Virginia Woolf's Thought and Writing and Joanna Russ's Science Fiction: Feminism in Orlando (1928) and The Female Man (1975)

Terpos, Nikita

Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

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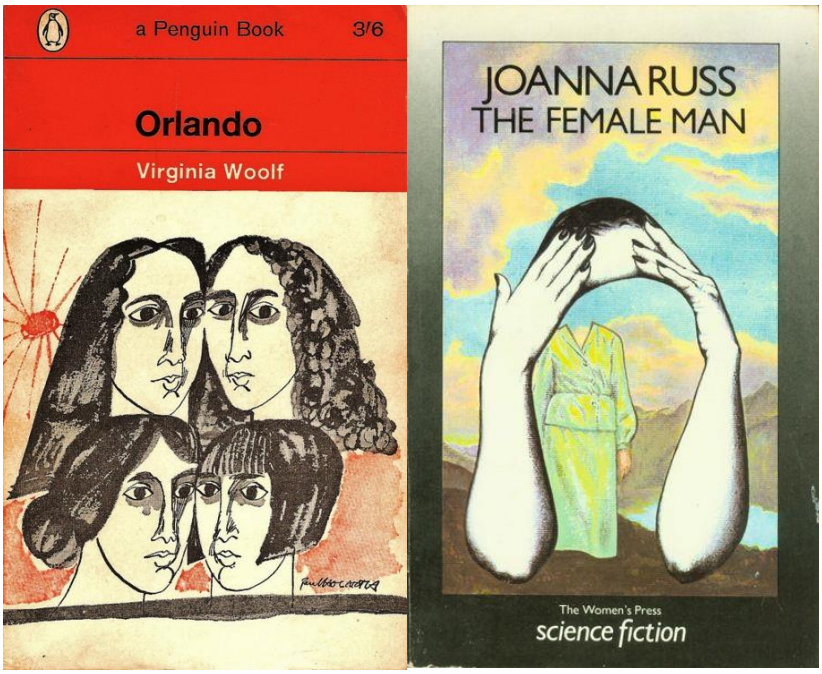

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Supervisor: Dr. Evert Jan van Leeuwen

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Table of Contents

Introduction

This thesis explores the feminist themes of Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) in relation to the earlier feminist thought of modernist writer Virginia Woolf, as expressed in *Orlando* (1928). Even though these two writers may have little in common at first sight, both of them strove, in their own way, and according to their own norms and values, for equal rights for women in society and a better representation of women in the literary profession. Today, Joanna Russ is known as a major science fiction author; with Ursula Le Guin, she is considered a founder of feminist speculative fiction. She was both an academic and a novelist in the field of feminist theory and practice. Her award-winning[1] novel, *The Female Man*, best conveys her feminist thought and shows that she broke away from mainstream science fiction conventions in order to express her concerns about the identities, roles and futures for women in American society. At the outset of the twentieth century, Virginia Woolf was one of the first modernist writers to stand up for, and write about, the representation of women in the literature and society of the early twentieth century. Before Russ, Woolf deliberately developed an experimental and progressive style of imaginative prose fiction through which she explored the experience of women's lives, and expressed a feminist critique of mainstream British culture. While science fiction is often understood as a form of popular-genre fiction, this thesis will show through a comparative analysis of Russ's *The Female Man* and Woolf's *Orlando* that Woolf's modernist literary experimentation and feminist ideas played a significant role in shaping Russ's later feminist thought and speculative-fiction.

Science fiction can be considered a quintessentially modern literary genre. It was only in the middle of the twentieth century that it established itself in the popular-culture sector

[1] The novel was nominated for the 1975 Nebula Award and eventually won a retrospective Tiptree Jr Award (now called Otherwise Award) in 1996 for its contribution of gender studies within science fiction.

through the thriving magazine culture of the day[2]; in the past, works now related to this genre – Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871) and H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) – were often classified as romances or fantasies. In his late nineteenth-century scientific romances, "Wells went on to advocate the 'world state', a sometimes pacifist and liberal notion that nevertheless retained links to arguments about technocratic and racial efficiently (Luckhurst 42). Roger Luckhurst goes on to explain that "the Wellsian embrace of science and Mechanism revealed the anti-humanism in his project" (43-44). As such, science fiction, in its earliest form already contained an ambiguous relation to the positivist notion human progress towards utopia.

After the Second World War, however, science fiction writers increasingly explored the negative impact of new technologies on the wellbeing of humankind and the future of human societies; science fiction more frequently became a vehicle for socio-political critique. Damien Broderick explains how in the 1950s, SF writers like Alfred Bester and Theodore Sturgeon "thrilled the innocent [readers of SF] with vivid language, bold imagery and a profoundly sceptical analysis of the world even as they unsettled and old guard [of SF writers] who found these modernist experiments a betrayal of everything in the established rules of" science fiction (49). As the genre developed in the post-war period, futuristic dystopias proliferated in which contemporary socio-political and economic problems had grown out of control (Latham 1). Rather than remaining in its pulp-fiction ghetto, SF developed into a very broad genre that spoke out on a variety of subjects. Sterling explains what SF entails today:

> The customary 'theatrics' of science fiction include prophetic warnings, utopian aspirations, elaborate scenarios for entirely imaginary worlds, titanic disasters, strange

[2] Key American magazines bringing science fiction into the mainstream were: *Amazing Stories*, *Astounding Stories*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Unknown*, and *Galaxy Science Fiction*; key British magazines were *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*.

> voyages, and political agitation of many extremist flavours, presented in the form of sermons, meditations, satires, allegories, and parodies – exhibiting every conceivable attitude toward the process of techno-social change, from cynical despair to cosmic bliss. (n.p.)

The genre thus began as a reaction to newly introduced technology in society, but evolved into a literary vehicle for the critique of current situations within society and the subsequent view of the future without being tied down by too many genre rules and conventions. Latham explains that SF "cannot be defined purely in terms of allegedly timeless formal qualities because the genre is inextricable from the historical influences that shape it at any given moment" (8). This was the case, especially, in the middle decades of the twentieth century, when science fiction writers began increasingly to borrow stylistic conventions and thematic concerns from the modernist "avant-garde," such as "psychological examination of inner space" and "subjectivist, anti-technocratic Modernist writing" (Luckhurst 142). Broderick adds to this the "jump cuts, meanderings, all-but-plotless immersion in image" (50) that distinguished New Wave cinema from mainstream movies. By 1961, Kingsley Amis defended science fiction as suitable genre for the expressions of social critique because it offered "a new vantage point from which to survey 'our culture'" (16). For Amis, the combination of "inventions" and "social criticism" was in fact "the point of departure for a great deal of contemporary science fiction" (31).

Concerning gender identities and gender roles, however, SF initially clung to many of the underlying patriarchal ideals and the androcentric perspective of writers like Robert Heinlein and Larry Niven. One major scholar in the field of SF, Brian Attebery, comments that this gender "conservatism" was deeply rooted in the genre and that "audience-kept gender exploration" was limited to a minimum by "primarily male audiences and the editors, publishers, and distributors" (5). Calvin explains that "science fiction initially emerged as a

genre concerned with science and technology" in a time in which science and technology were also "characterized by patriarchal … structures"; as SF "reflected the codes and traditions of a masculinist genre, it reflected a "technophilic, masculinist" attitude that many saw as antithetical to feminism" (Calvin 17). Salvaggio explains that there were (and still are) complaints that the genre was (and still is) "dominated by male authors who create male heroes who control distinctly masculine worlds" aimed at male readers (78). Clute draws the same conclusion and finds it particularly striking that there was (and still is) a "lack of female protagonists" in the genre (1343). Even though SF writers have the freedom to step outside traditional conventions, the genre is still often aimed at attracting and upholding the attention of the male reader. In other words, it still "tends to reveal specifically masculine sexual prejudices" (Clute 1088). According to Clute, gender "roles are skewed" in much SF, "so as to place authority in the hands of men, often by defining such powerful concepts as law, reason, tradition, creativity, and divinity as inherently masculine" (7). The roles of women are even more constricted by this, which makes the contrast in gender roles in society even more pronounced in this genre. Despite its openness to experimentation, SF has been as much a platform for the representation of "popular prejudices and feelings" (Clute 1088) about gender identity as a progressive voice. Consequently, a patriarchal atmosphere has prevailed from the start among many of the more prominent authors and publishers.

From the outset, science fiction was also a space for experimentation, incorporating a larger variety of different subjects and styles than other popular-culture genres. Gender identities and gender roles played a significant role in stories such as Judith Merril's "That Only A Mother" (1948) and Theodore Sturgeon's "The World Well Lost" (1953). In the wake of these early SF gender studies, other writers developed a more sustained engagement with the representation of gender themes. Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) – exploring themes of androgyny and dual sexuality in relation to socio-political

institutions – is one of the most famous feminist science fiction novels. From the late 1960s onwards, themes of gender and women's struggles in a patriarchal society often played a role in SF. There is always a trade-off between men and women whether it is politics, technology, art or labour. Attebery summarises well that "gender … is an integral part of the genre's intellectual and aesthetic structure. A focus on gender brings out certain transitional moments and counter-movements that have not figured prominently in most histories of the genre" (10). What Attebery highlights is that gender identities and roles always play a major role in social and cultural problems because – like categories of class and race – gender is inherently aligned with important issues of inequality and injustice at any given time.

Since the late 1960s, science fiction has offered increasingly more freedom to writers for alternative ways of thinking about and representing male-female divisions in terms of gender roles in modern western society (Clute 1088). Veronica Hollinger has highlighted "the potential of science fiction to disrupt its own constructions of the feminine in particular, and of the sex/gender system in general" and "its potential for imaginative re-presentations of the gendered subject, for re-presentations of difference and diversity" (127). Many writers within the genre focus on the depiction of an alternative, future world that could rise if current social, political or economic problems of the time keep developing in the direction they are heading. Representations of a world taken over by a specific economic, technological or political system are especially popular: in Frederick Pohl's *The Space Merchants* (1953), the earth is governed by advertising companies and every aspect of life is for sale. In Jean Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965), a metropolis is governed by a massive computer and people are controlled by computer logic. In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), part of the United States has become the theocratic dictatorship of Gilead. In the latter novel, gender identity and gender roles are directly addressed by presenting a society in which a return to

theocratic rule has led to a renewed contrast between the roles and identities available to men and women, and in which women's experience is primarily that of imprisonment.

Atwood's famous novel supports Attebery's contention that "within science fiction, separation by gender has been the basis of a fascinating series of thought experiments" (107). As a definition of gender in science fiction, Attebery writes that it is "a way of assigning social and psychological meaning to sexual difference, in so far as that difference is perceived in form, appearance, sexual function, and expressive behaviour" (2). He divides both gender and the genre into different cultural codes that are separate but which also constantly intersect. These alleged codes "allow us to generate forms of expression and assign meanings to them" (Attebery 2). According to Attebery's constructionist approach, both gender and genre are strongly influenced by the social conditions and cultural situation and not only determined by the individual himself. This has been observed from a feminist perspective by witnessing the often biased power position of the male gender in society.

