

**Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures
GER 327S: Madness in Literature**

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Description

What does it mean to be sane? To be normal? To be human? Throughout modern history, writers have tested the limits of normal human experience by casting their protagonists into the depths of madness and following them through their trials, their elation, their despair. In a speech in 1970 Michel Foucault pointed out what he called "a curious affinity between literature and madness. Literary language is not constrained by the rules of everyday language. For example, it is not subject to the severe rule of constant truth-telling, any more than the teller is under the obligation to always remain sincere in what he thinks and feels. In short, unlike the words of politics or the sciences, those of literature occupy a marginal position with respect to everyday language." Taking these ideas as our starting point, we will examine a number of texts written between 1800 and 1970. Our aim will be to analyze the literary descriptions of the limit experiences that separate sanity from madness. In the process, we will discuss topics such as truth and truth telling, exclusionary and assimilating practices for dealing with madness, discourses of containment, and how the outsider perspective of madness unsettles truth in literature.

Texts:

Most texts will be available on the course website. Students are required to purchase the following books, available at Victoria College Bookstore:

- Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Die Physiker*.
- Peter Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*
- Peter Weiss, *Hölderlin*