"Redeemed from the Curse Placed upon Her": Dialogic Discourse on Eve in the Woman's Exponent

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"REDEEMED FROM THE CURSE PLACED UPON HER": DIALOGIC DISCOURSE ON EVE IN THE WOMAN’S EXPONENT

Boyd Jay Petersen

IN WHAT MAY BE THE FIRST WORK of modern feminist literary criticism, the 1929 classic, A Room of One’s Own, Virginia Woolf argues that women would achieve literary greatness only after they possess sufficient freedom—financial, educational, social, and domestic—to allow them their creativity. In short, Woolf contends, “Give her a room of her own and five hundred a year” and a woman can be free to write great literature.1 Denied such freedom, women instead serve as “looking glasses,” reflecting back to men the image men want to see of themselves.2 The essay’s central argument, as one literary critic put it, is that “women are simultaneously victims of themselves as well as victims of men and are upholders of society by acting as mirrors to men.”3 Throughout her text, Woolf uses John Milton as a symbol of the patriarchal universe. His Paradise Lost portrays Eve as but “a fair defect of Nature” whose words to

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2Ibid., 38.
Adam are "God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more / Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise." In Milton's world like Woolf's own, not only do men govern, but they also hold "the power and the money and the influence. He [a patriarch] was the proprietor of the paper and its editor and sub-editor." For women to realize their full potential, they must see "past Milton's bogey," as Woolf puts it, and seize the full landscape of life, "for no human being should shut out the view."

Searching for this expansive, emancipated, literary woman, one would not think to find her in late nineteenth-century Mormonism. At the time, the eastern press depicted Mormon women as enslaved in polygamous marriages, helpless and exploited subjects of their husband's rule. Nevertheless, in "one of the neatest ironic contradictions of the period," as Claudia L. Bushman puts it, "the 'enslaved harems' of Utah produced some of America's most efficient early feminists." Some fifty years before Virginia Woolf published A Room of One's Own, many Mormon women not only had a room of their own, but they also had their own printing press, acting as proprietors, editors, and sub-editors. Within the pages of the Woman's Exponent, an independent Mormon periodical published between 1872 and 1914, Mormon women engaged in a spirited defense of two seemingly contradictory issues; women's suffrage and polygamy. Yet for these early Mormon suffragists, polygamy was a key to their liberation; and Eve, seen as the

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5 Woolf, A Room of One's Own, 36, 125. For more on Woolf's use of Milton, see Alice Fox, "Literary Allusion as Feminist Criticism in A Room of One's Own," Philological Quarterly 63, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 145–61.


prototypical woman, was a central symbol in this debate. Despite the fact that the publication had official approval from the male Church leadership, women's voices in the *Exponent* did not simply reflect back to men what men wanted to hear, but rather engaged in a dialogic exchange about the roles of women in both the world of Mormon polygamy and the larger world of politics. Within this dialogic feminism, images of Eve diverge even as they proliferate. While fiercely loyal to their male priesthood leaders, these women's views of Eve were complicated, often contradictory, and sometimes subtly subversive.

**Nineteenth-Century Contexts**

"Sin began with a woman," wrote the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus (or the "Wisdom of Ben Sirach"), "and because of her we all die" (25:24). Composed in the early second century BCE, Ecclesiasticus is likely the first text in which Adam and Eve resurface following Genesis; and right from the start, Eve gets the blame for instigating the fall of humanity into the lone and dreary world. Since then, Eve has been reviled in Western culture as the source of pain, sin, and sorrow. As early as the Middle Ages, however, women began coming to Eve's defense. Hildegard of Bingen argued that Eve rather than Adam was the prototypical human; Christine de Pizan noted that Eve was created out of "very noble material" rather than Adam's simple clay; and a *querelle des femmes* raged from around 1200 through the early seventeenth century, in which Eve was often invoked to promote women as the superior sex.

The history of Eve-based misogyny is vast, and the nineteenth century participated with gusto, often linking the mastery of men over women with the mastery of slave-owners over slaves. Southern clergyman James Henley Thornwell believed that it was as ridiculous to think that the "rights of the citizen" applied to slaves as it did to think that they applied to women, children, apprentices, and convicts. Slavery and the subordination of women were simply the logical consequences of Adam's fall. Nevertheless, positive portrayals of

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Eve also became more prominent. Abolitionists Sarah and Angela Grimké argued that women's rights were inextricably tied to the rights of slaves and appealed to Genesis for support. "Here then I plant myself," stated Sarah Grimké. "God created us equal;—he created us free agents;—he is our Lawgiver, our King and our Judge, and to him alone is woman bound to be in subjection."^9

Many nineteenth-century new religious movements produced innovative and less repressive readings of the Adam and Eve narrative. For example, the Shakers saw in Genesis 1:26 ("Let us make man in our image") a revelation that God is both male and female and believed that, since the first incarnation of God was as a man, Jesus, the second incarnation would be as a woman. They concluded that this second incarnation was Mother Ann. Christian Scientist founder Mary Baker Eddy likewise described God as Father-Mother and came to see the first account of creation in Genesis 1 as the "brief, glorious history of spiritual creation" while the second creation in Genesis 2 she regarded as an allegorical manifestation of the effects of human error. And John Humphrey Noyes believed that the prelapsarian relationship between Adam and Eve was "the first social relation" with an "open, fearless, spiritual fellowship, first with God, and secondly, with each other." The Fall brought a "derangement of this relation," argued Noyes, and he regarded Genesis 1–3 as a mandate for sexual pleasure, instituting a practice of "male continence" and complex marriage among the Oneida community.^10

Literary figures also reimagined an Eve quite different from that found in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In her 1845 feminist manifesto, "Woman in the Nineteenth Century," Margaret Fuller condemns "the severe nation which taught that the happiness of the race was forfeited through the fault of a woman." She later selectively quoted from Milton's *Paradise Lost* where Adam addressed his wife as, "Daughter of God and Man, immortal Eve" (9:291). Fuller exults: "What majesty in the cadence of the line; what dignity, what reverence in the attitude, both of the giver and receiver!"^11

At age sixteen, Emily Dickinson wrote to a friend: "I have lately

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^9Quoted in ibid., 343.
^10Quoted in ibid., 366.
^11Jeffrey Steele, ed., *The Essential Margaret Fuller* (New Brunswick,
come to the conclusion that I am Eve, alias Mrs. Adam. You know there is no account of her death in the Bible, and why am not I Eve? If you find any statements which you think likely to prove the truth of the case, I wish you would send them to me without delay.\textsuperscript{12} By associating herself with Eve, Dickinson was able to recognize the temptation of knowledge and the arbitrary nature of injunctions against its pursuit:

Forbidden Fruit a flavor has
That lawful Orchards mocks—
How luscious lies within the Pod
The Pea that Duty locks—.\textsuperscript{13}

As Herbert Schreidau states, Dickinson “used [the Bible] wholly against the grain of its accepted interpretations in her time. She sloughed off the orthodox Calvinism and conventional piety of her religion and her family early in life, and went on to challenge concepts of 'Heaven,' 'Eden,' and 'Eternity' with her own bold definitions.”\textsuperscript{14}

The elder Henry James read the Adam and Eve narrative in a Swedenborgian mode as an allegory of the development of individual consciousness, arguing: “Thus the first and highest possible service which Eve renders Adam is to throw him out of Paradise: i.e., strip him of the innocence which he has by creation merely, and which consists only with ignorance of his proper self, in order finally to clothe him with the innocence which he will have by virtue of a Divine redemption of his nature, and which is one with the profoundest wisdom, or experience of selfhood.”\textsuperscript{15}

Perhaps the most radical reimagining of Eve, however, is found

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12}Thomas H. Johnson, ed., \textit{The Letters of Emily Dickinson} (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1958), Letter #9, January 12, 1846.
\item \textsuperscript{13}Thomas H. Johnson, ed., \textit{The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson} (Boston: Little Brown, 1961), Poem 1377, p. 592.
\item \textsuperscript{15}Henry James, \textit{Substance and Shadow: Or Morality and Religion in Their Relation to Life: An Essay upon the Physics of Creation} (Boston: Ticknor and
in *The Woman’s Bible*, a project spearheaded by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and published in two volumes in 1895 and 1898. Stanton saw the Bible as a major stumbling block in the path to women’s equality and organized a committee to create a commentary to reimagine biblical women and counter misogynist passages. Some passages, she argued, were either mistranslated or misinterpreted, while others should simply be regarded as reflections of ancient mores and customs that had no place in a modern era. In sum, what could be repaired, Stanton would repair, but what could not pass for rational, woman-friendly religion, she would toss, much as Thomas Jefferson had discarded the miracles of the New Testament Gospels in order to accommodate his rational beliefs.

