Well-Tempered Women

Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric

Carol Mattingly

Southern Illinois University Press
Carbondale and Edwardsville

1998

Part Three. Fictional Accounts of Feminine Concerns

Plates

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Acknowledgments

I AM GRATEFUL for the generous assistance of the staff at the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union and Frances E. Willard Memorial Library in Evanston, Illinois, especially Alfred Epstein, curator of the Frances E. Willard Memorial Library, and Claudia Johnson Dobbs, hostess and guide at Rest Cottage. I gratefully acknowledge the Willard Library and the WCTU for their permission to reprint WCTU meeting minutes, pamphlets, letters, and other documents.

Lucy Freibert, perhaps the most inspiring teacher I've known, introduced me to nineteenth-century women and offered continued support throughout my graduate years and since. She will always represent the very best in academics and humanity for me.

Colleagues at Louisiana State University unselfishly provided both essential advice and continuing support. My special gratitude to Robin Roberts and Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, who read drafts of chapters more than once, providing intelligent suggestions and crucial reassurance. I wish to thank other colleagues at LSU: Sarah Liggett and Michelle Masse, who read and responded to portions of the text, and Emily Toth, who advised me in shaping the direction of this project. LSU supported me with a 1993 summer research grant and a 1996 spring semester research grant. I also benefited from a 1995 LSU Women's and Gender Studies Summer Institute. I am thankful as well for the staffs of the interlibrary borrowing office and microfilm reading room at LSU's Middleton Library and at the English department at LSU, as well as for the support of department chairs John Fischer and Jerry Kennedy.

Jerry Phillips's generosity in sharing his proficiency with biblical passages added immensely to my understanding of their meaning for nineteenth-century women. I am grateful as well to two readers at *Rhetoric Review*, Patricia Bizzell and Kathleen Welch, for their supportive and helpful comments on a portion of the text, and to the anonymous reader

for Southern Illinois University Press. Acknowledgment is also made to *Rhetoric Review* for permission to reprint a revised version of "Woman-Tempered Rhetoric: Public Presentation and the WCTU" 14.1 (1995): 41–61.

Many individuals, knowing of my research interests, forwarded materials to me, especially John Kennedy and Linda Rogers. Jean Witherow and Natalie April, student assistants, helped with numerous details. Tracey Sobol, editor at Southern Illinois University Press, patiently guided me through the publishing process. And Alexandria Weinbrecht's careful copyediting has contributed to the quality of this book.

Finally, my daughters, Amy and Maggie, have talked with me and sent me materials about nineteenth-century women; their love and support sustains me in my work, as does that of my loving and reassuring siblings.

Chronology

1820s–1830s
Women join temperance societies led primarily by men, such as the Daughters of Temperance, an auxiliary to the Sons of Temperance, and the Order of Good Templars, which admitted women to membership and office.

1840s
Women begin organizing independent female organizations, both local and state, particularly in such states as New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.

1851
Maine passes a law prohibiting the manufacture or sale of alcohol, a law commonly referred to as "The Maine Law" by both advocates and foes of prohibition.

March 1852
The New York State Sons of Temperance meet but deny Daughters of Temperance member Susan B. Anthony permission to speak. The women withdraw, elect Mary C. Vaughan president of their group, and make plans to call a state women's temperance convention. (This date differs from that given in Stanton, Anthony, and Gage's *History of Woman Suffrage*. This date reflects coverage given by newspapers reporting the events.)

April 1852
Women form the New York Temperance Woman's Society in Rochester to counter actions taken at Sons of Temperance meeting. Elizabeth Cady Stanton becomes president.

January 1853
First New York State Woman's Temperance Convention. Susan B. Anthony presides for absent president Elizabeth C. Stanton.

Spring 1853
Susan B. Anthony, Amelia Bloomer, and Antoinette Brown travel New York State lecturing on temperance.

May 1853
The Brick Church meeting, called to plan the World's Temperance Convention of all major temperance organizations, excludes women delegates from participation.

June 1853
The New York State Woman's Temperance Society holds its second convention. Mary C. Vaughan is elected president. Stanton and Anthony leave the temperance organizations. (The *History of Woman Suffrage* quotes newspaper coverage of this convention under the header "First Annual Meeting of the Woman's State Temperance Society" [493] but later refers to it as the second [498]. Other accounts refer to this meeting as the Second Annual Convention.)

September 1853
The World's Temperance Convention meets in New York City. Since women have been excluded from participation, critics nickname the meeting the "Half-World's" or "Pseudo World's" convention.

