“Humanity is Unnatural!”

Feminisms and Science-Fiction Strategies in Joanna Russ’s

The Female Man and The Adventures of Alyx

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1. Introduction

Joanna Russ, recipient of Nebula, Hugo, and James Tiptree Jr. awards, is a radical feminist and queer science fiction author perhaps best known for her 1975 novel *The Female Man*, a pioneering novel within the feminist utopian genre due to Russ’s “utopian vision, activist solutions and radical narrative interventions” (Tatiana Teslenko 124). The novel’s four protagonists, each of whom lives in a separate parallel universe, originate from the same genotype. Joanna lives in a world closely resembling late-sixties U.S. and is implied to be the author of the book, or in other words, she is a persona for the author. Jeannine Dadier hails from an alternative late-sixties U.S. where World War II and its subsequent technological advances never occurred, where the Great Depression is still ongoing, and where women are extremely oppressed. Janet Evason lives in Whileaway, a high-tech though largely agrarian lesbian separatist-feminist utopia where the common conception is that its male population was eradicated by a plague. Alice Reasoner, also known as Jael, inhabits a world where women and men are segregated in Womanland and Manland, and where an open war between them has reached a stalemate. These four protagonists are collectively referred to “Js” in the novel (e.g. TFM 181). Russ explains the parallel universes in *The Female Man* through a built-in model of possible worlds theory (PW) (*TFM* 6-7), which anticipates the theory’s use in literary criticism. *The Female Man* was only published in 1975 despite being completed around 1969-1971—Teslenko (21) and Jeanne Cortiel (57) appear to disagree on the time of the novel’s completion. While Russ partly attributed this delay to her agent (Cortiel 57), some of the other possible reasons for this are Russ’s attempt to “disrupt the narrative codes of patriarchal fiction” with techniques such as ambiguous narration and challenging reader expectations (Teslenko 125), Russ’s “explicit feminist politics” (Cortiel 58), and the fact that science fiction was at the time a “bastion of masculinism” (Cortiel 1).
Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Russ’s short fiction anthology *The Adventures of Alyx*, which includes all except one of the six works Russ wrote around the character Alyx, also has a confusing publication history (Wolfe 3–4). The Alyx stories tell a fairly consistent story of the titular protagonist, who drifts through occupations such as religious delegate, pick-lock, pirate, and thief in a world resembling the Ancient-era Mediterranean region, before being recruited into a conflict in the far future by the mysterious Trans-Temporal Military Authority. Four of the Alyx stories are mostly representative of the sword-and-sorcery subgenre of fantasy while two of them fall under the science-fiction genre (Wolfe 5–6).

Despite their generic differences, *The Adventures of Alyx* and *The Female Man* share recurring Russ motifs such as strong, fully-formed woman protagonists and violent acts they commit against the patriarchy (Vest 157–158; Mendlesohn x). Additionally, as observed by commentators such as Teslenko, *The Female Man* is “socio-historically contingent and implicated in the politics” of the second-wave feminist movement Russ was contemporary with (124), much like her other work from the same period, which is perhaps best exemplified in the satirical 1960’s scenes in *The Female Man*. This has led to some contemporary commentators arguing that certain aspects of Russ’s work are outdated: for instance, Judith Kegan Gardiner criticises *The Female Man*’s satirical scenes as “embarrassing even to recall” (88), and Jeanne Cortiel claims that the character of Alyx represents an earlier brand of feminism incompatible with the direction feminist positions had shifted towards by the mid-1970’s (47). Indeed, Gary K. Wolfe identifies a critical tendency to view *The Adventures of Alyx* as a formative work of an emerging feminist author, despite the critical acclaim and the attention its titular protagonist has enjoyed within science fiction and fantasy circles, and the fact that the first five Alyx stories were written between 1968 and 1970, i.e. roughly parallel to *The Female Man* (4). Contemporary criticism of *The Female Man* has also focused on its problematic representation of transgender identities (Stephen B),
for which Russ briefly apologised in a later interview (“The Legendary Joanna Russ Interviewed by Samuel R. Delany.”).

Both *The Female Man* and *The Adventures of Alyx* have nonetheless influenced authors and theorists alike. While *The Adventures of Alyx* appears more obscure than *The Female Man*, Wolfe mentions two authors who have cited the character Alyx as an inspiration more recently, Nancy Kress in 1993 and Mary Gentle in 2000 (4-5). Out of theorists, particularly Donna Haraway has been inspired by Russ, as is evident in her 1985 essay “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”. Discussing her influences, Haraway proclaims a number of authors (including Russ) as “theorists for cyborgs” (173) and mentions both *The Adventures of Alyx* and *The Female Man* in a footnote (247). Haraway explains that these authors explore high-tech worlds, bodies, politics, and transgressing boundaries, among other things (173-174). Regarding *The Female Man* and *The Adventures of Alyx* specifically, Haraway writes that Russ’s protagonists “refuse the reader’s search for innocent wholeness while granting the wish for heroic quests, exuberant eroticism, and serious politics” (178), discussing the same reader expectations as Teslenko, and correctly asserting that especially *The Female Man* is indeed a thoroughly political novel. While multiple papers have been written on *The Female Man* and “Cyborg Manifesto” in conjunction, it seems strange that little to no research appears to have been conducted on *The Adventures of Alyx* through a Harawayan lens given the obvious connection. I shall thus attempt to examine the Alyx stories alongside “Cyborg Manifesto” and its intersections with *The Female Man* to bring originality to my field.

While acknowledging that Russ’s work is problematic in some regards, then, the aim of this thesis is to counter the criticism of Russ’s oeuvre as outdated and sometimes stuck in second-wave feminist positions, instead demonstrating how Russ’s use of sci-fi strategies such as cyborgism, possible-worlds theory, utopianism, and concretised metaphors in *The
Female Man and The Adventures of Alyx enables her to move beyond second-wave feminist positions and anticipate third-wave feminism in ways that are still relevant today. The first chapter consist of an exposition of Russ’s relation to her contemporaries and dominant discourses of the second wave. In the second chapter, the functions of the four aforementioned sci-fi strategies in The Female Man and The Adventures of Alyx will be examined alongside the political implications of Russ’s work.
2. Russ and Second-Wave Feminism

Russ makes direct allusions to her second-wave feminist contemporaries at the end of *The Female Man*, name-dropping Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Germaine Greer, Shulamith Firestone, “and all the rest” (213), i.e. key figures of the movement, and therefore situates her novel in that context. The important question, then, is exactly how she relates to dominant discourses typical of the American second-wave feminist movement.

