

Adonis Mirror



Misandry: From the Dictionary of Fools

By Richard Leader

Man Rule: When in doubt, remember the tall, hard columns of Ancient Rome.

The story of history is a story of mirrors. It is not a tale scribed by victors on bloody battlefields. Nor is it told by professors or preachers. Instead, it is the story of white men seated on greasy couches, watching late-night television with reddened eyes. Regardless of their station, their individual qualities during the day, they are all men who are given the sanction to imagine themselves as victors, links in a long chain, merely by looking the part. They see a reflection of their own personalities in the great generals and emperors of the past. Others, in their eyes, exist outside of such thrilling legacies. To them, the human record is filtered through an ego-colored glass that first rendered God as a man and then his Son as a white one. The history of dominance that they recall—some of it real, much of it pure fantasy—translates into contemporary power for those who are able to borrow authority from its hallowed vaults. Belonging to a social class with not just historic power but the power to control history can go a long way in making up for personal shortcomings.

The backlash against feminism has always found solace in a mythological past where men were men and gender lines were freely drawn in wide swaths of blood. They smugly insist that cave-women were burdens to their brave hunters. They deny that there was ever any Great Goddess or matriarchy, even though such theories were highly promoted by male scholars before women themselves were admitted to the academy. As females became their peers, or at least too close for comfort, the idea of matriarchy was transformed from a libidinous hypothesis to a threatening reminder of the precariousness of male dominance. To this end, antifeminists also argue that sexism aimed against men is the most pressing danger to our own civilization, a society that just might tumble back to the Stone Age if the disparagement of masculinity continues.

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Criticism from women is somehow more dangerous than a male-created nuclear holocaust: evidently only men have the right to drive us onward to our extinction.

While men have long enjoyed attacking ungrateful women as “man haters,” the epithet seems more than a little bit silly when transposed onto the printed page—something demanded by the burgeoning market for so-called Men’s Studies materials. It certainly lacks the gravitas required to reflect the widespread injury and social disadvantages that many white males believe they endure on a daily basis. Thus a more scientific-sounding term was needed for “the hatred of men” and antifeminists crafted one out of their own perverted imagination of antiquity: misandry.

Cobbled together from two generally recognizable Greek components, “misandry” has the appearance of consequence and refinement. Words with such roots are privileged in our society. They are used by doctors and lawyers, not out of necessity, but as a matter of status: they can view their own image in that mirror of history, standing tall with the great men of the ages. The capital letters we afford to Classical Civilization is an artifact of both racism and sexism. That very same authority, unearned as it is, was harnessed in order to fashion the word misandry. As it is an unfamiliar term to most who encounter it, many automatically assume that it has sound intellectual underpinnings given our society’s expectations for such words and the biases that surround them. This is no accident.

Furthermore, the archaic roots misrepresent misandry’s status as a new word, a neologism: antifeminists want nothing more than to mislead the public into thinking the word has always existed. With the seed of that deception planted, they can then blame its esoteric status on a feminist conspiracy that quietly removed misandry from our vernacular, just as reports of abusive women and battered men are allegedly censored by the agents of Political Correctness. This tactic has actually met with a good measure of success: many who encounter “misandry” for the first time are given cause to wonder why they have never before heard a word that is made to seem “obvious” in nature by its proponents. By adding a

veneer of Pentelic marble to “man hater,” these men are able to act as if “misandry” were an unearthed treasure waiting to be found and not a newly minted piece of plastic.

The word and its variations (*misandric*, *misandrist*, *et. al*) were first used only by the most militant of antifeminists, where even the most published and professional remained outliers in male society. One early adopter of “misandry” was Warren Farrell, a man who once wrote on the benefits of incest for *Penthouse* magazine. Yet its constant repetition over the past decade has turned it from the battle-cry of the pathetic to a banal trivia question. It serves as the answer to “what is the opposite of misogyny,” a rhetorical question often posed to the editors of online-dictionaries by readers, all seemingly possessed of unlimited quantities of mock-innocence. Misandry’s less combustible presentation has allowed it to surge ahead of competing antifeminist devices (“androphobia”) that have since fallen by the wayside.

