

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

‘Expression is power’: Gender, residual culture and political aspiration at the Cumnock School of Oratory, 1870–1900

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Abstract

This article investigates the ways in which late-nineteenth-century students at Northwestern University’s Cumnock School of Oratory mobilised elocution training and parlour performance to foster mixed-gender public discourse. I use student publications to reconstruct parlour meetings in which women and men adapted traditions of conversational speech to allocate artistic and political participation equally across genders. Women expanded their expressive range and political aspirations, while men gained new understandings of manliness and women’s rights. With the onset of muscular masculinity in the 1890s, oratory students reworked their performance culture into an act of campus resistance and a blueprint for social reform.

According to the Chicago press, 4 July 1871 was a ‘day of triumph’ for the ‘girls of the Northwest’. Ten thousand people flocked to Evanston, Illinois for the ‘Woman’s Fourth of July’, a fundraising event for the Evanston College for Ladies. The women students – who would soon be joining men at the newly coeducational Northwestern University – contributed a series of ‘comic representations’ to the festivities, titled *The Girls: Past, Present, Future*. The curtain opened on an eighteenth-century farmgirl who yearned to follow her brother to college. Scene two depicted a nineteenth-century parlour hostess longing to throw her ‘soul into something grand’. ‘I’ll be a reformer!’ she resolved. ‘I’ll rave and rant and preach and stamp, and wear a short dress’. The play ended with a dignified speaker, ‘attired with healthful simplicity’, instructing an ‘Old Fogy’ how to spot the ‘Coming Woman’: her ‘eyes will sparkle with cheerfulness and intelligence ... the spinal column erect; the vital organs untrammelled; the blood coursing joyously through her veins’. The woman and man of the future, this confident elocutionist predicted, ‘together will seek the various founts of knowledge ... Brother and sister, hand in hand, will go forth into the various avenues of life’.¹

Over the next two decades, the women and men who enrolled in Northwestern University’s Cumnock School of Oratory adapted the traditional artistic forms of elocution and parlour performance

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to work toward an aspirational political vision. Students transformed homes, dormitories, academic buildings and churches into rehearsal rooms for mixed-gender public life, with conversation, storytelling, gameplay, dramatic reading and farce joining oratory, debate and parliamentary procedure in their repertoire of reform. During the 1890s, however, the shift in male gender ideals from benevolent 'manliness' to aggressive 'masculinity' threatened to limit the scope of their efforts, as increasing numbers of men refused to go forth 'hand in hand' with their female classmates. In 1896, the male editors of Northwestern's student newspaper issued a dire warning:

I see her turn the corner,
I hear her mannish tread,
I feel an awful presence
That fills my soul with dread.
Great Scott! She's drawing nearer;
I'll vanish while I can,
If she's the coming woman,
Then I'm the going man.²

This article argues that the practical application of the spoken arts reveals how and why a generation of women and men who enthusiastically prepared to enter public life together were followed by the panicked flight of the 'going man'. Investigating Northwestern's first three decades of parlour politics demonstrates the ways in which students navigated gender and public discourse through everyday acts of cultural production, and it uncovers the generative potential of mixing traditional artistic forms with forward-looking political ideas. Nineteenth-century Americans deemed the ability to exchange persuasive arguments in speech and print as indications of an individual's capacity for democratic citizenship. Those who were barred from formal political participation due to their gender or race used spoken rhetoric to contest their exclusion, demonstrate civic aptitude and shape public opinion.³ Some women appropriated the male-coded mantles of orator and debater at the cost of risking disfavour and undercutting the acceptance of their ideas. Others experimented with the limited practices that were deemed socially acceptable for their gender, such as conversation, parlour games and theatricals and recitations of poetry and prose. Women students at the Cumnock School of Oratory pursued both strategies, intertwining genres until the lines between 'manly' political speech and 'womanly' parlour play became indiscernible. While many men honed their oratorical skills in preparation for careers in politics, law and the ministry, those with artistic inclinations joined women in learning to interpret emotionally laden, in-character fictional texts, and men and women alike secured economic independence and public prominence by giving programs of dramatic readings in their local communities and on tour.

Elocution, the solo rendering of a literary text using trained vocal and physical expression, and parlour performance, the execution of literary programs and entertainments in semi-public venues, were deeply embedded in civic education for women and men in the nineteenth-century USA. Yet, these practices have only recently received close scholarly attention. Relying on a dichotomy between public and private discourse and space and operating in the shadow of the modernist repudiation of 'feminized' sentimental aesthetics, scholars initially dismissed the parlour and its repertoire as politically irrelevant, except to the extent that they reflected and reinscribed oppressive gender and class hierarchies.⁴ In her contribution to an extensive scholarly examination of Jürgen Habermas' model of the public sphere, Mary Kelley proposed the capacious concept of 'civil society' as a tool for recapturing the ways in which eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century women used 'institutions of sociability' to develop subjectivities as citizens and 'to interrogate the dominant social and political order'.⁵ Scholars have continued to search for overlooked sites of women's rhetorical education, asking: 'What have we belittled, dismissed, or missed?'⁶ Recent studies confirm that to gain a public hearing, nineteenth-century women first made creative use of private space, and women of colour

proved especially innovative in refashioning the parlour into an 'alternative public sphere' and 'a place of experimentation'.⁷

The parlour experiments featured in this article functioned as a subset of what Lindal Buchanan has termed the 'academic platform'. Consisting of curricular and extracurricular sites of oral expression, the academic platform was one of the first public forums to allow girls and women to display their speaking skills before large, mixed-gender audiences. Women's participation in turn transformed the academic platform into an especially 'contested site, rife with tensions over gender, education, power, and discourse'.⁸ Examining the Cumnock School of Oratory sheds new light on the ways in which the extracurricular side of the academic platform inspired women to adopt male-coded forms of expression and imagine an expanded political role. It also brings to the fore an understudied group of interlocutors: men who devoted their educations to dramatic reading and whose willing participation in female-dominated activities transformed their understanding of manliness and women's rights.

I uncover the politicisation of parlour play by substituting the practical for the proscriptive. The self-directed, solo performance format of elocution granted speakers 'an unusual degree of control over the content and style of their performances'.⁹ Rather than taking the dictums of textbooks and manuals as indicative of live speech, I turn to student publications to weave 'thick descriptions' of the 'campus-level form of republicanism' devised by elocutionists-in-training. Pupils at the Cumnock School of Oratory tested 'the direct impact of equal suffrage' by collaboratively learning parliamentary procedure, casting votes and running for organisational office.¹⁰ Parlour entertainments, meetings and elections were continuously advertised and reviewed in student newspaper editorials, essays and locals. The narratives put forward by contributors evoke an immersive and interactive experience in which women and men proved eager to adopt unexpected characteristics and roles.

