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978-1-107-13756-1 - A History of Twentieth-Century American Women's Poetry

Edited by Linda A. Kinnahan

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A HISTORY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN WOMEN'S POETRY

A History of Twentieth-Century American Women's Poetry explores the genealogy of modern American verse by women from the early twentieth century to the millennium. Beginning with an extensive introduction that charts important theoretical contributions to the field, this *History* includes wide-ranging essays that illuminate the legacy of American women poets. Organized chronologically and thematically, these essays survey the century's diversity of American women poets and their multilayered verse. Written by a host of leading scholars, this volume also devotes special attention to the lasting significance of feminist literary criticism. This book is of pivotal importance to the development of women's poetry in America and will serve as an invaluable reference for specialists and students alike.

LINDA A. KINNAHAN is Professor of English and Hillman Distinguished Chair at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Her publications on American and British poetry include *Poetics of the Feminine: Authority and Literary Tradition in William Carlos Williams, Mina Loy, Denise Levertov, and Kathleen Fraser* (Cambridge 1994) and *Lyric Interventions: Feminism, Experimental Poetry, and Contemporary Discourse* (2004).

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EDITED BY
LINDA A. KINNAHAN
Duquesne University



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Preface

The women poets who have graced our last century with work of nery, graceful, ragged, lyrical, stunning, and word-ful wonder are no conforming group, nor can they be easily pegged or pinned down or silenced or ignored. The poetical means through which twentieth-century American women have explored relationships to language, society, history, aesthetics, and the material conditions of life constitute an aesthetic bounty and a cultural labor remarkable in its diversity. And, until the advent of contemporary feminist scholarship's interventions and recoveries, these poetical means have often been met, across the century, with diminishment, indifference, obfuscation, or tokenism within standard literary and critical histories. This collection of essays joins ongoing projects bringing poetry by women into greater visibility to not only situate this work within the century's poetical histories but to reconsider how those histories are revised or altered when women – and their often gender-conscious poetics – are more fully a part of the picture. Adopting the critical stance that maintains a separate attention upon women poets, their poetic connections to one another, and their poetical developments, these essays further insist upon the significance of moving beyond and unsettling “the picture” by reading outside the frames of literary histories we have inherited, most often constructed around (and by) the work of men. Resituating our critical vision to focus on women allows us to strategically explore the poetic histories their work creates and to enrich broader understandings of twentieth-century American poetry.

A History of Twentieth-Century American Women's Poetry embraces the concept of history as multiple and layered, maintaining a keen awareness of the impossibility of a singular, comprehensive history of such poetic activity on the part of women writing between 1900 and 2000. Collectively, the twenty-four scholars contributing to this volume cover a wide swath of ground in charting the century's poetry by women, and each chapter's slice of history helps make visible the integral and vital

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importance of women's poetic activity to the development of American poetry in the modern and contemporary eras. New material, new readings, new connections, and new frameworks are brought together in an astonishing range of critical investigations in each chapter. Gaps remain, in part for the reasons that affect any such collection: choices must be made, space must be limited, contributors must be gathered, and the scholarship must materialize. More work remains to be done, more areas of inquiry identified and pursued beyond the scope of this volume and the topics it treats. Dedicated essays on sound, performance, and disability poetics would add to this history, for example, as would more focused treatment of lesbian/queer formations, working-class poetics, or the role of poet-critics. Moreover, the topics making up chapters here easily deserve more comprehensive treatment, and one can imagine many, many articles and books enhancing discussion, documentation, theorization, and critical reading of American poetry and poetics that foreground the work of women. Speaking for the scholars in this volume, we hope our work invites such future energies and fuels further questions.

This book is dedicated to the poets.

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Edited by Linda A. Kinnahan

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Acknowledgments

The community of scholars contributing essays to *A History of Twentieth-Century American Women's Poetry* forms across years and generations. This gathering includes individuals who have developed groundbreaking, foundational work in reading, recovering, and theorizing poetry by women since the early years of feminism's emergence as a literary framework, alongside those whose contributions have sustained and forwarded the energies of the field in more recent years, and those newer scholars who are refreshing the field with new ideas and conversations. I am deeply grateful for the commitment on the part of each of these scholars who have devoted time, expansive thinking, and intellectual acuity to this project. These are also scholars who care immensely about poetry, how it works, and the work it does – more than several are themselves poets as well as literary critics – and who recognize the rich diversity that women poets bring to our understanding of modern and contemporary poetics.

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