to clash with each other, or which shall contain sentiments not clearly understood, or not perfectly consistent with sound doctrine, and from which occasion might be taken to pervert the truth and sow the seeds of infidelity. . . . We ought not to reject the wheat because of the chaff among it; but the chaff must be separated from the wheat. 1. In some of the communications from Harvard and Shirley there are some things that do not appear to correspond with other parts of the same communications, thro the same instrument, and some that evidently clash with others from other societies. It does not appear reasonable that the divine spirit should hand forth TO HIS PEOPLE that which appears inconsistent with itself, or which contradicts well known historical records.⁵⁷

As examples of these errors, Wells cited writings by Ann Godfrey at Shirley, particularly her history of the antediluvians, and Leonard's histories of Joseph, Moses, and the American continent. Although Grove Blanchard's *Journal* does not refer directly to Wells' attack on the inspired writings at Harvard and Shirley, during December 1842 and January and February 1843, Blanchard spent a great deal of time "examining" and "rectifying messages." The effect of Wells' remonstrances on the instruments, however, was immediate. Within a couple of months, spiritual communications at Harvard and

56. Jerry V. Grant and Douglas R. Allen, *Shaker Furniture Makers* (Pittsfield, MA: Hancock Shaker Village, Inc. and Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989), p. 25, cite OCIWHI, V:B-293.

57. MS, OCIWHI, IV:A-38, 2-3.

Shirley virtually ceased. William Leonard's career as a Shaker "instrument" was over.⁵⁸

Once again Minerva Hill's story differs. Although the Harvard Ministry had, to a certain extent, succeeded in turning Hill's talents to its own purposes, it had never been able to completely contain her inspiration. In 1843, when most instruments at Harvard had ceased receiving spiritual gifts, Minerva Hill experienced some of her most powerful visions. These are particularly important, as they provide a stark contrast to the type of spiritual writing produced by William Leonard, and they illustrate the power that Minerva Hill possessed within the community, a power that was derived neither from political office nor from visionary appointment.

In March 1843, Minerva Hill was asked to read a message from the Prophet Jeremiah that had been given in a gold box for Mother Ann's birthday. The prophets, Sister Minerva revealed, require Believers at Harvard to "do all they can to preserve" the Square House. Many spirits, she said, "delight to come and visit this place where Mother suffered to plan the gospel." Believers must "keep it in good repair;" they must replace the roof, but they must never alter the form of the house; they must keep the yard neat and the inside of the house in order "for Holy Mother put her glory and beauty in every room." Additionally, the spirits direct Believers to hold a meeting in the Square House at least twice a year. The instrument then presented a catalog of images of spiritual splendor that infused Shaker imagination during the manifestations. The Square House is surrounded by twelve gold posts, which are connected by gold chains, each fastened with a large diamond on which is written the name of one of the twelve apostles. On top of the house, sits a large gold bell, and on each corner stands a flaming sword. Outside the house, gold and silver trumpets are suspended, and a green vine runs around each door and window. "A picture of Holy Mother's Angels wings, which resemble the rainbow" has been hung in every room, and all the windows are covered by beautiful curtains woven from diamonds, gold and silver. Each room contains a golden bowl of Mother's love and musical instruments for the angels. In the room where Mother lived rests a gold box which holds her every prayer. The house also contains Mother's gold chair, the broom she used to sweep away evil, her garments of sorrow, her burning lamps, her

58. William Leonard produced only a few insignificant pieces in 1843, see OCIWHI, VIII:B-79, "Copy of a Roll" and VIII: B-72, 137 ff., "A Little Book." Like other instruments, Leonard writes a testimony at the Ministry's request in 1843, see OCIWHI, VI: A-5. Some time later, probably in the 1850s, he composed an autobiography.

white cloud of love, and a flock of birds that light on green branches.⁵⁹

When I first read this text, Minerva Hill's descriptive powers impressed me, but it was not until I visited the Fruitlands Museum in July 1991, that I discovered how seriously her visions were taken by the Harvard Shakers. There I read the *Office Deacon's Journal* which, on August 30, 1845, notes: "Folks from the square house move today." On September 1, it records that renovations of the Square House have begun.⁶⁰ It is, of course, possible that Minerva Hill's vision of the Square House was itself a response to a current discussion in the Harvard community. Whether or not this was the case, her vision seems to have prompted the community to begin the extensive renovations of the Square House that occurred in the mid-1840s.

