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JOANNA RUSS' S *THE FEMALE MAN*: TOWARDS A FEMINIST REVOLUTION

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Abstract

American writer Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* is a novel of science fiction published in 1975. In this novel, there are four women coming from different times and places. Joanna is from the present time. Jeannine is a romantic dreamer from a place where World War II never happened and The Great Depression continues. Janet comes from a world where no men have existed from centuries. Jael is an assasin from a dystopic future where women and men are literally engaged in a "battle of sexes". First of all; in this study, alternative worlds of Janet and Jael's will be explored. The journey across the galaxies with four women approves us that women must struggle to survive in "a man's world" ... no matter which planet they come from. On the other hand, *The Female Man* was written at the same time when the second wave of feminism was very active. As Sarah Lefanu points out that modern feminist utopias are intimately connected with the modern women's liberation movement. Joanna Russ especially is influenced by radical feminist thoughts in the novel. The reflections of these thoughts will be analysed in the second part of the article.

Özet

Joanna Russ'un *Dişi Adam*'ı: Feminist Devrime Doğru

Amerikalı yazar, Joanna Russ'ın *The Female Man* (Dişi Adam) isimli bilim kurgu romanı 1975 yılında basılmıştır. Bu romanda, farklı zaman ve yerlerden gelmiş olan dört kadının hikâyesi anlatılmaktadır. Joanna günümüzde yaşamaktadır. Jeannine, İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın yaşanmadığı ve hala Büyük Depresyon'un devam ettiği bir yerden gelmektedir. Janet, yüzyıllardır hiç bir erkeğin varolmadığı bir dünyada yaşamaktadır. Jael ise; erkek ve kadınların savaştığı distopik bir dünyadandır. Bu galaksiler arası yolculuk kadınların hangi gezegenden gelirse gelsin erkeklerin dünyasında hayatta kalabilmek için çok uğraşması gerektiğini kanıtlamıştır. Diğer yandan, *Dişi Adam* romanı ikinci dalga feminist hareketin aktif olduğu bir dönemde yazılmıştır. Sarah Lefanu'nda belirttiği gibi; modern feminist ütopyalar modern kadın hareketleri ile direkt bağlantılı olarak yazılmışlardır. Joanna Russ'ta özellikle radikal feminist düşüncelerden etkilenmiştir. Makalenin ikinci bölümünde; bu düşüncelerin romanda nasıl yansıtıldığı ele alınacaktır.

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Joanna Russ is one of the important feminist writers in American Literature. She is famous for her science fiction and fantasy works. Russ also published a number of works of feminist literary criticism. *The Female Man* is the best known novel of hers. It was originally written in 1970 and published in 1975. In this science-fiction novel, the story revolves around four women coming from different times and places. When they explore each other's worlds, their different view of gender roles surprises each other's notions of womanhood. In the end, their encounters influence them to evaluate their lives and rethink about what it means to be a woman. Joanna lives in a world similar to 70s Earth. Jeannine is a romantic dreamer from a place where World War II never happened and The Great Depression still continues. Janet comes from a world where no men have existed from centuries. Jael is an assassin from a dystopic future where women and men are engaged in a "battle of sexes". Generally utopias written by women share the same characteristics of utopias written by men. However, they differ in terms of the role of women, issues of sexuality, reproduction, childrearing, and interpersonal relationships. First of all; in this study, alternative worlds of Janet and Jael's will be explored. On the other hand; as Francis states feminist utopias are not blueprints for a feminist revolution; they are instead part of an already happening feminist revolution (1990: 140). It means that the feminist utopias are directly connected with the women's liberation movement. In the second part of this study, this connection between women's liberation movement of the 70s and Russ' utopic fiction will be explored and reflections of second wave of feminism in the novel will be analysed.

