

The Reimagining of Mental Illness as Metaphor in Select Queer Graphic Memoirs

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Abstract

Mental illness, a misunderstood and much-misrepresented condition has been notorious for its historical medicalisation. Parallel to this has been the pathologisation of queer sexualities where to be ill or/and queer, was synonymous in their deviance. This paper on the other hand locates contemporary graphic memoirists' narratives about sexuality and mental illness as counter-discourses in not only deconstructing prevalent notions about queeras a state of unhealthiness or lack, but also conversely accuses heteronormativity instead as the illness-inducing cause. In assaying to demonstrate this aim, the analysis investigates the graphic medium's langue that enables the memoirists to depict the interrelatedness of both states in *The Times I knew I was Gay* by Eleanor Crewes and *How to be Ace* by Rebecca Burgess. Using Judith Butler's definition of performativity as a springboard, it studies how sexuality demands performance, and at the absence of which is instituted, a performance of illness. It thus reads Obsessive-compulsive disorders, eating disorders and panic attacks to be directly influenced by compulsory sexuality/heterosexuality, instead of the traditional understanding of queer as an innate condition of illness. It concludes with positioning the graphic text itself as a performance to reinstate the findings.

Keywords : graphic medium, queer studies, mental illness, heteronormativity, performance.