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**Alpine Guides, Gender, and British Climbers, 1859–1885: Swiss Guides and the  
Boundaries of Female Propriety in the British Periodical Press**

KATHRYN WALCHESTER

In a December 1885 article entitled “Two Lady Alpine Climbers” in the *Girl’s Own Paper*, Edward Whymper writes of the achievement of two important characters in the history of women’s mountaineering, Lucy Walker and Elizabeth Le Blond.<sup>1</sup> By the time Whymper’s article was published, women had conquered many of the key peaks in Europe and beyond.<sup>2</sup> Mont Blanc had been scaled in 1854 by Mrs. Hamilton, and the following year by Emma Foreman, who made the first female ascent of Monte Rosa in 1857. Emma Winkworth, wife of a Bolton spinner, was the first woman to summit the 4,158 metre Jungfrau and the 4,206 metre Alphubel in 1863, and Lucy Walker made the first female ascent of the Matterhorn in 1871.<sup>3</sup> Of Walker’s achievements, Whymper notes,

Should Miss Walker ever give to the world some account of her unparalleled experiences, her book would be unique of its kind; and amidst descriptions of scenes such as it has been the lot of few to enjoy, we may be sure that she would not forget to do justice equally to the loving watchfulness of her father and brother—her constant companions—and to the tender care of the faithful Swiss, their incomparable leader, whose ability and prudence have never failed in these long series of expeditions, and whose sterling qualities have long since justly earned for him the title of “Prince of Guides.”<sup>4</sup>

The guide to whom Whymper refers is Melchior Anderegg, born in 1828 near to Meiringen in the Bernese Oberland, who after a childhood tending cattle and carving wood became one of the principal guides of the region.<sup>5</sup> The positioning of Whymper’s laudatory account of Anderegg is peculiar given that it appears at the end of an article ostensibly celebrating the achievements of women mountaineers. Whymper’s portrayal of the guide, first as a “faithful

Swiss” and then as the “Prince of Guides,” overshadows the claims of the women, thus affording them an inferior and dependent position.

This article traces the representation of the mountain guide in the British periodical press between 1859 and 1885, highlighting the ways in which the figure of the guide contributed to fierce debates about the ethics and purpose of mountaineering and its suitability as a sport for ladies. In the press, guides were depicted in articles about climbing on the European continent, in accounts of landmark events in its history, and in reviews of texts written by British mountaineers. Because of their wide readership and accessibility, periodicals had considerable influence in the debate about the borders of conventional and acceptable femininity. A concentrated analysis of periodical literature can facilitate an understanding of incremental changes in the borders of ideological categories, especially the conventions of femininity and the appropriate boundaries of physical activity by women. Scholarship by Fraser, Green, and Johnston, among others, has illustrated the integral role of the periodical press in the “formation and circulation of gender ideologies in Victorian Britain.”<sup>6</sup> Referring to Mary Poovey’s influential work, the authors assert that the “medium that most readily articulates the unevenness and reciprocities of evolving gender ideologies is the periodical press.”<sup>7</sup> Discussions and representations of women’s mountaineering are a significant source for understanding the expansion of acceptable gender conventions over the period. In the 1860s and ’70s, women’s climbing achievements were predominantly addressed in articles by male reviewers of texts about women’s mountain adventures. It was not until later in the period that specific articles about women’s achievements began to appear in periodicals aimed at women and girls.

Accounts of female climbers at mid-century were most often used to underline women’s reliance on male guides. My study begins by analysing periodical reviews of *A Lady’s Tour Round Monte Rosa* (1859) by Eliza Cole (Mrs Henry Warwick). I then consider

the reception of *Alpine Byways* (1861) and *A Summer Tour in the Grisons* (1862) by Jane Freshfield (Mrs. Henry Freshfield). I contrast representations of these climbers and their relationships with their guides to periodical accounts of the achievements of Lucy Walker and texts by Elizabeth Le Blond from the 1870s and early 1880s. I argue that periodical reviewers discussed women's achievements differently in cases like these, where climbs were accomplished without the presence of a male relative.

