Valerie J. Korinek. *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. 460 pp.; \$75.00 (hardcover). ISBN 0-8020-4180-9.

For the browser in a magazine stand today, there is little to distinguish *Chatelaine* magazine from the other glossies racked in the “women’s” section. In her quest for self, familial, and domestic improvement, the reader of *Chatelaine* can learn how to make her own sushi, improve her children’s grades, and take ten steps to enhance her love life. Scant trace remains of the fun and feisty magazine that rose to national prominence under the editorship of Doris Anderson and gathered a loyal community of female readers from coast to coast.

Chatelaine magazine and its readers of the 1950s and 1960s are the topic of Valerie Korinek’s study. As the bivalent title announces, she presents an historical study of the relationship of the magazine and its audience through two decades of remarkable social change, for women particularly. But Korinek also provides “readings” of her own, that place the magazine in its various institutional and cultural contexts. Like Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance* – a work to which Korinek refers, and to which this book has methodological similarities – *Roughing It in the Suburbs* offers a combination of production, textual, and reception studies, with the emphasis on the latter. While analysing the magazine’s evolution and economics, and its editorship and authorship, Korinek is concerned with these factors largely as pieces of a larger puzzle: what peculiar combination of circumstances allowed *Chatelaine* to diverge from the formula of the classic women’s magazine? A second question arises from the first: since the magazine was so successful – gauged both by sales and by readers’ active engagement with it – what does this popularity tell us about those women of the fifties and sixties?

One significant contribution of this book is its demythologizing of the nostalgic notion that suburbanites of the 1950s were invariably conformative and uncritical. Women who were “roughing it” in the new post-war developments sometimes found life very rough going indeed. *Chatelaine* magazine, according to Korinek, identified the “problem with no name” some years before it was flagged in Betty Friedan’s *The Feminist Mystique*, the book which helped to launch feminism’s North American second wave. As Korinek also demonstrates, while marketers envisaged the suburban nuclear family as their ultimate target, the actual audience of *Chatelaine* reached from outports to ranches and across class divides.

Korinek's study begins with the growth of *Chatelaine* in the contexts of mid-century magazine publishing. Since there was a strict gender division in Maclean Hunter, with men handling finances and marketing and women controlling the editorial dimension in this one restricted instance (since they were felt to be more attuned to their readers' sensitivities), a distinctive editorial milieu soon evolved. On assuming the editorship in 1957 Anderson quickly moved to take the magazine out of (what the English sometimes call) the "knit your own husband" mold. While pieces on cooking and child care remained as staples, features on controversial topics such as wages for women, reproductive freedom, and racism, soon found their way into the pages. This magazine for "housewives" became, oxymoronically, a major proponent of Canadian women's return to the paid workforce. But male-controlled advertising agencies appear to have remained oblivious to the fact that editorial exposes of the excessive labour and irrational consumerism demanded of the homemaker, were contradicting the messages conveyed in their inserts.

The bifurcated nature of the magazine is elucidated in *Roughing It's* detailed textual analysis. Korinek's content study is both historical and structural. She traces the evolution of the magazine's themes, both the editorial matter and advertisements, and the ratios of topics as they shifted across the decades. She is also concerned with the relationship of the more traditional fare (including advertisements) to editorial and feature material operating in a more critical mode. Interestingly, Korinek is able to demonstrate more variability in the 1950s offerings than one would at first expect. But the divergence in the magazine's mandates widened as the 1960s developed and Anderson's editorial assurance increased.

Were readers comfortable with the seemingly mixed messages of the magazine? Were long-term readers alienated by the magazine's growing boldness? Did readers from different groups and communities across Canada find their experiences represented? And how did readers apply the magazine in the course of their daily lives? In answering these questions, Korinek draws upon the voluminous correspondence from readers contained in the Maclean Hunter archives. Some of these letters were published in the magazine's popular column, "The Last Word is Yours," and all were answered by a staff member and often by the editor herself. This interactivity is a double key to the magazine's success, for the letters allowed magazine staff to take their audience's temperature on an ongoing basis, and readers felt a sense of participation in the magazine's

creation. In their letters readers disputed the magazine's class biases, geographic centrism, and sometimes its morals; they sent recipes, hints, and addresses; asked for advice and gave suggestions. Articles were clipped, swapped, and frequently enclosed in letters to Members of Parliament. In 1968 more than 11,000 readers completed a questionnaire circulated in the magazine (which took three hours to complete), and the results were forwarded to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women.

In addition to the features, to which the magazine readers responded so vociferously, the magazine also published fiction on an ongoing basis. Since readers wrote infrequently in response to these offerings, however, Korinek is forced to be more extrapolative than in other parts of her study. She assesses the stories for how they offer alternatives to normative models, or forms of social critique even if ideational closure is offered in the concluding paragraphs. To see story reading as consisting primarily of forms of accepted or rejected identification with a protagonist, however, is perhaps to "under-read" the complex needs that fiction fulfills.

Korinek's study of *Chatelaine* readers is valuable both in terms of readership history, and from a more general social history perspective as it documents the emerging concerns of many English-Canadian women at mid-century. The argument amply overturns the idea that magazine readers are passive recipients of editorial or advertising messages (a stereotype that continues to adhere when women are the 'consumers'). As an empirical and theoretical audience study it leaves some questions for its own readers. Are readers really as free to choose among a panoply of messages as Korinek suggests? (Could it not be argued, for example, that the seeming contradiction between traditional and newer modes was actually bridged by an overarching concept, an updated maternal feminism?) Can this admittedly special case lead us to more general conclusions about the nature of women's magazine reading? Finally, while readers used the magazine to communicate with one another and to identify commonalities of interest, can a group whose interrelationships are so centrally mediated actually be classified as a reading 'community'? One of the great merits of Korinek's authoritative yet readable study, is that it provides a uniquely sustained portrait of a group of Canadian readers, and allows us to pose familiar questions with renewed interest and information.

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