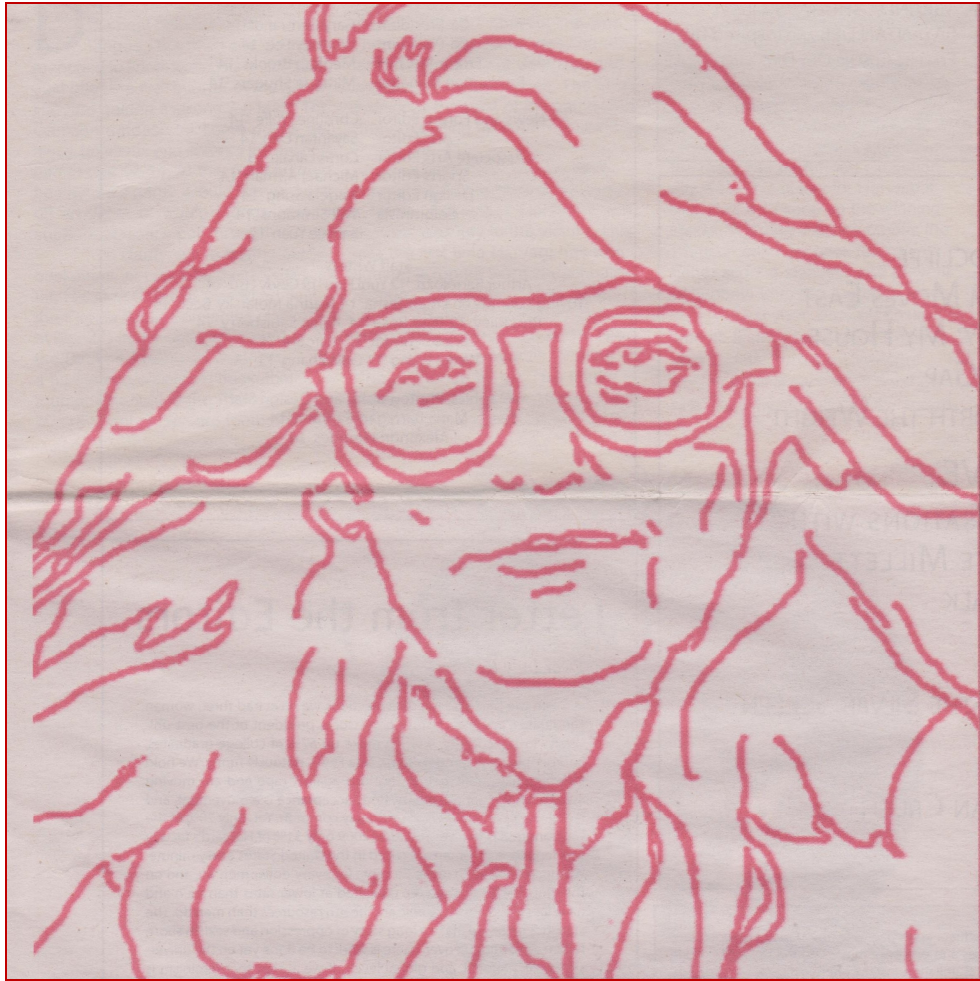


KATE MILLETT FESTIVAL 2012



“We’ve got to shift the whole society’s lights and brights and beacons...”

PRESENTED BY

VETERAN FEMINISTS OF AMERICA

JUNE 24, 2012

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KATE MILLETT: HER LIFE AND WORK

About Veteran Feminists of America

VFA is a nonprofit organization for veterans of the Second Wave. Goals are to document and preserve the history of the Movement, to enjoy the sisterhood forged during years of intense commitment, and to pass the torch to younger generations.

It was conceived in the 1980s, when the ERA had failed and feminists were being called “femininazis”. Noting that men were often honored for their contributions to society, while women seldom were, the founders decided that “if no one will honor us, we’ll honor ourselves.” So another goal is to honor all soldiers of the feminist “wars.”

The first celebration in 1993 honored the late Catherine East, the woman Betty Friedan called “the midwife of the feminist movement.” VFA has since honored over 15,000 early activists and held special events to reflect on the work of Betty Friedan, Congresswoman Martha Griffiths, Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, Flo Kennedy and Kate Millett. VFA has also celebrated NOW founders, Women’s Liberationists, women in politics, artists, writers, women studies founders, lawyers, and regional pioneers.



High points of our 20-year history include Barbara Love’s *Feminists who Change America*, an extraordinary book published by University of Illinois Press, presenting the stories of 2,200 pioneer feminists now available as a searchable c.d. from www.fwca.vetfems.org; Duke University’s purchase of VFA’s archives; and the Keeper of the Flame Award presented to VFA by The National Women’s Hall of Fame in August 2010.

At the request of younger women, VFA recently launched the Bridge Project, a matching service that introduces feminists from one generation to feminists from another, aiming for “lineage and legacy” in the words of its founder, Board member Zoe Nicholson.

For more information about VFA, click: www.vfa.us .

**To order copies of the Kate Millett CD for \$13 (includes Shipping/Handling)
click *PayPal* Link and make out your *PayPal* Check for as many copies as
you’d like- GO TO:
<http://katemillett.vetfems.org/>**

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KATE MILLETT AWARD 2012



On June 24, 2012 – these fabulous feminists...

Gloria Steinem, Kate Millett, Susan Brownmiller, Alix Kates Shulman, Terry O'Neill, Barbara Love gathered with over 100 feminists in NYC to present the Second *Kate Millett Lifetime Achievement Award* to VFA's president, Jacqueline Ceballos for her energy, enthusiasm and good will, for being a positive “force” in Second Wave feminism; for co-founding Veteran Feminists of America, an inspirational “Bridge” from “past to future generations of women.”

Joining in music and song: Alix Dobkin, Joan Casamo and Sandy Rapp

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Merle Hoffman and Kate Millett

On the Issues, The Progressive Women's Magazine Vol 10, 1988

"When you're working. .on any kind of social change, it is extremely important always to have that radical edge or your intellectual content will turn to water."

MH Kate, describe your political evolution.

KM I didn't grow up in a conventionally political family. It was a mixture of classes and immigrant types who were always trying to assimilate. The real theater in which my emotional life was played out was the Irish political situation because it was interesting, exciting, and it was ours. There could be strenuous arguments over the Civil War in '22, the Settlement in '36 and the six remaining unfree counties in Northern Ireland, etc. I learned good liberal sentiments from my mother along with tolerance, kindness and a real dislike for racism. Of course, as Irish immigrants we were naturally Democrats, with mother's family being very deeply involved in the Democratic party and the labor movement. The only taste of revolution came from abroad with the notion of centuries and centuries of oppression—700 years under the Heel of England, as my Aunt used to say. The unfairness of it all echoed again when I began to get a little feminist consciousness as a very small child.



MH Did you have any political role models?

KM Not the classic Marxist Jewish intellectual kind. Ours was different...an ongoing strange revolution which is still not solved...Northern Ireland is still an occupied country and it's not even a fashionable cause.

MH When did the feminism begin?

KM I think when I was five years old, or even earlier. I pointed out to my mother that the whole system was profoundly unfair.

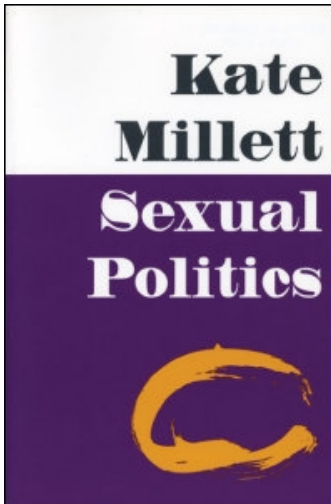
MH Did she agree and tell you to change it?

KM Well, yes she agreed. I think she has often found me a bit headstrong about all this but when I wrote *Sexual Politics* and explained to her that I was a feminist she said "Well, well, I have always been a feminist."

MH Since you wrote *Sexual Politics*, how much do you think has changed?

KM A great deal. The movement has had a great effect. We made alternate institutions but we haven't had a profound effect on the establishment, the government, public institutions. We didn't get the ERA and we can see how much is eroded or disappearing. Abortion is attacked every day. A lot of energy just goes into hanging on to what you already have. So, if you're still trying to hold on to abortion which you won 15 years ago, how much can you go out there and fight for decriminalization of prostitution, lesbian rights or whatever real radical issues would be interesting to work on now? A movement on the defense can't keep moving its front guard out the way we'd like to be doing.

MH What about the troops? Are there enough, are they still there, are they motivated?



KM I think we've created a consciousness. The media is always trying to say it's over, that college girls today are real nitwits, etc. They're certainly not the activists I'd like to see, but the fact that we are as strong as we are is positive. Other progressive causes are in worse trouble; the unions, and the Blacks, who are more defensive than we are, because they're losing more faster. Education rates and college degree's for Black people are just shriveling up. It's remarkable that we've got a strong enough base to be in this good a shape in the last year of Reagan's reign. Ten years ago you couldn't say the word, now you can be a gay and run for office in certain places. You are a recognized political movement and class of people which even AIDS can't seem to eradicate. That's a terrific amount of progress.

MH Do you agree that defining oneself politically by sexual preference is great progress or just another way to separate?

KM I think it's a wonderful thing because what is at stake here is everyone's sexual freedom. The more gay liberation the more sexual possibility. It's really not only sexual. It's the right to fall in love with, experience, be intimate, spend years with, another entire half of the human race. It really does widen the whole human experience vastly.

MH There are some that say that bisexuality is nonexistent, that it's a flight from the acceptance of homosexuality. In that sense, do you think that some of the politics of gay liberation are restrictive and oppressive?

KM Well, they can be. Groups have become very faction ridden, dogmatic and tedious, but all the early classic essays on gay liberation realize and were aware that the liberation of human sexuality was the essential issue.

MH The gay liberation movement seems to be willing (in comparison to a lot of feminist groups) to take greater political risks, both individually and as a movement. Do you think feminists have more of a stake in keeping the status quo on some level as opposed to gays who have broken the last social barrier?

KM The outrage, I love it. There is an enormous psychic rocket effect with coming out that does make you so empowered—you've broken that last conceivable barrier...there's nothing they can do to you anymore.

MH You're saying no one has power over you because you've taken away all the cards they can use to destroy you. Do you think a major issue with many women personally and with the Women's Movement is that there is a great need to be liked, be accepted, to be in the same space that everybody else is in at the same time, that keeps them limited politically?

KM Then there is always that possibility of buying in, of getting that middle-level job, of being the only lady on the team. That's something we always knew about. We had a little hometown saying for it: "We didn't want a piece of the pie, we wanted to junk it and start all over again in a new mixing bowl." There was always the question of whether we would compromise or be co-opted; we certainly knew about these issues from the beginning. When you're working from the inside on any kind of social change, it is extremely important always to have that radical edge or your intellectual content will turn to water. You won't have any new ideas, you won't have any new issues, you won't be doing anything that expands freedom itself, which is what this movement thing is about.

MH What are the cutting-edge issues? If we had the luxury of moving forward, where should we be moving?

KM We should decriminalize prostitution because it is sexually more progressive than censorship, and we should attack pornography tooth and claw in the streets, rather than through laws.

MH Stop pornography purely on an educational level?

KM Right, using our First Amendment rights to say this is rotten, nasty, inhuman, sadistic junk and no one would tolerate it if it were against any other class of people. We could be doing lots more for lesbian rights, and doing more for and with issues of working class and Black women.

MH Would your vision of a new society be a socialist vision?

KM We'd probably have day care, because if you really did that as an issue you would naturally give up class and capitalism; we're just going to have to stop giving some kids a whole lot and others nothing at all. I guess that's where I went over the socialist line, trying to imagine egalitarian day care.

MH But you're comfortable with the two-party system the way it stands, the politics as usual in the country?