In June 1843, when inspiration had ceased among most of Harvard's instruments, Minerva Hill located the habitation of the ancient prophets on the grounds of Harvard.⁶¹ On July 1, Minerva Hill received an apocalyptic vision that defies both the conventions of Shaker literature and scholarly interpretation. In it, Believers are instructed to remain silent as they witness "solemn signs": an enormous chariot of fire appears. Riding in it are an Angel with golden wings and two prophets, each seven feet tall, barefooted and dressed in sackcloth. They are, Hill knows, from the antediluvian time. In the chariot is a tall pillar, topped by a "bright crimson red" cap, which "made a great show." After the Angel attaches a large red wing to each corner of the Harvard meetinghouse, the prophets dig a trench around it, banking up the dirt against the fence. Then, the yard of the meetinghouse fills with blood, blood covers its steps, and "the meetinghouse looked as tho it rested on the blood, as a vessel rests upon the ocean." Standing in the chariot, the Angel speaks to the assembled Shakers and instructs them to put on "garments of mourning" and to "tear the curtains half across" in every room of their dwelling. Then he commands them to "march two abreast" through the blood with bare feet into the meetinghouse.

We stripped our feet bare, and then began to march, at the Angel's command. Every one was solemn, and dare not say, "why is this so" for the angel sat in his chariot, between the brethren and sisters as they marched. I

59. MS, OCIWHI, VIII: B-95, untitled collection of inspired pieces, 33 ff.

60. MS, Fruitlands Museums, Shaker Collection, *Harvard Office Deacon's Journal* 1843-1848.

61. Blanchard, *Journal*, lune 3, 1843. "She said their mansion covered more than an acre of ground, and there were then 150 prophets and Prophetesses in the mansion."

recollect well stepping into the blood, and when we came out, our garments were dry, but the blood had stained our garments, and also our feet. The brethren and sisters all marched thro the blood, into the meeting house; we took our places as we generally stand, and we were all standing in blood up to our knees. After we had taken our places, I awoke.

I do not recollect of hearing one word spoken from any of the brethren and sisters . . . except one of the sisters spoke, as we were about to enter the door, these words, "The Angels in Heaven do not know what this sign means." I thought the families were to have the same gift, and march thro the blood, into the meetinghouse. Minerva L. Hill⁶²

The text suggests multiple layers of meaning. The sexual imagery might bolster a psychological interpretation of the manifestations. The prevalence of blood might suggest Hill's awareness of her impending death from tuberculosis. The influence of biblical prophecy is also evident: the vision couples Ezekiel's warnings of the dangers of false prophets with Isaiah's reminder of God's covenant with Noah. However, if the Shaker meetinghouse is an ark and its inhabitants the remnant of the chosen people, why are the garments of the Shakers stained with the blood which also penetrates the meetinghouse? I want to suggest that within the context set forth here, the vision is an emblem of the end of the Era of Manifestations. It raises the crucial question that haunted the revival: What is the source of spiritual knowledge, and where does authority reside?

In Hill's vision, Shaker brothers and sisters perform rituals of mourning, they dress in sackcloth, they tear the curtains of their dwellings. But they also follow the Angel's commands without question, and wade through blood into the meetinghouse. In the biblical context, blood creates ritual impurity, and among the Shakers, it suggests sexuality and the "life of the flesh." The believers in Hill's vision are not dressed in the customary pure white garments; rather, their feet and garments are stained with blood.

Even more disturbing is the statement "the Angels in Heaven do not know what this sign means." It is significant that a sister, not a brother or an Elder, speaks these words. The female prophet knows the mind of the angels in heaven, but with this knowledge she also bears the weight of doubt. In the vision, the angel is the only source of authority: Is it possible that he too is ignorant of the meaning of the acts he commands believers to perform? If the ways of God are beyond the understanding even of prophets and angels, they must certainly be beyond the comprehension of humans. How then are Shakers to trust the authority of their Elders, their Ministry, their

62. Minerva L. Hill, MS, OCIWHI, VIII:B-75, 29-33, in "Solemn Promises and Weighty Instructions from Holy Mother Wisdom," July 1, 1843.

prophets? It is particularly significant that the believers in the vision maintain silence. If true prophecy cannot be distinguished from false prophecy, if rightful authority cannot be separated from arbitrary authority, how is the faith to be maintained?

In March 1844, when it was evident that she had only a short time to live, Minerva Hill saw, for the last time, the hand of the Savior stretched out over the "consecrated ground" of Harvard. The Savior offers her three pink posies, and says that she must tell Believers that "the hand of the Heavenly Father is over them to protect them." When Hill asks the Savior "if I might see him as long as I lived," the Savior says, "Yea child you shall. He then slowly withdrew from me, looking at the hand as he went; and when he had disappeared, I saw the hand no more."⁶³

Does the withdrawal of the Savior's hand signal the death of Sister Minerva? Or does it also suggest that when the prophet dies, the protecting hand of the Savior is no longer stretched over Harvard? Without their prophets, how will Shakers relate to the Heavenly Father? What is the future of the community when all has been called into doubt?

With Minerva Hill's death in June 1844, the Era of Manifestations at Harvard had closed. However, her last visions demonstrate how true inspiration could transcend the boundaries imposed by social, political, and religious structures. At Harvard, individual inspiration was silenced, but not without first voicing doubt about the legitimacy of community control which had seemingly triumphed.

63. Minerva Hill, MS, OClWHi, VIII: B-95, March 16, 1844.