

## **Joana Russ's *The Female Man*: A Utopian And Dystopian Science Fiction perspective<sup>(\*)</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This paper will attempt to show that *The Female Man* (1975) could be a Utopian and dystopian novel at once. *The Female Man* is one of the most famous novels of feminist science fiction, written by Joanna Russ, one of the strongest writers of the first era of explicitly feminist SF and one of the most challenging. Along with Alice Sheldon and Sheri Tepper, she is probably the best known author whose approach tended towards the directly confrontational. She is also a noted essayist, critic, and reviewer. *The Female Man* is about four different women: Jeanine, Joanna, Janet and Jael. They are parallels of sorts but from far different cultures, alternate worlds displaced in time. This is a book written from a place of righteous anger combined with keen social observation and a desire to point out how different the world could be. The book starts with Janet Evasson who was not born on our earth. From the very beginning we get to know that she is lesbian. The second is Jeannine Dadier who is a librarian in New York city . The Joanna, who had turned into a man. The fourth is Jael who comes from an alternative world where Womanlanders are at war with Manlanders; men and women live in separate armed camps. She is an assassin who enjoys killing men. The four J's have met each other on our Earth that brings both good and evil. Janet comes to our Earth where she meets Joanna and Jeannine to study men as there are none on her world; Whileaway .

**Keywords:** Female man, feminism, utopian, dystopian, science fiction, technology, radical environment, ideal world

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**المستخلص:**

يحاول البحث إثبات أن رواية "الرجل المرأة" هي مزج بين اليوتوبيا والديستوبيا. هذه الرواية هي واحدة من روايات العالم الخيالي للكاتبة جوانا روس، وهي واحدة من أقوى كاتبات الحركة النسوية من خلال الخيال العلمي بطريقة واضحة وليس بها أى غموض . وهي أيضا كاتبة مقال وناقدة. يدور هذا العمل حول أربع فتيات وهم: جينين وجوانا وجانيت وجيل على التوازي ذى ثقافات مختلفة وعوالم مختلفة لإثبات أن هذا العالم مختلف بكل الجهات.

تبدأ الرواية بولادة جانيت ايفاسون فى مزرعة بمقاطعة تسمى ويلواى وهي بعيدة كل البعد عن الكرة الأرضية، ومنذ البداية نعلم أنها من الفتيات الشواذ جنسيا. أما الشخصية الثانية فهي جينين دادبير التي تعمل أمينة مكتبة فى مدينة نيويورك وهي تعكس الكأبة الشديدة التي تمر بها البلاد. أما الثالثة فهي جوانا التي مرت بتجربة غريبة وهي أنها تحولت ألى رجل بعد إجراء عملية لها. وأخيرا جائت الرابعة وهي جيل التي اتت من عالم غريب حيث الحرب قائمة بين النساء والرجال وهم يعيشون فى معسكرات منعزلات بعضهن عن بعض، فهي تغتال الرجال وتستمتع بقتلهم. تقابلت الاربع فتيات على الكرة الارضية ليخططوا جميعا كيف التخلص من عنصر الرجل لكي تكون الارض خالصة للنساء فقط.

**الكلمات المفتاحية :** الرجل المرأة — الحركة النسوية — طوباوى — لاطوباوى — الخيال العلمى — التكنولوجيا — البيئة — الراديكالية — العالم المثالى.

The SF author can use his imagination to invent things not found in our world whereas the realist writer needs to focus on accuracy. But we can't categorize any "imaginative" fiction as SF . Adam Roberts gives us an explicit example to differentiate between SF and other imaginative fiction. He compares John Updike's magic-realist novel *Brazil* and Kessel's *Good News* from outer space to explain this difference. The first novel is about two lovers, a black boy and a white girl but at the end of the novel their skin colors change; the boy is white and the girl is black. On the other hand, the second novel tells about a kind of drug which changes skin pigment. It is planned by the novel's characters to put this drug in the American water to uproot racism from their society. Updike's novel may be regarded as

magic realism while Kessel's as SF although they both have the same main theme. Roberts justifies this as:

Kessel provides a specific mechanism for this change and Updike does not. Kessel's imaginary drug is not scientific-it does not and probably could not actually exist-but it is a material device and within the realm of the discourse it inhabits it as a plausible facilitator. Kessel's science fiction depends upon a certain premise, and that premise is symbolic of change. In other words, the drug is a symbol in terms of the text, but is a concrete and material symbol that is integrated into a certain discourse of scientific possibility (82).