This constructionist theory of gender has informed much literary-criticism on gender. According to Brickell, there is a difference between the definitions of sex and gender, and therefore they must be considered separately: "'sex' denotes a biological distinction between male and female, and 'gender' the cultural overlay that creates men and women, boys and girls" (93). Thus, sex is ultimately concerned with the biologically determined aspect of the individual and gender is socially and culturally determined. Brickell's research shows that "sex is 'natural' [and] not a self-evident expression of any actual underlying ontology, but is instead a socially constructed 'natural attitude'" consequently, the process and development of being male or female is "neither voluntaristic nor transcendent of social demands" (94). Individual human beings are thus born with certain biological distinction between the male and female sex of the species, but many further developments of gender identity are

structurally taught and even, in a certain sense, imposed on the individual by dominant socio-cultural conventions of masculinity and femininity: a hegemonic gender ideology.

Another important constructionist thinker, the gender theorist Judith Butler, developed a theory of "performativity" through which she explored "ways in which reified and naturalized conceptions of gender might be understood as constituted and, hence, capable of being constituted differently" (520). Butler referenced the earlier feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir, in arguing "that 'woman' is a historical idea and not a natural fact," which "underscores the distinction between sex, as biological facticity, and gender, as the cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity" (522). Salih explains that Butler's theory of the performativity of gender "collapse[s] the sex/gender distinction in order to argue that there is no sex that is not always already gender" (55). This plays an important role among constructionist feminist science fiction writers, partly because gender identity and the biological division of sex are seen as two different matters. Even though Butler's theory was published after Joanna Russ's major feminist SF novels, Kara explains that, like Butler, Russ "underscored the necessity of differentiating between gender and sex; by doing so, she explicitly highlights how slippery gender categories are and how important it is to understand that woman is a social construction" (2447). Gender identity, in the work of Russ, is thus shaped by the growth of individual identity within a larger socio-cultural environment. In terms of female gender identity, according to Butler, "to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (522). Therefore, individual identity is always fluid and dependent on the social environment. If the environment changes or the individual relocates, it will continuously change and adapt to a

new environment, no matter how strong-willed the mind is. Sabbe and Aelterman explain Butler's theory as follows: "gender performance" and "doing gender" both

> refer to the double active role that individuals have. On the one hand, children and adults constantly have to 'perform' or 'do' their masculinity or femininity. On the other hand, if individuals do gender 'correctly', that is, within the terms made available within dominant discourse, they simultaneously sustain, reproduce and legitimate dominant gender discourses as well as the social order and the institutional arrangements that are based on them. (523)

Multiple feminist theorists and literary writers since Russ have followed this constructionist view of gender. This thesis will show that within the field of SF, Russ was a key innovator in developing a similar perspective on the formation of gender identities.

The second wave of feminism in the 1960s turned the science fiction genre on its head, causing more and more women to become interested in reading science fiction. Slowly but surely female writers ventured into this genre. Initially, these women writers had much trouble finding a publisher because women in SF still went against the traditional conventions set up by the male authorities (James 184). According to Attebery, feminist SF writers increasingly challenged this male authority and "force[d] these assumptions out of concealment, to show where they lurk in custom and language, and thereby carve out a to space for women to talk together, explore their experiences, and use those experiences to create new identities and patterns for social interaction" (7). Feminists had to pave their own road towards more acceptance of women in this genre as this was still so male oriented.

Clute points out that after several waves of feminism women are "still considered 'newcomers' by most men, and women who become too successful or break the unspoken rules and stretch the boundaries of [science fiction], all too often arouse male hostility" (345). In one way or another, the women remain subordinate to men in SF, as writers, readers and

protagonists in fiction. However, the female role has become increasingly important as the number of women reading and writing SF has increased significantly (Clute 1343). As the target audience has seen a gender shift, the industry has developed accordingly, and is now paying much more attention to women readers as well as writers of SF.

Today, feminist SF is recognised as a genuine sub-genre in which "the abuses of the twentieth-century patriarchy is usually developed in defamiliarized, unreal settings" (Gilarek 221). Calvin defines feminist SF as a genre that "[seeks] to highlight, challenge, or alter social, cultural, and political structures regarding sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, and ability" and "seek[s] to address and, perhaps, redress the marginalization of certain members of society" (21). Gilarek adds that this genre is "a literary response to what second-wave feminists identified as the oppressive and limiting social environment of the 1970s" (223). Even though definitions of feminist SF differ, academics agree that feminist science fiction dovetails with the second wave of feminism from the 1960s onwards. Mendlesohn argues that "the boom in [this distinct genre] and the advent of feminist SF studies … signalled a significant shift in the ownership of taste- and tradition-making practices, and by now it has become commonplace to talk about the existence of a feminist SF tradition" (31). As a result, there has been a shift in gender traditions within the science fiction genre, making room for feminist science fiction to be recognised as an acknowledged sub-genre.

Since the rise of feminist SF, more female writers have turned to this genre, notably: Octavia Butler, Sheri S. Tepper and Margaret Atwood. While Russ was a radical feminist science fiction writer, she has received comparatively less mainstream recognition than Le Guin or Atwood. According to Bacon-Smith, her work has "never been honoured, although [it] often stands as the model for its type in the genre" (101).[3] Sarah Lefanu even goes so far

[3] As noted earlier, Russ was recognised for her work by the SF community, but received awards only decades after the first appearance of her novels.

as to state that "Joanna Russ is the single most important writer of science fiction, [even] if she is not necessarily the most widely read" (173). Mendlesohn indicates that "although feminist SF scholars vigorously debate the exact nature of [a feminist SF tradition], they almost universally recognise Joanna Russ as a central within it" (31). Clearly, the work of Joanna Russ stands at the centre of any critical project aiming to develop a better understanding of the distinctive features of feminist science fiction genre and its origins in mid-twentieth-century, and as this thesis will show, even earlier feminist theory and writing.

Russ gained her prominent role in science fiction by learning how to survive in what was then still a predominantly male-oriented genre. The tasks she was offered at the outset of her writing career consisted mainly of reviewing works by mostly male writers such as Barry Malzberg and Lloyd Biggle, Jr. As such, she immediately came face to face with what she believed to be wrong within SF: its continued adherence to patriarchal traditions of gender representation (Mendlesohn 20). Starting her career as a reviewer, she eventually made the transition to writing science fiction herself; she also developed into a writer of critical essays on feminism, gender and feminist science fiction. From the outset Russ's writing style deviated from the traditions in the genre, making her writing seem avant-garde and rather inaccessible compared to her male counterparts. Especially the plot-structure and style of her novels remains uniquely dense and challenging, and very different from the literary conventions employed by mainstream male authors.

Jones explains that Russ "was compelled to write science fiction by Cold War politics, captured by a homemade telescope, inspired by the science exhibits at the Natural History Museum and her mother's Groff Conklin anthologies" (3). She was attracted to the genre by her interest in science, but it was the genre's openness to criticism of dominant patriarchal culture that gripped her most. The radical feminism of the 1960s provided an opening in this male-dominated genre and this was the start of a "self-identified feminist SF in the early

1970s" (Mendlesohn 33). According to Mendlesohn, Russ's writing is "metatextual, [as it stands in itself] as a body of criticism of the science fiction field" (viii). Russ seized the opportunity and wrote openly about feminism and science fiction in a series of several critical essays. According to Mendelsohn Joanna Russ then "single-handedly" created "a field of inquiry" that in the 1970s "marked the beginnings of feminist SF scholarship" (35). It has become received knowledge that Russ is an outspoken feminist thinker who shows this prominently in her SF novels and critical essays on the genre.

Significantly, Russ was inspired by the work of one of the first and most influential feminist writers in twentieth-century literature, Virginia Woolf, rather than Le Guin or another early feminist SF writer. Russ discussed the impact Woolf had on her during her time in college. In *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983), she describes a situation in which she listened to a lecture on Virginia Woolf. According to the lecturer, Woolf was "not a great writer because she 'had no great cause at heart,' that she despised the working class and was 'a lady'" (88). Russ's lecturer was of the opinion that "Woolf would not consider improving the world since the mess was man-made and she, as a woman, had no responsibility for it, that Woolf's feminism was "peculiar," and "responsible for the worst of her books" (88-9). Probably because of the lecturer's dismissive attitude, Joanna Russ developed a keen interest in Woolf and her work, which never waned. This thesis will show the extent to which Woolf's feminist thought and literary style is reflected in Russ's work by presenting a comparative analysis of her seminal novel *The Female Man* and Woolf's *Orlando*. The next chapters will first discuss Woolf's and Russ's feminist thought, highlighting the similarities and differences between their feminist minds and manners of writing. Subsequently, the close reading of both novels will show that Russ was indeed indebted to the modernist feminist Virginia Woolf's in developing her feminist science fiction.

Chapter 1: Virginia Woolf's Writing and Feminism

Virginia Woolf is recognized as one of the most influential feminist thinkers of the twentieth century. She is also considered one of the most important modernist writers of that era (Froula 1). Her marriage to Leonard Woolf and her involvement with the Bloomsbury Group helped to ensure the lasting impact of her literary and feminist thought and gave her the opportunity to publicly express her view on this matter. The Bloomsbury group pleaded against "barbarities 'within the walls' of European civilization ... belligerent nationalisms, racialized imperialisms, the class system, the sex/gender system, genocidal persecution, and war" (Froula 1). The Bloomsbury avant-garde consisted of a large group of distinguished artistic and scholarly thinkers including "[the] Woolf's, Clive Bell, Vanessa Bell, John Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, and [even] Sigmund Freud"; much of their writing was published by the Woolf's Hogarth Press (Froula 1). Woolf was thus surrounded by critical thinkers from an early age and had an outlet for her intellectual productions; this intellectual environment greatly influenced her own development into a successful critical and feminist writer. As Elkin explains, it was through the intellectual conversations with the various men and women of the group that "the women of Bloomsbury freed themselves from the constrictions of gender and class too create their new world, about which we have not yet tired of talking" (118).

Virginia Woolf's feminist vision cannot be easily summarised. This is because many different aspects of her life played a role in forming her views on the position of women in society and her perspective cannot always be considered objective; her emotional life played a role as well. However, her narrative method and presentation of women's consciousness through this method had a significant impact on the literature of her time. Since her death, in 1941, her works have continued to influence and inspire emerging feminist writers.

Contemporary writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Margaret Atwood, Michael Cunningham and Ursula Le Guin have acknowledged Woolf as a key influence on their work (Stone; Sayers 629; Brockes; Foster 5). As the introduction to this thesis explained, from the 1960s onwards science fiction saw the rise of an overtly feminist strain, spearheaded by amongst others Le Guin, James Tiptree Jr. (Alice Bradley Sheldon) and Marge Piercy. In her lecture "Heroes" (1986), Le Guin notably claimed: "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf? Every little macho dodo, from Hemingway to Mailer. There is not more subversive act than the act of writing from a woman's experience of life using a woman's judgement" (177). The introduction also pointed out that Russ, like Le Guin, acknowledged Woolf as a seminal influence on her thought and writing. It is especially in her combination of feminist themes with experimental literary techniques of story-telling and character representation that Woolf has proven a key forerunner of Russ's feminist SF.

