

## Syllabus — LIT 6310: Narrative Theory &/in British Fiction

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**Office hours:** Tuesdays 2-4pm, MS Teams  
\* *please email for an appointment within those hours or at another time, if necessary*

<b>Course meetings:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mondays, 10am-12:45pm, MS Teams</li><li>• Synchronous attendance is optional.</li></ul>
<b>Instructional mode:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remote</li><li>• Synchronous sessions will be formatted as discussions, and we'll do our best to recreate a virtual "classroom" that is dynamic and interactive.</li><li>• Course participation will be measured through frequent contributions to online discussions and weekly reading journals, as described below.</li></ul>
<b>Course platforms:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>MS Teams</u> for synchronous class sessions and office hours</li><li>• <u>eLearning</u> for all other coursework.</li><li>• All course sessions will be recorded and uploaded to MS Streams with options for captions (follow the link in eLearning)</li></ul>

### Description:

This course will provide a wide-ranging introduction to theories of narrative and the novel, with an emphasis on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century critical and narrative theory. We will also read three British novels that reflexively theorize narrative form and the stakes of literary interpretation: Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, and Zadie Smith's *NW*. Our driving questions include: how does narrative form influence the kinds of knowledge we gain (and seek)? How do novels, and narratives more broadly, reinforce or transform our understandings of empathy, ethics, agency, and personhood? How have the forms of literary narrative worked with and against dominant ideological narratives about the relationship between individual selves and historical context? Our theoretical readings will range across Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, structuralist and poststructuralist traditions. They are, I warn, Eurocentric (indeed, British-centric), and many will align the development of the novel — as a specific, commodity form of narrative — to the development of capitalist modernity and nation-states in Europe. That said, you are welcome to write your final essay on a literary text not included in the syllabus or its implicit imaginative geography.

### Primary Texts:

- Jane Austen, *Persuasion*
- Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*
- Zadie Smith, *NW*

All other readings will be made available for download through eLearning.

**Course Objectives:**

Our work together this semester should strengthen your capacity to:

- Explain and contrast theories of narrative form that have been prominent in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century literary criticism
- Explain and contrast core contentions in novel studies regarding the shifting relationships between literary form, historical context, ideology, the marketplace of readers, etc.
- Analyze and interpret formally distinct novels in terms of their narrative form as well as their reflexive theorizations of narrative form
- Take effective notes and create an archive for personal use—skills particularly useful for qualifying exams and other independent scholarly work
- Contribute valuably to your intellectual communities: through expressing your own claims with clarity and evidential support, responding critically yet generously to others' ideas both verbally and in writing, and posing provocative questions to prompt collective inquiry

**Assignments:**

- |                                                                        |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| • Reading journal, weekly                                              | 20% |
| • Prompted online discussions, most weeks                              | 20% |
| • Presentation and discussion facilitation on assigned texts, one week | 20% |
| • Final paper proposal (April 16)                                      | 10% |
| • Peer reviews of proposals (April 21)                                 | 10% |
| • 10-page final paper                                                  | 20% |

of final grade

These assignments are outlined in further detail below the course schedule and in the Assignments Appendix document on eLearning.

**Course Etiquette**

One of the objectives of this course is to build a true community of inquiry, and that will require a few key commitments: 1) All should express our views / interpretations / concerns / questions openly, even (or especially) when those views (etc.) run against the grain of the views expressed by an assigned text, fellow students, or the professor. There will be a “course discussion overflow” wiki on which you can express thoughts that you’re unable or unwilling to express in other forums. 2) All should treat each other with openness, generosity, and kindness; when confused or concerned about another’s claim, please try to explain, either directly to the student or to the professor. 3) All should try to root claims in solid evidence that we can point to, but we should also understand that each of us may at times benefit from help finding or analyzing the appropriate evidence: this means we should be willing to think in public, to wrestle with ideas in front of one another while we’re still figuring our ideas out. It also means that we should be understanding and encouraging of such wrestling.

Would you like to add any other principles or guidelines for our course?

