This tutorial investigates the dramatic works of two radically innovative twentieth-century authors, Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett, alongside the criticism that has shaped their reception in English letters. In particular, the course examines how these dramatists grappled with the political upheavals and catastrophic losses of the twentieth century. How did Brecht and Beckett understand the relationship between theater and history? As we will explore in this tutorial, both playwrights found that the forces of modernity had shattered the theater of the past, necessitating a new theater that would be staged amidst the ruins of the old. Yet Brecht and Beckett discovered distinct strategies for reckoning with these ruins, and for reassembling a theater better suited to a modern audience. How did Brecht and Beckett perform these negotiations with dramatic form? How, in turn, did Brecht’s and Beckett’s critics situate their works in the context of shifting political currents in modern Europe and the world?

The structure of the course consists of four triads and a coda. In the first triad, we examine Brecht’s dramas through three critical entry points: Marxist criticism, the philosophical dialogue, and theater history. The second triad of the course applies the same configuration of critical methods to the dramatic works of Beckett. These first six weeks of the tutorial will introduce students to canonical texts and topics in the works of these two playwrights, in preparation for the submission of the Junior Paper Prospectus in the sixth week.

In the second half of the course, during the drafting and revision of the Junior Paper, we explore a wide variety of contemporary critical approaches to the works of Brecht and Beckett. The third triad of the tutorial entertains the concept of the “ruined stage” in greater depth, as it applies to the dramaturgy, language, and materials of Brecht’s and Beckett’s theaters. The fourth triad considers how these authors have generated new lines of critique within the field of literary study, exploring their intersections with visual and media studies, postcolonial criticism, and feminist criticism. The final week of the course (the “coda”) reflects cumulatively on notions of trauma, memory, and history in the twentieth-century theater. Students may explore texts beyond those on the syllabus as a focus for the Junior Paper, with the permission of the instructor. Additional works may be added or substituted on the basis of student interest.

Course Requirements

Active, thoughtful participation in seminar discussion, and weekly attendance 20%
Four one-page response papers on critical methods, to be presented in class 10%
Library visits, assignments, and correspondence with Harvard University librarians 5%
Meeting with Departmental Writing Fellow and participation in tutorial-wide meetings 5%
Short paper (5–6 pages) 15%
Prospectus and bibliography for Junior Paper 10%
Drafts of Junior Paper (one 10-page draft; one complete draft) 10%
Junior Paper (20–25 pages); submission is required in order to pass the course 25%
Required Texts

Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*
Bertolt Brecht, *Collected Plays: 2* (Methuen)
Bertolt Brecht, *Collected Plays: 3* (Methuen)
Bertolt Brecht, *Collected Plays: 7* (Methuen)
Bertolt Brecht, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*
  Recommended edition: *Collected Plays: 4* (Methuen)
Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*
  Recommended edition: *Collected Plays: 5* (Methuen)
Caryl Churchill, *Far Away*
Caryl Churchill, *Vinegar Tom*
Frederic Jameson, *Brecht and Method*

Recommended Texts

Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*
Walter Benjamin, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*
Bertolt Brecht, *The Good Person of Szechwan*
  Recommended edition: *Collected Plays: 6* (Methuen)

Response Papers and Short Assignments

Response papers should be one double-spaced typed page in a standard font. You will write four response papers over the course of the term, to be presented and submitted in class. Each response paper should feature a concise, thoughtfully developed analysis of one critical text. A schedule for these responses will be determined at the beginning of the semester.

You will also be given occasional short assignments over email throughout the semester. These may include finding a journal article on a particular topic, drafting a few sentences in response to a particular secondary text, or searching out the answer to a research question. These assignments will be distributed at least five days in advance, and should never take you more than 30–60 minutes, in addition to the time necessary to complete the reading for the week.

Finally, you will be given short library assignments to complete at each of the two library sessions (at Widener and the Harvard Theatre Collection). These assignments are required.

Mandatory Junior Tutorial Program Meetings and Departmental Writing Fellow

The English Department has scheduled mandatory meetings for the Junior Tutorial Program (dates and times listed on the syllabus), which you are required to attend. In addition, the Departmental Writing Fellow (DWF) has been appointed exclusively as a resource for writers of the Junior Paper. You are required to meet with the DWF at least once prior to submitting your prospectus. I encourage you to schedule these prospectus appointments early, and to meet with the DWF as frequently as you find helpful throughout the term.
Short Paper

A short paper (5–6 pages) is due on Friday, 9/18. This paper will analyze one or more of the works by Brecht read in the first three weeks of the course in relation to one or more of the critical methods discussed. Alternatively, students may choose to write a paper that engages with one of the suggested, optional pre-term readings. A strong short paper will develop an engaging and persuasive argument, make effective use of literary evidence, and demonstrate a clear and sophisticated writing style. Students will meet with Rebecca in the fourth week of the semester to discuss the strengths of the short paper and identify areas for further growth as a writer and critic.

