



Reading Capitalist Realism (New American Canon)

By Leigh Claire La Berge

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As the world has been reshaped since the 1970s by economic globalization, neoliberalism, and financialization, writers and artists have addressed the problem of representing the economy with a new sense of political urgency. Anxieties over who controls capitalism have thus been translated into demands upon literature, art, and mass media to develop strategies of representation that can account for capitalism's power.

Reading Capitalist Realism presents some of the latest and most sophisticated approaches to the question of the relation between capitalism and narrative form, partly by questioning how the “realism” of austerity, privatization, and wealth protection relate to the realism of narrative and cultural production. Even as critics have sought to locate a new aesthetic mode that might consider and move beyond theorizations of the postmodern, this volume contends that narrative realism demands renewed scrutiny for its ability to represent capitalism’s latest scenes of enclosure and indebtedness.

Ranging across fiction, nonfiction, television, and film, the essays collected here explore to what extent realism is equipped to comprehend and historicize our contemporary economic moment and what might be the influence or complicity of the literary in shaping the global politics of lowered expectations. Including essays on writers such as Mohsin Hamid, Lorrie Moore, Jess Walter, J. M. Coetzee, James Kelman, Ali Smith, Russell Banks, William Vollmann, and William Gibson, as well as examinations of Hollywood film productions and *The Wire* television series, *Reading Capitalist Realism* calls attention to a resurgence of realisms across narrative genres and questions realism’s ability to interrogate the crisis-driven logic of political and economic “common sense.”

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Editorial Review

Review

“This volume’s conceptualization of cultural developments through the framework of ‘capitalist realism’ will be welcomed by many who seek after the social relevance of literature at a time when the humanities are disappearing (as a result of the very fiscal austerity that the volume calls out) and when we seem to have surrendered the methodological tools for doing so.”—Colleen Lye, associate professor of English, University of California, Berkeley

“At a time when, as Jameson famously put it, ‘it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism,’ we lose our ability to distinguish capitalism from reality itself. The essays gathered here perform the vital service of restoring capitalism to visibility, enabling us to see how it shapes our literary representations of the ordinary and the everyday, how it guides contemporary narratives of ‘real life.’ This is high-caliber, committed criticism, asserting once more the power and usefulness of Marxist method in literary studies.”—James F. English, University of Pennsylvania

About the Author

Alison Shonkwiler is an assistant professor of English at Rhode Island College. She has published articles in *Contemporary Literature*, *Studies in the Novel*, and *GLQ*. She lives in Providence, Rhode Island. **Leigh Claire La Berge** is an assistant professor of English at Saint Mary’s University. She has published essays on *American Psycho*, Slavoj Žižek, *The Financier*, and the aesthetics of debt.

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