

INDIVIDUAL PAPER PROPOSAL

CONFERENCE TITLE:

What Remains? Literature and Ethics in a Time of Crisis

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Title	"Some Truths that Were Too Difficult and Frightening to Know": the Ethics and Affordances of Contemporary Schizophrenia Memoir		

PRESENTER'S SHORT BIO NOTE:

[David Lombard](#) is a PhD student in literary studies at the universities of Liège and Leuven (joint degree) funded by the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research. His dissertation, "American Anthropocene Sublimes: Rhetorics and Narrations of Self and Environment in the Contemporary U.S. Ecobiographical Memoir," will be defended in September 2024.

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Since the early twenty-first century, there has been a gradual shift from a biomedical approach to mental illness to a bio-psycho-social-existential and interculturally sensitive model that led to the rise of the interdisciplinary field of health humanities. This model has, for example, emphasized the existence of visible and invisible disabilities for neurominorities coping with structural, social, and often racialized injustices (Kapp 2020; Rosqvist, Chown, and Stenning 2020). For literary scholars in the health humanities, studying the forms, rhetorical functions and institutional dimensions of illness narratives contributes to interdisciplinary knowledge about mental illnesses (e.g., see Van Goidsenhoven 2017 and Vermeulen 2023). Life writing on mental illness ("autopathographies" [Couser 1997, 5–12]), more specifically, provides "first person and experiential knowledge" that can help destigmatize neurodivergent people (Beresford 2021, 7). By mainly building on insights from rhetorical narratology (Phelan 2017; 2022), this paper will analyze the "thematic components," namely "*the ideational, ethical, and ideological dimensions*" (Phelan 2022, 29, emphasis in original) of twenty-first-century schizophrenia memoirs such as Elyn R. Saks' *The Center Cannot Hold* (2007) and Marin Sardy's *The Edge of Every Day* (2019). Since these memoirs were written by people suffering through schizophrenia and that the bio-psycho-social-existential model calls for a deeper understanding of psychotic people's struggles when investigating their narratives (Van Sambeek et al. 2023), special attention will be given to the ethics of a rhetorical reading that is engaged both in the actual or "flesh-and-bone" audience and the authorial or "the author's hypothetical audience" (Rabinowitz 1977, 126). Following rhetorical narratology's postulate that not all positions in these audiences are equal and can be more or less ethically acceptable (especially when dealing with mental illnesses), this paper will assess the knowledge and values communicated by schizophrenia memoirs and the ethical stakes of (re)using such knowledge and values in clinical and cultural discourses.

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