The Female Man begins with Janet's description of her utopian world: Whileaway. This utopian society plays a major role in the novel. Janet introduces herself in the first chapter. She is working as a Safety Officer. She is married and the mother of one child. She was sent to earth to explore the across time probabilities. Whileaway is a female society that exists over 900 years in the future, in another time probability. Before Whileaway, there was a Golden Age where men and women were still alive. In this Golden Age, men and women were living in harmony and peace. This society was corrupted by a sudden plague that killed all male. Then, women created their own society. Everything is organized very well. Everyone knows her duty and hard working is the basis of this society.

Most of the population live on the farms which are the only family units on Whileaway, because farm work is harder to schedule and demands more day-to-day continuity than any other kind of job. Farming on Whileaway is mainly caretaking and machine-tending; it is the emotional security of family life that provides the glamour (Russ, 1985: 89). Younger women do the works which demand much effort and more difficult, middle aged women do more careful management, repair and service work; and older women do advanced mental work of planning and creation by being directly connected to the main computer. As we

see here, the labour force is divided by age. But, they don't work more than sixteen hours a week or more than three hours a day.

Politically the government of Whileaway is as minimal and decentralized as possible. Government in Whileaway is located in two bodies, the Geographical and the Professional Parliament. They decide on issues of economic development but do not legislate morality or attempt to direct people's personal lives.The legal system on Whileaway is almost non-existent.They do not have any written constitutions and laws, courts and prisons. The taboos that do exist include "sexual relations with anybody considerably older or younger than oneself, waste, ignorance, offending others without intending to, as well as the usual checks on murder and theft - both those crimes being actually difficult to commit" (Russ, 1985: 53). Social and personal life is complex and the centre of this utopia. Clans organized in kinship webs constitute the social basis of life in Whileaway "you cannot fall out of the kinship web and become sexual prey for strangers - the web is world wide" (Russ, 1985: 81).

Non-biological family units number from twenty to thirty individuals, and though each person traces her own kin, from her two mothers, she makes a separate decision to join the family of her choice by the age of 22. When a family gets too large or ages just as individuals do, some go off to start a new family so that one quarter of the families at anyone time are new. Child-raising and socialization are very important here. Whileawayans bear children around the age of 30. The childbearing mother is relieved by the rest of her family of all household tasks during pregnancy and until the child is 5 years old; this time is one of slowing down, of a leisure that will not be known again until the age of 60, of total involvement in the nurturing of the child.

At the age of four or five, these independent, blooming, pampered, extremely intelligent little girls are torn weeping and arguing from their thirty relatives and sent to the regional school (Russ, 1985: 50). From 5 to 12 years of age, the children are cared for in groups of five and taught in groups of differing sizes depending on the topic. Their education at this point is heavily practical: how to run machines, how to get along without machines, law, transportation, physical theory and so on. They learn gymnastics and mechanics. They learn practical medicine (Russ, 1985: 55). They also learn to swim, shoot, dance, sing, paint, play, and "everything their mommies did". Turned loose at puberty, the children receive the ritual identification of Middle Dignity and have the right to food and lodging wherever they wander. From puberty to 17, they do not go home but wander alone or in bands. During this time they work occasionally, get involved in political movements, go directly to their desired work, drift or play. From puberty on, they are free to be sexually active. No Whileawayan is monogamous unless she chooses, however, later in life "Some restrict their sexual relations to one other person - at least while that other person is nearby - but there is no legal arrangement" (Russ, 1985: 53).

Sexual relations may, but usually do not, occur with members of one's own family. Three-Quarters dignity is achieved at 17, and all 17 year-olds are taken into the labour force and sent where they are needed, not where they wish. They take care of cattle, run machinery, oversee food factories, lay pipes, fix machinery - all with the technological help of the induction helmet. At 22, they achieve Full Dignity. At this point they enter their formal apprenticeships, have their learning certified, marry into pre-existing families or form their own. By now the typical Whileaway girl is able to do any job on the planet, except for specialities and extremely dangerous work. By 25, she has entered a family, thus choosing her geographical home base (Whileawayans travel all the time) (Russ,1985,p. 52). From 25 to 60, women bear and raise one or two children, work at their principal jobs, and travel and enjoy life. From the age of 60 onwards, they move to sedentary and highly intellectual work. Provided with the direct mental link with the computer, the older women are the most intellectually creative members of the society. Tom Moylan (1986) describes Whileaway as a woman's place that thrives on the pleasure principle in a post-scarcity, non-phallocratic, non-capitalist, ecologically sensitive, anarcho communist society. (71) Hard work, tidiness, privacy, community, freedom, creativity and a love of nature emerge as the primary values in a society that is purposely shapeless, without the linear order imposed by a central government or male abstractions (Moylan, 1986: 71).

