

**BOLDLY TO GO WHERE NO MAN . . . :  
THE FEMINIST SCIENCE FICTION OF JOANNA RUSS**

**BY**

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**A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

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Winnipeg, Manitoba**

**(c) December, 1998**



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of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree  
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## **Abstract**

Joanna Russ is a gifted writer whose works expose the folly of the dominant paradigm in science fiction, a patriarchal society which subverts female development. My thesis examines Russ's development as a writer, her innovative and heuristic approach to science fiction, and her feminist convictions.

To trace the development of Russ's works I will examine the characteristics and qualities of science fiction and adventure fantasy, their relationship to one another, and how they differ from conventional fiction. I will then apply those principles to Russ's "Alyx stories" as they develop from fantasy to science fiction, becoming more sophisticated and critical.

Picnic on Paradise (1968) heralds Russ's arrival as an author of science fiction. As a feminist entering a predominantly male genre, Russ established a foundation for later feminist writers via her critical approach to mainstream ideology and her intelligent alternatives to conventional gender roles. By detechnologizing science fiction and incorporating feminist issues in her plot and characterization she brought the women's movement into science fiction.

Russ's most provocative novel, The Female Man (1975), examines the difficulties of constructing a workable feminism for women of differing backgrounds and interests. She exposes the socialized self-denial and isolation used to divide women's groups and proposes a humanistic approach to feminism which subverts stagnant patriarchal conventions.

## **Acknowledgements**

I was able to complete this thesis largely because I was between a rock and a hard place. Thank-you for your unflagging support and confidence, Anne-Lise--my rock. Thank-you for your patience and wisdom, Dr. John J. Teunissen--my hard place. You both were essential in motivating me to complete this work and nothing could make me happier than your pride in my achievement of my goal.

I would also like to thank, for their support, my parents and family-- particularly my sister, Gailene, and my father, Harold--who rescued my thesis from technological oblivion on more than one occasion.

My thanks are also extended to Marianne Harnish and Lucia Flynn, who saved me repeatedly from own bureaucratic and administrative ignorance and ineptitude, out of the goodness of their hearts.

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## Introduction

Although the socially-critical function of science fiction was firmly established by Mary Shelly in Frankenstein as early as 1818, it is only in the past thirty years or so that readers of the genre have come to expect that the best science fiction--whatever its other methods, intents, and goals--will engage in social extrapolation, speculation, and criticism. Consequently, it is somewhat surprising that Joanna Russ, who began her career in science fiction around thirty years ago with strongly feminist social criticism, has been relatively neglected by the academic community and the broader reading public, perhaps because she was early both in choosing science fiction as her medium and feminism as her message. She identifies the social reluctance which limited science fiction's appeal and popularity to conventional audiences in her essay "Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction":

It is unlikely that science fiction will ever become a major form of literature. Life-as-it-is (however glamorized or falsified) is more interesting to most people than the science-fictional life-as-it-might-be. Moreover, the second depends on an understanding and appreciation of the first. In a sense, science fiction includes (or is parasitic on, depending on your point of view) non-science fiction. (117)

Russ is, however, a gifted writer who uses satire and irony to expose the folly of the dominant paradigm, a patriarchal society which subverts female development. Her science fiction is highly heuristic: compelling and obliging the reader carefully to

consider the ineffectiveness of various conventional responses to social inequity, in addition to the primary issue in her work of discriminatory gender roles. My thesis examines the development of Russ as a writer: her innovative approach to science fiction and her feminist convictions.

Even in its earliest stages, Russ's work has never catered to the traditional adolescent male audience of science fiction. She does not pander to expectations of technological wizardry, futuristic weaponry, and exotic cross-species encounters. Instead Russ focusses on social injustice and institutional complacency. While she is, first and foremost, a feminist, she does not write merely from that point of view; she uses wit and sarcasm to expose the oppressive nature of power in many forms: chauvinism, racism, classism, and even feminism itself. Russ also develops that segment of the genre commonly recognized as "soft" science fiction, stories and novels which focus on the human aspect of development in a technological age, a theme which can be traced back to Frankenstein (1818) and H. G. Wells's The Time Machine (1895), as well as to the fiction of C. S. Lewis, Ray Bradbury, Walter Miller, Jr., and Philip K. Dick, to name a significant few of her important forebears. I propose that Russ's writing is not simply or strictly feminist, that it is more broadly humanistic and advocates the removal of power and domination from human relationships while it encourages tolerance, independence, and self-knowledge. I will document Russ's development from the highly-charged, angry writer of the "Alyx" stories in the late sixties to the sophisticated, introspective, and critical writer she had become by the publication of The Female Man in 1975.



My first chapter examines Russ's early short fiction, the "Alyx" stories. Here I will address her literary innovations: the development of an assertive and competent female role model and her transition from fantasy literature to science fiction wherein she supplants the sexist conventions of adventure fantasy with her provocative and astutely critical feminism. The first chapter also examines the influence of the reemerging women's movement on the thematic aspects of Russ's stories. Russ's expansion from adventure fantasy to science fiction increased the audience she could reach with her feminism as the women's movement was struggling to shape and change contemporary society.

The second chapter investigates Russ's first novel, Picnic on Paradise (1968). Her writing becomes more sophisticated with this novel, employing irony and satire to greater effect as critical tools than in her earlier stories. I will also demonstrate the shift in Russ's feminism from a reaction against patriarchal discrimination to a proactive attempt to unite women in a common cause. Russ's focus on the need for unity parallels the increased organization of feminist groups with common interests and goals. She also addresses the psychological aspects of feminism which led to greater coordination of effort in the women's movement: personal doubts, outside opposition by traditional social groups, and misrepresentation by competing interest groups.

The final chapter will concentrate on Russ's novel, The Female Man (1975) which represents the apex of her feminist social criticism. I will outline her portrayal of divided feminist interests and motivations, and her call for solidarity among women

in their efforts to gain equality. The Female Man owes its psychological criticism of patriarchal systems to the advent of consciousness raising groups, which provided a platform for Russ to redress issues of organization in the women's movement, particularly the jeopardy of dividing women's interests into cliques with over-specified interests. I will also look at Russ's predictive societies and their heuristic value relative to the future of feminism: the cautionary dystopia, Womanland, and the hopeful utopia, Whileaway.

My thesis attempts to demonstrate that Russ's critical and comedic refinement provides, for the discriminating reader, a humanistic approach to social criticism founded on feminism but, more importantly, dedicated to individualism. It also demonstrates the skilful employment of science fiction's most distinctive characteristics as a vehicle for feminism, an accomplishment which directly defies some of science fiction's oldest sexist traditions.

## **Chapter One**

### **The Eve of Change.**

Laying a foundation can be a frustrating and demoralizing task. If one makes the mistake of trying to envision an entire project at the moment of its conception it is possible to discourage even the most creative and motivated individual. Progress is achieved through the diligent pursuit of each step of the task as it comes to hand; by approaching each obstacle in turn the creator gets progressive feed-back and motivation to continue towards the achievement of his or her ultimate goal. The struggle to bring science fiction into mainstream literature is no exception to this formula, and the development of Joanna Russ as a science-fiction author is an exceptionally good example of the process.

Russ's science fiction grows out of somewhat fantastic beginnings, quite literally. Her trademark character, Alyx, begins as a fantasy heroine. She is developed as the template for Russ's later science-fiction heroines through the course of the early short stories. These early works are more readily classifiable as fantasy than as science fiction. To trace the development of Russ's works I will examine the characteristics and qualities of fantasy and science fiction, their relationship to one another, and how they differ from conventional fiction. I will then apply those principles of development to Russ's work as it develops from fantasy to science fiction and as Alyx grows from "adventuress" to "pre-school conditioning director" and beyond--becoming the powerful heroine of Russ's later books and stories.

Russ's early fiction has been collected under the title Alyx, an homage to Russ's first heroine. The name Alyx brings to mind Alexander the Great--first conqueror of the world; the unique spelling of her name also bears consideration--male chromosomes are designated "XY", and Alyx is spelled "YX", a reversal of the universally recognized male genetic pattern. Alyx's name therefore anticipates her great responsibility as a champion for womankind, in which she bears the burden of uniting the civilized world in a reversal of conventional patriarchal patterns.

The volume, Alyx, contains five related stories: the first story is called, appropriately, "The Adventuress" (1967). The title is bold and straight-forward; it brings to mind images of swash-bucklers and cavalier heroes, action and free-spirited rebellion. The main difference between this tale and conventional fantasy is, of course, that the swash-buckling, cavalier hero is, in this case, a woman. Russ confidently introduces Alyx to the reader in the opening paragraph:

This is the tale of a voyage that is of interest only as it concerns the doings of one small, grey-eyed woman. Small women exist in plenty--so do those with grey eyes--but this woman was among the wisest of a sex that is surpassingly wise. There is no surprise in that (or should not be) for it is common knowledge that Woman was created fully a quarter of an hour before Man, and has kept that advantage to this very day. Indeed, legend has it that the first man, Leh, was fashioned from the sixth finger of the left hand of the first woman, Loh, and that is why women have only five fingers on the left hand. The lady with whom

we concern ourselves in this story had all her six fingers, and what is more, they all worked. (1)

Russ's introduction of Alyx manages at once both to adopt and to confound the conventions of fantasy literature, a genre which Samuel Delany, Russ's foremost critic, calls "sword and sorcery, that odd sub-genre invented . . . by Robert E. Howard" (vii). Alyx is the perfect counterpoint to Howard's most famous character, Conan the Barbarian. Delany provides a clear definition and purpose for this adventure fantasy literature in his introduction to *Alyx*:

Sword and sorcery begins as a specifically male escape from the coming responsibility of marriage, family, and a permanent home: i.e., wife, children, job. Its purpose, the people who publish, advertise, and sell it say, is to provide the adolescent male audience with a bigger, stronger man to identify with, who rescues the woman, beats up the villain, and who is loved briefly and allowed to leave without hassle. (xiii)

Russ immediately identifies "The Adventuress" as fantasy: it is the tale of a voyage, a departure from the known and familiar world into a world of uncertainty and danger. Russ works to dismantle and undermine masculine fantasy: she consciously (conscientiously) makes a departure from her source genre. Alyx is identified as an archetypal woman, "wisest of a sex that is surpassingly wise." This is the story of a lone woman's exploits--not the tale of a muscle-bound, mercenary, master of the universe and his cohorts--it is the tale of "one small, grey-eyed woman,"

exceptional in her actions but not otherwise unusual. Russ associates Alyx with the goddess Athena (via her surpassing wisdom and grey eyes) who sprang from the head of Zeus fully grown and fully armed, uttering a war-cry, much as Alyx springs from the mind of Russ, her creator, and immediately challenges the assumptions of adolescent male readers.

Russ inverts the traditional role of women in fantasy; Alyx is not a cowering, supplicating, nubile sex-object. By making the hero of her stories female Russ immediately addresses her assumption that Alyx is an exceptional character because she is female: "There is no surprise in that (or should not be). . . ." Because adventure fantasy is a popular genre Russ suggests that women should play a more prominent role as characters, especially as heroines.

In homage to one of the foremost authors of sword-and-sorcery fiction, Russ makes mention of Fritz Leiber's great adventure fantasy hero, Fafhrd; thereby connecting her work with the genre's traditions:

"I remembered," said Alyx, "one week in spring when the night sky above Ourdh was hung as brilliantly with stars as the jewellers' trays on the Street of a Thousand Follies. Ah! what a man. A big Northman with hair like yours and a gold-red beard--God, what a beard!--Fafnir--no, Fafh--well something ridiculous. But he was far from ridiculous. He was amazing. (24)

Russ's, and Alyx's amazement, is inspired by Leiber's bold, unapologetic style and the incredible risks he took in character creation. Fafhrd was a sterling example

of the noble, yet analytical, barbarian. Russ questions the traditional role cast for Fafhrd in Alyx's nostalgic, yet faintly rebuking, memory of Fafhrd's conventional masculinity:

"He was strong," said Alyx, laughing, "and hairy, beautifully hairy. And Willful! I said to him, 'Man, if you must follow your eyes into every whorehouse—' And we fought! At a place called the Silver Fish. Overturned tables. What a fuss! And a week later," (she shrugged ruefully) "gone. There it is. And I can't even remember his name."

(24)

The character Alyx shows some characteristics of Leiber's character, Ahura also known as Silent Salmacis. This mystifying woman draws the romantic attentions of both Fafhrd and his sidekick, the Gray Mouser. Ahura's apparent disinterest in the rivalry between the two friends is a model for Alyx's independence and a foundation for Russ's feminist "sword and sorcery." The Gray Mouser becomes intrigued when his amorous intentions are not acknowledged by Ahura and begins to suspect that there may be more to her than meets the eye. He is increasingly suspicious of the veracity of Ahura's gender:

Whether it was the souring of his inhibited passion, or the shrewder insight of a mind no longer a-bubble with the fashioning of compliments and witticisms, he began to feel more and more that the Ahura he loved was only a faint spark in the darkness of a stranger who daily became more riddlesome, dubious, and even, in the end,

repellent. He remembered the other name Chloe had given Ahura, and found himself brooding oddly over the legend of Hermaphroditus bathing in the Carian fountain and becoming joined in one body with the nymph Salmacis. (Leiber 130-31)

The Gray Mouser's bitterness regarding Ahura's ambivalence even prompts him to disrobe Ahura as she slept to prove her an hermaphrodite, or even a man. His paranoid intrusion only worsens his conceit: "The breasts, white as ivory, that he had known would not be there, were there. And yet, instead of his nightmare lifting it deepened. . . . He was never more certain than at this moment that Ahura was a man" (133). Russ discovers a germ of feminism in Leiber's work, cherishes it, as well as its source, and fosters it to maturity via Alyx: the model for an independent and confident woman, secure enough of her identity to act boldly in a world of male centred insecurities.

Her description of Alyx's wondrous left hand demystifies the Judeo-Christian creation myth by turning it on its head and suggesting that woman was created first and that man was created from an insignificant part of her--a concept much more in keeping with biology than theology (and perhaps also closer to the truth), not to mention its similarity to the creation myths of many aboriginal cultures. She uses this as an opportunity to outline Alyx's general opinion of men, that they have grown around an unessential, non-functional part earlier discarded by women. Alyx is the model self-sufficient woman: she is complete and competent; her fate is not dependent upon any man; it is, so to speak, completely in her own six-fingered hands.



In her later criticism and analysis of science fiction, Russ outlines several stages of development which may also be applied to her own fictional work, particularly to her Alyx stories. Russ's essay, "The Wearing Out of Genre Materials" (1971), divides fiction into three stages of growth: innocence, plausibility, and decadence. She proposes that these "three stages . . . may present a paradigm of the history of every aesthetic element in art. . ." (51). The stories with which I am here concerned, the foundation of Russ's later mature science fiction, form her fictional age of innocence, so to speak. As Russ explains:

Innocence is the simple and naive stage in the evolution of a genre construct. . . . I call the story innocent because the marvel in question here is--or rather was--a genuine novelty. (48)

While in this instance Russ is discussing a short story by Ambrose Bierce, her point is nonetheless useful in making a similar analysis of the development of her own fiction. In the interest of consistency in her theorizing, Russ's concept of development must of course include her own works.

To suggest at this point that Alyx will be employed to disrupt established literary conventions and to promote feminism would be an understatement. Russ's critical writing defines the limit to novelty in genre fiction, and she points out that conventions wear out in time; as recurring patterns in genre fiction become recognized and accepted by the audience the genre loses its distinctiveness and becomes boring, repetitive, predictable, and pedantic. Bad genre writers consistently employ the same devices and conventions in their writing and this leads to stereotyping, formulaic

plotlines and characterization, and literary assumptions identifiable with an individual genre. Russ suggests that this familiarity breeds contempt: "once used in art, once brought to light as it were, the effect of the fantasy begins to wane, and the scene embodying it begins to wear out" ("Wearing" 47). By transforming individual elements of adventure fantasy while at the same time ignoring its repetitive, predictable, and trite elements, Russ keeps the genre interesting and innovative. Using Alyx, Russ commands the ability to resurrect adventure fantasy from its moribund state, from a stereotypical and male-dominated genre, in both character and readership, into a vibrant, thought-provoking medium for social criticism and new ideas. Not only is Alyx developed from a rebel in a male-dominated world into a positive role model for womankind, but Russ's writing gradually escapes from the constraints of adventure fantasy into the liberated forum of science fiction.

Alyx was created in response to Joanna Russ's dissatisfaction with American society of the 1960's. Awareness of women's need to become actively involved in their own emancipation from structured patriarchal institutions increased significantly in the early 1960's. This self-directed move towards female independence, be it intellectual, emotional, physical, or institutional, was a topic of increasing interest among young women at universities and colleges across the United States as awareness of sexual inequality increased and social restrictions against women came under scrutiny. Mary King and Casey Hayden drew attention to some of these institutions in a memorandum circulated among feminist radical protest groups in November of 1965. The memo drew parallels between women and other disadvantaged "castes" in

society, particularly social and institutional biases against women. King and Hayden exposed the social policy of a double-standard which recognizes--and condemns--racial prejudice but which also turns a blind eye towards sexual discrimination. In "The Adventuress," Alyx's social reevaluation begins with criticism of and rejection of organized patriarchal religion. Upon entering the city of Ourdh, the geographical focal point of Russ's early stories, Alyx converted to the church of Yp:

But Alyx, a young woman of intellectual bent, had not been in Ourdh two months when she decided that the religion of Yp (as the hill god was called) was a disastrous piece of nonsense, and that deceiving a young woman in matters of such importance was a piece of thoughtlessness for which it would take some weeks of hard, concentrated thought to think up a proper reprisal. (1-2)

This critical approach to the world's dominant religion is the first indication we have that Alyx has an analytical mind and indomitable personality, and that her indignation is the result of some injustice or prejudice that she previously experienced at the hands of masculine society; and this is similar, in many aspects, to the activities of young women in American colleges and universities at this time, who gathered together and organized feminist opposition to patriarchal institutions. The fact that Alyx plots revenge against the church of Yp and later exacts that revenge for these injustices is icing on the feminist fantasy cake. In this connection, the characteristics which we should most carefully note in Alyx are her capacity for observation and her drive, in some small way, to expose some of the myths which are taken for granted as

truth in Ourdh.

In "The Adventuress" Alyx has taken charge of the education of a younger woman, Edarra, to protect her from these personally debilitating constraints while assisting her escape from Ourdh. This story is the earliest testing ground for Russ's feminist social criticism. Edarra begins, not as Alyx's ward, but as her employer. She hires Alyx to help her steal a necklace, the bride-price of her arranged marriage, so that she may escape from an unwanted and loveless marriage to an older man and live independently. Recognizing in Edarra some of her own irrepressible spirit and personal values, Alyx agrees to aid her escape, and then summarily takes responsibility for educating her in the ways of the world. During the course of their journey, Alyx instructs Edarra in the use of the sword--a traditional phallic symbol of masculine superiority in conventional adventure fantasy--and she also trains Edarra to perform demanding manual labour on their boat to increase her self-sufficiency.

