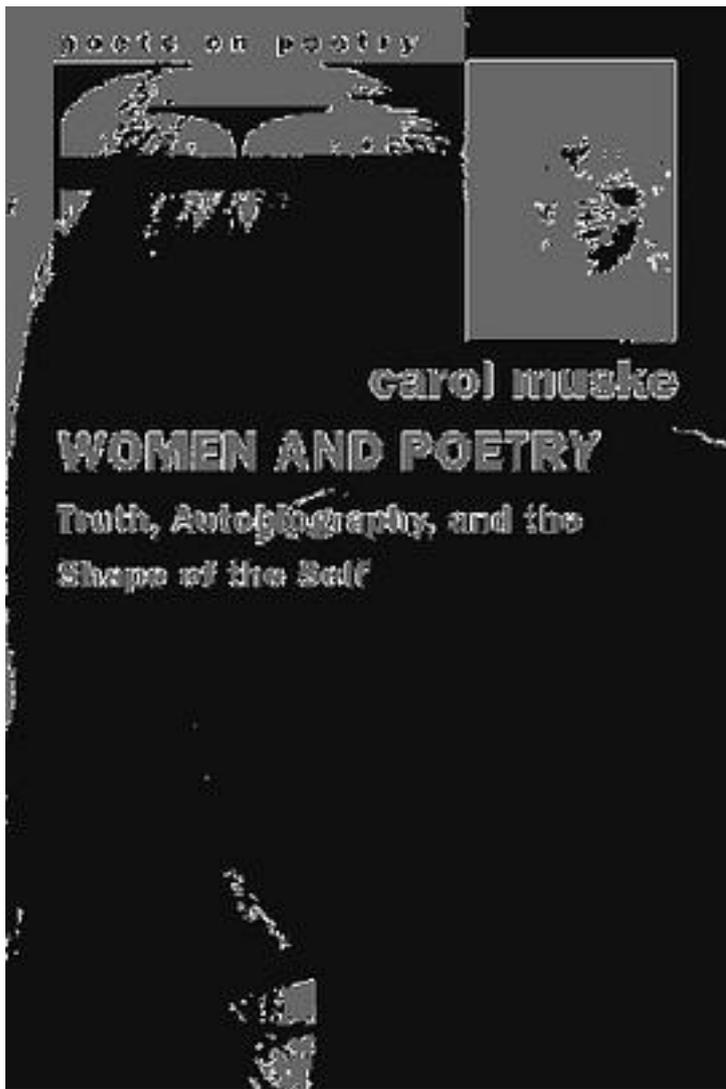


Women and Poetry



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The sense of self in poetry written by women is historically elusive, certainly less culturally defined than in poems by men. Yet it has ended up, in the present climate of truth-telling, autobiography, and testimony, that the positioning of the self as autobiographical referent in poetry has become central to our reading of poems by women. In "Women and Poetry," poet Carol Muske focuses a critical eye on her writings over the last fifteen years in an effort to investigate her evolving attitudes on the subject of women poets and the self. Muske argues that the poem of "testimony," created in part by the reinforcement of critics, has dramatically overshadowed the diverse variety and range of poems by women. She reexamines what many have taken for granted for some time now--that the poem of testimony "fits" women's needs in particular, as if it were a defining characteristic. Springboarding from Muriel Rukeyser's famous lines, "If just one woman told the truth about her life/the world would split open," Muske retorts with a question of her own, "'What' truth?" In so doing, she illustrates a split in women's poetry between those whose self stood as representative of truth or moral narrative, and those who continued to write as if the self were a fiction. In her engaging introductory essay, Muske reflects on these and other pressing questions concerning the current state of women and poetry. Carol Muske has published five collections of poetry, most recently "Red Trousseau." She writes frequently for the "New York Times Book Review," the "Los Angeles Times Book Review," "The Nation," "Parnassus," and the "Washington Post Book World." Currently she is Professor of English, University of Southern California.

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