Darko Suvin defines SF as "a literary genre ... whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (51). Suvin's definition assures that the "alternative" world of SF which is determined by "estrangement" and "cognition" must be possible and it must reflect the constraints of science (53). John W. Campbell, Jr. distinguishes between "fantasy" and "science fiction", suggesting that "fantasy is the only rule ... you need one, while, the basic rule of science fiction is set up a basic proposition then develop its consistence" (61). On the other hand, Delaney distinguishes between realistic and fantastic narratives, stating that "the world against which the thinking being, moves, acts, and reacts, operates differently from the immediate world of the hearer/speaker, or indeed, the reader/writer" (280).

Roberts argues that SF as a distinctive genre came to cultural prominence in the Age of Empires precisely because it is a necessary part of the official ideology of empire-forming that "difference needs to be flattened, or even eradicated. SF. In other words, figures as the expression of the subconscious aspect of this official ideology" (49).

Empire establishes and justifies itself by putting out the cultural message that the dominant culture in that empire is the best. It does that by raising up the values of the dominant culture and attacking those who are not part of that culture.

Feminist Science Fiction is related to Utopia: Science fiction is commonly accepted as a male realm; the authors are men, the heroes are men, and women's appearance is decorative. Only in the late sixties and early seventies, did a generation of women authors enter the science fiction field "Their voices infused science fiction with feminist ideas, theories and critical social commentaries about issues of gender, race, class and the survival of our species" ( Maralani 1). Mary Sheley, the founding mother of science fiction, could be considered the first science fiction writer with her *Frankenstein*. It tells about an ambitious scientist who creates an artificial creature, unnamed and described as the monster which becomes a destructive force. Maralani asserts that "science fiction is useful for feminists as a tool to attack and dismantle oppressive biases" (5). Joanna Russ, the famous American feminist, author and educator, was interviewed in 1984 and she said: " Science fiction is a natural, in a way, for any kind of radical thought. Because it is about things that have not happened and do not happen, it is very fruitful if you want to present the concerns of any marginal group, because you are doing it in a world where things are different" (1) .

Russ regards science fiction as a suitable medium for feminist issues because it enables feminists to shed light on political, social and gender issues and also criticize them. Koester argues that, " Feminists are using SF, which often emphasizes plot and characters, to present utopian visions, which traditionally place chief interest in political structures" (5). Maralani also emphasizes the same meaning:

Women science fiction writers often directly incorporated feminist themes and theories into their works. Themes of sex and gender roles appeared most often. Some feminist

writers explored these through utopian societies, others through dystopian ones. These themes exposed many problematic and controversial questions about women and society. Using these themes, science fiction writers can deconstruct and expose present realities, unmask hierarchies and offer alternative models which reconstruct human relationships in more egalitarian, positive and cooperative ways (7).

Hence, a question arises: why are most feminist utopias written in the science fiction form? Koester answers the question: SF allows depictions of both an “imaginary utopia” and imaginary “home base”, focusing on the present society. He sets out another reason that may be more convincing, suggesting that “feminist utopia would be so alien to existing patriarchal structures that would not be imaginable on this world” (5). Freedman justifies the close relationships between feminism and science fiction that “Science Fiction is able not only to display actually existing gender relations with the appropriate shock of defamiliarization, but also to offer speculative representations ... by properly utopian imaginings ... in character (2-3).

