

Trajectories of Change

Modernity / the Woman Question / New Woman Fiction

Progressive America (1890-1920) and Meiji Japan (1868-1912)

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*Of all cultural influences it is literary influences that
are easiest to allege and hardest to measure.*

G.B. Sansom

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Abstract

Literary studies have identified and examined cultural manifestations of the *New Woman* in contexts other than North America but rarely analyze these manifestations in relation to one another. Hence, what is needed in addition to the multinational or multiethnic approach is a relational approach that focuses on the possible connections that exist between the cultural manifestations of the *New Woman* either within a dominant culture or across national borders. In comparing the narratives by selected American and Japanese women writers, I aim to demonstrate that writers in both contexts described images of the *New Woman* that were similar and nonetheless tailored to the cultural conventions of their respective countries, using the *New Woman* as particular and universal concept. The social and literary articulations analyzed show that readings of the *New Woman* are culturally diverse and culturally interwoven readings. Moreover, the comparison illustrates how historical, social and literary developments fed into the formation of the *New Woman* as a transnational template of modern womanhood that Japanese and American writers claimed and adapted to the particularities of their respective cultures.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life. Whatever our obligations are to other others (or theirs to us) they often have the right to go their own way.

(Appiah xv)

At first sight, Japan and the USA could not be any more different. Japan is a society that is often characterized by the dynamics of collective obligation, ancestor worship and reverence for traditions. The United States, on the other hand, is commonly described as a pragmatic and young society that thrives on individualistic entrepreneurship and ambition. In spite of these cultural differences, the US and Japan have maintained “consequential and long-lasting” (Auslin 2) relations that have shaped the national culture and economy of each country. For instance, a survey conducted in late 2014 that was commissioned by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, showed that Americans considered Japan the most reliable and important partner in political and economic matters of all East Asian countries.¹

The foundations for US-Japanese relations as we know them today were laid during the final years of the Tokugawa era (1603-1868), also known as the Edo period. The fateful arrival of American ships under the authority of Commodore Perry in 1853 forced new trade agreements upon Japan that gave American industries preferential access to Japanese ports. The privileges the US gained also put an end to the state of political and cultural isolation

¹The results of this opinion poll can be found on <http://blogs.wsj.com/briefly/2014/11/09/5-takeaways-from-survey-of-u-s-attitudes-on-japan/> accessed 12/22/2014.

that Japan maintained for more than two centuries before Perry and the American navy arrived. Other decrees followed that opened the borders of Japan for trade with the USA and residence. Overall, the arrival of 1853 marked the beginning of a new era in Japanese and American relations, and a new era of cultural and political developments for Japan. While the US expanded its trade area, Japan found itself subordinated to foreign rule and American cultural influences. Out of desire to reclaim the authority over their own country, Japanese began to study and translate notions of Western modernity and appropriate these ideas for the constitution of their own modern nation.

As a result, Japan learned from its cultural difference with the West and immediately initiated processes of modernization that reformed political and economic governance. Against all odds, cultural difference here did not lead to the colonization of Japan, for example, as in India during the reign of the British Empire. In Japan, cultural difference turned out to be an empowering asset that enabled Japan to incorporate foreign social and economic models, and position itself anew. Therefore, this first US-Japanese encounter represents a historically significant encounter that ignited the modernization of Japan and connected Japan's development with that of the US. From then on radical change would similarly define Japan's and America's development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Following Kwame Anthony Appiah's thesis that cultural difference bridges nations rather than separating them (xv), "the modernization of Japan is not seen as a clash between civilizations" (Radtke ix) but as the cornerstone of US-Japanese relations.

Beginning with the encounter in 1853, a discourse surrounding modernization and national progress began in both the US and Japan. This ongoing discourse resulted in economic development and social change in both nations. The late 19th century saw challenges to cultural and social norms, including conventions of womanhood. Both countries witnessed the formation of social and literary debates that promoted women's issues and criticized conventions of womanhood in response to the changes of modernization. These debates are collectively known as the Woman Question. In Japan and in America, the interplay of modernization, discussion of the Woman Question, and the rise of New Woman fiction informed the Meiji era and Progressive era respectively.² Yet both nations approached the issues according to their particular

²In his study *The Foundations of Japan's Modernization: A Comparison with China's Path Towards Modernization* the historian Yoshiie Yoda, prof. identifies and explains the correlations between modernization and socio-cultural developments for the Meiji era and compares them with similar developments that occurred during the Qing dynasty in China (1644–1911/12). I use a similar approach to compare the developments of Meiji Japan with Progressive America with regard to modernity, modernism, and the New Woman.

social and historical traditions. For instance, in Japan the Meiji intellectuals Nakamura Masanao (1832-1891), Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), and Mori Arinori (1847-1889) “criticized concubinage and advocated equal marital rights for men and women” (Hastings 286) and inspired women such as Kishida Toshiko to advocate the feminist cause as a public speaker. In the US Sarah Grand’s article “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” (North American Review, 1894) set the stage for social and literary discussions of womanhood.

Despite their significance, these parallels are not extensively discussed in either Japanese or American Studies. The essay “The Meiji State’s Policy Toward Women” written by the historians Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings and published in Gail Lee Bernstein’s book *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945* in 1991, is one of the few exceptions that directly compares the effects of modernization on the definition of woman as a social category in Meiji Japan and Progressive America.³ Other sources that concern the history of gender during the late nineteenth century such as Teresa A. Meade’s and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks’ *A Companion to Gender History* (2006) or Dina Lowy’s *The Japanese ‘New Woman’: Images of Gender and Modernity* (2007) establish connections between changing images of womanhood in relation to modernization but remain in the context of Japan and neglect to draw detailed connections between the development of the New Woman in Japan and the US. The same holds true for American sources. For instance, the preface to Angelique Richardson’s anthology *Women Who Did: Stories by Men and Women, 1890-1914* (2005) elaborates on the historical conditions that gave rise to the New Woman in the US in relation to the British context, however it does not acknowledge that the New Woman and the historical developments that shaped her also occurred outside the Western hemisphere. On a similar note, Martha H. Patterson’s *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (2008) offers an insightful account of the significance of the New Woman for the cultural and literary history of the US but does not draw a connection to other nations that were similarly influenced by modernization and the New Woman. These sources represent only a fraction of the abundant research that has been done on the New Woman and her socio-historical context, however, they clearly demonstrate the tendency to research these topics at a national level and in relative cultural isolation. Considering the research that has been done in Japanese and in American Studies about the New Woman it is rather

³Nolte, Sharon H., and Sally Ann Hastings. “The Meiji State’s Policy Toward Women, 1890-1910.” *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*. Ed. Gail Lee Bernstein. University of California Press, 1991. 151–174. Print.

surprising that little has been written about the interrelations between the historical, social, and literary developments that defined the New Woman during the Meiji era and Progressive era.

The aforementioned parallels suggest a common ground that has been neglected so far and is thus deserving of a more extensive analysis. Therefore, the objective of my thesis is to analyze how women writers in Meiji Japan and Progressive America draft portrayals of the New Woman in order to criticize and undermine conventions of womanhood in the context of social change. Accordingly, I postulate that the examples of women's fiction discussed in this thesis is representative of a New Woman fiction that employs "a modernist discourse of rupture" (Pykett 57) that emerged under similar circumstances of modernization and found application in the construction of modern images of womanhood in Japanese and American women's writing. I will show that the New Woman represents a literary discourse that reflects and shapes the common modern experience across national borders from a female point of view. As a modernist trope, the New Woman illustrates the narrative subversion of conventional notions of womanhood. As a result, the comparative analysis of Japanese and American approaches the New Woman as a transnational phenomenon, and points to the subliminal paths of intercultural exchange that foster modern images of womanhood in women's writing of Japan and the US.⁴

The New Woman and the historical circumstances that conditioned her emergence are by no means new research subjects in either Japanese Studies or American Studies. What is interesting nonetheless, is the idea of consolidating existing research on the historical, social, and literary dynamics of the New Woman in Japan and the US in order to directly compare the transnational manifestations of the New Woman. Research undertaken in this field has firmly established the transnationality of the New Woman as either multinational or multiethnic concept. By multinational I refer to the emergence of the New Woman in various countries across national borders. A multiethnic approach focuses on how ethnic minorities create images of the New Woman within a dominant culture. In *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930* (2005) Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham, both scholars specializing in English literature of the late 19th century, frame the New Woman as a multinational concept that emerged in countries such as Canada, Japan, Hungary, the UK,

⁴New Woman fiction in this context can also be considered literature of the global as it captures and portrays womanhood on account of the inter-cultural encounter between Japan and the US in 1853. For a detailed account of global literature refer to Reichardt, Ulfried. *Globalisierung: Literaturen und Kulturen des Globalen*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010. Print.

and the US at the turn of the twentieth century. Thereby, they revise the common approach to solely situate the New Woman in the Anglo-American area alone. Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco, scholars of visual media and contemporary art, similarly pursue the multinational approach. Their essay collection *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s* (2012) introduces the New Woman as a subject of visual media including art, photography, and film in the various contexts of Germany, China, Africa and others. On the other hand, Charlotte J. Rich's book *Transcending the New Woman: Multiethnic Narratives in the Progressive Era* analyzes Native American, African American, Mexican American, Chinese American, and Jewish American narratives of the New Woman that took shape alongside the fiction written by white middle class authors.

The aforementioned books are insightful and significant sources for the study of the New Woman as multinational or multiethnic concept. All of them offer individual accounts of cultural approaches to the New Woman and thereby treat the New Woman in Japan or the New Woman in the US as separate fields of research. However valid and well-researched this approach is, there is much to gain from understanding how these cultural articulations of the New Woman interrelate and what the origins of these inter-cultural connections are. Indeed, research conducted so far suggests that the New Woman needs to be seen in all her cultural varieties and "situate the New Woman in a much wider geographical and cultural context" (Heilmann and Beetham 1). Nevertheless, it is not enough just to locate and identify the cultural manifestations of the New Woman. The next step is an analysis of these manifestations in relation to one another.⁵ Hence, what is needed in addition to the multinational or multiethnic approach is a relational approach that focuses on the possible connections that exist between the cultural manifestations of the New Woman either within a dominant culture or across national borders. By including a relational perspective, the intercultural comparison can provide a more nuanced picture that can do better justice to the complexity and diversity of the New Woman, and the cultural conditions under which new images of womanhood gained momentum.

A relational and multinational comparison is particularly useful when it comes to exploring how late nineteenth-century American concepts of modernization, the Woman Question, and women's writing can be used to describe the late nineteenth century in Japan. I aim to compare Meiji Japan

⁵Thereby, I intend to develop the approach to analyze the New Woman in her "international, multi-ethnic and multi-racial dimensions" (Heilmann 36) further by including an analysis of the interrelations between these cultural and ethnic interpretations of the New Woman.

and Progressive America by demonstrating that both countries can be characterized by similar contexts of change that brought about new conceptions of womanhood that were articulated in the social and literary discourses at the time. Thereby, I claim that the encounter in 1853 established irrevocable connections between the social histories of Japan and the US that also paved the way for Japanese women who, similar to their American contemporaries, took to public speaking and writing fiction to create new images of womanhood during the late nineteenth century. However, it is important to note that Japan did not merely imitate the US in that regard but adapted ideas of modern womanhood, the Woman Question, and women's fictions to their own cultural practices. Therefore, I consider the images of womanhood that materialized in literary or social discourses of the Meiji era and Progressive era as culturally diverse and culturally interwoven readings of the New Woman. Moreover, this relational approach thus allows me to analyze these articulations of modern womanhood subsumed under the New Woman from both a transnational and national perspective. Accordingly, I will analyze the US in relation to Japan while considering the unique traits of both nations and refrain from exceptionalist notions that consider the US a "politically and morally superior to other nations because of their unique political visions and moral virtues" (Pease and Fluck ix). Instead, I locate the US and its idiosyncrasies in the transnational contexts of other nations and their idiosyncrasies. My approach reflects the post-exceptionalist perspective in American Studies as discussed by Winfried Fluck and Donald Pease in *Towards a Post-Exceptionalist American Studies* (2014). Post-exceptionalism describes a new current in American Studies that aims to create a discourse of American culture and society that is transnational as well as culturally specific.

In the words of Winfried Fluck, it is an approach that

is designated to reinterpret America by gaining a better understanding of the role of the United States in the world. Transnationalism is thus an important part of a post-exceptionalist American Studies agenda, but it cannot be the whole story, because not everything in the U.S. can be most meaningfully explained as the result of transnational flow and exchange. It is not enough, then, to deconstruct the national and replace it with the idea of the transnational. We have to continue to look at the U.S. itself and we have to continue to discuss the ways in which this can be done best. (Fluck, "Surface Readings" 41–42)

In reading the US from a post-exceptionalist perspective the comparison will then not evolve around the alleged dominance of the US over Japan at the

time but will instead focus on a nuanced interpretation of American culture in relation to Japan and vice versa. In this way, the cultural idiosyncrasies of both – the US and Japan – and the transnational context in which their historical ties have been determined are considered to be significant components of the comparison. Consequently, I propose an analytical method that comprises a multinational and relational comparison of the US with Japan because it coalesces a broad transnational with a narrow national scope.

I will compare the social and literary articulations that materialized during the Progressive era and Meiji era based on the social history of modernization, the Woman Question, and the rise of New Woman fiction. These three key factors illustrate the parallels between Meiji Japan and Progressive America. In the first stage of my analysis, I establish these factors as analytical criteria by exploring their significance in Meiji Japan and Progressive America. Secondly, I then juxtapose these criteria and present different national interpretations in a transnational comparison. Accordingly, the comparison will draw on historical, cultural, and literary research conducted in American and Japanese Studies, which renders my approach not only multinational and relational, but also interdisciplinary.⁶

This thesis has four sections based on these key factors. The first three chapters describe the social context that led to similar works of fiction in Japan and America. I will examine processes of modernization that initiated the social changes that paved the way for new images of womanhood. In this context of social change, the Woman Question emerged as a social debate that queried conventions of womanhood and laid the foundations for feminist critique. These social debates carried over into the literary sphere prompting women writers to create alternative drafts of womanhood. These works subsequently were fed back into the ongoing social debates. Chapters two to four then go on to disclose a concatenation of historical events that similarly characterized the circumstances under which American and Japanese women writers found their literary voice and produced alternative conceptions of womanhood in their writing. Chapter five will be devoted to selected examples of women's fiction and their drafts of modern womanhood.

Specifically, the second chapter provides a historical overview to explain the impact of modernization on the social and cultural life in Progressive America and Meiji Japan. In both countries, the turn of the century similarly signified a sense of an ending and the thrill of a new beginning. The US

⁶The cultural influences that prompted similar and different portrayals of the New Woman also indicate processes of globalization. The impact of globalization on literature and other cultural goods is elaborated in Reichardt, Ulfried. "American Studies and Globalization." *American Studies Today: New Research Agendas*. Vol. 230. Heidelberg: Winter, 2014. 441–458. Print.

as well as Japan went through radical transformations that would inform the rise of changing images of womanhood. In the US modernization is primarily linked to the rise of a capitalist market, the mass production of consumer goods (food and non-food), and the formation of the first industrial cities such as Chicago and New York City. Progress was primarily technical and was realized through the exploitation of natural and human resources. In light of the moral and physical decay that accumulated in the cities calls for reform grew louder.⁷ Middle-class women responded and devoted their domestic skills as caretakers to the reform of a society perceived as corrupted by alcoholism, disease, and immorality.⁸ In this way, American women utilized their domestic skills to claim the public sphere as a female domain that would also serve to promote gender equality.

In the case of Japan, modernization represents Japanese efforts to reclaim their political, economic, and cultural autonomy after the US forcefully opened Japanese borders in 1853. The US was merely interested in the use of Japanese ports for trade and did not consider Japan a diplomatic equal. Following the first modern US-Japanese encounter, Japan aspired to modernize and create a modern nation state of its own. As aforementioned, during this process Japan reconsidered its national identity in relation to notions of Western modernity and thereby also revised conceptions of womanhood. During the Meiji era women became public emblems of Japan's progress and modernization. Thereby, the Meiji government considered women's tasks as mothers and wives as essential for the construction of a modern nation. Although the public recognition of women as good wives and wise mothers did not change the legal or social oppression of women, it nonetheless paved the way for social debates of modern womanhood.

In view of these aspects, American and Japanese modernization processes evolved under different conditions and signified different motivations. Nonetheless, modernization constituted a discourse of national progress in the US and Japan that similarly resulted in social change. This social change did not only cause the US and Japan to each reposition itself as a nation but also repositioned notions of womanhood in these countries. As a result, modernization functions as a shared circumstance that conditioned similar socio-economic changes that fostered the formation of alternative images of

⁷Riis, Jacob. *How the Other Half Lives*. Carlisle, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 2011. Print; Engs, Ruth C. *The Progressive Era's Health Reform Movement: A Historical Dictionary*. London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003. Print.

⁸Kraditor, Aileen S. *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement 1890 - 1920*. New York: Norton, 1981. Print; De Swarte Gifford, Carolyn, ed. *Writing Out My Heart: Selections from the Journal of Frances E. Willard, 1855-96*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1995. Print.

womanhood in social and literary discourses of the US and Japan.

Japanese and American societies at the turn of the twentieth century witnessed fundamental shifts in the understanding of gender identity that were captured in the Woman Question. Chapter three will discuss how the Woman Question in Japan and the US addressed as well as dissected the subjection of women within marriage and the family. Emma Goldman's "The New Woman" (USA/Lithuania 1898) and Kishida Toshiko's "Daughters in Boxes" (Japan, 1883) are two prominent examples of speeches that publicly demanded changes to the social system that subjected women to marital and domestic roles. In a close reading I aim to demonstrate that Goldman and Kishida similarly criticized marriage for thwarting female agency. However, I will also emphasize that both women did so in relation to the cultural idiosyncrasies of their respective cultures. Goldman focuses on the individual woman and gender relations between men and women, while Kishida draws attention to marriage as a family issue. In spite of these cultural differences, both activists aimed "to create a new [public] space of identity and voice that [women] can claim as [their] own" (Cutter xix). As a result, their discussions of women's issues were similar and yet different. Therefore, I claim that their speeches reveal the Woman Question, and thus women's issues, as "a [common] marker of modernity" (Heilmann and Beetham) that relates the Japanese with the American context without overwriting their cultural differences. Moreover, the analysis will also show that the Woman Question functions as an inter-cultural network that engages women across national borders in the debate of feminist ideas and creation of modern womanhood.

Whereas the third chapter is concerned with the social debates that arose as a response to social change, the fourth chapter is devoted to women writers and the role of their fiction in the changing societies of Progressive America and Meiji Japan. The Woman Question served as a space of social debate that allowed women activists like Goldman and Kishida discuss the conditions in American and Japanese society that needed to be changed in order to enable women to be modern women. Women writers transferred this social debate into the literary sphere to recount narratives of modern womanhood that capture and reread the social realities of Meiji Japan and Progressive America. What is interesting to observe is that Japanese and American authors are found to break with narrative conventions concerning theme and motif, plot, point of view and characterization to draft alternative images of womanhood that defy restrictions imposed by marriage, family, or domesticity. As a result, they express their feminist critique of conventional womanhood by deploying modernist modes of subversion that allow them to use the aforementioned conventions to create new narratives that focus on women's agency and autonomy. In this way, women writers create "a new

fictional environment, in formal and structural terms” (Bjørhovde 16) that is aligned with their intention to oppose the social conventions of womanhood through literary means.

In chapter five, I will present a comparative analysis of short fiction by American and Japanese writers to discuss the various approaches of constructing novel images of womanhood. On the cusp of the twentieth century, social conventions were subjected to a flux of change that created an awkward co-existence of old and new ideas of womanhood. The debate around the Woman Question fostered an attempt to renegotiate womanhood in this paradoxical climate of constant and change. In a similar attempt, women writers grabbed the chance to write new drafts of womanhood that deviated from the norm and yet, were derived from the conventions they criticized. Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Turned* (*The Forerunner*, 1911) and Higuchi Ichiyo’s *Troubled Waters* describe female identity as independent from marriage.

Her Letters by Kate Chopin (*Vogue*, 1895) and *The Letter* by Araki Iku, also published under Japanese title *Tegami* (*Seitō*, 1912), discuss adultery as a female prerogative and means of self-fulfillment. Willa Cather’s *Tommy the Unsentimental* (*Home Monthly*, 1896) and Shimizu Shikin’s *The Broken Ring*, also known in Japanese as *Koware yubiwa*, (*Women’s Education Magazine* or *Jogaku zasshi*, 1890) present masculine women to question gender boundaries. And Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899) and Kimura’s *A Mirror for Womanhood*, also known as *Fujo no Kagami*, (*Daily Newspaper* or *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 1889, transl. 1985 and 1988) delineate the path to modern womanhood as a path of solitude and self-creation.

Literature in the hands of women thus became a forum of feminist critique. Therefore, in this chapter, I will demonstrate how women writers realized their feminist critique through literary means. Thereby, I read the stories as representing similar debates of marriage and female identity formation in a transnational and national context. Each analytical section of this chapter is devoted to a pair of selected stories that consists of an American and a Japanese story. Thereby, I pair well-known American writers with lesser-known Japanese authors that wrote stories about the female crisis with marriage, female adultery as means of emancipation, the transgression of gender boundaries, and paths of female self-creation.⁹ The stories and authors I selected for this project share similar feminist convictions and, with the exception of Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, all stories are relatively unknown and have been rather marginalized in American and Japanese literary re-

⁹To this day, Higuchi Ichiyo is the most renowned and respected woman writer of the Meiji era. Rebecca Copeland and Melek Ortabasi consider her “the most successful of these writers in earning enduring fame” (11). Therefore, she is the only exception among the Japanese writers.

search. None of the American authors knew the Japanese authors personally and vice versa. The authors presented in each section are merely connected through the feminist themes they address in their fiction. Moreover, the authors I selected for this project share a middle or upper class background that afforded them with the liberty and financial means to pursue their vocation as writers and published the stories included in this project in literary journals. References to the journals will be provided in parenthesis after the story title. A major difference between American and Japanese writers is that Japanese authors were heavily dependent on male patrons.¹⁰

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Turned* (*The Forerunner*, 1911) and Higuchi Ichiyo's *Troubled Waters*, also known under Japanese title *Nigorie*, (*Literary Club* or *Bungei kurabu*, 1895), are the first pair of stories that I will analyze. Gilman and Higuchi led independent lives and earned their living as writers. Well-known for her short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), Gilman wrote an abundance of short and full-length fiction that promoted economic and social autonomy for women. As editor and publisher of her own magazine, *The Forerunner*, Gilman enjoyed the liberty of being able to express her feminist convictions freely and uncensored.¹¹ Higuchi was the most prominent Japanese writer of the Meiji era – so prominent that her image appears on the 5000 ¥bill. During her short life, Higuchi received praise for the elegant and sentimental style that she deployed to recount the yearnings for freedom from conformity in a changing Japan. However, writing was also a necessity for Higuchi since she was left to provide for her sister and mother after her father and brother died of consumption.¹² Gilman and Ichiyo thus knew of the value and significance of economic self-dependence from personal experience.

Turned and *Troubled Waters* describe failed marriages that prompt the female protagonists to embrace an autonomous life. Marriage is no longer considered a female identity marker but rather becomes the origin of female emancipation. On the one hand, the stories depict how marriage fails to meet expectations of emotional fulfillment and financial stability. Marion, the protagonist of *Turned*, puts her marriage behind her once she learns of her husband's infidelity and starts an independent life as a college teacher.

¹⁰These were typically benevolent fathers, brothers or husbands who were willing to support the women intellectually and financially. See Copeland, "The Meiji Woman Writer" 391.

¹¹Allen, Judith A. *The Feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Sexualities, Histories, Progressivism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. Print.

¹²Danly, Robert Lyons. *In The Shade of Spring Leaves: The Life of Higuchi Ichiyo, With Nine Of Her Best Stories: Life and Writings of Higuchi Ichiyo, a Woman of Letters in Meiji Japan*. Reprint. W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1992. Print; Tanaka, Yukiko. *Women Writers of Meiji and Taisho Japan: Their Lives, Works and Critical Reception, 1868-1926*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co Inc. Publ., 2000. 69-70. Print.

Ohatsu, the wife in *Troubled Waters*, is forced to earn a living because her husband fails to live up to his duties as father and husband. In the course of the story, she begins to articulate her frustrations with her marriage and thereby abandons her traditional role as the silent and submissive wife. Overall, my analysis shows that both characters create independent lives out of necessity and as means of emancipation. However, Gilman and Higuchi criticize marriage based on different cultural conventions. Whereas Higuchi embeds her critique of marriage in the collective system of family obligations, Gilman considers marriage as conflicting with ideas of individual fulfillment and holds to the idea of marriage as a failed romantic bond.

The literary careers of Kate Chopin and Araki Iku were both marked by scandals surrounding their fiction. Kate Chopin was a well-respected writer of her day before the publication of her novel, *The Awakening*, which ruined her reputation in literary circles beyond recall. Critics at the time reprimanded Chopin for her blunt portrayal of female immorality and sexuality.¹³ Araki was regular contributor to the magazine *Seitō*, a literary magazine that published critical fiction and non-fiction on women's issues from 1911-16. As a devoted feminist and writer, she was convinced that women should be free in their life choices and articulated adultery as a female prerogative in her story *The Letter*. Because the story caused public controversy the Meiji government began to monitor *Seitō* closely.

Her Letters by Kate Chopin (*Vogue*, 1895) and *The Letter* by Araki Iku, also known under Japanese title *Tegami* (*Seitō*, 1912), discuss adultery as means for female emancipation. Here, women are not described as the victims of their husband's adultery, instead they are depicted as the active initiators of adulterous relationships. Thereby, Chopin and Araki emphasize adultery as enabling the protagonists to lead a double life parallel to their passionless marriages. It is in the form of letters that they communicate their adulterous relationships and articulate their yearnings for the passion they are unable to find in their marriages. Araki relies on mediating the intimate thoughts of her I-narrator in epistolary form whereas Chopin constructs a narrative about the letters the protagonist wrote and the potential conflicts that these letters will induce in her husband. What is striking about these stories is that they identify possible ways of creating agency and autonomy within conventional restrictions through adultery and letter writing. Another connection is the way both protagonists undermine conventions of marriage and adultery and yet remain in the conventional context, i.e. neither character leaves her marriage to live with her lover. In this way, the challenge of restrictive

¹³Dimock, Wai-Chee. "Kate Chopin 1850-1904." *Modern American Women Writers*. First Edition. Touchstone, 1993. 47-57. Print.

conventions is rather subliminal but not less significant.

Like many other Japanese and American authors at the time, Shimizu Shikin and Willa Cather never met personally or were in correspondence with each other. What connects Shikin and Cather here is the use of their fiction to share their personal experience as women that defied conventions in their own lives. Cather stood out as being a butch with a preference for male clothing and women.¹⁴ Shikin, on the other hand, left her arranged marriage for a romantic partner of her own choice.¹⁵ Their stories reflect in part their liminal experience as odd women in their time.

Willa Cather's *Tommy the Unsentimental* (*Home Monthly*, 1896) and Shimizu Shikin's *The Broken Ring* also known in Japanese as *Koware yubiwa* (*Women's Education Magazine* or *Jogaku zasshi*, 1890) recount stories of hybrid characters that merge conventions of masculinity with conventions of femininity. They place their characters in a grey zone that exists in-between gender conventions to create new images of womanhood conventional and, at the same, unconventional. My analysis will draw attention to how Cather and Shikin depict masculine women that represent "a combination of two already existing social constructions employed in an attempt to create a new possibility" (Behling 4). Cather's protagonist Theodosia Shirley, also known as Tommy, and Shikin's unnamed protagonist defy conventions of female frailty and dependence. Instead, they are characterized by male attributes such as physical and emotional strength, rationality, and a strong sense of self. Tommy is single and lives in a small Western town and mostly socializes with her father's male friends. She is authorized to run the family business and is highly respected for her competence and reliability. Shikin's narrator, on the other hand, claims the authority to leave her unhappy marriage and thereby willfully disregards the authority of her husband and her parents who arranged the marriage in the first place. In claiming authority over her own life she claims the agency to decide for herself. Tommy and Shikin's protagonist thus transgress gender boundaries because they enjoy and claim the privileges of men. Therefore, the analysis aims to probe Cather's and Shikin's approach to invalidate gender conventions and the restrictions they represent by constructing images of womanhood that are fluid, agile, hybrid, and overall unprecedented.

Kate Chopin and Kimura Akebono are not connected through their biographies but through the bold visions of women as nonconformists. Chopin

¹⁴Stouck, David. *Willa Cather: The Writer and Her World*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1973. 1-28. Print.

¹⁵Copeland, Rebecca, and Melek Ortabasi, eds. *The Modern Murasaki: Writing by Women of Meiji Japan*. New York: Columbia UP, 2006. 10. Print.

identified herself as a suffragist or feminist.¹⁶ She was convinced that women had the potential for and were deserving of intellectual and physical freedom. On a similar note, Kimura considered the purpose of her writing as inspiring women to be more than daughters and mothers.¹⁷ As a result, my literary analysis will focus on Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Kimura's *A Mirror for Womanhood* also known as *Fujo no Kagami* (*Daily Newspaper* or *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 1889, transl. 1985 and 1988). I examine the ways these two narratives similarly describe modern womanhood as resulting from processes of female self-creation and isolation. Edna Pontellier, the protagonist in *The Awakening*, and *Yoshikawa Hideko*, the main character of *A Mirror for Womanhood*, gain autonomy and agency only as social outcasts. Edna attempts to find herself through art and solitude. In abandoning her husband and children, Edna aims to live a life of her own at her own terms. Hideko is the exiled daughter that returns to Japan from her stay abroad in England and New York City. Educated and full of confidence Hideko evolves from submissive daughter to skilled entrepreneur. Although the circumstances of their transformation differ, Edna and Hideko exemplify how a state of dependence can be transformed into a state of independence. Both characters take their lives into their own hands to create new opportunities for self-development. Thus, Chopin and Kimura similarly draft odd women that find themselves in-between gender conventions but they do so by isolating their characters from the contexts that inhibit their potential for agency and autonomy. Thereby, they redefine social isolation as empowering rather than paralyzing their female characters.

The aforementioned women writers and their fiction all offer different perspectives on the New Woman in their respective cultures. In both America and Japan, the New Woman acted as a template of modern womanhood and informed their work. Moreover, in both nations debates on the Woman Question followed particular historical and cultural factors, a circumstance that also holds true for the aforementioned narratives. Against the backdrop of cultural conventions and social change, women writers imagined new roles for women during the Progressive era in America and the Meiji era in Japan, and thereby created stories that fed back into debates of the Woman Question. Consequently, the New Woman thus functions as both an idiosyncratic figure, adaptable to the particularities of a specific culture, and as a signature of modernity across geographical boundaries.

¹⁶“Chopin was undoubtedly sensitive to the ‘woman question,’ [nevertheless] she was neither an activist nor an advocate” (Dimock 49).

¹⁷“[Kimura] wants to write fiction with a certain central message that can instruct and inspire contemporary women” (T. Suzuki 157).

Chapter 2

The Social History of the Woman Question and Modern Womanhood

The analysis of the New Woman as a shared literary theme in Japanese and American women's fiction can only be understood in relation to the social modernization both countries underwent. The following outline of what modernity and modernization actually meant in late-19th century America and Japan serves to clarify the complex circumstances that allowed for the literary and social image of the New Woman to emerge. Modernization caused profound changes in both societies fostering a beneficial climate in which novel perceptions of womanhood could flourish. The pursuit of modernity was also a process to reclaim and reset national identity. These changing times created a climate of uncertainty and renegotiation in which both countries saw their national self-image challenged. Whereas the US felt that the ideal of individual agency was endangered by mass production and the rise of consumerism, Japan was eager to reclaim its cultural autonomy after the forceful entrance of Western and primarily American powers. Reclaiming national identity runs parallel to reclaiming gender identity. Critical perception of national identity amidst industrial changes translated into critical questions about women's status and functions in a changing society. Were women still just mothers and wives? And how could women find their place in a society in which categories of national and gender identity became more fluid? The framework of dualism comprising male vs. female and public vs. private was challenged to construct gender images that reflected the *zeitgeist* of change.

Modernity: Transnational and Local

Why not simply posit modernity as the new historical situation, modernization as the process whereby we get there, and modernism as a reaction to that situation and that process alike, a reaction that can be aesthetic and philosophico-ideological, just as it can be negative as well as positive?

(Jameson 99)

Modernity is a complex phenomenon in many ways. Firstly, the concept in itself is ambiguous for it is a dynamic concept by definition. Secondly, modernity is nonetheless defined by the different degrees of rejecting the past and embracing the new in a technical and socio-cultural sense. In relation to Frederic Jameson's suggestion above, concepts of modernity range from a historical context that determines the conditions in which changes emerge, to describing a course of development, and, finally, it can also refer to the multifarious attempts to respond to the modern stimulus. Modernity thus stands for a variety of simultaneous developments caused by industrialization or as a reaction to it. Carol C. Chin applies "modernity as a kind of cultural consciousness or mindset" (Chin, *Modernity and National Identity*, 491) in her analysis of China's modernization in the early twentieth century. In addition to Jameson's three-way characterization, modernity is also understood as an archive of cultural values in transition and thus as a reflection of the zeitgeist of uncertainty. Therefore, modernity is both a preservation *and* continuous transformation of cultural values. The Japanese scholar Naoki Sakai supports this argument by outlining modernity as an ambivalent concept which carries both universal and particular appeal.¹

So, if modernity is universally applicable and yet culturally defined, how is the concept of modernity useful to this research project then? Modernity in the classic sense describes the transition "from a feudal-agrarian country to a modern urban-industrial society" (Köhler 3). The transition is a common feature found among modernizing countries and thus constitutes the pivotal point for considering modernity as a universal concept. However, bearing in mind that these transitions take place under different cultural realities, modernity remains a particular concept as well. The ambivalence of modernity is useful for comparing late 19th-century developments with regard to social history, literature, and the portrayals of modern women images in the US and Japan. Modern economic and political developments effected more

¹Naoki Sakai emphasizes modernity as ambiguous in his essay *Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism* (Sakai 153–176).

social changes that allowed for a repositioning of women's roles within their particular societies, and perhaps giving rise to new forms of expression.

The turn into the 20th century was equally shaped by a sense of an ending and the thrills of new beginnings. The Meiji era in Japan (1868–1912) and the Progressive Era in the US (1890–1912) were a time of transition that required both societies to rethink their national identities. Between a fading past and an unprecedented present not only their national identity, but also conventions of womanhood became subject to revision. Meiji Japan as well as Progressive America thus witnessed the rise of women's issues and novel gender images alongside their social and economic modernization.² Whereas the US coped with the social miseries that came from industrialization, Japan focused on shielding its cultural identity from Western influences, while at the same time using Western notions of modernity to transform Japan into a modern nation.³

However, the turn of the century signified to both a state of uncertainty that encompassed the paradoxical urge for perpetuating and adjusting national identity. Therefore, the historical outline of the Progressive Era and the Meiji period will explain these change processes so as to understand their relevance as essential prerequisites for the rise of the Woman Question and the New Woman in both contexts. Thereby, I claim that without the uncertainties created at the turn of the century and the upheavals caused in the course of change, it is most likely that neither society would have developed new concepts of gender roles or would have been even open to the idea of them. The struggle to cope with an ongoing industrialization in the US or the urge to regain cultural and political autonomy in Japan through modernization therefore constituted a beneficial climate for the debate of women's issues and the revision of gender images in social reality and fiction. As a result, I will use "modernity as a kind of cultural consciousness or mindset" (Chin, *Modernity and National Identity* 491) that conditioned the recalibrations of national and gender identity in Progressive America and Meiji Japan.

²See in particular Heinz Ickstadt's definition: "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. (Ickstadt, "Die Amerikanische Moderne" 218).

³"By the 1880s, however, there was a deep unease among many Japanese political thinkers that some essential element of Japaneseness was being lost in the rush to Westernization, and they advocated a modernization, which did not hold itself hostage to Western assumptions and demands" (Lahiri-Choudhury 1105).

2.1 The Progressive Era 1890–1920

Industrial America & the Need for Reform

Between 1865 and 1890 the US encountered its peak period of industrial growth and development.⁴ The technological advancements in the shape of the railway system, the expansion of the steel industry, the invention of the conveyor belt, and the increasing significance of the city represent the technical progress America made in the mid-19th century. Nonetheless, “[t]he Progressive Era proved to be a time of extraordinary change – for good and for ill” (Chambers 247).

The Industrial Age in the US was marked by the rise of technology and the mass production of affordable consumer products. Indeed, progress generated work in the industries and attracted waves of European immigrants that sought jobs and opportunities promised by the American Dream. The great influx of immigrants led to a decisive increase in urban population turning the city into the center of industrial production and working class poverty. What immigrant workers or the domestic poor shared was that the entire family was required to work, including underage children, to secure the economic survival of the family. Therefore, the Progressive Era came to witness the “family as an economic unit” (Kessler-Harris 92) representing the economic struggle of the working class. Malnutrition and the continuous exposure to unsanitary living and working condition made the working class prone to diseases such as tuberculosis. As Ruth Clifford Engs notes “[t]uberculosis was the principal cause of death, followed by heart disease, pneumonia, and violence for males and kidney disease for females” (Engs 174). Due to their limited financial means, most working class families took residence in tenement housing, residential buildings that were in poor condition and housed more people than the normal capacity would allow for.⁵ It was not without reason that Jacob Riis concluded in his study of the New York working class, known as *How the other Half Lives*, that residential buildings of working class families were “the hotbeds of epidemics” (Riis 3). These “ills” (Chambers 247) of modernization caused ambiguous sentiments towards industrial progress in American society. On the one hand, American society struggled to gain the upper hand over the detriments of industrial progress. On the other hand, progress was found to cultivate national power in relation to less developed countries such as Japan. Industrial change thus concomitantly enhanced and challenged American national identity.

⁴I follow the timeline as described by Berkin et. al. *Making America* (Berkin et al. 466–543).

⁵See Berkin et al. 525–526.

Industrial America experienced that “economic production and national wealth was often accompanied by harsh urban life, brutal factory conditions, a scarred environment, and an unprecedented concentration of economic power” (Chambers 1). These changes created a society struggling with the burdens of the very progress it was pursuing. Accordingly demands for reform and government intervention grew and fostered a climate in which American society found itself “between increasing social demands and the need for some kind of collective action, on the one hand, and, on the other, older American traditions of individual autonomy, private property, and limited government” (Chambers 285). Government intervention was, among other aspects, bound to improve working conditions and ensure food safety without interfering with the national idea of the American individual and its autonomy. As a result, the *zeitgeist* of the Progressive Era was a liminal and transitory one. Under this aspect historian Walter T. Nugent considered the question “what should America be like?” (7) as emblematic for the reassessments of national identity in relation to the ongoing modernization processes.

Reclaiming the American Self: Muckraking, Women’s Reform Movements and Women’s Education

It was in this climate of transition that prompted American society to reassess its self-image as a nation in relation to the ideal of individual autonomy. The realization that this form of industrial capitalism actually curtailed this fundamental American ideal evoked the pronouncement that the current miseries were of “common public interest” (Chambers 285). The ideal of self-governance was thus channeled, for example, towards reforming working conditions in manufactories, regulating food and drug production, improving living conditions in urban areas and the prohibition of child labor and other related issues. These issues were not new to American society but initiating solutions for these problems was a new challenge. The approaches were as diverse as the issues reformers would attempt to redress. Among these reformation attempts were forms of investigative journalism, also known as muckraking, and reform efforts initiated by middle class women.

Muckraking was an early form of investigative journalism that aimed to investigate and disclose violations of health and safety standards in the industry. As the name implies, journalists attempted to expose the poor conditions in the factories, as well as the greediness and corruptibility of entrepreneurs and politicians alike. Apart from publications in periodicals such as *McClure’s*, *Collier’s* and *Cosmopolitan*, muckraking also found its

way into fiction.⁶ Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* is one example where the dire working conditions in the meatpacking industry of Chicago and the ailments workers suffer from as a result are portrayed.

Of the butchers and floorsmen, the beef-boners and trimmers, and all those who used knives, you could scarcely find a person who had the use of his thumb; time and time again the base of it had been slashed, till it was a mere lump of flesh against which the man pressed the knife to hold it. The hands of these men would be criss-crossed with cuts, until you could no longer pretend to count them or to trace them. They would have no nails, - they had worn them off pulling hides; their knuckles were swollen so that their fingers spread out like a fan.

(Sinclair 121)

The physical degeneration of the butchers' hands attests to the tolls industrialization took on the workers. With these graphic descriptions Sinclair aimed to confront his readership with concrete examples of the downsides of industrialization. Sentiments of disgust triggered questions about the optimistic embrace of mass production especially in the food industry. Sinclair's literary report of the meatpacking industry in Chicago posits a semi-fictional account with factual significance. Stirring America's conscience about the costs of industrial growth, he raised awareness for the working and living conditions in the industrial cities through his writing to initiate social change.

Whereas Sinclair felt the need to call attention to the grave conditions of the meatpacking industry, middle class women started to take a public stand as campaigners for social and political reform. Just like Sinclair these women were acutely aware of the industrial and urban conditions and aimed to improve the situation of domestic and migrant workers, while advocating reforms for women. Whereas Sinclair pointed out the terrible conditions of meat processing, women reformers propagated the value of the family and focused on the moral education of American society. Interestingly enough, these women intruded on the public sphere and claimed authority to bring change to a struggling society based on the idea that they were fulfilling their conventional tasks as caretakers. The need for reform was claimed as female vocation outside the private sphere. However, women reformers refrained from negating the Victorian ideal of the True Woman entirely but instead linked the domestic ideal to a public cause. Based on this argument, the domestic caretaker was turned into a public caretaker, which granted women public visibility and individual agency.

⁶See Berkin et al. 620–622.

One example in point is the settlement movement that established residences in densely populated districts of industrial cities. These residences operated as reform institutions offering childcare, English classes, cooking lessons, access to art and music, and other services to the communities around them. Hull House presents the most prominent example of the settlement movement. Founded and directed by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr in Chicago in 1889, Hull House serviced the community in the 19th ward, an industrial and congested district of Chicago.⁷ Apart from the settlement movement women also were engaged that sought to battle alcoholism and initiate labor reform, which was founded in Cleveland in 1874. The various reform efforts also led to the founding of other organizations. The National Consumers' League was founded in 1891 to lobby against child labor and support food safety. Another reform effort was directed against corruption in the food industry. The goal of the Women's Trade Union League was to improve conditions of working class women in the workplace. Similarly, settlement houses, such as the aforementioned Hull House, founded by Jane Addams in 1889 in Chicago, were established to help immigrant working-class women to improve living conditions within their families and teach them healthy child education. The National Birth Control League was heavily controversial since it advocated female agency with regard to the reproductive functions of the female body. Overall, the founding and the agenda of these organizations signify the female penetration into the public sphere and the increasing awareness as responsible, individual citizens. Reform therefore paved a legitimate way into the public sphere for middle class women and thus expanded their opportunities for tasks outside the domestic sphere. Education at the newly-established women's colleges similarly contributed to the expansion of female opportunities.