The two young women have several encounters which provide Alyx with opportunity to debunk social complacency. As they are sailing one night they are attacked by a monster, a "bulbous" faced, whiskered, barking denizen of the deep whose oddly human visage is disconcertingly masculine. Alyx harpoons the monster, in an overtly masculine display of competence, and it dies. Edarra is huddled clutching the mast of the boat, in effect clinging to another phallic symbol for protection in her terror. Her fear represents the traditional subservience of women to a predominantly masculine society, their fear of confronting that culture, and in some cases their misguided faith in the moral benevolence of a protective patriarchy. Alyx

debunks the myth of sea monsters and the myth of masculine supremacy which is immobilizing Edarra with the assertion that there was never any real danger:

There was silence for a while. Then she said, "It's only an animal," and then she made the mark of Yp on her forehead to atone for having killed something without the spur of overmastering necessity. She had not made the gesture for years. . . .

"It was an animal," said Alyx with finality, "that's all." (12)

As Alyx destroys the sea monster, Russ symbolically emasculates the threat of patriarchal domination; via Alyx's examples of competent and decisive action, she diminishes the power these institutions hold over women. By slaying the beast Alyx exposes the fallacy of supernatural power attributed to sea monsters, thereby demonstrating the impotency of threats made by masculine society to control women. These trends of psychological control and dehumanization in social institutions were a key issue among feminist groups establishing themselves between 1965 and 1969. Dissatisfaction with the ponderous legal and parliamentary process of reversing sexual discrimination prompted the development of "radical" feminist groups. Groups like the New York Radical Women, the Redstockings, the Feminists, and WITCH separated themselves from the larger, politically-based groups such as N.O.W. (National Organization for Women) and WEAL (Women's Equity Action League) to emphasize individual and personal feminist issues rather than general political injustices. Alyx's spirit is very much in keeping with the ideas of these radical feminists who favoured individual empowerment and public protests--often called

"Zap" actions—over political lobbying as a means of social change.

Alyx's religious atonement here suggests two things. First, Alyx blesses herself because she knows it was wrong to slay the monster, because it posed no serious threat to the women—either as an animal or as a symbol of male society—she knew herself that it was only an animal, which suggests that she killed it solely for Edarra's benefit, to demonstrate that its power was merely illusory. Second, Edarra, being an inhabitant of the city of Ourdh, will recognize the significance of the blessing as an act of atonement. Alyx's example will teach Edarra not to react out of fear or superstition or conventional belief but carefully to assess whether or not force is required to cope with a given situation. Alyx is compelled to act because of her responsibility to educate Edarra, but she may perhaps regret the unavoidable necessity of violence as a solution to their problem.

"The Adventuress" demonstrates the danger of accepting something indisputably or irrevocably merely because it is a convention or tradition. Alyx has not at this point done anything more exceptional than to empower another woman: encouraging Edarra to question the merit of institutionalized thinking (which might already be considered subversive in some circles). This lesson can be applied to Russ's burgeoning science fiction as well. Science fiction traditionally questions and challenges existing paradigms. Russ brings into question erroneous assumptions about the character of science fiction itself. By choosing adventure fantasy as her starting point, Russ challenges the expectations of its largely adolescent male audience. Alyx's authority and confidence highlight the obvious contrast between Russ's writing

and the established paradigm in fantasy literature in an act of introspective analysis.

Russ defines science fiction in her essay, "The Subjunctivity of Science Fiction" (1973). She quotes Delany's definition of science fiction, which suggests that it is an amalgam of naturalist fiction, depicting everyday events, and fantasy fiction, depicting the impossible:

"Events that have not happened are very different from the fictional events that could have happened, or the fantastic events that could not have happened. . . ." (51)

She goes on to expand and clarify Delany's statement:

science fiction concerns itself with what has not happened: that is, its subject-matter does not exist. The subject-matter of naturalist fiction is understood to be in some way characteristic or typical of what does exist (this could have happened); fantasy is understood to bear a reverse relation to what exists (this could not have happened). (52)

"The Adventuress" is the staging point for the development of feminist science fiction, an approach to the field which would take several years to be recognized as a sub-genre. We cannot say of Alyx's behaviour, "This could not happen"; her actions and the ideology she represents are new but are not beyond the realm of probability. Neither can we say, "This could have happened," because there is no historical reference to Alyx or the previous occurrence of feminist science fiction. All we can say of "The Adventuress" is that the story "neither contravenes reality nor represents it" ("Subjunctivity" 52); therefore, according to Russ it is science fiction: it occupies

the middle ground between what Delany defines as naturalism and fantasy because its issues reflect real concerns and hopes.

Alyx continues to undermine male superiority in "I Thought She Was Afraid Until She Stroked My Beard" (1967) the second story in *Alyx*, wherein Alyx asserts her autonomy without equivocation. Delany's greatest interest in this story is its reinforcement of Russ's progressive separation from the genre of adventure fantasy. In "The Adventuress" her most marked departure from conventional fantasy was the use of a female hero, but in "I Thought She Was Afraid Until She Stroked My Beard"--written after "The Adventuress" but preceding it contextually--Russ takes Alyx even further from the centre of the genre. Delany suggests that Russ's departure from fantasy becomes more sophisticated in this story:

. . . an even larger break is that there is, at least, one--and this is what sword and sorcery banishes entirely from its landscape--husband in the series.

He is killed in the second story. (xvi)

According to Delany one of the principle characteristics of adventure fantasy is the absence of marriage, a lack of connection between the protagonist and his community and the absence of permanent relationships. This independence and diminished social responsibility allows the reader vicariously to re-experience the liberty he may have lost through various real-life responsibilities and obligations. Alyx asserts her right to this liberty and freedom in "I Thought She Was Afraid Until She Stroked My Beard." She does not merely avoid marriage, she escapes it, thereby



correcting the mistake she made herself by accepting a husband and the role of wife (incidentally reflecting Russ's own recent, but amicable, divorce).

Alyx begins the story in a state of marital oppression: her activities are restricted by her husband to the mundane duties of housekeeping. He routinely deals with smugglers as his source of income, but disdains and ignores her advice on how to conduct business. Alyx's frustration and anger prompt her to rebel against her husband's egocentric and misogynistic restrictions. They argue over her participation in his negotiations with the smugglers, and this argument degenerates into a typically misogynistic, abusive, and violent confrontation—with one extraordinary difference:

when he took out from behind the door the length of braided rawhide he used to herd cattle, when he swung it high in the air and down in a snapping arc to where she—not where she was; where she had been--this extraordinary young woman had leapt half the distance between them and wrested the stock of the whip from him a foot from his hand. He was off balance and fell; with a vicious grimace she brought the stock down short and hard on the top of his head. She had all her wits about her as she stood over him. (32)

As Alyx stands over her vanquished foe, she recognizes the profound consequences of her actions. She has torn liberty from her husband's hand and used his symbol of authority to punish him for terrorizing and demeaning her. She stands over him in triumph with the whip—in some cultures a traditional gift from the bride's father to his son-in-law symbolizing marital authority—in her own hands. Not only

has Russ reversed the typical, woeful roles of spousal abuse but she has undermined the traditional empowerment of men over women through the institution of marriage. She has demonstrated women's right to self-determination, and autonomy.

Alyx debunks the conventional role of wife as home-maker and mother, much as Betty Friedan's pioneering book, The Feminine Mystique (1963), challenged the accepted role of women as wives and mothers and the myth that these roles somehow satisfy, psychologically and emotionally, the drives and desires of women. Russ reinforces this liberation with an echo from the beginning of "The Adventuress," where Alyx is described as having all six of her left-hand fingers; now she is acknowledged to have retained "all her wits" at the killing of her husband, perhaps having temporarily relinquished them by marrying in the first place.

She has learned from the experience, and so, revelling in her recovered liberty, and secure in the knowledge that phallic symbols hold no power over her, Alyx vanishes into the night and begins an adventure in direct defiance of the restrictions imposed on her by her late husband. She joins the band of smugglers with whom he was conducting business and takes a new husband of her own choosing, their captain.

Russ uses the adventure as an opportunity to address some questions of social development and women's possible role in society's institutions. The first paradigm Russ questions is the objectification of women. As Alyx comes aboard the smugglers' vessel she is confronted by a group of sailors who immediately respond in the stereotypical fashion of sea-going men:

One whistled, indrawn between his teeth, long and low. "What does

she want?" said someone. The watch took hold of her arm and the sailor who had whistled raised both arms over his head and clasped them, at which the crowd laughed.

"She thinks we're hot!"

"She wants some, don't you honey?"

"Ooh, kiss me, kiss me, dearie!" (34)

The sailors' bawdy derision does not have the expected effect on Alyx. As they threaten her with sexual violence, Alyx merely notes the sailors' similarity to her late husband, an unfortunate comparison for the sailors:

She did not think they were behaving badly, as she was not sure how they ought to behave, but they reminded her uncannily of her husband, of whom she was no longer at all afraid. (34)

Significantly, at this stage in her literary development Russ does not use this opportunity to introduce a feminist reevaluation of men's and women's roles or of egalitarian reform in society, although Alyx has certainly begun to question whether or not she should submit to men merely because they happen to be men. Alyx is too fond of her independence to relinquish it to any man, especially to a man reminding her of her husband. Her reaction can be predicted if one considers the brutality she employed to subdue her late husband; she explodes all over the quarterdeck:

when the nearest winked and reached out two hands even huger than the shadow of hands cast on the deck boards, she kicked him excruciatingly in the left knee (he fell down), the watch got the belt buckle round in a

circle from underneath (up, always up, especially if you're short), which gave him a cut across the cheek and a black eye; this leaves her left hand still armed and her teeth, which she used. It's good to be able to do several things at once. (34)

With her left hand armed--by Russ's definition a woman's most powerful hand (not to mention her "sinister" hand, from the latin)--Alyx sets about giving the crew a sound thrashing. The black eye and cut cheek she inflicts upon one sailor are a chilling reminder of the injuries most commonly received by women from abusive husbands. However, the suggestion that woman's work has made her more competent and efficient as a fighter because she can do more than a single thing at once lends some humour to this violent encounter. She ceases to demolish the crew members only when she encounters their captain, her reason for coming to the ship. He recognizes her from his dealings with her husband and welcomes her as his mistress, under the delusion that she has been attracted by his manly mien. Alyx recognizes the possibility of controlling the entire crew by controlling their leader and sets out to dominate this buccaneer.

The captain recognizes Alyx's ability to fight but is unable to take her seriously because she is a woman. He indulges her desire to learn more about fighting, with patronizing amusement, in exchange for her sexual favours. Alyx, though, is clearly in the relationship only out of convenience; she is far too clever to romanticize her position on board the ship. Russ emphasizes Alyx's cunning and managerial skill: Alyx is incongruously responsible for the discovery of several important social

developments which form the foundation of modern society, more specifically, a socialist economy. Alyx develops statistical analysis: "She told the fortunes of the crew quite obligingly, as (the captain) had taught her, but was much more interested in the probabilities of the appearance of any particular card in one of the five suits" (40). When the captain goes ashore on business she tags along and notes his incompetence as a merchant, much like that of her dead husband--an ominous foreshadowing of the captain's possible fate, not to mention the possible fate of a monopolizing capitalist market. Alyx decides "that small producers should combine in trading with middlemen so as not to lower prices by competing against one another" (43). Russ here draws a parallel between the disadvantaged and devalued state of small, isolated merchants and the role of women as domestic servants. Coming, as it does, from Alyx, this comparison may be extended to suggest that women should band together to overthrow the monopoly of power by men in society, just as merchants should form cooperatives to increase their negotiating power. Russ's ideas are contemporaneous with the appearance of marxist-feminist organizations like the Redstockings. These small groups organized around common issues and evenly distributed responsibilities among members, thereby removing hierarchical structures which they associated with patriarchally influenced feminist groups and federal institutions, such as N. O. W., WEAL and the OFCC (the Office of Federal Contract Compliance).

That Alyx should be responsible for the early concepts of commodity cooperatives is no more unlikely than her idea that "doctors [should] cut up the bodies

of dead people in the schools to find out how they're put together" (47). The impossibility of Alyx's discovering these principles alone strains credibility, but it serves the purpose of giving women a role model with whom they can identify. It does, along with her fighting prowess, make Alyx somewhat a super-woman, counterbalancing the serious message Russ includes advocating women's rights, keeping the story from becoming preachy.

Russ continues to develop Alyx in her next short story, "The Barbarian" (1968). While it might be assumed from its title that Alyx has undergone a reversion or degeneration of character, Russ uses this story as a forum to write about the ethical implications of science in society and the morality underlying the control of technology as a resource. This seems to be an astounding leap when one considers that Alyx has yet to encounter any situation which can immediately and indisputably be considered science-fictional. Alyx has served to defy the stereotypes and conventions of adventure fantasy, but "The Barbarian" is the first Alyx story which could be described as containing elements of science fiction.

In "The Barbarian" Alyx is approached by a fat man who wishes to hire her as his accomplice in a personal venture, house-breaking a palace. He attempts to impress her with two objects we might recognize as science-fictional. The first is a form of visual monitor, in the shape of a small cube, which gives the user control over the sensations felt by the viewed subject. The second is a hand-held laser. Alyx feigns amazement at these articles but intellectually rejects their professed magical properties. Unlike Conan, who cringes in the face of magic, Alyx analyses these objects and the

personality of the man wielding them. She considers the cube as it is being used by the fat man to torture her husband and thereby coerce her cooperation:

*Must be some sort of small machine, though God knows who made it and of what. It follows thoughts! Marvellous. But magic? Bah! Never believed in it before; why now? Besides, this thing is too sensible; magic is elaborate, undependable, useless. (54)*

When the fat man gives her a demonstration of the laser, which looked to Alyx like nothing more than "a kind of blunt knife" (54), she gives voice to her cynicism. After he reduces a brick wall to ashes, Alyx is impressed but sceptical and cautious: she says, "It's quiet, for magic" (55). The fat man misreads her cautious statement as admiration or awe and boasts that he has destroyed whole armies with this device. The fat man's attempts to impress Alyx serve only to increase her suspicions of him; he is himself too enthralled with the properties of his tools to be completely in control—he is attempting to garner Alyx's respect and reaffirm himself as master.

The fat man's plot eventually comes to light; he plans to murder an infant who will, in time, become a tyrannical and cruel queen (one wonders who the queen terrorizes—men or women). The complications of his prescience are not addressed: Alyx accepts them as the function of some form of machine. Along with his other devices, his prescience serves only as a means of taking advantage of others. She refuses to kill the child and mocks the fat man for his squeamish incapacity for violence and his lack of resolve; she derides his assumption that she would willingly serve as another of his implements.

The palace is raised in alarm at the discovery of their invasion and they flee. The fat man has, however, used the cube to turn Alyx's current husband into a raving fool, and she consequently seeks him out for revenge, reversing the gender roles in the tale of "Sleeping Beauty": she is the "hero" pursuing the evil "sorcerer" to free her love from his "enchantment".

In his introduction to *Alyx*, Delany characterizes "The Barbarian" as fantasy and dismisses its science-fiction plot devices and accessories as an equivalent to the magic found in adventure fantasy. He argues that the science here is somewhat mystical and poorly defined. He maintains that Alyx rejects the chicanery of the fat man, not because she recognizes his duplicity and the import of the technology he employs, but because she refuses to accept that the universe is deterministic. Her faith in the randomness of the universe, in Delany's estimation, is Alyx's reaction to "over-determined" society. He explains her reasoning for self-determination:

Alyx knows the fat man is wrong (i.e., not God) because if he were right and the Universe were a mechanical product of his (specifically recognized as) machines (which he tries to pass off as magic), then the Universe would have to be deterministic. (xviii)

While Russ's science-fictional innovations may lack technological explication, the issues surrounding their purpose and use, the moral and ethical implications of technology, important themes in science fiction, are thoroughly addressed. In addition, Russ implies that the restriction of this knowledge from devalued minorities, including women, reinforces the oppression of these groups. Because Alyx controls



the events in her life, changing the system to suit her needs as we have seen in the earlier stories, she refuses to believe the fat man's claims to God-hood. Instead, she recognizes the insecurity motivating his megalomania: a childish attempt to gain reassurance and praise, thereby increasing his sense of self-worth, by manipulating others. She refuses to acknowledge his superiority and actively works towards his destruction.

When Alyx pursues the fat man to his tower she finds more of his technological gadgetry. She encounters a laser alarm system and a forcefield, but cleverly reasons out their operation and thwarts their defensive value. She finally confronts the fat man in a control room and realizes that his technology is the true and only source of his power. Alyx kills the fat man for his audacity, for soliciting her as a murderer of children, and for tormenting her lover to coerce her. "The Barbarian" can be read as Russ's condemnation of America's arrogant and contemptible use of technology as a means to exploit and intimidate weaker and less privileged governments, particularly those in South-East Asia--hence naming the villain "the fat man" after America's first atomic bomb.

Alyx scorns the technology in this chamber, not from a position of technological ignorance but from a position of moral superiority, because its purpose was to dominate the weak, infirm, and ignorant in support of tyranny. Alyx's contempt for the fat man's misuse of technology expresses the feminist opposition to unlimited military development and American involvement in the Vietnam war. Groups like WSP (Women on Strike for Peace), led by anti-war organizer Dagmar

Wilson, fought to halt this exorbitant and meritless expenditure of American resources in a conflict which continued largely as a matter of military pride.

After breaking the fat man's back and smothering him with a cushion, ironically a common method for murdering the weak and defenceless (small children and the aged, for example), Alyx shuts down the control room, lights a candle, and then proceeds to destroy the equipment. When she has completed her labour, she considers the relationship of the fat man to his tools:

*Make the world? You hadn't the imagination. 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. You are a child yourself, a child and a horror, and I would ten times rather be subject to your machinery than master of it.*

Aloud she said:

"Never confuse the weapon and the arm," and taking the candle, she went away and left him in the dark. (73-74)

In this way Russ illustrates the complex morality of employing technology: that one must understand the workings and makings of the tools one uses, otherwise one cannot completely understand the effect one will have on the world. Alyx prefers to control her own destiny; she will not relinquish control to technology or acknowledge technicians as her master. This dictum sets the tone of her reaction to technology in the two stories written after "The Barbarian" and moves Russ farther away from adventure fantasy and closer to the more sophisticated science fiction produced by her

and others in the very late 1960's.

Russ's story "The Second Inquisition" (1970) is a departure from the earlier works she produced which incorporated aspects of both adventure fantasy and science fiction. "The Second Inquisition" focusses on the frustration experienced by a sixteen-year-old girl coming to grips with her femininity and the stifling gender roles which Delany associates with "America in the summer of 1925" (xix). The main character, Bess, lives with her parents and a boarder, referred to only as "the visitor." Over the course of the summer Bess struggles to develop for herself a code of behaviour, but she is torn between the glamour of New York high society and the rebellious independence which is growing in her. The visitor serves as a kind of mentor, guiding Bess towards individuality and mocking the complacency of what could be called "the American Way": social mixers, going out, seasonal hemlines, indentured drudgery, demure wifely obedience, the prejudiced convention that a man is lord of his domain, and the condescension that "father knows best."