This transformation has framed the term in a “common sense” approach that many feminists, especially young ones, have difficulty discounting: if the word misogyny exists, logically and mathematically, there must be another side of that coin to restore balance. This tact has the advantage of highlighting “rationality” as a masculine attribute. Those who refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of misandry, both as a word and as a sociological fact, are portrayed as effeminate and thus bereft of logic, no matter how detailed and thought-out their arguments might be. Feminists who employ the so-called “soft sciences” of history and sociology in their rebuttals are easily disregarded by men who invoke “hard science” on their own behalf: the Coin Defense involves mathematics, of a perverse kind, and is thus deemed “objective” even though it is nothing of the sort.

As the Coin Defense is misandry’s best chance at achieving some measure of linguistic legitimacy, at least in the popular imagination, it has been necessary for men to pave over a number of inconsistencies. The word “misanthropy” proved to be the largest stumbling block. As it was also a likely candidate for the “opposite of misogyny,” men eagerly rewrote its definition, not just in our own

language but in Ancient Greek as well. If misanthropy now means the “hatred of people or humanity” and is unequivocally gender-neutral, it is a very recent innovation.

While the definition of misanthropy in dictionaries might have been changed from the hatred of “mankind,” which has fallen out of favor due to the efforts of feminists, the general and historic sense of exactly *who* a misanthrope *is* has not changed one iota. From the dawn of time, nearly every person accused of being a misanthrope, or honored for it as an antihero, has been a male; as were those doing the accusing and honoring for that matter. It takes resources and power to publish nihilistic poetry or philosophy, to act in socially unacceptable ways without dire consequences, or to even own the property needed to play the part of the angry man on the hill. White women and people of color were historically excluded from the very possibility of being misanthropists in English speaking societies, whether by convention or by force of law.

Even after such strictures had begun to weaken, the label misanthropist still remained unattainable by white women and people of color as those in power naturally assumed that their dissatisfaction was aimed at them, rather than at humanity in general. It takes a fair amount of privilege to make the outlandish claim that one “hates everyone equally,” a common defense made on behalf of both racists and sexists. It takes even more privilege to have others accept that claim at face value. Similarly, notable misanthropists throughout the ages had no shortages of wives, mistresses, servants, and slaves at their disposal: they achieved their notorious reputations not by their behavior towards their inferiors but towards those who mattered, affluent male society and the values it holds in esteem. It is apparent that misanthropy still means the hatred of mankind and not of humanity.

Even as antifeminists complain about the fascism of Political Correctness, in this case, they have been more than willing to facilitate the change in the definition of misanthropy (dropping “mankind” for the more neutral “humanity”) in order to satisfy their goal of establishing misandry as an authentic word. To conceal this irony, they have also attempted to retrofit the meanings of the Greek roots that our English borrows from, hoping to make them

consonant with a new, gender-neutral, interpretation. Antifeminists—usually with no qualifications in linguistics save for their penis—regularly make confident assertions about the historic meaning of words. Here, they set up a false dichotomy between *aner* or *andros* (both forms mean adult man and husband) and *anthropos*, claiming that if an ancient writer specifically meant “actual men,” only the former would invariably be used. According to them, any other case involving *anthropos* should be interpreted with extreme latitude for that reason alone.