The founding of women's colleges such as Vassar (1861) and Wellesley (1875) granted women access to higher education and, as Elizabeth Ammons notes, opened a diverse spectrum of jobs for women.

According to the census the spectrum of work open to women by the 1910s ran from factory hand to surgeon, farm worker to college president, and it included numerous occupations customarily reserved for men in modern Western societies: architect, carpenter, stonecutter, teamster, mail carrier, detective, banker, undertaker. Moreover, jobs unheard of a generation earlier- stenographer, typist, trained nurse, department store clerk- now presented them-

⁷Two original buildings of Hull House still remain in Chicago as a museum. The accompanying website provides more information on the settlement movement and Jane Addams' biography.

selves to women.

(Ammons 82)

With access to higher education, women's employment increased accordingly. The United States Census Bureau report titled *Women in Gainful Occupations 1870 to 1920* stated "that the number of women employed as clerks in 1920 was almost four times what it was in 1910." (Hill 16) Therefore, women did not only seek occupations in the public sphere as reformers but also as wage earners. Taken together, the increase in educational and professional opportunities alongside the various reform endeavors constituted a climate in which women became publicly visible and vocal.

With the expansion of their opportunities in the public sphere women also grew more influential in politics. Values associated with the domestic realm became politicized and established moral values in politics. The conventional role of the caretaker was therefore reframed as a public service women could provide. From 1890 on, the suffragists' demand for change in a woman's legal status was established in the social agenda of America. The family law in 19th century America did not consider women independent legal entities. Instead, the legal existence of women was subsumed under the legal status of their husbands also known as "*feme covert*" (Eby 18).⁸

The husband was the head-of-the-household, having authority to decide such matters as the family's residence, the education and religion of children, and the disposition of family income. The common law doctrine of spousal unity or 'coverture' subsumed a wife's legal personality into her husband's, preventing her from holding property or making contracts in her own name.

(Shanley 192)

If women were to cope with the social mores of industrialization, they were to be given equal legal status. The argument of suffragists for female enfranchisement thus entailed gender equality and expediency. On the one hand, suffragists underlined the fact that the designated female sphere was as much concerned with politics as its male counterpart. When passed laws "concerning food, water, the production of clothing, and education" (Kraditor 67), these domestic matters became classified as male issues. If female issues gained political relevance, women's penetration into the male arena of politics could no longer be denied. Based on the preceding argument, women were to have the vote in order to fulfill their tasks as mothers or caretakers.

⁸For a detailed account of the family law and women's legal status in 19th century America confer Shanley (192–193) and Eby (17–35).

On the other hand, the activists pointed out the fact that their claim would not only elevate women to the same legal status as men, but that it would benefit American society as a whole in terms of morality.⁹

Francis Willard, suffragist and national president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (1874 WCTU), similarly argued for the female right to vote since "they would quickly clean up politics and 'make the world home-like,' bringing the moral influence of the home into the institutions of government" (De Swarte Gifford 7). The founding of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1890 is one example of pushing the political agenda in the interest of women's equality on a national level. Lobbying the US government in the name of female suffrage and legal equality, the organization's leaders, Carrie Chapman Catt and Anna Howard Shaw successfully supported the suffrage movement in their efforts, indicated by the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, which approved of women suffrage as a constitutional right. Thus, the claim of the public sphere took place in the shape of reform efforts, female higher education and professionalism. In the process, the long-held dichotomy that designated separate masculine and feminine spheres of influence became eroded. For women engaging in reform, education, or work, the ideal of the True Woman was declared outdated and no longer responsive to the circumstances of women in Industrial America. However, despite their pursuit of change, society still perceived women through the lens of the True Woman and continued to contextualize women in the domestic sphere. Education, for instance, was not considered means for self-fulfillment but as supplementing the skills of a good wife.

Although women were set on making a change in the definition of womanhood, the True Woman persisted in the American mindset. A woman was still considered to be intellectually inferior in comparison to her husband or other men. Hence, education that opposed to the view of the inferior woman was considered a danger to a woman's social standing.

It held that a woman should be literate and familiar enough to manage her household accounts competently, and to supervise the education of her children. . . . Most men did not welcome the opportunity to engage in serious intellectual conversations with women.

(Hoffert 126)

It is obvious that males disapproved of the intellectual woman. The perception that a woman was in the position to understand and critically evaluate the daily business of her husband, was a clear violation of the male expectation to find entertainment and detachment from his daily duties within the

⁹See Kraditor 67–73.

public sphere. The well-being of the man in the household ensured the well-being of the family, and in turn the overall welfare of the American society and this could only be if female duties were fulfilled. Women attempting to deviate from True Womanhood were constantly confronted with the threat that their search for self-fulfillment endangered their social membership and the future of American society. The True Woman persisted as a valid role model and was used to pressure women into perpetuating the tradition of female inferiority. The influence of the True Woman is also shown in the prominent argument that the pursuit of higher education stood in conflict with female nature. These critics of the New Woman argued on the basis of essentialist assumptions about the female sex and claimed that college education should have been remained inaccessible to women due to their scientifically proven physical condition. In view of the increasing number of educated women, Victorian physicians such as Edward Clarke, Thomas Addison Emmet, and Thomas Smith Clouston emphasized the damaging effects of education on female health. As Carol Smith-Rosenberg explains, they all agreed that inherent physical deficiencies of the female body rendered women too weak to withstand the challenges of college life:

Her overstimulated brain would become morbidly introspective. Neurasthenia, hysteria, insanity would follow. Her ovaries, robbed of energy rightfully theirs, would shrivel, and sterility and cancer ensue.

("The New Woman" 258)

Mental and physical damages to females were deemed to be foreseeable results of pursuing a college education. An occupation outside their sphere of motherhood and marriage stood in contrast to the familiar image of the Victorian woman and was heavily criticized to uphold the beset image within American society. Despite the immediate damages allegedly encountered by the New Woman herself, the aforementioned physicians envisioned a society of infertile women unable to provide descendants to maintain American society, and thus equated the emergence of the New Woman and her pursuit of opportunities with "race suicide" (Woloch 278). Indeed, women receiving degrees in higher education were less likely to marry since 50 per cent of college graduates during the 1880s and 1890s decided not to marry. Nevertheless, the medical allegations did not justify concerns of human extinction. Similar to the critique of higher education, employment was not considered suitable for a woman's life and would only lead to a neglect of her female duties to preserve the home as a refuge for her husband and children. In the end, the bias against female education and employment confirm once more, the essen-

tialist lens through which women were defined by their ability to give birth. Nevertheless, the medical allegations that educating women would result in infertility and insanity, and the social conventions of decrees about female conduct were not significant enough to discourage the rise of a new image of womanhood.

Along with this expansion of their sphere of influence, the categories that defined womanhood pluralized accordingly. Reformers and activists also gave rise to a new image of womanhood, one that presented women as active, outspoken, and demanding. Even though their public engagement was purported as complying with their domestic duties, their actions still gave rise to a new image of womanhood, known as the New Woman. As a response to the modern experience of uncertainty and change, the New Woman represented the rise of women advocates and reformers claiming their place in public. Moreover, the New Woman represents changes in defining womanhood from an exclusively domestic ideal limited to marriage and motherhood to a public and active ideal. The circumstances of transition allowed for women to claim conventional tasks in an unconventional setting. The shift in focus from motherhood and domesticity alone to a broader spectrum of opportunities defining a woman caused a major change in gender perception and definition. Thus, the New Woman is well understood as a concept which regards identity as an expression of social order, change, and discontinuity:

The images of the New Woman produce and reproduce this spirit of transition, of uncertainty or chance, respectively, which challenged men and women to reconstitute their identities in this permanently changing system of symbolic power.

(Köhler 27)

In her statement, Angelika Köhler puts emphasis on the characteristics of this to the point and manages to underline the New Woman as a concept of female agency. The New Woman as a group applies to white middle-class femininity which marks a significant transition in the cultural understanding of human identity from a static ideal to a social construct subject to change starting in the 1890s. Furthermore, identity was disclosed as an expression of the current social order which attempted to determine the distribution of power between the sexes in American society. Köhler thus presents the basic idea that the New Woman revolutionized the given comprehension and cultural definition of gender identity of the white middle class in early 20th century America. Nevertheless, the New Woman does not represent one particular image of womanhood. As Lois Rudnick notes, the New Woman also represented a diverse range of images of womanhood due to the idea

that gender identity is in a continuous flux of development:

The ground of her definition was continuously shifting, depending on who was doing the looking. Typically, the New Woman was defined as having the attributes of independence, self-definition, physical adeptness, and mental acuity, qualities that allowed her to work, play, study, volunteer, and socialize with equal aplomb.

(73)

Similar to Köhler's elaborations, Lois Rudnick defines the New Woman as representing mental, cultural, and conventional independence disrupting the traditional understanding of womanhood as a stable category. The conventional point of view of femininity assigned a set of characteristics and social duties to men and women to unequivocally define their gender identities. Instead, with the rise of female public engagement feminist debates began to emphasize that " 'women' is indeed an unstable category" (Riley 9). With the fluidity of categorization, the definition of womanhood was extended beyond motherhood and marriage. As a result of this process, women no longer based their self-image on marital and domestic roles alone. Therefore American society encountered a new perception of gender identity at the turn of the century. Identity is no longer understood as being a marker of class conventions, but as an individual issue in which women, as well as men, have a conscious say in shaping their identities. Stuart Hall refers to this understanding of identity as being a process which requires the understanding that identities are neither fully shaped by social conventions, nor by pure human will.

Identities are not just given or chosen, they have to be enacted, but this means that they have to enter into negotiation with the situation in which they are performed or otherwise acted upon.

(Hall 150)

The realization that identity is not a given entity which needs to be accepted in the way societal conventions enforce it upon individuals, underlines identity as a category which is highly complex and shaped by both the social environment and the individual itself. Consequently, Hall addresses the aspect that identity is the result of constant negotiation between external societal expectations and individual demands for authenticity. Thus, the debate around female identity encompasses a change in defining identity and the process of identity formation.

The Progressive Era was marked by a transition from the Victorian True Woman, which saw women's vocation in the conjugal home alone, to the

New Woman, a concept which comprised female agency and the freedom of choice beyond the boundaries of domesticity and marriage. “A ‘true’ woman was supposed to want, above all else, to be a mother and to fulfill her social and civic obligations by centering her life around her children and dedicating herself to their care” (Hoffert 129). The self-sacrificial devotion of the True Woman was contrasted with the emerging demand for female self-sufficiency and a broader understanding of womanhood. Martha H. Patterson, for instance, sees the qualities of the New Woman as “a character type and a cultural phenomenon [that] described women more broadly than suffragist or settlement worker, while connoting a distinctly modern ideal of self-fashioning” (2). The Progressive Era witnessed the juxtaposition of old and new understandings of womanhood but did not witness a linear development in which the True Woman was replaced with the New Woman. Instead, the breach of social boundaries separating the female from the male sphere of action was based on the emphasis of the female Victorian code and its purpose for a society in moral decay.

As Smith-Rosenberg notes

they [middle class women] transposed the Cult of True Womanhood to suit their needs. They moved into America’s corrupt and unjust cities not as self-conscious feminists but as “True Women.” They were, they told husbands, politicians, and industrialists, the conscience and the housekeepers of America. Their virtue constituted a national resource. Selfish and corrupt men had created a chaotic and fragmenting world; the women would set it right.

(“The New Woman” 173–174)

Public engagement of women in the suffrage or reform movements thus relied on the reinterpretation of the woman caretaker as a public ideal.¹⁰ What is often described as the New Woman then refers to a hybrid that comprises Victorian and progressive ideas of womanhood. In the words of Sarah Grand, the Progressive Era demonstrated that “the New Woman could combine domesticity with public life” (Sutton-Ramspeck 11).

The Industrial Age presented several challenges to American society. The emergence of the working class, immigration, the overpopulation of urban areas, and unsanitary food production disintegrated the American self-image. Accordingly, the national identity became subject to debate. The central idea of individual autonomy became transferred to “the image of the Ameri-

¹⁰ I refer to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s claim that “they [Progressive Era women] transposed the Cult of True Womanhood to suit their needs” (Smith-Rosenberg, “The New Woman” 173).

can who faces the challenge of the unknown, of the modern, and who learns to control the new by repositioning him-/herself within the symbolic order, produces the powerful national optimism and belief in the future which characterizes the Progressive Era” (Köhler 132). The realization that industrialization undermined the autonomy of the American people in the emerging market economy created uncertainties about national identity that resulted in the demand for reform. Therefore, the linear and expansive growth of the industry was accompanied by a non-linear rise of uncertainties of an individual and national nature. These uncertainties created a beneficial climate in which women presented themselves as moral guardians and caretakers able to steer American society out of its struggle with the moral demons of industrialization. Women exerted their influence on the public sphere to prove that their abilities had a purpose outside the private sphere. Progressive America found itself in a situation of transition, a situation in which old and new values co-existed and were evaluated in relation to each other. This context fostered similar negotiations of womanhood as a social category, especially in relation to the public engagement of women. Women situated themselves in-between the conventional scheme of domestic and public sphere by legitimizing their intrusion into the public sphere as meeting the requirements to do domestic tasks. Womanhood was defined as transient and liminal and was thus, just as the national self-image of the US itself, in a state of transition between the old and the new. This state of liminality and flux was also very similar to the conditions found in Japan during the Meiji period.

2.2 The Meiji Restoration 1868–1912

The Rise of New Japan: From *Sakoku* to *Kaikoku* (late Tokugawa era)

Like progressive America, Meiji Japan encountered tremendous social and political changes on account of modernization. Before the Treaty of Kanagawa in 1854 (a trade agreement imposed on Japan by the US), and the notorious arrival of Commodore Perry and his black ships in 1853 in Uraga Bay, Japan existed in seclusion from Western countries. *Sakoku* was the “official policy of isolationism” (Goto-Jones 15) and served to prohibit migration and settlement of foreigners to and in Japan. A small community of Dutch traders in Deshima nearby Nagasaki constituted the only exception at the time. Therefore, the Treaty of Kanagawa represents the American success in opening the borders of Japan to naval trade from 1854 on. However it needs to be emphasized that the US was certainly not the first nation that

attempted to open the heavy curtain of self-imposed isolation. Although the treaty of 1854 indeed opened the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate for trade between Japan and the US, it also paved the way for similar agreements between Japan and Europe (e.g.: France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Russia). These were all nations that had previously attempted to open the Japanese borders or had strong interests in trade relations with Japan. The Treaty of Kanagawa held an ambivalent meaning for Japan. On the one hand, it initially formalized Japan's tentative intention to open the country to the West (*kaikoku*) with regard to the realization that "Japan needed to 'catch up' with the West in order to survive in the modern system of international relations" (Goto-Jones 50).¹¹ The involvement in naval trade was to prevent Western exploitation of Japan as a commercial harbor and was thus connected with the hope to enter the ranks of Western powers as a political and economic equal. After all, Japan had great potential to become modern and civilized through the modernization of its silk reeling and iron mining technologies, which existed before the Western intrusion beginning in 1854.¹² On the other hand, the Treaty of Kanagawa bestowed an inferior status to Japan and paved the way for the Unequal Treaties of 1858. The American demand to gain access to Edo, Osaka, Kanagawa (today's Yokohama), Hyōgo (today's Kōbe), Nagasaki, and Niigata for foreign trade and residency were the underpinnings of the Unequal Treaties. In addition, the treaty determined low duties for foreign imports and high duties on Japanese exports to the US.¹³ With these demands in place Japan was not in charge of trade relations and had no say in the domestic and foreign tariff systems. Clearly, in the Unequal Treaties Japan was not considered a diplomatic equal to the US. Instead, the treaty unofficially assigned Japan the status of a colony and its enforcement made Japan feel more like a colony.¹⁴ However, the humiliation caused did not diminish Japan's aspirations for modernization in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods but spurred the idea of a modern Japan on par with Western powers.

¹¹"Japan no longer had the option of remaining 'apart' in its isolation, the only choices were to join the elite group of modernized nations or to accept the abuse of unequal treaties, trade pressure, and perhaps even colonization" (Orbaugh 21).

¹²See Wittner pp. 1- 42 for an in-depth account of the silk reeling and iron mining industry in Meiji Japan.

¹³See Goto-Jones Chapter 1 pp. 14-41 for a description of the Unequal Treaties and the limitations Japan had to endure.

¹⁴"Symbolic of their failure were the unequal treaties signed with Western powers, which though they did not technically make Japan a colony, left the Japanese in a subordinate and extremely disadvantageous position, vulnerable to the same pressures that had already negated the past and compromised the future of Asia's great powers, India and China" (Sievers, *Flowers in Salt* 7).

The Meiji Era: Implementing Japanese Ideas of Modernity

The late years of the Tokugawa era inherently affected Japan's self-perception as an independent nation and turned the tentative approaches to modernize the country into a widespread national campaign. The Unequal Treaties of 1858 was a setback and fostered the realization that the country "was yet unequipped to be a modern nation-state" (Hirakawa 495). Based on this realization, Japan developed an unrelenting eagerness to learn about the West and its understanding of modernity to compensate for the inferiority imposed upon them.¹⁵ The historian George B. Sansom considered this unbounded enthusiasm as characterizing the Meiji era as a "period of intoxication" with modernization (378) and contributes to the perception of this time as encompassing

modernity in terms of cutting-edge technology, science, and medicine; an industrial (as opposed to agrarian) economy; an extensive transportation and communications infrastructure; the construction of imposing buildings for diplomatic and cultural events;

(Orbaugh 21–22)

Consequently, Japan turned a situation of Western occupation to their best advantage by dedicating the national agenda to modernization. The agenda to shape *New Japan* comprised two major goals – the first was to modernize Japan under Western premises and to reverse the Unequal Treaties of 1858 and the second was to develop Japanese modernity without losing the authenticity of Japanese culture. These goals constituted the "master narrative" (Morikawa 251) of *New Japan* and rendered Japanese modernity a hybrid composition of Eastern and Western values.¹⁶ The years between 1868 and 1890 attest to the most intense phase of modernization in Japan. The modernity that took shape during these years emerged as a result of "selective modernization" (Hirakawa 448) and the goal to perpetuate "tradition within modernity" (Duara 131). Thus, following Sukehiro Hirakawa's and Prasenjit Duara's argument, Japan pursued a systematic evaluation of

¹⁵Hirakawa describes Japan's thrive for modernity as "show[ing] a singular desire to learn from the West" (Hirakawa 495).

¹⁶"Dieses *master narrative* besagt: Japan habe viel vom Westen gelernt, vor allem moderne Technologie und Wissenschaft, mit großen Anstrengungen und Mühen, um sich zu industrialisieren und sich in der Welt zu behaupten. Trotzdem habe Japan seine kulturelle Identität – von den Japanern selbst oft als *tamashii* bezeichnet- nicht verloren." (Morikawa 227) & Morikawa describes Japan's approach as "eine Mischung von 'altem Japan' und 'Westen' " (Morikawa 252).

Western values of modernization in relation to the goal to shape a modern but still Japanese nation. This approach advocated Japanese self-reliance in the quest for modernity. Nevertheless, it cannot be neglected that Japan initially was dependent on the West as a role model of modernization since

Japan, a non-Western nation, adopted from the West a tremendous amount of what was fundamental and essential to modernization during these twenty-two years. Without those ideas and institutions, the establishment of a national identity would have been impossible, and the existence of an independent Japan within a society of nations dominated and ordered by the West could not have been maintained.”

(Hirakawa 497–498)

What becomes clear is the ambiguous significance of the West in Meiji Japan. Regardless of the Unequal Treaties and its impact on Japan’s national self-esteem, Hirakawa points out how the West functioned as a modernization template for Japan. The West as *the* source of modernization clearly renders Japan’s modernity as resulting from an other-directed endeavor. Nevertheless, the process carries traits of inner-directness as well since Japan aimed to create its own type of modernity to counter the political inferiority imposed by the Unequal Treaties. Japanese modernity was created through “cultural borrowing” (Pyle 21) and thus comprised fragments of Japanese tradition and Western modernization which gave rise to conflicts of cultural identity throughout the Meiji era.¹⁷

The idea to learn from the West to build a modern nation state became embedded in the governmental pledge to modernize made in 1868, also known as *the* Charter Oath. This document set the terms for Japan’s modernization strategy and determined a creation of Japanese modernity originating in Western paradigms. Among the five goals of modernization presented in the document, the fifth article explicitly addressed the intention to modernize through education declaring that “[k]nowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule” (De Bary, Gluck, and Tiedemann 666). The Charter Oath articulated Japan’s perseverance to self-direct the course of modernization and the intention to remain culturally distinct from the West. One example in point was the Iwakura Mission.

¹⁷“There were, however, troubling implications in this identification with Western history and traditions. Cultural borrowing, though not new in the Japanese experience, in the latter part of the nineteenth century posed peculiar dilemmas: its coincidence with mounting national consciousness wounded self-esteem. If the goals and values of Japanese society were defined entirely in Western terms, all cultural autonomy would be lost” (Pyle 21).

Between 1871-1873 a delegation of government officials was sent to the US and Europe to gather knowledge of Western concepts of education, governance, and general culture. This “study tour”, as Sebastian Conrad frames it, equipped Japan with the knowledge necessary for its own modernization.¹⁸ The majority of the delegation was male but some women were also included in this mission. In doing so, Japan aimed to present itself as a progressive nation aware of the necessity to change its social and cultural conception of women.¹⁹ Following Mara Patessio’s line of argument, a scholar of Japanese studies, these women “personified the expanding horizons of female education” and acted as “symbols of national progress” (*Women and Public Life* 55). Tsuda Umeko and Okami Keiko are the most prominent women who were part of the mission. Leaving Japan at the age of seven, Tsuda was the youngest member of the delegation to live and study in the US. Upon her return she founded Tsuda College in Tokyo, one of the oldest private institutions for women in Japan. Okami was the first Japanese woman to earn a medical degree from an American university in 1889 and became the first president of the Tokyo Women’s Medical College.²⁰ Tsuda and Okami are living examples of women who contributed to the education of Japanese women beyond the domestic realm.²¹

With these measures Japan started to direct their own course of modernization. What began as an imposed occupation of trade ports in Japan was turned into an opportunity to modernize on Western *and* Japanese terms. Japan aimed to achieve technological and political progress without the loss

¹⁸“In 1872 a group of high-ranking government officials under the leadership of Iwakura Tomomi set out for an 18-month tour to the United States and Europe. The significance of this study tour (the concomitant aim of revision of unequal treaties was not successful) is underscored by the fact that important government decisions were halted until the return of the delegation. The government began to hire foreign experts (*oyatou gaikokujin*) who were expected to establish institutions and forms of knowledge that were considered advanced and enlightened. They included the German Erwin von Bälz, who was instrumental in institutionalizing Western medicine, the American zoologist Edward S. Morse, the Italian artists Antonio Fontanesi and Edoardo Chiossone (who painted the emperor), the German Jacob Meckel whose military reforms are sometimes credited with Japan’s victory over China in 1895, and Ludwig Riess who helped transform the various traditions of studying the past into the academic discipline of History” (Conrad 608).

¹⁹“Discussions about women allowed the Japanese to feel as though they were moving toward a level of civilization on par with the West, while at the same time preserving their unique traditions” (M. S. Anderson 6).

²⁰Beatrice Levin also writes that Okami believed that “women must have economic independence [and that] medicine would be a path to earn a decent living and to self-respect” (Levin 73).

²¹The original idea of making women part of the Iwakura Mission was to employ them as teachers of domesticity. See (Rose 4-5). For a more detailed account of women’s education abroad refer to (Patessio, *Women and Public Life* 55-57).

of Japanese authenticity thus revealing the ambivalence of Japanese modernity marked by the “tension between a common modernity and a distinctive national history” (De Bary, Gluck, and Tiedemann 1224). What were these Japanese terms though? The Confucian ideal of self-cultivation, also known as *shūyō* (Molony and Uno 15), constituted the foundation of Japan’s aspiration for modernization. The Tokugawa belief in the Confucian values of “loyalty . . . , filialty, obligation, duty, harmony, and diligence” (Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* 191) became manifested in the modernization agenda of Meiji Japan. The understanding of “‘[s]elf-cultivation’ [as] essential to the moral life, and the key to social order and harmony” (Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* 191) served to preserve the indigenous and collective identity of Japan in a process of Western-inspired modernization.²² The Meiji agenda thus declared education, moral and formal, a prerequisite to accomplishing the national goal of modernization. In this way, education became means to generate a sense of affiliation in Japanese with the modern nation. The discourse of “character building” (Hirakawa 485) applied to the emperor and the empress as much as the common people of Japan. Both ends of the social spectrum were required to devote their education to the nation as a whole. Therefore, the Meiji discourse considered personal and national education synonymously. Education was understood as means to create New Japan and not as means to create modern Japanese. In contrast to the US process of modernization throughout the Progressive Era, Japanese modernization can be seen here as a matter of “collective agency” (Nisbett 6) rather than Western-inspired individualism.

The Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 substantiated the ideal of a modernized, collective, and yet unimpaired culture. The initial enthusiasm for collecting Western ideas of modernity became subject to critical evaluation in the Japanese context as can be clearly seen in the text below:

Know ye, Our subjects:

Our Imperial Ancestors (*waga kōso kōsō*) founded our empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly planted virtue; Our subjects, ever united in loyalty (*chū*) and filial piety (*kō*), have, from generation to generation, illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Nation (*kokutai no seika*), and herein also lies the source of Our education (*kyōiku no engen*). Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty

²²“Die Japanizität beansprucht keine Universalität; vielmehr konstituiert sie sich gerade dadurch, dass sie sich vom Universellen unterscheidet” (Morikawa 61–62).

and moderation; extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate the arts and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore, advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the constitution and observe the laws; should emergence arise, offer yourself courageously to the state (*giyū kō ni hōshī*); and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of our imperial throne coeval with heaven and earth. So shall ye not only be our good and faithful subjects (*chūryō no shinmin*), but render illustrious the best traditions of your forefathers.

The way here set forth is indeed the teaching bequeathed by our imperial ancestors, to be observed alike by their descendants and the subjects, infallible for all ages and true in all places. It is our wish to lay it to heart in all reverence in common with you, our subjects, that we all thus attain to the same virtue.

(De Bary, Gluck, and Tiedemann 780)

The Imperial Rescript on Education embodied an official return to the origins of Japanese culture after a phase of enthusiastic and intense learning from the West. Marius B. Jansen evaluates the Imperial Rescript on Education as ending modernization under the terms set in the Charter Oath:

One might conclude, with Hirakawa Sukehiro, that where the Meiji Revolution began with a turn to the West in the Charter Oath's promise to "seek wisdom throughout the world," and posited that "just laws of nature" had theretofore not been followed in Japan, the Imperial Rescript on Education brought that process to an end with its assertion that a "national essence," whose values had been manifested in Japan's antiquity, should be the foundation for future action and belief.

(Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* 411)

According to Jansen both documents represent different stages of Japanese modernity. Whereas the Charter Oath initiated the intense accumulation of Western modernity, the Imperial Rescript propagated the appropriation and absorption of Western notions under Japanese terms. Jansen is right in his assumption to the extent that Japan's modernization can be read to have reached a point of saturation when the rescript was published. Nevertheless, it is doubtful, whether the process of "selective modernization" (Hirakawa 448), ignited by the discriminatory trade agreements of the Treaty of Kanagawa and the Unequal Treaties, actually came to a complete standstill. The

enforced opening of Japan more likely shaped diplomatic relations between Japan and the US far into the present age.

Trade relations continued and within the course of history, cultural exchange became a predominant channel of influence on both sides of the Pacific. The idea to advance Japan based on the accumulation of knowledge was not abandoned. The foundation of exchange societies such as the Japan Society of New York in 1907 and the America-Japan Society (AJS) of Tokyo in 1917 refute Jansen's assumption and clarify how US-Japanese relations matured into diplomatic ties based on mutual interest.²³ Learning from the West was expanded to connote learning about the East. The promotion of Japan and its culture was pursued "to promote friendly relations between the people Japan and the United States of America, and to study the aims of national life of the people of the United States, their ideals, learning, arts, industries, and economic condition, and a more general dissemination of such knowledge among the people of Japan" (Auslin 122). With regard to later developments in US-Japanese relations, it is questionable whether the westernization of Japan was actually halted beyond recall since the rescript did not signify a return to *sakoku* but was rather a reminder to respect Japanese tradition while keeping borders open. Therefore, Jansen's evaluation is only partially valid in the context of diplomatic and cultural ties that formed between Japan and the US during the 20th century and beyond.

Modernization in Japan is externally and internally informed as Japan sought to understand the West and mingle these insights of Western modernization with Japanese traditions. The relations between Japan and the West therefore remained ambivalent since the West was perceived as both an inspiration and a deterrent to Japan's aspirations for modernization. Japan's measures to reform education in the Meiji era and the ideological foundation of these reforms are an important indicator of Japan's efforts to modernize the country under both traditional and progressive premises, confirming once again Duara's delineation of Japanese modernity as being "tradition within modernity" (Duara 131).

Modernization as Translation / Translating Modernity

The comprehension of Western modernity and its introduction in Japanese culture was not realizable without the use of translation. Although translation mediates between two languages, it is not an objective process as it entails cultural selection outcomes of "[d]ecisions about what is translated [as

²³See Auslin 84–129.

a reflection of] social and cultural rules and hierarchies“ (Sorà 1045).²⁴ Hirakawa Sukehiro, a historian of Meiji Japan, frames the transition of modern Japan as a process of “Western learning” (Hirakawa 13).

The opening of the country also led to a flood of imported English, French, Russian and German works in an attempt to learn from the West, and the aim of many translations in the first decade of the Meiji period was educational rather than aesthetic.

(Kondo and Wakabayashi 488)

The forceful end of Japan’s self-imposed isolation fostered a massive invasion of foreign influences. Translation was used to decipher these notions of modernity and integrate these in Japan’s plans to become a modern nation. Nevertheless, translation efforts were not random but subject to meticulous choices by the Meiji government and its aim to transform Japan into an independent nation. Therefore, translation was not only essential for understanding Western modernity but also for monitoring the country’s exposure to foreign influences under Western occupation. Hence, translation functioned as an instrument of cultural selection.

However, the idea to use translation as means of advancing Japanese culture was not novel to Meiji Japan. As a “culture of translation” (Levy 10) Japan has a tradition of constructing its cultural identity through acts of translation. In premodern times, Japan built its cultural identity on aspects of Chinese culture and language. The import of these foreign values should not be misconstrued as a replication of Chinese values in Japan. Instead, we need to take into account how translation also alters texts through the very process of translating them. For instance,

the Confucian value system that was brought in along with the Chinese canon, Chinese writing, government institutions, and religion, was changed by the very processes of translation and transculturation that brought them to Japan.

(Haag 30)

Translation thus paved the way for Chinese values into Japanese culture but did not guarantee the fidelity of the concepts adopted. These concepts were not imitated but adapted to the Japanese context. Although, “Japan

²⁴I apply Gustav Sorà’s understanding of translation: “Translation serves two purposes. In the first place it involves a mediation: the translation is a device that allows comprehension of a message expressed in a language that a potential receiver does not know. ... Secondly, it is a *phenomenon of cultural selection*: not everything is translated. Decisions about what is translated reflect social and cultural rules and hierarchies” (1045).

had no written script until the adoption of Chinese characters in the 4th century” as Judy Wakabayashi (121) emphasizes, this did not mean that Chinese dominated the Japanese language. Chinese was integrated in a translational manner by introducing an “interpretive reading of Chinese” known as *kambun kundoku* (Kondo and Wakabayashi 485). This method allowed Japanese to “read Chinese texts without translation” (Kondo and Wakabayashi 485) and remain in the Japanese context. Therefore, Japan had long included aspects of the Chinese culture and language into the Japanese context through “cultural borrowing” (Pyle 21). The latter describes Japan’s approach to make foreign notions such as Chinese characters or Confucianism their own based on translation.²⁵ When Japan aimed for the revision of its inferior position as an allegedly uncivilized country, it did so in relation to the given tradition of appropriating Chinese notions through translation. The correlation between translation and “cultural borrowing” (Pyle 21) is thus intrinsic to Japanese culture and constitutes the grounds on which Japanese modernity was able to grow and mature. As a result, not only translation is “key in the process of modernization” (23), as Sergey Tyulenev has claimed, but also the process of “cultural borrowing” (Pyle 21).

Translation is cultural borrowing in the Japanese context. Therefore, understanding the formation of Japanese modernity requires a profound understanding of the incentives for translation in the Meiji era.

The long-term and far-reaching implications of translation for Japanese modernity have little regard for disciplinary boundaries; proper inquiry into this topic calls for a consideration of “translation” not simply in terms of language and texts, but in the broader sense of what motivates translation, what political and cultural developments translation makes possible, and what the sociopolitical consequences of a particular translation may be.

(Haag 40–41)

What knowledge becomes subject of the translation and how it is translated are intrinsic in the approach to translation. It is equally important though, to raise questions about why particular pieces of information are translated at all. In his essay on translation and modernity in Meiji Japan, Andre Haag draws our attention to the latter to emphasize the importance of political, cultural, and social incentives in the consideration of what is deemed important enough to translate.²⁶ The selection of texts for transla-

²⁵See Haag 22–26 for an extensive description of Sino-Japanese relations in the Edo period.

²⁶Haag 15–41.

tion conducted in Meiji era all served the same cultural and political goal of transforming Japan into a modern nation, also propagated as *New Japan*.²⁷ Consequently, the formation of Meiji modernity was fostered through the reconciliation of the given tradition of “cultural borrowing” (Pyle 21) and the modern striving for Japanese nationhood, disclosing the socio-political function of translation.²⁸

When borders were open to the West, little was known about the West in Japan. Contrary to the situation with China, Japan was actually faced with Westerners demanding trade agreements without the time of thorough investigation of Western customs and character.

Information was completely lacking. This was the polar opposite of the situation vis-à-vis China, there was knowledge of China, but no Chinese people; when it came to the West, however, Westerners appeared, but there was no information about them.

(Haag 18)

The early years of Meiji Japan were thus marked by a profound gap in knowledge, not only about Western modernity, but also about the West itself. The West was the unknown other that caused “a deep-rooted sense of insecurity and crisis” (18). China did not pose a threat to Japan, since China was traditionally viewed as merely a source where Japan could retrieve knowledge from at its own discretion. In contrast to relations with the West, Sino-Japanese relations did not curtail Japan’s independence or declared Japan an unequal partner.

On the one hand Japan’s modern encounter with the West is characterized by its conspicuous divergence from an earlier mode of relating to the outside world. Whereas Japan’s premodern relations with China were knowledge-based, consisting for the most part in a unilateral transfer of learning and culture, Western steamships brought the Japanese face-to-face with a new and distant culture about which precious little was known. . . . [T]he knowledge-based model of Japan’s premodern relations with China framed its encounter with the West in terms of knowledge about the other or a lack thereof.

(Haag 18)

²⁷Several other sources on Meiji Japan have referred to the Japanese nation state as “New Japan” See (Jansen, *The Emergence of Meiji Japan* 197), and (Beasley 2).

²⁸I refer to Boris Buden’s and his co-authors who found that “the cultural task of the translator is always a social – indeed a political- one, the task of nation-building” (Buden et al. 200).

The rapid transformations were only realizable because of Japan's custom of assimilating Chinese notions in its own culture. Japan studied China from a distance and enjoyed the convenience of adaptation without actual interaction with China and its people. The encounter with the West differed from Japan's relation with China in the way that Japan was overwhelmed by the "denial of agency under international law which was rationalized precisely by the claim that such subject nations were uncivilized" (M. Anderson 49). The forceful opening of the Japanese ports for naval trade and the Unequal Treaties of 1858 caught Japan unprepared for a situation of Western occupation. The "knowledge-based model" (Haag 18) was useful for Sino-Japanese relations but also disclosed the profound gaps in knowledge about the West. Nevertheless, the political humiliation spurred the motivation to redeem Japanese autonomy through the use of the same "knowledge-based model" (Haag 18) and revealed the given motivation to use translation to meet their "need for information" (Kondo and Wakabayashi 485). The ensuing study of the West through translation of books and learning delegations known as the Iwakura Mission attest to this approach. Japan similarly studied and appropriated Western modernity as it did with Chinese values during the Edo period. Therefore, the import of Chinese values preconditioned the Meiji immersion in Western modernity.

The importation of foreign books, both in the original language and in Chinese translation, the concomitant rise of Dutch studies, and a growing consciousness . . . that Chinese too was a foreign language, all helped to condition the rise of a translated modernity in the mid-nineteenth century.

(Haag 26)

Although the Iwakura Mission immersed Japan in Western notions of modernity, these notions also had to be processed for the Japanese context. Translation provided the means for Japan's "selective modernization" (Hirakawa 448) and the realization of an independent and internationally acknowledged nation. Therefore, Meiji Japan aimed for what Lydia Liu and Andre Haag coin "translated modernity" (Haag 26; Liu 185). Consequently, ambitions to redeem the autonomy lost on account of the Unequal Treaties demonstrate "translation as means of learning *and* rectifying" (Tyulenev 23) (emphasis added by me).

The idea of modernity entered Meiji Japan prior to the actual implementations of modernity. Translation informed Japan about existing examples of modernity and provided a theoretical groundwork that enabled Japan to fill the voids encountered. Japan needed to understand given concepts of

modernization prior to applying these in the Meiji context.

Translation, the great equalizer of historically distinct political movements, allowed these theories to be introduced almost as soon as they were written, but long before the social and economic conditions that they described had come into being in Japan.

(Haag 33)

In this way, Japan was able to choose among already developed concepts of modernity, European and American, prior to actually modernizing the country. Therefore, understanding modernity preceded the process of becoming modern in Japan. The ability to apply the knowledge gathered on modernity required a dual approach to translation. On the one hand, translation mediated the given ideas of modernity in Europe and the U.S. On the other hand, the translated ideas had to be transferred into the Meiji context and were translated culturally. Given the complex approach of using translation, the idea of Japan as a passive absorber of Western modernity can no longer be sustained.

Translation bestowed Japan with cultural agency. The “thorough acquisition of knowledge about the West, [led] to an embrace of translation as a critical means of defense” (Haag 18). Despite the policy of isolationism, Japan sought cultural and intellectual inspiration from China. People did not emigrate from China to Japan during the Edo period, but nonetheless there was a consistent influx of Chinese notions into Japan. China was therefore perceived as a valuable source of knowledge and not as a threat to Japanese autonomy. Consequently, Japan’s cultural identity in the Edo period was already a mosaic consisting of given Japanese and imported Chinese values. In this way it is also affirmed how “Japanese . . . embraced translation as the preferred method of interacting with the outside world” (Haag 17). Japan was able to withdraw from the rest of the world and yet retrieve knowledge from China as a source of its own choosing. Sino-Japanese relations were maintained from afar to ensure a controlled influx of Chinese values. In this way, Japan remained a self-sustained culture by restricting Chinese influences. What is meant by interaction then is not the establishment of Chinese values through face-to-face involvement between Chinese and Japanese. Instead this term refers to the implicit impact of China on Japan through the acts of translation on the Japanese side. Translation therefore accounts for Japan’s unique situation in which the country could consciously avert and admit foreign influences at its own discretion. The geographic isolation in premodern times thus did not thwart Japan’s advancement through the acquisition of foreign knowledge but allowed for a restricted form of transculturation

instead. Despite the state of isolation Japanese culture complied with Wolfgang Ivens's observation that "cultures...interpenetrate or emerge from one another" (4). As a result, the policy of isolation served to maintain its self-proclaimed empowerment.

In contrast to the Tokugawa era, the early Meiji years were a time of insecurity for Japan. Carol Gluck asserts that "Meiji was an exceedingly self-conscious age" (Gluck 11). The insecurities felt during the early Meiji years explains the ambivalence of Japanese modernization as fluctuating between consciously admitting foreign influences to Japan and yet protecting Japanese culture from vanishing under these influences at the same time. Contrary to the policy of isolation in which Japan aimed for an absolute restriction of foreign influences on Japanese culture, the heavy influx of Western ideas caused processes of hybridization in which Japanese culture was first confronted with Western culture and then converged. However, this process did not imply a complete Westernization of Japanese culture but rather led to another stage of development in which the notions gained became adapted to Japanese culture. Thus, translation functioned as a defense mechanism intended to perpetuate Japanese uniqueness and demonstrate Japan's ability to adapt to a time of transition. Nevertheless, the difference is that actual interaction between the Western powers and Japan took place on unequal territory. The enforced status as uncivilized and therefore inferior prompted Japan in its motivation to channel the efforts of translation beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge to the idea of protecting and reaffirming its own culture towards the condescending West. What Meiji Japan aimed for was the perpetuation of an authentic core of Japanese culture while enhancing this core with beneficiary ideas of Western modernity. Relating to Haag's idea of translation as defense Japan's approach to modernity has to be seen as a protective measure rather than blind imitation.²⁹ Japan aimed to be on par with the West with regard to the economic and political power but wanted to remain culturally distinct from the West in terms of cultural authenticity or uniqueness. Hence, with the influx of foreign notions of modernity to restore its self-reliance. The paradoxical situation in which Japan was dependent on the West for notions of modernity and yet used these notions to emancipate themselves from the allegedly "superior" West is crucial to understanding the changing attitudes towards modernization and the West in the long Meiji era.

²⁹See Haag 18.

Gendering Modernity: The National Family & the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*Ryōsai Kenbo*) Ideal

Although, Japanese ambitions to create a modern nation state aimed at reaffirming patriarchal gender conventions, the same ambitions were also found to trigger the emergence of a women's rights discourse in the later years of the Meiji era. After all, "[m]odernity in Japan as elsewhere has encompassed changes in notions of gender and gender roles as well as economic, political, and cultural changes" (Molony and Uno 3). The nation and the reconceptualization of gender images are considered interrelated factors affecting the emergence of *atarashii onna*, the Japanese equivalent of the American New Woman in use starting in 1910, in social and as will be shown later, fictional accounts.³⁰ Hence, the political, technical, and economic modernization of Japan, as described in the previous sections, went hand in hand with socio-cultural modernization of gender. The preceding historical account of Japan's modernity constitutes the backdrop against which the emergence of the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) and *atarashii onna* can be analyzed.

Initially, modern womanhood was defined by the ideal of the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*). Generally, this ideal encapsulated the appreciation of women's roles as first mothers and second, as wives in modernizing Japan. In her study of the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) in modern Japan Koyama Shizuko, a specialist for women's history in Japan, points out that

from the Meiji period onward women were assimilated into the nation-state, first as mothers, later as wives. In the transition from Edo to Meiji, raising and educating children first came to be seen as an essential vocation for women, and a "good wife" was expected not merely to be subservient to her husband and parents-in-law but to take responsibility for housework and manage the household. Women were also expected to use their knowledge to help their husbands and to exercise their "high" moral nature. All of this means that *ryōsai kenbo* thought articulated a model of what was expected of women in a form that was responding to such things as a view of the genders as a diametrically opposed and a modern sexual division of labor which placed men at work and women in the home.