Bess admires the uniqueness of the visitor, extolling her grace and self-possession while being amazed by her height and the effect the visitor's physical size has upon her father. Bess is enchanted by the suggestion of masculine power in the visitor's bearing. Her awesome presence and enigmatic composure inspire Bess's confidence and admiration:

When she got up and went in to the kitchen with the gracefulness of a stork, for something to eat, she was almost too tall for the doorways; she went on legs like a spider's, with long swinging arms and a little

body in the middle, the strange proportions of the very tall. She looked down at my mother's dishes from a great, gentle, height, remarkably absorbed; and asking me a few odd questions, she would bend down over whatever she was going to eat, meditate on it for a few moments like a giraffe, and then straightening up back into the stratosphere, she would pick up the plate in one thin hand, curling around it fingers like legs, and go back gracefully into the living room. She would lower herself in to the chair that was always too small, curl her legs around it, become dissatisfied, settle herself, stretch them out again--I remember so well those long, hard, unladylike legs--and begin again to read.

(233-34)

Bess is fascinated by the way the visitor consumes books over the summer, sitting in the tiny chair devouring them like a spider in a corner draining the essence from its prey. The visitor is described in terms which are both masculine and otherworldly. Her detachment and pensive air draw Bess to her, making her seem exotic and alien. This impression is reinforced for Bess by the circumstances of the visitor's presence and its effects on her family. Bess describes the basic reaction of her family:

My mother, who disliked her, said she was from the circus and we ought to try to understand and be kind. My father made jokes. He did not like big women or short hair--which was still new in places like ours--or women who read, although she was interested in his carpentry and he liked that. (234)

Not only does Bess's father disapprove of the visitor's physical appearance and intellectual habits but he also scorns her smoking habit. What more attractive role model could there be for a sixteen-year-old girl trying to gain her independence than the object of her parents' disdain? Her admiration for the visitor increases directly in proportion to her father's discomfiture in her presence. Bess uses this kernel of rebellion to support her fantasies about the visitor and thereby to reinforce her own theories of womanhood and independence. She begins to develop fantasies around the strange boarder.

Russ has not completely discarded the conventions of fantasy literature in this story; she uses them to include science fiction as a means of increasing the plausibility of Bess's fantasies regarding the visitor. The reader is completely aware that the visitor is grounded in reality: an unusual and lonely woman, ridiculed and excluded by "polite society." Bess's fantasies border on the impossible; they project her own desires and ideals on the visitor. Bess imagines that the visitor is her own granddaughter and that she has come from the future, using time travel, on a mission to rescue Bess. This premise permits Russ to include science fiction without lengthy explanations and technical descriptions, in much the same style as H. G. Wells, the author most admired by Bess. Bess's fantasies are plausible because she can identify the visitor with scenes and characters from Wells's novel The Time Machine (1895).

In his introduction to H. G. Wells: The Time Machine, The War of the Worlds (1968), Isaac Asimov identifies Wells as a founding father of science fiction. He prefers Wells's writing to the earlier writing of Jules Verne because:

Wells, by disposing of his gadgetry quickly, with a slash of fantasy reduced to plausibility, had much room left over to deal with human beings. He saw in science fiction not primarily the tale of the advance of science, but rather the reaction of human beings to that advance of science. (16)

This sentiment would no doubt be supported by Russ, whose earlier story, "The Barbarian," focusses on the ethical responsibilities demanded by the advance of technology and science. Russ hearkens back to The Time Machine as an homage to Wells's dedication to issues of the human condition. Asimov applauds Wells's technological ambiguity as a means to focus on humanism, morality, and human development:

we have the opportunity to wonder how it was the Eloi and the Morlocks developed; what made them what they are; whether perhaps it is better to be one or the other. Most interestingly, we might be led to consider whether a life of ease leads to a kind of vegetable degradation; whether to eat of the lotus is to become a lotus; and whether scientific advance must lead inevitably in that direction. (17)

In The Time Machine, the premise of reaching another world is simplified and detechnologized by the concept of time travel. Wells has the Time Traveller construct a machine which travels along the dimension of time as simply as we would travel down a road. There are no complicated concepts of fantastic physics or fabricated technical jargon regarding the "space-time continuum" which have become so popular

in recent years; Wells states that the machine can travel through time, so it does. Its description is ambiguous, almost mysterious, and in all cases incomplete: "Parts were of nickel, parts of ivory, parts had certainly been filed from rock crystal" (32) and "squat, ugly, and askew; a thing of brass, ebony, ivory, and translucent glimmering quartz" (96). The other aspects of its construction indicate a "saddle" (37), "little levers that would set it in motion" (42), and dials with hands like a watch representing the passage of years along with the mention of rails and bars: the entire machine disappears in a "whirling mass of black and brass" (97) which seems like nothing more than a dust-devil. Wells's description, or rather lack of one, is amorphous enough not to strain the reader's credulity and thereby allows one to focus one's attention on the humanistic aspects of his writing.

The Time Traveller arrives in a future where man has evolved beyond his current state of physiology and sociology. He encounters two separate types of creature, descendants of the human race. The first are the Eloi, who arrive to greet him shortly after his appearance in the future. He describes the first creature to meet him:

He was a slight creature--perhaps four feet high--clad in a purple tunic, girdled at the waist with a leather belt. Sandals or buskins--I could not distinguish which--were on his feet; his legs were bare to the knees, and his head was bare. . . . He struck me as being a very beautiful and graceful creature, but indescribably frail. His flushed face reminded me of the more beautiful kind of consumptive--that hectic beauty of which

we used to hear so much. (41-42)

Upon closer observation, the Time Traveller describes the Eloi in fuller detail:

Their hair, which was uniformly curly, came to a sharp end at the neck and cheek; there was not the faintest suggestion of it on the face, and their ears were singularly minute. Their mouths were small, with bright red, rather thin lips, and the little chins ran to a point. The eyes were large and mild . . . . (42-43)

Wells's descriptions present a singularly feminine portrait of the childlike Eloi which is reinforced by the behaviour of the Time Traveller's sidekick cum sweetheart, Weena. As Wells's vision of womankind in the future, Weena would be a grave disappointment to Russ. The Time Traveller is enchanted with her seemingly idyllic personality (or lack of same):

by merely seeming fond of me, and showing in her weak, futile way that she cared for me the little doll of a creature presently gave my return to the neighbourhood of the White Sphinx almost the feeling of coming home; and I would watch for her tiny figure of white and gold as soon as I came over the hill. (59)

Weena is utterly devoted to the Time Traveller, a living doll of sorts: she fusses over him, she defers to him, she attends his every move, she is the perfect love-slave. The Eloi inhabit the ruins of a once decadent and sophisticated world, where there once was technological luxury and intellectual creativity there remains only pastoral ease. However, the Time Traveller is confronted with the other side of



the evolutionary coin soon after meeting Weena. While examining a dark, deserted building he blunders into a Morlock:

My impression of it is, of course, imperfect; but I know it was a dull white, and had strange greyish-red eyes; also that there was flaxen hair on its head and down its back. But, as I say, it went too fast for me to see distinctly. I cannot even say whether it ran on all-fours, or only with its forearms held very low. (61)

He follows it to a shaft descending into the Earth and, striking a match, watches as it retreats swiftly from view:

looking down, I saw a small, white, moving creature, with large bright eyes which regarded me steadfastly as it retreated. It made me shudder. It was so like a human spider! (61)

The Morlocks are the subterranean caretakers of the world. They maintain the technology which provides the Eloi with their pastoral and idyllic lifestyle, at a price. The Eloi provide the Morlocks with meat; they are, for all intents and purposes, livestock. Wells's cautionary tale of our possible future contains a problematic moral dilemma: whether it is better to serve or be served (pun intended). It warns of the possible consequences of complacency in a society whose leisure is purchased by the sweat of others less fortunate.

Russ builds on Wells's rhetoric and concludes that it is not enough to rebel against lethargy and complacency, but that one must recognize one's own limitations in the process and work towards achievable goals. She argues that it is not enough

merely to wail and rage against the injustices of patriarchal society, we must oppose prejudices daily and make the attempt to improve society as a whole. This is as important a characteristic of science fiction in Russ's eyes as any other and she incorporates this moral struggle in "The Second Inquisition."

One evening, while passing the visitor's room, Bess imagines having a conversation with her about The Time Machine. In her fantasy, noticing a copy of The Time Machine on the visitor's bed, Bess asks the visitor whether she would prefer to be a Morlock or an Eloi. Bess associates the Morlocks, as Russ herself would, with rebellion, dissatisfaction, and revenge. In her fantasy, the visitor answers: "I am a Morlock. I am a Morlock on vacation. . . . There are half a thousand Morlocks and we rule the worlds" (240-41). The connection between the visitor and the Morlocks is enhanced by Bess's impression of the visitor in comparison with the Morlock encountered by the Time Traveller: their lanky, spidery bodies.

In obvious contrast to the visitor, Bess's parents occupy the role of Eloi. Their respectable, ordered lives offer Bess the same bland, demure, conventional oblivion enjoyed by Wells's Eloi. Bess's disdain for her parents leads her, at the visitor's prompting, to read The Green Hat, a book which her parents have prohibited her from reading, and which may refer to the book Peyton Place, written by Grace Metalious and published in 1956: a scandalous story exposing the hypocrisy of suburban promiscuity and degeneracy in "apple-pie" America. The lifestyle depicted in The Green Hat represents the American dream, so to speak--a life of decadence, excess, and scandal. It happens also to be the hypocritical desire of Bess's parents, who

purchased and read the book but prohibited her from reading it because they were scandalized by it, perhaps it too closely mirrored the petty scandals of their own middle-class lives.

Bess believes that society life is a means to escape the restrictions of her family but she is haunted by a sense of responsibility, characterized in the pensive, analytical personality of the visitor, which invades her dreams:

Unfortunately our guest's face kept recurring in my dream, and because I could not make out whether she was amused or bitter or very much of both, it really spoiled everything. (236)

The visitor functions as a conscience in Bess's imaginings, preventing her from embracing the luxurious and decadent lifestyle of romantic fiction and New York society which could be characterized as the Eloi ideal, a life without concerns, or responsibilities. Torn between the extremes of rebellion and complacency, Bess continues to build on the fantasy she has constructed around the visitor in an attempt to reconcile her emotions and her reason. She fabricates a complicated intrigue involving the visitor as a renegade Morlock agent whose mission is to warn Bess of the impending Morlock invasion and to sabotage their plans for global domination and destruction.

Bess creates a scenario in which the visitor is an unwilling member of the Morlocks, better known as the Trans-Temporal Military Authority, who are opposed to the principles of social dominance embodied by the Eloi. The Morlocks hope to destroy the Eloi way of life through sabotage and destruction. Bess imagines that the

visitor has come back in time somehow to change the course of history, perhaps to prevent the development of a misguided social institution dedicated to undermining the "haves" in society. The other rebels condemn the visitor because she is jeopardising the rebellion; they see her pacifism as treasonous and condemn her attempts to educate Bess as "dilettantism" (261).

The Morlocks corner the visitor in Bess's living room and a debate and altercation ensue. After killing one of the rebels, the visitor is arrested, for treason. The leader of the rebels castigates her:

"We are at war; Trans-Temp is at our heels; do you think we have time for dilettantism? You presume on being that woman's granddaughter! We are fighting for the freedom of fifty billions of people, not for your scribbles!" (261)

Identified as the founder of the Trans-Temporal Military Authority, Bess realizes that she could be responsible for the destruction of the world. Her directionless rebellion against society could set in motion a chain of events which might ultimately lead to self-perpetuating violence between social groups, all of it self-defeating.

This schism in the Trans-Temporal Military Authority represents the differences in policy and conviction held by the women's movement and what was called the New Left or Radical feminism. Russ tries to encourage identification with feminist groups like N. O. W. and WEAL through her portrayal of the visitor. Her tolerance and patience for Bess are symbolic of the patient lobbying and long-term

legislative goals of the Women's Movement towards the education of women and the recognition of equal human rights. The violent, subversive attitude of the Morlocks represents the dedication of the New Left to rebellion, subversion, demonstrations, and political action: principles which may only serve to perpetuate conflict. Bess realizes that her adolescent rebellion is selfish, misdirected, and impotent--she collapses.

Bess's collapse is identified as anemia, and she recovers shortly after the visitor leaves. As she tries on shoes for the coming school year, Bess has another "conversation" with the visitor in her bedroom. She sees the visitor in the mirror on her own closet door. The visitor is evidently some aspect of Bess herself, most likely a feminist dissatisfaction with the doll-like role cast for her by a male society. The visitor is unable to manifest herself through the mirror and join Bess in the real world. She does however show Bess some drawings which illustrate Russ's evaluation of the state of feminist politics. The first depicts an Eloi, representing the male hierarchy, revelling in the excesses of a technological world. The second depicts the visitor, representing Bess as a mature woman, holding a troubled world in her hand suggesting the responsibility Bess must accept for the state of the world and its fate. The last depicts a tiny world full of Morlocks, representing feminists, followed by another smaller world, and another smaller world. This last drawing illustrates the fear Russ has that feminism will continue to fragment until it loses all perspective of itself and any power to effect change.

Bess comes to the conclusion that rebellion, while justified, may not be the

best solution to her problems—instead, it may amplify them. She desperately wants assistance and in bitterness and loneliness thinks to herself,

If I could not have a protector, I wanted a monster, a mutation, a horror, a murderous disease, anything! anything at all to accompany me downstairs so that I would not have to go down alone.

Nothing came. Nothing good, nothing bad. I heard the lawnmower going on. I would have to face by myself my father's red face, his heart disease, his temper, his nasty insidencies. I would have to face my mother's sick smile, looking up from the flowerbed she was weeding, always on her knees somehow, saying before she was ever asked, "Oh the poor woman. Oh the poor woman."

And quite alone.

No more stories. (265)

Bess ends the story accepting that she must cope with her own problems and that she cannot defer them with adolescent fantasies of rebellion and immediate change. Her father's tyranny and her mother's self-abnegation compel Bess to strive for change on a day-to-day basis, with the realization that it will be a gradual, prolonged process to reverse the trend of patriarchal society.

Russ has introduced her science fiction in a setting which identifies it as a solution-seeking genre, dedicated not merely to the identification and analysis of social injustice but also to the careful consideration and development of viable solutions. Asimov said of Wells's fiction that "his was the first clear realization of science

fiction as a way of delineating the response of man to plausibly depicted advances in science and technology" (22). Russ goes a step further and addresses the personal issues which stem from the proposals of writers like Wells. Her inclusion and extrapolation of social themes first produced by H. G. Wells, the founder of humanist science fiction, ties her work to a recognized and appreciated body of work, lending it viability. Russ does not rely solely on this association, for she strives to build on it and develop it into a more sophisticated genre representing the interests of women alongside those of men. Her progression from adventure fantasy to science fiction allows us to make a smooth transition from the impossible to the plausible, from a literature of fairy tales and dreams to a literature of aspirations and goals.

## Chapter Two

### This is no Picnic!

Written in 1968, Picnic on Paradise is Joanna Russ's first "foray" into pure science fiction. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles (1988) defines a foray as both "a hostile or predatory incursion" and "the advance guard of an army" (785). As a feminist entering a male-dominated field of literature, Russ could be identified as an invader, especially when one considers her reputation for subverting oppressive trends in literature, a reputation earned through her earlier, fantasy-based fiction. Besides criticizing the existing sexual hierarchy of science fiction, Russ proposes intelligent alternatives to the sexist conventions that she perceives in its mainstream, establishing a beach-head for those who will follow her lead and build upon the feminism she introduces into science fiction.

The basic plot of Picnic on Paradise is that of a pilgrimage and a rescue, the premise being that the ironically-named planet Paradise has ceased to be a pleasant place and the tourists trapped on it must be rescued before corporate authorities destroy them in their bid to control this lucrative site. Alyx has been enlisted as a guide under the authority of Trans-Temp, a time-travelling archaeological society which enjoys the reputation of a secret government agency. She is responsible for leading the tourists from their present location to a safe point for evacuation. Russ uses the concept of a war fought solely for economic gain, with little or no regard for the consequences to innocent bystanders or non-participants, as a platform from which



to discuss the views of feminists in the anti-war movement, such as Dagmar Wilson and Coretta Scott King in the early 1960's, and later activists like Shulamith Firestone who were specifically concerned with the Vietnam war.

In an interview with Donna Perry conducted in 1991 Russ identified three stages of authorship in science fiction: "The first is inventing things. . . . The second is what [Isaac] Asimov does with his robot stories, where you construct a plausible society for this to happen in. And the third stage is where you use it for some other purpose" (Perry 298). Russ is a third-stage writer because she uses science fiction as a medium to convey her feminist message to readers: she is not satisfied to produce science fiction for its own sake; she has a moral agenda. Science fiction provides, for writers like Russ, a platform for issues and discussion which might be neglected in conventional fiction--controversial, unprecedented or unsubstantiated theories and ideologies--in that it permits her the freedom to extrapolate from existing social trends and to speculate about their future possibilities. Russ's essay "What can a Heroine do? or Why Women Can't Write" (1972), gives us insight into this area. Russ is offended by the limits imposed on literature by the pedantry of established literary models:

The lack of workable myths in literature, of acceptable dramatizations of what our experience means, harms much more than art itself. We do not only choose or reject works of art on the basis of these myths; we interpret our own experience in terms of them. Worse still, we actually perceive what happens to us in the mythic terms our culture provides. (16)

Literature not only reflects social morality, it also imposes morality on our actions and shapes our perception of ourselves. Stagnant ideas perpetuate themselves because we continue to live our lives and establish our morals and beliefs using prejudiced concepts and themes from canonized patriarchal literature. Russ's writing actively opposes these themes and presents the reader with options other than the repetitive dogma of privileged, patriarchal literary traditions.

Delany agrees with Russ about the flawed morality of Western literature. He is particularly concerned with the application of traditional approaches of literary analysis and criticism to burgeoning genres such as science fiction. Delany fears that social and moral criticism will be suppressed by forcing science fiction into a traditional mould:

What we risk--what any critical analysis of science fiction risks--is lumbering science fiction with all literature's traditional mystifications, prejudices, pretensions, ignorances, and, finally, ideological rigidities. These . . . are not accidental ignorances in an enterprise that is otherwise an accumulation of "right knowledge" over an indefinite period: they are historically determined and are a response to Western history, through which the "development of literature" is only a single strand. And these rigidities, intolerances, pretensions, prejudices, and mystifications are sufficiently (if not necessarily) proscribed by the literary model itself. ("Orders" 101)

Delany argues that there is no necessity to reinforce the dominant ideas of

patriarchal literature through criticism because literature itself will present those opinions. We must therefore focus our efforts on the development and presentation of new ideas and concepts in literature. Criticism of that new literature must come from an ideological position appropriate to it; we cannot continue to measure science fiction against a conventional literary yardstick.

