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Strategies of Representation, Relationship, and Resistance: British Women Travelers and Mormon Plural Wives, ca. 1870–1890

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During the 1870s and 1880s, several British women writers traveled by transcontinental railroad across the American West via Salt Lake City, Utah, the capital of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons. These women subsequently wrote books about their travels for a home audience with a taste for adventures in the American West, and particularly for accounts of Mormon plural marriage, which was sanctioned by the Church before 1890. "The plight of the Mormon woman," a prominent social reform and literary theme of the period, situated Mormon women at the center of popular representations of Utah during the second half of the nineteenth century. "The Mormon question" thus lends itself to an analysis of how a stereotyped subaltern group was represented by elite British travelers. These residents of western American territories, however, differed in important respects from the typical subaltern subjects discussed by Victorian travelers. These white, upwardly mobile, and articulate Mormon plural wives attempted to influence observers' representations of them through a variety of narrative strategies. Both British women travel writers and Mormon women wrote from the margins of power and credibility, and as interpreters of the Mormon scene were concerned to establish their representational authority.

Key Words: British travel writing, Mormons, nineteenth century, postcolonial studies, sexuality, Utah, women.

I endeavoured as far as I could during my residence in Salt Lake City to study, without prejudice, the problem this extraordinary community presents... I have patiently listened to the arguments in favour of the system; but the more I read and the more I hear, the less justification can I discover for a religion which... sanctions the hateful system of polygamy, which strikes, in my opinion, the deadliest blow at the purity of family life, and involves the cruellest subjection and the most hopeless degradation of the women belonging to the community (Emily Faithful, Three Visits to America, 1884:152).

I was sealed to the Prophet, Joseph Smith, for time and eternity, in accordance with the Celestial Law of Marriage which God has revealed—the ceremony being performed by a servant of the Most High—authorized to officiate in sacred ordinances. This, one of the most important circumstances of my life, I never have had cause to regret. . . . From personal knowledge I bear my testimony that Plural Celestial marriage is a pure and holy principle, not only tending to individual purity and elevation of character, but also instrumental in producing a more perfect type of manhood mentally and physically, as well as in restoring human life to its former longevity (Eliza R. Snow, "Sketch of My Life," 1885, in Beecher 1995:17).

Salt Lake City, Utah, was a key destination on the itineraries of many British women travel writers who toured the western U.S. by railroad in the late nineteenth century. These writers were among the many wealthier British subjects who took "grand tours" of North America by train in the last three decades of the century, when trans-Atlantic steamship crossings had become faster and more reliable, and especially after the transcontinental railroad line connected New York and San Francisco in 1869. Salt Lake City was added to travelers' itineraries along with other popular tourist destinations in the West (such as Colorado Springs and the newly organized national parks), both because of its

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location on the railroad routes and because the "Mormon question" sparked so much interest and controversy. Salt Lake City attracted curiosity-seekers hoping for first-hand glimpses of Mormon polygamy, a sight as foreign to them as views of Native Americans or cattle ranches (Hafen 1997). Like other journalists and traveling men who took advantage of improved transportation to view what was to them a still remote and exotic frontier West, British women travel writers were engaged in the process of "place-making," or establishing the narrative conventions through which western American locations were discussed and understood. Salt Lake City was contested terrain where American and European travel writers, both men and women, claimed authority to represent the "true" Mormon culture region.

In visiting the area principally settled by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons, British women travelers viewed terrain that had been previously described by American and European traveling men (e.g., Burton [1862] 1971; Twain [1872] 1995; C. A. J. Dockman [1874] 1971), U.S. government officials (e.g., Stansbury [1852] 1966), and former Utah residents (such as Ferris [1856] 1971). They wrote at a time when British and American serials carried lurid reports about the Mormons, especially the Church's doctrine of polygamy (Bitton and Bunker 1978, 1983). After 1850, about thirty anti-Mormon novels and purportedly true anti-Mormon autobiographies with fictionalized elements (e.g., Smith 1860) appeared. Negative images of Mormon women and sexuality during the second half of the nineteenth century were popularized by the satire of Latter-day Saint plural marriage published in Mark Twain's popular Rousing It (1872 [1995]); a smash-hit anti-Mormon play that toured in the U.S. and Great Britain for twenty years, Joaquin Miller's The Donites in the Sierras (1877 [1889]); and the sinister portrayal of Mormon courtship in the first Sherlock Holmes mystery, A Study in Scarlet (1887 [1887]). By the mid-1870s, however, Utah was still relatively neglected by women travel writers, notably those from Great Britain (Mulder and Mortensen 1958; Arrington and Haupt 1966; Snow 1972; Cannon 1974; Bitton and Bunker 1983; Hafen 1997). With the exception of their better-known countrywomen Isabella Bird (1869) and Emily Faithful (1884), most have been neglected sources on the cultural and historical geography of the American West, and their works deserve recovery.

British women travelers' responses to the practice of plural marriage by white American women were by no means uniform. They ranged from fascination, revulsion, and moralistic, reform-minded concern for the "plight" of Mormon women to an acceptance if not of the practice itself, then at least of their right to self-determination. While representations of plural marriage in the travelers' texts form a key starting point for this paper, our main purpose is to explore the intersections between travelers' representations of polygamy and the self-representations of Mormon women themselves. The transparent, authoritative European subject/observer has been placed under scrutiny by colonial and postcolonial critiques, but less has been written in geography on the ways that objectified women actively sought to influence or moderate their external images.

In this paper, we explore a small collection of descriptions of Mormon women and the practice of plural marriage written by British women travel writers in the late nineteenth century. We link those representations both to the writers' own concepts of proper female sexual conduct and to the individual and orchestrated efforts of Mormon women to counteract negative public images. We also suggest links between the travel writers' texts and earlier writing about polygamy, as representations of Mormon women tend to become formulaic in both sets of texts.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' religion and built environment in Ogden, Provo, and especially Salt Lake City, received considerable attention in the texts of British women travelers after the completion of the railroad. Writers such as Theresa Longworth ([1875] 1974), Mary Duffus Hardy (1882), E. D. Bridges (1883), Emily Faithful (1884), Emily Pfeiffer (1885), and Emily Catherine Bates (1887) typically devoted a chapter or two to the Mormons in their travel books about the U.S. As key locations at the intersections of the western rail lines, these cities and their inhabitants became significant topics of interest to railroad passengers. The success of Brigham Young's religious utopian experiment, especially the material gains of the second generation of his followers (many of whose parents had migrated from Britain to the region in a state of poverty), was evident by the later nineteenth century. British women travelers commented on the prosperity of the region, Mormon farming practices, and women's farm labor...
(e.g., see Hardy 1882:112; Bates 1887: vol.2:209–10). E. D. Bridges noted the Mormons' success in turning an "unprofitable plain" into cornfields and orchards (1883:388), and Lady Hardy referred to Salt Lake City as an:

"oasis in a desert, a blooming garden in a wilderness of green. We can scarcely conceive how this flowery world has lifted itself from the heart of desolation... Everything seems flourishing, and everybody seems well-to-do, there are no signs of poverty anywhere (1882:104–05).

Travelers also discussed the structure and layout of Mormon territory into religious districts, religious temples and other buildings, and the seeming orderliness of Mormon social space.

While the Mormons' irrigated farms, urban environment, and the economic prosperity received significant attention in the travelers' texts, it was the Mormon practice of polygamy, which openly continued in the West until 1890, that most captured the attention of British travelers and framed their discussions of Mormon territory generally. The situation of Latter-day Saint women emerged as preeminent in travelers' representations of the Mormon region, wherein they often expound lengthily on abstract logical arguments on the institution of polygamy in preference to careful observations of the Utah scene. Travel writers especially tended to describe Mormon women solely in relation to plural marriage, and this in turn greatly affected what they recorded about other aspects of Mormon women's domestic, political, and economic arrangements.

Secretly practiced by some Church members during the 1840s, polygamy was publicly announced by Brigham Young in 1852 as a restoration of Old Testament patriarchal marriage; the Church officially banned the practice in 1890 due to increasing federal anti-Mormon pressure. For a variety of methodological reasons, there is no reliable estimate of how many Latter-day Saints practiced polygamy, though rates varied enormously between communities and socioeconomic classes (Bennion 1984; Embry 1987; Hardy 1992; Van Wagoner 1992). Some plural families lived under one roof, but many had separate homes for each wife and her children. Particularly during the anti-polygamy persecutions of the 1880s, many plural wives lived in different communities. Few polygamists had more than four wives, but a few men like Brigham Young had more than a dozen. Unlike polygamous families in Africa or Asia, Mormons implemented few traditions or regulations to govern their arrangements, although middle-class Victorian notions of sexual propriety were widely accepted in the conduct of daily life.

As prominent, well-connected women, British travel writers were received by Church president, bishops, and other leaders in Salt Lake City, including President Brigham Young and his successor John Taylor, and they were invited into the homes of many of the most senior and influential women among the Mormons. These "leading sisters," who essentially served as docents of Salt Lake City for distinguished women visitors, included most notably Eliza Snow (Figure 1), plural wife and widow of both the faith's founder Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, author Hannah King and Eomonia Pratt, M.D., daughter-in-law of a prominent church Apostle (Beecher 1982). The travelers also visited the editorial offices of the Woman's Exponent, a Mormon women's newspaper that focused considerable attention on suffrage and women's rights. There they spoke with the newspaper's editor, Emmeline Wells (Figure 2), plural wife of Salt Lake City mayor and Church Apostle Daniel Wells (Bennion 1976; Madsen 1977, 1985). These influential Mormon women, as well as many other anonymous Mormon women and men whom the travelers encountered, were ardent supporters of the Mormon Church and offered a positive view of plural marriage to the British travelers, even to the point of criticizing conventional monogamy.

A few travelers also became acquainted with apostate Mormon women through their published books or through first-hand encounters. These include Fanny Stenhouse, who wrote a best-selling, anti-Mormon exposé about her experiences, Tell it All, The Tyranny of Mormonism (1971 [1874]), as well as Mrs. William S. Godbe, whose husband led a dissident movement. Other nominally Mormon women, whose identities were never revealed by the women travelers, purportedly narrated their personal "horror stories" in confidence to the British women writers, and many antipolygamy tales emerged through word-of-mouth informants who claimed knowledge of other women's difficult situations.

In what follows, we problematize the category of the "subaltern" or "other" in studies of British travel writing, showing how two groups of women, both on the margins of influence and power, variously attempted to establish their authority as observers of the "true" Mormon scene. Before
turning to the women’s writings, we first situate our research within postcolonial studies of subaltern subjects and critiques of women’s narrative authority.

