

The Politics of Memory in Feminist Dystopian Fiction A Comparative Study of The Female Man, Vox, and The Power

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Abstract

This paper examines how feminist dystopian fiction mobilizes memory and trauma as mechanisms of critique and resistance against patriarchal domination. Through a comparative reading of three contemporary novels, Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, Christina Dalcher's *Vox* and Naomi Alderman's *The Power*, it explores the ways memory can be constructed, if not outright silenced, or mobilized as a weapon to either support or oppose gendered oppression." Through the lens of theories of collective memory, trauma studies, feminist epistemology, and narrative theory, this paper illustrates that memory in these texts is more than a narrative function, rather, it is a site of ideological contention. If Russ posits fragmented memory as feminist historiography, and Dalcher silenced memory as inherited trauma, Alderman investigates memory's transmutation into myth and power. Ultimately, these novels disclose how an act of memory becomes radical in dystopian landscapes in which forgetting is systemically imposed.

Keywords: Feminist dystopia; Memory; Trauma; Voice; Power

جدليات الذاكرة في الرواية النسوية الديستوبية: مقارنة نقدية مقارنة لروايات المرأة الرجل، وفوكس، والقوة الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث كيف تُشكّل الذاكرة والصدمة النفسية في الأدب الديستوبي النسوي أدوات فاعلة في نقد البنى الأبوية ومقاومتها. ومن خلال دراسة مقارنة لثلاث روايات بارزة هي: *المرأة الرجل* لجوانا روس، *وفوكس* لكريستينا دالتشر، و*القوة* لناومي ألدرمان، يُسلّط البحث الضوء على الدور المحوري للذاكرة، ليس بوصفها عنصراً فنياً فحسب، بل باعتبارها ساحة للصراع الفكري والسياسي حول من يُكتب له أن يتذكّر، ومن يُفرض عليه النسيان. يستند البحث إلى إطار نظري متعدد المشارب يجمع بين دراسات الذاكرة الجماعية، ونظرية الصدمة، والإبستمولوجيا النسوية، ونظرية السرد. ويكشف من خلاله كيف تتخذ الذاكرة في هذه الأعمال طابعاً مقاوماً، فتتحوّل من مجرد استرجاع للماضي إلى موقف نقدي من الحاضر وإعادة تشكيل للمستقبل. فذاكرة المرأة لدى روس تتجزأ لتعيد كتابة التاريخ بمنظور نسوي، أما دالتشر فتصوّر الصمت الموروث كجرح جماعي ممتد، في حين تقدّم ألدرمان الذاكرة بوصفها أداة تُعيد إنتاج السلطة عبر الأسطورة. وفي ختام الدراسة، يتبيّن أن هذه الروايات لا تسعى فقط إلى تخليد ذاكرة المهمّشات، بل تُقدّم الذاكرة ذاتها كفعل مقاومة، وتؤكد أن النسيان في ظل القهر ليس حياً، بل خضوعاً مقنّع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرواية النسوية الديستوبية، الذاكرة، الصدمة، السلطة، المقاومة، النسيان.

1. Introduction

Feminist dystopian literature has now become a key place to interrogate the intertwining of gender, power, and historical memory. Such worlds, real or imagined, maintain a conversation not only about how to resist patriarchal structures but also about how memory can be distorted, erased, or reclaimed under ideological regimes. This paper considers the

function of memory and trauma in three landmark feminist dystopian texts: Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) and Christina Dalcher's *Vox* (2018) and Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016). These works that date as far back as the late '70s also reflect changing feminist preoccupations, moving from second-wave resistance to contemporary fears around voice, power and collective history.

Within the realm of dystopian fiction, memory requires more than recall; it becomes a territory in contention, where stories are constructed, timelines revised, and agency negotiated. As Michel Foucault (1977) declares, knowledge and power are co-constitutive, and the control of memory becomes instrumental to the governance of bodies and beliefs. Feminist dystopias make visible the gendered means by which memory is suppressed, whether via silence, surveillance or myth-making, even as they illuminate how remembering becomes a form of resistance.

