

**English 793A—Special Topics Seminar:
New Economic Criticism**

Dr. Michael Germana

Spring 2012

Meets: 4:00-6:50PM Mondays in G10 Colson Hall

Office Hours: 11:30AM-12:30PM MWF and by appointment

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Course Description:

In this course we will examine the foundations and development of, as well as recent trends in, New Economic Criticism—a critical genre that explores “the homologies between language and money” and the cultural work these homologies facilitate (Woodmansee and Osteen 15). The scholars whose works comprise this genre bring the material histories of economies as well as the cultural histories of economics to bear on readings of literary and popular cultural texts. Our focus in this class will remain on the critical genre and what it affords for Literary and Cultural Studies. An exploration of the histories New Economic scholars engage will emerge from our study of these materials.

The first half of the semester is dedicated to an examination of the key figures in, and scholarship of, New Economic Criticism. In the second half of the semester, we will read and discuss primary texts chosen by enrollees that lend themselves to study through an economic lens. The primary source or sources chosen by each student should be the tentative subject of his or her seminar paper.

Each student enrolled in the course will:

- Lead one class discussion (in tandem with another student) during the first half of the semester,
- Craft five brief précis-and-response papers during the first half of the semester,
- Select a primary source—be it a novel, play, series of stories, or collection of poems—for the rest of the class to read and discuss during the second half of the semester, and
- Research and write a 20-25-page seminar paper of publishable quality.

Required Texts:

Books:

Available at the WVU Bookstore:

- Marc C. Taylor, *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World without Redemption* (U of Chicago P, 2004)
- Lawrence Weschler, *Boggs: A Comedy of Values* (U of Chicago P, 1999)

Available as E-books via MountainLynx:

- Steven Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Harvard UP, 2007)

- Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (U of Chicago P, 2008)
- Linda Woodbridge, ed., *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism* (Palgrave, 2003)

Online Resources:

- *American Literature*: available from Duke University Press via MountainLynx
- Making of America at Cornell (MOA-Cornell): <http://digital.library.cornell.edu/m/moa/>
- Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore: <http://www.eapoe.org>
- Readings marked “ereserves” are available in PDF format at <http://ereserves.lib.wvu.edu/>

Assignments:

Discussion Leading:

In each of the six class meetings beginning January 23 and ending February 27, two members of the class will team up to lead discussion of the text(s) assigned for the day. Your goal, as discussion co-leader, is to pose questions and/or problems that help define the critical contours of the texts we are examining. You can introduce any pertinent examples into the discussion, be they from contemporary popular culture or from the literature of the period under examination. There is no formula to follow. Do work closely with your partner when preparing for your discussion-leading day.

Précis-and-Response Papers:

You will also complete five brief précis-and-response papers (~500 words) during the first half of the semester. Basically, between January 23 and February 27, if you aren't leading class discussion the day we meet, then you have a précis-and-response paper due. These will be informally graded and commented upon using a “+” or “-” system. Your paper should begin with a lucid characterization and summary of the argument made by one of the scholars whose work we read for the day. This précis must then be followed by a critical response from you that engages with and responds to this argument. The response is the place to stretch your own critical legs and pose venturesome questions that can promote class discussion and, in many cases, provoke future research on your seminar paper topic.

Primary Source Selection:

On or before February 6 you must choose a primary source (or, in the case of short stories or poetry, a collection of sources) for the entire class to read and discuss during the second half of the semester. If the text(s) you choose are available online, you must also provide a description of how and where to access the source(s).

Seminar Paper:

As the culmination of your work for the semester, your seminar paper will be an expertly argued and exhaustively researched essay of 20-25 pages. The seminar paper should display mastery of the text(s) being engaged and the criticism that surrounds it while offering an original interpretation of a topic related to New Economic Criticism. You may choose to expand one of your précis-and-response papers or develop an idea generated by your class discussion leading, but you may not resubmit an essay originally written for another class, conference, or journal.

Aside from these requirements, the topic, methodology, and objective of the seminar paper are all open. I strongly encourage you to discuss your plans for your paper with me as they evolve. Seminar paper drafts will be peer-critiqued during the final class meeting of the semester, so have copies of your rough draft ready to distribute the meeting before that. The final draft of the seminar paper is due in my mailbox in the English Department office on or before Monday, April 30 (the Monday of Exam Week).

Nota bene, failure to complete any one of the above assignments will constitute failure of the course.

Attendance and Participation:

Because this is a graduate seminar, your presence and active participation are expected. Except in rare cases under extraordinary circumstances, absences will have a profoundly negative impact upon final grades.

