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Epideictic Rhetoric and the Formation of Collective Identity:
Nineteenth-Century Mormon Women in Praise of Polygamy

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Introduction

Plural marriage is perhaps the single most distinguishing characteristic by which The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been known popularly since its organization in 1830. Although the practice was officially discontinued in 1890, the church is still known worldwide for its once-held dedication to the principle of plural marriage.¹ At one time, that dedication was intense and the church was embattled because of it. In the late 1880’s, by which time the entire nation had come down on the Mormons demanding that they give up the practice of polygamy, the Deseret News, which was the "church’s official journalistic voice" (Hardy xix), printed the following proclamation in defense of polygamy, which had become central to early LDS theology:

The abandonment of polygamy, that is considered by some to be so easy of accomplishment, is more untenable even than fighting. However much the people might desire to do this, they could not without yielding every other principle, for it is the very keystone of our faith, and is so closely interwoven into everything that pertains to our religion, that to tear it asunder and cast it away would involve the entire structure. (qtd. in Hardy xix)

¹ Throughout the thesis I will be using much specialized LDS terminology. Nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints used numerous terms for the institution of polygamy, including plural marriage, celestial marriage, and spiritual wifery. In this thesis I will stick to two terms, polygamy and plural marriage, as the other terms have come to mean different things in the LDS culture. In addition, throughout the thesis I will generally refer to the LDS church and its members by the terms they commonly used during the nineteenth century: Mormon and Mormons.
Clearly, the law of plural marriage was vitally important to the LDS church in the nineteenth century. Yet despite its importance to the membership of the church, the principle was never an easy one for most Mormons to follow. From the time of its introduction until the Woodruff Manifesto officially ended the practice (and certainly beyond), polygamy was in many ways a source of conflict for the majority of the membership of the church.

Throughout the polygamy years, there was much contention about the practice within the membership of the church itself. Even when polygamy was in full swing, completely endorsed by the leadership of the church, many insiders spoke openly against it. Adding to the internal conflict surrounding polygamy, church members suffered from enormous persecution and pressure from the outside community. There is no room to go into the persecution in detail here, but from the early days of the practice, church members were publicly humiliated, defamed, and imprisoned. Wives were forced to testify against their husbands, and the church stood to lose all its property. Men were forced to live in hiding; women and children learned to forget their familial ties and even their own names. (See Ludlow 1095, Hardy 49, Van Wagoner 118-19 for some representative examples.)

Finally, because the practice of polygamy ran so counter to everything most of these Mormons had always been taught to believe, many of them were personally conflicted over the practice. Although much of their doctrine may have seemed radical to most nineteenth-century Americans, the Mormons’ pre-polygamy lifestyle fell very much in line with mainstream Victorian values. In general, Mormons were “spiritual
descendants of the Puritans and sexually conservative" (Ludlow 1091). As the principle was first being preached, most Mormons found it as offensive as adultery (Van Wagoner 19). In addition to all the other sources of conflict surrounding the question of polygamy, many Mormon polygamists had to struggle with themselves in order to fully accept the practice.

Yet in spite of all the controversy surrounding the issue of plural marriage, both from outside and inside the church, Mormons were still under enormous pressure to fully accept, embrace, and practice the law of polygamy. Because of this pressure, and because many Mormons did become very committed to the principle, they consistently found themselves in situations where they felt they needed to defend and praise the law of polygamy, to outsiders, insiders, and even to themselves. The male leadership of the church did much of the public defending, and their ideas permeated the nation through the media. However, Mormon women living in polygamous marriages also participated in the justification of the practice to a large extent. These polygamous wives wrote newspaper editorials, participated in pro-polygamist rallies (probably largely in response to the rallies held by the anti-polygamy campaigns which were held nation wide), and gave public speeches in defense of their lifestyle. In addition, many of these women praised and defended the practice in their more private writings: autobiographies and daily diaries, perhaps praising the institution for future generations, usually seen as the audience for those types of documents. These justifications and praises of this controversial practice often took the form of epideictic rhetoric, or the discourse of praise and blame.
One of the most important forums for this kind of defense were public gatherings of women, often sponsored by the Relief Society, the official women’s organization in the Mormon church. At the height of the polygamist era, when persecution against polygamists was very strong, these meetings were held frequently, and numerous polygamous women spoke, publicly justifying their choice. In these meetings, women used many traditional justifications of polygamy. Some of these included that it was founded upon principles espoused in the Bible (a religious history justification); that it was better for society (and even that it solved social ills); that it was practically much easier than monogamy, especially dealing with the surplus of women in the community (particularly the surplus of righteous women); and finally, the main justification, and one that was probably most meaningful to other members of the church, was that it was commanded by God, and that commandment was handed down by infallible leaders. The statements nearly always contained strong personal testimonies stating that these women knew that they were making a righteous choice by living the principle, in spite of what anyone else said and in spite of the persecution they were suffering because of the choice. Because these meetings were primarily attended by women sympathetic to the principle of polygamy, much of the justification and praise worked primarily to recommit people to their support of the practice, even in times of trial.

Polygamous wives also defended their lifestyle in their autobiographies. From the time the church was founded, Mormons had been encouraged to record their stories. Some of them did this in daily diaries, but many of them wrote, in addition to or in place of these diaries, more coherent autobiographies as they grew older. Many of these
autobiographies contain numerous stories about how polygamy blessed the lives of those who lived it. In addition, it was common for these women to take a more formal tone and explicitly state their feelings about polygamy, as if they were speaking directly to an audience. This is probably because they had such an established sense of their perceived audience: their posterity. Some women even directly addressed those for whom they were writing, their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. However, many of these women who were active polygamists in the nineteenth century wrote their autobiographies after the practice had been discontinued. In these cases, women usually praised polygamy not for the sake of advocating the practice, but rather to inspire their descendants by their stories of commitment and faith, even in times of extreme trial.

In these public writings, Mormon women often used epideictic rhetoric, what Aristotle called the discourse of praise and blame. Traditionally, epideictic is the type of discourse used in formal settings where a speaker praises a person or an institution to a friendly and receptive audience. Epideictic can have many functions, but one of its primary uses is to unite a community through a reminder of and recommitment to their shared values. Much of the discourse in the public writings of these polygamous wives works in the same way.

In this thesis, I will proceed as follows: my first chapter will be a general overview of epideictic rhetoric, focusing on the limitations of how it has traditionally been viewed and understood by theorists. At the end of that chapter I will establish a working definition of epideictic which extends traditional views about how epideictic can function in certain types of writings, focusing on the important role of the speaker in
epideictic rhetoric and how it can work in enabling a community to create a collective identity. In the remainder of the thesis, I will analyze two texts in which epideictic functions in that specific way. The first is a public speech given by Artimesia Snow which was later published for a larger audience as a newspaper editorial. This speech was given in a setting which was very traditional for epideictic, and it contains many examples of epideictic elements working in recognizable ways. In my analysis, I will look at how an authoritative speaker establishes herself as a representative figure for the community which she is addressing.

The second text I will analyze is an autobiography, written by Martha Cox, a woman who was a devoted polygamist before the Manifesto of 1890, and who remained faithful in the church after the practice was discontinued. This autobiography is less clearly a genre in which epideictic is a useful form of rhetoric, yet throughout the text, she clearly includes epideictic elements in her rhetorical appeals. In that chapter I will examine her text, specifically looking at how epideictic works differently in non-traditional settings, and how she uses different rhetorical tools in order to invite the formation of a collective identity. Finally, I will conclude with a brief summary of my findings and a discussion of how they can help us broaden the definition of epideictic rhetoric and better understand the social and cultural function of the writings of these Mormon polygamous women.
Chapter One

Epideictic Rhetoric and Public Discourse

Of the three types of rhetoric originally defined by Aristotle (deliberative, forensic, and epideictic) epideictic has definitely been the most troublesome to define. Aristotle’s definition has been seen as too limiting by some scholars, and throughout the past two thousand years many of them have seen fit to redefine it for themselves. Christine Oravec argues that during this time, the definition has been broadened so much that it is almost meaningless, and that epideictic has been seen as being a part of numerous different genres (163). In order to establish that Mormon women polygamists did use this particular type of rhetoric in their defense of the practice, and to understand how it functioned in their writings, I will first discuss the traditional definitions of epideictic, and then I will move on to some of the more revisionist ideas about this type of discourse. Finally, I will establish a working definition for this project, in which I will describe an extension of these traditional functions of epideictic which is at work in this particular setting.

Traditional Definitions of Epideictic Rhetoric

In his Rhetoric, Aristotle defines epideictic as "panegyrical or declamatory speeches, in the nature of an exhibition or a display, eulogies—in general, speeches of praise (or blame)" (17). Aristotle explains that one must praise that which is noble, the foremost of noble things being virtue. He says that the elements of virtue are justice, courage, temperance, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, prudence, and
wisdom (47). Hence, these are the major characteristics one would discuss in the
discourse of praise and blame. Usually this means discussing the character of one who
possesses or lacks these characteristics, although, as I will demonstrate later, epideictic
doesn’t always need to focus on a person. Aristotle makes it clear that epideictic can
focus on an idea or institution.

In addition to explaining to his readers the qualities that should be the subject of
an epideictic speech, Aristotle also gives advice as to how one can most effectively
deliver such a speech. He says that an epideictic speaker can praise an institution by
showing the value of the origins of a principle in addition to the value of what comes
from it (a kind of "by their fruits ye shall know them" strategy) (48). He also advises
epideictic orators to "consider . . . the audience to whom the praise is addressed . . . .
Whatever quality the audience esteems, the speaker must attribute that quality to the
object of praise" (51). In other words, he encourages the epideictic speaker to draw on
commonly held values. Finally, Aristotle gives numerous practical tips to speakers about
how they should proceed to elaborate on the virtues of a person or institution in order to
effectively praise it for the audience (53-4).