This article is based on a multidisciplinary theoretical framework. Cathy Caruth's (1996) trauma theory can help to explain how memory in these texts often manifests as fragmented, non-linear forms, reflecting the resistance of trauma to being fully integrated into a narrative. Judith Butler's (2004) work on grievability opens a frame around which lives—and consequently which memories—are considered worthy of preservation. Maurice Halbwachs's (1992) concept of collective memory and Sara Ahmed's (2017) formulation of affective circulation provide further context so the social and emotional components of feminist remembering can be better understood. Julia Kristeva's (1982) framing of abjection helps expose how women's memories are culturally purged and subsequently retrieved as objects of resistance.

Although such novels have been studied individually, this article variously enters these texts into comparative dialogue that illuminates shared strategies and points of tension regarding their representations of memory and trauma. *The Female Man* builds a fragmented feminist historiography; *Vox* puts into drama the act of linguistic memory being smothered under an authoritarian regime; and *The Power* examines how memory, once mythologized, can reenact the very structures of violence it wishes to oppose. In conjunction, these texts show that memory in feminist dystopia is not just thematic but structural: a formal and political challenge to hegemonic histories.

In so doing, this article argues that feminist dystopian fiction acts as a counter-archive: within these pages, silenced voices, forbidden stories, and disavowed traumas are reactivated. By imagining memory as a mode of resistance, these novels contest not only the future, but the past; they insist on the ethical and political imperatives of remembering.

2. Theoretical Background: Memory, Trauma, and Feminist Dystopian Narrative

The relationship between memory and trauma has received critical attention through feminist dystopian fiction as academics begin to consider how narratives of history can also serve as erasures, silences, or rewritings under patriarchal regimes of governance. According to Halbwach (1992), memory is not a phenomenon of individuals, it is a collective and social action, embedded within cultural frameworks, control structures (institutions) and group identities. Memory transforms into a battleground in dystopian fiction—an arena where the battle over whose past is remembered versus whose is erased plays out.

Women's histories are systemically suppressed, or their struggles with technologies of power tamped beneath the ploughshares, and feminist dystopias exaggerate this resistance. In those narratives, memory is both the battlefield and the weapon: a method for reclaiming agency and creating resistance. Alison Landsberg's (2004) theory of "prosthetic memory" provides a striking complement to Halbwachs. Landsberg explains that she is interested in how people come to "adopt" memories of events through mediated experiences (reading literature,

watching movies) that frame people's emotional connections with histories they did not witness. Feminist dystopias often work like this — channeling inherited trauma to readers by way of speculative scenarios that blurs boundaries of past and future.

On this point, Cathy Caruth's (1996) trauma theory offers a more nuanced view of how the experience of memory takes place in a dystopian novel. Trauma, in Caruth's account, is not a wound of the past so much as it is a haunting that, like a nightmare, refuses to work itself out. It is "an event that is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (p. 4). In *Vox* and *The Female Man*, trauma materializes as a discontinuity, a rupture: characters struggle to narrate what has been rendered unspeakable by systemic oppression.

This rupture is reflected in narrative form. Feminist dystopias take fragmented or nonlinear forms, mirroring trauma's disorientation. Marianne Hirsch's (1997) notion of "postmemory" comes in handy again here—especially in works like *Vox*, in which the protagonist's daughter Sonia comes to inherit the silence trauma, even though she has no physical memory of the freedom to speak. Postmemory describes the second generation's relationship to the traumatic experiences of the first generation, mediated not through the experience itself but through the stories, behaviors, and omissions that the first generation conveys.