In response, women call the Whole World's Temperance Convention, which also meets in New York City. The convention is called to counter the exclusionary practices taken by men in planning the World's Temperance Convention and is open to both sexes.

Autumn 1853
Lydia F. Fowler and Clarina Howard Nichols travel Wisconsin delivering temperance lectures.

Amelia Bloomer lectures on temperance throughout the Midwest, specifically Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

1861–1865
The nation is embroiled in the Civil War. Temperance women direct their efforts primarily at supporting the war effort.

1869
The National Woman's Suffrage Association breaks from the Equal Rights Association (ERA) to protest the ERA's support for the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

1870
Ohio passes the Adair Law permitting wives and children of alcoholic men to bring suit against saloon keepers to recover damages.

The Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified giving black men the right to vote.

1873–1874
Women join in the Woman's Crusade, the largest public demonstration by women in the nineteenth century. They march and pray in streets and saloons, protesting the sale of alcohol.

1874
The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) is founded. Annie Wittenmyer becomes president.

1879
Frances E. Willard becomes president of the WCTU.
The National WCTU Convention adopts a suffrage resolution.

1889
The Iowa delegation, led by J. Ellen Foster, walks out of the National WCTU Convention and begins the Nonpartisan Woman's Christian Temperance Union.

1894
Ida B. Wells accuses Frances E. Willard and members of the WCTU of racism.

1898
Frances E. Willard dies at age fifty-nine.

1919
The Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, establishing national prohibition on liquor.

WCTU membership reaches its highest official number of 346, 638.

1920
The nineteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, extending suffrage to women.

Introduction: Silenced Voices

TEMPERANCE WOMEN MADE up the largest movement of women in the nineteenth century, and the largest group of women orators and rhetors as well. The quantity of material they produced alone justifies critical attention. However, their claim for critical study is by no means solely quantitative. Nineteenth-century temperance women, despite their lack of formal rhetorical training, exhibit an exceptional understanding of language use within the cultural context of their time in that they demonstrate remarkably effective rhetorical strategies in relation to their own purposes and the audiences they addressed.

Twentieth-century feminists often more comfortably identify with leaders of the suffrage associations, even though temperance women were enormously effective in creating change for nineteenth-century women. Such identification has been problematic. Lori D. Ginzberg, in recent efforts to contribute more broadly to our understanding of women's activism in the nineteenth century, has noted that "The historical focus on the radical demand for the vote as women's only significant political act . . . has had the effect of both foreshortening and distorting the history of women's participation in the political process" (29).

Perhaps because of my roots in a rural, poor community, I find it easy to understand and appreciate temperance women. I do not see them as conservative and complicit in their own oppression, charges often leveled against them. Instead, temperance women seem much like women I knew during childhood—strong, sensible women who recognized the real circumstances of their existence and strove, pragmatically, to improve life for themselves and for others.

Temperance women were remarkably effective for the very reasons they are often criticized. They presented arguments in comfortable, familiar language that made both women and men amenable to new ideas and evidence. Words are most effective when an audience admires its

speakers and finds the messages non-threatening. The great strength of temperance leaders was their ability to meld a progressive message with a rhetorical presentation and image comfortable to a large number of women and men. By the hundreds of thousands, women came to hear temperance women's ideas because they could identify with and admire these speakers. Men came to accept women temperance speakers and their positions because, through their rhetoric, these women provided a way for men to see change as imminent and non-aggressive. Temperance women connected theory to practice, and made the connection both important and comprehensible to the general populace through speeches, fiction, and even dress.

We are accustomed to binarisms, and nineteenth-century scholars have tended to label women's rhetoric in a dichotomous fashion—conservative/liberal (or radical); consolidators/pioneers (Giele); arguments from expediency/from justice (Epstein); arguments from morality/from natural rights (Karlyn Campbell). However, with nineteenth-century women, and with temperance women in particular, binary labels do not fit so neatly. Temperance women represented broadly diverse attitudes. They wanted to change laws governing alcohol because they believed that the issues of temperance and woman's rights were one and the same. Many women explicitly noted their efforts to introduce the notion of woman's rights through the issue of temperance. For others, their intentions are less clear, since inadequate records prevent us from knowing their purposes. Women's temperance rhetoric is complex and varied and might, according to time, purpose, and author, fit any assortment of labels. Women who combined traditional rhetoric with an appeal for change mobilized hundreds of thousands of previously inactive women. Labels such as conservative and radical inadequately describe the complex speakers who successfully addressed a large community of people, united them, organized them, and moved them to action.

