"But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.
"Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."
"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.
"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

“Much madness is divinest sense,” Emily Dickinson wrote, further observing that “much sense [is] starkest madness.” The poet insisted that the majority sets and enforces the standard by which sanity is evaluated, and we will take this notion as our starting premise. How are social standards for what is and is not normal set? How are they enforced? What is at stake in maintaining definitions of mental health? How have these definitions changed over time? What is the price of transgressing the boundaries of sanity? What might be the privileges conferred by madness? And, perhaps most crucially, how does art interact with these concerns? How do works of literature and theatre and poetry, of film, of visual art, both in high and popular culture, engage with, (re)enforce, challenge, and transcend definitions and demarcations of madness?

As we trace the development of constructions of madness, we will consider the various meanings and valences of reason and disorder in Western culture and explore the ways in which (in)sanity and (non)sense shape and structure civilization and its expressions of itself.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Our goal this semester is to consider how “madness” is defined, understood, approached, and treated, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which the concept informs literature and art. We will consider various artworks connected to mental and emotional distress and disorder, alongside critical studies that seek to contextualize the phenomenon of madness, in order to arrive at a deeper appreciation of what madness contributes to and takes away from civilization.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

The following texts have been ordered at the NYU Bookstore (726 Broadway).

Andre Breton, *Nadja*, Grove, 1994
Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Signet, 1963
Julia Kristeva, The Black Sun, Columbia UP, 1992
Olivier Martine and Clem Martini, Bitter Medicine, Freehand Books, 2010
Sylvia Plath, The Bell Jar, Harper Perennial, 2005
Jean Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea, W.W. Norton, 1992
Kurt Vonnegut, Breakfast of Champions, Dial Press, 1999
---. Slaughterhouse-Five, Dell, 1991

The following works have been posted on NYU Classes, either as PDFs or links. Please be advised that you are expected to have (the relevant excerpts of) these materials with you on days assigned.

John Berryman, selected poems
Andre Breton, The Surrealist Manifesto
Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre
Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, Un Chien Andalou
Salvador Dalí, selected works
Henry Darger, selected works
Max Ernst, selected works
Euripides, Bacchae
Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Don Quixote
Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents
---, “Mourning and Melancholy”
Allen Ginsberg, “America”
---, Howl
---, Kaddish
Vladimir Khlebnikov, selected poems
Yayoi Kusama, selected works
Andrew Marantz, “Unreality Star”
Sylvia Plath, selected poems
Anne Sexton, selected poems
David Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon”

Any additional required readings will be made available as handouts or emailed, in advance of a class meeting, as a PDF.

OPTIONAL TEXTS
We will be working with excerpts of some of these texts, and you may find that you wish to consult the whole of the work. Other texts might simply prove illuminating of some of the issues we will touch on. Should you wish to purchase these works, copies have been ordered at the NYU Bookstore.

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Don Quixote, Harper Perennial, 2005
Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, W.W. Norton & Co., 2010
Darian Leader, The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia, and Depression, Graywoolf Press, 2009
Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, Basic Books, 2000
Adam Phillips, Going Sane, Harper Perennial, 2007

COURSE POLICIES
It is essential that you attend class regularly, arrive promptly and prepared, and submit all work on time. If you suspect you might need an extension, please let me know well ahead of time so that we can
make arrangements. If you need to miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out about any work you may have missed; exchanging contact information with a classmate is advised and advisable. Please keep in mind that more than two unexcused absences will have an adverse effect on your grade; so will persistent lateness. This course is a seminar, and it will work best if all of us are here and ready to engage with each other's thinking and the material.

Keep in mind that some of that material involves sensitive topics: please be a mature, respectful, and nonjudgmental contributor to all of our conversations, in class and otherwise.

Please make sure to turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices before class begins. (Seriously.) And, for the sake of furthering a collegial atmosphere in this class, which is, after all, a seminar grounded in discussion, please limit laptop and tablet use in the classroom to referencing assigned texts.