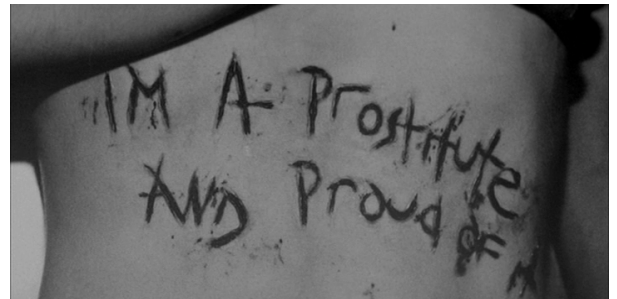
KM Oh no, I could never be comfortable with it; it's crooked, they call the elections hours ahead of time. The whole thing is done with money, and with media which is all money. Corporations are manipulating our foreign policy and economic interests. That's what all our wars are about; how this or that rich multi-national can exploit South America. It really has nothing at all to do with South America "going Red."

MH I read *The Basement* years ago. It was in my mind and consciousness for a very long time, it touched me so profoundly. What moved you to write that book?

KM I read about the case in the cafeteria at Barnard and it changed my whole life. Sexual Politics doesn't mention this atrocity because I was making a decent argument for a doctoral thesis, but *The Basement* was Sexual Politics II. I always felt that Sexual Politics was a theory and *Vie Basement* was practice. I wrote it in the Farm House. They were strange summers and it was an awful book to live with. I lived with it for 14 years. It's a terrible book.

MH How was the book received?

KM The reviews were better than I'd ever had. I'm usually attacked tooth and nail with gleaming eyes. Yet for readers, and women in particular, it seemed to be so unpleasant a thing to bring up. It was evaded and refused. *The Basement* concerns the sexual abuse and murder of a young girl (Sylvia Likens) by her foster mother Gertrude. Many feminists still tell me years later "Well I never read your book; I just couldn't put myself through that." I always want to say that it was a lot harder for Sylvia Likens than for you. I wanted so much to help her, (Sylvia). I wanted us all to help her, but if we couldn't save this particular Sylvia's life, we'd get right on it and see it never happened again.



MH Then, what you were asking women to do even just by reading this book was to separate themselves from their subtle participation in the system that brutalizes and oppresses them. This is very difficult for many women.

KM Perhaps if we could get *The Basement* back into print, people could stand it now. Enough time has passed. I always need a little while with my books because they're always so repellent or shocking at first.

MH You spent 14 years of your life writing this book. If you could make a synopsis of what you wanted to say with all those years and all that work, what was the message? What is the message?

KM The issue is the imposition of sexual shame, which is a crucial part of our oppression and one that we've never really dealt with. Branding us at puberty with an enormous load of guilt which is terrific in terms of controlling us. After all, we really are an abject people. We will obey and make ourselves small. What could have been our source of life and happiness (our sexuality) is now terribly embarrassing, all manifestations of it are our fault, we're dirty, etc. In Sylvia Likens's case, this is particularly graphic because her tormentors were so sublimely

stupid that they actually wrote it out on her body. [Sylvia's body was found with the words "I am prostitute and proud of it" bumed into her stomach by cigarettes.] There was no way to escape it and when I read it I thought this is the most terrible thing that must have ever happened to anybody. Later I learned that there were people who had experienced worse.

MH Who is Gertrude to you and to us? Is some of her in all of us?



KM Yes she could be, especially if we didn't have any options, or good luck, or liberated moments, we could all be driven into being that kind of thing. I couldn't write the book for a long time because I couldn't deal with Gertrude. I just didn't want to admit "ideologically" that anyone like Gertrude could exist. We've all had bullying surrogate types who made us behave, made us put on lipstick, lower our eyes, etc. But Gertrude was different.

MH In a sense, Gertrude functions as a "Kapo"—a prisoner turned guard against her fellow prisoners.

KM You don't run a system like this without Kapos.

MH There is a problem with the ideology that consistently promotes the view of women as purely victims of oppression. We have an enormous responsibility to see our own victimization and start to end it—to withdraw our consent. We talk about the patriarchy, yet most of the patriarchy comes home and lays his head on a woman's breast and gets succor there to continue to go on the next day. There's a lot of collusion.

KM We're breaking the necks of our daughters, and that's what Gertrude passes on: the stone that says we are a defeated people and this kid (Sylvia) will not learn. You've got the whole authoritarian personality in Gertrude. The true believer.

MH How did the system try to break you*

KM "Stop being a tomboy and be a good girl." The nuns were always trying to make us demure. I had a big sister who had been expelled several times so I went for the big time and got thrown out five times. I was fortunate to get a very good education, but then they wouldn't let me earn a living. That was when I started to join and organize. I joined the very first thing I heard about. I went to lectures the way a closet gay goes to a gay bar or as a junk food person sneaks out in the middle of the night with the thrills that go with it. I had already been told by my friends at the University of Oxford that because I read *The Second Sex* and quoted endlessly, I was a little unstable and maybe I should get some therapy and "adjust". No—I went to those lectures and somebody from NOW got me to join and every week after that there was a new feminist group. I joined them all...Uptown, Downtown, Columbia, Now, Radical Women, Redstockings, the Lavender Menace, Radical Lesbians...I went to meetings all the time.

MH Did you come out as a lesbian at the same time as your growth as a feminist? What was the connection?

KM Feminism carried us all to such a height of euphoria that we thought it made a lot of sense to fall in love with each other. On the other hand, I did have a history...I had been a lesbian before I was married, and had been a lesbian in college, so it was a very pure and happy accident that I fell in love with a man and lived with him for 10 years. Now I was falling in love with women again and wow, it was even politically correct.

MH So, would you describe yourself as bisexual?

KM I guess so. I do have this one true case of being deeply in love with a man for a long time. I wasn't just kidding myself. It would be a great shame if I hadn't loved all of these people.

MH Were you egged on by feminists to come out publicly as a lesbian?

KM Oh sure, but that was fair enough because it all seemed to make a good deal of sense in terms of what feminism was trying to do. I wasn't going to fall for the kind of thinking that said "It isn't respectable and feminism could be hurt." I was also egged on by the respectful feminists who would say "You can't do this Kate", but I felt it was morally necessary and absolutely politically essential. If all of us who were gay said so, they couldn't call us queers anymore at demonstrations. It would lose all its effect if we agreed we were.

MH Did you personally suffer for your political stand?

KM Those were very traumatic times for feminists in general. We were having enough trouble as it was with the media but it was a very wonderful and liberating experience and I did just fine. It also had another effect which was kind of nice for me. I was living in the television and the newspaper at the time, suddenly coming out of my happy little starving artist scholar obscurity. I found living in the television very crazy making, so when I said that I was a lesbian, bisexual, etc., and television and radio repeated this scandal, they didn't need to hear from me anymore because I had become a patsy that they had set up.

MH So in other words they defined you, categorized you, and minimized you.

KM And got rid of me. I loved the fact that they got rid of me because now I had my life back. I could be a downtown artist. I couldn't live in that crazy box anymore anyway.

MH But didn't that take away your power to affect people? You were, after all, the only Radical Feminist that made the cover of Time.

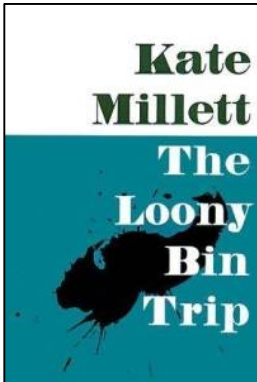
KM I gave them the reasons why gay liberation was a path to the future and that we were dealing with sexual human rights, etc., but it backfired on them because the Women's Movement took a very strong stand. This gave the Movement enormous momentum— we did a bang-up press conference and really laid out the political lines endorsing gay liberation whole-heartedly. I thought that was splendid because we'd done what I wanted us to do. Half of them were saying "We have to do this for Kate", and I'd say, dear hearts, don't do it for Kate, we're talking principle. So that was very good. Now the Women's Movement enters Big Trauma where they deal with their homosexuality, bisexuality, etc., which goes on for years. It is a trauma when you don't solve it. They did turn off my knob and silenced me but I also got on with my work, which is writing books and making pictures and sculptures. You don't really ever silence me anyway.

MH I wouldn't think so. What do you think has been your major contribution so far?

KM Well, I'm sure the world is convinced it's Sexual Politics but I still think of that as my Doctoral Thesis. I wanted *The Basement* to be big and I'm very disappointed that it hasn't reached its public recognition. You have to be a little patient if you're an artist, people don't always get you the first time.

MH Sometimes they don't get you at all. What are you working on now?

KM I have two new books we haven't published yet. One's called the *Looney Bin Trip* and the other is about my family and my Aunt.



MH *The Looney Bin* is about your experience with the mental health establishment?

KM It's my crazy book. My coming out as a crazy. What else will I think of? I believe I've exhausted the list. I don't cheat on my income tax, and I can't think of anything else that I'm trying to hide. You've arrived at the end of my liberations.

MH You've been on some psychotropic medications for depression. Did they help you?

KM I've taken antidepressants but I don't know how much they really help. The fact that there is somebody giving them out, some human sympathy, may help as much as the stuff itself. I took lithium for ages and ages and still take it; and think all the time that I really ought not to but it seems to be part of the conditions of my "parole". If you ever tell anybody that you stopped taking it, then 12 minutes later they decide you're crazy.

MH Are you doing any political work on mental health issues?

KM I've been to some conferences this year and met some of the people involved, and I've read anything I could get my hands on. I've been doing some speaking on advocacy and community mental health. It's a very interesting movement, one that's going to have to come to the forefront soon, hopefully when things loosen up a little.

MH Do you agree that for a woman to be mentally healthy in this system is an act of great radicalism? If you become aware of all the conditioning and political difficulties of the system it has to make you a little crazy or enraged on some level. You can either close your mind off, or exist in a constant state of opposition.

KM When you have buddies and comrades, of course, it's a big high.

MH But if they put you out alone and then say, you're crazy, we're not going to listen to you and people move away from you, it can be very crushing.

KM And stressful. So you're in a kind of turmoil between their emotions and yours.

MH But you set up a support system here at the Farm which seems to work well for you.

KM Yeah, but it also has its moments when it's not that wildly supportive. It can be a pain in the neck. When I have all the responsibility, expense, and everything else and somebody at the farm can decide we shouldn't have planted trees, we should have planted lettuce—it can be a big problem. In the beginning it was terribly hard work, 12 hours a day for the staunch, the hardy. Now it is getting to be infinitely easier. We've restored the land and grow little Christmas tree seedlings, and we only work five hours a day in the summer. You have to wait 10 years for this crop, so something's got to give on the economic line. It's much harder to build a community than it is to restore farmland or rebuild buildings.

MH Why is it difficult for women to work together'?

KM What we're doing is strange. We're sharing something and people are unaccustomed to dealing with: something they don't own. For women to understand that they can come to the farm any time they want is kind of hard to believe. Suddenly they have a country house and all they have to do is show up. Some of them will put a paint brush in their hands for a couple of hours; the rest of the time they can get a sun tan, have terrific dinners, romp and do all the things they want to do. So, that's an unusual thing and they see it as making this big

desperate commitment and actually it is really kind of worry-free. But it's a new idea and once they've been here for a while, they fall in love with the place. But then what will they do with it? They can't own it because there's no ownership, so they get very distressed and ambivalent, They have a hard time realizing that they can come back all the time.

MH It appears that you "let all flowers bloom" that there is no "politically correct" mind-set here at the farm.

KM Sometimes I want to throw in the towel. "I think you're burning yourself out kid, nobody needs this many Christmas trees and certainly nobody needs this much grief. Go back to New York, write, forget about it all." But now it's beginning to work. You just have to keep at something. It's about being stubborn and perseverance. You learn that working with the land. You keep mowing the dogwood until it no longer emerges to strangle your trees. It's pretty much the same with this. You just keep believing in people's good will, and there's finally enough of it. This Spring has been wonderful because every time we really needed somebody, somebody drove up in a car and said oh yeah, I'm here, and we got everything done.

