**The WAYLAND BAPTIST UNIVERSITY**

**Virtual Campus**

**School of Languages and Literature**

**Wayland Baptist University Mission Statement:** Wayland Baptist University exists to educate students in an academically challenging, learning-focused and distinctively Christian environment for professional success, and service to God and humankind.

**Course Name:** ENGL 5307-VC01 Literary Theory

**Course Term and Year: Fall 1 2025**

**Office Phone and Email:** [maria.o’connell@wbu.edu](mailto:maria.oconnell@wbu.edu) **806-291-1102 Cell: 806-224-8234 (You can also find me on Facebook, if you would like to message me).**

**Office Hours, Building, and Location: I am available by email or text. If you need to talk by phone, email me to set up an appointment**

**Class Meeting Time and Location**: On BlackBoard

**Catalog Description:** A study of literary theory and criticism. Required of all MAE students.

* Required Textbook and Resources:
  + ***Literary Theory: an Anthology,* third edition, edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, Wiley Blackwell Publishers, 2017 (Automatic Ebook)**

**Other readings may be included from online sources.**

**Other Materials:** You will need good internet access and the ability to participate in discussion board threads and to turn in written work in a timely manner. You must have software that allows you to save materials as .doc or .docx formats and some form of storage. You will be responsible for making sure that you have saved all works in progress and other materials.

# **Course Outcome Competencies**:

At the conclusion of this course, students *actively engaged* in learning will be able to (1) discuss the characteristics the general schools of literary theory; (2) differentiate among the various approaches to reading a literary text (poem, story, film, or play); (3) apply theoretical strategies to given literary texts; (4) demonstrate graduate-level research and scholarship by applying at least one theory to text; and, (5) demonstrate comprehension through discussion online and the development of a research essay.

**The more the student puts into the course, the higher his or her outcome competencies will be.**

**Attendance Requirements**: The course will take place entirely online. You must have a functional Blackboard account and be able to access the WBU library website, as well as articles and other material provided through proprietary databases available via the WBU library website. You also must have an active WBU email address. Your WBU email address is the usual way that I will contact you. You are strongly encouraged to visit the Blackboard login page and test your browser for Blackboard compatibility, as well as take the Blackboard Tutorial if you are not familiar with how the service works. If you have problems with Blackboard or your WBU email, please use the WBU Support Contacts available on the Blackboard login page

**Disability Statement**: “In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), it is the policy of Wayland Baptist University that no otherwise qualified person with a disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity in the university.  The Coordinator of Counseling Services serves as the coordinator of students with a disability and should be contacted concerning accommodation requests at (806) 291- 3765.  Documentation of a disability must accompany any request for accommodations.”

# Plagiarism and Conduct Statement

**Writing is a collaborative art. Working out ideas for your paper with an instructor, writing tutor, classmate, family member, or friend is encouraged not only for this class, but also for other classes that involve writing. Discussion and collaborative brainstorming are good. However, passing off another's *writing or ideas* as your own is plagiarism. It is unethical, it constitutes Academic Dishonesty (cheating), and it is sufficient grounds both for failure of a course and suspension from the university.**

**Common examples of plagiarism or academic dishonesty include the following:**

* **Copying any amount of text directly from an internet website, book, or other document without appropriate citation and synthesis into one’s own discussion.**
* **Paraphrasing the ideas presented in any source or oral discussion without *appropriate citation*.**
* **Using the evidence and conclusions of any source as the controlling framework for one’s own paper.**
* **Recycling work from a previous or current course, whether your own work or another student’s work.**
* **Purchasing or otherwise downloading a paper from an internet website. In some writing assignments, you will be expected to incorporate scholarly sources into your document. ALL OF THE FOLLOWING must be met to constitute *appropriate citation* of any source:**
* **Including MLA, Chicago, or APA parenthetical or note-style citation format as required by the instructor.**
* **Placing borrowed text directly from another source within “quotation marks.”**
* **Introducing clearly another author’s voice into the document by means of a signal phrase (an introduction of that author).**
* **Offering, in short, a clear distinction between one’s own voice or ideas and those of any outside authors brought into the discussion**
* **Wayland Baptist University observes a ZERO TOLERANCE policy regarding Academic Dishonesty.**
* **Any suspected instance of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will first be evaluated by the instructor and discussed individually with the student.**
* **If the instructor determines that a student’s actions constitute Academic Dishonesty, the case will be filed with the school dean (as determined by course prefix) and reported to**

**the university executive vice president/provost, as per university policy. ALL CASES OF**

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY WILL RE REPORTED.**

* **Per university policy as described in the Wayland Academic Catalog, second offenses**

**WILL RESULT IN SUSPENSION FROM THE UNIVERSITY.**

* **In this course, the first instance of Academic Dishonesty may also result in a zero on the assignment.**