IN THE SPRING of 1994, I visited Evanston, Illinois, to see Rest Cottage (plate 1), where Frances E. Willard, president of the WCTU for most of its nineteenth-century history, had lived and to make use of the extensive materials on nineteenth-century temperance women in the Frances E. Willard Memorial Library. As I walked down Chicago Avenue in the direction of Rest Cottage, I found no signs of Willard's nineteenth-century neighborhood. Modern homes and tall apartment and office buildings lined the street. But then, seemingly out of nowhere, Rest Cottage appeared, a nineteenth-century treasure nestled amidst the numerous testimonies to modernity. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) had recently renovated the outside of the cottage; the inside, however, reminded me that the headquarters for the largest organization

of women in the nineteenth century has been generally disregarded by the twentieth. Largely forgotten, Rest Cottage has not received the expenditure granted landmarks more acceptable to twentieth-century pride. Yet, while the inside of Rest Cottage needs restoring, the home remains a slice of time in the history of our country and of women. Both the WCTU headquarters and nearby Rest Cottage preserve valuable nineteenth-century history.

When I again visited Rest Cottage and the WCTU headquarters during the summer of 1994, I felt as if I had stepped back into the nineteenth century. I stayed nights in Rest Cottage, sleeping in Frances Willard's bed, surrounded by pictures and mementos from her life. There were no radios or televisions in the house, no working clocks, and I had forgotten to bring my watch. I did research in the Willard Library, a basement addition to the WCTU headquarters, surrounded by the papers and thoughts of nineteenth-century temperance women. I haunted Rest Cottage, imagining the women who lived there, examining Willard's extensive intact library, exploring the wealth of gifts given to Willard by admirers, as well as the other preserved relics of the greatest mass movement of women in the nineteenth century.

The last night I stayed at Rest Cottage, my daughter and I shared a meal with the Cottage's hostess and guide, Claudia Johnson Dobbs. We ate at Willard's dining-room table (plate 2), where Ms. Dobbs gave the Wesley blessing[1], as inscribed on the Blessing Tea Service; the service was probably a gift to Willard from John Wesley's descendants when she spoke in the Wesley Chapel in London. In the corner, a specially-lit cupboard illuminated the cupboard's glass door installed on Willard's fiftieth birthday, a gift from the WCTU portraying the rising sun to represent "a new day dawning for women." On the dining-room walls hung the prints given to Willard by Hannah Whitall Smith, a temperance and suffrage activist. After the meal, Ms. Dobbs gave us a tour of the home. Her wealth of knowledge, and her love for Willard and her home, gave life to this historical treasure.

Most of the house, which Willard's father Josiah built himself, remains as Willard left it, with the original furniture as well as the personal items of Frances, of her mother, Mary Willard, and of her long-time secretary, Anna Gordon, still intact. Four rooms of Rest Cottage have been made into a museum to hold the temperance memorabilia collected during Willard's tenure as president of the WCTU. Here visitors can view the huge bell made from melting one thousand opium pipes, Willard's gowns, and the Polyglot petition—a call for world prohibition written by Frances Willard and affixed with 7.5 million signatures from around the world, sewn into more than two thousand yards of white muslin.

The living room remains as Willard left it, containing the organ Wil-

lard bought with the first money she earned from teaching, as well as the collapsible desk she used when travelling. Here is the Willard family Bible, and an inlaid music box, a gift from Lady Henry Somerset that plays the favorite hymns of Frances Willard's mother. In the hallway rests Gladys, the beloved bicycle on which Willard learned to ride at age fifty-three, also a gift from Lady Henry.

Willard's upstairs study has a bay window, a gift from WCTU members to the woman they adored. The room contains the largest segment of Willard's personal library—her collection of works on rhetoric and contemporary writings on women's issues, such as her personal copy of the *History of Woman Suffrage* (signed by one of its authors, her friend Susan B. Anthony), as well as Willard's dictaphone and other accessories that helped with her voluminous writing.

The house is quiet, except during tours, but the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union headquarters, on the grounds behind Rest Cottage, bustles with activity. The union continues to admit only women as full members. Men may become honorary members, but may not hold office or act as voting delegates. The WCTU continues to sponsor three youth groups—the White Ribbon Recruits for children under six years of age, the Loyal Temperance Legion for those between six and twelve years, and the Youth Temperance Council for those between twelve and twenty years of age. All full and honorary members sign the total abstinence pledge and pay annual dues.