**Situating the Contact Zone**

"Postcolonial" Questions in the Utah Mormon Context

It is useful to turn first to studies of representation and resistance to help situate the multiple and complex narrational voices and discursive positions that arose out of contact between British travelers and Mormon women in late nineteenth-century Utah. Studies of representation and resistance appear frequently in postcolonial studies, and although the Mormons of Utah were obviously not a colonized group in the sense of indigenous colonized Africans, Asians, or Native Americans, postcolonial theory lends itself to our study for several reasons. First, many of the relevant publications on British women travel writers overseas are based upon postcolonial theories (e.g., Blunt and Rose 1994; Mills 1996; McEwan 1996). Postcolonial scholars posit a variety of relationships between British writers and indigenous peoples, many of which are relevant to Mormons and British travel writers. Even where the literal fact of colonization is absent, these women’s representations are replete with inequality, marginalization, essentialism, and resistance, to name but a few (Slemon 1990; Sharpe 1989; Ashcroft et al. 1995; Sommer 1993; Kaplan and Pease 1993). Second, many Latter-day Saints viewed themselves as an oppressed religious minority. Congress increasingly deprived Mormons of their rights as American citizens, particularly during the 1880s when most of the British women travelers visited Utah. The Edmunds Act of 1882 disenfranchised polygamists and accelerated a program of harassment and arrests that drove many of them into hiding to escape conviction; the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887 legally dissolved the Church corporation and transferred Church property to the territorial government (Arrington and Bitton 1992:180–83; Iversen 1997:113–14). In addition, the women travelers were writing about the Mormon women at a time when they and other British
men and women were visiting and constructing knowledge of the colonies of the British empire. Several of the British women writers had previously observed polygamy in true colonial settings, and reflected uneasily in Utah about their casual acceptance of the practice among indigenous Asians and Africans, but not among white Americans. Finally, the use of postcolonial theory in a study of white Mormons should offer increased awareness of its applications and limitations. What happens when one takes interpretations normally applied to colonized people of color and applies them to a persecuted white minority in America?

To begin teasing out these multiple and complex dimensions of the encounters between British travelers and Mormon women, one can begin with Edward Said’s foundational thesis of orientalism (1978) that in many ways stimulated a broad-ranging critique of the active European observer, or subject, of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, who traveled to the colonies viewing and describing other peoples and cultures as passive objects. Said (1978) argued that British travelers (in his case, to the Near East) wrote more about their own ethnocentric prejudices and imaginative constructions of Arab society than they did about actual Arab people and places. “Orientalism” came to mean, more broadly, the process by which members of a dominant colonial culture objectified and marginalized subordinate peoples. In such a narrative tradition, British travel writers unquestioningly assumed their own objectivity and authority. Such travelers were agents of empire who cast colonized people into subordinate roles through their use of imperial ideologies and rhetoric. As objects of the British gaze, colonized peoples were seldom credited with actively seeking to influence the travelers’ opinions of them, nor of disabusing the British traveler of distinctively British notions of imperialism, gender roles, or social class.

As critics questioned the applicability of Said’s theory in other historical circumstances and locations, his homogeneous view of orientalist writing was quickly modified to consider more specifically time, place, and type of colonial intervention, and most significantly, to challenge the dualistic construction of colonizer/colonized in his model (and which Said himself subsequently modified; see Said 1983, 1993; Porter 1983). Several feminist scholars of nineteenth-century European women’s writing, for instance, have convincingly critiqued Said’s theory of orientalism by examining the very complex roles that European (mostly British) white women in the colonies had in their association with imperialist cultural values, particularly when it came to relations with female aboriginal inhabitants (Callaway 1987; Strobel 1991; Frank 1986; Mills 1991). While aristocratic and other genteel British women may have considered themselves superior to aboriginal colonized people by virtue of their race and class, and thus wrote of them in an orientalist fashion, their own subordinate positions as women in patriarchal Britain potentially created for them an alternative textual space within which they “produced” aboriginal women for their home audiences. The literary critic Sara Mills and others have argued that this positioning could entail articulating a particular empathy for colonized peoples, displaying a high moral concern for their welfare (Mills 1991; Chaudhuri and Strobel 1992), or by granting a degree of subjectivity (“empowerment”) to Native peoples by, for instance, allowing them to speak through the traveler’s text, especially by direct quotation (Mills 1991:3, 97–98; Blake 1990:353–55).

Criticism of cultural conflict theorized around the binary opposites colonizer/colonized, oppressor/oppressed has yielded a fruitful move away from the simple “othering” process that orientalism defined and toward a focus on difference. Rather than employing absolute terms to define the relative powerlessness and negative associations of the “other” compared to the standard-bearing (self-reflective) hegemony of the colonizer or oppressor, a focus on difference calls for a more two-sided or multilayered cultural exchange, with neither side able to define a priori what the terms of difference will be. And in fact, the terms of difference emerge only out of the encounter itself, as different groups seek to define the “contested zone” in their own way (Jehlen 1993). (Moreover, the sense that two “sides” exist at all in the present case is problematical, as multiple speaking positions are evident in both the travelers’ and Mormons’ texts.) Taking Mohanty’s (1988) lead, we have attempted to avoid the homogenizing tendency to treat British women travelers as the power-wielding dominant group and Mormon women as the group oppressed by hegemonic Anglo-American religious and political culture. In some cases, this is a case of one marginal group confronting another, but between and among them is a host of negotiations and cultural clashes being played out along many
lines of difference, not least of which are religious, sexual, and class identifications.

Neither British writers nor Mormon wives can be assumed to have possessed a coherent or collective identity with equivalent interests or shared oppressions, again, at least not prior to an analysis of the social relations that produced those interests or oppressions (Mohanty 1988). Just to take one example that will be developed later on, travelers' impressions of Mormon life were often filtered by "leading sisters" who were highly placed within a strongly hierarchical and powerful Mormon theocracy (Beecher 1982). Rather than arguing for a binary opposition between dominant and subordinate groups of people, then, we argue that Salt Lake City was a cultural "contact zone" within which many heterogeneous subjects interacted and exchanged ideas and practices. Our use of the term "contact zone" here follows Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) thesis on the "transculturation" process that occurs where different culture groups meet. Pratt emphasizes the need to consider metropole-periphery interactions as influenced by multidirectional power relations. To Pratt, the contact zone concept corrects the "habitual blindness" that keeps the metropole from recognizing ways that it is determined by the periphery (1992:6).

The Mormon women in our study ("leading sisters," ordinary women, and apostates) both exemplify and contradict the models of subalterity developed in postcolonial studies. It might appear at first glance that the northern-European descent of most Mormons and the obvious economic growth of their capital hardly qualify them for the subaltern position discussed in postcolonial literature (see, for instance, Spivak 1988). The Mormons were white, upwardly mobile Americans (albeit many from lower-class origins) who themselves displaced Native peoples in imperial expansion. At the same time, however, polygamy was seen by many nineteenth-century observers as an evil as great as slavery. Fort Douglas and Camp Floyd were established at the perimeters of Salt Lake City not to protect the Mormons but to destroy them if they proved too subversive.5 As we have noted, a series of repressive federal laws were used to increasingly disenfranchise Mormons. Some polygamists were jailed and there were threats to confiscate Church property. The Mormons, with their blend of capitalist prosperity alongside social and sexual regulation at the hands of dominant American and British Protestant cultures, then, uneasily con-

form to the label of "subaltern." And yet, as has already been noted, foreign visitors (and some Mormons themselves) considered Mormon wives almost entirely in their relation to the institution of polygamy and often described them as having inferior and powerless relationships to their husbands. But many Mormon wives resisted this notion. The ways that particular Mormon women defined their own positions vis-à-vis monogamy and sexual difference is a primary concern of our study, and provides the main discursive site around which their (potential) subalterity revolved.

Postcolonial literary critics have provided much insight into the specific discursive strategies employed by subaltern subjects. Poststructuralists in particular have foregrounded questions of resistance agency, and how people who were objectified by Europeans actively worked to manipulate, shape, and control their own representations (Slemon 1990; Sharpe 1989; Ashcroft et al. 1995; Sommer 1993; Kaplan and Pease 1993). Much of this scholarship focuses on what Slemon (1990) describes as a fundamental ambivalence of resistance literature, in which those resisting outside control are also complicit in many of the institutions they seek to transgress. Along with Pratt (1992), these scholars call for a move toward theorizing postcolonial interactions in terms of cultural exchanges between heterogeneous groups of people, while maintaining a focus on the power inequalities that accompany those exchanges (Ashcroft et al. 1995:86).

While literary theorists and others have assessed ways in which indigenous peoples influenced their own representations in travel texts, much of the recent feminist geographic work on travel writing within an imperial context has concentrated almost exclusively on the broad discursive fields emanating from Europe or Britain around which travelers' ideas were articulated (Blunt 1994; Blunt and Rose 1994; McEwan 1994; Mills 1991; Morin 1995, 1998a). For example, geographer Alison Blunt analyzes the many discursive pressures on the nineteenth-century traveler Mary Kingsley to produce a positive portrayal of West African polygamy, based on contemporary imperial representations of Africans as well as Kingsley's patriarchal cultural values; yet Blunt does not examine the possibility that West African women themselves might have influenced Kingsley. This singular attention to how European social and cultural values influenced the travel text in effect reproduces the very European-
centered discourse that it is seeking to replace; namely, by assuming the passivity of the colonial subject. This has the potential to “recolonize” the subject.6

In this paper, we initiate a corrective to this scholarship through an analysis of how British women’s social and cultural perspectives were both reinforced and produced anew within a particular contact zone of the American West, with an assessment of Mormon women’s influence on their own representations. We trace both “material” practices of Mormon women to influence the British traveler (such as hosting them at parties, and engaging in some of their own proselytizing), as well as their discursive maneuvers to portray themselves. Many Mormon plural wives left extensive written records in the form of published books, diaries, letters, memoirs, newspaper articles, and even petitions to Congress. Some of the British travelers read Mormon women’s writings, and both sets of women describe meetings that took place between them. Mormon women therefore had available an extensive array of strategies to influence the British travel narrative. While many negative portrayals are readily apparent in British women’s appraisals of the Utah Mormons—for instance, in their emphasis on Mormon men as licentious—this negative stereotyping appears in stark contrast to many devout Mormon women’s own depiction of polygamy as a virtuous religious trial.

British Women Travelers and Narratorial Authority

One of the principal rhetorical problems faced by both British women travel writers and Mormon women was how to establish narratorial authority. Narrative strategies became particularly important for Victorian women travel writers in an era when they were often dismissed as overly emotional and excessively given to rapturous, sentimental depictions of scenery, yet equally expected to retain a discrete and deferential femininity. As Georgi-Findlay notes, however:

women’s western writings can never be fully reduced to the constraints that work on writers through discourses of femininity. Rather, attention should also be directed to the ways women writers negotiate these constraints in the genre of western travel writing, which is so highly charged with the authorization of expansion and conquest, and with the production of knowledge and the assumption of power (1996:175).