## Technological Requirements, Policies, and Support

**All course content** other than live, synchronous sessions can be accessed using your UT Dallas NetID account on the [eLearning](#) website. Live sessions and office hours will take place on MS Teams, which can be accessed here: <https://teams.utdallas.edu/>. I recommend downloading the app, but you can also access Teams from your web browser.

**Course Recordings.** All live sessions will be recorded and posted to Streams and eLearning. Students are expected to follow appropriate University policies and maintain the security of passwords used to access recorded lectures. Unless the Office of Student AccessAbility has approved the student to record the instruction, students are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course. Recordings may not be published, reproduced, or shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. If the instructor or a UTD school/department/office plans any other uses for the recordings, consent of the students identifiable in the recordings is required prior to such use unless an exception is allowed by law. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

**When attending live sessions,** you should be prepared to contribute in the chat, in breakout sessions, or by speaking after being called on. Please show up with 1) the text we are discussing, so you can refer to specific passages; and 2) a pen and notebook, for taking notes and/or responding to freewriting prompts (if you prefer typing, you can, but I recommend trying the handwritten method, which research indicates helps most of us learn).

**Tech Requirements and Support.** Certain minimum technical requirements must be met to enable a successful learning experience. Please review the important technical requirements on the [Getting Started with eLearning](#) webpage.

For Teams-related help, start with the “Help” tab (located at the bottom left of the page when viewed on a computer), where you’ll find training videos, FAQ sheets, etc.

You can contact UTD’s eLearning support team for help with either eLearning or Teams. The [eLearning Support Center](#) includes a toll-free telephone number for immediate assistance (1-866-588-3192), email support ([elarning@utdallas.edu](mailto:elarning@utdallas.edu)), and an online chat service.

**Writing support.** In addition to scheduling meetings with me to discuss your writing strategies and progress, the Office of Graduate Education offers one-on-one writing consultations, workshops, and peer writing groups. Our librarians are also available to provide you with virtual guidance on using various databases to do secondary research. Learn more here: [https://graduate.utdallas.edu/student\\_life/writing\\_services/](https://graduate.utdallas.edu/student_life/writing_services/) and here: <https://www.utdallas.edu/library/research-instruction/instruction/consultations/>

## Additional policies

For additional policies as well as resources and information about COVID-19 and UTD’s response, visit <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>.

## Assignments

### Reading journal

You will maintain a reading journal, posting entries to eLearning each week by Sunday at noon.

Each week's entry should focus on one of the assigned texts (your choice) and it should include one- to three-sentence summaries of the following: **1) What; 2) How; 3) So What (or A Tension)**. Feel free (but not obligated) to go over the 1-3 sentence guidelines, if you find you have a lot you want to say or work through, via writing.

A fourth section will be a paragraph: **4) One More Thing**, in which you will dive into one aspect of the text. This could entail close-reading a particular scene, interrogating how the text treats a specific theme, considering the significance of an element of the text's structure, questions raised by the text or by considering the text in relation to other assigned texts (or issues outside this class), etc. *Note: you may wish to use a variant of this format when preparing for your qualifying exams; getting into the habit of taking concise and useful notes will be essential. If you have a different format/method that you prefer, please let me know.*

See Assignments Appendix for more details and examples

### Online discussions

Most weeks, I will post a prompt for our online discussion board by Thursday at 5pm, and you will be required to respond to my prompt by Sunday night (11:59pm). Some prompts will ask you to develop an interpretation of a specific element of the text; others will ask you to develop your own detailed interpretive question. Unless otherwise noted, your responses should be 250-500 words, and they should cite specific details from the relevant text.

- **Answers to my questions** should have **three components**:
  - A debatable claim
  - Evidence that supports the claim
  - Analysis explaining how the evidence supports the claim
- **Your interpretive questions** should:
  - Reference specific details
  - Explain where the question comes from and why you think it matters that we try to answer it
    - Explain what makes it hard to pin down the text's point of view on a topic, citing specific details or passages. (One good template: on the one hand \_\_\_\_, but on the other hand \_\_\_\_. So what is the novel really suggesting about X?)
    - Explain what is strange about a specific stylistic feature.

