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Susan Ayres

The “Straight Mind” in Russ’s *The Female Man*

For years I have been saying *Let me in, Love me, Approve me, Define me, Regulate me, Validate me, Support me*. Now I say *Move over*. (§7.2:140)

In *The Female Man* Joanna Russ contrasts our present-day heterosexual society with two revolutionary alternatives: a utopian world of women and a dystopian world of women warring with men. *The Female Man*, both science fiction and utopian novel, operates as what Monique Wittig in *The Straight Mind* (hereafter, *SM*) calls a literary “war machine” (69). The goal of such a war machine is “to pulverize the old forms and formal conventions. It is always produced in hostile territory” (*SM* 69). Russ’s war machine confronts hostile territory—the heterosexual institutions that regulate gender—in tones that are variously hilarious, furious, and parodic. Her purpose in *The Female Man* is to trick the reader into recognizing the problem of “contrariedades”: “You can’t unite woman and human any more than you can unite matter and antimatter” (138, 151).

In deploying this literary war machine, Russ critiques—in a manner similar to Wittig’s *The Straight Mind* and her utopian novel *Les Guérillères* (1969)—heterosexual institutions that regulate gender, showing how two representatives from a world similar to ours respond to those institutions. She also shows two alternative worlds that further undermine, but do not offer solutions to the ways in which heterosexual institutions regulate gender. Ultimately, Russ’s war machine succeeds by reappropriating language, as illustrated by one character’s change into the female man.

The Female Man takes place in four worlds inhabited by four J’s, very different women who share the same genotype: Jeannine Dadier (who lives in 1969 in an America that never recovered from the Great Depression), Joanna (who also lives in 1969, but in an America like ours, and who merges at times with Joanna Russ, the author), Janet Evason (who lives in the all-female utopian future of Whileaway), and Alice Reasoner, christened Jael (who lives in the dystopian future where Womanlanders are at war with Manlanders). These worlds constitute “worlds of possibility,” but are not linearly related, so neither Whileaway nor Jael’s world is “our future” (§1.6:6-7, §8.5:160-61). The novel presents multiple configurations of a visitor-guide utopia: Janet, a visitor to America, is guided by Joanna and Jeannine, who are in turn visitors to Whileaway, guided by Janet. Joanna, Jeannine, and Janet are visitors to Manland and Womanland, guided by Jael. Jael also visits America and is guided by Jeannine.

The novel constantly shifts among these worlds and voices, sometimes to such an extent that it is impossible to identify the speaking “I.” For instance,

when Janet moves in with an American family—the Wildings of Anytown—and has a lesbian affair with the Wildings' daughter, Laura Rose, an "I" follows her (§4.2:58). Based on textual clues, it is impossible to determine who this "I" is. Similarly, near the end of the novel the following sentence illustrates this confusion: "I said goodbye and went off with Laura, I, Janet; I also watched them go, I, Joanna; moreover I went off to show Jael the city, I Jeannine, I Jael, I myself" (§9.7:212). As the entire novel implies, the question of identity is intertwined with the question of gender. This is depicted, for example, in the following description of the statue of a god on Whileaway: "Persons who look at the statue longer than I did have reported that one cannot pin It down at all, that She is a constantly changing contradiction, that She becomes in turn gentle, terrifying, hateful, loving, 'stupid' ('dead') and finally indescribable" (§5.16:103).

These narrative shifts not only displace the reader, but on another level they raise the question of the identity of the subjective self. Identity, like the statue on Whileaway, "is a constantly changing contradiction." In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler discusses the relation between gender and identity and argues: "It would be wrong to think that the discussion of 'identity' ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that 'persons' only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (16). Although gender and identity are ineluctably intertwined in *The Female Man*, this paper sets aside questions of identity in order to focus on how the "standards of gender intelligibility" in "our world" are contrasted with and undermined by Russ's two alternative worlds and how language is deployed as the ultimate weapon to destroy "standards of gender intelligibility."

The worlds Jeannine and Joanna inhabit are ruled by standards which Wittig, a materialist feminist, associates with what she calls "the straight mind." Wittig asserts that the straight mind "cannot conceive of a culture, a society where heterosexuality would not order not only all human relationships but also its very production of concepts and all the processes which escape consciousness, as well" (*SM* 28). For Wittig, there is one category of sex—female—and this "category of sex is the product of a heterosexual society which imposes on women the rigid obligation of the reproduction of the 'species'"; it also "turns half of the population into sexual beings.... Wherever they are, whatever they do...they are seen (and made) sexually available to men, and they, breasts, buttocks, costume, must be visible" (*SM* 6-7).