Domesticity, women’s social roles, the family, manners, fashions, religious piety, the home, and morals were topics in which the proper Victorian woman writer could claim superior insights, occasionally with a disingenuous inattention to the “masculine” expansionist project in which she participated (Welter 1966; Pratt 1992).

In some sense, Mormon plural marriage, with its connection to conventionally feminine themes of home, love, and family, was a ready-made topic for nineteenth-century women travel writers, who could claim that their gender gave them legitimate and unique access and insights unavailable to men because plural marriage centered so firmly in women’s experience. At the same time, however, polygamy’s apparent strength among the Mormons destabilized the British travelers’ own security as single women or monogamous wives. The historian Martha Allen, in her study of 143 women’s narratives about the American West in the second half of the nineteenth century, argues that while men observing Mormonism might disregard polygamy and focus more directly on agricultural and technological developments of the Mormon region, women could not overlook polygamy (1987:35), and thus, to a large extent, it framed their interpretation of Mormon physical and cultural landscapes. Allen argues that few nonresident women “came to a genuine understanding of the principles behind” the practice . . . “[N]on-Mormon women could not imagine any woman in her right mind willingly submitting to a polygamous marriage” (1987:35). Allen explains the practice as following from the Mormon premise that since “men held the divine keys of admission to heaven, the plural marriage system . . . simply made it possible for practically all Mormon women to be married, and hence to be saved” (1987:35). This position was problematic for Victorian notions of women’s appropriate religiosity.

Peggy Pascoe (1990) further develops these interpretations in her analysis of white Protestant American women’s efforts to improve the lives of brightened women throughout the American West: Chinese immigrant women, Native American women, mining camp prostitutes, and Mormon plural wives. The reformers subscribed to Victorian middle-class notions of Woman as a properly pure, pious, and chaste “moral guardian” whose virtuous status entitled her to rescue and to elevate the status of her fallen sisters according
to these ideals. Iversen (1991, 1997) similarly argues that Mormon polygamy was the paramount issue facing American moral reformers and women's rights activists following the abolition of slavery. Yet ironically, in adopting essentialist notions of proper womanhood as a means of legitimizing her own rhetorical position, the reformer also reinforced highly limiting stereotypes for women, deflecting attention away from her own biases and assumptions, and often failed to understand other women's lives at a level that would make meaningful intervention productive or possible.

British middle- and upper-class women who became travel writers of the American West sometimes explicitly adopted some of the American reformers' rhetoric on Mormon polygamy. For example, the American Baptist reformer Cornelia Paddock (1881; Pascoe 1990:228) wrote an anti-Mormon novel, The Fate of Madame La Tour, which was read and cited as truthful by travel writer Emily Faithful (1884). The notable American antislavery crusader Harriet Beecher Stowe not only wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin, but also published work on women's proper domestic life and wrote an introduction to Stenhouse's exposé, Tell It All (1874) 1971; Walker 1974). Faithful also read this book and interviewed Stenhouse in San Francisco.

Pascoe (1990:61–67) and Cannon (1974) note that middle-class values were deeply threatened by polygamy. For plural marriage to be correct or even tolerated would be tantamount to acknowledging a much wider double-standard or gulf between the sexes than most were prepared to admit: that men's enormous libidos "loomed just beneath the surface of middle class self-control," and that a married woman had no exclusive right to her husband's affection, home, or income. Polygamous marriage further confronted Victorian beliefs in monogamous romantic love as the ideal, indeed only natural, type of union. For polygamy to be acceptable to women travel writers would be to acknowledge that the writers' own status was not secure in any rational way. To consolidate one's position as a respectable English gentlewoman, no "lady" could have written favorably about polygamy without simultaneously undermining the principal status (monogamous wife or chaste single woman) that gave her moral authority within her "patriarchal bargain" as it was constituted at that time and place. As a consequence, the women travel writers' gendered heterosexual, monogamous, and genteel-class identities were not simply norms or attributes, but sites through which their representations of Mormons were expressed and through which their beliefs became problematized.

The above is not to say that men's voices of moral outrage about Mormon marriage customs were entirely silent. Sir Richard F. Burton, in his book, The City of the Saints, and Across the Rocky Mountains to California (1862) 1971:203–99, cited an extensive bibliography of American and European sources on Latter-day Saints. Of those he expressly categorized as anti-Mormon, about one quarter of their authors identified themselves as Protestant clergymen. But men traveling through Mormon country more typically tended to undermine the moral authority of their women counterparts, particularly by affecting a more worldly masculine persona. Burton (1971:206), for example, resisted few opportunities to ridicule feminine hysteria in women writers' anti-Mormon works, such as that of Ferris (1856) 1971: "The reason for this lady's rabid hate may be found in polygamy, which is calculated to astound, perplex, and enrage fair woman in America even more than her strong-opinioned English sister" (see also Codman [1874] 1971:159–69). The seasoned professional correspondent Phil Robinson wrote positively of Mormon polygamy in his Sinners and Saints: A Tour Across the States, and Round Them, with Three Months among the Mormons (1883). Like Burton, he slighted women's narratorial authority (and was subsequently attacked for it in print by Faithful, 1884):

But the "Woman's Rights" aspect of polygamy is one that has never been theorized on at all. It deserves, however, special consideration by those who think that they are "elevating" Mormon women by trying to suppress polygamy. It possesses also a general interest for all. For the plural wives of Salt Lake City are not by any means "waiting for salvation" at the hands of the men and women of the East. Unconscious of having fetters on, they evince no enthusiasm for their noisy deliverers. . . . On the contrary, they consider their interference as a slur upon their own intelligence, and an encroachment upon those very rights about which monogamist females are making so much clamor (1883:103–04).

Clearly the Victorian moral high ground was contested terrain and women travel writers in Utah confronted marginalization both from men travelers as well as from the Mormon women about whom they were writing. Because it was difficult for reform-minded women writers to speak authoritatively, they attempted to improve their
own credentials to do so. In the travelers’ texts, this was also accomplished by emphasizing their superior social positioning, or by claiming privileged, confidential knowledge of Mormon women’s situations. The British woman traveler often accomplished the former by distancing herself from Mormons and by representing Mormons as inferior to herself or her own social milieu. The latter often was obtained through feminine gossip or conversations with Mormon wives, from which men normally would be excluded.

How these “strategies of representation” developed and intersected is the subject to which we now turn. Following that, we consider alternative representations of Mormon women in the travelers’ texts, what we have termed “strategies of relationship,” in which more positive, reciprocal, and multivocal interpretations of plural marriage emerge. Finally, we conclude our discussion by considering the eventual impact of Mormon women’s “strategies of resistance” to outsiders’ representations.

Strategies of Representation

Travelers’ Class Consciousness and Mormon Ignorance

Morin (1996, 1998a) has commented on British women travel writers’ Britishness or Englishness per se as expressed during their North American travels. It had a strong class-based element that frequently categorized Americans as unintelligent, uncouth, or rude, possibly reflecting their republican lack of deference towards British gentlewomen. Travelers examined in this study similarly sought to establish their social and intellectual superiority over Mormon men and women.

Lady Mary Hardy, a British novelist popular with American audiences, traveled to America in 1880–1881 and subsequently published Through Cities and Prairie Lands: Sketches of an American Tour (1882). With polygamy foremost on her mind, immediately upon her arrival in Salt Lake City, Hardy asked the first Mormon man she encountered (a train conductor) how many wives he had (1882:103), a trope repeated by several other of the travelers (e.g., see Bates, 1887:211). (He had only one.) Hardy referred to polygamy as “the great social problem of today” and as “an ulcer” (1882:110–12, 128). Polygamy was more successful in the rural areas, she argued, because “the people are drawn from a different calibre, and are drawn from a lower rank in life” (1882:113).

Emily Faithful, a leading British suffragist, writer, philanthropist, and businesswoman, traveled to America three times during the 1880s and published Three Visits to America (1884). Faithful referred to Mormon emigrants as “ignorant people” duped by a “carefully organised land speculation scheme”. “These ignorant people... accept the land as the generous gift of the Mormon Church, instead of realising the source from which it really comes, the United States Homestead Law” (1884:151). Lady Hardy maintained that Mormon missionaries brought back “stupid looking people” to Utah: “it seemed as though they had raked the social gutter, and brought thither the scum of all nations” (1882:111–12). E. Catherine Bates spent a year crossing North America in the late 1880s, and in her A Year in the Great Republic (1887), she recalled a conversation she had with a Mormon convert. Bates’s initial admiration for the Scotsman’s religious zeal turned to ridicule when Bates discovered that “the old fox” left a wife and child behind in Scotland and remarried in Utah. At this point in her narrative, Bates mentioned that his “strong Scotch accent and the loss of all his teeth except two in front made conversation somewhat difficult” (1887[2]:228).

Travelers’ first impressions of Mormons were frequently formed at Sunday worship. E. D. Bridges, traveling through the American West in the summer of 1880 as part of a world tour with her husband, attended church services at the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City. Bridges declared that the sermon was “nonsense... blasphemous rubbish” and the Book of Mormon a “silly mixture of the Koran and a modern romance” (1883:392–93). Lady Hardy similarly contended that the sermon she heard was a “tirade of self-glorification... a mass of irreverent twaddle” (1882:126–27). Bridges reported that the extravagant temple was built by “clever ignorant people,” and, in agreement with Lady Hardy, further maintained that “Mormonism has gathered together the low-class type of humanity and uneducated of all countries.” The “stupid, good-natured, unintelligent faces” of the crowd reminded Bridges of people in the remote parts of Ireland or Wales, rather than the “usual” Americans (1883:389–90) (typically reputed to be “sharp” Yankees). She further asserted that the
women were "sad and ugly" (1883:390, 394), a criticism advanced by several other of the writers (e.g., Bates 1887[2]:225).

