



Women, Religion, and Emotion; 19th Century Readings and Discoveries



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Abstract

How did the coercive, hierarchical, byproduct of the psychological need to understand why human beings exist, *religion*, affect women in the 19th century? Through meticulous reading, analysis, and discussion of preserved journals, diaries, and letters from women living in the 1800s, the authors of this paper have begun to untangle the emotional implications of religion for women in America. Status, class, marital status, motherhood, friendship, grief, joy, family, politics, and love are inextricably linked to shape lives. The authors ascertained that women approach religion from the areas of obligation, necessity, and circumstance. Some women clung to God as life source, others participated in organized religion for the social aspect, and still others studied theology from an academic perspective. Gender roles in America before women's suffrage were exacerbated by Christianity in the United States, and religion was often used to keep women in their proverbial place. The discoveries and discourse from this research is pivotal as women, religion, and emotion interact in much the same way as they did 200 years ago, despite progressive movements, and learning from the past is essential to survive the present, and improve the future. Ultimately, it was determined that women in patriarchal social structures often must fulfill emotional obligations to meet the feelings deemed appropriate by the society in which they live.

Introduction

Women have historically been associated with high levels of both emotional hysteria and intelligence compared to men. Is this truly the case? Does religion affect women's emotional health, and if so in what way? How do emotional expression and religious experience affect women in the 19th century in contrast to women today? In Dr. John Corrigan's upcoming writings he is exploring the relationship between women, gender, and emotion for women in the 19th century. To understand this work one must lean into the discomfort of stepping into the shoes of women in the past and dig into the emotional turmoil that may occur. It is imperative to critically analyze religion in this context from an academic viewpoint as we do not endeavor to test the validity of the beliefs held, but how these beliefs affect the holder.

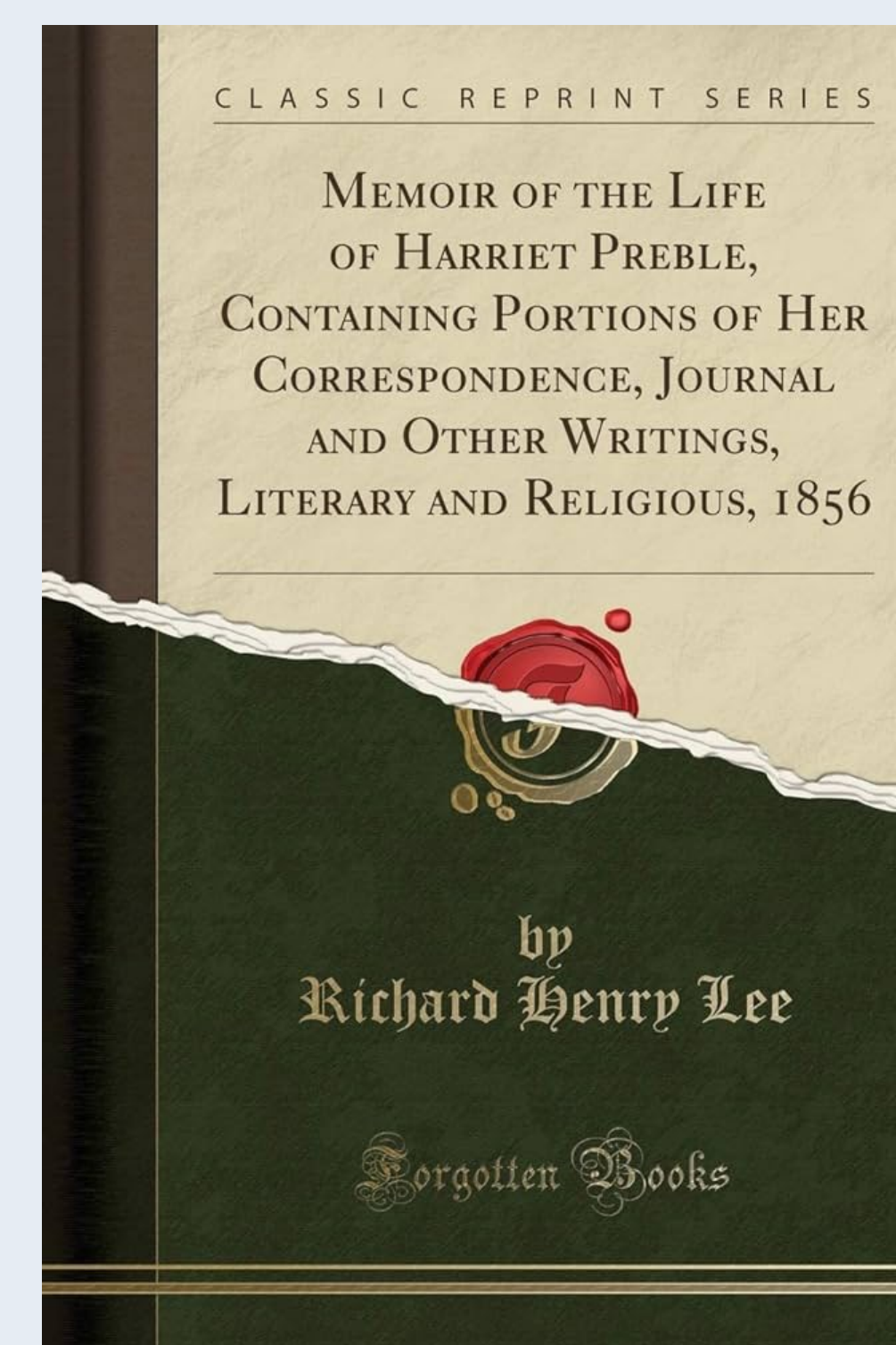


Methods

The authors began by reading through the database "North American Women's Letters and Diaries," an archive of women's diaries, letters, and journals from the 19th century, majority transcribed into text, some photo copied. With three research assistants and researcher professor John Corrigan, the group met weekly to discuss about 150 pages worth of diaries. These discussions pertained to religion, emotion, and society in the 19th century. The type of data was qualitative as it was all reading, personal interpretation, and group discussion. The research assistants would read through the diary of a chosen woman, making notes on their emotions, milestones, relation to religion, and keywords. The motives were to understand how religion impacted the lives of women in the 1800s. This was done by group discussion of the differing possibilities of the range of female emotion, harm and benefit of religion in relation to their emotions, and how this contrasts to woman in the present and throughout history. The technology used was computers connected to the internet the access the online database. The sampling method used was systematic sampling as the researchers went through the database one by one, conducting analysis on the women whose diaries met the criteria of journaling about religion and emotion.

Results

The findings of the authors' research is that religion has a major impact on the lives of nineteenth century women, especially in their emotional lives. The women whose diaries were analyzed during the study fell into the archetypes of pioneer and domestic, as some of the women were world travelers while others life centered around the home. There was a very common throughline of depression in the lives of almost every woman studied, although this may be due to the confessional and complainant nature of journaling. Marriage was found to be a huge determinate of religious and emotional health of women, as becoming a wife and eventually mother has a huge impact both physically and emotionally on women's bodies. Many women turned to God in times of trouble, calling out to him to take away their suffering, often praying for death. Others approached religion as more of an academic study of philosophy and sociology. Overall, how well women viewed themselves in God's eyes dictated their emotional well being, guilt being a prevailing feeling. Additionally, women, their emotions, and how they relate to religion are extremely similar to women in the current day and age.



Sources:

