



## In the Name of Friendship

*Marilyn French , Stephanie Genty (Afterword)*

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### **In the Name of Friendship** Marilyn French , Stephanie Genty (Afterword)

Marilyn French's seven million copy bestseller *The Women's Room* crystallized the issues that ignited the women's movement. Now the acclaimed author updates that classic with a new exploration of the truths and realities behind women's lives. *In the Name of Friendship* dares to investigate how the women's movement changed the lives of those it touched and what hurdles it left to cross.

Set in the Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts, this wise novel is a group portrait of four disparate women who forge life-altering friendships despite personalities that vary as greatly as their vocations and ages. The novel weaves together a series of family crises with the friendships that help the four women refashion their lives. Maddy, the seventy-six-year-old real estate agent and matriarch of the group, struggles with the gradual death of her angry and rebellious Vietnam-marked son; fifty-year-old Alicia fights to reconnect her gay son with her newly retired husband; seventy-year-old musician Emily strives to bridge the gap with her estranged niece right at the moment her composition career starts to finally bloom; and Jenny, the thirty-year-old painter and baby of the group, questions the life she has created with her successful painter husband and tries to decide if she wants more from life.

With this unusual group of multi-generational ladies, French tells a truly rare tale about four women who accidentally come into each other's lives and in the process form an enduring friendship. It is a story of supporting one another, of looking at the grim conflicts created by cultural expectations of women, and realizing you are not alone—truly a tale of continuing hope.

### **In the Name of Friendship Details**

Date : Published May 1st 2006 by The Feminist Press at CUNY (first published January 1st 1997)

ISBN : 9781558615212

Author : Marilyn French , Stephanie Genty (Afterword)

Format : Hardcover 382 pages

Genre : Fiction, Womens, Feminism

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## From Reader Review In the Name of Friendship for online ebook

### Meaghan says

I liked the story but did not like the lecture on feminism. Lady, you are writing for the classic feminist writers series. You do not have to convince your readers that feminism is important and relevant. More importantly, the story is more convincing than the lectures. Show, don't tell!!!

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### Sally Atwell Williams says

Loved the different ages of the women and the discussions between two or all four throughout the novel. Well written. I had read *The Women's Room* in the 70's. Haven't read any others of Ms. French's books until this one. It was well worth it.

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### Michelle says

Tedious, didactic, contrived and in need of heavy editing. Disappointing after enjoying French's earlier novels. Maybe written for someone who has not noticed there has been a change in women's lives in the last century.

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### Bernice Schwartzman villa says

While the characters are interesting there is far too much of her now familiar and repetitious feminist rhetoric.

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### Terry says

I am a HUGE Marilyn French fan, but I was a bit underwhelmed with the particular book, and it pains me to say that. For fans of *The Women's Room* French is basically working on the same ideas (how women balance expectations of them--their families', their colleagues', their children's, their own--with their own needs and desires and interests) with the same very general plot device (following a group of women over the course of a year). In this particular book a few of the women are a generation older than others, and that sets up some interesting ideas and exchanges as the women chart how their lives would have been different had they lived in a different era.

French's conclusion seems to be that women are only fulfilled if they commit fully to their art, whatever their art may be--music, writing, medicine, travel, mothering--and that trying to find a balance between that art and wifehood/motherhood is, basically, impossible. It's art OR wifehood, art OR motherhood (and if mothering IS your art, you better commit to THAT with your whole being). There is no way, even in "today's" society (the early 21st century) to be someone's partner and have a career or a vocation at the same time. It can't be done.

Anyway, I feel that most of the same conclusions were made in *The Women's Room* and I'm not even sure what is new about this particular book, except perhaps its era and its setting, but that doesn't really seem to add much. She does explore mothering in this book more, but there also seems to be a kind of disconnect--the main characters all have difficult relationships with their own mothers, yet find themselves puzzled about their difficult relationships with their children. It never seems to occur to them that their children will feel the same way about them as they do about their mothers.

And of course it must be pointed out that French's books concern themselves wholly with upper-middle-class, Ivy League-educated, well-traveled, wealthy women, so her view will feel a little narrow to many people.