"Homely" Mormon Women

One type of representation of Mormon women by the travelers was aesthetic: travelers frequently commented on whether they found Mormon women attractive or ugly, from a narrative position that placed no attention on the travelers' own looks or personalities. Written descriptions of Mormon men and women as lascivious, ill-mannered, poorly dressed, or uneducated further objectified them. Bridges (1883:390), Hardy (1882:108), and Bates all claimed that women submitted to polygamy because they were plain, unattractive, or homely. While Bates contended that the strongest arguments for polygamy were to produce a fine race, she found herself "bound" to admit that she saw "no sufficient justification for the doctrine in the appearance of the Salt Lake City Mormons." Bates complained that she never saw so many "'homely' (we should call them ugly) looking women in my life. Polygamy must indeed be looked upon as a sacred duty to induce men to take more than one wife from amongst them" (1887[2]:225). Lady Hardy similarly complained about the women at a church service, without apparent understanding of these women's economic situation or proximity to "frontier" life. She described them as:

motley set of people who seemed to set worldly fashion at defiance. There were some elderly heads in corkscrew curls and poke bonnets, trimmed with sad-coloured ribbons or faded flowers; . . . As a rule they wore short scanty skirts and old-fashioned kerchiefs or shawls pinned across their breasts. Such a collection of antiquated millinery and quaint combination of colours it would have been difficult to find elsewhere (1882:125).

This type of discourse may be interpreted as invoking a particularly gendered version of class superiority, wherein Hardy and Bates measured Mormon women's dress and hygiene from the norm of their own lives, rather than from the point of view of the Mormon women, few of whom could afford more recent fashions. But what is also noteworthy is the extent to which these travelers' views were embedded in the more widespread literary genres of the day. There is considerable evidence, for example, that Mark Twain's Roughing It (1872/1995) codified and satirized the prototypical tour of Salt Lake City, whose itinerary and narrative form were adopted by many subsequent travelers to Utah.

Roughing It, originally published in 1872 and widely available to British audiences, was a largely autobiographical account of Twain's self-styled "vagabondizing" in the American West and Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) in the years following the Civil War. Twain poked fun at most of his subjects, and Mormons and their marriage customs were no exceptions. Twain referred to the Book of Mormon as "chloroform in print"—"If Joseph Smith composed this book, the act was a miracle—keeping awake while he did it, at any rate" (1995:107). Twain devoted several pages to an imaginary insider's view of domestic life at Brigham Young's house. In this satire, Young had difficulty emotionally, psychologically, and financially keeping abreast of his hundreds of children and seventy-two wives, in bed together and simultaneously snoring in a "deafening roar" (1995:105). (Brigham Young actually had seventeen wives, not all coresidents, and fifty-seven children.) Twain, however, reserved his greatest irony for Mormon women. While he only stayed two days in Salt Lake City and "had not the time to make the customary inquisition into the workings of polygamy":

I had the will to do it. With the gushing self-sufficiency of youth I was feverish to plunge in headlong and achieve a great reform here—until I saw the Mormon women. Then I was touched. My heart was wiser than my head. It warmed toward these poor, ungainly and pathetically "homely" creatures, and as I turned to hide the generous moisture in my eyes, I said, "No—the man that marries one of them has done an act of Christian charity which entitles him to the kindly applause of mankind not their harsh censure—and the man that marries sixty of them has done a deed of open-handed generosity so sublime that the nations should stand uncovered in his presence and worship in silence" (1995:97) (See Figure 3).

Arguably Mark Twain's trope of the homely Mormon woman was followed by Bates, Hardy, and even Isabella Bird (1969) in their own narratives.

Heinous Mormon Men

While Bridges stereotyped Mormons as stupid but good-natured, when her attention turned specifically to Mormon women, her narrative voice grew simultaneously more moralis-
Figure 3. "I Was Touched." Anti-Mormon literature of the time, such as this illustration from Mark Twain's Roughing It (1995 ed.), often rested on representations of Mormon women as homely and undesirable (photograph reproduced courtesy of the Bancroft Library).

tic and sympathetic. She wrote about the "plight" of Mormon women who were treated poorly by their husbands (1883:394). Rather than complain about Mormon women's deficiencies, British women travelers more commonly based their narratives about polygamy on the deficiencies of Mormon men by establishing their licentiousness and by blaming and vilifying them for their abuse of innocent Mormon women. From this moralistic, reform-minded perspective, women travelers ostensibly identified and sympathized with Mormon women as women with values similar to their own. From their authoritative, standard-bearing positions, the travelers portrayed virtuous Mormon women as victims of men, who were alternately represented as slave masters, barbarians, sexualized perverts, and treacherous liars, or as power-hungry patriarchs interested only in extending their personal orbits of control (cf. Cannon 1974). Thus, if plural marriage encouraged particular passive or victimized representations of Mormon women, it equally encouraged corollary representations of victimizing Mormon men. Having secured their dominant position over Mormons on the grounds of intelligence and attractiveness, British travelers often moved to assert their "female moral authority" in the domain of the polygamy question.

Marianne North, the celebrated world traveler and painter who crossed North America twice in her career (in 1875 and 1881), reported meeting Brigham Young and hating him: "Mr. S. had a letter to Brigham Young, and took us to interview him; horrid old wretch! my hand felt dirty for a
week after shaking hands with him" (1892 [1]:201). Though Brigham Young had died before Emily Faithful’s travels to Utah (and so she never personally met him), she referred to him as a “ruthless tyrant,” “one of the greatest despots that ever lived,” and the “Napoleon of Mormonism” (1884:159, 172). She discussed Young’s need of education and refinement, and asserted that “[t]here is certainly no despotism so severe as that of the man not accustomed to power, who by dint of unscrupulous use of talent achieves a position of absolute sovereignty” (1884:171). Though outsiders were excluded from entering the sacred space of the Mormon Endowment House, Faithful claimed knowledge of its “secrets” from both gentile and Mormon sources, such as the baptismal, marriage, and other rituals that took place there. Faithful presented herself as an authority on an endowment ceremony (“an absurd and irreverent travesty” conducted by [male] church elders), and claimed that the penalty for breaking oaths secured at the Endowment House was everlasting damnation, and “having the tongue and heart cut out while the victim lives,” a penalty that she asserted Brigham Young personally enforced (1884:163, 165–66). As to marital arrangements, Faithful derisively described the Mormon belief in “celestial marriage”; while Mormons could marry or be “sealed” to one another either “in time” or for eternity, she condescendingly maintained that some women, overcome with patriotic zeal, could be sealed to already-deceased men such as George Washington (1884:167).

Hardy also had little positive to say about the Mormon men she met. Her visit with Mormon President Taylor amounted to a half hour in the “exchange of polite nothings” (1882:124). She wrote of being sympathetic to Mormon women and suspicious of Mormon men, specifically pitying women who were judged by how many children they bore—“those who have no family are merely tolerated or set aside as ‘no account’ ” (1882:116). When visiting a Mormon household, Hardy commented that “the ladies are refined,” but she could “not say much for the gentlemen” (1882:115). In inferring that polygamy originated from men’s physical nature, Hardy maintained that:

The Mormon men are genial and good-natured, but as a rule are coarse and sensual-looking, full of the physical strength and energies of healthy life; one cannot imagine a bad digestion or ill-regulated liver among them (1882:115).

As a self-proclaimed suffragist and Anglican, Faithful presented herself as the most outspoken critic of polygamy among the women whose texts are examined here. Faithful was deeply committed to the English women’s reform movement, and she wrote of polygamy as nothing less than “slavery” of women:

No one can hate more than I do the employment of force and law against mistaken beliefs in religion and politics; but polygamy, as practised in Utah, is such a crime against nature, involving such terrible degradation, that those who have the interests of women at heart can never rest satisfied until they are freed from the worst form of slavery the heart of man ever yet invented, and justified on biblical and religious grounds (1884:197; emphasis ours).

Faithful also refers to Latter-day Saint beliefs that they had reinstated Old Testament marriage practices, thus drawing out tensions between different views of Christianity. But her position should also be read within British transnational discourses of women’s reform movements. As Burton (1994) has demonstrated in her study of colonial India, British feminists often relied on imperial ideologies, such as Anglo-Saxon racial superiority and primitive Indian gender relations, to argue for the emancipation of other women. Faithful’s position here similarly relies on the need to establish the barbarity of Mormon men’s enslavement of Mormon women, a move that posits middle-class British gender relations as the index of women’s empowerment (also see Strobel 1991; Blunt and Rose 1994; Morin 1998b).

Racializing Mormons

Although some scholars have described whiteness as an “unmarked category” (Roediger 1994), Walter (1997) shows that the British press applied racializing stereotypes to identifiable white-skinned minorities, such as Irish immigrants. Faithful’s criticism of polygamy as somehow uniquely “practised in Utah” similarly contains a racializing sentiment. Several of the travelers commented that they had observed or heard of polygamy in parts of the British empire (or elsewhere) and were not offended by it, but the situation was unacceptable for Christian white women in a developed country. Polygamy, then, was fine as long as it was practiced by Africans or Asians, but a crime when practiced by English or Scottish emigrants. Maria Theresa Longworth, the Viscountess of Avonmore, during her 20,000-
mile tour of North America in 1872–1873, reported that Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, was “a mere maniac,” and that she was “furious” about the Mormon institution of polygamy (1974:35). Longworth noted that she had lived in Oriental countries:

where plurality of wives was the law of the land, but had never thought a man a monster because he had two or three sultanas, a score of “yearling wives,” and numberless others of different grades. But that was in the East, and they were Mahomedans. Living in the West, and being Christians, would seem, then, to have made the crime (1974:36).

Faithful’s and Longworth’s passages display ethnocentric and patriarchal sentiments that are similar to those of the nineteenth-century British traveler to West Africa, Mary Kingsley, who adopted a pro-polygamy position vis-à-vis the indigenous Africans, as analyzed in Blunt (1994). That is, British women accepted polygamy in the East only to the degree that they disassociated themselves from a common women’s experience. Blunt argues that a narratorial voice primarily identified as feminine would find polygamy taboo and could not condone it, whereas a voice identified as masculine could (1994:82–85). In the case of the Mormons, however, that ostensibly common identity remained intact for some of the women travelers. The “female moral authority” upon which the reform-minded late nineteenth-century feminist voice was articulated demanded that Mormon women raise themselves to the domestic ideal of the pious and pure British or American matron (Pascoe 1990; Burton 1994; Morin 1998b).

Strategies of Relationship

Intimate Conversation and the Enslaved Mormon Woman

British women travelers claimed authority as women when their gender facilitated confidential discussions with Mormon wives concerning the feminine domains of marital hardships, domestic arrangements, and household economy. Faithful reported many first-hand encounters with privately unhappy Mormon wives who provided her with insights into what she referred to as the “accursed doctrine” of polygamy. Her narratorial voice was relational and sympathetic as she com-

miserated with women who confessed their despair and unhappiness when their husbands took a new wife:

Many a poor soul has bravely tried to bear with silent submission the dreaded affliction of a second wife, pacing her lonely chamber all night, struggling with keen anguish, naturally mixed with bitter indignation, as she realised that she had lost the “rights” most sacred to a true woman, the undivided possession of her husband’s love. . . . No loving wife can see her husband’s affections straying to another woman with placid submission (1884:154–55).