The novel’s historically situated scenes, mostly those set in Joanna’s world, read as localised observations of the functions of the patriarchy. One of the most revealing is the dinner party in Joanna’s Manhattan where she takes Janet after she is sent from Whileaway to Joanna’s world (*TFM* 33). A man named Ewing, first introduced as “Sharp Glasses”, explains to Janet that feminism is unnecessary because “most women are liberated now” and “you can’t challenge men in their own fields”, while claiming, “I haven’t got anything against women’s intelligence. Some of my colleagues are women … It’s women’s psychology.” (43) Sharp Glasses additionally argues that men are physically stronger than women (43-44) and thus implies that male violence towards women is “natural” (Teslenko 131). Ironically, Sharp Glasses wipes his metonymic spectacles in between clauses, diverting attention to his own “physical limitations” (*TFM* 44). At this point Janet, oblivious to the courting practices in Joanna’s world, is becoming increasingly irritated and Joanna, intent on preventing an escalation, attempts to leave the party with her (*TFM* 44). However, the visibly intoxicated host of the party starts flirting with Janet and refuses to let her go, to which Janet responds by beating him (44-6), undermining Sharp Glasses’ argument. When Joanna asks why Janet beat the host, she simply responds, “He called me a baby” (47), which illustrates the cultural and societal differences between Joanna’s world and Whileaway. Since “gender is not a basis of oppression” on Whileaway (Cortiel 214), Janet does not feel obliged to submit to the patriarchal gender roles of Joanna’s world. Janet’s violent response is a radical enough
transgression of social conventions in Joanna’s world that both the host and Joanna appear helpless and must rely on their notebooks to find the appropriate words to say (45-47), books which parody populist self-help books within the discourse of naturalised gender roles and sex differences.

In fact, Janet is one of several Russ protagonists who commit violent acts against the patriarchy. Jason P. Vest argues that rather than “masculinizing” her women characters through violence which has traditionally been portrayed as a male trait, Russ believed that physical violence and aggression are not “exclusively male” characteristics “foreign to female psychology”, which sets her apart from her contemporaries (157). Cortiel sees even the early works of Russ as indicative of an “uneasiness with stable identities and sweeping, monolithic political claims” (210), which Russ made explicit by arguing that most of the “characterological sex differences we take for granted are in fact learned and not innate” in an afterword to “When it Changed” (qtd. in Sleight 197). This might not be obvious from The Female Man alone, however, since the novel may appear polemical given the constant juxtaposition of women and men. Russ’s views of gender and sex are shared by “a number of feminist critics” whose “positions do not solely rely on the integrity and homogeneity of the category woman”, one of them being Haraway (Cortiel 210). The universalised “women’s experience” countered by these critics is a construct materialised through feminist positions which “totalized their own (white, Western) concept of ‘woman’ as an essentially homogenous group of innocent victims” (Cortiel 211). As Amanda Boulter documents, questioning “what it meant to ‘be’ a woman” was not of interest to many radical feminists such as Robin Morgan, who in the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference attacked a transgender woman’s participation as a “male” intrusion of women-only “personal-political” spaces (152). While Boulter misgendered this individual, Beth Elliott, and misidentified her as a cross-dresser like Morgan did, she is correct in asserting that the discourse of the
universal women’s experience resulted in many being “marginalized by … their own liberation movement” (152). Although it might seem that the Js, originating from one genotype, represent this “illusion of a global sisterhood” (Boulter’s term, 152), this is actually not the case since the Js have drastically different experiences of what it means to be a woman—or lack thereof, as the category of “woman” has ceased to be meaningful in Whileaway, as Cortiel among others observes (214). Moreover, by transforming into a “female man”, Joanna simultaneously embraces and rejects the category of woman in order to escape the patriarchy’s definition of her identity (Cortiel 212). Russ’s subversion of the traditional notions of gender and sex, while perhaps subtler than those of later generations, then, suggests that dismissing her work as outdated is not entirely justified.

However, as mentioned before, Russ’s representation of transgender identities in The Female Man has attracted criticism which stems from the later sections of the novel set in Manland. I believe this is important to discuss since as Cheryl Morgan observes, “the change in Russ’s attitude towards gay men and trans people over the years” is absent from some notable entries of Russ studies (“On Joanna Russ”). Since the Manlanders are unable and unwilling to copulate amongst each other—unlike Whileawayans—they purchase infants from Womanland, “save for the rich few who can order children made from their very own semen” (167). At the age of five, the children are subjected to a macho rite of passage in which “little boys are made into Men” (167), but those who fail the test are subject to what T.X. Watson describes as “forced feminization” through surgery (The Female Man (End-of-book post). Some make the “full change”, whereas others refuse the surgery, which separates them into the problematically named groups of “changed” and “half-changed” (TFM 167). The latter instead perform what Boulter calls an “excessive parody of femininity” (158). While Watson acknowledges that Russ may have intended the forced feminization as an “exaggerated criticism of the way hegemonic masculinity affects men who fail to live up to
the ideal of the “real-man”’, they point out that Russ’s later apology problematises such a reading and, more importantly, even if Russ is given the “benefit of the doubt”, she fails to take trans women into account while creating the scenario (“The Female Man (End-of-book post”). Indeed, the passages in which Russ describes Manland’s social order contain numerous lines which come across as transphobic. While Russ points out that no one asks the “changed or half-changed what they like” (TFM 167; italics in original) and the “I” narrating the chapter claims to be “respectful of ruined lives and forced choices” (172), one cannot help but disagree given Russ’s disdainful descriptions of them. They are infantilised, as they are described as wearing earrings “of no use or interest to fully six-sevenths of the adult human race” (TFM 171; italics mine). Anna, Jael’s contact and link to Boss, is mocked by the narrator: “This one has intelligence. Or is it only the weight of his false lashes?” (171). As Russ’s terminology already suggests, the bodies and genitalia of the “half-changed” and “changed” are repeatedly over-emphasised, perhaps most explicitly in the following passage:

I’m cynical enough to wonder sometimes if the Manlanders’ mystique isn’t just an excuse to feminize anybody with a pretty face—but look again, they believe it: look under the padding, the paint, the false hair, the corsetry, the skin rinses and the magnificent dresses and you’ll see nothing exceptional, only faces and bodies like any other man’s. (172-3)

These examples suggest that, in Watson’s words, “Russ bought into the prejudice that trans women are men trying to infiltrate women’s spaces or replace women in the social order” (The Female Man (End-of-book post), and Morgan even suggests that the way trans people are portrayed in The Female Man parallels Janice Raymond’s views which are now “widely regarded as … unpleasant bigotry”, although Morgan argues it is “understandable given the state of gender politics” at the time (“On Joanna Russ”). Watson’s advice is to “look into the treatment of trans women in second-wave feminism and take care to separate Russ’s
prejudices from her criticism of hegemonic masculinity” although they find it difficult to praise Russ for the latter given her execution of it (The Female Man (End-of-book post)). Thus, while Russ may have dismissed the singular notion of women’s experience, it appears her views of transgender women were at the time less progressive.