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## Brigitte says

Ik begrijp de feministische boodschap van Marilyn French volkomen, sta daar ook helemaal achter, maar vond dit boek wel erg moraliserend op dat gebied. Daarnaast vond ik de vrouwen in dit boek veel te braaf en verschrikkelijk saai !

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## M says

Feminist novels promise to be thinly veiled agenda driven platforms for spewing all sorts of angry philosophy, and this certainly delivers. French penned this in her seventies, three years before her death, and this affected a lot of the writing - most of the women are around that age, and the story is primarily a rambling stream of consciousness about how things have changed in the world over the last seven decades. Four women who at times seemed interchangeable to me form a friendship that is nourished mainly by how wronged they all feel by society and Evil Men. Oddly enough one of the women is 31, and I have a hard time understanding how she hangs out with women more than twice her age and why, exactly, these are her only friends?

French's style is to string non sequiturs together in narrative as well as dialogue so that you get something like this:

She still looked pretty good for her age. her hair could seem blond from a distance. And it was blond, for the most part, though a lot of gray had seeped in. But gray was normal for her age. Still, it wasn't something she was happy about it. Well, could anyone be happy about gray hair? Maybe that neighbor, Sheila. She knitted sweaters for soldiers. Does anyone knit anymore? Her mother used to but ...

Etc etc etc. The sloppy writing is only improved upon by French's unique brand of simile/metaphor (this is a direct quote):

"Satisfaction spread through her like warm urine in a diaper"

Hm. I ought to suggest that one to my writing students.

The constant griping about men as well as the men playing out their stereotypes so precisely so as to fully embody the author's point made for a rather comical and at times slightly pathetic story - women spoke as though they were conducting therapy sessions while men stumbled over their communicating how they don't know how to communicate- and the men indeed were hardly sympathetic except when the author tried, in an overtly deliberate way, to make them appear as such.

While this work presents interesting conflicts - Jenny wants a child, Tim is horrified at the thought - his horrible behavior is wholly unjustified, his character entirely unredeeming, and yet Jenny sticks with him, and he does a rather unrealistic 180 thus proving that women can do anything, even alter the state of the man they married by sticking up for their rights.

While I could mock this book mercilessly and endlessly, there were positives that I feel I should address as well, in keeping with my new resolution to be a less critical reviewer - French, through her characters, raises some very interesting ideas. I don't personally agree with most of them but they were definitely thought provoking - here were some:

1 - A character laments that her mother only had kids because she was 'supposed' to yet given her incredibly adept way of running a home she could have easily been a CEO and what a shame she wasn't born at a different time.

Well, part of me wonders, if you saw some spinster CEO who made her zillions and retired at fifty with nothing to come home to, might you not say, wow imagine what kind of family she could have run? Or is the point that family is something that, if forced upon you, is a mistake and some people were just meant to be CEOs and stupid society had forced them out of their actual calling? But then what about the people who want to run a family but are now forced out of that?

2 - A wife complains inwardly about having to get her husband a drink when he comes home from work (not that she has to as much as it has become sort of routine) - it irks me that in feminism that very give and take of two people who love each other suddenly needs to be raked through the coals (one woman felt on principal that she should not thank her husband when he helps with the children - personally I say get the heck over yourself, I am sure you'd like a thank you if you changed the oil in the car or took out the trash)

3 - One of the characters says that adultery is a concept created by men because of its attitude toward women as property and she feels that we each own our bodies and faithfulness is irrelevant; she also speaks of love being about context and that if the context changes the love changes as this is only natural. I think a lot of what I was seeing as a response to years of 'oppression' is just a ton of selfishness. Don't tell me how to be, or who to answer to, when in relationships there is a lot of that simply because its a partnership. But in business its ok, just not in love?

