



The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance: Kenneth Fearing, Nathanael West, and Mass Culture in the 1930s (Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture)

By Rita Barnard

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The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance examines the response of American leftist writers of the 1930s to the rise of mass culture, and to the continued propagation of the values of consumerism during the Depression. Rita Barnard traces in the work of Kenneth Fearing and Nathanael West theoretical positions associated with the Frankfurt School (especially Walter Benjamin) and with contemporary theorists of postmodernism. As well as probing the relationship between literature and mass culture, the book offers a new reading of two of the most unjustifiably neglected literary figures of the 1930s.

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Review

"Barnard's analysis helps explain why writers such as Benjamin and West should reappear now as significant figures for another generation of intellectuals. The mark of a good critic is that she makes you want to go directly to the text. Barnard reminded me of what a great poet Fearing was as she seconded my return trip to West; I expect this study to spark a Fearing revival....Like the shock of finishing a plate of potato salad to find Salamina's hairy legs sprouting from the prairie, these 1930s writings draw Marxist critiques of commodity fetishism from the very icons of capitalist consumption. And make you ask fir seconds. So does Rita Barnard." Paula Rabinowitz, Novel

"Rita Barnard's The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance offers a rich and insightful study of the Depression as seen through the work of two of its most important, albeit insufficiently recognized, cultural observers: Kenneth Fearing and Nathanael West." American Literature

"This book will force scholars to rethink the meaning of mass culture in the Depression years....Barnard takes a fresh approach....This is a brilliant book." Robbie Lieberman, AmericanHistorical Review

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