

ventors on side; they were marketable commodities, proof of female wit and wisdom, and they were after all sisters united in a common front. Generally though the inventors simply wanted to invent, and resented what they often felt was exploitation by the "sisterhood" for their own gains. The women who invented defined themselves less by their gender and more by their individualistic inner drive to create.

In one case the dress reformers, who regarded themselves, Macdonald writes, as "missionaries to women in need," suggested to Susan Taylor Converse, the designer of three "reform garments" that she make her designs freely available to all women. Ms. Converse refused, writing, "With all their zeal for woman, did they [the dress reform committee] ever ask why one woman like myself should give of her head and hand labor, without fair compensation?" In response a committee member writes, "In our zeal for woman we did not ask 'why one woman should give head and hand and heart,' for we were all giving it and expected others to do so." It is a fascinating conflict, and though Macdonald reports on it, she shies away from further discussion. In the light of current dissension over the definition and direction of feminism today, by such various and self-defined feminists as Katie Rolphe, Camille Paglia, Naomi Wolf and Gloria Steinem, it could provide an interesting and valuable reference for women leery of cookie-cutter feminism.

A recurring theme throughout *Feminine Ingenuity* is the debate about the validity of so-called "household" inventions, primarily developed by women, versus the more "serious" or technology-driven inventing dominated by men. From the day in 1809 that Mary Kies received her patent the argument raged. Women have dominated the areas of domestic invention because women have traditionally had more experience in these fields and recognize and demand innovation. But it was a question that split early feminists,

who often lamented that "women's" inventions, like clothing, household appliances or children's articles guaranteed that women would remain shackled to their traditional arenas of family and home.

The question of what constitutes good inventing is fundamental and interesting and can encompass not only gender bias but also cultural and class bias. For example, in relating the story of the invention of the "Snugli," the pouch-like infant carrier popular today, Macdonald tells us that the "inventor," Ann Moore, copied the idea from the Togolese of West Africa where she worked as a member of the Peace Corps in the early 1960s. Later, after the U.S.-made "Snugli" had become the cornerstone of a hugely successful company, foreign marketing sold "Snuglis" back to the more wealthy people of Africa. While Macdonald finds this an "interesting twist" to the invention, she drops the information quickly.

In another example, the women Macdonald includes all hold patents in the U.S. patent office; she notes that while many women undoubtedly contributed to many inventions that do not bear their name or acknowledge their effort, it would be impossible to record their contributions accurately because of the lack of hard evidence. It is a necessary note because in spite of the seemingly endless list of names Macdonald records, it is in fact not endless. In the final chapter Macdonald writes that only 5.6 per cent of all patent holders are women. It is useful to be reminded that official record does not constitute ingenuity. However, these are both points where a discussion about the ownership of ideas, cultural influences and the power of free-market access would be a fascinating adjunct to the story.

The strength behind Macdonald's text is the enormous amount of legwork that a comprehensive presentation of data represents, and in an area of women's history that has until now largely been ignored. Women have long had a thriving and active entrepreneurial spirit, and if *Feminine In-*

genuity can serve as a foundation for further exploration and discussion, then it is well worth the effort. However, we are now at the point that we have recognized that traditional historians have reneged on women, revising, revamping and refitting actual events to suit a gender bias. We need to move beyond the indignation. I know that my gender has received short shift in the traditional history books. I know that few male-centric historians ever asked provocative questions about women in history, about the role of women or about how the two genders worked together in creating history. I get angry, I get frustrated. But tell me something different. Give me questions that I can sink my teeth into, that I can analyze to help with the present and future. Give us women's history that is history-telling at its best, that pokes and prods and brings personalities and events to life, that reveals that "special talent that lies in the ability to wade through mountains of documentation and come out with a clean storyline, that invites the reader to follow the author through the maze of events and data into the life of a period."¹ Into life. Don't just tell me it happened.

¹Journalist and historian Frances Fitzgerald, commenting on Tuchman's *March of Folly*.

