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## Key Thinkers Lecture on Kate Millett

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## Key Thinkers Lecture on Kate Millett

### Abstract

This contribution includes a written Introduction to the Key Thinkers lecture on Kate Millett by Sheila Jeffreys and the lecture in two videos.

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## KEY THINKERS LECTURE ON KATE MILLET

Sheila Jeffreys

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**K**ATE MILLET'S *SEXUAL POLITICS* (1970) is the book that made me a feminist, as I explain in my autobiography, *Trigger Warning: My Lesbian Feminist Life* (2020). I read it, immediately looked for a feminist group to join, and began my career in feminist activism and writing.

In 2009 a group of academics at the University of Melbourne, where I was a Professor, decided to set up a lecture series called Key Thinkers in which colleagues would speak about the work of the theorists they considered the most important to their work and the work of their discipline. I was asked to contribute and chose Millett because I consider her first book to be the one that was most influential in creating the Women's Liberation Movement.

*Sexual Politics* is comprehensive and persuasive and has aged well. Unlike the other two main feminist books of that year, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), *Sexual Politics* is as relevant now as it was then. There are no embarrassing echoes of the sexual revolution, such as occurs in Greer's book, for instance. The main subject that I taught at the University of Melbourne, *Sexual Politics*, was named after Millett's book. I used it to demonstrate to the students the central idea of my work and my teaching, which she explained so well, that women's oppression, unlike that of any other group, is mediated through sex.

I was astonished when I began to research what academic literature existed about the book so that I could speak of her influence. There was vanishingly little, and there was no biography of her. This was in stark contrast to the theorist, Judith Butler, about whose work many books have been written, though increasingly a new wave of feminists today are rejecting the queer and postmodern theory she represents as antithetical to feminism rather than a variety of it.

I wrote up the lecture as a journal article so that there would be a permanent record (Jeffreys, 2011) and so that there would be some recognition of Millett's importance in an academic world that had so effectively wiped her from its memory.

I was pleased to hear that Kate had seen the two videos of my lecture about her before she died. It gives me more pleasure to see that her work is being recognized once more as a new wave of radical feminism emerges and is rejecting the post-modern and queer hegemony, which was mainly responsible for the obscuring of her legacy.

### **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

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