

Carleton University
Summer 2026 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

ENGL 4607A/5900T – Studies in 20th and 21st-Century Literature/
Selected Topic in English Studies I
Topic: Madness and Time in Fiction of the 1960s

Prerequisites: fourth-year standing or permission of the department
Preclusions: none

Instructor: Adam Barrows
Email: adambarrows@cunet.carleton.ca

***** This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change.
A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****

Course description

This course explores the temporal experiences of madness. Focusing on fiction of the 1960s, an era when “anti-psychiatry” movements gained traction within both institutional and mainstream cultures, we examine characters whose deviation from accepted norms of behaviour, speech, and thought places them in a unique and radical relationship with time. Literary works depicting “descents into madness” have long had pride of place in most literary canons, inspiring a great deal of literary commentary and theoretical formulation. The madness of these texts, however, has often either been poeticized in terms of quasi-mythical radicalism (à la Deleuze and Guattari), or else medicalized and rationalized by psychiatric models of “mental health.” Disability Studies, and Mad Studies in particular, have more recently offered new ways of approaching this body of material, refusing both the diagnostic immiseration of the medical model as well as the romantic mystification of all-too-ableist cultural theories. Prioritizing survivor narratives, experiential auto-ethnographies, and the lived experiences of the mad, we will attempt to find new ways of understanding and speaking about the times and temporalities of the experience of being or going mad.

Learning Outcomes

Students will learn to: identify and discuss key themes and formal features of representative works of fiction by a range of English-language writers; independently research the work of one English-language writer of their choice; place works by English-language writers within their national, cultural, political, and historical contexts; conduct secondary research in the service of original literary analysis and argumentation.

Texts (available through the Carleton University Bookstore):

Dick, Philip K. *Martian Time-Slip*.

Findley, Timothy. *The Last of the Crazy People*.

Kesey, Ken. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Plath, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*.

Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse-five*.

Evaluation for 4607A:

Attendance: 15%

Response Papers: 40%

Formal Examination: 45%

Evaluation for 5900T:

Attendance: 10%

Presentation: 20%

Annotated Bibliography: 30%

Formal Essay: 40%