MH Do you have a sense of your own destiny? I know that your life has had a great deal of struggle. Have you come to terms with it?

KM Only on good days. Seriously, it's getting a little surer now. Running a farm, there's a lot of knowledge that one has to acquire very fast. There are so many ways you can err, and have to do it again next year, or a week later. My real terror is that the farm will consume me as an artist, so I've got to sort of slip out from under it. When I get this next book against torture finished I'm going to arrange my life so that I can really love writing and write just what I want to. Perhaps a book about my father and family. I want to write more autobiography. I think I'm ready for a lyric period or maybe loafing around foreign towns.

MH Where do you see women going? What more should they do?

KM I want to see it [the Movement] get more international because I think that we need the energy of people in other countries to clear our minds and go forward. Of course, this country is so basic to the general impression of the planet that the more we can energize and activate ourselves, the more it will be useful to fellow human beings, to fellow women in other places.

MH It's your thinking that American feminists have been too isolated—too burned out...

KM Our tire got busted and we need somebody who knows how to change a tire.

MH Who do you see as having the ability to reenergize us?

KM Because of the book I'm doing on torture, I'm very aware of the political situations in South Africa, South America and Central America. I really want to see women of the two hemispheres come together, North and South. I think that's our future. Our friends are European women but our real cousins (whom we haven't met yet) are the women south of the border. We could be very germane to changing that situation along with the entire movement against racism and imperialism. It's really essential that we do that and that there are beginnings. I went to Mexico last spring and realized that that's my future. I'll be going to Mexico and all over South America a great deal now because that's where it's going to be at. We can connect, and also it's such a hopeful, wonderful thing to see it this other way—to begin to think about making a Pan American culture. It's going to be (I think) a delightful prospect. What wonderful women, what amazingly nice people all together, and how decent they are about their inevitable resentment against the United States of America. How really decent they are to you as an American when you and your ilk have caused them so much harm.

MH And we, always complaisant, have allowed Reagan to do this.

KM Because we thought it was economically advantageous to us. That is so short-sighted in terms of the economy—to penalize millions and millions of people. It's not even good business—though that's not why you shouldn't do it. I truly believe women can be a real influence. We've got to become political, economic, heavy-duty and full citizens, not just arguing for issues that affect us personally, like "pay me the same amount of money," or "take this disability away from me," etc.

MH You mean move beyond the equality issues—to where feminism is a step in the process rather than the end of the process?

KM We need a totally different kind of political organization.

MH We need another level. Many women get very caught up in politics that relate purely to gender difference equity.

KM That just makes you another one of the other guys.

MH It's liberal politics. Liberal feminism instead of radical feminism.

KM And it's quite illiberal, finally.

MH Ultimately, it's as you said, the difference between cutting up a piece of the same pie or rebaking it altogether.

KM Right.

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KATE MILLETT & ME: A MEMOIR OF FRIENDSHIP

By Eleanor Pam

She had long black hair that contrasted dramatically with milk-white skin and she talked in a soft, slightly husky voice. She spoke as if there were a cigarette dangling from her mouth, even when there wasn't. It made her sound slightly tough. Her name was Kate Millett and she lived on the Bowery. That alone was both shocking and intriguing. It was the late fifties and no one lived in such a dangerous and disagreeable area, especially a single female! Never had I encountered an educated woman from the middle class who was not only determined to embrace downward mobility, but who delighted in it. Creating a home in the most déclassé neighborhood in the city was a statement she was making then and for the rest of her life. She never left.



"Kate Millett at the Los Angeles Women's Center, 1977" photographed by Michiko Matsumoto, from the Kate Millett Papers. © Michiko Matsumoto

Like me, she was in her early twenties. Since we traveled in the same bohemian circles it was inevitable that we'd eventually meet. At first, we socialized because of contiguity; later by choice. When I was initially introduced to Kate she was just back from England where she had recently graduated from Oxford with First Honors. It wasn't long before we became close pals and intellectual sparring partners. By default, and the sheer genetics of outlasting everyone else in her initial circle, I am her oldest friend.

I think it was my newly minted degree in Philosophy that attracted Kate the most when we first met. In turn, I was awed by her obvious brilliance. She was also quirky and extreme, an original. These qualities initially drew me to her and simultaneously made me anxious. An odd duck to be sure, but interesting and disquieting at the same time. We shared many common and uncommon interests but our differences were just as apparent. Kate was unlike anyone I had ever known, including me. It wasn't only that we came from completely different worlds; the woman seemed to inhabit a universe of her own, one that was not always intelligible or accessible to me. I could rarely decide if she was the alien, or I was. We both lived in our heads, but I was better at pretending that I didn't.

During that period, I was earning a salary of \$4,000 a year as a teacher, a sum that seemed like a small fortune to us both. I knew Kate had very little money and was seriously estranged from the aunt who had subsidized her education at Oxford. If she had other income streams they were not obvious. While her impecuniousness was not an expressed concern, it was an undeniable reality. Her mind seemed focused instead on a love relationship that was apparently not going well. It was that, not money, which both preoccupied and obsessed her. Later that would change, when the prospect of poverty would stalk and terrify her like a bogymen she could never dodge.

Her pallor so alarmed me that I mistook it for sickness, not the love-sickness it probably was. Compelled to do something to aid her recovery, I would periodically present myself at her door and filled with the determination

and self-importance of a rescuer, kidnap her. I'd drive us to the beach in my flashy red convertible for fresh air and sun, then end the day with a triumphantly sybaritic excursion to Chinatown for a decent meal.



The thing that impressed Kate most about those outings was not what I expected. Like a child who does not focus on the toy, but the box it comes in, Kate did not gush about the food, the beach, our conversation or my stellar company. Instead, she was wowed by my ability to reach our destination in one straight and unfettered shot, to time and calibrate the car's pace so we'd catch every green light and keep on zooming. For whatever reason, this minor talent delighted her. Anarchist that she was, perhaps she was simply appreciating the elegance of beating the system without breaking the law. Later, Kate observed that it was a metaphor for the way I lived my life. Eventually she wrote about this in her third book, FLYING, but the section ended up on the cutting room floor.

Obviously, her editors were less enthralled by my parlor trick than she was.

In the winters, the only source of heat in Kate's apartment was a coal-burning, pot-bellied stove that sat precariously on the badly rotted wood floors of her dilapidated flat. A cast-iron creature so heavy I would not have been surprised if one day it crashed through to the flat below. Because it was a hassle to keep running up and down the steep steps to feed the fire, she asked her friends to help out. So we'd scoop up handfuls of coal from a filthy sack that nestled at the bottom of her stairs, then carry ourselves--and the coal--upstairs. A delighted Kate, watching the scene from above, would call down greetings, cheerily monitoring our progress as each of us, with blackened fingers and coal-speckled clothes, panted to the top.

The apartment, like the woman herself, was a miracle of surprise. It was a large space filled with books and more books, wall to wall, floor to ceiling. They compensated for sparse furnishings and a lack of amenities, including a bathroom without a door, as well as for the sour smells that permeated the walls from outside. Winos and derelicts lay strewn with their empty liquor bottles across her broken front steps, causing me to worry each time I visited this young woman who was my friend, living alone in this neighborhood and under these conditions.

We had great fun exploring the city and sampling its banquet of adventures and ideas, open to life as only the very young and innocent are capable. She took me to the Cedar Bar, a neighborhood pub where artists hung out, where she hung out. I didn't realize it then, but we were rubbing elbows with Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Larry Rivers. How could I know who they were and who they would become?

How did I know who Kate Millett was and who she would become?

In 1961, Kate declared she was going off to Japan to study art. This struck me as a bad idea, even worse than her decision to live on the Bowery. She knew no one there, did not speak Japanese, and it was halfway around the world. Two years later, she returned with a boyfriend and fellow sculptor named Fumio Yashimura, an urn containing his dead wife's ashes--and a friend, Yoko Ono.

After their marriage in 1965 I paid them a visit. They were living at Kate's apartment on the Bowery. But as I approached the front door, my eyes were routinely drawn to the familiar sign over her doorbell: Kate Millett. But wasn't she now Kate Yashimura? I thought. And there was Fumio's name, in neat lettering, taped beneath her own. The sight was so beyond my experience I had trouble processing it. Married women always took their



husband's names! Didn't he object?

They were cute together. Fumio was a diminutive man—slight, almost girlish in build. He had a kind face, gentle manner and spoke very little English. At first, Kate served as his translator. She told him she regretted he could not understand the nuanced bite of my wisecracks, a street affectation I had at the time that seemed to endear me to her. But despite the language handicap and the imprecision of relying on Kate as our interlocutor, he and I seemed to communicate well, and I liked him. A gifted artist, Fumio built delicate mobiles of birds that hung trembling from the ceiling of Kate's apartment. They complemented her pop art that was on display everywhere in the flat, like witty furniture.

She told me they married to solve Fumio's immigration problem, making it sound like a business decision rather than a romantic one. But although she sounded almost apologetic, perhaps even defensive, it was clear that the relationship was a genuine one. When they were together they created an atmosphere of calm compatibility. I was happy for Kate. Gone was the low grade fever of sadness and sorrow, the whiff of loneliness, some undefined suffering in her that seemed always to linger just beneath the surface—all appeared to have abated. Or so it seemed.

They divorced in 1985, the marriage technically lasting 20 years, although they lived apart for much of that time in an open relationship. After Fumio died in 2002, Kate told me she was planning to write a book about him. But she already had, I thought. She described her marriage and its disintegration in FLYING, as well as the female love interest who'd supplanted Fumio and impelled Kate's return to her previous lifestyle as a woman who loved women.

She continued to drag me to meetings and protests all over the city, championing causes that reflected themes of social unrest and social justice: civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, and pacifism—including many fringe groups too bizarre even for my unformed tastes.

Finally, she took me to a meeting that resonated in a way the others had not. We sat in a room with passionate and argumentative women who had recently formed an organization called NOW. They were magnificent, I thought, thrilled to my core.

I joined immediately and, with Kate looking over my shoulder, perused a menu of possible committees. It was no surprise that I selected Education, Kate's own specialty. She was the Chair and I, Vice-Chair. There were no other members. A committee of two, we elected each other.



Eleanor and Kate

Together, we tackled the daunting job of analyzing curricula and pedagogical trends across the country. It was mind-blowing to discover how pervasive and systematic was the bias against females and the ways in which it infected our entire system, short-circuiting girls and women from getting good educations and eventually, productive jobs and careers as well.

Where were our judges, college presidents, and architects? They were in the next generation, soon to be born, we hoped.

Kate and I took turns presenting our recommendations and findings in a final report that we read at a meeting, a version of which was published by NOW in 1968 under her name as TOKEN LEARNING.

Kate's hand and voice shook as she read her portion of our "poop sheet" to the group, and I remember how the paper she held also trembled, betraying her fright. The terror that seized her at that meeting would never really abate, even after she became a practiced speaker and stood at multiple microphones addressing hundreds, maybe even thousands of people. She was so very shy and scared. Large group or small—it didn't matter. Kate forced herself to perform, but it was never easy or natural.

We couldn't have known it then, but our work later became the foundation for many studies and a raised

national, even global consciousness, resulting in dramatic and gratifying changes to gender-based educational practices in this country and others.



