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**Victoria E. Thompson**, *The Virtuous Marketplace: Women and Men, Money and Politics in Paris, 1830-1870*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. viii + 229 pp. Illustrations, notes bibliography, and index. \$32.00 US (hb). ISBN 0-8018-6414-3.

Review by William M. Reddy, Duke University.

Historians in recent years have attempted to understand cultural change using a variety of methods. Salient among them have been (1) looking beyond the canon and (2) exploitation of police and judicial archives. Looking beyond the canon has meant examining lesser known genres of printed matter as well as lesser authors: satirical literature, caricature, travel guides, broadsides, as well as novels and essays by forgotten scribblers. Police and judicial archives have provided a vast wealth of circumstantial narratives: reports by police agents and informants, depositions of witnesses, and barristers' pleadings. The idea has been, in both cases, to capture collective trends, shifts in unexamined common sense, the application and embodiment of abstraction in the everyday. Social historians sought to seize a social whole via information wedged into fixed categories such as those of censuses, arrest records, and vital statistics. Not very personal, such approaches were at least concrete and relatively democratic. Everyone got counted. New cultural historians have tried to write the history of the categories themselves--sometimes, alas, to the neglect of the people who gave this history life. Once the categories start shifting, it is often hard to see how we can grasp, or have any dependable knowledge of, individuals as their images are refracted off shifting surfaces.

Victoria Thompson, in her new book, has combined the two types of sources mentioned above. She has done so, as well, in a way that keeps the reader apprised of developments both at the level of social common sense and at the level of individual fates and life chances. *The Virtuous Marketplace* is not exactly about gender, not exactly about markets, not merely about social thought concerning gender and markets--it is about all these things and more. The subject Thompson explores is not as sweeping as the subtitle might suggest. She does not examine arranged marriages, marriage contracts, the wives of politicians or bankers, or elite women's spending and consumption patterns. Her focus is on women without standing: working women, kept women, prostitutes, market women. It occasionally stretches to include some well off women (big dealers on the Temple market, stock speculators). Thompson's selection is based not on present ideas about gender, but on concerns expressed at the time about the gender implications of the competitive marketplace. Not only was open competition widely believed to be a danger to women (whose traditional places in the productive economy began to look odd to middle-class men raised on Malthus and Ricardo). Women as free competitors were also seen as a danger to men. Even worse, men in the laissez-faire marketplace who lacked honor and self-restraint were viewed as dangerously similar to prostitutes and fallen women.

Thompson explores this evolving range of anxieties about trade in the social order through the examination of a series of issues that give her study a coherent shape and reasonable limits. She begins by examining the images of the prostitute and the *grisette* in the 1830s and follows by considering the emerging argument in the 1840s that women, even working-class women, were degraded by wage labor, and that men should be able to earn enough to support their wives. She then turns to issues of market regulation during the Second Empire, examining first the rebuilding and reshaping of Les Halles and the Temple in the 1850s and 60s (both marketplaces dominated by women operators), and second the transformation and regulation of stock trading at the Bourse that accompanied the engineered capitalist boom of those same years.

As the sources allow, Thompson is able to examine not just generalization or legislation, but also vivid details of life. This she is most able to do in the chapters on changing market regulation because police and prefectural archives allow examination of numerous instances of petitioning and enforcement. In other parts of the study, she makes her argument work better by means of surprising juxtaposition. We learn that the transformation of the image of the *grisette* resonated with the enormous hardships faced by young writers. We learn that stock brokers fearful about the integrity of the Bourse's operations sought to control the destabilizing influence of women. Their passionate natures predisposed them to dangerous *agiotage*. They were excluded from the galleries after 1848; in 1856, the prefect of police ordered that they be kept off the square outside. Agents were sent out to chase women out of alleys and cafes in the neighborhood.

Thompson's study thus provides us with one very interesting and useful model of how cultural history can be done without losing all ties to the concreteness and specificity that social history, in its limited way, opened up. She shows, as well, how to grasp cultural trends driven by contradictions and incongruities thrown up by the passage of time. She shows how one trend in question—the tendency gradually to exclude women from the public marketplace—responded to male anxieties about gender's relation to exchange (and exchange's to public morality) that simply could not be wished away. Thus we get a picture of a changing (but unexamined) common sense that leaves matters as much unresolved at the end of the period as they were at the beginning. Thompson also gives us a picture of the peculiar, somewhat unpredictable, but seldom positive impact on women's life chances of this fruitless search for stability. On the issue of life chances, one could ask for more. But there is enough to suggest one way cultural history can remain ethnographic in its ambitions and avoid decay into a dry set of reading strategies. Thompson's study will be widely appreciated, both as a source of useful information about a range of poorly understood issues and also as a very creative response to the challenges of doing cultural history.

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