**Grade Appeals**

**Students shall have protection through orderly procedures against prejudices or capricious academic evaluation. A student who believes that he or she has not been held to realistic academic standards, just evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course by using the student grade appeal process described in the Academic Catalog. Appeals may not be made for advanced placement examinations or course bypass examinations. Appeals are limited to the final course grade, which may be upheld, raised, or lowered at any stage of the appeal process. Any recommendation to lower a course grade must be submitted through the Executive Vice President/Provost to the Faculty Assembly Grade Appeals Committee for review and approval. The Faculty Assembly**

**Course Requirements and Grading Criteria:** Students will provide evidence of successful completion of the course outcome competencies by:

**Semiweekly Responses to Study Prompts1: 30%**

1 Regarding “Responses to Study Prompts”: There will be two (2) study prompts due each week, on Wednesday and Friday. One prompt will be a discussion of the reading for the week and the characteristics of each theory. The second prompt will entail some analysis of a reading and how the theoretical approach might be applied.

**Threaded Peer Reviews of Responses: 15%**

2 Respond to any of the posted responses from your colleagues—one from the Wednesday submissions or one from the Friday submissions. Each review should consist of a single, well-developed paragraph (you will touch on your peer’s argument, question, and critique). This must go beyond, “I agree” or “good job” to really engage your peers. Ask questions, bring up ideas, or explain WHY you agree/disagree. Submit your considered reviews by Saturday midnight of each course week.

**Essay 1 25% :**

3.) Essay 1 will be a **2-3 pp analysis** of a text of your choice. I suggest that you send me an email telling me your text and possible approaches, so I can give you some feedback and you can feel comfortable with your approach. This will be a close reading of a text and will use only the textbook and the text you choose.

**Essay 2 30%:**

4). Essay 2 will be **2-3 pp** andwill be much in the same vein as Essay 1, **except that** you will use a different text with the same theoretical approach, or you will use the same text with a different theory.

***Tentative Schedule****: Subject to (slight) revision as necessary! This is a basic overview and will evolve with time and discussion.*

# Basic History of Theory

**Week 1: Read “A Short History of Theory” and the introduction to “Part One: Russian Formalism” in the anthology.**

**Discussion prompt 1 (due Wednesday) Introduce yourself and tell us what you expect from the course.**

**Discussion prompt 2 (due Friday): For this response read Chapter 2 (“Art as Technique) Chapter 4 (“Keats’ Sylvan Historian: History Without the Footnotes”) and Chapter 9. Answer the discussion prompts.**

**Discussion 2: Answer ONE (1) of these:**

1. **What common thread do the authors seem to find that unite the study of theory.**
2. **How might taking a theoretical approach show the importance of literature and art to a culture?**
3. **How and why do the formalists wish to make the study of literature more “scientific”?**

**Peer responses (due Saturday)**

**Week 2. Read the Introduction to “Part Two: Structuralism, Linguistics, Narratology”**

**For Discussion 1, Read Chapters 2, 4, 5, and 6 in Part Two. Answer the questions on the discussion prompt.**

**Discussion 1: Answer ONE (1) of these:**

1. **How does Structuralism differ from Formalism? Are there any overlapping ideas?**
2. **How is mythology a structure for storytelling? Can you think of some recent narratives (books, plays, or movies) that have mythological elements?**
3. **Are there levels of discourse in literature other than novels? How would a poem or a short story work with different levels?**

**For Discussion 2, Read Chapters 8, 9, and 10. Answer the questions on the discussion prompt.**

**Discussion 2: Pick one of the offered works and analyze it. Choose either a formalist or structuralist approach.**

[**“Hard Rock Returns”**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51367/hard-rock-returns-to-prison-from-the-hospital-for-the-criminal-insane)

**“**[**How to Know You’re a Killer**](http://www.thebigclickmag.com/know-youre-killer/)**”**

[**Excerpt from *The Crossing***](file:///C:\Users\maria.o'connell\Downloads\The%20Crossing%20excerpt.docx)

**Week 3: Read the Introduction to “Part Three: Phenomenology, Reception, Ethics”**

**For Discussion 1, Read Chapters 2—6 in Part Three**

1. **Phenomenology, reception, and ethics all depend on the relationship between the text itself and the reader. How does that approach differ from formalism and structuralism and how does the “transcendental aesthetic” change the approach to criticism? Does it broaden avenues of criticism? How could it limit understanding of a text?**
2. **What happens to the author’s intention if the phenomenology of reading occurs between the reader and the text? Is the author included in analyzing the work?**
3. **How does a real reader differ from Kathleen McCormick’s concept of a constructed or inscribed reader (323)? How do real readers resist contextualizing or historicizing literature?**

**For Discussion 2, Read Chapters 9 and 10 in Part Three**

**For Discussion 2: Analyze** [**“Ash Wednesday”**](https://thepoetryplace.wordpress.com/2010/02/17/ash-wednesday-by-t-s-eliot/) **by T.S. Eliot using one of the approaches in this section.**