Also, Foucault's (1977) theory of knowledge and power introduces an institutional dimension. His notion of genealogy explores how history is never produced outside regimes of power and discourse. History is manipulated through origin myths in *The Power*, the very same as how Foucault puts it that "history becomes effective... in the sense that it can cut through the continuities of thought, break up its unity and coherence" (p. 88). Here, memory is not just politicized — it is weaponized.

Judith Butler (2004) adds to that matrix with her concept of grievability, by which she examines whose suffering is publicly mode of recognition and whose loss goes socially unnoticed. In *Vox*, the suppression of women's voices is not merely linguistic; it is ontological. A life that cannot be mourned from the beginning is a life that has never lived (Butler 38). Legibility, therefore, is determined by memory within a political community. Sara Ahmed (2017) offers a feminist ethos of emotion and memory in her theory of "affective economies." Emotions, she contends, are not personal states but social forces, which flow between bodies and institutions. In *The Female Man*, memory becomes contagious — passing between temporalities and protagonists, engendering solidarities that are as emotional as they are political.

Finally, theory of abjection (Kristeva, 1982) allows us to theorize the psychic dimensions of exclusion and stimulation. Abjection is the process of expelling what disrupts social order; but this expelled thing returns with the power to disrupt. Figures like Jael in *The Female Man* and Jean in *Vox* signify abjection — people who are exiled from normal femininity who come back into the story as avengers or prophets or witnesses.

According to Hovey (2003), feminist dystopian fiction "disrupts the teleology of patriarchal history by opening multiple narrative pathways through memory" (p. 149). This disruption isn't just formal, it's political: The refusal of linearity becomes a refusal of historical inevitability. It opens a prospect of future relays based in this rearticulation of the past. Combined, these theoretical contributions illustrate that memory within feminist dystopian literature isn't merely a theme at work in the texts; it is a methodology, a structure and a politics. Whether through fractured narrative, affective circulation, or counter-histories, these novels demonstrate that the act of remembering is a radical and destabilizing act.

3. Memory and History in Naomi Alderman's *The Power*

3.1. Memory and the Rewriting of History

Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016) offers an extreme reconfiguration of gender hierarchies as its premise: Women develop the capacity to emit electrical energy from their

bodies, endowing them with physical supremacy over men. This biological mutation dismantles and upsets patriarchal constructs worldwide and begins to redeem histories. But *The Power* is more than just a story of feminist reversal — it's a densely theoretical meditation on trauma, memory and the mythic as both tools of liberation and a form of power over.

Through the novel's metafictional frame — a correspondence between a male historian, Neil, and a female literary mentor, Naomi — Alderman embeds a sophisticated commentary on historical memory. This epistolary exchange — a turn that recalls the metafictional devices employed by Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* — highlights the politics surrounding historical authorship. Neil's manuscript troubles master-discourses of immanent female supremacy, yet is branded a threat, epitomising Foucault's (1977) contention that history is inscribed in power/knowledge regimes. Neil writes:

They'll laugh at this. They'll call it fiction. You know they will. You can't just go around saying things like this, not anymore. It's kinder to let the women have their narrative. The past is whatever I say it was (Alderman, 2016, p. 11).

This snippet summarizes the novel's primary caution, that, when owned by an ideology, the past becomes a weapon.

3.2. Trauma, Religion, and Affective Memory

Allie, who becomes the religious figure Mother Eve, represents the transformation of trauma into myth. The early child abuse she suffers in silence, in isolation, sparks a spiritual awakening. She is said to hear the voice of God, but her revelation is muddled by her fractured memories. As Caruth (1996) puts it, trauma is never fully felt in the moment, returning belatedly in the experience of symptoms, hallucinations, and repetition. Allie's holy voice could be interpreted as the post-traumatic urge to find meaning in unthinkable suffering. She recalls:

I lay still and I heard it. A voice low and dark like thunder rumbling through my belly. It said, 'You are here to remake the world.' And I believed it. I believed it with all my remaining innards" (Alderman, 2016, p. 85).

