

a e BOOKS

Sita Looking Back 30 Years

REVIEW BY MICHELLE BARBER

I'm a little late. No, actually, I'm just young. I read Kate Millet's *Sita* for the first time this month.

I'm 25, cut me some slack.

Sita was published for the first time in 1976 and I bought it because I found the fat book (it's combined with *Sexual Politics*) on the shelves of Rivendell Books in Montpelier just as I heard the owner talking about how "Women's Studies" just don't sell anymore.

So, literally, 30 years after her publication date, Kate can now release the breath she's been holding, because here, finally, is my review of *Sita*. [As an aside, for all of you wondering: I've submitted this review to *OITM* because there are those of us lesbian/bi/trans women who sometimes fall upon lesbian classics a little later than the rest of the community, but regardless, are experiencing the book for the first time.]

Sita is the autobiography of an affair Millet had with a slightly older woman over a number of years. The affair apparently started off hot and wild, entering Millet's life shortly after her hetero break-up with Fumio Yoshimura. The first time we encounter it, however, the relationship has reached an extremely unhealthy level. Millet flies to California to be with Sita, only to find that "their" house is now overrun with Sita's family, a gaggle of daughters and son, in-laws, friends, and the occasional friend of the family who needs a place to crash. Millet is supposed to teach a course at Sita's university, but hesitates because she quickly realizes that Sita isn't exactly excited about a few months of monogamy. Thus, the psychological spiral that proceeds for the next 300-plus pages. Millet cancels the class, decides to leave, reschedules the class, chooses to stay, joins Sita for hope-filled, but ultimately disappointing mini-vacations, feeds the multitude of hungry people in the house, doodles in her journal day after day, tolerates Sita's mysterious nights away from home, and just generally puts up with a lot of grief from everyone in the house, including her lover, Sita.

This is one of the few books I've ever read that has actually made me angry with the author/main character. I had to put the book down several times because I was so incensed at Millet's ability to put up with such abuse - verbal and psychological - from her not-really-there partner. However, I'd leave the book for a few minutes, blow off some steam, and then rush right back to see if she ever got up the nerve to leave this witch. I'm not ruining much of the story by telling you that, no, she never really does ditch the witch. So what the reader gets to enjoy - and I do mean that - is an intense, journal-like mini-autobiography, closely detailing Millet's emotional insecurities, flashbacks, hopes, and dashed hopes page after page, peppered with bittersweet sexual encounters between Millet and Sita.

So why would any sane person read this book? I was hooked because the jacket cover stated that Sita committed suicide not long after the first publication.

Dang.

I had to find out the story after reading that. But I stuck with it because Millet eloquently combines stream-of-consciousness writing, journaling, and darn good prose to expose what many of us have experienced: the doubts, worries, and stress of having a partner who can simultaneously blow your mind and never really give you what you want. The book, *Sita*, can be as relevant, enjoyable, challenging, and entertaining for the generation of lesbians who might not even know who Kate Millet is, as the generation who read it in 1976 did.

So, go check out this book. Prove the bookstore owner wrong: "Women's Studies" isn't dead. And let this book make you angry, really angry. And then leave you with a knowing smile afterwards. ▼

Michelle has a day job as Service-Learning Coordinator at Norwich University, but dabbles in other forms of media whenever possible. She has a radio show on 88.3 WNUB, brings international films to NU, and is a Board member of Mountain Pride Media. She lives in Montpelier.

Scrambled Receiver

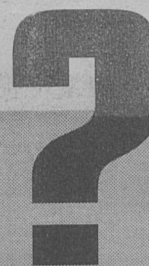
Dear Joe,
I am a middle-aged man, recently divorced, living in an isolated spot. I am using the online services in hopes of finding a partner. I find that some men go wild with the initial emails, sending several lengthy missives within hours. I respond. Nothing more. Am I sending the wrong message?

— Concerned Correspondent

Dear Concerned,
Your message is fine. You have a scrambled receiver!

Most of us, especially those a bit older, have experience with gay bars. At times, one is accosted by those who are drunk, on drugs, manic, or otherwise unstable, with proclamations of undying love and desire. These folks self-identify by their appearance and overenthusiastic come-ons! One disengages and moves on.

When online, you are in a cyber-bar that encompasses the entire world. Anyone



Ask Joe

By Joe Swinyer

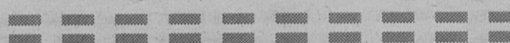
with Internet access can communicate with you. Unfortunately, some of these folks are drunk, on a trip, or emotionally unstable. So, they send voluminous and frequent messages for a few hours. Their interest then flags, and you hear from them no more. Simply chalk it all up to experience and correspond with those who present themselves more reasonably.

I once had one of these experiences. The writer told me every detail of his life, professed me to be his sweetie (the chap was from the UK), wrote several emails within 24 hours and then ... nothing. Surprise, the same experience took place with the same individual within the last two weeks, over a year after the first flurry. That is why "thank you, but no thank you" messages were created.

Be at ease, your messages are fine.

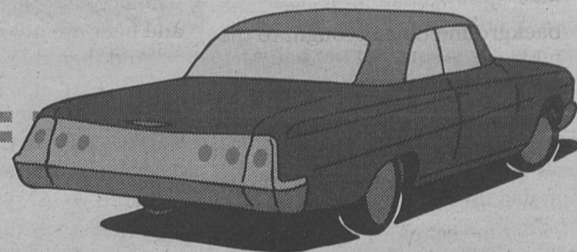
— Literally, Joe

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T-BIRD Q&A

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How to Jumpstart a Dead Battery

BY TAYLOR

Though lately Mother Nature seems confused, eventually we will have to deal with cold weather. Many of us will also have to deal with batteries that will not start. So what to do?

Step 1: Get yourself a pair of jumper cables. I would suggest spending no less than \$30 (cheaper ones are for emergency uses only and are unreliable) and make sure they are a minimum of eight feet long, for easier use. Why, you might ask? Simple: if you have to jump your battery more than two times (without the reasons like leaving the lights on or something to drain the battery) you should just get a new battery.

Step 2: Find a friendly person who will let you use their car and their battery. Holding up your cables on the road will let people know you are looking for a jump, if friends are not available.

Step 3: I would suggest having the cars face nose-to-nose so that the process will be easier and batteries will be facing each other. If this is not possible, the batteries should be as close to each other as you can get them.

Step 4: Turn off cars.

Step 5: Unless easily identified, take a dry rag, wipe down around the terminals to identify the positive and negative stamp on

both batteries; then you are ready to use the cables. Take one cable and connect the cable to the positive (usually the larger) terminal of both batteries.

Step 6: Take the other cable and attach to the negative terminal of the dead battery. Take the other end of the same cable and ground it, which means putting it to any part of the "good battery" car's engine (a real piece of metal) to ground it.

Step 7: Turn on the car with the good battery.

Step 8: Then turn on the car with the dead battery. If it does not start, try the following:

Try jiggling the cables connections to make sure you have a solid connection.

Wait a few minutes, as a really dead battery takes a few minutes to re-charge.

If after a few minutes you still do not get the engine to start, then you probably need a new battery. If you hear nothing, (no clicking of the starter), and the radio, wipers and headlights work, there might be a problem with your starter.

Or if the car does start:

Remember to take the cables off in reverse, negative, negative then positive, positive.

Leave the car running for at least 20 minutes. This is how long it takes to re-energize a battery.

Store your jumper cables in a dry place. If they get wet during the "jump," wipe them off and put back in your trunk. Hopefully you will be the friendly person with a good battery and not need a jump this winter.