

Table 1. Different concepts of mental illness as depicted in the novels. Translation of passages from Mélo (German version: Auf den Straßen von Paris) by MEW.

Disease concepts	Quotations from the novels/the theatre play
Biological	<p><u>The Goldfinch</u></p> <p>“And there were other worries as well; the reason I knew about Mr. Barbour’s time in the ‘ding farm’ was that Andy had told me, in his matter-of-fact way, that his parents were afraid he might have inherited something of the same vulnerability, as he put it.” p. 96</p> <p>“[...] I was worried that my exuberant drug use had damaged my brain and my nervous system and maybe even my soul in some irreparable and perhaps not readily apparent way.” p. 427</p> <p>“It was as if I’d suffered a chemical change of the spirit: as if the acid balance of my psyche had shifted and leached the life out of me in aspects impossible to repair, or reverse, like a frond of living coral hardened to bone.” pp. 460-461</p> <p>“Chemical imbalance is how our grandmother spoke of it. Bipolar disorder.” p. 487</p> <p>“Once on the medicine, though, he was a lamb. Wonderful father—well—you know.” p. 488</p> <p>“But they gave him shock treatments in there, and they really seemed to work because when he came out again he was an all-new person.” p. 489</p> <p>“[...] the mental damage from hard-core drinking, neurological stuff that never went away.” p. 529</p> <p>“[...] but the dopamine slam had dropped me hard and left me with the pre-tremblings of something that felt very like death—a sadness you felt in your stomach first, beating on the inside of the forehead, all the darkness I’d shut out roaring back in.” p. 627</p> <p>“No, but he was breathing and Horst has Narcan. That’ll bring him right out of it. Like magic, have you ever seen it? Throws you right in withdrawal. You feel like shit, but you live.” p. 654</p> <p>“I never got one inch taller after it happened, not one. [...] Injured and traumatized children—they quite often fail to grow to normal height.” p. 689</p> <p><u>Open City</u></p> <p>”In recent years I have noticed how much the light affects my ability to be sociable.” pp. 193-194</p> <p>“But take another set of individuals, a most distant tribe, and among these the brains differ from those of the first set in some chemically and physiologically significant way. These are the mentally ill. The mad, the crazy: people who are schizophrenic, obsessive, paranoid, compulsive, sociopathic, bipolar, depressed,</p>

	<p>or some grim combination of two or more of these: these people all belong together, they ought to be classed with each other.” p. 205</p> <p><u>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</u></p> <p>“[...] that gap had taken a toll on her neural pathways [...]” p. 85</p>
Psychological	<p><u>The Goldfinch</u></p> <p>“Why did I obsess over people like that? Was it normal to fixate on strangers in this particular vivid, fevered way? I didn’t think so.” p. 31</p> <p>“When I was little, four or five, my greatest fear was that my mother might not come home from work. [...] To think of something happening to my mother was especially frightening because my father was so unreliable. <i>Unreliable</i> I guess is the diplomatic way of putting it. [...] Though I didn’t understand why he was so unhappy, it was clear to me that his unhappiness was our fault.” pp. 61-62</p> <p>“Part of me was immobile, stunned with despair, like those rats that lose hope in laboratory experiments and lie down in the maze to starve.” pp. 77-78</p> <p>“How was it possible to miss someone as much as I missed my mother?” p. 97</p> <p>“[...]a soldier so mad with shock that he started burying birds and squirrels on the battlefield.” p. 140</p> <p>“Did she ever have the sense of observing herself from afar, as I often did, as if the explosion had knocked my body and my soul into two separate entities that remained about six feet apart from one another?” p. 430</p> <p>“The shame that tormented me was all the more corrosive for having no very clear origin: I didn’t know why I felt so tainted, and worthless, and wrong [...]. Part of it had to do with the painting. [...] But by far the greater part of unease had to do with my father. I knew that his death wasn’t my fault, and yet on a bone-deep, irrational, completely unshakable level I also knew that it was.” pp. 440-441</p> <p>“Her father very very right wing—a Nazi basically. I think—no wonder Astrid has depression problems with father like that. What a hateful old shit!” p. 598</p> <p>“What I mainly remembered about the showers [at school] was not so much Andy getting concussed on the tile as Scheffernan and Cavanaugh wrestling me down and trying to shove a stick of deodorant up my ass.” p. 636</p> <p>“[...] and there were way too many people in the theater [...], way more people than I was comfortable with given my generalized anxiety and hatred of crowded places, [...] but I didn’t care, it could have been a foxhole in the Somme being shelled by the Germans and all that mattered was her next to me in the dark, her arm beside mine.” pp. 682-683</p> <p>“But that night, finally, I did find her [his dead mother]. Or more accurately: she found me. It felt like a one off, although maybe some other night, some other dram, she’ll come to me like that again—maybe when I’m dying, though it seems almost too much to wish for. Certainly I would be less frightened of death [...]” p. 810</p>