Russ's strongest objections are against the perpetuation of patriarchal gender roles in literature and the superficial and deficient female literary role models which occur as a consequence of critical condescension and literary tokenism. She identifies traditional gender roles as being particularly destructive:

Our traditions, our books, our morals, our manners, our films, our economic organization, everything we have inherited, tells us that to be a Man one must bend Nature to one's will--or other men. This means ecological catastrophe in the first instance and war in the second. To be a Woman, one must be first and foremost a mother and after that a server of Men; this means overpopulation and the perpetuation of the first two disasters. ("Heroine" 20)

Russ's most effective tools in her efforts to counteract the censorship and suppression of feminism in literature are irony and satire. In this chapter, I will examine her use of irony and satire in Picnic on Paradise as tools subverting chauvinistic tropes in science fiction and promoting feminism in its stead.

In a short survey of Russ's works, Marilyn J. Holt explains the role science fiction fills in Russ's writing:

Russ must create and re-create the myths that embody the women of our culture. She uses the conventions of science fiction to juxtapose the "real" world to her alternatives. Then, through examination or exaggeration of an aspect of the "real" world, she bends that world to form another, contrasting world view. ("Joanna" 484)

Holt's explanation designates science fiction as the ideal platform for the transformation of literary values. Her description of Russ's tactics concurs with Nancy A. Walker's feminist agenda for employing irony and satire against the dominant male paradigms of literature. In her book, Feminist Alternatives: Irony and Fantasy in the Contemporary Novel by Women (1990), Walker encourages the use of irony as a method for feminists to carve a niche for themselves in the edifice of existing literature and criticism. She categorizes feminist writing into two groups:

One group includes challenges to male-dominated language, either by appropriating male discourse for women's purpose or by altering it or subverting it. The second group of approaches is composed of those that emphasize women's exclusion from language--their silence.

Writers who challenge the dominant discourse typically do so by employing some form of irony, whereas those who stress women's position outside that discourse are more apt to use fantasy as a concomitant narrative strategy. (44)

Russ is unquestionably an example of Walker's first group of writers. Her scepticism and irreverence for male stereotypes are exemplified in the first paragraph

of Picnic on Paradise, Alyx's departure from adventure fantasy and her introduction to both the "modern world" and to science-fiction readers:

She was a soft-spoken, dark-haired, small-boned woman, not even coming up to their shoulders. . . . The young lieutenant, who was two meters and a third tall, or some three heads more than herself, very handsome and ebony skinned, said "I'm sorry, ma'am, but I cannot believe you're the proper Trans-Temporal Agent; I think--" and he finished his thought on the floor, his head under one of his ankles and this slight young woman . . . somehow holding him down in a position he could not get out of without hurting himself to excruciation. (1-2)

Alyx is hardly typical of "soft spoken" or "small boned" women. That is, she does not fit any conventional stereotypes; she is not weak, timid, dependent, vulnerable, or docile. Her aggressive domination of the lieutenant (who is an obvious representative of the Vietnam era stereotype of the patronizing military muscle-head who looks good in a uniform but is not useful for much else) places the reader immediately in the arena of sexual politics. By asserting Alyx's authority in this situation, Russ steers criticism towards the roles thrust upon women by excluding them from the draft and active military service. Women filled roles as administrative staff, communications and logistical personnel, entertainment organizers (WSO), and medical staff but were denied any combat role. While Russ is strongly anti-war she does recognize that there are women who would be willing and proud to serve in a military capacity and she defends their right to equal opportunity and treatment in the

military, she condemns the concept that women are qualified only to serve in nurturing and organizational duties. The conventional military professions occupied by women--nursing, secretarial duties, logistical and communications positions--as well as those at home--supporting and nurturing the emotional health of their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers in combat--are rejected by Alyx, who prefers to handle her own affairs and, if necessary, fight her own battles.

Russ has reversed the characteristic gender roles and has turned a male stereotype to the advantage of feminism by employing humour to disarm the implied sexual bias in the lieutenant's assumption of authority. Walker reminds us that "irony is a way of negating the truth or validity of a received tradition and pointing to its incongruity or absurdity" (22), and the humour of this scene is almost slapstick in its irony. When Alyx's authority is challenged by this overconfident young officer she cuts him down to size as effectively as any drill sergeant. After humiliating the lieutenant, she is forced to assume the position of the alpha male in the limited social hierarchy of the novel: leader by "virtue" of physical prowess. Alyx effortlessly restrains this gigantic man and controls him completely. He is utterly helpless and may rise only when Alyx chooses to release him.

Russ's use of irony to convey her message results in a comedic writing style with a sharp moral edge. She compels the reader to consider the validity of her target's ideological position: to search out the flaws in the moral righteousness of conventional science-fiction traditions. Walker's study of the use of irony in women's writing concludes that humour is a powerful and invaluable tool:

The initial step in negating the hegemony of oppressive language is to question its authority by making fun of it. Pointing to the absurdity of the official language of a culture is a method used commonly by members of oppressed groups; humour negates the power of hegemonic discourse quite simply by refusing to take that power seriously. (44)

I disagree with Walker's comment that an ironic writer does not, or should not, take the power of an oppressive discourse seriously, that it may be reduced to ignominy simply by ridicule. A full understanding of the psychology and power structure supporting a dominant paradigm must exist for the writer to produce sophisticated and humorous irony. Mere ridicule seems acrimonious and lacks the intellectual or moral consideration adequately to support any serious attempt to dismantle traditional stereotypes, regardless of their absurdity. Walker is however correct in her assertion that humour is the most powerful offensive tool at the disposal of feminists. Russ's understanding of the ubiquitous permeation of gender stereotyping in culture, its role in everything from economics and religion to fashion and the entertainment media, makes her an especially effective critic and a profound humorist. That is why she indulges in an over-the-top parody of all that is masculine and "heroic" in science fiction by creating a "fearless" leader who is undeniably "feminine" and occasionally at odds with herself.

We recall that Russ originally presented Alyx as a cunning, independent, sword-wielding female counterpoint to the male characters of the sword-and-sorcery genre, exposing the defects in the adolescent male sensibilities of adventure fantasy

through Alyx's competent mastery of male society and her confident, independent sexuality. Russ brings Alyx into science fiction to demonstrate that, as science fiction has developed from fantasy and grown more sophisticated, Alyx has also become a more sophisticated and emotionally profound character. Russ's feminism and her presentation of that feminism through her writing are also becoming more complex and intricate at this point in her career. She chooses the theme of a pilgrimage cum escape across Paradise because of its group dynamic and its purpose as a personal journey for contemplation and introspection. This permits Russ more easily to develop Alyx's character through a variety of interpersonal conflicts.

To avoid capture on Paradise, and possibly being used either as hostages or executed, the travellers are prohibited from possessing any modern electronic or technological equipment which might register on an electromagnetic satellite surveillance system which orbits the planet. Alyx is chosen to lead the tourists to safety because as a resident of ancient Tyre (as we just now discover) she is considered ignorant of modern technology:

"Sheer ignorance," she repeated. "The most valuable commodity of all. Me. No familiarity with mechanical transportation or the whatchamacallits. Stupid. Can't read. Used to walking. Never used a compass in my life. Right?" (10-11)

Because she is unfamiliar with technology, her handlers believe that Alyx will be better qualified to survive on Paradise than the people of the future whom she is guiding. Without modern conveniences, they will be disoriented and disadvantaged.



Similarly, Russ has a greater chance of success delivering her feminist message to readers if she does not use the familiar, masculine devices of science fiction in this novel. Russ's fiction, like Wells's fiction before her, rejects technological trappings in favour of psychological and moral exploration in science fiction. She writes in defiance of Gernsbackian science fiction, the space opera: science fiction which carries on the sexist traditions of fantasy with technology as a cover for its literary weakness. This style of writing, often attributed first to the editor Hugo Gernsback, did much to undermine the legitimacy of science fiction as a literary genre by stifling its social development with technological fluff and adolescent pornography.

Through self-reliance Russ and Alyx have a greater chance of success. Russ points out the humour in the situation--the irony of ignorance as a desirable qualification: Russ's intentional ignorance of science-fiction traditions and Alyx's ignorance of Paradise. As Alyx prepares to leave the orientation base, leading the tourists across a snow-bound planet to safety, she makes a discovery which dismays the lieutenant and undermines our confidence in her skills: "By God! . . . I don't believe I've ever seen snow before" (11). Russ chooses what may be an inappropriate literary vehicle for her feminist message, but remains determined to succeed in spite of the sometimes moral weaknesses of her adopted genre. It is ironic that Alyx may succeed in spite of her ignorance and the odds against her, just as Russ succeeds as an author of science fiction without bowing to the Gernsbackian traditions of the genre.

Alyx is faced with the responsibility of guiding eight other people across an expanse of wilderness without technical support, a feat we would be hard pressed to

accomplish today. Although she is directed to escort these people, she does not "lead" them—she goads them, she bullies them, she beats and prods them, and she insults them as well as the society which they represent. Her approach to the task is that of a chore she must do because no one else will, and she constantly reinforces her role as "leader" through intimidation. Alyx seems to be a merciless Amazon, a bitch-queen with no empathy or mercy or heart: a stereotype borrowed from innumerable fantasy and science-fiction stories. Sarah Lefanu describes the male perception of the bitch-queen in her book, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism & Science Fiction* (1988). She speculates that male readers fear women in a leadership role and that male authors foster this prejudice:

For many male writers of science fiction Amazons serve as symbol of all that is most feared and loathed as Other, the castrating mother wreaking vengeance for her condition on her male offspring. She must be denied through death, or forced into submission to a male-dominated heterosexual practice which then becomes the norm. . . . Amazons must be punished, nominally perhaps for their presumption in assuming "male" characteristics, such as strength, agency, power, but essentially for their declaration of Otherness. (33)

Russ's version of feminism in science fiction has put her in the position of "Other" time and again and, predictably, she has been marginalized and criticised by the literary community. Alyx faces the same prejudices and biases when she accepts the responsibility for leading the tourists across Paradise to safety. As a woman, her

authority is challenged constantly by men, and her position is denied or envied by women. Alyx reacts by becoming increasingly tyrannical and abusive, ignoring the personal needs of her charges.

The tourists represent a broad range of social stereotypes, and Russ surrounds them with ironic symbolism. There are four women and four men, not including Alyx. Iris, a flamboyant and trendy young woman, and her unacknowledged mother Maudey are members of the socially privileged and elite; Alyx is criticized for her gauche mention of such an embarrassingly intimate relationship. The two other women are nuns, members of a Buddhist sect, whose passive approach to crisis undermines Alyx's authority at decisive points during the journey. Gavrily is the oldest man in the group, a useless bureaucrat whose only power rests in political influence. Raydos is an artist specializing in archaic styles and forms; he prefers, pretentiously, to wear contact lenses rather than have corrective eye surgery. Alyx's greatest antagonist is Gunnar, an amateur explorer and heroic dramatist (Marlon Perkins meets "Lost in Space" a particularly Gernsbackian character) who consistently attempts to undermine Alyx's authority by assuming leadership via popularity. The last man is Machine, a "bald young inexistential rebel" (7) who is held in contempt by the others for his refusal to participate in or even to respond to their social order. He becomes Alyx's lover because he shares her critical view of this society.

It is perhaps not unexpected that this group decides early in the journey to replace Alyx as leader with someone less aggressive and demanding. After the first afternoon's march they spring their decision (reached democratically, of course) on

Alyx. The tourists propose that stops be made more frequently, that they take a shorter and more direct route, that they stop for photo opportunities at scenic areas, and that Gunnar should be in charge of the expedition. Alyx is infuriated by their complacency and ignorance, and reprimands them for their stupidity and shortsightedness:

She was prepared to blast their ears off, to tell them just what she thought of them. She was shaking all over. She began in her own language, however, and had to switch clumsily to theirs, trying to impress upon them things for which she could not find words, things for which she did not believe the language had words at all: that she was in charge of them, that this was not a pleasure party, that they might die, that it was her job to be responsible for them, and that whoever led them, or how, or why, or in what way, was none of their business. She kept saying over and over that it was none of their business. (21)

Alyx's scolding is met with glib dismissal, much as a child's tantrum would be, and Gunnar tries to console her. When he takes Alyx's hand she reacts by attempting a defensive throw which he counters easily. Gunnar teases her, saying, "I know this kind of thing too, you see" (22). Alyx abruptly shifts her assault and uses Gunnar's physical strength against him, subduing him and demoralizing the group by humiliating their "champion."

Alyx is at as great a risk of losing the cooperation of her group of travellers by

repeatedly bullying them as Russ would be to lose the tolerance of undecided readers of feminist science fiction by bludgeoning them with man-bashing role reversals, which merely substitute one set of prejudices in favour of another. Aware of this potential, Russ appeals to the intellect and reason of her readers to provide support for her proposals. Russ is confounded by the complacent ignorance, or perhaps the tenured audacity, of male writers who ignore the emotional and psychological requirement for credible female protagonists in science fiction. She comments on the dearth of realism in female characterization: "Women in twentieth-century American literature seem pretty much limited to either Devourer/Bitches or Maiden/Victims. Perhaps male writers have bad consciences" ("Heroine" 8). So, because male writers seem to lack the capacity accurately to represent women's interests, Russ takes the task out of their hands.

Alyx is primarily a critical tool in Russ's fiction; through Alyx, she introduces concepts into science fiction which would be problematic as an overall plot or theme. As personality traits, Alyx's ideas can be seen as developmental, the accumulation of her experience. These traits reflect Russ's own development as an author and also the development of her literary theories and the progressive incorporation of those theories into science fiction. Alyx broke conventional gender roles in Russ's early fantasy stories and it is only natural that Alyx continue to develop as a feminist character, paralleling Russ's development as an author.

Perry asked Russ why each of her works uses a unique literary approach. Russ responded that "Most of what's worth saying in fiction cannot be said straight. You

have to go around; you have to use all your technical resources" (303). Alyx has become more complicated because the reader should also by now have become more sophisticated and discerning. Ironically, Alyx's facade of Amazonian toughness masks an uncertain and vulnerable woman who wishes merely to survive. Lefanu sees through the tough-guy facade erected by Alyx; she describes Alyx as a character with a great purpose: "The traditional tropes of sword-and-sorcery . . . are offset by Alyx's strong vein of rationalism and scepticism, which makes her a particularly modern heroine" (35). Alyx must learn to rely on the other party members if she wants to achieve success: she must work with them and learn to respect their beliefs as well. Russ's resourcefulness includes the ability to couch her feminism in the terms and characterization of science fiction, gradually converting and developing characters, via introspective passages, out of their emotional adolescence, expanding their understanding of social issues and of themselves.

Russ is disappointed that science fiction writers have not taken greater advantage of the creative possibilities existing in the genre, especially the opportunities to expand feminine character development. There remains a focus on superficial social issues and technological advancement. Russ exposes this lack of attention to the individual development of human nature in her essay, "The Image of Women in Science Fiction" (1971):

One would think science fiction the perfect literary mode in which to explore (and explode) our assumptions about "innate" values and "natural" social arrangements, in short our ideas about Human Nature,

Which Never Changes. . . . But speculation about the innate personality differences between men and women, about family structure, about sex in short about gender roles, does not exist. (80)

By neglecting issues of gender development, the science-fiction community had effectively ignored feminist issues because, despite social programs and institutionalized efforts to achieve equality, both in the literary community of science fiction and in society as a whole, little can be done to change the personal beliefs of readers. The difficulties and vulnerabilities facing writers in gender issues had discouraged them from addressing these problems. Brian Aldiss sees writers like Russ as innovators, rejuvenating a genre which, due to an unfortunate tendency towards conformity and arrested adolescence in the 1950's, was stagnating and, consequently, alienating readers. Russ's attention to social issues--and the emotional involvement of her characters in those issues--places science fiction, once again, in an explorative and predictive frame of reference. Russ's writing is essential to this reanimation of the genre:

Science fiction, in other words, has come back to a much more central position in the world of art. The all-male escapist power fantasy had devoured all but what we have called the Huxleyan branch, those writings which occurred only irregularly as specific social criticism. Science fiction has returned from the Ghetto of Retarded Boyhood; and, to tell the truth, it seems not to have suffered from its imprisonment. (Aldiss 306)

While Aldiss is highly optimistic regarding recovery from the ill-effects of science fiction's stunted adolescence, he is correct to say that science fiction has begun to recover and function as integrated social criticism. In the interest of educating readers and presenting moral options, Russ concentrates on the psychological problems facing Alyx, bringing feminist issues into clearer focus.

Alyx's development is complicated by her own conventions and beliefs; she must adapt to the world if she expects the world to adapt to her. Russ realizes the need for a complex character to reflect the day-to-day complexities of feminism and morality in the larger arena of social interaction. She tries to create scenarios which reflect the sophisticated relationships between people and understands that forcing someone towards any conclusion will only ensure resistance and intolerance, just as the tourists resist Alyx's bullying and tyrannical ranting.

After beating Gunnar, Alyx is faced with the realization that she cannot simply continue to order her charges around. She muses on the uncertainty of their survival and comes to an important personal conclusion while remembering a poem from her own era:

The refrain of the poem was *What will become of me?* which she changed to *What will become of them?* until she realized that nothing at all would become of them, for they did not have to understand her.

*But I, she thought, will have to understand them.*

*And then, . . . what, O God, will become of me? (23)*

Alyx and Russ both risk losing sight of their objectives in the course of their



personal struggles to survive against popular beliefs. They must adapt to the existing social order or risk failure and ultimately their own demise, as character and author respectively. However, this does not mean they must abandon their beliefs, and it is difficult for both of them to moderate their beliefs without denying their validity. The most reliable means they have of reinforcing their ideas is to pass those ideas on to someone else. Russ accomplishes this through her stories while Alyx teaches her ideas to a protege, much as she has in earlier fantasy stories, with the difference that she now gives more consideration to the personal interests of her protege.

Alyx tries to give Iris the support necessary for Iris to break free of the stereotypes which exercise control over her thinking and behaviour. Alyx does not try to educate Iris by instruction, but instead encourages Iris to make her own decisions and act for herself. She tries not to impose her own ideals on Iris; she prefers to let Iris develop independently. This heuristic approach to educating Iris reflects Russ's heuristic feminism and science fiction. In all cases, one learns better and more important lessons through personal experience than could be taught in any other fashion. Education by set traditions or conventional methods would only reinforce the patriarchal system Russ is criticising and Alyx's delayed realization that she is tyrannizing her charges creates an ironic and introspective highlight to Russ's message.

