

# Inviting Infamy, Reframing Freedom: Nineteenth-Century Anti-Polygamy Lecturer, Ann Eliza Young, and the Dynamics of Incremental Persuasion

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**Abstract:** *This essay reintroduces the nineteenth-century anti-polygamy lecturer, Ann Eliza Young; examines the rhetorical strategies the estranged nineteenth wife of Brigham Young employed to achieve her aims; and argues that she emerges for historians and theorists of rhetoric as an unexpectedly heuristic figure, affording insights into the dynamics of incremental persuasion and the networked nature of rhetorical agency. After familiarizing readers with her career and the criticisms she faced, I analyze how, by drawing on the resources offered by anti-Mormon rhetoric and fiction and by developing embodied and ethical arguments that challenged audiences to form identifications expanding their conceptions of who could be a speaker, Young was able to reframe the Mormon question so that her listeners and readers might engage more productively with what was ultimately at stake in cultural conversations about the problem of polygamy.*

**Keywords:** *nineteenth-century, women, rhetoric, agency, history*

While American democracy has always produced powerful public speakers, lecturing did not fully come into its own as a profession until the 1870s saw the establishment of lyceum bureaus, booking agencies for speakers capable of attracting paying audiences throughout the country. The most formidable among these was Boston's Redpath Lyceum Bureau, which listed as part of its annual Star Lecture Course many of the country's best-known lecturers on reform topics, including Wendell Phillips, Henry Ward Beecher, Susan B. Anthony, and Mary Livermore. Due to their ability to guarantee box-office receipts, popular lyceum lecturers were referred to as "paying cards" (Scott 27-28). During its early years, Redpath's most in-demand "paying card" was Anna E. Dickinson, whose oratorical abilities reportedly earned her over \$20,000 per year in the early 1870s (Gallman; Ray, *The Lyceum* 40). By mid-decade, however, Dickinson's mantle as Redpath's top-drawing female orator had been assumed by a less likely figure: Ann Eliza Young, the estranged nineteenth wife of the Mormon prophet, Brigham Young (Pond). During a career that lasted nine years and carried her from New York to San Francisco, the controversial

anti-polygamy speaker was a staple on Redpath's Star Lecture Course, drawing crowds in the thousands and, by some accounts, giving "the emerging field of professional lecturing . . . its first sensational box-office star, at last" (Wallace 15-16).

Although historians of rhetoric have recovered a wider and wider range of overlooked nineteenth-century female speakers and writers, few have taken note of Young. To some extent, this may be attributable to the field having lately reoriented toward researching "the rhetorical practices of ordinary women" (Royster and Kirsch 58). Yet, as Kathryn Derounian-Stodola has recently suggested, the lack of attention may also be the result of Young's infamy having "hitherto overshadowed her contributions" (151). This hypothesis seems credible when one looks at how Young is depicted by those few biographers and scholars who have written about her. Among Young's biographers, Helen Woodward, for instance, emphasizes Young's taking advantage of her second husband, Moses Denning, a "rich old logger with one arm" from Manistee, Michigan (330). Autumn Stephens follows Woodward's lead in lampooning Young as a gold digger, and Frances Laurence depicts Young "as someone notorious and something of a freak" (191). Likewise, despite his wanting to present Young as an unlikely feminist hero, Irving Wallace is forced to concede that Young was "driven by the twin demons of duty and money" (278). Scholars have also emphasized Young's infamy. Angela Ray suggests that Young's "moral" talks were only popular because they were "titillating" and that her success was symptomatic of the emergence of the 1870s-era "controversial lecturer" and the commercialization of the formerly idealistic lyceum culture (43). And Ray's assessment of Young aligns with the judgments of other scholars who treat Young as a suspect figure in the course of broader discussions of nineteenth-century nativist literature (Davis 221-22), conversion narratives (Holte 216-21), and women's mission organizations (Pascoe 40).

What if, however, Young's infamy might be regarded as one of the main reasons she merits being looked at more closely? Feminist historical scholarship across the disciplines has been moving away from its traditional focus on unimpeachable figures in direct conflict with hegemonic social structures. Historians of rhetoric such as Carol Mattingly and Malea Powell have helped lead the way in examining how resistance is just as often accomplished by ambivalently situated speakers and writers functioning in discursive contexts that may seem to be at cross purposes with feminist objectives. I aim in this essay to contribute to the conversations initiated by these and other scholars whose work on nineteenth-century women speakers has been so instrumental in transforming our understandings of rhetorical agency, helping us appreciate how rhetoric functions within complex dynamics to bring about social change, and moving the field toward a more productive comprehension of "the history

of nineteenth-century rhetoric as a multilayered text" (Johnson 47). Toward that end, this article draws on archival research to familiarize readers with Ann Eliza Young's accomplishments and rhetorical abilities and to work toward a fuller understanding of how such an infamous figure was able to not only achieve her immediate aims as an anti-polygamy activist but also contribute to the broader women's rights movement.

I begin by looking more closely at Young's career, at the criticisms lodged against her, and at the case that could be made against her meriting careful study. Then, I turn to consider how these same criticisms, when viewed from a different angle, might be seen as pointing us toward elements of a rhetorical practice that is noteworthy for its attentiveness to the challenges presented by her identity as a female speaker, escaped Mormon wife, and divorcee, as well as for its suitability to the sort of incremental persuasion necessitated by the intransigent audiences she typically addressed and by the multiple aims she pursued. Finally, I will consider some of the broader implications of what we might gain from studying Ann Eliza Young, suggesting that in offering such an infamous, complexly situated, and challenging example to consider, Young may be seen to emerge as an unexpectedly heuristic figure for historians and theorists of rhetoric, affording a unique opportunity to continue working toward a "richer understanding" of the "networked" and "dynamic" nature of rhetorical agency (Geisler 15, McIntyre 26-27, Royster and Kirsch 132).