The concept of residual culture guides my analysis and periodisation of students' gender negotiations. Raymond Williams defines the 'residual' as an institution or formation that was 'formed in the past' but 'is still active in the cultural process' of the present, and which can sometimes manifest 'an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture'.¹¹ Stuart Tannock elaborates that especially for 'subaltern cultural and social groups' facing 'a present that seems overly fixed, static, and monolithic', nostalgia can inspire individuals and collectives 'to comb the past for every sense of possibility and destiny it might contain'.¹² Gail Bederman evokes a similar pattern of temporal overlap in her analysis of the 'ongoing ideological process of gender'. 'Men and women cannot invent completely new formations of gender', she contends, 'but they can adapt old ones'.¹³ To allocate public participation equally across genders, School of Oratory students revitalised a centuries-old women's tradition of collaborative and conversational discourse.¹⁴ While the elocutionists-in-training enjoyed influence and admiration during the 1880s, by 1900 they faced ridicule and censure from a new generation of 'strong men' enrolled in Northwestern's College of Liberal Arts. With backlash chilling the campus climate, oratory women and men adopted the motto 'Expression is Power' – rewording John Quincy Adams' declaration that 'eloquence was POWER' in the Ancient Greek and Roman republics – as they transformed their nostalgia for residual performance cultures into an act of campus resistance and a blueprint for far-reaching social reform.¹⁵

For women seeking to develop powers of speech, Evanston, Illinois was an unusually hospitable setting. The town emerged during the mid-1850s in close relation to Northwestern University and the Northwestern Female College. The latter offered a relatively untested experiment: a college course for women equivalent to that of its neighbouring all-male institution. When the Northwestern Female College was reorganised as the Evanston College for Ladies in 1871, its students began taking classes with Northwestern men. The schools finally merged in 1873, and Northwestern became one of the first universities in the USA to welcome women, not only as students, but as full professors, trustees and officers.¹⁶

Northwestern's fulsome commitment to coeducation was an outgrowth of the local political culture. As a Methodist dry town, Evanston attracted families who had been active in antebellum reform. Townsmen practiced a form of benevolent manliness that originated during the early years of the temperance movement, and mothers and fathers alike viewed their daughters' higher education as the

key to transforming society.¹⁷ The town's social, artistic and political life centred in mixed-gender voluntary associations. Newly arrived students discovered that Evanston was 'especially favored with literary organizations, discussing all questions which agitate the public mind', especially 'all the questions relative to women's progress and education', suffrage chief among them.¹⁸ Townspeople connected their widespread support for women's rights to regular and congenial parlour interactions. Explaining that 'the absence of saloons and hotel bars reduced to a minimum the separatist conditions between men and women, with which most places are cursed', Frances Willard, Northwestern's first Dean of Women, cited Evanston's profusion of societies as the reason why 'no village on the continent illustrates more of mutual respect, general admiration and helpful good will between the brothers and sisters of the human household'. In Willard's opinion, locating public discourse in the parlour – a space that 'included men and women equally' – had transformed Evanston into nothing short of a 'paradise for women'.¹⁹

The students who joined this 'paradise' contributed to a discourse of 'western exceptionalism' by claiming that Northwestern practiced a more egalitarian form of higher education than their northeastern counterparts.²⁰ College tuition varied by region, with more expensive eastern single-sex institutions proving unaffordable to most midwestern families.²¹ Northwestern students described themselves as 'hayseeds' from 'towns here and there throughout the middle West', where 'the whole community' took 'no little pride in such of its young people as enter institutions of higher learning'.²² A few had grown up in urban poverty, such as Jerome Raymond, who had been a Chicago newsboy before funding his studies and supporting his widowed mother as a stenographer.²³ Male students reported that they 'shoveled, hoed, sawed, chored, and peddled their way' through school, while women who professed to have 'no means at all' yet 'longed for a college education' found positions as maids, nannies and needleworkers.²⁴ Many students 'from want of money' were 'compelled to drop out and spend a few months each year teaching school', but they resolved to acquire their 'diplomas at all hazards'.²⁵ Given that over half the student body was 'self-supporting', they vehemently rejected 'caste' and 'class distinctions', directed scorn towards the 'self-satisfied ... snobs' across the Alleghenies and announced that as 'Western-bred and Western-educated' men and women, their 'breezy' spirit and 'breadth of view' could 'scarcely be developed under more conservative surroundings'.²⁶

A small contingent of immigrant and Black students joined the progeny of the rural and small-town Midwest. Foreign-born students used class orations and benefit lectures to share their performance traditions with their native-born classmates.²⁷ White students wrote editorials in support of 'the co-education of whites and blacks', claimed to extend 'esteem and friendship' to their Black colleagues and counted them 'among the very best students'.²⁸ Although far from achieving a critical mass, Black students actively contributed to the university's elocutionary culture. Ada Taylor was a founding member and president of Northwestern's Eugensia literary society, and she raised money for her tuition by inviting renowned Black elocutionist Henrietta Vinton Davis to give a benefit performance in town.²⁹

Northwestern students mobilised their regional positioning to reflect on male gender ideals and advocate for women's education and enfranchisement. Northwestern men practiced a form of 'pious' college manhood that flourished among the aspiring ministers who populated midwestern denominational colleges. Eager to distance themselves from the eastern 'college rowdy', who they characterised as engaging in 'barbarous practices, such as "rushing," "hazing," etc.', they held up 'faithful discharge of duty', 'religious spirit' and 'moral convictions' as the true indicators of 'upright, manly conduct'.³⁰ Fulfilling their 'moral convictions' involved refuting eastern sceptics of coeducation, and they provokingly wrote into the college exchanges: 'Our young College, with its warm Western blood, accomplished with no unsettling of foundation what the old fogy Eastern Colleges seem never able to persuade their slow brains to do'.³¹ Coeducation, in their view, was 'a most substantial triumph in favor of the *woman movement* in its highest and grandest conception', but it was only the first step in a far more capacious project.³² At a time when many eastern campuses forbade the public discussion of suffrage, visitors to Evanston were startled to find that 'woman's ballot' was practically 'an article of faith' among students and townspeople, and the university's male contingent pledged themselves as 'vocal women's suffrage men'.³³

Students and faculty identified oratorical training as an essential component of preparing women and men for political participation. Prior to the onset of coeducation, the Northwestern Female College faculty encouraged students to take a 'lively interest' in elocution, considering it an 'all-important, yet, in ladies' institutions, much neglected branch of women's education'. The students took full advantage, practicing selections of a 'descriptive, dramatic, and senatorial character' until they could speak with a 'deep, rich voice' that 'filled the house'.³⁴ The women's composition classes, taught by Willard, adopted 'a regular business organization with proper officers', and following a period of student-run parliamentary procedure devoted the rest of the hour to oratory and storytelling.³⁵ Coeducation brought women into the classroom of Northwestern's elocution instructor, Robert Cumnock, a Scottish immigrant and a former Lowell mill worker who earned a national reputation as the 'the finest reader and elocutionist in the Northwest'. Under his guidance, women and men undertook 'the preliminaries of oratorical culture' and 'dramatic expression', with an eye toward success 'in the pulpit, on the rostrum, or at the bar'.³⁶ Aspiring to 'fill high positions in public life', Cumnock's students resolved 'to express their thoughts ... in a clear and forcible manner' because they believed that the 'sublimest possibilities' were open to whoever possessed the ability '*to speak well in public*'.³⁷

