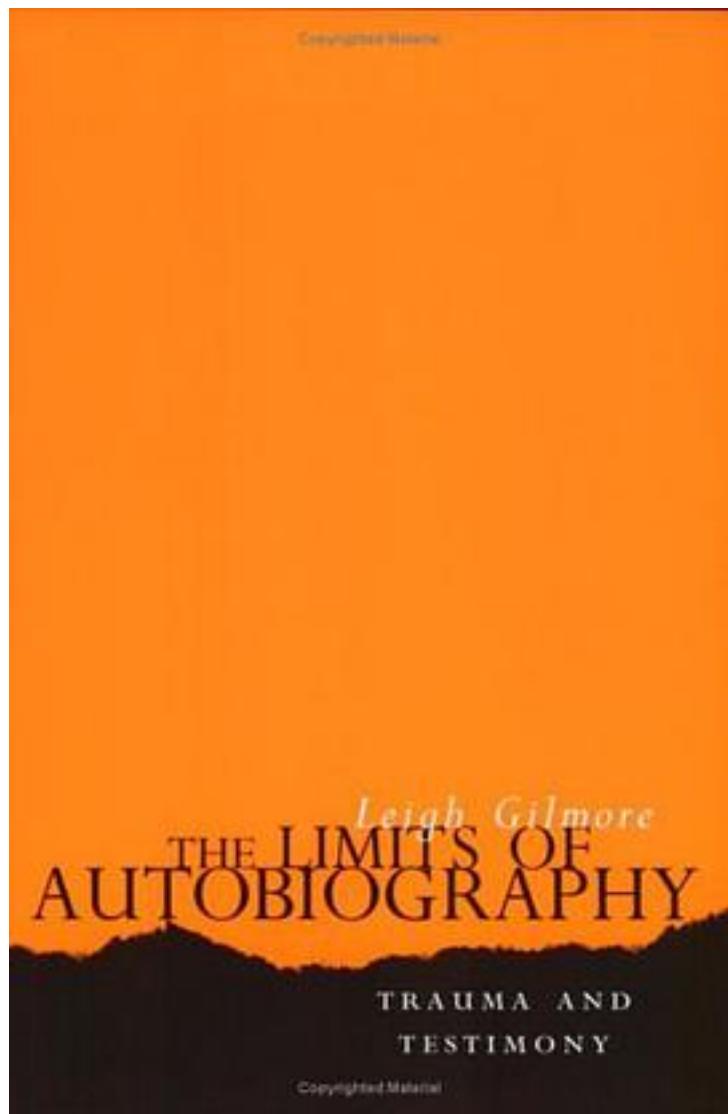


The Limits of Autobiography



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著者:Leigh Gilmore

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Memoirs in which trauma takes a major -- or the major -- role challenge the limits of autobiography. Leigh Gilmore presents a series of "limit-cases" -- texts that combine elements of autobiography, fiction, biography, history, and theory while representing trauma and the self -- and demonstrates how and why their authors swerve from the formal constraints of autobiography when the representation of trauma coincides with self-representation. Gilmore maintains that conflicting demands on both the self and narrative may prompt formal experimentation by such writers and lead to texts that are not, strictly speaking, autobiography, but are nonetheless deeply engaged with its central concerns. In astute and compelling readings of texts by Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Dorothy Allison, Mikal Gilmore, Jamaica Kincaid, and Jeanette Winterson, Gilmore explores how each of them poses the questions, "How have I lived? How will I live?" in relation to the social and psychic forms within which trauma emerges. Challenging the very boundaries of autobiography as well as trauma, these stories are not told in conventional ways: the writers testify to how self-representation and the representation of trauma grow beyond simple causes and effects, exceed their duration in time, and connect to other forms of historical, familial, and personal pain. In their movement from an overtly testimonial form to one that draws on legal as well as literary knowledge, such texts produce an alternative means of confronting kinship, violence, and self-representation.

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