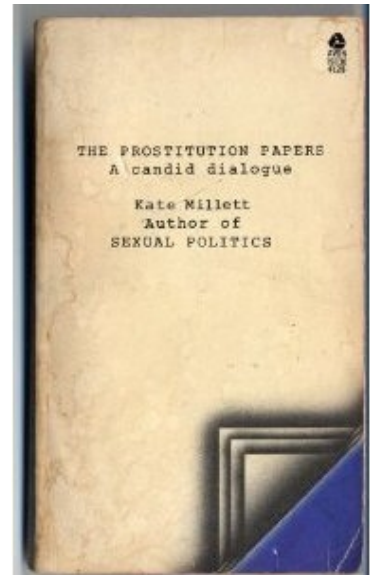
Kate pursued her doctoral studies at Columbia University and was graduated with distinction. But she also delivered a dissertation so brilliant and original it caused a sensation. Published in 1970 as *SEXUAL POLITICS*, it would become a classic and the bible of the women's Movement. These very writings also created a firestorm. This yin and yang of both cheers and jeers was the very spine of her life, inapposite doppelgangers that often derailed her. She was Janus, writ large.

Doubleday hosted a publication party which Kate insisted be held at CBGB's, a dingy neighborhood bar several doors down from her apartment, later to become famous as an underground rock music dive. Kate took pride

in being a "downtown artist," another example of her reverse elitism. So CBGB's it had to be! At the time, however, its allure was not obvious as it shared the ripe smells of the Bowery along with a clientele that was mainly indigent, alcoholic and homeless.

Bums mingled with the invited guests at this event, many of the latter attired in outrageous clothing that offended the aesthetic eye of the photographer sent to document the occasion. Flopping down on the bench next to me, he rested his camera on the table and complained that there was not one useable or respectable picture that he could send back to his boss at Doubleday for publicity purposes. The scene was way out, he lamented: crazy people running around in feathers and beads wearing mismatched outfits and costumes, many of them not distinguishable from the street people coming in and out of the bar.

Kate's next literary effort, *THE PROSTITUTION PAPERS*, precipitated a personal crisis. She was having problems with the IRS and needed my help. Why me? Because I was her friend, obviously; but also because she saw me as grounded, in the world, of the world, a person who knew her way around bureaucracies, someone with connections and contacts. The government was after her, Kate declared, demanding their cut of monies she had earned from *SEXUAL POLITICS*. But she had no money; she had given it all away to sex workers. Kate was a luftmensch and an innocent: Taxes on royalties? It never occurred to her to worry about such things until the garbage landed on her head. Of course, I came running.



New groups were forming, splintering off from NOW. Kate seemed to be everywhere, prominent in her role as an articulate voice of the Movement. In fact, she stated, if there were a thousand feminist organizations, she would join them all. I believed her. Kate's passion for this new cause burned bright, different from the flameouts of her personal relationships that so often brought her grief and brought her down. For her, romantic love was a bad drug, an opportunistic infection that took hold of her soul. She just wasn't good at it.

But she was good at feminism. Psychically, she now seemed turbo-charged, and privately I cheered. Against all odds and all bets, mine included, she had become an accidental celebrity.

My friend, who had many gifts but seemingly few prospects, morphed into one of the most famous people in the world--her face on Time Magazine, "the Mao Tse-Tung of Women's Liberation," they wrote. On August 26, 1970, she marched down Fifth Avenue at the head of an army of women. I watched with pride as she ascended the podium at Bryant Park, took the microphone, and exhorted the crowd. She was a midwife of the Movement and in helping to birth it, was herself reborn.

The New York Times anointed her "the principal theoretician of the women's movement." Kate's acclaim lasted awhile and then cratered into scandal and assault. She, who had been feted and admired, was now demonized and discredited. The cruelty was extraordinary. Her flaws were magnified; her virtues and accomplishments

diminished or canceled. It turned out that she was all too human, after all. As Kate fell from grace, transitioning from famous to infamous, there were many defections. Friends and fans turned on her; feminists did, too, although certainly not all. Ultimately, Barbara Love and others organized a press conference. There was enthusiastic support from feminist leaders, including Gloria Steinem.

But it broke my heart to watch it all unfold. It also broke hers.

What were her crimes? First, she wrote a book so important and controversial that it rocked the world. Then, she came out nationally (or was outed) as a bisexual woman. This caused a furor on both sides of the sexual spectrum. Lesbian purists, as well as self-righteous heterosexuals, were offended by Kate's reluctant disclosure--the former because she did not go far enough, and the latter because she went too far. In all events, both sides judged her harshly. Amplifying the noise was the wrath of Norman Mailer wielding his avenging pen. Aimed more at her sex than her sexuality, he emitted the male roar in one long screed and tantrum called, *THE PRISONER OF SEX*. The party, it seemed, was over.



I didn't have imagination enough to envision any of it. Nor did I foresee the cost to her--how expectations and pressures colluded to stain and poison her life and sometimes make her ill. Kate's sudden, unexpected celebrity had changed me, too, at least for a little while. I had become self-conscious and shy in her presence, aware also that we could not go out in public without people gawking or interrupting us to chat. Everyone seemed to know her. Eventually though, my awkwardness about her new status passed.

One evening, we were at the theatre watching a play whose female star was Arthur Miller's sister. Sure enough, at intermission I spotted him standing in the back with his daughter Rebecca. "Look, look," I said excitedly. "There's Arthur Miller! Do you want to go over and say hello?" This was a writer whose work I'd always admired, and I was eager to meet him. Kate shrugged. "Sure," she said casually and without revealing anything more. "Okay, let's do it," I said happily, and charged over to them. Kate lagged shyly behind me, but I felt shielded by her fame.

"Mr. Miller," I announced triumphantly and presented her with a flourish as if I was a chef in a pricey French restaurant offering up the best dish on the menu. "I've got Kate Millett here with me." I pointed to her. But she wasn't next to me or immediately within sight. I turned around to look, taking my raised finger with me. While she wasn't exactly hiding behind me, it would have been a pretty fair description to say she was. Kate managed a small smile, and I shoved her in his direction. "We just wanted to say hello," said I brightly, hoping to penetrate the density of his blank stare. "Kate Millett!" I insisted, plunging ahead. "You know--the feminist!" His expression remained impassive. I gave him a clue. "She wrote *SEXUAL POLITICS*," I prompted. No reaction. The blood rushed to my face.

His daughter, Rebecca Miller--bless her--saved me. (She was later to become a writer herself and marry Daniel Day Lewis, the actor.) Rebecca was jumping up and down with excitement. "Dad!" she cried. "Kate Millett!! You know! She helped found the women's Movement. You must have heard of her!" Rebecca kept looking at Kate and then at her father. Her eyes, dancing with pleasure and respect, finally settled on Kate while Miller only shook his head--stolid, unmoved, and unimpressed. Kate was already retreating from our little group while I was wishing that I'd done something simpler during intermission, like go to the bathroom or buy a soda. Finally, he gave us back our freedom. "How do you do," Arthur Miller said at last, with formal dignity. He was so stiff I thought he'd never be able to get back into his seat.

After we made our escape, Kate finally spoke. "He never remembers me," she said with disgust. I looked at her. Now I was really scratching my head. "So you've met him before?" I ventured. "Yes," she said, and made no further comment on the subject. We watched the rest of the play in silence.

Kate did so many improbable things. She bought a farm, raising and selling Christmas trees, and then turned it into an Art Colony. At first I scoffed. "You're becoming a farmer? Are you kidding?" But she wasn't, and to make her point, marched in the Gay Pride Parade with a contingent of women rounded up for the occasion and underneath a banner that read, "Farm Dykes."

Many distinguished feminists made the trek to The Farm, and in some respects it became an important historical marker, perhaps even a feminist institution. Simone de Beauvoir visited one year. When she died, Kate represented the United States at her funeral in France. She happened to be in Paris at the time of the great woman's death and asked de Beauvoir's sister, Helene, if she could sit with the body for a few minutes. Stunned, she stayed for fifteen minutes, after which she remarked that de Beauvoir's profile looked like what you would see on a Roman coin. Kate was invited to march behind the sister and Claude Lanzmann, de Beauvoir's intimate friend who created the nine-hour documentary Shoah. Silvie, the companion and adopted heir, marched at the head of the line. The only other American was Ti-Grace Atkinson in the back of a long throng of mourners.



The Farm was a financial and labor-intensive albatross. Kate worked like a demon to keep it going, both as a business and a literary/intellectual/artistic salon. Kate still lives there seasonally, although she sold off parts of the land and is no longer in the Christmas tree business. Her friends still gather at The Farm, as do I, on special occasions and to keep faith with her and each other.

Often I have been humbled by Kate's ability to imagine possibilities I could not. When I look back at our years together, I see many instances when she led the way and I lagged one beat behind.

One day I was in my car listening to the radio when the newscaster broke into the program. "Famous writer and feminist, Kate Millett was just arrested in Iran by the Ayatollah Khomeini." (pictured: Linda Clarke, Kate Millett, Eleanor Pam, Phyllis Chesler, Merle Hoffman)

My heart raced. This was serious! They could kill her, I remember thinking. Stone or behead her even. It was beyond scary. I remembered how excited Kate was about the trip and how much she was looking forward to meeting some of the Iranian feminists who had invited her to come. Suddenly, she found herself right in the middle of a revolution and, ultimately, in the clutches of religious fanatics! They hated her--this American feminist infidel who had come to spread her poisons. The Shah had been deposed and now they were cleaning house. Kate's timing could not have been worse. Events had moved too swiftly, overtaken her, and now she was trapped in this danger.

The State Department must have sprinkled its magic dust because she was thankfully released and expelled from the country. But I couldn't breathe properly until she was back again, safe on American soil.

Kate wrote eleven published books, scissoring her life into compartments in order to make art. She never understood the new cottage industry of Women's Studies that seemed to exclude or ignore her. I remember discussing this many decades ago over lunch with Kate and Robin Morgan, both of whom lamented that primary sources were in disuse, including their own books. None of the titles listed on the recommended reading lists were recognizable to either of them. Where in these courses were the feminist classics of the Second Wave? When had they been erased?

Women's Studies were a natural marketplace for Kate, but gradually all her books went out of print, including SEXUAL POLITICS. She framed the problem succinctly and unemotionally. It wasn't only that the books were out of print. She was out of fashion.

Kate needed money. I raided my Rolodex and organized several dozen friends to come with me to the Bowery

and buy her pictures. I instructed them to bring at least one hundred dollars each but to stay away if they were not serious. I was stern. Everyone had to buy something! I pushed them around as if they belonged to me and their money already belonged to Kate.

They arrived in caravans of cars and vans. The women who came were wonderful. They followed my instructions, which were actually obnoxious when I later thought about it. Everyone mingled and bought, bought and mingled. Kate was ecstatic. I was relieved. Kate seemed as moved by my support as she was happy about the money. I believe she was also turned on by the boldness of the idea and the audacity of my behavior. I knew that Kate--despite her doctorate, eleven published books and global celebrity--really enjoyed having customers. In some ways she was an old fashioned shopkeeper, opening "lemonade stands" as she called it, in order to make a couple of bucks here and there. She's still doing it.



For years, she has suffered the stigma and shame of being labeled and defined by others as manic-depressive. She thinks and cares about mental illness and is a passionate participant in the anti-psychiatric movement. She's not too crazy about the pharmaceutical industry either, as suppliers of drugs that medicate patients and who are, therefore, in her view, complicit in their situation or captivity. Viscerally opposed to "anything that threatens liberty of person," she is repelled by involuntary confinements of any kind and has found a home for her views at the United Nations where she spoke out in 2006 against "psychiatric torture."

Almost twenty years earlier, in 1990, Kate wrote a breathtaking and painfully personal book, *THE LOONEY BIN TRIP*, which describes her experiences of being diagnosed as bipolar by mental health professionals and being held against her will in psychiatric facilities. A masterpiece, it displays Kate's graceful, brave and evocative writing at its most mature.

In spring 1991, I reviewed it in *On the Issues*, describing the book as a "psychological thriller of sorts...an unflinching examination of an evolving life and psyche...the story of an extraordinary woman in ugly circumstances, struggling against her many personal demons."