Joanna Russ offers two alternative worlds in the *Female Man.* We have seen the utopic world of Janet so far. Another alternative is the dystopic world of Jael. She lives in Womanland. In her time, world is separated into two as Womanland and Manland. There is a constant battle between these two worlds. Behind the scenes of battle, manlanders buy male infants from Womanlanders and bring them up in "batches", until they are five years old. The little boys are then sorted out into those that will become "real men"- five out of seven, who are the ruling caste of this male society- the "changed" who undergo complete sex change surgery- one out of seven, who as transsexuals exist to serve the desires of the real men as women once did, only now the male race is purified of any contamination by organic women- and the "half-changed" who without surgery keep their genitalia but grow "slim, grow languid, grow emotional and feminine" (Russ, 1985: 167), the last seventh, who as parodies of gay males serve the needs of pseudo-male and Pseudo-female genders as the most oppressed caste. Moylan describes Manland as an authoritarian, homophobic, masculinist dystopia: it is a militarized society striving for the final solution in which the freedom of women is eliminated and only a few are kept as breeders for the men who cannot give birth to their own selves (1986: 74). On the other hand, Womanland is the place of action and mediation between utopia and dystopia, the front line of female freedom and fighting. Women live communally in safe "underground" cities, except for those elite who after years of service to the cause have secured private housing in the

countryside. Womanland has to sell its male babies to Manland in order to survive. It allows a caste system of leaders and experienced fighters such as Jael, and it is a society engaged in terror and warfare against the enemy who are by no means defeated.

As Sarah Lefanu points out that modern feminist utopias are intimately connected with the modern women's liberation movement (1988: 53). On the other hand, Anne- Cranny Francis states that, contemporary feminist utopias are not blueprints for feminist revolution; they are instead part of an already happening feminist revolution, a revolution pursued not by physical force but by the re-examination of traditional gender roles and the recognition of their appallling injustice, their delimitation and deformation of both women and man (1990: 140). Russ with this novel tries to show that how women struggle to retain their identities as women by using alternative worlds. The title is interesting here. The character Joanna who is the fictionalized version of Russ, calls herself the "female man" because she believes that she must forego her identity as a woman in order to be respected. She states that "there is one and only way to possess that in which we are defective... Become it (Russ, 1985: 139). The women in the novel were raised in different environments and each woman has a different idea of what it means to be a woman. Jeannine believes that only marriage can validate her existence. Janet does not understand how women can be inferior to men. Joanna searches to establish her identity as a strong individual and believes that she must adopt masculine characteristics in order to be respected in her society. Jael thinks that men should be eliminated. Joanna Russ wrote *The Female Man* in 1975. It was the time when second wave feminism was very active. It is a period of feminist activity began during the late 1960s and lasted through the late 1970s. First wave of feminists struggled to be equals with men legally. However, second wave feminists were mainly concerned with independence and greater political action to improve women's rights. They tried to liberate themselves from the traditional roles of wife and mother. In 1987, Lynn Segal summarises the aim of the second wave feminism as:

> We did want real power, in every sphere. By power we meant not the man's to control and dominate others - at least that is not what most of us though we wanted - but rather the freedom and space to express our own desires, creativity and potential: to flourish and to find "our place in the sun". We sought to build the collective power of all women. We wanted power to participate in the making of a new world which would be free from all forms of domination (1987: 2).

