



T-LitCon

Istanbul Topkapı University

2nd Annual International Conference on Literature “Capitalism and
Literature”

May 09–10, 2024

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

SERAY DIZARD IV

Editor

E-ISBN: 978-625-94640-1-5

İstanbul Topkapı University Press



May 2024

T-LitCon

Istanbul Topkapı University

1st Annual International Conference on Literature “Capitalism and Literature”

May 09–10, 2024

Pleanery Speakers:

Dr. Alys E. Weinbaum — University of Washington

Dr. Gordon Bigelow — Rhodes College

Conference Organizing Committee:

Prof. Dr. Ferma Lekesizalın (Chair) — İstanbul Topkapı University

Dr. Elvan Karaman Mez — İstanbul Topkapı University

Res. Asst. Furkan Tozan — İstanbul Topkapı University

Res. Asst. Seray Dizard IV — İstanbul Topkapı University

Conference Scientific Committee:

Prof. Dr. Ferma Lekesizalın — İstanbul Topkapı University

Dr. Gordon Bigelow — Rhodes College

Dr. Joseph T. Salazar — University of the Philippines

Prof. Dr. Michael Valdez Moses — Duke University

Prof. Dr. Nadia Ghounane —University of Saida

CALL FOR PAPERS

ε

Capitalism has developed historically out of systems of feudalism and mercantilism in Europe, and dramatically expanded industrialization and the large-scale availability of mass-market consumer goods. Capitalist industrialization has led to the expansion of wage labour, grand-scale bureaucratization and increasing rationalization of the everyday life. The most distinguishing feature—in fact, the intrinsic rationale of capitalism—is, however, the relentless urge to make profit. As Adam Smith, the 18th century philosopher and father of modern economics, said: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.” Smith points to the fact that butcher, brewer, baker, and their customers participate in a voluntary exchange transaction and have their own interest in the outcome. The exchange transaction takes place only and only if neither can obtain what they want without addressing what the other wants. The theorists of capitalism have always advocated that it is this rational self-interest that leads nations to economic prosperity. Studying literary works in conjunction with capitalism may enable us to discern literary take on the rational self-interest and desire for prosperity; the relationship between rational and acquisitive aspects of capitalism; the ways in which capitalist urge for profit governs human behavior; economic and social inequalities produced by such urge; capitalist exploitation and working class. Literary criticism provides theoretical contexts and discursive tools through which we may evaluate literary perceptions of the workings of capitalism and the ways in which literary texts engage with social reality governed by pure self-interest. A consideration of the critical perspectives further helps us investigate the literary representations of the identities and values shaped by capitalism. The engagements of literature with the political, psychological, and social consequences of capitalism have produced illustrious representations of alienation and disenchantment. Literary works have provided unique perspectives on the rationalization of everyday life, the psychology of consumption, and many other ethical issues relating to the tension between economic self-interest and basic human values. Such issues may be considered in critical addresses to literature and capitalism. We, therefore, invite critical inquiries into literary perspectives on capitalism and those who are interested in presenting their research at the 2024 Topkapi University Literature and Capitalism Conference.

Prof. Dr. Ferma Lekesizalın
Conference Organizing Committee, Chair

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CALL FOR PAPERS	i
Prof. Dr. Ferma Lekesizalin.....	i
Surrogacy, Capitalism and the Filipina Caretaker in Joanne Ramos’s <i>The Farm</i>	1
Raluca Andreescu.....	1
Investigating Alienation and Exploitation of Women in Selected Indian Plays in English	2
Sreetanwi Chakraborty	2
Capitalism, Class, and Gender in Elizabeth Gaskell’s <i>Mary Barton</i>	3
Şebnem Düzgün.....	3
Commerce and Pleasure: Metonymic Textiles in Elizabeth Gaskell’s <i>North and South</i>	4
Başak Demirhan.....	4
Body, Labor, and Conflicting Roles in Bobbie Ann Mason’s “Shiloh”	5
Hediye Özkan.....	5
Tropical Hysteria in the Communist Heartland: Ideological Temporalities in Rolando S. Tinio’s “Mula sa Leningrad”	6
Joseph T. Salazar.....	6
Capitalizing on Scarce Oxygen Levels and Decapitating the Lower Social Classes: Striving to Breathe Free in the Capitalocene of Sarah Crossan’s Eco-Dystopic Fiction <i>Breathe</i>	7
Merve Günday.....	7
The relationship between existentialism and capitalism through the works of David Foster Wallace	8
Paolo Pitari.....	8
Survival and Struggle: The Interplay of Capitalism and Darwinism in Upton Sinclair’s <i>The Jungle</i>	9
Erel Mez.....	9

