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ENG 4775-001: Literature And Madness

R Beebe
Eastern Illinois University

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In this course on Literary & Cultural Criticism, we will study the (healthy?) relationship between literature and madness—a topic fraught with complexity, uncertainty, and intrigue. Creative literature has long been the domain of the mad, tortured, eccentric writer. And as readers, we are well familiar with many of literature's disturbed, irrational, or anti-social characters that drive stories from *King Lear* and *Hamlet* to the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*.

But do texts written from the realm of madness—or containing irrational, disturbed characters—require special handling? Do they demand or beg that we read or interpret them differently? In other words, if madness, by definition, is irrational, then how can we use reason to structure our response?

Such questions and others will guide our discussion this semester as we confront the topic of madness as it has been both confined and exposed in its literary, medical, legal, and social categories.

We will proceed along two tracks of study. One track will be to sample literary expressions of madness, a sample ranging from the conventional to the extreme. The other track will be to look (as best we can) at the history of madness, reading medical, legal, and philosophical accounts.

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**Texts**
- Michel Foucault, *Madness & Civilization* (1964)
- Other selections (via handout and e-text)

**Requirements**
- 3 Presentations - 15% (@ 5%)
  - psychological term
  - biographical portrait
  - overview of final paper
- Interpretive Paper - 15%
  - to be arranged (4-6 pages)
- Final Paper - 30%
  - Topics to be arranged (12-15 pages)
- Final Exam - 15%
- Participation/Brief Writing - 25%

**Course Format**

English 4775 is a senior-level capstone course, which assumes that you're fairly skilled English majors and are ready to conduct more sophisticated, advanced research in literary studies.

To this end, the most important work you do this semester will be your final paper (details provided later). For some of you, this course may be your last opportunity to engage in serious academic research; for others, this paper may provide a first step toward a larger topic of study, such as an honors thesis or topic you'll pursue after graduation.

The other important work you do will be to contribute to class discussion actively. To the greatest extent possible, I'll be running this course as a true seminar, which means that all participants will be required to bring to class material to share and discuss. (More details in class.)
Conferences ~
With the importance of the final paper for this course, you should meet with me early and often to discuss your project as well as any other reading or writing concerns you have.

Attendance Policy ~
- I abide by the University’s definition of an excused absences, and I generally allow two unexcused absences—no questions asked. On the third absence—and for every absence thereafter—
  I will deduct 5% from your final grade.
- Five or more absences equate to an automatic “F” for the course.
- For any day that you are not in class, it is your responsibility to find out what was covered, new assignments given, changes in the syllabus, or any homework due for the next meeting. Unless the absence is excused, any homework due on a day you were absent may not be turned in late or made up.
- It is also your responsibility to provide the appropriate documentation to verify an excused absence, preferably within a week of the absence.
- Please do not email me to tell me you were not in class or why. This is best done in person either after the next class or during my office hours.

“As an experience, madness is terrific I can assure you, and not to be sniffed at; and in its lava I still find most of the things I write about.” — Virginia Woolf

Academic Honesty ~
Students are of course responsible for knowing Eastern Illinois University’s regulations and policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism, even if unknowing or accidental, can result in your failing the course and in further action by the university. Please note the English Department’s statement on plagiarism. Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—“The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s own original work” (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments, of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, feel free to ask me to clarify.

Computer & Classroom Etiquette~
You’re welcome to bring your notebook computer to class. However, I ask that you observe common rules of etiquette and decorum when you use it. In brief, you may use it to take notes or complete an in-class writing activity. You may not use it for anything not directly related to class work. Also, please turn off (or mute) cell phones. Out of respect for the class and the integrity of class activities, absolutely no text messaging during class is allowed.

Electronic Writing Portfolio ~
This course is a writing-intensive course and, as such, your papers satisfy the requirements for the Electronic Writing Portfolio. If you plan on using work from this course for your EWP, I ask that you complete this before the last two weeks of the semester.