

Kitabiyat/Book Review

Body, Self and Melancholy: The Self-Narratives and Life of the Nobleman Osvaldo Ercole Trapp (1634-1710)

Siglinde Clementi. Routledge, 2024. 216 pp. ISBN 978-1-032-44061-3.

NİL TEKGÜL

Bağımsız Araştırmacı
Independent Scholar

(niltekgul@yahoo.com), ORCID: 0000-0002-2380-5843

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The book is the English translation of *Körper, Selbst und Melancholie: Die Selbszeugnisse des Landadeligen Osvaldo Ercole Trapp (1634-1710)* published in German in 2017 by Böhlau. The author Siglinde Clementi is the vice-director of the Competence Center for Regional History at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, and leads the research area of gender and women's history. It addresses early modern concepts of the body and the self by focussing on three self-narratives authored by the nobleman Osvaldo Ercole Trapp (1634-1710) in the archives of the Magnificia Carte di Caldonazzo and attempts to answer the question of early modern self and

historical body. It is an innovative contribution to early modern studies in self-narratives. The first of the self-narratives is a description of his body, the second one is an autobiographical writing and the third one is a brief chronicle of the house of Trapp-Caldonazzo.

Osvaldo was born in 1634 at the Magnificia Corte di Coldonazzo in the Italian speaking part of the county of Tyrol. Following the death of his father in 1641, he lived under the guardianship of his mother and later of his parental uncle Ernesto Trapp. In 1659, upon reaching the age of 25, he became the lord and judge of Caldonazzo. However 10 years later he was declared incapacitated. The three self-narratives were written during the period when he was declared incapacitated and were probably intended for a specific circle of readers like his family. The author is aware and finds it significant that Osvaldo's narratives are melancholic writings about himself and his life who was also a Catholic member of the landed gentry and who had been under guardianship for several years looking back on his life from a marginalized position. (p. 6) The author investigates the history of body and self from these three self-narratives. Clementi was inspired by Zemon Davis's essay "Boundaries and Sense of Self in 16th century France who showed that early modern self was constituted in the context of social relationships within groups. Clementi argues "early modern subjectivity is fundamentally distinct from our own: It is constituted on the basis of the complex interplay of changeable bodily substrates, individual environments and worlds and early modern discourses of knowledge and representation, and it is perceived and experienced by the protagonists in question as fundamentally "embodied". (p. 6)

The book approaches the "self" of Osvaldo in 3 stages: 1) via analysis of his self-representation 2) via reconstruction of his biography and the Trapp family history and thus via an approach to the world in which he lived 3) by correlating the knowledge he articulates in his self-narratives with discourses and representation of his era. Every stage is clearly articulated and successfully written. Part I analyzes the context of three self-narratives translated from 17th century Italian to present day English. Direct quotations from the original Italian wording are always given in parenthesis meticulously which I believe stands as one of the strengths of the book since every translation involves an interpretation. Part II interprets the performative autobiographical act, compares the actual and remembered experience

via the person's biography and family history. In part III the text is discussed within the context of the history of early modern noble masculinity, pre-modern theories of human procreation and early modern theories and doctrines concerning the human body. The author states three self-narratives analyzed in this book "grow out of a concept and perception of Osvaldo's own body that is not directly accessible, with an approximate understanding only obtainable by looking at learned concepts and early modern representation of the human body". (p. 8)

The author reconstructs Osvaldo's concepts of self-interpretation and relationships, his strategies and writing intentions. When interpreted against the backdrop of his social and personal failure as a nobleman and a melancholic, the three texts, she argues have a common concern which is to present his own failure and make it comprehensible.; the failure of his body, his life story and the failure of the fate of the house and family.

I will focus on Part III particularly in this review since it may be of interest and beneficial for Ottomanists who are engaged with self-narratives. In this part the author discusses the central themes addressed in self narratives within the context of early modern discourses and settings of knowledge like family, house and lineage, procreation and childrearing, balance and moderation, physiognomy and astrology and thus; she attempts to relate time-specific knowledge formations to cultural and social practice.