According to Faithful, one woman confessed, “with tears roll[ing] down her face,” that she accidentally encountered her husband with his intended bride. Faithful quoted the woman as feeling degraded and humiliated “at the recollection of the loving devotion I had given him for years” (1884:156). While Faithful contemptuously recalled Eliza Snow’s admonitions to the woman to “pray for resignation . . . to the will and order of God” in her “supreme hour of anguish” (1884:155), she was even more contemptuous of men who claimed to have “finally awaken” to polygamy as their religious duty:

no one who has studied the matter can believe for a moment that polygamy is “the trial” to a husband’s “faith” some Mormons would have their first wife suppose it is! She, at least, is not slow to notice his altered manner towards herself; his ill-concealed anxiety to be with the new object of his affections . . . his sacrificing efforts to make himself “look as attractive as possible” in the eyes of his latest love (1884:156).

Faithful scathingly attacked the notion that Mormon men never took another wife without the “consent” of the first:

It is true that the first wife is forced, by a barbarous rite, to place her rival’s hand in that of her husband during the sealing ceremony in the Endowment House; but this mockery is endured because the wife dare not refuse (1884:160).

Stenhouse was among the more well-known apostate women whom Faithful reportedly met. Faithful wrote of meeting Stenhouse in San Francisco, where Stenhouse told her that “the worst day’s work Brigham Young ever did in the interests of his religion was the building of the theatre” (1884:184). According to Faithful, Stenhouse argued that it was in the Salt Lake City theatre that Mormon women were presented with an image of monogamous love, which contrasted greatly
with the women’s lives in plural marriage, the “difference between poetic ideals and degraded lives being lived” (1884:185). Faithful further recounted Stenhouse’s indignant outrage when she presented a $275 bill to Brigham Young for bonnets she sewed for his wives, but was refused payment and told to “count it toward her tithing” owed to the Church (1884:198). In retelling Stenhouse’s story, Faithful’s sentiment matches that of several other travelers who described the Mormons’ Saturday morning trips to the Tithing House, where they were forced to contribute ten percent of their earnings, the balance of which went to the “advantage of the officers of the church” (Bates 1887:231).

Much of Faithful’s Three Visits to America focuses on American women’s social status. She explains that her purpose in traveling to America was to study the changed position of women in the nineteenth century, “by ascertaining how America is trying to solve the most delicate and difficult problem presented by modern civilization” (1884:vii). Faithful spent much of her time talking with America’s leading feminists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and analyzing America’s reform movements. While Faithful found much to admire in America in terms of women’s property ownership and occupational opportunities, she declared that she “was at a loss to discover how the laws of Utah improve the conditions of women”:

when a husband is given the power to take away his wife’s goods, to hand them over, if it be his lordly pleasure, to the new wife who has supplanted her in his affections. I was told, on authority which could not be impugned, of women robbed of their property for the benefit of a new wife (1884:188).

Faithful quoted a Mrs. A. G. Paddick (American novelist and reformer Cornelia Paddock) who claimed that the law did not give a Mormon wife, legal or plural, any claim upon the property or earnings of her husband (1884:195).

These themes and passages collectively indicate how British women travelers established their legitimacy as observers of the Mormon scene. But they also suggest a reluctance to view Latter-day Saint women’s lifestyles from their own points of view. Rather, travelers measured Mormon social practices against their own lives in British society, highlighting differences to establish their textual authority and assuming all the while the normative position of the Victorian domestic “ideal” (cf. Burton 1994; Davidoff 1983). As Strobel (1991:50) argues, by focusing on another society’s “barbaric” treatment of women, travelers falsely presented themselves as free from patriarchal oppression. Monogamy was unexamined and simply assumed to be a trouble-free alternative to plural marriage. Travelers such as Faithful implicitly maintained that a woman could only be happy with a close relationship with one husband all to herself (even though some of the travelers themselves never married). Since Mormon women’s lives did not fit the middle-class Victorian domestic model from which the travelers gained their own authority, emphasizing Mormon women’s unhappiness, and especially emphasizing the tales of apostate women to “prove” the immorality of polygamy, were useful for their larger purpose. Faithful, in particular, put the travel narrative into the service of a lengthy exposition on the immorality of polygamy, ignoring to a large degree other aspects of Salt Lake City’s social geography that were the supposed rationale for her visit.

Many of the passages from Faithful’s text call to mind the Victorian gothic novel of “rack and ruin” as well. Swetnam (1991) notes that Mormon pioneer autobiographical writing tended to repeat a stock sequence of events, elements of which also seem to appear in the travel writers’ versions of the stories of the poor “duped” British converts. Antipolygamy narratives follow emplotments similar to Victorian gothic novels within which an innocent, trusting young woman is tricked by Mormon missionaries or authorities, travels to Zion, and learns of her deception, only to find that it is too late, and she must then live out her days in anguish and misery (and as a stern warning to the reader not to follow her example) (Lynn 1981). (See Fanny Stenhouse’s depiction of this discovery, Figure 4).

Pascoe (1990:62) suggests three stock anti-Mormon narratives among the writings of American female reformers: “that of the wronged first wife, the deluded plural wife, and the besieged young girl.” One might add to her list the basic narrative of the duped woman convert who marries a Mormon missionary. Faithful recounted one particular story of an (unnamed) young woman “gone wrong” through an unscrupulous man and eventually punished for her mistakes. She related the story of a woman from Cornwall who became a Mormon and, after emigrating to Utah, was very much missed by her family. The missionary returned to Cornwall and enticed the woman’s niece to join her aunt in Utah. En route, the
missionary tricked the niece into marrying him, and once in Utah, she discovered, to her horror, that his first wife was her own aunt. As Faithful told it, "[t]his is no romance, it is one of the many sad histories I know to be true" (1884:175–78).  

Alternative Voices of Mormon Women

Yet the very strategies that British women writers used to legitimate their narratives and to express their opinions also created paradoxes and textual openings for positive impressions. They often permitted Mormon women to speak for themselves through the use of direct or indirect quotations (cf. Mills 1991; Blake 1990). Moreover, an author who deployed her gender to gain entrance into Latter-day Saint women’s homes and confidences could not easily ignore information derived from these sources that offered positive images of the Church or plural marriage. The relational feminine voice could not retain such a position without representing Mormon women as cordial and articulate acquaintances rather than as exotic “others.” Suffragette authors who believed that polygamy oppressed women could not easily counter devoted plural wives who expressed their right to self-determination and religious freedom.

While none of the British travelers in this study represented plural marriage as a preferable arrangement to monogamy, their assessments of it and Mormon society were not entirely negative. Several of the travelers affirmed much about the Mormons, either by presenting positive images of Mormon men, by discussing benefits of plural marriage to women, by admiring the spiritual ideals and sacrifices made by Mormon women, by observing a diversity of desires and needs among the Mormons, or by giving voice within their books to people whose ideas did not match their own. Several of the British women attempted to establish a greater reciprocity between themselves and their Mormon counterparts. Such reciprocity could be achieved textually by treating Mormon women as individuals with a range of legitimate viewpoints, and especially by reporting on personal conversations with women who held pro-polygamy positions.

The Sympathetic Mormon. Several of the travel writers presented Mormon men in a sympathetic light. Theresa Longworth, for instance, was positively impressed with Brigham Young and
his family. Upon meeting Young, she reported that he:

has probably one of the most powerful minds in the United States, and is quite as much of an educated gentleman as most of them... for powerful intellect, breadth of mind, and that strong magnetic influence by which great men sway the multitude, [he] has few equals... he has a quiet, unpretentious, impressive manner. You could feel certain he would help you if you really needed it (1875:1974:45).

Longworth was equally impressed with one of Young's daughters, whose "character and disposition I like exceedingly... her winning, natural acting [in an amateur theatrical performance] took my secretary's heart by storm" (1974:46). Nevertheless, Longworth reported that one elderly Saint was apparently romantically inclined toward her, a man "who came with a view of making a convert, or pervert: of me," and as a defense, she pretended to be married to her secretary (1974:46).

Other travelers seemed to sympathize with Mormon men suffering from the pressures of too many wives. Bridges's train stopped to pick up a Mormon family on a Sunday outing. She contended that the husband "looked bored at having to carry [the] three bundles, three umbrellas and three shawls," of his three wives (1883:389). Bates also seemed willing to acknowledge the perspective of a church-going Mormon man, whom she quoted as saying that Sterhouse's book was "all gas" and that a husband was never forced, or even urged, to take a second wife. Rather, "it's a great privilege" to do so (Bates 1887:218-19). And whereas some travelers found Mormon men more "monstrous" than their Asian or African counterparts who practiced polygamy (cf. Longworth 1974:36), Lady Hardy positively compared Mormon men to Muslims:

There is... a wide difference between the Mohammedan and the Mormon—the two polygamic nations. Whereas the former keep their women in a state of slavery, idleness, and ignorance, the Mormons give their women every possible advantage of education, and permit, nay encourage, them to take their part in the world's work and in the management of affairs generally (1882:123).

Several of the travel writers pointed to some specific benefits of plural marriage. The poet Emily (Davis) Pfeiffer, whose travelogue about the Mediterranean region and America, Flying Leaves from East and West (1885), considered polygamy a "horrible evil," also acknowledged its benefits in controlling "the most festering sore of our modern civilization"—prostitution. Where polygamy exists, "there is little or no prostitution." She continued by arguing that:

Polygamy may, therefore, further be looked upon as a sacrifice made by women for women; by women who, in abdicating their natural rights, withhold from the deepest mire of pollution their trailer and more tempted sisters (1885:145-48).

Faithful similarly contended that the Mormon women she spoke with reminded her that "Gentile women... are subjected to 'infidelities no Mormon wife ever experiences!' There is no place on earth where women's virtue is more protected than in Salt Lake City" (1884:153-54).

Lady Hardy also found something positive to say about plural marriage, that is, for women who identified themselves more strongly as mothers than as wives. She conceded that while Mormon women's material comforts were satisfied, their lives undoubtedly consisted mostly of "gloom and emptiness" (1882:108). But, in recognizing differences among Mormon women, she added that "maternal women" were happier in a polygamous household since they "do not depend so much on love relationships with a man":

My remarks do not apply indiscriminately to all, for there are many wives who are perfectly happy in the polygamous state; women to whom the children are more than the husband, whose maternal instincts are much stronger than their conjugal affections... women of a more delicate spiritual organization, who feel the necessity of loving and being loved in the divinest, purest sense... they live a life of daily crucifixion (1882:109).