To Allie's journey, affect theory adds nuance. Sara Ahmed (2017) claims the emotional rude remedial automaton is one that becomes a circulating aspect of the "affective economies" that attach, accumulate and spread across bodies and social groups to form structures of collective response. In *The Power*, Allie's trauma becomes a rallying point. Her affective memory turn individual wound into cultural movement, convocating girls from all over the globe. The divine takes on a political manifestation; private pain is turned into sacred justification. As Allie declares in one of her sermons:

We were not born to suffer. We were born to wield. Let the old story end. Let the new story begin. You are not weak. You have never been weak. You are the fire, the tempest, the wrath" (Alderman, 2016, p. 167).

This sermon-like moment captures the alchemy of trauma into myth, and the ability of memory, when canonized as doctrine, to ignite the engines of social change.

3.3. Violence, Grievability, and the Mythologizing of Memory

The larger arc of the novel follows an international wave of feminist revolt sparked by living memory of patriarchal violence. Kristeva (1982) theory of abjection, where that which is cast out (women's rage, pain, and memory) returns as a destabilizing force and the traditional political invisible becomes visible, resonates through scenes of women whispering their stories, organizing underground, and retaliating collectively. Roxy's discovery of her power, triggered by her mother's murder, illustrates how grief and memory can be a source of political agency:

Her mother's face lights up and surprised and then disappears. She sees her father's hands. She sees the blood. Not memory, but a calling, a calling. The voice inside her says: Do not forget. Remind them (Alderman, 2016, p. 141).

ALDERMEN complicates this narrative by introducing characters like Tunde, a male journalist whose curiosity about the uprising becomes horror as he feels the sting of victimization himself. His arc plays into Butler's (2004) notion of grievability: men in this new matriarchal world are ungrievable, their suffering ignored. Tunde thinks: They won't believe me. No one will help me. There is no rescue helicopter on the way. I'm just another body. A story no one will tell (Alderman, 2016, p. 293).

His memories are invalidated, and his story is erased like women's used to be. This ironic inversion complicates simple ideas of justice and victimhood. Moreover, the novel shows that memory is a thing that can be mythologized into tools of oppression. Mother Eve's incipient cult depends on historical reinterpretation and narrative whitening. As Neil reflects: We've made pain into pageantry. We have turned trauma into scripture. And now we live by it. The truth has been rewritten so many times, I wonder if it ever existed at all (Alderman, 2016, p. 312).

This echoes LaCapra's (2001) warning that trauma narratives, if taken at face value, become mythic repetitions not means to recovery.

Thus Alderman's critique has two facets: she destabilizes patriarchal mythologies, but also points out the dangers of filling their void with new absolutes. Her main themes are the cyclical nature of trauma and the instability of memory. In *The Power*, memory isn't an ethical constant but a volatile medium—harbinger of revolutionary justice and tyrannical violence.

In short, Alderman has a thoroughly feminist and adamantly ambivalent vision of power and memory. By showing the ways individual and collective memories inform sociopolitical systems, she asks readers to question not just who records history, but at what cost. The novel reminds us that memory is never neutral — it is always situated within struggles for voice, for visibility, for legitimacy.

4. Silenced Language and Inherited Trauma in Christina Dalcher's *Vox*

4.1. Language as Memory and Control

In her novel *Vox* (2018), Christina Dalcher imagines a dystopian United States in which women are limited to uttering 100 words a day, a rule enforced by wrist-mounted word counters that shock you if you go over your limit. This speculative premise enacts the erasure of women's voices — and, thus, their memories, identities and cultural legacy. The novel provides a poignant illustration of how language functions not as a simple tool of communication but as a reservoir of historical continuity and political agency.