**ABSTRACTS AND AUTHOR
INFORMATION**

Surrogacy, Capitalism and the Filipina Caretaker in Joanne Ramos's *The Farm*

Raluca ANDREESCU¹

Abstract

My paper examines how the unchecked exploitation of new reproductive technologies doubled and driven by an extreme capitalistic ethos contributes to the widening of the economic and social divide in today's globalized and highly interconnected world. It takes as its starting point Joanne Ramos's recent novel *The Farm* (2019), whose title refers to a surrogacy facility in Upstate New York populated by surrogates for the ultrarich. In this dystopian world, separated by an inch from our immediate reality, pregnancy has been outsourced to Hosts, who come predominantly from poorer or immigrant backgrounds and whose unique version of the American Dream entails carrying bespoke fetuses to term within a highly regulated and controlled environment in exchange for a shot at economic security in ruthless capitalist America. The novel foregrounds the life and work experiences of two Filipina women in the United States who, in pursuit of a better life for their families, help maintain and perpetuate a system of "stratified reproduction". The opportunistic business venture which exploits pregnancy and these women's experiences as willing commodities expose and reinforce at the same time the inequalities based on race, class, gender and economic status in bearing and raising children, particularly against the background of the commodification of reproductive labor.

Keywords: Surrogacy, NRTs, capitalism, dystopia, Filipina, American Dream.

¹ Asst. Prof. Dr., University of Bucharest, Modern Languages Department, Romania.

Investigating Alienation and Exploitation of Women in Selected Indian Plays in English

Sreetanwi CHAKRABORTY²

Abstract

Social realism, alienation, and exploitation of women are inextricably interwoven across patterns of culture. In Indian drama and performance studies, the narratives of gender, body, capitalism, and women's exploitation become relevant points of highlighting existential feminism. This paper attempts to explore playwright Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*, *Lights Out*, *The Mating Game Show*, and *Astro-Nuts* as representing the multilayered patterns of existing in a capitalist world. The second part of the paper also delves deeper into Mahesh Elkunchwar, a Marathi playwright's insights into Capitalism, social realism, and existential corruption in his selected plays. There is a specific discussion of the gender-based violence and voice of women in *Garbo*, *Sonata*, *Desire in the Rocks*. The plays highlight women's role, agency, and what kind of generational quality they show. Incorporating women's functionality in the family as a microcosm and in the larger macrocosm of a patriarchal society is fraught with difficulty. In return, the question of whether she is a burden to the family, or do they remain completely invisible in the production system is investigated. Essential to the study of economic and familial marginalization stands how in *Origin of the Family* by Engels, there is a foregrounding of the concept of private property and the consequences of having it. Elkunchwar and Padmanabhan's plays transcend the local dialectic in Marxism and attain a sense of global discomfiture in terms of locating women's issues. The intensity, style, and parallel narratives of social ostracization give birth to women's alienation and reaffirmation of identity through dramatic setting.

Keywords: Alienation, Marxism, Drama, Women's Studies, Capitalism, Social Alienation

² Asst. Prof., Amity University Kolkata, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, India.

Capitalism, Class, and Gender in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*

Şebnem DÜZGÜN³

Abstract

In nineteenth-century industrial capitalist system, working-class women were forced to join the paid labour force to survive. However, bourgeois family model, based on the ideology of separate spheres, segregated the private from the public, reinforcing the idea that women are too weak and delicate to participate in the world of commerce and capitalist production. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) portrays the conflict between the working and industrial capitalist classes and shows the overlap between capitalism, class, and gender. While bourgeois female characters remain in the 'proper' domestic sphere as selfless, dependent beings, working-class female characters, including *Mary Barton*, the eponymous character, are forced by socio-economic conditions to move into the public sphere to earn their own money. However, working-class women, who become self-sufficient by taking part in capitalist industry, get alienated from the domestic sphere and feel defeminised for failing to fulfil their domestic duties. Displaying the problems with the concept of womanhood proposed by the industrial capitalist class, the novel suggests a new paradigm of femininity through the case of *Mary Barton*, who mediates between the masculine ethos of the public sphere, such as self-reliance and self-control, and the feminine ethos of the domestic sphere, such as nurturing and selflessness. This study aims to show that *Mary Barton* offers a new model of femininity that merges the masculine ethos of the public realm with the feminine ethos of the domestic realm as an alternative to the bourgeois notion of womanhood, which degrades women into idle, non-productive and passivised beings.

Keywords: *Mary Barton*, capitalism, class, gender, womanhood

³ Assoc. Prof. Dr., Ankara Science University, English Language and Literature, Türkiye.