Recent scholarship by Ann C. Colley, Carole Osborne, and Clare Roche has shown that women's mountaineering was hardly unusual during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> In her chapter "Ladies on High," Colley asserts that "women were not peremptorily dismissed from trespassing on such lofty heights. Rather they were often admired and encouraged."<sup>9</sup> She notes how "articles in the popular press, such as the *Daily Telegraph* ('The Queen of the Alps'), *The Graphic* ('The Scottish Alps'), the *Daily News*, the *Standard*, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Daily Graphic*, the *Weekly Budget*, and the *Evening News* regularly lauded women's climbing skills."<sup>10</sup> However, Colley's examples are largely from the end of the century, when, as Kathleen McCrone and others have noted, public exhibition of women's physicality in sporting activities, whilst not always approved of entirely, was more frequent.<sup>11</sup> At mid-century, women climbers were sometimes treated with disdain. A June 29, 1861 article in the *Saturday Review*, for example, acknowledged it noted the "permanent mischief" left on a woman's physique by the sort of "over-fatigue that a man can shake off with half a day's rest."<sup>12</sup> As Clare Roche points out, "There is a sense . . . that there were limitations to the amount of encouragement to be given to women. Despite praising their independence and prowess at walking and climbing, newspapers covered very few challenging ascents made by women."<sup>13</sup> The first ascents by Lucy Walker of the Eiger in 1864 and the Matterhorn in 1871 were not widely reported in the press.<sup>14</sup> By concentrating on a relatively short chronological span prior the period Colley focused on in her work, I explore

how representations of women mountaineers and guides evolved over time, especially in terms of the independent agency ascribed to them in the popular press.

The figure of the alpine guide is likewise a complex and much debated trope in scholarship about Victorian mountaineering. As a paid employee, the guide was deemed socially inferior to his British employer. Furthermore, as French or Swiss nationals, foreign guides were often portrayed negatively in publications focused on shoring up the national identity of the British middle and upper classes.<sup>15</sup> The identity of the alpine guide is further complicated by the fact that the guiding field was undergoing professionalization during the second half of the nineteenth century. Scholarship by Trevor Braham, Michael Reidy, Peter Hansen, and others has shown how British climbers fought to secure their preferred guides.<sup>16</sup> Guides were therefore not dismissed or overlooked in periodical literature of the period. As Trevor Braham contends, “The leading amateurs of the era were unsparing in praise for their guides.”<sup>17</sup> However, this positive representation of guides evolved over time, developing with alongside climbers’ growing demands. As Ronald Clark notes, “It was, in fact during the decades between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the rise of Prussia in the 1870s that the Alpine Guide was transformed from the humble worker in the small village into the craftsman whose prowess was respected and whose companionship was sought by eminent men of all of the professions. In this development the gentlemen of England played a decisive part.”<sup>18</sup> Organizations and examinations for guides were established from the 1820s in Chamonix, but as Clarke underlines, it was not until well into the 1870s that many organizations offered any form of training.<sup>19</sup> Van Looche also asserts the role which British mountaineers played in the professionalization of alpine guides in the 1850s and ’60s.<sup>20</sup> This trajectory is mirrored in the representation of guides in the periodical press, where, for example, members of the British Alpine Club contributed articles both to the club’s *Alpine*

*Journal* and to the popular press. In these articles, the figure of the guide is increasingly noted for his skill and his integral role in supporting the expedition.

The status of the guide as a leader was temporary though. There were moments of appreciation and shared triumph, for example when John Tyndall allows his guide, Joseph Bennen, to be the first to step onto the summit of the Weisshorn.<sup>21</sup> However, as Thompson notes, “On the mountain the relationship between client and guide was often friendly and informal but when they returned to the valley the social divide between gentleman and peasant reasserted itself.”<sup>22</sup> Power was, as Michael Reidy asserts, “mapped on a vertical scale,” with amateur climbers taking charge until a certain altitude before the guide took over.<sup>23</sup> Thus, while this essay explores the role of guides in periodical discussions of the suitability of climbing as an activity for women, it also engages with the topographical boundaries of altitudes and valleys as well as ideological borders of class, gender, and nationality.

### **Women Climbers and Guides in the 1850s and '60s: Reviews of Cole and Freshfield**

Eliza Cole, known as Mrs. Henry Warwick Cole, made three climbing excursions in the Alps with her husband from 1850 before pseudonymously publishing *A Lady's Tour Round Monte Rosa*.<sup>24</sup> Cole's title avoids asserting that she scaled the 4,634 metre mountain, but the text does indicate that she made a number of substantial nearby ascents.<sup>25</sup> The text does not make significant claims for its author's achievements and does not challenge conservative understandings of gender roles from this period. As Clare Roche notes, Cole writes from a “feminine perspective.”<sup>26</sup> Cole's modest style was acknowledged in an article in the *Examiner* which reviewed her book alongside *Passes, Peaks, Glaciers: A Series of Excursions by Members of the Alpine Club*, edited by John Ball, the club's president. The reviewer moved from his discussion of Ball's book to Cole's with the question, “And what can a lady do?” before noting that she “travelled with her husband, but she needed mules and

