# Harriet Madeley’s Outpatient uniquely blends comedy and mortality in a solo hospital drama



In the evocative landscape of contemporary theatre, "Outpatient" emerges as a uniquely introspective work that deftly navigates the delicate interplay between life, death, and our societal reluctance to address mortality. Written and performed by Harriet Madeley, the play centres around Olive, a self-absorbed journalist determined to craft a meaningful narrative about dying. Set against the backdrop of a bustling hospital, Olive seeks interviews with terminally ill patients, her quest for stories ultimately mirrored by her own shocking diagnosis of primary sclerosing cholangitis.

The narrative carries a profound personal weight, as Madeley draws on her own experiences of interviewing terminally ill individuals while grappling with her health crisis. “It’s weird we don’t talk about it,” declares Olive early on, reflecting a widespread hesitation in society to confront death. This theme resonates with an audience that often shies away from discussing illness and the end of life, yet paradoxically consumes countless narratives revolving around these very subjects.

In her dynamic portrayal, Madeley brilliantly integrates comic elements into Olive’s existential plight. The character's increasing recklessness—partying, running, and pushing aside her supportive fiancée, Tess—creates a tension that oscillates between humour and pathos. Olive’s attempts to evade her reality offer a narrative arc steeped in both absurdity and melancholy, as she finally confronts the emotional ramifications of her situation. Commenting on this tumultuous journey, Madeley’s performance is described as “sparky and charismatic,” seamlessly engaging with audio clips of other characters that add depth to her solitary stage presence.

The production, directed by Madelaine Moore, showcases Madeley's energetic physicality as she interacts with props like a treadmill and an exercise ball. These devices not only serve as instruments for comedic effect but symbolise Olive’s frantic attempts to outrun her fears and the inescapability of her circumstances. The pacing of the show ensures that the audience remains captivated, even if the extreme comedic escalation diminishes some emotional gravity, an aspect noted by critics.

Despite its comedic undertones, "Outpatient" is fundamentally a poignant exploration of mortality and human connections. It invites viewers to reflect on their own relationships and the fleeting nature of life. As Olive grapples with her fear of death, the play underlines a powerful truth: understanding and embracing the love that surrounds us is paramount. The closing scenes of the production prompt audiences not just to laugh but to ponder the significance of appreciating life's transient moments.

As "Outpatient" runs at Park Theatre from May 20 to June 7, 2025, its narrative echoes a broader societal anxiety regarding illness and mortality. Winner of the Summerhall’s Lustrum Award for Unforgettable Theatre at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2024, the show has garnered attention for its earnest interrogation of the invincibility often felt by young adults confronting their own vulnerabilities. While Olive seeks a Pulitzer Prize-worthy article, she inadvertently crafts an emotionally layered reflection on living authentically in the shadow of death.

This nuanced exploration positions "Outpatient" as both a humorous and deeply affecting commentary on life’s fragility, demonstrating that the act of confronting our mortal truths may well be the most significant story of all.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/may/25/outpatient-review-journalist-inside-scoop-death-park-theatre-london), [[3]](https://theatreweekly.com/outpatient-a-dark-comedy-exploring-life-and-death-at-park-theatre/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/may/25/outpatient-review-journalist-inside-scoop-death-park-theatre-london), [[4]](https://www.londontheatrenews.co.uk/news/outpatient-a-dark-comedy-solo-show-at-park-theatre-london)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://parktheatre.co.uk/event/outpatient/), [[5]](https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/outpatient), [[6]](https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/outpatient-summerhall-ana-23567)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://theatreweekly.com/outpatient-a-dark-comedy-exploring-life-and-death-at-park-theatre/), [[7]](https://www.comedy.co.uk/fringe/2024/outpatient/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/may/25/outpatient-review-journalist-inside-scoop-death-park-theatre-london> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://parktheatre.co.uk/event/outpatient/> - Park Theatre's official page for 'Outpatient' provides detailed information about the play, including its synopsis, cast, creative team, and ticket availability. The play follows Olive, a self-absorbed entertainment journalist who sets out to make her name interviewing dying people, only to discover she is living on borrowed time. The production runs from May 20 to June 7, 2025, at Park Theatre's Park90 venue.
3. <https://theatreweekly.com/outpatient-a-dark-comedy-exploring-life-and-death-at-park-theatre/> - 'Outpatient' is an autobiographical dark comedy written by Harriet Madeley and directed by Madelaine Moore. The production runs at Park Theatre’s Park90 from May 20 to June 7, with a press night on Thursday, May 22, 2025. Inspired by Madeley’s own experiences with a life-changing diagnosis, the play delves into the fragility of the human body and our responses to the prospect of death. The solo show follows Olive, a self-obsessed entertainment journalist who, while attempting to make a name for herself by interviewing dying people, discovers she is living on borrowed time.
4. <https://www.londontheatrenews.co.uk/news/outpatient-a-dark-comedy-solo-show-at-park-theatre-london> - This article discusses 'Outpatient,' an autobiographical dark comedy by Harriet Madeley, running at Park Theatre from May 20 to June 7, 2025. The show follows Olive, a self-obsessed entertainment journalist diagnosed with a life-threatening condition, as she grapples with the realities of mortality while striving to make her mark in the world. The production, which won Summerhall’s Lustrum Award for Unforgettable Theatre at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2024, explores the fragility of life and the egotistical invincibility humans feel when facing death.
5. <https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/outpatient> - Time Out's review of 'Outpatient' highlights the autobiographical solo show by Harriet Madeley, which follows a self-absorbed entertainment journalist who looks to make her name from interviewing dying people but then discovers she is on borrowed time herself. The play is directed by Madelaine Moore and runs at Park Theatre from May 20 to June 7, 2025. The review notes that the show was a hit at the Edinburgh Fringe last year.
6. <https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/outpatient-summerhall-ana-23567> - The British Theatre Guide's review of 'Outpatient' praises Harriet Madeley's performance as Olive, a journalist who dreams of a Pulitzer Prize by interviewing dying people but is then diagnosed with a rare illness herself. The review notes the impressive physical performance, with Madeley energetically interacting with a treadmill and exercise ball. The play is described as a touching and personal exploration of mortality, with a poignant progression in Olive's relationship with her fiancée and parents.
7. <https://www.comedy.co.uk/fringe/2024/outpatient/> - The British Comedy Guide's listing for 'Outpatient' provides details about the play, including its venue at Summerhall's Anatomy Lecture Theatre during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2024. The show follows Olive, a journalist who attempts to interview people in a palliative care ward for an article about death but then faces a rare and devastating diagnosis of her own. The listing notes that the play is based on real events and is Harriet Madeley's first solo show, described as an interrogation of invincibility that will make you laugh and live longer.