

Alice in Bed: A Play

By Susan Sontag

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Alice in Bed is a free dramatic fantasy which merges the life of Alice James, the brilliant sister of William and Henry James, with the heroine of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. It is a play about the anguish and grief and rage of women; and about the triumphs and limitations of the imagination.

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Alice in Bed: A Play By Susan Sontag Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Sontag's (*The Volcano Lover*) first stage play focuses on Alice James, the invalid sister of Henry and William and, since Jean Strouse's acclaimed 1980 biography and the publication of her diary, a feminist icon. It is in the latter role that Sontag casts the bed-ridden Alice, and playing off her name, she suggests, too, another, more famous Alice of fiction--to the extent that the center of the play's action is a tea party. The tea party becomes a gathering of independent women of imagination: Emily Dickinson, Margaret Fuller, Myrtha from the ballet *Giselle* and, as the somnolent dormouse, Kundry from Wagner's *Parsifal*. Alice's doting brother Henry makes a couple of appearances as well. Unfortunately, although Sontag acknowledges that her work is "a free fantasy based on a real person," none of the characters ever breathes with life; each lies flat on the page as a mouthpiece for Sontag's ideas about the imagination's dual role as liberator and jailer for a 19th-century woman of intelligence and about "women's anguish and women's consciousness of self." Moreover, her dialogue is arch and literary. Regrettably, Sontag can add her name to a list of talented novelist-critics whose stage work disappoints.

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From Library Journal

Sontag (*The Volcano Lover* , LJ 6/15/92) describes her play as a "free dramatic fantasy based on a real person," Alice James, the sister of William and Henry James. A brilliant woman who suffered from depression from the age of 19, James died from breast cancer at age 44. The center of the play is "a mad tea party," a la *Alice in Wonderland* , to which Sontag has convened real and fictional 19th-century women to counsel the protagonist. Emily Dickinson; Margaret Fuller; Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis (from the ballet *Giselle*); and Kundry (from the opera *Parsifal*) all make appearances. The dialog is terse and the action tense in this trenchant tale of imagination and feminine anger and grief. Recently excerpted in the *New Yorker* (5/31/93), this play had its premiere (in translation) in Bonn during September 1991. Recommended for all drama and literature collections.

- *Carolyn M. Mulac, Chicago P.L.*

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Review

"Oddly eloquent."

--Bruce Weber, *The New York Times*

"The dialog is terse and the action tense in this trenchant tale of imagination and feminine anger and grief.... Recommended for all drama and literature collections."

--*Library Journal*

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