On the other hand, Walker cautions feminist writers against the use of satire as a critical tool because "satire . . . is grounded in a fixed moral vision, whereas irony is characterized by ambivalence" (23). Walker, however, appears to draw her opinion

of satire from her own interpretation of Lillian Furst's Fictions of Romantic Irony (1984). Walker quotes Furst's outline of the strategic benefit of irony as a critical tool. Furst wrote:

The less immediately abrasive art of irony may ultimately be the more disturbing because its upshot is a series of open ends and contradictions. It is an inquiring mode that exploits discrepancies, challenges assumptions and reflects equivocations, but that does not presume to hold out answers. (23)

Walker goes on to claim that irony is not governed by "rules of right or wrong, truth or falsity" (23). However, if we are to gain knowledge and a sense of the "incongruity or absurdity" of a situation or conversation or concept in literature there must be, inherently, an opposition of themes and agendas. Without conflicting interests, right or wrong thinking, in terms of the novel, there can be no contrast to support irony. And, while morality cannot exist in a vacuum, it is fallacious to assume that the moral or ethical stance being presented in contrast to the dominant paradigm is the sole or ultimate solution to the prejudices or failures of that particular paradigm. Walker's suggestion that satire has a "fixed moral vision" (23) makes the assumption that it is the author's goal to indoctrinate the reader. A work can be satirical, it can subvert a specious moral code, without replacing it with another. By placing alternative moral positions in the context of the existing paradigm, satire provides the option for change without the presumption of a perfect solution. Russ effectively avoids the moral agendas which Walker feels plague satire and also

manages to produce ironic characterization which is emotional and complex--hardly ambivalent from any standpoint. Alyx's struggle to come to terms with her ideas and the desires of the tourists demonstrates sophisticated introspective satire.

Picnic on Paradise occupies the moral ground between a failing system and the promise of change and development. Alyx discovers early on that she cannot continue to ignore the interests of the tourists and she struggles to achieve a balance between being protector/leader and companion/mentor. One of the most important qualities in Russ's work, according to Holt, is her realistic portrayal of Alyx's personal interests which lends her fiction credibility. Holt says:

There is no pretence of objectivity in Russ's novels. Russ includes the viewpoint character's perceptions of the environment, and intellectual and theoretical interests. But the character's prejudices, limitations, and psychology--what could be called a psychological landscape or innerscape--control the story. ("Joanna" 484)

Holt goes on to explain why Alyx has so much trouble reconciling the differences between herself and the tourists in the novel. Alyx's view of her position in the larger scheme of things is to live for the moment, whereas her charges are weighed down by their perceptions and analyses of losses and gains of material and social power. Holt describes their differing ethics:

Alyx survives in her world because she lives in the present; only the journey itself is important. But those whom Alyx must lead to safety have no concern with their present; most lack concern and

understanding of themselves and their situation. Their subjective universes lack morality and order. This contrast provides the major tension of the story. ("Joanna" 485)

Alyx's frustration with the egocentrism and narcissism of her charges, characteristics which she has not seen change in 4,000 years, drives her towards their goal because Alyx feels responsible for these gigantic "babes in the woods". The group chatters ceaselessly about their interactions, analyzing and unravelling each other's motives; how Iris feels about Gunnar, why Machine chooses to ignore their society, whether or not the nuns are interacting adequately with the rest of the group, and endlessly on in the same way. The lack of interest in their situation and circumstances irritates Alyx; she feels it increases their risk of failure and furthermore cannot find a way to reinforce the importance of attention to their journey. She is limited in her capacity to express herself, making her message all the more difficult to pass on. After a particularly trying day--Iris spontaneously singing and jeopardising their safety, Gunnar admiring her with his eyes full of love or hero worship, Raydos tactlessly explaining the behaviour of the others to her--Alyx seeks some privacy and walks ahead of the group. As she muses over the richness of the land they are travelling through she gradually falls back to the group, joining up with Machine. Alyx asks Machine to clarify something which has cropped up in her thoughts, a vocabulary gap:

"What's a pre-school conditioning director?"

"A teacher," said Machine in a surprisingly serene voice, "of

very small children."

"It came into my mind," she said, "all of a sudden, that I was a *pre-school conditioning director*."

"Well you are," he said gravely, "aren't you?"

He seemed to find this funny and laughed on and off, quietly, for the rest of the afternoon. She did neither. (49)

The irony of the situation escapes Alyx, but Machine is in tune with it. Alyx, leading these eight gigantic adults through the wilderness, is in a position to teach them to survive, to rely on one another, and to learn respect for one another, but she is too mired in her own responsibilities to see the progress they are slowly making, both physically and emotionally. For Alyx the journey lies in the progress they must make, not in the distance they have already covered and in the complications which may lie ahead, not in the obstacles they have overcome. This exchange also reflects Russ's objectives as a writer: to effect change without losing perspective of her previous accomplishments as Alyx's biases are exposed when she risks losing perspective by being excessively goal oriented.

Alyx may not be aware of the impact she is having on her companions, but they are gradually becoming aware of her importance to the group. Gunnar is becoming more reliable as Alyx's right hand man, so to speak. Machine is becoming more actively involved in the group and takes an interest in the decisions and interactions among the others. More important, Iris is realizing that there is more to her existence than the shallow role that society offers her. She takes a greater interest

in Alyx and strives to become more like her. Russ has demonstrated that there is more to Alyx's position in Picnic on Paradise than merely to undermine the dominant paradigm. As Alyx becomes more receptive to her charges, accepting their idiosyncracies, she becomes more involved in their personal problems and seeks to console and aid them, as part of her own "family," perhaps the only family she has. And, as her only family, Alyx must accept them as they are—not excepting her distaste for some of their behaviour.

She realizes that Iris is interested in changing and takes her under her wing, once again accepting the role as mentor and advisor for a younger woman who wants to escape the role society has designated for her. Russ has pointed out that:

The conventional idea that women are second-class people is a hard idea to shake; and while it is easy enough to show women doing men's work, or active in society, it is in the family scenes and the love scenes that one must look for the author's real freedom from our most destructive prejudices. ("Image" 89)

Alyx, however, realizes that this change is not easy to make and that sometimes one must push the fledgling from the nest to teach it to fly on its own. This "mentor program for young feminists" is one of the characteristic aspects of Russ's fiction from its very beginnings. In the opinion of Thelma Shinn:

Russ has taken a strong, feminist stance throughout her career, and repeatedly the female champion of sword and sorcery in her works has passed on good advice and a strong example to a young female still

caught in a subservient or self destructive role. (208)

The concept of feminism as a heuristic experience for both the teacher and student is readily apparent in Russ's work, and Alyx learns from Iris as much as Iris learns from Alyx. Russ's writing encourages cooperative feminism where women rely on one another, benefitting from their shared personal experiences and discussion of their common obstacles, rather than trying to effect change alone--in effect, developing a consciousness-raising group. J. Caissa Wilmer explains the importance of this united effort:

[Russ] also maintains that a feminist work must have at least two women working and/or fighting together, or one helping to liberate or empower the other. A prevailing theme in Russ's work is *the rescue of the female child*--a rescue however, in which the mentor also learns from the child. (483)

Iris's empowerment is a gradual process catalyzed by her own mother's death; this death is symbolic of the rejection of traditional female social roles by women and men alike in the interest of promoting feminism. Maudey was the product of a society which defined women as objects. She concealed her age through rejuvenating drugs which maintained the illusion of youth even though she was over ninety years old. After several days journey however, Maudey began to have seizures and radical mood swings: symptoms of systemic withdrawal from her drugs. Alyx tries to lend Maudey the emotional and physical support to continue, but Maudey has invested too much energy maintaining her facade to venture outside the context into which society

has written her; she is addicted to her drugs and her identity depends on convention. In a state of delirium brought about by her withdrawal she begins to recite a litany of her problems and insecurities, ultimately associating herself with a faulty childhood toy, a doll which kept repeating itself. It is ironic that Maudey lulls herself into complacent oblivion repeating the same phrase over and over while Alyx tries to reinforce her resolve using the same method:

"I'm a living doll," Maudey was saying, "I'm a living doll, I'm a living doll, I'm a living doll," interspersed with terrible sobs.

*They do tell the truth*, thought Alyx, *sometimes*. "You," she said firmly, "are a woman. A woman. A woman."

"I'm a doll!" cried Maudey.

"You," said Alyx, "are a woman. A woman with dyed hair. A silly woman. But a woman. A woman!"

"No I'm not," said Maudey stubbornly, like an older Iris.

"Oh, you're a damned fool". . . . (52)

Maudey's fear of change prevents her from grasping the lifeline that Alyx has thrown her; she clings to the security of socially defined behaviour. This scene reminds us of Weena's helplessness and fragility in The Time Machine, and of Russ's objection to that particular view of women's future for women. In spite of her disdain for Maudey's social station and helplessness, Alyx believes that Maudey could still make the transition from the mindless habituated behaviour in which she currently wallows to being independent and having self-respect. Maudey refuses her help and



retreats into denial, unable make the transition.

Twenty-nine days into their journey, Maudey falls victim to a spasm and slips over the edge of a cliff, breaking her neck. Alyx feels responsible and consoles Iris, who is stricken with grief for the mother she could never acknowledge publicly, a mother whose passivity and complacency embarrassed her in much the same way as Bess was embarrassed by her mother's subservience to her father in "The Second Inquisition." When the suggestion is made by Machine that Iris be sedated, Alyx refuses to permit her sedation and takes responsibility for consoling her. At first Iris denies her mother's death, but she soon begins looking for a person to blame and settles on Alyx. When she suggests that Alyx wanted Maudey dead to save herself the trouble of watching over her, Alyx loses her cool and nurturing attitude. Perhaps the accusation of wanting to be rid of the apathetic and helpless old woman strikes her too close to the bone. Alyx reacts predictably but with notable restraint:

Alyx hit her across the face. She threw her down, sat on her, and proceeded to pound at her while the others watched, shocked and scandalized. She took good care not to hurt her. When Iris had stopped, she rubbed snow roughly over the girl's face and hauled her to her feet, "and no more trouble out of you!" she said. (73)

Alyx is rough with Iris to prevent her from slipping into the same hypnotic self-denial and self-pity into which Maudey fell. She realizes that Iris must accept her mother's death in order to continue, and so she uses force to snap Iris out of her negative attitude. As the group continues on their journey, Alyx quietly reinforces

Iris's memory of Maudey's death and consoles her, helping her to support herself emotionally.

Alyx is undermined by the group again when, as she sleeps, one of the nuns gives Iris a psychedelic drug to alleviate her emotional suffering. Alyx reacts furiously, considers murdering the nuns for their damnable interference, but instead continues to support and govern the intoxicated Iris, nursing her through the effects of the drug and ensuring her safety. As Iris gradually returns to normalcy in the following days, Alyx, at her request, reinforces her memory of her mother's death. This support of the weak by the strong-minded is a basic principle in the feminist movement of consciousness raising, developed and outlined by Kathie Sarachild. Unfortunately, Alyx has little cooperation from the nuns and must therefore form a support group of one.

In her struggle to assert herself over the confusion and apathy induced by the tranquilizer, Iris tries to produce sensations of grief to combat the euphoria negating the validity of her grief. She wants desperately to recover her individuality and recover her familial ties, she turns to Alyx for help:

"My mother's dead," said Iris with sudden emotion. "My mother's dead. I've got to remember that. I've got to!"

"Yes, yes, she's dead," said Alyx.

"Please, please," said Iris, "keep me here. I keep sliding away." (92)

As Alyx attempts to console Iris, Iris begins to strip, inflicting cold and pain

on herself in an attempt to maintain her grasp of reality and prevent herself from slipping into the euphoric oblivion which threatens to separate her from her grief. Alyx threatens to beat her, and Iris subsides but still struggles to recover her "self". When Alyx consoles Iris, she addresses her as "baby;" Iris responds: "I'm not a baby, . . . I'm not a--a--baby. I'm a woman" (92-93). This objection verbalizes the feelings of many young women trying to assert their identity in the late 1960's and may have been the same emotion which inspired Helen Reddy's popular feminist anthem from 1972, "I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar." Iris's assertion of her maturity and responsibility, however faint, is all the encouragement Alyx requires to support her struggle for identity--it is proof that Iris wants reform but also that she fears losing herself to the same fate as her mother.

To take Iris's mind off the effects of the drugs, Alyx shares with Iris her experience as a woman in her own place and time--a montage of a woman's life in ancient Tyre: aging, childbirth, disease, and death. Iris cannot believe it. Frightened and discouraged, Iris denies Alyx's testimony:

"But it's so long ago!" wailed little Iris.

"Oh no it's not," said Alyx. "It's *right now*. It's going on right now. I lived in it and I came here. It's in the next room. I was in that room and now I'm in this one. There are people still in that room. They are living *now*. They are suffering *now*. And they always live and always suffer because *everything keeps on happening*. You can't say it's all over and done with because it isn't; it keeps going on. It all

keeps going on." (94)

Just as Alyx's world of suffering continues in her absence, in the face of denial from Iris's world, suppression of feminism continues despite the denial of those in the literary community. Russ combats this policy of complacency to expose the denial of agency which women impose upon themselves to succeed as authors and critics, just as Iris tries to deny the fact of her mother's death while under the effects of the tranquilizer to maintain her emotional security. Alyx continues to help Iris in spite of her lack of faith because she has shown potential, which is itself enough reason for Alyx to extend herself.

At about this point in the narrative Alyx and Machine begin an affair. Machine's denial of the established hierarchy in society appeals to Alyx because she scorns society's inconsistency and prejudices. She and Machine develop a relationship based on their critical opposition to society's rules and their support of one another's beliefs. During a terrible storm, Machine falls into a chasm. Alyx attempts to rescue him but becomes trapped in the chasm herself when Gunnar jealously refuses to aid her. He betrays them both to bolster his masculine pride and exercise control over them, going so far as to sabotage Alyx's attempts to provide first-aid for Machine. Eventually Alyx is pulled out of the chasm, but not before Machine dies. Alyx's grief is violent and immediate. She executes Gunnar with extreme brutality and utterly without compassion for his begging and pleas for mercy:

"None of us," said Gunnar quickly, "can help the way we are brought up, Agent. You are a creature of your world, believe me, just

as I am of mine; I can't help it; I wanted to be like you but I'm not, can I help that? I did what I could! What can a man do? What do you expect me to do? What could I do!"

"Nothing. It's not your job," said Alyx.

"I am ashamed," said Gunnar, stammering, "I am ashamed, Agent, I admit I did the wrong thing. I should have gone down, yes, I should have--put those things away, for God's sake!--forgive me, please, hate me but forgive me; I am what I am, I am only what I am! For heaven's sake! For God's sake!" (128)

For her own sake, and the sake of all women, Alyx destroys Gunnar in feminine rage, for his weakness and betrayal and hypocrisy. She has nothing but contempt for his begging and complacency, his abject terror at being found out and held responsible, his denial of responsibility, his selfishness, his betrayal of the group, and his transparent attempts to shift the blame, so she executes him. Russ has here struck at the fundamental defense of segments of the literary community which, denying the rights of feminist authors and critics, cite the canonical traditions of literature as the source of their supremacy and neglect, hoping to avoid the controversy surrounding feminist works.

Alyx retreats from her (remaining) charges--she seeks to escape reality, she cannot cope with the loss of her lover and confidant--she seeks to mourn the only intimate relationship she has had in this world and steals drugs from the nuns to numb her own pain. As Alyx comes out of her drug-induced stupor, the first person she

sees is Iris. It is Iris who lent her support as she struggled in delirium, in spite of the savagery which Alyx has inflicted on any and all who attempted to take away her chemical soother. As Alyx regains consciousness she notices something different about Iris:

Iris had a black eye.

"Where'd you get that?" said Alyx with interest.

Iris put her hand over her eye.

"Well, where'd you get it?" said Alyx. "Who gave it to you? Did you fall against a rock? . . . How'd you get it out here in the middle of the desert? Huh? How did you? Come on!"

"You gave it to me," said Iris. (140)

With this frank statement, Iris's empowerment is complete. She is now the responsible woman and Alyx the screw-up in a temporary reversal of their previous roles. Iris, however, does not indulge in hypocrisy and demean Alyx or deride her. She gets things organized and continues on with the now familiar travel routine. In an understanding and determined tone, Iris begins the day's march:

"I think we are running out of food," said Iris. "We had better go on."

"Come on," she added, getting up.

They went on. (141)

Iris takes responsibility for the setback, she shoulders the burden of leading the party, and they carry on. She has learned responsibility from Alyx and tempered it

with her personal understanding of individual weakness. She has, in some way, surpassed her teacher. Alyx has in turn learned humility, trust, and that she is also vulnerable; losing four of her eight companions exposes, in a brutal flash, her misconception of her own competence and the limits to her emotional strength.

Barron characterizes Alyx as an "outlaw because her ideas are so far ahead of her time . . ." (328). Alyx is, without doubt but also paradoxically, ahead of her time. Once the tourists have reached their final destination and been rescued, Alyx relates the tale of her arrival in Iris's world. In an attempt to explode the myth of her own heroism, Alyx tells Iris that she is not an agent or professional leader, that she was forced by chance into her position as guide. The Great Trans-Temporal Cadre of Heroes and Heroines is as much a fabrication of Iris's society as the Trans-Temporal Military Authority is of Bess's imagination in "The Second Inquisition." The Great Trans-Temporal Cadre of Heroes and Heroines is merely an archaeological consortium whose retrieval of Alyx was completely accidental, and could be classified as technical incompetence:

Only one day they were fishing in the Bay of Tyre a good forty feet down and they just happened to receive twenty-odd cubic meters of seawater complete with a small, rather inept Greek thief who had just pinched an expensive chess set from the Prince of Tyre, who between ourselves is no gentleman. They tell me I was attached to a rope attached to knots attached to a rather large boulder with all of us considerably more dead than alive, just dead enough, in fact, to come

through at all, and just alive enough to be salvageable. (149)

Trans-Temp cannot intentionally retrieve anything living because they fear serious repercussions, in the form of temporal paradoxes--which occur unavoidably when Alyx is introduced to any situation, regardless of the precautions taken. Alyx was rejected by her society for her behaviour; she was cast into the sea to drown because she was a thief. She was employed by Trans-Temp because they considered Alyx to be unsophisticated, innocuous, and expendable--she was already dead in her own time and therefore should not have been able to disrupt the future. She is placed in charge of a situation where success is not important and failure is the expected outcome; only the pretence of a rescue is important. Alyx's success is an unexpected complication of events and will have a definite impact on and serious consequences for the future. So, Alyx survives the curious transition from fantasy to science fiction and remains, reluctantly, a heroine in spite of all attempts to eradicate her, intentional or not. She defies the odds and those who set them. As a writer, Russ has also survived scrutiny and criticism in fantasy fiction to become an author of science fiction. She maintains her controversial critical stance against conventional writing and ideological conformity in spite of her cold reception. She continues, perhaps reluctantly, to provide an example for others.