During her lifetime, Woolf experienced hard times as a woman writer. There was much criticism of her work by intellectuals within her own circle directly and by literary scholars (Goldman 123). In the years after her death, however, the judgement of many scholars is almost unanimously that Woolf had a great influence on the development of feminism, and literary modernism (Fernald ix; Goldman 66; Black 1). It appears in hindsight that Woolf was too progressive for her time, meaning that her feminist statements about the role of women were not easily accepted by the members of mainstream society, as well as the more conservative intellectuals of her day. Naomi Black explains that Q.D. Leavis was one of the most hostile of Woolf's early critics. In her review of *Three Guineas*,

> she pities 'the unfortunate men who are to marry these daughters of educated men [and who] must from the start share the work of tending their offspring,' including hurrying home every four hours to give the baby its bottle. This would represent, she says, 'a tl1orough-going revolution ... a regular social reorganisation.' The tone of the

> review is apocalyptic: Woolf's feminism would be the end of civilization as we know it. To which, again, the radical and political feminist who is Virginia Woolf replies: And what about my civilization? (Black 8)

A justification for this discourtesy towards feminism may be that "the representation of women in literature … was felt to be one of the most important forms of 'socialisation', since it provided the role models which indicated to women, and men, what constituted acceptable versions of the 'feminine' and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations" (Barry 85). The predominantly patriarchal and rigidly class-stratified society of 1920s London somewhat explains the unpopularity of Woolf's feminism at the time. Yet, as Black argues, Woolf's "feminism mattered even … in an era that was bound to misunderstand it" (8).

Woolf's progressive ideas on the identity and role of women in society fit well, however, in the feminist tradition of the second wave of feminism that developed in the 60s, long after her death. Black explains that

> in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf asked on behalf of women for economic independence and privacy (together, these two items mean autonomy for women then dependent on male relatives), as well as for egalitarian, nonviolent families (legally and psychologically). Repeatedly, she demanded education that would extend as far and as wide as men's, to include the accumulation of experience through leisure and travel. She endorsed working-class women's specific demands, including reformed divorce laws, minimum wages, and the modernization of household equipment. In *Three Guineas* she added the long-term goals of a women's party in electoral politics, progressive education (non-hierarchical and including what we would call women's studies), and state subsidies for underpaid or unemployed single women as well as for wives and mothers. (47-8)

Woolf was not afraid to criticise and share her views on gender inequality and did not flinch from doing so in her written work. Jane Goldman states that "Woolf is rightly considered the founder of modern feminist literary criticism" (66). She played a major role in the development of literary works that directly addressed women's roles in society and women's experience of oppression in a patriarchal society. Jane de Gay adds that Woolf "provided the discipline with some of its most memorable quotations" (62), such as the following from Chapter 5 of *A Room of One's Own*: "Women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics." Woolf's insistence that "women writers, artists and composers" (Goldman 68) be included in any complete picture of a culture's intellectual minds opened the minds of many women who discovered new possibilities for their future outside of this patriarchal structure.

Especially *A Room of One's Own* (1929) revealed how oppressed women still were in British and more broadly in Western society in the early decades of the twentieth century. In this seminal work, Woolf examined social inequities and criticised women's deprivations concerning the liberty of expression: "I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman" (Chapter V). She laments the general lack of interest in literary matters in the workaday world, and in doing so also reflects on the society's lack of interest in "the development by the average woman of a prose style completely expressive of her mind" (Chapter VI). Of course, in doing so, Woolf had in fact been developing exactly such an idiosyncratic style, a language that allowed for the expression of that which never had been fully expressed before, and could function to express a critique of institutionalised gender divisions and women's lack of opportunities in that current society.

According to Goldman, *A Room of One's Own* "has come to be canonised as the first modern work of feminist literary criticism" (67). Barry seconds this judgement, arguing that it "vividly portrays the unequal treatment given to women seeking education and alternatives to marriage and motherhood" (85). What makes the text so significant is that it addresses woman's plight in the 1920s and calls for women's liberation from male dominance directly and with an activist fervour: "Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (Chapter IV). Black highlights Woolf's utopian aims by stressing how *A Room of One's Own* "is about the better, non-sexist, and therefore peaceful world that feminism envisages" (1). And Woolf called for no compromise in women's writing:

> so long as you write what you wish to write, that is all that matters; and whether it matters for ages or only for hours, nobody can say. But to sacrifice a hair of the head of your vision, a shade of its colour, in deference to some Headmaster with a silver pot in his hand or to some professor with a measuring-rod up his sleeve, is the most abject treachery, and the sacrifice of wealth and chastity which used to be said to be the greatest of human disasters, a mere flea-bite in comparison. (Chapter VI)

In this sense, Woolf also made an attempt to change history: to make women the unacknowledged legislators of the world, so to speak. De Gay states that, during her lectures, Woolf "urged her audience of female students at Cambridge University to 'rewrite history' by seeking out figures neglected by conventional (patriarchal) histories in order to trace a female tradition, a concept she described as 'thinking back through our mothers'" (62). Woolf thus not only inspired an audience through her written works, but also had the opportunity to directly influence young female students with her ideals and open their eyes to a fresh perspective on the patriarchal society they lived in.

Mainly through *A Room of One's Own*, but also in works like *Orlando*, Woolf inspired young women to take up the pen and express themselves. Woolf frequently discussed "the status of women as readers and raise[d] interesting questions about gender and subjectivity in connection with the gender semantics of the first person" (Goldman 73) and the experiencing subject and narrative voice in general:

> It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only? Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities? For we have too much likeness as it is, and if an explorer should come back and bring word of other sexes looking through the branches of other trees at other skies, nothing would be of greater service to humanity; and we should have the immense pleasure into the bargain of watching Professor X rush for his measuring-rods to prove himself 'superior.' (Chapter V)

According to Goldman, Woolf was also one of the first writers who connected "feminism to anti-fascism [in this same book], which addresses in some detail the relations between politics and aesthetics" (71). She was thus active on several fronts within literature, both gender inequality and politics as well as human rights. *A Room of One's Own* has played a significant role in the development of feminist thought and is a foundational work of feminist literary criticism that called for women to stand up together and challenge the pernicious consequences of patriarchal society, not only for women, but for human wellbeing as a whole.

In a society defined by "economic constraints and often degrading representations of women," Woolf tried to find a way for women to form their own identity by "urging [them] to write, to give themselves a voice" (Burns 346). Partly because of this work, today Woolf is considered one of the most important feminist writers of the twentieth century. Robinson

explains that *A Room of One's Own* "helped expand the debate on women's equality beyond constitutional legal issues such as voting rights. It examined the deep psychological effects of the conditions of everyday life on women, and on female writers in particular" (14). This opened the eyes of many readers and brought a renewed focus on the constraints experienced by women in everyday life.

Woolf's feminist theory forms a nuanced and suggestive philosophy developed over a series of texts belonging to different genres: essays, fiction, and autobiography. Goldman explains that Woolf's work "is difficult partly because it is so enormous and so multi-faceted, and partly because of her own suspicion of the term feminism itself. Woolf did not so much come up with one approach or theory as frame and ask several important questions for feminist criticism" (69). Goldman agrees with Batchelor that Woolf's feminism, as a specific philosophy of womanhood, can be "unclear," and concedes that Woolf's use of the term feminism is far from consistent (69). Many scholars understand, however, that feminism, feminist consciousness and the position of women in society cannot be expressed in only one clearly defined framework, and form one unified perspective. Black explains that "Woolf's feminism is indeed drastic, basic [and] transformational. The other adjective I would apply to Woolf's feminism, Political, is also helpful, for it indicates relevance to the public world and its structures of domination" (10). It is confusing, therefore, because Woolf looked at feminism from multiple perspectives, literary, political and social.

Barry explains that it was difficult for Woolf to give a simple definition of the work she was doing because she felt it was "impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility which will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded ... it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric [male-dominated] system" (88). In other words, Woolf believed it was difficult to develop more space for women to express themselves in literature and in society as long as the system does

not understand how to deal with and accommodate this form of expression. As Black explains, "feminism must start with the observation that women are categorized in terms of their gender. That is, they are contrasted to men and also nearly always subordinate to men" (9). An unrestricted view of female gender identity and a feminist critique of patriarchy needs to be made room for in society before it can be offered as an independent position at all.

Over the years, literary scholars have discovered certain patterns in Woolf's style of writing that she developed in order to express her feminist views on women's lived experience. Goldman explains that "a significant element of Woolf's experimental fictional narrative strategy is her use of shifting narrative personae to voice the argument. She anticipates recent theoretical concerns with the constitution of gender and subjectivity in language in her opening declaration" (72). In this way, her novels explored the problem from two sides. In addition, Woolf forged "a new feminist literary critical language" in order to open up the argument regarding her feminist ideals on society (Goldman 68). It is also noticeable that, in her work, Woolf chose to take a realistic view of the situation she wanted to address. As a result, the hard truth can also be read in her work about her portrayal of feminism in society. According to Black, "this is a feminism – a radical and political feminism that is significant. This feminism mattered even in its own time, in an era that was bound to misunderstand it. It is even more important today when our understanding of feminism is less constrained" (8). This topic was contemporary in Woolf's time and will always remain contemporary. It is a timeless problem which will exist for a long time before one can really consider there to be gender equality. Accordingly, Batchelor explains that Woolf is not necessarily concerned with feminism, but it is more about "a passionate concern with the nature of womanhood" (7).

The feminist concerns Woolf puts forward in her novels is that women should no longer be restricted, but that they "should be free to make their own unique development" (Batchelor

3). Thus, it is not so much about making the woman equal to the man but recognising that the man is the problem of the restriction of the woman and finding a solution to it in order to liberate the woman. According to Black, "Woolf presents a deeply radical sort of feminism. Her feminism was original, yet firmly rooted in the women's movement of her time" (7). She shows this in a realistic way in her work. She uses a combination of imagination and real-life situations from her own life to demonstrate "contextual information" that can "clarify the process" (Black 4). Woolf's works reveal her vision that "sexism itself is both the root and the flower of the male-dominated hierarchies that, were leading the world into global conflict" during the period the lived in (Black 5). According to Black, the main focus of Woolf's feminism is that she wants to make every woman aware "of the existence of 'my civilisation' and the reasons to refuse any offers of joining the boys" (5). In Woolf's eyes, therefore, women should not try to participate in the same society as men. However, she has occasionally expressed in exceptional moments that "the ideal state of men and women, [is] a state in which they live and move in perfect cooperation" (Batchelor 3). The emphasis here is on cooperation, but this does not mean that men and women are equal to each other as gender equality literally means. Rather it means that the two groups can live together in harmony. One can argue that this is already the case, but this matter of gender inequality in society, even though not taken literally, proves otherwise.

Woolf's writing style developed into a unique way of storytelling that was very progressive for its time. Instead of using a standard linear narrative style, she chose to constantly change her point of view and to jump from one narrative voice to another; as such, Woolf made sure that the story was illuminated from every angle, which provided the most complete understanding of her characters. Woolf employed free indirect discourse in many of her texts in order to present the feelings and thoughts of her female characters as completely as possible to the reader. Instead of writing only in the third-person or the omniscient

narrator, this method sets out to combine two person narratives. In *the Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms,* Baldick explains that this free indirect style of writing is "a manner of presenting … a fictional character as if [written] from that character's point of view by … [allowing] a third-person narrative to exploit a first-person point of view." According to Abramson, this type of discourse can be described as "a narrative strategy driven by logic of absorption: the narrator absorbs and is absorbed by the voices of the novel's extensive cast of characters" (47). This narrative form can thus be interpreted in various ways, but the goal remains the same, namely to make the reader feel as if he or she is inside the characters head and as such almost feels as if he or she is the character. This narrative technique "allows for this play between the objective and subjective" (Goldman 75). In this manner, Woolf creates a "fuller picture" of individual experience in her novel than a more traditional narrative technique would achieve.

