

# One Man's Revolt:

Michel Richard



## Un Homme qui se révolte

Un étudiant abandonne ses concepts machistes après avoir lu Sylvia Plath, et maintenant il cherche une nouvelle orientation.

For the first nineteen glorious years of my life I delighted in the divine right of the male ego. What with five subservient sisters and a devoted mother I lacked for nothing. My mother had been expertly conditioned for her career by the sisters of a convent in Quebec. Given this family background, male superiority was well entrenched in our household. I was not about to work for change.

Outside the home, life was equally rewarding for a male conditioned in this way. There seemed to be a never-ending supply of young women — willing to render their loyalty, trust, and affection in exchange for momentary affection, feigned emotion (expertly articulated, of course) and perhaps the price of admission to a dance or movie.

Those were the days! Plenty of clean socks and underwear and an endless exchange with the guys swapping experiences of countless conquests. We all knew we were lying but we all played the game — one-upmanship.

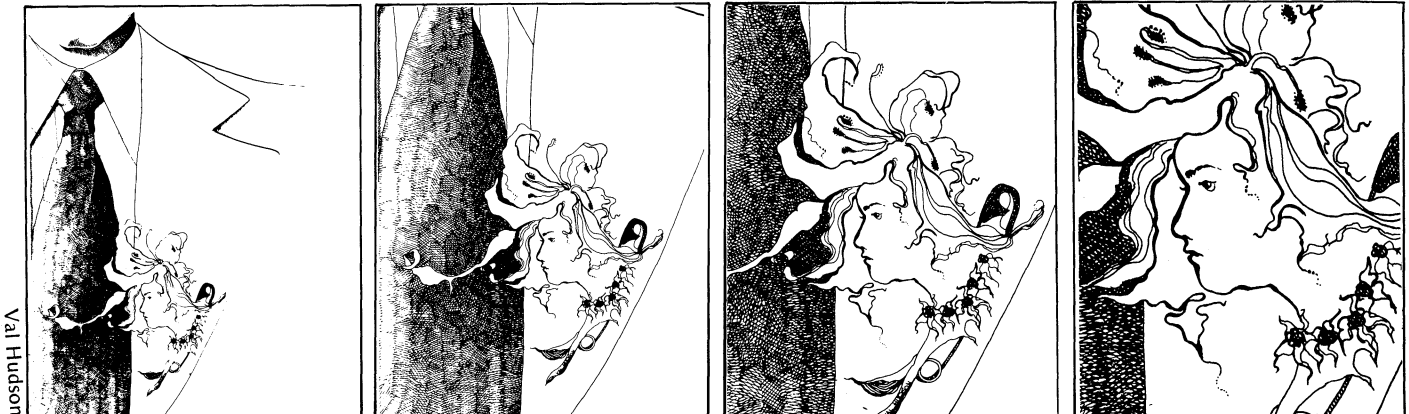
Unfortunately, some men I didn't even know started a war in Vietnam and that was the end of my 'Utopia' and my youth. Like many men of my age I accepted military service as a confirmation of my masculinity. Images of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' and 'The Sands of Iwo Jima' flashed through my mind as I practised drill and kept my rifle clean. Sleek uniforms, shiny buttons, envious contemporaries and awestruck young women flooded my daydreams, while all the while there was a constant droning in the background.

It grew in intensity and as the time to leave for the war drew near I transferred my energies from those romantic fantasies to chant in unison with that now identifiable echo. K-I-L-L K-I-L-L-KILL-KILL. And then I was in the war.

Errol Flynn, John Wayne, and Gary Cooper just never showed up. Instead, the participants appeared as simple, unglamorous men who revealed all the fragilities of the human body and psyche. The harshness, cruelty, brutality, and destruction were numbing. To add to this madness, brief interludes were arranged for 'the boys' in an attempt to re-establish our confidence and manhood. We were taken from the area of conflict to a 'friendly' part of the city where we were supposed to reaffirm our masculinity and bravado with the conquest of a woman. The brass considered this the ultimate ego-booster. I had imagined that I could leave the shame of war behind by taking part in the perpetuation of a system of economic bondage. Neither situation left me with any dignity — my shame became entrenched.

