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Multiplicity of Self and Space in Semi-autobiographical Speculative Fiction: Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* and Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*

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Abtract: Speculative fiction has always provided a suitable ground for contesting social constructions such as strict gender roles and conventional views on sexuality. In the 1970s especially, with the influence of second wave feminism, speculative fiction authors began to depict the political struggle of women in fictional universes which presented alternative modes of subjectivity and social structures. Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) and Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) make use of the historically-situated nature of speculative fiction to narrate their experiences, reflect personal as well as political struggles in fictional alternate and future worlds which are indeed reflections of the here and now. Both Lessing and Russ combine autobiographical and fictional elements in their exploration of female subjectivity and experience. This preference leads to a more genuine, less generalized impression of female identity and solidarity. In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, described as "an attempt at autobiography" by its author, Lessing integrates personal experiences from her own life into the text while exploring a post-apocalyptic, or more precisely, a post-"Crisis" world. Although the events take place in a fictional future, they are influenced by the author's past in real life. Similarly, in *The Female Man*, Russ adds autobiographical elements into the text, especially her experiences as a lesbian feminist and her struggle to exist in male-dominated environments. *FM* presents four different alternate narratives, two of which take place in the future (one is a utopia and the other is a dystopia); however, all of them express a different version of women's, and of course Joanna Russ', struggle in life. Both *FM* and *Memoirs* therefore reflect the multiplicity and plurality of the voices of women, and by employing speculative fiction tropes, they point to diverse ways of confronting oppressive ideologies both collectively and individually.

Keywords: Speculative Fiction, Women's Autobiographies, Second Wave Feminism, Doris Lessing, Joanna Russ

The 1970s was a period in which a large number of feminist speculative fiction novels – mostly utopias and dystopias – were written and published. With the influence of second wave feminism, authors began to give voice to women and reflect their political struggle in fictional universes which presented alternative modes of subjectivity and social structures to those in the real world which is still dominated by patriarchal ideology. Among all the feminist utopias and dystopias of the 70s, two novels stand out as essentially distinct examples: Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) and Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975). These novels are different from their contemporaries as they combine autobiographical and fictional elements in their exploration of female subjectivity and experience. As a literary sub-genre, speculative fiction provides a suitable ground for contesting problematic social constructions such as strict gender roles and conventional views on sexuality. As M.J. Wolf-Meyer states, "[s]ocial theory and speculative fiction are two sides of the same coin [...] Both traditions ask us to imagine worlds that can be described and depicted, and ask us as audiences to imagine the rules that undergird a society and its human and more-than-human relationships" (5). Wolf-Meyer also draws attention to the fact that both social theory and speculative fiction are situated in "time and place […] historical

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moment [...] in the lives of people who develop and implement the theory (5). In other words, speculative fiction is not an ahistorical sub-genre; works of speculative fiction are products of certain historical moments and sometimes political movements whose voice they reflect and represent. This is why women writers like Lessing and Russ turn to speculative fiction to voice both personal experiences and political ideas.

Lessing and Russ take the historically-situated nature of speculative fiction to another level by adding the autobiographical mode to it, disrupting the conventions of both. In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, described as "an attempt at autobiography" by its author, Lessing integrates personal experiences from her own life into the text while exploring a post-apocalyptic, or more precisely, a post-"Crisis" world. Although the events take place in a fictional future, they are influenced by the author's past in real life. As Roberta Rubenstein explains, in *Memoirs* "[a]n important element of the narrative is a series of dreamlike scenes that feature pertinent details concerning the nameless elder narrator's childhood, apparently based on the emotional circumstances of both Doris Lessing's mother's childhood and her own" (189). Similarly, in *The Female Man*, Russ adds autobiographical elements into the text, especially her experiences as a lesbian feminist and her struggle to exist in male-dominated environments. *FM* presents four different alternate narratives, two of which take place in the future (one is a utopia and the other is a dystopia); however, all of them reflect a different version of women's, and of course Joanna Russ', struggle in life. One of the four main characters is even named Joanna, and the initials of others' names are all "J": Jeannine, Janet, and Jael. The four women are usually read by critics as "different phases/faces of the same self" (Shinn 167), that of Russ the author. In both novels, therefore, the authors employ the particular technique of bringing together autobiography and fiction as an attempt to combine personal with the political, a combination which allows them to explore female subjectivity and voice in a patriarchal society.