Although *andros* and *anthropos* have been set up as oppositional terms, historically, males have not required the presence of *either* word to translate “men” into English from Ancient Greek. This is perhaps best seen in their treatment of Sappho and her poem now known as Fragment 147, a verse popular for its ability to connect to modern readers. Anne Carson translates it as “someone will remember us / I say / even in another time” (2003). She is both accurate to the original Greek that rendered “someone” as “someone,” while appreciating the success of Sappho and her bridge across time: as the first female poet, the “I say” becomes a pivotal expression. Carson sets up the space for it to stand alone and triumphant. Yet men have always had cause to impose their own image in the voice of Sappho: H. T. Wharton (1895) translates the same fragment as “Men I think will remember us even hereafter.” Edwin Marion Cox (1925), similarly, gives “I think men will remember us even hereafter.”

Anthropos in the time of Socrates was not neutral for the same reasons the word misanthropy is colored male today, even if men’s dictionaries deny it: the aspects of humanity that existentially render people as “human” were, and are, gendered masculine. Greek women, whatever their individual qualities, diverge from that model. Thus their humanity was conditional—something that applied equally to more minor attributes, such as Athenian citizenship. Whether or not women counted as authentic people depended upon the specific arguments, and their rhetorical needs, being made by men. Only in certain situations did *anthropoi* (or “mankind”) include women and only when it benefited males to do so. Contemporary antifeminists behave similarly with their reinterpret-

tation of “misanthropy,” its own meaning subordinate to the defense of “misandry.” Women are allowed to count as fully human in this narrow scenario (as “agents of misanthropy”) only because doing so grants men a better weapon, “misandry,” that they can use to later rescind that same privilege on a broader level.

Yet the secular antifeminists who demand, in their Wikipedia entries and elsewhere, that *anthropos* is perfectly gender-neutral, have not been keeping up with the efforts of their more religious-minded brethren. Inclusive Language bibles, texts that strive for gender-neutrality, are not just the domain of Unitarian Universalists: many fundamentalist congregations also desire a more encompassing translation to aid in their evangelical work. Even so, it remains a divisive issue. Some Christian literalists are willing to go as far as allowing for the absolute de-gendering of God as a Being, though they still insist that the *relationship* between God and humanity is of an essential “male-female” nature where the church, like the female, exists only to be “penetrated.” Others, however, are quick to declare the whole project to be a wash. To this end, they cite numerous sex-specific uses of *anthropos*, such as 1 Corinthians 7:1: “It is good for an [*anthropos*] not to touch a woman.” Unlike their secular counterparts who do not have the benefit of calling upon the Apostle Paul to demand women’s silence, Christian misogynists—those with adequate schooling at any rate—have no compelling need to rewrite history.

Beyond etymology, something only made relevant by the Coin Defense and its claims for “misanthropy,” the most counterfeit feature of misandry can be found in its stark definition. Proponents insist that its meaning is simply, without further adornment or explanation, “the hatred of men.” Yet it has never been used to describe such hatred in general terms. While pro-feminists are sporadically accused of misandry, it is clear that the word, as it is used in the real world, more accurately means the “hatred of men by women.”

Men despise each other in great numbers. They hate one another for being better at being men—and for being worse at being men. They often hate themselves for that very same reason. Murder rates certainly bear witness to this hatred and perhaps the more-

masculine-than-not root of “homicide” serves equally as a grim testament to this fact. One antifeminist writer, Adam Jones, stole the concept of “gendercide” from a feminist scholar, Mary Anne Warren (*Gendercide: The Implications of Sex Selection*), and tried to make a career out of being an expert on how men are killed for being men. Jones conveniently omits from his analysis that their killers are also male and how that differs from the one-sided brutality that women face. Men, as a class, are more than willing to risk engaging in such violence as a cost of doing business: a business that ensures male dominance over women for the survivors of the carnage.

Despite men’s animosity towards each other throughout history, it is clear that such conflicts do not fall under the purview of misandry; those battles, no matter how gore-soaked their outcome, never challenge manhood as an institution or an object of reverence. Yet few who choose to define the word do so honestly. The preference, due to the Coin Defense, is to keep the definition short, a perfect mirror for misogyny’s “the hatred of women.” One rare example to the contrary is the *Hutchinson Encyclopaedia* (Helicon Publishing Ltd.): they offer a website on “difficult words” for readers to test their own vocabulary against. They describe misandry as the “hatred of men by woman [sic].”