When my tour of duty was over I returned to the 'world' to become part of a group of men who were broken and scarred and disillusioned. Most of us were trying to let our conscience take a rest — but it was hard. For two years I agonized over the options available to me. The intense conditioning of the Marine Corps and a lifetime of conditioning by a sexist, mercenary society had made me bitter. I decided to enrol in college in the hope of finding a way out. I kept telling myself not to look back; perhaps the answers were ahead. After only one month into my first English course a light appeared.

I read *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath. What a revelation; it opened my eyes and it turned my head around. Her words brought comfort and shame because the story of Esther



Val Hudson

Greenwood made me feel guilt but also made me see the cause of it all — all the stupid myths that I had believed and the crippling effect that they had in my relationships with women. The insensitive, superior attitude that was mine so closely paralleled those that brought about the destruction of Esther Greenwood and, more importantly, of Sylvia Plath. And the woman destroyed — this Sylvia Plath — was the very writer who had opened up a whole new perspective on life.

Gradually I began to see that women were equal partners, and this gave me a new freedom I had never been aware of. I no longer had to keep up stereotyped roles and attitudes that I had been conditioned to accept (although some die hard). Life becomes easier when I can say 'I don't know' and then ask for help. Naturally, the years of conditioning still have an effect, but I hope it is diminishing. Perhaps one day in the future, with the help of women like Sylvia Plath and Margaret Atwood — and women I meet — I will be able to reverse the conditioning almost completely.

Sylvia Plath committed suicide, but it is more accurate to say that she was killed by the male ego. Her work symbolizes the dignity and intelligence of a woman, trapped within the confines of a role that was projected upon her by an inflexible

society, whose writing can influence and change others in a positive and healing way.

How many Sylvia Plaths will it take to bring the realization that women have been denied their basic freedoms and have long been involved in a one-sided war where traditionally the opposition had all the weapons? Isn't it about time all of us tackled the problem of the sex-role game, because aren't we all losers if we don't?

Through reading books written by this new breed of women writers, I am gradually realizing what a bill of goods I was sold — and bought. I see now that both men and women are caring, patient, kind and loving, and that both men and women have egos and are ambitious, competitive, intelligent, strong, and very often scared.

If only somewhere back in kindergarten someone had opened my eyes to this — or maybe even before, at home — or even later in high school. But in every area of my life — in school, at home, on the street — that old game of *roles* was played to the hilt. Sylvia Plath opened *my* eyes but how many of us are lucky enough to stumble on her work — more important, where do I go from here?

## Is Anybody out there Listening?

Susan Wright



Photo by Lee Post

### Est-ce que vous m'écoutez au moins?

Cet article est écrit par une étudiante. Après avoir participé à la réalisation d'un vidéo sur le sexisme en milieu scolaire, elle s'attendait à ce que ses camarades, ses professeurs, l'administration s'intéressent au sujet. Déception. Désillusion. Elle dénonce ici l'apathie, voire l'hostilité qui l'a entourée ensuite et son abandon de l'école traditionnelle. Le vidéo en question est disponible à. . .

In 'Is Anybody Out There Listening?' five highly articulate senior high school students discuss, with a teacher, some of the many examples of sexism which they find in their school. The colour videotape includes discussion and illustration of guidance materials, text books, teacher attitudes and Physical Education budget allocations. This 30 minute tape will be of interest to Ministries of Education, student councils, teachers and teacher training institutions, participants in women's studies courses and concerned parents.

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The experience of writing 'Is Anybody Out There Listening? A Study of Sexism in a Secondary School' was undoubtedly the most profound and important of our high-school years. Not only did we learn about sexism in the secondary school, we gained insights into the education system and the people within it. The things we discovered about administrators, our teachers, and our fellow-students seriously undermined any faith we previously had in the school system.

The title of our report, 'Is Anybody Out There Listening?', was a reflection of the despair we felt as the full impact of