Fictions of capital
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The American novel from
James to Mailer

RICHARD GODDEN
University of California
To Rhian Hughes
Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

1 Some slight shifts in the manner of the novel of manners

2 ‘You’ve got to see it, feel it, smell it, hear it’, buy it: Hemingway’s commercial forms

3 The Great Gatsby, glamour on the turn

4 Money makes manners make man make woman: Tender is the Night, a familiar romance?

5 Iconic narratives: or, how three Southerners fought the second civil war

6 Fordism: from desire to destruction (an historical interlude)

7 Why Are We in Vietnam?: because the buck mustn’t stop

8 Fordism, voiced and unvoiced: Mailer’s vocalism and Armies of the Night

9 Armies of the Night: a familiar romance?

Conclusion

Notes

Index
I once heard it said that if, as Marx argues, ‘language is practical consciousness’, it follows that most of us are practically unconscious. Many voices worked on my lack of consciousness over several years; while there is a chronology to the ensuing list there is no hierarchy, save to say that the first group have been at it longest, and without them this book would not have been written. I thank Lorraine Hewitt, who first told me about Marx and Adorno and who still insists on ‘the standpoint of redemption’; Charles Swann, whose scepticism came armed with revelatory reading lists; Rhian Hughes, whose generosity of perception persuades me that everyone merits ‘reading against the grain’; and Colin Richmond for his conversation. These four in their different ways have changed the way I think. Others have helped enormously and variously: Ian Bell, at dark times, evinced more belief in the project than I did; whenever I needed historical advice or information, Martin Crawford bore with my eccentricities; two graduate students, Pamela Rhodes and Geoff Cox, always argued and pointed out that it was no good writing in a foreign language; Karen Harrison typed, re-typed and bullied the chapters towards deadlines; Keith Carabine taught me to value the question, ‘But what does it mean?’ Particular sections were closely read by Robert Clark, Peter Nicholls and Mark Jancovich, whose editorial intelligence not only saw opacity where I had seen clarity, but pointed out how I might reduce the murk. All these people are in varying degrees responsible for what follows: I hope that these essays will not shame their responsibility.

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Fictions of capital

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