Comparatively, Aristotle had much more to say about both deliberative and
forensic rhetoric than he did about epideictic. However, although he said very little, it
was enough to give subsequent scholars sufficient reason to determine over the years that
epideictic was somehow a lesser, degenerate form of rhetoric. This belief stems from
several characteristics that have traditionally categorized epideictic.
First, many theorists have questioned the validity and ethics of epideictic since epideictic orators seemed to be less concerned with what was true or false than they were with what was good or bad. Truth (or reality) could be manipulated in order to teach audiences about particular perspectives on virtue and honor. Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle illuminates this view in her discussion of epideictic. She argues that the epideictic orator isn’t bound to statement of fact, and that epideictic even "sanctions falsification because it is not invented about truth and falsehood but about good and evil, for praise and blame" (27). Takis Poulakos takes this idea further and argues that a disregard for historical accuracy is part of what defines epideictic as a genre, that epideictic means "the events in the discourse are not commensurate with events in the experiential world" (320).

Although most theorists recognized that the preaching of values was paramount in epideictic, many saw its disregard for factual accuracy as a fault. Karen Sheard, for example, notes that "epideictic’s imaginative presentation of history, or the present for that matter, is not easily reconciled with its ethical impulses" (784). This phenomenon is but one of the factors that led to epideictic’s less-than-respectable status in the highly practical world of rhetoric.

Another criticism of epideictic is that it has traditionally been seen as a rhetoric of display, one in which an audience serves as a spectator, not a judge or agent, and in which the rhetor’s oratorical talents are more important than any topic which is being discussed. Oravec notes that many have categorized epideictic as being a rhetoric of spectacle, one which is merely a display of rhetorical talents (162). In Walker’s discussion of lyric poetry, which he describes as epideictic, he calls it text which is "essentially dramatic
or expressive, rather than, say, discursive, argumentative, or suasory—no matter how much" it may seem to work discursively (5). This argument that epideictic was focused on spectacle rather than substance lowered its status among rhetorical theorists.

In the Rhetoric, Aristotle also calls the epideictic audience member a "mere observer" or "critic," as opposed to a judge, which is the title given to the audiences of the other two types of rhetoric. Sheard also addresses this idea. She argues that traditionally, the charisma of the speaker has been of primary interest in epideictic (773). In addition, she notes that in traditional views of epideictic, if the listener was to act as a judge at all, it was only in judging the skill of the speaker, not in making any sorts of judgments about the issue being discussed (767). In The New Rhetoric, Chaim Perelman notes that in traditional studies of epideictic there was talk about how the display of the ability of the speaker was the end goal of this type of rhetoric, and that it became more important than the topic at hand. This notion was connected to the idea that epideictic was closer to literature than it was to argumentation (48).

A third characteristic of epideictic as it has been traditionally defined is that persuasion is not a necessary part of the discourse because the focus has always been on non-controversial values, those which are already upheld and revered by the community which is being addressed. In her discussion of this idea, Sheard calls epideictic a rhetoric that begins and ends in agreement (766). The idea that epideictic could only deal with what was universally accepted contributed to the general belief that it was a less-than-useful mode of discourse. Perelman addresses the idea that many theorists believed that since epideictic speeches were only about non-controversial topics, about which no one
disagreed, the speech had no practical consequences (48), and Carter echoes this idea, stating that epideictic appears to be "nonpragmatic" in nature (209).

Sheard discusses this same problem extensively, noting that epideictic has been a discourse whose themes may seem timeless and universal, rather than timely and culturally based (768). She also expresses the idea that epideictic was thought to draw only on commonplaces, which meant that a rhetor was merely telling the audience what it wanted to hear, which further decreases the potential power of the genre (775). She builds on this idea by saying that an epideictic orator is freer to make broad generalizations purely because there is no argument to prove, and that the speech is based merely on tradition (781). The focus on the uncontroversial led some theorists to believe that epideictic was in many ways less powerful and less useful than other forms of rhetorical discourse. A final related criticism of epideictic as it has been traditionally defined is that it wasn’t designed to move its audience to action. Sheard argues that epideictic had an apparent detachment from immediate needs and concerns of the audience (773). Because many believed epideictic’s real purpose was merely to help people recommit themselves to values they already held, discourse of this nature has not been viewed as that which would push people to action.

Re-seeing Epideictic

In the twentieth century scholars have begun to reexamine epideictic, arguing that there is more to it than mere display and communal back patting. Chaim Perelman is one of the most influential scholars to work on revising the image and the general
understanding of epideictic rhetoric. In his book, *The New Rhetoric*, coauthored with Olbrechts-Tyteca, Perelman discusses the traditional theories about epideictic which I have outlined above, and then he redefines many of them. He argues that epideictic is central to persuasion, and that an epideictic rhetor has a specific goal to win the audience to his aims (49). In answering those who had argued that epideictic was relatively useless because it doesn’t move a group toward action, he says that epideictic "strengthens the disposition toward action by increasing the adherence to the values it lauds" (50).

Perelman paved the way for other scholars who have also begun to see epideictic differently.

One way that scholars have sought to revise the traditional version of epideictic is to argue that epideictic is indeed argument, and that it is powerful enough to actively engage an audience. Christine Oravec asserts that epideictic is a powerfully persuasive tool "insofar as it ‘proves’ the significance of the praiseworthy object and insofar as it ‘confirms’ the judgments of the orator, thus lending insight and comprehension to the perception of the audience" (172). Sheard supports this idea with her claim that "epideictic does argue and it does present evidence, though the structure of the argument may be different from that of forensic or deliberative rhetoric" (781). By establishing epideictic as a persuasive form of discourse, scholars have made room for the argument that epideictic can also be practical, impelling its listeners toward action.

Some twentieth-century scholars have also argued that in addition to encouraging communities to recommit themselves to values they already hold, epideictic speech can actually impel an audience to rethink and revise those values. Bernard Duffy argues that
it is possible to see epideictic rhetoric as an instrument for the reexamination of values (as well as a renewed commitment to them) (82). Sheard’s essay, "The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric," is focused on this very idea. She argues that epideictic can be a vehicle for bringing about communal change (771), and that one of the ways this can happen is that an epideictic speech can be a means by which a community can practice self-reflection and self-criticism (777). In addition, Sheard claims that epideictic can bring communities to social, political, and ideological change as members evaluate the conduct of their leaders and their institutions (771, 779). She asserts that epideictic has the potential to call upon the audience’s sense of responsibility to act (785).

Many contemporary scholars also assert that epideictic has a powerful capacity to move its audience toward personal (in addition to collective) action. This phenomenon can occur in several ways. First, epideictic rhetoric can function to give an audience advice about what kinds of behaviors are appropriate for them to undertake in the future. Oravec clarifies this idea with her assertion that "often the praise of an individual may easily serve as advice upon the future action of the audience, educating them through the imitation of great men" (170). Sheard builds upon this notion by stating that traditional epideictic speeches, such as funeral orations, served not only to eulogize the dead but to guide the conduct of the living (770). As epideictic rhetors praised and publicly honored the deeds and characters of well-loved individuals, they subtly (and sometimes directly) urged their listeners to live the same kinds of lives and perform the same kinds of deeds. Poulakos argues that this function of epideictic has always been in place. He says that Isocrates’ motivation for giving epideictic speeches was to employ praise for the purpose
of shaping the moral character of his audience. In fact, this idea even goes back to Aristotle. He states, "When you wish to praise, consider what you would suggest as advisable" (53). The connection between praising past action and advising future action is as old as epideictic itself, although many rhetorical theorists have traditionally ignored it.

**A Working Definition of Epideictic**

In order to first establish that the two texts written by Mormon women in praise of polygamy which I will analyze do function as epideictic rhetoric, I plan on looking at elements of epideictic that seem to fit into both the traditional and the revised definitions as I have discussed them here. Many of the strategies used by the authors of these texts come directly from Aristotle. First, I will look at how these women praise polygamy by following Aristotle's principle of drawing on commonplaces, on prominent values shared throughout the community. Specifically, Mormon polygamists emphasize the fact that the principle was God-given (to Mormons specifically) in order to reiterate to their audiences that the divine nature of the principle made it of great worth and value in the Mormon community.

I will also look at how these two Mormon women ascribe characteristics of virtue both to the practice of polygamy itself and also to those who were living the law faithfully by showing that the origins of the practice and the fruits that came from living it were deemed of value in the Mormon community. One way the women do this is by connecting the practice of polygamy with well-respected figures (particularly ancient
prophets) in the Mormon community. Both authors also emphasize the value of polygamy by informing their audiences of the benefits their own families received, including righteous children and harmonious homes, because of their faithful diligence in living the law. Finally, these women demonstrate the importance of polygamy by informing (or reminding) their audiences that those who lived the law of polygamy were blessed individuals in the sight of God (both in this life and the one hereafter). Conversely, these authors also use a variety of tactics to demonstrate that those who spoke against polygamy or who were involved in the persecution against Mormons were punished in various ways.

Each one of these traditional Aristotelian epideictic strategies is clearly at work in the texts I will examine in this thesis, but throughout my analysis I will focus specifically on the important role of ethos in public epideictic discourse.\(^1\) However, my discussion will question traditional ideas about the epideictic speaker which imply that epideictic is merely a display of an individual orator’s talents at public speaking. Instead, building on the ideas of Dale Sullivan, I will focus on the importance of the speaker’s ethos in representing the topic she addresses. Because epideictic has, by definition, as its subject matter the issue of values, of the good and the bad, then clearly, the reputation and virtue of the speaker (though not necessarily the talent) will be a central factor in the effectiveness of the epideictic speech.

\(^1\) In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle delineates three "means of persuasion": logos (the argument itself), pathos (emotional appeals geared towards the audience), and ethos (the character of the speaker, as portrayed through the speech) (8-9).
Specifically, I will look at how each of the two speakers presents herself as what Frederick Antczak calls a "representative figure," one who is in essence authorized to speak for the community as a whole, and who is seen simultaneously as a role-model in the community as well as one who understands the values and experiences of the general membership (98). In both of the primary texts I will examine, the authors do just this. They reveal enough of their own experiences to demonstrate for their audience that they are exemplary members of the community, living the "ideal" as the community would define it. Yet these women are also open in discussing their struggles and fears, thereby allowing their audiences to relate to them as real individuals.

