Art Does Not Answer to Psychiatry: A Response to "*Game of Thrones*: A Cliché About Madness? (spoiler alert)"

To the Editor: I have read with great interest the letter to the editor "*Game of Thrones*: A Cliché About Madness? (spoiler alert)"[1] by my fellow psychiatrist Dr Mallet published in a recent issue of the *Primary Care Companion for CNS Disorders*. Although I support the spirit and motivations of the letter, I cannot share its reasoning or its conclusions. Dr Mallet argues that, through their fictional plots, the *Game of Thrones'* author and screenwriters are liable for disseminating several stigmatizing ideas regarding mental illness through the concept of madness. I cannot find evidence supporting this claim.

First of all, in reality, madness is not a psychiatric disorder. Furthermore, madness and its potential atavism have long been established as a literary topic within Western literature, from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*[2] to Ibsen's *Ghosts*.[3] Despite this, the issue raises the wider question: Should the *Game of Thrones'* author and screenwriters have been, by principle, concerned with stigma associated with mental illness? From my point of view, the answer is no. Artists do not have any obligation or intrinsic duty to adapt to psychiatry needs or struggles; they might, but they should not be expected to do so. Moreover, art is a space of freedom, and artistic expression has, above all, an aesthetic purpose. Artistic content does not have to adapt to ethical, moral, or scientific standards. Otherwise, why stop at psychiatry? Why not gynecology, pneumology, or otorhinolaryngology? Should Kafka[4] have explained exactly how Samsa turned into an insect? Should biologists be upset that he did not? Such specialistic concerns would render artistic expression impossible. Moreover, is it plausible that the author and screenwriters had the intention of promoting mental illness stigma?

Dr Mallet has every right to consider the plot predictable and tedious and is entitled to feel defrauded as a spectator. In this regard, I confess I share her frustrations. Nonetheless, I struggle to see how a psychiatrist, as such, could be defrauded by a work of art. Artistic expression could be of extreme value to psychiatry, as well as to any other area, as a discussion starting point. However, artists have no inherent duty to use art as a means to an end. Aesthetic appreciation stands outside the realm of psychiatry.

The stigma surrounding mental illness remains a critical problem within the general population.[5] To fight this stigma, psychiatrists should focus on promoting positive pedagogical actions to increase mental health literacy. I am not sure that denouncing fiction and attempting to shackle artistic expression is the most beneficial strategy.

REFERENCES

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