saddles, and her book perfectly succeeds in telling travellers of her own sex not only how much they can do, but how they are to set about doing it, if they wish to secure the utmost attainable amount of health, knowledge and pleasure, without straining unduly the amount of strength and climbing power usually given to their sex.”<sup>27</sup> She is thus described as having “travelled,” rather than “climbed,” and the fact that she was accompanied by her husband is duly noted in the first sentences of the review. The reviewer highlights the suitability of her text for women and armchair travellers, that is, people who have no intention of climbing. This emphasis distinguishes the woman climber from her male counterparts and signals the acceptability of mountaineering for women only when they are accompanied by a husband or father. This had consequences for how women were seen (and saw themselves) in relation to local guides, whose role was generally a matter of debate. Reviews and commentaries about mountaineers during the 1850s and ’60s in the periodical press often included negative portrayals of alpine guides. Van Looke notes that “mid-century travel stories, guide books or diaries of mountaineers often refer to the low quality of tourism and mountain guiding.”<sup>28</sup>

The Italian guides who accompanied Eliza Cole on tour were not mentioned in the reviews. Presumably, since her husband was present, it was unnecessary to indicate the physical support they may have offered or their role as chaperones. Indeed, Cole’s own text largely erases the guides, using them mainly as a source of humorous anecdotes, for example in narratives highlighting their over-reactions when encountering difficulties.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, the book reviewed alongside Cole’s in *The Examiner* does highlight the presence of guides during the journey. When reviewing John Ball’s *Passes, Peaks, Glaciers*, the reviewer notes that British climbers are “as competent to overcome [the challenges of climbing the high Alps] as most of the native guides.”<sup>30</sup> The textual presence of competent guides here functions to emphasize the competence of the British male climbers who equal the guides in their climbing skills and their knowledge of the terrain.

The excursions made by Jane Freshfield and her family to the Bernese and Pennine Alps, and later to the Engadin region of Eastern Switzerland, did much to popularize the areas with tourists and led to an expansion in the number of guidebooks to the region.<sup>31</sup> The reviews of the books Jane Freshfield published on these excursions—*Alpine Byways; or, Light Leaves Gathered in 1859 and 1860* (1861) and *A Summer Tour in the Grisons* (1862)—portray the guides as unskilled workers who often require information from their British employers on the climb. A review article of Freshfield's second book in the *Morning Post* on April 26, 1862, represented the guides as amateurish: "The Bernina is an Alpine group, with whose byways but one guide is practically acquainted; and even he by the author's admission was obliged to resort to a close study of maps before he could thoroughly understand the route of the English travellers."<sup>32</sup>

A review in the *Examiner* on April 26, 1862, cited Freshfield's account of climbing Piz Languard, in which she herself outlined the poor knowledge and bad advice from her guides on the Muretto Pass. The guides Jenni and Coutett both told their party that they thought it was going to rain in order to urge them onwards. In the extract chosen by the reviewer, Freshfield notes, "We, however, maintained that it was only 'a shower,' and as we had time enough, we remained snugly ensconced for half an hour. We then started again, and were soon greeted by returning sunshine."<sup>33</sup> The guides' lack of knowledge about the weather, and perhaps their ulterior motive of hurrying their employers, is exposed and the superior judgement of the British party is asserted. Later in the extract, Jenni loses his way on the descent through woodland and is advised of the best way by a local worker. Freshfield notes that "Jenni was not very clear as to his course, and was evidently well-pleased to be directed."<sup>34</sup> Freshfield's choice of travelling with her male family members was praised by the *Athenæum*: "Wisely, therefore, did Mrs. Freshfield make an incursion into the Grisons and view the scenery of the Ober Engadine; wisely also did she provide herself with all



travelling necessities, in the shape of husband, son, and luncheon basket; the first for protection, the second for mountain exploration, and the third for stomachic satisfaction.”<sup>35</sup>

Like Eliza Cole, Jane Freshfield also did not threaten mid-century conventions for feminine behaviour. Singing her books as “A Lady” or “Mrs Henry Freshfield,” she emphasizes her feminine dependency—that she travelled with her family and that she did not physically exert herself on her climbs. Citing Freshfield’s self-effacing preface to her first text, *Alpine Byways*, Clare Roche notes that, “as with most women who wrote about their climbing she insists they do not have to ‘aspir[e] to exploits which may be deemed unfeminine . . . [but] may now enjoy the wildest scenes of mountain grandeur with comparative ease.”<sup>36</sup>

