only three articles that dealt with women, but, they contend that the current division between feminism and political economy is “conjunctural and not fundamental.” Responding to a challenge from a 1981 conference to “put your pen where your mouth is,” Feminism and Political Economy is an attempt to show that the two approaches need not be isolated, that the differences are resolvable, that an explicitly feminist political economy is possible.

The analyses of domestic labour developed by theorists such as Wally Seccombe, Margaret Coulson and Jean Gardiner in the 1970s have already demonstrated the usefulness of extending the traditional categories of political economy into oft-ignored “peripheral” women’s areas. The 15 essays in this collection continue this important research, advancing the analysis of women’s work in the home and the “pink-collar ghettoes.” For example, in “Rational Capitalism and Women as labour,” Patricia Marchak asks a key question: “If employers normally seek the least-cost labour supply, and if women are the cheapest source of labour in the capitalist economy, why are men and women channelled into separate labour pools?” She arrives at her conclusion — that the division of labour under capitalism “has been rationally developed in the interest of profit accumulation, and has been an integral component of advanced capitalism between 1945 and 1980” — by using analytic distinctions such as domestic labour and service versus surplus-producing labour. Other essays, such as Charlene Gannagé’s analysis of the gender and ethnic division of labour in a Canadian garment factory, underscore women’s economic oppression with empirical investigations. Gannagé outlines the complexities of class, race and gender that must be addressed in feminist political economy. For example, both the gender and ethnic ideology of the trade are made explicit in one woman’s account of her firm’s hiring practices of “operators,” a traditionally male Jewish job.

**CHANGING PATTERNS: Women in Canada**


**FEMINISM AND POLITICAL ECONOMY**

Edited by HEATHER JON MARONEY and MEG LUNTON

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY**

*Another lady was come for work by machine. And she was work very nice. She finish a coat and I say “Oh, you make very nice coat,” I met her in the toilet. She say “I don’t think so he likes.” I say, “Why?” She say, “Because I am a woman, I’m not Jewish.” ... Everybody say she ... make a nice coat. It was lunchtime. After lunch the foreman say “Oh you make a nice coat. You go home. We going to call you,” he say. “Now not so busy.”*  

Many of these essays are endeavours to lay out the groundwork for future feminist research, ending on “toward” notes, such as the concluding section of Luxton and Maroney’s essay, “Toward a Feminist Political Economy,” and the last part of Lorna Weir’s piece, “Toward a Socialist Feminist Politics of Sexuality.” Weir argues for the permanent integration of sexual politics into socialist feminist theory and practice, openly confronting “a tension in socialist feminism between its class and non-class ‘popular-democratic’ aspects,” a tension which may not be resolvable within the confines of the women’s movement, according to Weir. She calls for — and begins to elucidate the conceptual framework necessary for — a non-reductionist class analysis of sexual politics. While non-socialist feminists might hold that “a non-reductionist class analysis of sexual politics” is an impossibility, Weir’s call for the inclusion of the category of sexuality — and thus the inclusion of analysis of the oppression of lesbians, bisexuals and gays as lesbians, bisexuals and gays and not as generic class subjects — along with those of gender and class in socialist feminist theory and practice must be lauded.

In their introduction, appropriately titled “From Feminism and Political Economy to Feminist Political Economy,” Luxton and Maroney present a manifesto which actually illustrates the root of the division between feminism and Marxist political economy. Statements such as “[p]olitical economy, like feminism, sees social relations as conditioned by economic structures and processes” serve the purpose of prematurely suturing a debate that has not yet been resolved satisfactorily, in theory or in practice: the basic disjunction between Marxist analysis in which class is the fundamental category and feminist analysis in which gender is the fundamental category.