³⁰"It was unquestionably Shōyō's lecture of 1910 that used the expression New Woman as a specific term and led to its use by a wider audience. In that lecture Shōyō mentioned the activity of the women's movements in the West, and in particular discussed a new trend in European theatre portraying a new type of woman, such as the character Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*" (Kazue 206).

(Koyama 49–50)

The *ryōsai kenbo* perpetuates an essentialist approach to women's significance in modern Japan and yet grants women public recognition of their domestic duties. Despite Koyama's argument that the *ryōsai kenbo* is not a modern invention but a concept which evolved in meaning from the Tokugawa era to the post-WWI period, I will focus on the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) ideal solely in relation to the integration of women in the Meiji state.³¹ The recognition granted by the propagation of the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) was public but nevertheless only symbolic in nature since this ideal did not change the expectations of women to excel as mothers and wives alone. Legal equality with regard to property rights or suffrage was not included in the Meiji vision of modern womanhood:

The Constitution (1889) and the Civil Code (1898) gave no rights to women. Civil rights – even the right to reign as an emperor – were limited to men, and wives had no rights independent of their husbands. Husbands could maintain concubines, but a wife's adultery was ground for divorce. Wives had no right of contract. Sons were given absolute priority in inheritance. Women were even prohibited, under Article Five of the Public Peace Police Law (first passed in 1890 and expanded in 1900), from joining political parties or speaking at public rallies.

(Molony 534)

The Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) ideal granted women a public place in Meiji Japan without changing the traditional perception of women as mothers and wives. Although their conventional roles were now declared meaningful for the constitution of a modern Japanese nation, Meiji women were still considered legal minors dependent on their husbands or fathers that acted as their legal guardians. Similar to the US, Japan's women had no legal identity of their own. Their identity would only be recognizable under their husband's or father's name. Legal recognition, even of this minimal sort, was

³¹“The period covered here ranges from the middle of the Edo period, in the eighteenth century, to the early Shōwa period, in the late 1920s. Roughly speaking, this period saw the appearance of three different models embodying the expectations that society held for women. The first was the model that existed before the ideal of *ryōsai kenbo* came into being. The second was the original *ryōsai kenbo* model. The third was the *ryōsai kenbo* model after it had altered in content in response to changing social conditions. Through an analysis of these three models, I will attempt to explain the meaning of the appearance of the historically constructed concept of *ryōsai kenbo* and identify the factors that caused it to change, while also examining the content of the ideas themselves” (Koyama 8).

subsumed under male patronship and sustained male dominance as a result. In contrast to the Tokugawa era, women's domestic duties were not taken for granted in the Meiji era as they were framed within the larger context of the nation. As the generator and social glue that keeps the nation together, women's public presence became legitimized through the propagation of the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) by the Meiji government. Only during the late Meiji period (1910s) did women's activist start to articulate demands for suffrage and property rights.³²

The conventional role as a mother serves as the starting point for modern womanhood and draws another similarity to the American context. Like the American New Woman, modern womanhood in Japan evolved from the conventional expectations of women and paved the way for the Japanese New Woman, also known as *atarashii onna*, from 1910 on. As a result, the introduction of the ideal of the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) is the catalyst for the formation of womanhood in later years of the Meiji era and the Taisho period (1912-1926), even though this is an effect that was never intended by the Meiji government. The modern context in which the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) materialized was characterized by the emphasis on the nation, the nation as a family, and the education of the Japanese people in compliance with the goal of modernity aimed for. The concept of the Japanese nation was the driving force behind Japan's modernization and its educational reforms.

The abstract idea of a modern nation was linked to tangible measures in the shape of educational reform to outline a clear path of participation for the Japanese people, especially for women. Therefore, Mori Arinori, Japan's first Minister of Education from 1886-1889, perceived formal education as means to internalize and perfect morality as well as loyalty in Japanese men and women – and thereby benefitting the creation of national modernity. In this way, Mori balanced Japan's modernization with the long-held tradition of learning as “character building” (Hirakawa). His ideas on modern education complemented articles two and three of the Charter Oath which strongly promoted the inclusion of all social classes in the process of building a modern nation state:

All classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state. The common people, no less than the civil and military officials, shall each be allowed to pursue his own calling so that there be no discontent.

(De Bary, Gluck, and Tiedemann 672)

³²See Molony 534.

Meiji Japan drafted modernization as an egalitarian mission in compliance with the Japanese belief “that education is essential for both personal and national development and that it requires the active and sustained commitment of energy and resources at all levels of society” (*A Cross-Cultural Comparison* 4). The premodern convention to restrict education and its access thereto by social class was thus abandoned in the Meiji era.³³ Education evolved from a demarcator of class to a common vocation of the Japanese populace.³⁴ The form of equality suggested by the oath served to generate support for Japan’s modernity and constituted the ground for women’s inclusion in the nation. However, contrary to the Declaration of Independence of 1776 which promotes equality as an individualized concept the Japanese approach to equality refers to Japanese society as a collective. Therefore, the Charter Oath reinforced the Japanese self-image as a *Gemeinschaft* (collective community) not as a *Gesellschaft* (society) (Nisbett 56). In line with the sense of loyalty instilled in Japanese citizens, the modern nation was promoted not only as an ideal to aim for, but also as the family every Japanese is indebted to. This reaffirms Richard Nisbett’s observation, a psychologist pursuing research in differences between East Asian and Western thinking, of Japan as a *Gemeinschaft*. However, in relation to the historical developments, Japan needs to be understood as a collective that was enhanced through the renewed emphasis of the *ie* in relation to the nation. The *ie* system, a patriarchal family structure which prioritizes the continuation of the paternal family line, was reframed to declare the nation the family to all Japanese in the Meiji era.³⁵ The “main family” represented by the Emperor and his spouse would rule over the “branch famil[ies]” (Orbaugh 37) represented by all individual households. In premodern times the *ie* would refer to the main house which is headed by the father or by the eldest son or even son-in-law. The head of the main house represented the entire family and ruled over the main and subordinate houses, which are headed by younger brothers or the husbands of younger sisters.³⁶ As a result, modernization ushered “traditional loyalties to the family and to the local community by encouraging the individual to identify above all with the nation” (Pyle 19).

³³ “[E]ducation had been essentially class-based, with segregated schools for the samurai class and a wide variety of autonomous and ad hoc institutions for the common classes: merchants, farmers, artisans, and assorted others. For most, education was largely a family endeavor, with decisions about what school to go to, how long to stay, and so forth being private matters” (De Bary, Gluck, and Tiedemann 751).

³⁴ “The major accomplishment of education in the Meiji period was centralization and standardization across the entire population” (De Bary, Gluck, and Tiedemann 751).

³⁵ See Hendry, “Family-Life in Pre-War Japan” 15–17 & Orbaugh 44 for definitions of the *ie*.

³⁶ See Orbaugh 37–38.

Officially, the *Meiji Civil Code* of 1890 transferred this structure of the stem family to the nation.³⁷ The nation became “*kazoku kokka* (the family state), in which the emperor was figured as head of national family . . . and all his subjects . . . as his children” (Orbaugh 29). The family system was thus based on a dual structure which featured the nation as the universal frame of reference whereas the immediate family, considered as *katei* continued in its function to uphold stability in the Japanese nuclear family.³⁸ The family, in the larger or smaller sense, gained importance as the key component for a stable nation and so did the functions men and women fulfilled in the realm of the family. The Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) declared women part of the national family to integrate them as loyal subjects eager to devote themselves and their abilities to *New Japan* alongside their male counterparts. Modernity and modern nation gained legitimacy because of its embeddedness in the tradition of the family.

The Meiji leaders hoped to modify traditional loyalties to the family and to the local community by encouraging the individual to identify above all with the nation. There was a natural growth of national consciousness, too, with the emergence of Japan as a nation-state in competition with other nation-states and with the influx of Westerners and Western cultures.

(Pyle 19)

National patriotism rooted Japanese people in their understanding of the rightfulness of Japanese modernity and its implementation. Taking pride in Japanese modernity guaranteed a devoted engagement among Japanese people. The nation as the family to take pride in constituted one incentive for individual commitment to Japanese modernity. Another incentive was derived from the functions men and women were expected to fulfill in the national family. The approach to modernity was therefore determined by

³⁷“The Constitution (1889) and the Civil Code (1898) gave no rights to women. Civil rights – even the right to reign as an emperor – were limited to men, and wives had no rights independent of their husbands. Husbands could maintain concubines, but a wife’s adultery was ground for divorce. Wives had no right of contract. Sons were given absolute priority in inheritance. Women were even prohibited, under Article Five of the Public Peace Police Law (first passed in 1890 and expanded in 1900), from joining political parties or speaking at public rallies” (Molony 534).

³⁸ “In contrast to the ‘traditional’ ie system, the *katei* was presented by its advocates as a modern idea, inspired by the Christian ideology of monogamy and the Western ideal of romantic love more generally. The *katei* was envisioned as the Japanese version of the modern nuclear family, centered on a romantically bonded married couple and their offspring; the parents of the husband, even if he were the eldest son, had no place in this schema, in strict contrast to the multigenerational ie household” (Orbaugh 46).

imaging the nation as a family with strong mothers and fathers whose different contributions were equally important and deserving of respect and protection after the attainment of national independence and strength; and struggling for equal rights of citizenship as a prior condition for women and men to work on behalf of the nation.

(Molony 513–514)

The family state was built on gender-segregated tasks for women as mothers and men as fathers. Without this strict distinction between men having public duties and women having domestic duties, the family state could not have been united with the *ie* system. As it turns out, the family state was simply a macrocosmic version of the Japanese household with its emphasis on patriarchal power structures and the perpetuation of a public and private realm. The tradition to define women by their maternal qualities alone remained throughout the modern era. However, the label of the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) was nonetheless a sign of public recognition of their abilities by including their qualities as educators and caretakers of future Japanese citizens.

For middle- and upper-class women, the government’s ideal of the ‘good wife, wise mother’ (*ryōsai kenbo*) reflected a new emphasis on education for women, but it also defined their roles exclusively in terms of mothering and caring for the household, from which men were now absent.

(De Bary, Gluck, and Tiedemann 1190)

The intricate ties between motherhood and the nation were supplemented by the need to educate mothers in the process. Women should gain a more profound understanding of their duties as caretakers and educators in the private realm and the impact of their duties on the public scale. However, “the [sole] purpose of female education was training women to be ‘good wives, wise mothers’ (*rysōai kenbo*), not independent professionals” (De Bary, Gluck, and Tiedemann 787). Nonetheless, women’s education was included in the promotion of education as serving the collective and the common goal of the modern state. Education was understood in terms of “character building” and not as a self-sustained individual and self-centered effort. Under the influence of foreign notions of formal education (France and Germany),³⁹ Mori declared literacy as an obligation for all Japanese people and a national priority in the preamble to the *Fundamental Code* of 1872:

³⁹See Sansom 450–467.

Learning is key to success in life, and no man can afford to neglect it. It is ignorance that leads man astray, makes him destitute, disrupts his family, and in the end destroys his life. . . . there shall, in the future, be no community with an illiterate family, nor a family with an illiterate person. . . .

(Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* 402–403)

Thus, aspirations for modernization also correlated with the introduction of formal and compulsory education for men and women. Education in the Tokugawa era was not standardized and was mostly received in temple schools (*shijuku*) or neighborhood schools (*terakoya*) and other local institutions.⁴⁰ The establishment of invariant standards for education in the early stages of the Meiji era also signified the unification of the Japanese people under one common goal: to become morally and formally educated for the sake of national modernization. Educational reform was clearly conducted under Confucian principles of “obligations . . . between emperor and subject, parent and child, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and between friend and friend” (Nisbett 6), which reaffirms the Japanese “sense of *collective agency*” (Nisbett 6). Mori addressed this particular form of indebtedness in *Essentials of Educational Administration* (*Gakusei yōrō*), a document comprising his ideas on universal education in Meiji Japan dated 1885.⁴¹

The national school system (schools established at state or public expense) is the predominant element in the school system and should be administered in accordance with the principle of enhancing the national economy (wealth and power of the state). . . . Higher learning should be divided into pure science and applied science. Both are essential to the interest of the state. . . . The purpose of elementary education is to provide training sufficient for children to understand their duties as Japanese subjects, to conduct themselves in an ethical fashion, and to secure their own individual well-being.

(De Bary, Gluck, and Tiedemann 776)

The reforms pursued underlined education as a group effort and channeled these efforts towards the social and political acknowledgement of Japan in

⁴⁰See Tocco 40 .

⁴¹“This was written in the form of a memorandum, and although the date is unknown, it is thought to be 1885, shortly before Mori became minister of education” (De Bary, Gluck, and Tiedemann 776).

the Western hemisphere. Richard Rubinger's claim that "literacy has always been associated with power and prestige" (164) in East Asia confirms the strong correlations between modernization, education, and collective selfhood in Meiji Japan. In this respect the implementation of modernization in terms of educational reform did not undermine the cultural identity of Japan, which is often referred to as *tamashii*.⁴² Instead these reforms reinforced the ideal of a modern Japan upholding traditional beliefs in self-cultivation and collective devotion. Japan did not seek to rid itself of its cultural identity but instead aimed to reinvent the national self, assigning Japan a new purpose in a modernized world. Amidst these ambitions to reverse the Unequal Treaties, women were granted a place within the nation as good wives, wise mothers. The expansion of the nation as a macroscopic family to all Japanese regardless of former class boundaries did not modernize the role of the mother or the wife fundamentally. It was merely the context that changed from the private home to the public nation. Meiji Japan's approach was paradoxical since the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) promoted as a modern ideal of womanhood even though this ideal did not entail any legal changes for Japanese women (such as suffrage and property rights).

Nonetheless, we need to consider the inclusion of women in the Meiji agenda as a first step which paved the way for later and more radical demands for women's equality in the late Meiji and Taisho period. The encounter with the West thus changed the government's perception of female education. However, the open borders also enabled the founding of women's schools by Christian missionaries such as Mary Kidder. She founded the Ferris Women's Seminary in 1870 to establish higher education for women in Meiji Japan. Similar in intention and educational scope was the Meiji Women's School that was founded by Japanese Christians in 1885.⁴³ Even though Japanese modernity was realized through domestic measures we have to bear in mind that these measures were informed by external, foreign sources. The Meiji government intended to construct women as mothers and wives in the modern nation through education reform. However, with the foreign influences flooding the country, especially from the missionary schools, women would soon question their domestic roles in later Meiji years (1890s) and debate the conflict between government-envisioned domesticity and the female desire for public participation. Therefore the West was inspiration for Japanese modernity as well as a major obstacle to the pursuit of Japanese interests.

⁴²See Morikawa 227.

⁴³For a more detailed account of women's education in Meiji Japan refer to Copeland and Ortabasi 12–16.

2.3 Modernity & Gender: A US-Japan Comparison

Modernity was the cause for intrinsic changes to the national identity of Japan and the US. Whereas Japanese struggle to become modernized constituted the onset to a cultural confrontation between Eastern and Western values in the process, the US saw itself confronted with an American spirit of individual agency drained by the demands of the industrial world. Therefore, in both contexts modernity triggered domestic conflicts with regard to their national identity. Before the Unequal Treaties of 1858 Japan would perceive itself as a culture unspoiled and in full charge of external influences as it was the case with its relationship with China. The US on the other hand witnessed the pitfalls of industrialization, alcoholism and poverty, among other perils endangering its ideal of individual liberty. Both ideals constituted an integral part of the countries' culture and measures were taken to counteract the downsides of modernity. In the course of modernization, whether it meant becoming modern (Japan) or coping with being modern (US), ideals of modern womanhood were reformulated in correspondence to the changes described.

Modernity was not only related to nationhood but also to gender. What connects Japan and the U.S are the recognizable "intersections between women's reproductive roles and the constructions of nations" (Yuval-Davis 27) amidst modern transitions. According to Yuval-Davis, women represent and create the national identity of a collective in their roles as mothers.⁴⁴ Despite the socio-cultural restrictions and definitions of womanhood that converge in the role of the mother, modernization caused a new recognition of this concept. Maternal duties were no longer of private interest alone but became also of public and national interest. Women in the US would draw attention to the benefits of their maternal qualities themselves, whereas in Meiji Japan, the national agenda framed conventional roles of the mother and wife as useful in their quest for modernity. Whether actively claimed (US) or passively assigned (Japan), in both countries women became part of the national agenda. Stressing qualities of motherhood in relation to the education of the nation or future citizens was therefore a transnational approach. As Koyama confirms

it was by no means only in Japan that the expectations for motherhood went beyond simple biological function to give birth to children, to include such social functions as loving, raising, and ed-

⁴⁴See Yuval-Davis 37–69.

ucating them. The notion of motherhood, therefore, is a historical one. (11)

In the US women actively claimed their place in public as reformers and suffragists by reframing their roles as moral guardians beyond the private home. What was initially perceived as the abandonment of domesticity was restated as an extension thereof in order to justify women's public engagement in issues of poverty, child labor, and alcoholism. In this way, the domestic sphere and the duties associated with it gained greater pertinence in the male-dominated public without the absolute negation or affirmation of the True Woman. The focus on motherhood in the American nation was therefore a focus on their function as caretakers rather than their biological ability to give birth.

By contrast, Meiji women were assigned a place public. As good wives, wise mothers (*ryōsai kenbo*) they earned a visible place in the newly-framed family state without gaining any legal rights. The acknowledgement of their skills as mothers served to perpetuate the collective commitment to *New Japan*. The ties between Meiji women and the nation were based on their biological and educational ability to provide devoted citizens that would build a strong Japanese nation. This essentialist reading of women's capabilities reflects what Nolte and Hastings called "the cult of productivity" (Nolte and Hastings 173). The nation was perceived as an extended family in which all Meiji women contributed in their functions as mothers and then as wives. Childbearing and childrearing were thus considered key functions of women in Meiji Japan. Modern womanhood in Japan and the US was therefore a hybrid comprising given conventions of womanhood as found in the role of the mother and new applications of these conventions in the context of the modern nation desired or the society found in need of (moral) reform.

With the integration of women in the discourses of the nation, opportunities of rudimentary education in Japan and of higher education in the US unfolded as signifiers of modernity. This means that being or becoming modern is also measured against the implementation of women's education in a society. As a result, "the 'emancipation of women' has come to signify ... important mechanisms in which ethnic and national projects signified - inwardly and outwardly - their move towards modernization" (Yuval-Davis 60). Whether women found their way on the public agendas themselves or were assigned these places, common to both countries is that women and the definition of their place in society came to the foreground amidst industrial transitions. In this way, the contexts of transitions made economically and politically paved the way for social and literary debates of woman's place in society under the rubric of the Woman Question.

Chapter 3

The Woman Question as Marriage Question: Kishida Toshiko’s “Daughters in Boxes” (JP) and Emma Goldman’s “The New Woman” (USA)

The Woman Question in Turn-of-the Century Japan & America

The historical outline presented the Meiji era in Japan (1868–1912) and the Progressive era in the US (1890–1912) as a time of transition that required both societies to rethink their national identities. However, between a fading past and an unprecedented present both countries also reassessed given categories of gender. The Woman Question thus emerged in response to the modernization processes that took place at the turn of the 20th century. Meiji Japan was confronted with the challenge to overcome a state of political and economic inferiority exposed by the arrival of Western powers, while, at the same time, Progressive America struggled to gain the upper hand over the detriments of industrial progress. “The question of women’s place in society and politics [thus] arose most acutely in times of turmoil and transformation” (Canning 193) and reveals the correlation between national change and gender as a social category.

The Woman Question in Japan and the US had similar objectives but addressed different and culturally informed issues. In Japan women’s rights activists castigated the ideal of the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*)

for restricting women's functions to the home, family, and marriage alone. As an educational ideal of Meiji Japan, this concept publicly recognized their functions as mothers and wives but it did not grant any legal privileges to them. After all, "the goal was to create a space for women in the modern Japanese polity, but one explicitly devoted to serving the family and the state" (Chin, "Translating the New Woman"). Contrary to the Meiji government, women's rights advocates argued that the Good Wife, Wise Mother-ideal (*ryōsai kenbo*) ought to signify women's public visibility *and* women's active engagement in creating Japan's modern nation state, often referred to as *New Japan*. Moreover, they called for a rereading of marriage from a parental arrangement to an intimate bond between lovers. The idea of romantic love entered Meiji Japan as a modern concept adopted from the West and signified "freedom and independence from the bonds of the traditional family and community" (Kazue 211).

In contrast to Japan, the women's movement in the US was highly politicized through its incessant demand for female suffrage. In Progressive America, women reformers and suffragists justified their public engagement as complying with the qualities of the devoted caretaker as represented by the Victorian True Woman. Progressive era women channeled their reform efforts towards society as a whole but also recognized that "their own condition needed addressing [and considered] suffrage as the key to a better world" (Bland 170). Reforms sought under the auspices of the temperance or settlement movement thus linked domestic tasks with a public cause. For instance, Frances Willard, second National President of the *Women's Christian Temperance Union* (WCTU), identified women's modern calling in the idea of making "the whole world homelike" (Berkin et al. 530). She saw the need for traditional caretakers to step outside the boundaries of the domestic sphere in order to exert their wholesome influence over a society struggling with working-class poverty, child labor, and alcoholism. In sum, women's confinement to marriage and domesticity was thus challenged from different angles. While in Japan the individual choice of a marital partner and agency in marriage were central, women's autonomy in the US was defined in terms of political participation and recognition.

Women speakers like Emma Goldman (US) and Kishida Toshiko (JP) created public forums in which these issues of female agency were addressed. The speeches "The New Woman" (USA/Lithuania 1898) by Goldman and "Daughters in Boxes" (Japan, 1883) by Kishida represent their respective reflections on the Woman Question in relation to women's subordination in or through marriage. By comparing Goldman's and Kishida's ideas of modern womanhood I intend to reveal the Woman Question as "a [common] marker

of modernity” that relates the Japanese to the American context.¹ Thereby I emphasize the Woman Question as representing a set of shared beliefs that connects Kishida and Goldman, despite the lack of personal interaction between them. Both engaged in the gender debate by declaiming the societal restrictions for women. However, they did so with the awareness that the Woman Question was a transnational debate. Goldman followed and supported the anarchist movement in Japan while Kishida endorsed the efforts of suffragists and reformers in Great Britain.² Hence, the Woman Question can be understood as a transnational space of feminist ideas that informed national activism. Therefore, I will first analyze Kishida’s and Goldman’s speech separately to provide insights into the particular circumstances of women’s issues in Japan and the US. As a second step, I will describe how their speeches display similarities and differences to demonstrate that both speakers engaged in the same cause but in their own way. Thereby, the juxtaposition also draws attention to the Woman Question as creating an imagined community that connects feminist activists “who do not - indeed who cannot - share a physical proximity . . . [but] who are connected through a network of shared beliefs” (Huff, *Women’s Life Writing* 156).

The Woman Question in the Speeches of Kishida Toshiko and Emma Goldman

Goldman was born in Kovno, Lithuania in 1869 and immigrated to Rochester, New York in 1885 to escape her father’s authoritarian rule, as Bonnie Haaland explains.

As a young child, Goldman was frequently the victim of her father’s physical and verbal abuse. His presence created a dark prison-like atmosphere for young Emma. . . . At the age of fifteen, her father insisted that she be married, arguing that girls ‘do not have to learn much.’ Wanting to continue her schooling and travel, Emma rejected her father’s decision. . . . Shortly after this abortive attempt at an arranged marriage, she emigrated to the United States to live with her older sister, Helena. (ix–x)

¹By modernity I mean reactions to the ongoing modernization processes in Japan and the US at the turn of the century.

²Goldman publicly supported the Japanese anarchist Shūsui Kotoku and was a great influence for the feminist anarchist Noe Itō. (Diggs 98–99). Kishida followed the efforts of Millicent Fawcett, a leading figure in the British suffragist and reform movement (Sievers, *Flowers in Salt* 37).

Before she gained prominence as a public speaker, Goldman earned her wages as a textile worker and experienced the dire working conditions in the industry first hand. In the 1890s, Goldman became widely known as a prominent lecturer for the anarchist movement. Newspapers would report on her vivid and uncompromising rhetoric that earned her respect and popularity in the anarchist community.³ As an anarchist feminist Goldman conceived of American society in a hierarchical order that benefitted men and disadvantaged women. For Goldman “a society without hierarchical structures of domination” (Boles and Hoeveler 39) is needed to create gender equality and grant women the same individual rights as men.⁴

Kishida Toshiko lived from 1863 to 1901 and was widely known as an advocate of female education. Kishida grew up under privileged circumstances. Not only was she from an affluent merchant family in Kyoto but, more importantly, she had a supportive mother that furthered her intellectual capacities. In addition to the formal education Kishida received, her mother provided her with additional readings and engaged her in intense discussions. Kishida’s intellectual accomplishments also brought her an invitation to join the imperial court as a consultant and tutor at the service of the Meiji Empress Shōken in 1879. Kishida resigned from this post in 1881 and began her career as a public speaker. Her mother Taka continued to support her daughter throughout her lecture tour across Japan and fully endorsed her daughter’s mission to challenge women’s roles in Meiji Japan.⁵ Kishida was certainly not the first woman to give public speeches on women’s issues but as Sievers explains, she was clearly the most renowned woman orator of the Meiji era.

She was the first woman lecturer most of the audience had ever heard and the first woman speaking in an ‘official’ capacity about the need for women’s liberation and the building of a society that honored the principle of equality between men and women.

(“Feminist Criticism” 697)

³See Falk, Pateman, and Moran 5-6.

⁴“Anarchist Feminism. A theory, derived from Emma Goldman, that argues that the state and man-made law, based on violence and coercion, are responsible for gender inequality. Legal equality for women in such a system cannot advance the status of women. Anarchist feminists envision a society without hierarchical structures of domination, one that respects the individual and maximizes cooperative social relations. Anarchist support for personal autonomy has greatly influenced the debate on reproductive freedom” (Boles and Hoeveler 39).

⁵For more details on Kishida’s biography please refer to Sievers, “Feminist Criticism” 605–606 and K. Butler 284.

In her function as writer and lecturer for the freedom and popular rights movement (*jiyū minken undō*), a political movement for democracy in Meiji Japan, Kishida spoke against *danson jōhi*, the custom to “respect the male and despise the female” (Sievers, “Feminist Criticism” 604) and considered education as the remedy for women’s subordination in marriage and Japanese society.

Kishida and Goldman shared the demand for gender equality and both opposed female servitude in marriage and the family. However, they addressed this issue from different angles. Goldman envisioned a radical break with the current social order and considered women as individuals with the same privileges as men. Kishida, on the other hand, found that social order should not be overthrown but rather altered to include women as contributors to Japan’s ongoing modernization and frame them as patriotic subjects. “For Kishida, women’s rights were closely bound up with her own deep sense of patriotism and she was convinced that reform of civil and human rights would not only improve relationships within the family but also make for a better nation” (Rappaport 368). Beyond the feminist convictions shared, Kishida and Goldman are also connected through their similar life stories. Their public outspokenness made them pioneers of their time and inspired later activists to follow their example. For instance, Goldman, who was also a pioneer in birth control advocacy, mentored Margaret Sanger.⁶ Fukuda Hideko found her vocation as an activist through Kishida’s speeches. Known as the ‘Joan of Arc’ in modern Japanese history, Fukuda advocated female education and fought for the freedom of women in Japan.⁷ Moreover, Kishida and Goldman were both prosecuted for their feminist activism. Having distributed pamphlets on contraceptive measures, Goldman was tried in 1916 for violating the 1873 Comstock Law, a law that declared the distribution of contraceptive devices or information about it illegal. When Kishida gave her speech “Daughters in Boxes” in 1883, Meiji authorities arrested her for making a political speech that vilified the Meiji government. She was also brought to trial on the grounds of violating the Public Assembly Act of 1880 that considered the public delivery of a political speech without an official permit a criminal offence.⁸

In their speeches Kishida and Goldman follow Sarah Grand’s apt conclusion that “the Woman Question is the Marriage Question” (Grand 276). Grand holds that the conventions of marriage subordinate women to the ruling of their husbands. This subordination in marriage, so Grand, also

⁶See Matthews 120.

⁷ See Sievers, *Flowers in Salt* 35–36, 48–50.

⁸For more details on the accusations Kishida faced refer to Sugano 171–189.

constitutes the restriction to traditional roles as mothers and wives.⁹ Similar to Grand, Kishida and Goldman question male authority in marriage and expose the flaws of the conventional system women are subjected to. However, Goldman calls for gender equality and vehemently opposes marriage for the female state of dependence it creates. Kishida, on the other hand, endorses female education to subvert the image of the silent and submissive wife but does not question the legitimacy of marriage. In addition, Goldman frames her critique of marriage in relation to female individuality while Kishida contextualizes her critique of marriage and womanhood as bound by the Japanese family. Both argue that marriage represents a patriarchal control mechanism bound to foster male dominance and female submissiveness. The subversion of the dualism consisting of powerful male and disempowered female is therefore considered crucial. Similar to Grand, Goldman and Kishida strongly promoted the liberation of women from conventional restrictions. In doing so, both sought to reform the image of female submissiveness crafted by a paternalistic system in Japan and the US.

3.1 Kishida Toshiko’s “Daughters in Boxes” (Japan, 1883)

Kishida delivered this speech during her career as a public speaker that lasted from 1882 to 1884.¹⁰ Supported and accompanied by her mother Taka, Kishida expressed her demand to alter conventions of womanhood as formulated by *The Great Learning for Women* also known as *Onna Daigaku* (1716).¹¹ The Neo-Confucian philosopher Kaibara Ekken wrote the book *The Great Learning for Women* as a code of conduct that educated women about their functions as servile daughters, mothers, and wives in the Tokugawa era, the era preceding the Meiji period. In particular, Kishida questioned the convention known as *the three kinds of obedience*, the requirement for

⁹Grand, Sarah. “The New Aspect of the Woman Question.” *The North American Review* 158.448 (1894): 270–276. Print.

¹⁰When Kishida resigned from her position at the imperial court in 1881, she traveled to the Southwest of Japan with her mother. There she became an active member of the Popular Rights Movement and began to deliver speeches on women’s emancipation on behalf of the movement for the next two years (Tanaka 22).

¹¹*Onna Daigaku* was first translated by Basil Hall Chamberlain as *The Greater Learning for Women* in his book *Things Japanese* published in 1905. Based on Chamberlain’s translation another edition of *Onna Daigaku* was first published in 1908 as *Women and Wisdom of Japan* with E.P. Dutton and Company in New York and then as *Onna Daigaku: A Treasure Box of Women’s Learning* in 2010 with Nezu Press in the United Kingdom. I will refer to *Onna Daigaku* as *The Great Learning for Women*.

Japanese women to subordinate themselves to the authority of their fathers, their husbands, and their sons.¹² Thereby, as Sievers notes,

Kishida sharply attacked the Japanese family system, which made it impossible for most women to develop their intellectual capacities. 'Hakoiri musume,' [daughters in boxes] one of the most critical appraisals of the family system ever delivered by a woman in the Meiji period, lashed out at women's subordination in the family and focused on the failure of the mothers and fathers to provide suitable educational experiences for their daughters.

(“Feminist Criticism” 610)

Women only understood their place within the family system in terms of subordination and compliance. Kishida was convinced that women could be educated, actively contribute to their marriage and family, and remain ethically pure. *The Great Learning for Women* envisioned Japanese women as acquiescent to patriarchal authority but neglected education and the possible benefits of it. According to Kishida, education is essential for preparing women for marriage. They are thereby enabled to step outside their submissive positions and fulfill their tasks not only with virtue but also with reason. Therefore, Kishida opposes the family system for treating women “more or less like babies, neither trusted with the independence which our modern manners allow, nor commanding the romantic homage which was woman's dower in medieval Europe” (Chamberlain, “Woman” 534). Not only did this ideal convey the idea of absolute dependence but it also enforced a disregard for women.

Kishida herself was blessed with a supportive mother who saw to her education and enabled her to develop a mind of her own. However, this was not common in Meiji Japan. Therefore, as Japan reconsidered its national identity in the aftermath of the Western occupation of Japanese ports, Kishida proposed that Japan should modernize and create opportunities for women. The speech “Daughters in Boxes” (Japan, 1883) constitutes her appeal to Japanese parents to educate their daughters. She believes that they need to recognize their daughters' ability to manage the challenges of married life, motherhood, and possibly widowhood through education. Only if Japanese women were to be educated, could they live up to social expectations and master these challenges.

What I deem appropriate is to allow daughters to study first and then have them marry. Education is the most essential item in a

¹²For an extensive account of women's status in Meiji Japan see Chamberlain, “Woman” 533.

woman's wedding trousseau. And what are the subjects she should study? Economics and ethics. Although a woman lives under her husband's protection for most her life, the day may come when he should die. Then she should fortify herself with her moral training and plan her future with financial knowledge. Thus these subjects, when taken together, form the most important item a woman will bring to her marriage.

(65)

In articulating her demand for female education Kishida refers to ideas of women's education that began to take shape in the circles of Meiji intellectuals. For instance, Fukuzawa Yukichi, a political philosopher and author who "denigrated the women of his day, calling them ignorant and lacking in intelligence [emphasized] that [women needed] a basic education in practical matters such as science, bookkeeping, and general affairs" (Walthall 232). In keeping with the currents of intellectual thinking, Kishida opposes the persistent Meiji convention that considered "learning . . . an obstacle to a woman's successful marriage" (Kishida 65) to introduce an approach that coalesces education and marriage. Similar to Fukuzawa and other intellectuals of the Meiji era, Kishida believes that education gives women the capacity to act in the best interest of their families and themselves. Life holds different challenges and being a widow is one of them. Education, so Kishida, thus equips women with the skills they need to survive on their own if they have to. In the long run, Kishida envisions education as transforming women from inexperienced adjuncts of their husbands to knowledgeable agents. Kishida's idea to merge marriage and education challenges the custom "daughters in boxes" (Kishida 63). Popular in the Kansai area, which includes the cities of Kobe, Kyoto, Nara, and Osaka, Rebecca Copeland and Okamoto Macphail explain "daughters in boxes" (Kishida 63) as a parental

practice . . . of keeping the unmarried daughters of the middle and upper classes tucked away from the outside world, protected from dangers and degradation but also denied access to a meaningful education.

(Kishida 58)

In Meiji Japan, life before marriage was thus a life without social interaction or formal education. The idea behind this kind of confinement is that the parental home shields the virtue of the Japanese woman from corruption. By pursuing this model of restriction, it was the parents' "hope to guide their daughters along the correct path toward acquiring womanly virtues" (63)

Kishida notes. The sustenance of their physical and moral purity was indispensable to ensuring the value of the daughter as a marriage commodity. Furthermore, in the system of arranged marriages seclusion eased the transition from the parental to the marital home.¹³ What Kishida criticizes about this custom is that it only produces lethargic daughters that lack the understanding for their roles as mothers and wives. Isolated from the outer world and from formal education, women are in a state in which they are neither in command of their bodies nor their minds.

Because these girls are like creatures kept in a box. They may have hands and feet and a voice—but all to no avail, because their freedom is restricted. Unable to move, their hands and feet are useless. Unable to speak, their voice has no purpose. Hence the expression.

(Kishida 63)

“Daughters in boxes” represents conventions of female subservience. More than a pre-marital custom, Kishida points out that the box she criticizes restricts women’s liberty and subordinates them to the authority of their parents and their later husbands. Similar to a collectible, women are admired for their passivity and beauty; they are not admired for their actions nor are they expected to act. Kishida aims to change this female state of inertia by educating women. To legitimize education and agency for women, the social structures that restrict women have to be altered. Accordingly, Kishida drafts an alternative model of womanhood that she deems a “formless box” (63), a liberal version of the box she declaims earlier.

But the box I would construct would not be a box with walls. Rather, it would be a formless box. For a box with walls visible to the human eye is cramped and does not allow one to cultivate truly bright and healthy children. Sisters crowd each other, competing for space, and end up developing warped personalities. And so I intend to create a box without walls. . . . A box without walls is one that allows its occupants to tread wherever their feet might lead and stretch their arms as wide as they wish.

(Kishida 63)

¹³Thus, daughters are supposedly prevented from engaging in pre-marital relationships that may thwart their chances for a legitimate marriage. Even before the Meiji era, in pre-modern Japan, it was not uncommon for young women to have sexual relationships before they got married. The introduction of Christianity and the idea of physical and moral purity during the modern age changed Japanese perceptions of female sexuality and marriage. Also see Kazue 214–215.

As a first step, Kishida suggests to transform the parental box of restrictions into a box of opportunity. She reinterprets a restrictive convention as a resource for women to shape themselves:

It may seem biased to say so, but constructing this box is above all a woman's task and an important task at that. A hastily made box will not do. A woman should carry with her into marriage a box filled with a good education. Upon giving birth to a daughter, she should raise her in the box she has herself carefully constructed. Thus she will nurture a bright daughter of good character. But if she forces her daughter into a box she has hastily constructed, the child will chafe at the narrowness of the structure and resent being inside.

Far better to build the box before the birth of the child, for indeed a woman's ability to produce good children for the propagation of the family and to encourage domestic harmony depends on how carefully she has built this box.

(Kishida 64)

By envisioning a “formless box” Kishida negates the conventions of female subservience and their confinement to the parental or marital home.¹⁴ She changes the box of virtues into a box of education in which daughters are enabled to acquire skills beyond the art of flower arrangement (*ikebana*) and the procedures of the tea ceremony. Because mothers are responsible for the education of their daughters Kishida puts them in charge of her alternative box. To create this kind of box Kishida requires mothers to balance formal with moral education and thus monitor the private *and* public experience of their daughters. As a result, she does not take a stance against motherhood but she changes the self-perception of women within this convention. Mothers educate their daughters to become future mothers themselves. Therefore, the education they provide is helping daughters to fully embrace their future tasks as mothers and homemakers. Moreover, Kishida alludes with her “formless box” to the changing significance of women for the modernization of Japan. As Kate Butler explains the box “without walls, illustrates the extent to which she [Kishida] saw women are capable and ready to embrace a more public role” (285). When Japan introduced compulsory education for girls in 1872 the government intended to create a meaningful place in the

¹⁴Mara Patessio emphasizes that the custom of daughters in boxes could longer be upheld amidst the changes Meiji Japan underwent: “It was impossible to suppose that they could continue living confined to their homes as *okusama* (wives, ‘literally women whose place is in the interior of the house’)” (“Readers and Writers” 208).

agenda of *New Japan* for women as good wives and wise mothers.¹⁵ This applies to mothers educating their daughters as well as to the daughters themselves who will educate their own daughters according to this ideology.

Given that women are encouraged to educate themselves and gain more confidence in the process, Kishida holds out the prospect that there will be an equilibrium reached between women's urge for liberty and marriage.

And if we no longer need restrictive boxes, then daughters will no longer need to escape them, and servants and maids will no longer need to spend their time chasing after them. Their agency can be more appropriately applied to the management of the house, thus better utilizing household resources!

(Kishida 69)

Here Kishida suggests the possibility to divide the responsibility for a successful marriage between parents and daughters. Parents grant their daughters access to education and daughters put their experience towards their marriages. If daughters feel prepared for marriage and feel supported in their ability to act, there is no need for women to be unhappy and have marriages fail. Because their mothers provide their daughters with the necessary education marriage ceases to be the unknown realm to which daughters are helplessly subjected and becomes a sphere of conscious female action. Kishida suggests an alternative model of womanhood that delineates the transition from traditional notions that merely expect women to conform to an approach that allows women to conceive of marriage and motherhood as their responsibility. Therefore, Kishida's proposal of a "formless box" transforms a confining marriage convention into a resource of female agency that ensures personal growth without disrespecting the Japanese family.

3.2 Emma Goldman's "The New Woman" (USA/Lithuania 1898)

In 1897 Goldman published the essay "Marriage" in the anarchist magazine *Firebrand* to propagate her idea that women's equality with men is thwarted by the institution of marriage. She opposed marriage for the power of ownership it created for men. Wives were not considered partners but property of their husbands and thus subjected to their authority.

¹⁵"[T]he law on compulsory elementary education, which also included girls, in order to form 'good wives and wise mothers,' a phrase originally coined by Nakamura Masanao, a Christian-influenced Meiji progressive" (Therborn 59).

It is because marriage relations, are the foundation of private property, ergo, the foundation of our cruel and inhuman system. . . . because it is not the form or the kind of marriage relation we have, but the thing, the thing in itself that is objectionable, hurtful and degrading. It always gives the man the right and power over his wife, not only over her body, but also over her actions, her wishes; in fact over her whole life.

(Goldman, "Marriage" 269)

Resonating with the ideas articulated by Friedrich Engels in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* published in 1884, this essay constituted the foundation for Goldman's later publications and speeches, including "The New Woman".¹⁶ Goldman delivered "The New Woman" at a convention of the *Liberal Progressive Society* in 1898. The transcript of her short address was published in the anarchist newspaper *Free Society*. Similar to her aforementioned *Firebrand* essay, she discusses marriage as constituting the economic, social, and psychological subservience of women. From Goldman's point of view "women are slaves to society" ("The New Woman" 62) and only equality can enable them to become self-sufficient individuals. Goldman begins by claiming that women's enslavement is institutionalized by marriage. Enforced by the ideal of the True Woman, the convention of marriage (and motherhood) is the only option open to women. Apart from the lack of choice, marriage is also challenged for prioritizing male authority and thereby perpetuating the inequality of women within marriage. The subservience of women within this power scheme reveals the domestic sphere as a realm of male dominance and female inferiority.

Woman is bred to be seen and for outside show, and hence the sham in society. Her only mission is to marry and to be a wife and mother, and cater to a husband who for this will support her. She thus degrades herself.

("The New Woman" 63)

Women represent their marriage and their husband but do not have a social identity of their own. The other-directedness of their existence renders them adjuncts of their husbands and children. For Goldman this devotion is humiliating since it represents women's deprivation of choice and freedom. Her elaborations also point at how the division of American society into female private sphere and male public sphere entrenches the lack of female power, despite the arbitrariness of this division. As a result, marriage is

¹⁶Confer Falk, Pateman, and Moran 42–45.

"the most oppressive institution for women" (Frankel 920) since it serves to enforce women's subordination as "slaves" ("The New Woman" 62).

Not only does Goldman deem the challenge of male-centered power structures as essential for women's equality but she also presses women to understand their entitlement to equality. Hence, to Goldman "the key to solving these difficulties lay in women liberating themselves psychologically" (Solomon 66).

Woman, to be free, must be the mutual friend and mate of man. The individual is the ideal liberty. We owe no duty to anyone save ourselves. When universal woman once comprehends this ideal, then all protective law, intended for protection, which is indeed her weakness, will disappear, and this adulterous system goes, and with it charity and all its attendant ills.