In order to present her characters' experiences of life in a more realistic manner and with greater psychological complexity, Woolf also turned towards the "stream-of-consciousness" technique. This concept was first employed as a critical term in 1918, by May Sinclair, in her discussion of the writings of Dorothy Richardson (Bowling 341). In principle stream of consciousness is a further development of free indirect discourse (Fernald 134). While not developed by Woolf herself, Dora Zhang explains that Woolf remains "one of its most skilled practitioners" (n.p.; see also Bezirciloglu 771, Humphrey v, Fernald 133). As such, stream of consciousness has become closely associated with Woolf. This style lends itself well to conveying the innermost and most personal feelings and thoughts of characters. As a mode of representation of lived experience this style is particularly complex because it does not have to adhere to any sense of linear progression in terms of "plot, chronology, and characterization" (Bezircilioglu 772). Every train of thought and emotion of the characters and the narrator is revealed to the reader by this method. It is a deliberately disjointed way of

writing that records fragments of "impressions across a character's mind from a subjective point of view" (Fernald 133). This provides an advantage in that the writer should not feel limited by conventional notions of narrative perspective, dialogue and plot structure and, therefore, has much more freedom to express immediate and spontaneous subjective experience. According to Bezircilioglu, reading a work presented through a stream of consciousness can turn the reader into a "detective [who has] to gather the parts scattered everywhere in the minds of the character in such time consisting past, present, future at once" (772). Stream of consciousness, in Woolf's texts, also manifests itself in the complexity of grammar. Think of a text written as the description of "a flickering parade of impressions," or "irregular or absent punctuation, fragmented or incomplete sentences, ellipses, and discontinuous syntax" (Fernald 133). In addition, Woolf's "use of analogies" and "interior monologue" also became characteristic aspects of her stream-of-consciousness technique (Fernald 133-134), foregrounding individual mental associations and arguments with the self. Woolf's stream of consciousness technique is especially relevant to this thesis as it is one of the central literary characteristics of Russ's novel through which she explores subjective female experience in the late 1960s.

Apart from *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf's fantastic novel *Orlando* (1928) most overtly expresses Woolf's feminist thought. Particularly striking in the novel is the blurring of strict gender divisions by the main character's transformation from a man into a woman, from a masculine to a feminine sense of self, while holding onto the previous gendered experience through memory. The novel is a fictional biography, based in part on Vita Sackville-West, a writer, friend and (at a certain point) lover in Woolf's life. In her sense of self, including her sexuality, Woolf was not held back by the gender conventions prescribed by the dominant gender ideology of her time; in matters of love she looked at the individual person rather than the biological sex and/or gender identity of that person (Sproles 8). This became clear in both

her friendship and romantic relationship with Vita. Sackville-West and Woolf got on well from their first meeting and had a similar view of women's position in society. Hallett explains that "both women were disenfranchised through the absurdity of the patriarchal process of estate inheritance and the silence of patriarchal history in drawing attention to this absurdity" (509). Besides the physical attraction, the mutuality in their disenfranchisement gave rise to several similarities in which Sackville-West and Woolf had the same approach to life and thus formed a connection.

Woolf's relationship with Vita certainly influenced her perception of gender identities and her view of traditional gender divisions in British society. Karbo describes Sackville-West as "the most flamboyant and desperately glamorous character in Virginia's life" who was very "self-assured" and "magnetic"; the fact that she was "gender fluid" and, from an early age, liked women with a "distinctly male attitude" made for an irresistible combination that a woman like Woolf could not resist (188). In response to this relationship, and their shared unconventional views of gender, *Orlando* was written. Woolf described this explicitly in her diary on 5 October 1927: "And instantly, the usual exciting devices enter my mind: a biography beginning in the year 1500 and continuing to the present day, called Orlando: Vita; only with a change about from one sex to the other" (qtd in Karbo 85). Woolf makes it clear that the fictional Orlando is based on a real person, a woman. Hallett even proceeds to point out that, in the novel, there is an "identification of exact analogies between Orlando and the ancestors of Vita Sackville-West" (505).

In *Orlando,* Woolf constructs a male protagonist who turns out to be immortal and lives for centuries, experiencing what it is like to be a man during the English Renaissance, and a woman in the age of Enlightenment, the Victorian era and finally Woolf's contemporary Britain. The most important event in the life of Orlando is the moment at which he/she realises that he/she has changed sex from male to female. From the moment Orlando changes

sex, the novel becomes overtly feminist, becoming a literary vehicle for the expression of Woolf's unconventional views of women's gender identity and gender roles. The fantastic time-travel aspect of the novel gave Woolf more opportunities to write freely about women's experience under various forms of patriarchy and to formulate her ideas about the pernicious effects of ideologically prescribed gender roles for women. Samuelson explains that "*Orlando* is virtually the only work of Virginia Woolf's in which critical questions about her 'feminism' have not repeatedly arisen" (54). The central fantastic trope of Orlando's sex change and the time-travel motif help to foreground the novel's feminist themes.

The novel's immense scope, in terms of time passing, ensures that Orlando experiences many strange events and adventures. The protagonist keeps waking up in a different era, that is unfamiliar and forces him/her to reflect on his/her identity and role in relation to previous experienced selves. This foregrounds the philosophical nature of the novel in which Orlando is given room to express his/her own experiences of and feelings about the various forms of gender inequality with which he/she is confronted and the ways in which he/she needs to adapt to the current society. The mystical moment of Orlando's sex change is of course the key turning point for all the following major events and the male Orlando's experience of his new female gender identity. From that moment onward, Orlando goes through life as a woman, but to make a distinction between genders is rather difficult because in his/her head Orlando still remembers his/her experiences and thoughts as a man in the time of Elizabeth.

Working on this experimental novel gave Woolf the chance to reflect on her own gender identity, since she did not value the ideologically prescribed gender division between men and women in her own day. It is clear that Woolf did not allow herself to be led by any set gender conventions and was also open to a relationship with a woman like the one she experienced with Vita Sackville-West. However, in the 1920s, it was dangerous to express this openly, as "being a person who loved someone of their own gender wasn't merely a

scandal in England, it was also illegal" (Karbo 188). Therefore, it was dangerous to openly critique gender conventions and sexual mores in non-fictional essays; through the fantastic fiction of *Orlando,* however, Woolf opened a way for herself to be a "revolutionary feminist [and not completely step] … outside of the existing (patriarchal) world" (Burns 347).

Samuelson explains that "Orlando's sex change occurs fairly early in the novel, and is introduced is such a way as to suggest there exists no essential difference between men and women, other than the physical" (55). By exploring what goes on in the inner-most chambers of the protagonist's mind, as he/she comes to terms with being a woman, Woolf reflects critically on various aspects of Orlando's life as a man during the Renaissance. In her mind, after the change of sex, Orlando is still a man in certain respects, out of convention. But it is the development of a dual consciousness in Orlando that allows Woolf to set up various moments of internal monologue in which Orlando has to compare and contrast his male and female experiences. An example of this in the novel is where Orlando reflects on his/her independence of action:

> 'Lord,' she thought, when she had recovered from her start, stretching herself out at length under her awning, 'this is a pleasant, lazy way of life, to be sure. But,' she thought, giving her legs a kick, 'these skirts are plaguey things to have about one's heels. Yet the stuff (flowered paduasoy) is the loveliest in the world. Never have I seen my own skin (here she laid her hand on her knee) look to such advantage as now. Could I, however, leap overboard and swim in clothes like these? No! Therefore, I should have to trust to the protection of a blue-jacket. Do I object to that? Now do I?' she wondered, here encountering the first knot in the smooth skein of her argument. (92)

Here Orlando receives a first-hand impression of the way women have conventionally been treated in a patriarchal society and is forced to acknowledge that women suffer social restrictions and have to adhere to roles prescribed to them by an androcentric culture. Once

Orlando realizes that he/she will forever be defined as a woman, he/she becomes aware of the fact that he/she cannot achieve anything, unless he conforms to gender role prescribed to him/her by the dominant patriarchal traditions. In English society, Orlando reflects, "All I can do, once I set foot on English soil, is to pour out tea, and ask my lords how they like it" (94). Victorian Orlando becomes truly aware of how constrictive life is as a woman in that era is, especially because he/she can still remember being a man and having all the freedom of the world during his youth in the time of Queen Elizabeth.

Most of the novel is told from the point of view of an apparently present biographer who follows the protagonist Orlando closely, but this is constantly interrupted by the narrator's focalisation through Orlando, which reveals Orlando's innermost thoughts and feelings about having become a woman. The stream-of-consciousness technique is certainly used, therefore, to provide an insight into the protagonist's gendered experience of life, which is emphasised in the final chapter in which Orlando goes to a tree overlooking her house and again expresses her feelings of being a woman through an inner dialogue:

> She liked to think that she was riding the back of the world. She liked to attach herself to something hard. As she flung herself down a little square book bound in red cloth fell from the breast of her leather jacket—her poem The Oak Tree. "I should have brought a trowel," she reflected. The earth was so shallow over the roots that it seemed doubtful if she could do as she meant and bury the book here. Besides the dogs would dig it up. No luck ever attends these symbolical celebrations, she thought. Perhaps it would be as well then to do without them. She had a little speech on the tip of her tongue which she meant to speak over the book as she buried it. (It was a copy of the first edition, signed by author and artist.) "I bury this as a tribute," she was going to have said, "a return to the land of what the land has given me," but Lord! once one began mouthing words aloud, how silly they sounded! She was reminded of

> old Greene getting upon a platform the other day, comparing her with Milton (save for his blindness) and handing her a cheque for two hundred guineas. She had thought then of the oak tree here on its hill, and what has that got to do with this, she had wondered? What has praise and fame to do with poetry? (192)

Here, the reader is offered direct insight into Orlando's private thoughts and can follow the protagonist's associations as he/she looks out over the house and lets his/her thoughts run free. Woolf's use of this 'stream of consciousness' technique allows for the expression of the characters' subjective thoughts and experiences, which are vital to the feminist project of making visible and understandable the experiences of women in a patriarchal society. Here Orlando reflects on the various great male writers she has come to know in her long life, and their assumptions that the literary life is intrinsically involved with money and fame.

The central theme in *Orlando* – explored further in Chapter 3 – is the significant difference between a person's biological sex and their experienced gender identity. The protagonist mysteriously changes from a man into a woman, but experiences as much a sense of continuity of thought and feeling as a fundamental break with his/her previous identity. The society in inhabits, by contrast, responds very differently to the woman Orlando than it had done to the man. As time goes by, Orlando also comes to experience a continued sense of limitation and frustration as a woman. As such, Woolf is developing a rather constructivist notion of gender, as discussed in the introduction, in which an experienced gender identity and biological sex are two different aspects that inform a person's overall sense of self.

