

Ulrike Gleixner (Hg.), Religiöse Emotionspraktiken in Selbstzeugnissen. Autobiographisches Schreiben vom 16. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert, Wiesbaden (Harrassowitz Verlag) 2024, 264 S., 8 Abb. (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, 178), ISBN 978-3-447-12115-6, EUR 62,00.

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This book arose out of papers delivered at a workshop at the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel in October 2021 devoted to the performative nature of autobiographical writing in the context of religion and emotions. The argument is that these sources should be viewed not so much as documenting emotions as generating emotions through the act of writing. The process of writing is itself an emotional religious experience. Most of the contributors are historians, with German literature and religious studies scholars among them as well. Four of the contributors are doctoral students.

As Ulrike Gleixner explains at the outset, the act of writing diaries is viewed here as an emotional *praxis* with the goal of managing one's personal life situation in dialog with God. In all of these writings one finds »a triangle of personal emotional work, calling upon God, and communicating with others« (16). Life writing was widespread in early modern Europe and crossed denominational lines. Kate Hodgkin observes that Anglicans, Catholics, Baptists, and Quakers wrote about God's working in their hearts and lives. Miriam Nandi writes of »an explosion« of early modern English diaries. Research into religious autobiography in French cloisters has discovered »an astounding number of previously unknown texts« (14). In Spain and Spanish America, hundreds of nuns wrote spiritual autobiographies, inspired by Teresa of Avila. Spiritual diaries offered women the possibility of participating in the process of self-formation (14).

The book's chapters discuss Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Pietist and Jewish emotional and autobiographical cultures. The contributors demonstrate the various expressions of performative emotional work. The studies are based on approaches found in the new research on emotions by scholars such as Barbara Rosenwein, William Reddy, Susan Broomhall, Ute Frevert and especially Monique Scheer. In *Emotions in History: Lost and Found*, Frevert observed that modernity is marked by a strong interest in emotions. Emotions belong to the unique features of a modern person's individuality. People express their emotions while distancing themselves from society's expected »emotional regimes«. For Scheer, emotion is understood not so much as something we have as something we *do* and *perform*. It is an act that involves both body and mind. Emotions are not just



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experienced within but are expressed outwardly as well. And so, one can speak of emotional praxis. Emotions bring together subject and world, inner and outer, body and mind. Emotions are not universal but are culturally determined; they express not nature but culture (178–179).

The first five contributions fall under the heading, »emotional work in daily writing«. In the book's longest chapter, Andreas Herz examines the diary of the Calvinist Prince Christian von Anhalt-Bernburg (1599–1656), »one of the most valuable and complex German self-testimonies from the period of the Thirty Years War« (25). The Prince kept his diary for over thirty years, using it to manage his anxiety and find comfort in trying times. Through dreams and miraculous signs he found guidance from God for navigating the ship of life. The latter included signs in the heavens such as comets, portents of disaster, images in the clouds, or eclipses of the sun. Other signs that drew the Prince's attention were a broken clock, a steamed-up window, a hole in a wall, a rose that blooms in the fall, a birch tree with red leaves, a flock of birds or school of fish. These are all »telegrams of God's will« by which he offers instruction and warning. Christian's diaries were a way of documenting evidences of God's providence in his life, a practical means of finding religious assurance. Herz adapts Monique Scheers' formula: »One does not just have religion; one acts it out«. Herz concludes that the »signs and wonders« piety of the Prince calls into questions the portrayal of Calvinist faith as rational and lacking in mysticism and emotion (35, 37, 45, 48).

The next three chapters fall under the heading, »writing as an attempt to situate oneself in a religious network«. Two of the chapters examine the abundant *Lebensläufe* composed among the Herrnhuters, or Moravians. Kerstin Roth's study is based upon eighteenth-century handwritten life testimonies found in the archive of the Herrnhut community in Neuwied. The accounts typically have three parts: a short section on the author's childhood; a description of one's spiritual awakening; and one's acceptance into the fellowship of Moravian brothers and sisters (138–139). The discipline of historical linguistics provides the orientation and context for Roth's contribution. Emotions express themselves in language through intonation, exclamation, interjection, and metaphor. Emotions are inscribed in Herrnhuter *Lebensläufe* according to cultural rituals and practices (143, 145). The sources reveal the existence of »an emotional community« among the Moravians. Asking how emotions are verbalized in these sources, Roth considers interjections such as »Ach« to express surprise, fear, pain, or loss. A »language of feeling« (*Gefühl*) is used by the community to express the experience of faith, including expressions such as »inexpressible«, »words fail me« (152).

Jessica Cronshagen examines some 100 letters that the Moravian missionary Thomas Longballe (1764–1826) wrote between 1788 and 1820 from Paramaribo, the capital of Surinam, where he worked among slaves. Born in Jütland, Longballe grew up within



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the Moravian community in Christiansfeld, Denmark where he apprenticed as a watchmaker. Herrnhuters such as Longballe were encouraged to nurture a piety of the heart's inner relationship with Christ, marked by emotional praxis. To this end they developed »an emotions-oriented language«, to express their feelings in writings that identified them as belonging to the Moravian community. Cronshagen shows how the expression of emotions in Longballe's letters served to bring him religious assurance and to position him within the European colony and the larger Moravian network of correspondents.

The five contributions in the third section demonstrate the interweaving of emotional self-awareness with addressing a wider public. Of special note is Ulrike Kollodzeiski's examination of the travel report of Pietro Della Valle (1586–1652). From 1614 to 1626 he traveled throughout the Ottoman empire, Persia, and the west coast of India. His report was translated from Italian into numerous European languages and has since been recognized as one of the most significant travel sources of the seventeenth-century. Kollodzeiski observes that the concept of »emotion« has experienced a boom in recent scholarship, but wonders whether »a modern reading does not prematurely see emotions at work« in Della Valle's love for an Assyrian Christian. Asking to what extent Pietro Della Valle's depiction of his Babylonian love can be seen as »emotional practice in the sense of Monique Scheer« (177–178), she concludes that his writing provides not so much a portrayal of emotions as it does the author's virtuous reason. For Pietro Della Valle, love does not bring together inner and outer, mind and body, subject and society, but earth and heaven, temporal and eternal (192). Kollodzeiski finds limited value in the concept of emotional *praxis*.

The theoretical template of emotional *praxis* used in these studies sometimes seems in danger of overwhelming the historical reality. Kollodzeiski is to be commended for not allowing a method to skew the empirical data that she encountered. The editors must be thanked for compiling a richly varied study of emotional *praxis* in self-testimonies. The book is completed by an index.

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Seite | page 3



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