Throughout my thesis I will be looking at epideictic as a discourse in which the author uses traditional persuasive tactics as described by Aristotle, and in which the ethos of the orator (although in terms of moral character rather than public speaking talent) is central. And, in many ways, these texts also function according to the traditional ideas about the perceived possible functions for epideictic. Much of the material in the texts focuses on uncontested values, and it serves to unite the community in adherence to those values. Sullivan notes that epideictic functions around a constellation of purposes: preservation, education, celebration, and aesthetic creation. It is certainly possible that particular instances of the genre may be missing one or more parts of the constellation, but the essence of epideictic resides somewhere within the locus of these characteristics. (116)
Indeed, both of these texts adhere to these purposes to a large extent, perhaps focusing most centrally on preservation and celebration. However the principle of education is also at work, as epideictic speakers encourage their audiences to act in accordance to the beliefs being praised. For example, in her speech before the Relief Society sisters in St. George, Artimesia Snow praises polygamy in order to encourage her audience to recommit themselves to the practice, to adhere to the principle in spite of opposition. In that sense her speech is "persuasive" in ways that many traditional theorists argued that epideictic could not be. In contrast, Martha Cox, who could not ask her audience to literally join her in recommitting themselves to the law of polygamy, still uses epideictic strategies to persuade her audience to commit to something. In her case, the shared value was a commitment to the restored gospel, valid in any time period, in whatever its demands. Yet in the sense that she is moving the audience to action, epideictic cannot reasonably be called "nonpragmatic."

However, in these particular texts, there is also evidence that epideictic has another function, not traditionally recognized to the extent of those listed in Sullivan’s "constellation," or in many of the others works written by rhetorical theorists. Certainly, epideictic has always been recognized in its ability to unite a community in adherence to shared values. But in the case of this specific Mormon discourse, epideictic seems to have the potential to unite a community not just in shared values, but in a collective identity. Carter hints at this idea by asserting that through epideictic, a group is able to establish "the beginnings of their identity as a culture" (221). This function shows up clearly in the writings of nineteenth-century Mormon polygamists.
Mormonism is, to a large extent, a religion in which a unified cultural identity is extremely important. The church itself paralleled the nineteenth-century religious separatist movement in America, and throughout the nineteenth century, Mormons’ self-designation as a "peculiar people" was an extremely important aspect of the religion itself. Because of the value of a shared identity (often at the expense of individuality), it seems natural that epideictic discourse, which is by definition communal, could function to create a collective identity in Mormon society, which is largely how it works in the two texts I will explore in this thesis.

Focusing on the important role of the speaker’s ethos in presenting herself as a representative figure for the community, I will explore how individuals in a community undergo the process of establishing a common identity through what Kenneth Burke calls "identification." As the author focuses her discourse on shared ideas and values, thereby establishing herself as a model for the community, she then invites the audience to identify with the individual identity she presents. In that process, the individual identities of audience members are subsumed behind hers (the representative identity), and a communal, shared identity is formed. This phenomenon pushes the boundaries of what have been seen as the possible functions of epideictic. Instead of merely uniting the community in their commitment to shared values (which this type of discourse also does), it actually allows the community to define itself as a group according to a shared identity which is based on adherence to a common worldview.

For this project I am focusing on this definition of epideictic, a discourse which has its roots in traditional Aristotelian theory, but which has a functional social potential
which has been largely unexplored until this point. By building on shared ideas and values, and establishing themselves as representative characters for their audience as a whole, these two Mormon women were able to express through their rhetoric a collective identity, defined by the group commitment to the values of the restored gospel.
Chapter Two

Public Uses of Epideictic in Creating a Unified Mormon Identity

The national outcry against Mormon polygamy began as soon as outsiders noticed that the church had adopted the practice. In the nation’s capital, politicians fought to legally abolish polygamy and to otherwise punish the Mormons. Protests also occurred on the local level, taking the form of anti-polygamy protests and civil and criminal suits. As the persecution aimed at polygamists and Mormons in general became more fierce, Mormons fought back, whether directly, by addressing their critics, or indirectly, by gathering together as faithful Mormons, publicly showing their support of the practice. Church leaders (both general and local) took much of the responsibility to justify the practice to external persecutors as well as doubters within the church. Representatives were sent to Washington D.C. to speak with government leaders, and church representatives spoke publicly in a variety of venues in attempts to protect this important doctrine and to reassert their commitment to it.¹

But male church leaders did not bear sole responsibility for the justification. Mormon women in the nineteenth century were quite active politically, and they took numerous opportunities to speak out publicly in defense of polygamy. In doing so, many speakers not only spoke out in defense of the principle, but they moved further to serve as representatives for the larger Mormon community, a group united in a new covenant

¹ See Hardy and Van Wagoner for detailed descriptions of both national protests against polygamy and the retaliation made by Mormons.
relationship with God, one which they felt distinguished them (a “peculiar people”) from all other Christians.

One of the primary settings in which Mormon women shared their ideas was the public meeting (a standard setting for the use of epideictic rhetoric). These women gathered regularly to talk about issues and to feel the solidarity that came with sharing ideas with like-minded individuals. Indeed, many of their beliefs about who they were as a community came out of meetings like this. In these gatherings, Mormon women would often satisfy both the conservative and educational functions of epideictic (Sullivan 115): they would reinforce the value of polygamy, and through their praise of the institution, they would instruct one another on how to be remain righteously committed to practice the doctrine, in spite of external persecution. In addition, epideictic served another function in these gatherings. As women praised the institution of polygamy, they actually defined themselves as a community committed to the practice (as well as to all other principles of the restored gospel). By asserting their support of doctrines which distinguished them from the rest of Christian society, these women designated for themselves a group identity.

When particularly well-respected or well-recognized women spoke at such meetings, there was a great demand for larger access to the speeches they presented. The Women’s Exponent, a monthly periodical that was the most official voice women had in the church in the late nineteenth century, was an important forum for women to share their ideas about who they were and what they believed in, and hence it was a place where these sought-after speeches were regularly printed for a larger audience. In this
chapter I will examine the use of epideictic rhetoric in a public speech given to a group of women supporters of polygamy which was later reprinted in the *Women’s Exponent*.

**Artimesia Snow’s Public Address for a “Mass Meeting of Ladies”**

Artimesia Beman Snow was the first wife of Erastus Snow, one of the apostles of the Mormon church in the late nineteenth century. Throughout her life, she was firmly committed to church doctrines, which included the law of polygamy, a principle which she earnestly defended even when “the pressure of the national government and the press were directed against [it]” (Larson 746). On December 5, 1878, at a time when other Mormon leaders vowed that the practice of polygamy would never be abandoned, in spite of external persecution, Snow gave a public speech in support of this position. She spoke as an ardent polygamist, as well as a woman of prominence within the church, to a large group of Mormon women (many of whom were polygamists themselves) gathered as a Relief Society\(^2\) in St. George, Utah.

In this chapter, I will give a brief overview of the speech given by Artimesia Snow, and then I will offer a general discussion of its characteristics which clearly identify it as epideictic rhetoric. Following that general overview, I will offer a more specific analysis of how Snow’s presentation of her own individual character establishes her as a representative figure for the community. Further, I will discuss how, based on Snow’s position as a representative, the community uses the epideictic occasion in order to abandon their own individual perceptions of identity in a commitment to a communal

\(^2\) The official women’s organization within the Mormon church.
identity, emphasizing as a group their unique relationship to God as members of His restored church.

The Structure and Content Of Artimesia Snow’s Speech

Snow begins her speech by stating her specific purpose in coming before the women in that setting: "We are called upon today to express our feelings in regard to the principle of polygamy, and whether we uphold the proceedings of our Christian sisters—(call them sisters because they are of our sex) or whether we enter our protest against them." In this reference to "Christian sisters," Snow is speaking about non-Mormon women, not part of her audience, who had launched a national campaign in order to deliver polygamous wives, whom they considered to be slaves to the practice, from their bondage. This undercutting remark unites Snow with her Mormon "sisters" who constitute her audience.

After succinctly stating her purpose, and carefully implying which side she is on, Snow commences the body of her speech. In the first section she states in no uncertain terms her belief in the divinity of the principle of polygamy, and she informs her listeners that she has supported the practice since it was first introduced to her. Acknowledging the external criticism, she tells her listeners "I have no wish—I have no desire—to have it changed or abolished," offering a resolute public commitment to the principle.

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3 The Women’s Exponent. 11:10. 15 Oct. 1882: 77. All subsequent references to Snow’s speech are from this same source.
In the next section of her oration, Snow shares a bit of her own history, comprising primarily her personal experiences with polygamy. She tells her audience that, like many of them, she "ha[s] not been without [her] trials in the practice of this principle," but that through those trials she had become a better person, more worthy of the glory of God that was promised to anyone worthy to receive it. Snow also informs her readers that she has raised many children in a polygamous home, all of whom became righteous and honorable individuals, doing their parents proud.

Snow then shifts from talking about her own positive experiences in polygamy to talking about how those who refuse to live the practice are somehow inferior to herself and the other supporters of polygamy in her audience. In doing so, she creates a sense of shared identity among them, specifically in how they are defined in opposition to outsiders (non-polygamists). Snow says that when she sees a man with only one wife "it looks very odd." She gently chides those who aren’t faithful enough to join the polygamous ranks, and then she moves on to overt condemn those who have fought to have polygamy abolished. She reminds her audience of the injustices which they have suffered at the hands of their persecutors, and then speaks directly to her enemies, as if they were present. She urges her foes (the non-Mormon women to whom she previously referred) to abandon their fight and to instead return home and deal with the problems in their own communities.

As she concludes her speech, Snow again emphasizes her own belief in God and in his principles by reminding the group of their covenant relationship with Him: "God is at the helm. In Him we trust." After that brief reaffirmation she leaves her audience with
her final statement on the matter: a prediction about the future. The people of God will someday be able to follow His principles and live in peace, while "God shall pour out His scourges and judgments on the wicked and ungodly. . . especially upon all those who seek the overthrow and destruction of his people."

