



Susan Sontag (Critical Lives)

Jerome Boyd Maunsell

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'My idea of a writer: someone interested in "everything"', declared Susan Sontag (1933–2004). Essayist, diarist, filmmaker, novelist and playwright, her own life seemed to match this ideal. As well as writing in an unusually broad array of genres, Sontag wrote about a startling range of topics – from literature, dance, film and painting to cancer, AIDS and the ethics of war reportage. Few have captured the twentieth century in the same manner.

In this new biography Jerome Boyd Maunsell assesses the astonishing scope of Sontag's life and work, tracing her growth during her academic career at Chicago, Oxford, the Sorbonne and Harvard, through her marriage to Philip Rieff at the age of seventeen, to the birth of her son David and her relationships with women. From Sontag's literary life in New York to her diagnosis of cancer in the mid-1970s and her miraculous rebirth as a novelist and critic in the 1980s and '90s, this biography puts intellectual development hand-in-hand with the personal, providing an integrated picture of Sontag as private person and public figure. Drawing on her extensive diaries, Susan Sontag gives a far more intimate portrait than has been previously possible of Sontag's struggles in love, in marriage, as a mother and as a writer. It offers an essential re-evaluation of a pivotal figure that is of interest to anyone concerned with literary history or culture.

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