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Defining Illness, Impediment, and Inspiration

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In 2020, Merriam-Webster declared ‘pandemic’ as their Word of the Year, claiming in a press release that “sometimes a single word defines an era”. It is fitting, since the world has hence come to a stand-still, hesitantly accommodating new habits, new hobbies and new ways of socialisation. As we try to understand, unpack and process what ‘lockdown’, ‘quarantine’, ‘isolation’, ‘disease’, and ‘immunology’ mean whilst becoming singularly aware of our anatomy and social habits, we are gradually discovering and uncovering implicit ways in which our thoughts, languages, cultural values and social rank dictate how we perceive the pandemic, how we receive it, and how are living through it.

The 31st issue of FORUM focuses on “Art, Disease, and Expression” as well as the intricate and co-dependent relationships amongst illness, impediment and inspiration. The papers in this issue explore a diverse range of topic – from tracing the history and representation of epilepsy in Russian Literature (with a focus on Dostoevsky), to (mis)representation and public reparation surrounding the evolving dialogue on AIDS/HIV and how it permeates in poetry and theatre. Another central topic to this issue is female agency, female ‘madness’ and the interconnectedness between the act of writing, articulating independent thought, and having an inner voice incongruent to the external world. Papers have explored the subversive potential of applying feminist, post-colonial and Marxist critique to thought-provoking texts which deals with medical procedures and diagnosis often imposed on queer bodies as well as female subjects. Authors examine, question and deconstruct medical and non-medical discourse, as well as jargon which is used to construct mythologies surrounding diseases, diagnoses and disability. Politics, policymaking as well as perpetuating pathologizing narratives have been called under scrutiny as the very definitions of art, disease, and expression are being recontextualised beyond the normative diktats of ‘well-being’ and healthy-living.

Built upon the scholarship on disease, cultural theory, post-modernism, post-humanism, and counter-cultures, this issue of FORUM is intent on rejecting presupposed interpretation of clinical ‘reality’ and is instead focused on the experiences of psychological and physical trauma whilst examining the composition of a complex journey from illness to health, from pre-diagnosis to post-diagnosis, as well as the authorial agency and the existence of art as treatment.

The disruption of meaning and meaning creation – of what is pure, clean, healthy, ‘normal’ is being explored, evaluated and questioned in this issue. The selected papers depict a visceral rejection of patriarchal, colonial, racial and Western understanding of the body, the mind, and the Other. In asserting hybrid identities and speaking multifaceted truths to power, this issue aims to enter a new dialogue which deals with our own engagement with discourses around health, normalcy, agency, co-existence, in a post-pandemic world.

Author Biography

Adrija Ghosh recently completed her master's degree in Comparative Literature from the University of Edinburgh. Her academic interests include postcolonial studies, world cinema, adaptation studies, translation studies, as well as Intermediality. She is a multilingual poet, with a focus on identity, gender, and urban melancholia.