## Engaged as a "Sensation"

At first glance, it would seem obvious that Young should be accorded more attention as a significant figure in the history of nineteenth-century rhetoric. According to a January 29, 1875 article in the *Boston Daily Globe*, Young's career "began in an obscure town in the far West, on the sixth of December 1873," and by "the first of January, 1875, she had lectured two hundred and twenty-three times" throughout the United States. As to the source of her popularity, the *Globe* noted that although she generally may have been "engaged for the first time as a 'sensation,'" once she had spoken, she was inevitably "recalled on her own merits as a lecturer" (Circular 21). By 1874, her first full year as a professional speaker, Young was commanding \$1,000 per performance and often drew crowds in the thousands for multiple-night engagements in cities from Boston, where she addressed 2,000 in her first lecture, to San Francisco, where according to the *Chronicle*, there were "3,000 souls anxiously surging before the door struggling to get within" (Laurence 187; Circular 27). In addition to lecturing, Young authored a 604-page autobiography and exposé of Mormonism, *Wife No. 19, or the Story of a Life in Bondage*, which, when published in 1876, sold 30,000 copies in four months. A review in the Northern Kentucky/Cincinnati-area *Christian Standard* predicted that

“the authoress will, in history, hold her place with reference to Mormonism and its overthrow, as Mrs. Stowe and ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ to American slavery” (“Mormon Literature”).

Young was born Ann Eliza Webb to Mormon parents, Chauncey and Eliza Webb, in Nauvoo, Illinois, September 13, 1844. Only three months earlier, their religion’s founder, Joseph Smith, had been assassinated by an angry mob. Two months prior to his death, however, Smith had announced his most controversial revelation, the doctrine of “celestial marriage,” referred to informally by Mormons as “plural marriage” and by “Gentiles,” or non-Mormons, as polygamy. A few months after Smith’s death, Ann Eliza’s mother’s close friend, Brigham Young, was elected President of the Church. Harassment of the Mormons in Nauvoo continued throughout 1845, and in 1846, Brigham Young began overseeing the migration westward to Salt Lake City (Bushman and Bushman 30-36; Young *Wife No. 19*).

In the year before the family crossed the Great Plains, Chauncey Webb married his first plural wife, Elizabeth Taft. He would take three more before Ann Eliza reached adulthood. Young’s picture in *Wife No. 19* of her childhood alternates bucolic recollections of growing up in Deseret, as the newly-arrived Mormons termed Utah, with lamentations of her mother’s misery under polygamy. Her depiction of her teenage years offers a behind-the-scenes look at her baptism and the accompanying secret Endowment House rituals. As she moves on, Young discusses her unhappy first marriage to and divorce from the abusive James Dee, and her ensuing, unexpected courtship by and forced marriage to the septuagenarian, Brigham Young. The autobiography culminates with its narrator’s dawning awareness, due to alleged mistreatment by the Prophet, that the plural marriage system is an evil on the scale of Southern chattel slavery. Perceiving a vocation to combat this “twin relic of barbarism,” as polygamy had been referred to in the 1856 Republican platform and thereafter regularly in the press, Young filed for divorce from Brigham Young and took up residence in the Gentile-owned Walker House hotel (*Circular 21*; Gordon, “The Mormon Question” 22).

News of Ann Eliza’s suit to divorce Brigham soon became a sensation throughout the country, with the proceedings reported faithfully in many papers over the next two years as the court battles dragged on. As the reports continued, their focus began to shift from the Prophet to his rebellious young wife, as attested to by the following chronological list of *New York Times* article titles: “Brigham Young’s Divorce Suit” (28 Aug. 1873); “Brigham Young” (27 Aug. 1874); “Brigham Young” (2 Sept. 1874); “Ann Eliza Young’s Divorce Suit” (27 Feb. 1875); “Ann Eliza’s Suit” (7 Mar. 1875); “Ann Eliza Young’s Divorce Suit” (21 Jul. 1875); “Ann Eliza Young’s Alimony” (1 Aug. 1875); and “A Menial Instead of a Wife: The Divorce Suit of Ann Eliza Young - The Decision in the Case” (28 Aug.

1877). Ann Eliza's emergence as a notorious figure during the legal wrangling is also apparent in the treatment she received from *Saturday Evening Post* humorist, Max Adeler, who joked, "If Ann Eliza Young ever succeeds in obtaining a divorce from Brigham, she [should] immediately mail to us the silver-plated butter knife which we sent her when she married him. . . . If he now marries again, as he probably will when Ann Eliza secedes, another butter knife will be wanted, and we would rather give him an old one than to incur any further expenditure" (Adeler 4). Adeler and others recognized early on that Ann Eliza could be useful for generating laughs. Few, however, likely foresaw her emergence from the gossip columns to become a formidable public speaker. One who did was James Burton Pond, a *Salt Lake Tribune* reporter who volunteered to become Young's agent after seeing her first informal talk in the lobby of the Walker House. Thanks to the financial success and valuable connections he reaped from managing Young, Pond later went on to become owner of the Boston Redpath Lyceum.

In his memoir, *Eccentricities of Genius* (1900), Pond reflects on Young's rapid ascent as a speaker and activist. He claims the 1874 passage of the Poland Act, which amended the jury selection process in the Utah Territory and was a major step toward ending polygamy, was attributable to Young's impromptu lectures to a standing-room-only audience of congressmen in House Speaker, James G. Blaine's, office, as well as to the effects of her sold-out speeches in Washington during the opening months of her activity as a speaker (Pyle 40; Pond xx). Young went on to lecture on average between 160 and 180 nights a year throughout her approximate nine-year career, which also saw major political victories for her cause with the Supreme Court's 1879 decision to uphold the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act and the 1882 passage of the Edmunds Anti-Polygamy Act (Laurence 185, 187; Bushman and Bushman 106). Years after his early protégé had retired, Pond continued to testify to her exceptional skill, comparing her favorably to Stanton, Anthony, and other women lecturers ("Major Pond's" 5) and consistently defending her integrity to any who might be skeptical of her motives: "I will say now that in all my experience I have never found so eloquent, so interesting, so earnest a talker. . . . She had a cause. She was in dead earnest. She could sway audiences with her eloquence" (Pond xi). Nevertheless, it should be noted that most of Young's contemporaries took a somewhat dimmer view of her talents and accomplishments.