Rachel B. Kelly now serves as president of the forty-six state groups that contribute to the union's $360,000 budget. In addition to its many efforts toward educating the public, especially today's youth, about the dangers of alcohol, illegal drugs, tobacco, "and other threats to the health of the human body and the society in which we live" (*National WCTU* 7), the union maintains the Frances E. Willard Home as a museum.

The National WCTU continues to maintain its own publication house, Signal Press. The publishing service provides educational materials for teachers and for the public at large, including leaflets, booklets, books, posters, and videos. The WCTU also continues to publish the *Union Signal*, its bi-monthly magazine, the *Young Crusader*, a children's magazine, as well as various newsletters and directories.

Today's Woman's Christian Temperance Union has its roots in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and, to a degree, in the writings and speeches of women throughout the 1800s. Despite little formal rhetorical preparation, WCTU members actively worked to change their position in the second half of the nineteenth century. They were creating their own interpretations, images, and realities, educating and exploring ideas with one another, forming a large community of support—activities previously denied women.

In both fiction and platform speeches, temperance women were well aware of ethical appeal. They carefully constructed their ethos in an acceptable fashion, and attention to presentation was part of an overall strategy for gradually reconstructing and molding that ethos.

Evidence of women's difficulty in coming to public voice after centuries of silence surfaces over and over in temperance women's rhetoric. When Eliza J. Thompson recounts her leadership of women in their protest before saloons in 1873 and 1874, she describes her own fear, her inability to move or talk when chosen to be president of the group of women who would take to the streets in remarkably unfeminine demonstrations. When her minister asked that she come forward to take charge of the meeting, "her limbs refused to bear her." As do other women, she notes her greater ease at speaking in the company of women. Only after all men had left the room did she find both strength and voice:

> As the last man closed the door after him, strength before unknown came to me, and without any hesitation or consultation I walked forward to the minister's table, took the large Bible, and opening it, explained the incident of the morning; . . . I then called upon Mrs. McDowell to lead in prayer, and such a prayer! It seemed as though the angel had brought down "live coals" from off the altar and touched her lips—she who had never before heard her own voice in prayer! (Willard, *Woman and Temperance* 56–57)

Many women needed the support and comfort of other women to use their voices publicly, but they invariably expressed a joy at hearing those voices in a public arena for the first time.

Understanding the complicated fears and emotions women experienced when taking on a new role and when broaching accepted roles in speaking, Frances Willard instructed WCTU leaders to encourage other women's public voice as often as possible:

> When it comes to a vote after the parliamentary interval for remarks, mention that you are tired of your own voice and anxious to hear theirs, adding in your clearest tones, 'All in favor of that motion will please to say aye,' and let your final word be in the most decided sense a rising circumflex. You will be surprised to see the readiness with which you can thus call out the voices of the timid, partly out of good nature and partly because their musical perceptions lead them to put a climax to your incomplete inflection by their own. (*How to Organize* 7)

Willard's recognition of the difficulty for many women in uttering even one syllable in public presents a painful image of female voicelessness. In this context, especially, we should celebrate the successful process and the tremendous coming to voice represented in the voluminous speeches and public meetings held by temperance women by the end of the nineteenth century

TEMPERANCE WAS A major reform issue for most of the nineteenth century and represented the most important and far-reaching issue for women during that period. Yet, despite efforts in recent years to include women's voices in our understanding of our country's past, scholars have tended to ignore those of women associated with temperance. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's valuable *Man Cannot Speak for Her* explicitly seeks to recover the rhetoric of women active in seeking greater rights, but Campbell overlooks the role played by temperance women. While she does devote one segment to Frances Willard, Campbell sees Willard's impact as transient (131) and independent of the feminist movement because she "generat[ed] discourse which was suited only to reinforce existing beliefs" (129). Campbell's subsequent edited volume, *Women Public Speakers in the United States, 1800–1925*, does include a number of women who were active both in temperance and in suffrage associations—Clara Barton, Antoinette Brown Blackwell, Clarina Howard Nichols, Anna Howard Shaw, Julia Ward Howe, and Frances E. Willard—but, with the exception of Willard, the selections emphasize their suffrage connections. However, the style often associated with temperance women is more fully appreciated in this anthology than in her first study, and the volume includes a more positive presentation of Willard.

