



# The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere

*Elizabeth Dillon*

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## **The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere** Elizabeth Dillon

In a sweeping reassessment of early American literature, *The Gender of Freedom* explores the workings of the literary public sphere—from its colonial emergence through the antebellum flourishing of sentimentalism. Placing representations of and by women at the center rather than the margin of the public sphere, this book links modern forms of political identity to the seemingly private images of gender displayed prominently in the developing public sphere. The "fictions of liberalism" explored in this book are those of marriage and motherhood, sentimental domesticity, and heterosexual desire—narratives that structure the private realm upon which liberalism depends for its meaning and value. In a series of bold theoretical arguments and nuanced readings of literary texts, the author explores the political force of these private narratives with chapters on the Antinomian crisis in Puritan Massachusetts, early national models of gender and marriage in the works of Charles Brockden Brown and Hannah Webster Foster, infanticide narratives and nineteenth-century accounts of motherhood in the work of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Lydia Maria Child, and "re-arranging" marriage in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

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