

COLI 380I: Genius and Madness

(C' and 'H' gen. ed. credit)

4 credits (meets with COLI 380O, GERM 380O and ENG 380F for 'H' credit only)

Professor Neil Christian Pages

Comparative Literature/German and Russian Studies

Binghamton University SUNY

Spring 2009

Course meeting times: MW 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

LN 1120

Office Hours: TU 2:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. (LT 1408) and by appointment

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Teaching Assistant: Mr. Matthew Applegate

Office Hours: W 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. and TH 12 noon – 2:00 p.m. and by appointment (LT 1408)

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Course Description

Long before physicians and psychologists began to describe extraordinary human beings in the pathographic writing of the scientific case study, writers, thinkers and visual artists were depicting the extremes of the mind in the representations of art. Viewers and readers, it was supposed, could experience in the work of art the spirit of the great man (and, yes, it usually was a man) whose genius had allowed for its creation. Telling stories and otherwise representing “madness and genius” would simultaneously reveal the inner workings of the artistic intellect while allowing for his/her consumption by the less-talented (but “saner”) reader. Literature thus provided sites for both a demonstration of and an experimentation with that which went beyond the “normal,” offering an opportunity for the confinement and regulation of aberration and excess and for the “enjoyment” of the madness of others.

This course explores the stubborn linkage in Western cultures between intellectual and artistic works and the imagined incapacities, altered states and excesses of their creators. Through readings of European literary and theoretical texts from the Enlightenment to (post)Modernism (primarily from the German tradition, where the theme is particularly pronounced) we will interrogate the relationship between creativity and the slippery term “madness” and consider the regimes of control mobilized by societies in order to confine madness and manage genius. In these cultural productions we will discover the origins of discourses that inform fields like criminal anthropology (Cesare Lambroso) and psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud), produce types like the evil genius in the cinema (Fritz Lang) and the suffering artist in the popular imagination (van Gogh, Jean-Michel Basquiat as objects), suggest the aesthetic strategies of Modernism in the visual and performing arts (Edvard Munch, Jackson Pollock, performance art like that of the Viennese *Aktionisten*), and call to mind contemporary phenomena like the confessional-psycho-pharmaceutical bestseller (*Prozac Nation*).

The course format includes short lectures and discussion, but with a strong emphasis on the latter. Committed interest, scrupulous preparation and active participation are required. During the semester students will work toward becoming better critical readers who are able to discuss and debate issues raised by texts and discourses in an informed and nuanced manner. Students will work

toward improving writing skills – presenting a case concisely, arguing through it logically, and concluding elegantly. Students will research topics in-depth and with attention to the critical literature that informs those topics. Good writing emerges from thoughtful conversation, and thus your engaged participation in class discussions is vital to your success in the course.

Readings

The primary texts are available at the university bookstore or through ereserve (accessed via Blackboard). Students must pursue background readings and conduct in-depth research during the semester. Students are encouraged to read the texts in the original languages. All translations are not equal, so please purchase the titles as listed below (year of publication or edition is usually not important as long as the pagination remains the same):

- Bachmann, Ingeborg. *The Book of Franza and Requiem for Fanny Goldmann*. Trans. Peter Filkins. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1999.
- Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage, 1988 (We will work with this abridged version of Foucault's famous work, but the complete edition has recently been published for the first time in English translation).
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Trans. Burton Pike. New York: Modern Library, 2005.
- Hamsun, Knut. *Hunger*. Trans. Robert Bly. New York: FS&G, 1967.
- Jelinek, Elfriede. *The Piano Teacher*. Trans. Joachim Neugroschel. London: Serpent's Tail, 2002.
- Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis*. Trans. Stanley Corngold. New York: Norton, 1996.
- Kleist, Heinrich von. *Michael Kohlhaas*. Trans. Martin Greenberg. Hoboken, NJ: Melville House, 2008.
- Weiss, Peter. *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*. Trans. Geoffrey Skelton. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1981.

Course Goals

On completion of the course, you should have knowledge of the following:

- the primary texts;
- key aspects of relevant social and cultural history related to the primary texts;
- a selection of theoretically informed approaches to texts and discourses.

On completion of the course, you should have **developed** the following skill areas:

- skills in critical reading and analysis of texts as representations;
- the ability to distinguish between description and analysis;
- the ability to make valid comparisons between texts;
- the ability to locate and explain themes in literary works in a broader socio-historical context; and to describe the formal characteristics of a text;
- the ability to construct an argument and to defend it;
- the ability to write clear and accurate English;
- research skills, bibliographic skills, time management.