In literary studies and criticism, the relationship between autobiography and fiction has always been a matter of debate. Especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the fictional aspects of autobiographies are foregrounded in many studies including Jill Ker Conway's *When Memory Speaks: Exploring the Art of Autobiography*, in which she asks the questions "Is autobiography just another form of fiction? A bastard form of the novel or of biography?" (3), or Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir's *Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing* which examines the erasure of the borderline between fact and fiction in autobiographies. These debates are primarily centred on the idea, which is influenced by postmodern and poststructural theories, that human consciousness and memory are not reliable sources of information and language is insufficient in relaying what passes through a person's mind. Moreover, the disposition of the human mind to fictionalize, or to tell events in the story form, means that the author cannot depict past events without resorting to fiction. Just as "[o]ne cannot ever completely take the fictionality out of autobiography" as Gudmundsdóttir argues (272), one also cannot take autobiography out of fiction. Indeed, the first examples of literary analysis read fictional works in relation with their author's lives, their environment or their views on various matters, before the new critics of the twentieth century argued against such reading. Still, it cannot be denied that most fictional works subtly or explicitly include traces of their author's lives and thoughts. While in some cases it requires a thorough analysis to find these traces, in others the author herself/himself deliberately adds autobiographical elements into the fiction as in the case of *Memoirs* and *FM*.

Although this fusion seems to mean that there is hardly any difference between a novel that is based on the author's life and her autobiography, this is actually not the case. As Linda Anderson states, "if the writer is always, in the broadest sense, implicated in the work, any writing may be judged to be autobiographical,

depending on how one reads it", however, she continues, "autobiography has also been recognized since the late eighteenth century as a distinct literary genre" (1-2). Actually, autobiography has been a mainly "male" literary genre, a fact that became more visible as feminist critics delved into its history. Barbara Johnson draws attention to the fact that "the very notion of a self, the very shape of human life stories, has always, from Saint Augustine to Freud, been modelled on the man" (189) and Anderson also writes that "the genre of autobiography has been implicitly bound up with gender. Insofar as autobiography has been seen as promoting a view of the subject as universal, it has also underpinned the centrality of masculine – and, we may add, Western and middle-class – modes of subjectivity" (3). This means that traditional autobiographies were mainly written by white Western middle-class men and represented their ideology while women were constrained to the realm of private diaries or journals, which were the "less literary" versions of autobiographies. At this point, feminist criticism by Anderson, Johnson and others becomes important in revealing the domination of this literary genre by male authors. More importantly, however, they foreground the struggle of female authors against a masculine tradition. As Johnson contends, "[t]he problem for the female autobiographer is, on the one hand, to resist the pressure of masculine autobiography as the only literary genre available for her enterprise, and, on the other, to describe a difficulty in conforming to a female ideal which is largely a fantasy of the masculine, not the feminine, imagination" (189-90). Although they are not essentially autobiographies, both *Memoirs* and *FM* tackle this problem as they investigate alternative identities and spaces for women to tell their narratives and resist rather than conform to the male constructions of ideal female identity.

It is obvious that both the concerns of feminist politics and feminist literary critics of autobiography are similar: they want to give voice to women, a unique voice which is not dictated or influenced by a male tradition. This is why *Memoirs* and *FM* are crucial feminist texts that need analysis; they combine the personal experiences of their authors with the tropes of speculative fiction in order to explore an environment that is free of the structures that define conventional gender roles and identities. The focus of this paper is the method that Lessing and Russ use to resist and subvert male voice; namely, the employment of fragmented/multiple/plural identities and spaces. This method is important in the sense that it overturns conventional autobiography by unsettling the unity of the autobiographer's identity which is the core of an autobiographical work and also the unity or certainty of space; the dwellings in which the subject resides. Here it is important to refer to Conway's *When Memory Speaks*, in which she asks important questions regarding women's representation of themselves in autobiographies: "[H]ow can a woman write an autobiography when to do so requires using a language which denigrates the feminine and using a genre which celebrates the experience of the atomistic Western male hero? [...] If the autobiographer gazes at himself in the mirror of culture [...] how should a woman use a mirror derived from the male experience?" (3-4). The answer to these questions is that a woman should not *use* that "mirror of culture" which is "derived from the male experience", but *shatter* it. This shattering method is the opposite of that of the masculine, "conventional" autobiography which "enables a more coherent sense of self than is possible in life, and, on the other hand, it ignores - or at least devalues - the experiential life that underlies the self's formation" (Haegert 623). Lessing and Russ subvert this tradition by both undermining the idea of coherent, unified, total self through making use of fragmentation in a positive way and giving equal voice to experiential and mental life of the characters which take place in different spaces. However, fragmentation or multiplicity here should not be confused with the broken state of women under dominance; on the contrary, the common struggle of women brings them together to form a shared identity made of multiple voices. As Boulter argues, *FM* "cannot be reduced [...] to a metaphorical representation of women's fragmentation in patriarchy"