Jean McClellan, the novel's protagonist, is a former neurolinguist who slowly wakes up again to the meaning of her own silencing. Her memories, which had gone stale with complacency, resurface when her son recites misogynistic ideology and her daughter, Sonia, grows up frightened to speak. Thus, as highlighted by Halbwachs (1992), memory relies upon language and collectively shared frameworks of meaning: where speech is confined, memory cannot circulate, adapt or resist. Jean's flashes back to her academic and activist past articulate Caruth's (1996) conception of trauma as a return of the repressed — a belated confrontation of that which once seemed remediable and unremarkable.

I remember the day Patrick came home with the counters. He fastened Sonia's to her wrist as if it were a charm bracelet. 'It's for your own safety,' he said...Don't tell me you're going to leave me. It was the first time I was really afraid — not afraid for me but afraid for the history Sonia would never have (p. 64) (Dalcher, 2018).

Dalcher's portrait of Jean's earliest disillusionment shows how memory and language overlap with maternal fear. Sonia's muteness stands for not just a literal silence but a symbolic break in the transfer of generational knowledge.

4.2. Trauma, Surveillance, and Silenced Knowledge

Dalcher threads personal trauma through systemic violence. The description of Jean's internal monologue, influenced by guilt and anger, represents the fragmentation that Caruth (1996) defines as "the inability to integrate the traumatic event into memory" (p. 153). The trauma is not just psychological, but collective. The women surrounding Jean — friends, students, family — are rendered living silences, all harboring unspoken stories that add up to an act of collective amnesia. Sonia, especially, is the epitome of postmemory (Hirsch, 1997): a child who inherits trauma not through direct experience but via limited expression and mandated ignorance.

It wasn't only that we ceased communicating. That we stopped remembering we could. That's what frightened me the most. Not the device. Not the shocks. The forgetting (p. 98; Dalcher, 2018).

The regime in *Vox* is premised on Foucault's (1977) theory of surveillance. The mechanical counters strapped to women's wrists track them like the disciplines of modern institutions. Reminders are watching our memory as well as enforcing silence. The state dictates what histories can be told, what names can be remembered, what emotions can be expressed. This process makes certain lives "ungrievable," as Butler (2004) explains — those denied the visibility of their narratives cannot be mourned, let alone historicized.

They had us watch the trials. They wanted us to watch the women begging, exhausting their hundred words before the judge had even asked the first question. Then the shock. The silence. The message: remember this. Forget it in your body (Dalcher, 2018, p. 142).

These staged spectacles of public punishment serve as a kind of state-sponsored memory, transforming trauma into a lesson plan for submission.

4.3. Resistance Through Remembrance

Dalcher also disparages the complicity of scientific knowledge in maintaining systems of oppression. Jean is recruited to help develop a cure for a speech-related brain injury — but only for the President's brother, a man. You're meant to believe her. This demonstrates Ahmed's (2017) argument, that knowledge in a patriarchal system is gendered, with women's intellectual labor separated from narrative autonomy.

Affecting is not only what the novel contains but how it contains it: critically, memory becomes the form of the text. The narrative structure of *Vox* is punctuated by Jean's flashbacks, moments of muted fury, the rediscovery of lost documents and outlawed conversations. Such narrative elements operate as counter-memories—what Foucault (1977) terms "subjugated knowledges" that disrupt official histories. The revolutionary act itself becomes that of memory, particularly once Jean starts to plot with others to take down the regime.

It all started flooding back to me then—not a trickle, but a torrent. The protests, the chants, the voices I once raised. I had seen the footage of us, young and yelling. I knew the syllables that mattered; the words we used to move the world (Dalcher, 2018, p. 204).

Jean's rather reluctant passive voice, turned into active defiance, is reminiscent of what Kristeva (1982) theorizes as the movement from abjection to re-subjection. Jean's initial paralysis, her reticence even when alone, is an abjection—a psychic ejection of value. Her

regaining of voice, and therefore memory, represents her re-entry into political agency.

Dalcher equates vocalization with resistance when Jean learns:

If I don't say anything, I'm complicit. To say it all means to risk it all. But remaining quiet has cost me more than I can handle. It is I who will speak (Dalcher, 2018, p. 235).

