

2011

## Women's Poetry: 2011

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### Keywords

editor's note

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Welcome to the inaugural volume of *Aphra Behn Online*, a new, interactive scholarly journal. *ABOnline* offers something different for scholars and students alike in that it focuses exclusively on the issues related to women in the arts from 1640 to 1830, and it provides cutting edge work in an open access, online format that allows for readers to post comments and engage in a conversation about the ideas presented.

This volume is organized around the theme of women's poetry in recognition of the landmark publication of the [Paula R. Backscheider](#) and [Catherine E. Ingrassia](#) edition, *British Women Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2009), which will redefine the content of eighteenth-century literature courses around the globe. Backscheider and Ingrassia's anthology builds upon the important recovery work done by [Germaine Greer \(1988\)](#) and [Roger Lonsdale \(1989\)](#) who introduced readers to long-ignored female poets, but this updated volume greatly expands our range of poetic voices and the representation of poems by individual authors. Backscheider and Ingrassia benefit from two decades of research and editing produced by feminist scholars since the Greer and Lonsdale anthologies, and their volume stands as a measure of what we have accomplished and what we have yet to do.

The massive book (roughly 950 pages) presents 368 complete poems by 80 poets and is supplemented with generous and informative introductions to each section. Despite the expanded range of this book, the editors remain "painfully conscious of the poets and poems we have not been able to include" (xxix). Some authors, such as Frances Greville, Elizabeth Molesworth, or Hester Thrale Piozzi, are represented by only one poem, whereas the major female poets (Anne Finch, Charlotte Smith, Anna Laetitia Barbauld) have each over a dozen poems included. For those of us that teach eighteenth-century women writers, the book is a cornucopia of possibilities. For those of us who just want to read more poetry by women, the anthology is an exciting roadmap of discovery.

Backscheider and Ingrassia organize their volume thematically, rather than by the more standard author/date or alphabetical methods. They do so in order to highlight the diversity of content and style in the women poets, and so that patterns of topics emerge which allow for a more rigorous analysis and understanding of individual poets' work. The approach also provides a kind of history of poetic forms, whereas chronological organization can actually obscure the way an individual author responds to the literary and cultural discourses in which she is participating (xxx). Like any good anthology, *British Women Poets of the Long Eighteenth-Century* is a treasure trove of favorites, like Behn, Wortley Montagu, Seward, and new discoveries, such as Elizabeth Hands and Jane Cave Winscom. The editors challenge us to see the historical context and social purpose of women's poetry in far more complicated ways than has been the case in the past. In addition to short biographies of the poets, the editors also helpfully include a section on "How to Read Eighteenth-Century Poetry" that features the kind of analytical questions readers might ask, as well as a mini-tutorial on meter, scansion, rhyme, and figurative language.

Thus we are particularly delighted to have [Catherine Ingrassia's](#) contribution to our first volume of *ABOnline*, along with the work of several other established and emerging critics of eighteenth-century literature. Ingrassia's essay analyzes the representation of violence and social protest around the Bristol Bridge Riot of 1793 in three poems by Jane Cave Winscom. While Ingrassia enlightens us on a relatively unknown female poet and her historical significance, [Claudia](#)

[Thomas Kairoff](#) offers an intervention in our understanding of better known poets Charlotte Smith and Anna Seward. Kairoff, who will be publishing a monograph on Seward later this year with [Johns Hopkins UP](#), demonstrates how Seward has been wrongly dismissed as a sonneteer in the wake of Smith's Romantic admirers. Providing a convincingly new reading of a frequently visited poem of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, [Danielle Bobker](#) argues that "Reasons That Induced Dr S[wift] to Write a Poem Call'd the Lady's Dressing Room," belongs in the tradition of the seventeenth-century impotence poem and also makes an important statement about print culture. At the far reach of our chronological scope, [Katharine Kittredge](#) examines the Victorian reception of the popular – and yet relatively unknown to us – poet and memoirist Melesina Trench as a cautionary tale in feminist literary history. In our book review section, you will find coverage of three recent monographs on eighteenth-century women's poetry.

Two unique features of *Aphra Behn Online* include our sections devoted to issues of pedagogy and to Women on the Web. In pedagogy, we are pleased to have an essay by [Elizabeth Kraft](#) who makes concrete the process of reading eighteenth-century poems out loud in the classroom and the research that an ethical reading might entail. She juxtaposes the example of Swift's 1719 birthday poem to Stella and Barbauld's "The Mouse's Petition" in an article that contains hyperlinks and audio files to renditions of the poems read out loud. In our technology section, [Emily Bowles](#) offers us a thoughtful review of tools on eighteenth-century women poets available on the web and suggests how future contributors might participate in this type of writing.

We encourage you to read through our journal and leave a response. Please also take a look at the call for submissions for next year's volume, which will be centered on the theme of accessibility, broadly understood. Enjoy!