(157) and the same can be said for *Memoirs*. Both Lessing and Russ use fragmentation to situate women not *in* but *against* patriarchy by making use of the multiplicity of female voices, which can be read as an empowering technique.

Multiplicity in both novels work on two dimensions: Characterization and space, which complement one another. The first dimension is more related to personal experiences of the authors; therefore, contain more autobiographical elements, while the second makes use of the tropes of speculative fiction, mainly the post-apocalyptic, dystopian setting. *Memoirs*, in which "Lessing blurred the boundary between actual and fictionalized memoir to explore deeply personal experiences" (Rubenstein 187), has two major characters: A nameless narrator who is living alone in an apartment and a girl named Emily Cartright who is given into narrator's care under vague circumstances, left by an "ordinary man" saying the girl is the narrator's "responsibility" (*Memoirs* 17). The events are told by the narrator, who, as the title of the novel suggests, survived the catastrophic events after "the Crisis" and is able to reflect on her life with Emily and Emily's pet, a cat-dog hybrid named Hugo. Both the narrator and Emily are women who are trying to survive in a hostile post-apocalyptic environment by supporting each other; the narrator looks after Emily when she is young and Emily likewise protects the narrator when she is older. The two figures are seen by some critics as fragmented selves of one woman; but the author, Lessing herself, can also be added among the figures that construct that one woman who is in fact multiple. Indeed, in the novel the narrator and Emily are tightly connected; in addition to her own existence, the narrator sees herself as a "continuation, for [Emily], of parents, or a parent, a guardian, foster-parents" (*Memoirs* 27), while Emily is also connected to the narrator who becomes "her refuge" that she cannot leave even when she is grown up. Anderson informs us that "[w]oman's difference [...] requires a different emphasis. It flies in the face of conventional modes of representation, producing a multiplicity which cannot be captured within one and the same the singular 'I' of masculine discourse" (98). This idea is well-represented in *Memoirs* in which the voice of "I" is divided into different selves that reflect another aspect of womanhood. The child-Emily with a violent mother and indifferent father represents the early stages of a woman's life under oppression. Adolescent and adult Emily is painted as a more complex character; she is nurturing and matronly towards her gang, but she is also "heavy, dreaming, erratic" and has survival skills (*Memoirs* 47), which means that she is learning to be independent and active in a post-apocalyptic world. She embodies both the features that are traditionally attributed to women and those that are attributed to men. The narrator is also not a flat character; at first look she may seem passive as she remains inside the house, but she can travel with(in) her consciousness, so she represents the "mind" and also the intuitive side of humans. Although most of their time take place in different environments – Emily begins to go out more when she is older but the narrator always stays at home – they both experience oppression in some way which forms a connection between them; they form a bond through facing chaos together.

The employment of space in *Memoirs* has parallels with multiple identity construction. Lessing chooses to construct the locations rather unconventionally; the name of the city in which the characters live is never mentioned and there is a general vagueness about space and time in the novel, a fact that might disturb the readers of conventional science fiction or speculative fiction. Amid such vagueness, Lessing creates two spaces which at first seem fundamentally different but as the plot progresses revealed to be complementary. The first one is the physical/material space, a dystopian landscape, in which gangs roams the streets, and humanity struggles to adapt to scarcity and disorder. This is the "real" world where the devastating events happen and it is more Emily's world than the narrator's. When Emily grows up, she begins to leave home and socialize with the

