



Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel (Literature, Religion, & Postsecular Stud)

Dawn Coleman

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Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel by Dawn Coleman recovers a crucial moment in the history of the intimate yet often contentious relationship between religion and literature. Coleman's book highlights the intersection of two cultural trajectories in America around 1850, both often downplayed in literary histories: a boom in preaching, associated with the growth of evangelicalism and the country's oratorical traditions, and the long struggle of the novel, still facing considerable disdain at mid-century, to achieve moral legitimacy and aesthetic autonomy.

Before the Civil War, the preacher in the pulpit was the culture's paradigmatic voice of moral authority, and novelists who wished to establish the moral value of their own storytelling needed to incorporate sermons. This book explores how antebellum ministers sought to preach effective, authoritative sermons and how novelists sought to claim a similar authority through canny representations of preachers, often veiled critiques of actual ministers, and sermonic voice, or a creative reworking of the sound of preaching. Such intense engagement with sermons shaped some of the period's most interesting and important novels, including *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Quaker City*, *Moby-Dick*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *Clotel*.

In illuminating how novelists sought to displace traditional religious institutions, *Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel* reminds readers of the deep connections between Americans' religious practices and their literature and speaks to how the processes of secularization are often less concerned with rejecting the elements of religion than reimagining them.

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