Charlotte Perkins’ *Gilman’s Harland* is amongst the first truly feminist visions of utopia. It is a women-only world where everyone lives peacefully until this peaceful world is interrupted by the arrival of three American explorers. Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Disposed* contrasts two societies, Anarres and Urros. Le Guin’s masterpiece, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, is about a society where the residents have the freedom to become either men or women when they chose to reproduce. Booker summarizes the feminist movement (concerning the literary utopias) of the late 1960s and the 1970s:

This tradition gained considerable energy with the feminist movement of the late 1960s and the 1970s. Indeed during

this period writers like Piercy, Ursula K. Le Guin, Samuel Delaney, and Joanna Russ produced works that reenergized the utopian genre as a whole, moving toward an open-endedness that sought to overcome the tendency toward monological stagnation that had long haunted conceptualization of utopia (2).

Many feminist science fiction writers have tried to envision a world without men. They have created an all-female world. In Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women*, the women live within walled cities and are in complete control of the government, science and education of the world. Meanwhile, men live in bands outside these walls. Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to women's Country* shares Sargent's main theme. Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* features four women from alternative Earths. It is both science fiction and utopian novel. It includes a women-only utopian realm called Whileaway. Sally Miller Gearheart gives a concise and comprehensive definition of a feminist utopia:

A feminist utopian novel is one which **a.** contrasts the present with an envisioned idealized society, **b.** offers a comprehensive critique of present values, **c.** sees men or male institutions of a major cause of present social ills, and **d.** presents women not only as at least the equals of men but also as the sole arbiters of their reproductive functions (296)

Hawthorn adds another trait to literary utopias in general "The literary utopias denied the processes of social change by describing a state of perfection from which there could be no departure" (55). Hawthorn also held an interesting comparison between those who organize "real utopia" and the authors of "literary utopias": "The

authors of literary utopias, who search for the perfect ... should indeed have an easier time than those who organize real utopias. They can work free from the bonds of reality... they can draft the specifications of the ideal community” (22).

Joanna Russ (1937-2011) is an American writer, academic and radical feminist. She is the author of a number of works of science fiction, fantasy and feminist literary criticism. She is best known for *The Female Man*, a novel combining utopian fiction and satire. Russ came to be noticed in the science fiction world in the late 1960s, in particular for her award-nominated novel *Picnic on Paradise*. At the time, SF was a field dominated by male authors, writing for a predominantly male audience, but women were starting to enter the field in larger numbers. Russ, an out lesbian, was one of the most outspoken authors to challenge male dominance of the field, and is generally regarded as one of the leading feminist science fiction scholars and writers. She was also one of the first major science fiction writers to take slash fiction and its cultural and literary implications seriously. Over the course of her life, she published over fifty short stories. Russ was associated with the American New Wave of science fiction.

Typically considered a science fiction author, Russ’s writings on pornography and her important contributions to feminist thinking about pornography and sexuality are often overlooked. She wrote several influential essays on these subjects, including “ Pornography by Women, for Women, with Love”, “Pornography and the Doubleness of Sex for Women”, and “Being Against Pornography”, which can be found in her archival pieces located in the University of Oregon’s Special Collections. These essays include very detailed descriptions of her views on pornography and how influential it was to feminist thought in the late 80s and early 90s. Specifically, in “Being Against Pornography”, She calls pornography a feminist issue. She sees pornography to be the essence of evil in society, calling it “a monolithic, easily recognizable, uniquely evil essence; and at the same time, commercially available, explicit, sexual fantasy” (16). Her issues with pornography range from feminist issues, to women’s sexuality in general and how porn prevents women from freely express their sexual selves, like men can. Russ believed that anti-pornography activists were not

addressing how women experienced pornography created by men, a topic that she addressed in "Being Against Pornography", she directly addresses the issue in her multiple published and unpublished essays.