Mélo

“His worst public humiliation, 1995, was connected with his constant absenteeism. Because he had avoided his class in Sociology of Work for weeks(for his DEA, Diplôme d’études approfondies, Master 2), the turbo-assistant in charge – a man with a moustache, likable and sorrowful at the same time in his tartar-coloured suit – dropped the remark that the compulsive absentee must surly have ‘psychological problems’ [...]” p. 25

Americanah

“‘I think you are a self-sabotager,’ Ginika said. ‘That’s why you cut off Obinze like that. And now you cheat on Curt because at some level you don’t think you deserve happiness.’ ‘Now you are going to suggest some pills for Self-Sabotage Disorder,’ Ifemelu said. ‘That’s absurd.’” p. 287

“There was something wrong with her. She did not know what it was but there was something wrong with her. A hunger, a restlessness. An incomplete knowledge of herself. The sense of something farther away, beyond her reach.” pp. 289-290

“Dike attempted suicide. [...] I felt as if I had been felled by something. Auntie Uju tells me I have depression. You know America has a way of turning everything into an illness that needs medicine. I’m not taking medicines, just spending a lot of time with Dike [...]” p. 372

“[...] You have a responsibility to that child downstairs! What you do today can ruin her life and make her damaged until the day she dies! [...]” p. 464

Open City

„His [Freud’s] writings on grief and loss, I found, remained useful.” p. 208

“For the troubles of the mind, diagnosis is a trickier art, because even the strongest symptoms are sometimes not visible. It is especially elusive, because the source of our information about the mind is itself the mind, and the mind is able to deceive itself. [...] the mind is opaque to itself, and it’s hard to tell where, precisely, these areas of opacity are.” p. 238

“And then, with the same flat affect, she said that, in late 1989, when she was fifteen and I was a year younger, at a party her brother had hosted at their house in Ikoyi, I had forced myself on her. [...] indeed I had been ever-present in her life, like a stain or a scar, and she had thought of me, either fleetingly or in extended agonies, for almost every day of her adult life.” p. 244

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

“[...] when [Oscar] lapsed into that killer depression at the end of sophomore year—drank two bottles of 151 because some girl dissed him—almost fucking killing himself and his sick mother [...]” p. 169

“Embraced the amnesia that was so common throughout the Islands, five parts denial, five parts negative hallucinations.” (pp. 258-259)

	<p>“The road where he became so nuts over a girl he stopped thinking. The road where very bad things happened.” (pp. 291-292)</p>
Social	<p><u>I Call my Brothers</u></p> <p>“And I remember that time when we were at the outdoor pool and the lifeguard called the spot where we were sitting ‘Monkey Mountain’ [...]” p. 33</p> <p>“Yeah, but your brothers are so... I don’t know. Naturally social.” p. 58</p> <p><u>The Goldfinch</u></p> <p>“[...] between anomie and trance [...]” p. 528</p> <p>“I wasn’t over Pippa and I knew it, might never be over her, and that was just something I was going to have to live with, the sadness of loving someone I couldn’t have; but I also knew my more immediate difficulty was in rising to (what I found, anyway) and uncomfortably escalating social pace.” (p. 573)</p> <p>“But they are very unhappy and miserable people, all of them, these Swedes. One minute laughing and drinking and the next—darkness, not a word.” p. 598</p> <p>“[...] locked-in and nodding politely amidst the crowd of well-born, wealthy, powerful... (<i>never forget you aren’t one of them</i>, my junkie pal from Accounts had whispered in my ear when he’d seen me socializing among important clients at an Impressionist and Modern Art sale...)” pp. 710-711</p> <p><u>Mélo</u></p> <p>“His first attempts at working life were cruel. [...] Despite his salary of 9.000 francs (1.400 Euros nowadays), nobody wants to let him a flat, he cannot offer a firm deposit.” p. 25</p> <p>“She is from his milieu. She is not a rich parent’s child.” p. 33</p> <p>“Once he says, sorrowfully looking at the work of the sociologist: ‘One has to bear disillusionment.’” p. 45</p> <p><u>Americanah</u></p> <p>“[...] and yet there was cement in her soul. It had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness. It brought with it amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a piercing homesickness.” p. 6</p> <p>“‘You have to blame the black kid first,’ he said, and laughed. [...] ‘I feel like I have vegetables instead of ears, like large broccoli sticking out of my head,’ he said, laughing. ‘So of course it had to be me who hacked into the school network.’” p. 349</p> <p>“‘Do you remember when Dike was telling you something and he said ‘we black folk’ and you told him ‘you are not black’? [...] You told him what he wasn’t but you didn’t tell him what he was.’ [...] ‘His depression is from his experience, Auntie!’” pp. 379-380</p> <p><u>Open City</u></p> <p>“But she had retained the memory of having been aware of this hard beginning:</p>

not the memory of the suffering itself, but the memory of knowing that it was what she had been born into. [...] It was only years later, when I became interested in these things for my own sake, that I surmised that my oma, heavily pregnant, had likely been one of the countless women raped by the men of the Red Army that year in Berlin, that so extensive and thorough was that particular atrocity, she could hardly have escaped it. [...] She'd been born into an unspeakably bitter world, a world without sanctity. It was natural, decades later, losing a husband, for her to displace the grief of widowhood onto that primal grief, and make of the two pains a continuity." p. 80