In addition, while Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran's edited collection, *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, explicitly seeks to reclaim nineteenth-century oratory and does include some women, there is no inclusion of temperance women. This omission is surprising. After all, the largest group of rhetorically active women in nineteenth-century America was comprised of temperance women. And leaders of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union systematically encouraged and instructed vast numbers of nineteenth-century women in rhetorical, organizational, and parliamentary techniques.

Contributing to the recovery of nineteenth-century African American women's voices, Shirley Wilson Logan's recent *With Pen and Voice* offers an anthology of African American women rhetors, including women important to the black woman's club movement. These women were also instrumental in the organization of the National Association of Colored Women at the end of the century. Chapter 4 discusses the connection between these important African American women and the WCTU.

Frances Willard has long fascinated scholars, and several recent works

focus explicitly on restoring Willard's voice. Amy Slagell's 1992 dissertation, "A Good Woman Speaking Well: The Oratory of Frances E. Willard," gathers and examines many of Willard's previously unavailable speeches. And Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford's new publication, *"Writing Out My Heart": The Journal of Frances E. Willard*, provides an edited compilation of Willard's journals. Both works afford a more current appraisal of the best-known woman orator of the century.

Even with recent interest in nineteenth-century women, and in Frances Willard specifically, only Janet Giele, and in a more limited manner, Jack Blocker, have examined the language of a large number of temperance women. In her valuable study, Giele examines and compares the socioeconomic and educational backgrounds of temperance and suffrage leaders, finding little difference in their backgrounds. She also searches out what these women had to say in the pages of the *Union Signal* and the *Woman's Journal*, the official publications of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the National Woman's Suffrage Association, respectively. Giele finds that the words used by suffrage women were more radical than those of temperance women, but the language in the *Union Signal* (beginning in 1883) is a limited sample of temperance rhetoric. The official journal presents temperance women in a light different from that of their words at national and state conventions. Often, women who spoke at conventions were more likely to be progressive than those who sought the relatively safe space of the written word; and even progressive women writing for the *Union Signal* would have been conscious that their audience included rank-and-file members who might require a more moderate rhetoric. Temperance women nearly always presented non-traditional ideas in a manner carefully crafted to appeal to a widely diverse audience. In doing so, they incorporated both traditional and progressive ideas within their presentations, a strategy scholars often misinterpret as conservative.

Past scholarship on the teaching of rhetoric has looked to educational institutions and academic texts for instruction in rhetorical skills. But since women were most often excluded from and had little influence on institutions of higher learning, those studies provide little information about the education of and communication among women. Because the history of rhetoric has concentrated on the move from an oral to a written tradition in male-dominated western history, women's voices have been omitted. Women's movement toward attaining a public voice in the nineteenth century took the reverse path, beginning largely in the more acceptable (because less public) written form and moving toward oral, public delivery. The temperance movement provides a unique look at methods women used for teaching one another rhetorical skills in a manner "appropriate" to and successful for their gender.

Efforts at recovering nineteenth-century women writers have also

largely neglected women writers of temperance fiction. Lucy Freibert and Barbara White's *Hidden Hands* includes an excerpt from Metta Fuller Victor's *The Senator's Son*, acknowledging the widespread availability and cultural importance of such fiction. Robert S. Levine also includes an examination of temperance fiction in mid-century America, including some by women, as a "central motif of the writings" in "Fiction and Reform," a segment of *The Columbia History of the American Novel.*

But as studies on nineteenth-century women writers flourished in the 1980s, little attention was given to writers of temperance fiction. Legacy, a new journal devoted specifically to nineteenth-century women authors, for example, began publication during that time but has not included women writers of temperance fiction. Most scholars of nineteenth-century women writers have ignored women's temperance fiction. The present volume shows, however, that women's temperance rhetoric, including fiction, is a rich and engaging field of study for feminist readers.

Women's temperance reform has often been incorrectly dismissed as a conservative representation of the nineteenth century's cult of true womanhood. In our secular age, scholars tend to disregard women associated with evangelical or religious causes not considered progressive by today's standards. However, because of the large participatory role women took within church organizations and reform causes, a vast number of women prepared for further involvement in public life through positions in such organizations. Numerous leaders credited their early activity within the church as providing initial interest and continuing preparation for their later public leadership roles. In addition, evangelical women created their own standards for Christianity, which they deliberately delineated from orthodox patriarchal religious organizations. Their own interpretation of Christian principles and their appeal to a "higher authority" justified their defiance of patriarchal authority and enabled them to demand greater rights for women. And, as chapter 3 shows, women temperance leaders provided the largest school for preparing women for public participation in the nineteenth century.

