

Helga Meise. *Das archivierte Ich: Schreibkalender und höfische Repräsentation in Hessen-Darmstadt 1624-1790.* Darmstadt: Hessische Historische Kommission Darmstadt, 2002. 644 pp. EUR 50.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-88443-043-9.

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Meise's first book was an interesting study of the novel in the eighteenth century entitled *Die Unschuld und die Schrift: Deutsche Frauenromane im 18. Jahrhundert* (1984). That study explored the literary construction of female identity and was well within the parameters of *Germanistik* and cultural studies. With *Das archivierte Ich*, Meise is moving in an interdisciplinary direction that combines *Germanistik*, media studies, and history. While both books are concerned with the development of the modern notion of the self, this study is driven by an interest in the role that "ego-documents" play in the development of the individual in early modernity. Meise wants to arrive at a better understanding of the structure and function of the calendars and then explore their significance for the process of individualization in the early modern period and the rise of autobiography.

Meise concludes that the *Schreibkalender* (writing calendar) was a *Schwellengattung* (liminal genre or genre of the threshold) on the way to the diary and other forms of autobiographical writing. Indeed, she sees the calendars as a catalyst for autobiographical writing in this period. Essentially, the calendars trained their users in daily writing and reflection on their activities. Meise asserts that with the correct impetus (generally a crisis of status), such activities could draw "I-statements" from the writers. To test her thesis,

Meise studied the 177 calendars dating from 1624 to 1790 preserved in the court archive of Hesse-Darmstadt. This selection is in and of itself a challenge to the accepted paradigm that these calendars were primarily used by lower classes and for reading, not for writing. However, Meise focuses on their value to this ruling family. Although calendars from thirteen members of the family remain in the archive, Meise concentrates on the writing of three ruling couples: Sophia Elenora (1609-1671) and Georg II (1605-1661); Ludwig VI (1630-1678) and Elisabeth Dorothea (1640-1709); and Ludwig IX (1719-1790) and Karoline (1721-1774). By tracing the different use of the calendars over time, Meise arrives at her second significant conclusion. She argues that the more court ceremony and festivals lost their representational function, the more the role of representation shifted onto the calendars. At the same time, "[d]er in Gang gesetzte Wechsel von der Auf-führung zur Schrift setzt Individualisierungsprozesse im Funktionsraum des Hofes frei" (p. 34).

After an introduction, Meise begins with a review of the current research and a description of the calendars. The summation of the research is informative and well-presented. Meise makes clear that, although these writing calendars were likely the most common publications of the period after the Bible and catechisms, their study has

been neglected. Furthermore, the research that has been conducted has focused almost exclusively on the calendars as printed materials, not as a repository for writing. For Meise, the most unique characteristic of the genre is this multi-mediality of the calendars. Her attention to this characteristic and her analysis of the writing represent a definite step forward for research in this area. Her descriptions of the calendars in general and of those in the archive are also thorough and detailed. Although the book contains fifteen illustrations, including a page from a calendar of each of the six writers (as well as a portrait of them), Meise unfortunately does not tie illustrations directly into her presentation. This is a missed opportunity to help the reader grasp the format of these texts and the relationship of writing to print. However, one can access digital images of some writing calendars from this period at the website of the Herzog August Library (<http://www.hab.de/bibliothek/wdb/barockdtd/siglist.htm>).

In examining the calendars as a whole, Meise notes that over time the writers begin to break the constraints imposed on them by the various formats of the calendars. Initially the handwriting remains within the space allotted to each day. Frequently, this is no more than a single line. Then the writing starts to expand beyond these frames; writing fills blank spaces, and inserts appear that are related to the printed space. Gradually the printed constraints are ignored until—late in the eighteenth century—the calendar users move to blank books. Since Meise's study is so closely focused on the Darmstadt calendars, more research will have to be done to see if this pattern can be discovered to be fundamental to the period. But Meise has set a thesis that deserves exploration and testing.

The following six chapters each focus on one of the calendarists and each follows the same format. Each set of calendars is described as a set of objects and then analyzed for thematic groupings

in the written content. The analyses are very detailed and one at times wishes that Meise had used more discretion in her selection of material to quote. Meise likely wants to reinforce the formulaic nature of many of the statements, but more quantification and less repetition would have made for a more succinct and effective text. Although the long and numerous quotations from the calendars give one a clear picture of the writers as calendarists, I would like to have heard more about their personalities and activities from other sources. While Meise wants to make the point that these people are available to us through documents, I cannot help but think that a greater contextualization would have been helpful. More significantly, the volume of the quotations and her descriptions tend to overwhelm her analysis.

After her documentation of the themes that appear in the calendars, Meise then establishes a context for them by exploring other texts produced by the count or countess. These texts include documentation of performances at the court, testaments, commentaries, letters, poems, etc. Since Meise is interested in the mediality of these texts, this focus is expected and it works quite effectively at times, because it shows how the different writers use the medium of the calendars in relation to their other writings. These sections are in some ways the most interesting of the studies. I found the section on Elisabeth Dorothea fascinating, because it demonstrates so clearly how she resorts to writing in the calendar and elsewhere to respond to the loss of respect that she feels after she has stepped down as regent.

On the other hand, these sections are not tied into specific entries from the diaries and have a tendency to take on a life of their own. The chapter on Ludwig VI is 132 pages long. Meise dedicates nearly three-fourths of the chapter to Ludwig's poetry. The discussion is interesting, but it does not belong here, at least not at this length. It is in these sections that Meise presents her argument that texts and calendars take on representa-

tional functions. She concludes that "Die Schrift löst die Aufführung, die die Representatio Maiestatis, die Sicherung der Legitimität fürstlicher Herrschaft, gewährleistet hatte, ab. Sie übernimmt deren Funktionen und vermag sich auf diese Weise weiter zu konsolidieren. In diesen Austauschprozessen mit seinem Kontext formiert sich der Schreibkalender als literarische Gattung" (p. 547). Despite the numerous variations on this statement, it is hard to offer a final judgment on the validity of this thesis. This argument is spread over too many different sections and the analysis does not mediate well enough between her description of the diaries and her conclusions.

Meise's work has opened new possibilities for research and shows the value of highly detailed readings of these and other "ego-documents." Yet at the same time, I would have liked to have seen more attention given to some fundamental theoretical questions, including a more thorough articulation of the concept and practice of *representatio maiestatis*, especially as it pertains to the calendars. It also remains unclear to me when an "ich" in a text gains the status of "Ich-Aussage" and then an "Ich-Aussage im modernen Sinne." While Meise considers the calendars as catalysts for autobiographical writing, she also notes that the I-statements tend to appear first in other text types before entering the calendars. How much then do the calendars influence the appearance of the modern ego and how much do they merely reflect it? These are significant questions; however, without Meise's study we might not have known to ask them.

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