As has been demonstrated, while it would be an exaggeration to claim Russ was a full-fledged third-wave feminist during the second wave, then, some of Russ’s responses to second-wave feminist positions are still relevant today. In the next chapter, Russ’s use of science-fiction strategies will be discussed to further this line of argument.
3. Russ and Science-Fiction Strategies

Having established how Russ relates to her contemporary discourses, let us move on to science-fiction strategies. In this chapter, Russ’s use of the four aforementioned sci-fi conventions, cyborgism, PW theory, utopianism, and concretised metaphors will be examined and discussed in conjunction with relevant theorists of each field. As mentioned before, I will demonstrate that Russ’s use of these four strategies anticipates later theories and allows her to further move beyond the discourses of her contemporaries.

3.1 Cyborgism

Just as the ideas of previous theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir were picked up by Friedan et al. and built upon, Russ in turn built upon theirs, and later generations representative of less polemical and more intersectional positions have taken up Russ’s ideas and expanded on them. This is perhaps most prominently exemplified by Haraway: in addition to her name-dropping in “Cyborg Manifesto”, she acknowledges that Russ’s interpretation of the “female man” was the basis of the figure “FemaleMan©” in her 1997 book *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (69). In this section, I will argue for the profits of reading Russ through Haraway and Haraway through Russ, a fruitful coupling given their at least partially aligned political goals. Additionally, I will suggest a reading of “Cyborg Manifesto” as a text implicated in the feminist utopian genre, which shall be further discussed later on in this chapter.
With “Cyborg Manifesto”, Haraway intends to “build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism” centred around the cyborg figure, which Haraway defines as both a “hybrid of machine and organism” as it commonly appears in science fiction, and as a “creature of social reality” (149), which establishes the multi-faceted nature of the cyborg. While Haraway approaches her subject from positions within the three ideologies mentioned, she clarifies her myth is “[p]erhaps more faithful as blasphemy is faithful, than as reverent worship and identification” (149) or in other words, Haraway is partly critical of certain positions originating from these ideologies. As mentioned before, Haraway, too, sees the universalised women’s experience as a discourse “constructed” by feminist movements and claims it is her cyborg, a “matter of fiction and lived experience”, that will “change what counts as women’s experience in the late twentieth century” (149). This claim is aptly suggested by the subtitle of the essay, “An Ironic Dream of a Common Language for Women in the Integrated Circuit”, an allusion to Adrienne Rich’s 1978 poetry collection *Dream of a Common Language*—Haraway’s subtitle reads as a digital update of that of the collection. Instead of unity through the singular, universalised women’s experience, Haraway calls for a “coalition” through “affinity, not identity”, defining the former as “related not by blood but by choice, the appeal of one chemical nuclear group for another, avidity” (155). This is vaguely paralleled in *The Female Man*, where right before Jael meets the other Js, the latter suspect someone is “collecting J’s” (*TFM* 155), which is indeed revealed to be Jael (160). She compares the Js to “the old story of Doppelgänger”, explaining that “[t]his is the double you recognize instantly, with whom you feel a mysterious kinship” (162) in an early attempt at bringing the Js together to participate in the revolutionary war against the patriarchy.

Moving beyond singular identities, Haraway encourages “pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and responsibility in their construction” as a means of escape from ‘Western’
traditions such as “racist, male-dominant capitalism” (150; italics in original). The key boundaries Haraway wishes to confuse are the three dualist oppositions between “human and animal” (151), “animal-human (organism) and machine” (152), as well as “physical and non-physical” (153). Haraway also claims that “the boundary between science fiction and reality is an optical illusion” (149). One of the clearest manifestations of Haraway’s statement of the blurred boundaries between reality and (science) fiction is the technology we now possess and have possessed for some time, partially due to which we already live in a near-science-fi world. Furthermore, since “[c]ontemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs” who inhabit “worlds ambiguously natural and crafted” (149), the boundaries between reality and fiction are increasingly blurring. Even the formal aspects of Haraway’s work appear to mirror this claim, evident from her usage of words such as “myth” (“Cyborg Manifesto” 149) and “story” (“Cyborg Manifesto” 173) to describe her essay, and the rhetorical strategy of figuration she uses throughout her work (see particularly Modest_Witness).

Due to Haraway’s embrace of the seeming contradictions she defines the cyborg through, and her rejection of a more conventional sum-of-the-parts approach, particularly the ontology of Haraway’s cyborg appears to have been a misunderstood aspect of “Cyborg Manifesto” as Jill Marsden points out (7-8). Kate Soper’s 1999 essay “Of Oncomice and Femalemen: Donna Haraway and Cyborg Ontology”, in which she criticises Haraway’s work for lack of clarity on the ontology of the cyborg, is partially a response to Marsden’s defence of Haraway. Soper argues that to refuse the blurring of the boundaries between human and machine, and human and animal, for instance, is important to the “condemnation of torture” and to respecting “the distinctive pleasures and pains of human love and sexuality”, respectively (171). However, these claims are ultimately short-sighted since Haraway explains that animal rights movements do not represent “irrational denials of human uniqueness”, but rather a “clear-sighted recognition” of the importance and pleasures of inter-
species connection, which she points out is embraced by many feminist movements as well (152). Furthermore, Haraway correctly asserts that “nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal” (“Cyborg Manifesto” 152). Critical of some dualist readings of “Cyborg Manifesto”, Marsden points out that Haraway’s refusal to align the cyborg within “traditional dualisms” allows the cyborg to be utilised to examine the “social production” of “essences” such as “woman’s identity” as truths, which according to her makes “Cyborg Manifesto” particularly attractive to feminists wishing to challenge these notions (7).

