

Disability and Tragedy: Then and Now

Instructor: Sam Bozoukov

sbozoukov@fas.harvard.edu

Office Hours: TBA

I would argue that disability is perhaps the essential characteristic of being human.

The body is dynamic, constantly interactive with history and environment.

We evolve into disability. Our bodies need care; we all need assistance to live.

—Rosemarie Garland-Thomson

Tutorial Description:

From disabled characters and disabling punishments, the dramatic form of tragedy abounds with disability. What is disability's role in tragedy if disability studies has dispelled the tragic model of disability, of disability *as* tragedy? In other words, what exactly is disability *doing* in tragedy if it's not tragic?

To study the tragic form through disability studies, this tutorial will range through the history of tragedy, reading translated classical works, such as Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannos* and Euripides's *Medea*, early modern dramas by William Shakespeare and John Milton, modernist tragedies by Tennessee Williams and Samuel Beckett, and even contemporary plays like Martyna Majok's *Cost of Living* (2016). We will also engage with several other methodological lenses: from performance and gender studies to queer theory. By the end of this tutorial, students will be equipped with the skills to make interdisciplinary interventions in a tragedy of their choice.

Tutorial Goals:

- ✓ Engage in a survey of primary and secondary texts focused on tragedy and disability
- ✓ Using at least three articles, write a 20-25 research paper on tragedy and disability in a literary work in preparation for an honor's thesis.
- ✓ Work with a wide range of theoretical approaches in dialogue with one's own ideas.
- ✓ Improve scholarly research skills, such as formulating a research question, building a critical bibliography around that question, and sharpening their writing's clarity and precision.
- ✓ Workshop more effectively with both instructors and peers.
- ✓ Acquire practice and confidence in presentation-speaking.
- ✓ Gain a better appreciation of tragedy and disability

Assignments:

- **Short Essay** (Week 4, 10%): **A 5-7 page** paper, an extended close reading of a primary text (using secondary sources is optional), followed by an individual student conference to discuss the paper
- **Prospectus & Annotated Bibliography** (Week 8, 10%): **two-page** prospectus of the project before students begin working on it. **An annotated bibliography of 8-10 sources** should accompany the prospectus. The bibliography should reproduce in a few sentences the main argument of the work you intend to make use of. It should also include, in a few sentences, how you plan on engaging with the thesis of the work you have summarized.

- **Draft** (Week 11, 20%): **A full draft will be due by Week 11's section** and then circulated among classmates for workshop. Students will also meet with the instructor to go over their work and are also required to meet with the Departmental Writing Fellow.
- **Final Paper** (Reading Period, 40%): **20-25 page paper** on a tragedy read in this class. Students will also present their work in a junior tutorial conference (date TBA). Any topic on a tragedy outside of the ones we cover in class must be run by the instructor by **week 6**.
- **Minor Assignments and Participation** (20%):
 - 1 short "Reverse Outlining" assignment, week 7
 - 2 response papers of 1-2 pages, to be shared in class (5 minutes), focusing on a passage from one of our primary texts (sign-ups during first class)
 - 2 in-class presentations (5 minutes) summarizing one of our critical works (sign-ups during first class)
 - Participation and Preparation: A small seminar thrives when students participate actively and offer thoughtful contributions to class discussion.
- **Conference Presentation** (ungraded but required): a 5-minute paper on your research

Required Texts:

Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannos* (Please get the most recent Norton Critical Edition, translated by Emily Wilson)

William Shakespeare: *King Lear*, *King Richard III* (newest Arden editions)

Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie* (any edition)

Samuel Beckett: *Endgame* (any edition)

Martyna Majok: *Cost of Living* (any edition)

All other texts, including secondary sources, will be provided electronically and are usually hyperlinked in the syllabus. The links to the translated Greek texts are given, but if you can, do try to get these in paper form (as in the case of *Oedipus Tyrannos*). Usually plays by Greek authors come in a bundle from the publishers, since they're short, which means you can read the others in your book whenever you want, in addition to any helpful introductions they might have.

Schedule:

Unit 1: Going to the Theater to Watch Tragedy and Disability?

Week 2: What is/was tragedy? What is disability studies?

Primary Reading –

- John Milton, *Samson Agonistes* (1671)
- Aristotle, *Poetics* (335 BCE) (selections)

Secondary Readings –

- T.J. Reiss, "Tragedy" in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*
- Tobin Siebers, Introduction to *Disability Theory*
- Pasquale Toscano, "'Let Be Assigned Some Narrow Place Enclosed': Requesting Accommodations Has Always Been Tricky Business" (short online article)

Week 2: Disability as Tragic, Ritualistic Punishment?

Primary Reading—

- Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannos* (429 BCE)
- Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* (424 BCE)

Secondary Readings –

- René Girard, “The Origins of Myth and Ritual” in *Violence and the Sacred*
- Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Disability, Identity, and Representation” in *Extraordinary Bodies*

Week 3: How are We to Watch/Behold Tragedy and Disability?

Primary Reading –

- Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939)

Secondary Readings –

- Antonin Artaud, “Theatre and the Plague” and “The Theater and Cruelty” in *The Theatre and Its Double*
- Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Why Do We Stare,” “Looking Away, Staring Back,” and “Beholding” in *Staring: How We Look*

Unit 2: The Role of Madness as Disability in Tragedy

Week 4: Disability/Madness as Dionysian Revelation

Primary Reading –

- Euripides, *The Bacchae* (405 BCE)
- August Wilson, *Fences* (1985)

Secondary Readings –

- Friedrich Nietzsche, short selection from *The Birth of Tragedy*

Short Paper Due by Friday, 11:59pm

Week 5: How does Illness/Madness Fit within Disability? Is Mad Studies Different From Disability Studies?

Primary Reading –

- William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (1606)

Secondary Readings –

- Susan Sontag, first four sections of *Illness as Metaphor*
- Sander Gilman, “Madness as Disability”
- Hannah Morgan, “Mad Studies and Disability Studies”

–Separate library/research visit during week 5 (date TBA)

Week 6: Why has Madness been Hystorically Gendered?

Primary Reading –

- Euripides, *Medea* (431 BCE)
- Macbeth 2.2 & 5.1 (1606)
- **WATCH:** The 2014 National Theatre’s staging of Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947)

Secondary Readings –

- Elaine Showalter, “Defining Hysteria” and “The History of Hysteria” in *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media*

By section this week, please email the tutorial a 2-3 sentence topic “pitch” for your final paper idea and a starter list of 5 relevant sources.

Unit 3: Disability and Performance

Week 7: Performance History and Disability as Theatrical Performance

Primary Reading –

- William Shakespeare, *Richard III* (1597); please also read the Arden introduction’s performance history section

Secondary Readings –

- Allison Hopgood, “Making Gains” in *Beholding Disability in Renaissance England*
ASSIGNMENT: “Reverse outlining”: After completing Hopgood’s chapter, summarize its argument in 1-3 sentences and create a reverse outline of its argumentative progression.

Please also watch this 2022 performance of *Richard III* by the Royal Shakespeare Company (link).

Week 8: Masquerading Disability?

Primary Reading –

- Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944)

Secondary Readings –

- Tobin Siebers, “Disability as Masquerade”
- Anne Fox, “Reclaiming the Ordinary Extraordinary Body: Or, the Importance of *The Glass Menagerie* for Literary Disability Studies” in *Disability Theatre and Modern Drama: Recasting Modernism*

Half of this class will take place in the Houghton Library, so that we can explore the Tennessee Williams collection.

Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography due by Friday, 11:59pm

Week 9: Performing with Disabilities

Primary Reading –

- Martyna Majok, *Cost of Living* (2016)

Secondary Readings –

- Carrie Sandahl and Phillip Auslander, Introduction to *Bodies in Commotion Disability & Performance*
- Alexis Soloski, *New York Times* article, “Actors With Disabilities Are Ready, Willing and Able to Take More Roles”

Please also search for reviews of Majok’s *Cost of Living* and read any two of them. Be prepared to share your thoughts on some of the reviews.

