

NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERARY WOMEN AND THE TEMPERANCE  
TRADITION: TEMPERANCE RHETORIC IN THE FICTION OF  
LYDIA SIGOURNEY, FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS HARPER,  
REBECCA HARDING DAVIS AND ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

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ABSTRACT

Although historically scholars have viewed nineteenth-century temperance as a lesser movement in a century characterized by other weighty reforms, this dissertation builds on recent scholarship that redirects attention to the multi-faceted nature of women's temperance work as it coalesced women for important cultural work. Just as the women's temperance movement as a whole has suffered from critical neglect, so too have the literary productions of temperance women. In this work, I analyze how—despite the characteristic sentimental, generic stereotypes often associated with temperance literature—nineteenth-century female authors of temperance literature did in fact utilize this genre to respond to a wide array of social and political concerns. For Lydia Sigourney, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Rebecca Harding Davis and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, the temperance issue does not stand alone; my work illuminates how to various degrees and in diverse ways, temperance is intimately connected with topics such as women's concerns, community, capitalism and reform among a host of other pertinent social topics.