Adopting Marsden’s perspective also allows one to investigate related matters in Russ’s work. The deconstructions of the category of woman in both Russ’s and Haraway’s work, which Cortiel sees as partially analogous (210), carry notable political implications. As Cortiel puts it, “[i]nstead of searching for an all-encompassing concept of humanness which would be universally shared by all people … Russ's fiction plays with impersonations and performances of these roles” (211), as was demonstrated in the previous chapter. While Jael with her cybernetic enhancements is the most prominent cyborg in The Female Man, Susana S. Martins observes that her world is “utterly predicated on the categorical distinctions that Whileaway blurs, breaks down, and/or rejects outright” (410-1). These distinctions include the binary views of both sex and gender, heteronormativity, as well as patriarchal gender roles, traditions which Haraway’s cyborg transcends. However, like the Harawayan cyborg, Jael herself appears predicated on seeming contradictions. While she repeatedly insists she is an “old-fashioned girl” who does not have “love-affairs with other women” (TFM 192), by the point when she claims to be old-fashioned even during sex with her robotic man-servant Davy (TFM 196) her mantra transcends into self-parody. Indeed, as Hollinger points out, Jael serves to “disrupt the naturalized relations” that “maintain heterosexuality’s psychological
and social hegemony” (152), particularly since she is portrayed as sexually dominant and Davy as sexually submissive.

While as a result of its lack of origin within Western traditions the Harawayan cyborg has no origin story or myth of creation in this sense (“Cyborg Manifesto” 151), the myth is situated in a “postmodernist, non-naturalist” context and in the “utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender” (150), which is to a large extent the context of The Female Man as exemplified by Russ’s narrative experimentations and the novel’s utopian dimension. The cyborg’s lack or origin story is mirrored in both The Female Man and The Adventures of Alyx. In the former, while it is explained earlier that it was a plague which killed off all men on Whileaway (TFM 12), Jael claims this is a lie: “The world-lines around you [Janet] are not so different from yours or mine or theirs and there’s no plague in any of them … It is I who gave you your ‘plague’ … the war I fought built your world for you” (TFM 211). Janet laconically responds, “No … I don’t believe” (TFM 212). Although Russ never resolves the question of the true origin of Whileaway, what the two presented creation myths have in common is the eradication of the patriarchy in favour of a utopian genderless society characterised by technological advancements and high quality of life. Whatever Whileaway’s actual origin is, the events have thus allowed it to break free from the oppressive Western traditions and from the patriarchy, which in turn parallels Haraway’s cyborg myth. In The Adventures of Alyx, such a rebuttal ensues in “The Barbarian”. In the story, Alyx works as a “kill-quick for hire” in the city of Ourdh (Alyx 49), set in a world which resembles the Mediterranean region in the ancient era—Alyx herself claims she is from Tyre in Picnic on Paradise (73). A strange man hires Alyx for a job, which turns out to be a mission to murder the city governor’s infant daughter who the man claims will become a queen and a “horror to the world” (56). Since Alyx refuses to kill the baby, she finds herself at odds with the man, who with the help of a mysterious contraption causes Alyx’s husband
to fall ill and Alyx herself to seek out the man’s lair in an effort to save her husband and
defeat the man (58-59). Throughout the story, the sorcerer patronises Alyx: the first words he
utters to Alyx are “[a] woman—here?” (49) and he repeatedly calls Alyx a “little savage”
(e.g. 51) and a monkey (e.g. 52). However, Alyx proves herself to be more resourceful than
the man gives her credit for, realising that penetrating the force-field protecting his hideout is
literally a matter of life and death (61), and managing to kill the sorcerer despite the
protective armour he is wearing (64-66). Before Alyx kills the man, he boasts not only to be
the creator of Alyx’s world and of Alyx herself, but supposedly of several worlds, aided by
his machinery (63). Alyx expects the world to end after killing the sorcerer and turning off
his machines, but as nothing changes instead, she concludes: “Make the world? You didn’t
even make these machines; that shiny finish is for customers, not craftsmen, and controls that
work by little pictures are for children” (66, italics in original). Vest sees the appearance of
the force-field as the moment the Alyx stories shift from their “sword-and-sorcery origins
into the realm of science fiction” (10), and indeed, the presence of “machinery” in the
“sorcerer’s” hideout discloses that he is no magician. Since the details of Alyx’s early life
before the age of seventeen are not discussed, and she dismisses the creation myth the man
ttempts to impose on her, she effectively has no origin story, which asserts that Alyx is in
control of her own future. However, since her society is drenched in the “doctrines of
patriarchy” and will not “provide the material conditions for her existence” (Cortiel 55), a
future without oppression is unattainable for her. When the Trans-Temporal Authority sends
her off to the future in Picnic on Paradise, she initially faces scepticism due to her physical
appearance as plastic surgery and other enhancements are near-universal in that society, but
not overtly due to her gender (Alyx 71-72). However, as two members of the party she is
tasked to lead to safety, Machine and Gunnar, clash over and attempt to control her, it
appears that unlike the knowledge of ancient survival skills, patriarchal attitudes have
unfortunately not died out in this future. In this sense, what the Alyx stories lack in common with *The Female Man* and “Cyborg Manifesto” is the possibility to imagine a world without oppression, not to mention the possibility of actually stepping into it. While Alyx is independent and even operates largely outside of her Ancient-Greek society’s laws (Cortiel 53), the fact that even four millenia into the future (*Alyx* 71) she finds that men attempt to control her suggests she can never fully be free from the patriarchy. Another difference is that while the future society Alyx is sent off to is clearly high-tech, Cortiel argues that its “merging with machinery” does not carry the liberatory potential technology does in some other works of Russ such as *The Female Man* (52). Clear parallels can be seen between the Alyx stories and “Cyborg Manifesto”, then, but the lack of a utopian dimension in the anthology distances it from Haraway’s myth.

In this section, the relationship and parallels between “Cyborg Manifesto” and Russ’s oeuvre has been discussed. While *The Female Man* is arguably more “cyborgist” than *The Adventures of Alyx*, there is enough similarity in both to allow one to see why Haraway would’ve been inspired by the two works. Haraway’s claim of blurring boundaries between reality and fiction leads to the second sci-fi convention discussed in this thesis, possible worlds theory.