State psychiatry is Kate's enemy; being institutionalized is her greatest fear. Too many misguided friends and relatives, she told me, have put her away over the course of her adult lifetime, situations where she has been at the mercy of substituted judgment. She needed my promise never to do that to her. I sighed, not with indecision but with sadness, and gave my word. It was a heavy conversation.

After years of trying--and failing--to achieve an academic career, we sat at dinner one night and talked about Kate's failure to land a steady and substantive job. Decades earlier she had been fired as an instructor at Barnard because of her sexuality and perhaps--to a lesser extent--her behavior during the student takeover of the Columbia University campus. This was a lost post she would forever mourn--an early and fatal turning point in her professional life, she believed. At dinner, Kate told me that she was confused by her inability to find sustainable work at a university, "a real faculty appointment." Wasn't she qualified, credentialed enough? It hurt to think of herself as unemployable and left her with a sense of defeat. Worse, she confessed to being envious of a mutual friend who had arisen to dizzying heights in that world, a woman she had sometimes come to view as a rival. Kate looked down at her meal in misery, and I knew she was thinking about our friend, the person who had succeeded where she had not. It was clear that I needed to do something to lighten her mood so I comforted her with a flat truth. "Yes," I said. "But you will be in the history books and she won't." She rewarded me with a reluctant smile, but it was enough. The words had worked.

We have been “hanging out” for 54 years, having marvelous conversations and being amused by each other. Over the years, she has supported my prison work as an advocate for women who I believe to be unjustly incarcerated, lending her voice and presence on behalf of female inmates whenever I asked for her help, as well as the tattered but still intact prestige of her name. Her own work--whether political, literary or through graphic arts--consistently reflects the enormous empathy and compassion she feels for incarcerated and institutionalized persons. I am proud of her for that. When she was being honored by the Veteran Feminists of America as an icon and historical figure--I had the privilege of helping to organize the event and speak about my old friend.



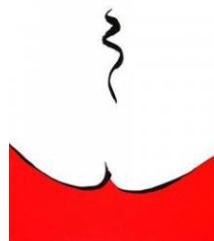
Blanche Wiesen Cook, Clare Coss, KATE;
Eleanor Pam, Barbara Schork

Kate Millett is still very much in the game. In May 2011, her prestigious alma mater, Oxford University, honored her. She returned from London happy after a meaningful and triumphant trip where she was acknowledged and feted for her many contributions and achievements. The circle of her academic life was complete.

In October 2010, we celebrated Kate's birthday at The Farm in Poughkeepsie, New York. As I looked at her, a 76 year-old icon who still enjoys making trouble, it was impossible not to smile and do a little time-tripping.

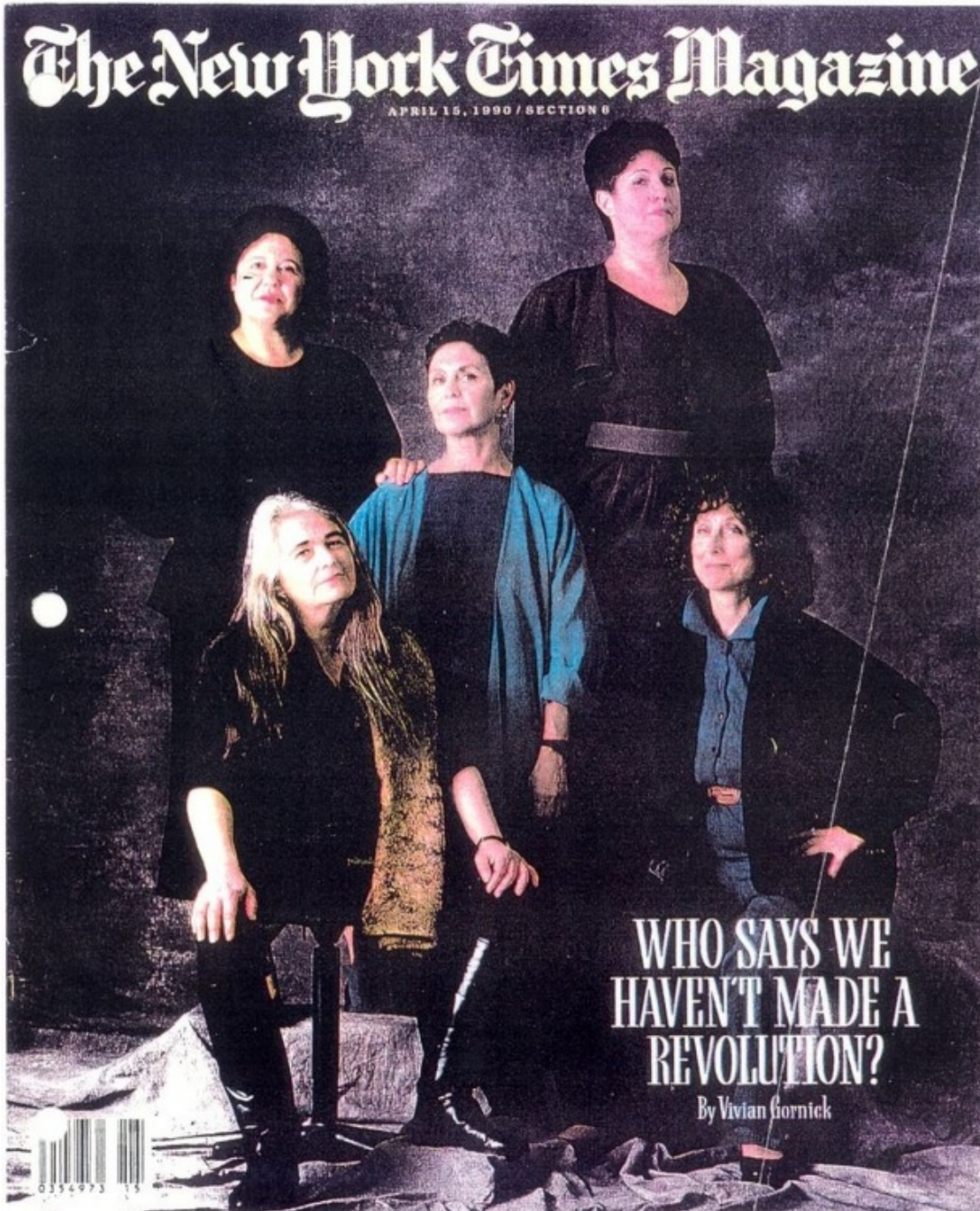
I was reminded of the young Kate and her short career as a kindergarten teacher, a job inspired by the example of my own steady paycheck and one I strongly encouraged her to take. She cheerfully became a kindergarten teacher in Harlem and had a lovely time with the children, painting and listening to chamber music. Yet she was terminated from that job because her class was unruly and the noise (and the children) spilled out into the halls. But most of all, because of bitter complaints by the 3rd grade teachers that Kate had taught the tots to read! This was an outrageous and fatal offense because reading wasn't on the curriculum until 3rd grade!

That was Kate, then and now--a rebel, an anarchist, a free-spirited gangster who wouldn't behave, a woman who, at enormous cost to herself, led the rest of us--sometimes kicking and screaming, often at her--into the future.



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NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE APRIL 1990



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Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 67, p. 254

Ann Tyler

It takes an act of courage to read this book. Think, therefore, what it must have taken to write it. *The Basement* is an exhaustive study of the weeks-long torture of a 16-year-old girl names Sylvia Likens. It is nonfiction. Sylvia Likens died on October 26, 1965 in Indianapolis. Her starved and mutilated body was found in the house of Gertrude Banisewski...who went to trial for the murder, along with three of her children and two neighborhood boys.

... To Kate Millett, the case became such an obsession that she spent 14 years trying to figure out how to write about it – “waiting for be good enough,” she says. She opens her book by addressing Sylvia directly:

Finally, I can touch you with my voice, finally it's time, Sylvia Likens. In how many sad yellow hotel rooms have I spoken to you, writing these words before me on the way as I lay back on some bed and staring at the painted plaster...For fourteen years, you have been a story I told to friends, even to strangers, anyone I could fasten up.

Clearly the wait was of value. The writing is fully ripened, rich and dense, sometimes spilling out in torrents.

.....”Sylvia would not have been subjected to her specific tortures if she were not a girl,” says Kate Millett. “They were devised for her precisely because she was one. That was her crime.” But actually, any of her tortures could have been practiced, with very little variation, upon a boy; and girls are not the only victims of child abuse which is what Sylvia's case boils down to. ...It's more plausible that Sylvia was a victim of a general sense of despair on both her part and her murderers' part, largely resulting from poverty. Which is not to excuse her murderers in any way. (“Simply being poor does not necessarily lead you to the place where you torture children in basement,” Kate Millett says, sensibly enough.) ...It could have been, as Kate Millett suggests, that Gertrude killed Sylvia “for sex. Because she had it. She was it. Like a disease. Like some bizarre primitive medicine. Because nubile and sixteen she is sex to the world around her and that is somehow a crime.” But no firm proof is ever offered.



Sylvia Likens

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TIME MAGAZINE AUGUST 31, 1970



Alice Neel painted this portrait in 1970 on commission from TIME Magazine. It now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. and is considered one of the finest examples of Neel's work.

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Kate Millett in the Eyes of a Contemporary French Historian of the Women's Liberation Movement

In the opening pages of a book on American feminism published in France in 1972, Rolande Ballorain tells how she was introduced to the Women's Liberation Movement. She had arrived in Massachusetts in the fall of 1969 to conduct research on the American novel at Smith College. Soon after she attended the first meetings of a local Women's Liberation group and travelled to Boston and New York where she spoke with militants and leading feminist thinkers. Sensing the importance of what she was witnessing, Ballorain set aside her work on the American novel and embarked on a new project: to follow the developments of Women's Liberation and provide the most objective account possible.

Ballorain arrived in the United States and discovered Women's Liberation during the months when Kate Millett was revising *Sexual Politics* prior to its publication in July 1970. The following paragraph from Ballorain's *The New American Feminism* describes her impressions of Millett in the period prior to and following her rise to public prominence:



I saw Kate Millett twice. The first time, in spring 1970, at Smith College, where she was participating in a symposium on Women's Liberation. She gave a one-hour lecture that was striking for the quality of her language, her humor, the decisiveness and audacity of her thinking, the density of her reflection, her warmth and brilliance. She was at that time easy to approach and I was able to talk to her for two hours the following day in a house on campus where she was staying about literature and the role of women. I was dazzled by the force of her thinking and imagination. I tried to see her again in spring 1971, at Yale, where she had been invited by students. She was now on a tight schedule; her face had aged, streaks of white ran through her long black hair, and an air of weariness prevailed over her composure, her patience and her good humor. Of all the leaders of Women's Liberation, she was probably the most highly praised and badly treated as much by the press and the public as within the movement.

An article published by Ballorain in November 1975 in *Les Temps Modernes*—the famous literary and cultural review directed by Jean-Paul Sartre, in which incidentally Simone de Beauvoir had first published parts of *The Second Sex*—is entirely devoted to Millett, and particularly to her novel *Flying* published the previous year. In contrast to *Sexual Politics*, an analytical book written according to academic conventions and intended to have a social and political impact, *Flying* was written in a personal and subjective style and was concerned with the inner life of a single individual. Critics had panned the book as wordy and ponderous, insisting on the “exhibitionism of an autobiography dedicated to Sappho filled with detailed descriptions of hetero- and homo-sexual relationships.” “The book,” Ballorain observes, “is all of that. But that's not all it is. It invites us to go in search of its author, as she does herself.”

