



The Scandal of Susan Sontag

From Columbia University Press

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Susan Sontag (1933–2004) spoke of the promiscuity of art and literature—the willingness of great artists and writers to scandalize their spectators through critical frankness, complexity, and beauty. Sontag's life and thought were no less promiscuous. She wrote deeply and engagingly about a range of subjects—theater, sex, politics, novels, torture, and illness—and courted celebrity and controversy both publicly and privately. Throughout her career, she not only earned adulation but also provoked scorn. Her living was the embodiment of scandal.

In this collection, Terry Castle, Nancy K. Miller, Wayne Koestenbaum, E. Ann Kaplan, and other leading scholars revisit Sontag's groundbreaking life and work. *Against Interpretation*, "Notes on Camp," *Letter from Hanoi*, *On Photography*, *Illness as Metaphor*, *I, Etcetera*, and *The Volcano Lover*—these works form the center of essays no less passionate and imaginative than Sontag herself. Debating questions raised by the thinker's own images and identities, including her sexuality, these works question Sontag's status as a female intellectual and her parallel interest in ambitious and prophetic fictional women; her ambivalence toward popular culture; and her personal and professional "scandals." Paired with rare photographs and illustrations, this timely anthology expands our understanding of Sontag's images and power.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This volume of essays by a dozen contributors (most notably Wayne Koestenbaum) examines a number of key works and aspects of Sontag's career—nearly five decades worth of gender-bending and upsetting the social apperception. Like its subject, this assessment comes with the baggage of ultra-self-consciousness and a dash of self-importance. Why shouldn't it? It is an attempt at interpreting the author who, with much provocative fanfare, came to disown interpretation. Overall, this appreciation—edited by two associate professors of English (Ching at the University of Memphis, Wagner-Lawlor at Penn State)—yields new insights on a most complex sensibility. The contributors accomplish this with sophisticated admiration, usually with originality and, with the requisite doses of wit to deconstruct the chronicler of camp. Sontag's work and reputation are looked at from all angles: in popular culture (a cameo in *Zelig*), as a filmmaker herself, as playwright and director, as novelist, as mental and literal world traveler. What predominates amid the academic-speak is Sontag's understanding of the politics of experience. 9 photos. (Nov.)

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Review

[*The Scandal of Susan Sontag*] yields new insights on a most complex sensibility... with sophisticated admiration... [and] the requisite doses of wit. (*Publishers Weekly*)

An exhilarating read that succeeds in constructing a complex and multi-faceted portrait of the woman and her ideas, which remain as vital and thought-provoking as ever. The West Australian
(*The West Australian*)

The Scandal of Susan Sontag offers revealing insights into the work of one of America's most famous and provocative intellectuals (Charles Green *The Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review*)

About the Author

Barbara Ching is an associate professor of English at the University of Memphis. She is the author of *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture* and the coeditor of *Knowing Your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy*.

Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor is associate professor of women's studies and English at Penn State University. She is the author of *A Moment's Monument: Revisionary Poetics and the Nineteenth-Century Sonnet*.

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