

Re-writing 'Woman': New Woman Hybridity in Araki Iku's "The Letter" and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "Turned"

Carrie Khou

ABSTRACT: Turn-of-the-century (1890-1920) short fiction in Japan and the United States portrays the New Woman as a figure of hybridization subverting the legitimacy of binary gender codes. This article outlines how Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story "Turned" and Araki Iku's "The Letter" exemplify and interrogate the hybrid nature of the New Woman concept. The concept of hybridity serves to reveal female identity as negotiable and permeable, simultaneously disclosing the New Woman as a transnational figure, which enables a broad set of cultural interpretations.

KEYWORDS: New Woman; hybridity; gender dichotomy; American short fiction; East Asian literature

Woman as a Category / New Woman Hybridity

'Woman' as a social category represents the attempt to establish an ideal, or more precisely, a universal female code of conduct. Finding and claiming the ideal womanliness, the role model signifies a preposterous quest for uniformity, which portrays woman as a static, unchangeable, and more importantly, universally idealized category. This restrictive conception of womanliness is commonly understood despite the fact that gender is a social construct and arbitrary in its nature. The unconscious acquiescence results in the subordination of woman to a specific number of social roles such as the mother and the wife, rendering these preconceived identities irrevocable and barred from negotiation.

Feminist critics strongly revoke this essentialist assumption. Simone de Beauvoir, for instance, vehemently opposed the conclusion that the biological condition determines the social role as a woman. The often-quoted statement that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (267), prominent in *The Second Sex* published in 1946, asserts female identity as a social construct subject to change and negotiation. De Beauvoir's

conclusions constitute the basis of recent readings of becoming. The political philosopher Sonia Kruks, for instance, demonstrates the arbitrariness of female identity concepts by explaining how "'becoming woman' can imply a volitional engagement in the creation of one's gender identity" (Kruks 40). As de Beauvoir, Kruks reads female identity formation as an act of becoming. In addition, Kruks presents this process as an ever-developing re-evaluation of identity markers. The contingency of womanliness and the social functions entailed with these presumptions are revealed as a forum of negotiation in which female identity is a matter of becoming. Thus, identity formation is suggested as a continuous process requiring constant review. Self-perception and social expectations do not necessarily have to exclude each other but are part of a profound process in which traditional perceptions of womanliness are challenged and reread. As a result, identity formation is stressed as a process conducted at the discretion of each individual woman, enabling the development of multifarious identity concepts defying immobility and uniformity.

The act of 'becoming' can also be found in current theories of hybridity represented by Homi K. Bhabha's accounts of cultural hybridity and Fabienne Darling-Wolf's findings on gender hybridity. Both scholars contest the rigid assumption that female identity is inalterable and reveal this assumption as flawed. Bhabha's hypothesis that identity is the outcome of negotiation rendering identity politics a "process of cultural hybridity" ("Interview with Homi Bhabha" 211) and Darling-Wolf's approach, which underlines the capacity of "hybridity [to] unsettle hegemonic constructions of gender" ("Disturbingly Hybrid" 67), argue for the fluidity of female identity.

In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha critically re-assesses the power relations between colonizer and colonized to dissolve the alleged dualism of dominance and subordination between these social groups. Instead, Bhabha reads the interaction between colonizer and colonized as relationships of mutual dependence and impact. He considers this particular struggle for