- Explain how your question relates to other aspects of the text or ongoing class discussions.
- Be summarizable as a variant of “why does the text do [this thing], and what does it matter?”

**You are required to reply to classmates on the discussion forum at least 10 different weeks** this semester. You are welcome and encouraged to reply more frequently, and/or to multiple students per week. But the requirement is at least one reply on 10 different weeks. Depending on the week, your reply might be an engaged response to their response to my prompt, or it might be an attempt to answer their interpretive question.

More tips are included in the Assignments Appendix

## Presentation

You will present an overview and critical response to assigned or suggested further readings once this semester. Your presentation should be 10-15 minutes long; it should include a cogent synopsis of:

- What the text does/argues
- How the text makes its case (describe formal or logical features and evidence)
- What the stakes of the text are (if its argument is true, then ...; if the text is literary, identify a claim implicit in the form or representative content and do the same)
- What you find to be the text’s strengths, weaknesses, omissions, or most urgent provocations

Following your presentation, you will guide the course in a brief discussion lasting approximately 10 minutes (or longer, if the conversation takes wing). You might pose questions along the lines of: what does \_\_\_ claim in the text mean, and why is it important? How does the figurative language in \_\_\_ passage work? In what ways does \_\_\_ build on, or against, the argument we read earlier in the semester by \_\_, that \_\_\_\_?. You might prompt classmates into freewriting or other activities to stimulate analysis and discussion.

Think of this as an opportunity to practice pedagogy you’d try in a course of your own someday, as well as an opportunity to draw your colleagues into a genuine conversation on a topic that interests you. The best questions will be questions you think can be answered but which you’re still mulling: invite your colleagues to think with you about these matters.

**If you are taking the class asynchronously**, you can do one (or a combination of) the following:

- Record yourself presenting and share the video through MS Streams, YouTube, or some other format; supplement the video with written discussion prompts.
- Prepare slides and a script, which you share with the class. The professor or a volunteer can read the script. Supplement the slides with written discussion prompts.
- Prepare a script (no visual), which the professor or a volunteer can read; supplement with discussion prompts.

## Final paper, proposals, & peer review

Your final paper will be an analysis of a literary text, placing the text into dialogue with theory you've encountered this semester. The literary text can either be one of the assigned novels or a text from your own primary fields of interest.

The paper will be 10 pages, double-spaced. This is conference length.

You'll write a proposal outlining the main question you'll seek to answer in your essay. You will exchange proposals with two peers and provide detailed feedback to one another. I'll provide full prompts for both the proposal and the peer reviews.

<h3>Schedule</h3>
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*\* Please note that the schedule might change in order to accommodate class interests, needs, or the unpredictable contexts in which we are working*

#### 2. Jan 25. Introductory stories

- Kent Puckett, *Narrative Theory*, Introduction
- Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller"

### Part 1: Structures of Narrative & Narratology

#### 3. Feb 1. Plot and structure

- Aristotle, *Poetics*
- Claude Levi Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth"
- If you haven't ever done so, or wish for a refresher, please read *Oedipus* by Sophocles

Further reading: Peter Brooks, "Reading for the Plot"

#### 4. Feb. 8. Narratology

- Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative"
- Mieke Bal, *Narratology*, Introduction
- Susan Lanser, "Toward a Feminist Narratology"

Further reading: Puckett Ch. 6, "Narratology and Narrative Theory"; Bal, *Narratology*, Ch 2, "Story: Aspects"

### Part 2: Novel Selves: Narrating Personhood

#### 5. Feb. 15. Subjectivity and Narration

- Henry James, "Preface to *Portrait of a Lady*"

- M. Bal, *Narratology*, Ch 1, “the Narrator” (19-31)
- Virginia Woolf, “Modern Fiction”

Further reading: Genette, “Mood” from *Narrative Discourse* (185-211); Seymour Chatman; Dorritt Cohn; Wayne C Booth; Percy Lubbock