MAID IN THE MARKET: WOMEN'S PAID DOMESTIC LABOUR

Wenona Giles and Sedef Arat-Koc,
Eds. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing,
1994.

by Ann Duffy

Since the 1960s, a sizeable literature has been created which examines women's paid labour force experience. Despite the progressive devel-

opment of this literature, certain areas have been left relatively unexplored. The editors of *Maid in the Market* are to be commended for tackling one of these blind spots by bringing together research on varied aspects of women's paid domestic labour. While almost all of this research has been published elsewhere, the excerpts here are concise, focused and engrossing. The thematic organization is well maintained and the only discordant note is the inclusion of a piece on retail workers which seems somewhat out of step with the other more traditionally domestic tasks such as house/room cleaning and child care. This minor objection aside, the overall result is a thought-provoking and challenging collection which is a "must read" for anyone interested in understanding the full complexities of women's labour force attachment.

By drawing attention to paid domestic work, the editors have targeted a particularly pivotal component of women's role in the paid labour force. Through the provision of child care services, cleaning, fast-food preparation and so on, paid domestic workers may seem to liberate women from many of their unpaid labours in the home. However, the women workers themselves—whether as office cleaners or fast-food workers—are routinely oppressed in their labour force activity. Work that is done for "love" in the home is predictably poorly paid and unprestigious when performed for pay. Clearly, the contradictions inherent in paid domestic labour go to the heart of class, racial, ethnic, age (and dis/ability) differences amongst women since it is well-to-do white women who are most likely to be freed from their domestic chores by the commodification of household services. Other groups of women, notably working-class women from racial and ethnic minorities, are more likely to find themselves slotted into the resulting poorly paid, insecure and oppressive jobs as nannies, cleaners or chambermaids. Paid domestic labour is clearly key to analyzing the

conflicting interests between women.

The contradictions are not, however, simply external. As pointed out in Chapter One—Audrey Macklin's examination of Canada's foreign domestic workers—feminists may also struggle with the contradictions of purchasing their "liberation" at the expense of other women. Having detailed the grim record of Canadian governmental policy surrounding the employment of foreign domestic workers and the workers' oppressive employment conditions, Macklin considers the "feminist implications" of achieving equality in "middle-class" Canadian families by exploiting cheap foreign labour and recreating a pre-industrial system of servants.

These personal contradictions are also felt by the paid domestic workers themselves. As discussed in Jane Bertrand's chapter on child care workers, these workers often find themselves performing de-valued work caring for the children of others, while "their own child care and other personal needs may be neglected due to low salaries, and lack of benefits and job protection." Such internalized contradictions are also rife amongst fast-food workers for, as Ester Reiter points out, they are not only expected to prepare and present the food (while being completely constrained by the dictated labour process), they are required to "adopt suitable attitudes" and smile. The worker's inner world is called upon both to sell the product and to negate the realities of working conditions.

The selections in *Maid in the Market* are, however, far from pessimistic. There is considerable evidence here of both individual worker resistance and organized workers' struggles. As Mary Romero explains, Chicanas house-cleaners in the US devise personal strategies for resisting exploitation and maintaining some control over the content and pace of their work. Similarly, the Canadian retail workers interviewed by Pat McDermott are quick to challenge notions that their work is unskilled or easy. Organized resistance also abounds. Varied groups of workers,

including office cleaners in Toronto and Portuguese chambermaids in London, have organized collectively to challenge their employment conditions.

In their introduction, the editors make a persuasive case that paid and unpaid domestic labour is an enduring and central problematic. Certainly the role of contemporary live-in nannies and home cleaners harkens back to the pre-industrial mistress-servant relationship while the commodified familism of the fast-food industry appears to portend the increasing commercialization of private life. The challenge posed by this collection is to trace these historical connections, analyze the gender, racial/ethnic and class dimensions and develop socio-political strategies more consistent with the liberation of all women.

LES OUVRIÈRES DE DOMINION CORSET À QUÉBEC, 1886-1988

Sous la direction de Jean Du Berger et Jacques Mathieu. Sainte Foy: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1993.

by Bettina Bradbury

Brassières, corsets and lingerie. Words and products that are potent symbols of past constructions of femininity that constricted and remade women's bodies to fit the changing dictates of female fashion! The Dominion Corset Factory, the subject of this book, was one of the largest manufacturers of female underwear in the world for the century between its founding in Quebec City in 1886 and its closure in 1988. *Les ouvrières* is based largely on interviews with twenty former employees, with some reference to promotional literature and material saved "grâce à l'intervention du Laboratoire