power as actually being “neither One nor the Other but something else besides, in-between” (Bhabha 313) to point out how the lopsided perception of this particular power struggle is highly constricted and inadequate. Nevertheless, Bhabha’s “colonial subject in his work is remarkably free of gender, race, caste or other distinctions” (Loomba 316) and, thus, requires further revision. Based on Bhabha’s elaborations on the colonial subject, in *Hybrid Identities* Darling-Wolf describes the unbalanced power relations between the mutually-exclusive types of womanliness and the distinction of male and female attributes. As Bhabha, Darling-Wolf aims to deconstruct the legitimacy of dualisms which assign allegedly irreversible power position in society. The critique of dualisms and the arbitrary distributions of power and dominance are shared by Darling-Wolf but are further developed to include the imbalance of power relation between men and women, and the definition of womanliness in particular. The inclusion of gender, as demonstrated by Darling-Wolf, thus allows the applicability of postcolonial theory to contexts other than a retrospective reading of colonial conditions. Thereby, Darling-Wolf demands to read gender categorization against the backdrop of hybridity to unveil gender categorization as being in an ever-evolving process, negating the imposed static character of the concept. On the one hand, she points out that “gender hybridity might serve to destabilize essentializing categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman,’ and consequently challenge patriarchal definitions of what these categories mean” (“Disturbingly Hybrid” 63). On the other hand, she delineates the need to contextualize gender hybridity “in relationship to broader processes of transnational influence, cultural identity formation, and nationalism” (64). Furthermore, hybridity is understood to foster negotiation between given conceptualizations of gender codes, dissolving binary boundaries of “acceptable” and “unacceptable” codes of gender identity. Darling-Wolf portrays the negotiation for meaning, in this case for gender identity and power positions,

beyond national boundaries.¹ Thus, my reading of the short stories “Turned” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and “The Letter” by Araki Iku will apply her hypothesis by emphasizing that the negotiation process is not conducted within the domestic borders of the United States and Japan in isolation but in close interrelation with each other. In addition, my analysis will underline how the definition of gender norms exceeds the domestic border and emphasizes how the concept of the New Woman is not an exclusively American concept but instead represents various culturally specific approaches to questioning given conventions of womanliness. Therefore, this challenge is reciprocal and implies the mobile and pliable character of the New Woman as a transnational concept.

I use the term hybridity as a strategy to revise the notion of the New Woman as a narrative figure and a theme to exemplify the involvement of this particular concept with transnational negotiations of binarisms, especially the binarisms of power and gender identity represented by the True Woman/New Woman, good wife, wise mother/New Woman (*atarashii onna*) or male/female dichotomies. Therefore, the proposal to read New Woman literature in the light of these theories of hybridity are bound to stress how the New Woman as a literary figure represents a profound critique of gender

¹ The fluidity and individuality of womanliness strongly relates to Homi K. Bhabha's ideas on cultural identity as being in a “process of cultural hybridity [which] gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (“Interview with Homi Bhabha” 211). The understanding that culture does not exist in isolation but in interaction with other cultures, discloses culture as a relational, and foremost, hybrid concept. The understanding of culture and the understanding of female identity are complex and multilayered social constructs. Therefore, the concepts of becoming and hybridity depict identity as a highly dynamic and not a static concept, rejecting dichotomy as a determining factor. The rigid framework of binaries is disputed to enable the perception of woman as a fluid and dynamic category.

dichotomies and of the narrative portrayal according to social conventions as seen in the marriage plot.²

New Woman Fiction: Fictionalizing Female Modernity

Modernity encompasses the experience of modernization, meaning changes to the social, political, and economic structures in society.³ The modern experience of change, especially the changes concerning the perception of women's social status, is thematized in short fiction written between 1890-1920 in the United States and during the Meiji period 1868-1912. During this particular era female short fiction writers in Japan and the USA introduced the New Woman as a disruptive figure able to represent and, at the same time, subvert the dichotomy she represents. Angelika Köhler describes the transition of the Woman Question from a socio-political to a literary discussion as originating in "the discrepancy between the conservatism of the Victorian concept of the True Woman and the modernity of the New Woman" (4). I will argue that the short stories pursue a subversive discourse in which the female point of view is central and set in opposition to the established conventions of womanliness, reflecting how the modern debate of gender roles accounts for the fact that "the Modernist shift in style was inseparable from the Modernist

² The marriage plot is defined by "the use of conjugal love as a telos and of the developing heterosexual love relation as major, if not the only major, element in organizing the narrative action" (DuPlessis 200).