Ballorain's article on *Flying* includes passages from a conversation she had with Millett in New York in July 1974. Recalling, for instance, the period following the publication of *Sexual Politics* when Millett had publicly admitted to being a lesbian, Ballorain notes that Millett's statements did not reflect the actual circumstances of her life at that time when she had been living “as a good wife” for several years, but rather were made out of political solidarity: “During the entire period when I was publicly a lesbian, I wasn't actually even a lesbian, I had no sexual relations with a woman, since I had lost all relations of any kind with Celia, and this was very difficult, and it took a lot of courage and energy to keep on fighting for these principles, and at this time there was nothing but principles, since I had been abandoned by this person.

”

In Ballorain's account of their meeting in New York, Millett appears saddened, suddenly aged, worn down by the struggles of the previous years. "I was well aware," she writes, "that the most radical women in the movement were also the ones mostly likely to get burned."

Ballorain's own search for Kate Millet took the form both of real-life encounters and of attentive reading. What she ultimately discovered, behind the outward image of a leader of Women's Liberation, enthusiastic, sharp, caustic even, was someone vulnerable, sensitive and anguished. It is these two sides of Millet, joy and suffering, political engagement and wounded soul, that, according to Ballorain, are revealed in *Flying*:

This book reflects a divided consciousness and a life of transition, between two radically different worlds; going from one to the other with a will for change and renewal creates painful conflicts, like the movement from despair to joy. Our time also is one of transition, full of the weight of the past and struggles, or visions of a better future, in an unstable present made up of tensions and contradictions of which each of us cannot help but feel the political pressures, and endure the psychological unease. This is hard for any sensitive being to cope with. Within the space of a few years, American feminists saw their hopes of changing the sexist, technological society of the past fulfilled, and it is undoubtedly in American society that, up till now, these hopes have borne the most fruit. But in America, at the same time, since the beginning of the 1970s under the Nixon administration, this old society has made its presence felt more strongly and with greater resistance. It is difficult to say where American society is headed and if feminist and humanist forces will be able to make their values understood. It is good that a book like *Flying*, however personal and subjective it may be, that contains all the contradictions of an individual and her time, was published. It is also a step in the perpetual search for a better society.

Summary and Translation by
Reginald McGinnis
University of Arizona

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Art Review

Kate Millett at NOHO

By Lily Wei

Fluxus, December 1995

In her books – from the influential *Sexual Politics* (1970) to last year's *Politics of Cruelty* – Millett is a layered, complex, and persuasive writer. Unfortunately, while engagingly understated, her exhibition of four sculptures lacked real punch. That said, these pieces were still of interest for the economy of their effects and their candor.

...*Bureaucracy* is based on an old-fashioned commercial umbrella stand with a rectangular wooden frame and latticed top. Within are cloudlike clumps of cotton wadding that are looped by red plastic wires with dangling,

disconnected terminals. As a hold from the original structure, the square spaces for the umbrellas are labeled with numbers from 1-90 on small brass plaques. Some of the plaques are missing, underlining the idea that bureaucracies become antiquated or internally inoperative.



U. S. Policy – Latin America consists of two wooden sawhorses holding up a section of a metal-cutting machine. Hanging from the machine's "teeth" is a shirt in the process of being consumed – an emblem of the relationship between the First World and the Third. However, the whole ensemble is so rickety that if you were to pull on the wire-wrapped lever at one end, it might collapse. The dynamics of power and weakness are thus called into question.

...The most evocative piece in the show...is a shabby wood-framed glass cabinet with cabriole legs which straddles a checkerboard square of black and green vinyl tile. The exterior glass is shattered in several places, signifying forcible entry. Inside are clear glass bottles arranged on two glass shelves each bearing a one-word label, "Fright" stands next to "Stelazine" and

"Doubt" next to "Hadol;" "Prozac" is matched with "Quiet." Called *Psychiatry*...it seems to refer to psychiatry's increasing reliance on prescription drugs as agents of numbness, suppression and control...

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Jeanne Perreault

Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography

University of Minnesota Press, 1995



..Kate Millett's *The Basement: Meditations on a Human Sacrifice* makes her own feminist subjectivity preset in part through the paradox of ventriloquism, speaking in an array of frightening agencies and voices that she has both appropriated from the real world and created through her imaginative identification with those figures. Millett speaks herein her "own" voice, familiar to use from her other writing an "I," situating her particular experience in the foreground of a writing that layers the self with horror.

The Basement is a detailed account of the torture and murder of a sixteen-year-old girl by a woman and a group of teenagers in Indiana in 1965. Millett's book gives us her relationship to the story of Sylvia Likens's death. She uses photographs of the people and the house, excerpts from magazine and newspaper reports, transcript pages of the trial of Gertrude Baniszewski and her followers, and the testimony

of Sylvia's younger sister, Jenny, who had been boarding with Sylvia at Gertrude's while their parents followed the carnival. And she enters the minds of the characters, speaking in their voices.

It is Millett's relentless drive toward self-inscription and self-exposure from *within* the agents of this narrative that makes her feminist reading of this crime and its "meaning" autographical. Self in this text pushes boundaries of fragmentation and multiplicity very close to the "terrifying slide" into psychosis that Jane Flax describes as the real others – Gertrude, Sylvia, Jenny – become metonyms of Millett's interior drama, and projected figures of our own cultural scripts.

...The "particular validity" of Sylvia's actual experience can never be known, but Kate Millett's incursion into (and recreation of) those people and events explores and exposes the cultural construction of female sexuality that makes such violence possible. It is the presence in this text of Kate Millett's own self-inscription in all its variations that makes *The Basement* a work of feminist ethical autography.

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Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 67, p. 255
Joyce Carol Oates

It may be argued that tragedy consoles us in ways too deep, too complex, for us to delineate. "Tragedy," of course implies art, and art implies artifice. Denuded of Shakespeare's language, for instance, the brutal acts of the great plays – Gloucester's blinding, Othello's murder of Desdemona Cordelia's gratuitous death – would have a stupefying effect on us. We would be horrified, sickened and eventually numbed. Our very humanity would be eroded.

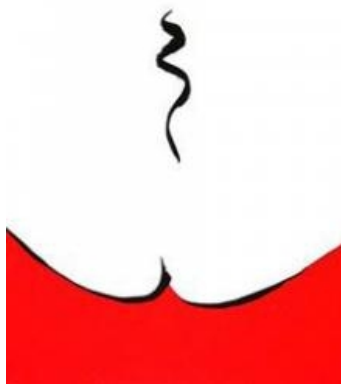
The Basement, so bluntly and so appropriately titled, is about a tragedy that has little to do with art and everything to do with horror, sickness, inhumanity...This is no event out of our witch-hunting past, no episode out of a cautionary German fair tale, but a crime that took place in Indianapolis in 1965.

...Miss Millett's identification with the murdered girl is extraordinary, and one can only respect, if not fully comprehend, the depth of its power. "I was Sylvia Likens. She was me." Elsewhere, as part of a long, reasoned, admirably sustained meditation on the historical fate of women in general (which includes a discussion of clitorrectomy and other genital mutilations still practiced today), she comes to the conclusion: "To be feminine, then, is to die."

...One soon begins to wonder, as Miss Millett did, so obsessively, *Why did they do it? Why did the neighbors allow them to do it?* And since it seems that Sylvia Likens could have escaped – it was not until the last two weeks that she was bound and gagged – the most troublesome riddle of all is why Sylvia failed to save herself....



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Kate Millett and the Origin of Women's Studies at Cornell,

November 1968, January 1969

by Sheila Tobias,

from the Preface to her book, *Faces of Feminism: An Activist's Reflections on the Women's Movement*, published by Westview Press, 1997.

...I first encountered Millett's thinking when she was invited in November 1968 to do a reading from her book *Sexual Politics* (still in manuscript) before a gathering of soon-to-become feminists at Cornell University, and I have never stopped drawing sustenance and stimulation from her work. Our group had not gone looking for Kate Millett – no one knew of her work at the time – and she had not gone looking for us. Emerging exhausted from the politics of anti-Vietnam activism that had consumed us from 1964 to 1968, some of us were slowly shifting our focus to women. A group of thirty women on our campus decided to organize a conference on women and pursued Ti-Grace Atkinson to be a speaker. Atkinson was also not yet well known, but she had been featured in an article about something called "the second feminist wave" in no less a publication than the *New York Times Magazine*.

When I sought her out in early fall, however, Atkinson declined our invitation, explaining to me, with the patience reserved for the unenlightened, that she did not speak before mixed audiences – audiences, it took me a while to comprehend, that included men. So unless I could restrict the attendance, she recommended as a substitute the head of the nascent New York NOW (National Organization for Women) task force on education, a doctoral student in Columbia University's literature department named Kate Millett.

Two years later, after *Time* magazine featured Millett and her book in a cover story remarkable for its attention to a movement as young as the "new feminism," everyone would be familiar with the broad outline of Millett's theories of patriarchy and "sexual politics." But as we soon-to-become feminists sat transfixed by her presentation in November 1968, we already knew in our bones that history was about to be made and that we were going to be a part of its making.

Some would say that Millett, to whom among others this book is dedicated, is no longer in the movement's mainstream; that, in the face of so many individual women's achievements since 1968 and the passing of so much new equal rights legislation in America, her stark rendering of patriarchy is obsolete. Others would maintain that her theory of sexual politics has been superseded by feminist thinking more sensitive to women's *differences* than to the *sameness* of their social roles. Some would say that.

I would not. For me, the insights that cascade from the pages of Millett's work remain as fiery and as much a call to arms as Thomas Jefferson's "We hold these truths to be self-evident."

Millett came back to Cornell two months later to keynote our Conference on Women. In typical "movement" fashion, she persuaded us to let her trade in her prepaid air ticket for a rental van so that she could bring a small delegation of New York feminists with her to our rural campus. Among them were six radical women from New York City's self-styled cabal, the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH). We also invited Betty Friedan, who was still touring the country with her 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, leaving proto feminists everywhere in her wake. In the persons of Millett and Friedan, though we had no way of knowing it at

the time, Cornell would bring two trends of the emerging second wave of feminism together for the first time on a single platform. There, the feminists would confront – also for the first time – “experts” on women, who thought they were unbiased, and male student radicals, who thought they were revolutionaries. Nothing at Cornell (or at the various colleges and universities where conferences like ours took place later on) would ever be the same again after these encounters.

Typical was an exchange between the feminists and a Cornell anthropologist on the subject of gender differences. Yes, we do studies of behavioral sex differences, the anthropologist said. We know that men play tick-tack-toe to win, women to tie. The WITCHes hissed, the crowd cheered (the hissing) and later, when the imported feminists pointed out that in men’s “socialist heaven” women poured the coffee, ran the mimeograph machines, and played groupie. It was the radical males’ turn to cower. A feminist critique of radical politics was long overdue.

But so was a critique of the curriculum. As the four-day conference wound down, students in our audience began to grasp that going to college was for women a kind of socialization for inferiority. Insofar as the curriculum mentioned women at all (and for the most part women’s lives and accomplishments were omitted) it trivialized both their problems and their contributions to literature, history, the arts, and the behavioral sciences. On a college campus we began to realize, feminist politics clearly had a teaching function as well. But who would replace what was missing? Who could? Who would offer courses on women and women’s issues? Who would critique the curriculum as a whole for its unexamined biases on gender issues? Questions like these haunted us conference organizers over the summer of 1969 and motivated us to offer in the spring of 1970 “The Evolution of Female Personality.” So it was that one of the first lecture-sized women’s studies courses in the country was born.

In the late 1960s, women had to invent new ways of working together. Patriarchy, according to Millett, involved hierarchy; women’s work need not. True to our subject, we course planners made ourselves into a collective, a team with no captain. The collective met regularly for ten weeks in fall 1969 and managed to create a course syllabus, reading list, and a series of lectures virtually out of nothing. To be sure, there were books about women, some biased, some good, but most dated. To our continuing surprise, the search for reading material made us realize that, although we came from disciplines as diverse as sociology, literature, and biology, we had read many of the same books. But there was no structure, no “story line,” not yet any agreed-upon topics in women’s studies. We had to sculpt a new field for ourselves and our students.