Stanton was particularly interested in repairing Eve’s image, which she felt had been misappropriated by male interpretations of the story. Noting the existence of two creation stories, Stanton argued that the first account (by the “Priestly” author) was truly egalitarian (“male and female he created them” [Gen. 1:27]) and more in harmony with natural laws and science. The second account she passed off as the work of a “wily writer” who, “seeing the perfect equality of man and woman in the first chapter, felt it important for the dignity and dominion of man to effect woman’s subordination in some way.”

Nevertheless, Stanton held up Eve as the central figure of the Eden narrative and pointed to “the courage, the dignity, and the lofty ambition of the woman.” As Kathi Kern has noted, Stanton and her coauthors “endowed Eve with the very qualities they valued in themselves: a rebellious spirit and a desire for knowledge of the soul. They rescued Eve by rereading her.” Although her work was not well received at the time, Stanton broke new ground with the publication of *The Woman’s Bible*, claiming for herself and for all women what had

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16 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman’s Bible* (New York: European Publishing, 1898), 21. Stanton got things backwards here since the second account (Gen. 2–3) was, according to critical consensus, written first; however, it is important to note the attempt at a “higher” criticism. While Stanton’s work was more social commentary than scholarly hermeneutics, she did incorporate scholarly insights; and in many ways, her work was a forerunner of criticism to follow.

17 Ibid., 24.

18 Kathi L. Kern, *Mrs. Stanton’s Bible* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University
been the exclusively male world of biblical criticism.

Both Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony spent a week visiting Utah in 1871 and established close ties with Mormon suffragists. Likewise, LDS Relief Society general president Emmeline B. Wells was asked on multiple occasions to speak at the National Woman Suffrage Association in Washington, D.C. Stanton believed that the views of the enlightened easterner who wanted to protect women from polygamy were hypocritical and patronizing, and argued for the full inclusion of Mormon women. During her stay in Utah, Stanton met Mormon women who were unhappily married but also many women who were independent and educated. All were entitled to vote. “Though the Mormon, like all other women, stoutly defend their own religion,” Stanton wrote, “yet they are not more satisfied than any other sect. All women are dissatisfied with their position as inferiors, and their dissatisfaction increases in exact ratio with their intelligence and development.”

Soon after the publication of The Woman’s Bible, the Woman’s Exponent published excerpts from it, including Stanton’s commentary on Genesis 1:26, “God created man in his own image male and female.” Finding particular resonance among Mormon women was Stanton’s argument: “If language has any meaning we have in these texts a plain declaration of the existence of the feminine element in the Godhead, equal in power and glory with the masculine. The Heavenly Mother and Father!” Eliza R. Snow had celebrated the existence of a Heavenly Mother in her 1845 poem “My Father in Heaven,” later titled “Invocation, or the Eternal Father and Mother.”

Mormon women would not produce a Mormon women’s bible, but they were in dialogue with the larger culture.

Press, 2001), 160.


20Stanton, Woman’s Bible, 14.

PRIESTHOOD LEADERS' VOICES ON EVE

Late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century LDS leaders have described Eve as the culmination of creation and praised her wisdom, foresight, and courage for bringing about human potentiality. President Gordon B. Hinckley regarded Eve as “the crowning of [God’s] glorious work” and “His masterpiece after all that had gone before, the final work before He rested from His labors.”^^ Elder Boyd K. Packer spoke of the Fall as “a choice” that “was imposed upon Eve” and stressed that “she should be praised for her decision.”^^ Elder Dallin H. Oaks enthused that “we celebrate Eve’s act and honor her wisdom and courage in the great episode called the Fall.”^^ And Elder Russell M. Nelson stressed that humanity is “forever blessed because of Eve’s great courage and wisdom.”^^

However, nineteenth-century Church leaders were less admiring, seeing Eve as being deceived but inadvertently fulfilling God’s purpose. In his inspired translation of the Bible, Joseph Smith emphasized that Eve “did labor with” Adam when they were driven out of Eden (Moses 5:1) and gave Eve a voice to comment on the Fall’s fortunate nature: “Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” (Moses 5:11). Smith would also use Adam and Eve as an exemplary model in a wedding ceremony, which he said was “original with me,” that he performed for Newel Knight and Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey in 1835. Smith recorded the ceremony “in substance” in his journal. After explaining to the bride and groom that

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“marriage was an institution of heaven instituted in the garden of Eden,” Smith continued: “You covenant to be each other companions through life, and discharge the duties of husband & wife in every respect, to which they assented, I then pronounced them husband & Wife in the name of God, and also pronounced the blessings that the Lord conferred upon adam [sic.] and Eve in the garden of Eden; that is to multiply and replenish the earth, with the addition of long life and prosperity.”

Smith’s use of Adam and Eve as a paradigmatic model for a wedding ceremony is echoed in W. W. Phelps’s marriage hymn, which was included in the first Mormon hymnal, compiled by Emma Smith in 1835:

> When earth was dress’d in beauty,
> And join’d with heaven above,
> The Lord took Eve to Adam,
> And taught them how to love.

> And bless’d them as an altar,
> For chaste and pure desire,
> That no unhallowed being
> Might offer there “Strange fire.”

> Beware of all temptation;
> Be good, be just, be wise,
> Be even as the angels,
> That dwell in Paradise.

Go multiply,—replenish,
And fill the earth with men,
That all your vast creation,
May come to God again:—

And dwell amid perfection,
In Zion’s wide domains,
Where union is eternal,
And Jesus ever reigns.²⁷

William Clayton’s diary also records a rather cryptic comment about Eve that Joseph Smith made in an address delivered May 17, 1843, in Ramus, Illinois: “The 7th verse of the 2nd chapter of Genesis ought to read—God breathed into Adam his spirit (i.e. Adam’s spirit) or breath of life; but when the word ‘rauch’ applies to Eve, it should be translated lives.” Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook speculate that perhaps Smith “wanted to emphasize Eve’s role as live-giver, which coincides with the usage of ‘lives’ appearing two months later in the revelation on eternal marriage (D&C 132:22–24).”²⁸ Aside from these comments, however, Joseph Smith said relatively little specifically about Eve. Other early priesthood leaders seemed to follow suit.


Brigham Young, on the other hand, had much to say about Eve, but little of it was laudatory. On the one hand, Young declared that “Mother Eve . . . had a splendid influence over [Adam]” and praised her for getting Adam to take the forbidden fruit. On the other hand, he reinforced many of the more repressive readings of the Adam and Eve narrative. He reaffirmed Paul’s statement that “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” He believed that Eve was Adam’s plural wife and that, when Adam left his celestial world to people this earth, “there is no doubt but that he left many companions.” He said that Eve nagged Adam to eat the fruit: “Just as it is with other husbands, she coaxes and persuades, and finally he gives way and partakes of the forbidden fruit.” And he used Eve’s example to caution women to remember their place in the home: “It is the calling of the wife and mother to . . . [labor] to make her home desirable to her husband and children, making herself an Eve in the midst of a little paradise of her own creating.” He also stressed that “there is a curse upon the woman that is not upon the man, namely, that her whole affections shall be to-

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96; see also Brian C. Hales “Evidence of Sexual Relations in Joseph Smith’s Plural Marriage with Almera Woodard Johnson,” Joseph Smith’s Polygamy, http://www.josephsmithspolygamy.com/JSPSexuality/AlmeraJohnsonSR.html (accessed July 21, 2013). Beverley Campbell, Eve and the Choice Made in Eden (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2003), 45, speculates whether Smith’s revision “indicate[s] that at the time of Eve’s first stirrings in the Garden, God endowed her with the seeds of those lives that in the Grand Council of Heaven she had committed to bring forth? If she were so endowed, could this assignment be conveyed to another? It seems that Eve’s role was pivotal if waiting spirits were to obtain the requisite mortal bodies of flesh and blood.” Campbell notes that “the name Eve (Chava or Chavvah in Hebrew) . . . means ‘life giving,’ and the Lord carefully taught Adam why this woman he had been given was to be called Eve.”