Providing the same oratorical curriculum to women and men was an unusual decision for colleges in the 1870s. Antebellum educators had set careful limits on women's speaking practices. Some institutions prohibited women from participating in elocution classes or reading their compositions aloud. Women who did ascend the rostrum were expected to read from a manuscript and avoid making eye contact with listeners. The rigid delineation between memorised male oratory and modest female reading persisted after the Civil War in academic settings and popular elocution manuals.³⁸ Northwestern faculty encouraged female students to break this convention and acquire the persuasive power of unscripted address. Women gave regular public debates in which they evinced 'a preparation and cultivation in the art of extempore speaking worthy of all praise'.³⁹ The support of the campus community helped those who were initially shy about meeting the audience's gaze to discard the manuscript and deliver 'a thoroughly excellent and original oration' with 'self-possession and naturalness'.⁴⁰ As women students made their first forays into oratory and debate, their male classmates learned to deliver sentimental poetry and prose by female authors while striving to meet standards of tenderness, beauty, grace and charm.⁴¹

Speaking contests and literary societies enabled women and men to share and observe one another's rhetorical acumen. Women fought for access, victory and respect in declamation, debate and oratory contests to prove they could present an argument that 'was self-possessed, clear in delivery, and withal logical', which was no small feat, given that women were presumed capable only of emotional appeal, not intellectual argumentation.⁴² Literary societies functioned as 'schools within schools', in which students pursued 'a tripartite objective' of honing skills in critical reading, writing and persuasive speaking.⁴³ Willard observed that as soon as her women students gained admittance into the men's literary societies, they manifested 'keen and sustained devotion to composition, speech-making and the study of parliamentary usage', as they hoped to 'break down the prejudice against woman's public speech and work' and encourage their male classmates to 'learn that young women are their peers'.⁴⁴ Vowing to give 'lady students equal rights in all of our literary societies', men elected women to leadership positions, including the office of president.⁴⁵ Women used their new platform to test and assert the political weight of their speaking skills. Maria Bergh proclaimed before the Philomathean Society that 'the most God-like gift of all is the tongue of the eloquent speaker' and concluded that 'eloquence is power of working miracles'.⁴⁶ Yet, a mixed-gender public sphere was easier to evoke through optimistic oratory than to achieve in practice. Coeducational literary societies proved controversial among university patrons and were abruptly banned by the administration in 1874. The men who reviewed campus speaking contests criticised women for speaking too forcefully, reserving praise for those who presented a 'modest' demeanour, chose pieces that were 'appropriate' for the 'lady voice', and, most importantly, lost, as the awarding of prizes to a woman 'created a great deal of dissatisfaction'.⁴⁷

Recognising the limits of administratively sanctioned options, Northwestern women transformed local parlours into autonomous speaking venues. Gathering in family homes and dormitories, they

revived boisterous mid-nineteenth-century games that enabled them to temporarily break social conventions and act as 'powerful cultural agents', and they organised reading circles that interspersed poetry recitations with discussions of 'news garnered from all sources'.⁴⁸ Participants published detailed accounts of their fun in the student newspaper, especially when it involved satirising hostile, male-dominated venues, such as when they held a 'shouting match' and awarded 'crackers and pickles' to the 'lady who shouted the loudest'.⁴⁹ After sharpening their wit among themselves, women students invited men to behold their 'racy and humorous' original essays, 'thrilling' romances patterned 'after the manner of sensational writers', 'impromptu' interpretations of literary passages and dramatisations of female political power.⁵⁰ Watching his classmates form *tableaux* of Queen Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots, a Northwestern reporter gushed that Stella Burke, 'in her Elizabethan costume, almost compelled us to bow the knee, so well did she represent the queen'.⁵¹ When not compelling men to bow before them, student hostesses took advantage of women's traditional role as 'female superintendents' of the parlour to enlist male guests in enacting a world in which women held the highest positions of civic authority.⁵² In 1872, the first women graduates to experience coeducation staged *The Spirit of 1876*, securing Cumnock as coach and adding two men to the cast. The 'lively little comedy' predicted the imminent overturning of gender roles within four years: with 'Women Suffrage in full blast', women occupied 'the Presidential chair and the Supreme Bench' and presided over urban political machines, while 'their husbands, good souls', served as 'Keepers at Home: tending strong-minded babies and sewing on buttons!'.⁵³

Women students worked to translate comedy into reality by organising mixed-gender literary society joint sessions. Etta Smith and Jessie Moore of Northwestern's Ossoli Society believed that maintaining 'self-possession' when speaking with and before the opposite sex was a prerequisite for women's integration into campus and civic life. Concerned that their fellow society members were developing a fear of performing in front of men, Smith and Moore invited male classmates to visit as often as possible and advised administrators: 'Were the ladies and gentlemen together, perhaps better work would be done by both'.⁵⁴ While the latter suggestion fell on deaf ears, the invitation to visit did not. Northwestern men enthusiastically accepted Ossoli's overture, agreeing that meeting with those not 'of our own sex' trained speakers 'to address an audience with ease and composure', which was especially crucial for 'the ladies to whom speaking in public is quite a new thing but to whom readiness in that line is becoming daily more and more necessary'.⁵⁵

Joint sessions challenged students to implement mixed-gender governance and deliberation. Andrea Radke-Moss identifies coeducational literary societies as 'the earliest laboratories' for implementing women's political inclusion, suggesting that 'perhaps at no other level in American society in the 1870s and 1880s were men and women publicly discussing current social and political issues in open, organized meetings'.⁵⁶ The Northwestern women who presided over joint sessions urged participants to openly discuss women's enfranchisement. One meeting featured a 'woman's suffrage senate', while at another the women in attendance commenced 'a spirited discussion of the question "Should the distinction of sex be removed from politics?"'.⁵⁷ Male participants accepted the challenge and celebrated such 'pleasant, friendly' meetings as a means of 'exchanging thoughts and ideas, and building up a feeling of unity', which they deemed 'most desirable' in a school 'designed for the co-education of the sexes'.⁵⁸

By the late 1870s, Northwestern students had moulded extracurricular spaces into a mixed-gender public culture. Their privileging of sociability and conversation combined with their 'vision of female oratorical and intellectual excellence' resembled the hopeful years following the American Revolution, before the antebellum era ushered in 'a new model of exaggerated modesty' for women.⁵⁹ When Cumnock established his School of Oratory as a separate department in 1878, the introduction of specialised elocutionary study accelerated student experiments in parlour-based political training. With the 'elocutes', as the distinctive cohort of oratory students came to be nicknamed, at the forefront of extracurricular activity, students celebrated the 1880s and early 1890s as a period when male and female voices were 'heard blended in sweetest harmony'.⁶⁰