4 - A lot of French;'s complaints attack ancient tradition - the women only getting a divorce if the man agree, adultery only applying to women unless a man has an affair with a married and therefore owned woman - are things I myself struggle with and I am still unsure as to how to resolve it, although frankly the opposite extreme is not necessarily better as it bespeaks a narrow and self centered view of relationships

There were some good lines and insights - like Emily commenting that depressed people are hard to take, because they don't appear sad, they appear angry, and other things I liked - and I fell into this world easily enough - but the random writing, the occasional sheets of music notes French tossed in because she never got to actually sell her music, the constant - I can't believe I am being successful, I am just a lowly woman! and the contrived spousal arguments to flesh out her ideas made this book silly and trite. The best piece was when one of the fogies was complaining about the struggle of women and Evil Men and a character in her 20s

said, mmm yea I'm over that - it;s a different world, men have what to contribute, too, and they're more aware than back in your day.

Well that basicallt sums up my thoughts as well.

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### **Linda Tuplin says**

After plugging through the first half of the book, finally gave up. I was excited to start it, having loved her other novels. But I found I could not keep the characters straight and that it was overall just boring and somewhat pretentious. Disappointing.

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### **Anne-marie says**

currently reading this-and loving it. it's like having a converstation - or listening to one - with women friends - smart friends. i'm noddng my head a lot! such great insight about women-men-feminism.

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### **Maryruth Endicott says**

Some of the writing was a little annoying because it was so obviously trying to make a point. But I really enjoyed the characters and their stories. Plus I think the issues raised in this book are important for us to remember and think about.

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### **Tina says**

Not as profound as her earlier books, but her descriptions of this small community of women is touching and comforting.

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### **Cathy says**

I had a really hard time getting into this one. I kept hoping it would get better and hook me...but alas...not my style maybe.

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### **Tess Mertens-Johnson says**

I devoured Marilyn French's "The Women's Room" in the 70s. I went tot my local library looking for it to re-read, and found "In The Name of Friendship" which has been called the Women's Room II. This book is set in the early 200s and follows a group of women who live near each other in Stevenson, MA.

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It is a melting pot of personalities and issues. Maddy, the Matriarch of the group who blames her family's issues on her parenting and is grieving the loss of her Vietnam damaged son. Emily, who is Maddy's oldest friend, deals with her estrangement and reconciliation of her brother's daughter she raised after he and his wife are killed in an auto accident. Alicia is trying to start Phase II of her life with her retired husband and dealing with her son coming out as gay, and her husband's reaction. Jenny is artists who is much younger (30s) than her neighbors and is dealing with a new marriage and want for a baby.

Each character has one common denominator - creatively independent, but not financially independent. Only Emily's niece, Clea, finds herself personally and professionally.

It was a good book of characters that all came together in the end when Emily's symphony (she panicked when she was making her own money) was performed. I liked the characters, but felt their stories were too wide apart. The area they lived was the glue they had, but it wasn't superglue...kept me looking for more

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### **Joan says**

I expected to like this way better than I did. I selected it because of the relationship of older and younger women. It could have been good if it has not been so wordy and political. I like the premise of four good friends of vastly different ages. And for the most part I liked the women, Maddy and Emily both in their 70's, Alicia in her 50' and Jenny in her 30's. They are all women of privilege and each with a special talent. And each of the men, Maddy's weak-willed husband, Charley, Alicia's psychiatrist husband with his own issues, Steven, Jenny's rich talented self-centered artist husband, Tim. Emily chose not to marry because it would limit her.

Before the story ended each woman was recognized, and the husbands "fixed." I guess it is just too long past the women's movement for me to hear so much about how it usta be.

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### **Jennifer says**

Decided to read this because of her history, it even says on the left hand corner of the book, "Classic Feminist Writers." I found it hard to read at times, sometimes the dialogue was a little stiff so that was distracting. It's a story about four friends who live in the Berkshires; two women are in their seventies, one in her fifties and one in her thirties. I felt like the men were portrayed badly and the focus for the women was either on how society limited their choices, due to the times they lived in, or how men limited their choices by their neediness or selfishness. So in some ways, it's probably a good window into a world that most women in their forties, thirties, and twenties do not have to deal with, thanks to the women and men who changed our societal views on women, but I think that relationships between men and women are more complex than those portrayed in this novel.

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