The third chapter will elaborate more on Woolf's understanding of gender in *Orlando* and will show how the novel allowed Russ to express a similarly fluid notion of gender identity that could conceptually free women from the patriarchal straightjacket. But first it is relevant to explore the broader socio-cultural conditions in which Joanna Russ developed her own style of feminist science fiction in relation to Woolf's example.

Chapter 2: Joanna Russ's Feminist Thought

The previous chapter has shown how significant Woolf has been in the development of feminist literature. An almost equally important writer, Joanna Russ, made her appearance in the genre of science fiction, in the 1960s. As mentioned earlier, Woolf influenced many feminist writers working in different literary fields, including Russ. As the introduction explained, Russ is a progressive writer who published essays and scholarly articles regarding gender and science fiction, as well as novels and short stories mainly categorised under the genre (feminist) science fiction. Over the past decades, three important scholarly works have critically explored Russ's literary career: *Demand My Writing: Joanna Russ, Feminism, Science Fiction* (1999) by Jeanne Cortiel, *On Joanna Russ* (2010) by Farah Mendlesohn and *Joanna Russ* (2019) by Gwyneth Jones. These works are key critical sources in any research project on Russ and the authors also refer to each other's works for support. Cortiel describes Russ as an author who "transformed science fiction from a bastion of masculinism into one of the richest spaces for feminist utopian thought and cultural critique" (1). Mendlesohn also acknowledges Russ as the founder of the feminist branch of the science fiction genre (35). Russ was interested in science from a young age and was constantly motivated by her parents not to let any ideologically prescribed boundaries of gender identity restrict her, even if it was the most popular or obvious choice. Gwyneth explains that Russ "as a child … lived with two loving adults, highly intelligent, fascinated by literature and the sciences, who taught her by example that no knowledge was out of reach and no achievement barred to her" (2). It is clear that Russ took these life-lessons with her into her career as an author. An example of this can be found in her collection of feminist science fiction stories *The Adventures of Alyx* (1976). While, this volume was published at a later date than *The Female Man*, the individual stories were written between 1968 and 1970. Herein the budding author constructs a strong female character who stands up against an abusive husband, distances herself from a constrictive

religious group, helps a woman escape an arranged marriage, kills a vicious sorcerer, and at her own death is caught by a time travel device and brought into a future world where she once again becomes a reformer, this time of the Trans-temporal Authority that had picked her up from her own time. The stories are remarkable for constructing a female protagonist in SF with strength, intelligence, resourcefulness and real agency to affect change.

Another key early short story is "When It Changed," published in 1972, in Harlan Ellison's ground-breaking SF anthology *Again, Dangerous Visions*. The story concerns Janet Evason, who lives on an all-women planet called WhileAway. Males in this colony had long been extinct, but suddenly after 30 years some male astronauts from Earth set foot on the planet, changing WhileAway forever. The story can be understood as a critical exploration of gender in the same way that *Planet of the Apes* explored what it means to be human through a satirical reversal of the relations between humankind and different species of monkeys. This story won Russ the Nebula Award for "Best Short Story," in 1972. It was also a first sketch of what would become *The Female Man*, explaining the life of Janet Evason before meeting the other three Js (three alternative versions of the same women) in the later novel. Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* anthologies were designed to provoke readers, and to bring more experimental and politically oriented SF to the mainstream. Mendlesohn describes Russ as "a writer whose work provokes reaction rather than emulation, and serves as an electric shock to the imagination" (ix). As such, Russ was exactly the kind of writer to which Ellison wanted to give a platform. And honouring her parents' progressiveness, and Ellison's literary aims, Russ pushed the boundaries of SF throughout her career, challenging the unwritten rules and conventions of the genre, as well as overtly advocating for women's liberation from constricting ideological gender roles.

While Russ had a general interest in science from an early age,[4] Samuel R. Delany has explained that "aside from her second novel, *And Chaos Died* (1970), all the books grow directly from feminist concerns, with which Russ was deeply involved from the second half of the 1960s on" (500). *Science* fiction, therefore, was primarily a vehicle for the exploration of gender inequality and women's continued oppression in American society. Like Woolf, Russ focused on voicing a feminist critique of the general literary establishment and society in general based on her own lived experiences as a woman. Russ experienced many rejections first-hand in the publishing industry due to her gender and "learned that female experience disqualified her from becoming a great writer, irrespective of her intellect and talent" (Gwyneth 4). Not only were works by male writers often chosen above her works, she also experienced the same gender discrimination when seeking a job as a lecturer before ending up as a lecturer at Cornell University. This difficulty of finding employment was mainly due to the "domestic revival" that prevailed in America whereby, regardless of their level of education, women were "strongly discouraged from seeking a career outside the home" (Gwyneth 5). Like Woolf, Russ also allowed her own experiences and opinion of gender discrimination and inequality to play a role in developing her feminist critique of science fiction and of American society in general.

According to Cortiel, Russ's "stories thrive on tensions and paradoxes …. Each of her texts further develops and hones such strategies of feminist cultural change" (74). Her research shows that Russ emphasises "the individual woman" (91) above any sense of an essential womanhood, and foregrounds "the tensions and contradictions between the essentialisms and the deconstructive elements in [her] fiction" (228). Mendlesohn agrees by stating that "[Russ's problem] with stories about galactic suburbia is … that they seem to

[4] In high school she was in the top ten of the Westinghouse Science Talent Search winners (Westinghouse Science Talent Search 1953).

celebrate stereotypical images of women, but that these images point to a failure of social extrapolation on the part of the authors who create them" (42). Instead, Russ's literary style and narrative technique is not based on highlighting social problems objectively, but on seeking solutions to these problems by proposing various suggestive alternative situations in her novels for a freer subjective experience of womanhood. An example of this can be seen in *The Female Man,* where she presents multiple versions of the same world in which gender inequality plays, or has played, a significant role in repressing women's identities and social roles. The presence in the novel of multiple subjective women's experiences of life in a male dominated world, but also in a "maleless" society, lead the reader to a more complete understanding of the plight of women within androcentric, patriarchal society. The reader is allowed insight into the minds and experiences of four different versions of the same woman, living in 1) an apparently "normal" world as it was known by readers in the 70s, 2) a parallel world where men and women have been at war with each other for over forty years, 3) a parallel world where the great depression never ended and the second wave of feminism never occurred, and 4) an apparently utopian world where men have been extinct for more than 800 years.

As mentioned in the introduction, Russ, like many other feminist writers, was influenced significantly by Woolf's feminist thought and literary techniques. Both women writers were fiery in voicing their dissatisfaction with the gender inequality in their own era and they do not allow themselves to be deterred by the strong emotions they express in their work. The previous chapter showed that Woolf was a proponent of free thinking about gender roles and wanted to emphasise the significance of a subjective female perspective of society in her work; for Woolf, the stream of consciousness technique was the ideal literary method to expresses what goes on in the minds of women and ensuring that readers were able to experience this along with the protagonist. The characters in her work are fictional women,

but she creates characters from her own experiences as a woman; as such, Woolf experimented in fiction with how a woman experiences society, socially, politically and psychologically. In *The Female Man*, Russ clearly adopted a similar stream-of-consciousness technique in writing; along with the lack of a clear plot structure, and writing in a style that foregrounds emotions such as anger and frustration, it will become clear, in Chapter 3, that Russ's major work bears many similarities to Woolf's *Orlando*.

It is important to note, however, that Russ defined her technique differently. While the stream of consciousness technique is known for a disjointed way of narrating using a plotless structure that brings together disconnected fragments of text (Sang 175), Russ considers her style of representing what goes on in the mind of characters more like a way of producing music with text (Russ 46). Russ examined Woolf's technique; in "What Can A Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write" she explains that "[i]n this sense of 'lyric' Virginia Woolf is a lyric novelist—in fact she has been [criticised] in just those terms, i.e., 'nothing happens' in her books. A writer who employs the lyric structure is setting various images, events, scenes, or memories to circling round an unspoken, invisible centre" (87). Russ concluded that Woolf used this technique to avoid the traps set by patriarchal culture in the dominant literary modes and to avoid having to confront the male myth of building and success in her novels.

To some extent Russ resents what she believes is an evasion by Woolf of direct confrontation. She explains that for this reason Woolf's work contains elements of "lack of 'plot,' the repetitiousness, the gathering-up of the novels into moments of epiphany, the denseness of writing, the indirection" ("Heroine" 87). The resentment Russ feels is that in Woolf's novels "there is nothing the female characters can do – except exist, except think, except feel" ("Heroine" 87-8). It is important to keep in mind, however, that Woolf struggled as a woman writer in an era that had not yet seen the second wave of feminism. While Woolf cannot be considered a radical feminist in the 1970s sense of the term, she certainly had a

great impact on the acceptance of women within literature in her time, and through this a profound impact on her society, as she paved the road for many literary feminists to come.

Gwyneth argues that "Joanna felt the same pressures and, by her own account, the same ineffective resentment. But her academic achievements gave her a route out" (4). Even if Russ believed Woolf had not gone far enough, her own acknowledged debt to Woolf's thought and practice speaks volumes of her significance to the feminist cause. In one sense what Woolf was to Russ, Russ became to later women writers in the field of SF. Claude indicates that her work "opened new possibilities of form as well as content for science fiction" (571). Significantly, Bona highlights Russ's adoption of Woolf's technique of stream of consciousness whereby "feminist themes enriched the genre of science fiction and lesbian writing" (227). It can be said, therefore, that Russ continued the journey on which Woolf had embarked; and Woolf's victories made it possible for Russ to "insist … that women must come to terms with possessing power, and seeking power" and in doing so she "reiterates her belief in the value of female anger-even female rage" (Gwyneth 88). Benefiting from the second-wave of feminism, and 1970s radical feminist thought, Russ concentrated on the functionality of female anger for the feminist movement, rather than using it merely as an expression of emotional frustration. In *The Female Man*, this anger is mostly shown through Jael's warrior character, as exemplified in her meeting with the leader of the Manlanders (in the parallel world in which the gender war takes place). The man suggests an experiment in order to bring equality and bring men and woman together, but this is has to be done on his terms without showing any actual consideration for the women involved. Jael tries to control her anger until the Manlander pushes past her limits and she attacks him:

> I raked him gaily on the neck and chin and when he embraced me in rage, sank my claws into his back. You have to build up the fingers surgically so they'll take the

> strain. A certain squeamishness prevents me from using my teeth in front of witnesses—the best way to silence an enemy is to bite out his larynx. Forgive me! I dug the hardened cuticle into his neck but he sprang away; he tried a kick but I wasn't there (I told you they rely too much on their strength); he got hold of my arm but I broke the hold and spun him off, adding with my nifty, weighted shoon another bruise on his limping kidneys. Ha! He fell on me (you don't feel injuries, in my state) and I reached around and scored him under the ear, letting him spray urgently into the rug. (170)

At this moment, the inner struggle of Jael is visible when her standards and beliefs are challenged, which shows her to be the most violent and angry of the four Js. In contrast to the other Js, Jael is the demonstration of Russ's righteous rage. She is the one who supports Jeannine and opens her eyes and her character is the intended opposite to Janet's feminist utopian world. In *Orlando*, Woolf also shows some moments of aggression, which contribute to the formation of the protagonist. Expressing both positive and negative feelings evokes emotion in the reader, which contributes to increased empathy with the characters in a novel. An example of this in *Orlando* is when Orlando discovers that the exotic princess Sasha has left on a ship without him while they had agreed to flee together:

> Flinging himself from his horse, he made, in his rage, as if he would breast the flood. Standing knee deep in water he hurled at the faithless woman all the insults that have ever been the lot of her sex. Faithless, mutable, fickle, he called her; devil, adulteress, deceiver; and the swirling waters took his words, and tossed at his feet a broken pot and a little straw. (38)

Orlando expresses so much aggression because he is genuinely stunned and did not expect to be swindled by a woman. As a young nobleman, Orlando has not yet experienced being rejected by a woman, as he is normally a popular bachelor who decides for himself which

women he wants to be with. He feels betrayed and his androcentric perspective blinded him from any suspicion of being opposed by a woman; this sense of betrayal also hurts him emotionally because this was the first time he had genuine feelings for a woman. Much later in his/her life, Orlando, as a woman, will have the chance to reflect on Sasha's experience of him and to come to a much more complete understanding of her as a woman.