gangs and help people, trying to make a "real" change in the world. However, she is never fully separated from the narrator and this becomes especially apparent when Emily decides against leaving the city and fight against wild children alongside the narrator. This behaviour reveals that although they occupy different spaces, the two women still share a sense of solidarity. The second space is a metaphysical/mental space inside the narrator's house; a wall that reflects realistic images only to the narrator. Unlike Emily, the narrator is more introverted; she states that while chaos was taking over the world, her "ordinary life was the foreground", and that she was living "somewhere else", an inner world of hers which is materialized as an occasionally see-through wall. When the narrator begins to "see" beyond that wall – a meditative phenomenon she calls "'personal' experience" (*Memoirs* 38) – she observes "a small girl of about four" whose name is revealed to be Emily (39-40). When the narrator looks at the wall which reflects a different time than the present, or an alternate world, she is also looking at her own mind and memories. Therefore, what she sees beyond the wall can be interpreted as Emily's childhood that she is able to observe, which means that it can also be her own childhood as she sees it in a "personal experience." This interpretation is also affirmed by Lessing who explains that "what the narrator believes that she is seeing behind the wall, that apparent dream world, actually represents her own life, her own childhood" ("Observing" 148). Moreover, it also represents Lessing's own life and childhood as "the narrator witnesses scenes that include an unloved, neglected child—a composite of Lessing herself as the daughter who keenly felt the absence of her mother's love" (Rubenstein 187) and the naming of Emily (whose second name s Mary) is a conscious choice as the name of Lessing's own mother was Emily Maude. Rubenstein explains that Lessing's "mother died when she was three years old" but she knew that her mother's "early life was shaped by a similar experience of maternal absence and emotional neediness" (187). Lessing thus brings together autobiographical elements with the spatial tropes of speculative fiction in order to reconcile these separate female selves which also represent parts of her own identity.

The parallels between characterization and space also work together to create an escape from conventions for women, both in a literary and a political sense. The space experienced by the narrator beyond the wall presents an alternative to the oppressive reality which is "in a state of escalating social collapse" (Rubenstein 187). In fact, there are two kinds of visions she has in that space; the first one is autobiographical as the narrator witnesses her own past (as Lessing confirms). These dismal visions are personal scenes that depict a problematic, oppressive, patriarchal family life which remained in the past but still haunts her. In order to escape it, and also to escape the harsh reality of outside, she must focus on the other alternative in the wall which presents a better picture. She comments on that second realm that "it was always a liberation to step away from my 'real' life into this other place, so full of possibilities, or alternatives" (*Memoirs* 57). DuPlessis argues that these scenes "which prepare for or intimate the future are the very opposite of garish and heavy. First, there is a sense of anticipation tempered with the incessant, sometimes oppressive work of cleaning and preparing. The narrator must paint the rooms an eggshell white, as if she were preparing her own birth" (5). This implies two things: The personal space is a "female" space which is ready to give birth to a new self after going through constructive struggles, but it is also a transformative space that includes utopian hope for the narrator, Emily, and Lessing altogether. None of these selves can exist in isolation because individually they do not represent the full personality of a woman. But in the end they come together through reconciliation as both the narrator and Emily pass through the wall (*Memoirs* 181). Although "there is no picture of what happens beyond the wall, after the ritualized conversion" of the narrator and Emily, the future is hopeful for them because there is a "transformation against a backdrop of disaster" (DuPlessis 5). The reality beyond the wall is definitely a new "extensive" space

"with no boundaries or end that [the narrator] could find" (*Memoirs* 87). It is a free space which forms a contrast with the restrictive, dark, dystopian space of the narrator's "ordinary" life. The narrator's life does not flow linearly or progressively, but it is made first of conflict and then of solidarity between different selves that represent a woman's coming to terms with her identity and finding her own voice: "[T]he one person I had been looking for all this time was there", says the narrator after passing through the wall (*Memoirs* 182). Beyond the wall is the utopian hope and figure of a woman which represents the unique voice that is finally achieved.