Russ's fiction does not profess to hold out the answers--it exists to present options and alternatives for forward thinking individuals, especially those persons ready to support the active participation of women in representing their own destinies and those who would reject the status quo. Russ explains the need to represent



marginal groups in literature in her later critical work How to Suppress Women's Writing (1983):

In everybody's present historical situation, there can be, I believe, no single center of value and hence no absolute standards. That does not mean that assignment of values must be arbitrary or self-serving. . . . It does mean that for the linear hierarchy of good and bad it becomes necessary to substitute a multitude of centers of value, each with its own periphery, some closer to each other, some farther apart. The centers have been constructed by the historical facts of what it is to be black or working class or what-have-you; when we all live in the same culture, then it will be time for one literature. But that is not the case now. (120)

While Picnic on Paradise may not be a universal solution to the shortcomings of male-dominated science fiction, it does form a significant foundation for a science fiction that reflects the concerns of women. Lefanu emphasizes Russ's contribution to feminist science fiction, both through her short stories and Picnic on Paradise, pointing out that the dominant images of women in science fiction, as proposed by Susan Woods, are those of hero, heroine, and alien. Lefanu continues along this train of thought, expanding on Woods's analysis:

These images do not come from nowhere, nor are they simple opposites of old stereotypes. They demonstrate how science fiction and feminism can engage in a fruitful interplay that releases the writers' imaginations

to explore new relations between ideas of inside and outside, self and world. (20)

Russ's attention to the duality of personal conflict, the need for self and society in terms of feminism, creates a significant irony of its own, that being the determination of a process to set in motion changes which will ultimately achieve a unified literature and culture, an endeavour which I believe Russ tries to encourage through her writing because once personal and social interests are addressed on equal footing we will have eliminated the biases and prejudices which plague society.

## Chapter Three

### This is a (Wo)Man's World.

The Female Man (1975) is Joanna Russ's most provocative and intellectually challenging novel. In it, Russ examines the difficulties of constructing a workable feminism for women of differing backgrounds and interests. She takes the day-to-day restrictions of patriarchal society and disqualifies them by exposing the inherent flaws in socialized behaviour and beliefs through the actions and musings of four women brought together by science. According to Betty King:

This feminist novel is written from varying points of view, each character expressing her own feelings and thoughts about the life she lives, and the men (or the lack of men) with whom she must contend.

This novel . . . will be hard to beat for character studies of women in a variety of societies and for a fearless feminist statement in the genre of sf. (173)

In discussing The Female Man it is important to consider its context and relationship to the feminist movement in the early 1970's. In 1975, the feminist movement was gaining momentum in North America, and may even have been reaching a plateau of maturity. However, the publication date of The Female Man is somewhat misleading. Holt suggests that Russ deserves far more credit for her role in promoting and fostering feminism in the literary community than she received:

Although The Female Man was first published in 1975, Russ finished

the novel in December of 1971—before the resurgence of feminism. This makes the novel more remarkable. Indeed, it is more understandable if it is viewed as preceding, rather than proceeding from, the feminist movement. Russ invented the modern feminism and the dialectics she wrote; she owes many fewer debts than the 1975 publication date indicates. ("Joanna" 488)

Publication of The Female Man was delayed for over three years, despite its groundbreaking feminist message. Russ had previously written at least one full length work of powerful feminist science fiction. As I have demonstrated, Picnic on Paradise, Russ's first novel, was certainly an astute and confrontational critique of patriarchal culture which openly attacked conventional morality and social stereotypes. The Female Man is not merely a social critique, however; it offers strategy and support to women of varied backgrounds in their effort to emancipate themselves from a predominantly male-oriented culture. It proposes viable solutions to the problems of gender bias and role reinforcement in our social interactions, as well as encouraging women to reexamine their position in society and the options available to them. While The Female Man was certainly a landmark accomplishment for feminism at the time Russ wrote the novel, its themes should have been earth-shattering in the field of science fiction. Not to mention the fact that it is a perfect embodiment of prediction, a benchmark of good science fiction.

In her novel, Russ creates a feminist utopia which encourage the development of women, from sexually and culturally restricted servants of the patriarchy to

autonomous individuals capable of reasoning, feeling, and acting--quite literally--for themselves. The purpose behind Russ's utopia, called *Whileaway*, is to permit women to recognize and consider the possibilities denied them by existing institutional limitations and to instruct them how better to serve their own interests. Russ uses a utopian format for two reasons: to escape conventional feminine literary tropes and to address neglected social issues which daily reinforce patriarchal views.

In an analysis of Russ's essay "What Can a Heroine Do? or Why Women Can't Write," Brooks Landon explains Russ's assessment of the exhausted state of female roles in literature:

Russ is not suggesting so much that literary forms have been used up as that the cultural myths concerning women articulate in those forms have reached a dead end. Her point is simply that, without a change in some of the cultural groundrules for thinking about sexuality, women have just about run out of things to do in the novel and certainly have run out of patience with the characteristics patriarchally oriented readers--those attuned to the idea of a culture dominated by men--expect of them. (61)

This dead-endedness motivates Russ in her writing. Ten years after Russ finished *The Female Man*, she continued to reject previous literary attempts by other authors to create credible feminist utopias. In her essay "Recent Feminist Utopias" published in 1981, she demonstrates the common flaw of utopian writing--that it maintains an almost exclusively heterosexual bias and ignores the possibility of

fulfilling homosexual social roles. She examines the utopian works of ten authors from 1971 to 1979, including: Suzy McKee Charnas, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Samuel Delany, Sally Gearhart, Ursula Le Guin, Catherine Madsen, Marge Piercy, Alice Sheldon (writing under the pseudonyms Racoon Sheldon and James Tiptree, Jr.), Monique Wittig, and herself. She categorizes utopias into three groups: the first merely extrapolates the social development of conventional gender roles; the second reverses traditional gender roles but maintains a heterosexual gender bias; the last generally develops a heterosexual and egalitarian society. Aside from the obvious bias towards conventional sexuality there exists another fundamental lack in these utopias: "When science fiction between 1965 and 1975 has dealt with feminist insights, it has usually been by the expansion of the last category, with the usual evasions: parenting and human nurturing takes place offstage, as do the effects of such work on the personalities of those who do it" ("Utopias" 73).

Russ considers the development of a feminist utopia an important step towards educating readers about the shortcomings of male-orientated science fiction as well as about contemporary societal deficiencies. For her, without addressing the roles traditionally occupied by women in society it is impossible to create a believable utopia in which responsibilities--all responsibilities--are shared equally. For example, Whileawayans see child rearing as an opportunity for personal development. Because children are raised communally, the responsibility does not fall on the shoulders of a single individual and therefore does not unduly restrict the mother's activities. A Whileawayan embraces childbirth because it offers a myriad of possibilities for her, it

is a liberating blessing, not an onerous task.

Little Whileaways are to their mothers both sulk and swank, fun and profit, pleasure and contemplation, a show of expensiveness, a slowing down of life, an opportunity to pursue whatever interests the women have been forced to neglect previously, and the only leisure they have ever had--or will have again until old age. A family of thirty persons may have as many as four mother-and-child pairs in the common nursery at one time. Food, cleanliness, and shelter are not the mother's business; Whileaways say with a straight face that she must be free to attend to the child's "finer spiritual needs". Then they go off by themselves and roar. (49-50)

The liberated "roar" of Whileaways is a definite reference to the popular song by Helen Reddy, "I am Woman, Hear Me Roar." By recognizing Reddy's contribution, through popular music, to the women's movement, Russ connects her novel to the larger feminist community and its role supporting women's issues. Its context in The Female Man is significantly more assertive than Iris's timid testimony, "I'm a woman" from Picnic on Paradise. The women of Whileaway represent the progressive independence of spirit Russ hopes will infect the feminist movement; they are the model for those, like Iris, who have yet to recognize their full potential. In an era when men saw women as competitors for power in society and a viable threat to their dominance in previously all-male fields (consider Billie Jean King's highly publicised "battle of the sexes" tennis match and her efforts to equalize playing

conditions and remuneration for women as Women's Tennis Association president), Russ defines feminist utopias in her essay, "Amor Vincit Foeminam: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction" (1980).

The feminist utopias, to the degree that they are concerned with the "battle of the sexes" (and most are) see it as a long, one-sided massacre whose cause (not cure) is male supremacy. They are explicit about economics and politics, fairly sexually permissive, demystifying about biology, emphatic about the necessity for female bonding, concerned with children...non-urban, classless, communal, relatively peaceful while allowing room for female rage and female self-defence, and serious about the emotional and physical consequences of violence. (58)

In short, Russ's feminist utopia is everything which society and science fiction was not in 1971; it is a woman's world.

The Female Man revolves around four main characters: Janet, Jeannine, Joanna, and Jael. These characters embody the feminist concepts Russ wants to demonstrate in the novel. Janet is an Earth-mother feminist and a native of Whileaway, travelling through time collecting women together for their better good. Jeannine is a timid, dissatisfied woman searching for direction and companionship as well as for her self. Joanna is a college professor whose dissatisfaction with patriarchal stereotypes, professional sexism, and inadequate female social roles drives her to search for a way to assert herself. Jael is the embodiment of feminine rage against sexism and oppression. She gathers the other three J's together at the end of



the novel to organize rebellion against masculine cultural conventions. Together, these women serve a larger purpose, representing the need for a means of feminine emancipation:

Russ's four J's--Janet, Jeannine, and Joanna, whose names all mean God's precious gift, and Jael, the neo-Biblical nailer who pierces the head of a man with a blow of anger--comprise an exotic cluster protagonist whose meeting is the climax of the book. The group protagonist presents a collective self, rather than individual selves, and therefore proposes the values which go with collectively, especially unity of social purposes. (DuPlessis 2)

Russ's characters inhabit worlds which exist parallel to our own. Reality has developed along separate lines in these worlds as a consequence of the different paths taken by their societies. However, there remains enough correlation between their realities and our own to permit travel between one another's worlds without creating existential paradoxes. Janet explains the theory like this:

Every displacement of every molecule, every change in orbit of every electron, every quantum of light that strikes here and not there--each of these must somewhere have its alternative. It's possible, too, that there is no such thing as one clear line or strand of probability, and that we live on a sort of twisted braid, blurring from one to the other without even knowing it, as long as we keep within the limits of a set of variations that really make no difference to us. Thus the paradox of

time travel ceases to exist, for the Past one visits is never one's own Past but somebody else's; or rather, one's visit to the Past instantly creates another Present (one in which the visit has already happened) and what you visit is the Past belonging to that Present--an entirely different matter from your own Past. (7)

Janet is able to visit her own past, which action has an immediate effect on her present--in fact it is impossible for her to leave her present, she can only alter the path it takes. She is also able to transport the other characters with her to other versions of her world's past. Russ, in Wellsian fashion, scorns any attempt at a technological explanation of the process, much as she has in her earlier science fiction. Instead she feminizes it, equating time with a braid: something both diverse and unified which symbolizes the strength individual elements lend one another as a united entity and which can also represent the role of the characters in the novel. The purpose of Russ's metaphor is to demonstrate to the reader that the difference between our world and the characters' worlds is only a difference of a hair's breadth: we follow similar paths with similar consequences. The utopia of Whileaway can never be our world because it existed independently of our knowledge, as Russ's feminist ideas existed prior to the entire feminist movement. The only effect Whileaway can have on us is heuristic, prompting us to consider the effects of our actions and possibility resulting in a society which resembles, but is not, Whileaway.

The value of science fiction as a teaching medium, particularly its value as a vehicle for moral and ethical issues, has been demonstrated in my examination of

Picnic on Paradise. Russ's "lessons" become more and more sophisticated with the publication of each of her works, subsequently approaching more and more closely a state of realism in her writing which resembles our own society, and therefore placing her moral debate into a viable frame of reference. Rachel Blau DuPlessis makes a close study of The Female Man in her essay "The Feminist Apologues of Lessing, Piercy, and Russ." She focuses on Russ because, in her own opinion, Russ provides the best balance between realism and fantasy in her fiction. The proposals Russ makes in her science fiction are more credible because Joanna and Jeannine are so solidly based in realism and therefore lend more credibility to the reforms and theories she proposes in The Female Man.

Perhaps the most important of the four characters is Joanna; she is a sceptical, critical character who expresses dissatisfaction and frustration in the role society has imposed upon her. Throughout the novel, Joanna provides Russ with a convenient forum for authorial asides through the obvious association of author and character by way of their names and the similarity between their professional personas. As chronicler of the narrative, Joanna is in a position of omniscience. In fact, Joanna often appears in scenes with the other characters as a stylized conscience. She does not play the role of instructor, however; instead her reactions to situations often provide the reader with insight to the characteristic reaction of women in Joanna's time (and ours) when confronted with assertive and unconventional behaviour among women. For example: Joanna is present as Janet is seduced by Laura Rose Wilding, she cringes as Janet beats up a man at a party, she acts as the devil's advocate while

Jeannine deliberates the restrictions which hinder her development as an independent woman: Joanna is the fly on the wall we often wish we could be, providing valuable commentary on the patriarchal inhibitions with which women have been traditionally afflicted.

Duplessis realizes that this same quality, the convenience of an authorial back door, facilitates the free dissemination of Russ's ideas about feminism. Russ's frequent "appearances" in The Female Man create an intimacy and confidentiality between the reader and the novel which might otherwise be strained and artificial. DuPlessis sees Joanna as a character in crisis, divided by her desires and practically:

Joanna--it has escaped no one that she bears the author's given name--is closest to ourselves: the woman who stands in a puddle of water, grasping two alternating electrical currents, trying to fuse them. She is the woman who lives in contradiction: between woman and man, between feminist and phallocrat, between transformation and acquiescence, between joy and rage. (6)

This description serves as well for the author, Joanna Russ, as it does for the character. It is Joanna who becomes the "female man," making the transition from victim to victor, and it is through her relationships with the other characters that we, as readers, are instructed in the process of feminist metamorphosis. Each of the characters represents a significant stage in the development of the "female man" and reflects an important feminist theme in Russ's writing. DuPlessis reminds us that

One way or another, sooner or later, the reader discovers that these

four women are either alternate selves in one person or, as types of the genus Woman, alternative strategies for dealing with the same kind of social givens: female nondominance in a patriarchy. (6)

The best place to begin with Joanna's development is to examine her dreams and aspirations. While Joanna's feminist goals may be closely related to the author's, one should not assume that her portrait is necessarily autobiographical:

Given the fact that readers are tempted--sometimes by the authors themselves--to view main characters as purely autobiographical projections, it is worth underlining that characters in these fictions engage in activity to illustrate an author's ideals or speculative conclusions, not to mimic her life. (DuPlessis 2)

Janet is the envy of the other three characters, as well as the heroine of their dreams. Whileaway, from Janet's descriptions, bears a striking resemblance to our world, with the notable exception that its technology actually liberates women from drudgery. Whileawayans bear immense social responsibilities: their adolescence is characterized by successive apprenticeships and tutelage; they are delegated physical labour and hands-on tasks as experienced, knowledgeable, and mature women; and they are rewarded with administrative and theoretical work in their old age. Their society is driven by the pursuit of their desires and personal needs, in spite of the apparently overwhelming catalogue of their responsibilities. Whileaway's commercial and industrial development is dedicated to increasing freedom:

Whileaway is engaged in the reorganization of industry

consequent to the discovery of the induction principle.

The Whileawayan work-week is sixteen hours. (EM 56)

Whileawayans have had the "induction principle," the capacity to perform dangerous, repetitive, and laborious tasks remotely through the amplification of brain waves (a technology currently developing in our own society as we speak), for several centuries. By automating mind-killing tasks with which we commonly burden women and the uneducated today, Whileaway has expanded the opportunity for women to develop emotionally, culturally, and intellectually.

Coming from this idyllic society, Janet's reaction to our sexual stereotyping and role-orientated society is "Huh?" In a central scene of the narrative, Janet attends a party with Joanna and is confounded by the many rigid social roles played by the people in attendance. Russ satirizes the denigrating feminine stereotypes encouraged by our society through her naming of female party-goers: Sposissa (the wife), Eglantissa (the social butterfly), Aphrodissa (the siren), Clarissa (the depressive academic), Lucrissa (the successful yet unappreciated professional), Wailissa and Lamentissa (chronic complainers), Travailissa (the unrewarded workaholic), Saccharissa (the tease), and Amicissa ("the Good Sport") (34). In absentia are Ludicrissa (the woman no one wants) and Amphibissa (the lesbian). All of these stereotypes inhibit feminine development by imposing roles, dictating the nature of women's success or failure in relation to men.

Janet rapidly loses interest in the party because of the stilted and duplicitous behaviour displayed by the guests. Her departure is delayed by the host in an

obnoxious drunken scene of sexist insistence which borders on sexual assault. Unused to this type of tactless effrontery, Janet reiterates her intention to leave and, after the host insults her maturity--"He said she had acted like a virgin, not knowing what to do when a guy made a pass, just like a Goddamned scared little baby virgin" (46)--she beats the hell right out of him, leaving him lying on the floor with a broken arm, immediately bringing to mind Gunnar's fate in Picnic on Paradise. Janet does not break his arm intentionally, for the host refused to quit struggling when he was placed in an arm lock. The injury was a consequence of his own pride and belligerence, in both Janet's and Joanna's/Russ's opinion.

An interesting consequence of this altercation is the discovery of the source of all the misguided social behaviour Janet has encountered at the party: handbooks to "appropriate" gender relations--blue for boys, pink for girls. The male equivalent of these drops out of the host's pocket as Janet disarms him. Joanna picks it up and flips through it, discovering two important things: first, that it advocates some sexist and dominating response to all situations for men, asserting their superiority and authority, and second, that these masculine assertions are reinforced by her own little pink book with submissive and placating responses--in all cases. After examining the cross references between the two books Joanna turns to Janet and says, "I don't think you're going to be happy here" (48). Janet's response is typical for her--if it doesn't fit discard it instead of causing yourself misery: "'Throw them both away, love,' she answered" (48). Russ has pursued a career in feminist science fiction following this same ideology; unable to reconcile the traditional tropes of adventure fantasy and

science fiction to her feminist message, she threw out the insulting conventions of these genres and formulated her own as a parody of them—another example of progressive disarmament.

Janet's rejection of our demeaning and oppressive roles for female sexuality is quite clear. As a citizen of another world, better by far than ours, her disdain for backward thinking is understandable. Janet's dismissal of the constricting bonds of male-centred sexuality and behavioral models reappears, in a clear and scholarly format, in Russ's later analysis of feminist utopias (including her own):

Classless, without government, ecologically minded, with a strong feeling for the natural world, quasi-tribal in feeling and quasi-family in structure, the societies of these stories are *sexually permissive*--in terms I suspect many contemporary male readers might find both unspectacular and a little baffling, but which would be quite familiar to the radical wing of the feminist movement, since the point of the permissiveness is not to break taboos but to separate sexuality from questions of ownership, reproduction and social structure.

("Utopias" 76)

In an action reflecting the goals of early activists in the women's movement, like Shulamith Firestone and Pat Mainardi, Janet rejects the sexual stereotypes which restrict interaction between the sexes and expands the possibilities for women in our world, confronting sexism with humanism.

There are also developmental aspects to utopias like Russ's *Whileaway*; they



do not exist merely as reactionary social criticism of conventional patriarchal societies.

