



**Li Gerhalter, *Tagebücher als Quellen: Forschungsfelder und Sammlungen seit 1800* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2021, ISBN: 9783847011798).**

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Focusing on Germany and Austria from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, this erudite and thorough study aims at historicizing the use of diaries as scholarly evidence and historical sources in the academic disciplines of pedagogy and early childhood research, youth psychology, and the new cultural history emerging in the 1980s. For each of these disciplines, Li Gerhalter, the long-time curator and now director of the ‘Sammlung Frauennachlässe’ at the University of Vienna (<https://sfn.univie.ac.at/hauptmenue/bestand/>), traces whose diaries were collected, when, by whom, for which scholarly purposes, and to what effect for the formation and transformation of the respective academic discipline under scrutiny. In addition, the individual chapters shed light on the donors of diaries, the culture and practices of diary writing, and the different communicative and epistemological functions that diaries had for their writers and researchers.

Gerhalter organizes her analysis into four chapters that investigate which research questions defined the interest of the various academic disciplines in diaristic material, elaborate on the institutional strategies of collecting them, and reflect on the sociological structure of the diary collections with a special focus on the categories of gender and class.

Chapter one discusses diaries in which parents documented the development of their toddlers and small children, analyzing their foundational role for the discipline of early childhood research emerging after 1800. The chapter treats parents’ diaries as both indicators and factors of the growing scientification of childhood in the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The chapter demonstrates how scholars in the emerging field of pedagogy (August Ludwig Schlözer, Joachim Heinrich Campe), evolutionary biology (Maximilian Wundt, Charles Darwin, William T. Preyer), and developmental psychology (Clara and William Stern) encouraged parents to closely observe the development of their children and document it in diaries. Frequently the leading scholars in the field, closely observing the development of their own children, were prolific writers of such diaries themselves.

Used as scholarly material, parents' diaries became foundational evidence to support different concepts and theories in the field of pedagogy, evolutionary biology, and developmental psychology. In this context, Gerhalter reconstructs a process of academic professionalization that went hand in hand with the vanishing of parent lay scholars documenting the development of their children, which for the most part were women. In all, chapter one convincingly demonstrates how parents' diaries became a medium and practice of bourgeois self-description that was put to the service of early childhood research. With this research around 1900 being translated into popular advice books on children's education, parents' diaries and their academic use contributed to defining gender norms and patterns of 'deviance,' all built on the bourgeois model and lifestyle.

While diaries were foundational material and evidence for early childhood research from 1800 to the early twentieth century, Gerhalter's first chapter also recapitulates how the 'diary method' fell from grace in the further course of the twentieth century. The focus on individuals necessarily resulting from the preoccupation with diaries, and the contingency and non-representativeness of a single biography was increasingly seen as problematic as both the research questions and methods in the field of early childhood research multiplied. With questionnaires and experiments becoming increasingly more important as research methods, diaries lost their former importance as research material. In addition, diaries were increasingly seen as problematic for the ethical problem of documenting the early lives of one's own children for scientific purposes.

The second chapter analyzes the collection and use of diaries in the discipline of youth psychology that had been emerging in Germany since the 1890 and that began to embrace youth diaries as its major source in the 1920s. In this chapter, the reader encounters diaries not as an instrument for observing others by a third person but as a medium of juvenile self-thematization and self-reflection that was put to the service of youth psychology research. While chapter one traced the role and function of diaries for the scientification of childhood, chapter two does the same for the scientification of youth.

Positioning her investigation at the confluence of diary studies and institutional history, Li Gerhalter, in chapter two, introduces readers to the history and sociology of the major collections of youth diaries established by Fritz Giese, Siegfried Bernfeld, Eduard Spranger, and Karl and Charlotte Bühler. In this context, the study is particularly interested in the question of how the categories of class and gender were negotiated by both the diarists and the researchers, and how this contributed to shaping the specific sociology of the diary collections. In very detailed statistical investigations, Gerhalter measures the collections in terms of gender and class that again highlight the overall bourgeois character of the diaristic genre, but otherwise produce rather complex, incoherent, and partly contradictory results that preclude simple generalizations. Her statistical investigations also show that it is one thing to collect diaries for academic purposes, and that it is another thing to work with them. The latter involves decisions by the researchers on at least two levels: first, he or she must decide, which of the diaries available in a collection should be put center to an investigation, and second, which of the diaries are worth publishing as a source for future research.