At the end of this very broad review essay Luxton and Maroney try to assimilate all the major strands of feminist theory since the 1960s with seven “analytic and methodological theses” for their proposed feminist political economy. The theses presented here are not always nuanced enough to resolve the theoretical dilemma between class analysis and gender analysis, but this is not to suggest that the development of a sophisticated feminist political economy is an impossibility. Indeed, the empirical descriptions of women’s economic oppression in Feminism and Political Economy show that, when put to work analyzing specific, historical moments of women’s oppression, the extended categories of political economy can illuminate underlying economic structures of women’s oppression that other types of feminist analysis can only hint at.

**Randi R. Warne**

Those of us who teach courses outside the domain of women’s studies are often dismayed to find how complacent many young women students are about the feminist project. It is not uncommon to hear feminism called “old-fashioned,” or to have current feminist activists characterized as bitter women “who keep harping on the same thing over and over” when in fact all the doors of opportunity
stand open for any woman with the determination and intelligence to make something of her life. Much of this sanguine attitude may be attributed to naiveté, of course, and to the persistence of anti-feminist prejudice in the common world, and we educators both look forward to and regret that hard day when students are forced to recognize the “merit dream” for what it is. Nevertheless, it is equally true that good general materials which might introduce students to a wide range of feminist concerns and analyses are not readily available in Canada. It is this lack which Changing Patterns: Women in Canada admirably offsets.

The text marks an important moment in Canadian women’s scholarship. It describes, in a comprehensive and easily accessible way, the changing realities of women’s lives set against the historical backdrop essential for evaluation of those changes. It does so, moreover, from a perspective which is thoroughly feminist, without presupposing a similar depth of feminist commitment on the part of its readership. While some might consider this a retrograde step, others will recognize the political astuteness of conveying feminist awareness to the huge body of undergraduate students which will be this text’s primary audience. In its breadth of perspective and non-polemical style, Changing Patterns effectively challenges the opinion, often voiced, that feminist concerns and analyses are not adequately available in Canada. It is this lack which Changing Patterns: Women in Canada admirably offsets.

The text marks an important moment in Canadian women’s scholarship. It describes, in a comprehensive and easily accessible way, the changing realities of women’s lives set against the historical backdrop essential for evaluation of those changes. It does so, moreover, from a perspective which is thoroughly feminist, without presupposing a similar depth of feminist commitment on the part of its readership. While some might consider this a retrograde step, others will recognize the political astuteness of conveying feminist awareness to the huge body of undergraduate students which will be this text’s primary audience. In its breadth of perspective and non-polemical style, Changing Patterns effectively challenges the opinion, often voiced, that feminist concerns and analyses are not adequately available in Canada. It is this lack which Changing Patterns: Women in Canada admirably offsets.

The range of topics addressed by Changing Patterns: Women in Canada will make it a valuable resource for a variety of disciplines. Each chapter has its excellences, no doubt enhanced by the collaborative model adopted by the authors. All cover a breadth of material, extensively documented, augmented by a list of suggested readings for those wishing to pursue the topic beyond the introductory level. Taken as a whole, Changing Patterns: Women in Canada is an excellent introductory text for general arts and women’s studies students alike, and a useful “refresher course” for those more deeply involved in the discipline.

No work is without its flaws, of course, and while in Changing Patterns these are fortunately few, at least one is serious enough to warrant sustained comment. It should be first noted that almost all the authors are successful in describing a variety of interpretations with subtlety and wit, without sacrificing their own sense of perspective. One minor exception is Roxana Ng’s chapter on immigrant women, which would be strengthened by a more nuanced treatment of the interactions between the patriarchal values of immigrant women’s traditions and the patriarchal structures of Canadian society. The historical antecedents of current realities are also generally well-covered; in this regard, the reader should hear more from Shelagh Wilkinson on earlier Canadian women writers (Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, etc.) whose didactic style distances them from current scholarly fashions, but whose works played an essential role in creating a Canadian identity.