Representations of guides in reviews of these women’s writing largely responds to their self-portrayal as woman climbers who did not wish to challenge conventions of appropriate feminine behaviour. Both Freshfield and Cole climbed with their husbands and positioned their writing, as Roche and Reidy have argued, as advice for “lady travellers,” thereby assuming a relatively conservative gender position.<sup>37</sup>

### **Representation of Guides in Accounts of Achievements by Male Mountaineers**

In accounts of male mountaineering adventures, guides take a much more prominent and positive position than they do in women’s climbing narratives. For example, in response to the Matterhorn tragedy of July 14, 1865, when four members of a British climbing party fell to their deaths on the descent, Charles Dickens wrote an angry article, “Foreign Climbs,” that targeted the “increasing rashness of would-be acrobats calling themselves amateur mountaineers,” particularly the individual who attempts, “with no practical objects or end except the gratification of his personal vanity, peaks and pinnacles never scaled before.”<sup>38</sup> Dickens portrays the guides as Roman gladiators, risking their lives for the satisfaction and leisure of others: “To tempt hardworking guides, mostly family men, to expose their lives for no adequate object; bringing them for our object and amusement to the condition of Roman

gladiators, who might exclaim, ‘Morituri te salutamus,’ ‘We take off our caps to you, on our way to destruction?’”<sup>39</sup> He further notes that the “uppermost Switzerland” region explored by the Alpine Club members “furnishes peaks ascended only by scientific men and human donkeys.”<sup>40</sup> Dickens portrays the guides as both brave and passive; they are tempted to climb into difficult and dangerous situations because of the money offered by their employers. Dickens does not mention women mountaineers but notes that climbing “is not womanly”.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, he compares the futility of mountaineering by men to the hazards which women faced in cities because of fashionable clothing, writing,

If you read to a lady a newspaper paragraph recounting a death through crinoline, whether by burning or entanglement in a carriage-wheel, she will ask in triumph, “And do *you* never get killed foolishly? What are your battues? What are your Melton Mowbrays? And what, if you please, are your Alpine Scrambles?”<sup>42</sup>

Texts by male mountaineers and reviews of mountaineering texts were often produced by members of the Alpine Club and consequently demonstrated an understanding of contemporary developments in the professionalization of the guiding industry. A review of Whymper’s *Scrambles amongst the Alps* (1871), for example, notes: “Perhaps the most curious of them all—certainly one of the most interesting, from its connection with the story—is the frontispiece, representing the fog bow seen on the Matterhorn by Mr. Whymper and the two Taugwalders when making their way down the mountain after the loss of their companions, and which, with a pardonable superstition, the guides firmly believed to be connected with the accident.”<sup>43</sup> In the frontispiece, Whymper and the two remaining guides face three crosses in the fog marking the final resting place of the trustworthy guide and his employers who had been lost in the tragic accident. In another review of the book, Leslie Stephen likewise writes largely complimentary appraisal of the guides.<sup>44</sup> Of the guide who fell to his death, he asserts that he was “one of the best and bravest of guides.”<sup>45</sup> Later in the

article he cites the opinions of guides Peter Taugwald and Melchoir Anderegg on the passable routes to the summit of the Matterhorn which challenges Whymper's assertion, made in *Scrambles in the Alps*, that Taugwald had "intentionally used a weak rope in fastening himself to Lord F. Douglas, in order to have a chance of being separated from him in case of accident."<sup>46</sup> Stephen notes the expertise of guides but in this case also their tendency to risk climbs with thin ropes.

Stephen's positive comments about guides in his review of Whymper's text is mirrored in his own writing, and this positive assessment in turn was recognized by his fellow reviewers. A review of Stephen's 1871 mountaineering account, *Playground of Europe*, in the *Saturday Review*, draws attention to his rhetorical strategy of using both guides and the actions of his fellow climbers as a source of humour: "The burlesque is only laid on, and the story is worth reading in itself. After laughing at his guide or his fellow-traveller, he has only to chop back to the bergschrund or the arête, and tell the tale of the ascent till the moment comes again for joking."<sup>47</sup> The fact that Stephen draws on both his guides and companions as a source for humour perhaps indicates a move towards a collegiate relationship, on the mountain at least. At this moment in the "Golden Age" of climbing, guides could be praised for initiative, strength, and expertise but also satirized alongside their British employers.