### 3.2 Possible Worlds Theory

According to Marie-Laure Ryan, the possible worlds theory is the “literary and narrative counterpart” of parallel universes, and both have metaphorical overlaps (643). Ryan finds Umberto Eco’s idea of the narrative text as a “machine for producing possible worlds” an apt description, as it appears that “new worlds sprout in the narrative universe every time a character contemplates or makes a decision” (644). Russ’s interpretation clearly follows this train of thought, as she explains in the first chapter, “Sometimes you bend down to tie your
shoe, and then you either tie your shoe or you don’t … every choice begets at least two worlds of possibility … or very likely many more … To carry this line of argument further, there must be an infinite number of possible universes … for there is no reason to imagine Nature as prejudiced in favour of human action” (TFM 6-7). Russ sees this incompatible with time-travelling as it is commonly envisioned, as in The Female Man the “paradox of time travel” is nullified since “the Past one visits is never one’s own Past but always someone else’s” (7). This is because one’s visit to one’s past creates a new possible world in which the visit has happened. As Jael puts it when she explains this to the other Js later on, the “only possible motion is diagonal” (160).

According to Ryan, PW theory is founded on the idea of reality as a “sum of the imaginable rather than the sum of what exists”, and that of a universe consisting of multiple worlds (644). Ryan distinguishes two major interpretations of PW theory: the “absolutist” view, according to which the actual world exists physically, and all other possible worlds are the product of mental activities—the view which she calls “the most commonsensical”—and “modal realism”, conceived by David Lewis, according to which every possible world is equally real, and it is thus impossible to pick a world as the single “actual” world (645). The PW model in The Female Man is akin Lewis’s interpretation, since although Joanna’s world closely resembles the U.S. of our world in 1969, nothing explicitly suggests it is the sun around which the novel’s other possible worlds revolve. Moreover, in Lewis’s view, actuality works like deictics in that its reference is dependent on the speaker and situatedness (Ryan 645). All the Js apart from Jeannine take turns in being a first-person narrator, and Russ complicates matters with an ambiguous deployment of deictics throughout the novel’s narration: it is often unclear who the first-person narrator, or the “I”, actually is, as has been pointed out by many (e.g. Teslenko 127). According to Ryan, by the allegory of deictics Lewis means “the actual world” is “the world where I am located”, and thus our world would
seem nonactual to inhabitants of worlds we consider nonactual (646). This is illustrated in sections of *The Female Man*, for instance Part One, Chapter VII:

(The first thing said by the second man ever to visit Whileaway was, “Where are all the men?” Janet Eason, appearing in the Pentagon, hands in her pockets, feet planted far apart, said, “Where the dickens are all the women?”) (8; parentheses in original)

Haraway’s previously discussed statement in “Cyborg Manifesto” about the blurred boundaries between sci-fi and reality appears to manifest itself in Russ’s work, too. By 2018, a work of fiction being available as an e-book is hardly extraordinary, since the means of e-publishing have been around for decades. *The Female Man*, too, has been resurrected to haunt cyberspace with its direct presence in an electronic edition. What is interesting about this seemingly casual observation, however, is that it ties closely into the content of the novel. We are told that Whileawayans possess the technology to access the “reproductions of the books you want” via a contraption called the induction helmet (*TFM* 53), a scenario not impossibly far removed from, although far more sophisticated than, the process of accessing databases online, which has allowed for the writing of this very paper. There is, furthermore, a world-wide “kinship web” on Whileaway which provides a sense of community and protects Whileawayans from risks such as sexual assault, while retaining their individual autonomy (*TFM* 81-82). As Teslenko points out, the idea of a world-wide web in 1969 is “quite prophetic” given how the internet came to evolve (174). Noting this technological connection and the fact that possible worlds exist in *The Female Man*, an argument can be made that our future is not fixed, as in some ways our world already resembles worlds like Whileaway. This suggests that it is possible to imagine a world without oppression, and even that such a possible world is already attainable to us, which links to the discussion of utopianism in the following section. By conceiving Whileaway as a utopia that exists in the future, “[b]ut not our future” (*TFM* 7; italics in original), Russ suggests that utopia in general
does not have to exist as an Edenic myth in the past, or in the future either, but rather as something that exists as a parallel possibility intrinsic to PW theory.

Russ’s use of PW theory, then, presents an alternative to the perhaps more typical sci-fi motif of time-travel, and anticipates the theory’s use in literary criticism with notable parallels to Lewis’s modal realism. As was shown in this section, the possible-worlds theory fundamental to the parallel universes of *The Female Man* closely intertwines with the politics of the novel, too, as it allows Whileaway to avoid some common criticisms of utopias, which will be further explained in the following section.

### 3.3 Critical Feminist Utopianism

Utopianism, the third sci-fi strategy discussed here, is not necessarily an easily definable concept. Teslenko points out that ever since Sir Thomas More coined the term, there have been numerous attempts at defining its meaning, an effort made challenging due to “ambiguous” nature of More’s concept (1). The understanding of utopia has further been “systematically problematized” due to the “manifestations” of the term in a range of disciplines (1). However, Teslenko explains that what all definitions of utopia have in common is “their representation of dreams of a better life”, which might explain why “mainstream” definitions of the term focus around the controversial positions of “utopia as a blueprint and utopia as perfection” (2). This “patriarchal … common-sense understanding of utopia as a perfect society” has produced “closed representations”, which carry the potential to even “promote totalitarianism” (159). While Teslenko recognises the feminist utopian genre’s potential to provide viable alternatives for the patriarchy, the genre is nevertheless not unproblematic since the bulk of the feminist utopian discourse of the 1970’s originated from “middle-class” positions and was “the product of White feminism”, which led to an “ambivalent attitude” towards race and social class within the genre (160).
However, in order to respond to the limitations set by these mainstream interpretations of utopia, a “multidimensional” approach was developed in the 1990’s by scholars such as Sargisson and Tom Moylan (Teslenko 160). The latter argued that what he called “critical utopias”, created by a range of feminist authors, oppose the patriarchal status quo by renouncing “utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream” (qtd. in Teslenko 160). In other words, the function of these critical utopias is to challenge the status quo while “maintaining a selfcritical awareness” of the utopian genre’s limitations, which enables them to avoid the pitfalls of the genre and hollow utopian clichés (160).

