highlights how, after a dearth of teen-girl texts in the early 1950s (and a shift into the domestic world of the ingénue), narrative cycles of the 1960s dramatized a patriarchal desire to put unruly teenage girls 'back in their place' (p. 213).

At once engaging and disquieting, *American Sweethearts* not only offers a compelling account of constructions of teenage girlhood from the 1930s to the 1960s, but also provides an important context in which to develop analyses of subsequent portrayals of adolescent femininity. As Nash argues in the epilogue, while American popular culture has expanded its definitions of girlhood, contemporary representations continue to recycle traditional types and myths – for example, Buffy the Vampire Slayer's 'kick-ass' agency is mitigated by her 'lack of intellectual acumen' (p. 219) and adherence to the disciplinary practices of traditional femininity. Although the epilogue is relatively wide-ranging in its tour of late-twentieth-century representations of girlhood, its discussion needed to attend more directly to their relationship with contemporary feminist and post-feminist discourses. Indeed, while one of the strengths of this study is its breadth of reference and approach, there are times when its methodology needed to be framed more rigorously. The introductory assertion that substituting 'teenage girl' for 'Orient' in Edward Said's seminal argument that the Orientalist 'makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West' will provide 'an accurate description of the female adolescent's rendering in popular culture' (p. 4) is a particularly conspicuous example of this theoretical over-simplification. That said, *American Sweethearts* is, overall, a persuasive and dynamic study and, as such, will make a vital contribution to current conversations about constructions of girls and girlhood in American popular culture.

Rebecca Munford

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British women writers 1914–1945: professional work and friendship

Catherine Clay; Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006, 194p, ISBN -10: 0 7546 5093 6 (Hbk), £50.00 (Hbk)

The focus of this book is the friendship and professional networks of a group of women writers living and working during the period framed by the two world wars. It centres on women connected to the feminist journal *Time and Tide* and is primarily concerned with the social and professional lives of key contributors Stella Benson, Vera Brittain, Winifred Holtby, Storm Jameson, Naomi Mitchison and Margaret Haig, and Lady Rhondda, who was the journal's founder and financier.

This text is a valuable addition to our understanding of how feminist networks operated in the interwar period. The quotes from previously unpublished documents enable one to gain a new insight into the complexity of relationships among this group of successful writers. It also problematizes sexual identity in a period when the lesbian was coming into public focus, yet that public focus was cruelly hostile and condemning. The trial of *The Well of Loneliness* puts same-sex friendships under the microscope and it took a brave woman like Laura Hutton, a friend of Stella Benson, to stand up and be counted. Most women did not want to take on the identity of lesbian and therefore their same-sex friendships were hedged in by discursive boundaries.

Clay is particularly concerned with the form, meaning and significance of the relationships between these women and she does this by constructing a series of case studies that she calls 'biographies of friendships'. These case studies shape the structure of the book. Drawing on unpublished letters and diaries as well as printed material, much of which is out of print, Clay seeks to establish that the friendships between these women were instrumental in developing their writing skills in both practical and emotional ways. Further, Clay argues that a close textual analysis of the private writings suggests that these women 'shared erotic interests and/or intense desires for intimacy' (p. 3). However, given that lesbianism had been propelled into a fascinated but appalled public gaze through the trial of *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928, these desires were suppressed and manifested through a discourse of work and professionalism. In doing this Clay insists that, rather than trying to make the reductive attempt to claim that a certain person is a lesbian or not, she is tracing lesbian desire rather than lesbian identity. This she does through examining the ambivalence and denial around sexuality in the writings of these women.

The degree to which she is successful in this attempt, is, I think, variable. The period examined is, indeed, particularly interesting with regards to the increasing visibility of lesbian identities and she rightly argues that Laura Hutton, a close friend of Stella Benson, was able to identify as lesbian and live as one albeit with criticism from Benson. But I was not convinced that Benson's cruel dissection of Hutton's character both before and after Hutton's self-identification as lesbian, and a poem that she wrote, suggests that Benson was suppressing her desire for Hutton. However, other examples were more convincing, especially concerning the relationship between Lady Rhondda and Winifred Holtby, where Lady Rhondda's desire for Holtby is expressed through her imagining them travelling in Europe together. Given that they were at that time in different countries there was a certain safety in this expression of desire, and both women seemed comfortable with expressing their longings at a distance. Indeed Holtby seems to have been at the centre of the web of friendship and the object of desire for several women, not least Vera Brittain.

I found the chapter on the relationship between Brittain and Holtby the most convincing. Rather than attempting to claim or refute a lesbian relationship between the two writers, Clay, using previously unpublished correspondence, explores their mutually dependant, complex relationship. They had, she argues, a professional friendship that was shot through by erotic energies, a relationship that she calls 'a trade in work and desire'. Rather than speak of the emotion that underpinned their need for each other in terms of desire, they used a discourse of work and professionalism. A discourse that bound them together more firmly than any declaration of love could have done in an era when to speak of same sex love was to speak of inversion and therefore threaten their status as serious writers.

This text is on the whole compellingly argued and Clay draws on a wide range of sources to make her case. It will be useful to students of literary studies and the history of feminism in the interwar years. It evokes a period when some women had at last gained some of the freedoms they had been struggling for, yet had lost the 'innocence' that had surrounded same-sex friendships of an earlier era. Above all, it demonstrates most clearly that for feminists at this time the private was most certainly political in the broadest sense of that word.

Gerry Holloway

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White lives: the interplay of 'race', class, and gender in everyday life

Bridget Byrne; Routledge, 2006, 280p, ISBN 0-415-34711-4 (Hbk), 0-415-34712-2 (Pbk), £24.99 (Pbk)

The current panic over the alleged failure of multiculturalism in Britain focuses attention on modish terms like 'social cohesion' and 'engagement with alienated youth' (read Muslims). In contrast, the idea that vast sections of the white middle class opt to live segregated lives in urban and rural parts of the country is seldom raised as a problem. Natasha Walter, author of *The New Feminism*, recently illustrated how middle-class parents routinely lied about their religious affiliations to get their kids into more exclusive church schools (2006). One mother she interviewed admitted to moving her daughter from a nearby state school where she was perfectly happy because of social pressure: 'As soon as I started talking to the other mothers like me that I met in the neighbourhood, I found that none of them would even consider sending their children there, and that put me off'. At a time when the blame for faith-based separation is being laid at the door of minorities, this phenomenon, rarely discussed in public, suggests that the wrong people are being targeted for anti-social behaviour.