That Young was regarded by many more as a freak than as a legitimate reformer is reflected by her having received, immediately after the news of her first informal lecture was transmitted across the country via AP cable, a telegram from P.T. Barnum offering her \$100,000 if she would agree to be exhibited as a curiosity under his management (Pond ix). Demonstrating awareness of her status as a curiosity, Young typically opened her most popular lecture,

"My Life in Bondage," by proclaiming, "The nineteenth wife of a man living in the nineteenth century, in a heathen country, would perhaps be considered a curiosity. But in civilized Christian America, where the abomination of polygamy is permitted by the Government, she is, of course, no curiosity" (Laurence 184). Yet, Young also undermined such efforts to counteract negative preconceptions by making questionable decisions. For instance, before she had even managed to lecture her way to the east coast, an article appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* questioning her credibility. In an ill-conceived public relations move intended to respond to the allegations, Young set up and then abruptly cancelled an interview with notorious columnist and free-love advocate, Victoria Woodhull, who, after being snubbed, approvingly broadcast that Young was carrying on an affair as she flitted unchaperoned across the country (Wallace 298; Laurence 185). While Young and Pond both always strenuously denied the persistent allegations of impropriety, when one reads Pond's reminiscences, it is hard to miss the degree to which his recollections of his first star lecturer's "eccentricities" always remained suspiciously adulatory and apt to emphasize her appreciable physical attributes ("Major").

Questions and insinuations continued to dog Young throughout her career and even after it ended. Some common accusations included claims that Young was the creation of a group of anti-Mormon provocateurs connected with the Walker House hotel and the *Salt Lake Tribune*, that her motives were entirely pecuniary, that elements of her autobiography were plagiarized from Fanny Stenhouse's *Exposé of Polygamy in Utah* (1872), and that her speeches and autobiography were ghostwritten by the anti-Mormon author, John H. Beadle (Nibley 427-569; Wallace 235). The cumulative effect of these criticisms was that newspapers and magazines came to enjoy poking fun at Young, whom they regarded as cutting a ridiculous figure, continually railing about the evils of polygamy. This attitude is apparent in the ironic tone of reporting on Young's later activities, as when the December 26, 1877 edition of the *Louisville Courier Journal* informs readers that "Ann Eliza Young is going through Massachusetts with her 'Horrors of Mormonism,' one of whom she is which" ("*Puck's Exchanges*" 12) or the *Daily Democrat* of Albuquerque writes of her 1883 re-marriage, "It affords us unusual pleasure to announce the recent marriage of Ann Eliza (Brigham Young's 19th flame) to an Ohio man. Not only does it relieve the country of a female lecturer, but at the same time a long suffering nation gets even with the irrepressible Ohio man" (Laurence 191). By the late 1880s, in the wake of a third divorce during which Denning publicly referred to Young as a "bitch" and a "whore," Young's reputation as a speaker had been almost completely effaced, and her image as an minor celebrity and serial divorcee had been cemented, as further evidenced by the indifference

that greeted her attempts in 1908 to solicit subscriptions for an updated version of her autobiography (Wallace 421).

Such is the case that was and might be made against Young. Much of what has been described, such as the tendency to dismiss her as a curiosity, the insinuations about her involvement with Major Pond, and the ridicule in the press, is typical of the treatment received by nineteenth-century female speakers (O'Connor 32-40; Johnson 52-64). Yet, some of the charges are more difficult to dispense with. It is indisputable that Young's career was facilitated by the material support of men like Pond, Judge McKean, and the Reverend C.P. Lyford (Young, *Wife No. 19* 598). Additionally, as Young lacked any means of supporting herself and her children immediately after her divorce from Brigham Young, she undoubtedly commenced her lecturing career partly for the money. These criticisms, however, impose unreasonable expectations for self-sufficiency and disinterestedness on female speakers. Such criticisms would obviously seem ridiculous if applied consistently to males.

All that remain, then, are the accusations that her speeches and autobiography were ghostwritten and that her persona was fabricated based on her 1872 reading of Stenhouse's *Exposé of Polygamy in Utah* (Nibley 489; Stenhouse and DeSimone 182-83). The first of these charges is relatively easy to address, as Young's handwritten 1878 letter to *Chicago Tribune* publisher S.L. Beidler, as well as her 1881 letters to Jenny Froiseth, publisher of the *Anti-Polygamy Standard*, offer clear evidence of her command of the voice that one encounters in her speeches and her autobiography. The second charge, however, is not so readily dismissed, as it is impossible to deny that Young's lectures and her autobiography appropriate material from Stenhouse's writings, which Young often told audiences had been among her main encouragements to leave Brigham Young's household (Wallace 235-36; Stenhouse and DeSimone 15-16). One instance of such borrowing is found in the closing chapter of *Wife No. 19*. There, Young makes a final, emotional appeal to women to join her crusade:

And you, happier women . . . can you not help me? The cry of my suffering and sorrowing sisters . . . asks you, as I ask you now, "Can you do nothing for us?" Women's pens, and women's voices pleaded earnestly and pathetically for the abolition of slavery. Thousands of women, some of them your country-women, and your social and intellectual equals, are held in a more revolting slavery today. (603)

This seemingly heartfelt peroration lifts ideas and language directly from the preface Harriet Beecher Stowe had contributed to Stenhouse's 1874 book, *Tell It All*. Stowe's preface features very similar phrasing and diction, describing polygamy as a "cruel slavery whose chains have cut into the very hearts of

thousands of our sisters” and calling for “every happy wife and mother” to help relieve the “sorrows . . . of thousands, who, suffering . . . cannot or dare not speak for themselves” (Stenhouse and DeSimone vi). Meanwhile, other components of Young’s autobiography and her lectures might also be traced to Stenhouse’s publications, including chapters in *Wife No. 19* on the so-called “Handcart Scheme” (200-27) and the “Mountain Meadows’ Massacre” (228-61) that bear a remarkable similarity to the chapters on those same events that Stenhouse had recently included in *Tell It All* (191-220, 324-39).

While Young’s critics have tended to emphasize her borrowings from Stenhouse, it might also be argued that Young appropriated key elements from the speeches of another of her predecessors. Anna Dickinson might be seen as having done much to blaze the trail that Young would travel as an anti-polygamy orator. Already a popular draw on the lyceum circuit, Dickinson had been inspired by an 1869 trip to Salt Lake City to write what would become one of her most famous speeches, “Whited Sepulchres” (Ray, *The Lyceum* 151). Delivered throughout the country during the 1869-70 lecturing season, Dickinson’s speech contrasted the open beauty of Utah with the attenuated lives Mormon women were forced to live and argued that the oppression of women under polygamy was the “logical outcome of patriarchal principles” (Gallman 70; Ray 154). While it is unclear whether Young was familiar with Dickinson, it is striking the extent to which Young’s self-presentation mirrors Dickinson’s positioning of herself and her motives in “Whited Sepulchres.”

