

# Kirkus

February 1, 2001

★ **Roberts, Russell**

THE INVISIBLE HEART: *An*

*Economic Romance*

MIT (266 pp.)

\$22.95

Mar. 2001

ISBN- 0-262-18210-6

A romance from MIT Press? Yes, because it's devoted to radical economic ideas delivered as marvelously inventive fiction.

Business scholar and NPR commentator Roberts (*The Choice: A Fable of Free Trade and Protectionism*, 1993, not reviewed) hangs his debut novel on a trick, which of course we can't give away, but think clever twists à la *The Sixth Sense*. The story: Sam Gordon teaches high-school economics at the high-toned Edwards School in Washington, D.C. Sam's pro-capitalist ideas about economics sound an outlandish drumbeat for \$ucce\$\$ that would have Ayn Rand hauling him straight into the bedroom. Though at first blush his ideas sound immoral and unprincipled, they're grounded in profound good sense. As Sam explains to unmarried English teacher Laura Silver, "There is an invisible heart at the core of the marketplace, serving the customer and doing it joyously." A hundred years ago, he tells her, forty percent of the American population lived on farms; today only three percent do. What if, out of "compassion," we'd passed laws against the improved technology that drove the kids off the farms, just as we might fetter today's industries and keep them stateside? Our new technologies would not have arisen. *Never regulate business!* Sam insists. Among his stunned students is Amy Hunt, daughter of powerful Senator Hunt (member of the school's supervisory board), and her parroting of Sam's radical capitalism around her house may get him in deep trouble. Meanwhile, a subplot goes forward as giant pharmaceuticals firm HealthNet moves to Mexico, causing a huge loss of jobs in an American factory town. Can watchdog Erica Baldwin's Office of Corporate Responsibility bring HealthNet's fanged CEO, Charles Krauss, to heel?

There is actually a love story (largely unrequited) amid all this finagling, but it's capitalism that charms you breathless.

# Publishers Weekly

February 12, 2001

## pwforecasts

### THE INVISIBLE HEART

RUSSELL ROBERTS. MIT, \$22.95

(266p) ISBN 0-262-18210-6

Hailed as an "economic romance" by the publisher, yet reading more like a dissertation on big business versus the consumer, this snappy, well-written novel casts economic polemic in fictional form. Laura Silver is a newly hired English teacher at the prestigious Edwards High School in Washington, D.C. On the street one day, she strikes up a conversation with Sam Gordon, fellow instructor of economics at Edwards. Despite Sam's fanatical devotion to free-market capitalism, bleeding-heart liberal Laura finds she enjoys their verbal sparring. Over the course of the school year, Laura and Sam run into one another on campus and around town, each time learning more about the other and delving further into political and economic topics. Meanwhile, an out-of-the-ordinary subplot pits ruthless Charles Krauss, CEO of megacorporation HealthNet, against smart and savvy Erica Baldwin, director of the consumer watchdog agency, the Office of Corporate Responsibility, with their vicious sparring illustrating Sam and Laura's abstract arguments. It's an understatement to say that this is a novel with an agenda—the agenda is the story here. Readers with a basic sympathy for deregulation and capitalist hegemony will enjoy Sam and Laura's intellectual adventures best, but students of economics across the board may find this fictionalized debate engaging and informative. (Mar.)