REMEMBER: Any and all work you hand in this semester must be your own. Whenever you use someone else’s words or ideas, you must cite them properly. Per official school policy: “As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website for a full description of the academic integrity policy: www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html.”

Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or concerns. I am glad to meet with you to discuss any and all aspects of the course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation is an important part of your course grade. Please come to class prepared to ask questions, to comment, to fully engage. You must bring the assigned readings to each class meeting.

In preparation for our class meetings, you will need to post a one-page response (that’s about 250 words) to the assigned materials. The response ought to address itself to a specific textual detail, to closely read a particular image or moment in the context of the reading as a whole and, ideally, in terms of the theoretical and historical possibilities we discuss. The response may also take the format of a question or a series of questions inspired by the assigned materials. You must post your response to the relevant forum on NYU Classes by 11:59am on the Thursday before class. [No responses need to be posted on days when an essay is due; you may also forego posting the week of your presentation.] It is your responsibility to become familiar with all submitted reflections as part of preparations for class: we will use the responses as a major component of the day’s discussion.

As an ongoing, semester-long project, you will be keeping a “madness journal,” a record of and a commentary on instances of “madness” you encounter in the media and culture, broadly defined. On occasion, we will begin our meetings with a review of the journals. I am in addition asking you, as part of the “madness journal,” to keep a running definition of madness: this may include explicit explanations and classifications you encounter, implicit demarcations, and, most importantly, your own evolving definition. The goal is, in part, to trace whether and how your own preconceptions change, as well as to see if we might not, in the course of the semester, produce something more complicated and dynamic and involved than standard dictionary definitions. Finally, you are encouraged to post references and/or links to any relevant materials you come across in the course of the semester in the General Discussion section of Forums on our course’s NYU Classes site.
Each of you will be presenting on a topic related to our course’s theme in the course of the semester. In conjunction with your presentations, you will turn in an annotated bibliography and a five-page exploration of the key issues pertinent to your presentation. The bibliography and discussion must be submitted, by email as a PDF attachment, no later than 11am on the day you will be presenting; the file name must be “LastName FirstName PresentationTitle.” A hard copy should be turned in as well at the start of class. You will shortly have a chance to sign up for a presentation date; a list of potential topics will be available, though you are by no means restricted to these.

You will also be responsible for an essay engaging with and responding to an issue you encounter in one of the course texts, as well as a final project, which can take the form of a research essay and/or a creative project. All papers must be submitted, by email as PDF attachments, no later than 11am on the date due; the file name must be “LastName FirstName EssayTitle.” A hard copy should be turned in as well at the start of class. Please be advised that late papers will be marked down half a grade for each day after the due date. A list of potential topics will be available, though you are by no means restricted to these.

Your final course grade will be based on:

- Participation (including "madness journal"): 15%
- Responses: 10%
- Presentation: 20%
- Essay: 25%
- Final Project: 30%
COURSE SCHEDULE
Depending on the pace we establish, this schedule is subject to change with notice.

September 4
Introduction

September 11
Madness and Civilization: Preface
Civilization and Its Discontents
The Bacchae

September 18
Madness and Civilization: Ch. I-IV
Don Quixote, Part I

September 25
Madness and Civilization: Ch. V-VIII
Seeing the Insane

October 2
Madness and Civilization: Ch. IX
Asylums
One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest
Howl
“America”

October 9
Madness and Civilization: Conclusion
Nadja
The Surrealist Manifesto
Un Chien Andalou
Selections from Berryman; Khlebnikov; Dali; Ernst

October 16
Mrs. Dalloway
Selections from Kusama
PAPER DUE

October 23
Breakfast of Champions
Slaughterhouse-Five

October 30
The Bell Jar
Selections from Plath and Sexton

November 6
Wide Sargasso Sea
Selections from Jane Eyre
November 13
Depression  
Black Sun  
"Mourning and Melancholia"  
Kaddish

November 20
In-Class Film Screening

November 27
Thanksgiving

December 4
“Good Old Neon”  
“Unreality Star”  
Bitter Medicine

December 11
Conclusions  
FINAL PROJECT DUE