Several of the travelers spoke to and quoted prominent Mormon women while in Salt Lake City, such as Eliza Snow, Emmeline Wells, Hannah King, Dr. Romana Pratt, and the wives of prominent Church authorities (e.g., Beecher 1982; Bushman 1976; Burgess- Olson 1978). The travelers often portrayed these Mormon women as their social equals, and their lives and households as thriving and successful. Theresa Longworth, while disparagingly writing of lower-class "Mrs. Mob Caps," asserted that Mormon women regarded polygamy "as a priest might regard celibacy" (1875:1974:2:35,41). Longworth reported staying with a Swedish-born Mormon bishop and his eleven wives, and in explaining the division of labor within the household, expressed admiration toward the household's efficient operation (1974:2:38-41). While Longworth ex-
pressed initial apprehension at staying in a Mormon home, her "scars and horrors that might befall [her] while visiting these Mormon dens of iniquity" began to subside after a visit in her room with one of the bishops' wives. She further admitted that the wives' assiduous attention to their consumptive husband threw her "previous ideas into the strangest confusion" (1974:2:40).

Hardy quoted a wife of a wealthy merchant as feeling as if she were "in a zoo" and under surveillance by Hardy and other curiosity seekers (1882:118). Hardy described the woman's home as "extremely beautiful" and "lovely," and the "mistress thereof . . . a stately, noble-looking woman, with a grave earnest face, and eyes that seemed to be looking far away from this world into the next" (1882:116). As Hardy pressed the woman to explain and defend her plural marriage, she recalled their exchange:

"Surely," I exclaimed, "these children cannot all be yours?"

"They are, and they are not" she answered. "I have fourteen children . . . Those . . . belong to my sister wife, who died about a year ago; but they are the same as mine; they know no difference. Our children were all born under one roof, and we have mothered them in turn."

"But do you mean to say," I urged, "that you never feel any petty jealousies?"

"I do not say that," she said somewhat sharply. "We are none of us perfect, and are all liable to the evil influence of earthly passions; but when we feel weak and failing we pray to God to help us, and He does" (1882:117).

Bridges and Pfeiffer wrote of visiting the offices of the Mormon women's newspaper, the Woman's Exponent. Bridges noted that the young woman who escorted her around the office, a niece of Brigham Young whose own father had seven wives and twenty-six children, was "really . . . lady-like . . . and seemed sensible and well-informed" (1883:397). Pfeiffer devoted much of her text to Snow, the plural widow of Smith and wife of Young, and to Wells, the forty-year editor of the Exponent and plural wife of Daniel Wells, mayor of Salt Lake City. Pfeiffer presented an extremely sympathetic portrayal of these and other Mormon women throughout her text. At Wells's home, Pfeiffer met Dr. Pratt and was reintroduced to Snow, whom she would subsequently describe meeting at several other social occasions. Pfeiffer concluded that Wells appeared a "tender mother . . . and in this stage of her existence, a happily detached wife, content in the free exercise of her activity. Dr. Roumanie [sic] was a sensible looking woman, who also had found a sphere of action to her mind" (1885:167).

The Pious Mormon. Even Faithful, who maintained a virulent antipolygamy stance in her travelogue, quoted prominent Mormon women and men at length. She reported that Church President Taylor gave a party in her honor shortly after her arrival in Salt Lake City, and she soon found herself "in the thick of apostles, priests, and priestesses." Among them was Snow, who, Faithful claimed, tried to convert her to Mormonism after lunch. She reported that Snow "attacked" her on several Biblical questions, such as whether plural marriage was not in fact sanctioned in the Old Testament (1884:180–81). Along with Lady Hardy, Faithful acknowledged that "even among the Mormon ladies themselves there is a vast amount of conflicting testimony as to the happiness enjoyed . . . Eliza Snow . . . assured me with apparent sincerity of her perfect faith and entire satisfaction in the teachings and practices of Mormonism" (1884:152–53). Faithful reported being invited to Snow's eightieth-birthday party, on January 21, 1884, and cited the many complimentary statements made of Snow at the party. Faithful also declared that she had "much pleasant intercourse" with Emmeline Wells and Hannah King (though she referred to them as "energetic fanatics") (1884:153). The Englishwoman Hannah King, an active member of the Salt Lake City Elocution Society and Polytechnical Society (Ursenbach 1975), maintained a positive view of the church and plural marriage to the women travelers, even though she lost position and wealth by migrating to Utah. Faithful quoted King as "continually" reminding her that:

The laws of this Church coincide with the laws of my nature; I have three beautiful daughters living in polygamy . . . I have been in the Church for thirty years, and would not return to my former state for Queen Victoria's crown and all its appendages (1884:153).

Despite her overwhelmingly negative assessments of plural marriage, Faithful summarized her stay in Salt Lake City as a positive experience,
concluding that “nothing could exceed the kindness and courtesy shown to me by the leading Mormons” (1884:179).

During a meeting with “Sister Smith,” Pfeiffer wrote, “we were introduced into the presence of an old lady with a mild and serious face, spare frame, and the sort of dignity which comes from the possession of, and living up to, an idea” (1885:144–45). As Snow explained to Pfeiffer and her companion all the “trials the Mormons had to endure,” she gradually found she was talking to “willing listeners”:

the fire kindled, and the old priestess unfolded to us the inner life of her singular faith, expounding, and at last I could not but feel almost exhorting, in the spirit of a Hebrew prophetess. The face that had been cold to us at first grew full of human love and pity; the dim eyes that had looked upon the world for eighty years were tearful, her voice vibrating with emotion (1885:145–46).

Though referring to polygamy as a “repulsive creed,” Pfeiffer nevertheless presented herself as a receptive listener, well disposed to locating some common link between herself and Snow. She continued:

I do not envy the condition of that soul that could have watched the earnest face of Sister Snow, and not have felt lifted to some meeting-place of sympathy far above prejudice and even knowledge. . . . One lesson I had learnt from her . . . that there is something in every honestly inspired human heart better than its opinions, whatever they may be (1885:146, 167).

Pfeiffer asserted that Snow’s “natural and simple eloquence” deeply touched her, and that she (Pfeiffer) recognized the human need for a “mutual pity” that wanderers on earth should express to one another (1885:146).

Pfeiffer also met with King, whom she had read about in the Woman’s Exponent. According to Pfeiffer, King asked her to “speak well” of Mormonism to her readers, “it’s the Lord’s truth” (1885:158). While Pfeiffer presented herself as sympathetic to Snow, she contended that King “impressed [her] disagreeably.” King, “who presented herself as a country-woman,” was a “kindly and well-meaning dupe as it seemed to me; a good woman at heart I am sure. There are people who are capable of maintaining some sort of spiritual life on chaff” (1885:158). Thus, while Pfeiffer represented Snow as a woman with “a selfless purity of motive which surrounded her luminous atmosphere” (1885:167), King was a “dupe,” even though they advanced similar pro-polygamy positions.

Interestingly, Pfeiffer admitted that she personally met only with elite women of Mormon society, but also said the more “ordinary” women in shops were “singularly retiring and modest of aspect” (1885:169), hardly the harsh criticism made of Mormon women by the other travelers. Lest Pfeiffer appear more conciliatory to plural marriage than it might appear from the above excerpts, she closed her discussion of the topic by noting the “unhappiness of famished affection” in Mormon women, which equaled the “growing and full-fed depravation” of the men. She presented herself as in the “deepest commiseration” with the women, but “the Mormon man is at once a tyrant and a slave. . . . Not the Popedom itself is so absolute a despotism as that wielded by the chief apostle of this creed” (1885:170). To Pfeiffer, the final “blame” fell on the Church President, a man apparently above the law, who enslaved men and women alike, and whose “pseudo revelation” presented a “grave menace” to the American government (1885:170, 168).

The above excerpts highlight the extent to which British women travelers represented plural marriage in a more positive light when the location of the encounter was a private home versus a public space such as a church, and when the socioeconomic status of the individual Mormon woman interviewed more closely matched the traveler’s. Some of the travelers to Mormon territory were perhaps convinced of some of the positive aspects of polygamy because they could identify with the Mormon women as women—but only as women within a particular social class (and who stood in marked contrast to lower-class Mormons, who required social uplift). At the very least, allowing the plural wife to speak for herself in the traveler’s text opened the possibility for Mormon self-representation outside of British standards of propriety.

Strategies of Resistance
Efforts at Self-Representation

If the moral high ground of virtuous Victorian womanhood was terrain that more than one population might claim, Mormon women were willing and often articulate speakers for their own positions and defenders of their own beliefs and practices (Dunfey 1984). In arguing their right to
speak for and thus to represent themselves without the benefit of poorly informed and voyeuristic outsiders, Mormon women deployed a number of rhetorical and operational strategies. As with the British women travelers, it should become clear that no single or unproblematic voice expresses Mormon women’s sentiment (cf. Mohanty 1988). Devout Mormon plural wives staked their moral claims on the basis of their attachment to a patriarchal theology and social order articulated for them by Church men in positions of authority (Pascoe 1990:21–22), but also on the basis of other arguments that ranged widely from feminine to feminist, from progressive to scriptural, and from utilitarian to sociobiological. Latter-day Saint women at times turned their attention back upon their monogamous observers and would-be reformers, noting the social ills that beset Britain and America in the context of conventional families, such as prostitution, the stigma of illegitimate births, mistress-keeping, infanticide by unwed mothers, and sexual harassment faced by single women factory workers. Most important, Mormon women claimed the right to speak for themselves, or to put forward their own spokeswomen (such as the revered Snow) on their behalf.

Devout Mormon women’s attempts to influence the opinions of British travel writers and their readers about Mormon women should be set in the context of their larger history of efforts to represent themselves and their Church. Their means varied, including: simple letters written from their farms to unconverted relatives “back East” or in Europe, formal petitions to Congress to legitimize their marital status; books valorizing leading “sisters,” meetings with genteel travelers and journalists, corrective letters-to-the-editor of newspapers that published antipolygamy material, displays of their handiwork at national exhibitions, and, particularly, their Church-approved (though not Church-sponsored) biweekly newspaper, the Woman’s Exponent (1876–1914) (Bennion 1976; Madsen 1977). This newspaper was principally intended to educate and enhance communication between geographically scattered and often isolated Mormon women living throughout the Great Basin, but it was also mailed to editors of women’s newspapers elsewhere in the U.S. and had a peak circulation of about 2,400 (Bennion 1976:237). Lapsed Mormons also attempted to influence a wider public on the subjects of the Church and polygamy, typically through publishing sensationalistic autobiographies, often followed up with public lecture tours. It must be remembered that the period of the British women’s travel books (1870s and 1880s) coincided with increasingly severe public opinion and federal government pressure on the Church to abandon polygamy. Thus, Mormon plural wives spoke out to attempt to secure not only their reputations, but also their legal status.