This paper will attempt to show that *The Female Man* could be a Utopian and dystopian novel at once. *The Female Man* is one of the most famous novels of feminist science fiction, written by Joanna Russ, one of the strongest writers of the first era of explicitly feminist SF and one of the most challenging. Along with Alice Sheldon and Sheri Tepper, she is probably the best known author whose approach tended towards the directly confrontational. She is also a noted essayist, critic, and reviewer. *The Female Man* is about four different women: Jeanine, Joanna, Janet and Jael. They are parallels of sorts but from far different cultures, alternate worlds displaced in time. This is a book written from a place of righteous anger combined with keen social observation and a desire to point out how different the world could be. The book starts with Janet Evasson who "was born on a farm on Whileaway" (1) and was not born on our earth. From the very beginning we get to know that she is lesbian "I love my wife" (2). The second is Jeannine Dadier who is a librarian in New York city and "lives in 1969 in an America that never recovered from the Great depression" (Ayles 1). The third is Joanna, who had an experience on "the seventh of February last, nineteen-sixty nine". She "turned into a man" (20). The fourth is Jael who comes from an alternative world where Womanlanders are at war with Manlanders; men and women live in separate armed camps. She is an assassin who enjoys killing men. The four J's have met each other on our Earth that brings both good and evil. Janet comes to our Earth where she meets Joanna and Jeannine to study men as there are none on her world; Whileaway "There have been no men on Whileaway for at least eight centuries- I don't mean no human beings, of course, but no men-and this society, run entirely by women" (9).

Janet informs Joanna and Jeannine about her peaceful society on Whileaway and they tell her about the relationships between men and



women on our Earth. Jael comes to earth as well to visit Janet where the four J's met together. Towards the end of the novel Jael takes Janet, Joanna and Jeannine to visit her brutal world of separate male and female societies. But none of the three J's is impressed by Jael's world. The novel shifts among these worlds; Whileaway (the utopian world), Jael's world (dystopian world), and our Earth (the status quo world). Russ's novel takes place in :

Four worlds inhabited by four J's, very different women who share the same genotype: Jeannine Dadier (who lives in 1969 in an America that never recovered from the great depression), Joanna (who also lives in 1969, but in an America like ours, and who merges at times with Joanna Russ, the author), Janet Evason (who lives in the all-female utopian future of Whileaway), and Alice Reasoner, christened Jael (who lives in the dystopian Future where Womanlanders are at war with Manlanders (Ayres 1).

When Janet is interviewed on television, the M.C. asks her, : "How do you think your society on Whileaway will react to the reappearance of men from Earth ... after an isolation of eight hundred years?". But Janet can't imagine "why" men should come to her Whileaway. The M.C. tells her: "Do you want to banish sex from Whileaway?" (9). Janet and all Whileaway citizens were born and gave birth through gene splicing. Janet's parents are two mothers: "My mother's name was Eva, my other mother's name Alicia" (1). Joanna is very interested in her ... all I did was ... dress for the Man. Smile for the Man ... sympathize with the Man. Flatter the Man ... Entertain the Man. Keep the Man ... Then a new interest entered my life" (29).

Joanna is not the only one who admires Janet and is happy to have

her on earth, Laura does as well . Laura, the teenage daughter of the family that hosts Janet, doesn't like the heterosexual world she is living in. She shares Joanna's rejection for the rules that govern the society; mainly the inequality between men and women. They both admire Janet because she stands as a symbol of liberty and independence. When Laura was five years old she told her Mum: " I didn't want to be a girl but she said oh no, being a girl is wonderful. Why? Because you can wear pretty clothes and you don't have to do anything; the men will do it for you ... I could stay home in lazy comfort listening to the radio and eating chocolates" (65).

This was completely upsetting for Laura who thought that, when she was five, "I'm not a girl, I'm a genius" (65). Besides, she used to think that "women were always sick" (66). Laura doesn't like songs about " I enjoy being a girl, I'm so glad I'm female" and asks if there is a song about "how glad I am I'm a boy?" (66). She, the same as Joanna, rejects the idea that everything must be done for the sake of "Man": " ,Finding The Man. Keeping The Man. Not scaring the Man, building up the Man, pleasing the Man, interesting The Man, following The Man ... losing yourself in The Man" (66). Laura also is "daydreaming that she's Genghis Khan" (60). But at the same time she doesn't want to be Lesbian like Janet. She knows that being Lesbian is abnormal and it is also abnormal to do what she doesn't like to do or to be "I've never slept with a girl. I couldn't ... that abnormal" (68). On the other hand, we have Whileaway where women enjoy a great deal of liberty. They can go wherever they want without being watched or encountering any danger "In all of Whileaway there is no one who can keep you from being where you please ... no one who will follow you ... no one who will attempt to rape you" (82). Russ here sheds some light on what takes place in Jeannine's and Joanna's world which is opposite to what takes place in Whileaway. All the things mentioned here do happen in the heterosexual societies. Janet tells of "Taboos on Whileaway" (63 ).