("The New Woman" 63)

Once women understand that they are individual agents that do not answer to convention or male authority, they will no longer be adjuncts but equals of men. The claim for equality enables women to transcend their conventional dependence and rid themselves of the obligation to serve others. Goldman stresses that autonomy and individuality are not exclusively male prerogatives but also female privileges. Furthermore, she underlines the potential in women for independence and strength to defy the idea of women as 'weak' and in need of male guardianship. In doing so, she creates a new self-image for women and exposes given conventions of gender segregation as arbitrary and subject to change.

Women should become aware of their potential for independence and grant themselves permission to pursue equality with men. However, Goldman rails against merely imitating male behavior since equality is founded on equal opportunities, not the continuation of male-centered power structures. After all, women and men are different but deserve equal opportunities for self-fulfillment and freedom.

Another great error in the ideal new woman, and one is that to be condemned, is that of aping the male, seeking to become masculine, considering that man is superior to woman. No decent woman can emulate them.

("The New Woman" 63)

Duplicating male conduct only affirms the power structures that oppress women in the first place and therefore does not bestow equal status. Instead, women's equality with men is based on the idea that women are enabled to

freely create a space of their own while disregarding gender conventions in American society. Goldman thus envisions a paradigm shift that abandons the lopsided focus on men and aims to create a realm of gender relations that is not coined by gender-coded inferiority or superiority. Consequently, equality for women can only be created if womanhood *and* manhood become subject to critical assessment. Convinced that “the new woman movement demands an equal advancement by the modern man” (“The New Woman” 63), Goldman emphasizes that images of womanhood can only evolve in relation to images of manhood. In addition to this correlation, she delineates her idea of the New Man by critiquing the flaws of conventional manhood.

One of the invasive points in the character of man is, that he is too authoritative for the forced progress in woman, and while he has evolved slowly he is making the fatal mistake of securing more liberty for woman through the very thing that was his own enslavement, i.e., authority.

(“The New Woman” 63)

The character of conventional manhood is conditioned by the dominance and control of women. Therefore, the enslavement of American women originates in the social belief of male superiority. The focus on male superiority renders this image of manhood incompatible with the emerging demand for female equality. However, this conventional conception is also flawed because it impedes the evolution of a new image of manhood that would be compatible with the New Woman. Thus, the critique of women’s subordination also has to entail the critique of conventional manhood that serves as the basis of paternalistic power structures.

3.3 Conclusion: Kishida & Goldman

The turn of the century witnessed negotiations in the sphere of personal, gender and national identity in the US as well as in Japan. Issues of political, social, or economic dominance, or the lack thereof, ruled the agendas of Meiji Japan and Progressive America. Therefore, relations between both countries are often considered as the encounter between “the modern West and the premodern non-West” (Sakai 154). However, this binary division is oversimplified and neglects the similarities that Japan and the US share. The analysis of Kishida’s and Goldman’s speeches draws attention to similar discussions of women’s status in Japanese and American society. The Woman Question thereby functions as the common ground that connects both countries without overwriting their cultural idiosyncrasies.

Kishida and Goldman both reveal “the political nature of the private sphere” (Frankel 920) and critically assail passive submissiveness to domesticity and marriage. Kishida approaches a new image of womanhood by seeking to modify an existing marriage custom and the conception of womanhood this entails. Goldman considers it essential to dismantle structures of male dominance while simultaneously creating new images of womanhood. Both women approach new womanhood and the Woman Question differently but agree on the necessity for mutual respect either between men and women or between parents and daughters.

Both speakers use different terms to criticize the confinement of women to the roles of mothers and wives; what to Kishida is the “box”, Goldman calls slavery. Modern womanhood signified to both a transition from a passive servile object to an active vocal subject to varying degrees. The Woman Question is addressed as a Marriage Question to unearth the oppression of women in both societies as systemic. Japanese marriage customs and the American division into private and public spheres both represent social structures that benefit men and disadvantage women by default. Goldman and Kishida attack social structures that are constituted to subordinate and silence women. At the same time, they suggest solutions and new images of womanhood that entail freedom, individuality, and equality for women. Whereas Kishida sees the solution in the pairing of education and marriage for women, Goldman suggests an even more radical approach—she proclaims that concepts of womanhood can only change in relation to the concept of manhood. Kishida calls for reform in educational methods whereas Goldman seeks to challenge the social order that conditions gender images.

These women reformers subvert patriarchal power structures to include women as fully recognized and capable citizens in their vision of an equal society. Thereby, both advocates similarly “defended the new ways in an old language” (Carroll Smith-Rosenberg 264) by simultaneously referencing and subverting conventional ideals. They believe in ‘woman’ as a transitive category, a category open for revision in response to emerging changes in their cultural contexts. Moreover, they assume that the transition from a conventional image of the True Woman or Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) to a modern New Woman or atarashii onna was not immediate but gradual.¹⁷

In addition, both speakers clarify that female oppression is not only enforced by external structures but also through the internalization of these

¹⁷“The term ‘New Woman’ (‘atarashii onna’) was used for the first time by Tsubouchi Shōyō, a Tokyo Imperial University professor of English and a playwright, in a lecture entitled ‘The New Woman in Modern Theatre’ which he gave at the Symposium of the Osaka City Educational Board in July 1910” (Kazue 205).

structures. Therefore, to challenge oppressive conventions also means to unveil how women by default adhere to these conventions. Convinced that women should be enabled to realize their potential for action and self-determination, Kishida and Goldman delineate the Woman Question not only as a Marriage Question but also as a Confidence Question to redress the vicious cycle of women's internalized subordination. It is confidence that Kishida and Goldman sought to instill in their female audience, the confidence to strive in their marriages for equality, the confidence to claim their place in public through the acquisition of education, the confidence to make their own choices in marriage or outside of marriage, and finally, the confidence to recognize themselves as equal to men. No longer governed by parental or male authority, women, in this way, should be enabled to govern themselves. The authority to define womanhood and the promotion of female agency equally characterized and motivated the work of women writers at the time. Chapter four will draw attention to women writers and their approach to convert the Woman Question from a social to a literary debate.

Chapter 4

American and Japanese Women's Writing & Images of Modern Womanhood

4.1 Literary Modernity in Japan and the U.S.

The Meiji era in Japan (1868-1912) and the Progressive era (1890-1912) in the US were both phases of radical change that developed new social as well as literary discourses of womanhood. Modernization fostered an “expansive paradigm shift” (Kalaidjian 4) that challenged concepts of national and gender identity in both countries. The preceding chapter provided an insight into the debates concerning womanhood under the rubric of the Woman Question. The current chapter aims to explain how the literary discourse responded to the social changes that occurred in Japan and the US. Moreover, I will discuss how women's writing in Japan and the US translated the modern experience as narratives of modern womanhood that are subsumed under the New Woman. By focusing on categories of literary composition that inform the approach of Japanese and American writers, I aim to demonstrate that their fiction, similar to the Woman Question, creates an imagined community that connects female readers and female writers through a common space of literary imagination that promotes the idea of modern womanhood as an act of transgression, subversion, and hybridization.¹

¹Mara Patessio has described women's literature in Japan as creating “an imagined community of readers” (Patessio, “Readers and Writers” 212) and thus situates the imagined community within the national boundaries of Japan. I transfer the idea of an imagined community beyond the domestic realm of Japan to describe how American and Japanese writers are connected through similar literary modes that describe modern images of womanhood.

The advent of modernity signified not only progress but also uncertainty. Divided between fast-paced industrialization and the slow adaptation of cultural mindsets to this process, Japan and the US both came to perceive of modernity as an enhancement of and an endangerment to their national identity. For Japan, becoming modern meant regaining the autonomy it lost when it had to give up the idea of cultural seclusion. By the time Japan began to modernize, the US was already thriving because of its strong market economy yet it was also battling the decline of morality and the ideals of individual agency. Modernity thus rendered Japan and the US as societies in transition between a fading past and an unfolding present. In these situations, when old values are in decline and new values are still undefined, literature mediates between “contradictory desires for change and for stability” (Ickstadt, “Deconstructing / Reconstructing Order” 22). The modern experience was liminal and therefore an experience beyond conventional comprehension and literature placed this experience in a tangible and coherent narrative. Thereby, literature functions as “a response to the ‘crisis in representation’ caused by the historical forces of modernity” (Starrs, *Rethinking Japanese Modernism* 5). However, literature also claims modernity as an opportunity to explore new possibilities of constructing national and gender identity. Developing new approaches that were able to grasp the complexity of their time, modernism as a literary movement was both a mirror of modernity and a creative generator of it.

[Modernism] enacts the crossing or redrawing of boundaries, the ambivalent wavering between order and experience, between a need for hierarchy and the yearning for its dissolution. Its fictions project a social and cultural space in which a new sense of self is tested against the need for structure on the one hand, and an exhilarating (but also terrifying) awareness of fluidity and openness on the other.

(Ickstadt, “Liberated Women” 594)

Modernism is thus a cultural discourse that subverts, fragments, and varies given conventions to create new perspectives.² Inspired by the realities of Meiji Japan and Progressive America, fiction drafts hypothetical scenarios in which modernity is depicted as fostering unprecedented readings of social and cultural conventions that have no designated place in the

²Heinz Ickstadt distinguishes between a cultural and textual discourse of modernism. The cultural discourse aims to explain the modern experience by unveiling modernity as the social changes that disrupted and fragmented a formerly coherent world view in a society. The textual discourse concerns the formal innovation of the use of language as a reflection of the modern experience (Ickstadt, “Die Amerikanische Moderne” 224–225).

societies of Japan and the US.³ As a result, modernism transcends and transforms conventions by taking a what-if approach that aims “to modify if not overturn existing modes of representation” (Childs 3–4). The examples given in this paper have shown a wide range of possibilities concerning social roles and gender that the authors generated by taking this approach. In addition, modernism illustrates this cultural discourse as a narrative of the modern individual in a changing world. With modernity, societies in Japan and the US similarly encountered a state of human frailty and the loss of control. Literature offers an imaginative space in which the individual is bestowed with the agency to act and the agency to construct an identity of its own especially in times when the established social order starts to crack. As “the vehicle for one’s own thoughts, one’s own memories and impressions, one’s own feeling for the past” (Keene 77) literary discourse empowers the individual to claim the complexities of modernity as an opportunity for self-creation. The world that has lost its cohesion in the process of modernization is thus not depicted as a paralyzing threat but is considered as an opportunity to emancipate oneself from restrictive conventions.

The functions and effects of modernism equally apply to the literature produced in Meiji Japan and Progressive America. In light of these similarities it comes as no surprise that modernism is commonly considered as a transnational phenomenon. However, its transnational emergence is not tantamount to its uniformity. Instead, as Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane explain, modernism is transnational with regard to its cultural diversity.

Scanning the pattern of its development in east and west . . . one notes the emergence of artistic phenomena, explosions of consciousness, generational conflicts which – even if not always contemporaneous – show remarkable similarity. Yet each of the contributing countries has its own cultural inheritance, its own social and political tensions, which impose distinctively national emphases upon Modernism and leaves any account that relies on a single national perspective misleadingly partial.

(Bradbury and McFarlane 95)

Thus, when I speak of transnational modernism I refer to it as a general concept that finds application in various societies and as a concept that is nonetheless shaped by the cultural idiosyncrasies within the context from

³In his review of *Literatur in einer industriellen Kultur*, eds. by Götz Großklaus & Eberhard Lämmert, David Roberts translates this function of modern literature as “the imaginative testing of these utopian and dystopian potentialities” (Roberts 423).

which it emerges. Similar to modernity, modernism is thus universal and particular.⁴

Regarding Japan, modernism is not only a culturally informed concept, but also a translated concept. The processes of modernization in Japan similarly created uncertainties and problems that were addressed and dissected in literature.

Within the context of these efforts and concerns, translation represented for the Modernists much more than either just a minor mode of literary production or an exercise of apprenticeship, though for some writers it continued to fulfill such a traditional function. Rather, it constituted an integral part of the Modernist program of cultural renewal, a crucially important mode of writing distinct from, yet fundamentally interconnected with the more traditionally esteemed modes of poetry and prose fiction.

(Yao 6)

Hence, modernist practice in Japan was also a practice of translation. Steven Yao, a scholar of English literature and translation studies, claims that literary translation heavily influenced the literary production of Anglo-American modernists such as Ezra Pound, who translated Chinese poems into English despite his less than perfect command of the Chinese language. In a similar fashion Japanese authors “engage with, shape, and reshape Japanese experiences of modernity” (Fuji 10) through translation. The modernist discourse in Japan was shaped by translations of Smiles’ *Self-Help* or John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* that introduced ideas of the self-reliant individual and novel notions of womanhood to Meiji Japan. Therefore, translation reveals the modernist discourse as a “cultural activity” (Yao 13) that incorporates foreign notions and, in this way, “opened up new vistas for Japanese literature” (Kondo and Wakabayashi 488). Here, it is clear that modernism was itself a translated concept.

In light of modernism’s transnational significance, Japan and the US have more in common than the East/West divide allows for. Both countries encountered a modernization process that generated new discourse methods to deal with these changes. Therefore, it makes no sense to use such categories as “the modern West and the premodern non-West” (Sakai 154) because this dichotomy wrongfully renders Japan as the inferior East that simply replicated the superior West. Instead, it is far more useful to consider both coun-

⁴Brett de Bary considers this “a modern paradigm of literature – as simultaneously ‘universal’ (in its characteristics) and yet susceptible to classification on a ‘national’ basis” (5).

tries as legitimate and equal sites of literary production that use modernism to process the changes modernity caused. Since there are different “geographies of modernism” (Huysse 207), the idea of modernism as transnational should also include modernism as a *transpacific* and *translated* discourse.

4.2 Modernism & Feminist Criticism

In spite of cultural differences, it is important to recognize that Japan and the US went through similar processes of modernization which resulted in similar processes of social change that fostered a changed perspective of womanhood. However, to revisit the history of modernity from a comparative point of view also means to understand that modernity is a transnational phenomenon that while paving the way for technical and social progress, also reinforced conventional expectations (marriage and motherhood) of women that female speakers and writers aimed to refute.⁵ As in my analysis of the Woman Question, I aim to show that women’s writing at this time criticized female subordination to the cultural conventions of womanhood in Japan and the US. Comparing women writers and their fiction thus describes the modern experience as a transnational struggle for women’s advancement under national and culturally-defined conditions. Therefore, the comparison aims to “point at the diversity of power structures and grammars of difference, but also reveal common patterns in the production of structures of inequality” (Tschurenev 276), which renders the feminist critique of female oppression a universal and particular concept in the context of modernity.

The American and Japanese writers in this research project all came from prosperous households that afforded them with the financial means and social liberties to pursue their calling as writers. All Japanese writers considered in this project were “daughters of affluent and privileged families” (Copeland and Ortabasi 20) that belonged to the (upper) middle class of Meiji society. Until 1900, these women writers were known as *keishu sakka* or lady writers and from 1900 on, Japan would refer to its women writers as *joryū sakka*.⁶ Women were “supported and protected by a father, brother, or husband” (Copeland, “The Meiji Woman Writer” 414) that “held important positions as educators or bureaucrats” (Copeland, “The Meiji Woman Writer” 391). Higuchi Ichiyo is the only writer that had to earn a living to support her family after the premature death of her father and the only writer whose career was not endorsed by a male patron (spouse or family member) before

⁵Jana Tschurenev considers “modernity as a global constellation” that constitutes its own “‘matrix of domination’ ” (Tschurenev 269).

⁶See Copeland and Ortabasi 2.

she became famous.⁷ Generally, it is important to note that Meiji women writers were highly dependent on male patrons who supported their work financially or even artistically. Even though women gained new liberties of self-expression (literary and social debates), they were nonetheless expected to live up to a patriarchal code of female tone and conduct that encompassed grace, elegance, and sentimentality – qualities that Rebecca Copeland, a literary scholar in the field of Japanese studies, subsumed under “feminine sensibilities of emotions” (“The Meiji Woman Writer” 399). Meiji society encouraged literary modes of female expression only within the extent of these feminine qualities. Women’s writing that was outspoken and critical of the patriarchal system was considered unfeminine, imitative of male authors, or simply unworthy of public attention.⁸ The Meiji era was thus an ambivalent era in which “women founded educational institutions and published their work, but they did so under the auspices of men and subject to a state that offered them new outlets for their talents on the one hand while constraining what they might do with them on the other” (Walthall 233–234). Given the circumstances of male dominance in the literary field, it is even more important and significant to look at how these women writers still managed to create their own modes of literary expression that would undermine the conventional codes of womanhood.⁹

In the US, women writers during the Progressive Era were similarly met with condescension and prejudice. Reduced to their biological sex, women’s writing was “often categorized as sentimental or intellectually limited” (Showalter, Baechler, and Litz xi). Privileged by their (upper) middle class background, American authoresses were well educated and were hence, intellectually capable of disseminating the conventional codes of womanhood at the time. Similar to the Japanese authors, American writers struggled to establish a literary voice of their own that would dispel the compulsion to write in a feminine style and “wanted to be received into the community of serious writers” (Wagner-Martin 142). However, what distinguishes American writers from their Japanese counterparts is that they wrote fiction that related to other women writers. For instance, the literary production of Willa Cather is known to be greatly inspired by Sarah Orne Jewett.¹⁰ In Meiji Japan, as Mara Patessio clarifies, “there was no such thing yet as a community of women writers of books or fiction, [but] women writers of articles and

⁷See Copeland, “The Meiji Woman Writer” 414, 417.

⁸See Copeland, “The Meiji Woman Writer” 399, 403.

⁹“The fact that these women were even able to write in the face of such well-established attitudes proscribing female public expression is deserving of further scrutiny” (Copeland, “The Meiji Woman Writer” 386).

¹⁰See Showalter, Baechler, and Litz xi–xii.

their readers did become a community” (“Readers and Writers” 196). During the early years of the Meiji era, women readers met in women’s groups also known as *fujinkai* that collectively purchased magazines and books so women could read and discuss these together.

Nevertheless, women’s writing was clearly not only a phenomenon that emerged in the late 19th century. In Japan, women authors and their works were well-received and greatly appreciated during the Heian era (nine to twelfth century in Japan). During the Heian era “it was not male courtiers but women in aristocratic service who produced prominent literary documents” (Miyoshi 197). The most prominent example of this time that still referred to in contemporary scholarship is Lady Murasaki’s *Tale of Genji*. Japanese critics consider the graceful tone and diction as paramount skills of women writers of this era. In the American context, in the late 18th century, after the Revolution and during the early years of the Republic, when “American attitudes toward women and literature were in fact more progressive than those of England and Europe. Americans took patriotic pride in the country’s female genius, seeing the development of women’s abilities as a testimonial to the democratic ideal” (Showalter, Baechler, and Litz xii). Clearly, even before the Meiji era and the Progressive era, women writers left their mark on the literary landscapes of Japan and the US. However, the imprints they left during the late 19th century bear a different significance than those of their predecessors because they used their fiction to actively challenge patriarchal norms of womanhood.

During the time when Meiji Japan and Progressive America were at the crossroads between a familiar past and uncertain future, women writers altered literary representations of women in response to the social changes both societies encountered. With opportunities for education and employment on the rise, more women took up pen and paper to put forward their views on the changing matter of womanhood in journals and magazines. Concomitantly, compulsory and higher education literacy rates among women increased and thereby, produced an interested audience that read the stories that were being published. The social advancement of women in Japan and the US thus coincides with a literary discourse that captured and shaped the new ideas of womanhood. Women writers gave expression to female lives in changing societies by appropriating modernism for feminist ends. This female modernism focuses on modernity as a particularly female experience and discusses “how women might find ways to view themselves outside the parameters of patriarchy” (Linett 3) as a response to the changing images of womanhood discussed under the rubric of the Woman Question.

What distinguishes women writers of the Meiji and Progressive era further is the creation of fiction (short and long) as a feminist discourse that avails

itself of modernist modes of expression and methods of translation. Women writers from both countries aim “to subvert the monologism of the dominant discourse” (Godard 88) and write alternative images of womanhood that deviate from patriarchal standards. They commonly translate the trials and tribulations of the turn of the century as an opportunity to overthrow conventional womanhood and write new approaches to reading womanhood. Here the idea of translation exceeds the linguistic procedure in which meaning is transposed from a foreign into a native language to represent a process of conversion that manifests itself in the fiction produced by female authors. Along the same lines, Barbara Godard, a scholar of translation studies, reads translation as “a topos in feminist discourse used by women writers to evoke the difficulty of breaking out of silence in order to communicate new insights into women’s experiences”(89). When female authors craft new narratives that present unprecedented images of womanhood, it is not only a matter of subverting patriarchal codes of womanhood, but also of translating, i.e. adapting these codes to social change. In keeping with Ming-Bao Yue’s theory, a scholar specializing in East Asian languages and literature, women’s writing in both contexts can be understood as positing a procedure that encompasses the “*transcription* and *transformation* of patriarchal language” (Yue 67). Thus, women’s writing is subversion because it translates a narrow concept of womanhood restricted to marriage and motherhood into a broad concept that reflects womanhood as hybrid and in-between patriarchal conventions.¹¹

Women writers translate the modern experience into a female experience as means to emancipate images of womanhood from patriarchal standards. The ways to articulate this emancipation are found in their use of modernist modes of expression that reinforce the idea of subversion in their fiction. Therefore, female modernism unites the social with the literary form of feminist criticism. In concrete terms, this means that women writers redefined the idea of womanhood by questioning established ideals embodied by the True Woman (US) or the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*, JP). Women writers present the New Woman as a literary theme and figure that disrupts given conventions of womanhood. In this way, they transform the image of womanhood from silent, sentimental, and invisible to outspoken, rational, and publicly present. Because women writers imagine the heretofore unimagined in their narratives, they follow a modernist approach when they depict “alternatives to the status quo in order to challenge it and, in many cases,

¹¹“Feminist discourse is translation in two ways: a notation of gestural and other codes from what has been hitherto ‘unheard of’, a muted discourse (Irigay, 1985:134, 132), and as repetition and consequent displacement of the dominant discourse” (Godard 90).

to illuminate the absurdity of social mores” (Behling 20).

The aforementioned characteristics of modernism as a narrative of modernity, liminality and the individual also find expression in the stories written by Japanese and American women writers included in this project. Even though Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, Willa Cather, Higuchi Ichiyo, Shikin Shimizu, and Kimura Akebono are not typically categorized as modernist writers, their fiction clearly capture and shape the changing images of womanhood against the backdrop of socio-economic changes (industrialization, urbanization, and social reform). Excluded from the mainstream canon of the US and Japan, they aimed “to create a new space of identity and voice that she [woman] can claim as her own” (Cutter xix). Translating the shifts and changes of the late 19th century as a particularly female experience they deploy modernism as socio-cultural phenomenon that transcribes given conventions of womanhood.¹² In this way, these women writers use their fiction to test the boundaries of conventional womanhood.

The Woman Question informs the stories of women authors in Japan and the US as a question of marriage and female confidence. Guided by the feminist demands articulated by Kishida, Goldman and other activists at the time, the narratives included in this project focus on women’s opposition to marriage and their demand for personal happiness.

Marriage, in modern literature, is no longer an accepted social norm; its failure to fulfill the diverse demands put upon it has led to a fundamental questioning of it as a desirable institution . . . writers concentrate rather on how well it is fulfilling its ideal functions. Thus marriage is examined as a product on the basis of whether or not it satisfies its partners’ needs.

(Osmond 826)

Literature mediates the increasing dissatisfaction of women with their conventional roles as mothers and wives. Through the critique of marriage women writers convert the modern narrative into the narrative of the New Woman in “search for selfhood, a desire to realize her own potential as a human being on an equal footing with man” (Bjørhovde 3). As a result, women writers “take control (authorship) of their own self-representation”

¹²Roy Starrs speaks of “a concept of modernism that embraces not just the familiar ‘radical innovation in the arts’ but also wider social, political and cultural practices and ideologies” (Starrs, *Modernism and Japanese Culture* 8) to define modernism as a socio-cultural concept. Moreover, I base this reading of modernism on Geetha Ramanathan understanding of modernism as “a term reserved for modes of representation used to narrate experiences of modernity and should not be confined to specific aesthetic modalities” (Ramanathan 2).

(Copeland, *Lost Leaves* 218) by criticizing conventional images of womanhood and rewriting them as New Woman images that encompass agency and autonomy. In this way, their writing encapsulates women's potential to change the ways patriarchal society perceives them. In relation to the critique of marriage, writers construct modern womanhood around female evaluations of marriage, family and domesticity in the context of modern changes to create alternative perspectives of conventional womanhood. However, this approach was informed by a clear understanding of the restrictions convention imposed upon women in late 19th century Japan and USA as these writers were also subjected to them.

Being insiders and outsiders at the same time, they were favorably 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.

(Bjørhovde 183)

The literary construction of modern womanhood therefore relies on a double perspective that takes established ideals and rewrites them in relation to female expectations for autonomy and self-affirmation. Their stories opposed the notion of womanhood as a universal code of conduct exempt from change. Disconnecting the definition of womanhood from marriage, women writers emphasized womanhood as a dynamic category that comprises a diverse range of images of womanhood. They criticize marriage to expose "the tragic limitations of the place of women under patriarchy [and their] imaginative vision of alternatives" (Childers 524). Transcending the social realities of Meiji Japan and Progressive America, writers imagine women characters that actively transgress conventions of womanhood and deny social expectations to construct a deliberately unconventional self-image. The domesticated image of women as wives, mothers, or faithful daughters is disrupted to demonstrate "the possibility of an instability of the category sex [and gender] – and the social and personal consequences of such an instability" (Gymnich 514). Japanese and American writers created innovative images of womanhood by claiming literature as a test bed for female characters that were not only critical of marriage and motherhood, but also attempted to find ways to find self-realization within the conventional system.

Accordingly, they read the Woman Question as a narrative of modern womanhood and thereby respond to and shape the debate of womanhood through their fiction. Kishida and Goldman exemplified the Woman Question as a social debate that demanded changes to the social system that

subjected women to marital and domestic roles. These debates criticized the subjugation of women and pointed out the flaws of the status quo in each society, however they did so without suggesting concrete steps of implementation. Women writers at the time fill this particular gap by drafting narratives that present the New Woman as a “woman of action [that] struggles against her confinement in the domestic sphere of home and family” (Köhler 288). Female agency, liberty and the demand for a modern image of womanhood thus became tangible, albeit fictional, examples for women readers that were not able to find these examples in the realities of Meiji Japan and Progressive America just yet. Their writing diversifies images of womanhood and becomes a testing ground for explicit and implicit revolts against conventional womanhood.¹³ In this way not only the Woman Question changed from a social to a literary debate but also the New Woman, the embodiment of modern womanhood, emerged as a “social and literary type which had challenged traditional representations of women” (Blain, Clements, and Grundy 792).

Women writers substantiate the obscure idea of modern womanhood by drafting stories that exemplify the subversion of conventions.¹⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Higuchi Ichiyo challenge conventional marriage as the sole identity marker of women and reveal the concept of marriage as flawed. Kate Chopin and Araki Iku offer a new perspective by discussing the modern woman as being both – the passionate adulteress and the loyal wife. On the other hand, Willa Cather and Shimizu Shikin portray modern womanhood as a merger of masculine authority and feminine qualities. The novellas by Kimura Akebono and Kate Chopin commonly define the modern woman by a sense of self that the protagonists create outside the conventions of marriage, motherhood and family. In this manner, the literary alternatives they sketch show that “modernity was also permanently embedded in the reconstructions of gender, the molding of the self, and the transformations of culture” (Molony and Uno 14–15).

Indeed, ‘woman’ is a category that is firmly rooted in the social, cultural and historical conditions of Japanese and American society. However, the

¹³My understanding of literature as testing ground refers to Eberhard Lämmert’s description of modern literature in Germany as “Literatur als Test-Raum, in dem Grenzen der Belastbarkeit, der Leistung, des zumutbaren Risikos ermittelt werden” (Lämmert 17).

¹⁴“Women writers used literature, particularly short stories, to represent their concerns, to criticize women’s oppression, and to suggest possible changes. Women of all ethnic groups participated in this project. They exposed men’s physical, psychological, and often cultural violence to women; they used strong female characters who undermined men’s obstinacy often with the latter’s own weapons; they argued rationally and showed the detrimental consequences of patriarchy. Women’s oppression frequently occurs within an ethnic group or culture, but the phenomenon as such is universal” (Birkle 253).

oppression of women is also inherent in narrative structures and the authority to verbalize them. Women writers draft their own narrative discourse to portray female characters from a fresh perspective but they also do so to claim their own literary voice. Therefore,

[o]ur attention needs to be drawn to the words that shape behavior and relationships, to the categories that arrange valued and importance to the associations and oppositions that mark what is 'woman' and what is 'man' in a particular culture and time. We must also attend to the social acts of construction in the text. Who speaks the shaping words? Who gets to answer? Who gets to frame or challenge the terms? Who is left silent?

(Carr 575)

Women's writing changes narrative patterns that inherently subordinate women. The patterns of oppression encountered in the social realities of both societies are met with fictitious drafts of womanhood that counteract these conventions. The New Woman commonly embodies the female revolt against conventions depicted in the aforementioned stories and novellas. Therefore, they rewrite 'woman' as a discourse of the New Woman that addresses the conflicts and opportunities that arise from modernity for women in Japan and the U.S. In doing so, women writers create modern literature to be "a new fictional environment, in formal and structural terms, too, not just in subject matter" (Bjørhovde 16). Women's writing is thus modern as well as experimental writing since it conveys modernity as a female narrative that tests the boundaries of conventional womanhood. By referencing and subverting conventional notions at the same time, they describe "new ways in an old language" (Smith-Rosenberg, "The New Woman" 264). Modernity seen through the female lens or in the figure of the New Woman thus fosters a new grasp of modernity and compels reconsideration of women as agents of modernity.

Women writers thus transform the modern narrative into a female one by using existing social and narrative conventions to present modern womanhood as hybrid and individual. Thereby they acknowledge that "the Modernist shift in style was inseparable from the Modernist shift in value" (Quinones 247). Moreover, women writers attest to this interrelation between fiction and social reality by experimenting with existing ideals of True Woman and Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) to create their visions of modern womanhood. The New Woman represents womanhood as resulting from an individual process that fosters a diverse range of women images and defies conventional uniformity.

4.3 Modernist Subversions: A Feminist Paradigm

The subversion of narrative conventions lies at the heart of female modernism. The preceding section elaborated on the significance and effect of the female modernist discourse. In this section, the literary conventions that inform the modernist discourse of women writers of Japan and the US will be introduced in order to emphasize these narrative elements as integral components of “a female modernist paradigm” (Liska 72) that underpin the images of modern womanhood the writers create. At the same time, this paradigm should be seen as a shared set of literary conventions because it allows a comparative reading of American and Japanese women’s writing. Writers of both contexts deploy the New Woman as modernist theme and figure that represents the general subversion of conventional images of womanhood. Women writers thus “enact the ‘feminine’ as trope of a truly subversive and therefore ethical modernism” (Liska 74) in their narratives. The subject of subversion is similarly reflected in the use of literary conventions such as theme, plot, point of view, and character. Women writers overthrow patriarchal patterns of narrating womanhood by addressing themes of modern womanhood, describing plots of female agency, creating female subjectivity, and by presenting modern womanhood in the shape of hybrid characters.¹⁵ Hence, women writers subvert narrative patterns through “fragmentation, heteroglossia and modernist experimentation” (Heilmann and Beetham 2) in order to subvert social conventions.

Although they were a continent apart, the women writers of Japan and the US imagined modern womanhood in similar ways. They deploy modernist methods of subversion to express their feminist critique of conventional womanhood. The proposed set of criteria helps to illustrate how women writers of both contexts shape their narratives according to modernist techniques and forms a common ground that enables a comparative analysis of Japanese and American fiction. However, by establishing a common frame I do not intend to overwrite the cultural differences that play into the depiction of modern womanhood. Instead, the juxtaposition relies on what the feminist narratologist Susan Sniader Lanser termed “a comparative specificity,” a concept that “embrace[s] both difference and similarity but would never simply dissolve a text, idea, writer, group, or movement into a safe and homogenous whole” (Lanser 297). Thereby, Japanese and American women’s writing becomes comparable on account of the same set of criteria without assuming that

¹⁵The literary scholar Vivian Liska considers these criteria as “protomodernist features of their [women writers’] texts: the break with traditional plot structure, versions of a feminist mythopoesis and, above all, the reversal or parodic mimicry of women-related topoi” (Liska 73).

Japanese and American women writers wrote identical narratives of modern womanhood. Instead, I refer to these criteria to emphasize that these authors wrote different versions of New Woman fiction that “consistently problematized, deconstructed, demystified, or rethought ‘womanliness’ ” (Pykett 57) in relation to the conditions they found in Meiji Japan and Progressive America.

Themes & Motifs of Modern Womanhood

Women writers define their characters and plots by employing the themes of female agency, autonomy and conflict represented in the figure of the New Woman. Using the critique of marriage as their starting point, they incorporate the social debate of the Woman Question by declaring the “belief in the autonomy of women” (Richardson xxxiii) as crucial to the construction of modern womanhood. Women characters are shown to achieve personal freedom by rereading the conventions they are subjected to. Marriage, adultery, manhood, and womanhood no longer signify female subordination but female empowerment. However, this form of empowerment sustains itself through the “tension between the demands of marriage as a social institution and the needs of individual self-fulfillment” (Osmond 826). Women characters attain their autonomy because of their conflict with conventions. Furthermore, this conflict bestows them with the agency to reshape their self-image within these conventions. Their ability to create autonomy through conflict inform these women characters as New Woman figures that actively challenge the patriarchal codes of womanhood. The Japanese narratives prioritize the protagonist's autonomy to choose a romantic partner, whereas the American stories foreground the protagonist's social and economic independence from marriage. As a literary theme the New Woman opens new avenues of defining womanhood through the depiction of single, divorced, economically independent, and rational characters that willfully overstep the borders that segregate the male public sphere from the female private sphere. Women writers extract the themes of female agency, autonomy, and conflict from the Woman Question to create a narrative of modern womanhood. However, because these narratives “figure desires that have never been realized before” (Ardis 3), they should not be mistaken for accounts that imitate reality in Japan and the US. Instead, the aforementioned themes underpin their approach to imagine contexts other than patriarchy in which modern womanhood can materialize.¹⁶

¹⁶Ann Ardis writes that women writers “imagine worlds quite different from the bourgeois patriarchy in which unmarried women are deemed odd and superfluous” (Ardis 3).

From Marriage Plot to the Plot of Female Agency

Whereas earlier authors used marriage to reveal social truth about class and women's rights, the critique of marriage from the social to the literary realm in these modern stories is transposed by changing the marriage plot into a plot of female agency. 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). In other words, getting married is often seen as the ultimate happy end. Women writers in this era undermine this plot by shifting the narrative focus to women and their development within and without marriage. They reread the male-centered plot that portrays "the Adventures of Him in Pursuit of Her [that] stops when he gets her" (Gilman, *The Man-Made World* 53), to create a linear plot that documents women's transformation from submissive wife or daughter to self-asserted individual. Marriage does not conclude the plot but rather constitutes the cause and starting point of the characters' transformation. Thereby, American authors describe the emancipation of their protagonists as an individual process while the Japanese authors embed this struggle for autonomy in the context of family obligations, which renders the marriage plot also a family plot. The linear plot structure is also deployed to portray the parallel lives the characters pursue as loyal wives and passionate adulteresses. However, the linearity of their narratives does not lead to narrative closure. The endings are inconclusive and raise more questions about the personal conflict with marriage and family than it actually solves. Women writers deny narrative closure to underline the development of modern womanhood as open-ended and conflicted. Thereby, they subvert the logic of the marriage plot by demonstrating that "marriage no longer resolved the female dilemma [but] compounded it" (Walkowitz 13). Women writers thus exempt their characters and their development from patriarchal patterns to enable new perspectives of womanhood as a continuous process.¹⁷

Female Subjectivity (P.O.V.)

The narrative of female agency is expressed from a female focal point. Women writers frame their stories around a personal and female perspective by restricting the narrative situation to figural or first person narration. The absence of an authorial voice allows women writers to fully disclose the inner world of their characters and reflects their approach to claim narra-

¹⁷Richardson considers the women writers' approach to plot as producing "evasive short stories [that] were a perfect fit for the modern woman, as she released herself from repressive social codes, and tried out new identities" (lxvi).

tive authority over images of womanhood. The experiences and thoughts of the characters are narrated as subjective and intimate accounts that expose the internal conflicts of women characters in a changing society. Instead of an authorial voice that comments and interprets the characters' action and thoughts from a distance, the readers experience the characters' uninhibited thoughts and emotions. The female point of view serves as the primary lens through which matters are evaluated and also discloses the "uncharted areas of women's subjective experience" (Hanson 15). With a voice of their own they candidly introspect their conflict with marriage, motherhood, and family and engage the reader in their way of looking at themselves and the conventions they are subjected to. As a result, the restriction of the point of view to a (female) figural or first-person narration represents the empowerment of the silent wife and obedient daughter that are enabled to construct their self-image by telling their own story.¹⁸ Having their own voice gives these characters the self-confidence to articulate what needs to change in conventional society and makes them active contributors to the debate of womanhood. In this way, women writers create a literary voice that mirrors the social voice of the woman question.

Hybrid Characters / Hybrid Characterization

Women writers also discuss womanhood as a process of becoming that results in gender and cultural hybridity. Generally characterized as round and complex, the characters are situated between existing conventions of womanhood. Modern womanhood is constructed through "the lack of specific distinction" (Smith 81) that informs the formation of it as a process of self-reliant becoming. Simone de Beauvoir's often-quoted statement that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (267), prominent in *The Second Sex* published in 1946, similarly challenges the subjection of women to marriage and domesticity. Women, so de Beauvoir, "are often complicit in their oppression" (Kruks 40) and thus need to actively counteract their subordination in society. Identity formation thus requires women to actively review identity markers through the negotiation between self-perception and social expectations.¹⁹ American and Japanese women writers reference de Beauvoir's theory and construct modern womanhood as a process of becoming to emphasize the active engagement of their characters with the challenges

¹⁸"[W]omen at this time were exploring new spaces, new interiors which had previously been denied to them, as they told their own stories and, in doing so, constructed themselves" (Richardson lxv-lxvi).

¹⁹According to Sonia Kruks " 'becoming woman' can imply a volitional engagement in the creation of one's gender identity" (40).

of marriage and domesticity. They describe characters that explicitly argue against marriage and motherhood or express their discontent with these conventions through their actions. Women writers' characters transgress gender binaries to be both loyal wives and passionate adulteresses or find ways to claim masculine positions of authority and be feminine caretakers at the same time. Becoming thereby transcends gender boundaries and creates hybrid images of womanhood. Fabienne Darling-Wolf, a scholar of international communications, defines hybridity as means to deconstruct the dualisms that inform conventional womanhood. Her argument holds that "gender hybridity might serve to destabilize essentializing categories of 'man' and 'woman,' and consequently challenge patriarchal definitions of what these categories mean" (Darling-Wolf 63). Similar to Homi K. Bhabha, Darling-Wolf uses the concept of hybridity to explain identity as ever-changing but she does so by rereading his concept of cultural hybridity as a concept of gender hybridity. Whereas Bhabha offers a postcolonial reading of power relations between colonizer and colonized, Darling-Wolf aims to analyze power relations between men and women. Bhabha and Wolf, indeed, share the critique of dualisms and the arbitrary distribution of power that results from it, but Darling-Wolf rereads Bhabha's theory by including gender relations and their impact on the understanding of womanhood.²⁰ Seen from the perspective of Darling-Wolf's theory, the female characters portrayed are not only hybrid because they synthesize gender categories but they are also hybrid because they subvert the binary system that empowers men and disempowers women by default. Women writers thus construct modern womanhood in the shape of hybrid characters to deconstruct gender binaries.

However, Japanese and American women writers depict gender hybridity under different circumstances. The context of women's writing in Japan was informed by imported and thus translated notions of womanhood. With the translation of modernity, notions of modern womanhood in terms of autonomy and individuality entered the Japanese context. Considering the history of Japan's modernity, women's writing has to be understood in the sense of Bhabha as performing a "process of cultural hybridity [that] gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Rutherford 211). Bhabha's elaborations on the dynamics of cultural identity thus help to reveal that Japanese drafts of womanhood consolidate cultural *and* gender codes. Japanese characters are hybrid because they merge codes of femininity and masculinity that

²⁰Ania Loomba, a scholar of literary and postcolonial studies, has drawn attention to how Bhabha's postcolonial theory "is remarkably free of gender, race, caste or other distinctions" (316).

are informed by Japanese and Western values. They change the Japanese convention of female subservience by incorporating Western ideas of individualism and autonomy. In the Japanese stories, the New Woman therefore represents a transcultural conflict between the imported ideal of female autonomy and the collective family system. On the one hand, this conflict shows that gender and cultural hybridity are interrelated processes because cultural hybridity situates the development of gender hybridity “in relationship to broader processes of transnational influence, cultural identity formation, and nationalism” (Darling-Wolf 64). On the other hand, the theory of cultural hybridity emphasizes that the New Woman can refer to multiple readings of female individuality and find application in collectivistic (Japan) and individualistic (US) societies. Female individuality in the Japanese context is defined by the inclusion of women as autonomous agents in the collective system. Feminists and women writers advocate the inclusion of women as responsible agents in marriage, family or the nation state because they consider inclusion as empowerment. The American reading of individuality and autonomy is founded on the idea of self-imposed seclusion from society and its conventions. Individuality in this sense means a deliberate separation from a collective frame of reference (conventions, society). Given the cultural differences with regard to the formation of individuality, agency, and cultural hybridity demonstrates the New Woman as representing both interdependent (Japan) and independent selves (US).

Nevertheless, writers of both countries negotiate womanhood by uniting categories that are mutually exclusive by convention. Thereby, they introduce hybrid images of womanhood that alter the significance of marriage, domesticity, adultery, and family while challenging the boundaries of male public and female private sphere. Their stories exemplify how the domestic becomes public, adultery and marriage overlap, and how the family is no longer patriarchal but matriarchal. The transgression of conventional boundaries symbolizes the dwindling importance of binary gender convention that stem from the Victorian age or the Edo period. Moreover, this approach exemplifies the irrelevance of absolute categories for the definition of modern womanhood.

4.4 Conclusion: Women Writers/ the Social/ the Literary

Female authors of the Meiji era and Progressive era similarly engage in creating a literary discourse that expresses the “new sensibilities of their time”

(Childs 3). The subversion of gender categorization in the literary realm reflected the discrepancy between female expectations and the actual realities of modern society. In America and Japan, national interest in economic growth and political prestige collided with and gave rise to women's demands for equality. In Japan the situation was aggravated by the intercultural comparison of women's status (East and West). Amidst these tensions women's fiction came to be the mouthpiece for women and represented their experience of social change. Social change rendered categories of national and gender to a liminal state between familiar traditions or conventions and new approaches to define national and gender identity.