Artimesia Snow's speech was clearly well-received. The editor's note which accompanied the reprint in the *Exponent* reads, "[Snow's] address to the ladies of St. George, is copied from the records of the Relief Society of that place, as many of her friends were desirous to see it in print, that her testimony upon the principle of celestial marriage might be on record." In the following section I analyze that reprint, a copy of the actual speech, to explain how it works to invite the listeners to join together in a collective identity as faithful members of the restored church.

**Snow's Use of Common Epideictic Strategies in Establishing a Communal Identity**

Throughout the speech, Snow uses a variety of epideictic tactics in order to achieve the commonly accepted purposes of that particular mode of discourse: to unite a community in its commitment to certain shared values. Foremost among these strategies is Snow's reference to communally shared values—what Aristotle would call commonplaces—to reinforce the idea that the principle is God-given. Knowing her audience to be a God-fearing people, Snow wisely emphasizes the source of the principle. Among a number of similar statements, Snow asks a rhetorical question: "For why should I wish to change the plans of the Almighty, that He has marked out for the benefit of the human family?" By highlighting the idea that polygamy is a divinely-appointed
doctrine, she builds her praise upon a fundamental assumption which she knows is shared by her audience. In addition, this statement builds upon the community-held ideals of humility, and the unquestioning submission to the will of God.

Snow also emphasizes the religious importance of the principle of polygamy by focusing on its relationship to other praiseworthy figures and concepts within the Mormon community. This strategy was originally described by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*. In his discussion of epideictic he states, "Obviously, whatever is productive of virtue (since it tends toward virtue) must be noble; as must also whatever results from virtue—and under this head come the signs of virtue and its works" (48). In this case, Aristotle’s argument implies that an effective way of demonstrating the religious value of polygamy is to remind the listeners that the origins of and/or fruits from the principle are also worthy of praise.

One of the many occurrences of this tactic comes as Snow tells her audience that she originally accepted polygamy because she “kn[ew] it to be a principle practiced anciently by those, who now sit at the right hand of our Father in Heaven.” This example follows Aristotle’s reasoning that a doctrine originally practiced by such righteous men must by association be righteous in itself. Similarly, Snow also uses her own experiences to argue that the ultimate worth of polygamy can also be demonstrated by what comes out of it. Her primary example is the righteous offspring of polygamous marriages: “My husband has been the father of thirty-five, twenty-six now living, all equally honorable in as much as they pursue an upright, righteous course through life.” She continues on this
course by arguing that most polygamous families are just as righteous. Her statements about righteous children and strong families are in concordance with traditional epideictic tactics: they demonstrate that just as the origins of polygamy demonstrate its inherent worth as a divine doctrine, so do the fruits.

After laying a solid foundation upon which she can build an argument about the importance of polygamy to the Mormon community, Snow follows the epideictic tradition in her effort to unite her audience as a community by "increasing [their] adherence to the values" which are being discussed (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 50).

In this case, the primary "value" in question was polygamy, in connection with the community’s commitment to living it and the other principles of the restored gospel. One of the ways Snow builds upon the need for the community to share their commitment to polygamy is by emphasizing the benefits they will receive as a people by living the law: “The Lord has said, He would have a tried people, that they should come up through great tribulation, that they might be prepared to enter His presence and glory.” This promise of rewards available to each righteous individual works to unite the community in their commitment to act in whatever way they need to in order to receive the promised blessings. Further, it serves to establish an identity for the group as a whole: we are a people who strive to obey God, and who, in many ways, have privileged access to knowing God’s will and therefore receiving His blessings.

Snow also endeavors to unite her audience in their commitment to polygamy by encouraging them to align themselves against a common enemy. Throughout her text she gives numerous examples of the hostile actions of the foes of polygamy, and her final
words serve as a forceful call to join together against those who would destroy the practice. She reminds her listeners that “God shall pour out His scourges and judgments upon the wicked and ungodly, and all those who reject that Everlasting Gospel, and especially upon all those who seek the overthrow and destruction of this people.” Again, this statement serves several purposes: Snow reminds her audience that she is praising a divine principle, to which her community has almost exclusive access, and she unites her audience in a renewed commitment to this principle by reminding them of the blessings in store for the righteous and the plagues in store for all others.

The Essential Role of Ethos in Establishing a Communal Identity

Certainly, Snow uses a variety of epideictic strategies in this speech, but perhaps the most interesting and pervasive element in this text is the strong sense of her ethos as one able and worthy to address a crowd on such an important issue. Rhetoricians have always recognized the importance of ethos in epideictic discourse. Aristotle claims that ethos (or the character of the speaker) is perhaps "the most potent of all the means to persuasion" (9). But in epideictic rhetoric, where the issue in question is one of values and ideals, the character of the speaker is of utmost importance. In fact, Dale Sullivan calls epideictic a type of rhetoric in which "unusual authority [is] invested in the rhetor" (125-6).

The ethos of any speaker comprises numerous elements, but Aristotle explains that in order to create an persuasive ethos, a speaker must establish that she has "intelligence, character, and good will" (92). Snow does establish all these things in her
speech, but her ethos extends further than that. In much of her speech she establishes herself as one authorized to speak for the entire community, one with whom each of its members could and should identify. In many ways, she serves as what Frederick Antczak calls a "representative figure," a spokeswoman for the entire community of righteous Mormon women. As Snow becomes such a representative for the community in this epideictic activity, her ethos in a sense becomes the collective identity, one which she attributes to the audience as well. In this specific rhetorical setting, the function of epideictic is an expression of this collective identity as it is exhibited in the representative, the speaker.

Throughout her speech, Snow makes numerous statements which establish her as an appropriate representative figure for her audience. According to Antczak, this is no easy task as an effective representative has to simultaneously "appear both like and unlike [her] audience" (98). This is because a community looks for two things in a representative: authority (she must show that she is an outstanding member of the community) and accessibility (she must also demonstrate that she understands the values and experiences of each member of the community). By showing her audience that she exemplifies community values while still understanding the real-life struggles any member might face, Snow skillfully demonstrates her possession of both these qualities.

A simple strategy Snow uses in order to establish her authority as an outstanding member of the Mormon community is making straightforward, general statements in support of polygamy. Through such statements she establishes herself as one worthy to represent the community as a whole based on her righteous commitment to the law. She
frankly tells her audience that she believes “such an order of marriage [polygamy] to be a pure and holy principle, revealed from the heavens to our beloved Prophet, Seer, and Revelator.” Here she establishes herself both as a faithful believer and an obedient supporter of the prophet, an extremely important characteristic in an authority-centered community. She continues to demonstrate her commitment to the principle of plural marriage by declaring, “I have no wish—I have no desire—to have it changed or abolished.” Snow would have been aware of her audience’s knowledge and understanding of the extreme persecution which she, as a polygamist, would have suffered; such a statement would show her listeners that she was a truly devoted woman. As she expresses her own devotion, she in turn invites her audience to share in that sentiment. She has suffered, as has the rest of her community, yet she sets an example of continued commitment in times of trial.

Building upon her general statements of faith, Snow continues to set herself up as a representative figure by showing herself to be one who has had extensive experience with the law of polygamy, thereby establishing herself as a solid member of the community. In this, she moves from sharing general ideas about polygamy to revealing her own personal experiences living the law. She states, “In 1844 my husband first asked my consent to take to himself other wives . . . I have lived in the order of Celestial marriage thirty-five years.” This statement establishes her character in several ways. First, Snow shows that she clearly has spent much of her life in a polygamous marriage. Chances are she had lived the law much longer than the majority of the women in her audience, which puts her in a position of authority: she immediately becomes one from
whom the audience can learn. Secondly, the dates show that she was living in a polygamous marriage before the practice was publicly acknowledged among the members of the Mormon church. This would have indicated to her listeners that for decades she had been numbered among the elite of the church, trusted and privileged within the Mormon community.

In a similar way, Snow uses her personal connections with important members of the Mormon community to further establish her ethos. She tells her listeners, “My next sister older than myself, was the first woman given in plural marriage. . . . [She] is now rejoicing with her husband, our beloved Prophet, in eternal worlds.” By showing her position in relation to those pioneers of polygamy she commands respect from her listeners. But more importantly, in this statement Snow establishes a familial relation with Joseph Smith, the beloved prophet and founder of the Mormon church, their most highly regarded authority. Both her early entrance into polygamy and her relationship to Joseph Smith establish Snow as an outstanding member of the Mormon community, one whom her audience would desire to learn from and emulate.

In addition, Snow shares other details of her lifetime of personal experiences in polygamy which further demonstrate her outstanding example to the Mormon community. She declares: “I have reared a large family in this marriage system. I have been the mother of eleven children.” Nineteenth-century Mormons regularly taught of the importance of raising numerous righteous children unto God, and one of the standard justifications of polygamy was that it made that goal possible. Through this statement Snow demonstrates the fact that she not only understands the community ideal, but, more
importantly, she has lived this ideal. In a further attempt to distinguish herself as an exemplary member of the community, Snow continues by praising her own children. She informs her listeners that all of her husband's children (mothered by each of his wives) "pursue an upright, righteous course through life. . . .[and] who are walking in the footsteps of their father and mothers." This statement embodies important community values: if you righteously live the laws of God, you shall be rewarded with honorable and obedient children. In discussing her commendable personal experiences with polygamy, Snow presents herself as a solid role-model for the Mormon community.

Yet in order to establish herself as a truly appropriate representative figure for her audience, Snow must also convince her audience that she is accessible, the second required characteristic. Thus, in the midst of demonstrating her ethos as an outstanding member of her community, Snow continues to remind her audience that she is just like any one of them. She shows her humility by stating, "for why should I try to change the plans of the Almighty, that He has marked out for the benefit of the human family?" This demonstration of her lowly position in relation to God acts as an equalizer. Like each member of her audience, Snow is a mere mortal, trying to make correct choices in obedience to a higher law. This statement not only reminds her audience that they are all united in their commitment to obey the laws of God, but also that she, just like any other member of the community, is subject to these very laws.