Unit 4: Dependence, Care, Accomodation

Week 10: “With a Little Help From My Friends”

Because of the full draft due next week, the only assigned reading for this week is the Afterword to *Angels in America*. By this week, however, please watch the HBO miniseries (links in class webpage, ~6 hours total). In class, we will watch clips from the National Theater performance and discuss them in relation to the TV series and Kushner’s essay.

Week 11: NO READING FULL DRAFT WORKSHOP (+pizza)

Week 11: Disability and Dependence

Primary Reading –

- Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (1957)

Secondary Readings –

- Michael Davidson, “‘Every Man his Specialty’: Beckett, Disability, and Dependence” in *Disability Theatre and Modern Drama: Recasting Modernism*

Alternative performance to be watched TBA

Week 12: Accommodation and Crip Futurity

Primary Reading –

- Sophocles, *Philoctetes* (409 BCE)

Secondary Readings –

- Alison Kafer, Introduction to *Feminist, Queer, Crip*
- Christopher Rowland, *The Washington Post*, “Covid long-haulers face grueling fights for disability benefits”

Alternative performance to be watched TBA

Academic and Cultural Support Resources:

Disability Access Office (DAO)

Students requiring adjustments or accommodations in connection with a documented disability should contact me and provide a Faculty Letter from the DAO **no later than the end of the fifth week of term**. Failure to do so may compromise our ability to respond to requests in a timely manner. Any requests for adjustments or accommodations will be treated in confidence. To get started with accommodations, [fill out a registration form here](#).

Academic Resource Center (ARC)

The ARC is a great resource for those who need support with managing a busy life at Harvard, especially those who might be struggling with time management, strategic/effective reading, or other things that, for example, might take extra effort for people with ADHD, autism, chronic illness, etc. The ARC can also help you find a peer tutor if you're struggling with a specific course.

Center for Wellness and Health Promotion (CWHP)

The CWHP provides **massage and acupuncture services** (which can be partially reimbursed under certain insurance plans) as well as yoga, meditation, and Pilates via livestream or in-person.

Counseling and Mental Health Services

CAMHS has a variety of services for various mental healthcare needs. While the number of appointments a student can access is limited, **CAMHS can also help you find an affordable outside provider for long-term care.**

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failure on the paper to dismissal from the course to even more serious actions. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with Harvard FAS's Honor Code: *"Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs."*

Collaboration: You are absolutely encouraged to talk with other students about the course and its readings, and to read each others' work. In individual assignments academic collaboration and external sources should be always cited.

Attendance: Your attendance in tutorial is vital to your own success as well as to the success of the class as a whole; so is your attendance in Junior Tutorial General Meetings and at other required events. I will allow each student a "free" tutorial absence to be used in case of sickness, travel, etc: no explanation necessary. Missing more than one class will decrease your participation grade, and excessive absence could result in failing the course. Also, being late really disrupts the

work we're doing together: 2 lates = 1 absence. If you have extenuating circumstances, you must communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can discuss how to deal with it.

Due Dates & Late Grades: Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due by 11:59pm on the date listed in the schedule. Late assignments will be docked 1/3 letter grade per day late, except for the final paper, which must be turned in before the due date. Students failing to turn in a final paper, or turning it in late without an official excuse, will fail the tutorial. If, well in advance of an assignment, you expect you will need an extension, please talk with me.

Email: You are responsible for checking your email for handouts, reminders and adjustments from my address listed above. If you have a question that you need to ask me by email, be sure to give me at least 24 hours, or you may not get a response until it's too late. Also, please let me know if you'd like to use a non-Harvard email address.

Writing Assistance: One-on-one writing assistance, for any step of the process, can be found in person or online at Harvard's Writing Center (<http://writingprogram.fas.harvard.edu/>).

Citation: The Purdue Online Writing Lab is a great place to familiarize yourself with citation practices (https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/). Zotero is an excellent and free (through Harvard) extension that can be added to your web browser, Google Docs, and Word that facilitates correct citational practice. Workshops on how to use the tool are provided by Harvard (<https://guides.library.harvard.edu/cite/zotero>)