



Naomi Wolf

biographical story of socially-approved starvation, it is informative and often moving.

The strengths of the book would have made a good article, and perhaps part of the problem is that Wolf set very wide parameters for her subject. Yet a book on the etiology of women's inequality in contemporary society which downplays capitalism, technology, biology, reproductive roles, religion and social conformance in favour of beauty as the controlling factor, is bound to be inadequate. For all its ostensible seriousness and urgency, this is a superficial analysis of women's place in society. Women are not the sum of their accoutrements.

THE LOONY-BIN TRIP

Kate Millett. Don Mills: General Publishing, 1990

By Patricia Bishop

At least two versions of this story are possible. The reader ponders a sad but predictable narrative of manic-depressive psychosis during the summer of 1980 in an artists' colony in upstate New York. Alternatively, the narrative is a political thriller wherein a sane but wild and outrageous writer attempts to escape confinement in a mental institution. She won a famous insanity trial in St. Paul years before the action of the story occurs but has to prove her sanity over and over.

The social interpretation excites the imagination and the political consciousness far more than the medical one, and it is the version preferred by the author herself. The evidence, however, lies be-

fore the reader and as in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, one is free to choose either version. What makes this process of judgement interesting is that the story is not a work of fiction.

Millett presents a no-holds-barred picture of herself during the summer that changed her life. It is not a flattering portrait. She is as "high as a kite," as her psychiatrists so delicately describe it. What might be called ecstasy or a moment of being or a Joycean epiphany is instead classified as mania, and everyone knows there's nothing artistic in that.

The forty-five-year-old feminist challenges her young apprentices, who have joined her farm for the summer. They are there to experience a feminist, lesbian paradise of sorts, but they are also there to perform back-breaking construction, woodworking and plumbing. It is never spoken, but the feeling lingers that these university students have been recruited as cheap labour whose hard work will build up Millett's equity in a rustic farm property.

Millett, however, sees that she has opened her home and prized retreat to uncouth youths who trample mud over her Persian carpet, misuse her farm implements and disrespect her person. Meanwhile, her lover Sophie thinks she discerns signs of incipient madness in Millett's increasing euphoria, irritability, loquacity and spendthrift actions.

The trigger for these perceptions is not, however, behaviour; it is expectation. Sophie and Kate have mutually decided that Kate should discontinue taking lithium, a psychotropic medication which the author has been ingesting on prescription for over six years. The side effects make her increasingly worried; there are the omnipresent hand tremors, the bane of an artist, there are the possibility of permanent kidney damage, the constant thirst and dry mouth. Moreover, there is the ever-present feeling of being "fuzzy" at the edges, of not experiencing the full range of human emotions.

Millett yearns "to be whole" again. Her task is impossible in an environment in which moodiness, anger, talkativeness and expansive gestures such as rescuing unwanted horses from slaughter are interpreted as psychopathology.

Friends and family become increasingly uneasy and begin to insist that Millett return to an acceptance of her "mental illness," as indicated specifically by a return to lithium. Millett refuses. Doubt-

less she is a difficult woman encountering some difficult times; it is entirely speculative whether lithium would help her in the sense that she wants to be helped.

Friends and family will not take no for an answer. They and a quickly recruited psychiatrist importune her to agree to voluntary hospitalization; when she demurs, her cohort of friends, led by a card-carrying member of the American Civil Liberties Union, calls an ambulance and the police and try to have her hauled off as she screams helplessly in the Bowery street. Luckily for Millett a police officer supports her civil rights and prevents her from an involuntary confinement.

She is not so fortunate in Ireland. The culmination of a series of misadventures is forced hospitalization in an insane asylum in southeast Ireland not far from Shannon. This institution is a home for the powerless and the dispossessed. Millett winds up there thanks to the intervention of a civil-liberties lawyer who consulted with her friends in New York.

Millett is held incommunicado under a psychiatric regime which appears to have nothing to do with healing and everything to do with destruction of personality, resistance and the sense of self. It is a penal colony and Kafka could not have described it better. Millett is drugged against her will with powerful overdoses of lithium, Thorazine and Prolixin. She is denied writing paper and not even permitted one phone call. She fears that she could be housed there, forgotten, for the rest of her life. She thinks she might even become mad in this place of torture and deprivation.

Irish women friends locate her and with some trouble manage to have her transferred to a Dublin institution, wherein a psychiatrist immediately certifies her sane. She is free. She returns home to New York and enters a period of grief over the loss of her friends and her lover. Her estranged husband wants a divorce. Most significantly, she is unable to write, to draw, to sculpt. Psychiatrists say she is clinically depressed, and now she wants lithium because she cannot imagine surviving otherwise.

Millett starts taking lithium and months later during the course of psychotherapy she emerges from her depression. Whether there is a causal relationship between the lithium and the lifting of the depression or not, Millett is trapped in a Pascal's wager; she is not about to tempt the fates again.