Another point of similarity between Woolf's and Russ's literary style is the lack of conventional realism; in fact, they both more or less reject this traditional novelistic form. According to Peach, "Woolf's modernist novels of the 1920s have generally been seen as a rejection of the nineteenth-century realism" (104). Instead, she shows an alternative, often repressed experience of reality by chronicling the subjective world of her female characters minds. In her novels, she uses her main protagonists not to depict a so-called objective, empirically verifiable reality but rather to depict the "proximity to the 'real'" (Peach 105) for women. Thus, she adheres closely to the truth of lived experience for women. That Russ aimed at a similar experiential truth is shown in her novel through the way in which each J experiences her own (fictional) world differently and only a combination of these various subjective experiences leads to a fuller understanding of what it means to be a woman in the "real" world of the reader reading the novel. As Gwyneth summarizes, Russ was "a politically aware lesbian feminist, a critic, an academic theorist, and a teacher," whose ideas on women's oppression and gender inequality were "raw and personal, outspoken and specifically not 'essentialist,'" and above all "inspirational and uncompromising" (72).

Chapter 3: A Comparative Analysis of *The Female Man* and *Orlando*

To further illustrate and explore the aforementioned similarities between Russ's and Woolf's literary feminism, this chapter will compare and contrast *The Female Man* to *Orlando* in more detail. It will critically explore both similarities and differences between the two novels in terms of style, structure and feminist themes, especially the use of stream of consciousness to convey the social experience of womanhood in a patriarchal society to the reader. As Wollf did in *Orlando*, Russ turned to stream of consciousness to give the reader the experience of what is happening in the minds of her protagonists, in this case Joanna, Jeannine, Janet and Jael. In this way, the reader can step into the mind of a character and experience that character's private thoughts, which emphasises the subjectivity of lived experience.

Especially in *Orlando*, the first-hand experience of the protagonist's thought processes is of great importance when he becomes a woman. Orlando becomes aware of what it means to be a woman through the experience of being able to contrast his/her former masculine self with the present feminine self. This enables him/her to reflect on the past and to think about the plight of women and their position in society, partly because he/she has experienced life from the perspective of both sexes and their corresponding gender roles within different social formations within English history.

Russ's plotless narrative revolves around the lives of four different versions of what is seemingly the same woman, who live in different versions of the same earth that exist in parallel universes. Joanna, Jeannine, Janet and Jael are shown in different situations regarding the role of women in their separate, but intricately related, worlds; gradually their separate life paths cross and increasingly converge in mysterious ways. As mentioned earlier, the novel has no traditional plot structure of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and

denouement; instead, the women's lives and the events they experience are interwoven in disjointed fragments without any clear order in the novel.

Joanna (who does not have a last name) can be considered the fictionalised version of the author Joanna Russ. Janet Evason exists in a far-future version of earth with an all-women population called Whileaway. Jeannine Dadier lives in an alternative version of earth, during 1969, that has not seen the sexual revolution or the second wave of feminism, and in which, since the 1930s, most people suffer under a prolonged economic depression. Jeannine's world contrasts sharply with Joanna's, as well as the reader's reality, as the novel was published just a few years after the great revolt of women in the second wave of feminism in which "women mobilized to demand equality and an end to discrimination – suing corporations, challenging unjust laws and writing new ones, launching insurgencies within trades unions and professional associations, founding new institutions (including day care centers, shelters, coffee shops, bookstores, newspapers, and journals), running for elective office, and championing new (and at times revolutionary) ideas" (Hall 52). The feminist movement of the 60s and 70s was so large that Baxandall and Gordon refer to it as "the largest social movement in history of the United States" and divide it into "two separate streams, with two distinct sets of roots" (414). The first of the two movements was called "the equal rights tendency," which was mainly concerned with obtaining equal legal and political rights for women in relation to men. Baxandall and Gordon explain that this tendency was derived from the earlier "women's activist networks" (414) that had arisen during the Second World War and focused on the examination of "power relations" in areas outside the domesticity of the home that men had "not considered relevant to radical politics" (415). According to Baxandall and Gordon, the second branch of the second feminist wave was characterised by "a rebellion of these civil rights and New Left women" (416) against male dominance. The focus here was particularly on "woman-only" and "autonomous groups," in which feminists

radically pleaded for "structural change" to society as a whole. But they were at the same time skeptical that the contemporary political institutions could achieve this change (Baxandall and Gordon 417).

The four female protagonists can be understood as Joanna Russ's imaginative alternative versions of herself had she lived in those different worlds under those different circumstances, as a woman. In Jeannine's world, there is no freedom of speech and no civil rights organisation. Jeannine is still made to believe, according to traditional patriarchal ideology, that she needs a man to be whole, and needs to marry in order to be truly happy in her life. The narrator explicitly states that "there is some barrier between Jeannine and real life which can be removed only by a man or by marriage; somehow Jeannine is not in touch with what everybody knows to be real life" (116). Instead of seeking to find her own path to happiness, she allows herself to be influenced by the conservative community in which she has grown up and which still surrounds her and cajoles her to conform to their standards of womanhood. Jeannine has her doubts whether a man will make her happy, after several failed attempts to find a suitable partner; but until the other Js enter her life, she does little to rebel against the expectations of the dominant social order. Alice-Jael Reasoner, in short Jael, is from a future earth where a war wages between men and women, suggesting a hyperbolic extrapolation of the so-called battle of the sexes that waged during the period.[5] In contrast to Jeannine and Jael, Janet is a woman who has grown up free from male domination, but also free from any confrontation with men entirely, as in her world men have been extinct for a very long time. Finally, Joanna is the character who attempts to understand how the other

[5] On September 20, 1973, a actual "battle of the sexes" was organised within the professional tennis world. The young American Billie Jean King took on the 55 year-old, retired, Bobby Riggs in a televised spectacle that played a part in establishing the independent WTA and demands for equal pay for men and women tennis players (see: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Battle-of-the-Sexes-tennis). As such, it can be said that in American popular culture of the 1970s a real battle of the sexes was indeed taking place.

three Js have become who they are. She is the one seeking to understand the problem of gender inequality and exploitation in the different worlds of the novel.

The author and one of the protagonists of the novel, Joanna, keeps comparing and contrasting the different Js to each other in different settings over the course of the narrative. These key moments are the character's reflections on their position as women within their respective societies. Hence, the novel shifts from moment to moment and subjective point of view to subjective point of view without observing any linear structure or sense of objectivity; this reinforces the critical comparative design of the novel that highlights the development of different potential forms of female identity and experience in different socio-political and economic contexts.

The same is true for the fragmentary nature of Woolf's *Orlando*. Here, the protagonist falls asleep and wakes up again in a new time period and experiences a new sense of self depending on the context in which he/she finds him/herself. In Woolf's novel, the reader is still taken on a linear journey, as it is a journey through time. The reader learns how the protagonist, often through soliloquy, is continually debating his/her identity in relation to the society and its gender ideology in which he/her finds him/herself; in *The Female Man* the reader is taken on a spatial journey to parallel worlds that are somehow connected by the minds of the different Js, which makes the narrative even more disjointed than Woolf's, but which foregrounds multiple alternative subjectivities.

In both novels, the fragmented nature of the text is explicitly mentioned by the narrators. In *Orlando* the narrator intrudes the story with the explanation that "[o]ur simple duty is to state the facts as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may" (39). This is what the narrator of *The Female Man* does as well; for example, she comments at the beginning of part three, chapter one: "This is the lecture. If you don't like it, you can skip to the next chapter" (34). Just as the narrator also keeps commenting on the story in

Orlando, Joanna keeps commenting on her own story in Russ's novel. In chapter three of Woolf's novel, the narrator reflects on manuscript fragments remaining of the historical documents after the great fire of London in 1666: "[i]t is with fragments such as these that we must do our best to make up a picture of Orlando's life and character at this time. There exist, even to this day, rumours, legends, anecdotes of a floating and unauthenticated kind about Orlando's life in Constantinople" (74). Such narratological self-reflection foregrounds the ambiguous status of Woolf's novel as a biography; with only fragments from which to construct a character, certain aspects of the text must be products of the biographer's imagination. The fragmented structure of Woolf's novel makes possible the event of Orlando's sex change, the exact nature of which was not recorded, leaving the reader with a sense of mystery while able to continue the suspension of disbelief the novel's plot calls for. In appearance, of course, Orlando has changed into a woman, after this event, but mentally Orlando is still the same character. The narrator's duty is to state the facts as far as they are known and to let readers make of them what they wish: for a fact, Orlando has become a female man. The title of Russ's novel is an allusion to Woolf's *Orlando*, since Orlando is a man who is also a woman, with access to the consciousness of both identities.

Russ's novel explores how one woman, in this case Joanna, would develop a very different sense of self, as a woman, depending on the socio-political and economic circumstances in which was raised; it is through such an imaginative thought experiment that Joanna learns what it must feel like to be a woman in a different world to her own, just as Woolf, through Orlando's character, could imagine what it must have been like to be a woman in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Russ was clearly following in Woolf's footsteps by turning to speculative fictional devices to express her feminist criticism of essential gender categories and the polarisation of male and female gender roles in a

patriarchal society, without provoking an overly negative reaction from the literary and socio-political establishment.[6]

Many a scholar has praised Russ's direct and imaginative approach to subjects such as gender inequality and identity in *The Female Man*. Bona sees Russ as one of the key writers of the 1970s who created fictional worlds that provided access for the free discussion of subjects such as "power and communal existence" (227). She considers *The Female Man* "a classic tour de force of science fiction" and points out that *Orlando* should be "considered its spiritual predecessor" (227). Claude echoes this academic praise, also acknowledging signs of Woolf's narrative technique in Russ's novel and describing it as "a funny and serious book about what is wrong with patriarchy and how to fix it" (571). In essence, therefore, the novel is clearly designed to express a profound critique of gender inequality and to develop in readers a feminist consciousness by allowing them to experience the thoughts and feelings of the four female protagonists.