Russ explains the progressively emancipating aspects of feminist utopias:

Whether tentative or conclusively pessimistic, the invented, all-female worlds with their consequent Lesbianism have another function: that of expressing the joys of female bonding, which--like freedom and access to the public world--are in short supply for women in the real world. Sexually this amounts to the insistence that women are erotic integers and not fractions waiting for completion. Female sexuality is seen as native and initiatory, not (as in our traditionally sexist view) reactive, passive, or potential. ("Utopias" 79)

Russ could have made an even larger distinction between our society and that of *Whileaway* by refusing to use the term "lesbian" to describe sexual relations among *Whileawayans* and other all-female utopias. After all, without a contrasting heterosexual component to sexuality in society, monosexual or homosexual relations become ubiquitous and therefore do not require separate distinctions in language--raising the question of whether lesbianism can exist in a society composed only of women. This point does not serve to diminish the complexity or thoroughness of *Whileaway's* revolutionary society; instead, it emphasizes the complications of bridging cultural gaps with philosophical ideas.

Janet embodies the rights of women to determine their own roles, sexually and socially. Russ indicated through several encounters in the novel that an entire aspect of women's sexuality has been neglected in our society merely because it does not

reaffirm male superiority and therefore has been viewed as aberrant or warped. To return to the issue of The Female Man's delayed publication, there is a possibility that Russ was waiting for a more tolerant social climate to release her novel: in February of 1975, Ms. published a petition in support of sexual freedom for homosexuals which carried the signatures of "Congresswomen Bella S. Abzug and Shirley Chisholm, actresses Joanne Woodward and Lily Tomlin, writers Anais Nin and Joyce Carol Oates, scholar Margaret Mead, and the reverend Carter Heyward" (Papachristou 251). With such prominent and varied social support, Russ could expect a more receptive audience.

Janet serves to open a Pandora's box in male-centred societies by openly advocating lesbianism. Women have traditionally been denied the guilt-free experimentation in personal sexuality which exists on *Whiteaway*, where disapproval of cross-generational relationships--intimate relations between the young and the mature--is the only sexual taboo. The very concept of woman-to-woman sexual encounters is embarrassing and frightening to several of the characters. Jeannine is openly disdainful of lesbianism while Joanna is timid and frightened of admitting her own sexual experiences with another woman as a university student. Her sexual morality formed by a permissive and supportive female society, Janet represents options not formerly acceptable among women either in Jeannine's and Joanna's worlds or our own society in the early 1970's.

As the omniscient conscience of the group, Joanna is driven in anxiety and confusion from Janet's mind when Janet is seduced by Laura Rose. As Laura kisses

Janet. Joanna is reminded of a sexual encounter she shared with a college friend and she flees: "Janet's rid of me. I sprang away and hung by one claw from the window curtain" (71). Still watching, but not connected to the emotional aspect of the seduction, Joanna has released Janet from the social restrictions and taboos of two societies: cross-generational restrictions on Whileaway and homosexual taboos on Earth. There is no longer any gauge of propriety to frustrate or restrain Janet, and so she gives herself over to the attraction between herself and Laura.

The restrictions of our society on women are summarized by Joanna's description of Whileaway:

There's no being *out too late* in Whileaway, or *up too early*, or *in the wrong part of town*, or *unescorted*. You cannot fall out of the kinship web and become sexual prey for strangers, for there is no prey and there are no strangers--the web is world-wide. In all of Whileaway there is no one who can keep you from going where you please (though you may risk your life, if that sort of thing appeals to you), no one who will follow you and try to embarrass you by whispering obscenities in your ear, no one who will attempt to rape you, no one who will warn you of the dangers of the street, no one who will stand on street corners, hot-eyed and vicious, jingling loose change in his pants pockets, bitterly bitterly sure that you're a cheap floozy, hot and wild, who likes it, who can't say no, who's making a mint off it, who inspires him with nothing but disgust, and who wants to drive him

crazy. . . .

While here, where we live--! (81-82)

DuPlessis argues that, in defiance of the elaborate, sophisticated explanations given by Russ for the existence of Whileaway as an alternative world, as science fiction The Female Man acts as a means of satirizing our own society. She says the science-fictional element masks "the essential truth about Whileaway. It is not a future place nor a future time, but is, instead, a mental place in the present" (6). Russ's utopia demonstrates the hope that women hold for a society of equality and the motivation behind the feminist movement. Holt, in her essay "No Docile Daughters: A Study of Two Novels by Joanna Russ," points to the unique perspective science fiction permits us in relation to social ills, distancing us from the problem by projecting it on an alien world or culture:

The obscenities, prejudices, and traditions accepted daily can become alien to us; in this alien form they can be examined; and change can occur suddenly, as it cannot in other fiction. . . . Throughout the story Russ manipulates accepted male traditions, sliding them into the alien so that we may consider them without prejudice. (96-97)

Knowledge can make profound leaps as a result of wisdom imparted by alien beings, whether they arrive from distant universes, or our own future, or parallel worlds. The convention of separation lends the theories of other civilizations a credibility and immediate urgency which would not exist in the slow bureaucratic process of social evolution in our own space and time.

There are factors which oppose the emancipation of women in society, many of them adopted by women themselves, either unconsciously through habituated behaviour, or as a result of fears and doubts generated by the threat of punishment or reprisal, or as a result of differences between women about the methods and ethics of the women's movement. Each of the characters in The Female Man represents a different interest group in the issues of the women's movement. The group as a whole functions as a consciousness-raising seminar, analyzing both the problems facing women in society and the solutions available to women. Jeannine represents the submissive, indentured role women have always held: the underappreciated, denigrating, stifling role of homemaker, mother, and wife which Betty Friedan objected to in The Feminine Mystique. In contrast, Jael is the vindicating embodiment of feminist rage, incited by the callous treatment of women, particularly after the beginning of the women's movement, and Russ's inspiration for Jael may have come from the spirited activism of Shulamith Firestone. Joanna, as we have already established, represents the position many women currently occupy in society-- a feminist no-man's land--and Janet represents the hope feminism holds for the future, of complete and uninhibited liberty.

Judith Spector comments that "The main point of The Female Man, and of the attitudes towards sexuality depicted in it, is that gender-related social distinctions have made women less than whole people" (202). Jeannine is a characterization of the insecurities faced by women as a result of male-dominated social structures. She serves to demonstrate the fears of failure and isolation faced by women in

conventional nuclear relationships. Jeannine's life reaffirms her role as an object, an accessory to supplement a man's life. She is housekeeper, mother, lover, and conscience to Cal, an impotent, distracted, unemployed journalist who always insists that he is on the verge of "making it." Cal's failure is counterbalanced by Jeannine's dependence on him and her tolerance of his apathy.

Russ recognizes the strength it requires to risk failure and strike out on one's own; she sympathizes with Jeannine's insecurity and the social pressures she must face from family and friends alike. However, she also condemns Jeannine's inaction and apathy because they undermine the progress of feminist ideals. Jeannine is frequently the weak member among the four characters because she lacks self-conviction and resolve.

Russ closely examines the traditional fears which undermine feminism in her book Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans & Perverts (1985). She insists that, for a woman to hold any measure of independence and power in society she must first relinquish the role of sacrificial martyr, the revered mother image. Russ calls this personality the "Magic Momma." The MM is selfless, responsible, loving, tolerant, has boundless energy, and is perpetually synchronized with the emotions of all other women. In The Female Man, Joanna mocks this stereotypical expectation in what she calls "The Great Happiness Contest." The object of this game appears to be the annihilation of self in a manner which best maintains the illusion of feminist independence--without actually jeopardising the ego of one's husband or destroying the illusion that one is "liberated." The following quotations would constitute a winning testimonial:

Neither of you is as happy as I am. I'm fantastically happy. My husband hasn't looked at another woman in the fifteen years we've been married, he helps around the house whenever I ask it, and he wouldn't mind in the least if I were to go out and get a job. But I'm happiest in fulfilling my responsibilities to him and the children. We have four children. (117)

Instead of winning the praise of the other competitors, Joanna's testimonial, "tainted" by her personal success, is met with rage and jealousy and vindictive hatred:

You miserable nits, I have a Nobel Peace Prize, fourteen published novels, six lovers, a town house, a box at the Metropolitan Opera, I fly a plane, I fix my own car, and I can do eighteen push-ups before breakfast, that is, if you're interested in numbers. (117)

Not surprisingly, Jeannine is an accomplished competitor in this delusional self-abnegation. As she prepares for a short trip to visit her family, she runs a mental checklist of the duties she must perform for Cal before she can go. Jeannine makes the bed, cleans the apartment, washes the floor, mends Cal's clothes, feeds the cat, packs her bags, and prepares a meal to leave for Cal. All the while she erects a romantic image of self-denial in her mind, deluding herself that this is why she was put on Earth and that all her work and effort would be appreciated if she were married. She is prevented from marrying Cal only by the nagging doubt that there may be something better out there. Jeannine's concept of improvement is that of a conventional romantic fantasy heroine it is not the feminist identity we would like to

see her assume under Janet's tutelage.

Jeannine comes to the conclusion, while at the family cabin, that Cal is the best she can achieve (fatefully equating her success with Cal's potential). Labelled a spinster by her family and criticized for her lack of ambition, Jeannine is driven to a community dance. There she meets a man, Bud, who is the son of her mother's friend. She is pleasant and friendly but unhappy that she was driven to attend this function. Outside on the verandah, she considers her life achievements and goals, holding an inner dialogue with Joanna, who objects strenuously to Jeannine's self-sacrifice in a reasonable, if urgent, manner. Jeannine reacts unexpectedly and begins to encourage a relationship with Bud.

After several days, Jeannine makes a hasty decision about the viability of the relationships she holds with Bud and Cal. Cal does not compare favourably with Bud; he is sullen and irresponsible while Bud is married and a successful teacher. As the decisive act in her life she makes a phone call.

She speaks quickly and distinctly, without the slightest hesitation now, remembering all those loveless nights with her knees poking up into the air, how she's discommoded and almost suffocated, how her leg muscles ache and she can't get her feet on the surface of the bed. Marriage will cure all that, The scrubbing uncleanably old linoleum and dusting the same awful things week after week. But he's going places. She says boldly and decisively:

"Cal, come get me." (130)



In a single stroke Jeannine has accepted the most pitiable role adopted by women to avoid the doubts and insecurities latent in feminism. Her self-sacrifice will continue endlessly as a "Magic Momma," perpetually fulfilling the needs of others and perpetually denied any recognition for it, culminating in martyrdom achieved through the denial of the self.

On the other hand, by denying her right to feminine agency, Jeannine also assumes the role of the "Trembling Sister," the bitter, jealous, invalidated woman who so rigorously plays "The Great Happiness Contest." This competitive jealousy leads only to alienation of women from one another and their subsequent identification with a male provider. Jeannine drowns herself in the inevitability of her association with Cal. Joanna bemoans Jeannine's surrender:

It seems to Jeannine that she has never known anything so solid and beautiful as the kitchen in the morning sunlight, with the walls glowing and everything so delicately outlined in light, so fresh and real. Jeannine, who has almost been killed by an unremitting and drastic discipline not of her own choosing, who has been maimed almost to death by vigilant self-suppression quite irrelevant to anything she once wanted or loved, here finds her reward. . . . At one stroke she has amputated her past. She's going to be fulfilled. She hugs herself and waits, That's all you have to do if you are a real, first-class Sleeping Beauty. She knows.

*I'm so happy.*

And, there but for the grace of God, go I. (131)

Russ warns us that these two excuses cooperate despite their apparent opposition in the female psyche. While the MM may be the envy of the TS, its nemesis, they both act together to cripple women from taking initiative in their lives through the increasing cycle of self-loathing they generate.

The MM/TS polarity is illusory. Both are positions in the same belief system. Both are engaged in ritually sacrificing the possibility of a woman's being effective on her own behalf, not needy and ineffective, not effective and altruistic, but effective for herself. (MM 54)

The only way to disrupt this cycle of denial is through rage: the irrational, passionate, violent response to chronic oppression. As I argued earlier, Russ's short stories about Alyx and her first novel, Picnic on Paradise, examined the circumstances and consequences of justified rage by women in the face of sexual prejudice. Russ demonstrates that women have the right to violent, passionate anger against their oppressors, especially when one considers the emotional and psychological restraint which society expects them to maintain for the sake of delicacy and composure. Feminist rage is a direct consequence of the seething mental pressure cooker into which patriarchal society has locked women by forcing them into the role of housewife. Women's rights took a downturn after World War II: although they were given the right to vote in World War I, they were exploited to support industry and the war effort in factories and manufacturing during both World Wars, they were expected to sacrifice daily comforts to support the war effort overseas, and then

locked back in the kitchen as soon as the "boys" came home.

By denying women the right to emotional responses and contradictory opinion, society hobbled them and created a state of emotional atrophy, the results of which can be seen in Jeannine's mild-mannered acceptance of her role as wife and the abandonment of her dreams—as conventionally romantic as they may be. The worst consequence of this propagandized oppression of women is the annihilation of women's personalities, constantly bludgeoned as they are by the threat of disapproval and the threat of emotional estrangement into a submissive, predictable, bland role. Russ identifies this "Masculine Imperative," the drive for success and power through the oppression of women:

All oppressed people must be controlled. Since open force and economic coercion are practical only part of the time, ideology--that is, internalized oppression, the voice in the head--is brought in to fill the gap. When people discover their own power, governments tremble. Therefore, in addition to all the other things which must be done to control people, their own strength must be made taboo to them.

(MM 44)

Russ goes on to point out that the argument that masculine expectations are not unreasonable has long been a controlling factor in the campaign against women's emancipation from patriarchal restrictions. This insinuating argument uses guilt and insecurity to keep women down without overt physical force—not that women are not victims of male violence but, generally, violence against women is condemned by men

as a loss of male-self control and is therefore unacceptable. The demand for constant support and cooperative obedience from women also serves to isolate women from one another, making them compete for the prize of "Best Wife" or "Happiest Couple" without realizing that the emotional compromise and effort to maintain good relations come largely from women. Russ encourages women to reject conformity, to cease working against one another for the scraps of praise from the feast table of the male ego and bind together, in spite of their personal difference, against gender restrictions:

To understand that no one has or can have your power, that it remains in you no matter how forbidden you feel it to be, means defying the patriarchal taboo and that's very hard. It means claiming one's own limited but real power and abandoning one's inflated notion of other women's power. It means engaging in direct public confrontation with the patriarchy as embodied in men and men's institutions, not concentrating on its symbolic presence in other members of the women's community. (MM 53)

Joanna reaches a state of tenuous independence in the male world by becoming a female man. Her tale of transformation follows the surrender of Jeannine to servitude and self-denial. The change takes place in several stages. First, Joanna had to recognize her right to be a woman in society and maintain her position as a successful professional. She realized that as "One Of The Boys" she had been cast in a neutral gender role--as well as a politically powerless position. In spite of the apparent respect and equality which she enjoyed as a token member of the "Old Boys

Club," consulted, deferred to, and even respected in professional issues, outside the workplace she was still subject to the restrictions of a sexist society. However much she may have been included in the sanctum of intellectual elitism, she was still denied equal treatment in society. She points to this bias, exposing the shadow of prejudice which hangs over professional women: "For a long time I had been neuter, not a woman at all but One Of The Boys, because if you walk into a gathering of men, professional or otherwise, you might as well be wearing a sandwich board that says: LOOK! I HAVE TITS!" (EM 133) And with that isolation comes all the conventional courtesy and tact which men are trained to believe protect women but which really serve to restrict their development.

Joanna became a woman again when she realized that while she was still denied status as a man, as "One Of The Boys," her expertise and intelligence were being exploited. Similarly she was denied her femininity by women who, repulsed by her association with men, saw her as a defeminized traitor. Joanna, stuck between roles, was powerless. Denied the boons of patriarchal society and denied her femininity, she despaired:

Very swampy in my mind. Very rotten and badly off. I am a woman with a woman's brain. I am a woman with a woman's sickness. I am a woman with the wraps off, bald as an adder, God help me and you.

(137)

Infuriated by the cunning placation she suffered at the hands of men, luring her into a false sense of power and acceptance, Joanna now demands the respect and

rights with which conventional society had taunted her. Disillusioned, she rallies to take by force the carrot men have dangled before her for so long.

Now I say *Move over*. If we are all Mankind, it follows to my interested and righteous and rightnow very bright and beady little eyes, that I too am a Man and not at all a Woman, for honestly now, who ever heard of Java Woman and Existential Woman and the values of Western Woman and Scientific Woman and all the rest of that dingy and antiquated rag-bag? All the rags in it are White, anyway. I think I am a Man; I think you had better call me a Man; I think you will write about me as a Man from now on and speak of me as a Man and employ me as a Man and recognize child-rearing as a Man's business; you will think of me as a Man and treat me as a Man until it enters your muddled, terrified, preposterous, nine-tenths fake, loveless, papier-mache-bull-moose head that *I am a man*. (And you are a woman.) That's the whole secret. Stop hugging Moses' tablets to your chest, nitwit; you'll cave in. Give me your Linus blanket, child. Listen to the female man.

If you don't, by God and all the Saints, *I'll break your neck!*

(140)

Judith Keegan Gardiner identifies this rage against apathy and injustice as the catalyzing effect in the women's movement and also the component which binds Janet, Jeannine, Joanna and Jael together. With a united cause women have the power to

effect change and demand rights and opportunities equal to those enjoyed by men. Gardiner explains that women must love and respect themselves and one another to achieve this goal, using their anger to further their cause rather than to undermine their solidarity. She says:

This is an explicitly narcissistic project: not finding love for or from others, not creating a just society, but being "ourselves," undiminished and powerful female selves, is the novel's utopian aim, and the political effects of the novel, according to this reading, would encourage women readers' sense of self through identification with the characters' anger against the patriarchal society that demeans them. (95)

Gardiner warns that anger and empathy are not opposed to one another in the feminist movement, but rather that they approach the problem of sexual prejudice from different ends. Rather than fragmenting under outside pressure, the feminist movement must use its divided resources to divide the opposition by patriarchal institutions. She encourages feminists to "empathize with the anger of others, even towards themselves, in order to form tenable political alliances or else face fragmentation, depression, and a loss of feminist effectiveness" (105-06).

The feminist rage which Russ and Gardiner advocate as a tool for social change is embodied in Jael. Jael is the antithesis of Janet, the product of a failed society where the sexes have completely divided and are involved perpetually in war: trying by combat, disinformation, and sabotage to subdue the opposite sex. Jael's name is taken from the fourth chapter of the Book of Judges. Sisera, a Canaanite

captain, was fleeing his Gentile pursuers and came upon the encampment of Heber, his ally. He was greeted by Heber's wife, Jael, who offered him shelter from his enemies. She fed Sisera and gave him a place to rest, he in turn asked her to deny his presence in her tent if any should ask. When Sisera had fallen asleep, Jael spiked his head to the ground with a hammer and tent peg and turned his body over to the Gentile general. Her boldness and brutality brought about the defeat of the tyrannical Canaanite king.

