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## New Book Explores Passed-Over Poets

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## **New Book Explores Passed-Over Poets**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — In her latest book, *The Poetry of the Self-Taught: An Eighteenth-Century Phenomenon* (Peter Lang Publishing, May 2008), Julie Prandi brings to light a group of poets long dismissed by scholars.

Once called the poetry of the “uneducated,” or “peasant class,” Prandi adopts the term “self-taught” to describe the work of poets who received no formal university education. Much of the work of self-taught poets was excluded from anthologies and textbooks because contemporary scholars considered the work second class. “We assume poetry disappears because it was bad, and did not stand the test of time,” said Prandi, a professor of German at Illinois Wesleyan University. “But sometimes scholars make mistakes when they do not include work in anthologies. Sometimes bias get in the way.” Prandi notes in the 1700s, poetry was very much a part of social life. “Poems were read at parties and sang in the pubs,” said Prandi, “perhaps not the calling card for scholars to consider it serious work.”

The book is the first to compare the works of self-taught poets from Germany and the United Kingdom, from Robert Burns to Anna Louise Karsh and Mary Leapor. “People have enjoyed or studied these poets individually, and found what they thought were idiosyncrasies, or just charming elements of their writing,” said Prandi, “when in fact they were characteristics these poets shared with other self-taught poets.”

A revival of several authors is leading more readers to discover the work of self-taught poetry, said Prandi, who hopes her book will further the exploration of these amazing poets.

Prandi earned her Ph.D. in German literature at the University of California at Berkeley. She has contributed chapters on Anna Louisa Karsch to the anthologies, *Bitter Healing: German Women Writers from 1700 to 1830*, and to *Women Writing in German Speaking Countries*. She co-edited a volume of essays, *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History*, and published two other books, one on the poet Goethe’s philosophy of life, *Dare To Be Happy! A Study of Goethe's Ethics* (1993), and one analyzing women protagonists in classical German drama, *Spirited Women Heroes: Major Female Characters in the Dramas of Goethe, Schiller, and Kleist* (1983). She has been with Illinois Wesleyan University since 1984.

Anyone interested in speaking with Professor Prandi can contact Rachel Hatch at the Office of University Communications, (309) 556-3960.

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