During this early period, negative representations of the guides of male climbers in the press often revolved around their culpability in fatal accidents. In the *Lady's Newspaper*, a September 22, 1860 article describes "Another Fatal Accident in the Alps" in which the Reverend William Watson was killed after falling into a crevasse.<sup>48</sup> The article notes that the "guide was solely responsible for the fatal occurrence" and then recounts debates over "obligation on the part of guides," including a lengthy section from a letter to the *Times* from John Tyndall, a celebrated physicist, mountaineer, and member of the Alpine Club. The letter

referred to the deaths of three other British climbers and their guide, an accident in which the two surviving guides had been culpable, according to Tyndall.<sup>49</sup> Emphasizing the simplicity of Fuller, Rochester, and Vavasour's descent along the "stony *arête*," Tyndall notes that "any lady of ordinary walking powers might be conducted down it with perfect safety."<sup>50</sup>

Tyndall's comment suggests that whilst a route's accessibility to "ladies" was still the measure of its level of difficulty, women were increasingly accepted as mountaineering companions.

### **Women Mountaineers in the 1870s and '80s**

In comparison to Eliza Cole and Jane Freshfield, Lucy Walker and Elizabeth Le Blond partly conducted their climbing careers without male family members accompanying them. Walker began climbing in 1858, prompted by her father and brother, who were keen mountaineers.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to her extensive list of first ascents, Walker became the second president of the Lady's Alpine Club in 1912.<sup>52</sup> Walker was the subject of a poem entitled "A Climbing Girl" in *Punch* 1871 after she became the first woman to scale the Matterhorn. As Clare Roche notes, the *Times*, for its part, "omitted any mention of this unprecedented ascent."<sup>53</sup>

Elizabeth Le Blond, born Elizabeth Hawkins-Whitshead in 1860, was the subject of Whymper's article "Two Lady Alpine Climbers" in the *Girl's Own Paper*. Le Blond was not only the founder and first president of the Ladies Alpine Club but also published seven texts about her alpine and Norwegian expeditions between 1883 and 1908.<sup>54</sup> She was married to traveller and explorer Colonel Frederick Gustavus Burnaby in June 1879, and her only son was born in 1880. She began her climbing career the following year after going to Chamonix for her health.<sup>55</sup> Le Blond's texts are significant not only in their scope and detail on women's contributions to Victorian mountaineering but also in their extensive and positive discussions of the role of the mountain guide. In summing up her early attempts in the preface to *The High Alps in Winter*, she notes that "it has been my invariable practice to

always employ the very best guides, and many obstacles were, no doubt, overcome by the skill of the men who accompanied me.”<sup>56</sup>

In the satirical and right-leaning *John Bull* magazine, Le Blond’s climbing achievements were acknowledged but also overshadowed by an emphasis on the skill of her guide. An 1883 review of her first book, *The High Alps in Winter*, notes, “The advocate of woman’s [*sic*] rights will be able to point to her achievements as indicating that the weaker sex, commonly so called, is able to hold its own in a pursuit which has hitherto been regarded as more exclusively the province of the stronger sex, commonly so called.”<sup>57</sup> Since Le Blond had claimed that she was inspired to begin climbing after being sent to the Alps to recover from a pulmonary complaint, the article begins with her remarkable achievements as an “invalid,” making special note of how she overcame her health difficulties: “But the invigorating air of the mountains and the indefatigable zeal and energy of her guide, Edouard Cupelin, coupled, we must in fairness to the writer herself, add with her own indomitable pluck and perseverance, enabled her to accomplish a variety of the feats of mountaineering which, considering the season of the year at which they were accomplished, are probably without parallel in the annals of Alpine excursions.”<sup>58</sup> Le Blond is famous for having made the first winter ascent of the 3,842 metre Aiguille de Midi and the first winter crossing of the Cols de Tacul and Argentière. In that first winter of climbing, she also attempted Mont Blanc but was driven back at 4,810 metres by a storm.<sup>59</sup> In spite of such achievements, it is clear that the reviewer acknowledges her accomplishments, while also noting that the mountain air and her faithful, talented guide were key to her success.

Edouard Cupelin was famous as a guide amongst British climbers in the Chamonix region and further afield in the Alps, having climbed Mont Blanc fifty-seven times. He accompanied climbing parties from the 1860s to 1884, when a falling boulder broke his knee and ended his career.<sup>60</sup> Cupelin was noted for his attentiveness and care, particularly for the

women mountaineers he accompanied. Le Blond dedicated her 1886 *High Life and Towers of Silence* to him and included his photograph as a frontispiece. She notes, “When I travel with Cupelin, I invariably leave all the responsibility of packing and seeing that nothing is left behind to him, and he takes upon himself so completely the united duties of courier, ladies’ maid, guide, cook, and many other vocations, that he looks after all the articles likely to go astray as if that was the sole business of his life.”<sup>61</sup> Le Blond’s representation of Cupelin goes beyond the technicalities of mountaineering and is remarkably domestic. In the mountain environment, he replaces Le Blond’s domestic staff, which to some extent affirms his lower class status and devalues his contribution to her success.