Wittig's position is that there is no gender and no sex; rather, the straight mind discursively produces these categories (see Butler 112-13, 115-16). The category of sex, Wittig says, "does not concern being but relationships.... there is no such thing as being-woman or being-man. 'Man' and 'woman' are political concepts of opposition" (*SM* 29). This is another way of saying that "there are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine, the 'masculine' not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine but the general" (*SM* 60). Butler, who agrees with Wittig's analysis of the straight mind, criticizes Wittig because she "presumes the subject, the person, to have a presocial

and pregendered integrity” and because she “neglect[s] the critical dimension of the unconscious which, as a site of repressed sexuality, reemerges within the discourse of the subject as the very impossibility of its coherence” (29, 28).

The category of sex and the straight mind which Wittig analyzes in her essays are found in the worlds of Jeannine and Joanna, which is unsurprising because their worlds are very similar to ours. For example, this monologue by Joanna illustrates some of the consequences of the straight mind:

“Do you enjoy playing with other people’s children—for ten minutes? Good! This reveals that you have Maternal Instinct and you will be forever wretched if you do not instantly have a baby of your own....

Are you lonely? Good! This shows that you have Feminine Incompleteness; get married and do all your husband’s personal services, buck him up when he’s low, teach him about sex (if he wants you to), praise his technique (if he doesn’t), have a family if he wants a family....

“Do you like men’s bodies? Good! This is beginning to be almost as good as getting married. This means that you have True Womanliness, which is fine unless you want to do it with him on the bottom and you on the top.... (§7.5:151-52)

Joanna’s monologue echoes an earlier chapter, “The Great Happiness Contest,” a series of dramatic vignettes which includes the following:

FIRST WOMAN: I’m perfectly happy. I love my husband and we have two darling children. I certainly don’t need any change in *my* lot.

SECOND WOMAN: I’m even happier than you are. My husband does the dishes every Wednesday and we have three darling children, each nicer than the last. I’m tremendously happy.

THIRD WOMAN: Neither of you is as happy as I am.... I’m happiest in fulfilling my responsibilities to him and the children. We have four children.

FOURTH WOMAN: We have six children.... I have a part-time job as a clerk in Bloomingdale’s...but I really feel like I’m expressing myself best when I make a custard or a meringue or decorate the basement.

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

ALL THE WOMEN: Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill. (§6.5:116-17)¹

Joanna says that the straight mind is the “doctrine of Nobody’s Fault...the doctrine that Women Can Love Better Than Men so we ought to be saints...the doctrine of It’s A Personal Problem.” All these doctrines are implicit in a heterosexual culture, just as in a heterosexual culture women are to men as slaves are to masters—as Joanna satirically taunts: “Selah, selah, there is only one True Prophet and it’s You, don’t kill me, massa, I’se jes’ ig’nerant” (§7.5:152).²

Russ also depicts consequences of the straight mind in courtship or flirting, other occasions for men to dominate women. For instance, when Jeannine goes on a blind date, the third-person narrator states: “His contribution is *Make me feel good*; her contribution is *Make me exist*” (§6.6:120). Likewise, when Joanna takes Janet to a party where Janet meets a man, Joanna says: “When I got back they had reached the stage of Discussing His Work” (§3.2:39). That

heterosexual institutions define sex roles for courtship can also be seen when Janet and the host of the party get into a fight. The host and Joanna furiously scramble through their copies of the little blue and pink books given out in high school entitled, *WHAT TO DO IN EVERY SITUATION* (§3.2:45-48). These books satirize the heterosexual institutions regulating gender. For instance, in the little pink book under "Brutality," Joanna reads: "*Man's bad temper is the woman's fault. It is also the woman's responsibility to patch things up afterwards*" (§3.2:47).

Women in *The Female Man* are objectified as sex objects. For instance, Joanna says, "After we had finished making love, he turned to the wall and said, 'Woman, you're lovely. You're sensuous. You should wear long hair and lots of eye make-up and tight clothing.' Now what does that have to do with anything?" (§7.5:150). Joanna also notes how people stare at her legs on the subway as if she were a cheerleader (§5.1:83).