One way Young mimics Dickinson is in depicting herself as “an exemplar, an individual capable of . . . giving voice to the unexpressed needs and desires of others” (Ray 155). For example, Dickinson says, “I speak for the hearts of tenderer and sweeter women, when I speak these words and I tell you what is in their souls.” Similarly, toward the end of *Wife No. 19*, Young says, “My life is but the life of one; while thousands are suffering, as I suffered, and are powerless even to plead for themselves, so I plead for them” (601). Additionally, Young echoes Dickinson’s presentation of herself as “transforming despair into a call to heroic action” (Ray 165). In “Whited Sepulchres,” Dickinson portrays herself as almost “longing for death” as she contemplates Salt Lake City, with its injustices, standing in stark contrast to its beautiful surroundings, but as being able to carry on by “realizing that her mission is to ‘live to work.’” Likewise, Young presents herself as despairing due to the intractability of the polygamy issue, but able to persevere due to her sense of vocation: “If one voice, or one pen can exert any influence, the pen will never be laid aside, the voice never be silenced. I have given myself to this work. . . . It is my life mission” (604). While Young’s metonymic positioning of herself as a “pen” and a “voice” for the voiceless may be powerful, it feels somewhat less than authentic given how strongly it recalls the stance that Dickinson had pioneered in “Whited Sepulchres.”

While Young's successes would seem to indicate she merits more attention from historians of rhetoric, she has remained more infamous than famous, in part because of unfair criticisms but also because of legitimate questions about her authenticity. Significant elements of Young's subject matter, style, and persona were appropriated from Stenhouse's writings and Dickinson's speeches. Thus, it would seem that if a case remains to be made for Young's significance, it will have to be made on grounds other than those previously offered by Major Pond: "She had a cause. She was in dead earnest. She could sway audiences with her eloquence." If Young could sway audiences, it was not because she had an unequivocally just cause or because she was authentic. An infamous woman appropriating the themes, words, and postures of her predecessors to advocate for women in a problematically nativist idiom, Young remains an irreducibly ambivalent figure. Yet, if one looks at Young's complex relationship with Stenhouse and Dickinson from a slightly different angle, it is possible to move beyond the traditional and limited conceptions of rhetorical agency implied by arguments like Pond's and work toward a fuller appreciation of how Young's addressed the particular challenges she faced and achieved her multiple aims.

## Returned on Her Merits

Understanding Young's complex relationship with her predecessors requires looking more closely at what she borrows. From Stenhouse, Young takes elements of Stowe's "Preface" to *Tell It All*, as well as chapters on the hand-cart scheme and the Mountain Meadows Massacre that Stenhouse had herself repurposed from sensationalistic accounts in such virulently anti-Mormon books as Benjamin Ferris's *Utah and the Mormons* (1854) and John Beadle's *Life in Utah* (1870). And from Dickinson, Young appropriates a stance that might also be seen as having been derived from prior anti-Mormon publications, as becomes apparent when one considers the following excerpt from Metta Victor's *Mormon Wives: A Narrative of Facts Stranger Than Fiction* (1856), in which an escaped wife addresses how she has transformed her despair into a sense of vocation to speak on behalf of voiceless women: "Always, always, my voice shall rise in defense of one love constant through life, and faithful in death – one home – one father and mother for the children – one joy on earth – one hope in heaven" (316). In this and similar passages from other anti-Mormon novels published by female authors in the 1850s, such as Alfreda Eva Bell's *Boadicea, the Mormon Wife* (1855), Orvilla Belisle's *The Prophets, or Mormonism Unveiled* (1855), and Maria Ward's *Female Life Among the Mormons* (1855), we not only see Dickinson's stance foreshadowed, but also Young's very identity as an escaped-wife-turned-speaker prefigured. When Young appears on the lecture circuit, it is, for many in her audience, as if Bell's *Boadicea*—another of

the novels' heroines who escapes across the great plains to tell her story—has suddenly sprung to life.

What is to be made of the fact that so much of what Young tends to borrow from her predecessors is itself derived from previous anti-Mormon publications? Looking at Young's appropriations from one perspective, one might argue they indicate why she should not be viewed as a significant rhetorical figure: because she was not agentive, but was rather epiphenomenal, an individual who just happened into a role imagined for her by hack authors writing in the grip of some of the nation's darkest nativist fantasies. Viewed from another perspective, however, one might argue it is precisely how Young negotiates her rhetorical agency in light of her positioning relative to these anti-Mormon novels, and to other discursive formations, that makes her a figure worth reconsidering. Making this case requires, first of all, an understanding of where these novels came from, what they shared in common, and what cultural work they performed in their particular historical context.

Hundreds of anti-Mormon novels, quasi-historical and pseudo-ethnographic studies, exposés, and alleged autobiographies were published in the U.S. between 1850 and 1890 (Arrington and Haupt; Foster; Nelson). The first recognizably anti-Mormon publication, *The History of the Saints; or, An Expose of Joseph Smith and Mormonism*, by disaffected former Mormon leader John Bennett, appeared in the early 1840s. Yet, the initial wave of anti-Mormon publications by "Gentiles" did not materialize until the mid-1850s. Prominent among this wave of publications, which responded to intense cultural anxiety in the wake of the LDS Church's 1852 public affirmation of the doctrine of plural marriage, were the four novels by Belisle, Bell, Victor, and Ward (Bushman and Bushman). These novels drew on the conventions of a wide range of genres—including the gothic; anti-Catholic, nativist novels and exposés; slave, conversion, and captivity narratives; and temperance and abolitionist writings—to "together mobiliz[e] a sentimental campaign that opposed the practice of Mormon polygamy" (Burgett 76). In addition to articulating connections with other sentimental genres that were commanding wide readerships in the wake of the success of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, these novels also performed important cultural work in helping to formulate what would come to be known as the "Mormon question," an assemblage of public conversations about polygamy, the limits of religious freedom, and related issues that was as much a matter of American Protestant culture defining its own values as it was about the Latter Day Saints (Arrington and Haupt; Burgett; Cannon; Davis; Gordon, "The Mormon Question"; Pierson). Because these novels so effectively repurposed the conventions of reformist sentimental fiction and prompted readers to engage with questions with major implications for U.S. Protestant self-definition, they offered anti-polygamy writers and lecturers considerable

resources for framing appeals in terms that audiences would recognize and credit.