Reviews of *The High Alps in Winter* recognize Le Blond’s close relationship with her guides in a positive way but also suggest that she depended on their leadership. A review in the *Academy* written by Douglas Freshfield (Jane Freshfield’s son and a mountaineer himself) noted the importance of recognizing the authority of the guide: “She [Le Blond] was fortunate in securing the services of a first-rate Chamonix guide and his brother, and under their leadership seems to have picked up with singular aptitude a knowledge of all of the mysteries of mountain-craft. One of the first of these—though not perhaps the most generally recognised of late—is a due appreciation of the skill, bravery and honesty of good guides, and a readiness to defer to their judgement.”<sup>62</sup> While Freshfield highlights deference to the guide as one of the central principles of “mountain-craft” and acknowledges Le Blond’s awareness of this, he also notes the skill which Le Blond has learned from watching and listening to her guides.

Edward Whymper, in a review for the *Girl’s Own Paper*, also approvingly noted Le Blond’s close relationship with her guide and, like Douglas Freshfield, emphasized the Cupelin’s skill rather than his domestic accomplishments. Whymper remarks how Le Blond was “under the leading of a Chamonix named Cupelin, who is described as a person of

unusual agility.”<sup>63</sup> As in his account of Lucy Walker’s achievements, Whympers once again emphasizes the skill of the guide and notes approvingly the woman mountaineer’s dependence on him. His concern about women’s climbing is evident from the outset of the article when he writes, “In these latter days many ladies have travelled in the Alps performing feats which have astonished the natives, and cause a feeling of wonder, sometimes not unmixed with apprehension, in the minds of those who were brought up in the more sober and cautious school of the last generation. Of the modern school, Mrs. F. Burnaby [Le Blond] is, decidedly, the most enterprising and the most remarkable.”<sup>64</sup> Whympers, born in 1840, places himself as one of that “last generation” who regards Le Blond and women climbers generally with reserve—admiring but not fully convinced of the suitability of climbing as an activity for women. His emphasis on Cupelin’s skill and agility underlines his belief in the professionalism of the guide and his expert role in teaching and supporting women mountaineers.

Surprisingly, close relationships between female climbers and their guides, such as those between Walker and Anderegg and Le Blond and Cupelin, did not receive much criticism in the British press. Walker, who never married, famously said, “I love the mountains and Melchior [Anderegg], and Melchior already has a wife.”<sup>65</sup> Le Blond climbed with Eduoard Cupelin, and, after 1884, with Swiss guide Joseph Imboden and his sons, but without her husband or any other family member.<sup>66</sup> Clare Roche suggests that the reason little heed was paid to these women was that following the Matterhorn tragedy of 1865, climbing had already received a considerable amount of negative publicity (see Dickens’s response) and that to draw attention to the fact that “women were spending nights alone on the mountain with relative strangers . . . may have brought unwelcome attention to mountaineering as a whole.”<sup>67</sup> Of course, it might also have been that guides were peremptorily dismissed as being sexually threatening because of their lower class status.

Whatever caused this apparent blind spot in the British press, guides and their skill were often under discussion in periodical reviews. Representations of guides acted to diminish the efforts and achievements of women climbers and to expand the boundaries of acceptable femininity without completely breaking the conventional gender constructs of the period.

### **Conclusion**

The intrinsic role of the guide in facilitating the travels and adventures of others was professionalized and represented with increasing deference as the Victorian period progressed. Accounts of the guides who accompanied male mountaineers stressed their important role in leading expeditions during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Whereas early in the century guides are often portrayed dismissively as lower-class foreign servants, later contributions to the periodical press during the 1860s and '70s written by prominent members of the Alpine Club, such as Edward Whymper, Leslie Stephen, and John Tyndall, emphasized the skill and bravery of guides and thereby such raised the profile of the profession.

Between 1859 and 1885, women climbers made significant achievements as mountaineers in the Alps, successes that were often interpreted within the context of broader discussions of gender roles. Women were repeatedly presented as requiring male support, which made their actions more compatible with conservative conventions of femininity. Accounts of women's achievements on the mountains indicate that the figure of the guide was often used to shore up ideological concerns about the suitability of climbing as a physical activity for women. When women climbed with their husbands and families, reviewers downplayed the role of the guide, either by making him invisible or using him as a source of humour. Later in the period, as women engaged in mountaineering without male relatives as escorts, they developed a more professional image in the popular press, as exemplified in Le Blond climbing and writing about her achievements for more than fifty years. These accounts



gave increased prominence to guides just as women's public roles were expanding.<sup>68</sup> By focusing on representations of guides in periodicals, we can see how they not only facilitate the journeys themselves but also the ideological battles within society as a whole.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Whymper, "Two Lady Alpine Climbers," 164–67. Whymper refers to Le Blond as Mrs. Burnaby, her name from her first marriage.