"V., an assistant professor at New York University and a member of the Delaware tribe, had based the book [*The Monster of New Amsterdam*] on her doctoral dissertation at Columbia. It was the first comprehensive study of Cornelis van Tienhoven. Van Tienhoven had been notorious as a seventeenth-century *schout* of New Amsterdam, officially empowered to enforce the law among the Dutch colonists of Manhattan Island. [...] she was at work on her next project, which, as she explained it, was a broader study of the encounters between the northeastern native groups---the Delaware and Iroquois in particular---and European settlers in the seventeenth century. V.'s depression was partly due to the emotional toll of these studies [...]. I can't pretend it isn't about my life, she said to me once, it is my life. It's a difficult thing to live in a country that has erased your past. [...] There are almost no Native Americans in New York City, and very few in all the Northeast. It isn't right that people are not terrified by this because this is a terrifying thing that happened to a vast population." pp. 25-27

"Insanity is used as an excuse for suppressing dissent, just as it has always been. [...] It was all about removing the contaminants from society." p. 202

"I suppose, Moji said at length, that the things black people have had to deal with in this country---and I don't mean me or Julius, I mean people like you, who have been here for generations---the things you've had to deal with are definitely enough to drive anyone over the edge. The racist structure of this country is crazy-making." p. 203

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

"Our then dictator-for-life Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina. No one knows whether Trujillo was the Curse's servant or its master, its agent or its principal, but it was clear he and it had an understanding, that them two was *tight*." pp. 2-3

"The white kids looked at his black skin and his afro and treated him with inhuman cheeriness. The kids of color, upon hearing him speak and seeing him move his body, shook their heads. You're not Dominican" p. 49

"[...] but some things (like white supremacy and people-of-color self-hate) never change [...]" p. 264

"[...] that whisper that all long-term immigrants carry inside themselves, the

	<p>whisper that says <i>You do not belong</i> [...]” p. 276</p> <p>“[...] the touched-in-the-head tío who’d been tortured during Balaguer’s reign [...]” p. 277</p>
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Box 1. Summary of the plot: *I Call my Brothers* (Khemiri, 2015)

I Call my Brothers is a theatre play about Amor, a young man who becomes paranoid walking Stockholm on the day after a car bombing because he feels foreign. Amor is of Tunisian origin and while he walks the city to run an errand for his cousin, who is in Tunisia, he receives several phone calls and the audience is taken back to his childhood days and his adolescence on several occasions. In so-called *Interludes*, several confusing voices speak to him. Amor has always been a strange and socially awkward boy and young man, stalking a girl for 20 years, expressing his feelings in equations, and seeing his peers as elements of the periodic table. The play, in a postmodern way, plays on several possibilities of truth and often the audience is left to wonder what takes place only as a possibility in Amor’s mind. Recurring themes are feeling foreign, feeling observed, trying to blend in, and the police, which is shown to be both oppressive and helpful.

Box 2. Summary of the plot: *The Goldfinch* (Tartt, 2014)

The Goldfinch is a coming-of-age novel about overcoming a trauma through lasting relationships and aesthetic experiences. Theo Decker, aged thirteen, loses his mother in a terrorist attack on a museum, while he can leave the museum alive, taking with him a famous painting. First he is taken in by a privileged New York family and, through events connected to the museum-bombing, befriends an antiques dealer (James “Hobie” Hobart), who becomes a father-figure. At Hobie’s, Theo falls in love with Pippa, a teenager who also survived the blast. Quite suddenly, his otherwise absent father appears, a man with an alcohol and opioid addiction and a gambling habit, and takes Theo to Las Vegas. There, he befriends Boris, an unrooted teenager neglected and abused by his father, who nevertheless is life-affirmative and gets by on petty crimes, alcohol, and drugs. When Theo’s father dies, Theo returns to

New York City, is taken in by Hobie, learns the antiques trade but also falls into a drug habit and engages in criminal activities, still suffering from PTSD and feelings of guilt and shame. The story picks up speed when Boris appears again on the scene. The picture, by then a negotiable instrument for criminal deals, is given back to the public by way of the police after a shoot-out in Amsterdam involving Boris and Theo. In the end, Theo concludes that the line between good and evil is blurry, that truth and reality are ambiguous, and that love and art will help him to go on living.