Chapter two ends with a section detailing the loss of the diary collections built in the 1920s and 1930s by youth psychologists during the Nazi regime and World War II. With only a very few diaries having been recovered after 1945, the destruction of the rich diary collections is one major reason of why diaries lost importance and relevance for youth psychology research after 1945. The Nazi rule over Germany and Europe had a far-reaching impact on the field of youth psychology, which did not square well with the militaristic ideology and gender norms of Nazi ideology. Individual scholars working in the field of youth psychology were persecuted, forced to emigrate, or even killed; research institutions and projects were dried of funding, and important diary collections were confiscated, broken up, or destroyed by the war.

Chapter three analyzes the scholarly treatment and collection of diaries in the field of historiography since the 1980s, when the discipline took its cultural turn. Forming at the intersection of 'Alltagsgeschichte' (everyday history), the new social history, the history of knowledge and meaning systems, and women's and gender history, the New Cultural History developed a strong interest in diaries as sources paving paths into the life worlds of individuals and their experience of history. In this chapter, Li Gerhalter describes the landscape of archives and collections holding diaries and other life writings, analyzes the composition of these holdings, reconstructs the history of the institutions holding these collections, and reflects on the motivations of those who decided to donate diaries to certain institution. The

reader is introduced to the collections of life writings created in Vienna in the 1950s in an effort to document the experiences of the twentieth century and especially those of World War II. From there, the account moves on to the collections begun in the 1980s, discussing the Tagebucharchiv in Emmendingen (Germany), the Kempowski-Biografienarchiv (Akademie der Künste, Berlin), the collection of war letters (Feldpostsammlung, Museum of Communication, Berlin), the collection of letters of German immigrants to America (Deutsche Auswandererbriefsammlung (DABS), Gotha), and the collection of love letters ('Liebesbriefarchiv') at the University of Koblenz-Landau. In addition, the 'Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen' and the 'Sammlung Frauennachlässe', both based in Vienna, are analyzed in this chapter. The multi-faceted investigation cements the fact that diary writing was primarily a practice of bourgeois self-description and self-documentation. It also becomes obvious that the world of archives continues to be male dominated, although women's diaries are a significant and growing part of the current collections.

The final thematic chapter engages in exemplary readings as historical sources of selected diaries written by girls and young women in the first half of the twentieth century. Elegantly moving between the disciplines of historiography and literary criticism, Li Gerhalter here highlights some of the major biographical, social, and communicative functions of the diaristic genre, identifies some key conventions of it, traces the individual reasons for writing a diary, and reconstructs elements of the 'diary industry' emerging around 1900. She places special emphasis on the issue of 'secrecy' in its multiple dimensions, functions, and contexts. Although the chapter can only touch on these many aspects based on a rather small selection of diaries, it still manages to give readers a feel for the complexity of the genre and its multiple biographic, social, economic, and cultural functions. As such, the chapter makes a strong case for the need to investigate these questions raised in a more systematic way for a broader selection of diaristic sources.

In all, Li Gerhalter has written a very informative and detailed study that can be read as a practical guidebook to the structure, shape, and form of specific diary collections, as a contribution to the history of the academic disciplines selected, and as an analysis of the genre of diary as scholarly sources and evidence. One of the most interesting facets of this multi-faceted study is the analysis on the different conceptualizations of diaries by both their writers and their researchers, and how this changed over time. Another major achievement of the study is to systematically reflect on the question of how diary collections came to pass, how they were composed in terms of gender, generation, and class, and what this means for us as

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researchers using the collections. As such, Li Gerhalter unearths the deeper layers of an archeology of knowledge in relation to both the diaries and their collections.

The four chapters offer precise case-studies, saturated with – at times overabundant – fact and detail that shed a strong light on the history of the selected academic disciplines and the uses they made of diaries as scientific evidence. The reader also learns a great many things about the genre as well as the biographical, social, and communicative functions of diary writing as a practice of bourgeois self-descriptions and self-documentation. As such, Li Gerhalter's book offers a rich treasure trove of relevant insights into the genre of diary and the many uses that different academic disciplines have made of them.

This strength of this magisterial study is also its weakness, insofar as the chapters offer detailed and rich case studies that are only rather loosely connected with one another. This makes it a little hard to identify, where all the rich knowledge about diaries produced in this book comes together, and what its larger significance, transcending the individual case studies, is. Li Gerhalter frequently casts her analysis into an 'exemplary mode' that produces many relevant insights into the genre and its multiple academic uses, highlights important patterns, traces certain trajectories, and discusses major problems, with all of this, however, remaining rather narrowly confined to the individual case study. I would have wished for some more systematic reflection on the larger relevance of the many individual findings for the use of diaries as scientific evidence, historical sources, and literary texts. However, with Li Gerhalter being among the first to systematically investigate the history of diary collections and the uses of diaries as scholarly evidence, her exemplary approach was probably without alternative. It only underlines the pioneering quality of this altogether excellent study.