Jael Alice Reasoner is an agent of Womanland working to destroy the dominating, oppressive threat of Manland. She joins the other three characters, bringing them together to solicit from them support for her cause. As a demonstration of her cause, she transports them to Manland; they accompany her as she attempts to bargain with "the Boss" for the exchange of children. The "three J's," identified as one by grouping them together, are given a crash course in the worst possible consequences of patriarchal prejudice. The violence and deception which pervade Manland are horrifying. Without women in society, men have subdued their weaker members and forced them into the role of women. These men are identified as "the changed" and "the half-changed": those who have undergone surgery, transforming them into a parody of feminine sexuality, and those who choose transvestism as a substitute to the irreversible effects of surgery. These "women" are the substitute for genuine females and are subject to the worst manifestations of male chauvinism--they exist solely as sexual objects.

Jael is escorted to her appointment with the Boss by a half-changed--Anna--



made up and dressed in a style reflecting the fantastic preferences of Manlanders (Jeannine of course secretly admires "his" flamboyant apparel). Jael brings the other three J's into the meeting with her, explaining that they are diseased women, highly contagious, being transported to another enclave of Womanland for treatment. In the process of Jael's negotiations with the Boss, he becomes distracted by the allure of her genuine female sexuality. He repeatedly attempts to seduce her with his boorish "charms," inquiring about her "hole down there," suggesting that "This is the crown of your life. This is what God made you for" (181).

Jael, exasperated by the inevitable degeneration of negotiations into the Boss's drive for sexual contact, is forced to employ her "feminine wiles":

Boss was muttering something angry about his erection so, angry enough for two, I produced one of my own--by this I mean that the grafted muscles on my fingers and hands pulled back the loose skin, with that characteristic itchy tickling, and of course you are wise; you have guessed that I do not have Cancer on my fingers but Claws, talons like a cat's but bigger, a little more dull than wood brads but good for tearing. and my teeth are a sham over metal. (181)

In a parody of sexual intercourse, Jael slaughters this testosterone-pumped imbecile. Her caresses are seductive but lethal, and Boss's jugular climax leaves his ravaged corpse on the floor in a violent parody of the "little death,"--"pumping his life out into the carpet" (182). Jael is in a state of excitement, but is disappointed that she could not complete her intended business. She thinks to herself, "God damn, but

once they get that way there's no doing business with them; you have to kill them anyway, might as well have fun" (182). Jael's exhilaration is not shared by the other three J's: "Jeannie is calm. Joanna is ashamed of me. Janet is weeping" (182-83). Jael has had a horrific impact on the psyches of the women she refers to as "The Young One, The Weak One, The Strong One" (165): Janet, Jeannine, and Joanna respectively. When asked by Jeannine if she had to kill the Boss, Jael responds, "I don't give a damn whether it was necessary or not . . . I liked it" (184).

Jael's violence shakes the foundations of the other characters' feminist beliefs--not to mention the infantile machismo of male readers. The expectation that there may be a peaceful resolution to the problems in patriarchal social roles presented by Russ is shattered. That there can exist the possibility of righteous rage in the quest for feminine independence confounds all society's preconceptions of women.

The character's visions of themselves is dramatically and permanently altered by Jael's remorseless vengeance. However, Jael is not through shocking them. The four return to Jael's home for her to recuperate from her physical exertion. There the three J's are introduced to Davy--Jael's android and housepet--who roams the house barefoot and naked, an intentional parody of the sexist adage of keeping women "barefoot and pregnant." Davy's true purpose is revealed to the three J's when they interrupt Jael's sexual gratification with Davy after dinner, a scene which appears to be choreographed as a parody of the Boss's earlier massacre, right down to Jael's feelings of satiation.

Jael's lack of embarrassment demonstrates the lack of emotion attached to her

sexual encounters with Davy. Davy serves the sole purpose of pleasing Jael sexually, after all Davy is only a dildo, similar in purpose, if not design, to the device Janet herself brought with her from Whileaway. Davy's anthropomorphic construction allows Jael the additional pleasure of dominating and controlling a "man" to satisfy her sense of irony, a reversal of the dehumanizing objectification of women as sexual objects--Davy is, after all, a humanized object for sexual gratification.

The sexual freedom to please oneself is an important component in the emancipation of women and distinguishes the more important relationship of intimacy from mere sexual gratification. It confronts the objectification of women as sexual objects. As Spector points out, "sex between a person and a dehumanized object is not--and should not be regarded as being--highly significant. This truth applies even more stringently if one is the object in question" (201). She adds that, "Sexuality that reduces one partner to the status of an object is, indeed, reductionist." Jael's actions and activities are profoundly disturbing to the J's; they prompt introspection and reevaluation of everything the J's thought was certain in their respective worlds. Gardiner supports this need for confrontational tactics as a means of wresting equal treatment from patriarchal society. It is as important as the understanding and tolerance which serve to unite women against prejudice.

Thus, "radical feminist" anger and "cultural feminist" empathy are not opposites but complementary components of an effective approach to feminist reading and social change. (106)

When Jael joins the three J's for lunch and brings forward her proposal for

forward bases of Womanland on their respective worlds, the only taker is Jeannine. It is arguable that she accepts out of rage for being so long a victim of male dominance and a sense of helplessness in the face of such ubiquitous prejudice. However, Janet and Joanna decline Jael's offer, perhaps because the ideology embraced by Jael's world merely reverses the prejudices of our own world. Their refusal is met with anger by Jael who accuses them of denial and pedantry. Joanna makes an astute observation:

Now you must know that Jeannine is Everywoman. I, though I am a bit quirky, I too am Everywoman. Everywoman is not Jael, . . . but Jael is Everywoman. (212)

As archetypes the characters represent the individual problems faced by women in their struggle to gain equality. Janet represents the hope for intellectual progress towards a workable solution. Jael, on the other hand, represents the rage and passion of radical activism and impatience with an unjust system. Susan Ayres suggests that the worlds of Janet and Jael are lessons in extremity. Their extreme difference from our own world highlights the injustice of contemporary patriarchal society. She says:

Russ compares the solutions Joanna and Jeannine reach to the alternative worlds of Janet and Jael. Though these two worlds further critique and undermine the straight mind, they fail to conclusively demonstrate a final victory. Janet's world of Whileaway is merely a hope and Jael's world is a parody. (28)

Jeannine, of course, represents the weakened and disadvantaged state which

women must reject. And Joanna is the struggling representative of things as they are now, flawed and frustrated but still challenging the status quo. Gardiner's strongest point and the focal point of The Female Man is that the characters are united in their cause:

The novel presents its multiple first-person heroines to dramatize how different any one might be if raised in a different society. In this sense, it illustrates common feminist beliefs about the priority of culture over nature and about the socially constructed determination of both gender and personality. At the same time, the novel can be seen from the traditionally unifying psychological perspective as a fantasy of narcissistic fulfilment, of a society composed entirely of oneself and of all one's own potentials. (93)

At the same time, these four women form the disrupted and often self-contradicting psyche of a single woman--the author. They personify the conflicting emotions of an educated woman's struggle for respect and opportunity in a condescending, male-oriented world. At the end of lunch, the J's go their separate ways but remain connected through their identification with the author, as if to say "stay in touch." Gardiner points out that, "Insofar as the J's are the fragments of one woman, the novel restores them to a kind of wholeness, parts of a female Humpty Dumpty back together again after society has shattered them (94):

We got up to pay our quintuple bill; then we went out into the street. I said goodbye and went off with Laur, I, Janet; I also watched them go,

I Joanna; moreover I went off to show Jael the city, I Jeannine, I Jael,  
I myself.

Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye. (212)

## Conclusion

Science fiction exists to provide a gathering-place for dreamers, philosophers, critics, and artists. Joanna Russ is all of these; her writing provides an exceptional example of the best characteristics of the genre and established a sound foundation for feminist science fiction. Her science fiction is not merely inventive and intelligent, it also smoothly blends feminism with the traditions of well established genre; in doing so it extrapolates the increased awareness achieved by the women's movement and predicts the future of women as a result of those social victories. Her ideas expand the horizon of what once was a predominantly male genre, and they encourage the expansion of women's role in society. Feminist science fiction has flourished under her tutelage; it has matured and now comprises a large proportion of the best science fiction currently available.

Russ's short stories provide a valuable index to the maturation of science fiction. By exposing the pornographic and self-indulgent adolescent male conventions which characterize adventure fantasy, she brought the validity of traditional adventure fantasy into question. Her heroine, Alyx, is an example of feminist strength and competence, revitalizing a stagnant, self-perpetuating genre by drawing attention to its sexism and smugness. Alyx provides a feminist perspective on science fiction and adventure fantasy which encourages and educates women readers and authors (and hopefully some males) alike. Moreover, by using adventure fantasy as a stepping stone to science fiction, Russ intimately connected the two genres, increasing the

moral value of adventure fantasy and reducing the technocracy of science fiction. For example, Sheri S. Tepper's Gate to Women's Country (1988) combines adventure fantasy and science fiction in a gender-segregated post-apocalyptic society—a concept which might never have seen print without Russ's efforts. Russ's later work, "Souls" (1982)—in the collection Extra(ordinary) People (1984)—is another example of her own cutting-edge fantasy literature.

The attention Russ devotes to the emotional and psychological aspects of science fiction gives her work more heuristic value than technological aspects of science fiction. Picnic on Paradise makes the social issues she examines more accessible to the reader and more pertinent on an individual level by permitting the reader to identify with various character ideologies which parallel contemporary problems. In addition, her characters become more sophisticated as Russ makes them more introspective and vulnerable, increasing their credibility through psychological realism. Seen from this historical point of view, The Left Hand of Darkness (1969), by Ursula K. Le Guin, may owe some small debt to Picnic on Paradise. It also is set on a frozen and largely unpopulated planet, and the main character has an epiphanic journey across a frozen wasteland. Moreover, both Russ and Le Guin owe a large debt to Mary Shelley's novel, Frankenstein, which is, without a doubt, the first science-fiction novel to explore the psyche and the frozen wasteland it inhabits within us. While Le Guin's novel has been more successful than Russ's, Russ was certainly published first and deserves recognition as the matriarch of feminist science fiction—an honour commonly awarded Le Guin.



Russ's feminism developed in tandem with the women's movement, sometimes it even preceded certain elements of it. Her writing reflects the most emergent feminist issues of her time. The consciousness-raising aspect of The Female Man is a major feminist contribution and is reflected in the story, Houston, Houston do you read? (1976) by James Tiptree, Jr. (alias Alice Hastings Bradley Sheldon). Tiptree's post-epidemic world borrows aspects of both Russ's Womanland and Whileaway in its support of coordinated woman's organization and self-reliance. Angela Carter's work, Passion of the New Eve (1977), also salutes Russ: its main character, Evelyn, metamorphoses from a man to a woman, becoming a female man. The transformation takes place in an all-woman enclave, reminiscent of Womanland, in the Nevada deserts.

Russ has detractors, of course; her work has been criticized as violent, inflammatory, and castrating. These accusations invariably focus on the few scenes where physical conflict arises between one of Russ's heroines and a persistently antagonist male character. Russ's negative critics address neither her development of feminist issues nor the circumstances leading to a violent episodes of her work. They appeal limply to masculine sympathy, citing Russ's violent passages in an attempt to discredit her as a man-hater for the unflattering portrayal she gives of patriarchal she society.

The violence of Russ's heroines is invariably an unavoidable consequence of overt masculine oppression, and the threat that patriarchal values will be physically enforced. Ironically, Russ's champions are greater warriors than their male

antagonists, perhaps because they have nothing to lose but oppression. Their moral conviction guides their actions, and they effectively exterminate these oppressive brutes in the interest of the common good. Russ does not totally reject male society; she exposes its prejudices and offers a feminist perspective as an alternative to traditional roles. Her characters resort to violence only in self-defense, which is itself cause of additional patriarchal embarrassment.

An interesting case can be made for the investigation of the causes and effects of the violence in Russ's work, which becomes less frequent and severe in her later novels and stories. Whether this trend in her work reflects the increased representation of women in government and administration or whether Russ herself lost faith in the capacity of guerrilla tactics to effect lasting change is an issue I could not address in this thesis. However, it bears consideration in the context of continued efforts to improve equality in social settings, for women and minorities alike.

Russ's emergence as an author established a new sub-genre: feminist science fiction. As I have already noted in passing, other authors were quick to take advantage of Russ's initial progress, and feminist science fiction flourished in the 1970's. Russ continued to write through the decade and well into the 1980's. Her works include: And Chaos Died (1970), We Who Are About To... (1975), The Two of Them (1978), as well as a collection of short stories spanning her writing career titled The Hidden Side of the Moon (1987). Such a large body of work, produced over two decades, would be impossible to address in the short space of this thesis; consequently, I have left those works for the interested reader to explore with the hope that the

hope that the development analysis I have made of Russ's fiction will provide adequate guidelines to analyze her mature writing.

As the unacknowledged matriarch of feminist science fiction, Joanna Russ laid a solid foundation for many writers. She was a leader to her contemporaries, inspiring such writers as Ursula Le Guin, Angela Carter, Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler, and James Tiptree, Jr. Her influence can be found in the works of the generation of writers who followed her: Nicola Griffith, Margaret Atwood, Linda Nagata, Sheri Tepper, Lisa Mason, and Pamela Sargent, to name a few. Russ's writing encourages us to question the dominant paradigm, not solely as a subversive act, but to educate ourselves and thereby improve the world we live in. Her advocacy of the women's movement is a step towards a society of equality and a rejection of complacency and patriarchal inflexibility. However, the realization of Russ's goal remains to be achieved. The Female Man concludes with an *envoi*, giving the reader the reassurance that more change will come, in time:

Go, little book, trot through Texas and Vermont and Alaska and Maryland and Washington and Florida and Canada and England and France; bob a curtsy at the shrines of Friedan, Millet, Greer, Firestone, and all the rest; behave yourself in people's living rooms, neither looking ostentatious on the coffee table nor failing to persuade due to the dullness of your style; . . . . Do not scream when you are ignored, for that will alarm people, and do not fume when your are heisted by persons who will not pay, rather rejoice that you have

become so popular. Live merrily, little daughter-book, even if I can't and we can't; recite yourself to all who will listen; stay hopeful and wise. . . . Do not complain when at last you are quaint and old fashioned, . . . do not mutter angrily to yourself when young persons read you to hrooch and hrch and guffaw, wondering what the dickens you were all about. Do not get glum when you are no longer understood, little book. Do not curse your fate. Do not reach up from the readers' laps and punch the readers' noses.

Rejoice, little book!

For on that day we will be free. (213-14)

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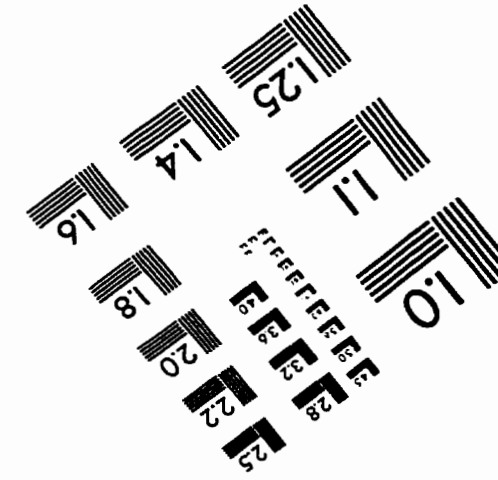
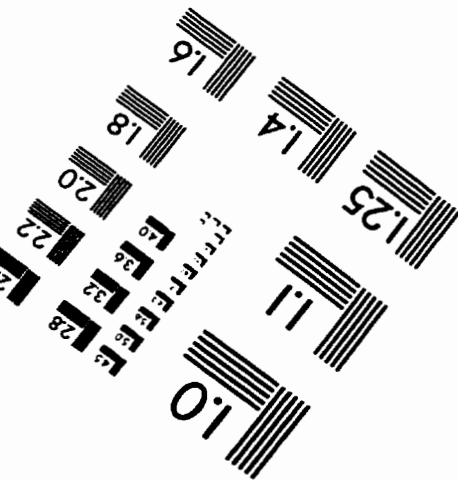
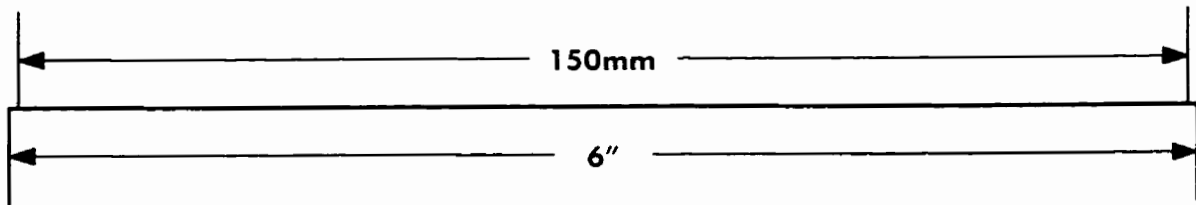
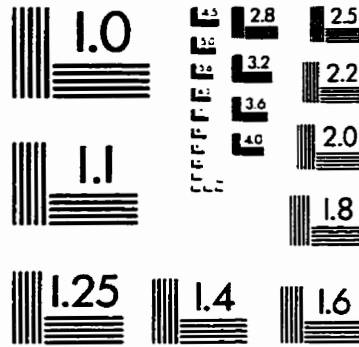
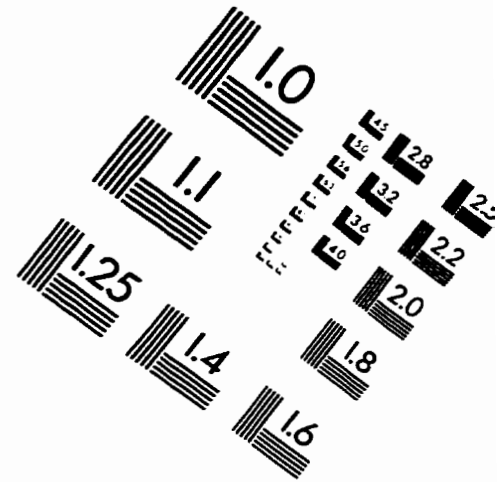
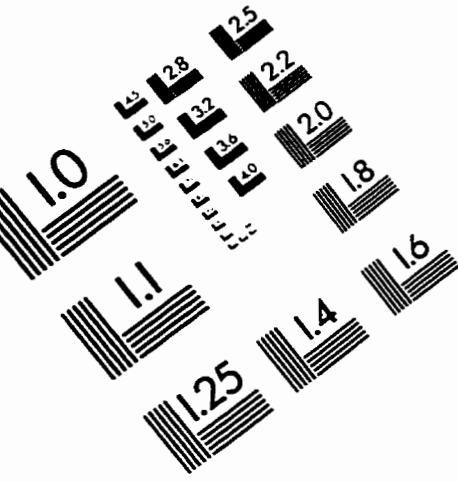
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