31Brigham Young, August 31, 1873, Journal of Discourses, 16:167.

32Brigham Young, May 18, 1873, Journal of Discourses, 16:40.

33Brigham Young, June 8, 1862, Journal of Discourses, 10:28.
wards her husband,' and what is the next? 'He shall rule over you.'"34

Few LDS General Authorities addressed the character of Eve as directly as Brigham Young. However, at least one General Authority, perhaps reading the excerpt published in the Exponent, directly attacked Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s argument for a divine feminine. George Q. Cannon announced that, within Joseph Smith’s revelations,

there was no revelation of the feminine element as part of the Godhead, and no idea was conveyed that any such element “was equal in power and glory with the masculine” [a quotation from The Woman’s Bible]. Therefore, we are warranted in pronouncing all tendencies to glorify the feminine element and to exalt it as part of the Godhead as wrong and untrue, not only because of the revelation of the Lord in our day but because it has no warrant in scripture, and any attempt to put such a construction on the word of God is false and erroneous.35

Orson Pratt held up Adam and Eve as an example of the importance of eternal marriage, stating that “the sealing of the great Jehovah upon Adam and Eve was eternal in its nature, and was never instituted for the purpose of being overthrown and brought to an end. It is known that the ‘Mormons’ are a peculiar people about marriage; we believe in marrying, not only for time, but for all eternity.”36 He would also refer to Eve as Adam’s “lovely consort.”37 Heber C. Kimball reminded Mormon priesthood holders that God “did not make the man for the woman but the woman for the man,” but balanced this statement by admonishing, “If a man does not use a woman well and take good care of her, God will take her away from him and give her to another.”38 Wilford Woodruff stressed that, although the world “has found a great deal of fault with Mother Eve and with Father Adam, because of the fall of man,” he believed that “Adam and

34Brigham Young, September 21, 1856, Journal of Discourses, 4:57.
38Heber C. Kimball, quoted by Helen Mar Whitney, “Scenes in Nauvoo, and Incidents from H.C. Kimball’s Journal,” Woman’s Exponent 12,
Eve came to this world to perform exactly the part that they acted in the garden of Eden [and] were ordained of God to do what they did." James E. Talmage later captured the nineteenth-century Mormon priesthood leaders' position on Eve in his 1899 book *The Articles of Faith*: "Our first parents are entitled to our deepest gratitude for their legacy to posterity—the means of winning title to glory, exaltation, and eternal lives." However, Talmage stressed, while Eve "fulfill[ed] the foreordained purposes of God . . . she did not partake of the forbidden fruit with that object in view, but with the intent to violate the Divine command, being deceived by the sophistries of the serpent-fiend." A turning point between the nineteenth century's less heroic Eve and the Eve of the present is, perhaps, the 1918 vision of Joseph F. Smith in which he records seeing "our glorious Mother Eve, with many of her faithful daughters who had lived through the ages and worshiped the true and living God" (D&C 138:39). Regardless, the status of Eve shifted, both rhetorically and theologically, at the turn of the century.

**THE DIALOGIC DISCOURSE OF THE WOMAN'S EXponent**

In the pages of the *Woman's Exponent*, we find both a reflection and subtle subversion of male priesthood voices, and a more dynamic view of Eve emerges. LDS women began with a canon and theology that gave Eve more favorable circumstances than she had in creedal Christianity. However, the full realization of Eve's potential was first explored by *Exponent* authors, not their priesthood leaders. While no coherent theology emerged from this discussion, the journal did bring together multiple voices and their debates were always open, always ongoing, always dialogical.

In his discussion of Dostoyevsky's poetics, Russian philosopher __no. 5 (August 1, 1883): 34.__


__41 Although the vision was not canonized until April 3, 1976, it was included in the 1919 Melchizedek Priesthood manual, *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith*, which became a standard in LDS Church literature._
and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin makes a distinction between monological and dialogical genres of discourse. Lyric poetry, Bakhtin believes to be monological, expressing a single authorial point-of-view, whereas the novel, he considers to be more dialogical, carrying on a continual dialogue with other works of literature and other authors. Not unlike Joseph Smith, who suggested that “by proving contraries, truth is made manifest,” Bakhtin sees dialogic discourse as more fully arriving at the truth of human experience, which is multiple, contradictory, and logically inconsistent. Monological discourse, on the other hand, is dangerous:

Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights (thou). With a monologic approach (in its extreme or pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness. Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other’s response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any decisive force. Monologue manages without the other. . . . Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word. It closes down the represented world and represented persons.

Bakhtin praised Dostoyevsky’s dialogic style, which he recognized had its roots in his “position as a journalist” and his “passion for journalism and his love of the newspaper page as a living reflection of the contradictions of contemporary society in the cross-section of a single day, where the most diverse and contradictory material is laid out, extensively, side by side and one side against the other.” Newspapers, Bakhtin recognized, are a naturally dialogical genre where flourished a “carnival sense of the world,” a context where distinct individual voices are heard, thrive, and interrelate.

I invoke Bakhtin not simply because the Woman’s Exponent is a newspaper, however. Mormons have produced many newspapers throughout their history, but the Woman’s Exponent is a more

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44 Ibid., 29–30.
dialogical newspaper than those produced by male Church leaders. Granted, I have focused my research on the Woman's Exponent and not other Mormon publications; however, for the sake of comparison I have spent some time exploring the Millennial Star, a publication run by men during this same period. I found the publication to be much more monological in nature. While the Millennial Star focuses predominantly on sermons given by men, the Woman's Exponent focuses on opinion columns, poetry, helpful advice, news, etc., and does not exclude male voices. Where the Star's sermons tend to gloss over or suppress disagreement, the Exponent encourages a more open exchange of opinions. Producing neither monological male discourse nor a monological female discourse, the Woman's Exponent celebrates many voices creating what Bakhtin would call a "carnival" sense of the world.

Furthermore, many of the voices in this carnival speak through absence; it is often unclear who is actually speaking behind the many noms-du-plumes or the initials of a given name. In the Woman's Exponent, we hear voices speaking in dialogue, preserving conflict, but maintaining civility.

THE TWO FACES OF EVE

Within this dialogical world of the Exponent, we find a theological debate over whether Eve was the essentially duplicitous instigator of evil or the noble initiator of human progress; between the traditional view of Eve that has persisted in Christianity for millennia and the ennobled portrayal of Eve that many found in Mormon scripture and theology. Susanna Morrill has argued that "faithful converts who still maintained mental and emotional connections with their earlier churches of origin" brought "this negative interpretation" of Eve into Mormonism with them, where it "remained latent in Mormon theology and culture."45 Perhaps Morrill overstates the influence that converts' prior religious experience had on negative views of Eve, since many of the seasoned and vocal priesthood leaders were portraying Eve in negative ways as LDS doctrine.

Nevertheless, a dialogue about these two opposing views of Eve ensues within the Exponent, the arguments informed by national

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Protestant voices of the past and present, even as they anticipate voices of the future. Some contributors saw Eve as culpable and cursed, suggesting that, like Eve, women should not rule over men, usurp their roles, nor adopt their dress and manners. In short, went the argument, woman should be a “help meet” for their husbands. For example, Eliza R. Snow called on a meeting of the Young Women’s Retrenchment Association to abstain from “round dances,” which she said “were originated by the adversary to lead to evil.” To urge the sisters to take a strong stand, Snow asked, “As Eve led out in the evil, why should she not be the first in doing good?” Citing the biblical injunction that Eve will be a “help meet” for the man, Phoebe Young stated, “It is not, then, our province to usurp the place, or do the work of our husbands, but to assist them, by every means in our power.”

Almost twenty years later, Young would articulate a strikingly different position: “Let not woman fear that she is overstepping the bounds prescribed by the Great Creator as the proper sphere of woman, for she was in the beginning created a helpmate [sic] for man and who will dare affirm she is out of place, because she shares his ambition and desires to assist in all great and worthy enterprises?”

Emmeline B. Wells, writing under one of her numerous pseudonyms as Blanche Beechwood, sees the command to be a help meet and “a nearer conception of woman’s mission and work” being fulfilled as the women’s movement allows women to become “more

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46 The original Hebrew ezer kenegdo, which the KJV translates as “help meet,” can be translated as “a helper corresponding to.” By the seventeenth century, the two words had become improperly hyphenated as “help-meet” and the compound form “helpmeet” became common usage during the nineteenth century. “Helpmate” is likely a coinage based on “helpmeet” and originates in the eighteenth century. All three terms are used interchangeably in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In this article, I employ the KJV’s unhyphenated original, but keep individual authors’ version of the word.