This liminality similarly informs women's writing and their construction of modern images of womanhood. On the one hand, women writers draft a literary and feminist discourse that "reflects life under conditions that are either not available in the empirical world or are denied by it" (Iser 244). On the other hand, writers deploy modernist modes of expression to turn the "[a]esthetic experience [into] a state 'in-between'" (Fluck, "Fiction and the Struggle for Recognition" 701). Japanese and American writers draw on place, theme, plot, point of view, and character to constitute a modernist mode that subverts patriarchal codes of womanhood.

In their narratives, women writers deliberately upset the social and narrative conventions of Meiji Japan and Progressive America by introducing themes of subversion, changing the marriage plot into a plot of female agency, deploying female subjectivity, and by describing modern womanhood as hybrid. Because they rely on similar criteria of subversion, their stories also promote the New Woman as "a transnational imaginary" (Mackie 271) of female autonomy. Women writers commonly address situations of female oppression and show possible paths of liberation to imagine modern womanhood in unimagined ways. Thereby, they go "beyond the confines of their particular culture, in order to explore and eventually reach a different level of understanding" (Rimer and Gessel 1) that paves the way for a varied and dynamic approach to womanhood. Women's writing in Japan and the US is therefore a feminist discourse that aligns literary expression with social critique to promote "critical sisterhood across cultural differences" (Higonnet 13). With regard to the literary innovations these authors employ and the feminist message their fiction carries, the turn of the century certainly witnessed the conversion of women images in literature alongside the conversion of literature in the hands of women writers. Concrete examples of these literary innovations will be provided in chapter five.

Chapter 5

Comparative Analysis: Literary Constructions of Womanhood by American & Japanese Women Writers

In the present chapter I will introduce comparative analyses of selected short fiction written by Japanese and American women writers during the Meiji era and Progressive era. Each chapter juxtaposes an American with a Japanese story to explore how women writers translate their feminist critique of conventional womanhood into narratives of failed marriages, female adultery as means of emancipation, hybrid women that transgress gender boundaries, and, finally, narratives of women that find ways of self-creation outside convention. Thereby, the analysis in each chapter is divided into two steps: First, I will interpret the stories individually to demonstrate the cultural idiosyncrasies that are involved in the process of rewriting conventions of womanhood. As a second step, I will discuss possible similarities and differences based on my findings. In this way, I can provide a national as well as a transnational perspective of women writers and their various ways of constructing modern images of womanhood in their fiction.

5.1 The Pitfalls of Marriage: The Love Triangle in Higuchi Ichiyo's *Troubled Waters* & Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Turned*

Marriage signifies female suffering and sacrifice. This conclusion drawn in the speeches of Kishida and Goldman finds expression in the first set of stories in the analytical section. *Turned* (1911) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and *Troubled Waters* (*Nigorie* 1895) by Higuchi Ichiyo recount the failure of marriage due to adultery committed by the husbands in these stories. Both authors set their characters in love triangles to capture the particular dynamics between the husband, the wife, and the mistress (or the prostitute in the Japanese case) in order to expose marriage as dysfunctional. Against conventional expectations, marriage here does not represent a romantic bond between husband and wife (US) or strong family integrity (JP). However, this dysfunction does not debilitate the female protagonists in the stories. The stories respond to the Woman Question by depicting scenarios of marital crisis that actually promote the development of women from helpless victims of their husbands' infidelity to self-affirmed agents. Therefore, Gilman as well as Higuchi outline fictional possibilities of dealing with marital crisis that undermine the conventional idea of female submissiveness.

Initially, Gilman's protagonist Marion Marroner and Higuchi's Ohatsu experience their marriages as violating their expectations of loyalty and responsibility. The adultery committed by their husbands is depicted as cause for their misery and doubts. However, both authors turn the situation around and portray a situation of female passivity into an opportunity for female action. Triggered by the adultery of their husbands, Marion and Ohatsu do not silently endure the missteps of their husbands, but rather voice their discontent and take their lives into their own hands. Thereby, the conventions of marriage and acceptance of adultery are challenged giving rise to new images of womanhood. At the same time, both authors offer a critical view of conventional images of manhood in the process. The following comparison thus serves to underline how Gilman as well as Higuchi write "alternatives to the status quo in order to challenge it and, in many cases, to illuminate the absurdity of social mores" (Behling 20) and, in this way, deploy a feminist discourse that relies on modernist modes of subversion.

Marriage and the Love Triangle

In *Turned* the protagonist Marion Marroner discovers her husband's affair with their maid Gerta Peterson 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. Moreover, Gilman outlines this scenario in response to demands made by feminists during the Progressive Era who found that

traditional marriage was needlessly tyrannical and repressive, that it discriminated against women, and that divorce was not only an escape hatch for abused women, but offered real opportunities for a reform of the whole marriage system. At the bottom of most, if not all, of this sentiment was the feminist impulse, for most divorce liberals were acutely conscious of the usefulness of divorce as an instrument for the emancipation of women.

(O'Neill 210–211)

Gilman deliberately does not depict Marion's post-divorce life as the fate of a socially shunned and impoverished divorcée in need of support by a male spouse or relative. Instead, she portrays her protagonist as a New Woman earning her own living and building a new home for herself, claiming male privileges of financial independence and female responsibilities of domesticity. In this way, Marion's development exemplifies the possible liberation of women through divorce.

Oriki is the main character of Higuchi Ichiyo's story. The most popular prostitute of the Kikunoi House, a facility set in the pleasure quarters of Tokyo, Oriki discovers her feelings for one of her formerly favorite customers named Genshichi. The impoverished merchant is facing financial troubles and with the financial matters in decline, his self-image as an affluent provider crumbles simultaneously. His shattered confidence causes Oriki to turn her attention to other solvent clients paying their visits to Kikunoi House. His wife Ohatsu equally loses respect for her husband Genshichi and reproaches him for his incapacity to provide for his family, especially for their son Takichi. Both the prostitute and the wife display New Woman features. Their dogged instinct to survive and their blunt expression of their demands undermine the assumed authority of Genshichi entirely. Instead, for both female characters, their individual existence prevails over perpetuating Genshichi's self-esteem. Ohatsu as well as Oriki defy the stereotype of the female gracefully enduring male tyranny in silence, which Copeland deemed the "nobly suffering wife" (Copeland, *Lost Leaves* 169).

Troubled Waters and *Turned* challenge the concept of marriage in two ways: firstly, marriage is dissected in its presupposed nature as a nearly sacrosanct union of a man and a woman and secondly, as a commitment

to serve the family. Gilman and Higuchi overturn the conventional view of marriage by describing marriage as a hypocritical concept in which three, and not two, parties are involved. The common pattern found in both stories is the husband who oscillates between the legitimately wed wife and the alluring mistress / prostitute. This pattern is a common literary motif further described by Elisabeth Frenzel, a scholar of German literary studies:

The literary motif of one man between two women is now embedded in the popular theme of adultery; he is not faced with the choice between two potential wives but instead is already married and vacillates between his wife and his mistress. Thereby, his wife almost always represents what is appropriate and familiar, or even what has become subconsciously dull. The mistress, on the other hand, often from a different social class, embodies the lure of the new and different that causes unprecedented passion to enter his life.

(Frenzel 506–507, my translation) ¹

The shifting portrayal of triangular relationships in 19th century literature also reveals that the double life between legitimate marriage and illegitimate affair also involves the crossing of social class boundaries. Whereas in these stories, the male character's marriage is situated in the (upper) middle class context, his affair is set in the working class context. Usually, the mistress is found in a work / business relationship which considers the husband as the superior employer or client, making the mistress financially and emotionally dependent on him. Thus, this particular scheme centralizes the husband and the satisfaction of his needs. This plot in favor of the husband is overturned in *Troubled Waters* and *Turned*. Higuchi and Gilman clearly oppose the triviality and frivolity involved in a male taking a mistress. Instead, the severe consequences of male egocentrism are demonstrated in the development of the female characters. *Turned* primarily presents the point of view of Marion Marroner, the betrayed wife, and her emotional collapse upon disclosure of her husband's unfaithfulness. *Troubled Waters* does not only use the triangular structure to portray complicated relationships, but also grants insight into the perspectives of all parties involved. It is a three-fold outline of

¹“Das Motiv des Mannes zwischen zwei Frauen ist jetzt in die beliebte Ehebruchsthematik eingebettet; der Mann steht nicht vor der Wahl zwischen zwei möglichen Ehefrauen, sondern ist bereits verheiratet und pendelt zwischen Ehefrau und Geliebter. Dabei repräsentiert die Ehefrau fast immer das dem Mann ursprünglich Adäquate, Gewohnte und oder unbewußt langweilig gewordene, während die meist einem fremden Milieu angehörende Geliebte etwas Andersartiges, Neues und daher Reizvolles verkörpert und ungeahnte Leidenschaftlichkeit in das Dasein des Mannes bringt” (Frenzel 506–507).

marriage as a concept and the social and emotional consequences of adultery from the perspective of Oriki, the prostitute / mistress, Ohatsu, the wife, and Genshichi, the husband. In *Turned*, the husband's and the mistress' perspective only play a marginal role. The affair with Gerta is a catalyst for Marion's development into a self-assertive New Woman, but does not depend on the moral or social ideals of Mr. Marroner. Marion disintegrates her husband's authority not only by enforcing changes in her own life, but also by bringing change to Gerta's life. Claiming responsibility for her husband's mistress and her illegitimate child situates Marion in a hybrid position as the breadwinner, mother, and father. Ohatsu equally obtains the position of the breadwinner since her husband fails to fulfill his duties to provide financial security. The mistress, Oriki appears to be the most self-centered and self-dependent character of *Troubled Waters*. Not only does she refuse to see Genshichi ever since his financial situation fell apart, but she also disregards her feelings for him to ensure her financial income and entertains other prosperous clients at Kikunoi. Oriki also transgresses the boundaries set between marital and extramarital space by befriending Genshichi's son Takichi. She gives him a rice cake, a gesture that seems kind and marginal. However, in doing so she intrudes into the sphere of the family, a socially proscribed sphere that has no place for Oriki.

The triangular structure does not only feature one active and two passive agents as described by Frenzel earlier, but Gilman and Higuchi change the significance of the agents involved. Gilman grants her female protagonist the active and superior position that is traditionally assigned to the husband in the triangle. Marion is the one who has the power to decide and who is followed primarily by Gerta and even eventually by Mr. Marroner. The female character of the wife is posited the center of this plot and enables a new reading of marriage and its relation to adultery. Higuchi, on the other hand, does not centralize any of the characters in her love triangle. Apart from the violent and lethal ending, Ohatsu's, Oriki's and Genshichi's voices are equally heard. What makes this love triangle interesting as well is the fact that Ohatsu and Genshichi equally blame Oriki for the demise of their marriage and social life. Consequently, the love triangle is reread in terms of dominance and the liberty to make decisions in favor of legitimate or illegitimate relationships.

The love triangle similarly reveals adultery as being inevitably attached to marriage. Marriage and adultery are presented as two sides of the same coin and add more cracks to the polished image of matrimony. Adultery is both an intrusion into and a component of marriage. For the female characters in both stories, adultery is the significant trigger causing them to reassess their marriages. The unambiguous and blatant voicing of their dissatisfaction

with their marriages originates in and evolves around adultery and allows the wives to contemplate their personal and unconventional expectations of their marriage. Paradoxically, Ohatsu's personal expectations are conventional, but yet result in her unconventional challenge of her husband's authority. The challenge of marriage undergoes several stages in which marriage is revealed as an undertaking of three people. This revelation causes other processes in which the self-perception of the female characters is subject to re-evaluation that equally results in the re-evaluation of their marriages in a personal and conventional context. As a final stage, the emancipation from the social pressures to conform to the corset of marriage is initiated. Ohatsu, Oriki, and Marion similarly encounter changes in their character which changes their perspective of their husbands and marriage as an institution.

The Disillusionment with Marriage: From Female Suffering to Female Agency

Initially, 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 with their maid Gerta Peterson. 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 caused 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, "Turned" 349)

Marion Marroner is horrified by the unexpected news. Her husband's adultery turns her entire world upside down. She cannot retain her composure, nor is she able to think rationally. This profound agitation over her husband's betrayal does not merely reflect the hurt feelings of a loving wife, but instead this situation unveils how deeply 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. On the other hand, this convulsive reaction to the revealed state of her marriage just underlines how unaware Marion had been of her husband's extramarital relationship with Gerta.

Similarly to Gilman, Higuchi describes the marital existence of Ohatsu as a state of misery. In contrast to Marion Marroner, Genshichi's wife is well aware of his adamant feelings for Oriki. However, it is not the emotional bond between husband and wife that Ohatsu bitterly mourns, it is the failure of Genshichi to be an apt provider for her and their son Takichi and the social exclusion her family has to suffer in their neighborhood.

He didn't know what it was like for her ostracized by her own neighbors. The humiliation she felt! Day after day she could see the chill in their eyes whenever she said hello to one of them. He never considered such things. All he ever thought about was that girl friend of his, though how he could love anyone as heartless as Oriki was beyond her. Even when he dozed off for a nap, he would babble Oriki's name. It was disgusting. Had he completely forgotten that he had a wife and a child? Was he going to give his whole life to her? What a cruel person she was married to! How she wanted to tell him all this! Tears of bitterness and frustration welled in her eyes.

(Higuchi 237)

As in Marion's case, Ohatsu's state of mind is equally conditioned by her marriage. The emotions and frustrations described originate from her realization that Genshichi is ignoring his duties as the provider of the family. In keeping with Meiji conventions, Higuchi initially portrays Genshichi's frequent visits to the pleasure quarters as a given and accepted convention. However, since this leniency only applies "as long as Japanese men did not jeopardize the family finances with their activities" (Copeland and Ortabasi 9), Higuchi reveals the downsides of his extramarital engagement. His relentless contemplation on his affair with Oriki and the involuntary end of their relationship due to his lack of financial means, thwarts the implementation of his marital duties. Therefore, Ohatsu does not bemoan the lost romantic bond between her and her husband, as it is the case with Marion. Her critique is directed towards the shattering of the family's well-being and social standing on account of Genshichi's egocentric sentiments for Oriki. She reproaches him for being dysfunctional within the family system, whereas Marion is confronted with her idealized belief in her romantic relationship with her husband.

I shouldn't say it, but you're being an undutiful son to your dead

parents and an irresponsible father to your child. Think about Takichi's future and pull yourself together, Genshichi.

(Higuchi 237)

Despite the convention of the supportive wife, Ohatsu is now portrayed to point out Genshichi's failures. The plain and explicit verbalization of his failure as a husband and son make Ohatsu a character in between a New Woman (*atarashii onna*) and the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*). Her reproach is ambiguous since she blames Genshichi for his incapability to fulfill his duties as the sole provider and head of the family. Instead, ill decision-making have compromised his role as a father and husband. Genshichi failed to meet the conventional expectations set by the *ie* system and expected by his wife.² Nevertheless, the direct confrontation with his incapability can be read as unconventional on Ohatsu's behalf. She clearly voices her loss of respect for her husband and does not euphemize her disappointment in him anymore. Yet her argument is based on the conventional role he has to fulfill as a father and husband. The strict line between conventional and unconventional gender roles become diminished as a consequence.

The potential for agency is inherent in both wives. They embrace their agency and use it to their own benefit when the burdens of adultery become too big to handle in their marriages. Ohatsu and Marion begin to work to either support the family income while married (Ohatsu) or to support themselves in their post-marital life (Marion). The occupations pursued serve to ensure financial stability, however, the occupations are claimed at different stages of their personal development. Marion returns to her white-collar position as a university teacher after she separates from her husband. Ohatsu works during her marriage to compensate the money that her husband fails to earn. Ohatsu does piecework to contribute to the meager family income. The making of wicker sandal pads by hand draws attention to her attempt to compensate her husband's inability to provide financial stability.

To bring in extra money, she was busy making wicker sandal pads. It was seasonal work, just before the Day of Souls, when the heat was at its worst. She would sweat over labors, the pieces of rattan she needed suspended from the ceiling to save her time. The woman was so diligent with her little pile of handiwork that it was somehow a sad spectacle.

²The family system, or *ie* system was 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).

(Higuchi 227)

Ohatsu is shown to fulfill both male and female duties in her marriage. She cares enough about her family to seek an occupation that allows her to compensate for the income that her husband is not earning. Therefore, she is fully devoted to her task of keeping the family together by stabilizing their financial situation. However, at the same time, this measure also reveals how Ohatsu takes on the role of the breadwinner to make up for Genshichi's shortcomings as a husband and father. As a result, Ohatsu complies with the female ideal of the caretaker but extends her duties by taking responsibility for the family income. In this way, she transgresses the rigid distinction of male and female duties as assigned by the family system.

Marion holds a Ph.D. that would allow her to pursue a self-dependent life outside the marital context. However, the highly qualified woman chooses her marriage over a possible career on account of love. Nevertheless, even during her marriage, Marion attempts to integrate her expertise through educating Gerta. However, she finds this task to be unsatisfying.

She had tried to teach Gerta, and had grown to love the patient, sweet-natured child, in spite of her dullness. At work with her hands, she was clever, if not quick, and could keep small accounts from week to week. But to a woman who held a Ph.D., who had been on the faculty of a college, it was like babytending.

(Gilman, "Turned" 351)

Domestic responsibilities such as instructing Gerta are menial and do not offer intellectual challenges. The line between domestic duties and public career is clearly drawn to demonstrate Marion's potential to accomplish more than teaching Gerta the rudimentaries of good housekeeping. Marion's weariness of the house as her sphere of social power comes to the fore with the disclosure of her husband's affair.

But the training of the twenty-eight years which had elapsed before her marriage; the life at college, both as a student and teacher; the independent growth which she had made, formed a very different background for grief from that in Gerta's mind.

(Gilman, "Turned" 354)

Despite her education, Marion is shown to have given up her independence for the idea of being married to Mr. Marroner. The initial emotional collapse is transformed into a rational evaluation of her situation. Because she is educated, she is not in desperate need of her husband's financial support.

Therefore, she fully embraces the opportunity to reinstate her self-dependent state as a college teacher. Ohatsu lacks Marion's educational background and yet leaves Genshichi eventually. She clearly demands Genshichi to stand by his responsibilities as the head of the family and uses the requirements of the *ie* system to pressure him.

You're not going to get anywhere brooding. You've got to change your attitude. Make up your mind and put your energy into business. Save up some money to get going. When you're weak, Takichi and I are helpless. We'll end up begging at the roadside.

(Higuchi 229)

Her attempts to remind Genshichi of his responsibilities are all in vain. He is so absorbed by Oriki's refusal to see him that he wallows in resignation. The tension between the couple increases when Oriki attempts to befriend their son Takichi. Takichi brings home a rice cake that was given to him by Oriki. Ohatsu perceives this gesture not as an act of kindness but as an intrusion of the mistress into the marital sphere that she is desperately trying to protect. Moreover, she reads this gesture as her husband's inability to keep his family life separate from his leisure life. As a result, Ohatsu lashes out against Oriki scapegoats her as the "demon" (Higuchi 238) disintegrating her family and marriage.

Both wives are shown to stand up for their individual demands once they face the failure of their marriage, be it an emotional failure or a financial failure. The realization that their marriage is in demise because of their husband's infatuation with another woman (Gerta or Oriki) triggers a shift in focus in both women. Ohatsu and Marion put themselves first and disregard the social convention to stand by (or behind) one's husband for better or worse. Both women leave the marital stage behind, however the Japanese narrative does not describe Ohatsu in her post-marital life. There are only clues that hint at an existence defined by poverty and the struggle to survive. Their husbands' failure to live up to the conventional expectations assigned by society cause the wives to re-evaluate marriage. Marion's and Ohatsu's self-perception are deeply rooted in the idealized understanding of marriage and their husband's contribution to this ideal. However, the ideal image of marriage is depicted on different grounds. Marion's emotional collapse is derived from her belief in marriage as an exclusive and romantic relationship between husband and wife, whereas Ohatsu's embitterment originates in her understanding of marriage as a system of clearly assigned duties for each family member. Whereas Gilman portrays a critique of marriage as a romantic concept, Higuchi fosters a critical context in which marriage is re-

vealed as a partnership of convenience. Thus, with Gilman and Higuchi there is a juxtaposition of a sentimental and functional understanding of marriage.

In both cases, marriage is questioned in its legitimacy as a binding conception of womanliness. On the one hand, in *Turned* the husband's affair forces the protagonist to re-evaluate the paradigms of her life without marriage. In *Troubled Waters*, on the other hand, Ohatsu is struggling to fulfill her marital duties as a wife because she has to be a wife and a husband. She supports her husband in their financial plight by doing piecework and even encourages him to envision better times in which he is able to visit Oriki again. However, this struggle does not pay off and she resigns in her frustration over her husband's irresponsibility to let his entire financial situation and with it his family life deteriorate. Consequently, adultery turns out to be the pivot that determines the lives of the female characters, both major and minor.

Adultery as Female Empowerment

The disillusionment with marriage that both protagonists encounter simultaneously reveals adultery as an ambiguous concept that cannot be easily categorized. The conventional understanding situates adultery in stark opposition to marriage. Adultery is immoral. Marriage, on the other hand, is socially accepted and represents moral guidelines for gender relations. Adultery and marriage constitute a dichotomous scheme to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate relations between men and women. However, what is often neglected is the fact that adultery and marriage can only be defined in relation to each other. The understanding of marriage as being an immaculate concept rigidly separated from adultery, thus turns out to be antiquated. Higuchi as well as Gilman dispute this conventional perception of marriage, adultery, and the interconnections of these concepts. Adultery and marriage are not settled in a binary spectrum of values, but are strongly dependent on each other. The reciprocity of marriage and adultery constitutes Gilman's and Higuchi's adamant critique of marriage as a binding identity marker for womanhood. Thus, the critique of marriage goes hand in hand with the critique of adultery. As shown above, marriage is depicted as a triangle structure challenging the idea of nuptial intimacy and trustworthiness. The triangular relations emphasize nuptial intimacy as an untenable ideal, however adultery is also shown to occupy more functions than just being the morally condemned contrast to marriage. As a result, the narrow and separate definition of marriage and adultery become broader and interwoven.

Against conventional expectations, the mistress is not presented as the social outcast shunned for her poor judgment for engaging in a relationship

with a married man. Instead, Higuchi and Gilman present the mistress as an integral part of marriage (regardless of the wives' awareness). The union of two is portrayed as a union of three, turning the essential meaning of marriage on its head. Gilman summarizes the understanding of marriage as follows:

Here were two women and a man. One woman was a wife; loving; trusting, affectionate. One was a servant; loving trusting, affectionate: a young girl, an exile, a dependant; grateful for any kindness; untrained, uneducated, childish. She ought, of course to have resisted temptation; but Mrs. Marroner was wise enough to know how difficult temptation is to recognize when it comes in the guise of friendship and from a source one does not suspect.

(Gilman, "Turned" 354–355)

As a result, the concept of marriage and the husband become subject to criticism in Gilman's story. *Turned* centralizes Mr. Marroner's moral and emotional disrespect.

He had done this thing under the same roof with her— his wife. He had not frankly loved the younger woman, broken with his wife, made a new marriage. That would have been heartbreak pure and simple. This was something else.

(Gilman, "Turned" 355)

The affair with their maid Gerta per se is not subject to critique alone. At closer inspection, the critique Marion voices concerns the double life; the inability of her husband to draw a line between both of his lives and to ultimately decide to live monogamously. The aberration is condemned for its lack of respect for their marital union. A similar critique is found in Higuchi's *Troubled Waters* when Ohatsu turns from a silent endurance of her husband's affair to profound doubts about his sense of responsibility and judgment.

The festival is here, and I can't even make little Takichi a dumpling or put out any offerings in honor of the dead. It was all I could do to light a votive candle. And whose fault do you think that is? Yours, for being such a fool over a woman like Oriki.

(Higuchi 237)

The social life of the family is curtailed on account of Genshichi's lack of reason. Unable to partake in the convention of exchanging gifts with their

neighbors and in the commemoration of their ancestors, Ohatsu is repulsed by her husband's idleness since he neglects his fatherly and marital responsibilities for the memory of unfulfilled love.

It was disgusting. Had he completely forgotten that he had a wife and a child? Was he going to give his whole life to her? What a cruel person she was married to! How she wanted to tell him all this! Tears of bitterness and frustration welled in her eyes.

(Higuchi 237)

Genshichi's growing indifference is met with furious contempt. The incompetence of her husband endangers the family's economic and social survival, yet he is oblivious to the severity of the situation. Both wives demonstrate the ability to perceive and comment on the impact of adultery on their marriages. The statements found are neither romanticized nor naïve. Instead, the critique reveals emotional and rational disappointment experienced by both female characters. As a result, the portrayal of adultery also implies how Higuchi and Gilman revise the notion of marital infidelity rendering it as a vehicle for female empowerment. Adultery turns out to be more than a misconduct committed by the adulteress. Both authors describe the necessity to hold the husband accountable for his questionable ethics to initiate and pursue an affair. In the Japanese story the wife is initially shown to condone adultery as a matter of living up to her marital duties in the family system. Ohatsu even tries to motivate her husband to start earning a living again under the prospect to reunite with Oriki at a later point in time.

Be a man, Genshichi and get over it! All you need to do is make some money, and you can have any woman you want. . . . You can build her a house in the country. Wouldn't that be nice? So stop pining away. Eat up!

(Higuchi 229)

The encouragement is rather pragmatic and serves to ensure the survival of Ohatsu and their little son Takichi. She appeals to his urge to be with Oriki to motivate her husband to claim responsibility as the provider of the family once again. Adultery leaves its traces in the marriages that eventually fall apart, however, the more interesting aspects concern the complex image of adultery that Higuchi and Gilman lay out for the reader. Adultery is enabled on account of the convention to legitimize extramarital relationships for husbands, but not for wives. The critique of adultery and marriage exceeds this conventional paradigm. The complexity of adultery is depicted as partially encouraged and admonished in the marriages described by Higuchi

and Gilman. Marion appears to subconsciously support her husband's ignorant liberty to have an affair on account of her naïve belief in romantic love. Ohatsu, on the other hand, is shown to be complicit in her husband's refusal to fulfill conventional requirements of the family system. Nevertheless, it turns out that both wives equally suffer from their husband's unfaithfulness. In both narratives their husband's adultery intrudes the domestic sphere, and thwarts Marion and Ohatsu from executing their conventional roles as wives, even though the conventionally expected support of adultery prevails in the Japanese context. Adultery as the idea of the female culprit destroying the nuptial intimacy is revised and exchanged for adultery as an issue which concerns all parties involved, namely the wife, the husband, and the mistress / prostitute.

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 *Troubled Waters* is portrayed as an act of female liberation and self-assertion.³ The ambiguous representations of adultery equally challenge marriage as a social concept pointing at the inability of female characters to find fulfillment in conventional marriage. Each story emphasizes a different kind of emancipation. Gilman has Marion start a new life of financial independence and female solidarity. Higuchi, by contrast, describes the individual experiences made by Ohatsu and Oriki. As Genshichi's legal wife Ohatsu sees herself in the position to demand her husband to rid himself of the paralyzing state in which he dwells upon the loss of his mistress, Oriki for the sake of their family's economic, and foremost, social survival. Oriki herself, focuses on her own economic well being. Ohatsu's and Oriki's separation from Genshichi is purely functional and neither involves emotional spite nor remorse.

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 for it is he who 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:

³"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" (Araki 11).

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, "Turned" 355)

The discontent with marriage depicted in both short stories results in different consequences. Marion consciously chooses to separate from her husband. The American protagonist shows moral stamina and takes care of their pregnant maid Gerta. 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, "Turned" 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" (Gilman, "Turned" 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 (Gilman, "Turned" 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.

In contrast to the American example, the Japanese mistress is attacked as being the origin of their family conflicts.

Don't you know the woman is a demon? Look what she's done to your father. She turned him into a wastrel. It's because of her that you don't have any clothes to wear, that we don't have our own house anymore. Everything is her doing. She's devoured us, and still she isn't satisfied.

(Higuchi 238)

Ohatsu blames Oriki for her damaging influence on Genshichi. At the same time, her crushing description of Oriki towards her son Takichi, also

implies how Genshichi's position as a provider is interrelated with his immediate spouse and offspring. The anger is directed towards Oriki at first glance, however, at a second glance, it becomes clear that the reproach needs to be contextualized within the intersecting responsibilities and interconnections between the family and the head of the family. The failure to provide is in focus, not the affair with Oriki. Moreover, his state of passivity also draws attention to his inability to take advantage of the changing opportunities for members of the merchant class. Barbara Rose explains that during the Meiji era merchants "whose position at the bottom of social scale was meant to curtail their potential power, were able to climb the social ladder" (Rose 4). The double life between pleasure quarters and his home is an indicator of the privileges Genshichi is able to afford. However, due to his depleting finances he fails to maintain these privileges long-term, which also speaks for his failure to take part in the benefits of modernizing Japan. By failing to reconcile his social responsibility to provide for his family and the frequent demonstration of his financial stability by spending money on Oriki, Genshichi loses the respect of both Oriki and his wife Ohatsu.

You'll be all alone from now on, Genshichi. You can indulge all your vices. But don't come asking me to return Takichi, because I never will. She rummaged in the closet for her things and found a scarf to wrap them in. I'm only taking Takichi's coat and sash and his pajamas. I know you haven't said these things out of drunkenness, so I don't expect there'll be any sobering up or changing your mind; but you ought to think carefully about what you're doing.

(Higuchi 240)

Ohatsu deprives Genshichi of his fatherly rights by taking Takichi with her. The separation enacted underlines her attempt to gain power over the situation setting the terms of their separation. However, it is more so a sign of Ohatsu having lost all trust in the authority of her husband, and with it all respect and kindness. Oriki undergoes a similar process of secession. Her financial stability and economic survival in mind, Oriki dismisses Genshichi as a preferred client once his financial situation deteriorates.

For a long time the man downstairs, Genshichi, was a patron of mine. He used to have a great reputation around here. He was a bedding dealer, but now he's pauper and living like a snail in a shack behind the vegetable stalls.

(Higuchi 225)

With the loss of his financial power, Genshichi lost the social position of Oriki's patron. Monetary issues are intertwined with social recognition and respect. Oriki rationally estimates the value of Genshichi as a client and displays the confidence to make self-centered decisions. Her focus on her own survival signifies her New Woman agency and partial rejection of being dependent on one specific patron. The dynamics of decision-making appear pragmatic and functional in both cases. Oriki and Ohatsu prioritize their social and economic survival and are vocal about their critique. Neither of the characters is passive and therefore, they defy conventions of silent acquiescence. 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.

Adultery as Debilitating Images of Manhood

Gilman and Higuchi reread conventions of marriage and adultery as benefiting novel images of womanhood thereby, also demonstrating how adultery functions as an identity marker of conventional masculinity. Whereas their female protagonists rid themselves of conventional restrictions, Higuchi and Gilman underline the strong dependence of their male characters on adultery and marriage for their self-esteem and identity formation. The characterization in the Japanese and American stories boils down to the projection of Mr. Marroner's and Genshichi's frustration upon their mistresses. Mr. Marroner and Genshichi are both described as men basing their self-perception on adultery and conventional expectations involved. Neither of them admits to their own mistakes as causing their marriages to fail. However, the critique of their ignorance is settled in distinct cultural contexts. Mr. Marroner is critiqued for his inability to find emotional physical satisfaction with his wife Marion. Genshichi's extramarital relationship with the prostitute Oriki, however, is not reproached for his moral failure to stay monogamous. Instead, the critique voiced concerns Genshichi's function as the provider and social representative of the entire family (*ie* / family system) "the patriarch represents the family as a group to the outside world, and most significantly the family as a single entity, since his social status is both equal to and the same as that of the family" (Ariga 363). The convention to see women or the adulteress as the subject of social condemnation and critique is found

in both male characters. When Marion decides to leave her husband upon the involuntary disclosure of his affair with their maid Gerta, it is a silent and unannounced act. Even after Mr. Marroner understands that Marion has left him, he feels no remorse or even understands the dimensions of his wrongdoing. The whereabouts of his wife cause him to feel sentimental about her. The realization of his feelings for Marion, to some degree, cause him to regret his affair with Gerta. However, rather than blaming himself, his regrets ultimately result in a condemnation and hatred of Gerta as the mistress destroying his “harmonious” marriage.

In his anxiety and distress he had fairly forgotten Gerta and all that. Her name aroused in him a sense of rage. She had come between him and his wife. She had taken his wife from him. That was the way he felt.

(Gilman, “Turned” 357)

Mr. Marroner displays a tunnel vision restricted by his conventional worldview. The anger triggered in him does not concern the realization of his aberration, but instead he reproaches Gerta for infringing upon the marital intimacy between him and Marion, disregarding his own contribution. In contrast to Mr. Marroner, Genshichi is described to initially blame himself for his failure to meet the expectations of the family system. Preoccupied with Oriki and his urge to see her again, Genshichi grows sentimental and wallows in self-pity instead of providing for his family. His mixed feelings finally cause him to project his anger and frustration onto Oriki blaming her for the collapse of his masculine identity as a provider and husband, and the consequential collapse of his marriage.

I don’t know why I can’t forget her, that witch, when I’ve [got] wonderful boy like this. Genshichi’s heart was wrenched, and he blamed himself for not being able to get over Oriki. What an idiot I am! Don’t even mention her name again – I only remember all the mistakes I’ve made. Pretty soon, I won’t be able to hold my head up. When I’ve sunk so low on her account, I don’t know how I can have any feeling left for the woman. . . . Her husband lay back on the floor and fanned himself furiously. He felt on fire with emotion. It was not the smoke from the mosquito smudge that was choking him.

(Higuchi 229–230)

Genshichi and Mr. Marroner remain convinced that their mistresses are responsible for their failed marriages. Both appear to be fully or partially

ignorant of their own contribution or project the self-inflicted frustrations on their mistresses. Masculine selfhood appears to be strongly rooted in the convention to legitimize adultery for husbands. Mr. Marroner feels bound to follow the conventions of silent endurance and refuses to admit to his marital problems in public.

At first he said nothing, did nothing; lived on alone in his house, taking meals where he chose. When people asked him about his wife he said she was traveling – for her health. He would not have it in the newspapers.

(Gilman, “Turned” 357)

His decision to have an affair with Gerta is as conventional as his decision to remain silent about the disappearance of Marion. The double standard is signified by the legitimization of both of his decisions, to be married and to have an affair in the first place. However, there also seems to be a double standard applicable to the way he deals with the unannounced separation from Marion. As a husband, he needs to maintain the façade of their happy marriage. Nevertheless, it seems odd that Gilman portrays Mr. Marroner to be ashamed or even in denial about the disappearance of his wife. If he were as conservative as we expect him to be, we would find that Mr. Marroner would not care about the disappearance of Marion and move on with a second wife. The glimpses of doubt and remorse signify Gilman’s attempt to portray a minor transition in the image of masculinity at the turn of the century. She manages to offer a marginally modified image of manhood reflecting the *zeitgeist* of modernity. Nevertheless, the situation of uncertainty becomes unbearable for Mr. Marroner and he falls back into the conventional pattern of patriarchal control. Without the slightest attempt to reflect upon the moral offense he committed, he hires private investigators to find Marion.

Then, as time passes, as no enlightenment came to him, he resolved not to bear it any longer, and employed detectives. They blamed him for not having put them on the track earlier, but set to work urged to the utmost secrecy.

(Gilman, “Turned” 357)

The situation is resolved by reclaiming his patriarchal prerogative to be informed about his wife’s whereabouts. The liberty and privilege Marion claimed by leaving her husband is infringed by her husband’s inability to rid himself of his ignorance. Unable to question his decisions prior to Marion’s

leave, he remains a conventional patriarch insisting on his privilege to be part of her life.

At the end of both stories, Mr. Marroner as well as Genshichi do not display any sign of remorse, let alone an awareness of their own aberration / moral failure. In the very last moments of *Turned*, Mr. Marroner tracks down his wife and finds himself reminiscing about his marriage and being naively positive about winning his wife back.

He was ushered into a still parlour cool and sweet with the scent of flowers, the flowers she had always loved best. It almost brought tears to his eyes. All their years of happiness rose in his mind again: the exquisite beginnings; the days of eager longing before she was really his; the deep, still beauty of her love. Surely she would forgive him – she must forgive him. He would humble himself; he would tell her his honest remorse – his absolute determination to be a different man.

(Gilman, “Turned” 358)

Mr. Marroner paints a sentimental image of a perfect marriage, full of devotion and marital affection. However, at closer examination, the description of his only serves to affirm his masculinity. The initial stages of their relationship required efforts of courtship. The procedure to woo Marion and drawing attention to him as a potential husband probably just satisfied by the challenge to chase and win Marion’s affectionate attention. The reference to their days of courtship, thus, implies the profound rootedness of his self-image in conventional masculinity and explains his adamant insistence on Marion forgiving him for his misdemeanor. The final pledge to change his ways and transform himself into someone who is different from the cheating husband appears as a definite sign of his ignorance. After all, it becomes clear that Mr. Marroner does not regret his affair with Gerta for the sake of his wife, but instead the remorse felt concerns the instability of his own identity. His identity is deeply conventionalized and cannot be maintained without Marion as his wife or the construct of conventional marriage for that matter.

The interdependence between masculine identity, self-esteem and external social acknowledgment is equally applicable to Genshichi’s case. The Japanese marriage crisis culminates in the ritual murder of Oriki and suicide of Genshichi. As Mr. Marroner, Genshichi seeks measures to compensate his frustrations about his failed marriage. In contrast to Gilman’s story, Higuchi’s outlines how these frustrations unfold in very extreme ways. He is in denial about the dimensions of his affair and the impact of it on his

marriage. However, Genshichi does not win his wife back. Instead, there is a marital dispute preceding which results in the expulsion of Ohatsu and the violation of Genshichi's function as the respected head of the family. The murder of Oriki can be read as an attempt to reconstitute his masculine self-esteem and social honor.

Mm. She was slashed across the back, down from the shoulder. There were bruises on her cheek and cuts on her neck. She had wounds all over. Obviously she tried to flee, and that's when he killed her. He, on the other hand, did a splendid job of it! Harakiri and the whole business. Who would have thought he had it in him? Ever since the days he lost his bedding shop, at least. But he died like a man. Went out in a blaze of glory.

(Higuchi 240)

The murder of Oriki is a somber scene narrated in hindsight as part of a conversation of two unnamed villagers. The enumeration of the injuries she allegedly suffered during the ordeal bear a testimony to the brutality and force Genshichi must have exerted. At this point of the plot, Genshichi has lost his social status as a husband and Japanese man. Both his wife and mistress have emasculated Genshichi by leaving him. Therefore, he attempts to regain his masculinity and authority by killing first Oriki, the alleged cause of his misery, and then himself. Killing Oriki is an act of retaliation that enables Genshichi to overcome his self-pity, self-hatred, and the lack of social standing. As a result, Genshichi takes control of his situation and masculine identity by killing Oriki. The same holds true for his own death. The villagers describe the killing and his suicide as signifying victory and strength to imply Genshichi's suicide as an honorable act. As Chamberlain comments "[v]oluntary harakiri was practised by men in hopeless trouble . . . [and] [t]he courage to take life – be it one's own or that of others – ranks extraordinarily high in public esteem" ("Harakiri" 236–237). Consequently, Genshichi saves face and regains social recognition through the murder of Oriki and his own suicide.

Conclusion

Marriage is re-evaluated with regard to its definition as inviolable union of husband and wife. The inclusion of the mistress or concubine as an integral part of marriage reveals the strong interrelations between marriage and adultery. The convention to categorize marriage as functional and adultery as dysfunctional is questioned and serves to redefine the significance of these

concepts. Marriage as the representation of morally pure and legitimate gender relations is revealed as flawed. Adultery, on the other hand, denotes female emancipation and the challenge of masculine selfhood. As mentioned before, marriage and adultery are two sides of the same coin and therefore reciprocal concepts. However, Gilman and Higuchi depict this interdependence from a novel point of view as the combination of marriage and adultery does not subordinate women but empowers them. The female characters of *Troubled Waters* and *Turned* develop their agency through the disintegration of their marriages on account of adultery. Ohatsu and Oriki undermine Gen-shichi's authority and self-esteem for the sake of their economic and social survival. The critique described is settled in conventions of the family system and are yet met with unconventional results of female agency. Marion, by contrast, becomes disillusioned with matrimony entirely. The separation from her husband allows her to become a self-dependent and successful divorcée. Marion is not subjected to social shaming or critique. The development of both protagonists implies the transgression of gender conventions and exposes them as subject to change. The meaning of marriage and adultery as a male domain are not indisputable facts, but subject to female debate. This instability of marriage and adultery constitutes the context in which female agency and outspokenness can flourish. Even though both writers present altered images of womanhood they also underline that images of masculinity do not change concomitantly. Nevertheless, the development of both protagonists from submissive wives to self-asserted New Women acts a response to the Woman Question. Gilman and Higuchi deploy similar approaches to challenge the conventional understanding of womanhood by altering the significance of marriage and adultery in their stories. Therefore, both writers continue the debate on the Woman Question by imagining alternative concepts of female conduct and identity. However, they do so in relation to the cultural contexts of Japan and the US. Gilman criticizes marriage for thwarting the fulfillment of Marion as an individual woman while Higuchi describes Ohatsu's unhappiness as originating from her husband's inability to be a provider for the family. Gilman distinguishes female agency from marriage and Higuchi describes the rise of female agency in relation to collective ideas of the Japanese family. Both authors approach the critique of marriage in culturally informed ways and yet promote a similar agenda of female agency and self-dependence in their stories. Moreover, their stories do not only use the Woman Question as a narrative theme but also extend the debate by changing the significance of adultery and marriage for the formation of new images of womanhood.

5.2 Letters of Transgression: Female Adultery in Araki Iku's *The Letter* & Kate Chopin's *Gilman's Her Letters*

The preceding chapter shed light on the ambiguity of adultery and its meaning for female liberation. In their short stories, Gilman and Ichiyo question the legitimacy of male adultery while exposing conventional marriage as highly flawed. The following stories by Araki Iku and Kate Chopin continue the idea of adultery as means for female emancipation within the conventional restraints of marriage. While the first analytical chapter focused on men seeking extramarital relationships and how wives could possibly cope with this situation, this chapter will discuss women seeking extramarital affairs with men to fulfill their need for passion and affection. These protagonists actively create adulterous relationships for themselves instead of being victimized by the infidelity of their husbands. Both protagonists communicate their adulterous relationships in private letters and also use these letters to construe a self-image outside of marriage. Araki presents the reader with one letter that exposes the intimate thoughts of the female I-narrator, whereas Chopin creates a narrative about letters written by the protagonist and the conflicts that these letters induce in her husband. Both stories deploy adultery and the letter as means of female rebellion. As adultery was considered an offense if committed by a woman in Japan and the US, Araki and Chopin subversively opt to depict an alternative reading of female adultery as a path of empowerment created within given conventions.⁴ The affairs they engage in are captured in the letters they discuss and write. However, these letters also attest to what they are unable to find in their marriages: passionate and devoted love. By committing adultery and sustaining their affairs through letter writing, both protagonists can escape their dull marriages and reshape their identities. Adultery along with letter writing constitutes a process of self-creation that enables both women to transgress conventional restrictions.⁵ Each story exposes how the letter engages both protagonists in negotiating between internal desires and external expectations. As a result,

⁴In Japan “article 252 of the Penal Code . . . stated that a wife committing adultery and her partner could be punished by up to two years of imprisonment and hard labor” (Patesio, *Women and Public Life* 128). In the US laws differed from state to state but “New York, Boston, and Philadelphia . . . were [sites of] occasional arrests and prosecutions for adultery, in the middle of the 19th century” (Friedman 448).

