Studies in Critical Theory: Literature and Debt

ENG 5049 (Spring 2017)

Professor Robin Truth Goodman

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Tues/Thurs 3:35-4:50, Williams 120

Office Hours (216 Williams): most afternoons, by appointment only

**Goal:** One might say that literature was embroiled in the development of political economy in the 18th and 19th centuries when political economy was first emerging as a scholarly discipline and a popular discourse. That is, before the conceptual lines between disciplines were sharply delineated in the mid- to late-19th century, authors like Charles Dickens were writing popular articles on economics including recommendations to Parliament, using similar techniques as evident in the novels that became such a substantial part of our literary canon. The very creation of the "invisible hand" as an economic concept grew alongside the development of literary "character" as an abstract actor in an imagined social world. Literature not only displayed, questioned, and experimented with the social contradictions induced by the play of money and the growth of industrial capitalism, but also produced the idea of fiction as a non-referential production of value, influencing the acceptance of circulating paper money as a medium of exchange, for example, and the credit concept. In this course, we will consider how debt was understood as a literary device that organized social relations between characters at a time in the nineteenth century when property was starting to be considered as mobile, speculative, immaterial, and commercial rather than landed, inherited, substantial, or backed by gold. The use of debt as a literary device makes clear how the Victorians were anxious over the fictionality of capital, but it also indicates how inequality was what they were really anxious about when they worried over capital's fictiousness. Finally, we will study instances where postcolonial literature understands the concept of the "Third World" as developing out of the Victorian concept of debt, similarly working out, in fictional form, contradictions of political economy.

**Objective:** To familiarize students with some of the key debates, vocabularies, and foundational ideas of literary and critical theory. To get familiar enough with certain critical concepts to be able to use them in our own research and writing, in order to make critical interventions.

##### Requirements:

1) Attendance is mandatory.

2) You must do the reading before the class when we will be discussing it. Please bring the reading materials to class to refer to during discussion. Some weeks have more reading than others. Try to plan ahead and make extra time for the weeks that require extra time.

3) **Readings and assignments are subject to change.** If you are absent, you are responsible for what happens in class, and for any changes made in assignments. **You should therefore get telephone numbers and/or email addresses from two classmates whom you can call if you are absent.** Please do not write or call me to ask what happened in class, and please do not write or call me to tell me the reason you are absent. If you ever email me, please make sure you put your name and the name of the course in the email.

4) Papers should be typed, double-spaced, in a standard and legible, 12-pt. font, proofread, *stapled without report covers,* and always with a standard MLA-style bibliography.

5) **Cell phones should not come to class unless you are expecting a pizza delivery.**

6) **Plagiarism is against the law, and will result in an automatic failure of the course.**

7) Please do not cite from Wikipedia.

8) Students are expected to uphold the Academic Honor Code published in *The Florida State University Bulletin* and the *Student Handbook.* The academic honor system of The Florida State University is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility:

1. To uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student's own work;
2. To refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the University community; and
3. To foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the University community.

9) The Florida State University adheres to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) in prohibiting discrimination against any qualified person with a disability. Any student with a disability may voluntarily self-report the nature of the disability and identify needed special assistance to the Student Disability Resource Center, *1st Floor, Kellum Hall*.

10) Grades:

Short papers and class participation: 50%

Final Research Paper: 50%

**Email**

I will be sending periodic emails to the class as a whole. This means that you must have access to your fsu account and check it regularly, or have your email forwarded to an account you do check regularly.

## Writing Assignments

I will not be grading you on the content of your argument or on your position,but rather on the credibility of your argument, its focus, whether it makes sense, and whether it is made convincing, as well as the quality of your evidence and your analysis of the evidence.

Every class meeting, two students will present a 2-to-3 page paper to the class based on the readings and class discussions that we’ve done most recently. The students will have circulated the short papers on-line the night before the class meeting, no later than 8pm. The students will then lead the class discussion. **Every other student will have come to class prepared with at least two discussion questions (either about the text or about the short papers) to ask the students presenting short papers.** The questions will be collected by the authors of the short papers. Please also bring a copy of your questions for me.

