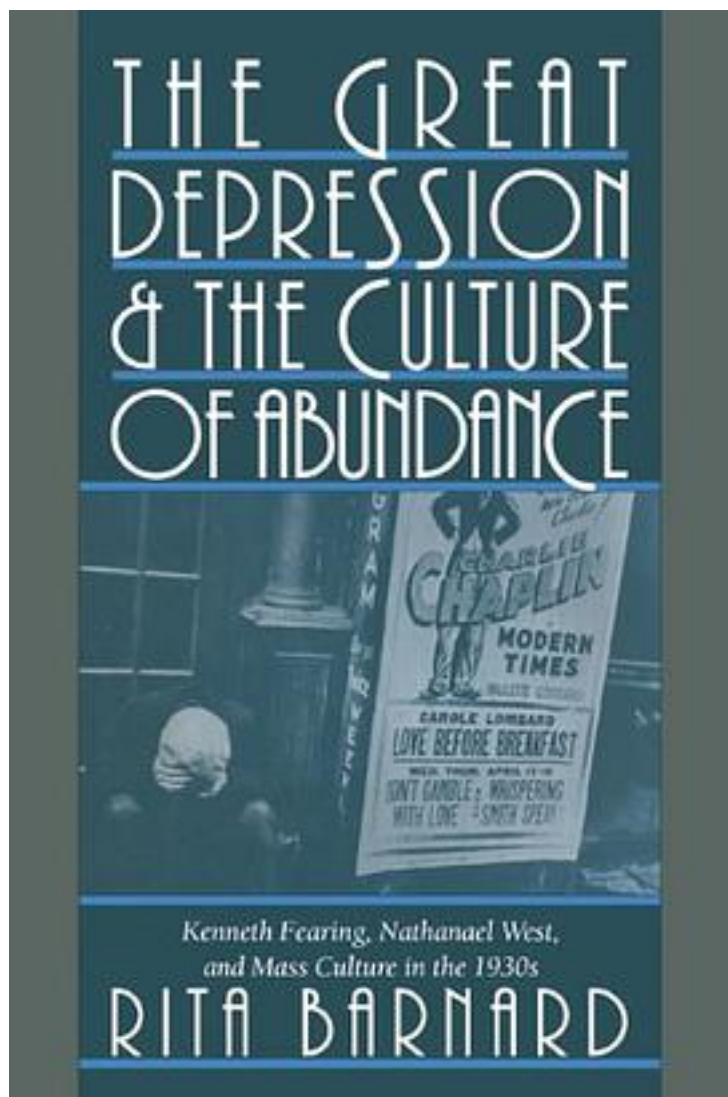


# The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance



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著者:Rita Barnard

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Two contradictory, or apparently contradictory, pairs of terms - depression and abundance, and literature and mass culture - make up the framework of this study in 1930s culture. Rita Barnard suggests that despite the painful national experience of scarcity and poverty, one can detect in the culture of the American thirties the now familiar outlines of an image-mediated, consumer society. She argues that the hierarchical opposition between 'high art' and 'mass culture' was powerfully contested in cultural productions of the depression era: as book clubs, radio, popular exhibitions, star conductors such as Toscanini and many other vehicles brought high culture to millions of people. In the meantime, writers with 'serious' literary interests borrowed from the discourse of the media in their writing. The central figures of this study emerge as pre-eminent - and in some sense prophetic - figures: their poetry and prose illuminate emergent cultural forces that have since attained new stature in our post-modern world. Despite their sharp and often prescient social critique, they are not to be mistaken for elitists, they recognised at once the deceit and the promise of our emergent culture of abundance.

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