The straight mind excludes females from the universal (male), a point made by the *Non Sum* that Laura and Jael repeat as a mantra. Laura "Says over and over to herself Non Sum, Non Sum, which means either *I don't exist* or *I'm not that*, according to how you feel it..." (§5.3:59). Jael explodes, "It is I, who you will not admit exists.... I, I, I. Repeat it like magic. That is not me. I am not that.... NON SUM, NON SUM, NON SUM!" (§8.10:195).³ Because of *Non Sum*, men oppress and invalidate women, as illustrated in "The Great Happiness Contest" and in the satiric chapter composed of fragments reviewing *The Female Man*:

"Shrill . . . vituperativeneeds a good layno characterization, no plota woman's bookfeminine lack of objectivitythe usual boring obligatory references to Lesbianism..... sharp and funny but without real weight or anything beyond a topical.... (§7.3:140-41).⁴

Joanna reverses *Non Sum* by becoming a man, a female man. She cryptically hints at this several times (§1.5:5, §2.2:19-20) before she explains it: "I'll tell you how I turned into a man. First I had to turn into a woman" (§7.1: 133). As Simone de Beauvoir says in the *The Second Sex*, "One is not born, but becomes a woman" (249). Before Joanna can become a man, she has to become a woman through societal enculturation:

I had a five-year-old self who said: *Daddy won't love you.*

I had a ten-year-old self who said: *the boys won't play with you.*

I had a fifteen-year-old self who said: *nobody will marry you.*

I had a twenty-year-old self who said: *you can't be fulfilled without a child.*
(§7.1:135)

She elaborates:

At eleven I passed an eighth-grader, a boy, who muttered between his teeth, 'Shake it but don't break it.' The career of the sexless sex object had begun. I had, at seventeen, an awful conversation with my mother and father in which they told me how fine it was to be a girl—the pretty clothes...and how I did not have to climb Everest, but could listen to the radio and eat bon-bons while my Prince was out doing it.... There is the vanity training, the obedience training, the self-effacement training, the deference training, the dependency training, the passivity training, the rivalry training, the stupidity training, the placation training. (§7.5:151)⁵

Joanna thus successfully becomes a woman but cannot “put this together with my human life, my intellectual life, my solitude, my transcendence, my brains, and my fearful, fearful ambition” (ibid.). In describing how she became a woman she self-consciously parodies “feminine writing,” the fluid and ludic style of writing from the body practiced by Hélène Cixous and others to show the desire to return to the preconscious state of union with the mother.⁶ Joanna rejects feminine writing because it is another (false) mark of gender: “my diction is becoming feminine, thus revealing my true nature...I have no structure...my thoughts seep out shapelessly like menstrual fluid, it is all very female and deep and full of essences, it is very primitive and full of ‘and’s,’ and it is called ‘run-on sentences’” (§7.1:137).⁷

Joanna explains that she becomes a man as a consequence of “the knowledge you suffer when you’re an outsider.... the perception of all experience through two sets of eyes, two systems of value, two habits of expectation, almost two minds” (§7.2:137-38). In other words, she must constantly be aware not only of the universal male, but also of the female Other.⁸ Thus, she becomes a female man: “To resolve contrarities, unite them in your own person” (138). Become your own universal. She says, “Manhood, children, is not reached by courage or short hair or insensibility.... Manhood, children, . . . is *Manhood*” (§2.2:20). A woman reaches “manhood” by appropriating language. Joanna describes the process metaphorically:

take in your bare right hand one naked, severed end of a high-tension wire. Take the other in your left hand. Stand in a puddle.... When She [God] roars down in high voltage and high amperage both, She is after your marrow-bones; you are making yourself a conduit for holy terror and the ecstasy of Hell. (§7.2:138-39)

Joanna’s change into a female man appears magical, but then, so does the appropriation of language. As Wittig points out, “One must understand that men are not born with a faculty for the universal and that women are not reduced at birth to the particular. The universal has been, and is continually, at every moment, appropriated by men” (*SM* 80). Gender, which reduces women to the particular, can be destroyed through language: “For each time I say ‘I,’ I reorganize the world from my point of view and through abstraction I lay claim to universality” (*SM* 81). As Butler points out, “This absolute grounding of the speaking ‘I’ assumes god-like dimensions within Wittig’s discussion” and affords “women [the ability to] *speak* their way out of their gender” (117).

