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Representation of Illness Narrative in Central European Fiction: Mental Illness Experience and Strategies of its Mediation to Public Through Literature

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Abstract

In the context of contemporary Slovak literature, Ivana Dobráková has assumed the role of the narrator, addressing themes of mental illness. In her literary works, she employs a narrative strategy known as a “chaos narrative”, in which the experience of depression, OCD, bulimia and other mental illnesses are conveyed to the reader authentically. The quality of her work has been demonstrated by a plethora of positive reviews and awards. The present study will examine some aspects of I. Dobráková’s specific depiction of mental illness that lingers and transforms in the context of various life stages. The objective of this paper is to analyse the depiction of the relationship between the concepts of health and illness, and the concepts of normality and abnormality, as they are portrayed in the book. The analysis will be conducted within the framework of the philosophies of K. Goldstein and G. Canguilhem. The secondary objective is to analyse the utilisation of language in chaos narrative (with reference to fragmentation, stream of consciousness, elliptical sentences, defective syntax and parataxis) and to explore the author’s gradual transition from the genre of fiction (or autofiction) to that of autobiography. This transition can be perceived as indicative of a broader societal shift towards greater openness regarding mental health issues in Central Europe, but it is also likely to reflect the author’s personal journey of acceptance.

Keywords: Autofiction; Autobiography; Normality; Abnormality; Mental Illness