**6. Feb. 22. Novel Subjects**

- Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Ch. 1 “Realism and the Novel Form”
- Nancy Armstrong, Introduction to *Desire and Domestic Fiction*
- N. Armstrong, *How Novels Think*, “Introduction”

Further reading: Watt, “Serious Reflections on *The Rise of the Novel*”

**7. March 1. *Persuasion***

**8. March 8. Jane Austen and readerly privacy**

- Deirdre Lynch, *Economy of Character*, Ch. 5, “Jane Austen and the Social Machine”
- Adela Pinch, “Lost in a Book”

Further reading: DA Miller, *Jane Austen and the Secret of Style*

~ *Spring break* ~

**9. March 22. Characters and fictionality**

- D. Lynch, *Economy of Character*, intro
- Catherine Gallagher, “The Rise of Fictionality”
- Monika Fludernik, “The Fiction of the Rise of Fictionality”

Further reading: Anderson, Felski, and Moi, *Character*, Introduction; Henrik Skov Nielsen, James Phelan, and Richard Walsh, “Ten Theses about Fictionality”

**Part 3: Narrativizing History, Historicizing Narrative**

**10. March 29. Historicizing Voice & Perspective in the Novel: Lukács and Bakhtin**

- Lukács, “The Epic and the Novel” from *Theory of the Novel*
- Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” from *The Dialogic Imagination*
- Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel”

Further reading: Nancy Ruttenburg, “Is the Novel Democratic?”; K. Puckett, Ch. 4. “Epic, Novel, Narrative Theory”; Yi-Ping Ong, *The Art of Being*

**11. April 5. Narrativizing Belonging**

- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, “Introduction” and “Cultural Roots”
  - you are free to skim the beginning of “Cultural Roots” and focus mainly on the section “Apprehensions of Time”
- Joseph Slaughter, “Enabling Fictions and Novel Subjects: The Bildungsroman and International Human Rights Law”
- Srinivas Aravamudan, “In the Wake of the Novel”
- Jacques Rancière, “The Politics of Literature”

Further reading: Bakhtin, “The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of Realism” (*Speech Genres*); Benjamin “Theses on the Philosophy of History”; Jed Esty “The Colonial Bildungsroman” and *Unseasonable Youth*; Frederic Jameson’s “Third-World Literature in an Era of Multinational Capitalism” and the retorts it provoked, e.g. Aijaz Ahmad’s “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’”

**Part 4: But... Are There Stories? (and why, and how, and according to whom?)****12. April 12. Woolf, *The Waves*, first half**

Further reading: Gabrielle McIntire, “Heteroglossia, Monologism, and Fascism: Bernard Reads ‘The Waves’”

- **Due Friday, April 16: final essay proposal**

**13. April 19. Finish *The Waves* and your peers’ essay proposals**

- We will set aside part of class on April 19<sup>th</sup> for peer reviews. If you are unable to attend synchronous sessions, you can submit your peer feedback virtually by the 21<sup>st</sup>, or coordinate with your peer review team to arrange an alternative time to meet. I strongly recommend you try to have a conversation regarding the proposals—this is a more effective way to offer and receive feedback than through written feedback alone.
- **Due Wednesday, April 21: written copies of your peer review feedback**

**14. April 26. Ethics, Empathy, and the Novel**

- Suzanne Keen, “Narrative Empathy”
- Dorothy Hale, preface to *The Novel and the New Ethics* and “Aesthetics and the New Ethics,” *PMLA*
- Rita Felski, “Identifying with Characters” from *Characters*

You may wish to start reading *NW*

Further reading: S. Keen, “The Literary Career of Empathy”; Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*; Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism*, Ch. 2. “The Art of Knowing Your Own Nothingness”

15. **May 3. *NW* and beyond...**

*After* you finish the novel and reflect on your own impressions/interpretations a bit:

- Zadie Smith, “That Crafty Feeling”: <https://believermag.com/that-crafty-feeling/>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/aug/01/zadie-smith-nw-book-club>

Further reading: TA Houser, “Zadie Smith's *NW*: Unsettling the Promise of Empathy”

**Please submit your final essay by 11:59pm on May 12<sup>th</sup>.**