

English 3250G: Madness and Literature

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Course Description

Madness is a subject of literary and cultural fascination from *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to *Fight Club*. But what do people with mental illness have to say about Madness? Literature and art allow Mad people to share their experiences of mental distress and to critique, support, and/or challenge psychiatry. This new course examines the relationship between mental health and storytelling from the perspective of those with lived experiences of mental illness, including Sylvia Plath, Ivan Coyote, Joshua Whitehead (Oji-Cree), and Esmé Weijun Wang. It will rely on insights from Mad Studies and the Mad Movement, which have championed the importance of including Mad voices within mental health care.

The course reading list will include one novel and the remainder will be shorter texts, including poetry, short stories, personal essays, film, graphic novels, spoken word, zines, and excerpts from memoirs. Students will get the choice between a traditional research essay and a creative assignment. Content warnings will be included for sensitive topics including violence, oppression, and trauma. This course is designed to be accessible for both English and non-English majors with an interest in reading Mad literature by Mad authors!

Some of the guiding questions of this course are:

1. What narratives exist about mental health/illness? (ex. biological, religious, cultural)
2. How has Madness become a reclaimed identity through the Mad Movement?
3. How can storytelling/art be a mode of narrative therapy for mental distress/trauma?
4. Why do Mad people share their stories with others?
5. What can we gain from reading these stories? What can we learn about ourselves?

Please reach out to the course instructor if you have any questions!

