



The Unsociable Sociability of Women's Lifewriting

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When Christine de Pizan described herself in 1405 as 'femme a part', she expressed a divided sense of identity that has echoed throughout women's life-writing up to the present day. In these three words Christine captures the uneasy relationship between the female self that is a part of communities and the self that stands apart from them. Christine anticipates Kant's concept of unsociable sociability in which 'an inclination to associate with others' weighs against 'a strong propensity to isolate [one]self from others'. It is this complex sense of self — seeking to belong yet yearning for solitude and distinction — that is at the heart of this volume's exploration of women's life writing. Offering a cross-cultural and cross-historical emphasis, it makes a distinctive contribution to current debates on women's life-writing. Its emphasis on unsociable sociability offers a timely, provocative response to the established notion of the female self as a 'relational subject'.

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