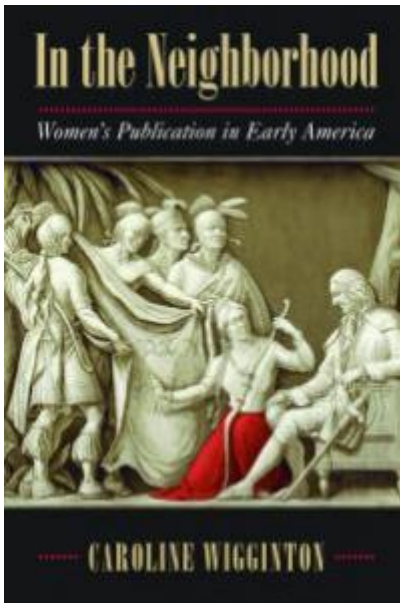


Caroline Wigginton. *In the Neighborhood: Women's Publication in Early America*



Caroline Wigginton. [*In the Neighborhood: Women's Publication in Early America*](#). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016. 240p., ill. ISBN 9781625342225. US\$ 25.95.

In August 1749, Creek diplomat and trader Mary Bosomworth (also known as Coosaponakeesa) led a march of her tribesmen to Savannah. She had spent many years helping the English to establish a settlement in Georgia, and now she sought recompense for her services. Her march culminated in a meeting with Georgia's council where she declared herself an "empress" representing her people. Bosomworth produced letters and petitions, but this scene of procession, spectacle, and conversation equally served as an embodiment of her authority and was meant to maintain her status within her neighborhood.

Coosaponakessa's march is just one example from Caroline Wigginton's ambitious *In the Neighborhood*. The book seeks to expand our understanding of early American women's publications and to provide an analytical framework for them. As this anecdote demonstrates, Wigginton embraces a capacious definition of "publication" as "an embodied act of information exchange" (4). This broad view builds upon work in Native American studies, such as Lisa Brooks' [*The Common Pot*](#) (2008) and Matt Cohen and Jeffrey Glover's [*Colonial Mediascapes*](#) (2014). In turn, Wigginton uncovers additional sources for exploring women's expression in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She coins the term "relational publication," which "could mobilize a variety of technologies – scriptive, print, performative, material – to negotiate and reimagine a neighborhood's particularities" (6). Wampum belts, engravings, sartorial choices, manuscripts, and conversations are all public forms of expression that women used to influence interpersonal relations.

In the Neighborhood also responds to the scholarly focus on republican print and the perceptions of its audience as male, property-owning, and white. Treating republican print as synonymous with publication, Wigginton argues, "preemptively excludes the kinds of publications in which women actively engaged" (20). Republican print, and its emphasis on anonymity, was not the only kind of

publication to forge bonds among Americans. In contrast, relational publications are rooted in the intimacy of neighborhoods – in the familiarity and bondedness among those who the publications reach. Wigginton’s emphasis on the neighborhood, where there were a mix of diverse peoples and kinds of spaces, moves away from binaries of public and private or political and literary.

In four chapters, she examines examples of women’s information exchanges to demonstrate how they used relational publication practices to shape and reshape neighborhoods. The definition of “neighborhood” here is capacious as well, in some cases meaning those down the street and in others meaning transatlantic correspondents. Wigginton provides fresh readings of familiar texts like Phillis Wheatley’s poems, Sarah Osborn’s spiritual diary, and Milcah Martha Moore’s commonplace book. There are some very compelling close readings of relational publications, such as the tracking of the idea of friendship through Moore’s commonplace book. Wigginton also deftly incorporates historical context in places, such as her reading of Coosaponakeesa’s red petticoat in the cultural context of indigenous diplomatic practices and of Wheatley’s elegies in the framework of beliefs about death in African slave culture.

A commonality among these diverse examples is each woman’s role as a node within a network that then allowed for the recording of their relational publication practices. Coosaponakeesa was a trader and translator between a colonial power and Native tribes. Wheatley was an enslaved woman who wrote elegies for whites in mourning. Moore compiled the literary output of multiple correspondents. Their key roles at the intersections of communities and correspondents raise some questions in this historian’s mind about marginality, access to relational publication practices, and recovery. Textual, scriptive publication remains a central element here – whether to recover the evidence of performative publication or as the primary evidence itself. But overall, scholars of early American women’s literature, history, and material culture will find Wigginton’s concept of relational publications to be a valuable framework for thinking about how women exchanged and circulated ideas and arguments.

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Date Created

05/11/2018