If material was scarce, collegueship was not. All over the country in that first year of the 1970s, feminists who were scholars and scholars who became feminists were beginning to locate “lost women” in history and literature and to do important new research about women and men, employing and sometimes having to modify the techniques of social science. Within a year, I located sixteen new courses at various other colleges about women and women’s lives. I compiled these into what became the first of a series of course catalogs of women’s studies. Within a decade, there were four thousand college-level treatments of women’s studies and 600 programs. The Cornell collective and I had no way of knowing it, but our participation in that first encounter with Kate Millett’s work and that first course in women’s studies were destined to change our lives.

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LESBIAN TIDE MAY/JUNE 1977

THE LESBIAN TIDE

A FEMINIST LESBIAN PUBLICATION, WRITTEN BY AND FOR THE RISING TIDE OF WOMEN TODAY

Millett's Passions



Kate Millett sculpts omnipotent nudes, and speaks of subterranean terrors.

photo by Cynthia McAdams

Anita Bryant Puts the Squeeze on Gays

Rubyfruit Movie

Sexuality Survey

Transsexuals:

Sisters or Strangers?

Gays of Our Lives

MAY/JUNE 1977

75¢ in L.A.

\$1.00 Elsewhere

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**Kristan Poirot,
“Mediating a Movement, Authorizing Discourse:
Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, and Feminism’s Second Wave,”
Women’s Studies in Communication, 27:2 204-235, Summer 2004**

The summer of 1970 proved to be a pivotal moment for feminism’s second wave. Although the August 26th Women’s Strike for Equality was arguably the most notable event of the summer of 1970, a close second may be the August release of Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*. Of course, neither *Sexual Politics* nor the Strike for Equality make the beginning of fruitful feminist activity during the second wave – one could easily turn to the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, the break away from New Left groups in the early 1960s, the formation of NOW in 1966, etc. for such germinal events – however, as Bonnie J. Dow (1999) notes, in terms of the development of feminism’s



public identity via media attention, 1970 marks an important moment...The Women’s Strike for Equality placed women’s liberation on the front page of the *New York Times* for the first time, as well as the first event to be covered by all three television news networks of the time. Not so silently behind this coverage, however, was Kate Millett with her new book, *Sexual Politics*. (photo: JP Laffont)

On the shelves by August of 1970, *Sexual Politics* was considered to be the first book-length exposition of second wave radical feminist theory, and as such it received substantial attention within the mainstream press. Though not in the way she and her publishers could have foreseen.

The case of Millett’s media inauguration and outing provides insight into a unique moment in the history of the second wave of feminism...the emergence of the media’s role in the construction of feminism’s public identity...the form of media recriminations made possible both Millett’s dissolution in the media’s eye and the internal split within the movement... As Millett is applauded and articulated as a quasi-figure-head for women’s liberation, she is simultaneously stripped of authority to occupy such a role.

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The Kate Millett Papers at the

SALLIE BINGHAM CENTER

FOR WOMEN'S HISTORY AND CULTURE

The Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture at Duke University is proud to hold the papers of Kate Millett. The collection provides rich documentation of Millett's activities as a feminist activist, artist, and author of numerous works, including *Sexual Politics* (1970) which placed her at the forefront of the women's movement.

The collection reflects the intensely personal nature of much of Millett's work and the frequent fusion of her personal, political, and professional interests. There are many files of personal and literary correspondence with Ti-Grace Atkinson, Rita Mae Brown, Andrea Dworkin, Cynthia McAdams, Yoko Ono, Alix Kates Shulman, and Gloria Steinem, as well as other activists, writers, artists, friends, and family. Additional material documents Millett's work as an artist, her involvement with gay and lesbian communities, her research on prisons and torture, and her work in anti-psychiatry activism.



In April 2010, for the first time since its initial exhibition in 1978, Kate Millett's chilling installation, *The Trial of Sylvia Likens*, was reassembled. The staff of the [Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture](#) and Art History instructor Laurel Fredrickson joined with filmmakers Sophie Keir-Thompson and Mary Beth Ross to film the piece for a documentary about Millett's life. The installation forms part of the [Kate Millett Papers](#), which are held by the Bingham Center.

The installation marked Millett's response to the horrific 1965 torture and murder of sixteen-year-old Sylvia Likens by the Baniszewski family and their neighborhood friends. Called "the most terrible crime ever committed in the state of Indiana," the story of the murder and subsequent trial transformed Millett, laying the groundwork for her revolutionary work, [Sexual Politics](#). Fredrickson writes, "For Kate, the case of Sylvia Likens exemplified in a very potent way how women are taught to accept punishment for real and imagined digressions from the cultural and social roles imposed upon them by patriarchal societies."

The collection also includes files relating to her New York farm and artists' colony, over 270 pieces of her artwork, and scripts and other papers relating to her documentary film, *Three Lives*. The process involved in creating each of her published works is well documented through drafts, research files, and correspondence with editors and readers. Audiovisual materials consist of recordings of Millett's lectures, speeches, and conversations, and many photographs round out the visual component of the collection. Millett's extensive collection documents her groundbreaking work while providing a unique and critical lens through which to understand the evolution of feminist theory and activism in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East.

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**Annette Kolodny, “The Lady’s Not for Spurning: Kate Millett and the Critics”
Contemporary Literature, Vol. 17. No. 4 Autumn, 1976.**

Kate Millett’s *Flying* was not kindly received by the reviewers when it appeared in 1974. Although one might be inclined to dismiss Rene Kuhn Bryan’s attack, which appeared in the *National Review*, as motivated by her politics and by her overt hostility towards both Millett and Gay Liberation, nevertheless her description of *Flying* as only an “endless outpouring of shallow, witless comment” repeated the sentiments of many a more sympathetic reviewer, as did her distaste for the way in which the book documented its subject, “minute by remorseless minute, if not second by interminable second.” Muriel Haynes, writing in the *New Republic*, for example, made much the same observation when she called the book “a leviathan ... that demands of the reader an analyst’s endurance.” But the most surprising response was undoubtedly Elinor Langer’s “Forum” article, in *Ms.*, which dismissed the book on the grounds that “confession is not disciplined autobiography.”

Responses like these – all by female reviewers – belie the currently fashionable notion that women will naturally be receptive or sympathetic to another woman’s writing. Supporting that notion, of course, is the assumption that women share certain rather specific areas of experience which men and women do not (as a result both of biological and cultural factors), and that they will automatically recognize and understand the content of another woman’s work. Yet *content* in these reviews never really seemed to be the issue. Bryan objected to the book’s detailed all-inclusiveness as “inchoate when it is not incoherent,” and Langer rejected a narrative format in which “free association has supplanted thought.” For Muriel Haynes, the *form* was unfinished, representing only an “assemblage of raw materials.”

Since the publication of Millett’s *Sexual Politics* in 1970 and, shortly thereafter, Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch*, women have come more and more to protest the fact that they themselves appear to be an “artful invention”....It would, then, be reasonable to expect that when a woman who had herself been a leader in this protest decided to set down her own life’s story, she might well disavow, or at least alter, the male tradition. A woman who devoted her Ph.D. thesis to the study of the inadequate and inauthentic presentation of women in literature would hardly be satisfied with presenting her own life as that “literary simplification of an extremely complex reality” which Wayne Shumaker summarizes as the heritage of male autobiography.

Indeed, it is the very complexity of their reality that women today are trying so desperately to map. ...The fine distinctions between public and private, or trivial and important, which had served as guides for the male autobiographer have never really been available to women. Traditionally taught that what was “important” for them lay wholly in the private sphere, having no public consequence, women internalized a picture of themselves that itself precludes the kind of self-attention which might generate autobiography....Treated as an ongoing reading experience, rather than measured against a Procrustean bed of received expectations to which it was never intended to conform, *Flying* reveals its own internal organizing principles, as it explores the many – layered associative intertwinings of consciousness, memory, and image.

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ART FORUM INTERNATIONAL April 1978

Reviews

Kate Millett's "The Trial of Sylvia Likens" wasn't the kind of exhibition you expect to see in Soho...or any other New York art context. You didn't just slip into it. It was clear, inelegant and meaty, and conveyed heavy personal feelings. It twisted your head around, and that appealed to me. ...The exhibition revolves around an event – the torture death in Indianapolis in 1965 of a 16-year old girl named Sylvia Likens – and Millett's response to it.

...She saw the death as an atrocity against all women, something that could happen to her or to anyone she knew, something that other women knew could happen to them....I liked the fact that the exhibition dealt with subject matter art does not ordinarily deal with. It has an urgency about it; it was clearly the expression of things that had to be expressed. In places, it scrawled on the walls, hung out Xeroxes, did what it had to do to get the facts across. It made direct statement. (Even some of the sculpted tableaux, *The Five Defendants in Court Awaiting Sentence* ...made the point subtly; in this case, the mixed media sculptures looked on as you fumbled through the documents spread out before them. As if you had been called to deliver the verdict.)

But the exhibition veered between stating and overstating its point; parts repeated themselves – the same facts, the same images over and over again, from tape to manuscript, slides to sculpted tableaux.

... The point was made, and then over-made, the viewer informed and then oversaturated....because the exhibition – more specifically Millett – did too much of the work for us. I think that the information alone, presented 13 years after the fact, at one remove from the press coverage, the courts, the sensationalism of 1965, could have accomplished more.



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Films Reviews

Three Lives – “Kate Millett’s Film of and by Women Begins Run”

Vincent Canby, New York Times, Nov. 5, 1971

Kate Millett’s “Three Lives” is a moving, proud, calm, aggressively self-contained documentary feature, shot by an all-female crew, about what it’s like to be the three very different women who talk about their lives, with feeling and a certain amount of surprise that anyone should be interested, in front of Miss Millett’s camera.

There is Mallory Millett-Jones, Miss Millett’s intense, appealing recently liberated young sister....Lillian Shreve, an attractive outgoing middle-aged woman who describes her marriage as a “Very happy 23 years, all told, and Robin Mide, 21, who left Far Rockaway five or six years ago to seek her independence in the theater, in drugs, in sex and in the exercise of that kind of happy egotism that might pass for searching self-analysis on the Merv Griffin Show: “I’m very happy doing what I want to do.”

“Three Lives” is a good simple movie in that it can’t be bothered to call attention to itself, only to its three subjects and to how they grew in the same male-dominated society that Miss Millett, in her “Sexual Politics”, so systematically tore apart, shook up, and ridiculed....

“Three Lives”

Reviewed by Philadelphia Women’s Anthropology Collective, Gina Oboler, Diane Freedman, Lorraine Sexton, Temple University, Minda Borum, Columbia University, and Molly McLaughlin [no affiliation provided].

American Anthropologist [Audio Visual Reviews], 1972, pp.1571, 1572

There is a real shortage of ethnographic and/or documentary films which deal honestly with women as central characters apart from particular social roles – with women as people. For this reason, *Three Lives* is a rarity. ...Through autobiographical interviews, the filmmakers try to give the audience glimpses into the characters of three very different, but ordinary, women...

The three women are very different, yet there are common themes in their stories. All have questioned their roles as women and engaged in a struggle for personal identity. Each rejected her primary socialization and her mother as a role model. Each was forced to re-socialize herself to a role more in keeping with her self-image. Each resolved this crisis in a very different, very personal way...

The fact that *Three Lives* was conceived and executed as a collective effort reflects the character and goals of the Women’s Movement. Mallory and Robin were both members of the film crew, as was Lillian’s daughter. Shots of the film crew at work and interaction between crew and subjects emphasize the group spirit of the filming situation...

