

This syllabus is subject to change due to available of required materials

The Culture of Mad Women

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This course will investigate whether gender and race influence the way US popular culture portrays madness, particularly in women. Is there a set of behaviors and ideations that are labeled as madness across culture, race, and gender or is madness gender-specific and culturally relative? Does popular culture portray madness in the same way across race, gender and sexuality or are there some differences? If there are differences what do we make of them? These are some of the questions we will be grappling with. This course will examine cultural representations of madness with a dominant focus on US popular culture. The syllabus uses bestseller novels and popular films to critically examine the influence of gender and race on portrayals of madness in popular culture. We will compare women's explorations of the topic of madness in fiction against cinematic adaptations of these novels (usually by men) and ask what (if anything) gets lost in translation/adaptation? What are the differences between black and white women's presentations of madness in fiction?

Course Objectives

Ideally by the end of this course you will be able to read and critically analyze films, and you will be well versed in critically studying literature. This course will also familiarize students with some of the concepts of feminism, and will most importantly equip students with the skills to get beyond the comic i.e. to read the ideology behind some creative work like films and best-seller novels.

Required Course Texts:

Sue Kaufman, *The Diary of a Mad Housewife*
Susanna Kaysen, *Girl Interrupted*
Joyce Bereta Burditt, *The Cracker Factory*
Nettie Jones, *Fish Tales*
Gayl Jones, *The Healing*
Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*

Films

Ghost
Diary of a Mad Black Woman
Why Do Fools Fall in love
The Cracker Factory
Girl Interrupted
Diary of a Mad Housewife

There will also be a list of readings that will be made available on e-reserve

Recommended Texts & Films

Books

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gurbar, *The Madwoman In The Attic: The Woman Writer And The Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*
Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*

Films

Burglar
Sister Act 1 & 2

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The Associate
Jumping Jack Flash
Crash
Nutty Professor

Course Grading

Mid Term paper 30%
Final Paper 30%
Group Presentation 20%
Participation 20%

Class Participation

This entails participation in class discussion, reading class materials and getting involved in the discussions of the required materials and shedding insights on your classmates' comments etc. The participation grade will also include attendance, class quizzes, as well as 4-minute spontaneous papers in class.

Group Presentations

You will be divided into groups and required to select a text from the recommended list or one that you think reflects the themes of the class (however you will have to notify me beforehand if you take the latter option) and present to the class how you think the text/s you have chosen depict madness, race and gender. Group presentations are graded on the strength of group collaboration and cohesiveness as well as the clarity of the presentation.

Mid-Term Paper

This is a short essay, between 5 – 7 pages that has to be handed in towards the of the term

Final Paper

This is an essay that is the same length as the term paper and has to be handed at the end of the semester in lieu of an exam.

Course Calendar

- Jan 23, Week 1 – Introduction “Meet the Mad Woman”
Susan Gurbar & Sandra Gilbert introduction to the second edition
- Jan 30, Week 2 – The Cult of True Womanhood
Sue Kaufman *Diary of a Mad Housewife*
- Feb 8, Week 3 – The Cult ... cont
Sue Kaufman cont.
- Feb 13, Week 4 – The Cult of True Womanhood
Joyce Bereta-Burditt *The Cracker Factory*
- Feb 20, Week 5 – The Cult... cont
Susanna Kaysen, *Girl Interrupted*
- Feb 27, Week 6 – And They Put a Man on the Moon – cinematic adaptations of women's novels
James Mangold's *Girl Interrupted*
- Mar 7, Week 7 – And they put a man...cont
Diary of a Mad Housewife & Cracker Factory
- First Paper Due**
- Mar 20, Week 8 – “Other Madness” Black Culture & Madness
Gayl Jones *The Healing*

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Mar 27, Week 9 – “Other Madness” ... cont.
Gayl Jones cont.

April 3, Week 10 – “Other Madness” ... cont.
Nettie Jones *Fish Tales*

April 17, Week 11 – “Super Strong – Super Crazy” Black women & Black Popular Culture
Diary of a Mad Black Woman, Nutty Professor, Only Fools Fall in love etc.

April 10, Week 12 – “Super Strong... cont.”
Whoopi Goldberg and Black Popular Culture

April 24, Week 13 – The Future is Here
Marge Piercy *Woman on the Edge of Time*

May 1, Week 14 – Round up – **final paper due**