While many late-nineteenth-century women speakers strategically deployed a 'feminine' delivery style, School of Oratory women eschewed demure speech and demeanour in favour of robust argumentation, unencumbered physicality and biting satire.⁶¹ One achieved notoriety for using her 'explosive Orotund voice' to proclaim, in the words of *Henry V*, 'that she was a "gentleman of blood"', much to the 'consternation' of the unsuspecting Northwestern men 'in her immediate vicinity'.⁶² (Cumnock reportedly supported such outbursts, as he advised his students that they 'ought to learn to swear, and ought to practice it in their rooms'.⁶³) As a result of their physical culture lessons, female oratory students also moved differently, exhibiting 'freedom from awkwardness and self-consciousness' on the platform and in daily life, and they dispelled the myth that women were inherently lacking in humour by provoking 'outbursts of laughter' with 'the wit and sharpness' of their original writing.⁶⁴

Armed with verbal, physical and mental agility, School of Oratory women mounted surprise attacks on Northwestern's august sites of manly speech. When Ada Peart entered the annual declamation contest, she bided her time while six men delivered 'hackneyed' political speeches, and two women, whose 'appearance was in every particular that of a lady', recited 'pleasant' and 'quiet selections'. Coming last on the program, Peart stunned her listeners by unleashing 'a new venture in the selection of a humorous piece': Charles Dickens' 'Cheap Jack', a monologue from the perspective of a cockney junk seller who was neither quiet nor ladylike.⁶⁵ More startling, women oratory students used collaborative drama to fully inhabit male 'breeches roles'. The cast of the School of Oratory's first theatrical production, directed by the ever-encouraging Cumnock, hinted that 'one of the special features of their representation' of a scene from *Hamlet* was 'the representing of Hamlet as twins, and ladies at that'.⁶⁶

In addition to bewildering spectators with fictional repertoire, oratory women earned reputations as 'lady politicians'. Northwestern men predicted that when the elocutes were 'turned out upon the world we may expect an immediate revolution in the woman suffrage question'.⁶⁷ The revolution had its beginnings in the College Cottage, the dormitory for 'girls in limited circumstances', and the oratory students' preferred extracurricular performance venue.⁶⁸ In their hands, the Cottage dining room cycled between an immersive space for in-character costume parties – during which many female elocutionists arrived dressed as men from literature, history and politics, ranging from Romeo and Don Quixote to Napoleon and President Benjamin Harrison – a makeshift stage for semiformal performances, and a headquarters for a society 'in the interests of Woman's Suffrage'. Leading up to the 1884 presidential election, in which a vocal minority united behind female candidate Belva Lockwood, the student suffragists 'procured the platforms of the different parties, and an amount of campaign literature' and held 'weekly meetings in which the political situation is discussed and partisan orations are delivered'. Deeming themselves prepared to enter electoral politics, they stormed the men's rallies 'en masse' and received 'hearty applause on entering the hall'.⁶⁹ In 1892, the women transitioned from storming rallies to organising their own. After watching their male classmates preside over a mock presidential convention, they dressed up as notable male politicians – in breeches, no less – gave 'lively' nominating speeches before a packed house and compelled student journalists to concede that they evinced 'much more preparation' than the men.⁷⁰

Oratory women were determined to break into men's political channels, but they also drew inspiration from a 'counterdiscourse of conversational rhetoric' that women had theorised as 'equally powerful to men's public speaking' since the seventeenth century.⁷¹ Women students devoured biographies of eighteenth-century French *salonnière* Germaine de Staël, citing her as proof that conversation was a female prerogative and predicting that 'with this weapon, mightier than pen or sword' they would soon 'conquer the world'.⁷² Women's history became a plan of action as students wrote and distributed 'conversation cards' at mixed-gender gatherings, hoping to revitalise the practice that was 'once so essential to social intercourse'.⁷³ Oratory men proved gracious interlocutors. Like the 'lady politicians', these aspiring male platform performers attracted attention for their unusual gender presentation. They layered an aesthetic sheen onto 'pious' college manhood by rejecting 'sheer power' in favour of 'magnanimity' and an appreciation for beauty, as well as by sporting a 'smooth face, long hair', and signature Prince Albert jackets.⁷⁴ While outside observers struck a bemused tone when evaluating oratory women, oratory men filled the Northwestern newspaper with tributes to the 'skill

in manner and in voice culture' and 'easy self-possession' of their female classmates and claimed to most respect the woman who was 'fully capable of speaking for herself'.⁷⁵ These admirers joined in the project of reviving salon sociability and used history to justify their expression of manhood. Musing wistfully about the age when 'the wittiest and most brilliant man was lord of the occasion, and when Voltaire was greater than the king', they argued that Voltaire's conversational dexterity proved that participating in parlour socials took 'nothing from manliness and strength of character', but rather added 'a most desirable fineness and gentleness'.⁷⁶

The Madame de Staëls and Voltaires of the School of Oratory invented countless new parlour entertainments that purposefully twisted normative male and female behaviour. Women challenged men to try their hands at traditionally feminine skills, such as hat trimming, and laughed heartily over the results.⁷⁷ Other times, they welcomed male guests with a 'graceful low bow', addressed them as 'Miss' and provided them with bibs embroidered with 'such appropriate mottos as "Our Darling"' and 'Baby'.⁷⁸ Men actively joined in this scrambling of distinctions, enabling students of both genders to stretch their vocal and physical range. At a 'sheet and pillow-case party', the attendees endeavoured 'to find out who was who and which was which, the gentlemen talking in shrill, falsetto tones, the ladies in hoarse, grave-like notes and all concealing their hands and feet, sure indices of their sex'.⁷⁹ Through parlour play, women and men learned that at least for the duration of a game, they could put on and remove 'social codes of gender' as easily as sheets and pillowcases.⁸⁰

Literary societies once again served as the catalyst for students to convert parlour sociability into democratic deliberation. Oratory women encouraged their fellow society members to hold 'vigorous, business-like' meetings structured by 'parliamentary usage', give orations in a 'strong, clear voice' and demonstrate that 'even in debate' they were 'foemen worthy of their steel'.⁸¹ Elocutionists took the initiative in inviting men to intersociety meetings, where participants collaborated on debates, dialogues and comedic newspapers, and on special occasions 'stretched a curtain' across the hall and staged pantomimes, mock trials and farces.⁸² Women officers superintended mixed-gender political procedure, presiding over joint sessions 'with grace and dignity', voting in elections with men and passing motions to symbolically merge societies.⁸³ When need arose, women proved more than willing to rein in underprepared or domineering male participants. After an unusually contentious session, the women's Eugensian Society published a notice advising the men of the Euphronian Society 'to have their speeches well committed hereafter, and to take a long look at Robert's Rules of Order, before attempting to bulldoze their sister society across the hall'.⁸⁴ Women displayed the same authoritative confidence at student government meetings, leading one man to complain that 'if the gents have the temerity to vote against a motion made by any lady member', the women inflicted 'a battery of ... diverse withering sarcasms'. He concluded that 'the boys' were 'fast getting disciplined' to accept the opinions of dauntless female representatives.⁸⁵