Like Joanna in *The Female Man*, women in Wittig’s *Les Guérillères* also “*speak* their way out of their gender.” *Les Guérillères* is a utopian, nonlinear novel about an anarchic society of women warring with and eventually defeating men. The women reject myths and symbols (30), are concerned with finding a new language (131), and with rewriting their history, which has been falsely invented by men (110-11). In the novel Wittig, by “universaliz[ing] the point of view of *elles*, illustrates how language can be used to destroy the mark of gender. The goal of this approach is not to feminize the world but to make categories of sex obsolete in language” (*SM* 85).⁹

Joanna destroys gender and becomes universal when she becomes the fe-

male man. This resolution is not the ultimate political goal Wittig has in mind, but it is a good short-term solution. Wittig believes we should "suppress men as a class, not through a genocidal, but a political struggle. Once the class 'men' disappears, 'women' as a class will disappear as well" (*SM* 3). This entails destroying "heterosexuality as a social system" because "[it] is based on the oppression of women by men and...produces the doctrine of difference between the sexes to justify this oppression" (*SM* 20). Wittig claims, however, that we don't need to wait until the ultimate victory; a short-term solution is to "declare...that women are human as well as men.... It is part of our fight to unmask them, to say that one out of two men is a woman, that the universal belongs to us..." (*SM* 56). And this—not the ultimate suppression of men, but the short-term declaration "that women are human"—is Joanna's solution to the dilemma of "unit[ing] woman and human" (§7.5:151). She becomes a "man" because man is the universal; man is human. She says, "If we are all Mankind [i.e., human], then it follows to my interested and righteous and rightnow [sic] very bright and beady little eyes, that I too am a Man and not at all a woman" (§7.2:140).

Jeannine doesn't evolve as much as Joanna. Jeannine works in New York City as a reference librarian for the WPA (§1.2:2). In her world of 1969, World War II never occurred and the Great Depression and rationing linger over America. Gender roles are more strictly inscribed in Jeannine's world than in ours, which accounts for her concern with her feminine appearance (she checks lines around her eyes and worries about her age, for instance) and her obsession with getting married. She is badgered by her mother who wants the answer to "the really important question, viz, is Jeannine going to have a kitchenette of her own" (§6.10:127), and her brother, who tells her to marry "Anybody" (§6.4:116). She has a lover, Cal, but she really doesn't like him and tries to avoid him because he will "want to Make Love" (§1.10:16). She daydreams that a prince will whisk her away (§6.1:109), but after a few blind dates ends up calling Cal and telling him the answer is yes to the marriage question he's been asking (§6.9:129-31).

What Jeannine believes is: "Somewhere is The One. The solution. Fulfillment. Fulfilled women. Filled full. My Prince. Come. Come away, Death. She stumbles into her Mommy's shoes, little girl playing house" (§6.7:125). After she decides to marry Cal she wonders "Do you think if I got married I would like making love better?" (§7.5:150). Jeannine has the potential to be the most intelligent of the genotype of the four J's, a possibility to which Jael quips, "try to prove that to a stranger!" (161-62). However, cultural expectations cause her to unquestioningly accept her role as (heterosexual) wife. She says, "I wouldn't be a man for anything.... I like being admired. I like being a girl" (§5.2:86). She is appalled when Janet and Laura Rose touch each other (§7.4:143), and when she finds Janet's dildo, Joanna tells her that it is "Infinitely [dangerous]":

What it does to your body...is nothing compared to what it does to your mind, Jeannine. It will ruin your mind. It will explode in your brains and drive you crazy. You will never be the same again. You will be lost to respectability and

decency and decorum and dependency and all sorts of other nice, normal things beginning with a D. It will kill you, Jeannine. You will be dead, dead, dead. (§7.4:148)

Jeannine's straight mind questions even slight deviations from the heterosexual norm. For instance, Jeannine asks Joanna whether there's "something wrong" with Cal because "when he does it [makes love], you know, sometimes he cries. I never heard of a man doing that" (84), and because "He can't make up his mind, either. I never heard of a man like that" (85), and most of all, because

Sometimes—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. He wants to be an actor, you know. But I think there's something wrong with him. Is it what they call transvestism? (§5.2:85)

Unlike Joanna, who becomes a female man and a lesbian¹⁰ by the end of the novel, Jeannine does not completely reject the straight mind but evolves only to the point of questioning it. She recognizes the myth of Woman and the necessity of feminist politics. She now gets up late and neglects housework; she is doing just as she pleases, which doesn't happen to coincide with the myth of Woman (§9.7:209-12).

