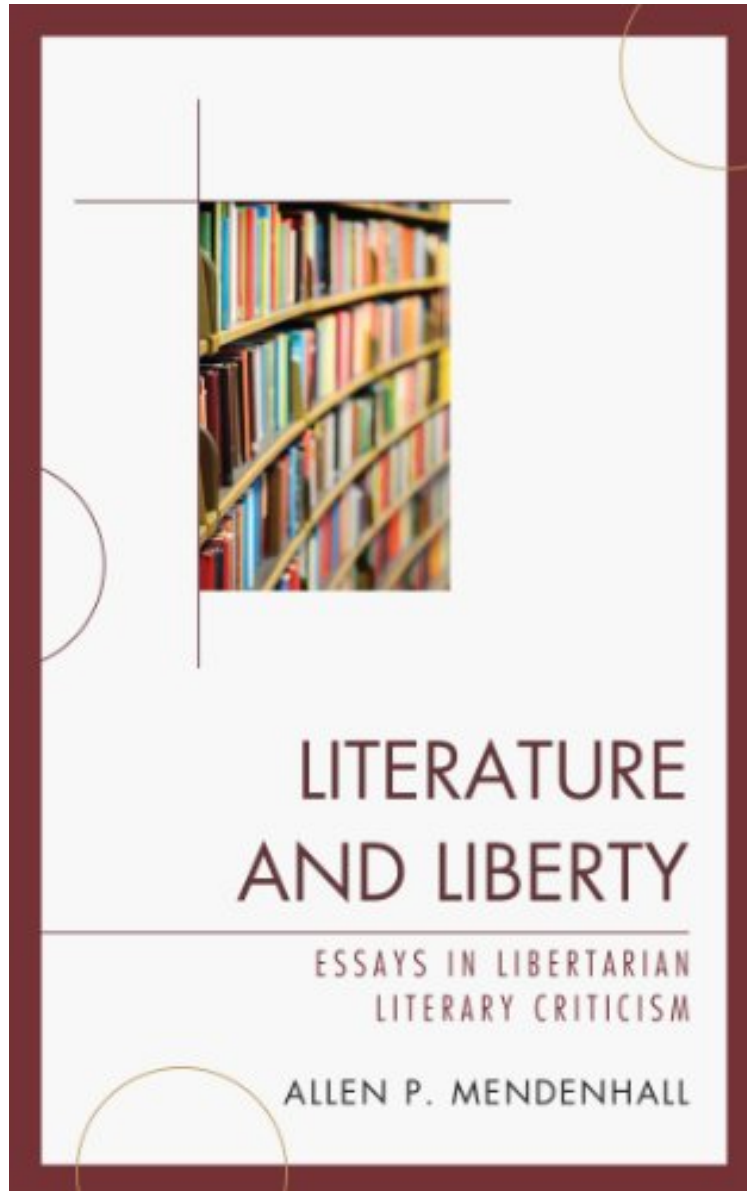


Literature and Liberty: Essays in Libertarian Literary Criticism

Allen Mendenhall

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Allen Mendenhall : Literature and Liberty: Essays in Libertarian Literary Criticism before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Literature and Liberty: Essays in Libertarian Literary Criticism:

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creates a rather compelling argument with this commentary on the traditional art of prose and that of another "art;rdquo; governance. In truth, I may be putting it a bit too narrow. Mendenhall brings large and broad notions together in a coherent and relevant way, and ultimately, posits an intriguing theory that is persuasive and logical, and thoroughly vetted throughout. Although I was somewhat skeptical initially, Mendenhall gathers together such complete citation, commentary, peer reflection and review as well as historical commentary that my original disposition (contrary to Mendenhall's submission) has been abated completely. (In an attempt to avoid spoilers, I will refrain from delving too deeply into just what such submission suggests). For my part, I found *Literature and Liberty* well written with the current culture in mind, yet cohesive and refined enough to satisfy the expert as well. To be sure, Mendenhall has created something special here; a scholarly work that is a must for any attorney, professional, academic, or anyone interested in this subject broadly, its relationship to politics, economics or the governance of our country and society at large.

The economic theories of Karl Marx and his disciples continue to be anthologized in books of literary theory and criticism and taught in humanities classrooms to the exclusion of other, competing economic paradigms. Marxism is collectivist, predictable, monolithic, impersonal, linear, reductive — in short, wholly inadequate as an instrument for good in an era when we know better than to reduce the variety of human experience to simplistic formulae. A person's creative and intellectual energies are never completely the products of culture or class. People are rational agents who choose between different courses of action based on their reason, knowledge, and experience. A person's choices affect lives, circumstances, and communities. Even literary scholars who reject pure Marxism are still motivated by it, because nearly all economic literary theory derives from Marxism or advocates for vast economic interventionism as a solution to social problems. Such interventionism, however, has a track-record of mass murder, war, taxation, colonization, pollution, imprisonment, espionage, and enslavement — things most scholars of imaginative literature deplore. Yet most scholars of imaginative literature remain interventionists. *Literature and Liberty* offers these scholars an alternative economic paradigm, one that over the course of human history has eliminated more generic bads than any other system. It argues that free market or libertarian literary theory is more humane than any variety of Marxism or interventionism. Just as Marxist historiography can be identified in the use of structuralism and materialist literary theory, so should free-market libertarianism be identifiable in all sorts of literary theory. *Literature and Liberty* disrupts the near monopolistic control of economic ideas in literary studies and offers a new mode of thinking for those who believe that arts and literature should play a role in discussions about law, politics, government, and economics. Drawing from authors as wide-ranging as Emerson, Shakespeare, E.M. Forster, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Henry Hazlitt, and Mark Twain, *Literature and Liberty* is a significant contribution to libertarianism and literary studies.