In *FM* there are likewise multiple main figures that can be interpreted as parts of a self but also as a multiplicity of selves that first contest and then come to terms with each other. As Sally Robinson mentions, in traditional novels, "[p]lot usually *centers* on a protagonist with whom we can identify, or at least through whom we can understand the story", but in *FM* "we have no unified personage, no traditional sense of character which is so central to the realist text [...] Each of the four J's intersects with the others: they share desires, experiences, possibilities, and even 'identities'" (116) (emphasis original). As in *Memoirs*, here each character represents a different aspect of one woman: Jeannine lives in an alternate 1969 in which the Depression never ended and World War II never happened. She is a woman whose personality and needs are shaped by patriarchy and whose aim is to get married. She is extremely dependent on men and has internalized female roles, as she says "I wouldn't give up Cal for anything. I enjoy being a girl, don't you? I wouldn't be a man for anything" (*FM* 86). Therefore, Jeannine represents the stereotypical 60s wife who is devoted to being a housewife. Joanna, the one who shares the author's name, lives in the author's reality in 1969 and is also a product of male dominated culture, but instead of adopting the female role she tries to enter the male domain and therefore internalizes male norms in a different way than Jeannine. She "vies for independence and becomes a man" (Silbergleid 163), because only men are allowed to be independent in her society. As her name suggests, Joanna is probably the most accurate representation of "Joanna" Russ. Another fragmented self is Janet Evason who comes from a planet called Whileaway, which is a kind of feminist utopia. Janet is the "projection of female power" (DuPlessis 6) as she grew up in a completely female culture that is not based on gender binaries. There is yet another fragment, Jael, who is a time-traveller assassin from a dystopian future in which there is a war between the sexes. Jael is also the representation of female power but in a more physical way than the others as she takes part in an actual war against men. Her character is in a way the materialization of anger within women which is suppressed by patriarchy. Besides these different personalities, what contributes to "polyvalence of character" is "[a] continual fluctuation in narrative voice [...] the 'I' of articulation is constantly changing, often unidentified in a deliberate refusal to be named or pinned down" (Robinson 117). Therefore, it can be said that *FM* also challenges the conventional techniques in autobiography and fiction which try to establish the fact that "each individual possesses a unified, unique selfhood" (Anderson 5). It foregrounds instead the multiplicity of little narratives which together resist masculine metanarratives.

The time and space occupied by each woman in *FM* complement their characterization. As such, in addition to making use of her own experiences to create multiple selves, Russ also borrows spatial tropes from speculative fiction in order to explore the constructive aspect of multiplicity. As Boulter suggests, especially during the 1970s "[t]he alternative visions of SF enabled writers to explore feminist futures, to reinterpret dominant histories and to allegorize the contemporary World" (154). In *FM*, which is usually read as a postmodern text, there are four different alternative spaces in which different identities of women are explored. Here the alternate realities seem more confusing but they have the same function as they do in *Memoirs*; to present different alternatives to the reality in which the author lives and also to explore different forms of female

self. Gudmundsdóttir states that in postmodern autobiographical texts, "there are retrospective possibilities, alternative lives and therefore alternative texts, an acknowledgment that this is not the only way the life could have been written, that there are other probably just as valid alternatives" (273). Accordingly, as a text that combines postmodern autobiography with speculative fiction, *FM* includes more than one alternative space: Whileaway, in which there are only women, and Jael's reality, in which there is a war between men and women. As in *Memoirs*, one of these alternatives is a negative and the other is a positive one. Jael explains that in her world "[t]here was increasing separatism, increasing irritability, increasing radicalism; then came the Polarization; then came the Split" (*FM* 252). Although Jael is a strong woman that can fight against male oppression, this alternate reality is not a good picture of the future of humanity and the one that should be avoided, because men still dominate women and force people into gender roles in their realm. However, the other alternative, Whileaway, is a place that "enables Russ to build a gender-free world from the ground up and imagine what a citizenship not premised on sexual difference might look like" (Silbergleid 162). Therefore, it is a free space like the positive alternate vision of the narrator in *Memoirs*; it is vast and full of possibilities for women. In fact, there are critics who read it as a mental place rather than a physical one. DuPlessis, for instance, argues that Whileaway "is not a future place nor a future time, but is, instead, a mental place in the present [...] it is the place where women are human. So Whileaway is a place which women enter in their own consciousness. It is a new understanding, a new ordering of priorities, assumptions, and patterns of thought" (6). In this sense, it resembles the "personal" space that the nameless narrator enters in *Memoirs*. Kathleen Spencer also states that "by its very existence, Whileaway provides a kind of imaginative rescue not only for its own inhabitants, but also for all (female) readers of the novel and even, according to the text, the author herself" (Spencer 173). As an alternative realm, Whileaway represents the empowering space – whether material or mental – in which both the characters and the author can shape their identity and make their voice heard.