A main way Young takes advantage of these resources is by establishing her *ethos* using strategies that will resonate with audiences whose preconceptions have been shaped by anti-Mormon fiction. The first of these strategies, which had frequently been used by the heroines of anti-Mormon novels to establish credibility, is to stress that she possesses no rhetorical training. In a personal letter dated April 14, 1881, Young thanks Jenny Froiseth, the editor of the *Anti-Polygamy Standard*, for complementing her speaking ability, but tells her, "I have never had any training whatever, in any way, for public speaking." Young similarly says, as she begins her lecture, "My Life in Bondage," "I cannot lay any claim to the grace of rhetoric or the art of elocution. Nevertheless, I have something to say, and . . . [while] I may not move your feelings . . . I do desire your attention, and if possible, to aid in determining your convictions" (Wallace 287). While these assertions, peppered throughout her discourse, are undoubtedly somewhat true, one might note that Young's very disclaimer seems to suggest some awareness of rhetorical theory, as it invokes Hugh Blair's currently influential conception of conviction's being inadequate to effect persuasion without one's also moving the feelings (Bizzell and Herzberg 975; O'Connor 111-16). In any case, as she stresses that she possesses no rhetorical training, Young is following the lead of fictional heroines like Bell's Boadicea, who similarly apologizes for her lack of skill, saying that all she can do is "relate events as they happen" and contribute her "'little all' towards arresting further horrors" (93, 69).

An additional strategy Young uses to develop and maintain her *ethos* is to profess a scrupulous reluctance to reveal all the sordid details of her story that might be mentioned. Toward the end of one of her lectures, for example, Young says, "I have but imperfectly told the story of polygamy; much that might be said, under some circumstances, cannot be told in a promiscuous assembly" (Wallace 291). In referencing her inability to tell her entire story, Young once again appropriates a strategy used by characters like the narrator of Orvilla Belisle's *The Prophets*, who begins her tale by claiming that because of a "reluctance to inflict a deeper grief" upon the surviving family of Joseph Smith, much that might have been included has had to "be withheld" (5-6). Whether used in a lecture or a novel, such affectations of restraint work both to establish credibility, by insinuating there is more evidence than one has time to present, and to titillate, by inviting the audience to fantasize about the salacious details that had to be omitted. Using this strategy, Young is able to simultaneously satisfy and circumvent her audience's expectation that she "speak to the facts."

As can be seen, there is good reason to be skeptical of Young's assertion that she "cannot lay claim to the grace of rhetoric." Her speeches and autobiography demonstrate a strong understanding of how to take advantage of the context established by prior anti-Mormon writers and speakers to craft ethical appeals. One might also go on to examine how she draws on these resources to craft pathetic appeals. Yet, it is possible to make more direct progress toward understanding her significance by moving on to consider how, by developing arguments that might be characterized as embodied and ethical, Young was able to incrementally move her skeptical audiences toward the formation of identifications that would have implications ranging far beyond her hearers' being convinced that polygamy should be outlawed.

## **An Accidental Feminist in an Intentional Man's World?**

One of the most interesting things about Young is that she rarely, if ever, offers what one would most expect from an anti-polygamy speaker—logical arguments in favor of a political solution to the polygamy issue. Rather, Young mainly focuses on sharing her story and her insider's perspective. When she does develop arguments, she addresses what seem, at first, to be tangential questions: Are Mormon women responsible for their own plight? Do they have the agency to escape? In this section, I begin by looking at why Young chooses to focus on these seemingly tangential questions. Then, I turn to how she answers them, analyzing how her rhetorical practice works incrementally by means of embodied ethical arguments to invite identifications and eventually accomplish her multiple aims. Finally, I conclude by considering what insights historians and theorists of rhetoric might gain from looking closely at Young.

Why does Young address these questions rather than argue for a political answer to the problem of polygamy? One reason is because she does not believe Congress is ready to move on the matter. Offering her assessment of the prospects for legislative action, Young says she expects "legislators, in doubt or in dread, [will continue] to give polygamy the benefit of their doubts or their fears . . . for a season" (Wallace 292). Also, she writes that, having witnessed the government's inability to enforce the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act of 1862, she is convinced "legislation will do no good, unless the laws can be enforced once they are made" (Young, *Wife No. 19* 604). Given these views, it makes sense that Young would not present logical arguments for why new laws should be passed. Another reason Young focuses on what initially appear to be ancillary questions is because she is presenting her arguments primarily via lectures to paying audiences on the national lyceum circuit. As Ray has explained, audiences did not come to lyceum lectures to have their minds changed. Rather,

they came to participate in gatherings that functioned “through repeated performative enactment” to constitute “group identity” (“What Hath She Wrought” 185). According to Ray, in this context, persuasion could only be effected indirectly via the “slow alteration of cultural definitions and expectations within a framework of assumed cohesion.” Adapting to these constraints, some speakers, such as Frederick Douglass and Anna Dickinson, developed what might be considered an ethical modality of argument that “presented the speakers themselves as texts available for public reading” (197). Via the ambivalent “bodily enactment” of identities that both “validated aspects of dominant cultural mores” and “move[d] beyond accepted conventions,” such speakers, Ray argues, contributed to the gradual realization of social change by “demonstrat[ing] that the category of public lecturer was more fluid than previously thought” (*The Lyceum* 175, 178). Additionally, speakers sought, with these embodied, ethical arguments, to “persuade incrementally,” shaping their listeners’ opinions on broader controversies “via careful, subtle movements away from what the lecturer imagined was the viewpoint of many audience members” (“What Hath She Wrought” 202). Given the constraints operative in lyceum lectures, it makes sense that Young would not opt to develop logical arguments aimed at securing immediate political change but might instead argue in the more oblique, embodied, and ethical mode that Ray ascribes to Dickinson and Douglass.