Even this definition is backwards. (One would hope that an encyclopedia publisher would not have made a simple spelling mistake and thus their use of “woman,” rather than “women,” is a meaningful choice.) There is no iconic “woman.” There is no abstract specter that stalks the wilderness, meting out hate on specific, individual men. It would be more correct to say the “hatred of *man* by women,” not only for grammatical reasons, but because the only “hatred of men” that men themselves consider truly threatening is the hatred of iconic masculinity and patriarchy.

In this light, the origin of the Coin Defense becomes even clearer: antifeminists believe in a sex-war, where males and females have been forever locked in a struggle for advantage. They see history as a sitcom where men and women have always provoked each other in equal amounts, mathematically balancing pleasure and pain across gender lines, despite the momentary inequalities that arise. Coins flip and pendulums swing. They see domestic violence

as a “dance,” where both sides are similarly at fault—a dance where men, incited to acts of violence by “codependent” women, suffer in amounts equal to their victims. In this world view, there are misogynists on one side of the coin, misandrists on the other, while the “good” people of the world recognize that the coin is forever spinning and simply accept their fate, heads or tails, as natural. There has never been any such sex-war with evenly drawn lines, however, just as there was never a battle between Pompeii and Mount Vesuvius.

The word misogyny was created long ago within a patriarchal culture. It was not invented by feminists. It was designed not to protect women, but men, separating good patriarchs—who were nevertheless patriarchs—from the bad. Those were the men who went too far, who needed be too rude or too rough in order to control the women they held as property; their failure was sign of weakness and infirmity. “Misogynist” was as an insult towards men who were, in a sense, women, possessing the worst traits of femininity: irrationality and a lack of restraint in behavior or appetite. The word misandry was also created in a patriarchy, as a specific, momentary solution to a problem faced by antifeminist men. They simply lacked a sophisticated enough word to describe their complaints against complaining women.

The idea of misandry in a patriarchal culture is a preposterous one. Nearly all of the examples of misandry cited by so-called “masculists” (another “coin” invention) are actually things that benefit men as a class, even if individual men sometimes believe they have suffered harm. While it is popular to complain about women being awarded custody of children, on a larger scale, it preserves male power in other arenas, allowing men to explain away the “wage gap.” Males might have higher rates of successful suicide attempts—though, clearly, it is the personally unaffected who are able to spend their time complaining about this particular disadvantage—but that also stems from a number of other privileges that men enjoy: greater access to firearms and the license to often act selfishly without concern for their dependents. Chivalry, what little exists, remains a double-edged sword for women while it costs men nothing as a class, whether they engage in its trivialities or not.

One antifeminist grievance is that “misandry” itself is underlined in red on their word-processors as a misspelling: this they view as a brutal assault upon their psyche, quantitative proof that men’s lives are worth less in our society than women’s. Yet it seems likely that future versions of such software will include the word, given the stealthy campaign they have launched to install “misandry” in our cultural vocabulary. This is not done solely on the grassroots level, but by heading straight to the top as well. The online-editors of traditional dictionaries and encyclopedias are evidently *besieged* by men who want to keep “misandry” in the limelight, even as they feign ignorance of the word when asking the famous “coin” question. WordSmith.org once included it on their “Word of the Day” mailing while AskOxford.com dedicated a webpage to such queries, shined up a bit into “What is the feminine equivalent of a misogynist?” Answering with “misandrism,” Oxford only hints of the political power-play going on behind the scenes with an enigmatic, “a rare word but seemingly *much sought-after*.”

