serve a range of purposes in addition to illustrating her main arguments. By focusing on the identity 'lesbian' she shows that a sense of lesbian self is a suitable guide to resistance (and change). The inclusion of her own experiences demonstrates her point that resistance and liberation require reflection on the unique experiences of individuals, this enables specific needs to be served and an understanding of the many ways oppression can be resisted, individually and collectively. Although not a sociological book, I have read it three times and each time I found something new and exciting that made the discussions increasingly convincing. *Heroic Desire* is an enjoyable read for anyone interested in identity politics, particularly if concerned with cultural studies, women's studies, lesbian studies and social geography.

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Celebrating Women's Friendship: Past, Present and Future

Ruth A. Symes, Ann Kaloski and Heloise Brown (Eds.); Raw Nerve Books, York, 1999, ISBN: 0-9536585-1-1 (Pbk) £13.00

This inter-disciplinary collection of essays on female friendship grew out of the conference organized by the Centre for Women's Studies at the University of York in 1995. It extends the thin literature currently available on women's friendships and makes a companion volume to Pat O'Connor's (1992) *Friendships Between Women: A Critical Review*. The contributors investigate friendship in specific historical, geographical and classed contexts in various locations – domesticity, Edwardian feminist politics, academia and cyberspace – through a range of media: letters, oral narratives, fiction, poetry, electronic mail and autobiography.

Several chapters grapple with familiar themes in research on female friendship such as the difficulty of defining friendship, the blurred line between homosocial and homosexual ties that are much more closely demarcated among men than women, the under-explored power dynamics between women and political sororities. In their discussions, several authors draw on inspiring sources: the work of Graham Allan, Nancy Chodorow, Adrienne Rich and Virginia Woolf.

The most engaging chapters bring a new perspective to friendship research. Side reviews feminist attempts to theorize friendship; Symes considers the links between friendship, the genre of epistolary writing and early developments in pedagogy for women; Brown and Cowman's analysis of the role of friendship in the suffrage movement offers a powerful example of effective political sisterhood mobilized around a single issue. Giles examines the possibility of friendship across class boundaries between bourgeois women and their domestic helpers; and Bertram

dissects images of friendship in contemporary lyric poetry that transcend the tensions of sameness and difference found in the attachment model of mother/daughter relationships. Kaloski, De Rimini and Thomas share their thoughts on how friendship takes on new forms in cyberspace: theirs is an original reflection on the possibilities of making new friends through computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the implications for transcending gendered identity on-line.

These contributors extend current thinking on friendship. They explore the theme of women's dependencies on each other, which has received less attention than that of autonomy in feminist thought. Side, reviewing psychosexual, radical feminist and social/cultural theoretical approaches to female friendship, questions assumptions of equality made by theorists. Side raises the issue of power relations and urges us to distinguish between reciprocity and symmetry in friendship. In Maria Edgeworth's correspondence about pedagogy with her American fan Rachel Mordecai Lazarus, Symes traces the evolution of their friendship into a working partnership across the geographical divide. Similarly, Giles points to the reciprocal rapport akin to friendship between a middle-class woman and her home help over several years from her oral history research to reveal the possibility of transcending class and material differences in ties of domestic employment. And in her compelling analysis of friendship poems, Bertram takes the discussion of the identification/difference tension one step further. Thylia Moss' 'An Anointing' playfully evokes mutuality rather than merged attachment as a friendship ideal through some exuberant teenage banter. One reason for the paucity of language and imagery to describe friendship, Bertram says, is the absence of myths for poets to draw on.

This collection makes a significant contribution to historical, literary and cultural perspectives on female friendship. A noticeable absence apart from Side's theoretical essay is sociological work on friendship, which although in evidence at the conference, is excluded here. Several contributors highlight the need for social research on contemporary experiences and forms of friendship and Valerie Hey's (1997) ethnographic work on teenage girlfriends, documented in *The Company She Keeps*, would have complemented their work.

Readers might also expect more references to the very different friendship experiences of Black women in a range of sites and historical periods and the distinct roles these can play in their lives. In this respect, the collection is unbalanced with four out of the ten essays devoted to authors' reflections on their personal experiences of friendship, and three of these about female ties in academic settings. This editorial selection belies one of the book's aims, which is to be accessible to a broad range of women inside and outside higher education. While women's friendships clearly are an important site of autobiography, the book's appeal would be broader had more space been devoted to research where autobiography provides a method for gathering narratives of diverse friendship experiences rather than those of privileged academic women. The four essays on friendship in the workplace, in illness and death, and over the life-course by Betts

and Watt, Potts, and Scott-Manderville seem more explorations of autobiography – about teaching, learning and living across private/professional as well as racial divides – that foreground friendship rather than experiences of friendship beyond the narrow confines of academia and the lenses of a select group of women's lives. Montague and Andrew assess the ethics of friendship in a professional context, in particular the issue of drawing on their friendship for constructing a 'living biography' for a teaching session.

This book will prove indispensable to anyone embarking on friendship research: its bibliography provides an invaluable resource and is one of its most exciting features.

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'Woman, your hour is sounding' continuity and change in French women's great war fiction, 1914–19

Nancy Sloan Goldberg; Macmillan, Houndmills and London, 1999, £32.50, ISBN: 0-333-913 892 (Hbk)

War literature, in France as elsewhere, was long assumed to be a masculine genre, and clearly the attempt to come to terms imaginatively with the direct experience of warfare – at least in the 1914–8 war – was the task of male writers. However, women's lives were also turned upside down by war, and (as several recent feminist studies have demonstrated) fiction was extensively used as a space where women writers and readers could explore the practical dilemmas and the changed moral landscape of their lives. With no French equivalent of the Virago Press – the women-only publishing company *des femmes* has never shown much interest in popular or middlebrow texts – and little French academic interest in rediscovering women's best-sellers now lost from history, virtually all the French female-authored fiction of World War I remains out of print, and the study of it has been mainly undertaken by British or American feminists. Nancy Goldberg has unearthed a huge corpus of now virtually unknown 'women's' novels that were widely read in the war period, while their female authors were often garlanded with prizes and honours. The use of such a large and little known set of texts carries a cost, in that argument is inevitably outweighed in some sections by a great deal of plot summary and explanation, but the book's guiding thesis always resurfaces, and its contribution to the archaeology of women's writing is extremely valuable. Quotations from the novels are translated into English, but also (sensibly) given in the original French in the footnotes.

In the pre-war years, the French feminist movement had reached its peak of influence and popularity, and it was widely – and, as it turned out, quite wrongly –