**Week 4: Read Introduction to “Part Five: Psychoanalysis and Psychology”**

**For Discussion 1, Read Chapters 2, 3, 5, and 7**

1. **How does it change the approach to literature (particularly novels) if “our mental lives derive largely from biological drives, that the highest achievements and ideals of civilization are inseparable from instinctual urges toward pleasure, constancy, and the release of excitation and energy” (Rivkin and Ryan 567)? Can such a lens account for spirituality, particularly Christianity?**
2. **How does the uncanny work in literature? Can you think of an example from a movie you’ve seen or a book that you’ve read?**
3. **All psychological criticism and trauma studies deal with what is unconscious, repressed or avoided. How might that focus work particularly well in modern literature? How does a modern society depend upon those repressions and how might they also haunt us?**

**For Discussion 2, Read Chapters 8 and 97**

**Analyze Hamlet’s** [**First Soliloquy**](https://owlcation.com/humanities/Hamlets-1st-Soliloquy) **from a psychoanalytical stance. What is his issue and how do we know?**

**Essay 1 (First close reading) due**

**Week 5 Read Introduction to “Part Seven: Gender Studies and Queer Theory”**

**For Discussion 1, Read Chapters 2, 4, 5, 8, 9**

1. **How are feminist and queer theories offshoots of a post-structuralist approach to literature?**
2. **What Freudian and psychoanalytic ideas do gender and queer theories value? What aspects of Freudianism do they tend to reject?**
3. **How do queer and feminist theories relate to the modernist appeal of autonomy and self-identity?**

**For Discussion 2, Read Chapters 14 and 15**

<https://cather.unl.edu/ss035.html>

Examine “Nanette: An Aside” by Willa Cather through a gender lens.

**Week 6. Read Introduction for “Part Nine: Cognition, Emotion, Evolution, Science”**

**For Discussion 1, Read Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6**

1. **In Chapter 3, what is narrative empathy and how does it matter in novels and other works of literary art?**
2. **How does fear operate in affective readings of a narrative? How might we take affective reactions (such as fear or other emotions) into account when reading or teaching a narrative?**
3. **How does Joseph Carroll’s approach to a Darwinian literary analysis differ from the popular notions of Darwinism? How might such an approach change the approach to gender or social structures in a work of literature?**

**For Discussion 2, Read Chapters 9 and 10**

1. **Go back to** [**How to Know You’re a Killer**](http://www.thebigclickmag.com/know-youre-killer/) **and analyze it from one of this week’s approaches.**
2. **Read** [**“Hard Rock Returns”**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51367/hard-rock-returns-to-prison-from-the-hospital-for-the-criminal-insane) **through an evolutionary lens.**

**Week 7. Read Introduction to “Part Ten: Animals, Humans, Places, Things”**

**For Discussion 1, Read Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6, 7**

**a.)  How might a materialist reading, such as “all the mitochondria in our brain cells amounts to a pile of matter until it is gathered together in a higher form of organization where it ignites into consciousness” (1420) affect popular understandings of literature?**

**b.) How might non-representational forms work better for portraying non-human life? What could be problematic about “unknowing,” especially when dealing with non-humans and their concerns? How does it return us to a more formalist or structuralist approach?**

**c.) What is the animal turn? How does it depend on narrative empathy? Could narrative empathy be a thinly veiled form of anthropocentrism? Why or why not?**

**For Discussion 2, Read Chapters 8 and 9**

**Read the following passage from *Annihilation*and discuss how it is or is not non-representational. How is it an ecocritical piece?**

We also needed to acclimate ourselves to the environment. In the forest near base camp one might encounter black bears or coyotes. You might hear a sudden croak and watch a night heron startle from a tree branch and, distracted, step on a venomous snake, of which there were at least six varieties. Bogs and streams hid huge aquatic reptiles, and so we were careful not to wade too deep to collect our water samples. Still, these aspects of the ecosystem did not really concern any of us. Other elements had the ability to unsettle, however. Long ago, towns had existed here, and we encountered eerie signs of human habitation: rotting cabins with sunken, red-tinged roofs, rusted wagon-wheel spokes half-buried in the dirt, and the barely seen outlines of what used to be enclosures for livestock, now mere ornament for layers of pine-needle loam. Far worse, though, was a low, powerful moaning at dusk. The wind off the sea and the odd interior stillness dulled our ability to gauge direction, so that the sound seemed to infiltrate the black water that soaked the cypress trees. This water was so dark we could see our faces in it, and it never stirred, set like glass, reflecting the beards of gray moss that smothered the cypress trees. If you looked out through these areas, toward the ocean, all you saw was the black water, the gray of the cypress trunks, and the constant, motionless rain of moss flowing down. All you heard was the low moaning. The effect of this cannot be understood without being there. The beauty of it cannot be understood, either, and when you see beauty in desolation it changes something inside you. Desolation tries to colonize you.

VanderMeer, Jeff. Annihilation: A Novel (The Southern Reach Trilogy Book 1) (pp. 5-6). Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Kindle Edition.

**Week 8: Final Essay due**

**Discussion Prompt: Answer BOTH of these. This is the only prompt this week.**

1. **What concepts do you take away from this class? Be as specific and clear as possible.**
2. **How does reading literary theory help you to understand literature? How would you see yourself using these concepts?**