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

Janet comes from Whileaway, an all-women, anarchist society (§5.7:91). The men on Whileaway were wiped out by a plague (§1.8:14), thus, women are (naturally) lesbians and have children through gene splicing. They marry but are not monogamous and have sexual relations primarily outside the family (52, 53). Janet's visit to America inevitably leads to reversals that undermine the straight mind.

For instance, when Janet is interviewed on television, the M.C. presumptuously asks how Whileaway will react to the reappearance of men. Janet cannot imagine "why" men should reappear. She keeps asking "why," until the M.C. finally tells her, "One sex is half a species" (§1.7:9-10). Janet does not comprehend this, of course, because on Whileaway one sex is the whole species. This is the reversal of universality: on Whileaway females are the universal. When Janet lands on Jeannine's world, she asks, "Where the dickens are all the women?" (§1.7:8). Similarly, although Whileawayan children are given the last name of their mother plus "son" (Janet's last name is Evason), Janet tells us "Evason is not 'son' but 'daughter.' This is *your* translation" (§1.15:18).

Another reversal is that of heterosexuality. On Whileaway women are lesbians and bear children, so they have no reproductive need for men and no concept of heterosexuality. Because of this, when the three other J's watch Jael have sex with her male robot, Davy, Janet exclaims, "'Good Lord? Is *that* all?'" (§8.14:198). Although one critic suggests Janet's exclamation shows that

"sex between a person and a dehumanized object is not—and should not be regarded as being—highly significant" (Spector 201), this interpretation ignores the obvious parallel to the possible dehumanization of women in heterosexual sex between "real men" and "real women." Moreover, Janet's exclamation can be interpreted from the lesbian perspective that, compared to lesbian sex, "is that [heterosexual sex] all [there is to it]?" Is it over so quickly? Is it so lacking in sensuality? And so on.

The lesbian reversal on Whileaway carries over to Joanna's world. For instance, before Laura sleeps with Janet, Laura carries the straight mind to its (il)logical conclusion:

I've never slept with a girl. I couldn't. I wouldn't want to. That's abnormal and I'm not, although you can't be normal unless you do what you want and you can't be normal unless you love men. To do what I wanted would be normal, unless what I wanted was abnormal, in which case it would be abnormal to please myself and normal to do what I didn't want to do, which isn't normal. (§4.11:68)

After Janet sleeps with Laura, Laura becomes a lesbian. From this perspective, we can read Laura's *Non Sum* ("I don't exist or I'm not that" [§§4.3:58]) as a reversal. Not only can it mean "As a female I don't exist because I'm not the universal (male)," but also it can mean "As a lesbian I don't exist in the categories of sex." As Wittig argues, "Lesbian is the only concept...which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically" (*SM* 20). Joanna, who at first rejects Janet's advances and the possibility of lesbianism, saying "*That's different...I couldn't*" (§3.1:31), eventually escapes the categories of sex by becoming a lesbian (§9.6:209).

Although Whileaway's all-women (lesbian) society undermines gender relations in heterosexual society, it also raises the problem of separatism. In "Recent Feminist Utopias" (1981), in which Russ discusses feminist science fiction including *The Female Man*, Russ comments: "I believe the separatism is primary, and...the authors are not subtle in their reasons for creating separatist utopias: if men are kept out of these societies, it is because men are dangerous. They also hog the good things of this world" (77). The purpose of utopias, she further remarks, is to "supply in fiction what their authors believe society...and/or women, lack in the here-and-now. The positive values stressed in the stories can reveal to us what, in the authors' eyes, is wrong with our own society" (81). Although Russ's comments expressly support separatism, Wittig does not agree that lesbian societies are solely separatist when they are part of a larger, more revolutionary purpose: "To destroy 'woman' does not mean that we aim, short of physical destruction, to destroy lesbianism simultaneously with the categories of sex, because lesbianism provides for the moment the only social form in which we can live freely" (*SM* 20).¹¹ Wittig creates a separatist society in *Les Guérillères*, in which the warrior-women brutally defeat the men, but accept those men who wish to "join them in their struggle" (141, 142); in *The Lesbian Body*, Wittig describes a (devouring) lesbian relationship, which Butler calls a "textual... 'overthrow' of the category of sex through a destruction and fragmentation of the sexed body" (114).