The source most cited as authoritative in the defense of “misandry” is a webpage hosted by Random House: their Mavens’ Word of the Day selection (June 3, 1998) answers the question, this time posed by one Ben Doof. The name is likely a joke from the German for “I am dumb.” Nevertheless, the Maven (Jesse Sheidlower) answers it with all manner of seriousness. Although he admits that misandry is a neologism without any direct precedent, he feels compelled to toss his antifeminist admirers a bone by hinting otherwise, always without citation. He begins by setting a date for the first English use of “misandry” in the 1930s, never mind where or how it was supposedly used, only to immediately skip ahead to 1989, mentioning an academic anthology famous only for its simple inclusion of the word in the title.

Sheidlower also presents the idea of a Greek *misandria*, without specifying whether it existed in Ancient or contemporary Greek. While he states that the English word is “probably” a re-coinage from the “genuine” article, he does so after the damage is done: readers, who exist in a society that overly values Classical material, likely came away with the impression that the phenomenon of misandry must be real as it was a problem also faced by men thou-

sands of years ago. They too, required a word for it. What he does not say, however, is that his *misandria* was not found in *any* original Greek text but in a single scholium—a margin note penned by a reader—of a copy of Euripides' *Andromache*. One, possibly two, uses of a word in 2,400 years of recorded history does not inspire great faith in anything “genuine” at all: a very poor choice of words by The Maven.

The passage in question, line 228 of *Andromache*, refers to the protagonist speaking of women's suffering and their faithful endurance in marriages to adulterous husbands. Euripides, though sensitive in several ways to the idea of misogyny, creates a reversal where it is the jealous wife, rather than her husband, who is deemed sexually insatiable: a feminine stereotype in that day. Andromache forswears her own sexuality as such lust for men, even that for a husband within the confines of marriage, brings only pain. At some point, one scholar marked the passage with *mis-andria*. Perhaps he believed that Euripides did not go far enough in protecting male interests or that the reversal was too open to ironic interpretation. Certainly it is to some extent, though sympathy for the condition of women is not necessarily a proto-feminist act if the subordinate condition itself is considered natural.

While Ben Doof did not bother to ask about “misanthropy,” Sheidlower addresses that as well, strangely, as he never introduces his readers as to *why* it might be relevant to the discussion. It is clear that Sheidlower is at least aware of the standard antifeminist script or is actually following it himself. Indeed, when many readers wrote in to make the cogent point that the opposite of misogyny is not the “hated of men” but the “love of women,” he asserts that he felt confident making his assumption about what Doof was *really* asking, given that he had “gotten many questions in the past that did clearly seek the word for the ‘hatred of men.’” Despite his evident familiarity with how antifeminists work to promote their rhetoric, he never lets his readers in on the existence of that script or its predictable outcome: his scholarly tone, despite refusing to back up any of his claims, belies the utterly naïve way in which he answers the question, skirting around the politics that charge the debate. After

all, if it were a debate, there could not be an authoritative expert like Sheidlower to declare that “misanthropy” is perfectly gender-neutral in meaning because “all modern dictionaries are clear that a misanthrope is a person who hates humans, not males alone.”

In other circumstances, it seems likely that he would know better than to say such a thing: language is infinitely more complex than that. In an associated webpage on “sensitive language,” Random House is firm that while they have a responsibility to not offend their readers, as linguists they are committed to not misrepresenting the language “as it really is” by omitting such words or how they are used in society. Yet that is precisely the behavior that Sheidlower is engaging in. He was willing to whitewash “misandry” and the politics that inform the discussion, all so he could weigh in as an unbiased expert with a neutral opinion. He stripped out the problematic layers in order to make it a word on par with “apple” and not “homicide-bomber.” While that ridiculous expression, meaningless as it might be, is now synonymous with the Bush administration and FOX News, antifeminists have had no shortage of expert help in wiping their fingerprints off of “misandry.”