<sup>2</sup> Brown and Blum, *Women on High*, 35–43; Roche, "Ascent of Women," 326.

<sup>3</sup> Roche, "Ascent of Women," 326; Newby, *Great Ascents*, 36; Simon Thompson also notes Walker's early achievements, claiming that her part in the expedition on the Balmhorn (3,698 m) in 1864 was the "first time that a woman had taken part in the first ascent of a major peak" (*Unjustifiable Risk?*, 48).

<sup>4</sup> Whymper, "Two Lady Alpine Climbers," 167.

<sup>5</sup> Clark, *Early Alpine Guides*, 95. Clark also notes Whymper's affection for Anderegg and cites Whymper's *Scrambles amongst the Alps* (192). See also Thompson, *Unjustifiable Risk*, 34.

<sup>6</sup> Fraser, Green, and Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, 2. See also Knelman, "Class and Gender Bias in Victorian Newspapers." In *Women, Work and the Victorian Periodical*, Van Remoortel has shown how women's gender identities were formed by their work with, and reading of, Victorian periodicals.

<sup>7</sup> Fraser, Green, and Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, 2. See Poovey, *Uneven Developments*.

<sup>8</sup> See Roche, "Women Climbers"; Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains*; Osborne "Gender and the Organisation of British Climbing". For an early account of women climbers see Seghers, *The Peak Experience*.

<sup>9</sup> Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains*, 126.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Colley cites “The Queen of the Alps,” *Daily Telegraph*, August 4, 1897, and *Daily Graphic*, July 18, 1892, as well as “Women as Alpine Climbers,” *Evening News*, August 20, 1898, and *Standard*, August 27, 1897. See also McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women*, 15–18; Osborne and Skillen, *Women in Sports History*, 1–7.

<sup>12</sup> “Alpine Byways,” 675.

<sup>13</sup> Roche, “Ascent of Women,” 275.

<sup>14</sup> Although Mont Blanc had been scaled in 1854 by Mrs. Hamilton, this was not noted in “Mont Blanc,” an article in the *Lady’s Newspaper* which gave details of the recent successes of British climbers. Meta Brevort’s first winter ascent of the Jungfrau in 1864 was noted alongside her other achievements in *John Bull*, despite being listed as “Miss Brewood” (“Foreign Miscellanea,” 119).

<sup>15</sup> The “othering” of native peoples (“travellees”) by British travel writers operating outside of Europe has been extensively discussed in scholarship, beginning with the publication of Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes; Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Catharine Mee’s *Interpersonal Encounters in Contemporary Travel Writing* deals with representation of guides in French and Italian travel writing (34–37). However, little scholarship has addressed the specific representation of foreign guides by British travellers.

<sup>16</sup> Reidy, “Mountaineering, Masculinity, and the Male Body,” 171; Hansen, “Partners,” 215–17.

<sup>17</sup> Braham, *When the Alps Cast Their Spell*, 276.

<sup>18</sup> Clark, *Early Alpine Guides*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 19. See also Van Looche, “The Shaping of Nineteenth-Century Guiding”. The first professional association for guides was the Compagnie des Guides de Chamonix founded in 1821.

<sup>20</sup> Van Looche, “The Shaping of Nineteenth-Century Guiding”.

<sup>21</sup> Hansen, “Partners,” 216.

<sup>22</sup> Thompson, *Unjustifiable Risk*, 36.

<sup>23</sup> Reidy, “Mountaineering, Masculinity, and the Male Body,” 173.

<sup>24</sup> Mazel, *Mountaineering Women*, 27.

<sup>25</sup> Brown and Blum, *Women on High*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> Roche, “Ascent of Women,” 158. See also Reidy’s “Mountain, Masculinity, and the Male Body,” which notes that Cole’s text is “gendered distinctly feminine” (166).

<sup>27</sup> “Lady’s Tour Round Monte Rosa,” 340.

<sup>28</sup> Van Looche, “The Shaping of Nineteenth-Century Guiding,” 277. Alfred Wills, despite dedicating his book *Wanderings among the High Alps* to “guide Auguste Balmat my third and faithful companion,” wrote repeatedly of the “bad guides” who were often afraid whilst on expeditions (52, 85, 88). In the excerpt reproduced in the review in *John Bull and Britannia* in June 1856, the guide is reduced to the status of an “invisible hand” who raises him to the summit of the Wetterhorn (“Wanderings among the High Alps,” 474).