Snow makes a bolder statement of her general membership in the community by admitting her own original hesitations about polygamy: "I had my prejudices to subdue, my selfishness to overcome, and many things to contend with." By confessing her early
fears and revealing her own change of heart. Snow makes herself accessible to the 
doubters in the audience. Like them, she had her own concerns about polygamy. 
However, instead of diminishing her ethos, this strategy can serve to enhance it, for an 
audience can relate to a “real” person with “real” concerns (Antczak 107). Moreover, by 
showing her previous failings, Snow is able to heighten the sense of her present 
commitment. Indeed, the very use of the words “prejudices” and “selfishness” indicates 
herself to the doubters in the audience like them she had her own concerns about polygamy 
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audience can relate to a real person with real concerns (Antczak 107). Moreover, by 
showing her previous failings, Snow is able to heighten the sense of her present 
commitment. Indeed, the very use of the words “prejudices” and “selfishness” indicates 
her belief that she has made the correct choice.

In addition, as Snow shares her own experiences with her audience, they in a 
sense become experiences that her listeners now share with her. This becomes what 
Kenneth Burke would call a representative anecdote, a powerfully persuasive tool 
(Grammar 59-62). Gregory Clark notes that anecdotes of this kind 
enact an order of values that their narrators present as definitive for the 
community they and those they address compose. Invited to make 
themselves over in the image of these anecdotes, they are propelled toward 
an intensity of consent beyond that developed by the persuasion of the 
argument. (4)

In other words, as Snow, speaking as a representative of the community she is addressing, 
shares her own transcendence of biases, she establishes that transcendence as the ideal 
behavior for the community. She shows her audience that just as she was able to 
overcome her selfishness, so should they.

In a similar way, Snow establishes her character by sharing with her audience the 
struggles she has known: “I have not been without my trials in the practice of this
principle, but I have had peace and comfort, and I have had sorrow.” By demonstrating the sacrifices she has made for the principle, she emphasizes her strong commitment. In keeping with the Christian tradition, she confesses her hardships to demonstrate her faith. Snow then builds upon this idea by stating, “If I had no trials, I should not expect to be numbered with the People of God, and therefore not be made a partaker of His blessings and glory.” Snow emphasizes her trials to express that they are the very things that have enabled her to become one of the children of God. Through this statement she indirectly communicates her assurance that God’s blessings and glory are indeed waiting for her. And again, standing in as a representative for each one in her audience, she invites her listeners to adjust their behavior in whatever way they need to in order to join her in awaiting that glory. Laura Sumision claims that once an audience has begun to identify with a representative figure, they can easily be persuaded “to emulate the characteristics that they already posses, or desire to possess, which they perceive in the model” (5). In this sense, Snow is in essence telling her audience that if they are already devoted to polygamy, they will join her in receiving God’s glory. If they are not righteously committed, they should become so, so that they may become worthy to receive the same blessings.

Throughout the text Snow repeatedly situates herself in the role of representative figure for the community she is addressing, and this is largely achieved as she shows that she is at once a peer and a leader. However, halfway through her speech, Snow switches personal pronouns: she moves from I to we. She has already established herself as one qualified in every way to speak for the community as whole, and in the second half of the
speech she uses that privilege. In his *Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke addresses this tactic in his discussion of the notion of identification in rhetoric. He states that rhetors have access to certain "formal patterns" (he looks at the use of plural pronouns specifically) which "[invite] participation regardless of the subject matter" (58). In this case, Snow uses this formal pattern to subsume the individual experiences of each of her audience members and attribute a shared experience to the entire group:

> We have been driven from a should be land of freedom and liberty. We have wended our way over a trackless desert, footsore and bleeding, to these valleys of the mountains, thinking here the weary could find rest. Thinking here we could live in peace, enjoy our rights and freedom, and worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience. But in this we have been disappointed. Our persecutors not being satisfied with driving us from county to county, from state to state, and at last from the United States, have followed us here.

By using the pronoun *we* in this passage, Snow not only designates herself as the representative for Mormon polygamists, but for all Mormons as this persecution was felt by the entire group, regardless of their affiliation with polygamy. In telling stories of communally shared tribulation, Snow binds her listeners together as a group. She has moved from uniting her audience in a shared commitment to live a specific principle to uniting them as one people with a shared past which serves to create a community identity. The Mormons whom she represents in this epideictic encounter have defined themselves as a group that has endured extreme persecution and is willing to continue
enduring it because they share a common world-view: a commitment to the restored gospel.

Snow ends her speech with this same idea. Still speaking for the communal we, she states: "God is at the helm. In Him we trust." By expressing these communally-held maxims, she wins favor in the sight of her audience, for people like maxims because they enjoy hearing "stated in general terms what they already believe" (Aristotle 154). Snow knows her listeners trust God to deliver them from the persecutors of polygamy, but more important, they are a people who define themselves by trusting God in all matters. Although this speech is ostensibly about polygamy, the practice itself receives no mention in her conclusion. Instead she focuses on a larger issue--who her listeners are as a community, and what their future will be because of who they are. She states, "I pray that we may live in peace in these valleys of the mountains. . . . with no one to molest or interfere." In contrast, she predicts the fate of those who have established themselves as the enemies of this community: "God shall pour out His scourges and judgments upon the wicked and the ungodly, and all those who reject the Everlasting Gospel, and especially upon all those who seek the overthrow and destruction of this people." Again, by focusing on the shared experiences of both communities, she further solidifies the collective identity of each group. She clearly describes the group that will be known as God's saints, all her listeners included in the we, and those who will be known as God's enemies.
Conclusion

Snow’s juxtaposition of a collective past and a shared future fits into traditional epideictic schemes of creating "consubstantiality," or a collective identity. Dale Sullivan asserts that "ultimately, the rhetor creates consubstantiality by engaging the audience in a conversation that transcends time" (126). Such an interaction focuses on "the ongoingness of a moral tradition, the consubstantiality of rhetor and audience as members of the same tradition, and the emphasis on attitude affecting moral action" (127). By focusing on a shared past and future, Snow reminds her audience that their collective experience is one that isn’t limited to their present circumstances. She conveys the idea that their unity isn’t based merely upon any individual event; it is based instead a shared identity that doesn’t happen in any place or time. It merely is.

Throughout her entire speech, Snow uses a variety of epideictic tactics, specifically those related to creating a powerful ethos, in order to allow her audience to undergo the process of identification. Burke states that "you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (Rhetoric 55), which is precisely what Snow has done in this speech. As she addresses her audience, she makes certain to demonstrate that her ideas, commitments, and habits are those belonging to the community as a whole. In sharing those communally held values, she invites her audience to identify with the persona she has presented. As Burke stated, she "invites the reader . . . to make [her]self over in the image of the imagery" (qtd. in Clark 2). In this case, the “imagery” is that of

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an ideal Mormon polygamous wife, fully committed to living all the principles of the restored gospel, and receiving the blessings that accompany such righteous living.

As this identification, this "remaking" of self, takes place, with Snow serving as a representative figure for the entire community of Mormon women, a group identity is formed. As the representative, Snow envelops both the individual experiences and identities of her listeners and in turn expresses a single unified identity of a community with a shared background and set of experiences, as well as a common worldview. In this sense, epideictic rhetoric lives up to its reputation as being the rhetoric of assent, although to an extent more broad than has been traditionally recognized. Not only does Snow unify a group of individuals in a shared commitment to a single principle, through the process of identification and consubstantiation she further gathers them under a single collective identity, one which is defined by their shared experiences and beliefs as the covenant people of God.
Chapter Three

Non-traditional Forums for Epideictic Rhetoric in Creating a Communal Identity

Traditional epideictic encounters are usually considered to exist in real time: a skillful speaker addresses a large audience orally (or at least through a written text with a contemporary readership), and in those moments, some kind of solidarity can be achieved. Yet, as Sullivan recognizes, epideictic rhetoric can "transcend time" (126). Of course, his discussion of this idea is largely metaphorical, meaning that the ideas typically addressed in epideictic speeches are timeless and otherwise "permanent" principles (Walker 8). Yet this timeless quality of epideictic has a literal application as well. Epideictic encounters can indeed span boundaries of both time and space, as epideictic discourse is recorded and rediscovered at a later date. Many of the written epideictic expressions of nineteenth-century Mormon polygamous wives fall into this category.

Although public meetings, such as the one at which Artimesia Snow spoke, and newspaper columns were perhaps the most obvious public forums in which Mormon women could share their ideas about polygamy, they were certainly not the only ones available. One of the most common venues Mormon women used to write about their experiences with polygamy was in their personal life histories and autobiographies. Since the early days of the church, Mormons have been advised to record their own stories, and the abundance of Mormon diaries and autobiographies from the early days of the church makes it clear that many of them took this advice very seriously (Ludlow 770). Although these types of documents may not seem to be public (and therefore not traditional epideictic expressions, which are usually considered to belong exclusively to the realm of
public discourse), many Mormon women wrote them in a very specific rhetorical setting, usually for the purpose of creating a sense of shared commitment to the gospel with their descendants.

In his description of what constitutes any rhetorical situation, Lloyd Bitzer discusses the important concepts of exigence and audience. Bitzer defines an exigence as “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (“Rhetorical Situation” 6). For many Mormon women, the exigence which compelled them to record their polygamist histories was the notion that in order to inspire their descendants (the primary audience for these documents), they needed to share their own personal stories, their struggles, and their unwavering faith in the gospel of the restored church. With this purpose in mind, many of these women focused their histories on faith-promoting stories and sentiments, and they used traditional epideictic strategies in sharing these stories. In this chapter I will analyze one such written autobiography, which, like Snow’s speech, has as its rhetorical purpose the goal of binding together its participants (both rhetor and readers) into a collective identity of self-sacrificing Mormon women, committed to give everything in order to follow the principles of the restored gospel.

