

# Fiery Dworkin's Chilling Words

by Jane Troxell

April, 1987, was a very busy month for the leader of the anti-pornography movement. She headlined the controversial "Sexual Liberals and their Attack on Feminism" conference, nearly inciting riot in the overflow crowd; she saw the release of two long-awaited works, *ICE AND FIRE* and *INTERCOURSE*; and she was the subject of an unauthorized interview in a heinous rival's magazine, *Penthouse*. Even in the midst of all this excitement and acclaim, Andrea Dworkin seems to be the most angry and depressing individual alive.

After reading her semi-autobiographical novel *ICE AND FIRE*, one could hardly blame Dworkin for being bitter. The narrator, who remains nameless throughout the work, goes on a journey to sexual self-determination in which the thought of survival could make one want to die. From a childhood marked by the constantly near-death condition of her mother and the absence of her father because of it, to college days at an elite women's school, to prostitution in New York City, to drugged-out times in Europe, to destitute living as a writer, the narrator finds herself being used for sex and relying on that sex for food, drugs, publication, etc. At one point, the woman sleeps with a man in return for saving her from being raped by another man.

*ICE AND FIRE* is one woman's struggle for sexual identity; however, her story speaks to many women whose potential for sexual autonomy has been sacrificed for day-to-day survival. Dworkin's first novel screams out reality and is, at times, chilling. The writing is clear, crisp, and crude. Nothing about the language used in *ICE AND FIRE* is "lady-like," and that pleased this reviewer. In fact, many folks would find Dworkin's sexual depictions pornographic. Dworkin's employment of the English language is more than effective in allowing the reader to join in the hell through which this junkie/prostitute goes to establish herself as a writer and radical feminist. At one point, I was so enthralled in *ICE AND FIRE* that I missed my stop on the subway and had to ride to the end of the line.

*ICE AND FIRE* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 181 pp. \$14.95). *INTERCOURSE* (Macmillan, 257 pp. \$19.95). Both by Andrea Dworkin.

One unnerving aspect of *ICE AND FIRE* is the lack of good characterization. Rarely does Dworkin bestow characters with names, including the narrator, the boyfriend (known as "my love," "my beautiful boy," "the boy I lived with," "my lost friend," among others), the husband, and the publisher creep. (Not so coincidentally, though, Dworkin names most female characters, including lesbian friends and lovers.) Dworkin fails to develop important male characters to the extent that we can never truly understand their impact on the narrator's sexual identity. Most disturbing is that we are never to know how an intelligent, middle-class, college-educated woman ever fell into such a fast-paced life of drugs, prostitution, poverty, decadence, and constant sexual abuse. Dworkin herself acknowledges that the strength of the book is not in its plot.

Dworkin achieves with great success, though, the brilliant construction of the intricate psyche of one intense and deeply feeling woman writer/thinker subjected to a male-defined society in which she must struggle to find some sanity and personal power. Using herself as model, Dworkin has created a radical feminist whose greatest argument is that she lived through the woman-hate. Dworkin's character plainly states, "I'm a feminist, not the fun kind."

Whereas the novel *ICE AND FIRE* is no sitcom, Dworkin's latest nonfiction *INTERCOURSE* is a "situation tragedy" — for all women. By their biological situation of having "openings," women are reduced to a class of inferior status. The thesis of *INTERCOURSE* is that the act for which the book is entitled must be abolished. The mere physical nature of heterosexual intercourse necessitates the abandonment of the practice in order for the sexes to achieve any semblance of equality, according to Dworkin. This may not seem important to many lesbians, but Dworkin asserts that a direct link exists between the "institution" of intercourse and sexism which affects all women.

Andrea Dworkin, 40, is a grave and serious woman, and she should be taken seriously. Earlier works *WOMAN HATING* and *PORNOGRAPHY* confronted our misogynist culture with brilliance and tenacity. However, Dworkin fails the reality check when it comes to the basic premise of *Inter-*

*course*: [Sexual intercourse] is intense, often desperate. The internal landscape is violent upheaval, a wild and ultimately cruel disregard of human individuality, not attached to personality, no respecter of boundaries; ending not in sexual climax but in a human tragedy of failed relationships, vengeful bitterness in an aftermath of sexual heat, personality corroded by too much endurance of undesired, habitual intercourse, conflict. The experience of fucking changes people, so that they are often lost to each other and slowly they are lost to human hope. The pain of having been exposed, so naked, leads to hiding, self-protection, building barricades, emotional and physical alienation or violent retaliation against anyone who gets too close.

When this reviewer's mother read this, she said, "Well, this doesn't apply to my marriage." I doubt that it does.

No matter whether you agree with her assessment as to the cause of sexism or not, Dworkin has compiled a good argument against the current societal perception of heterosexual intercourse. Using historical and literary references, including feminist analysis of the persecution of Joan of Arc and works by Tennessee Williams, Tolstoy, and James Baldwin, radical theorist Dworkin proves that intercourse "often expresses hostility or anger as well as dominance."



(Andrea Dworkin by Jerry Bauer)

However, Dworkin's solution is not viable. The outlaw of sex in order to stop sexism is analogous to outlawing race in order to end racism. The origin of sexism comes from somewhere else other than women's private parts. In the case of sexual intercourse, Dworkin's fire does not melt ice.