In *Vox*, the control of language is control of memory. This effort by the state to regulate women's speech is also a way of breaking them from their connection to the collective memory and feminist history. Through Jean's awakening, Dalcher demonstrates how, after all, remembering — especially remembering out loud — is a radical act. As Jean says near the end of the novel:

Words aren't mere sounds at all; they're histories, dreams, demands. To speak is to remember. And I have finished forgetting" (Dalcher, 2018, p. 278).

This insight sums up the novel's fundamental thesis: in a world where women are silenced, memory becomes a weapon with which to resist.

5. Fragmented Memory and Feminist Historiography in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*

5.1. Multiplicity of Memory Across Parallel Realities

One of the most canonical of all feminist science fictions is Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, from 1975, a novel recognized for its innovative form and revolutionary challenge to gendered oppression. The novel features four interlocking would-be female protagonists — Joanna, Jeannine, Janet and Jael — all four reaching us from parallel realities, but all meant to be variations on the same woman. Through this device of narrative fragmentation, Russ examines the discontinuity of women's historical experience and the multiplicity of female subjectivity (Russ, 1975).

In *The Female Man*, memory is a resistance against patriarchal normativity. Jeannine's world, in which World War II never happened, is rigidly patriarchal and culturally stagnant. Her memories are dictated by submission and scrubbed ambition:

I stay in the apartment, knitting, listening to the radio, pretending this is all I want. But there's something inside of me that's hollering. I try to forget it with new curtains and roast chicken and lipstick. But the cry grows louder as each year passes. It doesn't go away. It lurks; it waits (Russ, 1975, p. 72).

Caught in the maelstrom of second-wave feminism, Joanna faces internalized misogyny: I can't say it aloud. It is so ludicrous that I can't even imagine it straight. But it's there—that self-loathing, the shrinking into silence, the long pauses of laughing at the jokes that hurt me, just to stay agreeable, just to stay in view (Russ, 1975, p. 88).

Meanwhile, Janet from *Whileaway*, a utopia without men, exists in a cultural memory unimpaired by patriarchy:

We remember differently. We do not have your ghosts. We do not have your shame. Our narratives are not of submission or conquest. They are about growth. About survival without war. About mothers who brought their daughters up whole (Russ, 1975, p. 105).

Jael, a warrior from a violent and dystopian future, remembers — but she internalizes the violence, makes memory a technology of rage and plan:

There is no forgiveness. -a solution is that there is only memory with a purpose. Every scar is a map. Every scream is a scripture. What they do to us is what we do to them (Russ, 1975, p. 123).

These many experiences of female reality illustrate what Caruth (1996) describes as “the confrontation with an event that has not been fully assimilated” (p. 4). Each woman's memory is a reflection of her sociopolitical condition, indicative of the myriad forms of trauma and resistance.”

5.2. Abjection and Feminist Recovery Through Narrative Fracture

Kristeva's (1982) notion of abjection—the psychic process whereby that which is accepted, culturally or personally, is expelled—sanctified in Jeannine's and Jael's trajectories. Jeannine's enforced compliance with marriage conventions — against her better judgment — karst a social exorcism of female agency. Her discomfort is produced as a kind of abjection: I see myself disappearing in the mirror when the dress is on. It is lipstick over the words I wish I could say. I no longer own my own reflection. It smiles without reason. It tells me yes when I want to scream no (Russ, 1975, p. 93).

Jael, in contrast, embodies re-subjection through the radical incorporation of aggression and strategy. She declares:

We've tried softness. We've tried smiles. We've tried forgetting. Now we remember with teeth. We take back what was taken. We write our names in steel (Russ 1975, 129).