The Autobiography of Martha Cragun Cox

Martha Cragun Cox was a Mormon polygamist who recorded her life history in 1929, at the age of 77, three years before her death. Although much of the autobiography focuses on Cox’s own experiences with polygamy as a young wife, she actually wrote her
life history almost 40 years after the Manifesto of 1890 dictated that the practice be 
officially discontinued by the church. Her text was later bound in a collection along with 
other Cragun family life histories so it could be read by her descendants. Cox recorded 
her history, which she knew would be read by her descendants even years after her death, 
in a rhetorical setting which was very different from that in which Snow gave her speech. 
Snow spoke directly to her audience, and she was able to stand before them, literally, as a 
representative of who they were as nineteenth-century Mormon women living under a 
shared predicament, the extreme persecution suffered by all polygamists. In many ways, 
Cox serves as a similar type of representative, although she never meets her audience in a 
literal "space." Yet, as Bitzer notes, certain types of historical documents can still exist as 
rhetorical expressions—and in this case, I am arguing, as epideictic rhetoric—because "they 
speak to situations which persist—which are in some measure universal" ("Rhetorical 
Situation" 13). A rhetorical interaction can still take place even if the rhetor and her 
audience are distanced by time and space. For Martha Cox, this persistent situation was 
her desire for all her descendants to be committed to the restored church, regardless of the 
demands.

Cox's autobiography serves as such a document, although again, the function of 
epideictic in the text is slightly different than it was in Snow's speech. When Snow 
spoke, in the late 1870's, polygamy was a crucial doctrine in the church which was under 

1 A copy of this collection can be found in the Brigham Young University archives. 
Selected portions of Martha Cox's autobiography have also been published in 
*Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900.*
constant attack. Sustaining public commitment to it was the exigence which necessitated her speech which would allow polygamist women to join together in support of the principle. When Cox wrote her autobiography, polygamy was no longer practiced by the Mormon church. Consequently, her praise of the institution, though still very much present in her writing, did not function as a literal call to action, as it did in Snow’s oration. Yet Cox, like many Mormon women, still responded to the church-wide call to share her life story. In essence, the desire to retain the commitment of succeeding generations to the church (which was usually the purpose most women gave for recording their life histories) was the exigence that inspired Cox to share stories of her life as a polygamist. More specifically, as a faithful Mormon woman, Cox must have felt the need to inspire her descendants to commit their lives to the restored church, just as she had. But because Cox could not use her experiences in polygamy as examples which her descendants could literally emulate, she used her commitment to the principle as a symbol for a larger aspect of her identity—a faithful Mormon woman, fully committed to self-sacrifice in her goal to live the principles of the gospel.

In order to reach a twentieth-century audience with her nineteenth-century experiences, especially polygamy, Cox had to establish herself as a representative of both eras: an avid polygamist in the nineteenth century, and one still faithful to the church after the practice was discontinued. In sharing her experiences, Cox constructs her own identity as one wholly committed to the restored gospel, regardless of its requirements. Through the strength of her representative character, she invites her twentieth-century readers to join her in the collective identity of, not polygamists, but faithful Mormon
women, devoted to the principles of the restored gospel, and fully willing to make personal sacrifices in order to build up the Kingdom of God.

In this chapter, I will follow the same format I established in the last: I will begin with a brief summary of Martha Cox’s autobiography, which I will follow with a short discussion of some common epideictic elements contained therein. The body of the chapter will be a close analysis of the role of ethos and representative character in this epideictic activity, focusing on its function to create a collective identity in a situation where the community in question does not coexist in time or space.

The Structure and Content of Martha Cox’s Autobiography

In a document of roughly 70 pages, complete with headings and subtitles, Martha Cox gives an overview of her entire life. Much of the document focuses on her experiences in polygamy, although she does spend several pages talking about her family’s history and introduction to the Mormon church, and her own upbringing. After sharing several brief memories of her childhood, Cox speaks of the difficulties she had in trying to choose a husband, focusing on her reluctance to enter a polygamous marriage. Cox decides to follow the plan she feels the Lord has established for her (113), and in spite of the protests of her family and friends, she marries Isaiah Cox, who already has two wives. At this point the next major segment of the autobiography begins.

Cox spends the bulk of her life history focusing on her experiences as a polygamous wife. She shares numerous vignettes of her positive interactions with her husband’s other wives, whom she considers dearer than her own blood sisters (124).
Intermingled with these stories are other experiences she had as a teacher and a woman living in the western frontier. In addition to her own stories, she frequently shares inspiring and unique stories of her close acquaintances and other members of the Mormon community.

In the last section of her autobiography, Cox focuses on the persecution Mormon polygamists suffered at the hands of United States officers and government leaders. She recounts numerous stories about the wrongdoings of such officers, and speaks sympathetically about her fellow polygamists who suffered greatly. In addition, she shares many of her own hardships: her husband had to flee their community, and her sister wives and their children moved away. These are the ideas on which the true autobiography section of the manuscript ends. The document concludes with several diary-like entries, written in present tense, in which Cox discusses her daily activities and vows to "live as long as [she] can" (145).

**Traditional Epideictic Elements in Cox’s Autobiography**

Like Snow, one of the most important epideictic strategies which Cox uses in her autobiography is a reliance on commonplaces, the fundamental assumptions she knows she shares with her audience. Using polygamy as her personal symbol of obedience, she emphatically asserts her belief that the principle had been ordained by God. In discussing her decision to marry, Cox frequently reiterates the fact that God commanded her specifically to marry into polygamy, which was the only reason she married Isaiah Cox. Because she knew that she was writing for an audience that hadn’t lived in a polygamous
era, Cox's emphasis on the fact that polygamy was divinely ordained is an important rhetorical tool. A shared belief in the God of the Restoration, combined with the Mormon belief of privileged access to His will, may have been the primary piece of common ground which Cox shared with her audience. She emphasizes this belief in order to remind her audience of the importance of yielding one's own will to God.

In order to demonstrate the religious importance of polygamy, Cox also uses the origins and fruits model suggested by Aristotle in which he asserts that if whatever brings about or comes from any given principle is of value, then the principle itself must be so also. Cox states that one of the reasons she became comfortable entering a polygamous marriage was because she knew the other women of her household to be charitable and virtuous: "The good kind women whom I had chosen to share the burdens of life with gave me strength and comfort with their sympathy and love" (117). Cox uses the character of these good women living the law of polygamy to bolster the impression of the practice itself. In a similar example she shares a story of a woman who gave up the company of her husband so he could go and live with a second wife. Of this self-sacrificing woman Cox remarks, "Abraham's Sarah was not more noble than was sister Jeffrey" (132-3). By comparing a nineteenth-century Mormon polygamous woman with such an honored figure in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Cox is able to establish contemporary polygamy as a praise-worthy institution, and to show the righteousness of those who sacrificed in order to live it fully.

By showing the temporal benefits which result from the polygamy, Cox further demonstrates the value of the practice. In describing home life with her sister wives she
states, "we had in our home an almost perfect United Order.² No one can tell the
advantages of that system until he has lived it. We enjoyed many privileges that single
wifery never knew" (121). Cox proceeds to give numerous examples of how polygamy
solved many of the practical problems inherent in a marriage (and she never specifically
mentions any of the problems that it may have created). In connection with the day-to-
day advantages of such a system, Cox also emphasizes the joy she found in the close
family relationships that grew out of her experience in polygamy. The strong ties she
formed with these women and children because of her plural marriage indicates that since
what comes from polygamy is virtuous, the practice itself must be so also.

Cox also praises polygamy by aligning herself against the enemies of the
principle. Polygamous families suffered numerous hardships at the hands of those who
wished to abolish the practice, and Cox vividly illustrates those trials in her
autobiography. After establishing the fact that her polygamous home was loving and
peaceful, she writes about how the raids on these homes split her family apart. Her
husband fled to Mexico, and the wives were forced to find refuge wherever they could:
"It brought hardship upon us all" (129-30). In another section Cox shares the story of
officers "sneaking into homes without license and into women's bedrooms." In response
to this behavior Cox makes no secret of her feelings about the persecutors: "I had bitter
hatred in my heart against the officials in Utah, and against the traitors who exposed the

² The "United Order" is the Mormon term for a nineteenth-century practice in
which families would donate all their property to a collective "storehouse." The
material goods of the community were then distributed among the families by a
local church leader (see Ludlow for a more detailed description of the doctrine).
Saints" (129-30). Her vivid depictions of the trials themselves, coupled with Cox’s fierce expressions of hatred, naturally unite the readers with her and against those who wished to destroy polygamy.

Establishing a Collective Identity Across Temporal and Spatial Boundaries

Although Cox wasn’t writing in a traditional setting for epideictic discourse, the variety of epideictic tactics she used demonstrate that autobiography, which is typically full of the discourse of praise and blame (of oneself and others), can indeed function as epideictic rhetoric. And again, like Snow, one of the most effective strategies she used was the establishment of a powerful ethos which enabled her to serve as a representative figure for her audience. Cox exemplifies Antczak’s theory when she sets herself up as a representative figure who is both authoritative (a model Mormon polygamist) and accessible, as she made no secret of her own concerns and failures living the law. However, in her particular context, Cox can’t be a literal role-model, as she knows her readers can’t adopt polygamy. Instead, she uses her experiences in polygamy as a prototype for a larger issue, creating an identity for herself first, and her larger audience through the process of what Kenneth Burke and others call consubstantiation, a symbolic union between rhetor and audience in purpose, ideology, even identity. Through this process, Cox represents herself and her community as women devoted to personal sacrifice in order to fully live the principles of the restored gospel, whatever they may be.

