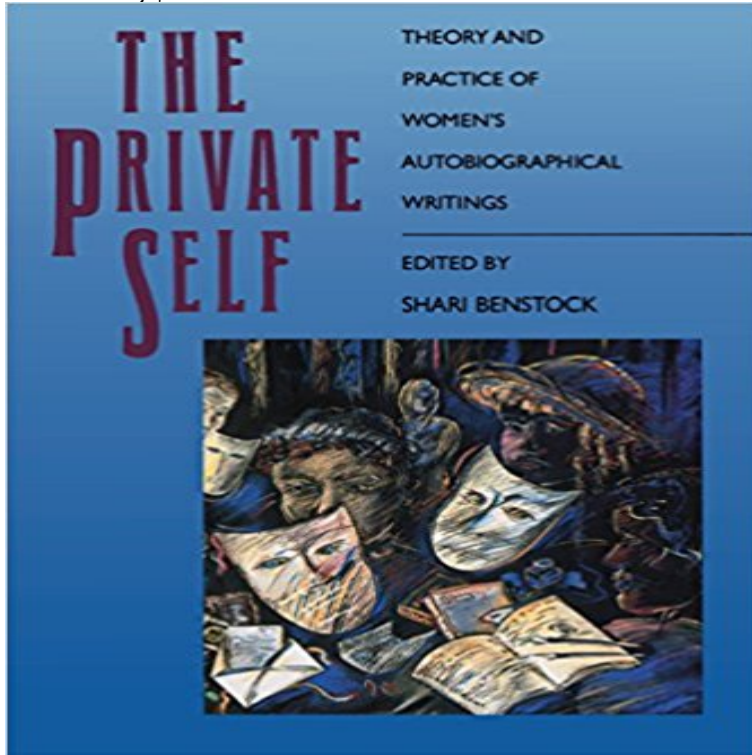


# The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Womens Autobiographical Writings



This collection of twelve essays discusses the principles and practices of womens autobiographical writing in the United States, England, and France from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Employing feminist and poststructuralist methodologies, the essays examine a wide range of private life writings -- letters, journals, diaries, memoirs, pedagogical texts, and fictional and factual autobiographies. The concepts of theory and practice -- as opposing and mutually exclusive methodologies, as focal points for conflicting interpretations, and finally as complementary approaches to the study of literature -- are central to this collection. The Private Self explores the links between the historical devaluation of womens writings and the cultural definitions of women that have constrained their writing practices and excluded them from the canon of traditional autobiographical texts. Collectively, these essays expose the cultural biases that derive from notions of selfhood defined by a white, masculine, and Christian experience. In an effort to revise our prevailing concept of autobiography, these essays deal with differences of race, class, religion, sexual orientation, and gender. Discussed here are writings by more than two dozen women including Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson, Alice James, Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Forten Grimke, Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Angelou, Sophie Kovalevsky, Anais Nin, Hilda Doolittle, and Simone de Beauvoir. The work of these writers reveals a split between public and private self-representations, and it is the notion of a private self expressed through womens autobiographical writings that forms the link among all the essays.

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