Temperance women and their rhetoric have also been neglected because our hierarchical, competitive society devalues a group it perceives as having "lost" when the Eighteenth Amendment was repealed. But these women brought about major political changes, including the passage of a constitutional amendment, a feat accomplished by few political movements. Temperance women were politically astute and effective; they were instrumental in achieving numerous local and state political gains in controlling the sale of alcohol, but they made gains in regard to other women's issues as well. They helped to raise the legal age of consent for girls in nearly every state, and they convinced the "average woman" of the need for woman's suffrage, leading to the passage of a

second amendment to the Constitution still in effect today. It is not mere coincidence that the woman's suffrage amendment was added to the Constitution in 1920, one year after the passage of the prohibition amendment.

Well-Tempered Women adds to our knowledge about temperance women by examining new sources: temperance fiction, newspaper accounts of meetings and speeches, autobiographical and biographical accounts, and minutes of national and state temperance conventions. Each of these sources intentionally or unintentionally presents biased but informative perspectives.[2] Even so, *Well-Tempered Women* contributes new voices and new perspectives to our study of women and women's words in the nineteenth century.[3]

Because much of the material included in this book is not readily available, I often quote women's words at length. While I have tried to "see" from the perspective of the numerous women portrayed here and to present their story as much as possible in their own words, my own limitations and perspectives necessarily influence my work. Nonetheless, I believe the evidence supports my contention that the temperance movement, and especially the rhetorical sophistication of its leaders, was essential in women's growing awareness about and ultimate insistence upon a change in sexual inequalities in the nineteenth-century United States.

PART 1 OF *Well-Tempered Women* examines nineteenth-century temperance women's oral rhetoric. Chapter 1, "Woman's Rights in Woman's Wrongs: Temperance Women at Mid-Century," explores texts from early temperance speakers, both those who subsequently organized the woman's rights movement, such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and those who chose instead to remain active within the temperance organizations.

The majority of extant texts by women temperance speakers are from members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Chapter 2, "Patriotic Reformers: 'Called by the Spirit of the Lord to Lead the Women of the World,'" examines the rhetoric of WCTU member Frances E. Willard, the primary leader of the WCTU during the final quarter of the nineteenth century, as well as other famous WCTU leaders, such as Mary Torrans Lathrap, often called the "Daniel Webster" of the temperance movement, and Eliza Stewart, referred to as "Wendell Phillips in Petticoats." Chapter 3, "Woman-Tempered Rhetoric: Public Presentation and the WCTU," examines the extensive network WCTU leaders created for teaching new members rhetorical skills.

Part 2 explores temperance women's rhetoric from perspectives outside those of mainstream, middle-class women. Chapter 4, "Dissension and Division: Racial Tension and the WCTU," focuses on racial conflict and alliances associated with the WCTU. Based largely on an essentialized

image of women, the WCTU began to show signs of strain as an increasingly diverse membership threatened the unity and harmony of the organization. Chapter 5, "Red-Nosed Angels and the Corseted Crusade: Newspaper Accounts of Nineteenth-Century Temperance Reformers," analyzes press coverage of women temperance speakers. Newspaper reports focused on women speakers' physical appearance to an extreme, reflecting the great concern for dichotomous gender distinctions and the fear of any blending of gender roles.

Part 3 explores temperance fiction written by nineteenth-century women. Chapter 6, "'The Feelings of the Romantic and Fashionable': Women's Issues in Temperance Fiction," examines women's temperance fiction in its remarkably candid presentation of injustices toward women and its insistence upon greater equality. The temperance issue permitted women to broach otherwise clandestine topics openly, many of them remarkably similar to the concerns of today's feminists. Chapter 7, "'Wine Drinkers and Heartless Profligates': Water Drops from Popular Novelists," examines the abundant references to temperance in the writing of the most popular women novelists of the day, as well as in fiction labeled temperance and written by well-known literary women: Louisa May Alcott, Elizabeth F. Ellet, Grace Greenwood, Sarah Josepha Hale, Caroline Hentz, Caroline Kirkland, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Lydia Sigourney, Ann Stephens, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

The conclusion, "Women of the Century," examines both the widespread success of the WCTU and the reasons for its diminishing strength. It also explores the parallels between women's groups at the end of both the nineteenth century and our own, as well as the importance to twentieth-century women of the most widely successful and popular woman's political movement: temperance.

Part One

From Pedestal to Pen and Podium