

## Abstract – “Between Neurons and the Self: Concepts of Consciousness, Identity and Reality in Representations of Mental Illness in Anglophone Novels since 1950”

The aim of this dissertation project is to analyse representations of mental illness in (auto-)biographic and fictional writing since the middle of the twentieth century, when neuroscience began to have an increasing influence on the scientific, cultural and personal perception of psychological conditions. Since mental disorders have the ability to challenge a person’s identity on the level of consciousness itself, narratives centred on mental illness have to negotiate personal experience with an imagined outer reality and – owing to the rise of neuroscience in the past half century – increasingly influential biomedical explanations of the workings of the human mind. This project will therefore study the way in which the narrative and the language of novels centred on mental illness interact with and challenge neuroscientific and medical discourses to construct identity and defend personal experience against cultural and scientific preconceptions. In the analysis of the texts, a mix of theoretical frameworks and methods will be used, including narratology, stylistics and cognitive poetics. While the study will focus on the treatment of concepts of ‘consciousness’, ‘identity’ and ‘reality’ in literary depictions of mental illness, it will also discuss the cultural implications of the concept of ‘illness’ in relation to the human psyche. Thus, the project endeavours to add a further perspective to ongoing cultural debates on mental health.