CfP for an Essay Collection to be submitted with Brill, for the Book Series Narratives and Mental Health

Discussion published by Laurel Daen on Thursday, June 11, 2020

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The Cultural Heritage of Psychiatry and its Literary Transformations: Middle Ages to the Present

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This volume explores the history of English, American and Anglophone literary representations of mental distress and its medical investigation and treatment as significant parts of the cultural heritage of psychiatry since the Middle Ages. In line with Aleida Assmann's approach, the volume perceives cultural heritage as 'that part of the material and immaterial cultural memory that has been selected and destined for active transfer and circulation' (2020, 9, transl. K.R.). The Cultural Heritage of Psychiatry and its Literary Transformations: Middle Ages to the Present (working title) approaches the cultural heritage of psychiatry as a complicated gift that connects the past to the present and the future. Like all forms of cultural heritage and functional memory, the cultural heritage of psychiatry calls for a responsible use of its components, for their preservation and protection against damage and suppression as well as for perpetual transformation, renewal and change (Assmann: 2013, 330; Assmann 2020, 9).

The cultural heritage of psychiatry is often regarded as problematic, difficult and burdensome, not least because of the long history of medicalization, institutionalized confinement, constraint and abuse of 'patients'/users (Foucault 1988; Showalter 1985; Reaume 2010; Lewis 2010; Punzi 2019, 243-244, 248-249; Punzi/Röder 2019, 197-201). While all cultural heritage is selective and incomplete (Assmann 2008, 106), the fragmentariness of the heritage of psychiatry is to a considerable degree the result of processes of social, political and rhetorical exclusion, that is, of the silencing, suppression, stigmatization, moral condemnation and invalidation of 'patients'/'users' voices/self-presentations in different periods of cultural and intellectual history (Foucault 1988, passim; Showalter 1985, passim; Punzi 2019; Guest Pryal 2010, 479-480).

In this context, literature is assigned a preeminent role as 'the mnemonic art par excellence' (Lachmann 2008, 301). As a reintegrative interdiscourse, it simultaneously creates and observes memory, representing a 'body of commemorative actions that include the knowledge stored by a culture, and virtually all texts a culture has produced and by which a culture is constituted' (ibid.; Erll 2008, 391). Hence, practices of writing, reading and creative appropriation revolving around the topics of mental distress/madness and forms of treatment performatively construct the cultural memory and cultural heritage of psychiatry. They
interact with extant cultural texts in diverse ways, e.g. through convergence, divergence, interrogation, assimilation or repulsion (Lachmann 2008, 301; Neumann 2008, 334, 337-338; Paris 2017). In these interactions, intertextuality plays a central role because it ‘demonstrates the process by which a culture […] continually rewrites and retranscribes itself […]’ (Lachmann 2008, 301).

The planned volume will explore how literary texts shape the cultural memory and heritage of psychiatry, how they interact with dominant and alternative forms and traditions of treatment and care and how they bear witness to and fragmentarily retrieve/imagine suppressed, medicalized voices, thereby producing counter-cultural memories (Saunders 2008, 327). By investigating the interdependence and complex interaction between literary and non-literary texts in their historical and cultural contexts, the anthology will emphasize the close connection between history and cultural heritage that was often either neglected or questioned in the past (Assmann 2020, 10).

By integrating the perspective of critical heritage studies, this volume will interrogate collective forms of cultural identity and literary canon formation with regard to what is forgotten, rejected and excluded (Assmann 2020, 10). It perceives the cultural heritage of psychiatry as a dynamic, globalized, dissonant process that is relative to as well as formative of changing and fragmentary systems of value and significance (Wells 2017).

Although there is a comprehensive body of recent and prevailing book-length studies about the relationship between English, American and Anglophone literature, psychiatric discourse and conceptions of madness/mental distress in specific periods, genres and historical and cultural contexts (e.g. Rogers 2019; Crawford 2019; Gaedtke 2017; Whitehead 2017; Stanback 2016; Iseli 2015; Dickson/Ingram 2012; Ingram/Sim/Lawlor et al. 2011; Sedlmayr 2011; Veit-Wild 2006; Neely 2004; Lange 1997; Ziolkowski 1990), investigations of the practices of remembering the cultural heritage of psychiatry in relation to historical changes in the representation of mental distress and its treatment remain a desideratum. This volume seeks to provide central insights into these topics.

We invite chapters (each with a length of ca. 7000 words) exploring the following questions:

- How do literary texts from different periods of literary history interact with the history and cultural heritage of psychiatry and with the cultural representations of mental distress in their specific historical moments (e.g. through intertextuality, imaginative appropriation …)?
- How do they bear witness to, negotiate, criticize, challenge, imaginatively reconfigure, transform and re-invent this heritage?
- How do literary texts problematize the relationship between memory, heritage, forgetting, fragmentation and suppression?
- How do they represent the heritage of psychiatry and the cultural imaginary of mental distress in ways that make this heritage relevant for their historical
present and their envisaged future?

Each chapter should start with a concise overview of concepts and discourses of mental distress/madness and the heritage of psychiatry in the respective periods of literary/cultural history. Thereafter, they should provide an analysis of selected literary texts (one or more, any genre) with regard to their techniques of representing and remembering conceptions of mental distress/madness and psychiatric treatment in their respective historical present and in reciprocal intertextual connections with their respective historical past (and perhaps their respective envisaged future). Whenever possible, discussions of intersectional relationships between concepts of mental distress/madness, psychiatric treatment and gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race and migrant identities should be included.

Please send your abstract (500-600 words) until 1 September 2020 to kroeder@uni-potsdam.de or cornelia.waechter@rub.de

Bibliography (secondary literature)


Mills, China, and Suman Fernando (eds.): 'Globalising Mental Health or Pathologising the Global South? Mapping the Ethics, Theory and Practice of Global Mental Health'. Special Issue. *Disability and the Global South* 1.2 (2014).


**Surveys**