Junior Paper and Departmental Junior Paper Conference

One of the primary goals of the course is the writing of an insightful, original, and authoritative Junior Paper (20–25 pages), which is due on Tuesday, 12/8 at 4 PM. There will be ample opportunity over the course of the semester to discuss strategies for crafting a successful Junior Paper, and a variety of resources will be made available to support you in your research and writing. A vital component of the Junior Paper writing process is the submission of multiple paper drafts, which will be discussed with Rebecca and with other members of the tutorial.

Students are required to attend the departmental Junior Paper Conference, where each tutorial participant will present a five-minute summary of his or her research.

Course Schedule

Pre-term  Suggested, optional pre-term reading
Walter Benjamin, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* (1925)

Week 1  Marxist Approaches I: Brecht and Benjamin
Bertolt Brecht, *A Man’s A Man* (1926)
Walter Benjamin, “What is Epic Theater?” (1930–31)
Frederic Jameson, selections from *Brecht and Method* (2011)
*Supplemental*: Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer” (1934)

Week 2  Philosophical Dialogues I: Brecht’s *Lehrstücke*
Bertolt Brecht, *The Measures Taken* (1930)
Bertolt Brecht, *The Mother* (1930–31)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tues, 9/15</td>
<td>Required Tutorial-Wide Meeting, 4-5 PM, Barker 133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td><strong>Theater History I: The Place of Production</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bertolt Brecht, <em>Mother Courage and her Children</em> (1941)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christa Hasche, “Through the Minefield of Ideologies: The Staging of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brecht’s <em>Mutter Courage and ihre Kinder</em>” (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alan Ackerman, “The Prompter’s Box: The Place of Modern Drama” (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri, 9/18</td>
<td><strong>Short paper due at 4 PM</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td><strong>Marxist Approaches II: Beckett and Adorno</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theodor Adorno, “Trying to Understand Endgame” (1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Recommended: Stanley Cavell, “Ending the Waiting Game: A Reading of</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Beckett’s <em>Endgame</em>,” in <em>Must We Mean What We Say?</em> (1958)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Library visits to be completed by this week</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Writing conference with Rebecca to discuss short paper this week</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td><strong>Philosophical Dialogues II: Beckett’s Theodicies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Martin Esslin, “Samuel Beckett: The Search for the Self” in <em>The Theatre</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>of the Absurd</em> (1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td><strong>Theater History II: Dramatic Material</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Billie Whitelaw, selections from <em>Who He?</em> (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samuel Beckett, selected letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Meeting with DWF to be completed by this week</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Two-page prospectus and preliminary bibliography due</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues, 10/13</td>
<td>Required Tutorial-Wide Meeting, 4-5 PM, Barker 133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td><strong>Brecht’s Montage: Drama in Ruins</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bertolt Brecht, <em>The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny</em> (1930)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bertolt Brecht, “Notes to Mahagonny” (1930)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td><strong>Beckett’s Echoes: Language in Ruins</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ruby Cohn, “Comment Dire,” in *A Beckett Canon* (2001)

*Revised prospectus and Junior Paper outline due*

**Week 9**

Beckett’s Objects: Landscape in Ruins

**Week 10**

Modes of Critique I: Media Against Modernity
Bertolt Brecht, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* (1938)
Samuel Beckett, *Film* (1964)
Martin Harries, “Theater and Media Before ‘New’ Media: Beckett’s *Film* and *Play*” (2012)

*First ten pages of draft of Junior Paper due*

**Week 11**

Modes of Critique II: Postcolonial Contexts
Bertolt Brecht, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944)

**Week 12**

Modes of Critique III: Brecht and Feminisms
Bertolt Brecht, *The Duchess of Malfi* (1943)
Caryl Churchill, *Vinegar Tom* (1976)
*Recommended: Bertolt Brecht, *The Good Person of Szechwan* (1943)*

**Tues, 11/17**

**Complete draft of Junior Paper due** (departmental deadline)

**Week 13**

Coda: Trauma, Memory, History
Tues, 12/8

**Junior Paper due at 4 PM** (departmental deadline)
To be submitted to Rebecca and to the English Department

Date TBA

**Junior Paper Conference** (departmental deadline)
To be held *either* Monday, 12/7, from 4–6:30 PM *or* Wednesday, 12/9, from 4–6:30 PM, in the Thompson Room

---

*Among the ruins of a badly shelled Caucasian village the members of two kolchos villages are sitting in a circle, smoking and drinking wine.*

—Brecht, opening lines of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

*Expanse of scorched grass rising centre to low mound.*

—Beckett, opening lines of *Happy Days*