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0521828481 - Fiction, Famine, and the Rise of Economics in Victorian Britain and Ireland

Gordon Bigelow

Frontmatter

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OF ECONOMICS IN VICTORIAN
BRITAIN AND IRELAND

We now think of economic theory as a scientific speciality accessible only to experts, but Victorian writers commented on economic subjects with great interest. Gordon Bigelow focuses on novelists Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell and compares their work with commentaries on the Irish Famine (1845–52). Bigelow argues that, at this moment of crisis, the rise of economics depended substantially on concepts developed in literature. These works all criticized the systematized approach to economic life that the prevailing political economy proposed. Gradually, the romantic views of human subjectivity, described in the novels, provided the foundation for a new theory of capitalism based on the desires of the individual consumer. Bigelow's argument stands out by showing how the discussion of capitalism in these works had significant influence not just on public opinion, but on the rise of economic theory itself.

GORDON BIGELOW is Assistant Professor of English at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. His work has appeared in the journals *ELH*, *New Orleans Review*, and *Research in African Literatures*, and in the volume *Reclaiming Gender: Transgressive Identities in Modern Ireland* (1999).

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Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee



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