

# Madman Angels and Beautiful Minds

## Fictions of Insanity

### from Edgar Allan Poe to Lady Gaga

**Lecturer:** Priv.-Doz. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, Gastprofessor

**Room and time:** AR-K 122/23, Thursday, 16-18

**Course type and number:** Hauptseminar (1032300032)

**First session:** October 14, 2010

**Modules:** Master LCM/LKM M 4.3: Kulturelle Identität und Alterität; LA GYM M 7.2: Texte und Medien; LA BK 6. Master Internationale Kulturhistorische Studien EM 5, 6 & 7.

**Course description:** “The only people for me are the mad ones,” Jack Kerouac writes in *On the Road* (1957), “the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time.” The celebration of the madman in Beat literature (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Kesey) signals a paradigm shift in the portrayal of ‘insane’ behavior in American culture and literature. Whereas in 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic literature, madness was often seen as a dangerous, yet fascinating deviation from normality, postmodernity has become literally obsessed with the ‘mad Other,’ valorizing its emancipatory and empowering qualities. The course will begin with descriptions of mad, or insane, behavior in Gothic writing (especially Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” from 1843), then move on to stories such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892). What function does madness have in these texts? What does it signify and what relationship between the reader and the ‘mad’ protagonist is established in them? 20<sup>th</sup> century literary texts on madness to be discussed in class will include writings by the Beats (*On the Road* from 1957) and Margaret Atwood (“Polarities” from 1977), just to name a few. As to visual negotiations of the theme, we will discuss important films such as *Now, Voyager* (1942, dir. Irving Rapper), *The Dark Mirror* (1946, dir. Robert Siodmak), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975, dir. Miloš Forman), and *Pi* (1998, dir. Darren Aronofsky). How can the fascination of mainstream Hollywood fiction with issues of deviation be explained? What function does the ‘mad Other’ have for a culture that accentuates individuality and rejects any form of conformism? In addition to these texts, we will take a brief glimpse at the negotiation of *eccentricity* as a liberating personal trait in American television series (*Monk*, *Ally McBeal*) and in music (Lady Gaga). Our observations will be backed by theoretical approaches by Michel Foucault (*Madness and Civilization*), Shoshana Felman (*Writing and Madness*), and Jürgen Link (*Versuch über den Normalismus*).

#### Grading:

2 CP: active participation in class discussions, expert session plus handout & at least nine entries in the discussion forum *before the session*;

5 CP: competent & lively participation in class discussions, expert session plus handout & at least ten entries in the discussion forum *before the session* & a 5-page summary of one important primary or secondary text (to be made accessible to the class);

7 CP: competent & lively participation in class discussions, expert session plus handout & at least ten entries in the discussion forum *before the session* & final paper of ca. 15 pages on a seminar-related topic with a close reading.

Note: Poor attendance or class participation will negatively affect your final grade!

**Deadline for Final Papers:** Friday, March 31 (Thursday), 2011. Note: There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

#### Syllabus

##### **14 October Introduction: “Are you mad? Or what are you?” Fictions of Insanity Then and Now**

Basic texts (recommended):

Michel Foucault, preface from *Madness and Civilization* (1965).<sup>1</sup>

Jürgen Link, from *Versuch über den Normalismus: Wie Normalität produziert wird* (1999).

Shoshana Felman, “Madness and the Literary” (from *Writing and Madness*, 2003).

##### **21 October Rationality vs. Irrationality – Madness in the Age of Reason**

Main text (required):

Washington Irving, “The Adventure of the German Student” (1824).

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<sup>1</sup> All main texts for this course are available at Moodle: <https://moodle.uni-siegen.de>. All these texts are also available in the form of a course reader (for those who like to have everything printed out already). Copy write, Weidenauer Str. 248 (behind the police station), phone: 0271-45416.

- 28 October Gothic Madness – Abysses of the Human Mind**  
 Main text (required):  
 Edgar Allan Poe, “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843).  
 Background text (optional):  
 E. Arthur Robinson, “Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’” (1965).
- 04 November Going Mad – The Insanity of ‘Separate Spheres’**  
 Main text (required):  
 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wall Paper” (1892).  
 Background texts (optional):  
 Paula A. Treichler, “Escaping the Sentence: Diagnosis and Discourse in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” (1984).  
 Jane F. Thraillkill, “Doctoring ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” (2002).
- 11 November ‘Building’ the Neurotic – Normativity, Social Control, and Psychoanalytic Therapy**  
 Main example (required):  
*Now, Voyager* (dir. Irving Rapper, 1942)  
 Background text (optional):  
 Mary Ann Doane, “The Clinical Eye: Medical Discourses in the ‘Woman’s Film’ of the 1940s” (1985).
- 18 November Noir Madness – Psychosis as Cinematic Construction**  
 Main example (required):  
*The Dark Mirror* (dir. Robert Siodmak, 1946).  
 Background text (optional):  
 Lutz Koepnick, “Doubling the Double” (2003).
- 25 November “The only people for me are the mad ones”: Madness as Spiritual Awakening**  
 Main text (required):  
 Jack Kerouac, from *On the Road* (1957).  
 Background text (optional):  
 Benedict Giomo, “Enlightened Attachment: Kerouac’s Impermanent Buddhist Trek” (2003).
- 02 December The Mental Institution and the Making of Lunatics**  
 Main example (required):  
*One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (dir. Miloš Forman, 1975).  
 Background text (optional):  
 Thomas H. Fick, “The Hipster, the Hero, and the Psychic Frontier in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*” (1989).
- 09 December Autobiography and Mental Disorder**  
 Main text (required):  
 Sylvia Plath, excerpts from *The Bell Jar* (1963).  
 Background text (optional):  
 Marjorie G. Perloff, “‘A Ritual of Being Born Twice’: Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*” (1972).
- 16 December The ‘Complexities of Ordinary Life’ and the Logic of Insanity**  
 Main example (required):  
 “Polarities” (from *The Atwood Stories*, Canadian Television, 2003).  
 Background text (optional):  
 Margaret Atwood, “Polarities” (from *Dancing Girls*, 1977).
- 13 January The Mad Genius – Intellectuality and Suffering**  
 Main example (required):  
*Pi* (dir. Darren Aronofsky, 1998).  
 Background text (optional):  
 Elizabeth Klaver, “*Proof*,  $\pi$ , and *Happy Days*: The Performance of Mathematics” (2005).
- 20 January Schizophrenia as Narrative**  
 Main film (required):  
*Secret Window* (dir. David Koepp, 2004).  
 Background texts (optional):  
 Stephen King, “A Note on Secret Window, Secret Garden” & excerpts (1990).  
 Lee R. Edwards, “Schizophrenic Narrative” (1989).
- 27 January ‘Slightly Mad’ – Amiable Eccentricity and Popular Television**  
 Main examples (required):  
 Episode from *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) and/or *Monk* (2002-2009) (to be announced).  
 Background text (optional):  
 Julie Brown, “*Ally McBeal*’s Postmodern Soundtrack” (2001).
- 03 February Madness as Pop Culture – The ‘Lady Gaga’ Hype**  
 Main examples (required):  
 Lady Gaga, “Bad Romance” & “Alejandro” (2009 & 2010).  
 Additional text (optional):  
 Derritt Mason, “Rah, Rah, Ah-Ah-Ah (Ro-Ma, Ro-Ma-Ma): Lady Gaga, Hysteria, Commodity Fetishism” (2010).