The Whileawayan world is a peaceful one. They celebrate

almost everything around them. Russ delicately a whole section of part five in her novel to elaborate “What Whileaway Celebrate”(82). Janet enjoys all “the Whileawayan improvements” “no rheumatism, no sinus trouble, no allergies, no appendix, good feet, good teeth, no double joints, and so forth” (162). Whileawayans are immune to all kinds of “parasites”, which maybe symbols of men; Whileaway have immunity to men and their maltreatment to women “Whileawayans breed into themselves an immunity to ticks, mosquitoes, and other insect parasites. I have none.” (104).

The way, as Russ states here, to change all the rules governing the heterosexual societies is through positivism and unity; “a crowd of gnats ... Talking gnats” (104). Jeannine always has dreams about Whileaway. She is attracted to what Janet has told them about it. However, the name of the feminist utopia also reveals its drawbacks, : “ Whileaway ... That means it’s just a pastime” (108). Susan Ayres arises the issue of “separatism” regarding Whileaway “Although Whileaway’s all- women (lesbian) society undermines gender relations in heterosexual society, it also raises the problem of separatism” (7). Joanna Russ comments on this in her book; “Recent Feminist Utopias “I believe the separatism is primary, and ... the authors are not subtle in their reasons for creating separatist utopias ... men are dangerous. They also hog the good things of this world” (Quot. In Ayres, 7). Russ expresses her frustration at women’s social conditions as well “My doctor is male. My lawyer is male... My land lord is male. ... All cops are male. All firemen are male ... The Army is male. The Navy is male ... I think most of the people in the world are male” (203-4).Then she adds that “it’s a legend that half the population of the world is female; where on earth are they keeping them all” (204).

Man is the center of women’s lives, Due to male dominance, Joanna decides to be a female man “we are defective, therefore that which we need, therefore that which we want. Become it” (139). Joanna decided to “Become it”; to become a female man. She destroys gender and all the systems and rules of heterosexual world

she lives in, she decided to become herself "I'm not a woman; I'm a man with a woman's face. I'm a woman with a man's mind" (139). She will not be able to live in a Whileawayan world because it is merely a utopia; doesn't really exist. The "plague" which wiped out all the men on Whileaway is a "lie" (211). Joanna just wants to be herself; she wants to reconcile with herself "if you let yourself through yourself and into yourself and out of yourself, turn yourself inside out, give yourself the kiss of reconciliation" (139). Joanna declares it now that she is "a man" and we have to "Listen to the female man": "you will think of me as a Man and treat me as a man" (140). That is why Janet is thought to be "our only savior" and her Whileaway is "a compromise between two worlds. She seemed to know where she was going" (87).

Jeannine, on the other hand, enjoys her being a female "I enjoy being a girl, don't you? I wouldn't be a man for anything". Jeannine, who "is going to put on her Mommy's shoes" and accept being a wife in her heterosexual world, is now twenty-nine years old and she shouldn't waste any time (119). Her Mum advises her not to wait any more "You don't want to be a dried-up old spinster at forty ... You are twenty-nine. You're getting old. You ought to marry someone who can take care of you" (114). Jeannine should remove all the barriers between her and the world in which she lives in "There is some barriers between Jeannine and real life which can be removed only by a man or by marriage" (120). Jeannine really wants to get married, but she is also "very romantic" (123) and "lands in the lap of the possible" (125). Jeannine, as Ayrse comments, has "the potential to be the most intelligent of the genotype of the four J's"(5).

Now we come to Jael's world. A world which is divided into the "Have" and the "Have -nots"; "the two sides"; "men" and "women" (165). We have "The Manlanders" and "The Womanlanders". We get to know that "Manlanders buy infants from the Womanlanders and bring them up in batches, save for the rich few who can order children made from their very own semen" (167).