The new feminists believed that they could transform their own ideas of themselves as women. They could create a new relationship between women and men and between women and the world. They did not want to be like men; they

wanted to be something new, and better. But the only problem with the new feminists was they were divided into groups or into new schools of feminism. The most important groups were Liberal Feminist, Socialist and Marxist Feminists, Radical Feminists. Radicals have the most revolutionary and rebellious thoughts and Joanna Russ was mostly influenced by this feminist thinking. Shulamith Firestone is one of the pioneers of radical feminists and she explains their views as follows:

> In the radical feminist view, the new feminism is not just the revival of a serious political movement for social equality. It is the second wave of the most important revolution in history. Its aim is to overthrow of the oldest, most rigid class/caste system based on sex - a system consolidated over thousands of years, lending the archetypal male and female roles on undeserved legitimacy and seeming permanence. In this perspective, the pioneer Western feminist movement was only the first onslaught, the fifty-year ridicule that followed it only a first counter offensive - the dawn of a long struggle to break free from the oppressive power structures set up by Nature and reinforced by man (1970: 16).

In *The Female Man*, as a new feminist and a radical thinker Russ shows that men have sexist assumptions towards women. At the same time, she ridicules the stereotypical portrayals of women in a male dominated society. As Rosinsky points out, parallel universes of these four women are linked by the actual and possible uses of humour as much as by the shared genetic makeup of its four protagonists, and the entire novel may be viewed as ironic commentary on the on going, multi-dimensional "battle between sexes" in androcentric society (1984: 67). For example; Janet and Joanna go to a party. Joanna does not feel comfortable because she lives in the 1960s and knows all the remarks about women. She waits for the conversations that begins with "women -" or "women can't -" or "why do women -". But Joanna is not afraid of men. She is not like the other women in the party. Joanna comes from a group of women who believes that they must go on their own way. She rejects to be discouraged by men. Joanna Russ, here, uses humour and shows classical dialogues between women and men in the party.

> "A Round of 'His Little Girl'"
> Saccharissa: I'm Your Little Girl.
> Host (wheedling): Are you really?
> Saccharissa (complacent: Yes I am.
> Host: Then you have to be stupid, too.
>
> A Simultaneous Round of 'Ain't It Awful'"

> Lamentissa: When I do the floor, he doesn't come home and say it's wonderful.
> Wailissa: Well, darling, we can't live without him, can we? You'll just have to do *better.*
> Lamentissa (wistfully): I bet *you* do better.
> Wailissa: I do the floor better than anybody I know.
> Lamentissa (excited): Does he ever say it's wonderful?
> Wailissa (dissolving): He never says *anything*!
> (Russ, 1985: 35).

These women are all the time ridiculed by men and they don't realize this. They need a man and they cannot do anything without men. Lamentissa and Wailissa here show that they are very traditional women. Men like them because they always see the women's place as their home in which she lives with her husband and children. Men don't like women who are working and trying to challenge with them. One of the men in the party says, "You women are lucky, you don't have to go out and go to work" (Russ, 1985: 35). Another humourous example about the place of women and men in the contemporary society can be seen here:

> Men succeed. Women get married.
> Men fail. Women get married.
> Men enter monasteries. Women get married.
> Men start wars. Women get married.
> Men stop them. Women get married.
> Dull, dull (Russ, 1985: 126).

Men give terrible names for women who want liberation from men. So many times Joanna Russ uses humour to show how men thought about this new feminism and liberation. In the following passage, men make fun of the demonstrations of bra burning which is a symbolic act of new feminists against male oppression and call the demonstraters as "hysterical bitches".

> Burned any bras lately har har twinkle twinkle. A pretty girl like you doesn't need to be liberated twinkle har. Don't listen to those hysterical bitches twinkle twinkle twinkle. I never take a woman's advice about two things: love and automobiles twinkle twinkle har. May I kiss your little hand twinkle twinkle twinkle. Har. Twinkle (Russ, 1985: 49).
>
> The Great Happiness Contest
>
> First Woman: I'm perfectly happy. I love my husband and we have two darling children. I certainly don't need any change in *my* lot.