As words, misandry and homicide-bomber have everything in common. Both are attempts to deliberately reframe an existing concept: neither makes any empirical sense without prior knowledge of “misogyny” and “suicide-bomber” as a reference point. Both attempt to invert power structures through their rhetoric: women and developing nations are seen as cowardly oppressors who refuse to honorably fight, and lose, on an uneven footing. Both are also tied to specific political groups: antifeminists and American conservatives. Yet while one term is a laughing stock of the liberal community, misandry has been making significant headway.

Not only have the men of the Left been receptive of the antifeminist message, as otherwise competing male-demographics are held together by the one privilege they hold in common, feminist women have sometimes found themselves using “misandry” as well. In many ways that is to be expected: they, too, are products of a society that affords status to words that merely sound “elite,” something the creators of “misandry” capitalized on. The world of

academics, especially, is a post-modernist war zone where annihilation comes swiftly for those not stocked with a full arsenal of elitist jargon. Furthermore, females are raised to assume that when they do not know something that the fault lies with them: many feminists who encounter “misandry” for the first time often assume that the term’s unfamiliarity is a result of their own ignorance.

On the other hand, sometimes feminists aware of the unsavory aspects of “misandry” still find themselves using the word for a variety of reasons. Some do so as a conciliatory gesture: they believe that by admitting that misandry exists in some fashion or another, at least sufficiently enough to justify the presence of the word in English, they will position them as moderates in the debate. They see language as a minor point of contention and trust that their compliance will pay dividends when the argument, now with men more favorable towards them as individual women, shifts to a more pressing issue. That shift never arrives, however, as such debates are dictated by the Coin Defense, where misandry and misogyny are held to be equally competing forces. Unsurprisingly, this happens more frequently in “progressive” circles where racism and institutional-racism are no longer considered equivalent expressions.

Other feminists believe that they can exert personal agency by claiming to be misandrists. They feel that they can beat men at their own game by adopting the term, as if their audacity in proudly taking up the label translates directly into political power. However, this differs entirely from performances given by Valerie Solanas and other iconic “man haters” in that self-avowed misandrists only adopt the title when engaged in conversations with men, generally in spaces under male control. While unexpectedly turning a “gender war” argument on its head can certainly be amusing, as men used to palliative women often do not have a suitable answer in response, the display of misandry is entirely focused on retaining male attention. Men as a class enjoy being abused in controlled environments by women, as no power exchange takes place despite the amusing pretense: it is the women who ignore men, not hate them, who incite the patriarchy’s most dystopian fears.

The existence and legitimacy of “misandry” is not a minor point of contention or a mere triviality of language. Nor is it an excuse to play the part of a dominatrix. Instead, it speaks to male control of history, a currency that only groups in power are allowed to spend. Even the most ignorant of white men are allowed to view themselves as consummate experts on the past, present, and future. It is no exaggeration to use the word “cocksure” when describing a layman’s insistence that “misanthropy” means this or that, “this” or “that” being whatever he needs it to mean in a given moment: his authority is derived from the interplay between modern and ancient man—and the fiction of masculinity that bonds them together. It is of vital importance to undermine and disrupt that authority.

Even the most educated and brilliant women have no such control over history or the language society uses to describe it. While dictionary editors and their word mavens have fallen in love with “misandry,” none have presented any selections from Mary Daly’s *Wickedary* for the benefit of their readers. The Coin Defense is rather one-sided, it would seem. In fact, many radical feminists themselves have abandoned politically constructed words like “womyn” or “womon,” worried that to use them is to be needlessly divisive and direct attention away from the specific points they are making. Men, with their “misandry,” are not worried about being divisive. They only care about punching through their opposition and coming out on top.

Misandry:

mi•sand•ry n. A love for honest speech; accordance with reality: “Besides preaching *misandry*, the basic premise of women’s lib is that women are more discriminated against than men. That is the biggest hoax in the Western world” (Richard F. Doyle of the Christian Party). [A parallel construction of English *misogyny*, by American antifeminists in the late 20th century.]