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“A WORLD WE HAVE INVENTED HERE”



Exploring Community, Identity and Art in the Construction of “The Farm” Kate Millett’s Feminist Art Colony, 1978-1994

By Anne B. Keating

Selections from the dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, 1995

Preface by Kate Millett

The Farm, July 1985

*...I wanted to see if we could find some little corner of the world to live in, where we could live a life we imagined,
but couldn't live in the rest of the world...*

From the Introduction

In 1978, feminist author, Kate Millett founded an art colony for women that remains in operation to this day. ...[At the time of its founding] Millett was a member of both the feminist and gay liberation movements that inspired feminist and lesbian separatist cultural and communal experiments in the 1970s. “The Farm,” as the art colony was and is familiarly referred to, evolved from ideas that fueled these experiments. It also blended aspects of Millett’s experience as an artist and writer. The colony was founded out of a belief that a gender-

specific community would provide an environment where women artists could work unencumbered by social stigma....



As part of this period in art making, the Farm has challenged ideas about not only the role of an artist in society, but also what kind of environment artists might work best in. The Farm is a community-centered art colony where communal life is not only encouraged but an essential part of life [which] challenges the traditional art colony idea of single artists working in isolation. Though traditional studio time exists at the Farm in the afternoon and practical needs at the Farm are at the root of why artists are involved in the building and upkeep of the Farm, the communal life of the Farm has some interesting roots in the avant-garde art movements Millet was a part of as well as in the way feminist cooperative ventures have been run....

In 1974, Bonnie Zimmerman in an article for the Chicago-based lesbian feminist newspaper, *Lavender Woman* summarized both the temper of the lesbian feminist movement and a significant change in the momentum of the movement....The year seemed to mark a turning point in the feminist movement as well. New community-based ventures replaced the consciousness-raising groups and constant political action. The communal art ventures included a range of feminist artists' spaces and environments: collaborative art projects like Womanhouse (1972) to feminist centers for the arts like the Los Angeles Women's Building (1973-91), feminist schools like Sagaris (1974), and lesbian-feminist art colonies like the Studio (1977). These alternative arts' organizations got their boost with the 1972 conference: "Women in the Visual Arts" (20-22 April 1972). The conference was organized by a small group of Washington D. C. artists, art historians, and museum professionals, who had recently picketed the Corcoran's biennial exhibition for its lack of female representation. [Hence the name, "Corcoran Conference"]



[quoting Arlene Raven] Although the initial Corcoran conference was the first organizing enclave on the East Coast for artists, similar efforts caught fire after 1972. There was a sharp rise in the number of women's institutions – galleries, bookstores, schools, centers – all during the 1970s....

Presently [as of 1995], there are thirty residential art colonies for artists in all disciplines in the United States. Only a handful of these colonies, including the Farm, are specifically for women artists. The Farm is listed as an art colony in Shewolf's *Directory of Wimmin's Lands* and is described as follows:

For over fifteen years we have been a retreat for artists who come here to write, paint, sculpt, and enjoy the company of other women artists. We promise community and cooperation and a willingness to work to maintain this 80-acre tree farm for continued use.....We plan to stay small with additional writing classes and possibly some seminars and meeting...

From Chapter 2



Located two hours north of New York City, and set in the rolling hills of Dutchess County, the Farm consists of eighty-five acres and is currently known as “The Farm: An Art Colony for Women.” Forty-five of the acres are either under cultivation with the Christmas tree crop or set aside for homestead buildings and a horse pasture. The other forty acres are woods filled with young beech and cedar trees as well as apple trees that have been growing wild there for over twenty years. Not far into the woods a small waterfall running of a tributary of the Wappingers Creek rounds out the bucolic setting. There is a pond near the main buildings on the seven-

acre homestead that is located just off the main road. At the back of the pond, the second largest elm tree in New York State spreads its branches against the sky...

On clear days, hawks rise on the air currents and their cries can be heard by the women working in the fields. In the early morning and around twilight, it is common to see deer, and sometimes one seeks them in the fields after a rainstorm. There are coyotes in the back fields and some evenings in early summer it is possible to hear them howling far into the night. The pond is home to large snapping turtles who, driven by internal clocks, emerge from the pond for one day in midsummer to lumber across the lawn toward the wetlands to lay their eggs. At nightfall, bats come out to hunt and the crickets sing...

The colony’s hope for economic independence is a Christmas tree farm. Thousands of Douglas fir and white and Norway spruce planted on 30 of the farm’s 85 acres are tended from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. by colony members who then go on to their own projects...It takes about 10 years to develop fir trees into a cash crop....[Mary Thom, “A Farm of our Own,” Ms. 16, No. 9 (March 1988),74 ...

The [Christmas] trees became part of the epic story of the Farm primarily because of their slow growing ten-year season and the fact that well through the mid 1980s Millett and the colonists were still fighting to tame the land. There was an education in farming, turning city women into field workers. Caring for the trees became both their commitment and best hope for the colony’s future. Many women remember the wonder of shearing the trees and imagining all the women who had worked the trees in previous summers. Each tree bears a tag that reads:

This tree was grown, tended, and cared for by the members of the Women’s Art Colony at Millett Farm. Throughout its ten years of life, we have mowed and cultivated it with love and real hard work. The trees are our future and make us a self-sufficient community...

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FEMINIST ICON KATE MILLETT ACTIVIST, WRITER, ARTIST, TREE FARMER

Jacqui Ceballos

KATE MILLETT was one of the most active and passionate of pioneer feminists. In 1967 she belonged to NYC NOW and practically every other feminist organization in the city. When radical feminists asked why she belonged to "conservative" NOW she'd reply, "If there were a thousand feminist organizations, I'd join them all."



Kate was born in 1934 in St Paul, MN, the middle of three daughters. Her parents separated when she was very young, and Kate remembers her mother struggling to earn enough to support her daughters. She received her B.A. from the University of Minnesota in 1956 and in 1958 obtained a first-class degree with honors from St Hilda's College, Oxford.

In 1961 Kate moved to Japan to study sculpture. Two years later she returned to the United States with fellow sculptor Fumio Yoshimura, whom she married in 1965, and lived in a three-story loft in New York's famous Bowery. Fumio's art gallery on the top floor was filled with his kites and flying sculptures, Kate's was on the second floor where her works were as down-to-earth as his were ethereal. I especially remember her toilet sculpture of a woman's legs in high heels straddling the bowl. What a statement!

In 1968 the toilet graced the Park Avenue building, home of Colgate-Palmolive, where NOW members announced to the world that this company, which sold its products to women, was discriminating against its female employees financially and professionally. As Anselma dell'Olio poured Ajax down the toilet, we all shouted, "This is where you throw AJAX, women!" In one week C-P changed its policy.

Kate also led the week-long demonstration against the *New York Times* to protest that newspaper's refusal to follow Title VII guidelines and desegregate its Help Wanted ads. At the crack of dawn Kate was in front of the Times building urging us on.

I remember spending hours with others in Kate's loft typing "Token Learning," Kate's work accusing the Seven Sisters colleges of betraying their trust by not providing education for women equal to that of men while boasting that their mission was "to educate women to become good wives and mothers."

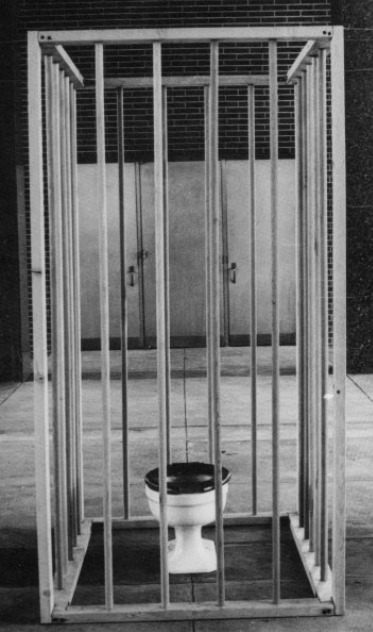
Besides her work with NOW and radical groups, Kate helped organize and run Barnard Women's Liberation. It is a mystery how she had time to write her Ph.D dissertation which, when published as *SEXUAL POLITICS* in 1970, made her famous and changed her life. The book was said to be "the first book of academic feminist literary criticism" and "one of the first feminist books of this decade to raise nationwide male ire." It was dedicated to her husband, Fumio Yoshimura, who was also a feminist.

For a while she was a media darling. But Kate was never comfortable with her fame. She didn't want to be a "spokesperson" for the Movement, which the media expected of her, and she hated the loss of her privacy. Then, at a talk she was giving at Barnard in 1970 someone shouted out that Kate should come out as bisexual and all hell broke loose. TIME magazine, which had featured her on its cover and had raved about her book, now discredited her. It was a shock to Kate and to everyone who knew and loved her.

Sales of her book fell, speaking engagements dried up, and it seemed her own country didn't appreciate her. But she was greatly admired by feminists around the world and she traveled to many countries speaking and inspiring women. She continued writing, though her other books weren't as well received as *Sexual Politics*. made films and spent more time at her art.

In 1971 her marriage to Yoshimura ended, but they remained good friends. She'd bought fields and buildings near Poughkeepsie, N.Y, and, after her divorce she created a **Women's Art Colony**, a community of female artists

and writers paid for by the sale of her silk-screen prints and the Christmas trees hand-sheared by the artists in residence. In 2004, she sold most of the fields, but retained a home there where she spends the summers and most weekends.



A few years ago Kate was diagnosed, like many of her generation, as "bipolar". She did something unusual: she won her own sanity trial in St. Paul. On a dare with her lawyer, together they changed the State of Minnesota's commitment law. She has since become an advocate for all those who labor under the stigma of mental health -- as a representative of MindFreedom International at the United Nations regarding the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, recently signed by President Obama.

Today she divides her time between her New York apartment and the farm in Poughkeepsie, writing, sculpting, and painting. Kate was in Bangalore March 2002. She read out excerpts from her work, *Sita*, and also launched her installation, *American Dreams Go To Pot*.

Kate's books: *Sexual Politics*, *The Prostitution Papers*, *Flying*, *Sita*, *The Basement*, *Going to Iran*, *The Loony-Bin Trip*, *The Politics of Cruelty*, *A.D.: A Memoir*, *Mother Millett*.

Her film: *Three Lives*.

She has also participated in many film interviews, including *Des fleurs pour Simone de Beauvoir*, *The Real Yoko Ono*, *Bookmark*, *Daughters of de Beauvoir*, *Not a Love Story* (a film about pornography made in 1981 by the Canadian Film Board). The same producer gave a study of her literary work and style in French Canada in a magazine called "La Vie en Rose". The story of Michael X was an oration given at Oxford University. There are many other film interviews with German film-makers and much archival footage of Kate Millett's speeches in Turkey.

Her works also include translations into many languages, to name a few -- Turkish, Korean, Japanese, German, and all the Scandinavian languages.

Sexual Politics was just reissued in a new edition in Spanish. With the exception of *Sexual Politics*, all her works are "out of print" -- Kate has, like Picasso, bought herself in. It's a sad occasion for an author so productive, but also an opportunity. She is now free to sell her books abroad and to Americans at reasonable prices. Most of her books cost \$25 in hard cover or in paperback. Certain texts, "first editions", are more expensive. The "*Elegy for Sita*" is still only \$50, as it was the first day it was issued by Targ Press -- using fine papers with a type of her own choice, including illustrations. She will henceforth print her own pictures at the farm under her own imprint called Loosestrife Press. Size will be bound by the size of the paper, 20" x 40" and 20" x 25", suitable for framing.

She has exhibited her artwork all over the world.

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SHEILA JEFFREYS ON KATE MILLETT



Prof. Sheila Jeffrey's of the School of Social and Political Science, University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, has written a definitive retrospective about the impact of *Sexual Politics* on the second wave of the feminist movement. It can be located on the Web under the title "Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*: 40 years on"

Women's Studies International Forum, 34 (2011) 76-84.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gg0LrEcDC4w>

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JOAN CASAMO AND KATE

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