During the 1880s, the mixed-gender collaboration that flourished in parlours and literary societies earned commendation from male participants. S. C. Davis, a devoted denizen of the oratory salon, argued that the abilities honed through 'the informal method of conversation' were as important as those acquired through formal debate. He observed that 'free and informal chat' nurtured students' ability to work with members of the opposite sex, trained them 'out of the great tendency to dogmatic assertion and conclusive opinions' promoted by competitive speaking and ensured that 'no restrictions' based on gender were 'imposed as to parts assigned' in performance or governance.⁸⁶ Northwestern students believed their model deserved national emulation and issued stern rebukes toward any campus that failed to measure up. When Harvard president Charles Norton Eliot 'refused permission to the students to hear Willard speak in a hall the students wished to hire, because he did not believe in women appearing in public', Willard's home supporters snapped: 'You had better wake up, Mr. Rip Van Winkle'.⁸⁷

In 1890, however, the intersections of gender, speaking and regionalism erupted into a heated conflict that presaged a decade of backlash on the part of Northwestern men. That year, a recent alumnus using the penname 'Cal Hobbs' submitted a vitriolic manifesto to the student newspaper claiming he 'could readily distinguish the girl of eastern birth and culture from our western sisters'

due to 'provincialisms manifest in carriage, manner, and speech'. Charging that Northwestern women were easily identified by 'the harsh voice, the ungentle look, speech mindless and unmusical', he argued that they were unsuited for marriage because 'the strong-minded girl' was 'intolerable'. The 'model' woman, he concluded, could only be found 'in schools distinctly female and east of the Alleghanies'.⁸⁸

Cal Hobbs' definition of true womanhood equated femininity with silence or polite acquiescence. Eager to protect women's right to 'enthusiastic vocality', students of both genders rallied to the defence of Northwestern's talkative women.⁸⁹ The first to respond was 'Chum'. He rooted his counterargument in parlour sociability, situating his women classmates as conversational mentors and effusing that 'one by one our awkward and ungraceful ways slipped from us in their presence'. He testified that after attending coeducational 'merry-makings', he and his fellow men 'found our ideals and standards of womanhood changed and elevated'. 'A Western Girl' chimed in next, embracing her 'imperfections' and asserting 'that in the matter of polishing a girl the eastern college leads the western, but let us remind you also that it does a much greater business in veneering'. Retorting that Hobbs' 'criticism of the strong-minded girl suggests that he may know girls who have ideas', she advised him to 'look at the strong-minded girl, the logical woman, with an eye less jealous of your masculine rights' and to recognise therein a woman 'worthy the friendship of any strong, noble man'.⁹⁰ Hobbs countered by linking talkative women to parlour men and condemning both as aberrations. He labelled Chum a 'hayseed' for expressing such 'devout gratitude to the sex which lifted him from squalor to the gorgeous tapestries' of the parlour, ridiculing 'his rusticity of mind and boots and stockings'. As for Western Girl, Hobbs painted her as 'female desperado whose gait is six miles an hour, up hill and down, and who stalks the earth shouting, "I am a free woman! Let no tyrant man dare tread on the skirt of me gown"'. Claiming to speak for the majority of American men, he concluded 'we thoroughly believe in *feminine* women'.⁹¹

In 1890, Hobbs stirred up more animosity than support. Over the coming decade, however, 'Western Girls' and their 'Chums' would have to fend off more and more of his ilk, as the idealistic vision of parlour politics cracked under the weight of changing male gender norms. While the School of Oratory embraced the 'expansive spirit' of the 'mentally and physically vigorous' New Woman, a hostile subculture took root among the men enrolled in Northwestern's College of Liberal Arts.⁹² Since the demonstration of manly character served as a prerequisite for social and political authority, men who subscribed to the new ideal of the 'strenuous life' eschewed 'effeminate' activities like elocution and parlour performance, strategised to shore up male power on campus and resolved to earn their university a more virile reputation.⁹³

At Northwestern, the rise of muscular masculinity corresponded with an influx of wealthier students, as affluent Chicago-area families who in earlier years would have sent their children to eastern colleges were now enrolling them closer to home.⁹⁴ These new arrivals congregated in fraternities. Fraternity members nationwide weaponised their performance of masculinity by excluding nonwhite and non-Protestant students, refusing to interact with female classmates and manoeuvring to gain control over extracurricular life.⁹⁵ Northwestern fraternity men identified their school's gender and class dynamics as an embarrassing liability. One compiled a list of external 'accusations' made against the university, the first being that it was a 'girls' school'. Conceding that 'it was somewhat effeminate', he noted that among the men "'goody-goodies" and downright toughs' seemed to 'predominate' and wailed: 'Poverty-stricken, long-faced, effeminate! Scorned by Eastern fraternities! Ostracized by the wealthy ... poor old Northwestern!'⁹⁶

The first step towards reform, in the view of fraternity men, was to silence the School of Oratory students. Much to the former's embarrassment, the oratory department had become fodder for satire in the New York press.⁹⁷ The male editors of the student newspaper directed a barrage of ridicule towards women speakers, ordering them to stop 'talking at an automobile pace!'⁹⁸ Northwestern men joined academics and popular authors in labelling suffragists, college graduates and working professionals a 'third sex' of 'masculine women'.⁹⁹ Abandoning the narrative of western exceptionalism, they reprinted from the *Cornell Era*:

Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these, 'Our Women are Men'.¹⁰⁰

Masculine women were only half the equation, as the students who identified talkative womanhood as a threat to male dominance were equally concerned about the School of Oratory's feminine men. By the 1890s, women elocutionists had become so pervasive in the USA that their male colleagues were increasingly viewed as effeminate. Northwestern's 'strong men' situated the elocutionarily inclined as their foil: the 'sissy boy'.¹⁰¹ The 'Oratory student' was easily recognisable, liberal arts men argued, as he 'let his hair and finger nails grow', dressed as a 'distinguished personage', spoke with varied vocal inflection and dramatic gestures in an effort 'to scatter sweetness and light' and was a teacher's pet, listening to Cumnock 'eyes goo-gooed with admiration' and staying up all night reading books.¹⁰² Worse still, he was a supporter of women's rights. One commentator marvelled that 'the line of demarcation between masculine femininity and feminine masculinity' had become 'so uncertainly defined' that some men were driven by their lack of 'sufficient virility' to 'appear in "bloomers"' and 'go forth as the champion of women'.¹⁰³ In the estimation of liberal arts men, the oratory 'bookworm', 'awkward athlete' and 'effeminate society youth' had yet to develop '*into the full man*'.¹⁰⁴