Despite these separatist novels, Wittig believes an all-lesbian society is not the way to destroy "heterosexuality as a social system"; rather, a lesbian society "pragmatically reveals that the division from men of which women have been the object is a political one and shows that we have been ideologically rebuilt into a 'natural group'" (*SM* 9).¹²

And while the all-woman/lesbian society of *Whileaway* is the utopia in *The Female Man*, it cannot evade the problem of origin. How do we get there? The men of *Whileaway* were wiped out by a plague that attacked only men (§1.8:12).¹³ This is obviously not a realistic way to destroy the heterosexual institutions that regulate gender. Moreover, as Butler points out, a "utopian notion of a sexuality freed from heterosexual constructs...fail[s] to acknowledge the ways in which power relations continue to construct sexuality for women even within the terms of a 'liberated' heterosexuality or lesbianism" (29). Despite these problems, *Whileaway* nonetheless critiques and undermines the straight mind, a point Jean Pfaelzer makes when she says that a utopia "deconstructs our assumptions about social inevitability through representations that provoke a cognitive dissonance between the present as lived and the potentialities hidden within it. Utopias tempt us as an evocation of political desire" (199). As Russ admits at the end of the novel, "Janet [is one] whom we don't believe in and whom we deride but who is in secret our savior from utter despair" (§9.7:212-13). *Whileaway*, like any other utopia, represents our hope.

Jael's world, on the other hand, represents our fear. Hers is a dystopian world in which men live in Manland, separated from women in Womanland. For forty years a war has been waged between the "Haves" and "Have-nots," the men and women (§8.6:164-65). Manlanders have more technology, but they have no women so they buy babies from the Womanlanders (§8.7:167). On Manland there are real-men, the changed (men surgically changed into "women"), and the half-changed ("who keep their genitalia but who grow slim, grow languid, grow emotional and feminine, all this the effect of spirit only" [*ibid.*]). Womanland has no men, but does have male robots, such as Jael's Davy, "The most beautiful man in the world" (§8.9:185). Jael herself is part robot (a cyborg) with surgical claws and steel teeth hidden under plates that look like human teeth (§8.7:181-82).

Both Manland and Womanland are heterosexual. For instance in Manland: "All the real-men like the changed; some real-men like the half-changed; none of the real-men like real-men, for that would be abnormal" (§8.7:167). Thus, unlike *Whileaway*, Jael's world reinscribes the straight mind and in Wittig's terms, it is an unsuccessful revolution against heterosexual institutions because it merely "substitut[e] women for men (the Other for the One)" (*SM* 54-55). For instance, after Jael kills Boss-man for relentlessly trying to seduce her ("You want me. It doesn't matter what you say. You're a woman, aren't you? This is the crown of your life. This is what God made you for.... You want to be mastered" [§8.8:181]), Jael thinks:

Still hurt, still able to be hurt by them! Amazing. You'd think my skin would get thicker, but it doesn't. We're all of us still flat on our backs. The boot's on our neck while we slowly, ever so slowly, gather the power and the money and the resources into our own hands. While they play war games. (§8.8:183)

Jael, like her Biblical namesake who kills the commander of the Canaanite army (Judges 4), is an assassin (§8.9:187). The night after she kills Boss-man she has a "didactic nightmare" of guilt: "It was the guilt of sheer existence," of being a "Cunt." "I was very lucid in my nightmare. I knew it was not wrong to be a girl because Mommy said so; cunts were all right if they were neutralized, one by one, by being hooked on to a man...." Jael dreams, "I murdered because I was guilty"; "For every drop of blood shed there is restitution made.... See? It's *me!*... Are you catching on? it is I, who you will not admit exists" (§8.10:192-96). Like Joanna, Jael's emphasis on "I" is an attempt to appropriate (linguistically) the universal. Other than this one appropriation, however, Jael does not succeed as does Joanna in becoming the female man.