47 “A Synopsis of Remarks, by Sister Eliza R. Snow, to the Young Ladies’ Retrenchment Association of the 16th Ward,” Woman’s Exponent 3, no. 23 (May 1, 1875): 178.


thoroughly developed and highly educated.” Beechwood continues, “Why should she not stand side by side with her brother, in all questions of interest for the common weal? For my part, I glory in the moral courage which arms woman with sufficient heroism to stand forth in her own defense, against any invasion upon her inherited rights and privileges.”50 Another writer sees Eve’s role of “helpmeet” as “embrac[ing] all that was to be done, every requisition devolving upon mankind.”51 Eve’s equality with Adam is stressed by M. E. Teasdale, who writes, “Woman’s sphere of usefulness is as great, and her influence as widely felt as man’s. She was placed upon the earth with man to be his companion, his helpmate and his equal. ‘She was not taken from his feet to be trampled upon by him, nor from his head to rule over him, but from his side to be equal with him; near his heart to be loved and cherished by him.’”52 And Sarah Howard simply asks, “Do you think he would have created an inferior being for a helpmeet or companion for man, who had been created in the image of...

50Blanche Beechwood [Emmeline B. Wells], “Woman’s Ambition,” Woman’s Exponent 4, no. 21 (April 1, 1876): 166.
51E. A. Crane Waton, “Woman’s Calling,” Woman’s Exponent 19, no. 4 (July 15, 1890): 27.
52M. E. Teasdale, “Equality of Sex,” Woman’s Exponent 15, no. 24 (May 15, 1887): 185. This trope dates at least to the Middle Ages, but this particular version appears to be a paraphrase from Matthew Henry’s Bible commentary, which states: “That the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.” An Exposition of the Old and New Testament (London: Joseph Ogle Robinson, 1828), 12. A decidedly different message comes from a Rabbinic midrash, where according to Genesis Rabbah 80:5, God says: “I will not create her from Adams’ head, lest she be swell-headed; nor from the eye, lest she be a coquette; nor from the ear, lest she be an eavesdropper; nor from the mouth, lest she be a gossip; nor from the heart, lest she be prone to jealousy; nor from the hand, lest she be light-fingered; nor from the foot, lest she be a gadabout; but from the modest part of man, for even when he stands naked, that part is covered.” Quoted in Nehama Aschkenasy, Eve’s Journey: Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 44.
God[7]53 One woman even questions the biblical record: “We are told in our earliest histories that man was made first, and that woman was so dependent on him, that even the first woman had to secure a start from man, and that afterwards she was placed in subjection to him, but this I doubt.” She argues that women’s subservience “never was a divine wish or expectation—was only a mundane retrogression that must first be checked before woman can attain her God-given position on [sic] strict equality with her liege lord, man.”54 Ida Peay reminded readers that God gave dominion to both Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28: “God has always considered woman and commissioned her as he has man.” She continued, “Man in his might and blindness has wrested from Eve’s daughters their God-given rights in the dominion, hence this modern war which woman-kind is waging to obtain them back again. The struggle is surely divinely instituted and will ultimately succeed, for the world’s problems to-day are sadly in need of the decisions of pure, high minded, God-fearing men and women.”55

Many, like E. H. Lyon, revered Eve as the “the finishing touch of the Almighty.”56 Marion Wilcox noted that it was only after the creation of Eve that the “Architect finished His work and proclaimed it ‘very good.’”57 A poem published in 1894 summed up the thought, “Man of the dust was earthly made, / Woman from man:—a higher grade.”58 Hannah Tapfield King called Eve “the sovereign mother of all living! She stands in close proximity to God the Father, for she is the life giving spirit of the innumerable hosts that have figured upon

54D. P. Felt, “A Man’s Advice about Woman Suffrage,” Woman’s Exponent 20, no. 10 (November 15, 1891): 73.
55Ida S. Peay, “Taking a Stand for the Right,” Woman’s Exponent 41, no. 8 (June 1, 1913): 61; emphasis hers.
this earth.”59 And in purple prose, Nellie Becraft described Eve:

With what majestic mien she trod life’s way,
Leading to higher plane all womanhood,
Ornate with virtues gilding direst day,
Until High Priestess to her sex she stood;
Eden and earth enriched, she passed along
Through gates celestial, joined the victor’s throng.60

Still others invoked Eve to speak of women’s influence over men, for both good or evil. “Ever since Adam accused Eve in the Garden of Eden, men have been laying the blame of every great social wrong, in which both participated, on woman,” writes Wilhelmina Christafferson, but goes on to admit: It’s “with a certain degree of justice.” Women, Christafferson confesses, have immense power to influence the emotions of men. “It is needless to cite instances in proof of this; each one of us will readily call to mind instances of our own experience, and history will furnish others, of men, great men, men of strong character and exhibiting practical common sense in all the walks of life, who nevertheless became imbecile and acted like fools in cases where women were concerned.” Women must acknowledge this powerful influence and “wield it openly and for good only.”61 Another writes that “there are thousands of Adams to-day who smoke that vile weed tobacco, because some fair Eve has told them she admires the smell of a good cigar. Many a modern Adam has taken his first glass of wine because it was proffered by the beautiful jeweled hand of a modern Eve, and many a modern Adam reformed his habits and morals because some fair and lovely Eve, who is more to him than all the world beside, has told him that he must do it, or he can never occupy the same garden of Eden with her.”62

Mary Anderson wrote that “if Eve had so much influence over

61Wilhelmina Christafferson, Letter to editor, Woman’s Exponent 5, no. 3 (July 1, 1876): 19.
62“Woman’s Influence,” Woman’s Exponent 14, no. 15 (January 1,
her companion, should we not be careful how we use our influence over our companions, and associates by whom we are surrounded daily, for are we not all daughters of Eve? Women must "use that influence which has been given her for a higher and better purpose," she argued. Ever since the days of mother Eve; woman's influence has been manifest for the advancement or retrogression of the people of the earth," wrote Susie Armstrong; and "from that time until the present, woman by her influence has been more or less responsible, for the conditions of society.

If Eve was culpable, several writers argued it is typically not the case for the woman to lead out in sin. "The old history of the Garden of Eden is repeating itself frequently. But in all recent repetitions of it, especially in political affairs, the Adam is the worst sinner. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he puts himself in the way of temptation, and in most of these he is saved from a fatal fall by his Eve." Still another saw men as the tempters. If women are called the "weaker sex," the author concedes it is because of her "deep and pure love which gives her the lasting faith (of which men so frequently take the advantage) she being pure thinketh no evil, until her eyes are opened to see that she like 'Another Eve' has been deceived by Satan appearing in the form of man instead of a serpent."

For Adelia B. Cox Sidwell, it is unfair to lay all the blame for the fall on Eve. Condemned to wander in the garden for "untold centuries" with no female companionship, Eve must have longed for conversation, wrote Sidwell. "If I am allowed to judge Adam by most men of my acquaintance, he was probably very indifferent company, as men's conversational brilliancy is seldom exerted to any considerable extent for the benefit or entertainment of a wife." Suffering such isolation and being deprived of motherhood, woman's "crowning glory, 1886): 114.

63Mary Anderson, "An Answer to the Article Entitled 'Woman's Calling,'" Woman's Exponent 19, no. 6 (August 15, 1890): 42.


65Ex. [pseud.], "A Vindication of Women," Woman's Exponent 5, no. 10 (October 15, 1876): 79.

comfort, joy,” Sidwell continues, “who I ask can blame [Eve] for being discontent, and desiring a change in her monotonous existence? even though that change included Death!”

Likewise, a woman writing under the name “Frances” states that “the probability is if Adam had tasted [the fruit] first he would have kept the knowledge to himself and have not offered to share it with his companion.” For Frances, Eve’s inquisitive nature is only matched by her compassion. “She wished to share that which was good with her fellow-creature which is a credit to her, and certainly showed her to be actuated solely by motives of a purely unselfish and generous character.”

