The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture before 1900

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Description
In this evocative exploration, Cheryl Walker shows that there is a distinct tradition of women's poetry in America—one that the poets themselves have not always been fully aware of—and that individual poems can be read as manifestations of that tradition. Philomela, the nightingale of literary mythology, serves as a model for women poets, representing simultaneously both their particular forms of power and the frustrating powerlessness imposed on them by the cultural norms for women. The author identifies a number of archetypal motifs: the power fantasy, the sanctuary poem, the renunciation poem, the forbidden lover poem, the "burden of beauty," and the "secret sorrow." Among the poets discussed are Anne Bradstreet, Phillis Wheatley, Lydia Sigourney, Frances Osgood, Julia Ward Howe, Margaret Fuller, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and Louise Guiney.

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