



Emily Dickinson, Daughter of Prophecy

Beth Maclay Doriani

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How do women, historically excluded from the role of preacher because of their gender, gain authority to assume a prophetic voice? What rhetorical strategies can empower the woman who would claim the role of prophet?

In this book, Beth Maclay Doriani looks at the ways Emily Dickinson addressed these questions in the context of patriarchal nineteenth-century New England. She explores some of the central strategies Dickinson used to claim both poetic and religious authority and to join the ranks of the self-proclaimed prophets of her day?literary figures like Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, as well as a host of preachers and other popular orators.

Dickinson drew on the prophetic tradition she knew best: the Judeo-Christian legacy that included both scriptural prophetic writings and the preaching of nineteenth-century Protestantism. Remarkably, the voice that emerged in response to these patriarchal sources was distinctly female. Despite entrenched cultural opposition to the idea of the woman prophet, Dickinson was able to craft her own understanding of the female seer, developing a singular voice that not only indicts but also sings, consoles, and wonders.

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