Box 3. Summary of the plot: *Mélo* (German translation: *Auf den Straßen von Paris*, Ciriez, 2015)

Mélo is a novel about high hopes and shattered ideals set in Paris on the day and night before Labour Day 2013. It contains three loosely connected parts called *Transfixion*, *Transformation*, and *Transaction*. In *Transfixion*, a nameless labour union official of Celtic heritage (his family coming from Brittany in Western France) commits suicide by parking his car by a garbage incineration plant and stabbing himself in the heart with a kitchen knife bought for that purpose, aged 39. He is described as disillusioned, romantically unsuccessful, ill at ease in a world of gentrification, a globalized world with diminishing union power. *Transformation* is about a garbage man from Congo who fails to pay child support to his ex-wife but at night turns into a shrill dandy as a “sapeur”, a member of the *Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes* (SAPE) which has its roots in colonial Congo, taking on a white servant and renting a Rolls Royce. He calls his role “Parfait de Paris” and has the feeling to be finally a king, to be himself. He puts off advances by women, wanting to live a chaste life just for the SAPE. *Transaction* is about a young homosexual woman of Chinese origin studying economics and at the same time working as a street vendor, selling cheap items produced in China from a hawker’s tray on roller blades. Her secret dream is to start a franchise business and be a millionaire in ten years. At the same time, her girlfriend betrays her and she gets into numerous conflicts on the streets.

Box 4. Summary of the plot: *Americanah* (Adichie, 2014)

Americanah is a novel about love, race, and the hope to escape choicelessness through migration set on three continents. Ifemelu and Obinze fall in love as teenagers in Lagos, Nigeria, and then move to Nsukka together to attend university. The country is under a military dictatorship, strikes at universities are frequent, and many young people leave to go abroad. It has always been Obinze's dream to move to America, but Ifemelu is the one who gets a chance to go, first living with her "Aunty Uju" and her young cousin Dike. Dike is Uju's child from a relationship as mistress of one of the Generals of the military government, and Uju had to flee the country after the General's sudden death. When starting university, Ifemelu encounters severe financial problems and in her desperation offers sexual service for money. Shamed by the act, she cuts off contact with Obinze without telling him why. After a period of social withdrawal and suicidal thoughts that Ifemelu denies to be a depression, her career in America takes a turn upwards, pushed by a privileged white boyfriend. She begins writing a blog about race and earns a Princeton fellowship before going back to Lagos. Her cousin Dike has grown up with identity problems, related to his race in mostly white surroundings, and attempts suicide. Obinze in the meantime did not get an American visa, lives in Great Britain illegally and, after a time of cleaning toilets and doing manual labour under a false identity, is deported. Back in Lagos, Obinze gets rich quickly as a property developer by fawning on an influential man, marries a non-descript woman, and has a daughter. When Ifemelu returns to Lagos, their love sparks again.

Box 5. Summary of the plot: *Open City* (Cole, 2012)

Open City is a novel about Julius, an indecisive 32-year-old in his last year of training as a psychiatrist, who walks New York and Brussels and shares his highly educated free-associating thoughts with the reader. It is a novel of ambiguity in which concepts are presented and deconstructed at the same time. Julius, a Nigerian with a German mother, came to the United States of America aged 17, estranged from his mother after his father's death. As a counterpoint to his working days at the hospital, he starts walking the streets of New York, where he encounters other people, art, crime, and thoughts about the city's history, especially with regards to slaves and Native Americans. The city thus becomes a palimpsest in Julius' eyes. Recurring themes are migration (of people and of birds, who frequently serve as a metaphor), solitude, death, identity as a black man, psychiatry (as a medical specialty that is still mostly a blind spot), and art in its different forms (music, film, paintings, writing, statues). When he goes to Brussels with the half-hearted plan to find his German grandmother, he feels the social friction and anomy of the city and meets an angry young Moroccan immigrant who feels excluded from the academic world because of his background. Julius himself is depicted in different scenes as a victim, an aggressor, and a life-saver.

Box 6. Summary of the plot: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Díaz, 2007)

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao is a novel about the trauma that a terror regime causes and how it ripples through several generations. At the centre is Oscar, a nerdy and overweight young man from the Dominican Republic (DR), and his quest to find love. At the same time, it is the history of his family, a history of violence, torture and misery under the dictatorship of Trujillo. The story is told with hints at magic realism, stating that a curse, *fukú*, has fallen on the family; a mongoose makes repeated appearances, as a good spirit, as does a man without a face, who stands for imminent danger. Oscar, who was born in the DR but came to the US as a young child, returns to the DR to find love but is killed in the process. In the end, there is a glimmer of hope that the next generation, represented by his niece, might overcome the curse. The novel is simultaneously postmodern and sceptical of postmodernism.