In order to achieve these goals you are expected to:

- find, evaluate, analyze and synthesize source materials (primary and secondary) in an analytical and critical manner that goes beyond simply locating information;
- communicate in class discussions and write at an appropriate level for assignments;
- work independently to acquire the knowledge necessary to achieve the course goals by reading, researching and writing analytically and critically about the course themes;
- work collaboratively in groups and develop team and organizational skills while exchanging ideas with others.

Grading and Course Policies

COLI 380I (C- and H-credit):

Attendance, scrupulous preparation and active participation	15%
Homework (responses to reading questions; short response statements)	10%
Research paper 1: 5-7 pages due 10/14 (with revision)	20%
Research paper 2: 8-10 pages due 12/2 (no revision)	30%
Midterm examination (in class)	25%

COLI 380O, GERM 380O, ENG 380F (H-credit only):

Attendance, scrupulous preparation and active participation	15%
Homework (responses to reading questions; short response statements)	10%
Research paper: 10-12 pages due 12/9	50%
Midterm examination (in class)	25%

Attendance, Preparation and Participation: Your final grade is based on written assignments and in-class participation. Attendance and active participation are mandatory. Read carefully, take notes while reading and come to class prepared with questions and points for discussion. You cannot earn participation credit if you are not present in class. I will not take attendance during the first week of classes. Thereafter each absence **above two** will result in a deduction of fifteen (15) points from your attendance/participation grade (up to a total of 150 points; 15% of your grade). Plan ahead and use your two absences wisely: celebrate a religious holiday, stay home sick, visit an ailing relative, recover from a particularly festive evening, but do not contact me with explanations for absences unless you will miss a week or more of class due to illness or a legitimate emergency (in which case, contact me **in advance**). You are responsible for all material missed due to absences. Establish a contact in class from whom you can access notes and information from missed classes. **If you normally skip a lot of classes, you will not do well in this course.**

Homework: Weekly written homework assignments prepare you for in-class discussions and must be handed in on-time. No late homework or homework submitted via email will be accepted. If you are absent from the course on the day a homework assignment is due, bring the assignment to the next session. Homework will include short response papers (1-2 pages), analyses of specific passages from the texts and responses to reading questions. These assignments are crucial to improving your writing and thinking skills and also serve as preparation for essays and exams. Take them seriously.

Research papers and other written assignments: Students are expected to write scholarly essays based on in-depth research on a topic the writer has developed with care. Papers must present a thesis

statement that includes an argument informed by research and supported by evidence. If this kind of writing is new to you, I invite you to discuss it with me or with Mr. Applegate as often as needed in office hours or by appointment at a mutually convenient time.

380I (C-credit): Two (2) papers are required. The first will involve a revision process. Your grade is the average of the first submission and the revision. A revision demands substantive rewriting and rethinking, and is not simply the correction of spelling and grammar errors. Should your second draft show no evidence of careful revision, then the final grade will be reduced. Submit both versions of the paper when submitting the revision. **Due dates are listed in the syllabus. There is no revision for the second essay.**

380O/380F: One (1) formal research paper of ten to twelve (10-12) pages is due on or before Wednesday, December 9, 2009 at the beginning of class. There is no revision for this final research paper.

Writing requirements for all course participants: It is your task to develop a cogent topic for your research papers, since developing a theme is a large part of the thinking process. Your papers must demonstrate familiarity with the text(s) and your ability to analyze form, style and content. You must present a thesis statement and defend it through analysis and by mobilizing scholarly sources. Note that you may not use electronic sources that are not accessed through the Binghamton University Library website (see, for example, the electronic journals section there). **I will not accept papers with other electronic sources. Do not submit work with such references, as it will receive no credit.** Research papers will be graded for the complexity and cogency of the argument as well as for usage, punctuation and spelling. **Grades for late papers will be reduced by one letter grade per day late. I will under no circumstances read a paper submitted more than three days late. You will receive a ZERO (not an 'F') for the assignment.** All written assignments must be typed with numbered pages and reasonable font and margins. Staple the pages together: **I will not accept papers that are not stapled. No paper submitted via email will be accepted.** All research papers are due **at the beginning of class** on the assigned due dates.