⁵Linda S. Kauffman emphasized letter writing as ways of reshaping female identity in fiction and termed this process “the heroine’s project –aided by her writing– also involves self-creation, self-invention” (25) to emphasize writing as reshaping female identity.

their “[t]ransgression lies in telling” (Kauffman 20). Moreover, the privacy of the letter as a form of writing grants the protagonists the opportunity to speak their mind and imagine themselves differently without the fear of reprisals. The letters and their affairs thus constitute an outlet for these women’s desires to break through the walls of conventionality and underline their nature as New Women coping with conventional contexts.

Letter Writing: Exposing the Conflicted Female Self

The Letter (Tegami, Seitō 1912)

In *The Letter*, an anonymous first person narrator appeals to her lover Hideo to resume their relationship that he ended six months ago. The story is written in epistolary form and articulates her private frustrations with the concept of marriage and her yearning for Hideo. A personal confession and social critique, the letter serves to discredit marriage for its lack of passion and for inhibiting an individual sense of self. Accordingly, the narrator negotiates between conventional constraints of her marriage and her individual desire for free romantic love.

Contrary to the love triangles in *Turned* and *Troubled Waters*, Araki’s story does not focus on the conventional scenario of a man between two women. Similar to the aforementioned stories, adultery functions as means to create female agency. However, Araki creates a different narrative that centers the wife as the adulteress and her conflict between the obligation to conform and the alluring freedom to love passionately. Another difference to the stories by Gilman and Higuchi is that Araki’s main character does not abandon her marriage for her affair. Instead, she aims to convince her lover Hideo to engage in their relationship while she remains married. With this juxtaposition, the protagonist critically assesses the significance of her (arranged) marriage and her affair to her identity formation.

Central to *The Letter* then is the narrator’s introspection of her feelings towards her marriage and her affair. She does not evaluate her husband or Hideo, but primarily voices how the interaction with each of them makes her feel about herself. Thereby, she refers to situations more than she does to either of the men themselves and their particular character traits. As a result, the discontent and yearning articulated in the letter expresses her urge to negotiate her self-image through the juxtaposition of an undesired and desired situation. The aim of explaining the disadvantages of her marriage and the advantage of their affair from her position is to convince Hideo that their relationship is legitimate with regard to personal, not conventional, values. She therefore prioritizes personal happiness over collective conformity.

Nevertheless, she does so without changing the conventional dichotomy that segregates adultery from marriage. But instead, she considers her affair as an alternative that co-exists with her passionless marriage.

She starts her letter by explaining her marriage as a personal plight that deprives her of agency and individual happiness. By elaborating on the burden marriage represents for her, the narrator aims to persuade Hideo to continue their relationship despite the social stigma it bears in Japanese society.

Because you haven't yet lived in this suffocating realm of "husband and wife" or "marriage," you wouldn't know this. That's why I feel I absolutely must tell you. . . . Writing this down gives me such relief. Life at home is as I have described to you. All the same, we are a married couple that lives together without any quarrels. I, too, am a "chaste lady," you see, though such words are not ones with any appeal for me.

(Araki 32–33)

She draws a sharp distinction between the monotony of her marriage and the excitement of their affair. With her marriage she has been living a lie; she lives a life that numbs her sense of self. Her marriage lacks the invigorating excitement of their affair because her marriage is the result of collective regulations. Marriage to her is a "suffocating realm" (Araki 32) because it is arranged by parents to continue the family line and neglects the individual needs of women. The critical advantage of marriage is also a critique of her position as daughter and wife. By being an adulteress, she deviates from the ideal of the obedient daughter and silent wife. Therefore, the affair she seeks to revive posits a violation of her marital commitment to her husband and her family. Since marriage in Japan "is less of a personal and more of a family affair" ("Marriage" 332), as Chamberlain notes, by convention, the narrator does not have the authority to reverse or change her parent's decision to marry her off.⁶ However, with her extramarital affair and her intention to revive this affair, she claims an authority of her own undermining the authority of her parents to choose whom she has sexual relations with.

Araki clarifies that an arranged marriage is not meant to fulfill women emotionally but is rather a matter of female conformity to the family system. The narrator acquiesces to married life and her role as a wife to live up to the expectations of her parents. Marriage in this sense signifies her position

⁶For a more detailed description of arranged marriage refer to (Chamberlain, "Marriage" 332–337).

as the dutiful daughter that obliged to respect her parents' authority. Being married thus underlines her obligation as a daughter but neglects her needs as an individual woman. Accordingly, she describes her marriage as a functional relationship that prioritizes obligation over mutual affection.

Perpetually smiling, my husband showers me with the requisite niceties: hair ornaments, rings, and delicious sweets, and a long kiss when I wake up in the morning. But I have never once won his heart, and he has never tried to touch mine. He thinks everything is all right simply if he sees my smiling face or my coquettish ways (these are in reality products of man's own imagination). And so, with my fingers entangled in his collar, I brush the lint off his kimono and tie together the stitching that has come unraveled. Then I embrace him, all the while thinking of the nape of your neck and the delight of the first night your crimson lips met mine.

(Araki 32)

This narrator is not in an abusive marriage and does not suffer from the verbal abuse and spousal disrespect described in *The Broken Ring* and *Troubled Waters*. What she suffers from in her marriage is the subliminal agreement that her relationship with her husband will never be more than a marriage of convenience. She conceives of their relationship as a charade that serves to fulfill conventional expectations, but denies a romantic bond between husband and wife. It is this subliminal understanding of her marriage that she struggles with. Therefore, she denounces her marriage for being a concept of restrictive and arbitrary nature.

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."

(Araki 32)

Marriage is not about love but about conformity and strategy. Conjugal relations are defined by the functions husband and wife fulfill and not by their emotional response to each other. Araki's story relates to Copeland's observation that "the married state . . . is almost always one of sorrow [and] suggests a subtle protest against the inequitable and outdated marriage system" (Copeland, *Lost Leaves* 43) by emphasizing her yearning for Hideo as a yearning for an individual self. As mentioned earlier, the narrator does not suffer from marital abuse. However, she suffers from the lack of liberty that marriage and family system denies to her. Contrary to the ideal of the

silent wife, the narrator speaks her mind and aligns herself with the “notorious, outspoken women of Meiji Japan” (Bardsley, “The Essential Woman Writer” 54). Similar to Kishida Toshiko and the later feminist activists of Meiji Japan, the narrator argues for female agency. However, contrary to Kishida who argues that women can gain agency within their arranged marriages, the narrator demands the agency to pursue a romantic relationship that is not confined to her marriage. Moreover, the protagonist of *The Letter* advocates free love by demanding the right to choose a romantic partner. Thus, female self-reliance and romantic love are considered reciprocal. The inherent bond between these concepts is also reflected in 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).⁷

Moreover, this quote alludes to how adultery allows the narrator’s true self to surface. She feels liberated from the conventional burdens of her marriage and feels acknowledged as an individual woman who is more in need of affection than for social and financial security. Adultery denotes a process of female individuation and self-determination and thus questions the Meiji Civil Code of 1898 that classified adultery as “a crime when committed by a woman” (Lowy 144). Araki challenges adultery as a solely male prerogative by rereading adultery as female advancement.⁸ No longer considered a criminal act, Araki emphasizes adultery as paving the narrator’s path to personal happiness – an aspect utterly neglected in her conventional marriage.

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)

⁷The 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).

⁸“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, *The Bluestockings* 11).

Similar to the preceding stories by Gilman and Higuchi, Araki deploys adultery as an ambiguous concept by underlining the inability of the protagonists to find fulfillment in conventional marriage. The narrator legitimizes her relationship with Hideo by declaring it a human right to happiness. In doing so, she undermines the conventional order that perceives adultery as immoral and illegitimate while granting marriage sacrosanct legitimacy. Marriage is a state of denial, the denial of personal needs for the compliance with obligations imposed by convention. Marriage presents the fulfillment of collective expectations that she contrasts with the demand for adultery as means of personal happiness and as an expression of her individual expectations. In the binary order that considers adultery and marriage as mutually exclusive, the narrator creates a third possibility by declaring adultery as a legitimate way to create personal happiness. Beyond the idea of escaping the numbing effects of marriage, she makes adultery an undertaking that gives her a voice and agency. She disassociates adultery from social shaming to open her and Hideo's eyes to the possibility to seek love and happiness through their extramarital relationship.

In addition, adultery also emphasizes the hybrid status of the narrator. Due to the fact that she does not 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. The narrator transgresses the binary distinction of conventional and unconventional womanhood represented by the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) and the New Woman. In an attempt to uphold these conventional façades, she stays in her marriage and keeps her indiscretion private. In this way, the conventions remain untouched because she pursues her relationship with Hideo without openly violating social conventions. On the one hand, this approach emphasizes her inability to break through the restrictions of the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*). On other hand, this approach demonstrates her ability to use the conventions she is subjected to further her own interests. In keeping with her ambivalent approach, she legitimizes adultery as means to indulge in romantic love ("earnest and human love" (Araki 33)) despite the legal charges she might have to face ("even if such love were condemned as a terrible crime" Araki 33). Because the narrator makes adultery her own to achieve self-affirmation and agency, she is not victimized by adultery as the women presented in the other short stories.

Araki defies the conventional idea of marriage to defy the sentimental nature that was expected of women's writing in Meiji Japan.⁹ She presents

⁹The Meiji period was characterized by the "moral imperative" to restrict women's

an outspoken and rational narrator that articulates her criticism bluntly and clearly. Even though she describes her emotions about her marriage and her affair, it is clear that she aims to reason with Hideo and not confront him with a random accumulation of her yearning and anger. The form of the letter requires her to structure her thoughts and select them according to how convincing they will appear in Hideo's eyes. Nonetheless, the letter also posits a personal challenge because she struggles to find words for what she feels and has not yet told.

When you see my handwriting, I am sure you'll understand how shaky my hand is and how restless my spirit. Really, I think I have spent days and days on this letter. Every time I begin to write, I become strangely anxious and my thoughts get all mixed up.

(Araki 30)

Writing this letter induces anxiety in her because she revisits her inner monologue in an external medium. The letter visibly captures her private thoughts and subjects these to external judgment. Even though writing the letter is a private engagement shielded from the public eye, she makes her thoughts public for Hideo. In writing this letter, she confesses to her inner strife between her inability to escape repressive conventions and her strong longing for free romantic love with Hideo. On the other hand, she does not only recount how she feels about her marriage and Hideo's absence but she also phrases these feelings in a sensible argument that serves to convince Hideo to come back to her. Therefore, the letter is a means of persuasion while it also represents a "negotiation of discourses of subjectivity" (Huff, "Women's Letters" 953). Writing delivers an unadulterated account of her struggle to create a sense of self in relation to conformity and nonconformity as well as helping her to mentally escape the distress of her current marriage.

The agency gained from having the affair with Hideo and writing the letter to him is nonetheless limited. Even though it is her resuming the correspondence, the protagonist is still dependent on Hideo's consent. Without his consent she will not be able to return to her double life.

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.

writing to the sentimental purpose to "lead men to a more favorable appreciation of the female heart" (Copeland, *Woman Critiqued* 21).

...Hideo. Please send me an answer quickly. You need only write the word 'Fine,' along with the date and time.

(Araki 32–34)

Araki ends her narrative with an open ending. The final appeal to Hideo exposes the narrator's dependence on his affection and presence. The emotional bond she feels between herself and Hideo is still overpowering her current marriage and nurtures her determination to continue her double life with him. She hopes to have convinced him by sharing her self-reflections with him. Her marriage is miserable because it is passionless. And this simple conclusion serves to instill Hideo's understanding for the urgency of her request. Nonetheless, the narrator is left to await Hideo's response and thus her conflict remains unresolved. Iku leaves it unclear whether the narrator will ever receive word from her lover and how their affair will further develop. The open ending thus signifies that the dialogue might still be open and that the final decision on their relationship has not been made yet. What is striking about Araki's story is the reciprocity of letter writing and adultery as female identity formation. The letter exposes the narrator's critique of marriage as vocal and yet private. She articulates these thoughts with Hideo in mind as her only audience. In writing, she evaluates her marriage in relation to her affair not only to persuade Hideo but in doing so she transcribes her place in the conventional system. As a result, the act of writing gives the protagonist the agency of self-reflection and self-creation by manifesting her rejection of marriage and her choice of adultery as means of liberation in the letter. Therefore, she can be vocal within the privacy of the letter and the knowledge that Hideo alone is going to read this letter. Only in this context can she confess to her desperate need for affection and her disillusioned view of her marriage. Contrary to Gilman's story *Turned* or Ichiyo's *Troubled Waters*, the narrator of *The Letter* does not drastically change her marriage or even abandon her husband. The conventional context remains unaffected since she chooses to create an alternative realm in which she can live her true self that co-exists with her marriage. She manifests this alternative relationship and her alternative self in the letter as a matter of self-writing. Writing the letter helps her to articulate the thoughts that would usually remain unsaid. In this way, the I represents her inner dialogue that oscillates between confession and social critique. The letter thus gives her the voice to oppose female subservience and empowers her in the demand for female nonconformity under the guise of conformity. The self-reflective style recalls the confessional mode found in the 'I' novel, a genre that began in the late years of the Meiji era and gained popularity in the 1920s. Similar to authors of the 'I' novel, Araki relies on the portrayal of self-reflection and personal

experience and thereby relates her fiction to the naturalist currents of literary modernity.¹⁰

Her Letters (1895, Vogue)

Similar to Araki's *The Letter*, Chopin portrays a narrative of personal conflict in *Her Letters*. Conventional marriage is again revealed as unfulfilling for the unnamed female protagonist. Like many of Chopin's other stories, *Her Letters* recount how "romances usually grow awry" (Chopin, *A Vocation and a Voice* xxiii). Emotionally estranged from her dull marriage, the nameless wife seeks an affair to find passion and romantic love. Just like Araki's narrator, the wife keeps her husband in the dark about her affair and leads a double life. The oblivious husband grows suspicious once he finds her letters a year after she died of an unspecified cause. As a loyal husband, he follows through with her wish to destroy the letters unread. However, he soon begins to regret this step due to his inability to shake the suspicion that his wife might have been unfaithful to him. Chopin deploys the letters as a plot element that unveils the rift in expectations between husband and wife. In this way, Chopin attempts to "problematize and complicate the business of courtship and marriage by bringing into the foreground the exigencies of desire" (Beer, *Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton and Charlotte Perkins Gilman* 42). The story relies on a juxtaposition of her desire for affection with his desire for certainty to show the flaws of conventional marriage. Chopin demonstrates that conventions in *Her Letters* are maintained and undermined. On the one hand, the wife stays in her marriage to protect her social reputation and secure her financial situation. On the other hand, she goes against convention to find emotional and possibly physical fulfillment in her affair. Similar to Araki's *The Letter* marriage is not considered as a bond of mutual affection but rather a social façade that masks the unfulfilled wants of husband and wife. The letters and the reactions they trigger thus emphasize that husband and wife are incompatible but nonetheless bound by marriage.

Accordingly, Chopin rereads marriage to demonstrate three aspects: firstly, the affair indicates that the wife is not an adjunct of her husband but a self-dependent woman even within her marriage; secondly, this scene discloses marriage as an obstacle to female fulfillment and adultery as enabling female agency; thirdly, Chopin depicts marriage, adultery, and female agency

¹⁰"In the shift to the culture of personality from the civilization of character, instead of self-restraint there was an emphasis on self-expression, and instead of value placed on normative, there was value placed on the idiosyncratic. Much of the literature of the period exemplified this shift, epitomized in the 'I' novel which became the distinguishing genre of Japanese fiction during the 1920s" (Tsutsui 197).

as intertwined, instead of presenting them as separate units. Therefore, *Her Letters* contradicts the common expectation that

marriage as a realm in which a woman may develop meaningfully as an individual is as alien to this society as the thought that many wives might be suffering miserably through lives that have been thwarted and stunted because of their marital vows.

(Stein 10)

Chopin breaks with the narrative convention that depicts female agency and marriage as mutually exclusive. Marriage represents the conventions the protagonist feels confined by and nurtures her need for unconditioned affection as found in her affair. Therefore, she contemplates her marriage in the context of a conventional society and her adulterous relationship as a valve for the individual yearnings denied by convention. Despite the restrictions of marriage, the protagonist develops the agency to create a novel image of womanhood that is situated between conventions of marriage and adultery.

Chopin divides her story into four sections to depict the varying significance of the letters for husband and wife. In part one of the story, Chopin sets out the situation of the wife. Contemplating her affair and her marriage in the face of her imminent death, the female protagonist finds herself unable to let go of past memories. Even though their affair ended four years ago, she is unable to discard the letters. As a reminder of “some intoxicating dream of the days when she felt she had lived” (Chopin, “Her Letters” 97) the letters are proof of a time in her life in which she experienced passion and love.

This man had changed the water in her veins to wine, whose taste had brought delirium to both of them. It was one and past now, save for these letters that she held encircled in her arms. She stayed breathing softly and contentedly, with the hectic cheek resting upon them.

(Chopin, “Her Letters” 96)

She is reminiscent of the emotions her lover was able to trigger in her. She found personal happiness and freedom in a relationship with a man that was not her husband. Not in marriage, but in adultery she experiences herself as a passionate woman. What is left of this time are the letters she used to exchange with her unnamed lover. In the face of death she clings to them for emotional support and attempts to relive the happiness in the final stages of her life.

That was four years ago, and she had been feeding upon them ever since; they had sustained her, she believed, and kept her spirit from perishing utterly. . . . What unbounded thankfulness she felt at not having destroyed them all! How desolate and empty would have been her remaining days without them; with only her thoughts, illusive thoughts that she could not hold in her hands and press, as she did these, to her cheeks and her heart.

(Chopin, "Her Letters" 95)

Even though she is no longer involved with her lover, the feeling of freedom and passionate devotion still lingers. The letters are evidence of the emotionally fulfilled self she found in her affair and thus attest to her ability to create a realm of her own choosing. "The personal letter comes to play a special role in this process, since the letter is regarded as a medium that spontaneously and directly expresses the innermost self of the writer"(165) as Ole Birklund Andersen notes. Her adulterous relationship bestowed her with the autonomy to choose who she wants to be instead of fitting into the role of the wife. Strong, happy, and independent from the restrictions of her marriage she was able to experience herself differently. Taking into account what this affair meant to her, the assumption is close that she might have enjoyed more the way he made her feel perhaps more than she actually liked him as a person.

Remorse is encountered when she contemplates the downsides of her affair. Although, she consciously engaged in an unconventional relationship and deviated from the convention of the dutiful wife, she still fears the social scorn her affair might stir. "She shrank from the inflicting the pain, the anguish which the discovery of those letters would bring to others; to one above all, who was near to her, and whose tenderness and years of devotion had made him, in a manner, dear to her" (Chopin, "Her Letters" 95). A disclosure of her affair would cause public humiliation for her and her husband. Even though she does not love her husband, she cares enough about him to consider the impact of this disclosure for him. On the one hand, this scene implies that she discerns the social conventions that rule her existence and her marriage. On the other hand, she is prepared to contravene these conventions for her personal happiness.

The ambiguous relation to the letters also unveils her ambiguous self-image. As an adulteress, she pursues personal interests but as a wife, she pursues conventional interest such as the reputation of her marriage and well-being of her husband. The letters encompass her most personal memories and pose a threat to her social reputation as they prove her infidelity in writing. The exposure of her indiscretion could possibly destroy the conven-

tional façade of her marriage and thus needs to be avoided. “She would guard against the possibility of accident by leaving them in charge of the very one who, above all, should be spared a knowledge of their contents”(Chopin, “Her Letters” 96). She is certain that the letters need to be destroyed. However, she is uncertain about whether she can destroy them herself as the preceding scenes have shown. She was bold enough to follow her urge for love but she is not strong enough to draw a line under this chapter of her life. She decides to bequeath these letters and the destruction of them to him. “I leave this package to the care of my husband. With perfect faith in his loyalty and his love, I ask him to destroy it unopened”(Chopin, “Her Letters” 97). Therefore, she shifts the responsibility to her husband and relies on his loyalty and trust. She delegates this burdensome task to her unsuspecting husband to ensure that her affair remains her secret and to hold on to them until the day she dies. For herself, she found a compromise that would allow her to wallow in the memories of her adulterous relationship without facing the painful process of destroying them herself and confessing her infidelity to her husband (“She was thinking of a way to keep them without possible ultimate injury to that other one whom they would stab more cruelly than keen knife blades” (Chopin, “Her Letters” 96).

Moreover, her request reveals her selective understanding of marriage. In requesting her husband to fulfill her last wish she insists on his marital promise to support her in times of crisis. However, she herself broke her marital promise to remain loyal to him physically by engaging in her affair. She acts as a loyal wife by considering the impact the knowledge of her infidelity might have on her husband. As a result, Chopin describes an unconventional approach that shifts the focus from conventional obligation to a selective partnership. Marriage is not demonized as we have seen in Emma Goldman’s speech or as we will see in *The Broken Ring*. Instead, Chopin underlines how the wife puts aspects of conventional marriage to her best advantage.

Chopin devotes part two and three of the story to the conflicts of the husband. Mourning the death of his wife, he contemplates her request to discard the stack of letters she left him with. The husband’s conflict originates in the uncertainty about the contents of the letters and the reasons for his wife’s request. Why did she leave these letters to him and what is written in these letters? These are the questions that torment him until his suicide in part four.

So here were letters which she was asking him to destroy unopened. She had never seemed in her lifetime to have had a secret from him. He knew her to have been cold and passionless, but true,

and watchful of his comfort and his happiness. Might he not be holding in his hands the secret of some other one, which had been confided to her and which she had promised to guard? But no, she would have indicated the fact by some additional word or line. The secret was her own, something contained in these letters, and she wanted it to die with her.

(Chopin, "Her Letters" 98)

Indeed, their marriage was a marriage without romance. Nonetheless, he is convinced that they had a respectful and sincere relationship. As a loving and kind husband he was content to accept what he thought was his wife's reserved nature. However, the encounter with her request and the unknown contents of her letters causes him to question his blind trust in her and their marriage. On the one hand, he perceives her request as the obligation as her husband to fulfill her last wish. On the other hand, this very request appears so obscure to him that he grows suspicious.

What secret save one could a woman choose to have die with her? As quickly as the suggestions came to his mind, so swiftly did the man-instinct of possession stir in his blood. His fingers cramped about the package in his hands, and he sank into a chair beside the table. The agonizing suspicion that perhaps another had shared with him her thoughts, her affection, her life, deprived him for a swift instant of honor and reason. . . . A half-hour passed before he lifted his head. An unspeakable conflict had raged within him, but his loyalty and his love had conquered. His face was pale and deep-lined with suffering, but there was no more hesitancy to be seen there.

(Chopin, "Her Letters" 99)

The more he contemplates the reasons for her request, the more likely it seems to him that she was not who he believed her to be throughout the years: his loyal and caring wife. To him the letters and her request suggest the possibility of her infidelity. Faced with the stack of letters he becomes distraught with uncertainty. He does not read the letters for reasons of marital loyalty and still wants proof for his suspicion. However, the lurking suspicion is enough to upset his understanding of his marriage, his wife and himself. By doubting her request he is prompted to doubt his self-image as a devoted husband. The letters thus induce a personal crisis.

His crisis temporarily subsides and allows him to consider the last wish of his wife as a spousal obligation. Even though the mere thought of her being

involved with another man gives him agony, he overcomes these feelings to honor his wife's last request. Instead of burning the letters in the fireplace of their home, he contemplates which method of destruction would have deemed as appropriate by her. The idea not to just destroy the letters but to think about how she possibly wanted him to destroy them underlines his loyalty to her as a husband.

He did not for a moment think of casting the thick package into the flames to be licked by the fiery tongues. That was not what she meant. . . . He drew the package from his pocket and leaning as far as he could over the broad stone rail of the bridge, cast it from him into the river. It fell straight and swiftly from his hand. He could not follow its descent through the darkness, nor hear its dip into the water far below. It vanished silently; seemingly into some inky unfathomable space. He felt as if he were flinging it back to her in that unknown world whither she had gone.

(Chopin, "Her Letters" 99-100)

Her letters finally vanish in the depths of the river and yet remain vividly present in the husband's mind. Acting upon his wife's wish does not give him satisfaction or enables him to make peace with the uncertainty he felt. Instead, his doubts continue to grow into an obsession with tracing the unknown. Letting go of the letters actually fuels his suspicions and thus exacerbates his inner conflict.

A weight had settled upon his spirit, a certitude that there could be but one secret which a woman would choose to have die with her. This one thought was possessing him. It occupied his brain, keeping it nimble and alert with suspicion. It clutched his heart, making every breath of existence a fresh moment of pain.

(Chopin, "Her Letters" 101)

The lack of knowledge leaves him restless. In his mind he repeatedly confronts himself with her alleged infidelity. Although he does not have proof of her marital misconduct, he is incessantly preoccupied with this thought. Because he "can neither accept the truth of his wife's infidelity nor deny it" (Weinstock 54) his initial doubts turn into an uncontrollable obsession. In keeping with his growing obsession he convinces himself that any man of his and her acquaintance is a possible suspect.

The men about him were no longer the friends of yesterday; in each one he discerned a possible enemy. He attended absently to their

talk. He was remembering how she had conducted herself toward this one and that one; striving to recall conversations, subtleties of facial expression that might have meant what he did not suspect at the moment, shades of meaning in words that had seemed the ordinary interchange of social amenities.

(Chopin, "Her Letters" 101)

He attempts to trace clues that he possibly missed or misunderstood in the past. Were there indicators of her infidelity that he simply ignored? On the one hand, this state of mind reflects his inarticulate regret for not having read the letter before he drowned them in the water. On the other hand, he becomes obsessed with the revelation that his wife had kept from him throughout their marriage. In effect, he knew very little about his wife and her actual wants. Therefore, solving the mystery of her infidelity thus goes hand in hand with fully understanding who she actually was and signifies an attempt to overcome "the mental separation the letters incur" (Weinstock 54). Moreover, his dogged pursuit for truth also represents his struggle to come to terms with his ignorance for her dissatisfaction and his gullibility during their marriage.

The husband searches for evidence in their social circle and their home, asking men and women what they thought of his late wife just to find that the people he questions and that the letters he finds in her room affirm her as "the true and loyal woman he had always believed her to be" (Chopin, "Her Letters" 102). Towards the end of the narrative, he has to learn that the other life of her "the secret of her existence – the secret which he had held in his hands and had cast into the river" (Chopin, "Her Letters" 102) will remain sealed to him. With no evidence at hand, the realization dawns on him that the letters he discarded for his wife were the only evidence that could have confirmed his suspicion. In response to this realization, he enters a state of limbo in which he neither is able to let go of his suspicions, nor is able to find evidence to end them.

The final section of the narrative captures his resignation. The struggle to unveil the truth about his wife's infidelity has left him exhausted and desperate. Weary of his life and his dogged search he decides that he needs to immerse in the waters that hold the letters and thus, the truth he is seeking.

Empty and meaningless seemed to him all devices which the world offers for a man's entertainment. The food and the drink set before him had lost their flavor. He did not longer know or care if the sun shone or the clouds lowered about him. ...He no longer sought

to know from men and women what they dared not or could not tell him. Only the river knew. He went and stood again upon the bridge where he had stood many an hour since that night when the darkness then had closed around him and engulfed his manhood. Only the river knew. It babbled, and he listened to it, and it told him nothing, but it promised all. He could hear it promising with caressing voice, peace and sweet repose. He could hear the sweep, the song of the water inviting him. A moment more and he had gone to seek her, and to join her and her secret thought in the immeasurable rest.

(Chopin, "Her Letters" 103–104)

Only in the water can he find peace of mind and free himself of the burden of not knowing and yet wanting to know about her other life. Thinking that the water will unite him with the letters and thus with his wife, he longs to overcome the distance between him and her created through the letters. Therefore, suicide seems a viable option to finally terminate his search. The descent into the water is reminiscent of Orpheus' descent into the underworld. Similar to Orpheus, the husband enters the unknown abyss to be reunited with his wife. However, Orpheus intends to return with his wife Eurydice to the world of the living whereas the husband in *Her Letters* simply aims to resolve his inner conflict. Therefore, his descent into the underworld is irreversible.¹¹ Moreover, the final scene bears great resemblance with the ending Chopin narrates in her novel *The Awakening*. The novel, published four years after *Her Letters*, and the short story depict the water as a realm of comfort and relief for their protagonists.

The voice of the sea is seductive never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. . . . She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace. She went on and on. She remembered the night she swam far out, and recalled the terror that seized her at the fear of being unable to regain the shore. She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end.

(Chopin, "The Awakening" 176)

¹¹Please confer "Orpheus (Greek Mythology)."

In both cases, Chopin personifies the water as the long sought-after redeemer. The water speaks to the weary minds of the protagonists. In a situation of distress and helplessness, the water presents their final means of escape to a world that promises an effortless and carefree existence. Edna as well as the husband are displaced figures unable to cope with conventional marriage. In Edna's case, marriage presents an insurmountable obstacle that thwarts individual fulfillment; the husband, on the other hand, has to learn that marriage lulled him into false sense of security that blinded him to his wife's extramarital life and true nature. Therefore, both protagonists end their lives in the water to find their inner peace and rid themselves of the burdens marriage has brought on them. Edna, as the unhappy wife, seeks individual fulfillment and freedom in the Gulf of Mexico while the unknowing husband in *Her Letters* wants to compensate for his inability to learn about his wife's secret.¹² Thus, Chopin portrays both characters as disillusioned with conventional marriage, albeit under different circumstances.

Chopin tells a story of husband and wife torn between self-affirmation and self-fulfillment. *Her Letters* is an alternative reading of the marriage plot since it neither affirms the conventional love triangle nor deploys the death of the wife as narrative punishment for her infidelity. Instead, Chopin subverts the love triangle to read adultery as female liberation and male victimization. In this scenario the husband – not the wife – is the wronged party. The husband is the victim of her indiscretion because he relied on her loyalty in good faith and did not suspect any infidelity until he learns otherwise. Thereby, the letters function as symbols of her empowerment and his disempowerment. The wife acts upon her desires while the husband becomes “emasculated by his inability to know” (Papke 78) as Mary E. Papke explains. The elaborations of the husband's conflict are central to the alternative marriage plot Chopin crafts because she demonstrates that his self-image is deeply rooted in the concept of marriage. Contrary to the preceding stories, Chopin thus clarifies that conventional expectations restrict female and male identity formation. In describing his miseries, Chopin demonstrates the inaptitude of marriage to mediate between unconventional wants of the wife for affection and the conventional wants of the husband for consistency. This clash of expectations is crucial for the differing perceptions of the letters. The husband obsesses over the letters because he obsesses over gaining the spousal authority he apparently never had during their marriage. Whereas the letters represent the husband's lack of authority, they represent

¹²My reading partially relies on Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock who analyses both suicides as indicators of “placelessness” (60) since Edna fails to find self-fulfillment in the conventional system and the husband unable to cope with his wife's subversion of the conventions he relied on.

a written testimony of the passion and agency she created in spite of her marriage. Consequently, the narrative inverts the power dynamics between husband and wife to challenge the commonplace notion of women as victims of adultery and men as legitimate adulterers.

The Letter (1912) & Her Letters (1895)

Araki as well as Chopin demonstrate an alternative reading of marriage and adultery from a female perspective. The Japanese story is characterized by the use of a first-person narrative situation that provides an intimate perspective limited to the female protagonist alone. In the American story, the narrative focuses on the perspectives of husband and wife by deploying a figural narrative situation. Despite the different point of views at work in each story, Araki and Chopin both present us with personal insights into the inner struggle with marriage and adultery. Nonetheless, the varying perspectives still serve different functions. Both short stories deploy the letter as a narrative theme and plot element. The plot of *The Letter* is not only written in epistolary form, but the letter is actually the plot. This one letter presents the narrator's attempt to win her lover back by adversely criticizing her marriage and marriage as a social convention. The narrative is thus a confessional plea that solely relies on her perspective while disregarding the views of either husband or lover. *Her Letters* on the other hand, divides the story between the perspective of the wife and the husband to reveal the different meanings the letters have for them. Contrary to the Japanese story, the content of the letter is only alluded to, remains unquoted, and its form does not dominate the narrative structure of the story. However, central to both narratives is that the protagonists pursue "a revolt staged in writing" (Kauffman 18) and thus related to the letters. The letters by the Japanese and American protagonist capture the adultery committed and the passion experienced as a process of self-transformation bound to overthrow their conventional position. Whereas Araki's narrator articulated her doubts in the letter, the conflict of Chopin's wife is about parting with the letters that she has kept over the years. The husband's conflict, on the other hand, originates in his realization that the letters he discarded for his wife unsettle his understanding of his marriage, his wife, and his self-image. Chopin portrays the different conflicts that arise from the letters to emphasize marriage as a problematic concept that invokes discrepancy rather than unity.

In both short stories, the husbands are in the dark about their wives' adultery, or as in Chopin's story, have only suspicions, but no proof of it. Both narrators lead a double life parallel to their passionless marriages. Neither suffers from an abusive marriage as they are married to kind and caring

men. As a result, both wives feel obligated to stay with their husbands not only for conventional reasons but moreover, for reasons of loyalty. Even though neither of the female characters suffers physical or verbal abuse by their husbands, they still suffer because they do not reciprocate the affection of their husbands and seek emotional fulfillment with another man. What distinguishes Araki's and Chopin's characters from the ones in the preceding chapter is that they are conflicted over their personal desires, their conventional obligations, and spousal loyalty. Conformity and non-conformity thus go hand in hand to merge social obligations with personal happiness.

Letter writing and adultery place both women in-between given conventions that segregate marriage and adultery. The act of writing is shown to help Araki's as well as Chopin's protagonist to "translate between the private and the public world" (Huff, "Women's Letters" 953), meaning to negotiate their self-image between personal desires and conventional obligations. Writing about their desires and living their desires informs the agency of both women and emphasize the letters as means of self-reflection and self-creation. By writing to their lovers the protagonists they express their affection for them but they also write themselves as passionate, possibly sexual, beings. The letters thus manifest their another part of themselves, the part that is unknown to their husbands and thus act as a dividing line that disintegrates the marital union. Moreover, the novel approach to connect adultery and letter writing as means of female emancipation similarly challenges the conventional love triangle. Empowered through writing the letters and having extramarital relationships the protagonists are agents and not victims of adultery. In this way, Araki and Chopin reread the conventional love triangle as representation of and as a means to resolve their internal struggle. Hillel M. Daleski's reading of the love triangle "as offering the novelist an alternative means of handling inner conflict, one that allows him directly to portray the divided self of the protagonist" (19) thus equally applies to the short stories analyzed here. The letters make these protagonists part of the love triangle while reshaping it at the same time.

Chopin and Araki depict the possibility to reread the significance of marriage and adultery in order to draft new images of womanhood. The boundaries between marriage and adultery become permeable and no longer serve to distinguish between allegedly "appropriate" and "inappropriate" forms of womanhood. Instead, the authors portray marriage and adultery as inter-related concepts that foster fluid images of womanhood. 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. The modifications outlined in this article serve to emphasize how Araki and Chopin 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 and adultery are revised in their rigid separation from each other to allow an intermingling of the aforementioned codes of “appropriate” and “inappropriate” womanliness. Consequently, Araki and Chopin demonstrate the New Woman as an agent of hybridity that questions gender dichotomies by merging them. In doing so, both authors delineate the transformation of both women as a complex process of becoming that bridges self-expectations and social conventions. In the next chapter we will see a different approach to the liminality portrayed in *The Letter* and *Her Letters* since conventions of masculinity and femininity are brought together to redefine womanhood, showing that femininity and masculinity can permeate each other.

5.3 Gender Hybrid: The Masculine Woman in Shikin Shimizu's *The Broken Ring* & Willa Cather's *Tommy the Unsentimental*

The New Woman: Masculine and Hybrid

So far, the New Woman has been associated with criticizing marriage as a convention that thwarts women's liberty and agency. Chopin and Iku did so by rereading adultery as a female prerogative that enables its characters to act upon their yearnings for love and passion. In this current chapter I aim to demonstrate that women writers also criticized conventional womanhood through their drafts of hybrid characters - female protagonists that unite masculine and feminine traits. Exploring this duplicity, women writers reflected on the historical demands for the female vote in Progressive America and the right to public assembly in Meiji Japan by disintegrating conventional perceptions of womanhood (and manhood) in their fiction. Shikin Shimizu and Willa Cather are two examples of turn-of-the-century writers that subverted gender binaries by incorporating codes of femininity and masculinity in their female protagonists. Contrary to the conventional ideal of female frailty and dependence, the characters often display physical and emotional strength, rationality, and a strong sense of self. These conventional male qualities are paired with conventional female traits such as compassion, empathy, and sensitivity to create an image of womanhood that defies existing conventions. Cather and Shikin thus respond to the changes at the time by presenting images of womanhood that are situated in-between conventional categories. The liminality of their characters recalls Darling-Wolf's claim that "gender hybridity might serve to destabilize essentializing categories of 'man' and 'woman,' and consequently challenge patriarchal definitions of what these categories mean" (Darling-Wolf 63). The deliberate confusion of the dualistic model aimed to reveal conventional concepts of manhood and womanhood as arbitrary and opened the floor for unprecedented gender images that had not yet found a place in the social realities of Japan and the U.S.

Their short stories written during this period exemplify this type of hybridity - *Tommy the Unsentimental* (1896) and *The Broken Ring* (1890). In Willa Cather's short story *Tommy the Unsentimental* (1896) and Shikin Shimizu's *The Broken Ring* (1890), the protagonists, Theodosia Shirley and Shikin's unnamed protagonist, are depicted as characters in-between conventional gender categories. Conventional ideas of manhood and womanhood become converged in both protagonists and emphasize the fluid permeability and temporariness of gender identity. Cather's and Shikin's contemplation

of gender as ambiguous reflect Judith Halberstam's thesis that

the momentous negotiations about gender that took place at and around the turn of the century, which were created by earlier developments, produced particular forms of femininity and masculinity and clearly showed that femininity was not wed to femaleness and masculinity was certainly not bound to maleness.

(Halberstam 48)

The incorporation of male attributes such as decision-making power, rationality, and strength (physical or mental) in female characters transgresses conventional gender boundaries. In this way, both authors demonstrate the New Woman as a "condensed symbol of disorder and rebellion" (Smith-Rosenberg, "Discourses of Sexuality" 266) upsetting given ideas of womanhood as subordinate to male dominance. Moreover, they read the New Woman, and thus modern womanhood, as a "masculine woman" (Behling 3) which Laura Behling considers "a combination of two already existing social constructions employed in an attempt to create a new possibility" (4). The convergence of manhood and womanhood diversifies the New Woman as a narrative theme and extends the range of unprecedented gender images the New Woman represents.

Tommy the Unsentimental (1896)

Tommy the Unsentimental was published in 1896 and inspired by James M. Barrie's story *Sentimental Tommy* that was released the same year. Barrie depicts an atypical male protagonist that is characterized by strong emotionality. Contrary to the Victorian conceptions of manhood, Tommy Sandys represents Barrie's conviction that "men should have free range of all their emotions" (Abate 471). As a result *Sentimental Tommy* questioned the conventional categorization of affect as feminine and the lack thereof as masculine. Similar to Barrie, Cather foregoes conventional binary gender codes by portraying her female protagonist Theodosia Shirley or Tommy as rational, mature, and respected by men. Tommy Sandys as well as Tommy Shirley are unconventional title characters with regard to their effeminate or masculine character.¹³ Similarly to Barrie, Cather subverts conventional notions of womanhood without affirming Tommy as fully masculine or feminine. At first sight, her aforementioned masculine characteristics prevail but Cather

¹³Michelle Ann Abate notes that "[b]oth characters are associated with an unconventional form of gender expression – Barrie's with effeminacy and Cather's with mannishness – which is largely determined by their relationship to affect" (477).

includes feminine attributes of caring and compassion to complicate Tommy's characterization. The pairing of Tommy's female sex with masculine gender describes the protagonist in ways that do not allow for a clear allocation of the protagonist with either conventional femininity or conventional masculinity. In a similar vein, Barrie merges masculine sex and feminine gender in his protagonist. Cather's use of Behling's "masculine woman" (3) relates her short story to Barrie's novel since both intend to transgress gender conventions to create novel images of manhood and womanhood.

Theodosia/ Tommy/ Tom: Masculine/ Feminine, Male/ Female

Cather's approach to delineate Tommy as a liminal character is found in the various names she is addressed with. Born as Theodosia Shirley, she is known as Tommy or Tom in Southdown. The boyish names give the protagonist a masculine gender and invalidate the binary distinction between male sex and masculine gender vs. female sex and feminine gender. As Judith Butler notes "for Cather the name stages an exchange of gender identifications that the substantializing of gender and sexuality conceal" (133). As gender codes are not static but dynamic, Cather presents Tommy as a female character with male privileges afforded her by the situations she is placed in.

Tommy's physique and physiognomy also speak for her masculine type. Even though she was born as a woman, her outward appearance bears masculine features and defies conventional expectations in a female body. "Needless to say, Tommy was not a boy, although her keen green eyes and wide forehead were scarcely girlish, and she had the lank figure of an active half grown lad" (Cather 168). Tommy has not only a slender figure, she is also described with no obvious characteristics that would emphasize her biological sex. Her "keen" eyes and wide" forehead draw attention to her alert mind (Cather 168). Moreover, there is "a sort of squareness and honesty of spirit" (Cather 170) to her character that defies the idea of the delicate and silent lady in need of male protection.

In addition to her boyish names and masculine physique, Tommy also occupies a position of authority in Southdown. She represents her father, Thomas Shirley, when he is absent as well as his banking business. As she is fully authorized to run the family business and equally versed in its intricacies and correspondences, Tommy is on equal footing with her father.

Her real name was Theodosia, but during Thomas Shirley's frequent absences from the bank she had attended to his business and correspondence signing herself 'T. Shirley', until everyone in Southdown called her 'Tommy'. That blunt sort of familiarity is not unfrequent in the West, and is meant well enough.

(Cather 168–169)

Tommy's authority stems from using her father's signature. The imitation of his identity provides for the acceptance of hers. Both identities are merged and become indistinguishable on paper. Acting on behalf of her father therefore changes her name from Theodosia, the daughter of Thomas Shirley to Tommy the business agent of Thomas Shirley. Even though the legitimacy of her authority is primarily founded on the authority of her father and secondarily on her own merit, Tommy is the only woman in town respected for her managing authority. The casual form of address Cather describes is also an indicator for Southdown's acceptance of Tommy for what she represents and does despite her difference in character or appearance. In other words, a woman with business expertise and authority is not perceived as odd but is naturally accepted in this western town. The boyish names and her masculine physique thus also indicate Tommy's social standing in the community of Southdown. Although paternal consent is key to Tommy's position in Southdown, it is also the tolerant environment that determines her position as respected business agent and female leader.

People rather expect some business ability in a girl there, and they respect it immensely. That Tommy undoubtedly had, and if she had not, things would have gone at sixes and sevens in the Southdown National. For Thomas Shirley had big land interests in Wyoming that called him constantly away from home

(Cather 169)

There is no doubt about her abilities to tend to business transactions in the absence of her father. Neither the town nor the father himself question Tommy's skills and fully trust her. Her sense of order and rationality that make her indispensable to the bank and the town also demonstrates her masculine traits. With her position, she gains authority and respect but in return for these privileges, she must comply with codes of masculine behavior. She is the one that maintains order and that people blindly trust their business to. Finally, she is the one woman in the story without emotional outbursts in times of crisis and difficulties.

Tommy's standing thus primarily relies on internalizing conventionally male-coded behavior. At first glance, this observation affirms Jeanne Harris' reading that the "theme of a woman's violation, misinterpretation, or simple failure to live up to an accepted male code dominates this early short story" (Harris 86). These conventional codes of masculinity do indeed prevail in Tommy, however Harris neglects the fact that these masculine ways of acting are coupled with feminine qualities. Especially, Tommy's relationships and

interactions with the Old Boys, Jay and Miss Jessica are evidence of this hybridity. As a result, Tommy is truly a hybrid character that reflects Behling's understanding that the "*masculine woman* is a combination of two already existing social constructions employed in an attempt to create a new possibility" (Behling 4). Tommy ultimately gains more freedom and control over her actions than the characters who are limited to one gender identity because she consolidates existing conventions of manhood and womanhood into a unique category of her own. The idea of the "masculine woman" (Behling 4) thus reflects her transgression of conventional gender constructions and contemplates liminality as means of subversion.

The Old Boys: Foundation of Tommy's Masculine Authority

Tommy is unconventional with regard to her social life. She primarily interacts with the Old Boys who are friends of her father's and Tommy's main social circle. As surrogate family and role models, the Old Boys nurture Tommy's self-esteem and her condescending perception of other women in town.

She knew almost no women, because in those days there were few women in Southdown who were in any sense interesting, or interested in anything but babies and salads. Her best friends were her father's old business friends, elderly men who had seen a good deal of the world, and who were very proud and fond of Tommy. . . . Those old speculators and men of business had always felt a sort of responsibility for Tom Shirley's little girl, and had rather taken her mother's place, and been her advisers on many points upon which men seldom feel at liberty to address a girl.

(Cather 169–170)

Friends her father's age are more appealing to her than women her own age who she considers dull and uninspiring. She is intrigued with the Old Boys and their life experiences and considers them valuable resources for her own life. Tommy is suspicious of women since she perceives them as limited in their views and opportunities. Her dismissal of women concerns their conventional focus on the female body as a reproductive site and a reflection of the limitations women adhere to in society. Tommy derides conventional womanhood and its narrow focus and challenges the restriction of women to their biological sex. Conventionally, women are expected to birth and mother children, and in addition, conform to an ideal of female slimness. Reduced to their bodily functions and physical appearance, conventional women are

not in the position to gain experiences beyond the home and the family. For these reasons, Tommy feels more comfortable with the friends of her father. Amidst these men she feels accepted and free to be herself. Similar to a conventional family with two parents and one or two children, these men care for Tommy and help to raise her. Tommy is their protégé, and contrary to other girls, the Old Boys do not feel inhibited in their interactions with Tommy finding it natural to have her in their midst. The membership to this social group emphasizes her unconventional character yet also reaffirms the Old Boys' conventional expectations of her.

She was just one of them; she played whist and billiards with them, and made their cocktails for them, not scorning to take one herself occassionally. Indeed, Tommy's cocktails were things of fame in Southdown, and the professional compounders of drinks always bowed respectfully to her as though acknowledging a powerful rival.

(Cather 170)

Because she is fully integrated in the circle of the Old Boys, it is natural for her and for them to spend their leisure time together. In other words, there is no distinction between them and her in these situations. Drinking and gambling together emphasizes Tommy's adoption of male habits and affirms her position within this social group. Tommy earns respect for behaving like a man. The critique of alcoholism as wrecking homes and human morale as articulated by the temperance movement does not resonate in Cather's story. Instead, she emphasizes these activities as fostering Tommy's integration in the circle of the Old Boys.

The situation is nonetheless ambiguous. Despite her internalization of masculine traits, she also fulfills conventionally feminine-coded duties in the circle of the Old Boys. Cather does not fully absolve her of the duty to serve men. She might engage in drinking with her friends but is described and appraised for her ability to prepare the drinks and serve them to the Old Boys. Another aspect of conventionality is found in the Old Boys' self-authorization to monitor Tommy's love life. Despite the privileges Tommy enjoys as a respected equal, she is still subject to the paternal authority of the Old Boys. Similar to a father-daughter relationship, the Old Boys attempt to discourage a possible romance between Jay Ellington Harper, a friend of the family, and Tommy. Jay does not meet their approval since he defies conventional categories of masculinity: he lacks rationality, is wasteful, and depends on Tommy's help with regard to business matters. What concerns them is that despite his lack of these important qualities, Tommy still seems to harbor sentiments for Jay. The Old Boys have an ambiguous relationship

with Tommy. On the one hand, they consider her an equal and claim to trust her judgment (“I think we can pretty nearly depend on Tommy’s good sense” (Cather 170). On the other hand,

[t]hey were too wise to say anything to Tommy, but they said just a word or two to Thomas Shirley, Sr. and combined to make things very unpleasant for Mr. Jay Ellington Harper. At length their relations with Harper became so strained that the young man felt it would be better for him to leave town, so his father started him in a little bank of his own up in Red Willow.

(Cather 170)

Without Tommy’s knowledge, the Old Boys drive Jay out of Southdown. Although the Old Boys intend to protect Tommy from engaging in a foolish relationship, they also deprive her of the liberty to decide for herself. This posits an authoritarian and paternal approach. The Old Boys represent the source of her authority and liberty but also represent the limitations of her independence. Tommy’s autonomy is then conditioned by what Harris coined “an accepted male code” (Harris 86). The Old Boys set the bar for Tommy’s life. Their standards for leisure and the rest of her private life are determined by a masculine standard that she has to comply with. Even though she is not aware of their conspiracy against Jay, she is still aware of her obligation to live up to the standards of the Old Boys. She knows that straying from their expectations could burden their relationship and her autonomy.

Now all these things displeased and puzzled Jay Ellington Harper, and Tommy knew it full well, but clung to her old manner of living with a stubborn pertinacity, feeling somehow that to change would be both foolish and disloyal to the Old Boys.

(Cather 170)

Tommy stands between the Old Boys and Jay and she relates to both parties for different reasons. The Old Boys are her family and she conforms to their expectations to uphold her privileged situation. She enjoys respect and the liberty to make business decisions because the Old Boys and her absent father approve of it. Her social situation has shaped her masculine behavior (drinking, gambling) and finds full acceptance among the ones that grant her the liberties she enjoys. Jay, on the other hand, does not understand the social dynamics between Tommy and the Old Boys. Despite her empathy in situations of business misconduct, Jay questions the defiance of female delicacy and restraint in Tommy when she is with the Old Boys. Their

idea of leisure she settles for overshadows the Tommy he claims to know: a sympathetic and kind person.

Here, Tommy is rendered a cryptic character – the interaction with both parties generates different impressions of Tommy. No one seems to have a firm grasp of who Tommy really is. What they know about Tommy is only a fragment of what Tommy is willing to share with them. She does not let them in on her intimate thoughts and doubts which she reveals at the end of the narrative. The impressions they have of her are only a fraction of her personality. The idea of Tommy as an ambiguous character by name and by behavior affirms Judith Butler's reading that "identification is always an ambivalent process, a taking on of a position that is at once a taking over, a dispossession, and a sacrifice" (106). In return for managing authority and respect, Tommy subordinates herself to the standards of masculinity represented by the Old Boys. Her autonomy and authority thus come at the price of compliance. The reading of Tommy as "masculine woman" (Behling 3) in relation to the Old Boys is thus complicated by the ambiguous position she has with them. The Old Boys grant and approve of her authority, yet demand that she live by their rules. Tommy is thus dependent and independent at the same time. Jay and Miss Jessica, on the other hand, are subject to Tommy's authority. Both are characters that rely on Tommy's leadership in times of crisis. Moreover, their characteristics build a strong contrast to Tommy as a "masculine woman" (Behling 3) emphasizing her liminality and otherness even more.

Jay Ellington Harper: The Effeminate Man & the Masculine Woman

Jay is introduced as the character benefitting from Tommy's unconventional status in Southdown. Contrary to the conventional image of masculinity, Jay is neither business savvy nor particularly ambitious. Jay is the odd character in town and fails to meet the expectations as articulated by Tommy at the beginning of Cather's narrative.

[H]e's a baby in business; he's good for nothing on earth but to keep his hair parted straight and wear that white carnation in his buttonhole. He has 'em sent down from Hastings twice a week as regularly as the mail comes, but the drafts he cashes lie in his safe until they are lost, or somebody finds them. I go up occasionally and send a package away for him myself. He'll answer your notes promptly enough though, but his business letters – I believe he destroys them unopened to shake the responsibility of answering them. (Cather 168)

If Tommy defies the image of female frailty and reserve, then Jay is depicted to defy the image of masculine rationality, pragmatism, and reliability. Nonetheless, Jay himself is drafted as an ambiguous character. In business matters, he is seen to be immature as he is in need of the assistance and care provided by Tommy. Jay neglects his professional responsibilities shying away from business correspondence and refusing to take responsibility, while at the same time taking painstaking care of his appearance. Contrary to his business self, he pays close attention to his hairstyle or the frequent supply of flowers for his buttonhole, and sends timely responses to private correspondence.

Despite his sloppy business conduct, Tommy still conceives of Jay as “a likeable fellow” (Cather 168) and repeatedly helps him in business matters. When the Old Boys drive Jay out of town, they do it so Tommy will no longer be distracted by her empathy for him. The geographic distance does not prevent Jay from telegraphing for help once he finds himself in a precarious situation at the bank in Red Willow. Without hesitation Tommy sets out on her bicycle to find Jay intimidated by angry clients at the bank.

Just at twelve o'clock, when Jay Ellington Harper, his collar crushed and wet about his throat, his eyeglass dimmed with perspiration, his hair hanging damp over his forehead, and even the ends of his moustache dripping with moisture, was attempting to reason with a score of angry Bohemians, Tommy came quietly through the door, grip in hand.

(Cather 174)

Contrary to Kishida, Cather does not subvert the marriage plot. Marriage is alluded to throughout the story but never openly discussed in the story or presented as the focus of Tommy's development. What prevails instead is the subversion of the conventional rescue plot “that positions the rescuer as the active protagonist in relation to the girl's helpless suffering” (Gilmore and Marshall 668). Cather subverts the conventional salvation narrative to illustrate the ambiguous positions of Jay and Tommy. Jay is reaffirmed in his image of weakness – unable to cope with the situation himself, he resigns to anxiously waiting for help instead. Cather's narrative reverses the roles in the trope of the helpless maiden who is played here by a male counterpart, while Tommy takes on the role of the hero coming to rescue Jay from yet another professional downfall. Once she enters the bank, it is not only the money she brings with her, but the air of confidence and authority that resolves Jay's conflict and puts a stop to the highly emotional situation of a run on the bank.

However, the scene at the bank also draws attention to the feelings Tommy has for Jay. The story implies that the motivation to help Jay derives from sentiments that she has developed for Jay and yet chose to ignore. Just like the Old Boys, Jay becomes part of Tommy's unspoken inner conflict. She stands between the privileges granted to her and her romantic feelings for Jay. In the aftermath of Jay's rescue, Tommy takes the time to contemplate her contradictory mindset towards Jay.

Tommy knew that she was immensely fond of him, and she knew at the same time that she was thoroughly foolish for being so. As she expressed it, she was not of his sort, and never would be. She did not often take pains to think, but when she did saw matters pretty clearly, and she was of peculiarly unfeminine mind that could not escape meeting and acknowledging a logical conclusion. But she went on liking Jay Ellington Harper just the same. Now Harper was the only foolish man of Tommy's acquaintance. She knew plenty of active young businessmen and sturdy ranchers, such as one meets about live Western towns, and took no particular interest in them, probably just because they were practical and sensible and thoroughly of her own kind.

(Cather 169)

What is striking about this particular scene is Tommy's manner to evaluate Jay's potential as an adequate partner. On the one hand, her "unfeminine mind" (Cather 169) rationally weighs the pros and cons of Jay's character as a suitable partner. On the other hand, she derides her romantic feelings for Jay and the idea of having him as a partner. She lingers over the idea of becoming involved with Jay and simultaneously dismisses this thought. Tommy justifies her approach by declaring that she and Jay are incompatible – they are just different kinds of people and would not be able to make a relationship work. Tommy is well aware that her self-image is situated "outside of conventional heteronormativity" (Abate 477) and implicitly articulates her desire for a relationship of similar unconventionality. The Old Boys disapprove of Jay because his "sentimental immaturity is likely to preclude his ability to be a successful husband and responsible father" (Abate 481). The inability to comply with conventional masculinity is depicted to be incompatible with Tommy's unconventional femininity. Tommy is found to distance herself from a possible relationship with Jay because her desires most likely concern women, not men.

Miss Jessica: Conventional Femininity?

Cather depicts Tommy as a character that prefers to associate herself with men rather than with women, with one exception – Miss Jessica. Despite her conventional femininity, Tommy is not dismissive of Miss Jessica, a friend she met during her studies on the East Coast. Miss Jessica is the opposite of Tommy. Frail, gentle, silent, and concerned for her appearance she displays all the qualities that account for conventional femininity. Similar to Jay, Miss Jessica can easily be categorized within the conventional scheme. Jay violates conventions of masculine strength and logic, while Miss Jessica is found to affirm conventions of feminine restraint and silence.

As to Miss Jessica's she was not quite so certain, for Miss Jessica, though pale and languid and addicted to sunshades, was a maiden most discreet. Conversations usually ended without any further information as to Miss Jessica's feelings, and Tommy sometimes wondered if she were capable of having any at all.

(Cather 172)

What distinguishes Miss Jessica from Tommy is her delicate physique. Her complexion speaks for restricted sun exposure and little physical activity. Similar to Jay, Tommy is unable to make heads or tails of Miss Jessica. At first sight, she complies with conventional expectations: she is passive and does not act on her own initiative. She follows Tommy because she lacks the ability to lead, indicating that she lacks a masculine component in her character. Her reserved personality also speaks for a conventional reading of womanhood. Tommy is able to match Miss Jessica against the conventional scheme she rejects for its limitations but yet finds herself unable to get to the core of Miss Jessica's personality. Just like Jay is puzzled by Tommy's conduct when with the Old Boys, Tommy herself is unable to pinpoint the inner thoughts of Miss Jessica behind the veil of convention. In this way, Cather implies gender conventions as a façade masking the inner world and separating the inner from the outer world. What Tommy perceives of Miss Jessica is thus her conventional self that blocks the perception of her inner self at the same time.

On the surface, Miss Jessica nonetheless represents female passivity, an aspect well demonstrated during their hasty journey to Red Willow. Upon receiving Jay's telegram Tommy immediately prepares for departure. Tommy gives orders and Miss Jessica follows these orders. Inspired by her determination to help Jay, Miss Jessica requests to be part of Tommy's mission. Confronted with her physical inadequacies to bear the strains of the journey, Miss Jessica quickly loses her initial enthusiasm.

Miss Jessica soon found that with the pedaling that had to be done there was little time left for emotion of any sort, or little sensibility for anything but the throbbing, dazzling heat that had to be endured. . . . The sun was like hot brass, and the wind that blew up from the south was hotter still. But Tommy knew that wind was their only chance. Miss Jessica began to feel that unless she could stop and get some water she was not much longer for this vale of tears. She suggested this possibility to Tommy, but Tommy only shook her head.

(Cather 173)

The Texan landscape between Southdown and Red Willow pushes Miss Jessica to her physical limits. Contrary to Tommy, Miss Jessica gives in to the arid and hot conditions and appeals to Tommy for sympathy. Tommy declines and continues without her. Miss Jessica is not involved in saving Jay but sends her moral support and affirms her passive position (“You go on, Tommy, and tell him, – tell him it won’t fail, and I’d do anything to save him” (Cather 173)). Miss Jessica does not only have a frail body, but also a frail mind. Once Tommy puts her mind to helping Jay, she does not stray from this goal whereas Miss Jessica falters in this demanding situation. Unwilling to compensate for her physical weakness with mental strength, Miss Jessica still remains in her conventional role of the weak female.

Nonetheless, the appearance of Jessica carries ambivalent meaning for Tommy and her relationship with the Old Boys. At first, Tommy’s decision to leave Southdown for an education in the East allays the concerns of the Old Boys and her father. Tommy’s devotion to amending Jay’s faulty business decisions were no longer an issue (“Tommy occasionally found excuse to run upon her wheel to straighten out the young man’s business for him. So when she suddenly decided to go East to school for a year, Thomas, Sr., drew a great relief.” (Cather 170)). However, when Tommy returns to Southdown after a year of studying, she returns with Miss Jessica and gives the Old Boys another reason for concern.

But to school Tommy went, and from all reports conducted herself in a most seemly manner; made no more cocktails, played no more billiards. . . . The only unsatisfactory thing about Tommy’s return was that she brought with her a girl she had grown fond of at school, a dainty, white languid bit of a thing, who used violet perfumes and carried a sunshade. The Old Boys said it was a bad sign when a rebellious girl like Tommy took to being sweet and gentle to one her own sex, the worst sign in the world.

(Cather 171)

The Old Boys were relieved to see Tommy off to college. Finally, she was no longer involved or tempted to be involved with Jay. Upon her return, they find that things have not gone the way they imagined. Tommy's return to town with a woman nurtures their suspicion of homosexuality. The Old Boys disapprove of Jay since he fails to meet standards of conventional masculinity. Their disapproval of Miss Jessica derives from their fear of Tommy turning to homosexuality, another unconventional and unacceptable form of gender relations. It is unacceptable for Tommy to be with an effeminate man like Jay and it is unacceptable for Tommy to be with a feminine woman like Miss Jessica. Both gender constellations are highly incompatible with the standards of the Old Boys.

Cather undermines the idea of static gender identity through the depiction of a biologically female protagonist with male attributes. The volitional transgression of gender boundaries is enabled and limited by male approval. With Tommy, Cather nonetheless blurs conventional gender boundaries since she navigates between different gender roles and conventions. The Old Boys, Jay, and Miss Jessica represent relationships that invoke the many facets of Tommy's hybrid character. To the Old Boys, she is a cross between their surrogate daughter and their laid-back buddy. For Jay, she is his object of adoration as well as the well-versed savior in times of crisis. Miss Jessica looks up to her as a role model of the agency she fails to implement herself, but also disapproves of her merciless goal-orientation. The perspective of Tommy is fragmented and does not allow for a definite allocation to either convention of masculinity or femininity. Conclusively, Tommy's position between "masculine" rationality and "feminine" emotionality clearly demarcates her liminal character, representing the modern transitions at the turn of the century.

The Broken Ring (Koware yubiwa, Jogaku zasshi, 1890)

The Broken Ring transforms "the traditional marriage narrative, where women suffer unduly the vagaries of fate" (Copeland, *Lost Leaves* 191) into a story of female agency. Through a flashback narration, the female protagonist, who remains anonymous throughout the story, retraces her maturation from an obedient daughter and wife to a self-asserted individual. As the only narrative voice in the story, the protagonist offers a subjective and intimate account of her premarital life, her marriage, and her life after marriage. The broken ring refers to the wedding ring of the protagonist and acts as the central motif that frames the maturation of the protagonist from conventional to

unconventional character in the narrative. Forced by convention to enter an arranged marriage, the protagonist suffers from the abusive conduct of her alcoholic husband. After her accidental discovery of her husband's mistress, the protagonist leaves her abusive marriage. Shikin's protagonist defies the trope of the silent wife by claiming authority and decision-making power in her marriage. Marriage is then no longer an inevitable fate women resign themselves to, but becomes a generator of female agency. In doing so, Shikin also drafts a new image of womanhood that incorporates male authority in conventional womanhood and aligns the Japanese family with individual agency. Her wedding ring embodies these different stages of her development. The unusual or even incomplete shape of it signifies its liminality as a recognizable symbol of marriage and personal symbol of self-assertion.

Fiction Meets Non-Fiction: *The Broken Ring & How Determined Are Today's Women Students?*

The Broken Ring functions as a fictitious response to her pamphlet *How Determined Are Today's Women Students?* published on November 15th, 1890.¹⁴ In this publication, she shares her vision of women engaging politically in the new nation state and gaining a more realistic outlook on marriage. On a more general scale, she demands Meiji women to take responsibility for themselves and the nation as "leaders and reformers" (Shikin, "How Determined" 228). Apart from her call for female education and gender equality in marriage, Shikin pushes for women's presence in the public sphere. She posits that the conditions of marriage and the restraints on female education could only change if women's self-conception changed as well. If women were entitled to the execution of legal privileges such as the right of assembly and the right of free association, then their self-awareness for their own potential and power would grow. However, these privileges were legally denied to women under Article Five of the Public Peace Police Law (first passed in 1890 and expanded in 1900) (Molony 534). The striving for modernity might have advanced Meiji Japan technologically and politically, but with regard to women's status, the passing of Article Five and the later induction of the Meiji Civil Code in 1898, a legally reaffirmed male authority in the Japanese family as absolute. Paradoxically, the zeal for modernity proved to be a severe setback for women's rights. Therefore, Shikin's critique discloses the interrelations between women's social and legal oppression. More precisely, her pamphlet is a caveat against marriage as a site of female deprivation and suffering. She reveals that marriage often is not the "life with an ideal

¹⁴"This much noted work addresses in fictional form some of the social problems Shikin had discussed in *How Determined Are Today's Women Students?*" (Jennison 223).

husband in a warm and happy home” (Shikin, “How Determined” 230) but rather an ordeal that women are forced to go through.

You may think of married life as something to be embarked on without apprehension or anxiety, something that promises hope and happiness, joy, and peace. I cannot help but feeling deeply concerned each time I see this. It is as if Eve were singing to herself while walking unknowingly toward this coiling snake or sheep were being sent into a den of tigers, wolves, or other wild beasts.

(Shikin, “How Determined” 229)

Marriage is not a dream, but a battle of expectations. The institution of marriage is not designed to ensure the well-being of the wife. Instead, marriage demands the selfless devotion of the wife to the well-being of her husband and his family as well as thrifty housekeeping. Marriage is merely a functional relationship rather than a romantic one. The spousal disregard and ungratefulness for the tasks performed adds to the wifely misery. According to Shikin, women need to rid themselves of their naivety about marriage and prepare themselves for marriage as a continuous battle for recognition and respect. She disillusiones her readers about marriage and makes them come to the realization that those who cannot avoid marriage should enter it with confidence.

In some cases, the pressures of household circumstances or family make it impossible for a young woman to avoid getting married. Then you should enter into marriage with the conscious determination to become a leader and reformer, never thinking that it is simply a way to settle down.

(Shikin, “How Determined” 231)

Confidence is key for women’s advancement in Japanese marriage, and for that matter, in Japanese society. Shikin’s pamphlet clearly defies paternity and speaks on behalf of female empowerment. However, we need to bear in mind that in her pamphlet, Shikin envisions modern womanhood as a distant possibility that remains to be accomplished. Therefore, her pamphlet posits a discussion rather than providing concrete instructions for achieving the empowerment she propagates. While her pamphlet plants the intellectual seeds for a female awakening, her story *The Broken Ring* outlines a concrete example of accomplishing modern womanhood.¹⁵ The plot and protagonist

¹⁵As Rebecca Jennison notes this “much-noted work addresses in fictional form some of the social problems Shikin discussed in *How Determined Are Today’s Women Students?* (223).

of *The Broken Ring* present the fictitious realization of Shikin's demand for women to become "leaders and reformers" ("How Determined" 228). Female leadership is demonstrated in the protagonist's claim for action and authority in her marriage. The conventional context of her unhappy marriage is altered into a situation of change under female leadership. Shikin enables her readers to follow her protagonist and experience her rocky development from obedient and oppressed daughter to confident individual. In this way, Shikin conveys a possible path of female awakening, the awakening to the inherent ability to change her marriage for the better.

The Broken Ring: Function and Dysfunction of Marriage

The protagonist begins her account by providing an in-depth description of the unusual features of her wedding ring and the significance it has for her. Her perceptions of the ring also inform her understanding of modern womanhood as a marriage question. Therefore, the wedding ring is emblematic of the narrator's attempt to reread marriage as a convention empowering Japanese women to male authority. The critique is found in the disclosure of marriage as an ambiguous concept, a concept open for more than one interpretation. The title *The Broken Ring* captures this ambiguity and serves as the leitmotif of the story.

The narrator opens the story by addressing the unusual condition of her ring and how this condition causes discomfort in the people she meets. Her blunt statement, "I know you are bothered by this ring of mine with no stone" (Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 232), clarifies that she is well aware of the commotion she provokes by wearing a wedding ring that does not seem to be one. The metal band partially confirms the ring as a matrimonial symbol, but the gap that interrupts the continuous shape of the ring thoroughly controverts this assumption. The ring is both recognizable and yet appears distorted. What adds to the unusual approach of the story is the value the protagonist sees in her broken ring, an approach that defies the common disregard for things physically impaired or incomplete. Therefore, the personal value derives from her decision to remove the gem from her wedding ring to give it its current appearance after her separation marking this new period in her life by recalling "two years ago when I broke it" (Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 232). Moreover, this willful act signifies her power to change the sentimental value by deforming her ring. Removing the stone is seemingly a minor change, yet it is a radical act since it represents a self-determination unknown for women in the early Meiji era. As a result, she consciously creates the gap to ascribe a new significance to the ring marking her personal growth from passive wife and daughter to active individual. From the beginning of the

story, Shikin lets her narrator complicate the meaning of her ring, and thus of marriage. Accordingly, the protagonist describes her feelings towards her broken wedding ring:

Each time I look at this ring, I recall the heart-wrenching pain I have suffered. Even so, I cannot bear to take it off, even for a moment, because it has also been my benefactor. You ask why? Somehow, thanks to the suffering it has caused me, I've been able to become a more mature person. It has given me strength and encouragement.

(Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 232)

On the one hand, her ring is a reminder of her oppression during her marriage. Marriage means suffering since her personal rights were compromised first by her father, who arranged her marriage, and then by her husband, who did not appreciate her as his wife. The ring denotes the parental expectation for daughters to get married to a suitable candidate chosen and approved by their fathers. Marriage from this point of view prioritizes the paternal prerogative to determine their daughters' marriage and legitimizes the subordination of the wife to the tyranny of the husband. However, this conventional view of marriage also signifies a personal challenge that helped her increase her self-confidence. She regards her ring as a symbol of the pride and independence that she was able to generate from the failure of her marriage. Without her marital experience, she would have not been able to embrace the person she is now. The divided view draws attention to the discrepancy between the personal and conventional meanings of marriage and also signifies the development of the narrator from a submissive to confident character. The protagonist ascribes personal failure and empowerment to the ring to emphasize her ambivalent perspective and, more importantly, the ambivalence of marriage in itself. The conventional meaning of marriage is juxtaposed with a subjective and empowered reading from a female focal point. In this way, the ring becomes a dividing line between old and new understandings of marriage and womanhood, and between her old and her new self. The narrator thus reinterprets a conventional symbol to suit her personal marriage experience and the lessons she learned from it.

Marriage: Fateful Convention

The memories of the arrangement of her marriage at the age of eighteen and her life as a wife are described in dualisms to contrast the conventional expectations that are imposed on the narrator by her parents and later husband, and the unconventional urge for recognition that tentatively arises in

the narrator in the course of the story. The conventional approach to marriage thus relies on binary oppositions: marriage vs. education, father vs. daughter, and husband vs. wife. The incompatibility of the female desire for education and liberty certainly clash with both paternal and spousal authority demonstrating the discrepancy between individual desire and collective expectations. Conventional marriage is thus a concept driven by the idea of the social pressure to conform; daughters are expected to obey their fathers' decisions, especially those concerning marriage; wives are expected to comply with their husbands' wishes. In the context of the family or marriage, women are subordinates who are never to question their position or the authority of their superiors (fathers and husbands).

Generally, daughters are considered insignificant in the process of arranging marriages. As Basil Hall Chamberlain remarks in his elaborations on Japanese marriage, "The girl, in particular, is a nobody in that matter. It is not for girls to have opinions" ("Marriage" 333). Shikin's narrator finds herself in the same position and quickly learns that conventional marriage is firstly, a destiny she is unable to avoid and secondly, a sphere of female subordination. These two aspects determine marriage as a space of male dominance and signify the binary opposition between the empowered male and the disempowered female. To the narrator then, marriage is an inevitable fate that discloses her lack of choice and control. Marriage is simply chance and therefore unpredictable to her.

A woman would never be sure what sort of husband she might end up with. Like drawing a fortune stick, there was no telling whether she would have good luck or bad. The choice was left up to fate, and all she could do was accept it.

(Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 233)

Conventional marriage thus functions on the principle of female acquiescence. The daughter is expected to conform with both the parental decision and the uncertainty of married life awaiting her. Japanese women from this point of view are destined to marry and accept their marriage for better or for worse. The preconception of marriage as female destiny thus defines marriage and the roles of women in it as an unchanging constant. To consider marriage a female fate not only implies the lack of alternative options, but it also implies its status as a long-standing tradition of female conduct passed on from generation to generation. In other words, marriage as a female fate is a living tradition that sustains itself through the role models it generates. In *The Broken Ring*, it is the mother who sets an example of married life for the narrator. "I was greatly influenced by my mother's subservient and

reserved behavior toward my father and couldn't help thinking a woman's fate was pitiful and unfortunate" (Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 233) she notes. Based on her observations, she concludes that being married means being at the unconditional service of your husband. Her dire conception of her parents' marriage as distant and demeaning for her mother, also prompts the narrator to notice that her mother not only serves as her role model, but that her mother follows a preconceived ideal of womanhood herself.

My mother was a woman who took pride in modeling herself after the ideal of womanhood found in the Great Learning for Women. When she spoke to my father, she would kneel respectfully in the doorway. She always treated him like an honored guest.

(Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 233)

Women like her mother align their lives with a conjugal code of conduct. Shikin references Kaibara Ekken, a Japanese moralist of the pre-modern era, and his work *Onna Daigaku* (1716), translated as *The Great Learning for Women*. It is "a manual of ethics and proper behavior for women of the samurai class" (Jennison 265) and determines female subordination as a marital norm. The success of marriage depends on the understanding that obedience to her husband and other male authorities such as her father-in-law is considered paramount for female comportment. Whatever her duties – entertaining guests, housekeeping, supervising servants, making herself look presentable – she has to assess whether her actions could disrespect or offend the authority of her husband.

A woman has no particular lord. She must look to her husband as her lord, and must serve him with all worship and reverence, not despising or thinking lightly of him. The great life-long duty of a woman is obedience. In her dealings with her husband, both the expression of her countenance and the style of her address should be courteous, humble, and conciliatory, never peevish and intractable, never rude and arrogant: - that should be a woman's first and chiefest care.

(Chamberlain, "Woman" 539)

The image of female obedience Kaibara paints finds expression in the character of the mother. She follows the rules in Kaibara's handbook to the letter and appears to have internalized serving her husband as her life's calling. As a result, she functions as the epitome of the obedient and silent wife in *The Broken Ring*. Moreover, the mother and her function as a role model suggest that mother and daughter are held to the same standards. Similar to

her mother's role as obedient wife, the narrator is expected to fulfill the role of the obedient daughter, paying respect to her father's authority and to the decisions her father makes on her behalf. Hence, mother and daughter are equally bound by the three obediences – "obedience, while yet unmarried, to a father; obedience, when married, to a husband and that husband's parents; obedience, when widowed, to a son" (Chamberlain, "Woman" 533). The authority of the father thus determines the lives of both mother and daughter. A violation of this rule erupts in conflict and Shikin exemplifies this conflict in the argument between father and daughter over the termination of her education for marriage. Resting on his authority, the father decides that it is time for his daughter to marry. She, on the other hand objects to this decision by requesting his consent to continue her education and postpone marriage until she graduates.

The girl is just selfish! It's your fault for bringing her up so badly. . . . What unfinished studies? Don't be a fool! I've seen to it that you've been given a good education, so what do you mean? Why are you complaining, you selfish girl? . . . What?! Teacher's School? Absurd! Just how do you think you would survive as a school teacher? It's no easy thing for a girl to go through life alone. I'll hear no more of that nonsense. You must do as I say.

(Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 234)

At this point Shikin describes a clash of collective and individual expectations. Marriage and not education is considered a woman's sole vocation. At the most, education was perceived as the theoretical underpinning of their roles as good wives and wise mothers. Education thus fosters an enlightened path of self-sacrifice; but it does not perpetuate the idea of self-realization.

For middle- and upper-class women, the government's ideal of the 'good wife, wise mother' (*ryōsai kenbo*) reflected a new emphasis on education for women, but it also defined their roles exclusively in terms of mothering and caring for the household, from which men were now absent.

(De Bary, Gluck, and Tiedemann 1190)

No longer a class privilege alone, education's prime purpose was to prepare women for marriage and their roles as caretakers in their families. Education was channeled towards a collective goal of modernity rather than individual self-actualization. Nevertheless, the protagonist perceives education as means for self-realization and as a strategy to evade marriage. Her

strategy of evasion is implied by her wish to continue her education. Her attempt to appeal to her father's benevolence in this matter fails and renders her in the position of the ungrateful and self-centered daughter. This conflict between father and daughter also reflects the historical discrepancy between what the government envisioned women to do with their education and what women were encouraged to do on account of their education. However, education did not only reaffirm their conventional functions but enabled women to create a mind of their own. Therefore, original intentions collide with unexpected outcomes.

Moreover, the daughter's wish to continue her education is perceived as an offence of paternal authority in two ways: first, the narrator's request means refusal to comply with parental orders; second, the narrator's deviance signifies her mother's failure to educate an obedient child, which in turn also questions her ability to comply with the rules of obedience herself. Thus, the father feels that his authority is questioned on several fronts in his family. This would explain his outrage over their daughter's reluctance to marry. The narrator's attempt to explain herself and her desire to continue education are all in vain and only reaffirm her father in his intention to restore his authority.

The narrator's pleas for education and a possible profession as a teacher are met with rejection. The scene demonstrates that marriage is not a daughterly choice but a fatherly command. Male authority prevails over female desire and exposes the narrator's lack of assertiveness. Therefore, the quoted scene clarifies the father's decision as firm and indisputable causing the narrator to realize the futility of her protest.

I realized my father had already made a final decision about the matter. Even if I were to protest at our first meeting with the groom, there would be no reason to expect them to listen, and I would only suffer great embarrassment.

(Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 234)

After all, marriage is subject to male privilege. The early attempt for revolt fails on account of the narrator's lack of judgment. Her tentative approach to argue her case with regard to her education is weak and immediately silenced by her father's authority.

Married Life: The Turning Point

The marriage the protagonist enters is described as an intermediary stage between conventional expectations and the growing anti-conformist tendencies of the narrator. It is a major step in her development into an independent

character. Initially, she fulfills her role as the obedient wife at the service of her husband. Similar to her mother, she encounters marriage as an obligation rather than a relationship of romantically involved lovers. The emotional distance between her and her husband cause her to doubt her marriage as a life-long commitment.

After two or three months of marriage, I still could not grow used to living with my husband and began to doubt seriously whether I could stay in that house for the rest of my life. I couldn't tell whether my husband cared for me or not. Sometimes he would take me to a museum or some other place and would offer to buy me things. But I never felt comfortable accepting gifts from him. I felt uneasy, as if I were not a member of the household. When we did go out, I never enjoyed it in the least. On such outing, I would constantly think of home and wish that my mother and sister could be there, too.

(Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 235–236)

Marriage has entered her life as an inevitable obligation. Consequently the narrator shows difficulties settling into her conjugal relationship. On the surface, her marriage meets the conventional standards of material wealth and interaction. The couple lives in a house with servants and is affluent enough to go out on occasion. Leisure time is spent together and occasional offerings of gifts could be read as signs of marital affection. Nonetheless, the signs speak more for a marriage of convenience, a marriage where financial and social security prevail over romantic motivations. When she states that "I couldn't tell whether my husband cared for me or not" (Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 235–236), she describes her state of alienation in her own marriage emphasizing that her marriage is a relationship of obligations rather than one of affection. Her feelings of displacement underline a discrepancy between her own expectations for love and the social concept of marriage. Contrary to the narrator's hopes "the main object of marriage was the perpetuation of the family line, not love" (Hendry, *Marriage in Changing Japan* 18). Conventional marriage is thus not a matter of personal chemistry but of social and financial survival of the bride herself and the family of her husband. Thus, Shikin depicts an authentic image of a conventional marriage where the husband is merely a provider but not a nuptial confidant of the wife.

Marriage represents a rite of passage for the narrator that involves, from a conventional point of view, her maturation from daughter to wife. In the process, her separation from her own family is mandatory to enable her full

integration in the family of her husband.¹⁶ The emotional hole she attempts to fill is not only because of her cold relationship with her husband; it is also caused by the loss of her mother and sister, female relationships that she was forced to give up with her marriage. Even though the narrator settled for her father's decision, she does not manage to come to terms with married life as a life without an emotional connection like she used to have with her mother and sister. At this stage of her marriage, Japanese conventions overshadow her individual desires for affection and acceptance.

Nonetheless, the narrator follows in the footsteps of her mother and devotes herself to the wellbeing of her husband regardless of his abusive behavior. Fulfilling the role of the self-sacrificing and obedient wife she learns to cope with the alcohol-infused contempt her husband holds for her and accepts marriage as suffering.

How I suffered on hearing his harsh words. I listened in silence, hoping the house girls would not be wakened by that loud, angry voice in the middle of the night and mistakenly think I was arguing with my husband for coming home so late. I knew that if I tried to speak, he would only complain more loudly. I handled him as gently as a piece of damp paper; placating him with apologies, I helped him into bed without further mishap.

(Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 237)

The scene describes well how the narrator repeats her mother's behavioral pattern in situations of marital distress. Similar to her father, her husband takes his anger out on her. Just like her mother, she endures this situation with silence and wifely benevolence. In doing so, the narrator is shown to comply with another rule of Kaibara's *The Great Learning for Women*. He claims that in case "her husband be roused at any time to anger, she must obey with fear and trembling, and not set herself up against him in anger and forwardness" (Kaibara 539). She settles for her role as the good wife but yet suffers profoundly under her husband's tyranny. The narrator keeps her situation to herself and does not communicate her plight to anyone. Enduring the tyranny of her husband in silence also means to endure her unhappiness in silence. Instead she reproaches herself for her alleged lack of strength: "I wondered if it was only I who had been weak and married only to undergo this suffering. At times, in spite of myself, I would break down in tears" (Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 237).

¹⁶"When it comes, the bride, dressed all in white, the colour of mourning – to signify that dies to her own family, and that she will never leave her husband's house but as a corpse – is borne away at nightfall to her new home, escorted by the middleman and his wife" (Chamberlain, "Marriage" 333).

However, the narrator continues to accept her marriage as a given burden in her life and even silently accepts her husband's mistress. Yet, when she learns of her mother's death she blames her unhappy marriage. Despite the fact that she never openly discusses her martial misery, the narrator wasn't able to hide her unhappiness during her last visit to her parents' home. She blames herself for burdening her mother with her sorrows that caused her early death.

I was heartbroken when I realized that the very marriage to which had so reluctantly agreed in the hope that my mother might be relieved had actually resulted in the premature end of her precious life. . . . Knowing that this misfortune was a result of my own lack of foresight and understanding, my unhappiness multiplied, and I spent all my days for the next years deep in sorrow.

(Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 238)

These incidents, the coincidental discovery of her husband's mistress and the sudden death of her mother are still not portrayed as causes for revolt. The years following her mother's death are characterized by resignation and discouragement and lead in no way to a revolt of hers. What causes a change in heart is her increased interest in discussions of establishing Japan as a modern nation. She follows these discussions closely and becomes especially interested in the debates of modern womanhood. The study of reading material about the West and its modernity alters her perception of marriage as female fate.

I am sure you can imagine how discouraged I felt. Yet during the two or three years following my marriage, a strong sense of indignation on behalf of young women had also begun to stir in me. New ideas about women's rights were being debated, and the notion that sorrow and tragedy are not necessarily woman's fate was gradually spreading. . . . What I read about Western views on women's rights impressed me deeply, and I began to understand that Japanese women also had the right to seek the fulfillment and happiness that are their due.

(Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 238)

Shikin references Meiji Japan's ambition to redress its unequal status imposed by the U.S. in 1858 as a context of the narrator's awakening. The political climate of change involved a changing perception of women and their possible contributions to the nation Japan envisioned as modern. Therefore, the political climate of change also inspires individual change in the story.

The narrator references this climate of change as her inspiration to make a change for herself. Shikin does not specify which debates or periodicals the narrator refers to. Taking into account that Shikin's story was published in 1891, it is most likely that *The Broken Ring* refers to debates that preceded the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in 1889. The earliest debates over the possible functions of women in a modern Japan were conducted by a society known as the *Meiji Six* or *Meirokusha*. Founded in 1873, the Meiji Six were a group of male intellectuals including Mori Arinori, Fukuzawa Yukichi, and Nakamura Masanao among others who contemplated the adaptation of Western modernity for Japan in the aftermath of the Unequal Treaties. Mori, Fukuzawa, and Nakamura were also known for their conviction "that the low regard for women in Japan was a major contributor to its backwardness" (Sievers, *Flowers in Salt* 18). They portended that reimagining the Japanese nation went hand in hand with reimagining Japanese women and concluded that the success of modernity in Japan correlated with the status of women. Their conclusion resonates with historical observations that "[m]odernity in Japan as elsewhere has encompassed changes in notions of gender and gender roles as well as economic, political, and cultural changes" (Molony and Uno 3).