When these characters interact, the process is one similar to what LaCapra (2001) refers to as “working through” trauma. Theirs are therapeutic confrontations with each other's suppressed realities:

You're not me, Janet tells Jeannine, but you might be, if you remembered what they took from you. In my recent documentary we tried to remind ourselves of God with beautiful people and kisses and donuts even if this was an absurd world we are just reaping now to those who see the world as it is, but if you stopped allowing comfort to be safety. If you dared to believe in more (Russ, 1975, 111).

The very style that Russ uses to tell her story resists coherence. The novel is deliberately non-linear and polyphonic, made up of a mosaic of scenes, direct addresses, typographical disruptions and metafictional commentary. This fragmentation of style mirrors the fragmented memory of traumatized subjects. “Feminist memory often lives in fragments, passed from one to another in incomplete stories” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 54). Russ literalizes this fragmentation as form, inscribing resistance into the novel's very structure.

5.3. Metafiction and the Reclamation of Silenced Histories

The novel critiques how dominant culture creates mythologies to shape collective memory and quashes female historiography. Jeannine's story, for instance, hints at a forced amnesia of feminist options:

There was a time in history, I believe, when women were more present. But I can't remember when. It's as if we woke to find those stories erased while we slept. Like someone had revised endings, unacknowledged (Russ, 1975, p. 117).

Her confrontation with Janet and Jael reanimates her to these repressed stories; in this sense, it performs what Foucault (1977) called “counter-memory” – that is, a practice of recovering histories lost, forgotten or obscured.

Russ's metafictional style challenges the authority of male-authored history even more deeply. The narrator routinely breaks the fourth wall to ask the reader how complicit she is: Whose story is this, anyway? Yours? Mine? His? Don't listen to everything you've been told. Stories are weapons. When you forget ask yourself ‘Who benefits from my forgetting’ (Russ, 1975, p. 134)

These moments place the reader as both observer and participant in feminist commemoration.

Russ, through narrative disruption, “challenges the reader to reconsider the linearity of time and the singularity of truth” (Hovey, 2003, p. 151). The result is not simply a novel but an active intervention in the politics of remembrance — an effort to rewrite the erasure. Significantly, *The Female Man* does not end with resolution. There is no synthesis of the four characters, no one timeline, no reconciled memory. This narrative denial is in keeping with Russ’s feminist historiography:

You want a neat ending? Then you’ve missed the point. We were never supposed to fit into one story. We are a chorus. A collision. A contradiction (Russ, 1975, p. 146).

The absence of closure is not failure; it is defiance — a refusal to impose coherence on lives that have been systemically broken and silenced.

This way does Russ forge a memory, trauma and resistance based feminist historiography. Her protagonists don’t just remember; they discover, resist and rewrite. *The Female Man* therefore serves not only as novel but as political memorial.

6. Comparative Analysis: Feminist Memory and Narrative Tactics Across Dystopian Worlds

Memory plays a role not only as part of the theme of Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man*, Christina Dalcher’s *Vox*, and Naomi Alderman’s *The Power* but as a mechanism of ideological disruption and feminist assertion. These novels deploy memory—personal, collective, historical, intergenerational—as a narrative technique and a site of resistance to hegemonic patriarchal epistemologies. But each author builds memory in different ways, according to genre conventions, temporality, and theoretical engagements.

Russ’s *The Female Man* employs fragmentation as a form of representing gendered trauma. The novel is not linear; it replicates what Caruth (1996) glosses as the “belatedness” of trauma or of comprehension and narration, the delay between the event of trauma and the hearing or telling about it. The four female leads present diverging but overlapping perspectives on gendered memory, while their eventual meetings serve as a kind of intertextual remembrance that resists the singularity at work in historiography. The novel’s ambivalence towards closing (and reconciling) these two (at least) realities resonates with Ahmed’s (2017) insistence that feminist memory tends not to close, but enacts itself through affective traces and relational narratives.