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3 See "A Likely Story: The Autobiographical as Epideictic" by Marjorie O’Rourke for a more thorough exploration of this theory.
During Cox’s lifetime, a woman essentially had to be a practicing and committed polygamist in order to prove that she was a faithful and devoted member of the Mormon community. Hence, in order to serve as a representative figure for her audience, Cox had to do just that, which she does in a variety of ways. The majority of the journal focuses on polygamy, showing that her commitment to the principle was a major part of her life. And although she never specifically states the length of time she spent living in a polygamous situation, her autobiography spans decades, which clearly gives her readers the indication that she has lived the law long enough to show her devotion. In addition, Cox draws attention to the fact that although polygamy “seemed” to be “the leading principle among the L.D.S.” (117), she was one of the very few in her town who had entered it. According to Aristotle, this fact along would single Cox out as a worthy role-model, since if a person is the “only one,” or one among few to accomplish a certain deed, “these things are noble” (53). Since Cox was among the few polygamists in her town, her achievements immediately become more extraordinary.

Furthermore, Cox makes a number of general, straightforward statements in support of polygamy. Among many such statements, early in her autobiography she tells her audience, "I had studied out the matter, I knew the principle of plural marriage to be correct, to be the highest holiest order of marriage" (112). As epideictic is a "rhetoric of orthodoxies" (Sullivan 117), Cox shows herself to be an outstanding figure by her devotion to the orthodox beliefs of her own era.

Cox then moves to strengthen her position as a representative figure by sharing numerous personal experiences from her life in polygamy. She frequently reveals her
private feelings about how she got along with her husband’s other wives: "we three who loved each other more than sisters, will go hand in hand together down all eternity. That knowledge is worth more to me than gold" (122). When statements like this go forward to an audience likely to be suspicious of polygamy, they reinforce the speaker’s righteous commitment. In contrast with common twentieth-century conceptions about struggles between polygamous wives, this statement shows Cox to be an ideal polygamist. Furthermore, this Christian sisterhood is a value that transcends the setting in which it occurred. It is a timeless virtue, which shows Cox not only to be a righteous polygamist, but, more importantly, a righteous woman, whose behavior should be emulated in any situation.

Many of Cox’s most compelling personal expressions show her struggling with trials and making great sacrifices in order to be obedient to the principles she believed in; in fact, this self-sacrifice becomes a central component of the identity she creates. From her first mention of marriage she clearly shows her reader that she gave up much to become a polygamist. Some of the sacrifices seem petty; for example, she married a poor man who was already struggling to support two wives instead of the rich bachelor who was courting her (112). Other sacrifices are clearly more consequential. As she discusses her decision to marry Isaiah Cox, she confesses “that I could not say that I had really loved the man as lovers love” (113), yet she married him anyway because of her devotion to something she saw to be more important than romance.

In addition to her own doubts and concerns, Cox also had to deal with the disapproval of the members of her own family, who were strongly opposed to the idea of
her entering a polygamous marriage. Cox uses powerful language in describing this conflict, telling her readers that in entering polygamy she risked “incur[ring] the hatred of [her] family” (112). Yet her final decision proves her firm devotion to the principle: “prayer only strengthened my resolve to leave father, mother, and all for—I scarcely knew what” (112). In spite of her own doubts and her family’s hostility, Cox still made the decision to enter the practice of polygamy. This choice clearly demonstrates for her readers that she is one worthy to praise it. In this setting of epideictic, she also establishes herself as a representative for all people willing to sacrifice to live the highest law of their time, polygamy, and, on a larger scale, for all those who would make personal sacrifices to live the gospel in any setting.

By providing general information about her own feelings regarding polygamy, Cox shows herself to be a devoted polygamist. As she adds many of her personal experiences to those general ideas, her perceived level of commitment becomes even stronger. In fact, throughout her autobiography, Cox shows herself to be an almost ideal polygamous wife in many ways. However, still in keeping with the dual required characteristics of an effective representative figure, Cox also assures her audience that she understands what it is like to be a common member of the community. By sharing some of her own struggles with selfishness and fear, Cox makes herself human and accessible to those in her audience who may share some of those “undesirable” traits.

Cox mentions several times that she originally harbored many prejudices against the principle, all of which she had to overcome. Early in her autobiography, before she herself had become a polygamist, she states that watching a good polygamist family had
“soften[ed] the prejudice [she] had formed in [her] mind against the principle of plural marriage.” She also calls the principle something which she had once “treated lightly” (106). After she had made the decision to enter polygamy in spite of the protestations of her family, she states, “I was sorry sometimes that I had taken up the question [whether or not to enter polygamy] at all” (112). In a later section she shows her naive beliefs about how her life would change once she entered the practice. She declares: “I had thought that when I entered that home of peace and prayer and Gospel love that all evil, unrest, and sorrow would be ended and I would have ‘Arrived in Zion.’” Yet she admits that instead she found that “every day was to be a day of sacrifice [sic]” (115). By showing herself to be a real person with real trials, Cox lets her audience understand that she can sympathize with sorrow even as she stands as a model of righteous obedience. These personal stories demonstrate the conversion of a representative, which invites identification on the part of the audience and sets a powerful example of selflessness for them to follow.

Yet just as these statements serve to make Cox a “real” and therefore attractive model, they also establish a means by which she can further bolster her ethos as an outstanding polygamist wife. Of course, as the focus of her autobiography is the praise of polygamy, Cox always finds a way to turn her struggles and fears into positive experiences. In dealing with her initial biases against polygamy, she clearly shows how she overcame them: “I found relief only in prayer when the Holy Spirit gave me inspiration and made it plain to me that it [plural marriage] was the only source through which I could attain salvation” (112). In a similar passage she tells her audience, “the fact
was that I had asked the Lord to lead me in the right was for my best good and the way to fit me for a place in his kingdom. He had told me how to go and I must follow in the path he dictated" (113). Through these statements Cox not only demonstrates her own obedience to follow the promptings of God, but she also shows her audience that she is the kind of person to receive those very promptings. The implication here is that because of Cox's membership in the restored church, and because of her willingness to give up her own desires in order to live all the doctrines that accompany that membership, she has become one in whom God is interested, and one whom He is willing to help in a very concrete way.

Just as these kinds of stories heighten Cox's position as a spiritual rolemodel, they also set a precedent for her audience. Because she was willing to abandon selfishness in order to follow the Lord's commandments, Cox was able to overcome her biases. In the same way, her readers learn that if they are willing to make the same kinds of sacrifices and commitments, they will be entitled to the same kinds of blessings.

Cox teaches this same principle in an even more dramatic way as she discusses the enemies of polygamy. Throughout her autobiography, Cox demonstrates her belief that those who fought against the principle will be punished by God. She communicates this idea by sharing numerous vivid anecdotes, which are powerful tools for identification. Walter Fisher asserts that "the operative principle of narrative rationality is identification" (66), indicating that these descriptive narratives have the potential to enact the type of identification that would enable Cox to be a representative figure. One of the most effective ways that Cox encourages this is by sharing explicit stories about her
experiences with the enemies of polygamy. Two of these anecdotes stand out for particular attention. In the first, Cox recounts her experience on a camping trip with some friends:

I no sooner took my station at the fire than Mrs. Vance commenced a tirade on Polygamy and Polygamists generally. Blamed B.Y. [Brigham Young] for his many wives and the silly men who followed his example. Then turned her tirade on to the prophet Joseph Smith for introducing the principle. At the time she was holding a piece of broiling bacon over the coals. When she referred to the Prophet in such scandelous [sic] terms I could not restrain myself from saying "You ought to have your tongue burned." I hardly felt responsible for my words . . . for I felt I had told the truth. At the suggestion she raised the broiling slice of bacon on her fork and laid it full length on her tongue. . . . She gave a deadly scream and I ran to our wagon jumped in and covered myself with quilts. . . . When we drove out of camp she was sitting on the wagon tongue with a wet towel pad on the burned organ. (114)

Clearly, this fascinating story supports Cox’s overall focus on how polygamy is a true principle ordained by God. More importantly in this context, however, it shows her readers that because of her own personal devotion to live and support the law, Cox has been endowed with some sort of supernatural power of suggestion. Sullivan asserts that traditionally, the epideictic rhetor has been viewed to have a "supernatural vision" (120). In this example, Cox seems to have stretched this traditional idea. This story suggests
that because of her obedience, she has been given the privilege to request the intervention of God to punish those who would speak ill of his divine doctrines and fail to recognize the righteousness of those who have sacrificed in order to live those principles. Of course, although Cox uses the example of standing up for polygamy, which was perhaps the most important gospel principle of her era, this same power could exist in any similar situation. A careful reader, naturally identifying with Cox because of the force of the narrative itself, would surmise that this power could be given to any committed Mormon woman, not just one who was committed particularly to the principle of polygamy.

A later story reiterates this same theory in a slightly different way. After a lengthy discussion of all the injustices which the polygamists have had to suffer at the hands of government officers, Cox openly expresses her rage:

I said in referring to McGeary who had been accustomed to act unfeelingly with the plural wives, ‘Every bone in his body should be broken’, and this was his fate, suffering with a fever he walked out of a high window in an Ogden hotel and the account published in the paper stated that every bone in this body was broken. (131)

Although this story shares obvious similarities within the tongue-burning incident, in many ways it is even more powerful. In the first, Cox speaks directly to her enemy, and her real power comes through her verbal suggestion. In this story, Cox has no literal contact with the victim, yet the implications are the same. Cox clearly believes that the curse she placed on McGeary was realized, indicating her belief that God recognizes her
self-sacrificing devotion to divine principles and because of it her righteous desires will be granted.