³ Heinz Ickstadt distinguishes between the terms modernization, modernity, and modern to stress the different connotations with social changes in general, the individual or collective experience of these changes, and as a literary and artistic practice. "Modernisierung bezeichnet die Prozesse gesellschaftlicher Umstrukturierung im Verlaufe und in der Folge der industriellen und technologischen Revolution seit Ende des 18. und, um ein Vielfaches beschleunigt, in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jh.s. Modernität bezieht sich dagegen auf die individuelle und kollektive Erfahrung der Modernisierung. Jedenfalls konnotiert Modernität ein kulturelles Bewußtsein des Neuen, das aus diesen Umbrüchen entsteht oder mit ihnen verbunden ist: ein Bewußtsein der Erwartung, aber auch der Fremdheit, der Bedrohung und der Krise. Moderne schließlich verweist auf jene literarische und künstlerische Praxis, die sich ganz der Idee des Neuen verschrieben hat oder die im Versuch, das Bewußtsein von Modernität auszudrücken, mit herrschenden Darstellungskonventionen und Kunstvorstellungen radikal bricht oder im Namen des Neuen vergessene Traditionen wiederentdeckt und zu neuen Ausdrucksformen entwickelt." (Ickstadt 218)

shift in value” (Quinones 247). The atmosphere of socio-cultural change is reflected in the narrative set-up of the analyzed short stories. For the most part I found that the stories assigned to the New Woman genre set themselves apart by the strategic presentation of a single perspective, the lack of omniscient narration, an inconclusive plot structure, and the presentation of female identity as dynamic. The aforementioned categories conform with Gerd Bjørhovde’s elaborations on “‘strategies’ of [women writers’] literary rebellion” (171) to portray the New Woman in turn-of-the century fiction:

Being insiders and outsiders at the same time, they were favourably placed for developing such ‘non-authoritarian’ narrative techniques as a multiple or a limited point of view, or methods of characterization which would emphasize a fluid concept of personality or multiple layers of consciousness. (183)

These formal characteristics negate the conventional portrayal of the sentimental female incapable of rational thought in fiction. Instead, these stories present protagonists seeking alternative concepts of identity to demonstrate the dynamics and versatility of womanliness, converting the literary form and content of short fiction. The female point of view serves as the primary lens through which matters are evaluated, underlining the intention to use literature to disclose “hidden areas of women’s subjective experience” (Hanson 4). The themes of marriage, divorce/separation, and adultery as the leading paradigms to distinguish between “appropriate” and “inappropriate” womanliness are dissected for their arbitrary and restrictive character. By using “appropriate” womanliness I refer to the self-sacrificial focus of female identity on marriage, motherhood, and family, whereas the term “inappropriate” womanliness connotes the pursuit of self-assertion through divorce and adultery.⁴

⁴ “The ideal woman according to Victorian standards had been (and still was to a large and influential section of the public) the self-sacrificing woman, a person who had no interests or wishes of her own, but identified herself completely with her family; parents, husband, or children. The New Woman on the other hand was concerned with and/or associated with [...] a search for selfhood, a desire to realize her own potential as

As a result, the short story becomes modified in form and content to demonstrate the genre's function as a literary forum and mouthpiece of the aforementioned New Woman writers. Araki as well as Gilman constitute similar, yet, different contexts of subversion in their short stories. They both denounce marriage as an absurd and delusional convention. Laura Behling describes Gilman's approach as offering "alternatives to the status quo in order to challenge it and, in many cases, to illuminate the absurdity of social mores" (Behling 20). Araki's short story pursues a similar agenda and features "wicked femmes fatales or disobedient daughters" (Bardsley, *Bluestockings of Japan* 22) to question marriage as a social institution. Despite the challenge of conventional marriage, both authors depict the New Woman as distressing the balance between the personal and public agenda of womanliness to denounce these standards of "appropriate" and "inappropriate."