To curtail oratory students' extracurricular influence, liberal arts men intertwined competitive speaking with intercollegiate athletics. Previous generations of college men had deemed competitive sports ungentlemanly and sought peer recognition through eloquence; during the 1890s, athletic prowess became the most important metric for determining a male student's worth. Proclaiming there were 'heroes of debate as well as of football', liberal arts students put forward a masculine conception of speech training by joining intercollegiate oratory and debating leagues patterned on athletic associations.¹⁰⁵ Contestants draped speaking, like sports, in the rhetoric of military and imperial conquest, echoing the 'jingoists' who urged intervention in Cuba and the Philippines as a means of restoring a political order in which strong men governed the nation and women raised citizen-soldiers.¹⁰⁶ Characterising intercollegiate oratory contests and debates as a 'battle royal', liberal arts men devoted their literary society meetings to training a 'great army of debaters' and claimed to be most satisfied when 'the oratorical cannonading was fast and furious'.¹⁰⁷ At their first debate against the University of Michigan, Northwestern men crowed that Michigan went 'down with colors flying' while Northwestern's debaters 'came home dangling three imaginary scalps from their belts'.¹⁰⁸

Spoken warfare left women stranded on the home front. John Pettegrew has argued that college football imposed 'a conservative template for university gender relations', as its 'tightly wound homosocial universe' subordinated women to a spectatorial role; he further suggests that the sport represented a 'strategic counter' to women's increased public participation.¹⁰⁹ Northwestern's oratorical conquerors explicitly employed this tactic, asserting that football, oratory, debate and politics were all 'a game for men'.¹¹⁰ While male students prepared to 'gird up' their 'loins and go into the fight', the only role available to School of Oratory women was to give a tea 'in honor of their victory'.¹¹¹ Between battles, contestants strengthened their 'zeal for supremacy' through blackface minstrelsy, a performance genre that epitomised the 1890s masculinity movement's effort to simultaneously assert racial and gender dominance.¹¹² Proclaiming that 'the vaudeville era has come', Northwestern fraternity members and football teammates championed their new pastime as an 'unheard of' and 'delightful innovation', commending themselves for their 'originality' in contrast to the traditional campus repertoire of parlour performance.¹¹³ Minstrelsy proponents poached jokes, dances and songs from the popular stage to demean African Americans and women, with one show foregrounding the impersonation of a frivolous and fawning 'co-ed'.¹¹⁴

While the spoken warriors claimed victory over the College of Liberal Arts, School of Oratory faculty and students persisted in their efforts to secure mixed-gender public discourse. Enrolment in the oratory department blossomed, leading Cumnock to hire an ever-increasing number of female graduates as faculty members. These alumnae mobilised the lessons they had learned as students to train the next generation to perform all genres and prepare for public-facing careers. Elizabeth Hunt, who as a student had been a leading figure in mixed-gender literary society work during the 1870s,

prioritised the spoken delivery and discussion of original writing in her 1890s rhetoric classes because she believed that a practice that so 'rapidly expands the mental horizon' should not be reserved for men.¹¹⁵

Outside of class, oratory students approached parlour receptions and performances with as much political intention as their opponents had invested in speaking contests. Their elected reception committees, who oversaw each social event's program of games and performance pieces, informed liberal arts students that the oratory receptions had fostered 'a spirit of rare comradeship' that could not be found in the cutthroat and exclusive culture of competitive speaking and fraternities.¹¹⁶ The oratory students' Thalian Dramatic Club connected parlour performance to civic preparation: its constitution outlined the club's purpose as 'to furnish and promote practical training in extemporaneous speaking and debate, in the management of parliamentary bodies, and in the study of dramatic action and presentation'.¹¹⁷ The club's elected 'committee on plays' curated a repertoire of 'delightful little comedies' that were laden with gender themes, such as *The Bachelor Maids* and *The Champion of Her Sex*. Women ensemble members favoured roles that enabled them to assert authority over male characters, rendering their capacity for independent thought and action as the club's most consistent public message.¹¹⁸

Oratory students used the verbal assurance they acquired in class, in the parlour and on the platform to challenge their liberal arts persecutors. In the annual Woman's Edition of the student newspaper, female editorialists wrote against the toxic triumvirate of 'contest', 'athletic field' and 'burnt-cork entertainment', enumerating these all-male venues as breeding grounds for an offensive iteration of white masculinity.¹¹⁹ They also revived the narrative of western exceptionalism to remind readers of Northwestern's history of training confident, well-spoken women. Opining that 'the East has always been the stronghold of conservatism' in terms of 'the adoption of coeducation' and 'political ideas', one woman student suggested that constant scorn had forced the 'Eastern college girl' to draw 'back within herself', while the 'Western college girl' was 'admired and respected' and thus came to feel 'equally at home in the class room' and public life.¹²⁰

Oratory women argued that public speaking was their fundamental right. Rejecting liberal arts men's dictum that 'from time immemorial it has been woman's part to be the silent force behind all things which man ... has undertaken', that it was women's job 'to sit back and watch the show', women students predicted that if they had an equal 'chance at things' as their 'less gifted brothers' they would 'smash a few fond dreams concerning masculine superiority'.¹²¹ They took charge of their own print portrayals, penning stories that starred 'vivacious elocutes' as the protagonists: 'impish maidens' with eyes 'sparkling with mischief', 'strong lines about the mouth', a 'proud poise of the head' and an 'indelible stamp of intelligence' across their faces, who held 'wild frolics ... their tongues wagging so incessantly that there was a continual buzz'.¹²² Embracing their depictions in Chicago newspapers 'as awful examples of the new woman' – for instigating such scandals as organising a debating club – they rebuffed demands for their silence.¹²³ Florence Longley dismissed the 'obsolete proverb' that decreed 'a whistling woman and a crowing hen are neither fit for God nor men' and challenged male readers:

Will you say she was worse for her rollicking song,
Or declare that the art to you men must belong?
Ah, but you have had your day!¹²⁴

Oratory men, meanwhile, defended their female classmates and experimented with alternative iterations of masculinity. Barry Gilbert celebrated the School of Oratory as a 'triumph of co-education', vowed that he had 'implicit confidence in the efficacy of woman's rights' and proclaimed: 'Great, indeed, oh woman, is your power'.¹²⁵ Turn-of-the-century men found a preferable model of male behaviour in alumni who had come of age in mixed-gender parlours. Alum Charles Thwing counselled current students to aspire to 'graciousness' and 'sympathy', explaining that a 'good fellow' cultivated his skills in conversation and affected change in others through a process that resembled female moral

influence.¹²⁶ To reanimate residual gender performance, one group of ‘fellows’ formed ‘a brotherhood for mutual helpfulness’ theorised in contrast to the ‘the evils of fraternity life’. The members resolved that more important than acquiring ‘power’ or ‘strength of body’ was achieving ‘grace of manner and refinement of bearing’, namely, ‘those indefinable qualities which mark the *gentleman*’.¹²⁷ Male oratory students combined refined manliness with class-based regionalism in satires of their campus nemeses. Percy Thomas published a story that positioned ‘Algernon Barclay’, a snobbish student with an affected eastern accent who aspired to marry into the ‘Standard Oil branch’ of the Rockefellers, as a foil to the self-supporting Midwesterners who served as narrator and heroine.¹²⁸

