

Madness and Reason (En 109)
Winter quarter 2020 / T, Th 10:30 – 12:00
Professor: Jocelyn Holland (jholland@caltech.edu)
Office: Dabney 301a / office hours: by appointment¹



Course description and objectives:

Madness as a behavioral phenomenon threatens to dissolve boundaries that might otherwise seem fixed. Historically, these boundaries have been articulated in a variety of different ways, such as between the human- and animal-like behavior, between violence and stability, or between reality and fantasy. Literary texts that address the theme of madness face the challenge of “rationally” containing madness through the act of writing about it while still, at the same time, giving a sense of its dangerous and transgressive potential. Through a selection of texts from the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries, we will consider how different ways of representing madness have evolved over time and consider, among others, the following questions: How do literary texts describe the symptoms of madness? Why might certain techniques, like the use of irony and humor, be important? And how do we know whether claims to write from a reasonable point of view can be trusted?

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Explain a few ways in which the understanding and treatment of madness have changed over time
- Put forth your own point of view why madness is a topic of interest and a challenge for literary texts
- Through comparative analysis, demonstrate how the “transgressive” nature of madness is context-dependent and can be articulated in different ways
- Feel confident about your ability to write a successful college essay that is well-argued and reflective of your own unique perspective.

Course Readings

Most readings will be posted on the course website before the Winter break for anyone who wants to get a head start. The exception: *King Lear*. Students should purchase a used or new copy. Hard copies are preferred. Note that we will be working with this text already in the second week of the quarter! The other text for purchase is Voltaire’s *Candide*, which we will read toward the end of the quarter.

¹ I am on campus every day. The best times to reach me are M/W/F in the mornings, or pretty much any day between 1:30 and 4 in the afternoon. You are welcome to stop by my office or schedule an appointment.

Class schedule:

January 7	Historical introduction		
January 9	Cervantes, <i>Don Quixote</i> (excerpt); “The Lawyer of Glass” (c. 1613)		
January 14	Shakespeare, <i>King Lear</i> , Act 1 (1606)		
January 16	Shakespeare, <i>King Lear</i> , Acts 2 and 3 (1606)		
January 21	Shakespeare, <i>King Lear</i> , Acts 4 and 5 (1606)		
January 23	Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> (1641)		
January 28	Dürer, <i>Melancholia 1</i> ; Burton, <i>Anatomy of Melancholy</i> (excerpt)		
January 30	No class		
February 4	Foucault, <i>History of Madness</i> (day 1)	<table border="1"><tr><td>Midterm essay: Due on Friday, Feb 1. Prompts will be posted by Jan. 14. Please submit your paper through email.</td></tr></table>	Midterm essay: Due on Friday, Feb 1. Prompts will be posted by Jan. 14. Please submit your paper through email.
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February 6	Swift, <i>Gulliver’s Travels</i> , Book 4 (1726)		
February 11	<i>Gulliver’s Travels</i>		
February 13	No class		
February 18	Trip to Huntington Library		
February 20	Voltaire, <i>Candide</i> (1759)		
February 25	Voltaire, <i>Candide</i> (1759)		
February 27	The Foucault/Derrida debate		
March 3	Ludwig Tieck, “Blond Eckbert”; madness in the visual arts around 1800		
March 5	E. T. A. Hoffmann, “The Sandman”		
March 10	Review and final paper workshop		

Final essay: due (through email) on Tuesday, March 17th. Prompts will be posted by March 1st.

The fine print:

Attendance and Late Work: Attendance in this course is required. Your success in this course depends upon timely attendance and active participation. Multiple unexcused absences, late arrivals, and the late submission of homework and essays will result in a reduced grade.

Formatting: Your papers should adhere to MLA formatting guidelines. I will help you with this in class and refer you to online sources that give you an easy overview.

Plagiarism: this includes both direct quotation and paraphrasing (summarizing) from internet or print sources without giving them credit. Because this class is to help you develop your own analytical and writing skills, I do not expect you to consult secondary literature. All plagiarism cases will be reported immediately to the university administration.

Course site and email: I realize that email is rapidly becoming old-fashioned, but please do check both our course website and your university email account regularly for important announcements. Be sure to use your caltech.edu address for all course communication so that your email does not accidentally land in my spam folder.

Electronic devices: Laptops are permitted for note-taking purposes or course readings **only**. Please turn off all social media platforms during class time. Cellphones should be silenced and stored away during class.

Grade breakdown:

short homework assignments (full credit given for completed assignments): 20%

midterm paper (approximately 1500 words): 20%

final paper (approximately 2000-2500 words): 40%

participation: 20%

Regarding gender & names: If you feel comfortable doing so in person or through an email, please do let me know if your preferred name differs from what is printed on the roster, and which pronouns you would like for me to use in the classroom when referring to you.

A note on plagiarism: **all** cases will be referred to the Dean of Students. If you have any questions about what plagiarism is, visit: <http://www.hss.caltech.edu/academics/avoiding-plagiarism>