The short papers will be a critical analysis of a chosen text, a combination of texts, or a relevant issue. The short papers will *set forth an argument for discussion*, taking *a clear position*, and then give support and evidence for the argument.

The papers will also initiate class discussion. You may want to include in them questions and topics to raise with the class, as though you were the teacher. You will lead the class discussion on your short paper, so be sure to think of ways to do that. The paper will also try to relate textual interpretations to broader social and political concerns: why does any of this matter? **You should not think of this as a book report where you have to touch on and/or summarize all the issues presented in the assigned text,** but rather as a thoughtful analysis and critique, using the theoretical insights to think through a focused and defined problem. This means you will most likely touch on only a portion of or point in the text. Here are some suggestions:

* What is debt? How does it work? How does it affect social being? How does it affect thinking?
* What does debt have to do with language? With literature?
* What is the role of literature in addressing problems in the world that are mostly thought of as non-literary problems? Why read literature?
* Does debt have a history?
* What is “the economy”? How is it thought about and represented? Whose interest does this framing serve?
* Why should we read literature to learn about political economy?
* Why should we read critical theory to learn about political economy?
* What is the text responding to? Why does this need a response?
* What is the text saying about power? What is it saying about oppression? Is this appropriate and/or adequate?
* What surprises you about the text? Does the text demand that you ask questions that you’ve never asked before? Does it make you think differently about what you know? Does it disrupt the concepts that you generally apply in your thinking?
* Did you like or dislike, agree with or disagree with what you saw as the text’s politics? How did the text convey these politics?
* Is the text making a critique of something? What is the text critiquing? How does the text construct its critique? How effective is the critique?
* What have you learned about contemporary critical theory by reading the text? What is the contribution the text is making? How is it pushing theory forward?
* Does the text give you any insights about what philosophical frameworks could lead to political actions or agency? What are the shortcomings or limits to this perspective? What kinds of actions become imaginable? What new ways are given for thinking about consciousness, change, and/or action?
* Do you notice any errors in the text? Misconceptions? Misreadings? Might any of these be purposeful?
* What are the limitations of the text’s historical perspective? Is this critique still relevant? Is it fair and appropriate?
* What does this text have to do with contemporary realities? Does the text give you any sense of how the future could be better? Does this text promise justice? How? For whom? Is this appropriate and/or adequate?
* How does the text help you to understand or evaluate another text?

In class, the student-presenters will lead class discussion, as though they are teaching the class, based on their own short paper.

After the class discussion, the students who are presenting will write up an analysis of the class discussion, responding to questions and points of contention, to be attached and handed in with the final paper.

**Monday, 1 May, noon: Final Research paper due (at least 12 pages)**

Final papers must be handed in electronically.

Short papers with a short (one page) commentary about what you thought of the ensuing class discussion (e.g. how the discussion helped you rethink your ideas or change your mind, how might you defend your ideas against the criticism of others, etc.)should be handed in hard copy for each of your short papers, at my office (216 Williams).

Your research paper will be on a topic of your choice. **You must** **discuss your ideas with me before writing**. Before coming to me to discuss your ideas, you should prepare by writing a working thesis and a preliminary bibliography. I would also counsel you to run your ideas by your classmates. This can be done informally on Blackboard.

In your final paper, please make your thesis and argument as clearly as possible.

We are aiming in this class to produce papers that are as close to professional quality as possible. This means that the paper must make a contribution to a scholarly debate.

###### Books to buy

Anthony Trollope, *The Eustace Diamonds*

Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*

Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Wizard of the Crow*

Wole Soyinka, *Collected Plays I*

There is an on-line reader that can be accessed via the Blackboard course library: [Bb].