> Second Woman: I'm even happier than you are. My husband does the dishes every Wednesday and we have three darling children each nicer than the last. I'm tremendously happy.
>
> Third Woman: 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 me 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.
>
> Fourth Woman: We have six children. (This is too many. A long silence.) I have a part-time job as a clerk in Bloomingdale's to pay for the children's skiing lessons but I really feel I'm expressing myself best when I make a custard or a meringue or decorate the basement.
>
> Me: 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.
>
> All the Women: Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill (Russ, 1985: 116).

This conversation between these women and Joanna once again presents us that not only men but also some women do not like the new feminists who are trying to challenge men in their own areas.Russ states her anger about men's place in the society with a very long paragraph:

> I committed my first revolutionary act yesterday. I shut the door on a man's thumb. I did it for no reason at all and I didn't warn him; I just slammed the door shut in a rapture of hatred and imagined the bone breaking and the edges grinding into his skin. He ran downstairs and the phone rang wildly for an hour after while I sat, listening to it, my heart beating wildly, thinking wild thoughts. Horrible. Horrible and wild. I must find Jael.
>
> Women are so petty (translation: we operate on too small a scale).
>
> Now I'm worse than that - I also do not give a damn about humanity or society. It's very upsetting to think that women make up only one-tenth of society, but it's true. For example:
>
> My doctor is male
> My lawyer is male
> My tax-accountant is male
> The grocery-store-owner (on the corner) is male

> The janitor in my apartment is male.
> The president of my bank is male.
> The manager of the neighbourhood supermarket is male.
> My landlord is male.
> Most taxi-drivers are male.
> All cops are male.
> All fireman are male.
> The designers of my car are male.
> The factory workers who made the car are male.
> The dealer I bought it from is male.
> Almost all my colleagues are male.
> My employer is male.
> The Army is male.
> The Navy is male.
> The government is (mostly) male.
> I think most of the people in the world are male.

Now it's true that waitresses, elementary-school teachers, secretaries, nurses and nuns are female, but how many nuns do you meet in the course of the usual business day? Right? And secretaries are female only until they get married, at which time, they change or something because you usually don't see them again at all. I think it's a legend that half the population of the world is female; where on earth are they keeping them all?

No, if you tot up all those categories of women above, you can see clearly and beyond the shadow of a doubt that there are maybe 1-2 women for every 11 or so men and that hardly justifies making such a big fuss. It's just that I'm selfish. My friend Kate says that most of the women are put into female-banks when they grow up and that's why you don't see them, but I can't believe that (Russ, 1985: 203- 204).

In *The Female Man,* Joanna Russ also talks about the changes in legislation in favour of women. Second wave feminists have worked to improve the conditions for women, but still the women have to face with difficulties. As it can be seen in the following passage, even if a woman has the right for abortion, she is still seen as a "baby killer" by society.

> You see how very different this is from the way things used to be in the bad old days, say five years ago. New Yorkers (female) have had the right to abortion for almost a year now, if you can satisfy the hospital boards that you deserve bed room and don't mind the nurses calling you Baby Killer; citizens of Toronto, Canada, have perfectly free

> access to contraception if they are willing to travel 100 miles to cross the border, I could smoke my own cigarette, if I smoked (and get my very own lung cancer) (Russ, 1985: 136).

Shulamith Firestone in her revolutionary book *The Dialectic of Sex* argues that the heart of women's oppression is her child bearing and childrearing roles. She believes that nature produced the fundamental inequality - half the human race must bear and rear the children of all of them - which was later consolidated, institutionalized, in the interests of men (1970: 232). Reproduction of the species cost women dearly, not only emotionally, psychologically, culturally, but even in strictly material (physical) terms before recent methods of contraception, continuous childbirth led to constant "female trouble", early ageing and death (Firestone: 232).Firestone adds that we have to free women from the burden of childrearing and childbearing. She, again, in her *The Dialectic of Sex* very shockingly states that "pregnancy is barbaric" (Firestone, 1970: 226). For her, pregnancy is the temporary deformation of the body of the individual for the sake of the species. Moreover, childbirth hurts and it is not good for women (Firestone: 226). It seems that Joanna Russ was influenced by these radical thoughts and in the novel Joanna describes pregnancy as a "disaster" for women. (1985: 194)