Approaching The Female Man as a critical utopia enables a full examination of the novel’s and Russ’s utopian politics. As acknowledged previously, Whileaway (and Janet by extension) represents the utopian dimension of The Female Man. Martins argues that the novel stands out among 1970’s separatist-feminist utopias due to its “embrace of technology” which allows Whileawayans to reach their full potential, contrary to many other contemporary feminist utopias which emphasised “closeness to nature” (405). Martins observes that the stereotype of women as “more “mystical” or intuitive than men” receives criticism from Russ through Jeannine, who is seemingly the weakest of the Js despite her implied closeness to nature: she only “begins to understand the potential for rebellion” after meeting Jael, the cybernetically enhanced assassin (409). Indeed, Martins argues that in The Female Man, it is not nature which will “provide the resources for political change” but technology, since “nature is culturally figured as that which does not change”—even if “ecology and rural living” are central to life on Whileaway (410). In Teslenko’s point of view, only Joanna’s writing of the book provides “the real potential for change” as it represents “fiction that provokes radical action”, although acknowledges that each J “attempts to challenge gender stereotypes” (127-8). I would add, however, that since Janet and Jael
have a profound influence on Jonna, which allows her to write the book in the first place, radical action provokes fiction too.

Coincidentally, the concept of feminist critical utopias is more faithful to More’s original definition of utopia, which according to Teslenko’s suggests “an evaluation” and “the unattainable” (1). These words are apt for describing the role of Whileaway in *The Female Man*, since Russ uses the world, and Janet as a metonymy for it, to make poignant criticisms of the social conventions of Joanna’s world, and by extension ours given that Joanna’s world is closely modelled after the late-sixties U.S. The use of Janet, the utopian visitor, to critique our patriarchal conventions, is exemplified in the following passage depicting an interview of Janet in Joanna’s world:

MC: One sex is half a species, Miss Evason … Do you want to banish sex from Whileaway?

JE: (with massive dignity and complete naturalness): Huh?

MC: I said: Do you want to banish sex from Whileaway? Sex, family, love, erotic attraction … we all know your people are competent and intelligent individuals, but do you think that’s enough? …

JE: I’m married. I have two children. What the devil do you mean? (10-11)

At this point, the MC provides a long-winded and defensive clarification that he does not understand how an all-women society is able to reproduce, and just as Janet is about to explain the technology between the merging of ova, she is “cut off instantly by a commercial poetically describing the joys of unsliced bread” (11), which reveals just how unwilling and
unready Joanna’s world is for an alternative to its patriarchal norms. While a women’s liberation movement exists Joanna’s world, Jeannine, in contrast, seems to have no real way of escaping the patriarchy. The restaurant in Jeannine’s world in which the Js gather towards the end of the novel is Schrafft’s (210), which is no coincidence given that according to Jesse Hirsch, the chain was one of the first American restaurants where women could dine without the accompaniment of men, and the restaurant “deliberately catered to women” by serving meals based on stereotypical ideas of “the types of food that women like” (“10 Restaurants That Transformed American Dining”). In Jeannine’s world, Schrafft’s might well be the closest thing to a feminist-separatist utopia or at least a safe space although ironically, the chain’s offering of the stereotypical “women’s meals” as a marketing strategy (“10 Restaurants That Transformed American Dining”) represents a patriarchal capitalist society far removed from the genuine freedom from oppression on Whileaway.

The “unattainability” of Whileaway crystallises by the end of the novel. Before that, Janet is characterised as a saviour figure for Joanna, and by extension Jeannine. After Janet’s appearance, Joanna recalls living for “The Man” in all possible ways and feeling unwell, but she miraculously gaining a renewed “zest for life” after she “called up Janet”, or vice versa (TFM 29). After the Js finish their last supper and return to their own worlds, Joanna muses:

Goodbye to Janet, whom we don’t believe in and whom we deride but who is in secret our saviour from utter despair, who appears Heaven-high in our dreams with a mountain under each arm and the ocean in her pocket, Janet who comes from the place where the labia of the sky and horizon kiss each other so that Whileawayans call it The Door and know that all legendary things come therefrom. Radiant as the day, the Might be our dreams, living as she does in a blessedness none of us will ever know, she is nonetheless Everywoman. (212-3)
The goddess-like imagery in the above passage evokes utopia’s promise of deliverance. However, since Janet refuses to help the other Js, this promise is unfulfilled, which is the reason why the Js also “deride” Janet. There are two meanings to the term “Everywoman” in this passage: while according to Boulter, “the metaphorical figure of the Everywoman” was a central discourse in the second-wave feminist movement (152) and thus refers to the “illusion of global sisterhood” of second-wave feminism, one alternative sense for the word is “the ordinary or typical woman” (Oxford English Dictionary). Given that by this point it has materialised that ultimately, Whileaway does not represent a viable blueprint for social change, but rather an empowering reminder that there is a possible world free of patriarchal oppression, by positioning Janet as the “Everywoman” of second-wave feminism Russ further undermines the viability of the singular “women’s experience” as the means of uniting women and other groups oppressed by the patriarchy. Additionally, given the second sense of the word, Russ seems to remind us that Janet is hardly an exceptional individual—or saviour—by Whileawayan standards; in fact, Janet is the first to admit she was made an ambassador and sent to parallel universes simply because she is considered disposable (22) and even “stupid” (146) by her society’s standards.

It is implied that since Joanna and Jeannine side with Jael, they see activism as the way towards a better society. This has echoes back to the dinner party where Joanna takes Janet: after evaluating the most appropriate responses to aggressive male behaviour, Joanna concludes, “The best thing is to suffer mutely and yearn for a rescuer, but suppose the rescuer doesn’t come?” (45) As this takes place earlier on in The Female Man, before Joanna’s transformation into the “female man” capable of revolutionary acts and before Janet’s refusal to help, the question is left unanswered. However, Jael proves that there is indeed an alternative to awaiting the “rescuer”, to take matters into one’s own hands. Even Jeannine
eventually gains the courage to go window-shopping as a symbolic goodbye to her past life led according to patriarchal ideas of womanhood (209). Given that unlike Janet, Jael represents concrete, often radical, actions, it is no coincidence that it is her who gives voice to the alternative myth of Whileaway’s creation, a possible world in which the utopia stems not from a natural disaster but rather from human action. This is not to suggest, however, that the importance of Whileaway lies only in the world’s empowering and liberatory potential. While the world might be unattainable to the other three Js—The Female Man ends before we get to see which world(s) of possibility Joanna and Jeannine’s assistance in Jael’s revolutionary war creates—it is not unattainable to us, as suggested in the previous section.

In this section, the concept of critical feminist utopianism, as well as the roles of Whileaway and Janet in The Female Man, has been examined. Unlike many other feminist utopias of the time, Russ’s embrace of technology and subversion of the “patriarchal” utopianism allows Whileaway to be considered a critical utopia. While Jael’s acts of violence empower Joanna and Jeannine, they are perhaps best read as exaggerations of the fight against the patriarchy rather than as suggestions to be taken literally, their real potential residing in their empowering potential via their subversion of patriarchal gender roles. These revolutionary, violent acts and their implications for Russ’s politics will be examined in the following section.