**Readings:**

Tues., 10 Jan, Introduction

*Victorians*

Thurs., 12 Jan., Charles Dickens, “Convict Capitalists” [Bb]

Laurence Oliphant, “The Autobiography of a Joint-Stock Company” [Bb]

George Rae, “Testimony of a Balance Sheet” [Bb]

Sidney Laman Blanchard, “A Biography of a Bad Shilling” [Bb]

Tues., 17 Jan, Anna Kornbluh, from *Realizing Capital,* Introduction and Chapter 1 [Bb]

Thurs, 19 Jan, Anthony Trollope, *The Eustace Diamonds,* Chapters 1 through 21

Tues, 24 Jan, Anthony Trollope, *The Eustace Diamonds*, Chapters 22 through 43

Thurs, 26 Jan, Mary Poovey, from *Genres of the Credit Economy,* Chapter 1: Mediating Value [Bb]

Tues., 31 Jan, Anthony Trollope, *The Eustace Diamonds,* Chapters 43-65

Thurs., 2 Feb., Mary Poovey, from *Genres of the Credit Economy,* Chapter 2: Generic Differentiation and the Naturalization of Money [Bb]

Tues., 7 Feb, Anthony Trollope, *The Eustace Diamonds,* Chapters 66-end; [optional: Georg Simmel, “Adornment” from *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* [Bb]

Thurs., 9 Feb, Lauren Goodlad, “’India is ‘a Bore’’” from *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic* [Bb]

Tues., 14 Feb, Robin Truth Goodman, Introduction and chapter 1 of *Promissory Notes,* “Futures and Fictions”

*Theory*

Thurs, 16 Feb, Friedrich Nietzsche, “Second Essay” in *On the Genealogy of Morals* [Bb]

Tues., 21 Feb, Marcel Mauss, *The Gift,* pp. 3-46 [Bb]

Thurs., 23 Feb, Jacques Derrida, “The Madness of Economic Reason” from *Given Time I* [Bb]

Tues., 28 Feb., Marshall Sahlins, “The Spirit of the Gift” [Bb]

Thurs., 2 March, David Graeber, from *Debt: The First 5,000 Years,* Chapters 1 and 2

Tues., 7 March, David Graeber, from *Debt: The First 5,000 Years,* Chapters 5 and 12 [Bb]

Thurs., 9 March, Deleuze and Guatarri, excerpt from *Anti-Oedipus,* pp. 139-145 and 184-216 [Bb]

14 and 16 March, SPRING BREAK

Tues, 21 March, Miranda Joseph, from *Debt to Society,* Chapters 1 and 3 [Bb]

Thurs., 23 March, Annie McClanahan, “Dead Pledges: Debt, Horror, and the Credit Crisis” in *Post45:* http://post45.research.yale.edu/2012/05/dead-pledges-debt-horror-and-the-credit-crisis/

PLEASE ATTEND: **Friday, 24 March: Mary Poovey will give a lecture entitled “Regimes of Factuality: Living in a Post-Fact World” AND SEMINAR**

Tues, 28 March, Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man,* pp. 7-88

Thurs., 30 March, Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man,* pp.89-end

Tues., 4 April, Simon Morgan Wortham, “What We Owe to Retroactivity: The Origin and Future of Debt,” In *Postmodern Culture* 23, 3 (May 2013). Special issue on “Debt.” [Accessible on Project Muse]

*Postcolonialism*

(Recommended listening: Juan Gonzalez on Puerto Rican colonialism

<http://www.democracynow.org/2015/11/26/juan_gonzalez_on_how_puerto_ricos?utm_source=Democracy+Now!&utm_campaign=8e049bc5cf-Daily_Digest&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_fa2346a853-8e049bc5cf-190579529> )

Thurs. 6 April, Wole Soyinka, “The Road” from *Collected Plays* [Bb]

Tues., 11 April, Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

Thurs., 13 April, Mahasweta Devi, “Douloti the Bountiful” and “The Author in Conversation” from *Imaginary Maps* [Bb]

Tues., 18 April, April, Gayatri Spivak, “Woman in Difference” from *Outside in the Teaching Machine* [Bb]

Thurs., 20 April, Ngugi, *Wizard of the Crow*

Tues., 25 April, Ngugi, *Wizard of the Crow*

Thurs, 27 April, Robin Truth Goodman, chapter 2 of *Promissory Notes,* “Debt’s Geographies”

**Monday, 1 May, final papers due, noon.**