"Turned" (1911) and "The Letter" (1912) feature failed marriages as the central theme. Each story focuses on the individual fate and perspective of one female character stressing her ability to exert female agency in a situation of expected female passivity. Both characters represent unconventional ways of coping with the failure of marriage and, at the same time, this particular process also initiates the crossing of binary boundaries set between opposing conceptions of womanliness. In "Turned" the protagonist Marion Marroner discovers her husband's affair with their maid Gerta and leaves him to start a new life as a working divorcée. With her marriage in crisis the protagonist reconciles New Woman, True Woman, male, and female attributes to form an identity detached from conventionalized marriage in Gilman's story. Marion's post-divorce life is not the fate of the socially-shunned and impoverished divorcée in need of support of a male spouse or relative. Instead, Gilman portrays her protagonist as earning her own living and

a human being on an equal footing with man. [...] And it was the tension between these two contrasting tendencies which seems to have appealed particularly strongly to the writers of the late nineteenth century, representing an apparently inexhaustible source of material for fictional treatment" (Bjørhovde 3).

building a new home for herself, claiming male privileges of financial independence and female responsibilities of domesticity.

The nameless protagonist of “The Letter” secretly pursues an affair with a younger, married man, named Hideo. She consciously chooses the role of the adulteress and claims the male privilege to have an extramarital relationship, reconciling mutually-exclusive attributes of womanliness and manliness. In a private letter to Hideo the protagonist implicitly outlines her liberal notion of adultery by voicing her contempt for her current marriage and, particularly, for her husband. In their own way, each short story introspects the psychological development of the protagonists in their negotiation of their self-image and their detachment from conventional womanliness. This detachment is portrayed as a process of hybridization in which rigidly separated codes of “appropriate” and “inappropriate” womanliness intersect and intermingle.

Marriage Re-Evaluated

The failure of Marion Marroner's marriage follows the familiar plot of the cheating husband and the naïve wife oblivious to her husband's affair. In “Turned” the protagonist is devastated by the realization that her marriage is flawed and based on a delusional concept. The strong physical and emotional reaction of the protagonist triggered by the revelation of her husband's affair underline how dependent her self-image was on her marriage:

She sobbed bitterly, chokingly, despairingly; her shoulders heaved and shook convulsively; her hands were tight clenched; she had forgotten her elaborate dress, the more elaborate bedcover, forgotten her dignity, her self-control, her pride. In her mind was an overwhelming, unbelievable horror, an immeasurable loss, a turbulent, struggling mass of emotion. (Gilman 349)

Marion Marroner is stricken with horror at the unexpected news. Her husband's adultery turns her entire world upside down. Neither can she retain her composure (“She sobbed bitterly, chokingly, despairingly”; 349) nor is she

able to think rationally (“In her mind was an overwhelming, unbelievable horror”; 349). This profound agitation over her husband’s betrayal does not merely reflect the hurt feelings of a loving wife, but instead the described situation unveils how deep her identity and well-being are rooted in her marriage and her social role as a wife. These exceptional circumstances force her to face what is left of her without the construct of an allegedly “happy” marriage. Thus, the critique of marriage is found in the physical and emotional response of the character revealing her as dependent and acquiesced. Whereas Gilman critiques marriage implicitly by having her character realize the absurdity of her faith in marriage, Araki presents a candid protagonist heavily disapproving the marriage she lives in for its restrictive and artificial character:

In this world where so many things are but superficial formalities, none is as bizarre as the relationship between husband and wife. People treat love like a handy tool. A woman who wields that tool skillfully can earn such titles as ‘virtuous lady’ or ‘wise wife.’ [...] I write this so you will understand that in the world we will create, not only must we acknowledge the happiness of lovers, we must as lovers achieve that happiness ourselves.” (Araki 32)

This quote represents the narrator as the voice of the “notorious, outspoken women of Meiji Japan” (Bardsley, “The Essential Woman Writer” 54) defying the expected sentimental nature of women’s writing.⁵ Furthermore, the plot also undermines the positive connotation of marriage as being the primary goal in a woman’s existence. The radical admonition critiques the “married state [...] [as] one of sorrow [and] suggests a subtle protest against the inequitable and outdated marriage system.” (Copeland, *Lost Leaves* 43). The radical impression of the nameless protagonist’s anger over marriage is dampened by the fact that the thoughts she voices are in writing. Thus, “The Letter” she writes is an attempt to have an imaginary dialogue with Hideo.