Students are expected to be familiar with the rules and conventions of college writing and English grammar and to avail themselves of both the resources of the BU Writing Center and reference works on writing and composition. An excellent selection of handouts on writing about literature is available through the University of North Carolina writing center website (<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/>). Knowledge of the basic rules for the citation of sources is expected. The UNC Writing Center website offers a helpful handout, "Citation and Documentation in the Humanities: MLA Format." Please adhere to the citation rules given there. The MLA (Modern Language Association) format is preferred (*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition, is the standard format for the humanities), but the Chicago citation style is fine as well (just be consistent). **I will not accept essays that do not cite sources properly and that do not include a list of works cited. Do not submit such work as it will be returned to you unread and you will receive no credit for your work. Proofread your work with these requirements in mind.**

Midterm Examination: The midterm (in class) will cover all material presented in class and will include short answers, identifications and an essay. Take careful and copious notes in class, as these will prove important as you prepare for the midterm examination and write your essays. **Note: There is no make-up midterm examination. You must take the exam on the scheduled date.**

Plagiarism: Of utmost importance in this course is your intellectual honesty. Any writing that you submit should be yours; it is your responsibility to ensure that all citations (quotations, indirect references, paraphrasing, etc.) are properly credited. Adhere to the University's Academic Honesty Policy (see <http://studenthandbook.binghamton.edu/>). An explanation and examples of what constitutes plagiarism can be found at <http://writingcenter.binghamton.edu/handout.htm>. **Plagiarism will result in a grade of 'F' for the course and will be reported to the appropriate university offices.** The instructor reserves the right to submit any written work to plagiarism detection services, and may request that students submit their work in electronic form. When in doubt, ask me.

Classroom Etiquette: Turn off all cell phones; absolutely no eating during class; leave the classroom only in emergencies in order to avoid unnecessary disruptions. If you bring a beverage to class, dispose of your trash.

Note: The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus at any time during the semester. No incompletes will be granted for this course. A grade will be submitted at the end of the term based on the work you have submitted.

Tentative Course Schedule

M 8/31 Introduction

Part I: 'Sturm & Drang': Writing and Madness from the Enlightenment to Romanticism

The "Genius Period"

W 9/2 Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774)

M 9/7 NO CLASSES LABOR DAY

W 9/9 *The Sorrows of Young Werther*

Of interest: Ulrich Plenzdorf's *The New Sorrows of Young Werther* (1973)

Madness in the Mountains

M 9/14 Büchner, *Lenz* (1835)

W 9/16 *Lenz*

Of interest: Werner Herzog's film adaptation of Büchner's *Woyzeck* (1979); Paul Celan's *Conversation in the Mountains* (1959)

Madness and Justice

M 9/21 Kleist, *Michael Kohlhaas* (1810)

W 9/23 *Michael Kohlhaas*

M 9/28 NO CLASSES YOM KIPPUR

W 9/30 *Michael Kohlhaas*

Of interest: Any number of Kohlhaas-inspired adaptations: J.M Coetzee, *Michael K.* (1983), but also E.L Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975) and a wacky film with John Cusack whose title I cannot recall

Madness/Genius/Perception

M 10/5 ETA Hoffmann, *The Sandman* (1817) (ereserve)

W 10/7 Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" (1919) (ereserve)

Foucault's Discourses of Madness

M 10/12 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (1961)

W 10/14 *Madness and Civilization*; **380I (C-credit): Paper #1 is due**

M 10/19 *Madness and Civilization*

W 10/21 Catch-up day and review

M 10/26 MIDTERM (in class)

Part II: Madness and (post)Modernism

Madness and the Modern Artist

W 10/28 Knut Hamsun, *Hunger* (1890)

M 11/2 *Hunger*

Of interest: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense"

Kafka's Transformations

W 11/4 Kafka *The Metamorphosis* (1915)

M 11/9 *The Metamorphosis*

Madness and Memory

W 11/11 Ingeborg Bachmann, *The Book of Franzä* (unfinished, published posthumously 1978)

M 11/6 *The Book of Franzä*

Madness/Genius/Revolution

M 11/16 Peter Weiss, *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* (1964)

W 11/18 *Marat/Sade*

M 11/23: **Screening:** Peter Brook, Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Marat/Sade* (1966)

W 11/25 NO CLASS THANKSGIVING

Madness/Genius/Gender

M 11/30 Elfriede Jelinek, *The Piano Teacher* (1983)

W 12/2 *The Piano Teacher*; **380I (C-credit): Paper #2 is due**

M 12/7 *The Piano Teacher*

Of interest: Michael Haneke's film adaptation of *The Piano Teacher*

W 12/9 **Final discussion and course evaluation; 380O and 380F: Final Papers are due**

(August 2009)