It is a world of fear that each woman wears “luminous, shocking-pink crest on chest and back” in order not to be shot by “the Manlanders who all carry guns” (166). Womanlanders really do hate Manlanders but they have business with them. The Boss-man also assures that “Now it’s obvious to anyone that we need each other. Even in separate camps we still have to trade, you still have to have the babies, things haven’t changed that much” (175). Jael is an assassin. She kills also the boss-man after his trial to seduce her. The boss-man hurts Jael with his bloody words “You’re a woman ... You’re a beautiful woman ... All you women ... You’re waiting for me, waiting for a man” (181). She explains why she has such a feeling in a philosophical way. She kills men to have a reconciliation with herself. She murders men to prove her existence “Murder is my one way out” (195).

Jael repeats the pronoun “I, I, I” like magic (195). Jael’s world is a dystopian world. It is a world full of fear, wars, and bloodshed; a world full of nightmares. Janet’s world and Jael’s are two opposites; Whileaway, the peaceful prosperous world, and Womanland and Manland, the military unjustifiable world. In the scene where Janet and Jael are having a meal together, they have different viewpoints concerning their meal. Jael comes to earth to “find my other selves” ... She comes to “get hold of the three of you” (160). Jael and the other three J’s are of the same “Genetic patterns”: “We are less alike than identical twins, to be sure, but much more alike than strangers have any right to be”. The four J’s are very distinct figures. Each of them has her own dreams, upsets, drawbacks, speculations and fears “Here is Jeannine, the youngest of us all with her smooth face: tall, thin ... And there’s Joanna, somewhat older, much more active, with a different gait ... There’s Janet, harder than the two of you put together, with her sun-bleached hair ... And I (Jael), who could throw you all across the room, though I don’t look it” (162), a quotation that proves they could be both utopian and dystopian characters.

Russ’s *The Female Man* has two alternative worlds; a utopian and dystopian one. This is the question of the paper. Both worlds do

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not represent victory for women. Getting rid of men or the complete separation between men and women are not the proper and convincing way to destroy heterosexual societies and institutions. Neither the plague nor men assassination is the key to a real woman utopia. Russ, at the end of her novel, declares her admiration for Janet Evasion but assures that “we don’t believe in her” (213). The female man, Joanna, is the hero of the novel and Joanna’s change into the female man shows that for all women, change into the female man is possible through language. Joanna thinks that her “diction” will reveal her “true nature” : “You will notice that even my diction is becoming feminine, thus revealing my true nature” (137). Russ swears at the end of her novel that change will come, that women will be free “We will all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we will all be free. I swear it on my own head. I swear it on my ten fingers. We will be ourselves” (213).

The worlds of Joanna, Jeannine, Jael and Janet represent four different worlds. This study penetrates Joanna’s and Jeannine’s contemporary worlds as well as Jael’s and Janet’s dystopian and utopian worlds. Science fiction underlies the plot of the novel. The uniqueness of this work emerges from the displaying of these different and contradictory worlds and views in such an interesting and clever way. Russ’s language and style are unattainable and controversial. She displays her viewpoint in a sugar-coated literary style. Russ makes a good use of the principles of science fiction. Her utopian world; *Whileaway*, was based on the scientific hypothesis of the “plague” which attacked men only and the “gene splicing” in which the process of the *Whileawayan* women’s productivity took place. *The Female Man* reflects Russ’s convictions towards some of the feminist issues such as sex, men’s superiority and social organization. She wanted to deliver her message to the whole world “Go, little book, trot through Texas and Vermont and Alaska and Maryland and Washington and Florida and Canada and England and France” (213).

If Janet's story is a sort of utopian alternate future, following the basic model of female separatist societies. Jeannine's is the dystopia drawn from our past. She is locked entirely into traditional gender roles and the desire to catch a man and be a wife. She may be the hardest character to read about because she locks herself into the worst constraints of that role. She's almost entirely passive, and she's devoted to a man for whom it's difficult to have any respect at all.

Janet is interesting in part because she is not particularly exceptional in either ability or intelligence. She just reflects the Whileaway culture, which leads to some sharp conflicts with the norms of Joanna's time. It is a very effective tactic for alienating the reader from current gender roles and sowing how absurd they appear with a different set of starting assumptions. Russ makes the point clearly; this is not a book that tends towards the subtle, although it can be a little hard to track the characters' progress through alternate timelines.

