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THE GODDESS SLEEPING

by Richard Bauer

BOOKS

Stilted and Sullivan

Love Undetectable will likely offend many,
but there's no denying Andrew Sullivan's talent

BY KRISTINE CHATWOOD

It is easy to think of Andrew Sullivan as pompous, pedantic and privileged. It is easy because, as an English expatriate with degrees from Oxford University and Harvard College and as a former editor of *The New Republic*, he is.

His first book, *Virtually Normal*, advocated gay marriage and gays in the military, but pretty much nothing else in the area of gay civil rights. Protection from employment discrimination? Such a threat to individual liberty and the free market!

Sullivan left his position at *The New Republic* and now writes full-time. His new book, *Love Undetectable: Notes on Friendship, Sex, and Survival*, is a collection of three essays discussing the end of AIDS as a killer disease, a look at the origins of homosexuality with a lit-

takes on those who seek to once again define homosexuality as pathological. He delivers an interesting and effective frontal attack on those who would "cure" homosexuality. He succeeds with help from his unexpected ally, Freud.

This is by far the best essay of the trio. Sullivan's arguments are well thought out, well presented, and fascinating to read. It is a difficult argument for the advocates of reparative therapy to refute.

As Sullivan writes: "In reading Freud, the thing that most struck me was his attempt to understand, rather than resolve, the question of homosexuality.... In one of the bizarrest twists of contemporary politics, it is those with the fiercest theological convictions—the fundamentalist right—who now most frequently invoke this most quizzical and frustrating of intellectuals. And it's only by reading

Freud himself that one begins fully to appreciate the irony."

Sullivan asserts that, for Freud, homosexuality was never inherently pathological or sick. He cites the following: "I am...of the firm conviction," Freud wrote to the newspaper *Die Zeit* in 1905, "that homosexuals must not be treated as sick people.... Wouldn't that oblige us to characterize as sick many great thinkers and scholars...whom we admire precisely because of their mental health? Homosexual persons are not sick. They also do not belong in a court of law!"

The final essay, "If Love Were All," purports to be a paean to friendship, that enduring relationship that so often gets short shrift. Instead, this particular work turns out to be a paean to how well-read Sullivan is. He quotes Tennyson. He quotes Cicero. He quotes Saint Augustine, Montaigne, Aelred of Rievaulx, Aristotle—they all find their way into this piece. Sullivan would have done better to have simply, without the literary trappings, told the sweet, poignant story of his friendship with Patrick.

It seems clear from this book that Sullivan lives his life in that rather isolated world of well-educated, well-connected, financially well-off white gay men. Although he uses the word "homosexual" throughout the book, what he really means is "gay men." Lesbians are rarely mentioned, except to bolster some particular point. This omission is particularly obvious when Sullivan discusses AIDS and the mobilization of the homosexual community to fight the disease and to care for its own. Where is the mention of the countless lesbians who put their own issues on hold to care for the sick and dying, to help form organizations like ACT UP, to staff AIDS service organizations, and to grieve the loss of their friends, brothers and fathers who were killed by the disease?

By the time Sullivan writes his next book, let's hope he has broadened the scope of his own life.

■ *LOVE UNDETECTABLE: NOTES ON FRIENDSHIP, SEX, AND SURVIVAL* by Andrew Sullivan. Alfred A. Knopf, 1998; \$23 cloth.

Sullivan will talk about *Love Undetectable* Tuesday, Nov. 10, at Powell's City of Books, 1005 W. Burnside St. in Portland, at 7:30 p.m.

tle help from Sigmund Freud, and an homage to friendship.

In the first piece, "When Plagues End," Sullivan describes personal encounters with AIDS: watching the death of a stranger whom he had volunteered to help; the wasting away and death of his good friend Patrick; the physical and psychological shock of his own seroconversion. On these points we are right with him. We have been there. We have felt his pain.

And then, he announces that the plague is over. No more dying from AIDS. New treatments and new drugs, writes Sullivan, have converted AIDS from a virtual death sentence to nothing more than a chronic, treatable illness.

As he recalls saying to a friend after attending a 1996 meeting where AIDS researchers David Ho and Marty Markowitz described the then-amazing results they were seeing from the use of combination therapies—protease inhibitors used with older AIDS drugs—"It's over. Believe me. It's over."

Sullivan does give passing notice to the fact that for the vast majority of people in the world AIDS remains a killer. In his world, though, the world of well-educated, well-insured, white gay men living in the United States, it's time to break out the champagne.

The second essay, "Virtually Abnormal,"