In spite of the remarkable nature of both these stories, Cox relates them both in a matter-of-fact manner. The vignettes are interwoven with the more quotidian details of her life, and Cox makes no further discussion of the implications which accompany them. By sharing the stories in such a manner, Cox implies that although they certainly demonstrate her personal righteousness, they aren’t remarkable in any other way. Again, although Cox never explicitly states this, she implies to her readers that this righteous power can belong to anyone who is fully committed to obeying the laws of the restored gospel. By showing her audience the power that comes from righteousness (in distinct contrast with the punishment that lies in store for the wicked), Cox invites her readers to join her in her unselfish commitment to be counted among the righteous Mormon women of any era, regardless of what sacrifices are required to make that commitment manifest. These descriptive narratives serve two purposes: first, they further demonstrate Cox’s identity as a representative Mormon woman, and further, they encourage her audience to identify with that created character. By vividly showing the ultimate privileges which inevitably follow personal sacrifice, Cox summons her readers to first identify with her, and then to join her in accepting that identity—a woman wholly committed to the restored church, regardless of the cost—as their own.
Conclusion

Martha Cox's effort to praise polygamy for "all who may care to read it," (qtd. in Godfrey 272) is clearly a rhetorical event, and in her autobiography she uses a variety of epideictic strategies, although the rhetorical setting was an uncommon one for epideictic. Throughout her text, Cox praises polygamy in many ways; however, because she understands that her readers cannot join her in the practice, polygamy instead serves as a symbol for her larger sense of identity. By focusing on her commitment to polygamy, Cox shows herself to be devoted to God even in times of severe trial. As she shares numerous examples of this commitment, she goes beyond merely stating her belief in a principle; she defines her own identity in accordance to that belief.

Although these women created their epideictic expressions in two different rhetorical settings in response to two distinct exigencies, Snow and Cox used the concept of identification with a representative figure to achieve the same overall purpose, the creation of a collective identity. In a different public setting, Cox, like Snow, invites her audience to identify with her and to adopt the identity she has established for herself. Yet, because genre conventions don't allow for Cox to use the collective "we" in the same way Snow does, Cox's invitation works quite differently. Instead of explicitly stating that she shares a common heritage and worldview with her audience, Cox instead tells powerful stories which show them the blessings and benefits she has herself received by adopting that worldview. Unable to take advantage of a literal proximity to her audience to promote identification, she closes the gap of time and space through the use of compelling narratives, invoking what Martha Nussbaum calls the "literary
imagination" which can potentially render the possibility of "entering imaginatively into
the lives of distant others and to have emotions related to that participation" (xvi).

Like Snow, Cox uses what Burke would call a formal pattern (Rhetoric 58), but instead of using language which includes all her literally present readers to promote identification, Cox invokes the literary imagination of her readers, which enables her readers to "form bonds of identification and sympathy" (Nussbaum 7) with the persona she has created in her autobiography. She then leaves it to her readers to come to the decision on their own that they will join her as a people identified as committed members of the restored church, willing to do whatever is asked of them. As Lockwood notes, it is "characteristic of epideictic speech to figure its readers as future speakers and doers" (30), which is precisely what Cox has done in her autobiography. After carefully defining her own very specific (and somewhat ideal) identity in such a way that her readers could strongly identify with her, she implicitly urges them to become future doers—to join her in becoming a united people, defined by their covenant relationship with God.
Conclusion

In *The New Rhetoric*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca remind us that "any society prizing its own values is therefore bound to promote opportunities for epideictic speeches to be delivered at regular intervals" (55). This description is certainly applicable to most religious groups, and perhaps Mormons in particular, who have always defined themselves as distinct from other Christian churches because of their specific values and doctrines. The Mormon faith is, inherently, a collective one rather than an individual or private one, and the idea of a Mormon community is very important in the Mormon religion. Because of this, epideictic discourse, a public rhetoric shared by communities who care about their own values, has always held an important place in Mormon society. In many situations, epideictic rhetoric in Mormon discourse has filled traditionally recognized functions: praising a respected institution, condemning the enemies of the church, eulogizing important figures in the community. However, in the specific texts I have examined here—as well as in many others, I am sure—epideictic has served a different purpose: to enable a community to literally define themselves, to create a shared identity, in terms of their common beliefs and worldview.

In many ways this nontraditional function of epideictic seems natural in Mormon discourse. Mormons have always prided themselves as being a "peculiar people," separate from the larger Christian community because of their restored doctrines and their ideas of maintaining a covenant relationship with God. For most Mormons, religion isn’t merely a question of what they believe, but who they are. Because of this, it is not surprising that Mormons have used an epideictic encounter not only to recommit
themselves to shared values, but to establish a collective identity, which overrides personal beliefs about the self, based entirely on those shared values and commitments.

In my thesis I have demonstrated this phenomenon in two entirely distinct rhetorical settings in order to demonstrate that it can work in different ways, even while working toward a common goal. In the case of the public speech of Artimesia Snow, which is perhaps a quintessential setting for traditional epideictic, the literal contact between speaker and audience facilitates the creation of a shared identity. Using persuasive tactics which are common in epideictic discourse, primarily the creation of a strong ethos, Snow first establishes herself as a representative figure, who understands and embodies the values of the audience, and, in a sense, derives from those shared values the authority to speak for the community as a whole (Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public Knowledge" 76). As a representative figure, she invites the audience to participate in what Burke calls identification, which allows Snow to attribute the identity she has established for herself to each member of her audience. In essence, the outcome of the epideictic encounter is an expression of this collective identity, made public by the representative spokeswoman, Snow. In her speech, Snow expresses the idea that she and her audience are a community of Mormon women, defined by their commitment to live the law of polygamy, and, on a larger scale, defined by their identity as daughters of God in every aspect of their lives.

Martha Cox uses epideictic rhetoric in a very different setting, as she didn’t have the opportunity to address her audience directly. Cox was distanced from her primary readers physically, temporally, and in some ways, ideologically. She told her life story,
of which her participation in polygamy was a central part, in order to inspire religious commitment in the hearts of her descendants who lived in an era when polygamy was no longer practiced. Unlike Snow, Cox cannot use the topic at hand in order to create a shared identity with her audience, because her purpose was never to encourage her descendants to revive the practice; instead, she uses the worldview behind the practice itself. Polygamy becomes a symbol of devoted selflessness, and Cox tells her story in order to convince her descendants of the ultimate benefits of that type of sacrifice. In so doing, she also invites them to join her in a collective identity, to define themselves as people willing to subordinate their own will to the will of God.

Like Snow, Cox utilized traditional epideictic elements in order to achieve her purpose, specifically establishing herself as a representative figure—on two levels. First, she establishes herself as one worthy to speak for all righteous polygamous wives, but, more importantly, she sets herself up as a completely selfless woman, willing to make personal sacrifices in order to live the principles of the restored gospel. Again, as a representative, she invites her audience to identify with the persona she has created, but because she has no literal connection with her audience, the process of identification becomes more difficult. To fill the gap created by the literal (and perhaps the ideological) distance, Cox uses descriptive narratives, powerful tools of identification. These narratives enable Cox’s audience to join her in a shared identity, not as polygamists, but as committed Mormon women, willing to sacrifice their desires and even their individual identities as they unite to define themselves as women of God.
In discussing the important role of ethos in epideictic rhetoric, Sullivan asserts that both the rhetor and the audience have an ethos (119). In certain specific instances, such as the ones I have examined in this thesis, the ethos of the speaker and that of the audience become one in the same. Sullivan discusses the idea that "ethos is not primarily an attribute of the speaker, nor even an audience perception: It is, instead, the common dwelling place of both, the timeless, consubstantial space that enfolds participants in epideictic exchange" (127). In these expressions by Mormon women, the speaker's individual identity comes to function as a representation for the entire community, and through the process of identification, this individual identity becomes a shared one, "a common dwelling place," inhabited by all participants. So to the "constellation of purposes" which Sullivan attributes to epideictic rhetoric (preservation, education, celebration, and aesthetic creation) (116), we should add one more: the creation of collective identity.

With this theoretical base, we can gain a greater understanding of the social and cultural function of epideictic rhetoric in the writings of these women (and perhaps in those of many other Mormons engaged in the praise of polygamy). In his book, *Solemn Covenant*, B. Carmon Hardy attributes to George Q. Cannon the idea that polygamy was a "doctrine purposely revealed by God to bring His followers into conflict with the rest of the world and its established beliefs" (18). Although this is not a commonly upheld idea in current Mormon doctrine, it is true that "much of what gave life among the Saints [in

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1 Cannon was a member of the First Presidency—the highest position of Mormon leadership next to the prophet—in the nineteenth century.
the nineteenth century] its distinctive character arose directly from things like plural marriage" (Hardy 18). Certainly, polygamy, along with numerous other distinct Mormon doctrines, succeeded in isolating Mormons from other Christian communities of the nineteenth century, an isolation that, based on their separatist doctrines and practices, was exactly what they had hoped for.

Epideictic rhetoric, as I have described it, helped Mormons to achieve this self-imposed "separateness." According to Mark Leone and R. Laurence Moore, nineteenth-century Mormons were never very far removed from mainstream American values. Rather, they suggest that "most of what separated [Mormons] were apologetics cultivated by the church to confirm its identity" (qtd. in Hardy 348). The two texts I have examined in this thesis function rhetorically by enabling members of this religious community to distinguish themselves from outsiders as they define themselves according to their own shared beliefs. Artimesia Snow and Martha Cox, although expressing themselves in diverse genres and using different rhetorical tools, facilitated this distinction by presenting themselves as representatives of what Mormon women ought to be. And their Mormon audiences, actively engaged with them in an epideictic encounter and remade in the image of these representative figures, successfully demonstrated to the world that they were, indeed, a "peculiar people."
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Epideictic Rhetoric and the Formation of Collective Identity:

Nineteenth-Century Mormon Women in Praise of Polygamy

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the rhetorical strategies used by Mormon polygamous wives in their nineteenth-century justifications of the controversial practice. Plural marriage was a central part of the Mormon church in the nineteenth century, but the conflict surrounding the practice necessitated much public praise for it. This praise came in a variety of genres, but much of the discourse was presented in the form of epideictic rhetoric, what Aristotle called the rhetoric of praise and blame. In this thesis I argue that in these Mormon writings, epideictic facilitated (among other things) the formation of a collective identity, centered around the persona of a strong representative speaker.

In order to demonstrate this phenomenon I analyze two case studies: a public speech given by Artimesia Snow to a large group of women, and an autobiography written by Martha Cragun Cox. Using these texts as models, I assert that a strong speaker can establish herself as a representative figure for the group and invite her audience to join her in a collective identity. I conclude with the argument that this function of epideictic helped Mormons distinguish themselves from the rest of the Christian world.

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