

Eve Bites Back: An Alternative History of English Literature

Anna Beer

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Anna Beer's *Eve Bites Back* is a scrupulous study of the complicated creative realities of eight influential but often unheeded women writers.

Beer notes that power dynamics of access and discourse make it challenging for women authors to get their work published and obscure them in discussions of the literary canon. Her chronological and nuanced examination of such women writers spans almost six centuries, detailing the creative pursuits and personal lives of Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Aemilia Lanyer, Anne Bradstreet, Aphra Behn, Mary Wortley Montagu, Jane Austen, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. The book analyzes their work and investigates the centuries of praise and criticism given to each. The result is a thorough, wide-reaching overview of women's literary accomplishments viewed through a fresh, modern lens, balancing the subjects' artistic achievements with explanations of the myopic world views that they often espoused as women of relative privilege during complicated periods of history.

Beer bemoans the fact that there are few records of women's lives over the past six centuries, and that those that do remain are often from women who struggled to confront the privileges that allowed their voices to resonate across time. While discussing topics as thorny as Anne Bradstreet's complete disregard of the Native American population that her family was complicit in eradicating, and Wortley Montagu's xenophobic travelogues, the book balances its due praise of the women's accomplishments with frank discussions of their shortcomings, confronting the myriad of ways that exceptionalism has been used to frame and explain privileged women authors' contributions to the canon.

Eve Bites Back is an exemplary work of literary criticism concerned with the lives and legacies of women writers.

KARIN KILLIAN (November / December 2022)

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