In addition to their print campaign, oratory students worked to reinstate residual values in practice. Female ‘elocutes’ trained women from other departments in parlour-based democratic procedure and suffrage organising through the University Woman’s Club, in which participants played ‘old-fashioned games’, listened to talks on French salon culture, staged ‘exceedingly witty and ingenious’ original plays about historical and modern definitions of femininity, discussed presidential campaign issues and secured mentorship from ‘the leaders of the Woman’s Suffrage movement in Chicago’.¹²⁹ Oratory women were also instrumental in bringing the Self Government Association movement to Northwestern, in which they joined the rest of the university’s women students in writing constitutions, petitioning the faculty and administration and ‘entertaining each other’ through elocutionary programs.¹³⁰ Male oratory students, meanwhile, attempted to mould liberal arts men into better listeners and collaborators by organizing conversation classes for them.¹³¹ Oratory personnel of both genders achieved campus-wide influence by directing Northwestern’s extracurricular theatrical productions, in which they guided casts of liberal arts students through electing mixed-gender play committees, coached women to exhibit ‘spunk’ and assume ‘stately, queenly’ roles and instructed men how to ‘sew on buttons’.¹³²

One indicator of the oratory students’ success was liberal arts men’s willingness to adopt parlour practices. Individual male students occasionally braved censure by abandoning careers in competitive speaking in favour of creative parlour endeavours. Just a week after abdicating his position in the final Northern Oratorical League contest, George Hills helped to devise a pantomime of *The Courtship of Miles Standish* for a ‘colonial party’ held at the home of Oratory student Mary Singleton. Shifting from competitive orator to female love interest, Hills reportedly ‘did himself credit’ as Priscilla, ‘the loveliest maiden in Plymouth’.¹³³ More often, young men decided to conduct parlour experiments in a group context. After holding joint sessions with the women’s Illinae Society, whose members cultivated ‘the power of expression’ through political discussions and storytelling, the men’s Zetaetha Society organised a ‘new and unique program’ that they tentatively ‘called a literary social’, in which each member performed ‘a number of his own choosing’ followed by a reception. The young men deemed the ‘new departure’ a ‘success’ and voted to repeat the format ‘throughout the year’.¹³⁴ Still another group of men broke off from intercollegiate debating to form the Poets’ Club. By introducing themselves in the student newspaper as ‘garrulous’ and describing their meetings as full of ‘chatter’, the members appropriated a conversational and collaborative mode of discourse that was traditionally coded female.¹³⁵

Proponents of aggressive masculinity began to suspect that the parlour was not simply the harmless refuge of the disenfranchised, but a subversive threat to the maintenance of male dominance. In response, liberal arts men identified a penchant for the parlour as a potent symptom of pathological male behaviour. In his ‘sketch’ of ‘Mr Gudemann’, F. J. Truby condemned talkative women and parlour men as equal halves of a disturbing whole. According to Truby, Mr Gudemann was a stellar student who was noted for his elocutionary and conversational abilities and who always ‘took care of neighborhood babies and pets’. After marriage, he ‘assisted’ his wife ‘about the house’ and happily spent every evening in whole-family parlour amusements. Truby ended this nightmarish fantasy with a tribute to the woman of earlier eras who ‘always permitted her husband to have the last word’, remarking: ‘This last, the ability of knowing when she had said enough, alone would raise her far above the rank of an ordinary woman’.¹³⁶

From 1870 to 1900, the parlour evolved from an optimistic rehearsal venue into one of the few remaining spaces in which Northwestern students could negotiate relatively equitable participation – in which women expressed themselves with few restrictions and men were freed from the pressure to conform to narrowing definitions of masculinity. The parlour’s cultural influence was waning, however. By the 1920s, elocution had become an outmoded genre, and university-level public speaking curricula was rebranded with a masculine focus and nomenclature. Radio and motion pictures rendered dramatic reading an anachronism, and the parlour practices that had served as ingredients in oratory students’ experiments dispersed into new fields of educational drama, modern dance and physical education. Meanwhile, the ‘liberal gender experimentations’ that flourished on coeducational campuses during the late nineteenth century were followed by anti-coeducation backlashes and student cultures centred on women’s socialisation and marriage prospects.¹³⁷

Rosemarie Zagari has described women’s path to political participation as fraught with ‘many false starts, much resistance, and many detours’.¹³⁸ Recognising the parlour, not as a false start or a detour, but as a site of creative and political experimentation invites us to broaden our consideration of ‘old-fashioned’ female-led venues and practices. Although the era of elocution’s greatest popularity – a historical moment in which ‘women stood alone on platforms across America’ and ‘audiences listened’ – had a limited lifespan, playing with elastic gender identities through parlour performance prepared Cumnock School of Oratory graduates to make innovative contributions to public life.¹³⁹ They won ‘laurels as teachers and public readers’ by establishing their own schools and departments, giving dramatic readings on platforms across the country and publishing anthologies and textbooks, while also using their oratorical prowess to advocate for suffrage, temperance, dress reform, arbitration and other Progressive Era causes.¹⁴⁰ In the contentious political climate of the 1890s and 1900s, oratory graduates joined a reformist bloc comprised of ‘assertive women and sensitive men’ who draped their civic vision in domestic imagery and aspired to improve both individual male behaviour and the corrupt political system pugilistic masculinity had wrought.¹⁴¹

The Chicago settlement house movement became a key avenue by which School of Oratory personnel extended their democratic experiments from the academic to the civic realm. Shannon Jackson has argued that the women-led, yet coeducational administrative and living arrangements at settlements required male residents and volunteers ‘to rethink a conventional hierarchy between the sexes’. By ‘unsettling the performance of masculinity’, settlements incurred copious ‘accusations of gender disruption’ from outside critics.¹⁴² Oratory students, graduates and faculty volunteered as ‘teachers and helpers’ in settlement clubs and classes and raised ‘generous financial aid’ through benefit performances, leading settlement residents to attest that they had ‘no better friends’ than the elocutionists.¹⁴³ The flexible approach to study, play and performance developed in settlement parlours by elocution-trained settlement volunteers and working-class participants resembled what Susan Kates has termed ‘activist rhetoric instruction’, as club leaders and members used the spoken arts as a jumping off point for new forms of community organising and social service.¹⁴⁴ Settlement participants expanded on the elocutionists’ effort to remodel gender relations and public engagement. During the 1910s, the girls and women who studied with School of Oratory mentors ascended public platforms alongside educators and reformers to demand the ballot, predicting that ‘in a few years we women would Rule the World of Politics’.¹⁴⁵ At the height of First World War militarism, the boys and men who embraced settlement elocution training staged original parlour plays that promoted a residual manhood rooted in ‘courtesy, and helpfulness, and generosity’.¹⁴⁶

