

**Keeping the Political in Economics: The Economic Concerns of  
Female Victorian Writers (Working Title)**

**Abstract**

With the growth of modern capitalism, economics emerges as a crucial form of knowledge production in the nineteenth century. However, due to society's patriarchal structures, the concept of an 'economic subject' essentially refers to male individuals whereby women were excluded from and in the prevalent discourses of political economy. Yet, there is an archive of female figures in narrative fiction who engage with the economy in diverse ways. The term 'female figures' is at once understood to refer to characters in literary texts but also to the authors themselves. Narrative fiction presents a useful resource that intersects productively with economics because novels play an active role in shaping economic thought; they have the potential to challenge, critically engage with, work through and re-imagine a specific society's understanding of the economy. In reconsidering the economic domain as it has been described in and for the Victorian period in terms of gender, this thesis puts the economic, political and reformist merit of the narrative texts examined centre stage. At the core of these novels is the tension between the industrial and the romance novel. To translate the interplay between these two genres into economic terms results in recognising the tension between productive and reproductive work. Rather than separating the one from the other, and thereby relegating the latter to a domain regarded as unimportant to the market sphere, these literary texts firmly insist they remain linked. It is only when they do so that the complex web of politics, economics, law, class and gender not only becomes visible but can be negotiated, both on an individual and a systemic level.