Ruth May Fox contended that since, Eve was blamed for the fall of humanity, “there has been a woman at the bottom of everything that savored of ill repute, but in the future there will be a woman at the bottom of everything that good [sic], not excluding good government.” Lucy M. Hewlings writes, “If woman was foremost in the fall, she is first and foremost in every enterprise that has for its object the uplifting of humanity and the glory of God.”

The chorus of voices found within the *Exponent* never paints a monological vision of Eve’s culpability or of her heroism, but all voices are allowed equal standing, creating what Bakhtin would call a “carnival” sense of the world.

**THE NOBILITY OF EVE**

Many women recognized the radical implications of Mormonism’s fortunate fall and spoke of Eve as brave and magnanimous for pushing humanity towards godhood. But even here, the voices are multiple and diverse, dialogic rather than monologic. Extolling the nobility of Eve, one author (likely Sarah M. Kimball) wrote: “Our great maternal progenitor is entitled to reverent honor for braving the peril that brought earth’s children from the

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69 R.M.F. [Ruth May Fox], “Lecture on Suffrage,” *Woman’s Exponent* 24, no. 6 (August 15, 1895): 41.

dark valley of ignorance and stagnation, and placed them on the broad, progressive plain, where they, knowing good and evil, joy and sorrow, may become as Gods.” She continued, “Mother Eve, for taking the initiative in this advance movement, should receive encomiums of praise; which should be shared by our great paternal [sic] who, though reluctantly, followed and aided in her heaven ordained enterprise.” An other writer states, “I am sure that if we are fortunate enough to meet and associate with our beloved Queen— Mother Eve, we will have an esteem and love for her, that words but faintly can express.” Isabella Horne pointed out that Eve “had the courage to partake of the fruit, willing to suffer the penalty so she could gain increased wisdom and knowledge” and stressed that “we are indebted [to her] for the opportunity of gaining that experience and knowledge that will enable us to return and dwell in our Father’s presence.” In 1903, Hannah Tapfield King referred to Eve as “the sovereign mother of all living! [who] stands in close proximity to God the Father, for she is the life giving spirit of the innumerable hosts that have figured upon this earth. The one grand, stupendous act of her life is all that is told of her in the Bible, and it is enough.”

An unsigned editorial, likely written by Emmeline Wells, stresses Eve’s role as the instigator of human progress: “Adam would probably have been content to remain in ignorance, but Eve, with woman’s quick, keen perception, saw that the fruit of the tree of knowledge was pleasant to the sight and to be desired, and Adam was encouraged to eat of that which otherwise he might never have

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71S.M.K. [Sarah M. Kimball], “Plea for the Women of Massachusetts and Mother Eve, vs. Kate Bowers,” Woman’s Exponent 2, no. 18 (February 15, 1874): 141.

72Hermita, “Familiarity Breeds Contempt,” Woman’s Exponent 9, no. 16 (January 15, 1881): 121. The publication also reported on a speech given by Mark Twain in which he said, “From the day that Adam ate of the apple and told on Eve down to the present day man in a moral fight has pretty uniformly shown himself to be an arrant coward.” “Mark Twain on the Crusade,” Woman’s Exponent 3, no. 3 (July 1, 1874): 24.


touched, because Eve offered it to him." Sarah M. Kimball, speaking to a gathering of Relief Society, Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association, and Primary leaders, maintained that "what Eve had done had generally been looked upon as a misfortune, a weakness of hers, but she considered it the greatest thing she could have done for her descendants." Discussing "Women in History," Lillie Devereaux Blake contended that "Eve was the last and crowning effort of the creative force. Adam evidently, had no idea of superiority over her, for although the Divine command not to eat of the tree of knowledge was given to him alone, when Eve, tempted by the noble ambition for wisdom, took of the forbidden fruit and offered it to him, he uttered no word of objection or remonstrance, but humbly followed where she led." This version of Eve as hero, one absent from male LDS thought of the nineteenth century, is the most common in today's discourse. Nevertheless, one male author's voice that is reproduced in the Exponent notes Eve's status as the "mother of all living" and describes her as "the link indeed between heaven and earth that connects all of the spiritual world with those who are below. She alone is fitted and endowed with capabilities to be the usher of all spirits into their earthly home." A man could see woman as usher and entry way into humanity, but not as the agent who propelled humanity toward godhood.

Eve's role as the "mother of all living," combined with Brigham Young's theology that Adam and Eve were divine beings who descended to earth to populate the planet, led Mormon women to eagerly anticipate following in Eve's footsteps as the mother of future worlds. In a report of a Young Ladies Retrenchment Associations of Salt Lake City held in 1874, Zina D. Young told the young women that "it was their privilege, hereafter to stand in the same position as Eve,

75 "Woman's Influence," Woman's Exponent 14, no. 15 (January 1, 1886): 114.
77 Lillie Devereaux Blake, "Women in History," Woman's Exponent 16, no. 9 (October 1, 1887): 65-66.
at the head of a world; and exhorted them to prepare themselves for all that is in store for the faithful.⁷⁹ Later, after she became the Relief Society general president, Zina Young told a gathering of sisters that she was “surrounded by Eves, yea even the queens of this world and believed that the works and labors which they would perform would entitle them to occupy such positions” in the hereafter.⁸⁰ “To be the ‘mother of all living’ is an office,” Samuel W. Richards stated in a speech published in the Exponent, a “labor embracing the most responsible duties of human existence.”⁸¹

The implications of Young’s Adam-God theology on Eve’s status were explored more fully in Edward W. Tullidge’s 1877 publication Women of Mormondom. Calling Brigham Young’s theology “the most important revelation ever oracled to the race since the days of Adam himself,” Tullidge refers to a “cestial Masonry of Womanhood” and “the other half of the grand patriarchal economy of the heavens and the earths” in which a “trinity of Mothers” preside: Eve, the Mother of the world; Sarah, the Mother of the covenant; and Zion, the “Mother of celestial sons and daughters” (a group name for Mormon polygamous women). Tullidge goes on to describe Eve as a “Goddess [who] came down from her mansions of glory to bring the spirits of her children down after her, in their myriads of branches and their hundreds of generations.”⁸² Though the book bears Edward W. Tullidge’s name as author, Eliza R. Snow was a significant but uncredited collaborator on the project and it

⁷⁹“R.S. Reports,” Woman’s Exponent 3, no. 7 (September 1, 1874): 50. Brigham Young, October 14, 1860, Journal of Discourses, 8:208, had stated this same idea as a way of comforting childless women: “Many of the sisters grieve because they are not blessed with offspring. You will see the time when you will have millions of children around you. If you are faithful to your covenants, you will be mothers of nations. You will become Eves to earths like this; and when you have assisted in peopling one earth, there are millions of earths still in the course of creation. And when they have endured a thousand million times longer than this earth, it is only as it were the beginning of your creations.”

⁸⁰Louisa Pickett, “Relief Society Conference,” Woman’s Exponent 18, no. 10 (October 15, 1889): 78.


⁸²Edward W. Tullidge Women of Mormondom (New York: Tullidge and
likely represented her views. As Claudia Bushman notes, “Because of the close collaboration with Eliza R. Snow, there can be no question that this is the story LDS women wanted told.” Though Adam’s status as a god was emphasized in sermons and writings by men and women of the period, it was primarily the women who emphasized the implication that Eve is a goddess. This rhetoric dropped out quickly as Adam-God teachings became deemphasized in the early twentieth century. There is, however, no indication that any woman sought to work toward a coherent theology of Eve. Instead Eve served as a symbol of human potentiality among the diversity of Mormon women’s voices.

**EVE AS MODEL OF DOMESTICITY**

While women varied in their theological views of Eve—some mirroring their priesthood leader’s views of Eve as duped, others emphasizing her place as a hero and goddess—there was a near-universal acceptance of the Victorian concept of “separate spheres,” where women were guardians of home and hearth. As Susanna Morrill describes this concept, the “home-centered roles of mother and wife” are “seen as the glue that keeps society together.” Within this sphere of domestic life, Eve was seen as the role model for everything from raising a family to choosing appropriate clothing styles. As one woman wrote, the scriptures’ teachings about Eve serve as “excellent instruction to the daughters of Zion,” helping them “understand their true position” and purpose, to “keep the first great commandment given in the ‘Garden of Eden,’ viz. to multiply and replenish the earth.” Another woman, admonishing young women to learn how to cook, takes a more comical tone: Eve “set us a worthy example” by “looking after, what she and Adam were to eat.” And Adam partook, without “interfering with her domestic arrange-
ments.” Sewing must be women’s role, stated M. C. Woods, “since our mother Eve must have used some sort of thread to sew the strings on her fig leaf apron.” “The domestic sphere is, of course, the theatre of woman’s peculiar role, but did God intend her to be a domestic drudge?” asks Hannah Tapfield King. Toil is not mentioned in Eve’s curse, she reminds readers. “That was especially man’s punishment.”

Women not only looked to Eve for an example of their separate sphere in the home, but also, somewhat ironically, as an example of proper attire and as a critique of the vanity and folly of nineteenth-century women’s fashions. Speaking of the “Idol of To-Day,” Ruby Lamont, the pen name of Maria Miller Johnson, asks, “Does anyone suppose for a moment that Eve was supported by [a corset of] bones and steels? And that outrage to all modesty and beauty, that disgusting deformity of the human form and dishonor to God’s handiwork and ourselves—the bustle! How must angels frown and demons laugh to see our sisters, the daughters of Zion! with that thing on to mock at and deform the shape that God has made!” Citing the law given to Eve that “her husband should rule over her,” Emily Spencer worried that for the woman’s movement “to encourage women in wearing or imitating the dress of man is ridiculous.” A woman responding to her did not discount how ridiculous it might be to dress like men; but stated that she had not heard of “man’s dress for woman, or anything approximating thereto, having been advocated among Latter-day Saints.”

Mary Ann Pratt, on the other hand, looked to men’s styles as a model for women’s when she commented on the degrading influence of women’s fashion: “Womankind should have respect for

87 M. C. Woods, “Thread?” Woman’s Exponent 25, no. 7 (October 1, 1896): 49.
89 Ruby Lamont, “The Idol of To-Day,” Woman’s Exponent 16, no. 3 (July 1, 1887): 17.
90 Emily B. Spencer, “Answer to Inez,” Woman’s Exponent 4, no. 2 (June 15, 1875), 16; Inez, “Eve’s Curse: Is It Never to Be Removed?” Woman’s Exponent 4, no. 3 (July 1, 1875): 22–23.
her fellow man, for as she looks upon him she sees the image of her Heavenly Father reflective. Man has not lost his original form as much as woman, he is not as much governed by fashion in dress as she is, in that which depresses the natural form.\(^9^1\) Despite the fact that the only thing recorded in the scripture about Eve’s apparel was that she and Adam wore fig leaves in the garden and that God made “coats of skins, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:7, 21) upon their expulsion therefrom, women looked to Eve as an example of a dress code that was unostentatious and uniquely feminine.

EVE AND POLYGAMY

Citing Eve as a model of domesticity likewise extended to Mormon marital practices. Despite being an only wife, Eve is frequently employed to defend polygamy prior to the Manifesto. Carol Cornwall Madsen summed up the nineteenth-century Mormon woman’s view: “Polygamy offered all women opportunity for marriage and motherhood and cleansed society of the pernicious evils of prostitution, abandoned children, and other related social ills.”\(^9^2\) The command to multiply and replenish the earth was given to both men and women, they reasoned, and polygamy allowed women the same opportunity to fulfill this commandment as men.

Recalling the commandment to “be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth,” one author notes that “those who are at all acquainted with physiology know that man’s capacity for increase is unlimited, while with woman it is entirely different.”\(^9^3\) Polygamy, she argued, solves this biological problem. Yet another writer complained that “men have changed this command [to multiply and replenish] to suit their own ideas, and have denied to woman through established systems, the privilege of bearing children.” She continues, “Congress has decided to settle this vexed question of plural marriage without regard to the parties most interested, and deprive women, who desire honorable marriage and homes of their own, of that blessed privilege

\(^9^1\)Mary Ann M. Pratt, “Woman’s Vote,” Woman’s Exponent 19, no. 24 (June 15, 1891): 189.
\(^9^2\)Madsen, An Advocate for Women, 9.
\(^9^3\)“A Mormon Woman’s View,” Woman’s Exponent 13, no. 11 (November 1, 1884): 82.
which God intended all the daughters of Eve to enjoy."⁹⁴

While, as Carol Cornwall Madsen has stated, "Differing views" published in the Exponent "did not include antipolygamy sentiment," the words of antipolygamy laws and Congressional testimony were published. One report of a Congressional Commission on Polygamy uses the Adam and Eve narrative as evidence that polygamy is condemned by God. Polygamy, it states, "is at variance with the divine economy if that [sic], originally God created but one man and one woman, Adam and Eve, each as the only partner in wedlock of the other."⁹⁵ Responding to those who would defend monogamy on the grounds that Adam had only one wife, as in this congressional report, "Aunt Ruth," the pen name of Ruth May Fox, simply countered that they "know nothing of the true history of Adam and Eve." Referring to the book of Moses, which states that there are countless earths, Fox continues, "Is this the only earth that had been created and peopled, and is the mother of this earth the only one that ever had or will have such honor?" She then quotes "the words of the inspired poet," Eliza R. Snow:

And what to Eve though in her mortal life
She was the first, the tenth, or fiftieth wife:
It mattered not to her, she proved her worth,
And thus became the Goddess and the Queen of the earth.⁹⁶

Eve may be the only wife Adam had on this earth; but according to nineteenth-century Mormon thought, he had more wives who populated other earths. The polygamous ideal of nineteenth-century Mormon theology was viewed as the order of heaven.

**THE CURSE OF EVE**

With its embrace of the Fortunate Fall, LDS theology reduced,
if not immediately overturned, Eve’s culpability. The curses, however, were another matter. According to Genesis, when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, God pronounced a curse upon each of them and on the Serpent. The Serpent is cursed to crawl on the ground. Adam is cursed to toil through thorn and thistle to bring forth food by the “sweat of his brow.” Eve’s curse consists of three parts: her birth pains will be severe, she will desire her husband, and he will rule over her. Like most of their contemporaries, nineteenth-century Mormons believed that Adam and Eve’s posterity still inherited these curses but, unlike other Christians, not the sin. These curses were only too obvious to nineteenth-century Mormon men who labored among the thistles (and sagebrush) to bring forth food and women who labored in painful childbirth, suffered the longings and jealousies of polygamy, and endured patriarchal rule. Nevertheless, nineteenth-century Mormon theology postulated a way for humanity to bring about an end to the curses through hard work and God’s grace.

In 1855, Brigham Young called on the Saints to strive to overcome the curse: “We have to labor to remove the curse from the earth, from the vegetation, from every creeping thing, and from ourselves, by the help of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.”97 Almost a decade later, he amended that statement, “We have to remove the curse; but remember, we shall never be able to save ourselves without help, but with that help which the Almighty has promised we can accomplish all things.”98 For men, to reverse the curse required them to turn the Great Basin deserts into fertile farm lands. They must, as Brigham Young put it, “labor to make the earth into a Garden of

97 Brigham Young, June 10–13, 1864, Journal of Discourses, 10:312. Speaking of the “curse” of slavery inflicted upon African Americans, George A. Smith, September 23, 1855, Journal of Discourses, 3:29, stated, “When the curse of the Almighty comes upon a people, it certainly is the work of generations to remove it.” Therefore, it is useless for “philanthropists” to pass laws that attempt to “remove the curse of servitude from the descendants of Canaan. . . . When God has decreed a certain way for men to be in servitude, and has designed they shall hold that position, it is worse than useless for any man or set of men, to undertake to put them in a position to rule.”

98 Brigham Young, June 10–13, 1864, Journal of Discourses, 10:312.
Young’s advice to women, however, was to, “Bear [your curse] with patience and fortitude!” because it cannot be “taken from the human family until the mission is fulfilled, and our Master and our Lord is perfectly satisfied with our work. It will then be taken from this portion of the community, and will afflict them no more; but for the present it will afflict them.” A year later, he confessed that he “did not know what the Lord could have put upon women worse than he did upon Mother Eve, where he told her: ‘Thy desire shall be to thy husband.’” But Young added, “Says a woman of faith and knowledge, ‘I will make the best of it; it is a law that man shall rule over me; his word is my law, and I must obey him; he must rule over me; this is upon me and I will submit to it,’ and by so doing she has promises that others do not have.” Young spoke of men redeeming themselves from the curse, but his only prescription for women was to bear their curse with patience and submit to their husbands’ rule.

Latter-day Saint women shared Young’s vision of ultimate redemption from the curse. In fact, the first reference to the idea that women may be redeemed from the curse is possibly from a blessing purportedly penned by Emma Smith for herself in 1844 (and which was later published in the *Exponent* in 1908). According to tradition, Emma had asked for a blessing from Joseph shortly before he was taken to Carthage Jail; but since “he had not time to write as he would like,” he told her to “write out the best blessing [she] could think of and he would sign the same on his return.” In that blessing, Emma pleads, “I ask, my Heavenly Father, that through humility, I may be enabled to overcome the curse which was pronounced upon the daughters of Eve.” In 1907, Emmeline Wells summed up this perspective in a talk she read at various “Women’s Clubs in New York”: “We believe in redemption from the curse placed upon woman. If you ask why, we tell you it is a part of our religion, and we are working to bring it to pass.”

*Exponent* writers searched for specific ways they could overcome

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100 Brigham Young, August 18, 1872, *Journal of Discourses*, 15:132.
the curse. All believed that the gospel’s truths will free them. “These are the times of the restitution of all things as it was in the beginning. Hence the curse has to be removed,” determined one woman. But there was great diversity over what “truth” from the gospel was the key.

REDEMPTION THROUGH SUFFRAGE

Some women sought redemption from the curse through women’s suffrage, a movement many associated with the gospel. As Lola Van Wagenen has aptly demonstrated, Mormon women were not passive pawns but active agents in obtaining suffrage for the Utah Territory in 1870. “Suffrage was not granted in 1870 because of an overwhelming egalitarian impulse on the part of the brethren,” Van Wagenen points out. Instead, “the women of Utah appear to have been enfranchised after they had demonstrated their potential for political usefulness. Being ‘useful’ was critical to building Zion.” Mormon women were even more motivated after suffrage was rescinded by an anti-polygamy law passed by Congress in 1887, and they fought strenuously for its inclusion in the 1895 Utah state constitution. However, others were concerned that the women’s movement could go too far. In 1875, Emily Spencer cautioned Mormon women about the movement, saying “Some of their ideas are good, some are simply ridiculous, and some are pernicious, and directly contrary to the gospel.” Spencer believed that “the theory they uphold that woman is equal with man, and has just as much of a right to govern man, as man has to govern woman, is wrong. The Lord told woman in the garden of Eden her husband should rule over her and that, with the rest that was told her, has descended to her daughters, and we are not exempt.” For Spencer, women should take their lead from Eve and not try to govern men nor usurp their roles.

Responding to Spencer, another writer, calling herself “Inez,”


105 Emily B. Spencer, “Answer to Inez,” Woman’s Exponent 4, no. 2 (June 15, 1875): 16.
questioned Spencer’s application of Eve’s curse on contemporary LDS women: “Was the sentence never revoked?” she asked. “I have an idea that the curse that was placed upon Eve by a merciful and loving Father, was not designed to stand unmitigated, unalterable forever.” The writer confesses, however, that she is not “advocating woman’s right to rule” and defers to a poem by Eliza R. Snow:

I have apologies to offer here
For Gentile ladies who disclaim their sphere.
Having obtained enough of truthful light—
To see life’s strange perversion of the right;
They seek with noble, yet misguided aim,
Corruption and abuses to reclaim;
But all their efforts to remove the curse
Are only making matters worse and worse.
They could as well unlock without a key,
As change the tide of man’s degeneracy;
Without the holy priesthood, ’tis at most,
Like reck’ning bills in absence of the host.107

In “A Contented Wife,” Helen Mar Kimball Whitney urged women to be patient in enduring the curse: “We know that when God in His tender mercy sees fit to take the curse from man he will from woman.” But she goes on to argue for equality as the ultimate redemption:

[God] has heard and taken cognizance of the cries of the millions of suffering women and children, and has turned the tide which is increasing daily in power and influence, and nothing this side of heaven can stay its progress; and weak man would do well to note it, and understand that our Heavenly Father, when He gave him power to rule, intended that he should do it in righteousness, instead of which he has taken advantage of his privileges, and God will hold him accountable for it; and until man is willing to acknowledge woman as his

106 Inez, “Eve’s Curse: Is It Never to Be Removed?” Woman’s Exponent 4, no. 3 (July 1, 1875): 22–23.

equal, and allows her to stand by his side and have a voice in all matters that concern the welfare of women as well as men, he need not expect to be prospered.¹⁰⁸

Men and women are, for Whitney, liberated or enslaved together. Likewise in a poem written seven years prior to the disfranchisement of women in Utah by the Edmunds-Tucker antipolygamy act of 1887, Emily Hill Woodmansee argues that women's rights will redeem women from the curse:

Alas! even Adam, (O, lasting shame)
Sacrificed Eve, to a selfish aim;
‘Twas this woman that gave me the fruit so fair—
‘Tis the woman, O, Lord, that the Curse should bear.

Has she shrank from “The Curse,” through the ages past?
Nay! Her Cross is her Crown, from first to last,
But if Woman should less of a heroine be,
The end of creation, be sure you’d see.

“The primitive Curse” is enough to bear;
And the women of Utah the first will share—
“The honors” with men nor content they’ll be—
Till Women all over the earth are free.¹⁰⁹

“Without the woman chaos would now reign triumphant on the earth,” declared Mary Ann Pratt as she suggested that the women’s rights movement could redeem the curse. “I say to all women, make yourselves acquainted with the technicalities of the law made by man, to govern you and your sons and daughters. Raise your voices on high to abolish laws that sustain grog shops and billiard salons to make drunkards of your husbands, sons and brothers.... I would again say to the women of the land get in your possession ‘Mother Eve’s’ knowl-

¹⁰⁹Emily Hill Woodmansee, “Behold the Dawn,” Woman’s Exponent 9, no. 10 (October 15, 1880): 73.
edge to know good and evil, to ward off the curse that leads to misery
and death.” Likewise, Hannah Tapfield King writing under the
pseudonym of “Rex” gloried at how the movement is helping to
“throw off the yoke of servile bondage of long and dark ages, in which
woman has been but a ‘chattel’ in her husband’s house,” and optim-
istically predicted:

She will awake one fine morning and rise up an unfettered being,
bound only by the law of God and her own pure nature[.] Those awful
words and their still more awful meaning: “Thy desire shall be to thy
husband and he shall rule over thee,” will have been cancelled because
the curse is fulfilled and the judge opens the door and bids the captive
go free, and she walks forth a free, unfettered being in her primal ad-
vent in the garden of Eden—she will then feel her dignified responsibil-
ity and will lay aside the frivolity that has so often disfigured her, and
which has generally arisen from the very feeling that somehow she was
but an outlaw in her Father’s house where He had intended her to live
as the free unfettered co-partner of her brother man.111

Despite the purple prose, this passage movingly describes a
day of redemption found within the women’s rights movement. Less
than a year before women again received the vote under Utah State’s
new constitution, Julia Anna Macdonald argued that the women’s
movement was God’s response to six thousand years of “sighs and
prayers and heart-yearnings of His daughters.” She continued, “I
contend that the movement for Woman’s Suffrage presages her re-
lease from the curse placed upon her in Eden; that it is a sign of the
times, as well as is the restoration of the Gospel, and that to fight
against it, is to array ourselves in opposition to the purposes of the
Almighty.”112 Emmeline Wells stressed that “perfect equality” ex-
isted in the Garden of Eden, “and so it must be when all things are re-
stored as they were in the beginning. It is this spirit stirring within
woman that is to bring her back again to that primeval state that ex-

110 Mary Ann Pratt, “Give to Those Rights Whose Rights Belong,” Woman’s Exponent 8, no. 21 (March 1, 1880): 165.


112 Cactus [Julia Anna Ivins Macdonald Pace], “Cactus Papers No. 1—Unbidden Thoughts,” Woman’s Exponent 23, no. 11 (December 1, 1894): 209–10.
In a poem titled "Eden," Ruth May Fox stresses equality and marital union as a key to redemption:

In this paradise enchanting roamed a stalwart noble man
In the image of his Maker comprehend it if you can,
By his side a lovely woman for a helpmeet unto him,
Not a slave nor yet his servant hum'ring every foolish whim.

Not his cook, O happy woman! it was theirs to pluck and eat,
Not his seamstress for their toilet nature's garb made all complete,
But with him to hold dominion over every living thing,
On the earth, beneath the water, and the birds of varied wing.

