

Andrea Dworkin, Writer and Crusading Feminist, Dies at 58

By [Margalit Fox](#) April 12, 2005

Andrea Dworkin, the feminist writer and antipornography campaigner whose work was a lightning rod for the debate on pornography and censorship that raged through the United States in the 1980's, died on Saturday at her home in Washington. She was 58.

Ms. Dworkin died in her sleep, said her husband, John Stoltenberg. The cause of death had not been determined last night, but Mr. Stoltenberg said that Ms. Dworkin had suffered from several chronic illnesses in recent years.

With her unruly dark curls and denim overalls, Ms. Dworkin was for decades a visible presence on the lecture circuit, at antipornography rallies and "take back the night" marches. In speeches and in her many books, she returned vocally, passionately and seldom without controversy to the subjects of sex, sexuality and violence against women, themes that to her were inextricably and painfully linked.

Among her best-known books are "Pornography: Men Possessing Women" (Putnam/Perigee, 1981), "Intercourse" (Free Press, 1987) and "Heartbreak: The Political Memoir of a Feminist Militant" (Basic Books, 2002).

Reviewing "Heartbreak" in The New York Times Book Review, Laura Miller wrote: "Dworkin is one of the few remaining specimens of pure countercultural Romanticism: fierce, melodramatic and utterly convinced that all truth can be found in her own roiling, untempered emotions."

With her first book, "Woman Hating" (Dutton, 1974), Ms. Dworkin drew the lines in what she saw as a pitched battle against men's historical domination of women. She opposed all forms of pornography, which she believed incited violence against women. She was also critical of consensual sex between women and men, which she saw as an act of everyday subjugation in which women were accomplices.

"One of the differences between marriage and prostitution is that in marriage you only have to make a deal with one man," Ms. Dworkin wrote in "Letters From a War Zone" (Dutton, 1989). Marriage, she added, "is a legal license to rape."

Andrea Rita Dworkin was born on Sept. 26, 1946, in Camden, N.J., and earned a bachelor's degree in literature from Bennington College in 1968. She later moved to Europe, where she married a Dutch political radical. The marriage was abusive, Ms. Dworkin said later, and she was divorced after three years.

"I was a battered wife," she told The New York Times in 1985, "and pornography entered into it. Both of us read it, and it helped give me the wrong idea of what a woman was supposed to be for a man."

To Ms. Dworkin, it did not matter that some critics condemned her sweeping antipornography stance as a form of censorship. With the feminist lawyer Catharine A. MacKinnon, she wrote a municipal ordinance, briefly adopted by several cities in the 1980's, that defined pornography as a form of sex discrimination. (In 1986, the United States Supreme Court affirmed a lower court's ruling overturning the ordinance in Indianapolis.)

If Ms. Dworkin's work was unabashedly polemical, her life was full of nuanced contradictions. She publicly identified herself as a lesbian, speaking movingly about "this love of women" as "the soil in which my life is rooted," and her work was a touchstone for many gay men and women. But in 1998, she married Mr. Stoltenberg, her companion of many years. A writer, editor and a founder of Men Against Pornography who also identifies himself as gay, Mr. Stoltenberg is her only immediate survivor.

Ms. Dworkin's other books include "Scapegoat: The Jews, Israel and Women's Liberation" (Free Press, 2000), "Right-Wing Women" (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1983) and, with Ms. MacKinnon, "Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality" (Organizing Against Pornography, 1988). Ms. Dworkin also wrote two novels, "Mercy" (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1991), about serial rape, and "Ice and Fire" (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), about prostitution.

Though some critics dismissed her work as unreasoned diatribe, Ms. Dworkin remained an outspoken champion of the causes in which she believed.

"I am not afraid of confrontation or risk," she wrote in "Letters From a War Zone," "also not of arrogance or error."