Towards the end of the book, they meet the fourth character. Jael is by far the most aggressive of any of them. Janet, the representative of the supposed utopia, does not agree with Jael or her methods, and the relationship between their world is interestingly complex. None of the four characters are exactly wrong; none of them are entirely right either. They are all struggling in different ways with how to define femininity. While the quiet and simplicity of Janet's world has definite appeal, it is the sort of utopia that one isn't sure one would actually want. And Jael has some pointed commentary on how wanting such a world is one thing, but the acts required to create it is quite another.

Many of the scenes that show gender relations and male behavior are both painful and funny. Reading it nowadays it's clear that social norms have changed; men do and say things here that they would no longer be able to get away. But it's also clear that some of the underlying attitudes have not changed, in part because the plot is sketchy at best. It's a collection of individual excerpts and

commentary, only some of which are shaped like a story. Much of it feels stream of consciousness, and when cut between three different viewpoints, it's also occasionally confusing.

Despite their symbolic value, the four Js are fully realized characters and Russ spends most of the book writing their back stories, in their own voices. At the same time these four women are all clearly in essence the same woman, in different circumstances and the way Russ tells her story underscores that. Sometimes she uses the third person to talk objectively about a character and her feelings, sometimes her story is told in the first person, with viewpoints shifting quickly between characters and worlds, where every now and then it becomes impossible to figure out which 'I' is actually telling a story. Frequent cutting between stories and short chapters help with this confusion and it takes effort to keep track of who is talking when – you just have to let go in the end and go with the flow.

None of these women is happy or able to do anything about their happiness, unlike the well-adjusted Janet, who never had to deal with men until she started jumping worlds. Janet is also the only one with a proper fulfilling sex life without hang ups, in contrast to the patriarchy ridden other three. She is the only one who gets to have sex in the book, with a young woman who until then was continually frustrated with the expectations her family and society expect of her to be satisfied with pretty dresses and babies.

This is also a book where there are no important male characters; they're bit players, caricatures, stereotypes, but never important other than as objects for the main characters to have to work around or manipulate. The female man itself is Johanna (Russ) who could only be taken seriously as a human when she turned herself into a man.

Therefore, Russ's novel refers to the problematic issues in the 1970s when the feminist movement rose to power. Because *The Female Man* was written during the 1970s, the character Joanna's



world is most similar to the world the author lived in. The novel also addressed the environmental movement as shown through Janet's utopian society. Though Janet's world is extremely technologically advanced, the women choose to live in agrarian societies. *Whileaway* forms an idealistic image of an organic environment where nature is preserved despite the radical development of technology. Joanna (the author) also mentions the Great Depression, which occurs in 1929 when economies all over the world took a devastating turning point. In Jeannine's world, however, the Great Depression never ended. The text suggests that the continuation of the Great Depression forced women to seek husbands for financial support and prohibited women from finding jobs of their own. As a result, the text implies that the Great Depression perpetuated gender roles.

From this we can detect that Russ' four settings may cover the utopian and dystopian milieus. Joanna exists in a world that's similar to Earth in the 1970s. Then we see Jeannine lives in a world where depression never ended. The second world War never happened because Hitler was assassinated in 1936, and Chiang Kai-shek controls Hong Kong, as Japanese imperialism still dominates the Chinese mainland. *Whileaway* (Janet's world) is a utopian society in the far future where all the men died from a gender-specific plague over 800 years ago. Their technology enables them to genetically merge in order to procreate. On the other hand, Jael's world is a dystopia where men and women are literally engaged in a battle of the sexes. Although they have been in conflict for over 40 years, the two societies still participate in trade with each other. Women trade children in exchange for resources. In order for men to cope with their sexual desires, young boys undergo cosmetic surgery that physically changes their appearance so that they look like women. In this sense the novel proves that utopia is part and parcel of dystopia. They cannot separate from each other. The world can be real and farfetched at once. Dystopia may be changed into utopia and utopia may be changed into dystopia.

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