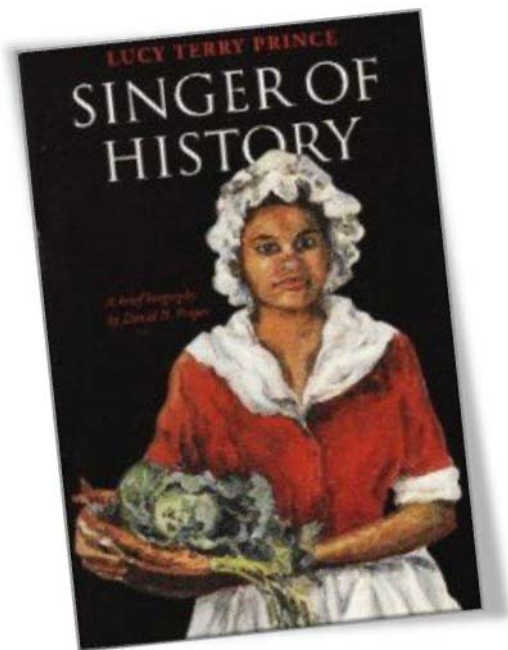


Many of us today write ourselves little notes on “stickies.” Or we journal and record our thoughts of times and events – both intriguing and banal. How many of us actually write in a way that would record our thoughts for our families, our children, or, even, posterity? Even more thought-provoking—how many of our thoughts are recorded in the ‘artistic’ manner that linguists call POETRY?

Historians believe that many women in centuries gone by wrote notes to themselves which they stuffed into their apron pockets, their hope chests, or even their family bibles. The art of writing poetry allowed women to express their thoughts in ways that didn’t take much time in their busy days. Poetry writing could be picked up or put down as was needed when women were attending to other aspects of their families’ lives. One of the entries in our book: *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who*

Changed America, reports that in 1800, women in this country had the highest recorded birth rate in the world at 7.04 babies per woman. It is pretty amazing to think that at a time when women were so busy wiping babies' noses and bottoms that they still achieved so many of the marvelous accomplishments that we documented in our book.

Surely, poetry became a refuge and a personal moment for many women writers. In this column, we highlight three historical poets.



In 1746, **Lucy Terry Prince** wrote a poetic ballad titled “Bars Fight.” History recalls Lucy Terry as the author of the first poem composed by an African-American woman. “Bars Fight” is the only poem of hers that survives. Lucy Terry Prince was an African who was stolen when she was a child and brought to the U.S. as a slave. As an adult, a freed black man bought her freedom and married her. This changed her future dramatically. At a time when only 40 % of white women were literate, very few black women knew how to read or write, and women did not speak in public, she became an outstanding orator. She defended her family and her property and argued a case before the U.S. Supreme Court and won. It is unfortunate that not more of her writing survived.

*August 'twas the twenty-fifth,
Seventeen hundred forty-six;
The Indians did in ambush lay,
Some very valiant men to slay,
The names of whom I'll not leave out.
Samuel Allen like a hero fout,
And though he was so brave and bold,
His face no more shalt we behold*

Excerpted from “Bars Fight” by Lucy Terry Prince

Emily Dickinson was an enormously prolific poet. During her lifetime, only a few of her poems were known. She often included poems within the letters she wrote to her friends. Shortly after her death in 1886, her family discovered over 1800 additional poems. Most of these have subsequently been published; the first volume of her work was published posthumously in 1890 and the last in 1955. Emily Dickinson is often described by critics as one of America's greatest poets!



Dickinson lived a quiet life in Amherst, Massachusetts, 50 miles from Boston. Yet she read widely; she particularly enjoyed the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Dickinson also spent time corresponding with numerous friends. Despite a life during which she spent little time with other than her family and close friends, the subjects of her poetry are wide ranging. She questioned the nature of life and death; she was concerned with religious questions and she was highly romantic in describing the beauty of nature.

*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,*

Excerpted from "Hope is the thing with feathers" by Emily Dickinson

Muriel Rukeyser was a twentieth century poet and social activist. In 1935, at age 21, she won the Yale Poets Award for her first book of poetry. The poet Adrienne Rich said of Rukeyser: "[her] poetry is unequalled in the twentieth-century United States in its range of reference, its generosity of vision and its energy." Rich continued: "She pushes us, readers, writers, and participants in the life of our time, to enlarge our sense of what poetry is about in the world, and of the place of feelings and memory in politics."



*We tell beginnings: for the flesh and the answer,
or the look, the lake in the eye that knows,
for the despair that flows down in widest rivers,
cloud of home; and also the green tree of grace,
all in the leaf, in the love that gives us ourselves.*

Excerpted from "Elegy in Joy" by Muriel Rukeyser

Rukeyser was a poet who used a number of complex forms and rhyming patterns to frame her ideas. Her poetry reflected her interest in social injustice, feminism, and equality. As her poetry evolved, she wrote in untraditional patterns famously declaring “No more masks! No more mythologies!”

In our columns we have often asked you to tell us of your accomplishments, so we could record them when we do a second edition. Perhaps you will tell us in poetic form of your thoughts and your feelings. We would be honored if you shared your work!



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