⁵ The Meiji period was characterized by the “moral imperative” to restrict women’s writing to the sentimental purpose to “lead men to a more favorable appreciation of the female heart.” (Copeland, *Woman Critiqued* 21).

Therefore, the outspokenness needs to be put into perspective. Nevertheless, the critique mentioned at this point is explicit and directed towards a demand for change defending the idea of romantic love. The protagonist demands the right for agency, the agency to shape her relationship according to deep affection felt between herself and a partner of her own liking. Thus, female self-reliance and romantic love are presented as compatible. The inherent bond between these concepts is also reflected in Muta Kazue's historical observation that "[f]or progressive women to be involved in a romantic love relationship with a man of their choice and marry him, instead of being part of a marriage arranged by their family, represented an important aspect of female autonomy" (211).⁶ In both cases, marriage is questioned in its legitimacy as a binding conception of womanliness. On the one hand, in "Turned" the affair of the husband forces the protagonist to re-evaluate the paradigms of her life without marriage. In "The Letter," on the other hand, the endurance of a marriage which is based on expediency rather than personal attachment cause the protagonist to critically assess the significance of (arranged) marriages and her identity formation within the realms of her affair.

The Ambiguity of Adultery

The preceding paragraphs alluded to how adultery plays an ambiguous role in triggering and defining womanliness in both short stories. In the case of "Turned" adultery is condemned as male misdemeanor. Despite the fact that "according to the Meiji Civil Code of 1898 adultery was a crime when committed by a woman" (Lowy 144), the adultery committed in "The Letter" is

⁶ The protagonist addresses the misery of arranged marriages and the social pressures of the family system, or ie system, established with the Meiji Civil Code in 1898. The system considered women as merely serving the nation state and the family, disregarding individual demands. Sacrificial devotion to maintain the family bloodline and the political power of the nation state were key to the female ideal of the good wife and wise mother model established and reinforced under the Civil Code (Lowy 2-3).

portrayed as an act of female liberation and self-assertion.⁷ The ambiguous representations of adultery equally challenge marriage as a social concept pointing at the inability of both protagonists to find fulfillment in conventional marriage. With her steadfast faith in marriage shaken to the core, Marion, then still referred to as Mrs. Marroner, is forced to turn to alternate points of reference for her identity other than her conjugal relationship. She retrieves confidence and strength from her realization of her husband's wrongdoing. It is him that committed "the sin of man against woman" (Gilman 356). It is her husband whose behavior needs to be denounced for its calculating and cold-hearted approach:

He knew. He understood. He could fully foresee and measure the consequence of his act. He appreciated to the full the innocence, the ignorance, the grateful affection, the habitual docility, of which he deliberately took advantage. (Gilman 355)

In contrast to the plot outlined in Gilman's short story, Araki portrays her female protagonist neither as the passive victim nor as the ostracized adulteress. The affair she has is not morally condemned but emphasized as means of escape and liberation.

What I want instead, if indeed I am a human being, is to feel completely enveloped by an earnest and human love. Even if such love were condemned as a terrible crime, I want a life that allows our hearts to mesh as one, regardless of what form it takes, rather than endure one more anguished day of deceit. (Araki 33)

The unfaithfulness portrayed in "Turned" appears as degrading and humiliating for Marion. Araki, by contrast, presents adultery as an urgent solution to the plight of her protagonist. It is urgent in the sense of granting herself relief from the agony to live according to norms that undermine her individual thrive for love and freedom. Thus, adultery is re-defined as a female act to seek self-fulfillment and genuine happiness. Araki changes the

⁷ "Adultery by husbands was condoned, but it was considered a crime for wives and could bring them a two-year prison term. [...] Although women could sue for divorce, divorce itself was frowned on and divorcées returned to their family were considered a source of shame" (Bardsley, *Bluestockings of Japan* 11).

