

Proposal for a monograph with the working title:

Autobiographical Writing and the Aesthetics of Illness – a Disability Studies Perspective on Contemporary German Life Writing

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Description of the book:

This study is motivated by a notable new wave (intensifying from 2007 onwards) of autobiographically inspired writing on illness, death and dying in the German-speaking world. It examines how the authors of such personal narratives come to write of and negotiate their illnesses between the poles of cliché and exceptionality, in text and in the wider public realm.

Informed by Anglo-American disability studies and using traditional methods and theories of literary criticism, the book, as the first of its kind, will explore this new phenomenon and analyse five key examples of recent autobiographical writing on the topic, namely: Verena Stefan's *Fremdschläfer* (2007), Kathrin Schmidt's Buchpreis-winning novel *Du stirbst nicht* (2009), Christoph Schlingensief's *Tagebuch einer Krebserkrankung* from the same year, Charlotte Roche's *Schoßgebete* (2011), and Wolfgang Herrndorf's *Arbeit und Struktur* (2010-2013). All of these texts have attracted a large amount of public attention. They tell of living through or living with a diverse range of experiences: from breast cancer, psychological trauma, a stroke and subsequent aphasia to diagnosis with a brain tumour and lung cancer. These experiences have given the authors' lives, and their work, a radically new perspective.

The proposed book analyses narrative strategies, aesthetic forms and experimentations with genre that can be observed in this kind of life writing. Its grounding in the field of disability studies gives the analysis an innovative perspective on each of the texts, and crucially enables the author to identify gaps in the dominant readings of the texts, which often effectively disregard the illness experience at their centre and contest their literary quality.

The book's recognition of the analysed texts' wider socio-political contexts of 'Pflegekräftemangel'¹ and 'Sterbehilfe-Debatten'² highlights how the decision to share personal experiences of illness in literature is a political and ethical act in contemporary Germany. Written in English, this volume will appeal to students and researchers from a wide range of fields within Literary and Cultural Studies and beyond.

¹ The shortage of nursing staff

² The public debate around physician-assisted suicide for the terminally ill