

[Link to Introduction \(language as tool of culture\)](#)

Joanna Russ, "This is Your Life" (from fanzine *Khatru*) (year unknown but about 30 years ago)

Here is a piece called "This is Your Life" which might be taken as scratchy sf; anyway, I had it duplicated in self-defense because I got so sick of writing the same letter over and over. Men often ask me what I have to complain about, since I'm so "successful" (whatever that is); well, here it is. I have had to slice my soul in half. I flatter myself that I must have a lot of soul because I'm still kicking and protesting, but all the same, it's one hell of a process.

### THIS IS YOUR LIFE

Your doctor is woman. Your dentist is a woman. Your lawyer is a woman. The police are (almost) all women. Government, business, finance, agribusiness, art, science, and the military-industrial complex are controlled by women. 40% of the work force is male, most of them in low-paying, dead-end, nonunionized jobs; 98% of welfare cases are to men with small children. Men's bodies are used to sell almost everything, from cars to tractors to matches, both to women and to men. Since women bear children, men care for them. Your mommy "worked" but your daddy "stayed home" and didn't "work." Actually your mommy didn't like her job that much, and when she was especially annoyed (your mommy often got angry; your daddy sighed a lot) she'd come home and tell your daddy how lucky he was he didn't have to work. You had a sister only a year older than yourself; sometimes you daddy would burst into tears because there was so much to do (but it wasn't "work") and your mommy would either get guilty or angry, because the house was a mess. Then your sister went to school. So did you. Somehow when she organized the class party, it showed she had organizational ability; but when you did it, it meant you were a good boy. Somehow nothing you did had any real connection to the future, except when you played with your dolls (everyone knew that because women bore children, nature equitably planted a fathering instinct in men so they take care of them; otherwise nobody couldn't do it alone) or your play-stove and play-house things. That did have a connection to the future. You know that girls had organs for sexuality that were separate from their procreative organs and boys didn't; that was why boys' sexuality was inextricably bound up with loving children and taking care of them. Everybody also knew that little boys must try and be as deft and dainty as possible (because that was natural to them) and never use their muscles because they would develop horrible lumps all over them and that wasn't pretty. Everybody greeted you with, "What a pretty little boy!" and was very protective of you. When you and your sister flirted with grown-

ups, she was told that big strong girls didn't do such things; you were encouraged to continue. ("Oh, look! Isn't he the little man already!") In school the teacher (male) told the class that any girl could become President because this was a Democratic country, with opportunity for all. He also told you that men were now equal to women because men had been given the vote only thirty years before (given it by the women, of course) and could legally go into any profession, but of course most men chose to become fathers and husbands instead. (When one bold little boy asked if a boy could become President, the class laughed and the teacher sent him to the (female) Principal for disciplining because he was being bad). At thirteen you were pulled by other little boys to the cosmetics counter, where you all fingered-fascinated-the false chest hair, shoulder-pads and buttocks-cinchers that would make you attractive to

Girls—who didn't have bouncing, delicate genitals that might be hurt – were practicing hockey, football, basketball, etc. (occasionally beating up some slight girl who wasn't good at athletics). You started reading and going to the movies; seeing endless variations on the Man with a Past, the Career Man, who gave it all up for love, scenes in which men swooned away into the arms of masterful women. Meanwhile you were learning that you should never, never get to a car with strange women, and that there were sick, perverted women who tried to get boys excited and if they couldn't, rammed things up their asses. You couldn't connect this with the movies. All you boys started wearing halters for your penises that made them stand up (well, almost), and everybody wanted one, even if they were too young to wear them. (They were called "brassieres.") It wasn't easy to run in them, or play hopscotch, but you were too old for that, anyway. You weren't quite sure what exactly women did to boys, but you were told you'd find out when you got married, and you mustn't let girls lead you on too far. (Later, you found out that meant an ejaculation. Of course, if you came too soon, or couldn't get it up, you were forced to relieve the girl by cunnilingus, because everybody knows that girls could get sick from unsatisfied sex and that they needed it much more than boys. This didn't seem fair, somehow, though you couldn't say exactly why.) meanwhile your friends' grades were going down, and they were spending most of their time day-dreaming about girls. There was a popular song, called "Someday my Princess Will Come." You began rather to look down on the other boys; because you, after all, were going to become a writer. (At six you had wanted to be a steward, but you understood now that that wasn't a real job, just a fancy waiter.) In fact, you were going to become an intellectual and a poet. (Of course, you were also going to be attractive, not going to let girls see that you were too smart, and you were going to run a house and raise attractive children—you had looked at the psychology books and you certainly weren't going to let anybody know what you really felt—but that would take care of itself, somehow. In high school; you learned about Java Woman, Peking Woman, Western Woman, Economic Woman, Victorian

Woman, and that "women" really included men, took because "women embrace men." Then you found the appendices in the back of the book: "Men, position of in Ancient Rome." "Men, special problems of." "Male writers, rise in the 15th century of." And so on. So all women were equal but some were more equal than others. In college, you read that classic of adolescent rebellion, "Portrait of the Artist of the Young Woman" by Virginia Woolf. You looked at sculptures of matrons, heroines, and girls; you read descriptions of menarche, childbirth, menopause—all the great human experiences. You learned the term "vulva envy." That wasn't what you had, of course. You were just going to be a poet, in spite of the fact that there never had been any really great male artists. Male experiences, after all, simply didn't include the wide variety that an artist needed. Some authorities (all female, a few male) insisted that the male nervous system just wasn't stable enough to produce great art; see the incidence of epilepsy, color-blindness, and a while variety of nervous diseases in men, likewise their shorter life spans. Others said it was male psychology (narcissism, masochism, passivity) that was responsible. Emma Kinsay's famous report came out and you found that as male education went up, male potency went down. (Only twenty years later did you find out that this was a distortion of the report.) Well, it didn't matter. You were going to an exception. (In writing classes, you were usually either the only boy, among a whole bunch of women, or one of the few boys.) You read Zelda Fitzgerald's "Women and Boys," a classic of life in the 1920's. You wrote stories of heroines who seduced their first boy, or descriptions of cunnilingus I which boys just love it, or stories about women who hunted whales or found their womanhood by shooting a bear or fought with other women in the Old West. Books by men bothered you, you liked them, but they were too much like soap operas, all about love and suffering and domestic interiors. (The critics agreed with you.) Women landed on the moon; "One small step for us, one giant leap for womankind." .....

Suicidal classmate who had twenty phone calls a night. (He later married and had four children, and hasn't written much.) When you wrote stories, you naturally wrote about heroines, although you tried hard not to. But of course it didn't matter which sex anybody wrote about; art was above all that. After school you found yourself in Bohemian society in NY (as it was then called); everybody was equal, of course, but somehow it just happened that not only was your lover a woman, all your friends were women. You began (with some shock) to realize that there were odd, strange women who almost behaved like—well, like boys and you felt an odd affinity with them. There were a lot of them in the theater; they didn't care about athletics or fights, or really womanly things, but of course they did behave rather peculiarly. In fact, you rather condescended to them. (You were later to write a friend that you'd spent most of your life feeling like "a rather peculiar Lesbian" but that's much later.) People were, of course, perfectly free to do just what they

wanted, and if your parents (especially your father) kept questioning you anxiously about your marriage plans or having babies, that was their problem. Except you did wish, sometimes, that some of the women you know didn't order their boy friends about quite as much. And it was tiring to keep looking good, but on the other hand, it was too frightening to think what would happen to you if you didn't ...

When you knew married couples, you of course always talked to the woman, not the boy.

You laughed tolerantly at movies in which women kept ramming things up men's asses because the men couldn't get it up. Only there seemed to be hardly any movies without at least one scene like that in them.

You began losing your taste for literature, you really didn't know why, except that it seemed all about irrelevant power struggles or something, and anyway, there wasn't much to write about. Perhaps because you were such an exceptional man. ("The proper study of womankind is woman.") Well, of course. Maybe if you had a baby ...

Nobody had ever told you about the Roosteretics in the 19th century (of course they didn't call themselves that) or why your love-affairs kept turning out so badly, or why you never felt like a real man when you did all the things a real man was supposed to do (like mopping the floor). And none of it mattered, anyway, because people were individuals. (Women run the world. Women are people. Therefore people run the world.)

You got annoyed when you were asked, "What does it feel like to be the first male to each here, eh?" or "You're funny creatures, you boys who have brains" or "Of course your maleness doesn't affect your teaching, does it--?" Some people just didn't understand. (Not "women," people).

After all, you were free to do what ever you wanted. Weren't you?

Women didn't seem to care as much about human relations as men, but that wasn't anybody's fault. Certainly it had nothing to do with sex. I mean, finding out that your father had been impotent for years and years (in fact, he'd hardly ever practice anything but cunnilingus with your mother, though they never told you; you'd been born via artificial insemination) ... Of course, you yourself had often wanted to stop in the middle of sex, but you couldn't do that because, well, because. It was an awful thing to do to a woman. If you got her excited, you just had to do something about it, even if it nauseated you. (Of course if she couldn't get excited enough to let you in, there was nothing she could do about that).

And of course you're not one of those hysterical pricks (as a female friend of your called them once) who run around burning their phallus-brassieres and shouting about hommy-lib because if you have to question everything, it's too...too...and people might actually think you were a jock. (You think you actually saw one of them, once, in Greenwich Village. With these fake breasts—at least his short was cut that way—and no ruffles on this trousers! And hair on his head! You shave yours every morning, of course.)

You've got a problem. You're neurotic. Either that, or you've been hanging around with the wrong women. There are nice women, after all—well, there are—who don't mind if you act more freely and if you even do things that might be called role-reversals.

Of course they work and their men don't.

Or their men work at low-paid, boring jobs. But that's a personal problem.

Or they move to Wisconsin and their men have to come with them, when their men do have jobs.

Or, just generally, in their circle, the women do most of the talking and own most of the money, and the men sort of are quieter.

But they like intellectually and sexually aggressive men. They really do.

So what are you complaining about?

An meanwhile your doctor is a woman, your lawyer is a woman, your dentist is a woman, agribusiness, the army, the navy, the government, the arts, finance, corporate life are all run by women. The museums are full of old mistresses, but as some wag wittily said (don't know who she was) "old masters" would be quite another thing, allot of superannuated beaux sitting around trying to look desirable and being only—well, superannuated!

And meanwhile the magazine racks are full of boy-boy mags with naked boys in all sorts of provocative positions, and boys' bodies are used to sell everything from cars to refrigerators to stockings—even to you—and people are even speculating whether a black—or a man—might be President in twenty years or so, and you've found you like all those Bobbie Davis and John Crawford movies from the 1930's, sort of Soffering, Soffering, but it does get you somewhere in the old Ur-masculine—and you've finally dared to write a so try about how men are suppressed in this society. (And strange, beefy girls and overbearing young women come up to you at sf conventions and say,

"You know, I never liked male sf writers until I read your works" and you know you're not supposed to say: "You know, I like fans until I met you." And you don't say it.)

And you've just gotten a letter from a female friend who met someone at a convention, who was a hom-libber, and who talked about Men's Wrongs, and she says, "He's been hanging around with the wrong sort of women." But you do think there's more to it than that, and it even strikes you that there's something typically feminine in limiting the whole business to a sexual problem and assuming that the crux of man's problems must be in his relation to women. Or in sex at all.

What IS wrong?

ON THE NATURE OF CONCRETE PHENOMENA AND RHETORICAL SLEIGHT-OF-HAND The Greeks invented Democracy. Their slaves...(who all lived elsewhere) Men have permanently enlarged breasts with which they suckle their young...this way men are unique among mammals. (Women, however--).

TIME magazine, 1973: A first-year college student can get into a lot of trouble. He can fail exams, not do his work properly, or get his girl friend pregnant. (Hm! Somehow back in 1953 I wasn't worrying about that last ...).

Erich Fromm: Men have always gladly surrendered their freedom to strong leaders who, in return, have provided safety, the sanctioning of aggression through wars in which men have obtained booty and women.

The Goths were hardy warriors. Their wives—(all Jutes).

Washington Irving: The Bowery was a favorite promenade for the inhabitants of New York and their wives—(who lived in Schenectady? Oh, those commuter marriages! Actually, Father Knickerbocker mentions "the citizens and their wives" which is correct. Married adult women were not citizens.)

The conditions of coal-miners in the 19th century were very bad. Pregnant coal-miners had to pull carts ...

Man is unique among mammals; he has an extremely long infancy, a very well-developed cerebral cortex, and he menstruates.

In 1960 the average man in America was a middle-aged woman who lived in Ohio and voted Democratic.

Americans can no longer support their wives and children; the two-income family is becoming more and more common. (I think I just lost my citizenship.)

To get the viewpoint of the man in the street, I stopped a young secretary who hitched up his pants and --- (fooled you).

TV GUIDE: He then meets a beautiful girl whose years of experience as an assassin have jaded her—(Must've started at 7).

"Man will conquer the universe," said Georgette, gazing at the stars, "and I will be among the first of him to do so." (Filthy sf magazines, writing stories about transsexuals--!)

1966 AND ALL THAT: The Scandinavians with their sagas, or sisters ... (This problem of mixed-nationality families is getting acute).

Victorian Man was a creature of sexual ignorance; he visited prostitutes, believed that women had no sexual feelings, and put vinegar-soaked sponges in his vagina to prevent conception. (True, apparently.)

Irving Howe, in his preface to an edition of Sophocles' OEDIPUS: We all want to kill our fathers and marry our mothers. (Question for Rhetoric 101: who is "we"?)

One of the characters discussed in our new freshman textbook EXISTENTIAL MAN, is Sophia Loren. (You will all now go home and read "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" by Virginia Woolf.)

In the 1850's Southerners were divided in their opinions about slavery. They held debates, argued publicly, and printed many articles in their newspapers. A fetching idea—Black Southerners arguing publicly and printing articles in newspapers. And Angelina Grimke speaking without lot or hindrance to cheering audience. Who'd a thunk it?)

Statistically speaking, Man has breasts and a vagina and wears skirts, except.....