A Voice from the Fire: The Authority of Experience

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Abstract

Over all, this thesis was written to be a "ramble" of its own around and through three issues that are central to the writing of the personal essay—voice, authority, and experience—and central to the emergence of this author’s own sense of "self."

Drawing upon years of voluminous journals, this collection of six personal essays demonstrates what the scholarly introduction proposes: that the personal essay is both a valid genre and a magnificent bridge from informal life-writing to genuine literary accomplishment. Drawing on Phillip Lopate’s differentiation of “memoiristic” essays from the more classic autobiographical form, this collection includes three of each “persuasion.” First, there are three autobiographical pieces which combine narrative with exposition. In the second section of the thesis there are three memoiristic essays written entirely in a story-like style, employing such devices as dialog, character development, and detailed description.

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