The central problem with the text, as I see it, is the superficial “maternalist” reading of first-wave feminism which is
given its most sustained treatment in the chapter “Pioneers and Suffragists.” As historian Veronica Strong-Boag has noted, scholarship on Canadian feminism has moved through at least three stages, from the virtually hagiographic through to the historically contextual studies which mark the best work today. Unfortunately, the chapter “Pioneers and Suffragists” relies overwhelmingly on materials generated out of the second stage of scholarship, which is characterized by an evaluation of the arguments and actions of first-wave feminist against a specific set of contemporary norms. By failing to engage the actual historical realities which shaped these women’s lives, ‘second stage’ historians have produced a distorted picture of both their motivations and their possibilities, reducing to a middle-class ‘maternalism’ what were actually quite radical demands to have the public sphere become accountable to women’s lives. When Frances Willard of the WCTU issued the order “to make the world more homelike” she was not talking about putting antimacassars into the factories. She was calling for the development of caring cooperative socialist communities, of the kind which figure so prominently in the demands of many feminists today. An essential corrective to this sort of misreading is Dolores Hayden’s The Grand Domestic Revolution; by employing her category of “material feminism,” the analysis presented in this chapter could have been deepened considerably. However, all that was required was to apply the insights of other chapters regarding the ambiguities facing women seeking social reform today to the development of first-wave feminism. What better compliment to a text’s depth and sophistication than to say it provides its own best corrective?

Changing Patterns: Women in Canada is more than a welcome and valuable addition to the study of women in Canada. It is an important developmental benchmark which substantiates the centrality of women to Canadian life, and their ongoing refusal to accept the innumerable limitations upon them which patriarchal society seeks to impose.


3I wish this text had been available when I was an undergraduate. Joanna Boehmert’s chapter alone would have saved years of therapy!

CANADIAN WOMEN: A History

Clara Thomas

The six scholars who wrote Canadian Women: A History call their work a collective and, as they describe the process by which their book came into being, it was one, in the best meaning of that loosely descriptive word:

Chapters were initially written by one or two of us; then, gathered around seminar tables and dining-room tables, or by phone and mail, we all discussed — and often vigorously debated — every idea, word and punctuation mark along the way. .... In the end we hardly knew who had written what, or where a particular idea for a change of direction might have originated.

Accustomed to viewing with misgivings all projected plans for such committee projects, I am astonished and awed by the seamlessness of the finished book. It is a triumph of cooperation, dedication, scholarship and writing skill.

The text itself runs to slightly over 400 pages, the appendices and index to almost another hundred. The book is divided into four major and chronological sections: “The Founding Mothers: Beginnings to the Mid-Nineteenth Century;” The New Pioneers: The Mid-Nineteenth Century to the End of the Great War; “The Promised Land? The End of the Great War to the Beginning of World War II;” and “The Unfinished Revolution: World War II to the Charter of Rights.” Each section’s introduction sets forth its shape and outlines its overall thesis which is then expanded in several chapters. The whole is embellished and much enlivened by numerous well-chosen and witty photographs. Their choosing was obviously a real bonus of enjoyment to the authors: each illustration fits closely, tellingly and adds a further dimension of visual comment to its accompanying text.

A pleasure to hold and a pleasure to browse through. What then of closer reading? The introductory sentence to Part I indicates a dominant characteristic of the whole: “Aaantistic, according to the Hurons, was the great mother.” This is a social and cultural history. Though it partakes of the political, constitutional, statistical, all the convenient sub-sets of the discipline, its over-riding effectiveness is in its personalized, often affectionately anecdotal style. We are never doomed to an endless tedium of dates, facts and figures; the text is constantly enlivened by the names and exploits of individual women. The concept of sisterhood is an underlying, nourishing foundation to the whole. And over-riding all is the authors’ constant, careful awareness of the patriarchal quality of the vast bulk of primary sources from early days to the present. They are feminists, naturally, but they do not ride one particular feminist ideology:

We hope to illuminate the history of women in Canada in all its diversity.