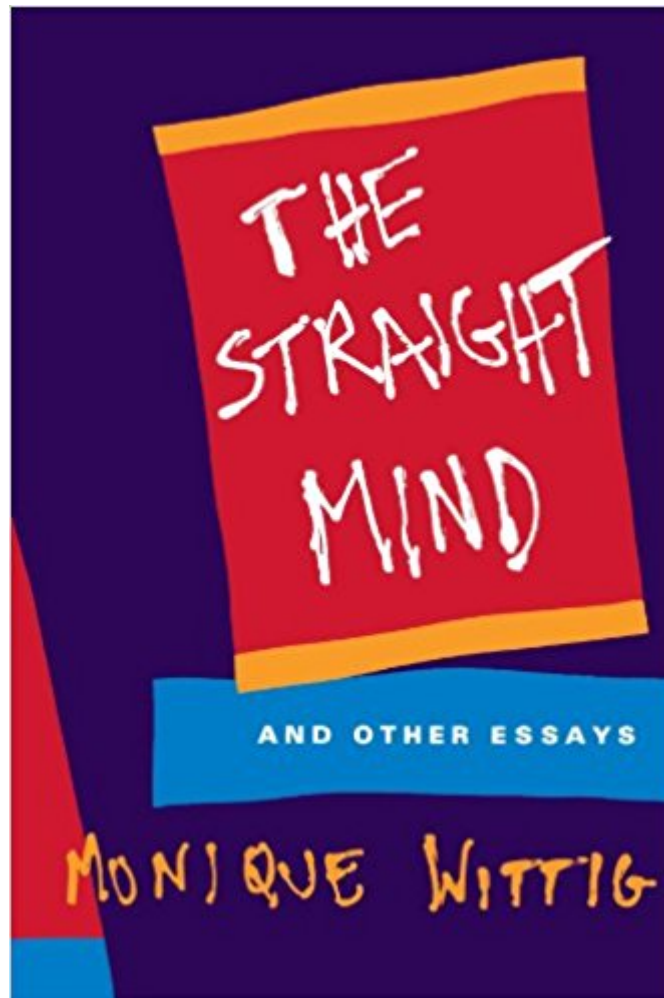




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# The Straight Mind: And Other Essays



## Synopsis

These political, philosophical, and literary essays mark the first collection of theoretical writing from the acclaimed novelist and French feminist writer Monique Wittig.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Wittig ( *The Lesbian Body* ) is a key figure in French feminism, perhaps the foremost theorist of a profoundly radical lesbianism. Half of the nine essays in this brief collection deal directly with the politics of gender, a battlefield on which Wittig has staked out a nearly unique position: "There is no sex. There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses." Drawing on de Beauvoir, Wittig strenuously resists both biological determinism and its twin, essentialism, arguing that sex itself is a social, ergo ideological, construct and that man and woman are not eternal categories. For women, she concludes, lesbianism is the logical escape from patriarchal domination. Wittig's prose is methodical and aggressive, combative and dense. The book's first half, containing the political essays, is a bit repetitive. The author is at her most elegant in the literary essays, which explicate the complex relationship between literary form and ideology. As a result, these ostensibly literary essays offer the most cogent statement of her political beliefs and, consequently, the most satisfying reading. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A celebrated scholar on several continents and best known for *Les Guerilleres* ( LJ 1/1/72) and *The Lesbian Body* ( LJ 10/1/75), Wittig's contribution to the French women's movement and feminist and

lesbian theory are internationally renowned. This collection of nine previously published essays, seven of which appeared in *Feminist Issues*, is a selection of her theoretical writings of the past 14 years. The title essay, a revision of a controversial text delivered to the Modern Language Association (MLA) conference in 1978, concludes that "lesbians are not women." In Wittig's own words, the first half of the collection is devoted to "materialist lesbianism" and the second half is about writing, especially how heterosexuality dominates language. A solid candidate for "core" readings in upper-level undergraduate sociology, women's studies, and philosophy courses. Highly recommended.- Melody Burton, York Univ. Libs., TorontoCopyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Great and thought-provoking!

excellent service

Dr. Wittig had so much anger, and had such a fight to fight. She seems excessive at times, or as though she is painting with such a broad brush, but writing such as this did win some important battles. No, things are not as dark as her wrath would suggest, or at least not anymore.

As a member of the LGBTQ community, I find being born between the binary norms an amazing advantage. But author Wittig finds being a lesbian oppressive! The author sounds like she is living in some ancient land that is long lost to present day humanity. She breaks all humans by stereotypical classes and connects that to Marxism theory and a class struggle. She never treats people as individuals with troubles and skyrocketing dreams. For the author women are oppressed and lesbians are not women. For a gay man, these essays and descriptions of our society are a tiny slice of who we are. Our sexuality is a small part of our being. We have character, strengths, weaknesses, hobbies, careers, jobs, loves and families, so being so focused on the oppression of our status is a bore. Our purpose while here is of primary importance. We are not here to be part of an oppressed class. All of us must find where we fit in the world of the hetero-normative. It takes a while, but soon we can live full lives without fear. This book can oppress us and keep us oppressed. Today's world is accepting and these theoretical works are no longer needed to uplift us. We are in the drivers seat of our destiny and I refuse to waste time with ideologies about social oppression. The word oppression appears so many times in this short book, that I felt OPPRESSED by reading that word again and again. These feminist theories are prehistoric and worn out ways of

looking at life.

This book will forever redefine feminism for its readers. There are two threads: one political, the other literary commentary. Fortunately, Wittig pulls the former into the latter. The astute and radical political critique in Wittig's book is uniquely powerful. Wittig addresses the question of how a movement is comprised of both group energy and individual experience. The theory, legacy, and limits of Marx and Engels are discussed. Then, drawing on de Beauvoir and other iconoclasts, Wittig addresses our dominator culture in a way that goes directly to its core. Wittig deals efficiently yet persuasively with the argument over whether nature or culture is responsible for inequality, declaring that "there is no sex." This statement becomes the book's alpha and omega, and the lens through which Wittig shows us history, literature, and the future of activism. Like whiteness, maleness is a social category that can be renounced. Man (Homo) once meant everybody in the human community -- it was indeed generic, in the unifying sense. Unfortunately, the word has so frequently been used to describe a socially constructed group that expels half of itself in order to oppress it, "man" is now identified with those identified as male. In the essay "The Category of Sex" Wittig writes: "The perennality of the sexes and the perennality of slaves and masters proceed from the same belief, and, as there are no slaves without masters, there are no women without men. The ideology of sexual difference functions as censorship in our culture by masking, on the grounds of nature, the social opposition between man and women. Masculine/feminine, male/female are the categories which serve to conceal the fact that social differences always belong to an economic, political, ideological order. ...The masters explain and justify the established divisions as a result of natural differences." I understand that Wittig has recently passed away. If only I had discovered this book a little earlier, so that I could have met the author. That feeling, I suppose, is the sign of a truly good read. "A text by a minority author is only successful if it succeeds in making the minority point of view universal" writes Wittig --and to read this book from beginning to end is to find that the author has done just that.

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