3.4 Concretised Metaphors

The fourth and final sci-fi strategy used by Russ discussed in this thesis is known as the “concretisation of metaphor”. According to Veronica Hollinger, Roger Luckhurst has described science fiction as a project of “speculation on the diverse results of the conjuncture of technology and subjectivity” (qtd. in Hollinger 140). This idea of the project has been taken quite literally in Anglo-American science fiction, evident in the widespread use of the
concretisation of metaphor within the genre (140). In this section, I shall demonstrate how the metaphor of the “battle of the sexes”—uses of which, according to Russ herself, often resulted in male domination in science fiction (To Write Like a Woman 43)—can be seen concretised and subverted in both The Female Man, and The Adventures of Alyx. I will additionally briefly return to the first chapter’s discussion of feminist movements and highlight continuities.

According to Cortiel, “Russ’s fiction develops androcide as the focused representation of a revolutionary war” (46). This war functions as a metaphor for the feminist struggle against the patriarchy, which the various conflicts in The Female Man and The Adventures of Alyx are concretisations of. While Cortiel recognises an analogy between “the ‘real’ lives of women” and those of fictional characters, she provides a caveat by arguing that Russ does not celebrate or glorify the violent acts carried out by her women, including Jael and Alyx, but rather utilises them as a “narrative device” which provides agency and capability for independent action for her characters (46; italics in original). Another important function of the violent acts committed by Russ’s protagonists is transgressing the boundaries of patriarchal norms and gender roles. For instance, Cortiel points out that the patriarchal stereotype and “demand” of women as givers of life, i.e. mothers, is undermined by Russ’s portrayal of women as takers of lives, particularly the lives of men (46). The revolutionary war between Manland and Womanland is perhaps the best and most obvious example of the concretisations of the “battle of the sexes” in The Female Man and of Russ’s attempt to debunk these stereotypes. The conflict is also an exaggerated concretisation of the metaphor of smashing the patriarchy, taken to its extreme.

Although the revolutionary war waged by Jael is among the most extreme examples of Russ’s concretisations of the battle-of-the-sexes metaphor, the other three Js too clash with the novel’s men to an extent: Janet beats up the mansplaining host of the Manhattan dinner
party (TFM 46), Joanna shuts a door on a man’s thumb inspired by Jael’s “revolutionary act” of murdering the Manlander named Boss (TFM 203; TFM 181-2), and while Jeannine does nothing quite this tangible, her struggles with her potential husband Cal (e.g. TFM 3-4) and her initial dependence on men in general can be seen as mental battles, but more importantly, her symbolic act of window-shopping represents her first step as a revolutionary. Even the supporting character Laura Rose Wilding, daughter of the seemingly ordinary family living in “Anytown, U.S.A.” (TFM 58), is depicted as “probably baring her teeth at passing men” on the street while she waits for the Js to finish their meal (TFM 211). However, the key difference between the violent acts of Janet and the other Js is that since Janet has no need to commit violence against the patriarchy in her own world, as it does not exist there, and is consistently portrayed as somewhat of a pacifist, her beatdown of the host is foremost an indication of her independence from and disregard of Joanna’s world’s social conventions.

Indeed, Jael’s request to the other three Js for aid in the war, for “bases on your worlds”, “raw materials”, and “places to hide an army” (TFM 200) stands in stark contrast to Janet’s refusal to participate in the conflict and the way Janet is characterised throughout the novel. Janet’s distrust in Jael partially stems from her pacifism, although she appears to be at ease with hunting (TFM 50) and duels, which Whileawayans engage in with persons they do not get along with (142-143). The foundation of Janet’s pacifist tendencies is laid early on when she is sent to presumably Joanna’s world and taken to the Pentagon, carrying nothing but a piece of string (Russ TFM 22-24). As Janet explains, “The important thing in a new situation is not to frighten, and in my pockets was just the thing for such an emergency. I took out the piece of string and began playing Cat’s Cradle.” (TFM 23) The nurturing connotations of the “cradle” stand in stark contrast to everything represented by the Pentagon Janet is taken to. In an subsequent interview in a talk show, the interviewer appears puzzled as to why Janet “should have come unarmed with anything except a piece of string” (TFM 24). Just as Janet’s pacifist
tendencies are questioned in the interview, the Js’ reaction to her for dismissing Jael’s request is to stare “accusingly” at Janet (TFM 212).

While the metaphor of the “Everywoman” was previously connected to its position within the second-wave feminist movement as well, the word carries yet another sense. Right after Janet refuses Jael’s request, the following clarification appears: “Now you must know that Jeannine is Everywoman. I, though I am a bit quirky, I too am Everywoman. Every woman is not Jael, as Uncle George would say—but Jael is Everywoman.” (TFM 212) The last sentence of the passage contains a paraphrase of the following line in George Bernard Shaw’s Man and Superman: “As I sat watching Everyman at the Charterhouse, I said to myself Why not Everywoman? Ann was the result: every woman is not Ann; but Ann is Everywoman” (qtd. in Oxford English Dictionary). It is no coincidence that Russ is well-known to have been a fan of Shaw’s plays and criticism, confirmed by among others Samuel R. Delany, a lifelong friend of Russ’s, in the afterword to his anthology A, B, C: Three Short Novels: The Jewels of Aptor, The Ballad of Beta-2, They Fly at Ciron (470).