Clementi argues that in his writings Osvaldo does not engage in introspective self-analysis, something that is characteristic of self-narratives from the late 18th century onwards. His concept of self is fundamentally not that of "a reflexive, autonomous subject that sets itself from others, but can be described as heterogeneous" (p. 128). Osvaldo perceives himself as "embodied". He describes himself and his own body through a "sectional" view by listing the body parts, from outside and inside, and describing them in varying detail. (p.163) Although this "sectional" perspective may be attributed to the development and success of the "new" anatomy of the early modern period after the publication of Andreas Vesalius' book *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem* (On the fabric of the human body in seven books) in 1543, Clementi successfully demonstrates that Osvaldo still retained the ancient concept of the body in an adapted form: the Hippocratic-Galenic theory of humors and temperaments, humoral pathology and Galenic physiology. His concept of body and health was shaped by the balance of the six

non-naturals (air, eating and drinking, rest and exercise, sleeping and waking, bodily excretions and emotions), physiognomics and astrology. Hence; God, stars, the environment and people have a direct effect on the body and spirit, whose influences can have both positive and negative effects. As Hartmut Bohme argued, she also demonstrates that the actual turn within the natural sciences did not occur until the 19th century and the concept of the body remained essentially Galenic even after Vesalius.

Osvaldo cites numerous causes of him being a failed man like his father's age-related weakness of the semen, the bad milk of the wet nurses, his mother's upbringing and his pronounced insomnia. The author persuasively posits Osvaldo's understanding in the discourses and medical knowledge of the period. Clementi shows that in Osvaldo Ercole's conception of the body, the multifaceted aspects of the Hippocratic-Galenic doctrine of the humors and temperaments and their medieval reception appear in different forms. For example, Osvaldo attributes a generally good, strong complexion to his father, which, according to Galenic view, corresponded to a hot and wet body. He considered his mother on the other hand, to be choleric and described himself as melancholic. The influence of the stars at the time of birth was also significant for him. For example, he wrote that the fact that he was born during a waning moon had a weakening effect on the body and favored his tendency towards a melancholic complexion. However, his melancholy also developed through an interaction between his constitution and living conditions. He also wrote about epileptic seizure that he had when he was a few months old, he connects it to the bad milk of the nurses.

The basic principle of early modern medicine which shaped Osvaldo Ercole Trapp's self-perception in a decisive way was the idea of living in equilibrium through moderation and the importance of balance and harmony. (p.127) For example, her mother, out of too much love, had shown too much zeal and attention in bringing him up and had therefore achieved the opposite. If moderate behavior, a middle way, balance, good rule and order are abandoned, the consequences are defective, contrary and of little good, he wrote. Moreover, health depended particularly on the moderate handling of passions, which were understood as both physical and mental phenomena, embodied in the self. (p.136) Feelings in this understanding were fluid, transferable from one person into another. In Osvaldo's case, from his

mother to himself. He also valued his passions as fundamentally negative. The author shows that feelings in Osvaldo Ercole's self-narratives come exclusively to the fore as "disturbing and pathogenic factors", as "passions", as "accidents of the soul" or as "mental restlessness", or even more frequently as "illness of the soul". Osvaldo Ercole Trapp identifies these passions and emotions as the true reason for his great suffering. He describes his mother as being of a sensitive and choleric character who was unable to moderate her passions. Osvaldo understands feelings fundamentally as a physical phenomenon.

The book successfully shows the importance of discourses and knowledge settings, particularly medical knowledge, on how people of the past understood their self and bodies. I would recommend Clementi's book which successfully and innovatively contributes to studies in early modern self-narratives for scholars and students as well, engaged in social and cultural history, history of emotions, history of body, history of experience, and also history of science and medicine. In-depth analysis of the self-narratives with a thoughtful mind accompanied by secondary sources utilized in discussions, the author could successfully relate time-specific knowledge formations to cultural and social practices. It also serves as a sound basis for making comparisons between different geographical spaces and different sets of knowledge for 17th and 18th centuries.