Commerce and Pleasure: Metonymic Textiles in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*

Başak DEMİRHAN⁴

Abstract

Textiles have a special status and special metonymic and metaphorical power as objects that accompany, hide, and reveal. Clothing is quite versatile in its ability to signify economic value, cultural taste, family lineage, national identity, or gender. It is the contact surface between the public and the private lives of the individual, as well as a pervasive commodity in the life of consumers in capitalist societies. Clothing and textiles constituted the most important products of industrialization in 19th-century England. English industrialists competed with the exotic Indian textiles, fledging European competitors' products, and the American textiles. As Victorian England became industrialized, traditional culture started to become incongruous with the habitus developed by the emerging industrialist and laboring classes. In her social problem novel *North and South*, published at the height of industrialization, Elizabeth Gaskell creates an image of social cohesion for capitalist Victorian England through her protagonist Margaret's eventual acceptance of industrial commodities. The novel focuses on specific textiles in critical moments as emblems of the conflict between old feudal and new industrial culture. The protagonist Margaret's relationship with these textiles changes from alienation to ultimately learning to enjoy textiles, which is the novel's way of signaling that this particular cultural conflict is resolved. In this presentation, I discuss three significant moments that showcase textiles: her detachment from Edith's muslin dress and Indian shawls in the first chapters of the novel, her encounter with cotton textiles and "fluff" in Milton, and her enjoyment of the Spanish mantilla, which her brother sends her at the end of the novel.

Keywords: Industrial capitalism, material culture, textiles, Victorian novel, *North and South*.

⁴ Asst. Prof. Dr., Boğaziçi University, Western Languages and Literatures Department, Türkiye.

Body, Labor, and Conflicting Roles in Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh"

Hediye ÖZKAN⁵

Abstract

Bobbie Ann Mason's short story "Shiloh" in *Shiloh and Other Stories* published in 1982 explores the fluidity of identity and gender roles through the conflicting relationship between Norma Jean and Leroy Moffitt. While Norma Jean is masculinized through body building, work, and writing, her husband Leroy is emasculated after a leg injury, a symbolic castration which forces him to stay in the domestic sphere. Their gender roles along with economic roles shift as both transforms physically with the increasing awareness of their bodies. While Norma Jean's financial and physical transformation accelerates her emotional detachment from her husband, Leroy is economically disempowered, yet dreams of building a log house as his materialistic fantasy of rescuing the failing marriage. I argue that Norma Jean's subversion of paternally sanctioned culture and repressed maternal terrain through financial independence and critical deconstruction of her body and intellect is the liberation of the culturally constructed human body within the institution of marriage and patriarchal society. Her bodily, intellectual, and emotional conflict with the cultural and political configuration of gender roles is an attempt to restore the set of categories and her symbolic castration due to the loss of her baby. Discussing the economic transformation in the late twentieth century and its impact on the structure of American family, this paper examines the corporal constructions and transgressions which serve for the emancipation of individuals from the boundaries of body and gender while ironically forcing them to be a part of the exploitative capitalist system.

Keywords: Bobbie Ann Mason, gender roles, labor, corporeality, southern literature.

⁵ Asst. Prof. Dr., Aksaray University, Western Languages and Literatures, Türkiye.

Tropical Hysteria in the Communist Heartland: Ideological Temporalities in Rolando S. Tinio’s “Mula sa Leningrad”

Joseph T. SALAZAR⁶

Abstract

This study examines time in Rolando S. Tinio's poem “Mula sa Leningrad” (“From Leningrad,” published 1989) through the lens of tropical hysteria, a concept portraying individuals from tropical or colonized regions as irrational and emotionally unstable, aiming to discredit objections to colonial rule. Although the USSR never controlled the Philippines, the dismissal of the poem's persona's frustrations riding a slow train to Moscow is reminiscent of the historical inefficiencies Filipinos experienced but were never able to articulate against the United States, which took control of the archipelago in 1898. The confrontation within the poem can be read as differences in ideological temporalities, with both cultures offering contrasting visions of the future and notions of progress: with the Soviet Union and its adherence to the economics of communism, and the Philippines as the proxy of American capitalism. However, despite divergent conceptions of temporalities, this confrontation renders this Cold War moment unnecessary. The persona comes to terms with his continued alienation as a third world identity regardless of whether he aligns himself with communism or capitalism. Furthermore, his lack of a decisive choice is reflective of a false sense of individuality and agency. Working through the persona's frustrations and reflections, the poem offers a critique challenging the supremacy of the future propagated by the Cold War powers, highlighting the gap between rhetoric and reality for marginalized communities.

Keywords: Rolando S. Tinio, Filipino Poetry, Tropical Hysteria, Colonialism, Cold War, Temporality, Filipino Time.

⁶ Asst. Prof. Dr., University of the Philippines, Department of English and Comparative Literature, Philippines.