She acknowledges, "I was terrified that without the drug I could plummet again. What if they were right after all? My own mind was too dangerous."

As she learns more about the patients' rights movement and its criticism of psychiatry as a political tool and a means of social control, Millett decides to forswear lithium again. This time, however, her counsel is judicious. She is advised to "drink lots of milk, don't get over-tired, have faith, and tell no one." She weans herself off lithium gradually, with support from fellow ex-psychiatric patients. A year after going off lithium totally, she tells her incredulous friend Sophie. She is productive, happy and quite "normal."

THE WOMEN'S SAFETY AUDIT KIT

By Barbara Hall

As chair of the city's Safe City Committee, I would like to introduce you to the Women's Safety Audit Kit, which is designed for women who feel unsafe out in the city and who want to do something about it.

The guidebook, published by the Metro Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) is about making public places like parks, bus stops and streets safer for women — "focusing specifically on preventing sexual harassment and assault." As well, it's about improving safety in semi-public places like your workplace, your apartment's garage, school yards, public washrooms and the transit system — "anywhere that the hair rises on the back of your neck."

Since it was published last year I have used it, together with community-based groups across the city, including the Winchester Park Residents' Association and the residents of Trinity Street here in Ward 7, to identify neighbourhood danger spots.

I believe the kit's emphasis on safety in public and semi-public places is important, partly because it is an area over which the city government has the most obvious jurisdiction, and partly because one third to one half of all sexual assaults occur in urban public space. I believe we in city government have a responsibility to ensure public safety.

The basic idea for the kit is very simple. It says that women know a lot about cities that traditional experts don't understand, perhaps because most architects, planners and police are either men, or are trained to see things from a male perspective. For example, they may not understand what it's like to be a woman alone, late at night, waiting for a bus or walking past a dark alley.

Although the focus of the kit is women's safety, I believe that a city which is safe for women is safe for everyone. Questions such as: "Can anything be done about drug-trafficking, gang violence, pimping, or mugging in this place? What would make it easier for the elderly or disabled to get around? Is the area safe for children?", are all raised.

The kit suggests that you, by yourself if necessary, but preferably with others who share your concerns, go out and inspect the places where you don't feel safe. Take lots of notes and ask lots of questions. What's the lighting like? Would anyone hear you scream? What improvements would you like to see? The booklet is full of helpful tips on how to organize so the information you gather will have the greatest possible impact, as well as ideas on how to get support from your neighbours and other groups.

I have been pleased to do audits with many community groups, and would be happy to be part of any audit you and your neighbours wish to do. Together, we would then see who was responsible for correcting the problems and work to see the changes were made. For more information, contact me at City Hall — 392-7916.

Reprinted from Winter 1990 "Inside our Schools/ Ward 7."

THE BROKEN HOOP

Susan Clements. Marven, South Dakota: "The Blue Cloud Quarterly," Vol. 34, No. 3, 1988

By Maria Gillen

The poems in Susan Clements' *The Broken Hoop* are beautifully crafted, lyrical creations. They are deeply sensual in their earthy awareness of the outer world and fey and intuitive in their ability to capture and portray the inner world. For example,

in "The Vision-Hunter Dies in the Rain," the poet combines these two characteristics smoothly:

*Mother your hands smelled
Like oak leaves — smoothed my hair,
Burning strand after strand,
In the sun....*

Clements describes her mother's "Seneca's hands" which hardened from work in a garment factory.

*For me, you said. Still I smelled
Oak, peeled myself
Naked Soot Streets, a gauntlet
Of stares. But clothes
Are not needed*

*Until the body becomes a wound
And a loneliness.
Only then do we shroud
What will not be touched. This is how
The dead see; this much
Is vision tamed. My hands, too,
Grow hard. Yet, an old scent
Lingers — crushed leaves, decayed
Beetles. No daughter in me,
No flame.*

In other poems, Clements presents the reader with remembered moments treated with gentleness and delicacy; she retreats behind a child's eyes where wonder remains untarnished, as in the moment when she sees her first city while she rides in her father's Chevy and smells "Evening of Paris" on her mother's skin. She's carried up a flight of stairs to visit an aunt whose hair cascades "like moonbeams" and the adults try to teach her how to say the aunt's name, "Grace"; when she says it, Grace becomes both her aunt's name and the grace and beauty of the moment remembered by the woman who knows just how difficult grace is to come by.

In other poems, Clements writes of her Indian heritage, of her grandmother who once walked through the mountains to the "Fire tower" but

*who now lies like a bundle of
thistles, stark silhouette
on her snow-white bed.
I held her thin, brown wrist
and the lingering legends.*

She sees herself, longing for the full knowledge of her heritage: