

# Valerie Solanas

compiled by Freddie Baer

(with a great deal of thanks to Donny Smith)

On April 9, 1936 in Ventor, New Jersey, Valerie Jean Solanas was born to Louis and Dorothy Bondo Solanas. Her father sexually molested her; sometime in the 1940s her parents divorced, and Valerie moved with her mother to Washington, D.C. In 1949 Valerie's mother married Red Moran. Rebellious and stubborn, Valerie disobeyed her parents and refused to stay in Catholic high school; in response her grandfather whipped her.

At the age of 15 in 1951, Valerie ended up on her own. She dated a sailor and may have gotten pregnant by him but still managed to graduate from high school in 1954. She was a good student at the University of Maryland at College Park, supporting herself by working in the psychology department's animal laboratory. She did nearly a year of graduate work in psychology at University of Minnesota.

After college, Solanas panhandled and worked as a prostitute to support herself. She traveled around the country and ended up in Greenwich Village in 1966. There she wrote "Up Your Ass," a play "about a man-hating hustler and a panhandler. In one version, the woman kills the man. In another, a mother strangles her son."

Early in 1967 Solanas approached Andy Warhol at his studio, the Factory, about producing "Up Your Ass" as a play, and gave him her copy of the script. At the time Warhol told the journalist Gretchen Berg: "I thought the title was so

wonderful and I'm so friendly that I invited her to come up with it, but it was so dirty that I think she must have been a lady cop.... We haven't seen her since and I'm not surprised. I guess she thought that was the perfect thing for Andy Warhol."

Also in 1967 Solanas wrote and self published the SCUM Manifesto. While selling mimeographed copies on the streets, she met Maurice Girodias of Olympia Press (French publisher of *Lolita*, *Candy*, and *Tropic of Cancer*), who gave her an advance for a novel based on the manifesto. (With this \$600 cash she visited San Francisco.) During this time Ultra Violet read the Manifesto to Warhol who commented, "She's a hot water bottle with tits. You know, she's writing a script for us. She has a lot of ideas."

Later, in May 1967, after Warhol had returned from a trip to France and England, Solanas demanded her script back; Warhol informed her he had lost it. Apparently, Warhol had never any intention to produce "Up Your Ass" as either a play or a movie; the script was simply lost in the shuffle, thrown into one of the Factory's many stacks of unsolicited manuscripts and papers. Solanas began telephoning insistently, ordering Warhol to give her money for the play.

In July 1967 Warhol paid Solanas twenty-five dollars for performing in *I, a Man*, a feature-length film he was making with Paul Morrissey. Valerie appeared as herself, a tough lesbian who rejects the advances of a male stud with the line that she has instincts that "tell me to dig chicks—why should my standards be lower than yours?" Solanas also appeared in a nonspeaking role in *Bikeboy*, another 1967 Warhol film. Warhol was pleased with her frank and funny performance; Solanas also was satisfied enough that she brought Girodias to the studio to see a rough cut of the film. Girodias noted that Solanas "seemed very relaxed and

friendly with Warhol, whose conversation consisted of protracted silences.”

In the fall of 1967 at the New York café, Max’s Kansas City, Warhol spotted Solanas sitting at a nearby table. He instigated Viva’s insult of Solanas: “You dyke! You’re disgusting!” Valerie answered with the story of her sexual abuse at the hands of her father. “No wonder you’re a lesbian,” Viva callously replied.

Over the winter of 1967–68, Solanas was interviewed by the Robert Marmorstein of the Village Voice. The article, “Scum Goddess: A Winter Memory of Valerie Solanas,” was not published until June 13, 1968, after the shooting. Solanas commented on the men interested SCUM: “[C]reeps. Masochists. Probably would love me to spit on them. I wouldn’t give them the pleasure.... The men want to kiss my feet and all that crap.” Her comment on women and sex: “The girls are okay. They’re willing to help any way they can. Some of them are interested in nothing but sex though. Sex with me, I mean. I can’t be bothered.... I’m no lesbian. I haven’t got time for sex of any kind. That’s a hang-up.” She told Marmorstein that Warhol was a son of a bitch: “A snake couldn’t eat a meal off what he paid out.” Solanas also talked about her life; she had surfed as a little girl. She panhandled and even sold an article on panhandling to a magazine. “I’ve had some funny experiences with strange guys in cars.”

According to the interview, she wrote a few sex novels and was paid \$500 for one. (Could this have been the novel that was to have been based on the SCUM Manifesto?) She was interviewed on Alan Burke’s TV talk show; when she refused to censor herself, he walked off the set. The interview was never aired. According to Paul Morrissey in a 1996 interview with Taylor Mead, the contract that Solanas signed with Olympia Press was “this stupid piece of paper, two

sentences, tiny little letter." On it, Maurice Girodias said: "I will give you five hundred dollars, and you will give me your next writing, and other writings." Solanas had interpreted it to mean that Girodias would own every thing she ever wrote. She told Morrissey: "Oh no, everything I write will be his. He's done this to me, He's screwed me!" Morrissey believed Solanas couldn't write the novel based on the SCUM Manifesto she had promised to Girodias and used this idea that Girodias owned all that she wrote as an excuse. In Solanas' mind, Warhol, having appropriated "Up Your Ass," wanted Girodias to steal her work for Warhol's use and never pay her, so he got Girodias to sign this contract with her.

In the spring of 1968, Solanas approached underground newspaper publisher (The Realist) Paul Krassner for money, saying "I want to shoot Maurice Girodias." He gave her \$50, enough for a .32 automatic pistol.

On June 3, 1968 at 9AM Solanas went to the Chelsea Hotel where Maurice Girodias lived: she asked at the desk for him and was told that he was gone for the weekend. Still, she remained there for three hours. Around noon she went to the newly relocated Factory and waited outside for Warhol. Paul Morrissey met her in front and asked her what she was doing there. "I'm waiting for Andy to get money," she replied. To get rid of her, Morrissey told her that Warhol wasn't coming in that day. "Well that's alright. I'll wait," she said.

About 2PM she came up to the studio in the elevator. Once again Morrissey told her that Warhol wasn't coming and that she couldn't hang around so she left. She came up the elevator another seven times before she finally came up with Warhol at 4:15. She was dressed in a black turtleneck sweater and a raincoat, with her hair styled and wearing lipstick and make-up; she carried a brown paper bag. Warhol even commented, "Look doesn't Valerie look good!" Morrissey told her to get out: "We got business, and if you

don't go I'm gonna beat the hell out of you and throw you out, and I don't want...." Then the phone rang; Morrissey answered—it was Viva, for Warhol. Morrissey then excused himself to go to the bathroom. As Warhol spoke on the phone, Solanas shot him three times. Between the first and second shot, both of which missed, Warhol screamed, "No! No! Valerie, don't do it." Her third shot sent a bullet through Warhol's left lung, spleen, stomach, liver, esophagus, and right lung.

As Warhol lay bleeding, Solanas then fired twice upon Mario Amaya, an art critic and curator who had been waiting to meet Warhol. She hit him above the right hip with her fifth shot; he ran from the room to the back studio and leaned against the door. Solanas then turned to Fred Hughes, Warhol's manager, put her gun to his head and fired; the gun jammed. At that point the elevator door opened; there was no one on it. Hughes said to Solanas, "Oh, there's the elevator. Why don't you get on, Valerie?" She replied: "That's a good idea," and left.

That evening at 8PM Solanas turned herself in to a rookie traffic officer in Times Square; she said, "The police are looking for me and want me." She then took the .32 automatic and a .22 pistol from the pockets of her raincoat, handing them to the cop. As she did so, she stated that she had shot Andy Warhol and in way of explanation offered, "He had too much control of my life."

A mob of journalists and photographers shouting questions greeted Solanas as she was brought to the 13th Precinct booking room. When asked why she did it, her response was, "I have lots of reasons. Read my manifesto and it will tell you who I am." Solanas was fingerprinted and charged with felonious assault and possession of a deadly weapon.

Later that night Valerie Solanas was brought before Manhattan Criminal Court Judge David Getzoff. She told the

judge: "It's not often that I shoot somebody. I didn't do it for nothing. Warhol had me tied up, lock stock, and barrel. He was going to do something to me which would have ruined me." When the judge asked if she could afford an attorney, she replied: "No, I can't. I want to defend myself. This is going to stay in my own competent hands. I was right in what I did! I have nothing to regret!" The judge struck her comments from the court record, and Solanas was taken to the Bellevue Hospital psychiatric ward for observation.

