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In ein Mühlwerk geworfen. Zum autobiographischen Schreiben in der Französischen Revolution. By FRANZISKA MEIER. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016. 287 pp.

Franziska Meier's study explores a variety of approaches to narrating the self in response to the traumatic experience of the French Revolution. Her broadly-defined genre allows her to include in her corpus works that Lejeune's narrower definition of "autobiographie" would exclude, and thus to accommodate various genre-defying attempts to find a form of writing that would express the intimate experience of sudden and great historical change, as well as to explore the intrusion of elements of the autobiographical into other genres entirely, such as the essay. The book surveys works by many different writers in order to identify shared characteristics of autobiographical writing in the period, rather than the distinctiveness of individual authors or ideological positions. Such writing often revealed agonised individual feelings of disorientation and reflection on the reciprocal relationship between the personal and the political. What is uncovered is not the sudden realisation of a new historicised consciousness, but rather an acute awareness of irresistible change and a strong sense of the inadequacy of traditional ways of thinking and writing to the new circumstances. Many writers who turned to autobiographical writing were aware that they were transgressing genre conventions in doing so. Meier shows this with particular clarity with reference to the genesis of Chateaubriand's *Essai sur les révolutions* and Staël's *De l'Influence des passions*. She identifies three stages in the writing of Chateaubriand's work: gathering the basic facts and placing them in chronological order; the incorporation of notes and comments based on reading; and finally adding an autobiographical twist in the shape of subjective elements from personal memory and experience. Staël's essay was not originally intended to be in any sense autobiographical, but became during composition a therapeutic exercise in recounting the author's emotional response to the Revolution, although the focus was more on the broader lessons to be learned from her experiences than their strictly autobiographical interest. Meier detects in the evolution of autobiographical forms a rapid and widespread realisation that the integration of self-writing and historical writing was deeply problematic. Were autobiographers witnesses to or actors in events? What was the relationship between their public and private selves? Had their private views changed with events, and was any avowal of this potentially dangerous? Meier contends that the sense of self was for most of the authors under consideration the only significant, unchanging anchor for their identity in a period of rapid and radical external change, and that this underlay their experimentation with form. Ultimately, according to Meier, what emerges is a precursor of the modern "écriture littéraire", a discursive mode beholden to its own rules and with its own goals, and deeply aware that self-writing could not reflect straightforwardly an external reality. Meier's closely-argued text draws extensively on published and manuscript sources to offer an inclusive survey of the autobiographical writing of the Revolutionary period, challenging convincingly any lingering view that while the autobiographical writing of the period may be of use to historians, it has little to interest literary scholars.

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