Grade Breakdown:

Seminar Paper: 85%

Everything Else (including discussion leading, précis-and-response papers, etc.): 15%

Academic Integrity Statement:

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code at <http://studentlife.wvu.edu/studentconductcode.html>. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me *before* the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Social Justice Statement:

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veterans' status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Disability Services (293-6700).

Course Calendar:

January 9:

Occupy Wall Street, an Overture:

- Lawrence Weschler, *Boggs: A Comedy of Values*
- Herman Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street,” *Putnam’s Monthly*, November and December 1853 (MOA—Cornell)
- “Inscription for the Back of a Bank-Note,” *Putnam’s Monthly*, November 1853 (MOA—Cornell)

January 16:

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—Class Does Not Meet

January 23:

Foundations of New Economic Criticism (w/ a Glimpse of its Possible Future(s)):

- Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen, “Taking Account of The New Economic Criticism” from *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics* (ereserves)
- Marc Shell, “Introduction: From Electrum to Electricity” and “The Gold Bug: Introduction to ‘the Industry of Letters’ in America” from *Money, Language, and Thought* (ereserves)
- Kurt Heinzelman, “ ‘Unreal Words’: Language in Political Economy” from *The Economics of the Imagination* (ereserves)
- Dierdre McCloskey, “The Literary Character of Economic Science” from *The Rhetoric of Economics* and pp. 1-39 of *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can’t Explain the Modern World* (ereserves)
- Edgar Allan Poe, “The Gold-Bug,” *Dollar Newspaper* June 21 and 28, 1843 (Edgar Allen Poe Society of Baltimore > Works > Tales > “The Gold-Bug”)

Class Discussion Leaders: _____ & _____

January 30:

Nascent Capitalism and *The Merchant of Venice*—Four Ways of Looking at Shakespeare’s Play:

- Linda Woodbridge, ed., *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism*, Chapters 9-12 (i.e., essays by Eric Spencer, Mark Netzloff, Steven R. Mentz, and Robert F. Darcy) (MountainLynx e-book)
- William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

Class Discussion Leaders: _____ & _____

February 6:

Genres of Economies and the Economics of Genre:

- Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Chapters 2 and 5 (MountainLynx e-book)

- Walter Benn Michaels, “The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism” from *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (ereserves)
- **Primary Source Selection Due—bring 12 copies of a document that identifies the primary source(s) you chose and, if available online, indicates point(s) of access.**

Class Discussion Leaders: _____ & _____

February 13:

Confidence and the Counterfeit:

- Steven Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (MountainLynx e-book)
- Mary McAleer Balkun, “ ‘I couldn’t see no profit in it’: Discourses of Commoditization and Authenticity in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*” from *The American Counterfeit: Authenticity and Identity in American Literature and Culture* (ereserves)

Class Discussion Leaders: _____ & _____

February 20:

Monetary Politics and the Cultural Politics of Identity:

- David Anthony, “ ‘Sleepy Hollow,’ Gothic Masculinity, and the Panic of 1819” from *Paper Money Men: Commerce, Manhood, and the Sensational Public Sphere in Antebellum America* (ereserves)
- Hildegard Hoeller, “Racial Currency: Zora Neale Hurston’s ‘The Gilded Six-Bits’ and the Gold-Standard Debate” *American Literature* 77.4 (2005): 761-785 (Duke University Press via MountainLynx)
- James Weldon Johnson, Chapter I of *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Google Books—Forgotten Books)
- Richard Wright, “The Man Who Lived Underground” (ereserves)
- Ralph Ellison, excerpt from *Three Days Before the Shooting...* [“McIntyre at Jessie Rockmore’s”] (ereserves)

Class Discussion Leaders: _____ & _____

February 27:

“In Uncertainty We Trust”—Economics, Faith, and the Cultural Turn:

- Marc C. Taylor, *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption*

Class Discussion Leaders: _____ & _____

March 5:

Discussion of Primary Texts _____ & _____

March 12:

Discussion of Primary Texts _____ & _____

March 19:

Discussion of Primary Texts _____ & _____

March 26:

Spring Recess—Class Does Not Meet

April 2:

Discussion of Primary Texts _____ & _____

April 9:

Discussion of Primary Texts _____ & _____

April 16:

Discussion of Primary Texts _____ & _____

Seminar Paper Draft Due—bring 12 copies of your draft-in-progress, no matter how rough. We will workshop these drafts in the forthcoming (and final) class meeting.

April 23:

Seminar Paper Workshop

Seminar Paper Due Monday of Exam Week (April 30). Please deposit your completed paper in my mailbox by 5PM that day.