*ICE AND FIRE* and *INTERCOURSE* are both fascinating reading, as is Dworkin a fascinating personality. As a result of her anger, Dworkin's female characters — and all women — appear in a constant state of victimization. Only in her solitude does *ICE AND FIRE*'s narrator find her own identity and sense of control. Now, if she could only take it out into the world.

Jane Troxell is a member of the *BOOK REPORT* editorial staff.

## Other Ways to Put the Squeeze on AIDS

by Kent Fordyce

For those people who want an alternative approach in health care, for those who have become disillusioned with their doctors, for those who believe that there is presently no home with the "establishment" medical treatment, here are some new publications that should renew your optimism.

*AIDS: A GUIDE TO SURVIVAL*, by Peter Tatchell (Paperback, \$6.95), is a very positive British book that gives a comprehensive program for strengthening the body's natural defenses, and gives techniques for meditation and mental imagery to sustain self-valuation and the will to live. The book has an excellent appendix to help positively organize one's thought and activities on a daily schedule. Tatchell firmly believes that by fighting back mentally and physically, people with the virus can reduce their chance of developing AIDS, and that even those who already have AIDS can increase their likelihood of survival.

*ALTERNATIVE & HOLISTIC HEALTH CARE FOR AIDS & ITS PREVENTION*, by Paul N. Van Ness (Pamphlet, \$3.00), is an excellent source book with an extensive bibliography for library reading. It has chapters with explanations and descriptions covering vitamin C therapy, macrobiotics, massage, acupuncture, homeopathy, and more. One of the best things about it is that it gives guidelines for choosing a practitioner or doctor and guidelines for personal evaluation of them. While it's geared for the Washington, D.C., and Maryland community, its value is real for everyone concerned.

*CONQUERING AIDS NOW*, by Scott L. Gregory and Bianca Leonardo (Paperback, \$15.95), is a book about natural treatment with heavy emphasis on dietary control using certain foods, vitamins, and plenty of natural and chemically un-natural things to ingest, annally insert and eliminate. Personally, I would be hesitant about the hydrogen peroxide and certain other suggestions. However, this book, although a loosely organized conglomeration, just might have a chapter or two that would perfectly fit an individual's needs.

*HEALING AIDS NATURALLY*, by Laurence Badgley (Paperback, \$14.95), is a self-help book which details the actual natural therapy programs of eight survivors. Using homeopathic medicine, it addresses the total person, physically and spiritually, in a holistic approach for improving the immune system of the virally affected person. The majority of the text covers nutrition of the body and the mind and the best means,

remedies, foods, and techniques for achieving a "balanced state" within the whole being. This is one of the outstanding small press contributions.

*HEALING FROM WITHIN*, by Dennis T. Jaffe (Paperback, \$7.95), views good health as living in harmony with one's inner self. It's a practical guide combining holistic techniques with traditional medicine that synthesizes a broad range of information on disease and self-healing. Specific exercises are given to reintegrate mind and body, to control stress and enhance relaxation. It defines illness from physiological and psychological perspectives, and can teach how to develop those attitudes which foster good health and which can help to overcome disease.



*MAXIMUM IMMUNITY*, by Michael A. Weiner (Paperback, \$4.50), is a popular commercial book that explains ways to fortify the body against diseases through a diet with increased immune-boosting nutrients, exercises to strengthen natural resistance, and mind strategies to reduce tension and stress.

*PSYCHOIMMUNITY & THE HEALING PROCESS*, edited by Jason Serinus (Paperback, \$9.95), is a compendium (Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Margo Adair, Jack Schwarz, et al.) of interviews, essays, meditations, trance channelings and resources on non-traditional ways to challenge AIDS. This

book's strongest premise is that holistic health is primarily a matter of attitude and spirit; that immunity to disease can be strongly influenced by attitudes, choices, spirit, and behavior. Its appendix includes a section on cleansing baths, other anti-viral and pro-immune substances, flower essences, and a thorough resource directory. Definitely a good buy.

*WHAT TO DO ABOUT AIDS*, edited by Leon McKusick (Paperback, \$8.95), covers the psychological aspects of AIDS, the struggle to combat the devastating repercussions that follow a positive diagnosis with a collection of articles by physicians and mental health professionals presenting innovative, noncompartmentalized approaches to treatment with concentration on risk reduction and mental health issues. If you want to read a book that is primarily aimed at physicians and therapists before you jump into one of the more unorthodox titles, try this one. Although somewhat of a downer, optimism does surface in several chapters.

*WINNING THE WAR WITHIN*, by Mark P. Friedlander, Jr. and Terry M. Phillips (Paperback, \$10.95), leads to an understanding of the immune system. While giving rules for eating right and rules for dealing with stress, it emphasizes eating well, being optimistic, getting adequate sleep, and using medications and stimulants with care. This book will help you "psych" yourself into good health.

What all of these books emphasize is good personal health care. All suggest good diets, light exercise, no stimulants or recreational drugs. Stop smoking. Stop drinking alcohol. And of prime importance is the obliteration of stress and tension totally from one's life. To help with the stress and tension, try one of the many audio tapes available on tension control or meditation. Also, consider Louise L. Hay's books, *YOU CAN HEAL YOUR LIFE* (Paperback, \$10.00), or *HEAL YOUR BODY* (Pamphlet, \$3.00), and her audio cassettes, *AIDS: A POSITIVE APPROACH* (\$10.00), or *YOU CAN HEAL YOUR LIFE STUDY COURSE* (\$25.00).

Please, take good care of yourself.

Kent Fordyce is a member of the *BOOK REPORT* editorial staff.