The very fact that the novel "has no beginning-middle-end, no clear relationship between author and characters, and, indeed, no clear relationship between text and meaning" (Lefanu 186), foregrounds the significance of the stream of consciousness technique in pulling the reader into the minds of the four Js and their individual confrontations with different views on women's gender roles and identities. The structural "chaos" of *The Female Man* reflects the turbulent times for women in the period of the second wave of feminism in which a social and intellectual battle was being fought for women's liberation, while the patriarchal establishment was seeking to hold on to power. The imaginative war between the sexes in

[6] Elizabeth Hedrick explains how Joanna Russ's fellow radical feminist of the 1970s, Mary Daly, had a "career [that] was fraught with controversy" (457). Working in the fields of theology and philosophy, rather than imaginative fiction, Daly's work attracted immediate critical attention not only from conservative male peers, but also from fellow feminists who came to judge her gender theories and criticism as essentialist, and even racist (Hendrick 458). The radicalism of Russ's ideas, imagining a utopia in which men have been eradicated, understandably drew much less heated debate amongst feminist scholars, as it was presented as a creative, even symbolic, thought experiment, rather than an actual feminist aim.

Jael's version of Earth, is directly related to the historical protests that turned into riots in Russ's time, like the Stonewall riots of 1969 (see Stein 126-182). These arose from radical protests by men, women and transgender people belonging mainly to the LGBT community who stood up for their rights and did not shy away from the police, which was often the outcome of similar protests.

Woolf's feminism revolved as much around the problem of men, as around equality between men and women, or the idea that women were intellectual and artistic equals of men. The paragraphs below will show much Woolf's feminist thought and literary techniques in *Orlando* can be traced in *The Female Man*. This will show how closely *The Female Man* reflects and builds on *Orlando* to develop a tradition of feminist speculative fiction. Through their shared interest in stream of consciousness narration, readers of both novels experience another person's private thoughts and feelings as directly as possible. In the case of Orlando, the moments in which the reader experiences the mind of the protagonist are most important when the male Orlando becomes a woman and he/she becomes aware of what it truly means to be a woman in his own as well as the future times he/she experiences. Orlando's double consciousness opens his/her eyes to how gender identities and roles are constructed and contingent on socio-economic contexts as much as individual personalities; it makes him/her reflect on the past which makes him/her suddenly consider the plight of women and the subordinate position they are in compared to the men, including the man he/she once was. As such, Orlando is able to see clearly where the problem lies when it comes to the continuing oppression of women: with centuries of ideologically motivated male dominance and the construction of polarized and unequal gender roles and identities; this fundamental structural inequality is challenged head on by Jael and Janet in *The Female Man*, who teach Jeannine to develop the understanding of her own ideological subordination she needs to develop in order to resist and overcome it.

In *Orlando*, the first example of how gender identity can function as a pernicious power tool in society comes in chapter one where the importance of the relation between Orlando and the old queen is shown. Renaissance Orlando is described as a successful man at the time: "he was the very image of a noble gentleman" (14) and "nothing after that was denied him" (15). As a young man, Orlando was in high demand in his immediate surroundings and this also attracts the attention of the old queen. Without ever having to work hard for it, he ends up in the position of the queen's favourite, which would have been unthinkable for a woman in the same situation. Orlando was lucky because "lands were given him, houses assigned him. He was to be the son of her old age" (15). Primogeniture ensures Orlando's visibility at court. He receives everything his heart desires because he is a man of noble birth. The queen adores and favours him, but Orlando is in love with another woman; thus the love is not mutual. The queen experiences Orlando's amorous interest in another woman as treachery. Despite Elizabeth being the queen, she has no power to control Orlando's love life. As a man, Orlando assumes the privilege to act on his own feelings as he sees fit. This makes it clear how the relationship between a man and a woman was structured in the Elizabethan period. The novel provides a great metaphor of this structural inequality that made women the playthings of men: "Girls were roses, and their seasons were short as the flowers" (16).

Orlando does not experience women as individual people but as objects to admire and possessions to treasure: "Orlando's taste was broad; he was no lover of garden flowers only; the wild and the weeds even had always a fascination for him" (16). His experience of manhood dovetails perfectly with the prescribed masculine identity within a strictly patriarchal society. Renaissance Orlando, as a young man, completely subscribes to the androcentric, even misogynist notion of women. The narrator shows Orlando as a womanizer who likes wild and free women, and sees all of them as objects of pleasure, even the queen he is supposed to serve.

This situation is very similar to the relationship Jeannine has with the men in her world, in *The Female Man*. She is the only one of the four Js who still lives in a traditional patriarchal society. She is not happy with the life she leads and she has convinced herself that she needs a man to marry in order to find that happiness. The narrator explains that "there is some barrier between Jeannine and real life which can be removed only by a man or by marriage; somehow Jeannine is not in touch with what everybody knows to be real life" (116). In part six, chapter six, it becomes clear that Jeannine is in danger of becoming just like her mother, the domestic servant of a husband who controls the house.

Despite the fact that Cal does not make her happy and she does not love him, Jeannine holds onto her relationship with him because she thinks she needs a man in her life, and is afraid to face life alone. It is only this insecurity about her own agency in society that makes Jeannine believe she cannot go through life without a man. When she is confronted with a vision of her future as Cal's wife, she realises that a traditional marriage is really not what she wants: "Brief flash of waxed floor, wife in organdie apron, smiling possessively, husband with roses. That's hers, not mine. 'Not Cal.' Ah, hell" (111). Chapter two of part five reveals Jeannine opening up about her struggle to disconnect her sense of self from her relation to Cal. She begins to realize that she is putting herself into a subordinate position out of custom, because she comes to think of Cal as a weak man. He is different from the man she met at a party during a holiday: "he's an assistant to the butcher and he's going to inherit the business" (85). As such, this man would be able to become a more stable provider because "he's got a real future" (85). It seems that Jeannine can only disconnect herself from the irresponsible Cal by placing herself in subordination to another, more powerful, man. She seems to be looking for a stronger, more "responsible" man to replace the weaker one; she still cannot conceive a future for herself, independent of a man. Jeannine's initial failure to develop an identity separate from that of the dominant identity of the male provider ensures

her continuing subservience to men and thus forms the epitome in the novel of a woman captured in the overruling sense of a traditional patriarchal society. It takes Jeannine's confrontation with the man-fighting Jael, and the entirely "manless" Janet to understand that her own identity and goal in life does not need to be defined by any relation to any sort of man at all. Like, Janet, she can be her own woman.

The above relates directly to Orlando becoming a woman and realizing that what he always assumed women to be (fragile playthings) is really only what he wanted women to be from his privileged male perspective. By experiencing male-female relationships as a woman he realises that what he believed women to be is not how women are at all: "[s]he remembered how, as a young man, she had insisted that women must be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled. 'Now I shall have to pay in my own person for those desires,' she reflected; 'for women are not (judging by my own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented and exquisitely apparelled by nature" (93). This, in turn, relates to Jeannine who is constantly trying to live up to standards of womanhood that are created by a patriarchal society, by men in positions of power to shape women's lives. She is trying to construct an identity that will make her desirable to men so she can marry one of them and be provided for, while serving her husband. Yet, just as the female Orlando realises on reflection and through bitter experience how wrong he had been about women's identities and desires, Jeannine comes to the realisation that the ideologically prescribed woman's life is not the life she desires to live.

The power to determine how men's and women's lives are lived is exactly what the men and women in Jael's world are fighting over. In Janet's world this battle has been won by the women who have established a seemingly egalitarian all-female society. However, Jeannine's consciousness is that of a woman living in a society that has not even seen the second wave of feminism, let alone an all-out war between the sexes. What Orlando realises in the

fragment discussed above is exactly what Jeannine needs to realise before she can develop an independent existence as a woman, similar to that of Janet. Janet's continual and sometimes violent confrontations with men in Jeannine's world set an example of defiance and counter-attack that to Jeannine seems frighteningly radical, but in Jael's eyes is absolutely necessary.

Significantly, some details in the novel indicate that Cal does not quite feel at home in the dominant position he was born into as a man in his society. Jeannine explains to Joanna, who takes on the role of narrator at various moments in the story, that "[s]ometimes – sometimes – he likes to get dressed up. He gets into the drapes like a sarong and puts on all my necklaces around his neck, and stands there with the curtain rod for a spear. …But I think there's something wrong with him. Is it what they call transvestism?" (85). This is a sign that Cal does not feel free to express himself as he wishes, because it does not conform to the patriarchal ideal of manhood. Tragically, Jeannine's claim that she suspects him of "transvestism," also suggests that Jeannine still holds onto essentialist notions of gender identity, as she believes that there may be something "wrong" with Cal's interest in cross-dressing. Early on in the novel, it is Jeannine's tendency to see her own as well as other women's and even men's gender identity as essential that keeps her locked up in the patriarchal prison of her society. The crucial insight into the constructedness of her sense of self that she develops through contact with the other Js is that individual as well as social change is possible and that oppressive circumstances and ideologically prescribed gender roles can malform and restrict individual identities and lived experience.

Another parallel between both novels can be found in the characterization of the Russian Princess Sasha in *Orlando* and Janet Evason in *The Female Man*. Renaissance Orlando's relationship with Sasha is strikingly different from the relationships he has with other women, including the old queen. As a typical "Renaissance" man, Orlando remarks Sasha initially for her beauty; she stands out in his eyes mainly because of her exotic appearance. He calls her

"melon, pineapple, an olive tree an emerald, and a fox in the snow all in the space of three seconds" (21), which shows to what extent his interest about her is piqued due to the fact that she is different from the other women he knows. He cannot find suitable words to describe his attraction to her as she is the first woman to challenge his sense that he owns women as property: "He wanted another landscape, another tongue. English was too frank, too candid, too honeyed a speech for Sasha. For in all she said, however open she seemed and voluptuous, there was something hidden; in all she did, however daring, there was something concealed" (27). Orlando feels a sense of fear for Sasha's individuality, which keeps his mind occupied as she may perhaps compromise his habits and career:

> [w]as there not, he thought … something rank in her, something coarse flavoured, something peasant born? And he fancied her at forty grown unwieldy though she was now slim as a reed, and lethargic though she was now blithe as a lark. But again as they skated towards London such suspicions melted in his breast, and he felt as if he had been hooked by a great fish through the nose and rushed through the waters unwillingly, yet with his own consent. (30)

As a young nobleman, Orlando is fixated on status and manhood and he has been used to use women to assert his manhood and status. Now he feels that the exotic strangeness of this woman, Sasha, overpowers him. Thinking of himself as "hooked" and "rushed through the waters" reveals his alienating sense of loss of control. Orlando panics, because he does not want to get stuck in a marriage and fears this woman will trap him and become a burden to him. Despite his misgivings, he does allow himself to become the plaything of this extraordinary woman. The gender tables are fully turned on Orlando, and he confesses that "the clearness was only outward; within was a wandering flame" (27), which indicates that the uncontrollability of this woman was considered a threat to him.

Sasha's character is in some ways similar to the character of Janet in *The Female Man*. Janet, is also a beautiful, young, strong, attractive and seductive woman who appears in the 1969 world of Jeannine to directly challenge the patriarchal customs and traditions. In Jeannine's version of Earth, Janet is also considered an exotic, strange and threatening woman in the eyes of not only the men, but also of many women. As a curiosity, Janet quickly attracts media attention. In an interview on television, Janet explains to a male host that in Whileaway society women have managed to live without men entirely for centuries. Understanding well that she will be perceived as a dangerous woman in a masculinist world, Janet says to herself: "you're in a strange place, Janet, Be civil" (47). Like Sasha, Janet is able to adapt without losing her individual identity and her strength of character as a woman in a male dominated culture.