negative connotation of the adulteress from an outcast subject to social shaming to a self-asserted individual claiming the liberty to make decisions beyond the given conventions. In addition, adultery also emphasizes the hybrid status of the narrator. Due to the fact that she does not actively leave her husband or presses for a divorce, the Japanese protagonist lives in both worlds. As a married woman she passively maintains the conventional context she internally despises. She claims the role of the adulteress to challenge conventional marriage from within and in secrecy. As a result, the protagonist's approach to subvert the significance of binary gender codes is manifold. The primary understanding, which ranges between the conventional image of the good wife, wise mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) and the New Woman ideal, is tentatively questioned for its legitimacy and disobeyed. The protagonist becomes aware of the restrictions she is subordinated to and creates a third way which allows her to turn the conceptualizations of the adulteress and marriage to her own benefit. Furthermore, the quote above states a highly romanticized vision of adultery identifying its legitimacy in the intention to immerse oneself in "earnest and human love" (Araki 33). The idealization of adultery is also measured by the protagonist's willingness to become a social outcast facing legal prosecution ("even if such love were condemned as a terrible crime"; Araki 33) expressing the strong urge to revolt against the Meiji ideal of the good wife, wise mother (*ryōsai kenbo*). In conclusion, the concept of adultery is ambiguously described. Marion, forced to realize the flaws of marriage, embraces the situation caused by adultery to start a self-dependent life. The Japanese narrator understands adultery as means of achieving self-dependence. Regardless of the apparent difference in describing adultery, it is stressed that both characters achieve the same goal of female self-assertion through adultery (as an active measure sought or a passive encounter) and transgress boundaries of conventional and unconventional womanliness, male and female codes of conduct.

Contemplating (and Enacting) Divorce / Separation

The discontent with marriage depicted in both short stories results in different consequences. Whereas the Japanese protagonist leads a double life between her conventional marriage, fulfilling the role of the good wife, wise mother ideal, and her illegitimate affair, Marion consciously chooses to separate from her husband⁸ and to take care of their pregnant maid. This conscious choice denotes an act of sisterhood and entails the motivation to have her failed marriage not ruin her and Gerta's prospects in life. Accordingly, she announces the separation to her husband in a plain and unapologetic letter delivered by her lawyer: "I have gone. I will care for Gerta. Goodbye, Marion'" (Gilman 357). Based on this confident decision she embraces the New Woman value of female agency and enters a hybrid stage in which she merges New and True Woman values, blurring the boundaries between male and female responsibilities. Marion "had resumed teaching under one of her old professors" and "lived quietly, and apparently kept borders" (358). She pairs this allegedly male position of the breadwinner with the True Woman values of the caretaker. Marion starts a new family-like household in which she provides for Gerta and her illegitimate child. The domestic context is not rejected but modified by Marion in terms of female solidarity. She claims an ambivalent position by fulfilling duties in the private and public sphere. Marion's transgression of gender boundaries contradicts the traditional fate of the destitute divorcée and social outcast proving "divorce as an instrument for emancipation of women" as William O'Neill argues (211). Thus, her return to her maiden name Wheeling and her single status offer a rereading of conventional values and underlines the hybridity of her character. With the Japanese protagonist matters are less resolved.

⁸ According to Peter G. Filene during the Progressive Era separation or divorce was still perceived as socially unacceptable for American women: "Divorce was too serious, too ominous, because it signified the disintegration not only of a family unit, but also of a moral commitment. In an era when many people still believed a kiss signified engagement and a marriage was forever, divorce meant far more than social disruption and personal distress; it meant vice" (40).

Writing “The Letter” serves to revive the relationship, which the couple put on hold six months ago. The protagonist defies the stereotypical role of the passive woman and takes the initiative to convince Hideo of the rightfulness of their relationship. The process of writing allows the protagonist to mentally escape the distress of her current marriage and emphasizes the claim of male privileges to negotiate and evocate change. Even though it is her resuming the debate, the changes are still moot since the implementation of change is dependent on Hideo’s consent to go along with the narrator’s request.

