

Hystera

Leora Skolkin-Smith

Why you should read this book

The state of your mental health is deceptive and relative

Someone once said that literature is either weighty and wise or interesting and captivating. Skolkin-Smith puts this to rest in *Hystera*. Lilly is a student in the 1970's at Sarah Lawrence College who experiences her life slip away from her in short mental breaks. One night, she swallows too many pills mixed with alcohol and then checks herself in to the psychiatric ward at the state hospital. What follows there is a collage of sights, feelings and sounds as Lilly attempts to both fit in with the patients yet keep some part of herself essentially separate. Lilly's parents are both

alive and her mother figures very heavily in her illness though it is only hinted at until Lilly is unable to avoid her at a random meeting. As Lilly journeys (sometimes very unwillingly) back to a healthy mental state, she alternates between fear of herself, fear of her body that strangely borders on paranoia regarding other's intentions towards her and a stubborn belief that she deserves punishment for a tragic occurrence many years prior. This book is a tragically beautiful reminder of how fragile mental health really is.