One endorsement of plural marriage appeared in a letter by convert Eliza Knowles to her family in Gloucester, England, in 1856. She and her husband Thomas farmed twenty acres of wheat and raised a few cattle in the community of Nephi in central Utah (original spelling is maintained):

I very much want to know how Unity is and if she is married. If she is single now tell her that we want her to come to Salt Lake Valley and she shall have a home with us as long as she should live and tell her if she does believe in plurality of wives she may have half of my man . . . (Carter 1939–51, 5:420–21).

Belinda Marden Pratt wrote a detailed and carefully organized letter in support of polygamy to a sister in the eastern U.S. that was subsequently published in Britain by Sir Richard Burton ([1862] 1971:43–41) in his City of the Saints. In addition to an extensive rationale based on Biblical exegesis, she delicately but essentially opined that men were far lustier than women; thus, polygamy simultaneously accommodated both the active male libido and feminine Victorian sexual reticence far better than did monogamous marriage. Pratt’s letter also demonstrates considerable variation in the representation of polygamy by plural wives in the same household or by an individual woman over a life course. Pratt became the second wife of newspaper editor Thomas Stenhouse, and was thus co-wife of Fanny Stenhouse. The Stenhouses eventually left the Church. Stenhouse’s daughter Clara became a reportedly happy, favored plural wife of a son of Brigham Young, was widowed, then drifted away from the Church later in life—after the Church abandoned plural marriage (Hunsaker 1991).

Of the “leading sisters” visited by the British women writers, Emmeline Wells was a newspaper editor and Romania Prat was a medical doctor, validating the argument that sharing of child care and housework by “sister wives,” together with husbands’ correspondingly diminished demands on any particular wife, encouraged women to be more self-reliant than were monogamous wives,
thus liberating ambitious women for intellectually fulfilling pursuits:

the plural wife “became freer and can do herself individually things she never could have attempted before; and work out her individual character separate from her husband.” Marcha Hughes Cannon was quoted in the San Francisco Examiner as saying that “if her husband has four wives she has three weeks of freedom every single month” (Scott 1986–1987:15).

Mormon women like Wells further argued that polygamy was a feminist cause, as women’s right to freedom of religious choice and self-determination were at stake, and they publicly supported women’s suffrage and advancement. If such beliefs subverted accepted Victorian notions of true womanhood (and flirted with deviation from Mormon patriarchal authority), they equally redefined the plural wife’s alienation from her husband in a positive light, as her latitude to develop as a self-actualizing human being.

One Mormon woman, Augusta Joyce Crocheron (1884), wrote a book of laudatory biographical sketches of leading Utah women that included the prominent women mentioned by British women travel writers: King, Wells, Snow, and R. Pratt. Her purpose explicitly included public relations with an anticipated hostile public:

[Mormon women’s] parity, integrity, and faith in God, their heroic firmness and the trials they have endured without wavering in allegiance to their cause . . . our women are not from the dregs of civilization, led and controlled by stronger minds without a knowledge within themselves for their course . . . O, that these truthful testimonies falling upon hearts that are as blocks of ice toward us, might like burning bullets melt their way therein, until . . . these should weep for injuries these have born (1884:i–ii).

Though few in number, the impact of vocal apostate Mormon women seemingly out-performed the faithful plural wives,’ no doubt because their assessments of polygamy validated the ambient anti-Mormon sentiment of the U.S. and Great Britain. So widely circulated were their memoirs that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle owned a copy of Fanny Stenhouse’s autobiography and may have used it as a source for A Study in Scarlet (Doyle [1887] 1987; Tracy 1979:15–16). Ann Eliza Webb Young (1876), divorced plural wife of Brigham Young, wrote an anti-Mormon autobiography, gave public lectures, and granted interviews with journalists. Indeed, the root of the apostates’ break with the Latter-day Saints religion seemed to be their own difficulties with plural marriage; they, like the Protestant reformers, subsequently sought to abolish polygamy and to elevate their benighted Mormon sisters.

Yet these anti-Mormon apostate women who wrote from their experiences as erstwhile Latter-day Saints did not necessarily align themselves with gentle travel writers, preferring, like their pious sisters, to claim an insider’s superior narrative authority. According to Stenhouse:

The Mormon women . . . do not care to tell their sorrows and trials to strangers who are not of their own faith. In this way, visitors to Salt Lake who have gone there with the intention of “writing-up” the Saints in a book have generally been misled. My own experience as a Mormon woman leads me to form anything but a flattering opinion of the Mormon stories told by Gentle pens ([1884] 1971:158).

Stenhouse herself cited Mormon patriarchal authority for her assertion of antipolygamy sentiment among “sister-wives” in referring to several sermons of Brigham Young published in the Mormon newspaper, the Deseret News (“there is no cessation to the everlasting whinings of many of the women in this territory . . .”) (1971:216). Nor did Stenhouse admit of problems attributable to monogamous marriage; rather, an insensitive husband becomes so through polygamy, not due to any character flaw that could just as well appear in a conventional marriage.

The position of Latter-day Saint women who publicly wished to live securely within the Mormon faith and community, while privately admitting misgivings about polygamy, is more difficult to categorize. A number of travel writers reported conversations with such women—who are never identified by name—but it is difficult to say whether the “doubting Thomasinas” intended to influence public opinion about Mormonism through their anonymous transmittals, or whether they simply appreciated a sympathetic ear and opportunity to unburden in what they believed was a confidential conversation. Also, some of these unattributed stories occur so frequently and with the same plot elements as gothic novels (for example, stories of “Danites,” or Mormon secret police, who prevent entrapped women from leaving Salt Lake Valley), that fictitious representations of polygamy are strongly indicated in a number of autobiographical accounts.
Certainly there are large numbers of pious Mormon women's private memoirs and diaries that indicate discontent and even anguish over their plural marriages, but these texts were mostly intended for only personal or family reading, and not for a "gentile" press. They suggest a position intermediate between faith-promoting Mormon women's strong public endorsement of plural marriage and apostate women's lurid descriptions of its horrors. Moreover, sometimes the identical woman promoted Mormon plural marriage in public, while admitting to its difficulties in a private diary—notably the Woman's Exponent editor Wells (July 8, 1881). Wells (May 25, 1881) reported in her daily journal considerable frustration with frequent visitors in her editorial office. Women wanted to unburden their domestic troubles to her while she and her assistant rushed to meet their newspaper deadlines—a newspaper that consistently presented a positive and hopeful image of Mormon domestic arrangements and life “in the principle.” While publicly promoting polygamy, she sometimes expressed resentment that her husband Daniel seldom stayed with her (like many plural wives, she maintained an independent residence). A typical unattributed anti-Mormon horror story concerned the wronged first wife whose husband shamelessly took some of her personal household furnishings in order to set up housekeeping for a rival second wife (Faithful 1884; Stenhouse 1971:328–29). Yet such a story does appear—not in anti-Mormon materials prepared for public consumption—but in the private journal of a loyal Mormon woman, Rachel Emma Woolley Simmons of Salt Lake City. She recorded on the occasion of her husband’s second marriage:

It wouldn't have been so hard if he had not courted her so strong. . . . Joe used to go every other night to see her, and I thought that was too much when he had a family at home, but it made no difference what I thought. He married her in the month of August 1855 and gave her my bedroom and the best of everything in the house, and was so infatuated with her that he neglected me shamefully. It was hard to bear (Carter 1947 11:167).

Simmons spent her life as a practicing Mormon, and it is not known how widely her own narrative circulated nor whether she spoke to individuals who ultimately put it into print. Even the devout Hannah King—the archetypal dupe to her detractors and the inspiring poet to her corligionists—privately expressed dismay in the pages of her diary with the decisions of several Church authorities (Oct. 8, 1856), although her entries on the Church were generally positive.

These women's emotional ambivalence had a ready rhetorical strategy, however. It was that their faith demanded true Christian trials, whose successful passage would elevate both women and men in the hereafter (cf. Hardy 1882:117; Ward 1980:117–20; Kay 1997). The virtuous Mormon wife submitted to polygamy in the belief that the extra burden which it placed upon her sex would correspondingly yield greater spiritual improvement for her in this life and greater exaltation in the hereafter if she negotiated it as a true Christian, with fortitude and forbearance (“No cross, no crown”). The complexity of Simmons’s, King’s, and Wells’s situations, however, suggest that no uniform or surficial representation of Mormon women’s viewpoints on polygamy can be promoted.

Mormon Women’s Responses to British Women Travel Writers

To say that Mormon women vigorously attempted to speak for themselves is not to say that their efforts had the desired effects. For example, when Faithful came to Salt Lake City in January of 1884, she received a glowing notice in the Woman's Exponent as a cultivated English gentlewoman presenting a "celebrated lecture" in the Salt Lake Theater, called "Modern Shams." Faithful’s critique of the expensive and superficial social life of the urbane and well-to-do appealed to a receptive audience of fundamentalist Utah Mormons. Wells reported:

Miss Faithful is affable and amicable in manner, a woman whom one can love and admire for her nobility of soul and thorough appreciation of the needs of the age. She has great good sense and marked ability; these qualities combined with a superior education and extensive travel make her a most charming conversationalist (Feb. 1, 1884, p.132).

Also on that page of the Woman's Exponent were a review of Crocheron's Representative Women of Deseret, a social note on Eliza Show's eightieth birthday party, a report on recent linkages between leading American suffragettes and prominent members of Mormon women's organizations, and a copy of a faith-promoting letter written by a Swiss convert to her family back in Bern.
Nine months later Wells received a copy of Faithful’s book on her American travels, and wrote of feeling devastated and furious at its depiction of Latter-day Saints. Coming on the heels of federal legislation that outlawed (but did not prevent) plural marriage, Faithful’s book was seen to betray Mormon women into the hands of the Church’s worst enemies. According to Wells, Faithful misrepresented her social activities in Utah; worse yet, she had lied about the revered Eliza Snow:

Miss Faithful was here a few days. She was suffering from asthma, so that she was unable to see much that would have been interesting to a casual traveler, yet she writes of Salt Lake City and the citizens as though she had been a dweller in their midst and knew whereof she wrote... What she expects by wilfully traducing and falsifying those who... sought to show her kindness and courtesy is difficult to imagine... (Woman’s Exponent, Nov. 15, 1884, p. 92).

Wells wrote to Faithful’s New York publishers at their invitation, with a scathing critique of her Mormon material.