Joanna lives in the present time. She's a Professor of English. But still in academic life, she has to face with sexist assumptions of man:

> Then there is the joviality, the self-consequence, the forced heartiness, the benevolent teasing, the insistent demands for flattery and reassurance. This is what ethologists call dominance behaviour.
>
> Eighteen Year Old Male College Freshman (laying down the law at a party): If Marlowe had lived, he would have written very much better plays than Shakespeare's.
>
> Me, A Thirty Five Year Old Professor of English (dazed with boredom): Gee, how clever you are to know about things that never happened.
>
> The Freshman: (bewildered) Huh?
>
> or
>
> Eighteen Year Old Girl At a Party: Men don't understand machinery. The gizmo goes on the whatsit and the rataplan makes contact with the fourchette in at least seventy percent of all cases.
>
> Thirty five year old male Professor of Engineering (awed): Gee. (Something wrong here, I think)
>
> or
>
> "Man" is a rhetorical convenience for "human". "Man" includes "woman". Thus:

1. The Eternal Feminine leads us ever upward and on (Guess who "us" is.)
2. The last man on earth will spend the last hour before the holocaust searching for his wife and child. (Review of the *Second Sex* by the first sex.)
3. We all have the impulse at times, to get rid of our wives. (Irving Howe, introduction to Hardy, talking about my wife.)
4. Great scientists choose their problems as they choose their wives. (A.H. Maslow, who should know better.)
5. Man is a hunter who wishes to compete for the best kill and the best female (everybody).

or

The game is a dominance game called I Must Impress This Woman. Failure makes the active player play harder. Wear a hunched back or a withered arm, you will then experience the invisibility of the passive player. I'm never impressed - no woman ever is - it's just a cue that you like me and I'm supposed to like that. If you really like me, maybe I can get you to stop. Stop, I want to talk to you! Stop, I want to see you! Stop, I'm dying and disappearing!

She: Isn't it just a game?

He: Yes, of course.

She: And if you play the game, it means you like me, doesn't it?

He: Of course.

She: Then if it's just a game and you like me, you can stop playing. Please stop.

He: No.

She: Then I won't play.

He: Bitch! You want to destroy me. I'll show you (He plays harder.)

She: All right, I'm impressed.

He: You really are sweet and responsive after all. You've kept your femininity. You're not one of those hysterical feminist bitches who wants to be a man and have a penis. You're a *woman.*

She: Yes (She kills herself.)

(Russ, 1985: 93-94).

As we see throughout the book, this is a typical novel that has so many elements of feminism. *The Female Man* shows us that women really have their own literature different from men. The journey across the galaxies with four women

approves us that women must struggle to survive in "a man's world" ... no matter which planet they come from. It is also very apparent in the novel that it is totally related to the feminist movement in the 1960s. It can be seen in the end of the book. In this male identified and sexist world, Joanna Russ (1985) closes her book with a paragraph which sends the book off a revolutionary assignment:

> Go, little book, trot through Texas and Vermont and Alaska and Maryland and Washington and Florida and Canada and England and France; bob a curtsey at the shrines of Friedan, Millett, 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; knock at the Christmas garland on my husband's door in New York City and tell him that I loved him truly and love him still (despite what anybody might think), and take your place bravely on the book racks of bus terminals and drugstores. Do not scream when you are ignored, for that will alarm people, and do not fume when you're 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. Wash your face and take your place without a fuss in the Library of Congress, for all books end up there eventually, both little and big. Do not reach up from readers' laps and punch the readers' noses. Rejoice little book! For on that day we will be free (pp. 213-214).

Joanna Russ sends and dedicates her book to Germaine Greer, Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone who are the most important names in feminist movement at that time. These women worked very hard to improve the conditions for women. However, in this male dominated world, women still have to struggle and there are lots of things to do for the feminists. In *The Female Man* , Russ tries to give the message that women can only survive if they can unite themselves in their societies.

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