Laura Mandell. ***Misogynous Economies: The Business of Literature in Eighteenth-Century Britain***. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999. 228p.

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Laura Mandell's *Misogynous Economies* is an intriguing treatment of gender, literature, and ideology which employs familiar terms from cultural studies to revisit broad historical patterns, attempting to reshuffle the cause-effect relationships traditionally seen between them. To name the central one: Mandell argues that misogynist depictions in literature are not simply the direct result of attempts to oppress women. Instead, at least throughout the eighteenth century, they are part of a more complex ideological response to alienating socioeconomic changes occasioned by capitalism. Rather than a natural consequence of unchanging human attitudes, unchanging itself, misogyny metamorphoses with society; and its story is in great part the story of the period. The result — what Mandell claims is the first sustained attempt to historicize misogyny, to see and combat it as unnatural — is a combination of high concept and textual commentary. Unfortunately, however, like iron filings around a bar magnet, the book remains too focused on each of these poles with not enough attention to the middle. While suggestive, at 158 pages the argument is ultimately too short to accomplish persuasively all that it sets out to do, although it does map out an agenda for future work.

The high concept is established in the detailed introduction, which eventually yields up a new overarching historical narrative, Foucault fashion. Where one of Foucault's chief interests was sexuality, the key terms here are gender and misogyny, which are also to be seen as dense transfer points for culture and semiosis rather than essentialist givens. Also as in Foucault, the source of Mandell's favorite terms for treating dynamic social processes, material and ideal, is economics, itself understood so broadly as to become more an engine of analogies than a precise economic theory. Thus, while treating the consequences of capitalism, her subject is not money and aggregate demand, but rather, as she puts it, the economies of emotion, where she tracks changes in the structure of desire throughout the period necessary to usher in capitalist modes of production.

Advancing a blend of feminist psychoanalysis enacted at the cultural level and a structuralist reader-response criticism, Mandel's discussion posits a central binary opposition against which misogyny will be measured. She identifies two economies of reading: sadomasochistic and sadistic. A sadomasochistic economy of reading, she says, is one of unmitigated expenditure. The reader continues to invest without any specific returns, continuing to co-create with the author in a play of possible interpretations. This type of reading emphasizes literariness, which Mandell defines using psychological terms from D.W. Winnicott, but which sounds much like Barthes' writerly (vs. readerly) and other post-structural distinctions emphasizing freeplay. A sadistic economy of reading, on the other hand, is a good investment, one which does bring more returns than are spent, "the same sort of structure as that which produces economic capital" (17). Sadistic reading, in Mandell's binary pairing, is associated with single interpretations, a reduction of literariness, and ultimately, the commodification and canonization of literature.

With this binary in mind, Mandell begins to scratch the itch which initiated this study in the first place: her frequent observation of misogynist elements in the texts of even the most feminist writers of the time. How, Mandell wonders, could Mary Leapor have said that? Mandell's response is her narrative of the changing function of misogyny. In brief, throughout the early eighteenth century, a sadomasochistic reading economy was dominant, which eventually gave way to a masochistic one, still in play today. While the function of misogyny later in the period was to increase gender differentiation occasioned by capitalism (bad misogyny), it was actually employed by Swift and Pope in the earlier economy to promote literariness, to keep their texts open (good misogyny). Swift's antiblasons, then, such as "Cassinus and Peter," though seemingly taking women's bodies apart with the same violence as blason love poetry in general, should more properly (or more historically), be read as a critique of Cassy's anti-literary empiricism, not Celia's body.

The movement of misogyny within this binary economy of reading leads Mandell to some paradoxical but intriguing conclusions, not unlike what Jonathan Dollimore does in *Sexual Dissidence*, although here what is explored is not homosexuality's but misogyny's strangely integral role in a culture that nevertheless obsessively denounces it. Among them: we mistake misogyny when we misread it as about real women instead of literary structures (as even Michael Mckeon is guilty); misogyny, properly seen, serves many functions, both good and bad (though it always promotes misogynist culture); we tend to read early eighteenth-century texts as commodities, from our own sadistic economy of reading, rather than the way they were read during their own day, as open texts; to read Pope sadomasochistically instead, we must employ a feminist method.

The proof, of course, of any high concept is in the pudding. But what follows, in discussions of a diverse range of texts from Otway's *The Orphan*, to Lillo's *London Merchant*, to Mandeville's *Modest Defence of Publick STEWS*, while interesting in its own terms, seems too detached from the introduction's schema to lend enough support. Realizing this, Mandell appends oddly formal conclusions to each subsection. Their oddity is highlighted by her method of presentation, itself mirroring Dollimore's, which breaks up her chapters into many of these sub-headed sections, too often with the result of making a blason of the argument. But where Dollimore's controlled shifts, from analysis to scenic description to narrative, contribute to his voice and variety, here Mandell's prose is all analysis, and the function of the mini-conclusions is simply to yank the argument back into its schema when we would have been better off never having lost track of it in the first place. Interestingly, the book improves the farther behind it leaves this schema, reaching its stride in the second to last chapter, Chapter 5, "Misogyny and the Canon: The Character of Women in Anthologies of Poetry," which presents a persuasive revisitation of how and why women's poetry was relegated to miscellanies and increasingly kept out of the early literary anthologies.

The merits of Mandell's work, ultimately, lie in her attempts to bring more complexity to discussions of misogyny, doing far more than simply finding it, or labeling it, but trying to address its many diverse functions. And her most successful and well-theorized tool for analyzing these functions lies in her translation of Kristeva's notion of abjection from the personal to the cultural level, following Stallybrass and White, synthesizing it with Rene Girard's and Mary Douglas' work on scapegoating. Her attempts to treat the aesthetic as an element of the economies of desire also seem at the forefront of a new trend. But what begins as complexity too quickly is reduced to examining the interplay of a limited set of binaries. This becomes most evident upon examination of the consequences of Mandell's psychoanalytic terms for her chief binary, seen through her quasi-economic model, which unlike abjection, is unable to make the jump from personal to social without becoming too reductionist. While sex and death are no doubt elemental drives that become expressed in broader cultural fashion, the farther removed from the individual, the more complex this expression will become: just as economists from John Kenneth Galbraith to Lester Thurow have shown that fundamental economic assumptions about individuals no longer necessarily apply in direct fashion to corporations. And this plays out at each pole of her binary as well. For example, despite Mandell's attempts to use John Guillory to innoculate her argument against too easily identifying the canon with ideological hegemony, her transposition of hegemony from text to readers (the fine line between them is the territory Mandell is constantly trying to tread) nevertheless amounts to too much the same thing, finally associating canonical texts — and their interpretations — with cultural capital reconceived as those single, hegemonic interpretations. One last index of this tendency lies in a comment about Letitia Barbauld in the final chapter, where Mandell says: “To elucidate Barbauld’s ideas as an Enlightenment thinker is not necessarily to condone them” (132). Most readers of Mandell’s text wouldn’t think that it was. The odd warning that critical attention might indicate blanket approval (Mandell goes on to praise Barbauld’s misogyny-resisting poetics) reveals aspects of Mandell’s own economy of desire, which sometimes in spite of itself still wants to separate things into two piles, with not much left in the middle.