# Kathy Lette exposes publishing bias against stories of middle-aged women



Australian author Kathy Lette has recently shed light on the challenges of securing attention in the publishing industry for stories centred on middle-aged women. Speaking at the 2025 Hay Festival of Literature and Arts, where she was interviewed by comedian Ruby Wax, Lette shared her personal experiences illustrating the industry's reluctance to embrace narratives featuring women in this significant life stage.

With a literary career spanning nearly five decades, Lette was thrust into the public eye at the age of 17 with her debut novel, **Puberty Blues**. Since then, she has produced over 20 works, translated into 19 languages, but remains vocal about the ongoing struggles women face in being represented authentically within literature. Her latest release, **The Revenge Club**, revolves around four middle-aged women seeking to reclaim power over their lives after being sidelined by a society that often overlooks them. Lette faced significant pushback while pitching this concept, revealing her agent's comment that “nobody wants to read about middle-aged women” due to a perceived lack of allure. Furthermore, she recounted a publisher’s dismissive assertion likening middle-aged women to regions of the world that “we know exist but nobody wants to go there,” highlighting a pervasive bias against older female narratives.

Lette’s determination bore fruit when **The Revenge Club** achieved number one status in Australia, prompting her to send the glowing reviews to those who had previously rejected her. Amidst the challenges, Lette firmly believes that life post-menopause can be transformative and liberating for women, describing it as “the best time of a woman’s life” when societal expectations carry less weight. She quipped that, “once you get to 50, you get a kind of ‘f\*\*\* it, I’m 50’ gene,” encapsulating the newfound confidence many women report experiencing at this juncture.

Lette’s situation is not an isolated one. The literary landscape often overlooks older women, a reality that has long prompted discussions about gender and age representation within the industry. In 2014, Lette herself highlighted this gender disparity when she voiced concerns about the underrepresentation of women in prestigious literary awards like the Man Booker Prize, querying whether female authors might need to revert to male pseudonyms to gain the recognition their work deserves. This sentiment echoes broader discussions in the publishing community about the barriers that exist for women writers, particularly those over the age of 50.

The publishing industry itself is not just grappling with issues of representation; it faces systemic challenges, including discussions surrounding sexual harassment. Although women make up approximately 80% of the publishing workforce, many face a culture fraught with inappropriate behaviour, revealing an urgent need for reform. Such an environment can further inhibit the success of female authors, adding another layer of difficulty to an already challenging landscape.

Moreover, Lette has been an outspoken advocate for creating a genre that resonates with older women’s experiences, distancing her work from the often-dismissed ‘chick lit’ category. The author emphasizes the need for literature that encourages women to embrace their age and the wisdom that comes with it. This advocacy aligns with a growing recognition in the literary world of the importance of storytelling that reflects diverse life experiences, particularly those of older women.

In drawing attention to these issues, Lette not only champions her work but also ignites a much-needed conversation on the representation of middle-aged women in literature, pushing for narratives that inspire, empower, and reflect the authenticity of their lives. As she continues to challenge the perceptions of her demographic, Lette's resilience serves as a beacon for aspiring writers navigating similar hurdles in an ever-evolving industry.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/kathy-lette-middle-aged-women-publisher-b2759434.html), [[3]](https://www.thebookseller.com/comment/kathy-lette-1240247)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/kathy-lette-middle-aged-women-publisher-b2759434.html), [[5]](https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/discover/articles/interviews/if-you-can-laugh-at-something-it-takes-the-sting-out-of-it-and-women-are-so-funny/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.thebookseller.com/news/lette-women-written-man-booker-judges), [[6]](https://www.writersandartists.co.uk/advice/interview-kathy-lette)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/75175-sexual-harassment-is-a-problem-in-publishing.html), [[7]](https://authorselectric.blogspot.com/2017/05/ageism-and-publishing-in-21st-century.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.thebookseller.com/comment/kathy-lette-1240247)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/kathy-lette-middle-aged-women-publisher-b2759434.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/lette-women-written-man-booker-judges> - In 2014, author Kathy Lette criticised the Man Booker judges for having 'written off' women writers, noting that only three women were included in the 13-strong longlist. She questioned whether female authors might need to revert to using male pseudonyms to gain recognition, highlighting the underrepresentation of women in major literary awards.
3. <https://www.thebookseller.com/comment/kathy-lette-1240247> - Kathy Lette discusses the challenges faced by older women in the publishing industry, advocating for a new genre that reflects their experiences. She criticises the term 'chick lit' and calls for a genre that encourages women to embrace their age and experiences, highlighting the need for more representation of older women in literature.
4. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/75175-sexual-harassment-is-a-problem-in-publishing.html> - Despite women comprising approximately 80% of the book publishing workforce, the industry faces significant issues with sexual harassment. Female professionals have reported experiences ranging from unwanted physical advances to suggestive comments, indicating a pervasive problem within the sector.
5. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/discover/articles/interviews/if-you-can-laugh-at-something-it-takes-the-sting-out-of-it-and-women-are-so-funny/> - In an interview, Kathy Lette discusses her novel 'The Revenge Club', which addresses ageist sexism faced by women. She shares personal anecdotes and emphasises the importance of humour in tackling serious issues, highlighting the resilience and wit of women in the face of societal challenges.
6. <https://www.writersandartists.co.uk/advice/interview-kathy-lette> - Kathy Lette reflects on her career, discussing the challenges of being a female writer in a male-dominated industry. She shares insights into her writing process, the importance of having an agent, and the hurdles she has faced, including issues of ageism and gender inequality in publishing.
7. <https://authorselectric.blogspot.com/2017/05/ageism-and-publishing-in-21st-century.html> - Katherine Roberts explores the issue of ageism in the publishing industry, noting that older authors often face challenges in getting published. She discusses the impact of age on career prospects and the need for the industry to recognise and value the contributions of older writers.