Given Russ’s explicit feminist politics, it must be no surprise that according to Michiko Kakutani, Shaw, a notable socialist and a supporter of the Suffragette movement, has been hailed as a “kind of father figure” to feminism, in reference to the 1977 essay collection Fabian Feminist: Bernard Shaw and Woman edited by Rodelle Weintraub (“G. B. Shaw and the Women in His Life and Art”). However, while Kakutani recognises that some of Shaw’s woman characters were “highly unconventional” for the Victorian era, she believes that Shaw as feminist is a “romanticized” notion, as she claims Shaw also saw and portrayed women as “predators, as hunters intent on capturing a man” (“Shaw and the Women in His Life and Art”). Kakutani finds evidence in Man and Superman, in which Ann Whitefield is portrayed “as a huntress, a lioness, a boa constrictor, and a ‘Lady Mephistopheles,’ and her mythic counterpart Dona Juana takes on all the libidinous qualities traditionally associated
with Don Juan. For Shaw, woman is the aggressor in the game of love” (“Shaw and the
Women in His Life and Art”). Regardless of whether one agrees with Kakutani’s take on
Shaw, the vocabulary she claims Ann Whitefield is referred to with matches the
characterisations of both Jael and Alyx even down to the feline metaphor: according to
Cortiel, Russ utilises the cat as a metaphor to describe several of her protagonists in order to
subvert “the traditional connection between stereotypical characteristics of women and cats”
and thus challenge how patriarchal fiction constructs women (70-71). Given the
“contradictory characteristics that Western cultures attribute to the image of domestic cats”,
the cat is a “momentous image in feminist texts” (Cortiel 70). As an example, Cortiel points
out that the owner might see their cat as “innocuous”, but a rodent would see the same cat as
a predator (70). This contradiction also hints at a patriarchal double standard for women,
which Joanna summarises in The Female Man when evaluating Janet’s possible responses to
the dinner party host’s aggressive behaviour: “If you scream, people say you’re
melodramatic; if you submit, you’re masochistic; if you call names, you’re a bitch. Hit him
and he’ll kill you” (45). The most significant usages of the cat metaphor in this sense are the
description of Jael’s claws as “talons like a cat’s but bigger” (TFM 181) and Alyx cleaning up
her suit “carefully and automatically, like a cat” after executing Gunnar for refusing to help
Machine who dies as a result (Alyx 148). While Cortiel argues that a cat kills its prey to
survive, which she connects to her discussion of Russ’s women killing in order to establish
and subsequently maintain their independence from men, the contradictory characteristics
attributed to cats complicates her metaphor since cats are also notorious for playing with their
food, often torturing live mice. Russ uses this image of cats as torturers to imply that Jeannine
has begun to rebel against the patriarchy, as during the Js’ last supper it is told she has started
to play with her food (TFM 211). The depiction of Jael’s relationship to Davy, with Jael as
the dominant and Davy as the submissive participant illustrates how Russ subverts the
traditional patriarchal notion of women as the submissive party of a monogamous relationship. Jael is clearly aware of the taboos she is transgressing as she laments, “Alas! those who were shocked at my making love that way to a man are now shocked at my making love to a machine; you can’t win” after the other Js witness her having sex with Davy (TFM 200). Another, perhaps more notable parody and concretisation of the “aggressor” stereotype and metaphor is Jael murdering Boss, which commentators such as Cortiel read analogous to sexual intercourse (62). The key difference between Jael and Alyx is that according to Cortiel, Alyx has “no explicit consciousness of the necessity to fight for women as a group”, whereas Jael kills Boss “not primarily as an individual, but as a member of the sex class she hates” (46). While Alyx may kill only to maintain her independence, then, she too resists the constant attempts of men to control her and is not afraid to use violence if necessary, as evident in the first pages of “I Thought She Was Afeard Till She Stroked My Beard” where she kills her abusive husband who refuses to let her go (Alyx 32-33).

Russ’s positioning Jael as Ann Whitefield represents continuity between feminist movements given Shaw’s politics. However, while Shaw has received both praise and criticism for different aspects of his women characters, Russ uses some of the more negative traits in an empowering way to subvert gender roles—word reclamation in itself is known as a common feminist strategy. However, it is likely due to Russ’s concretisations of the battle-of-the-sexes metaphor why many (contemporary) commentators, some of them feminist, criticise *The Female Man* as polemical.
4. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, Joanna Russ’s relation to her contemporaries and her usage of sci-fi conventions to transcend many typical second-wave feminist positions has been analysed and discussed. The contemporary relevance of the novel, however, is not only because some of Russ’s ideas anticipated the third wave of feminism. Pat Wheeler reminds us that although the historically situated scenes of *The Female Man* may be “products of their own time”, “women’s continued oppression cannot be overlooked” even today, and “[n]ot *all* women have achieved agency” (99). The very point of ongoing oppression is echoed in *The Female Man*, as the dinner party and Sharp Glasses’ dismissal of feminism as having achieved its goals indicate: the question of whether feminism has already achieved its goals and similar dismissals to that voiced by Sharp Glasses are still unfortunately pervasive in “Western” debates. As was seen, Russ’s views of gender and sex, although often nuanced, were ahead of several of her contemporaries. However, the nurture-not-nature view of gender and sex still ruffles some feathers, as evidenced by the recent BBC2 documentary “No More Boys and Girls” (2017) and the criticism it received (Nicholson). The conversation is but one example which suggests that the discourse of natural sex differences is still dominant in today’s societies, and that despite all the progress made to improve transgender rights and the increasing visibility of these issues, trans people are still frequently misunderstood and widely harassed.

Another way in which *The Female Man* carries contemporary relevance is Russ’s depiction of the relationship between Jael and Davy, given the rise of the sex robot industry. A 2017 study, “Our Sexual Future With Robots: a Foundation For Responsible Robotics Report” draws parallels between sex aids and sex robots, the latter of which “may have different impacts when compared with other sex aids” (Hancock et al.). Anette Myrestøl Espelid notes that while the “image of the sex robot has been central in many science fiction
novels, both old and new”, Davy stands out since sex robots are “traditionally almost exclusively female” and “more often described as being more robotic … than human” (58).

One can imagine how radical Russ’s role-reversal must have the early 1970’s given that according to Hancock et al., today’s commercially available sex robots tend to be female (1). However, in contrast to the fictional sex robots Myrestøl Espelid describes, today’s sex robots are “essentially pornographic representations of the female body”, designed to appear and even feel human (Hancock et al. 1). As Myrestøl Espelid remarks, Russ’s account of the sexual intercourse between Jael and Davy can be “unsettling” since Davy is described as “almost child-like” and is a part of Jael’s house (58). While Davy’s ontology, including that his “original germ-plasm was chimpanzee, I think”, is described in detail, Jael claims that whether he has a consciousness is “nothing that need concern you and me” (TFM 199).

However, given the sophisticated AIs and the increasingly human-like sex robots available today, precisely such ethical questions ought to be our concern. This would warrant further research on the topic of sex robots in (science) fiction.

Finally, the actual criticism The Female Man received, discussed by Cortiel (58-59) among others, is eerily similar to the arguments within a list of criticism Russ herself provides in The Female Man (140-141), and indeed, many have remarked how difficult it often is to voice criticism of Russ which she has not already articulated herself (Mendlesohn viii). This illustrates why Russ was such a forward-thinking author.
5. Works Cited

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