Still expressing deep anxiety, Wells continued this theme in her next issue of the Woman’s Exponent, noting that Faithful had lied about her attendance at Snow’s birthday party and discussions with Church President Taylor. On her return to England, Faithful reportedly urged Queen Victoria to put a stop to Mormon conversion of British subjects and their emigration to Utah. Suggesting that English reformers should first clean up their own moral backyards, Wells charged that British women converts to Mormonism themselves spoke of “the horrors of their own cities and towns,” presumably meaning various financial hardships and sexual pressures to which young single working-class Englishwomen were prey (Woman’s Exponent, Dec. 1, 1884, p. 100).

Similarly, Pfeiffer’s personal life, publications, and visits to Salt Lake City initially received favorable notices in the Woman’s Exponent (Nov. 1, 1884; 1889[18]:165). But on a subsequent visit to Washington, Wells met some British tourists at Mount Vernon who inquired whether she were “the Mrs. Wells that Mrs. Emily Pfeiffer had mentioned in her book” (1889[18]:182–83). Wells was aware that Pfeiffer intended to write a book about her North American travels and offered to mail her a copy of the book, but Wells had not received it. One of the tourists suggested that this oversight:

“was because of what it contained against our people.” She confesses she was astonished, for they had been entertained at the... [President’s house] while here, and President Taylor had taken more than ordinary pains to converse with them on Utah subjects. And they had also visited Sister Eliza at the Lion House (1889[18]:182–83).

She subsequently reviewed Pfeiffer’s book at length in the Woman’s Exponent, principally stressing Pfeiffer’s favorable impressions of Mormonism, rather than criticizing derogatory passages, as Wells had done in her review of Faithful’s book. Perhaps Wells hoped to encourage her sisters to believe that public opinion had not entirely turned against them during the last days of polygamy; perhaps she hoped to demonstrate to gentle newspaper editors having exchange agreements with the Exponent that astute foreign observers found Mormonism commendable. In a similar vein, Wells also reported in the Exponent about other travelers’ interviews in her office, home, or Church President’s residence, and their apparent good will towards the Mormons. For example, Wells described Isabella Bird (1878[6]:181), then en route to the Rocky Mountains, as refined and intelligent. (Bird subsequently only briefly alluded to Mormon women—as downtrodden and ugly—in A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains, 1879.) For example, in 1889, Wells also reported on visits from a Sir Julian and Lady Goldschmidt, Theresa, Dowager Countess of Shrewsbury, England, and the Countess of Selkirk, Scotland (1889[18]:84). Wells’s accounts of her distinguished British visitors were written up as social notes, and seem intended to reassure her readers that some important visitors held good opinions of the Mormons. In any event, they show Wells as judging British travelers in print, as well as being judged by them.

Perhaps naively, Wells assumed that the hospitality she arranged for foreign travel writers, particularly when extended by Church elites revered by faithful Mormons, would be sufficient to secure travel writers’ good opinions and positive press about the Latter-day Saints, rather than representations of them at best as curiosities, and at worst, as sexual deviants. The public-relations battle, in fact, was not one that Mormons were destined to win. Its decisive terrain was not to be found in the pages of British women’s travel books, nor in the parlors of Salt Lake City’s prominent sisters, but in American newspapers and in the halls of Congress (Poll 1978:257–74, 337–56). The Edmunds Act of 1882 gave the
federal government widespread powers to prosecute and disenfranchise polygamous. The Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887 further deprived Utah women of the vote and threatened to confiscate Church property. Mormon writers like Wells or Crocheron felt that they had an important, indeed critical, service to perform in simultaneously protecting their own social and legal status, as well as that of the Church, on the "home front." But with the jailing of polygamous husbands, and plural wives in hiding "on the underground" as the federal fist tightened, the fourth Mormon Church President, Wilford Woodruff, banned plural marriage in 1890. Most plural wives effectively received instant marital separations. Ironically, from the point of view of social reform, the Woodruff Manifesto left many plural wives as impoverished single mothers (e.g., Hafen 1983; Tanner 1991), although some quietly continued sub-rosa relationships with largely absent husbands. The liberation of benighted Mormon women sought by Faithful, Stenhouse, and like-minded reformers forced many estranged plural wives with young families into reduced circumstances with diminished paternal influence in their children's up-bringing, situations with which these women struggled long after the reformers had turned their attention to other issues.

Conclusion

One difference between our study of the Mormon situation and most studies of subalternity in nineteenth-century travel writing to date is the extent to which we are able to trace the many ways in which Mormon women attempted, in writing and through other social practices, to influence and modify outsiders' (non-Mormons') views of their communities and particularly their practice of plural marriage. Using a range of strategies, such as printing their own autobiographical accounts, publishing newspapers, hosting foreign travelers, and acting as informants on one another’s lives, Mormon women actively sought to modify their mostly negative public images. Pious Mormon women had forceful spokeswomen in the persons of Eliza Snow and Emmeline Wells, who received travel writers in their homes or editorial offices, spoke to them favorably about their perceptions of the spiritual and practical advantages of polygamy, and arranged for British travelers to visit the homes of other leading women in Salt Lake City. Such orchestrated efforts, if not ultimately convincing to outsiders, nevertheless appeared in British women’s travel books as alternative glimpses of life "in the principle." We thus have traced ways Mormon women were active in the production of their own representations, even if the broader social relations operating at the time, in both Britain and America, ultimately restricted those images to the margins of acceptable religious, sexual, and moral conduct.

The points of contact between British and Mormon women described in this paper also indicate some of the complexity and ambiguities of each group’s identities and interactions (cf. Mohanty 1988). As women coming from a society that assigned them an inferior status on the basis of gender, British women writers strategically deployed their femininity to stress relations of empathy and moral concern for the Mormon women of Utah. They simultaneously valorized their own projects and subverted the authority of men travel writers whom they deemed incapable of fully comprehending "the plight of Mormon women." White Christian polygamy itself introduced a whole range of subversions: of proper notions of family, love, marriage, women's status, and religious freedom, which were most easily addressed by denoting the plural wife as religious fanatic or victim, and by calling for termination of a "barbarous" practice.

Whereas race/ethnicity, class, and gender have been the principal modalities of postcolonial studies of British subaltern subjects (Kaplan and Pease 1993; Spivak 1988; Ashcroft et al. 1995), the Mormon’s “inferior” status was fundamentally based on perceptions of their religion, sexuality, and morality. Nevertheless, British travelers often condescended on the basis of class: British writers’ negative portrayals of white American Mormon settlers rested on descriptions of them as uncultured or insufficiently deferential to the more rigid British class distinctions. Furthermore, "whiteness" was no unmarked category; the Mormon example supports other authors’ conclusions on the distinguishing marks of class and ethnicity within the general concept of the "white race" (cf. Walter 1997; Roediger 1994). Finally, while Mormons were not "colonized people," they often represented themselves as victimized and oppressed, due to their losing struggle for public acceptance, an early history of martyrdom for their faith, and increasing federal-government interference. What emerges from our comparison of Mormon polygamy as depicted by British
women travel writers within postcolonial theory, then, are some reasonable fits as well as some important differences.

This research has focused on a particular religious subculture of western Americans whom travelers encountered, a subculture of people who in many and diverse ways sought to influence travelers' impressions and texts. With this research, we raise questions about ways subjected peoples may be positive actors in the formation of what come to be dominant understandings about them. We also posit another example of closely overlapping geographies of monogamous heterosexuality and a moral landscape of reform in competition with an alternative vision of acceptable morality and sexual relations.

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Notes

1. While we primarily use the term polygamy, “polygyny” is the more precise label for the Mormon practice of plural marriage, referring as it does to having more than one wife at a single time (while “polygamy” refers to having more than one wife or husband at a time). The Mormons themselves have traditionally preferred the term “plural marriage” over either of these terms.

2. While most of the travel writers discussed in this paper were specifically English, we primarily refer to them as British travelers because they traveled to the U.S. and other parts of the world within the context of Great Britain's empire building. Brief biographical sketches are available on these authors in Robinson (1990), Artheim (1962), and Rapson (1971), and from their own travelogs.

3. Following the murder of Church founder Joseph Smith in 1844, Young claimed the mantle of Church prophet and president until his death in 1877. He was succeeded by Taylor, who died in 1887 and was followed by Wilford Woodruff.


5. Many anti-Mormon writers, both American and British, viewed polygamy as one of the great social ills affecting the U.S. in the nineteenth century, ranking as significant as slavery or the situation of Native Americans. Utah Territory met the requirements for statehood within a few years of initial settlement, yet the “polygamy question” kept them out by Congressional votes until 1896. Utah gave women the vote in 1870, but it was taken away from them by the federal Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1882. The federal government actively prosecuted polygamists during the 1880s, and the third Church President outlawed polygamy in 1890 in response to federal pressure and in order to preserve Church property and institutions from further attack. By the late 1880s, polygamists were in hiding or were being sent to jail (Poll 1978).

6. An important difference between Blunt's account and ours is that nineteenth-century Mormon women left more texts for scholars to study than did nineteenth-century West African women. Mormon women's writings were easily and often ignored by their observers, however, and alternatively, much of the "resistance literature" (e.g., Kaplan and Pease 1993; Ashcroft et al. 1995) suggests that there are methods for excavating indigenous women's perspectives from colonial texts.

7. In reality, Mormons exercised squatters rights in Utah Territory under their own system of land allocation. These claims were subsequently approved after 1869 when the first General Land Office opened (Wahlquist 1977).

8. Anti-Mormon writers like Faithful rarely attributed their stories to named individuals. Interviewees' anonymity and the fine line between anti-Mormon "artistic license" and outright fiction calls Faithful's account into question; nevertheless, she exemplifies here a common type of (anti-Mormon) representation of Mormon women.

9. Longworth comes closest here to resembling the stereotypical Victorian "lady traveler" (Russell 1986; Birkett 1989), not least in her aristocratic background, heroic tales of mountain-climbing in Yosemite alone (1874:2:84–90), and her status as a professional writer traveling with a male secretary. Most of the other travelers were not primarily known for their travel writings, and came to the U.S. within a range of personal-professional contexts, such as (unmarried) Emily Faithful, who traveled primarily as a suffrage reformer. Notably, Lady Hardy traveled with a
woman companion who was quite likely her
daughter (Morin 1998a), and Catherine Bates,
referring to herself as an “unfortunate spinster,”
also traveled with another woman whose acquain-
tance she had only recently made (Bates 1887
[2]:263; [1]:205). Pfeiffer and Bridges traveled
with their husbands.
10. Not all the travelers met personally with leading
Mormons. Bates reported, for instance, that she
was “determined to speak with someone at the
Beehive” (home of some of Young’s wives), but she
was not invited in (1887: 231).
11. Federal marshals drove polygamists into hiding
to escape court trials, and plural wives into
hiding to avoid providing evidence of a polyga-
mous marriage.

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