Countering an academic environment in which Marxism and its variants are still being fed to students, this volume of essays offers nutritious food for thought to scholars across the humanistic and social science disciplines — whether they are already conversant with libertarian literary criticism or have never heard of it. (Libertarian Papers) The anti-capitalist and pro-socialist biases of many literary critics today are well-documented, but there are signs that the study of literature may be opening up to libertarian approaches. Allen Mendenhall represents a new generation of scholars whose exposure to Austrian economics has given them the intellectual tools they need to challenge Marxist, neo-Marxist, and quasi-Marxist analyses of literature. As both a student of literature and a practicing lawyer, Mendenhall brings genuine interdisciplinary training to the subjects he covers, several of which fall into the burgeoning field of law and literature. Eschewing the kind of jargon that infects many discussions of literature these days, Mendenhall writes clearly and effectively. Although this book has a polemical intent, and Mendenhall does not shy away from attacking well-known contemporary literary critics, he is not hostile to his intellectual opponents and actually tries to build bridges to the people against whom he is arguing. (The Journal of Prices Markets) Allen Mendenhall is both an attorney and an advanced student of literature. He also has an excellent knowledge of modern economics. . . . [A]s Mendenhall notes, non-Marxist treatments of economics and literature have been slow to develop. His new book, *Literature and Liberty*, goes far toward supplying this lack. It shows how much work can be done, and good work too, when law and literature are studied from the perspectives offered by a real competence in economic ideas. . . . Every part of the book shows the fully interdisciplinary character of Mendenhall's understanding of his subjects and his large knowledge of the historical periods he treats. Only the rare reader will be unable to learn from Mendenhall. . . . The kind of interdisciplinary work that Mendenhall advocates is an exciting enterprise, and one hopes that he will have much more to do with it. (Quarterly Journal Of Austrian Economics) Allen Mendenhall presents libertarianism as an alternative lens through which to view works of literature as a means of understanding them better. . . . The economist Thomas Sowell has written that much of the academic work that calls itself "interdisciplinary" is in fact non-disciplinary when it fails to require the actual mastery of multiple disciplines. Fortunately, Mendenhall's work is not vulnerable to this critique. As the holder of both a Ph.D. in English (this book was published when he was a doctoral candidate) and a law degree, Mendenhall is well qualified to write on the intersection of literature, political

theory, and law. . . .[H]is true interdisciplinary background allows him to critique literary studies from both the inside and the outside. . . .Literature and Liberty is a thought-provoking work that provides new looks at a number of classic texts from a perspective that is, quite frankly, refreshing given the current climate of literary criticism. (Journal of Faith and the Academy)Freedom is all around us, but we sometimes need expert guides to help us see it. This is exactly what the brilliant Allen Mendenhall has done with his outstanding collection of essays on the way great literary fiction interacts with the themes of human liberty. In taking this approach, he is turning certain academic conventions on their heads, finding individualism and property rights where others look for social forces and collectivist imperatives. He helps us to have a rich and deeper appreciation of the libertarian tradition and its expanse beyond economics and politics. (Jeffrey Tucker, CEO of Liberty.me)In Literature and Liberty, Allen Mendenhall aims to expand the marketplace of ideas in literary studies to include the entire spectrum of free-market theories. His goal is to break Marxism's monopolistic hold over economic ideas in the study of imaginative literature. In his diverse chapters, he convincingly offers multiple transdisciplinary approaches to libertarian theory that literature scholars could adopt and build upon. Celebrating individualism and freedom in place of collectivism and determinism, Mendenhall focuses on commonalities and areas of agreement with respect to free-market theories. This approach increases the probability that the ideas in this ground-breaking volume will be widely embraced by thinkers from various schools of pro-capitalist thought, including, but not limited to Classical Liberalism, the Austrian School, the Judeo-Christian perspective, the Public Choice School, the Chicago School, the Human Flourishing School, and Objectivism. (Edward W. Younkins, Wheeling Jesuit University)The much celebrated interdisciplinarity of contemporary criticism often amounts to nothing more than the absence of grounding in any traditional intellectual discipline, literary or otherwise. By contrast, Allen Mendenhall's book is genuinely interdisciplinary. With solid credentials in law, economics, and literature, he moves seamlessly and productively among the fields. Covering a wide range of topics—from medieval history to postcolonial studies—Mendenhall opens up fresh perspectives on long-debated critical issues and raises new questions of his own. (Paul A. Cantor, University of Virginia)About the AuthorAllen P. Mendenhall is adjunct professor at Faulkner University Thomas Goode Jones School of Law.