



Sontag and Kael: Opposites Attract Me

By Craig Seligman

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This is a witty and stylish assessment of the work of two icons of cultural criticism: Susan Sontag and Pauline Kael. Though outwardly they had some things in common - they were both Westerners who came east, both schooled in philosophy, both secular Jews and both single mothers - they were polar opposites in temperament and approach. Seligman approaches both women through their widely discussed work. Kael practiced a kind of verbal jazz - exuberant, excessive, intimate, emotional and funny. Sontag is formal and rather icy. From the beginning it's clear where Seligman's sympathies lie: Sontag is a critic he reveres; but Kael is a critic he loves. But for all his reservations about Sontag, he considers both writers magnificent and his exploration of their differences results in this luminously written landmark of criticism.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Though both were Berkeley-educated single mothers, critics Susan Sontag and Pauline Kael could not have been more different on the page. Where Sontag's tone was "formal and rather icy," Kael's was "verbal bebop"; where Sontag's diction was dense and meticulously worked, Kael's was colloquial and straightforward. Former New Yorker editor Seligman, however, applauds both approaches and exuberantly celebrates his "reverence" for the former writer and "love" for the latter in this engaging book. Writing with a tangible joy that oozes from his first paragraph to his last, Seligman begins his paean to Sontag and Kael by documenting their controversy-filled rise to prominence as writers in the 1960s. A supporter—and later a critic—of "camp" and a dissector of Leni Riefenstahl's fascist aesthetics, Sontag is the more criticized of the two, and Seligman spends a great deal of time justifying her ideological flip-flops and her comparatively unemotional response to 9/11. Kael, on the other hand, is a veritable goddess to Seligman. A late-comer to film criticism, she wrote her first review (of Chaplin's *Limelight*) at age 32 and was decrying screen violence and declaring Orson Welles a monster for the New Yorker by 1968. Replete with emotional asides, textual excerpts and personal anecdotes, Seligman's text often loses its focus. But what his stream-of-consciousness narrative lacks in organization, it more than makes up for in lyrical enthusiasm.

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From [Booklist](#)

Two resounding critical voices made sense of the creative ferment of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, two opposing forces of high-octane intellect and demanding aesthetics, two outspoken and revolutionary women: Susan Sontag and Pauline Kael. Seligman has drunk deeply at the well of both of these seminal and controversial thinkers, but his adoration takes different forms: he loves Kael and reveres Sontag. This crucial difference underlies his bravura inquiry into their ethos and influence, a dazzling performance of close reading in which he so vigorously parses each critic's style, ideas, temperament, politics, and emotional valence it's almost as though he's broadcasting color at a boxing match. And he's no slouch himself when it comes to piquant and exacting language and thought as he analyzes Sontag's mutability, austerity, and iciness versus Kael's puckishness, abundance, and pugnacity. Seligman's brilliant and far-ranging critique of two paradigm-altering critics inspires the reader to think hard about art's place in life and criticism's role in culture, and to renew delight in blazingly bold interpretative writing. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

"Seligman's openness and fluency take us to a place we couldn't have reached without him."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Roger Johnson:

This Sontag and Kael: Opposites Attract Me tend to be reliable for you who want to be a successful person, why. The key reason why of this Sontag and Kael: Opposites Attract Me can be one of the great books you must have will be giving you more than just simple looking at food but feed an individual with information that probably will shock your before knowledge. This book is actually handy, you can bring it just about everywhere and whenever your conditions at e-book and printed ones. Beside that this Sontag and Kael:

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Valerie Garrison:

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