As readers begin to grasp the alternate realities and persons in *FM*, they see that although these characters are from different realities or timelines, they are in fact the parts of one woman. As Rachel DuPlessis suggests, "[o]ne way or another, sooner or later, the reader discovers that these four women are either alternate selves in one person or, as types of the genus Woman, alternative strategies for dealing with the same kind of social givens: female nondominance in a patriarchy" (6). Therefore, it can be argued that the fragmentation in *FM* serves the empowerment of women by foregrounding the idea of solidarity as well as multiplicity. "The group protagonist," argues DuPlessis, "presents a collective self, rather than individual selves, and therefore proposes the values which go with collectivity, especially unity of social purpose" (2). This collective self does not mean the end of individuality for women, but it is "about the importance of interdependence and recognition of the need for collective survival" (2). Therefore, besides reflecting different aspects of womanhood, the multiple characterization also serves to underline the importance of solidarity between women. Boulter contends that "[t]he four Js might also be seen to approximate different ideologies in and about feminism in the United States in the 1970s: Janet is a lesbian separatist; Jeannine is a pre-feminist woman; Joanna is raising her consciousness; and Jael is a feminist-terrorist" (156). Again, as in *Memoirs*, these separate selves represent the author's own identity and struggles against social norms and rules in a period of strict patriarchal dominance. Instead of writing a pure autobiographical text, however, Russ makes use of speculative fiction to reflect multiple identities that, considered alone, are not useful in fighting against patriarchal oppression, but when they are combined they become powerful. She also uses fiction to form a connection between her past (younger) and future (experienced) selves "as the older woman in some kind of time-loop goes back to help her younger self

rebel against or survive patriarchal restrictions" (Spencer 168). The characters that are born out of Russ's life (and probably the lives of other women in that period) represent different aspects that must come together, help each other, and merge to form a strong female voice. Towards the end of *FM* these four characters indeed come together through the technology used by Jael, who succeeds in finding her "other selves" (*FM* 246). They turn into one voice that cannot be dominated or threatened by masculinity: "I, Janet; I also watched them go, I, Joanna; moreover I went off to show Jael the city, I Jeannine, I Jael, I myself [...] Remember: we will all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we will all be free" (*FM* 319).

As they shape their plots, both Lessing and Russ reject the traditional masculine narratives of the myth of male-self as a coherent whole in autobiographies and fiction, such as the journeys or quests of successful, solitary figures as seen in Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Benjamin Franklin's autobiographies and in most of the realist novels written by men. In opposition to such narratives, *Memoirs* and *FM* present alternative, multiple voices and spaces that "disrupt conventional narrative patterns and expectations in ways that leave [the texts] free to explore what might be called a 'feminine' space" (Robinson 106). Instead of creating solitary heroines, these novels incorporate multiple voices of women and this fragmentation works to establish ultimate self-realization which makes women stronger individually.

Lessing and Russ wrote during a time when women started to find voices of their own with rising feminist activism, nourished by solidarity. Their shared experiences and interaction allowed them to free themselves from male gaze and language. Although they lived in different continents, both Lessing and Russ chose to narrate their experiences and share their ideas in similar ways, which means that literature, and particularly speculative fiction in this case, is a powerful medium for reflecting personal as well as political struggles. The fact that these authors combine autobiography (their own experiences as women) and speculative fiction (possible alternatives for women) shows that speculative fiction is not a kind of escape literature that is detached from reality and historicity; on the contrary, it can be deeply political and historical. Nevertheless, it also provides a space in which the authors can wilfully alienate themselves from reality and discuss different possibilities. As Marleen Barr argues, feminist speculative fiction writers can "let go of current reality and penetrate barriers that inhibit creating new reality. As inhabiters of this alternative reality, like Emily's transmuted self, women can move beyond their present selves and become splendid, dignified selves. Feminists can theorize about dissolving walls that imprison women within a sexist reality" (146). There is not a clear line that divides the reality of the author and the world she imagines or creates, and this dialogue between reality and fiction is what makes *FM* and *Memoirs* powerful feminist texts that both reflect real political struggle and theorize about how to transform the sexist reality. In the words of Russ, "[b]ooks are not blueprints. They are experiences. The worlds in *The Female Man* are not futures. They are here and now writ large" ("Reflections" 247). Both the worlds in *FM* and *Memoirs* reflect the concerns of women of their time and show ways to confront them both collectively and individually. However, the worlds that they painted in the 1970s are still here and now in some parts of the world and these novels can still be the voice of women who are oppressed.

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