

What makes this book so compelling is not merely that O'Grada is able to play quantitative evidentiary games with a sophistication far beyond that of traditional historians, but that he cares for the people concerned and, as part of that concern, is willing to deal with qualitative evidence. Fluent in the Irish language, he uses material from the Irish Folklore Commission, not just to illustrate his points, but as an independent source of probative material.

What is wrong with this book? Nothing. It stands virtuous on its own terms. I would like in future to see someone deal with the Famine as an ecological event and to do so without becoming enmeshed in the silliness of arguments for and against neo-Malthusian demographics. Whoever does that, however, will need a kevlar suit.

We owe Cormac O'Grada a great debt for his scholarship — but, then, I suspect he would say that he was merely repaying a debt to some people, long dead, whom he loved.

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Joy Parr — *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Pp. 368.

This is an original effort by a talented writer to bring aspects of material culture to the forefront of historical scholarship. It will be of interest to historians, social anthropologists, and museum professionals. In her study of “modern Canadian material culture”, Joy Parr sets out to “consider both the technologies and aesthetics which influenced the physical form of things, and the economic and social ideologies which organized thinking about them” (p. 3). In four convincing chapters dealing with the political economy, she analyses approaches to spending and credit for industrial and household projects by government economic planners, manufacturers, and consumers from about 1940 to 1970. This is followed by five chapters dealing mainly with the material culture of the mid-twentieth-century home. The author analyses how furniture, stoves, refrigerators, washing machines, and dryers were advertised and sold by manufacturers and evaluated by Canadian women. Whereas the beginning chapters are very much in line with economic history, the latter ones venture into new territory. Because of the originality of this part of her study, I concentrate on it.

Parr argues that, whereas Canadian women valued practical considerations over design principles, men in design, manufacturing, and museums tended to herald novelty, appearance, and gadgetry. Evocative citations from women writing in the 1950s show how frustrated they were with the manufacturers' emphasis on new design principles and appearance to the neglect of performance and ease of handling (pp. 212–213). She describes how recommendations from women in the Canadian Association of Consumers concerning performance testing of appliances and housewares were not accepted by the men of the National Industrial Design Council (p. 211) or promoted by museum curators and trustees.

Why did these “patriarchal capitalist” attempts to convert consumers to the manufacturing and design credos of the 1950s not work? According to the author, Canadian women were informed consumers who resisted manufacturers’ attempts to put “Trojan horses” into their homes (p. 15). Moreover, Parr believes they were more sceptical than their American counterparts, who quickly adopted novelty, partly because they benefitted from lower prices (p. 232). Canadian women were “keepers” whose “non-market values” (p. 171) included a discourse of “suitability” (p. 179) or accommodation: “making do was a necessity and a source of accomplishment” (p. 188).

Parr’s arguments are in keeping with a strand of scholarship in women’s studies that focuses on empowering women and highlighting their agency. Although prescriptive literature is used in her analysis, oral history also plays a significant role, including interviews of 18 industrial designers and experts from Sweden and Canada and 23 women, mainly from Victoria and the Vancouver area. In addition, 23 letters from other women, mainly from British Columbia, as well as trade literature, documents from government, company, and consumer associations, especially from central Canada, radio broadcasts, advertisements, and a vast array of secondary works add weight to her analysis.

Despite this array of evidence, her sources seem to condition her description of gender differences. Rather than illuminating the domestic differences between husband and wife, for example, the conflicts Parr describes are less between women and men sharing the same house than between women in the home and in consumer associations and men in industrial design, manufacturing, sales, and advertising. Moreover, her heavy reliance on sources from Ontario and British Columbia may explain why regional variations are not more pronounced (though on page 267 she does conclude that more work is needed to uncover regional and class differences). The author shows women’s resourcefulness in responding to a commercial commodity culture, but her emphasis on nonmarket values risks underestimating the role played by class differences and financial resources. Do strategies involving accommodation or making do and mediating family demands not stem, at least in part, from financial considerations? Indeed, the author agrees that “homemakers lacked the financial resources to participate in the taste-makers’ play” (p. 195). Although this statement seems to run counter to her arguments about the primacy of consumer values in women’s decision-making, it also helps provide a balance to her analysis.

In a sweeping study such as this one, it is not surprising to find the author making a few questionable or inconsistent claims and overlooking important household objects. For example, Parr maintains that “In 1945 and 1946, museums and art galleries, rather than homes and stores were places people went to look at household furniture and appliances” (p. 40). Exhibitions in Toronto and Ottawa in these years included such items, but, given the paucity of museums outside major urban centres and the lack of working-class visitors to them, it is unlikely that such places played a critical role in generating mass consumption. Furthermore, her comments about “the goals of the curators and trustees” in the “North Atlantic” seem to demonstrate a surprising assumption about power dynamics in museums (pp. 12 and 42), especially since these statements are almost contradicted by her description of heightening tensions between curators and trustees at the Royal Ontario Museum in 1947 (p. 45).

While the major appliances used in the kitchen and laundry are analysed, many are not. I raise this question of omission only because the book's title and introduction announce a study of Canadian material culture or domestic goods. Similarly, little is said about how advertisements targeted different cultural communities or how members of these groups adapted western appliances and furniture to meet their needs.

An equally critical omission is the author's rather cursory treatment of men. For example, when discussing rural homes, Parr maintains that "labour-saving equipment for the farm took priority, partly because men made these decisions on their own" (p. 236). She is surprised that, whereas on prosperous farms only 10 per cent of the investment in equipment was in domestic technology, in poorer families, the proportion of the farm family's resources in household appliances doubled. I would argue that this is normal since big, successful farms would need more expensive equipment (such as tractors and combines) outside the home than in it. The proportionately larger investment in household technology in poorer families suggests that the decision to acquire it was probably not made by men alone.

Finally, a study of visual representations found in domestic goods, as well as a comparison of them with those used for men, might be beyond the scope of this monograph, but it would be instructive in helping to reveal more about the "social ideologies" mentioned in the introduction. For example, advertisements promising to save time while depicting smiling mothers and daughters in matching aprons and long dresses and high heels, standing or playing around washing machines (pp. 225 and 228), merit additional comments. I wonder, for example, whether these ads represent values internalized by some women, masculine projections, or both. Not only might such ads ease male guilt about working conditions in the home; they also suggest a vision of the way homemakers should behave and dress. Moreover, because manipulative ads for farm machinery stereotyped men, is it not safe to assume that they, too, were called upon to be active interpreters of consumer messages? If this is true, then should they not also be included in the marketing and mediation of domestic goods? Finally, it is obvious that ads for home appliances are clearly more sexist than those for machinery. Scholars need only study ads about domestic technology in engineering journals to see examples of sexist attitudes.

Despite these reservations, this study breaks new ground. Parr's analysis of domestic goods provides insights into the material, the economic, and the psychological in the postwar years and stimulates us to discover more about the artifacts, assumptions, and attitudes involved in household production and consumption.

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Valérie Piette — *Domestiques et servantes : des vies sous condition*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Académie Royale de Belgique, 2000, 521 p.

In the nineteenth century, domestic servants were workers between two worlds, set apart from the industrial working class and from the rapidly growing bourgeoisie in