<sup>29</sup> Cole, *Lady’s Tour*, 11–12. Reidy notes that Cole “represented her guides as a lazy lot, selfish, ignorant, timid, and always drunk,” (“Mountaineering, Masculinity, and the Male Body,” 166).

<sup>30</sup> Hunt, “Peaks, Passes and Glaciers” 340.

<sup>31</sup> Neate, *Mountaineering Literature*, 67; Roche, “Ascent of Women,” 158. See also Mazel, *Mountaineering Women*, 34, and Brown and Blum, *Women on High*, 35.

<sup>32</sup> “Jane Freshfield, ‘A Summer Tour in the Grisons,’ 3.

<sup>33</sup> “Mrs. Henry Freshfield,” 262.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “Summer Tour in the Grisons,” 751.

<sup>36</sup> Roche, in “Ascent of Women,” cites Freshfield’s *A Summer Tour in the Grisons* (158).

<sup>37</sup> Roche, “Ascent of Women,” 158; Reidy, “Mountaineering, Masculinity, and the Male Body,” 166.

<sup>38</sup> Dickens, “Foreign Climbs,” 135.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 137, 136.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>43</sup> “Scrambles amongst the Alps,” 49.

<sup>44</sup> Stephen’s appreciation of alpine guides has been noted by Thompson, *Unjustifiable Risk*, 35. Like many other significant mountaineers of the “golden age” of mountaineering, Stephen encouraged readers to “appreciate the capacities” of this “singularly intelligent and worthy class of men” (*Playground of Europe*, 76). See also Hansen, “Partners,” 214.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen, “Mr. Whymper’s Scrambles amongst the Alps,” 305.

<sup>46</sup> Stephen, *Playground of Europe*, 309.

<sup>47</sup> “Stephen’s Playground of Europe,” 444.

<sup>48</sup> “Another Fatal Accident in the Alps,” 196.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. See also Tyndall, Letter to the *Times*, 8. In contrast, “Mountaineering without Guides” recounts the deaths of three Cambridge scholars who went climbing without a guide. It discusses guides only in relation to male climbers but makes an argument for their indispensability. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was an increasing movement towards guideless climbing. Numerous articles in the *Alpine Review* after the mid-

1860s discussed the practice, and despite some controversy several popular texts outlined guideless excursions to the highest Alpine peaks, including those by Tyndall, Hudson, and Kennedy, who scaled Mont Blanc. See Tyndall, *Hours of Exercise in the Alps* and Lunn, “Alpine Controversies”. After giving a paper at the Alpine Club, F. Craufurd Grove published “The Comparative Skill of Travellers and Guides” in the club’s journal. He proposed that “Englishmen can never hope, save in cases so exceptional as not to come within the scope of any general argument, to equal even second-rate guides” (92).

<sup>50</sup> Tyndall, Letter to the *Times*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Brown and Blum, *Women on High*, 49.

<sup>52</sup> Thompson, *Unjustifiable Risk*, 48.

<sup>53</sup> Roche, “Ascent of Women,” 275.

<sup>54</sup> Walchester, *Gamle Norge*, 128–31.

<sup>55</sup> Hansen, “Elizabeth Alice Frances Le Blond.” See also Williams, *Women on the Rope*; Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains*; Brown and Blum, *Women on High*; McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women*; Osborne, “Gender and the Organisation of British Climbing.”

<sup>56</sup> Le Blond, *High Alps in Winter*, viii.

<sup>57</sup> “High Alps in Winter,” 362.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> See Brown and Blum, *Women on High*, 86–87.

<sup>60</sup> Clark, *Early Alpine Guides*, 86.

<sup>61</sup> Le Blond, *High Life and Towers of Silence*, 176.

<sup>62</sup> Freshfield, “High Alps in Winter,” 395.

<sup>63</sup> Whymper, “Two Lady Alpine Climbers,” 164.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. Le Blond further challenged the established conventions of mountaineering in 1900 when she and Lady Evelyn McDonnell pioneered “man-less climbing” (Le Blond, *Day In, Day Out*, 91). See also Brown and Blum, *Women on High*, 88, and Thompson, *Unjustifiable Risk*, 74.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Thompson, *Unjustifiable Risk*, 48.

<sup>66</sup> Hansen, “Elizabeth Alice Frances Le Blond.”

<sup>67</sup> Roche, “Ascent of Women,” 253.

<sup>68</sup> Brown and Blum, *Women on High*, 94–95.

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