



At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches

By Susan Sontag

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"A writer is someone who pays attention to the world," Susan Sontag said in her 2003 acceptance speech for the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, and no one exemplified this definition more than she. Sontag's incisive intelligence, expressive brilliance, and deep curiosity about art, politics, and the writer's responsibility to bear witness have secured her place as one of the most important thinkers and writers of the twentieth century. *At the Same Time* gathers sixteen essays and addresses written in the last years of Sontag's life, when her work was being honored on the international stage, that reflect on the personally liberating nature of literature, her deepest commitment, and on political activism and resistance to injustice as an ethical duty. She considers the works of writers from the little-known Soviet novelist Leonid Tsygkin, who struggled and eventually succeeded in publishing his only book days before his death; to the greats, such as Nadine Gordimer, who enlarge our capacity for moral judgment. Sontag also fearlessly addresses the dilemmas of post-9/11 America, from the degradation of our political rhetoric to the appalling torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib.

At the Same Time, which includes a foreword by her son, David Rieff, is a passionate, compelling work from an American writer at the height of her powers, who always saw literature "as a passport to enter a larger life, the zone of freedom."

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Literature and politics are inextricably intertwined and unified by moral purpose in this powerful collection of pieces (a couple not previously published in English or at all) by iconic critic and novelist Sontag (*Regarding the Pain of Others*), who died in 2004. Sontag was a dedicated champion of literature in translation, and the book opens with several introductions to such works, led off by a meditation on beauty. The section might have been called "Art and Ardor," so laced is it with artistic passion, both Sontag's own and that of the writers she celebrates, such as Leonid Tsypkin and Anna Banti. Part three contains speeches Sontag gave in accepting the Jerusalem Prize and other awards, and honoring others whose moral courage she admired. But most striking is to re-read the pieces she wrote in the wake of 9/11 and the Abu Ghraib scandal, which constitute the book's middle section. Sontag's controversial attack on the Bush administration immediately after 9/11 may have been an act of courage or of folly, but from a distance of five years, her critique seems on the mark. Sontag's brilliance as a literary critic, her keen analytical skill and her genius for the searingly apt phrase (like her damning "the photographs *are* us" in relation to the Abu Ghraib photos) are all fiercely displayed here. (Mar. 6)

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From [Booklist](#)

The world lost a brilliant, passionate, and ethical thinker and writer when Susan Sontag died in December 2004. In his moving foreword to this collection of resonant essays and speeches, Sontag's son, David Rieff, writes that his mother "was interested in everything. Indeed, if I had only one word with which to evoke her, it would be avidity." But for all her arresting insights into photography and other arts, literature was Sontag's true love, and nowhere else has she so directly addressed what literature accomplishes. Sontag was working on this book at the end of her life, and it is a generously personal volume addressing her greatest ardors and gravest concerns. Here is Sontag on beauty, Russian literature, and the art of literary translation. Here, too, are Sontag's clarion writings on Israel, 9/11, and Abu Ghraib. Although Sontag was happiest writing fiction, she never failed to celebrate the work of others or protest injustice and brutality, and in this she was both artist and hero. More posthumous works are promised. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

"Susan Sontag is a powerful thinker, as smart as she's supposed to be, and a better writer, sentence for sentence, than anyone who now wears the tag 'intellectual.'" ?Adam Begley, *The New York Observer on Susan Sontag*

"[Sontag is] one of our very few brand-name intellectuals. . .the bearer of the standard of high seriousness in a culture that has essentially capitulated to the easy lifting of the ironic mode or the ready clasp of pure entertainment." ?Sven Birkets, *The Yale Review on Susan Sontag*

"Not only did [her work] serve what should be an essential function of criticism, that of introducing readers to new work, weird work, things they wouldn't ordinarily encounter . . . it did so in a notable un-weird manner. Thoroughly trained in literature and philosophy, Sontag applied the standard of the past--truth, beauty, transcendence, spirituality--to the new art of the sixties, with its alienation, extremity, perseverance . . . And the writing was marvelous--high-toned, Brahmin, but full of zest and the pleasure of performing." ?Joan Acocella, *The New Yorker on Susan Sontag*

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