

Living beyond lithium

An Unquiet Mind
Dr. Kay Redfield Jamison
Vintage Books

BY TAMARA BOND

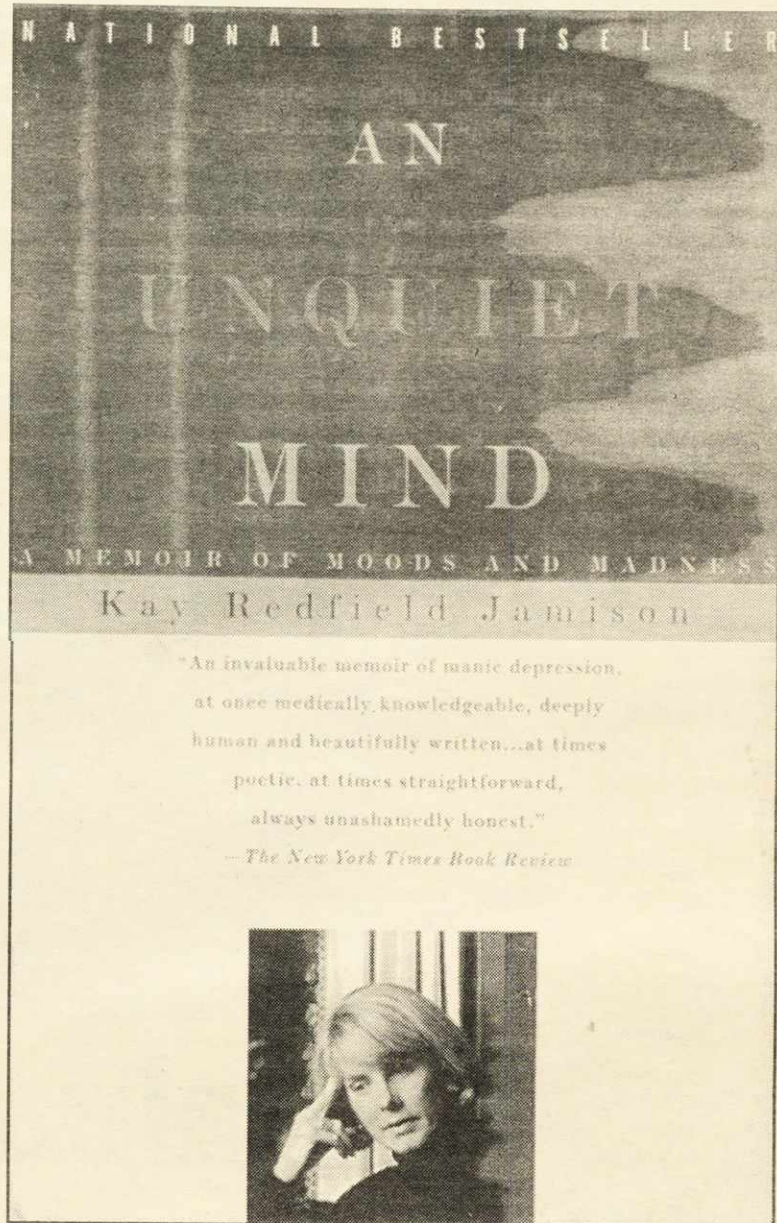
"People go mad in idiosyncratic ways." So does the writer of this statement, Dr. Kay Redfield Jamison.

An Unquiet Mind is the autobiography of a student, professor, therapist and patient who gained a unique insight into the world of psychosis while riding the rings of Saturn in a perilous psychosis. Jamison relates the severity of the manic-depressive (lately termed bipolar) illness through stories of her personal experiences.

"I saw and experienced that which had been only dreams, or fitful fragments of imagination," were Jamison's words in reference to her hallucinations of flying past stars, through the rings of Saturn and over fields of crystal. The book expresses a sense of loss in that once medicated, one can never return to the world where reality and dreams meld into one, the world of mild psychosis. This is the price of taking lithium, the drug Jamison has been forced to take for years. Without the drug at the height of her manias and psychoses, the manic-depressive Jamison would crash into the depths of life-threatening depression. This is also why she, and many of the other professionals at the mood clinic which she heads, have not switched to the term bipolar — this term portrays the manic and depressive states as separate when they are truly intermingled.

Manic-depressive illness is a mood disorder characterized by severe mood swings, grandiose missions of imagined self-importance, loss of contact with reality, hallucinations and in the most severe cases, suicide. The illness is genetic and chronic with a poor long term prognosis. There is no cure, but for some, lithium keeps the illness' debilitating side effects at bay. You can find all of this medical jargon in an abnormal psychology class, but the rest of *An Unquiet Mind* wouldn't be taught in the course. As both a manic depressive and a clinical psychologist, Jamison has made many improvements in the treatment of patients through her own insights.

Lithium flattens one's moods in general, meaning that not only is the depression lost but also much of the arousing euphoria of manic highs. Everyone has felt the exuberant, lighter levels of mania in their lifetime, but imagine mul-



tiplying that by a thousand. Then imagine being told you would never feel that way again. This flattened affect is what causes manic-depressives — even if they have a PhD in psychology — to stop taking their medication. To be "normal" once one has been "abnormal" becomes much less satisfying, especially if you become more "normal" than every-

retain information was not only a love for Jamison, but a requirement of her job that she could no longer handle. With lithium, control of simple motor skills like staying in a saddle can become impossible. As Jamison poignantly shows in her book, this can mean giving up many favourite hobbies in order to survive manic-depression. She spent much time and

took many risks using herself as a test subject. She self-experimented with low dosages of lithium in an attempt to remove the negative symptoms of the drug without losing the drug's medicinal effect.

The most important part of the author's work has been improving treatment for manic-depressives by talking about her life before and after the onset of the illness. Her book takes an impossibly complicated illness and helps one relate to it through a

one else.

Not only does Lithium dull moods but it also dulls your senses and motor skills. Reading can become a challenge because of blurred sight, and because can be difficult. As a professor and researcher, the ability to read and

rather simplistic portrayal of one life. It is a book about being a child, about growing up, about tragedy and about love. It is most of all about survival in an insane world. You will not read this book in a day, but you will remember it for a lifetime.

February is Black History Month

and the Gazette is looking for our readers' help in celebrating the achievements, history, and culture of the black people.

On February 6th the Gazette will be publishing its Black History Month supplement. The black community is invited to submit poetry, photos, graphics, prose, and feature articles to the supplement.

To get involved, call 494-2507 or come on up to the Gazette offices on the third floor of the Dalhousie Student Union Building, Room 312.

Submissions are due Monday, February 3rd.