It has been almost six months, since we’ve parted, hasn’t it? It’s frightening to think that I was able to refrain from writing to you all that time. What a long time it was, and what a test of my endurance! But, Hideo, please think about whether it is best to go on like this, serving only my husband and never writing to you. [...] Hideo. Please send me an answer quickly. You need only write the word ‘Fine,’ along with the date and time. (Araki 32-34)

The protagonist only alludes to a possible separation from her husband, but is very clear about continuing their affair. The emotional bond she feels between her and Hideo is still overpowering her current marriage and determines the decision to hold on to her double life. The decision has formed in her mind, but she is still dependent on Hideo’s consent. The focus of the short story is on the protagonist’s internal struggle with suffocating social conventions. The open ending of the plot leaves the reader in the dark about whether she will ever receive a word from her lover and how their affair will further develop. Paradoxically, the critique of marriage is vocal, yet internal since the protagonist keeps it in the privacy of “The Letter” and the secrecy of her affair with Hideo. The urge to gain independence and liberate herself from social constraints forms in her mind first and could lead to further action as in the case of Marion, who overcame her emotional breakdown and emerged from her dire situation as stronger and self-dependent. The critique of marriage appears to be weaker when compared to the critique conducted in “Turned.” Nevertheless, the critique voiced in “The Letter” is more outspoken and harsh when compared to the little vocal elaborations of Marion. As a result, the actual implementation of radical change as opposed

to the mere contemplation of required change constitutes a major difference between the analyzed short stories. The struggle between conventions and individual desire becomes apparent in both short stories. The emphasis on the shattered faith in convention and the resulting detachment characterizes the approach of "Turned."

The main character in "The Letter" is similarly torn between social convention and her personal expectations but does not actively seek tangible measures to change her situation. Gilman as well as Araki depict the possibility to reread the significance of marriage and adultery. The boundaries set by the bifurcation of marriage and adultery are questioned as the determining paradigm of "inappropriate" and "appropriate" womanliness. Both characters are New Women since they transgress social boundaries meant to keep alleged binary concepts of marriage, adultery, and womanliness apart. The binaries of female versus male, passive versus active, dependent versus independent, adultery as male legitimate deed and criminalized female act are dissolved. Each character mixes and matches categories regardless of their conventional dichotomous alignment. Thus, the plot presents two distinct and unconventional female characters seeking to achieve the common objective of self-determination.

New Woman Hybridity : The Becoming of New Women

"Turned" and "The Letter" showcase the New Woman figure as a complex representation of hybrid identity formation defying gender dichotomies and the confinement of this concept to national boundaries. Both short stories rebut the bifurcation of womanliness and the passive compliance therewith to re-define female identity as permeable and negotiable. The elaborations of Bhabha and Darling-Wolf found expression in the rejection of dualisms which determine positions of inferiority and superiority on account of arbitrary gender codes. The authors' composition of the short stories at hand engaged modifications in content and form. The New Woman not only found expression in the themes debated, meaning the re-evaluation of marriage,

the ambiguity of adultery and the contemplation or the actual enactment of divorce or separation, but also the form was adjusted to the New Woman as a motif of hybridity. The focus on a single perspective of one protagonist adds emphasis to the dire entanglement of women in given conventions and their struggle to change these. The modifications outlined in this article serve to emphasize how Araki Iku and Charlotte Perkins Gilman turn the composition of fiction into an act of hybridization by linking writing to the purpose of challenging literary and gender categories simultaneously. In this way, writing serves to demonstrate the process of hybridization, or the dissolving of rigid boundaries set between “appropriate” and “inappropriate” types of womanliness respectively. The conventionalized notions of marriage, divorce/separation, and adultery are revised in their rigid separation from each other to allow an intermingling of aspects to define womanliness in a new context and to redefine aforementioned codes of “appropriate” and “inappropriate” womanliness. As a result, the notion of the New Woman can be reread and rewritten as the early negation of gender dichotomies, simultaneously expanding the given understanding of the New Woman concept from a mere opponent of the True Woman/good wife, wise mother concept to a subversive entity questioning the very dichotomous order that was imposed on her. Conclusively, this suggests a sustainable approach to overcoming the conflict between self-expectations and social conventions and, hence, points out how the question of becoming actually turns out to be a question of hybridity.

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