Clearly, Womanland is a dystopia. Unlike Whileaway, it hopelessly fails to revolutionize heterosexual institutions because it merely reinscribes them. Thus, Jael's world shows the danger of "substitut[ing] women for men" (*SM* 55). But it is also a parody of those heterosexual institutions, and as a parody it reveals the shakiness of those very institutions. For instance, part of Jael's job is to impersonate Manlanders, as she does when she acts as a Manlander diplomat in "a primitive patriarchy on an alternate Earth" (188). Here, Jael is disguised as "Prince of Faery." One of the native women falls in love with her, she commits medieval acts of knighthood, and when she finally reveals "the marks of Eve" to her "most loyal feudal retainer," he says, "*If the women of Faery are like this, just think what the MEN must be!*" (§8.9:189-91).

Another parody occurs when Jael takes Joanna, Jeannine, and Janet into Manland for business (to make a baby deal with Boss-man). Their first stop in Manland is at "The Knife," a "recreation center" that is more like a tavern (§8.7:167-172). Here they meet their business contact, Anna, a half-changed (170). He wears "a pink chiffon gown, with gloves up to his shoulder, a monument of irrelevancy on high heels, a pretty girl with too much of the right curves and a bobbing, springing, pink feather boa.... His green eyes shrewdly narrowed. This one has intelligence. Or is it only the weight of his false lashes?" (171). Jael hypothesizes that "There must be a secret feminine underground that teaches them how to behave.... He wets his lips again, the indescribable silliness of that insane mechanism, practiced anywhere and everywhere" (171, 173). Anna thinks the four J's are "real men": "Anna bats his eyes at us and wets his lips, taking the women inside the suits to be real-men, taking me to be a real-man (what else can I be if I'm not a changed?)" (173). Later, at Boss-man's, his wife, Natalie, a changed, "clicked in with a tray of drinks—scarlet skin-tights, no underwear, transparent high-heeled sandals like Cinderella's—she gave us a homey, cute smile...and stilted out" (173).

The women who dress like men and the men who dress like women are parodies of "an original or primary gender identity," as Butler argues:

As much as drag creates a unified picture of "woman"...it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency. (135)

Anna and Natalie's feminine dress and coy behavior and Jael's posturing as Prince of Faery parody male and female gender roles, thus suggesting how gender roles are indeterminate and contingent. This parody of a parody is mirrored in the sex specifications the Womanlanders give the Manlanders for their sex change operations. No "real woman" exists behind the fantastic specifications. As Jael tells the other three J's, "[Manlanders have] been separated from real women so long that they don't know what to make of us; I doubt if even the sex surgeons know what a real woman looks like. The specifications we send them every year grow wilder and wilder and there isn't a murmur of protest" (§8.7:169).

Jael's world, which merely substitutes "Other" for "One," is not a viable solution to the heterosexual institutions that oppress women. Jael's world undermines heterosexual institutions through parody, just as Whileaway's lesbian society undermines heterosexual institutions by demonstrating the false nature of the categories of sex. But even the utopian Whileaway is not the final victory for women. *The Female Man* ultimately relies on the power of language to reappropriate the universal and thus fulfills Wittig's criteria for a successful war machine: "It is the attempted universalization of the point of view that turns or does not turn a literary work into a war machine" (*SM* 75).

Even though Russ says, "I like Jael the best of all.... who says die if you must but loop your own intestines around the neck of your strangling enemy" (§9.7:212), Joanna is the hero of the novel and Joanna's change into the female man shows that for all women, change into the female man is possible through language. As Wittig says, "to eradicate [the lexical symbol for gender] would not only modify language at the lexical level but would upset the structure itself and its functioning" (*SM* 89). Through language women can kill the myth of woman and abolish the class of women (and the class of men). Like Jael, women can yell "I, I, I. Repeat it like magic" (§8.10:195), and in this way attempt to universalize their point of view. *The Female Man* suggests that women can "speak their way out of their gender" (Butler 117). Although the conclusion of this battle is not clear-cut, the novel provides strategy and hope. Appropriately, Russ ends with an envoi: "Go little book...." and "Do not get glum when you are no longer understood.... Rejoice, little book! For on that day, we will be free" (§9.7:214).

NOTES

1. In other vignettes in this chapter, the characters are men and women who debate the effects of the straight mind on women. The debate usually ends when the man negates the woman's point of view—"This argument is becoming degraded and ridiculous" (118)—thus illustrating R.D. Laing's vignette in *The Politics of Experience* showing how men invalidate women's experience, which Russ uses as the epigraph of *The Female Man*.

