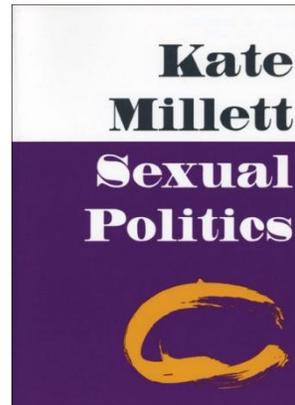


# Sexual Politics, Kate Millett



Kate Millett is an American feminist and activist, born in Minnesota, in September 1934. In 1960, Millett was politically active in the antiwar and civil rights movements, and then she was actively implicated in feminist politics in the 1960s-1970s. In 1966, she became a committee member of The National Organization for Women (NOW). She taught English at Barnard College and entered the graduate program in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in 1968. She received her P.H.D. with distinction in 1970. Her doctorate thesis completed in September 1969 was published as *Sexual Politics* in August 1970. For more information, visit this link: <http://www.bookrags.com/biography/kate-millett/>

We will focus on the first chapter of Millett's book's "Theory of Sexual Politics," which is divided into two parts. The first is about "Instances of Sexual Politics" according to extracts from three different books: Henry Miller's, *Sexus*, Norman Mailer's, *An American Dream*, and Jean Genet's, *The Thief's Journal*. The second is about "Theory of Sexual Politics." The word "politics" refers "to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of people is controlled by another." (23) This chapter shows the power men have over women, over society and the family.

In the first part of the chapter, the first two works (Miller and Mailer's) demonstrate explicitly male domination over society. Men do whatever they want, and women never object. The "pimp" feels his superiority through sexuality, which is associated with power. A man likes his own pleasure, and the pain and humiliation he imposes on his partner "who is nothing but an object to him in the most literal sense." (20) First, in extracts from Mailer, the hero killed his wife because she was impertinent, but at the end we understand that it is the satire of the "American Dream." The protagonist killed his wife but he still gets respect from people, the police, and nobody wants conflict with him. He is powerful because nothing happens to him, he is a hero. (16) Second, the extracts from Genet are about homosexuality. When the author was young, he was sent to jail and raped by men. He felt humiliated and totally inferior to them, as women do. This act reduced him to women's place. The text shows male domination in relationships, such as heterosexuality and homosexuality. Finally this extract explains why the homosexual code becomes a satire of the heterosexuality. (19) The patriarchy went on for centuries and is still well-integrated in our society. Men do not need to practice patriarchy with violence, because it is efficient without it. (43) Men dominate the world since their childhood because they are taught to be dominant. Women and men have a relationship of dominant/dominated. According to Millett,

male and female are considered as being part of two different cultures that are constructed from childhood. (31)

Furthermore, men have been in charge of the whole family for centuries. They were in charge of the family's fortune, and they were the line of descent. Power was transmitted from father to son. Mothers and daughters only have to take care of the house and children. Marriages were a contract between men and women. There is an "exchange of servitude for protection," and to be a male "it is to be a master, hero, brute, and pimp [...] stupid and cowardly" (17). When a woman gets married, she has to do domestic service in exchange for financial support given by a man. (35) Men and women's conditions are different because men have power and women are submitted to them. Women are part of a "minority group," they are treated like slaves because they do not have a lot of rights, and they are not equal to men, "they live for differential and unequal treatment" (55). In the traditional patriarchy, women cannot be in charge of the economics of the family. Then, "they could neither own nor earn in their own rights," and they are treated as "non-persons without legal status." (39) Men have always dominated women, but now things have changed and women also have their rights. However, it is known that women and men are still not equal at work because they do not have the same salary. In contemporary patriarchy, men dominate, they "form groups of their own level" whereas women need the approval of men, in church, and so on, to do something. (48)

Finally, the domination between a man and a woman is mostly sexual. Sexuality is power because the man reduces the woman to nothing, to pain and humiliation. Men exert their power through sexuality because they show their performances in intimacy. Men have power; women do not have the right to object because they cannot oppose a man. It is the "battle of sexes." (46) This chapter talks about the romantic period, which is another way for men to dominate women because they like courtly love; however, courtly love weakens the domination of males. (37)

Nowadays, we are aware of patriarchy, but we do not have a concrete idea about it. This book is interesting because we see how women's status was. The relationship between a man and a woman has changed in the West, but in some other countries, patriarchy still exists. (45-46)

## **Bibliography/Works Cited**

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