On June 13, 1968 Valerie Solanas appeared in front of State Supreme Court Justice Thomas Dickens; she was then represented by radical feminist lawyer Florynce Kennedy, who called Solanas "one of the most important spokeswomen of the feminist movement." Kennedy asked for a writ of habeas corpus because Solanas was inappropriately held in a psychiatric ward, but the judge denied the motion and sent Solanas back to Bellevue. Ti-Grace Atkinson, the New York chapter president of NOW, attended Solanas' court appearance and said she was "the first outstanding champion of women's rights."

On June 28, Solanas was indicted on charges of attempted murder, assault, and illegal possession of a gun. In August, Solanas was declared incompetent and was sent to Ward Island Hospital. In August 1968, Olympia Press published the SCUM Manifesto with essays by Maurice Girodias and Paul Krassner.

The night before Christmas 1968: Warhol answered the phone at the Factory; it was Solanas calling. She demanded that Warhol pay \$20,000 for her manuscripts that she would use for her legal defense. She wanted him to drop all criminal charges against her, put her in more of his movies and get her on the Johnny Carson Show. Solanas said if Warhol didn't do this, she "could always do it again."

June 1969: After pleading guilty, Valerie Solanas was sentenced to three years in prison for "reckless assault with intent to harm"; the year she spent in a psychiatric ward awaiting trial counted as time served. It has been suggested that Warhol's refusal to testify against Solanas contributed to the short sentence.

Solanas was released in September 1971 from the New York State Prison for Women at Bedford Hills; she was arrested again November 1971 for threatening letters and calls to various people, including Andy Warhol. In 1973 Solanas was in and out of mental institutions; she spent eight months in South Florida State Hospital in 1975.

In the July 25, 1977 Village Voice, Howard Smith interviewed Valerie Solanas. She claimed to be working on a new book, about her life "bullshit," titled Valerie Solanas. She was supposed to have received \$100,000,000 in advance from "The Mob," whom she describes as "the Money Men;" she talked at length about "the Contact Man" for this entity.

In the interview she discussed the Society for Cutting Up Men: "It's hypothetical. No, hypothetical is the wrong word. It's just a literary device. There's no organization called SCUM..." Smith: "It's just you." Solanas: "It's not even me... I mean, I thought of it as a state of mind. In other words, women who think a certain way are in SCUM. Men who think a certain way are in the men's auxiliary of SCUM."

She also protested a 1968 statement of Smith's: "The part where she said, 'She's a man-hater, not a lesbian....' I thought that was just totally unwarranted. Because I have been a lesbian... Although at the time time I wasn't sexual, I was into all kinds of other things... The way it was worded gave the impression that I'm a heterosexual, you know.... "

The next issue of the Village Voice on August 1, 1977 has another piece by Howard Smith, "Valerie Solanas Replies." In

it Solanas corrected misinterpretations from previous issue's interview. Included are:

1) Olympia Press's editions of the Manifesto were inaccurate, "words and even extended parts of sentences left out, rendering the passages they should have been incoherent;" and

2) The Voice refused to publish the address of the Contact Man, which she considered one of the important reasons for the interview. She called Smith journalistically immoral and said "I go by an absolute moral standard...." Smith: "Valerie do you want to get into a discussion now about shooting people?" Solanas: "I consider that a moral act. And I consider it immoral that I missed. I should have done target practice."

Also in 1977 she mailed a rambling letter to a Playboy editor on the theory that he was a contact man for The Mob. Then there is no record of Solanas until November 1987 when Ultra Violet tracked her down in Northern California. When Ultra telephoned her, Solanas didn't have much to say.

April 26, 1988: broke and alone, Valerie Solanas died of emphysema and pneumonia in a welfare hotel in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco. When she died at the age of 52, she had a drug problem and continued to turn tricks to support her habit. Prostitutes who knew her from that time said that she looked elegant and slender, and she always wore a silver lamé dress when she worked the street.

In a January 14, 1991 New York magazine article, "Andy Warhol's Feminist Nightmare," Rowan Gaither interviewed Dorothy Moran, Solanas' mother, who denied reports of Valerie's later years: "Solanas lived peacefully in New York during the seventies and later in Phoenix and San Francisco. 'I think she had some good friends that helped her out a lot.'" Moran rejected the idea that Solanas was in and out of mental institutions during the 1970s: "She was writing. She

fancied herself as a writer, and I think she did have some talent. For years, she even lived with a man.... She had a terrific sense of humor."

She was buried in Virginia, near the home of her mother.