While this might account for why Young does not argue in the way one might expect, why does she focus on whether Mormon women are culpable for their own oppression and whether they possess sufficient agency to break free? She focuses on these seemingly peripheral issues because doing so allows her develop the sort of arguments that Ray has suggested were necessary if a lyceum lecturer aimed to do more than just entertain. Additionally, this focus allows Young to pursue both the more immediate and the broader aims that Ray mentions, not only enlarging existing conceptions of who can be a public speaker but also moving her audiences incrementally toward agreeing with her on underlying issues bearing on how the Mormon question should be framed and, eventually, answered.

Let’s look first at how Young uses this indirect, embodied, and ethical mode of argument to broaden her audience’s sense of who can be a public lecturer. Young begins by arguing that the answer to both of the questions she raises is “no.” Her Mormon sisters should not be blamed for their predicament because “they are just as pure and true as any woman in the world” (Wallace 289). Further, she insists that her listeners must not imagine “the women are free to accept this relation or reject it—to live in it or leave it,” when, in fact, “They are not free. Their souls are fettered” (292). Young’s apparent purpose in defending her Mormon sisters’ virtue and sincerity and in stressing their lack

of agency is to preemptively rebut some of the most common excuses for not taking action against polygamy. Yet, as she makes these particular arguments, Young might also be seen as presenting herself as an ambivalent text available for public reading. Her very presence before the audience as an intelligent and articulate escaped polygamous wife would raise questions about such wives' lack of agency, while her willingness to take up the still-scandalous profession of female orator would cast doubt on their virtuousness. The discrepancy between Young's assertions about Mormon women and her "bodily enactment" presents her audience with a choice: Should they dismiss her as unreliable, recognizing that doing so would present a victory to the defenders of polygamy? Or, should they overlook the cognitive dissonance they are experiencing and identify with Young, whose message otherwise so powerfully aligns with "conventions" and "dominant cultural mores" familiar from anti-Mormon and other reformist discourses, although doing so means implicitly affirming that such an infamous individual should be allowed to occupy the category of lecturer?

To ensure everyone in her audience is on the hook, Young is careful to point out that, while her sufferings under polygamy were sufficient to facilitate some initial awareness of her being oppressed, her presence before them as a speaker was dependent on the intervention of individuals who provided her with "encouragement" (289, 292). Emphasizing the necessity of others' encouragement, Young invites audience members to consider whether, in listening to her at present, they might number themselves among those providing such support. And Young sets the hook even more firmly soon thereafter by relating how, after taking the initial steps toward her new vocation, she was beset by questions: "How would I be received into society? Would ladies, especially, recognize one who had been a polygamous wife?" Inviting her audience to imagine themselves overhearing her internal struggle with such questions, Young even more dramatically turns her speech into an occasion in which the audience must decide whether, in order to fight the Mormon menace, it might be necessary to accept the legitimacy of an ambivalent speaker like her. Young's apparently digressive arguments, as it turns out, function, like the ethical arguments of Douglass and Dickinson, as an important component of a strategy aimed at engendering the formation of identifications that would move her audience to shift their thinking about who can be a speaker.

Yet, as previously indicated, Young's embodied and ethical arguments might be seen as purposing and accomplishing additional goals beyond just expanding her audience's sense of who should be afforded access to the platform. Her strategy of presenting herself as a text available for evaluation and inviting identifications also works toward achieving the sort of broader, more incremental persuasive aims that Ray mentions. For Young, these broader

aims involve reframing her audience's understanding of the Mormon question so that, when the country is finally ready to address the matter, it may do so in a manner attentive to what is really at issue—namely, questions about women's roles and opportunities and about the nature of freedom. As we will see, Young accomplishes this reframing by articulating identifications of her anti-polygamy rhetoric with two key reformist discursive formations beyond the realm of anti-Mormon discourse: the rhetoric and fiction of temperance reform and of anti-Catholic nativism.

According to Krista Ratcliffe, an identification functions as “a place of perpetual reframing that affects who, how, and what can be thought, written, spoken, and imagined” (qtd. in Balliff 1). By speaking and writing in ways that subtly identify her anti-polygamy rhetoric with temperance and anti-Catholic discourses, Young expands what might be thought about the Mormon question, opening up possibilities for imagining how it, like these issues, might be fundamentally connected with the woman question. That Young was highly attuned to the possibilities offered by articulating connections between anti-polygamy and temperance discourses is illustrated by an incident that occurred in 1877. Thanks to the efforts of some prominent suffrage activists who supported the Mormons, due to Utah having granted women the vote, two polygamous wives, Emmaline Wells and Zina Williams, had been granted an audience with First Lady, Lucy Webb Hayes, to advocate for plural marriage. Upon learning of this, Young sprung into action and wrote to Mrs. Hayes. Taking advantage of the first lady's well-known interest in temperance, Young wrote, “You did not hesitate to be known as the uncompromising foe of those drinking habits which so widely desolate the homes of this country. But Polygamy desolates every home which it enters. Surely it will be neither improper or unwise for you to exert your influence against that vast and increasing crime” (Wallace 388). Here, Young not only identifies her cause with temperance reform, but also emphasizes the analogous negative impacts that polygamy and drink have on the domestic sphere, taking advantage of “the easy cultural conjunction between intemperance and injustices to women” to articulate productive connections between the Mormon question and “other issues of concern to women” (Mattingly 123-24).

Young does not explicitly connect polygamy with drink in her lectures or books, but the connection is nonetheless strongly implied by how readily the plot lines of Young's autobiography recall storylines familiar to readers of temperance fiction. As Mattingly points out, temperance novels from the 1850s and 1860s typically began with a wedding, but then would descend into chaos. The heroines would respond either by stoically facing their lots as wives of alcoholics or by striving to change their husbands until, failing, they would bury their husbands or die themselves (127). This is the shape of the story Young

tells of her mother's life, upended not by drink, but by the equally destructive force of polygamy. Likewise, the plot of Young's own story, with its not one but two divorces, finds its analogue in temperance fiction. A new generation of temperance novels published in the 1870s featured plots where strong-willed heroines would either assume complete control of the household or "make the radical choice to leave" (131-133). Such stories, which provided a space for discussing the potentially negative consequences of marriage and highlighted women's need for some means of recourse, control, or escape, helped make a figure like Young imaginable. At the same time, however, the existence of someone like Young presumably had ambivalent effects on the cultural work being accomplished by temperance fiction, as she embodied an extreme and troublesome instantiation of the sort of agency that the more recent novels had envisioned.

