



The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel

Catherine Gallagher

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The Body Economic revises the intellectual history of nineteenth-century Britain by demonstrating that political economists and the writers who often presented themselves as their literary antagonists actually held most of their basic social assumptions in common. Catherine Gallagher demonstrates that political economists and their Romantic and early-Victorian critics jointly relocated the idea of value from the realm of transcendent spirituality to that of organic "life," making human sensations--especially pleasure and pain--the sources and signs of that value. Classical political economy, this book shows, was not a mechanical ideology but a form of nineteenth-century organicism, which put the body and its feelings at the center of its theories, and neoclassical economics built itself even more self-consciously on physiological premises.

The Body Economic explains how these shared views of life, death, and sensation helped shape and were modified by the two most important Victorian novelists: Charles Dickens and George Eliot. It reveals how political economists interacted crucially with the life sciences of the nineteenth century--especially with psychophysiology and anthropology--producing the intellectual world that nurtured not only George Eliot's realism but also turn-of-the-century literary modernism.

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