

CREATIVE AGENCY: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MENTAL ILLNESS: AN EXPLORATORY REVIEW OF PRACTICE OF WRITING AS A TOOL DURING MENTAL ILLNESS

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Introduction: Mental Illness is a very unique and intimate experience. Over the ages various art forms, particularly writing have been used to document experiences of mental illness. Though the history of Psychiatry is a feature of mainstream Psychiatric training, complementary study of literature and its relevance to mental illness is underused.

Objectives: To undertake an exploratory search of writing as tool to reflect the phenomenology of mental illness and to evaluate the role of medical humanities in understanding and coping mental illness.

Aims: To present an explorative review of a selection of poems and prose by authors with mental illness who have written in English Language.

Methods: We conducted a comprehensive search of online databases including the Madness and Literature Network (UK), Medical Humanities Resource Database (UK), the Arts Literature and Medicine Database (US) and other popular books.

Results: We compare various extracts by well known authors along with the lesser known contemporary accounts of writers to evaluate the role of writing.

Conclusions: There is a long tradition of writing about depression mental illness in the canon of English literature. Compared to autobiographical writing about depression, it is difficult to identify many autobiographical accounts of severe mental illness. Examples of writing projects illustrate that people with severe mental illness, and with dementia, may use the support of others to produce creative writing. It may be useful to Psychiatrists in training, and to wider society, to reflect on the creative agency inherent in their writing.