2. Wittig states: "The perennality of the sexes and the perennality of slaves and masters proceed from the same belief, and, as there are no slaves without masters, there are no women without men" (*SM* 2). Like Joanna, the women in *Les Guérillères* say that men are the "domineering oppressors, the same masters who have said that negroes and women do not have a heart spleen liver in the same place as their own" (102).

3. Both of these passages allude to Martin Luther's crying out "Non Sum" in the choir. Intertextually, Russ's *non sum* relates to Wittig's essay entitled "Homo Sum," a title which she ironically takes from Terence's statement "Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto" ("Man am I; nothing human is alien to me"). In both cases, Russ's and Wittig's female perspective "playfully exposes" that the words "human" and "man" have been appropriated by the dominant group (Wittig 54, Spender 151-57).

4. Russ has previously written about how men invalidate and silence women's works in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, and Spender writes about the same thing in chapter seven of *Man Made Language*. Wittig makes the point about lesbian works in her essay "The Point of View: Universal or Particular?" (*SM* 62-63, 65).

5. This is similar to the things Laura Rose's mother tells her and what she experiences (§4.9:65-68).

6. For a discussion of feminine writing, see Todd (53).

7. Wittig also criticizes feminine writing because it "merg[es] a practice with a myth, the myth of Woman" (*SM* 59).

8. One aspect of this, as Spender explains, is that because "the registers for discourse are male decreed and controlled, women who wish to express themselves must translate their experience into the male code" (81).

9. Wittig uses the plural feminine pronoun *elles* to replace the general (male) plural pronoun *ils*. Unfortunately, the English translation of *elles* in *Les Guérillères* is "the women," which Wittig laments because "when *elles* is turned into *the women* the process of universalization is destroyed" (*SM* 86). (For a brief discussion of Wittig's strategic use of *j/e* in *The Lesbian Body*, see Butler 120.)

10. I don't believe the two are necessarily linked, even in Wittig's thinking. This issue is addressed below in the discussion about Whileaway.

11. Both Butler and Fuss criticize Wittig's concept of lesbianism as essentializing. Butler notes that, in effect, Wittig sees the lesbian as "a third gender" (113); Fuss points out that Wittig "tend[s] to homogenize lesbians into a single harmonious group and to erase the real material and ideological differences between lesbians" and is reluctant to destroy the category of lesbian (43).

12. As Butler argues, the point of *The Lesbian Body* "is not to call attention to the presence of rights of 'women' or 'lesbians' as individuals, but to counter the globalizing heterosexist episteme by a reverse discourse of equal reach and power" (120).

13. The Whileawayan history of the plague is contradicted by Jael, who tells Janet, "Whileaway's plague is a big lie"; "I, I, I, I am the plague.... I and the war I fought built your world for you" (§9.7:211). Jael's version of history—women warring against men—is discussed below.

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ABSTRACT

In *The Female Man* Russ contrasts our present-day heterosexual society with two revolutionary alternatives: a utopian world of women and a dystopian world of women warring with men. The novel functions as what Monique Wittig calls a “literary war machine” because it tries “to pulverize the old forms and formal conventions.” Specifically, Russ critiques the “straight mind”—heterosexual institutions that regulate gender—by showing how two representatives from “our world” respond to those institutions. She also shows two alternative worlds that further undermine, but do not solve, the way heterosexual institutions regulate gender.

In responding to the straight mind and to the consequences of being the female Other, one character from “our world,” Joanna, changes into a female man. Joanna becomes the female man by appropriating language and therefore “resolv[ing] contrarities, [by] unit[ing] them in her own person,” and in this way she destroys gender as Wittig describes by “lay[ing] claim to universality.”

Russ contrasts Joanna’s solution with the alternative worlds inhabited by Janet (on the all-women utopian *Whileaway*) and by the cyborg Jael (on the dystopian world of warring *Manland* and *Womanland*).

Russ’s literary war machine deploys various weapons against the Straight Mind. Of these, the most successful is language, which allows women to kill the myth of Woman and to abolish the class of women. In short, Russ demonstrates Judith Butler’s suggestion that women can “*speak* their way out of their gender.” (SA)