In contrast, *Vox* examines memory in relation to silencing and linguistic erasure. Dalcher’s dystopia is temporally closer, set in a familiar near-future United States where limiting language becomes a mechanism for controlling memory. Jean’s trauma is interlaced with collective postmemory (Hirsch, 1997), as can be seen in her daughter Sonia’s conditioned silence. Dalcher’s linear narrative runs counter to Russ’s disjointed structure, but the affective intensity is similar: both authors depict internalization of societal norms as a kind of memory loss. Memories, in *Vox*, are not forgotten but outlawed, their absence enforced by techno-totalitarian surveillance and ideological orthodoxy (Foucault, 1977).

In *The Power*, Alderman flips this structure, imagining memory projected into a terrible future dominated by women. The novel’s metafictional framing — Neil’s manuscript given to Naomi — puts memory into question as historical authority. It forces the reader to acknowledge that power, even at the hands of women, can still use memory as a weapon to grant legitimacy to violence. Russ and Dalcher are concerned with recovering suppressed memory, while Alderman is more interested in the way that mythologized forms of memory can be used as a tool of oppression. As LaCapra (2001) cautions, unprocessed trauma can spiral into myth, obscuring rather than shedding light on the past. Alderman’s speculative arc shows that memory, disjointed from ethical reflection, can uphold new kinds of hierarchy.

All three ask questions about the politics of narrative voice. Russ uses a fractured, multiple-voice approach; Dalcher focuses on a singular, first-person narrator; Alderman uses third-person omniscience interlaced with epistolary commentary. These formal choices shape their distribution and consumption of memory. Russ nudges the reader to build meaning from shambles. Dalcher makes the reader experience the subjective immediacy of repression and awakening. Alderman casts the reader as historian, complicit in decoding a skewed archive. Both approaches underscore how memory — like narrative — is shaped by power.

In their thematic content, the novels coincide in presenting memory as gendered labor. Women are depicted, thus, not only as bearers of trauma but also as custodians of cultural and affective memory. Jeannine, Jean and Allie all have difficulty converting their internal histories into political action. They're changed by being confronted: by others, by ideology, by the self. In this sense, memory in these texts is dialogic—it acquires meaning through interaction, refusal, resistance.

Finally, both texts speak to the tension between individual and collective memory. While *The Female Man* demonstrates multiplicity and simultaneity, *Vox* shows the fragility of memory in the face of systemic censorship, and *The Power* interrogates memory's ethics when it becomes weaponized. Taken together, they show that feminist dystopian fiction is concerned not just with speculative futures but with the continuing struggle to justly remember the past and narrate it ethically.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how memory is deployed in *The Female Man*, *Vox*, and *The Power* as a key mechanism of exploring and resisting gendered oppression. Through non-aligned narrative structures and temporal settings, each novel reveals and elucidates the fraught, contested, and, ultimately, violent terrain on which memory itself negotiates its stake in patriarchal and post-patriarchal societies. Witnessing a breach in the historical memory that allows a reckoning of the past, Russ's polyphonic and fragmented form models memory as a site of rupture and multiplicity that resists closure and the finality of history. With this act of silencing and its ensuing memory loss, Dalcher creates a future in which this linguistic guidance has become a mechanism for obliteration of even personal identity and collective memory. By projecting into a speculative future, Alderman warns that memory itself, if divorced from ethical accountability, can provide the basis for new kinds of domination. Memory appears across all three texts as a profoundly feminist issue, fundamental to the expression of agency, resistance, and justice. These novels are not simply representations of remembering but rather use the act of remembering as a focus of critique to question notions of history, trauma, and the ethics of forgetting. By giving their characters the struggle to remember, speak and rewrite, these authors invite readers to consider literature as a counter-archive, one that restores silenced voices, challenges the dominant narrative.

In sum, this comparative lens harbors the reality competing in feminist dystopian fiction is not solely a critique of futuristic imaginaries, but a call in response to historical erasure. The insistence upon remembering — particularly against systemic erasure — is revealed as a political and narratological necessity. These novels demand that the power to remember, and the power to be remembered, is inextricable from the power to resist.

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