As students, educators, performers and social reformers, Cumnock School of Oratory students moulded the artistic into the political and the traditional into the transformative. Searching for creative mobilisations of residual culture in the history of gender and rhetorical education may uncover more examples of participants claiming access to public discourse and reimagining the practice of democracy through creative collaboration and intergenerational mentorship. Like the School of Oratory students, we can look forward by looking backward; we can find innovative ideas by exploring and reworking the legacies of the past.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ 'Fourth of July', *The Tripod*, 20 July 1871, p. 79; 'The Girls that Amused Us', *Chicago Tribune*, Scrapbook #3, Julia M. Thayer, 'A Drama', Scrapbook #10, Papers of Frances E. Willard, WCTU Archives, Evanston, IL. Rosemarie Zagari explores the tradition of women claiming Independence Day celebrations as a rare public speaking venue in *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 71–3.
- ² *The Northwestern*, 13 February 1896, p. 4.
- ³ Carolyn Eastman situates speech as a means by which nonelite men and women claimed belonging in an American public and reimagined gender and citizenship roles. *A Nation of Speechifiers: Making an American Public after the Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
- ⁴ Jane Donawerth posits that the 'dismissive attitude toward elocution most probably results from its association with sentimental culture and with women'. *Conversational Rhetoric: The Rise and Fall of a Women's Tradition, 1600–1900* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), p. 107. Marian Wilson Kimber argues that 'the historical invisibility' of elocution demonstrates 'how artistic and academic disciplines shape knowledge and how gendered artworks are subject to cultural limitations on their artistic value'. *The Elocutionists: Women, Music, and the Spoken Word* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), p. xiv.
- ⁵ Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 5, 14–15. See also: John L. Brooke, 'Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution and the Early Republic', in Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson and David Waldstreicher (eds), *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 207–250; Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, tr. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).
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- ⁸ Lindal Buchanan, *Regendering Delivery: The Fifth Canon and Antebellum Women Rhetors* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), pp. 41–2, 74.
- ⁹ Kimber, *The Elocutionists*, p. 18.
- ¹⁰ Andrea Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch: Women and Coeducation in the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), p. 266; Carly S. Woods, *Debating Women: Gender, Education, and Spaces for Argument, 1835–1945* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2018).
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- ¹² Stuart Tannock, 'Nostalgia Critique', *Cultural Studies* 9 (1995), pp. 456–9.
- ¹³ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 10.
- ¹⁴ Donawerth, *Conversational Rhetoric*, p. 16.
- ¹⁵ 'The Oratory Graduation', *The Northwestern*, 9 June 1893, p. 195. Sandra Gustafson situates Adams' quote in context – and uses it as her title – in *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. xiii. Carolyn Eastman interprets Adams' speech as a prediction that 'the eloquent glory of the classical past might be revived by young Americans who felt strongly their republican duty to inspire their fellow citizens' and worked to create a new nation 'in which debate and oratory bound the public and its leaders in dynamic exchange'. *A Nation of Speechifiers*, p. 44.
- ¹⁶ During the 1873–74 schoolyear, Northwestern University had nine women faculty members who taught students of both genders. 'Notes', *The Tripod*, December 1873, p. 131.
- ¹⁷ Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 90–135.
- ¹⁸ *The Tripod*, 20 April 1871, p. 45.
- ¹⁹ Frances E. Willard, *A Classic Town: The Story of Evanston by 'An Old Timer'* (Chicago: Women's Temperance Publishing Association, 1891), pp. 157, 365–66; Frances E. Willard, *Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman* (Chicago: H. J. Smith & Co., 1889), p. 199.

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- ²³ ‘The Youngest College President’, *The Northwestern*, 7 October 1897, p. 5.
- ²⁴ ‘Paid Their Own Expenses’, *The Northwestern*, 4 February 1897, p. 4; ‘Young Women’s Christian Association’, *The Northwestern*, 31 March 1898, p. 2.
- ²⁵ ‘Editorial’, *The Tripod*, November 1873, p. 113.
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- ²⁷ Countries of origin included England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Russia, Macedonia, Syria, Turkey, Argentina, South Africa and Japan. ‘Northwestern University’, *The Northwestern*, August 1887, pp. 164–5.
- ²⁸ ‘Obituary’, *The Northwestern*, 25 September 1885, p. 165; ‘Exchanges’, *The Northwestern*, 27 April 1888, p. 139.
- ²⁹ ‘Eugensia’, *The Northwestern*, 14 March 1884, p. 51; ‘Preparatory’, *The Northwestern*, 15 April 1887, p. 85; ‘Nor’westers’, *The Northwestern*, 13 April 1888, p. 117; Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).
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- ³¹ ‘The Northwestern’, *The Tripod*, November 1873, p. 116.
- ³² *The Tripod*, October 1873, p. 97.
- ³³ Willard, *A Classic Town*, p. 366; ‘Theologues’, *The Northwestern*, 8 April 1881, p. 69; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, pp. 111–13.
- ³⁴ ‘Northwestern Female College’, *The Tripod*, 20 July 1871, p. 82.
- ³⁵ ‘Frances E. Willard’, *Evanston Index*, 1874.
- ³⁶ *The Tripod*, September 1878, p. 80; *The Tripod*, 26 October 1876, p. 78; ‘Elocution’, *The Tripod*, February 1878, p. 20.
- ³⁷ J. N. S., ‘Public Speaking’, *The Tripod*, 20 March 1872, p. 25; *The Tripod*, 27 April 1876, p. 32.
- ³⁸ Buchanan, *Regendering Delivery*, pp. 54–55; Kimber, *The Elocutionists*, p. 8; Nan Johnson, *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866–1910* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002).
- ³⁹ *The Tripod*, 20 May 1872, p. 58; Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power*, p. xvii.
- ⁴⁰ ‘Commencement Exercises’, *The Tripod*, 28 June 1877, p. 69.
- ⁴¹ Cumnock’s textbook featured eighteen selections written by women that were performed by male and female students. Robert McLain Cumnock, *Choice Readings for Public and Private Entertainment, Arranged for the Exercises of the School, College, and Public Reader, With Elocutionary Advice* (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Co., 1878).
- ⁴² ‘Contest in Debate’, *The Tripod*, 25 January 1877, pp. 9–10; Johnson, *Gender and Rhetorical Space*, pp. 23–24.
- ⁴³ Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, pp. 117–18.
- ⁴⁴ Willard, *Glimpses of Fifty Years*, p. 207.
- ⁴⁵ ‘Exchanges’, *The Tripod*, December 1873, p. 129.
- ⁴⁶ Maria S. Bergh, ‘The Pulpit’, *The Tripod*, November 1873, p. 115.
- ⁴⁷ *The Tripod*, 21 May 1874, p. 58; *The Tripod*, 27 February 1875, pp. 21–22; Nancy Green, ‘Female Education and School Competition: 1820–1850’, *History of Education Quarterly* 18 (1978), pp. 129–42.
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- ⁵⁰ *The Tripod*, 23 March 1876, p. 21.
- ⁵¹ ‘Locals’, *The Tripod*, 22 May 1875, p. 57.
- ⁵² Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, pp. 50–51.
- ⁵³ ‘A Suburban Entertainment’, ‘The Spirit of ’76’, Scrapbook #3, Papers of Frances E. Willard, WCTU Archives, Evanston, IL; *The Tripod*, 20 March 1872, p. 35.
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