Young's identifications with conventions familiar from temperance and anti-Catholic rhetoric and fiction were effective in that they provided her a means of reframing the Mormon question so that it overlapped more productively with other ongoing cultural conversations about the limits of religious liberty and about the nature of freedom, consent, and license. Yet, these subtly articulated connections and echoes could be, at the same time, problematic, not only for the reason just noted, but also because of the extent to which temperance and anti-Catholic discourses, much like anti-Mormon rhetoric and fiction, remained invested in reinforcing conservative gender ideologies and propagating nativist paranoia (Hofstadter 20-35). The simultaneously powerful and problematic nature of these identifications, and the important role they played in helping Young effect the sort of incremental persuasion needed to achieve her broader aims, becomes most apparent, however, when we consider the striking ways in which Young cannily deployed what Susan Griffin has called the "narrative language" of anti-Catholic fiction and rhetoric (2).

Young's speeches and writings strongly recall the narrative language of anti-Catholic fiction when she makes use of the previously-discussed tropes that anti-Mormon novelists used to establish *ethos*, such as emphasis on the speaker's lack of training and the "strategic omission[s] of information" (Griffin 45-46). Young's also recalls the narrative language of anti-Catholic fiction when she offers "thick description" of strange cultural practices and rituals. And her autobiography, with its plates providing aerial views of Salt Lake City, likenesses of Mormon leaders, and artists' depictions of the Temple, evokes the use of similar graphical features in anti-Catholic novels, which incorporated exhibits, illustrations, and floor plans to testify to both the empirical reality of the evidence presented and the considerable money spent to finance the book's development and printing (45). By using these sorts of features, Young encourages her audience to intuit associations between her project and this

parallel nativist discursive domain in which authors and readers were likewise engaging with “cultural ideas and problems, including the roles of women, shifting definitions of masculinity, the status of marriage, education and citizenship” (2).

Young’s use of these evidentiary strategies may have additionally called to mind, for her audiences, the anti-Catholic genre of escaped nun’s tales, as well as the career of Maria Monk, whose autobiography, *Awful Disclosures* (1836), had employed many of the aforementioned strategies to describe her life in and escape from the Hotel Dieu Nunnery in Montreal. Monk, like Young, had undertaken a speaking tour, during which she was continually confronted by attempted debunkings and accusations that her autobiography had been ghostwritten. By 1838, Monk had been discredited, and she quickly thereafter disappeared from view, dying in prison in 1849. *Awful Disclosures*, however, went on to sell an estimated 300,000 copies prior to the Civil War, and it remained in print and widely read in Young’s day (Billington 295-96). Young’s speeches and autobiographies most clearly echo Monk, and the genre of escaped nun’s tales, in blurring the line between autobiography and fiction. According to Griffin, anti-Catholic fiction was able to emerge as an “integral and shaping part of cultural controversy” largely thanks to how Monk and her heirs were able to create “‘true’ accounts” that not only “marshaled and confirmed recognized patterns of information for a Protestant audience” (26, 34, 38) but also created an interactive rhetorical dynamic wherein “the renegade must be subjected to examination and interrogation” (30).

We are now able to draw some conclusions about how Young’s incremental, ethical and embodied persuasion works, what she accomplishes with her reframing of the Mormon question, and why she might be regarded as an especially heuristic figure for historians and theorists of rhetoric. As has been shown, much of the power of Young’s rhetorical practice is due to her framing her appeals based on “patterns of information” from not only anti-Mormon discourse but from temperance rhetoric and fiction and anti-Catholic fiction as well. This strategy renders her recognizable and makes her seem authentic. At the same time, however, some of the most crucial aspects of Young’s rhetorical effectiveness are attributable to her remaining an irredeemably suspect figure in the tradition of Monk. As Young speaks, she poses a problem for her listeners, who want to identify with her but must grapple with her infamy, the inconsistencies between her arguments and her bodily enactment of the identity she is defending, and all of her blatant appropriations from various discourses. Like the escaped nun, she paradoxically represents both “authenticity and unreliability” (Griffin 30). Also, as Griffin argues was the case with escaped nun’s tales, Young’s lectures and autobiography accomplish their cultural work in large part by offering up Young herself as an ambivalent text available for

public reading. She counts on this dynamic, which invites her listeners and readers to actively engage in assessing her status as evidence, to help accomplish her reframing of the Mormon question. This reframing works because, as they are invited to assess Young's status as evidence, members of her audience are also challenged to engage with crucial questions about the nature of freedom, consent, and license underlying the debates over polygamy and woman's rights.

Why was it so important that Young's speeches and writings engage her audience with these more fundamental questions underlying the polygamy controversy and work to subtly and incrementally shape their views on such matters? Grasping why these sorts of strategies were needed requires understanding a bit more both about what was being contested in the polygamy debate and how it had been contested to that point. Prior to and during the 1870s and 1880s, anti-polygamy activists' arguments had generally boiled down to a single assertion: "Mormons had fundamentally misunderstood the nature and import of freedom" (Gordon, "The Liberty" 822). Meanwhile, defenders of polygamy had contended that the constitution's protections of religious liberties guaranteed a woman's right to consent to enter a polygamous marriage. According to this understanding of the limits of religious liberty and the nature of freedom, advocates of polygamy were actually the ones protecting women's rights. Anti-polygamy activists, on the other hand, had rejoindered that a right to consent to polygamy was merely "the liberty of self degradation," that all polygamous marriages were therefore non-consensual, and that women were justified in gaining their freedom via divorce or escape (817). The anti-polygamy activists' ability to make this argument had been complicated, however, by their audiences' prejudices against divorce. These prejudices led most to hold the view that, while one might consent to marry, consent crossed the line and became license when one wanted to do something conventionally regarded as unethical, like divorce (840). Additionally, Young's audience's thinking about freedom, consent, and license had been shaped by the abolition debate and the Civil War. Slave owners and the seceding states were both understood as having crossed the line between consent and license in insisting on their rights to own others and to leave the union. Obviously, the analogy with the slave owner was highly useful to anti-polygamy speakers, but the analogy with the seceding states was problematic, as their audiences were likely to conceptualize wives attempting to leave a marriage as breaking a union all had entered consensually. Most speakers attempted to cut this Gordian knot by arguing that the Mormons needed to be compelled, by law or by force, to abandon their erroneous conception of freedom. Young, however, differs in that she attempts to loosen the knot by reorienting the debate's underlying terms,

influencing how her audience thinks about freedom, and particularly how they understand the dynamic of consent and license as it relates to divorce.

One can see how she manages this by looking at another of Young's several dedications at the outset of *Wife No. 19*, this one "To the Mormon Wives of Utah." In this passage, Young attempts to convince reluctant Mormon women to overcome their fear and join the Protestant Christian community:

Hence, you shrink from those whom God will soon lead to your deliverance, from those to whom I daily present your claims to a hearing and liberation, and who listen with responsive and sympathetic hearts. But He will not long permit you to be so wickedly deceived; nor will the People permit you to be so cruelly enslaved. Hope and pray! Come out of the house of bondage! Kind hearts beat for you! Open hands will welcome you!

Here, Young speaks directly to Mormon wives, encouraging them to escape or divorce and to trust they will not be ostracized but welcomed. Yet, she also implicitly hails her readers, who are again asked to consider whether they will identify as among those who will provide encouragement to such women and to make this decision based on their knowledge of the only escapee and divorcee most of them have encountered, the author herself. As she engages her audience in this by-now-familiar identificatory dynamic, Young's wording subtly nudges her readers to reframe their thinking about the nature of freedom. It does so by encouraging them to consider whether a decision to escape or divorce might be re-conceptualized as a matter not of license, but of consent—of a woman's choosing to supplant a former union initiated by deception with a new union with "the People." With the series of imperatives closing the passage, Young suggests, in case her readers have yet to pick up on their envisioned role in this new alliance, that the proper response to the woman who has made such a choice is not only to "listen with responsive and sympathetic hearts" but to "welcome" with "open hands." While all these appeals remain implicit, they gain resonance and power when interpreted in light of the connections that Young's speeches and autobiography had articulated with anti-Mormon, temperance, and anti-Catholic discursive formations, all of which might be seen as having provided crucial space for addressing fundamental, but not often openly discussed, issues at the heart of the woman's rights and polygamy debates.

Ultimately, Young is able to speak and write powerfully, in spite of, or perhaps because of, her infamy, by drawing on the resources offered by anti-Mormon rhetoric and fiction, by developing embodied and ethical arguments that challenge her audiences to form identifications that will expand their conceptions of who can be a speaker, and by articulating connections

with a broader range of reformist discursive formations so that her listeners and readers might engage more productively with what is genuinely at stake in cultural conversations about the problem of polygamy. Her multidimensional rhetorical practice works by indirect, complex, and ambivalent means to incrementally move a resistant audience not toward support for a political solution to the issue per se, but toward changing the underlying attitudes that are ultimately keeping the issue from being resolved. With her reframing of the Mormon question, Young calls attention to the fact that the Mormon question is inseparable from the woman question, which is in turn inseparable from conversations about the limits of religious liberty. All of these are inseparable from prior questions about the nature and import of freedom. Further, it is not just Mormon polygamists who hold problematic ideas and attitudes. The reform-minded Protestant members of her audience will also need to change how they think about freedom, consent, and license; about divorced and escaped women; and, indeed, about women in general if the true roots of the polygamy issue are ever to be addressed. Young's rhetorical practice is attentive and responsive to all these broader issues, which makes her career as a speaker and writer an especially valuable resource for insights into what might be more generally thought of as the dynamics of incremental persuasion.

Young moreover emerges as an unexpectedly heuristic figure for historians and theorists of rhetoric because she challenges us to further extend and complicate our thinking about rhetorical agency. Hopelessly infamous and troublingly inauthentic, but, at the same time, highly effective and enormously successful, Young stands as of yet a bit beyond our explanatory reach. Yet, this "promiscuous and protean" (Campbell 14) quality is precisely what makes her such a productive figure to consider for a field presently seeking ways to "move beyond notions of rescue, recovery, and (re)inscription" and to work toward "understanding rhetorical agency itself in new, more dynamic terms . . . as an embodied social praxis" (Royster and Kirsch 43, 132). Trying to describe exactly this compelling and yet elusive quality that makes Young so worth revisiting, Irving Wallace, Young's best-known biographer, once referred to her as an "accidental feminist in an intentional man's world" (332). Wallace's thought-provoking description, it should be noted, perceptively recognizes the way in which Young's career functions to "challenge . . . the centrality of the actor-hero-rhetor"; however, it doesn't quite speak to the actual, surprising ways in which her rhetorical practice succeeds "by opening itself to networks of causes and to nonrational ways of knowing," or to how it reflects an awareness of the extent to which "political and cultural changes are the results of a myriad of extended, messy, sometimes inexplicable interventions" (MacIntyre 25-26). Wallace fails to fully grasp how Young manages to effect meaningful change by means more indirect, subtle, and ambivalent than we have tended

to recognize. Young's speaking, writing, and activism deploy powerful embodied and ethical arguments that persuade gradually by inviting identifications, articulating effective connections with diverse discursive formations, and reframing seemingly intractable public questions so as to make them more amenable to rhetorical action. She challenges us to "stand back from the simplicity and forthrightness of the basic account of eloquence to see more than we might perceive at first" (Royster 33) and offers a strong reminder of why historians of rhetoric should continue to seek out, listen to, and learn from new individual woman rhetors. When we take such a step back, attending carefully to what we might learn from Ann Eliza Young, we are able to discover considerably more than we might initially perceive, not only about a groundbreaking and unfortunately overlooked woman lecturer, but also about ourselves—about whom we can listen to with responsive and sympathetic hearts and whom we are willing to welcome as a significant figure in our histories of rhetoric.

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## About the Author

**J.P. Hanly** is an Assistant Professor of English and Associate Director of First-Year Composition at Monmouth University in West Long Branch, New Jersey, where he teaches first-year composition and undergraduate and graduate-level courses in the history of rhetoric, rhetorical and composition theory, and composition pedagogy. He has published an essay on intertextuality and iconoclasm in Susan Howe's "Eikon Basilike" in the *Kentucky Philological Review*; has delivered presentations at CCCC, RSA, NeMLA, PCA/ACA, and the Thomas R. Watson Conference; and is a 2011 graduate of the University of Louisville's Ph.D program in Rhetoric and Composition.