The liminal status of the gender identity of the protagonists is another point of parallel between the two novels. For Orlando, his change of sex from a man into a woman, causes him to develop a liminal gender identity, which is expressed, for example, through his moments of inner dialogue: "for the time being, she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each. It was a most bewildering and whirligig state of mind to be in" (94). To possess both the feminine and masculine perspective of gender relations and gender identities results in a very chaotic and stormy sense of mind for Orlando, as he/she is constantly pushed from one position to the other. This makes it difficult for Orlando to adopt these positions simultaneously or to take up only one subject position. Thus, what Orlando's comes to realise about gender relations and female identity is exactly what Russ's *The Female Man* is all about: that gender identities are not essential to the individual but ideologically constituted. Jeannine's identity as a woman manifests itself through her subordinate position within a patriarchal culture in which a sense of having a "future" and "a career" and freedom of movement is a male privilege. Jael's

sense of herself as a woman is shaped by her culture's polarisation of men and women into two warring political factions seeking control over the other. Janet's confidence in her womanhood is the result of growing up in a world which has rid itself of pernicious male influence all together. Just as Orlando's liminal identity is characterised by a mind continually in debate with itself and unable to find peace with either one identity, Russ's novel also suggests that ultimately a balance needs to be found between the polarized positions. None of the different parallel worlds visited by the four Js turns out to hold the solution to institutionalised gender inequality. As such, Russ does not provide a solution to the problem of gender inequality, but demonstrates what could happen in any society should the different scenarios unfold.

The Female Man is, in a sense, a future version of *Orlando*, with Woolf's protagonist Orlando being the original "female man"; Chapter four of Woolf's novel plays an important role in this regard, as here Orlando acquires the consciousness of being both male and female:

> It is a strange fact, but a true one that up to this moment she had scarcely given her sex a thought. Perhaps the Turkish trousers, which she had hitherto worn had done something to distract her thoughts; … At any rate, it was not until she felt the coil of skirts about her legs and the Captain offered, with the greatest politeness, to have an awning spread for her on deck that she realised, with a start the penalties and the privileges of her position. But that start was not of the kind that might have been expected. (91)

Here Orlando's double consciousness clearly comes into view, as he/she becomes aware of how the Captain's behaviour towards him/her is determined by his understanding of his/her gender identity, which according to the Captain is clearly female, while Orlando's sense of self remains liminal at best. Confronted with the Captains behaviour, Orlando has an epiphany: "to be clothed with poverty and ignorance, which are the dark garments of the

female sex" (96). Orlando comes to realise that the ideals of womanhood constructed by men and for men cannot be a sense of self through which women will find happiness. Similarly, in *The Female Man,* Jeannine eventually realises that she will not be happy with a man in her life and a conventional marriage and that she needs to find happiness within herself, which the three other Js urge her to find.

Back in England, Orlando realises in a shocking way that he/she no longer has the same rights now that she is considered to be a woman. Having left England as a man,

> [t]he chief charges against her were (1) that she was dead, and therefore could not hold any property whatsoever; (2) that she was a woman, which amounts to much the same thing; (3) that she was an English Duke who had married one Rosina Pepita, a dancer; and had had by her three sons, which sons now declaring that their father was deceased, claimed that all his property descended to them. (100)

Orlando was a man of property, and thus of power and political influence; he had belonged to the aristocratic elite of Renaissance England. As a woman in Enlightenment, Victorian and early twentieth-century England, he/she is not able to be any of these aforementioned things, which shows how artificially constructed along patriarchal rules his society actually was and is. The status quo is entirely based on upholding male power and privilege, because as soon as Orlando becomes a woman, Orlando has become invisible to those in power, and merely an object of use for men.

In *The Female Man,* it is exactly this insight to which Orlando comes that stands at the basis of the war between the sexes in Jael's world, where the women who recognised the ideological nature of their oppression rose up against their male oppressors in an attempt to win their independence. Orlando's epiphany and Jael's rebellion highlight the pernicious effects on the construction of individual identities in a society structured on unequal

opportunities in terms of power and freedom, and institutionalized inequality and injustice based on sexual difference.

These are some of the most prominent similarities between the two novels published nearly half a century apart that make it clear that both works rely on the development of a feminist consciousness that is non-essentialist and open to gender fluidity and self-transformation. The two texts reveal close intertextual relations and support my hypothesis that stood at the basis for this thesis that Joanna Russ was truly and visibly inspired by Virginia Woolf's feminist thought and writing when she developed her own idiosyncratic feminist science fiction in *The Female Man*.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the close intertextual relationship between two seminal novels by the early twentieth-century modernist writer Virginia Woolf and the mid-twentieth-century science fiction writer Joanna Russ. The analysis of their literary careers and practices has shown that both writers meet each other in their commitment to developing a specifically feminist literary mode through which the subjective experience of womanhood and the social plight of women under patriarchy can be examined and more progressive notions of individual gender identity can be developed. I have argued throughout this thesis that Russ was profoundly influenced by the earlier modernist writer Woolf, despite their very different positions in the history of literary feminism. I discovered that Russ openly acknowledged Woolf as a significant influence in her feminist thought and writing and showed how this influence is evident in the themes, characterization and style of her major novel *The Female Man*.

The first topic I examined was the nature of the science fiction genre in relation to women writers, readers and characters. I found out that SF traditionally had been a predominantly masculine genre that reproduced the dominant gender ideology of the first half of the twentieth century, despite developing a reputation for being an experimental popular-culture genre that pushed the boundaries of traditional social customs and traditions. While the second wave of feminism, in the sixties, had some impact on the emerging female interest in the genre, it still failed to achieve gender equality in terms of writers and readers, as well as characterization. However, the continued male domination of SF led to the development of the subgenre of feminist science fiction in the course of the 1960s, which allowed writers such as Russ to express their concern with sustained patriarchal oppression and their desire for freer and more nuanced and complex identities for women.

The thesis has shown that despite being a modernist writer Virginia Woolf implicitly played a significant role in the development of feminist SF, especially through her novel *Orlando*, which features the fantastic tropes of a mysterious change of sex and immortality, which allows the protagonist to travel through time and experience both manhood and womanhood in different socio-historical contexts. Woolf and Russ were both progressive thinkers for their time regarding views of literature as well as women's identities and the ideological construction of social gender roles. Both women writers refused to limit themselves by the established rules in their respective literary fields, as well as in their personal lifestyles and interpersonal relations. Both women writers combined literary criticism with literary creativity in order to develop their critique of the dominant gender ideology of their day that upheld a social structure dominated by men and masculinity.

Both Woolf's and Russ's feminism cannot be summarized in one clear thesis statement but emerges out of the interplay between their non-fictional and fictional writings and their commitment to the legitimacy of subjective women's experience and the freedom for women to develop their own sense of self. In their work, both women focused on the psychological aspects of a woman's daily life and combined their feminist insight into social oppression of women with a constructivist notion of gender identity, fusing feminist politics with feminist aesthetics.

The aim of Woolf's feminist thought and writing was to bring to light the effect on women's minds of ages of institutionalized male domination. They revealed how the men who still enjoyed this privilege unreflectively continued to uphold the restriction of women's experience and posed a direct hindrance to women's freedom. Woolf developed an experimental writing technique characterized by a lack of linear plot structures and traditional narrative techniques that gave her the space to freely move around in her narratives by constantly switching between points of view and narrative voice, chronicling women's

subjective experience of male oppression. Her development of the stream-of-consciousness technique allowed Woolf the opportunity to convey in much more detail and nuance her characters' feelings about being a woman in a patriarchal world. She aimed to create the fullest possible image of her characters and to give the reader access to their underlying thought processes, which is also the case in her experimental fantasy novel *Orlando,* in which she was able to express her mentally androgynous protagonist Orlando's double consciousness as a woman who could remember what it was like to experience life as a man.

The novel's fantasy tropes foreground its feminist themes by chronicling Orlando's changing experiences of life as a woman in Enlightenment, Victorian and modern England, all the while in relation to his initial male self in the time of Queen Elizabeth. Orlando was a man during the English Renaissance who shifts gender, and comes back to the world as mentally the same person, initially, but in the body of a woman. Especially in the Victorian period, Orlando begins to feel the heavy constraints put on women by the dominant gender ideology and feels a sense of imprisonment and a real lack of agency as a woman. These feelings continue when Orlando live in the modern period (Woolf's own time) where he/she begins to feel terrible about the fact that he/she is still a woman and the dreadful experiences she has to endure. By chronicling Orlando's thoughts, feelings and interior dialogues with him/her self, Woolf could make readers aware of what it must have been like to be a woman in the past, as well as in the present. Especially male readers, who could identify with the young male Orlando could be made to see the world from an entirely new gendered perspective. In many ways Russ was very much inspired by Woolf's *Orlando*.

In *The Female Man* Russ opted not for linear time travel, but for mysteriously connected parallel worlds inhabited by four different versions of the same woman. The characters in Russ's novel exist in different societies where different gender-related scenarios unfold. As they hop through each other's worlds each woman becomes aware of the extent to

which a woman's identity is both deeply personal and shaped by socio-economic circumstances. The parallel worlds device in *The Female Man* serves the same function as the time-travel device in *Orlando* because it gives the reader a similar insight into the different experiences of being a woman in a very particular time and under particular circumstances.

This thesis has shown that the thematic and stylistic similarities as well as similarities in characterization between *Orlando* and *The Female Man* prove that Woolf and Russ were aiming to draw their readers into the subjective, often private, but immensely significant experiences of their women protagonists. Neither woman was afraid to express their dissatisfaction with the lack of gender equality in society and to infuse their fictional characters with the feelings of frustration and anger they themselves felt as women writers in a male public sphere.

Both writers deliberately chose to express the harrowing and chaotic experience of womanhood within patriarchal society through equally disjointed plot structures. In *Orlando*, the story is told mostly by a biographer (the omniscient narrator) who follows the main character's adventures over the centuries; but this narrator frequently focalizes through the protagonist to reveal his/her innermost feelings about what it means to be a woman. In *The Female Man*, part of the story is told by a seemingly omniscient narrator, who turns out to be the writer herself, Joanna, one of the four Js that people the parallel versions of Earth that form the setting of the novel. The rest of the story is mostly told from the ever-changing perspectives of the other main characters. The many and sudden shifts in perspective similarly create a chaotic storyline that echoes the often bewildered mental state of the female characters in the face of male oppression, visible in *Orlando* through the female Orlando's struggle for freedom from imprisonment by an ideologically prescribed gender role and in *The Female Man* through the actual battle of the sexes in Jael's world.

Russ was certainly indebted to Woolf; however, it should be clear that she lived in a more liberal society than Woolf and could push the feminist envelope further than Woolf could in her day. The choices she made in the presentation of the feminist themes in her novel, in both form and themes, show that she was more progressive than Woolf. But without Woolf's experimental feminism of the 1920s, and her conception of the original "female man," in *Orlando*, the science fiction world may not have witnessed the publication of Russ's 1975 novel. As such, it can be said that Russ continued the journey towards gender equality and a freer sense of gender identity for women in literature that Woolf began in the 1920s. Russ's prominent position as a seminal feminist science fiction author suggests that she too, after her death in 2011, will remain an important source of inspiration for the next generation of feminist SF authors.

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