Capitalizing on Scarce Oxygen Levels and Decapitating the Lower Social Classes: Striving to Breathe Free in the Capitalocene of Sarah Crossan's Eco-Dystopic Fiction *Breathe*

Merve GÜNDAY⁷

Abstract

What if we were forced to live inside an artificial pod with air tanks behind us because of scarce oxygen levels, as victims having to pay for one of our basic needs for survival, air? The financially powerful would perhaps dare to confront such a world. Yet, what about those assigned to the lower levels of the social stratification system? How would they pay for the air to continue their life? Could it be possible to step outside this nightmarish universe and enter instead an alternative space offering free air to all individuals regardless of social hierarchies? Sarah Crossan's post-apocalyptic eco-dystopia *Breathe* (2012) grapples with these questions, pointing to the possible threats awaiting all the living beings in case of nature's degradation, decreasing oxygen levels, and the fall of air into the hands of capitalism. The present study discusses *Breathe* with the aim of emphasizing how devastating the results of ecological damage and thereby the monopolization of air by capitalistic desires could be, leading to the denial of even a biological site of existence to those lacking enough money for buying air tanks, that is, to those who can be already addressed as the living dead in social terms. As evidenced in the novel, with nonhuman air(nature)-human subjects being intertwined, capitalizing on nature no wonder equals to the colonization of the human bodies due to the role it disgracefully takes in determining who deserves to live, I would further contend. To underline that in the capitalocentric hands of those in power, not only nature but also lower social classes who fail to pay for air are disempowered, therefore, I discuss the novel in the context of Capitalocene.

Keywords: Sarah Crossan, *Breathe*, Capitalocene, eco-dystopia, environmental degradation, colonization of air.

⁷ Asst. Prof. Dr., Ankara University, English Language and Literature Department, Türkiye.

The Relationship Between Existentialism and Capitalism Through the Works of David Foster Wallace

Paolo PITARI⁸

Abstract

This contribution studies the fictional works of David Foster Wallace through a framework anticipated by the sociologist Jim McGuigan, who, in “The Neoliberal Self”, argued that neoliberalism is the concretization of existentialism. In agreement with McGuigan, I submit that, while Wallace dedicated his career to writing fiction that would function as an anodyne against the existential predicaments created by neoliberalism, he could never offer a solution to said predicaments precisely because he subscribed to existentialism. In short, the argument is that Wallace’s works unwillingly demonstrate that if one believes we are all individuals endowed with free will and responsible for ourselves, then neoliberalism follows, with all its consequences. In addition, the presentation compares Wallace’s framework with that put forth in Ulrich and Elizabeth Beck’s notion of ‘individualization’. Wallace and the Becks are shown to be all existentialists, albeit on opposite sides: Wallace sees the existential predicaments caused by neoliberalism but fails to solve them; the Becks entirely fail to see them because of their existentialism. Even in the failure of his project, therefore, Wallace’s works show that literary writers can have a deeper grasp of social dynamics than sociologists themselves. They thus invite us to keep literary analysis at the forefront in our attempts to understand ourselves and the world we live in.

Keywords: Ulrich Beck, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, Jim McGuigan, Adam Smith, Margaret Thatcher, John D. Rockefeller.

⁸ Dr., Independent Researcher.

Survival and Struggle: The Interplay of Capitalism and Darwinism in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*

Erel MEZ⁹

Abstract

Upton Sinclair's renowned novel, *The Jungle*, presents an intense frame of the intricate relationship between capitalism and Darwinism in the early 20th-century America. Set in the gritty and unforgiving landscape of Chicago's meatpacking industry, Sinclair's narrative serves as a profound exploration of how these ideologies intersect, intertwine, and often clash. This study embarks on an in-depth analysis of Sinclair's critique of capitalism, revealing its underlying mechanisms of exploitation and inequality. Through the perspective of immigrant laborers navigating the treacherous terrain of industrial Chicago, Sinclair exposes the stark realities of a capitalist system driven by profit maximization and the relentless pursuit of wealth at the expense of human dignity. The portrayal of exploitative working conditions, deplorable living standards, and the callous disregard for worker welfare serves as a sarcastic indictment of the inherent flaws and injustices within capitalist structures. Furthermore, this analysis explores the implicit endorsement of Darwinian principles within the novel, illuminating themes of adaptation, survival, and ethical choice within the harsh realities of industrial capitalism. Sinclair neatly weaves Darwinian concepts into the fabric of his narrative, investigating how individuals and communities face the pressures of natural selection and the imperative to adapt to their environment. By dissecting the tensions and complexities between economic systems and natural processes, this study discloses the profound human cost of unchecked capitalism and the potential merits of Darwinism in fostering resilience, equity, and social cohesion. Through Sinclair's lens, readers are compelled to confront the enduring struggle for justice and dignity in the face of capitalist exploitation, and to contemplate alternative frameworks that prioritize compassion, solidarity, and ethical responsibility. *The Jungle* emerges not only as a literary masterpiece but also as a poignant call to reassess prevailing ideologies and strive towards a more humane and equitable society.

⁹ Lecturer., İstanbul Topkapı University, English Language and Literature, Türkiye.