Together they held possession of this highly favored land,
Together they stood and listened to the Father's grave command,
Together received his blessing and the promise of his care
If they would try to serve Him and remember Him in prayer.

And together we must labor gentle woman, earnest man,
For the lifting up of nations and restore the ancient plan
And together have dominion and make this earth an Eden,
For know to make a perfect man, you must have Eve and Adam.  

Reflecting the nineteenth-century debate about the use of anes-

113 E.B.W [Emmeline B. Wells], "The Age We Live In," Woman's Exponent 30, no. 12 (April 1, 1902): 90.
The Journal of Mormon History

The most poignant discussion of Eve’s curse argued that it might be removed by enduring the trials of polygamy. Significantly, of the three parts of Eve’s curse—the pain of childbirth, desire for her husband, and submitting to her husband’s rule—many nine-

115Emily B. Spencer, “To the Sisters,” Woman’s Exponent 17, no. 2 (June 15, 1888): 13. While the use of anesthesia was never officially opposed by any church, many religious people felt that it defied the edict placed on Eve, and which applied to her posterity, that “in pain you shall bring forth children” (Gen. 3:16). See Rennie B. Schoepflin’s “Myth 14: That the Church Denounced Anesthesia in Childbirth on Biblical Grounds,” in Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion, edited by Ronald L. Numbers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 123–30.

116Ruby Lamont [Maria Miller Johnson], “Woman Suffrage,” Woman’s Exponent 24, no. 1 (June 1, 1895): 6–8.

117“Answer to the Woman and Sin in the Cincinnati Enquirer,” Woman’s Exponent 12, no. 19 (March 1, 1884): 145–46.
teenth-century Mormon women focused their attention on their desire for their husband, an aspect that is rarely seen as a curse by contemporary women. But this part of the curse takes on special meaning in the context of a polygamous society. To these women, to have intense desires for a husband whom one has to share with another woman or women was indeed a curse. And the weight of enduring the principle is subliminally evident in their words.

A tragic cognitive dissonance is manifest in the idea that the disease and its cure are the exact same thing. The very trials of enduring polygamy were seen as the means of redeeming the curse. In an 1869 general conference address, George Q. Cannon stated that if plural marriage is practiced in purity and virtue . . . it will exalt woman until she is redeemed from the effects of the Fall, and from that curse pronounced upon her in the beginning. I believe the correct practice of this principle will redeem woman from the effects of that curse—namely, “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” All the evils connected with jealousy have their origin in this. It is natural for woman to cleave to man; it was pronounced upon her in the beginning, seemingly as a punishment. I believe the time will come when, by the practice of the virtuous principles which God has revealed, woman will be emancipated from that punishment and that feeling. Will she cease to love man? No, it is not necessary for her to cease to love.118

Somehow this tragic paradox made sense to Mormon women and they came to defend polygamy as a means to redeem themselves from the curse of desiring the sole affection of their husband. Four months after Cannon delivered his remarks, Precindia Huntington Kimball told a meeting of the general Relief Society: “The day is approaching when woman shall be redeemed from the curse placed upon Eve, and I have often thought that our daughters who are in polygamy will be the first redeemed.”119 This idea was echoed by many women in the Woman’s Exponent. Helen Mar Whitney argued that en-

tering into the order of plural marriage “will more quickly free [wo-
man] from that bondage and curse which fell upon her through trans-
gression, than any other and that the ones who practice and advocate
it will be the first to stand again as man’s equal, as did our first
mother, Eve, in the garden of Eden.” Another woman stressed that
“through this principle of plural marriage woman will be redeemed
from the curse placed upon her, and this is worth all the sacrifices it is
possible to make.” In a birthday tribute to Eliza R. Snow, another
woman argued that polygamy allowed women to become better edu-
cated and self-reliant, and noted that women, like Snow, who endured
polygamy would set an example for “the rising generation . . . of im-
mense value and as the generations roll by nobler types of woman-
hood will be developed until the penalty laid upon woman in the be-

ginning that ‘thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over
thee’ will be repealed and she will stand side by side with man full of
that queenly dignity and self which will make her his suitable compan-
ion rather than inferior.” Ruth May Fox suggested that “jealousy, as
far as woman is concerned, seems to be traceable to the time when
she was placed under a ban by the Almighty in the Garden of Eden . . .
and unless this feeling is held under strict control will always prove to
be such.” She argued that polygamy offers redemption from the curse
so that the modern Mormon Eve is free to eat of the tree of life and
“by eating the fruit thereof, will ‘live forever.’”

For these women, freedom from the curse of desiring their hus-
band came only by practicing plural marriage, an institution that

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120 Helen Mar Whitney, “Scenes in Nauvoo, and Incidents from H. C. Kimball’s Journal,” Woman’s Exponent 12, no. 10 (October 15, 1883): 74. Whitney would later author a defense of polygamy in which she confessed her belief “that if the human family had always strictly lived up to the laws of God and nature, and had not transgressed and abused their privileges, there would not have been the same necessity for a plurality of wives in this life, though there are still other important reasons to justify and require its practice.” Why We Practice Plural Marriage: By a “Mormon” Wife and Mother (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884), 6–7.

121 “A Few Thoughts,” Woman’s Exponent 13, no. 1 (June 1, 1884): 4.

122 “Topics of the Times,” Woman’s Exponent 12, no. 20 (March 15, 1884), 157. This article was reprinted from the Juvenile Instructor.

could only amplify that desire and longing. Women saw themselves as being redeemed from suffering the insecurities, anxieties, and jealousies of having sister wives by working to overcome these very insecurities, anxieties, and jealousies. Plural marriage led women who practiced it to see the primary curse placed upon them as being the desire for their husbands, but it also led them to see redemption from that curse through enduring its practice.

Unsurprisingly, after the Manifesto of 1890, this line of thought disappears entirely from the pages of the *Exponent*. But the hope for eventual redemption continued into the new century. “The daughters of Eve will, we think, be instrumental in a great measure through the Gospel in effecting the redemption of woman from the curse,” Emmeline Wells wrote in 1907. “Redeemed from the curse, her triumph, her song of victory will be greater and loftier far than Miriam’s or Deborah’s of old.”

**CONCLUSION**

*Woman’s Exponent* authors certainly did their share of “reflecting back” the image of men, just as Virginia Woolf suggested. But with a press of their own, Mormon women’s conversations were more dialogic than those of Mormon men. Calling for a “dialogic feminism” in the emerging twenty-first century, Lidia Puigvert looked to the “dialogic dynamics of the ‘other women’ [that] are being translated into the theories of solidarity.” For the feminist movement to grow, she argues, women must listen to the diverse voices throughout the world and make space for “dialogue and egalitarian exchange.” “Dialogic feminism,” Puigvert states, “leaves behind the traditional debate about equality vs. difference, taking the assumption instead that the only way to defend equality is by means of respect and listening to the diverse voices.” Puigvert concludes, “Equality and difference are not contradictory concepts. The defense of equality would be unthinkable if the plurality of voices were not incorporated.”

I would argue that nineteenth-century Mormon women were al-

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125 Lidia Puigvert, “Dialogic Feminism: ‘Other Women’s’ Contributions to the Social Transformation of Gender Relations,” in *Woman and Social Transformation*, edited by Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim, Judith Butler, and
ready participating in this kind of dialogic feminism. They passionately disagreed with each other and challenged each other’s opinions, even as they maintained a sense of comity and civility. Men’s views were not shut out but were added to the dialogue, sometimes as their words were reproduced in the journal, other times as their words were voiced by women. Their debates were always open, always ongoing, avoiding monological male and monological female discourse. The speaking of many voices created a carnivalesque atmosphere where language was at once serious and subversive. Woman’s Exponent voices speak in dialogue, preserve conflict, even as they subvert and sometimes co-opt the patriarchal gaze that watched over the publication.

Mormon women also came to see in Eve more than Milton’s “fair defect of Nature.” Like her nineteenth-century Mormon daughters, Eve was transformed into a multidimensional character. No longer reducible to a minor role in the Eden drama, for some she was, nevertheless, the hapless and unintentional instigator of the Fall, while for others she was the noble and brave soul who brought about human potentiality. For some, she was Adam’s “help meet,” while for others she was a liberated and equal partner. Eve became the prototypical woman, an example to emulate, and a goddess to be revered.

Lidia Puigvert (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 54.