Without a doubt, women's status was under discussion in relation to Japan's goal to become a modern nation. The progressive views shared by the Meiji Six were, exclusively male but nonetheless paved the way for female elaborations on modern womanhood in the course of the 1880s. Kishida Toshiko, the most renowned female lecturer for the *Freedom and Popular Rights Movement*, a movement for democracy in Japan, is one example in point. History shows that before the restrictions of *Article V* were enforced in 1890, women of the Meiji era were well aware of the ongoing debates and attended lectures of feminists like Kishida in large numbers.¹⁷ Kishida's speech in Kyoto attracted 2,000 people and the majority of them were women.¹⁸ There was certainly a growing interest in attending lectures given by feminist activists like Kishida Toshiko however, it remains unclear as to how these lectures had an impact on the lives of their audiences. As Sharon Sievers notes:

By 1874 the discussion of women's issues was country wide; argu-

¹⁷"But by 1890 some members of the Japanese government had decided that women were not going to be given further opportunities . . . [and were] denied the right to participate in politics on any level under Article 5 of the Police Security Regulations. After 1890 Japanese women who tried to organize a political association, join a political group, or attend a meeting defined by authorities as political were subject to fine or imprisonment"(Sievers, *Flowers in Salt* 52).

¹⁸See Sievers, *Flowers in Salt* 193.

ments were full of contradictions, and the debate itself, carried in growing numbers of newspapers and periodical, often lapsed into silliness and superficiality. But it is clear from the statements and actions of Japanese women in the following decade that they were reading and listening to the issues in this debate with a great deal of interest.

(Sievers, *Flowers in Salt* 16)

Shikin certainly references the increased public tangibility of women's issues starting in the 1870s. The cause of the narrator's changing mindset is certainly founded on the historical events of Meiji Japan. Therefore, the narrator's increased interest in the current events of modernizing Japan adequately reflects the historical realities of Meiji women at the time. The narrator's awakening is an interesting turning point in Shikin's plot since she manages to implicitly reference the historical implication of the Meiji era while pairing this reference with a fictitious outlook on where these moments of revelation could lead to. The range of ideas discussed concerning modernity and gender was abundant but concrete approaches of implementing these ideas for women were sparse. The call for change was articulated without a concrete plan on how to implement it. The ideas were discussed but the implementation of these ideas was not often documented. Shikin fills this gap with her story inspiring other women who read her story for encouragement and guidance. The turning point that Shikin describes in *The Broken Ring* is a comparatively short narrative unit but nonetheless an important indicator for the development of the narrator. After her long path of endurance and silence she comes to realize that marriage is no longer a fate she is obliged to. Influenced by the discourse of female advancement, she now contributes her own thoughts to the discourse and further changes her self-perception. "To console myself and to help alleviate other women's unhappiness, I began to write occasionally on these difficult subjects. In doing so my own way of thinking changed" (Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 238). The narrator claims the type of leadership and reform that Shikin envisioned in her article *How Determined Are Today's Women Students?* The abstract idea of female leadership and reform (internal and external) of her article gains a concrete, albeit fictitious, dimension, demonstrating a possible path of change and implementation. Writing grants the newly awakened narrator a voice and by sharing her thoughts, she empowers her own voice to inspire and comfort other women. And this experience in turn, inspires the narrator herself to make a change in her marriage. "I decided to try and guide my husband so that he might change his ways and become a fine man of whom I need not feel ashamed" (Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 238). The leadership

she claims on behalf of herself and other women in a similar situation is now transferred into a leadership role to help her husband. What sounds like a naïve attempt to turn things around in her marriage is an expression of her confidence to rebel against her fate.

I made the sincerest of efforts to persuade him. But he was several years older than I and much more experienced in worldly affairs, and so he would not listen to me. Before long, whenever I tried to speak about these things, he would stop me, dismissing all my words in one breath.

(Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 238)

Speaking her mind is not well received by her husband. Her attempt to discuss their marriage is stunted by her husband since he considers it an offence of his authority in their marriage. The narrator deviates from the convention of the silent wife to improve her lot, yet she fails in her mission. She seeks comfort in the idea that her husband's ignorance is founded on his advanced age and life experience. Whereas this scene shows the progression of the narrator, her husband remains in his conventional position of authority unable to respond to his now outspoken wife. He is blind to her intentions and feels threatened in his authority, which he aims to protect by ridiculing and scorning his wife's attempt to talk to him about their marriage as selfish arrogance. He exclaims, "Not that again... aren't you acting just a little too clever... letting all that learning go to you head?" (Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 239). Her enthusiasm to change her husband for the better and with him their marriage are dampened by his unwillingness to cooperate. This short episode of marital dispute ends her reform efforts and reveals the narrator's inability to gain the authority to speak in her marriage and the authority to be heard by her husband. Nevertheless, her frustration with her husband does not end in resignation. On the contrary, she gains the strength from this experience to leave her marriage and be a role model for other women experiencing marriage as fateful misery.

Though I loath to do so, I decided to leave him, knowing that if I stayed, it would be worse for him as well. Since then, I have decided to work solely for the betterment of society. As a reminder of that vow, I myself struck the stone from the ring I am wearing. . . . I gaze at my ring morning and night, reminding myself of what it represents. . . . I most certainly have vowed to ensure a better future for the many lovely young women of today, in the hope that they will not follow the same mistaken path as I have.

(Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 239)

Leaving the marital context is an undefined journey by conventional standards. The narrator leaves her marriage with the confidence to improve her own situation and channel this motivation towards improving other women's lot. By separating, she certainly leaves an unhappy situation but also gives up the social and financial security marriage brings. Divorce could be legally obtained by women in Meiji Japan since 1873, however it was severely penalized with "the loss of children and economic support of any kind" (Sievers, *Flowers in Salt* 31). Shikin thus references the existing idea of divorce or separation and at the same time, rewrites post-marital life as an enriching rather than a depriving experience. Therefore, the narrator claims leadership and reform for herself and on behalf of other women in marital distress. Moreover, this scene signifies once more Shikin's approach to read historical occurrences beyond the collective and nationalist scope. The national growth envisioned by the Meiji government is rewritten as a context of personal growth for women of Japan. Shikin thus correlates female individualism with the emergence of the modern nation in Meiji Japan. She changes the historical outlook of a modern Japan by including women as individual agents able to participate in the building of *New Japan*.

Apart from the nation as generator of female agency, Shikin also rereads the family as supporting female agency in the final stages of her story. One would expect that the decision to leave her marriage for the sake of self-fulfillment would alienate the narrator from her family, but instead Shikin drafts a scene of reunion.

By good fortune, my father is still in good health and now has come to have great sympathy for my long years of suffering. He often writes thoughtful letters filled with regret that the foolish interference of an old man resulted in the breaking of a fresh, young branch. Now, he praises my aspirations and offers encouragement; this has given me the greatest pleasure amid days and months of sorrow.

(Shikin, "The Broken Ring" 239)

The narrator's revolt against marriage as female fate takes a positive turn. Even though the narrator violates given conventions of female obedience to paternal authority, her father does not shun her. Instead, he is apologetic about his ignorance in the past. His initial perception of his daughter as selfish is turned into a critique of his own behavior. The father has evolved from an authoritarian *pater familias* to a benevolent mentor and supporter. Breaking her marital ties does not result in breaking her family ties as a

result. Instead, the idea of female agency can unite the individual woman with her family, reconciling a collective context with an individual cause. By the end of the story, the narrator is no longer subordinate to the will of her father – she is portrayed as person respected by her father. The respect she was not able to earn in her marriage is granted by her father for her decision to leave an unhappy marriage. In this way, Shikin clarifies that the claim for leadership and reform does not necessarily result in social shaming and isolation.

The ending of *The Broken Ring* does not signify the end of the narrator's life as it was the case in Higuchi Ichiyo's *Troubled Waters*, for instance. Higuchi's protagonist is slaughtered by her former lover to reinstate his authority, but Shikin's character lives on despite her defiance of male dominance. In Higuchi's story "death occurs as a 'cosmic' essentialist ending when a woman tests the social and historical rules governing the tolerable limits of her aspiration" (DuPlessis 16). Contrary to Higuchi's conventional ending, Shikin portrays a positive ending that holds prospects for a life after marriage to defy the ending as means to penalize female critique. Therefore, Shikin creates an ending that underlines the nation and the family as concepts compatible with the modern idea of female agency. The ending signifies the beginning of a self-determined life defined by her personal ambition and liberated from conventional pressure. Marriage as fate, subordination to male power, and the ideal of the silent wife are subject to subversion in *The Broken Ring*. Not only does Shikin dissolve the connection between male authority and marriage, she also disconnects marriage from the family. By describing the reconciliation with her estranged father, Shikin demonstrates that female agency and family are not mutually exclusive. In this way, Shikin grants her protagonist a social existence after her marriage, a life beyond the ending.¹⁹

Shikin deliberately complicates the significance of the ring by exposing it as a symbol of female subordination and emancipation. The ambiguity in meaning reflects the protagonist's status in-between conventions of womanhood and manhood. The claim for authority is a claim for a male privilege and by claiming it, it gives her the agency to act. The narrator removes the stone from her ring to create a gap in the band and turn it into a symbol of liminality. Therefore, the ring is both incomplete and defective in conventional terms, but functional and wholesome in personal terms. The personal value she retrieves from the idea that the ring represents her ability

¹⁹This idea lends itself to Rachel Blau DuPlessis' thesis that women's fiction in the US focused on the subversion of closure in narratives of female emancipation in *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985. Print.

to fill gaps, whether these are gaps of affection, of legal or social privileges in her life and determine her transition from silent obedience to confident agency. Based on her marital experience, the narrator gains an authority of her own and carves a space for female agency within and outside of marriage. Thereby, Shikin presents an alternate conception of marriage that can include female agency and determination.

Tommy the Unsentimental (1896) and The Broken Ring (1890)

Shikin and Cather depict women who claim the authority to decide for or against marriage, the authority to be who they want to be, and the authority to reinterpret the conventions they are held to. With the incorporation of a conventionally male prerogative, both authors exemplify the enactment of modern womanhood under the auspices of liminality. Situated between conventions of masculinity and femininity Cather and Shikin draft alternative scenarios of female existence beyond mother and wife to defy marriage as female destiny. Tommy chooses her masculine lifestyle and privileges over a relationship with Jay. The narrator of *The Broken Ring* does so by leaving her unhappy marriage.

The debate of womanhood evolves around the conscious decision against marriage. It is an individual and internal negotiation of female identity in relation to the dichotomies education vs. marriage (*The Broken Ring*) and rationality vs. romance (*Tommy the Unsentimental*). The dualisms addressed represent conventional restrictions that both protagonists refuse to comply with. Shikin articulates the possibility for her protagonist to unite marriage and education, whereas Cather underlines the coexistence of rationality and romance in Tommy. Even though none of the protagonists actually succeeds in combining these binary oppositions long term, it is the attempt that makes them social deviants. The stories present two case studies of women seeking change for themselves. The focus lies on the process that leads to changes rather than the results they presumably achieve.

Relating to their critique of marriage, Shikin and Cather draft alternative images of paternal authority. Contrary to the conventional idea of unquestioned authoritarianism, Cather and Shikin emphasize benevolence and trust in their father figures. Tommy is authorized to stand in for her absent father at their family business and takes a rightful place in his social circle. In correlation with her development from obedient daughter to outspoken individual, the anonymous narrator of Shikin's story first encounters the authoritarian and then sympathetic side of her father. The challenge of marriage thus involves the challenge of paternity as restricting women to roles of subordination. Instead, Cather and Shikin propagate the idea of fathers and other

male characters supporting the unconventionality of their protagonists.

The subversion of gender categories is another aspect shared by both stories. Tommy is clearly masculine in her mannerism and physique. With Shikin's protagonist the masculine aspect of her character is implied by her claim to leadership and decision making power. The masculinity of this protagonist is thus implied and refers to her violation of paternal authority without the loss of her place in the family. Similar to Tommy, she acts like a man but yet remains within the realm of her family. As a result, both characters are masculine with regard to their varying degrees of agency and masculine behavior. These qualities displayed also relate to what Köhler termed "woman of action" (288).

Basically, the woman of action wants to be 'like a man.' She starts her rite de passage in pursuit of a meaningful vocation outside her home as the basis of her identity creation. Following the male pattern, the young woman values money and success first, because she wants to participate in a public world in which financial flexibility and public appearance create power.

(Köhler 288)

The "masculine woman" (Behling 3) is therefore also a "woman of action" (Köhler 288). Tommy prioritizes her privileges as a bank manager and her social existence is not bound to the domestic sphere. Shikin's protagonist leaves her marriage to follow her vocation as a reformer and role model. Both either have or claim responsibility for themselves and thus act on their own behalf. Contrary to Tommy, the Japanese protagonist encounters her awakening to leadership and reform as a major turning point. She considers herself as being on a mission to change her marriage for the sake of other unhappily married women in Japan. There is no such turning point for Tommy. Neither does she see a special cause in her life nor does she devote herself to women's rights. Cather does not situate her protagonist in the context of the women's movement and creates her masculinity in relation to the community she lives in. The agency and authority she is bestowed with is conditioned by the social order in Southdown not by demands of suffragists or reformers. Even though history shows that the American West was historically not exempt from women's reform efforts, it is the subversion of the western narrative that Cather focuses on.²⁰ Similar to western fiction written by women

²⁰Women in the American West engaged in the so-called Indian Question and "sought to turn Native Americans on nearby reservations into assimilated whites. Forced education – day schools and boarding schools– child removal to white households were two ways of that white elites and the federal government sought to solve the problems of Native poverty, alcoholism, and limited resources"(Woodworth-Ney 186)

authors, Cather portrays “heroic, spunky, female characters perform daring physical acts to save themselves and others, creating sensational excitement but also embracing the possibilities of expanded roles” (Tchudi 69) to replace the male hero with a female one.

The anonymous narrator openly articulates her dilemma. After enduring her role as suffering wife, she addresses issues with her husband thus sharing her thoughts with her husband. In view of her novel outspokenness, her husband feels disrespected in his authority. She is articulate about her concerns to make her marriage work. Tommy is quite the opposite and keeps her thoughts to herself. Her private nature does not permit her to discuss her dilemma with the Old Boys, her absent father, Jay, or Miss Jessica. She settles her dilemma alone and does not consult any of her social contacts. As a rational individual Tommy withholds her thoughts and emotions for reasons of loyalty and strategic thinking.

Tommy is blessed and burdened by the privileges whereas the anonymous protagonist feels the urge to create a beneficial situation for herself. What both have in common though is that they are independent characters outside of marriage, which implies the idea that the “masculine women” (Behling 3) is incompatible with marriage. Tommy is aware that a relationship with Jay, and possibly marriage, will not receive the Old Boys’ approval. Therefore, she dismisses her secret hopes and stays loyal to those who bestowed her with her privileges. On the other hand, the Japanese narrator rejects marriage as a realm of male dominance but still hopes for marriage as a romantic bond between equal partners.

From a formal point of view, the stories share an open ending. The denial of closure leaves room for interpretation of Tommy’s sentiments for Jay or Shikin’s protagonist and her hope for a change in heart of her ex-husband. There is no definite conclusion on whether Tommy will repeatedly find herself in this dilemma where she must decide between her privileges and Jay or whether the unnamed narrator will remarry or have another encounter with a possibly changed ex-husband. These are only speculations and speak for the lack of closure in the stories. The formal alteration allows for the emergence of prospects encouraging readers to imagine the future of these protagonists on their own. The liberty established for the protagonists equally applies to the readers who are bound to use these stories to re-imagine themselves and their future prospects. The unconventional characterization of the protagonists, the rereading of gender conventions, and the formal modifications found in both stories reflect the historical occurrences of transition and change in relation to the image of womanhood affirming the idea of the New Woman as masculine and hybrid. As we will see in the next chapter, Chopin and Kimura take this approach of hybridity further to describe characters that

develop an identity of their own by abandoning the conventional framework that holds them back. Similar to Shikin and Cather, Kimura and Chopin emphasize modern womanhood as hybrid but locate the formation of such an identity outside the realms of conventions. Instead of subverting conventions from within, these characters subvert conventions from without.

5.4 Female Conversions of Conventional Restrictions: Kimura Akebono's *A Mirror for Womanhood* & Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Kimura Akebono and Kate Chopin describe modern womanhood as hybrid and as resulting from a state of social isolation. By creating opportunities for themselves within the conventional schema they are subjected to, both protagonists become social outcasts because they define conventions instead of being defined by them. The protagonists are shown to take matters into their own hands by abandoning their conventional positions as submissive daughter or compliant mother and wife to seek new ways of identity formation. In this way, the state of isolation transforms a situation of female subjection into a state of female agency. Kimura's Yoshikawa Hideko travels abroad and gains professional and educational experience. Chopin allows Edna Pontellier to choose an occupation as a sketch artist and a solitary life in her own home. The opportunities created embody a process of self-creation in which Hideko and Edna independently discover a new sense of self. The alternate views of womanhood that both characters represent also signify that conventions of womanhood should not be condoned, but ought to be negotiated. In both stories, womanhood is therefore depicted as a continuous category that engages women in a process of reassessment. Similar to the preceding stories, Chopin and Kimura demonstrate that a state of dependence proscribed by social convention can be changed into a state of independence. Hideko and Edna represent different examples of how women can carve a space of belonging within a conventional society such as that of Japan and the US, making the idea of liberation and new images of womanhood tangible and perhaps attainable. In the following, the chapter will analyze the stories by Kimura and Chopin individually to demonstrate the different paths that Hideko and Edna take to create their idea of modern womanhood. The analyses will be followed by a side-by-side comparison that serves to emphasize how Chopin and Kimura depict alternate images of womanhood and ways to implement

them in relation to the cultural conditions of Meiji Japan and Progressive America.

A Mirror for Womanhood (Fujo no Kagami, 1889, transl. 1985 and 1988)

A Mirror for Womanhood presents Hideko as a draft of modern womanhood that encompasses female agency, education, and a sense of nationalism.²¹ Beyond functions of birthing and mothering, modern womanhood is defined to include women as agents of change able to contribute to the advancement of the Japanese nation. Kimura delineates Hideko's transition from prodigal daughter to respected manufacturer in order to show that there is a correlation between female and national progress.

Hideko's rite of passage begins with a moral conflict. Her father revokes his consent for her study abroad due to her alleged intentions to have an illegitimate relationship away from home. Even though the accusations are unfounded, Hideko leaves the parental home to evade social shaming. Despite her destitute situation, she finds support in an old family friend who provides her with the financial means that enable her to eventually go abroad. Within a year, Hideko is shown to master different stages as the story takes her from receiving a degree in higher education from Newnham College in Cambridge, gathering work experience in a factory in New York City, and opening her own textile factory with a complimentary child care center back in Tokyo. The stages alliterate her process of revising herself and therefore, becoming a New Woman. Hideko, however, does not represent an imitation of the Western ideal of the New Woman, but instead embraces Japanese ideas of modern nationhood and Western ideas of female agency. Her intercontinental travels enable her to gain the experience required to reread her place within the Japanese family and the Japanese nation. Hideko thus represents Kimura's idea that women can seek self-fulfillment without jeopardizing their place in the collective of the family or the nation.

Study Abroad: A Rite of Passage

Hideko's *ryugaku* or study abroad is described to benefit herself, the Japanese nation, and her social environment (friends and family). Kimura portrays her as a mirror for womanhood, meaning a role model for other women who seek "independence through social participation . . . , to be set free from a confining environment, to become useful members of her society, and to pro-

²¹I use the version translated and abbreviated by Margaret Mitsutani.

mote the cause of better lives for other women.” (Tanaka 28). The journey gives Hideko new experiences that allow her to reinterpret her role as the virtuous daughter on new terms. Thereby, Akebono demonstrates that not convention but female agency fosters female virtue. Moreover, the experience she gains in England and America is not considered as corrupting her virtue since Hideko is motivated by a sense of altruism and patriotism more than by selfishness. Instead, she enhances her position as virtuous daughter by using her knowledge gained for the good of other women in Japan. In this way, she channels her achievements towards the Japanese nation and proves her ambition to contribute to the modern nation, a goal formulated by the Japanese government in the early years of the Meiji era. As a result, the story of Hideko and her discovery of a new sense of self is reminiscent of Meiji Japan’s struggle to reset its national identity under the auspices of modernization. Similar to Hideko’s study abroad, Meiji Japan also redeemed its autonomy through knowledge gathered abroad. From 1871 to 1873, the Meiji government sent a representative delegation of Japanese citizens, to the U.S. and Europe to study political governance, education and the social dynamics of modernized societies. This initiative became known as the Iwakura Mission or Iwakura Embassy. Even though the majority of delegation members were men, a minority of women were also included in the mission and became known as contributors to Japan’s progress. Tsuda Umeko was one of the youngest participants on this tour.²² She became known as a feminist activist and founder of Tsuda College, the first private higher education institute for women founded in 1900 in Tokyo. A year before Tsuda College was founded, Kimura’s story drafted a plot that would foreshadow how modern Japan could possibly profit from the achievements of an educated woman. Possibly inspired by women like Tsuda, Kimura presents Hideko as an agent of change who is aware of her responsibility to Japan and to other Japanese women. Reflecting on a time when women’s rights were considered marginal, Kimura demonstrates that female education bears greater meaning for the modernization of Japan than assumed by most government officials.²³ The story thus reflects and predicts historical developments for women in a

²²Barbara Rose states that there were five women in total joining the Iwakura Mission. Their families belonged to the former samurai class and were affiliated with former Tokugawa government (11). And Hirakawa explains that the “appearance among the members of the Iwakura mission of seven-year-old Tsuda Umeko, carrying a doll, symbolized the return of peace. The idea of a girl studying overseas would have been unimaginable before the Restoration, but after her long sojourn in America, Tsuda returned to Japan and founded what later became Tsudajuku University for Women, an institution that along with Fukuzawa’s Keiō University and Nijima’s Dōshisha University, made important contributions to private higher education in modern Japan” (Hirakawa 462).

²³See Patessio, *Women and Public Life* 51–57.

changing Japan.

Hideko's education as a role model of modern womanhood begins in Japan and ends in Japan. The cyclical structure speaks for Hideko's education as a rite of passage since it involves a schoolgirl leaving her familiar environment to gain experience in a foreign context and then returning as a mature adult. At first, her plans to travel abroad are depicted as the result of paternal benevolence. Bound by the ideal of female purity and subservience, Hideko's journey is situated in the realm of the Japanese family and its emphasis of paternal authority. Without the support of her father, Hideko would not be able to enjoy the privilege of going abroad. Accordingly, Mr. Yoshikawa supports his daughter in her endeavor but also strongly advises her not to lose sight of her national duty that stands behind her studying abroad. Beyond the idea of a personal privilege, Mr. Yoshikawa emphasizes Hideko's journey as an education on behalf of the Japanese people.

As you are well aware, my daughter, the opportunity about to be bestowed upon you is a rare and precious one, which entails an equally heavy responsibility. There are but few fortunate enough to receive the benefits of a Western education, yet the behavior of those favored ones upon their return to our fledgling nation, in such need of their services, disappoints me gravely. Forgetting the sacred task of educating those less fortunate, they succumb to the temptations which distinction brings, dallying at this party and that ball, enjoying the empty flattery they hear there, mistaking it for a true assessment of their character and worth.

(Kimura, "Part 1" 52)

The father warns Hideko to uphold her sense of loyalty and piety as prescribed by the Confucian Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) ideal and to not let her experience abroad compromise her moral upbringing. Mr. Yoshikawa supports his daughter in her progressive endeavor, but also reminds her of her designated place as a woman in Japanese society. As a woman, she is privileged to receive an education abroad but this education does not foster her advancement as an individual but rather serves Japanese society as a whole. In this scene, Kimura clarifies that Hideko is both privileged and restricted at the same time. On the one hand, Hideko's story "embodies the dreams of many Japanese women for an overseas education" (Rose 98) since most women were confined to elementary and limited education in Meiji Japan. On the other hand, Kimura situates Hideko's privilege within the collective obligation to modernize as outlined in the Charter Oath of 1868 and the Meiji ideology of the family state, also known as *kazoku kokka*.

The Charter Oath declared education a political goal while the ideology of *kazoku kokka* established family relations between the Japanese people and the emperor.²⁴ Therefore, the words of warning issued in this scene demonstrate how Hideko is not only indebted to her father but also to the Japanese state while neglecting the idea of individual fulfillment.

However, Hideko's plans to travel overseas are thwarted by rumors about her corrupted virtue and disrespect for paternal authority. The public defamations terminate her first attempt at traveling overseas.

Her dream of studying abroad was about to come true – the departure date set – when Baron Yoshikawa received a letter, apparently from a young man of Hideko's acquaintance, accusing her of enticing him to join her abroad. To complicate matters, an anonymous article exposing the moral corruption of one who was to be a mirror of womanhood, the daughter of Baron X, adorned the front page of the following day's newspaper, and Hideko's doom was sealed.

(Kimura, "Part 1" 53)

On account of these false allegations, Hideko is no longer a reputable role model or virtuous daughter. She violates two important codes of Meiji Japan – respect for the head of the family and the commitment to virginity. The first aspect reflects the ideology of the family state; the second aspect references the establishment of Christian values during the Meiji era that led to emphasizing moral and physical purity in women. A relationship or marriage was only legitimate with the father's consent and if the soon-to-be bride was a virgin.²⁵ As a result, the allegations discredit Hideko's integrity on account of an illegitimate relationship that she allegedly pursued without the consent of her father. Such conduct is unacceptable and taints not only Hideko's reputation but also her father's name. Confronted with her alleged moral shortcomings, Hideko is deeply ashamed and leaves her parental home to vindicate her reputation.

²⁴"If anything the status categories of Meiji Japan emphasized the unity of the nation, for a central myth of the modern regime was the notion that Japan was a family state, with the father-emperor at its head. The clear hierarchy of the new status categories therefore replicated the vertical organization of a household, which maintained an essential coherence despite internally demarcated differences of status and power" (Howell 68).

²⁵Thus, daughters are supposedly prevented from engaging in pre-marital relationships that may thwart their chances at a legitimate marriage. Even before the Meiji era in pre-modern Japan it was not uncommon for young women to have sexual relationships before they got married. The introduction of Christianity and the idea of physical and moral purity during the modern age changed Japanese perceptions of female sexuality and marriage. See Kazue 214–215.

Despite the scandal her alleged immorality caused, Hideko is granted a second chance to go abroad. Thanks to the support of her friend Haruko and her generous offer to support her financially, Hideko is able to depart for England and attend Newnham College in Cambridge. Higher education abroad was not at all an option for all Meiji women. Only a small minority who had the financial means were able to pursue higher education outside of Japan. The Journal for female learning or *Jogaku zasshi* reported on women going abroad on their own or with the Iwakura Mission and introduced foreign institutions of higher learning such as Newnham College. The journal was in circulation between 1885 to 1904 and was founded to propagate women's education in Meiji Japan.²⁶ It is most likely that Kimura's narrative is informed by this journal and its stories on women's education. By using Newnham College as a setting for her story, Kimura bases her fictional account on the realities of her time to present Hideko's experience abroad as authentic. Moreover, this approach presents Hideko as a tangible role model of female education and experience abroad. Therefore, Kimura emphasizes Hideko's time at Newnham College as her first stepping stone on her way to becoming a modern woman and role model with restored integrity. Hideko goes by the name of Lilly and quickly earns a reputation as compassionate and talented student among the faculty and student body. Most likely she changes her name to integrate herself in the English-speaking community on campus. Hideko exceeds the expectation for a foreign student at her host institution. Awarded for her excellence (as seen in the quote below) with regard to academic and personal skills she receives acknowledgment for being diligent and virtuous.

Miss Yohsikawa has not only completed the requirements for graduation from this institution, but has also won the highest honors in the all-university examinations, a feat yet to be accomplished by any of our countrywomen. In honor of her personal achievement, and in appreciation for the prestige with which she has endowed Newnham College, I would like to present Miss Yoshikawa with this award.

(Kimura, "Part 2" 52)

With her time in England, Hideko adds educational and moral excellence to her profile. Beyond the idea of the virtuous daughter that devoted herself to the obedience to her father, she is now both virtuous and educated. She stretched the idea of the virtuous daughter to include intellectual capacities gained independently from the consent or recognition of her father. On the

²⁶See M. Suzuki 9 & Patessio, *Women and Public Life* 55.

other hand, the absence of her father and her solitary state in England far away from her family do not cause Hideko to dismiss the values she was brought up with. Instead, she claims these values as her own and merges them with the experience she has gained in England. Her time in England thus constitutes the first stage in her development from devout daughter to agent of change. In this way, Hideko begins to be both a traditional and progressive character.

Since Hideko seeks a broader education, she departs for New York City to gain experience in “the practical world of textile manufacture, rather than the ivory tower of intellectuality” (Kimura, “Part 2” 52). The next stage of her development thus involves on-the-job experience as a textile worker, which Hideko considers enriching rather than demeaning. Similar to the Iwakura Mission, Hideko attempts to familiarize herself with different aspects of Western modernization. To no surprise, she proves herself an excellent student and textile weaver. In England, Hideko impressed faculty and fellow students with her intellectual abilities and her sociability. Now in the US, she is found to impress yet another group of affluent women with her skillful weaving technique. A group of aristocratic women named the “Ladies Association” (Kimura, “Part 2” 54), comes across a delicate fabric made by Hideko and discusses the excellent quality of it.

This is sample is the work of a Japanese maiden who has come to our country to study manufacturing. She amazes all with her diligence, I hear – whereas our own factory maids are wont to forget their duties and become absorbed in idle chatter while the foreman’s back turned, this lass speaks nary a word until the day’s work is finished.

(Kimura, “Part 2” 54)

Hideko succeeds in both of her formative stages. Whether it is the challenges of academic work or the delicate handiwork of silk weaving, no challenge seems to be too difficult for her. She acquired knowledge quickly and receives praise for her intellectual and practical talent. The experience she gained in England and the US is therefore key for her renewed self-image.

Return to Japan:

Altruism, Entrepreneurship, National Pride, Respected Daughter

Hideko returns to Japan with academic credentials and professional experience. With her name now cleared from the allegations that thwarted her study abroad at the beginning of the narrative, Hideko shares her accomplishments by building a textile factory in Tokyo. Beyond the idea of a business

earning profit, Hideko describes her enterprise as a social project supporting women, their children, and orphans.

The purpose of this factory is to aid and educate the poor . . . The women who come to work and learn will not only be paid, but provided with free meals, and the neighboring lot will be set aside for a kindergarten and school for children. Here homeless children who, if they show promise, will later be offered employment in the factory, will also be given shelter and training.

(Kimura, "Part 2" 54)

Hideko creates job opportunities for those Japanese that are not in focus of modernization. The leaders of modernization were men and mostly focused on active contributions by men. Kimura drafts a scenario in which women and children that live on the margins of Japanese society function as active contributors to Japanese modernization. In line with the demands of the Charter Oath to include all social classes in the process of modernization, Kimura depicts Hideko's textile factory as a female effort with a collective impact. On the one hand, Hideko fulfills her father's request to pass on her expertise to the people of Japan and devote her knowledge to the greater good – thus reaffirming herself as a virtuous daughter. On the other, Hideko conceives of this factory as her contribution to the emancipation of Japan from Western rule.

And now as to the manner of goods we produce – our nation has been too long engaged in the slavish imitation of the West. Though we still welcome guidance and advice of cherished foreign friends . . . the time has come for us to return to the beauty of our own traditional styles to which our taste is most naturally suited.

(Kimura, "Part 2" 54)

This scene draws attention to a discrepancy between demands of the Charter Oath to engage all social classes in modernization and the realities of Meiji Japan and the actual realities at the time. Male intellectuals and government officials dominated the process and especially women were excluded as active contributors. Hideko and her business plan prove that women can act as agents of change while improving the situation of the poor. As a result, Hideko's rite of passage is an individual process with a collective purpose.

Hideko embraces modernization as her personal mission and accordingly devotes her knowledge to the people neglected in Japanese society and the advancement of the nation. This devotion to the greater good gains Hideko the approval and support of her father. "Baron Yoshikawa smiles and nods

his approval” (Kimura, “Part 2” 54) at Hideko’s selfless devotion of her experience abroad to the welfare of close friends and the Japanese nation. He takes pride in the fact that Hideko used the time abroad to her best advantage without losing sight of the purpose of her education. Paternal approval is significant in this scene with regard to Kimura’s attempt to reconcile paternal authority with female agency. These aspects are considered mutually exclusive in the conventional scheme of father-daughter relationships. Kimura does not question the relationship between father and daughter per se. Instead, she alters this relationship by providing the daughter with a form of agency that is accepted by her father. Kimura walks a thin line between propagating active roles for women in Japan’s modernization and advocating paternal support rather than authority for female agency.

With the evolution of Hideko from devout daughter eager for an education to confident entrepreneur, Kimura suggests that women can contribute beyond their roles as mothers and wives. She does not critique Japan’s ambitions to modernize at the time, but instead reinterprets them as a context for female agency. The path to modern womanhood is a divided one: it is a story of an individual rite of passage that guides Hideko away from Japan to other countries for the sake of her personal education, but conversely, the protagonist is shown to remain true to her task of educating herself on behalf of the Japanese nation. In this way, Kimura creates a niche in the Japanese agenda for Hideko on behalf of other Japanese women. Moreover, with Hideko’s case, she sets a precedent for women as agents of change that comprise the unusual pairing of individual agency and collective modernization. Hideko puts her knowledge gained to the utmost advantage of modernizing Japan and her social circle. Not self-indulgence but the wellbeing of her family and the Japanese nation take priority. Hideko is thus a role model since she aims to unite individual progress with social and national devotion. The transnational scope of her journey is also the source of Hideko’s confidence. Traveling across the Pacific enabled her to transgress cultural boundaries separating the East and the West. The geographic mobility fosters her ability to learn and select foreign knowledge that might be relevant for her personal development and the development of Japan. With the expertise she has also gained confidence in her abilities. In addition, Hideko also represents a case of hybridization as she combines intellectual knowledge, work experience, and Japanese traditions of virtue and collectivity and represents cultural transgressions across the East / West border as well. She links the old world with the new world without giving the West full priority. As a result, Hideko stands between the idea of the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*), the classic caretaker and the idea of individual fulfillment as found in the American New Woman.

Kimura offered Hideko's university education and social work in the West as experiences that gave scope to her heroine's native intelligence – only outside Japan, she implied, could Hideko claim freedom of action and thereby fulfill her innate excellence. That this freedom was not intended as an immature expression of self-indulgence moreover, is indicated by Hideko's social conscience, for she uses her education to better the lives of others and, at the story's close, to serve her country. Thus Kimura touched on a related concern of the 1890s: social reform.

(Rose 98–99)

Kimura envisions Hideko as a traditional and progressive role model of Japanese womanhood. The traditional aspects of her self-image are found in her patriotic commitment to devote her expertise to the development of Japan. However, the progressive aspects are emphasized when Hideko masters the various challenges she encounters on her own and realizes her vision of female employment in her business plans. Kimura depicts an image of modern womanhood that compiles female self-reliance and national patriotism. Therefore, Hideko's education abroad confirms but also challenges the ideal of the Good Wife, Wise Mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) by aligning Western ideas of female agency with Eastern goals of modernization. Kimura leaves us with Hideko as an outstanding example of modern womanhood situated between collectivism and individualism seeking to find a third way between the static conventions in place. *A Mirror for Womanhood* thus represents a hybrid, active, individual woman devoted to making a change for herself and other women in Meiji Japan.

The Awakening (1899)

Kate Chopin's protagonist Edna Pontellier is in search of a self outside the conventions of marriage and motherhood. Contrary to Hideko, Edna is driven by a vague and still undefined idea of a new self. Set on this obscure idea of reinventing herself, she tries her hand at art and lives by herself in a house of her own. Edna seeks solitude and artistic diversion in an attempt to satisfy her undefined need for change. Only aware of her dissatisfaction with her current life as a mother and wife, Edna is unable to pinpoint her frustrations and has difficulties to clearly articulate the dissatisfaction she feels.

She could not have told why she was crying. . . . An indescribable oppression, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day. It was strange and unfamiliar; it was a mood.

(Chopin, "The Awakening" 49)

The Awakening verbalizes Edna's inarticulate struggle with her conventional life and traces her attempts to resolve this struggle by creating a new sense of self. Central for the changes in Edna's self-perception is the setting. As Janet Beer explains, Grand Isle, a summer retreat for the upper middle class of New Orleans, constitutes the environment that enables Edna's awakening.

In the text, the resort of Grand Isle serves as a space outside the norm, essentially an 'other' place, exotic and languid, where, in the frequent absences of her husband, Edna's original awakening takes place. The setting facilitates her awakening to dissatisfaction and a sense of limitation, which in turn leads to the extremes of transgressive behavior (Beer, *Kate Chopin's The Awakening* 10)

Indeed, Grand Isle gives Edna the liberties she needs to develop a new sense of self. Only in this informal environment can she become aware of her inner conflict and cope with it. Due to her Presbyterian upbringing, Edna is taken aback by how much freedom the Creole community permits women. However, Edna embraces these new liberties without fully understanding the expectations of this French Catholic milieu.

She [Edna] observes the apparent freedom of married Creole women (their cigarettes, their drinking, and their flirtatious behavior with unmarried men), but fails to see how this apparent freedom actually operates in a set of unspoken social rules that in fact masks men's property right in women.

(Duvall 246–247)

Creole wives can be bold, outspoken, and flirty and are nonetheless subordinate to their husbands' authority.²⁷ The liberties they enjoy thus do not overwrite their duties as mothers and wives. Edna's conflict is therefore based on her inability to embrace these freedoms and yet remain dutiful to her roles as a mother and wife. Ironically, this misunderstanding on Edna's side explains why the same social context that encourages her awakening will later reproach her for being a nonconformist. Consequently, Edna's deviations (e.g.: work as an artist and her affair with Robert) are only temporarily tolerated for the time of their vacation. As soon as she returns to New Orleans and fails to comply with her designated role as a wife and mother the same social circle scorns her for misconduct. In the

²⁷"Because Creole women are considered above reproach, they are ironically free to flirt and to speak frankly" (Kemp 285).

following paragraphs her conflicted relationships with her husband Léonce Pontellier, Madame Ratignolle, and Mademoiselle Reisz will be dissected to explain Edna's displacement in the French Creole community in more detail. Moreover, the analysis will show that Edna's affair with Robert signifies her awakened sensuality and urge for autonomy but nonetheless represents yet another conflict between the conventions of marriage and her individual desire for self-fulfillment. Hence, Edna's awakening and her suicide in the Gulf of Mexico originate in the intransigence of the Creole context and Edna's unwillingness to give up on her new sense of self.

Edna subconsciously struggles with her marriage and her role as a mother because she does not consider these roles her personal vocation. Edna is an unconventional protagonist in a conventional context. Married to Léonce Pontellier, she has two children to look after and no financial sorrows that could burden her. Married life could not be any more comfortable. However, Edna quickly loses interest in both her husband and her children. Their marriage was "purely an accident" (Chopin, "The Awakening" 62) Edna claims. Her relationship with her children is described as "uneven, impulsive" (Chopin, "The Awakening" 63). In keeping with conventional standards her marriage gives Edna financial stability and social status but lacks emotional depth and devotion. She considers her marriage more a burden than a blessing despite her "husband's kindness and a uniform devotion which had come to be tacit and self-understood" (Chopin, "The Awakening" 49). Edna is unhappy because their marriage only functions through the fulfillment of conventional expectations. Once Edna begins to neglect her obligations as a wife she unsettles the relationship with her understanding husband.

Mr. Pontellier had been rather courteous husband so long as he met a certain tacit submissiveness in his wife. But her new and unexpected line of conduct completely bewildered him. It shocked him. Then her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife angered him.

(Chopin, "The Awakening" 108)

Neglect is Edna's silent revolt against her domestic fate. Even though she is not truly aware of her discontent yet her slow but firm rejection of her marital duties underlines her displacement. The expectations of Léonce reflect a conservative and unchanging understanding of his relationship with Edna. This discrepancy in expectations creates a deep rift between him and Edna. Therefore, the initial spark of their love subsides with their marriage. The entrance into this conventional scheme leads her to the realization that "no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection"

(Chopin, "The Awakening" 63).

The marital conflict also concerns her duties as a mother. Since Edna feels displaced as a wife and as a mother she also neglects the care of her children. She does not fully immerse herself in the care and love of her children. Every absence of theirs is a relief from the conventional burden she bears rather than a reason for motherly grief ("It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her" (Chopin, "The Awakening" 63)). Unable to perceive her current life as fulfilling or inspiring, Edna remains a secret misfit.

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels.

(Chopin, "The Awakening" 51)

The traits described for the other women are typical for the True Woman, social conventions that Edna feels unable to embrace. Edna feels odd about the sacrificial devotion that she is expected to develop and a life only evolving around her husband and children strikes her as bland. Whereas Edna has trouble getting herself into her role as mother and wife, her friend Adèle Ratignolle fully embraces her marriage and family as her life's vocation. Despite the homoerotic tendencies that arise between Edna and Adèle in the course of the story, they differ with each other with regard to their understanding of motherhood. Edna differentiates between being a mother and being her own person, whereas Adèle is convinced that being a mother is being your own person.

I would give up the essential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear, it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me.

(Chopin, "The Awakening" 97)

Edna is convinced that motherhood should not be the foundation of one's personality but only supplement it. She does not deny the responsibilities of a mother and is determined to provide her children with everything they need. Edna draws a line between motherly care and self-sacrifice. She still remains her own person despite her role as a mother. "I don't know what

you call essential, or what you mean by the unessential, . . . but a woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that" (Chopin, "The Awakening" 97). Adèle is a highly conformist character with regard to her views of marriage and motherhood, embracing social convention and morals. In contrast to Adèle, Edna is certainly out of place. Edna wants to be recognized for more than her duty as a mother as she feels that there is more to her than just being a mother devoting her time, money and emotions to her children. The question arises as to whether Edna fits with any type of womanhood presented in the novel.

The second character that Chopin juxtaposes Edna with is Mademoiselle Reisz, the solitary pianist. As a female musician, who is gifted and highly eccentric, she constitutes a stark contrast to the sacrificing mother figure of Adèle. The first time she is introduced to Edna and the reader is at a concert she gives during Edna's vacation on Grand Isle in the Gulf of Mexico. Though admiring Mademoiselle Reisz for her musical talent, Edna finds the way she presents herself odd.

She was a disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost everyone, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others. . . . She made an awkward, imperious little bow as she went in. She was a homely woman, with a small weazened face and body and eyes that glowed. She had absolutely no taste in dress, and wore a batch of rusty black lace with a bunch of artificial violets pinned to the side of her hair.

(Chopin, "The Awakening" 70–71)

Edna and her friends gathered to listen to Mademoiselle Reisz play the piano. Being the center of attention that night exposes Mademoiselle Reisz' eccentric nature. Contrary to Adèle, Edna does not perceive Mademoiselle Reisz to be a graceful woman. She also does not aim to please others by the choice of the right clothing or behavior. It seems that the musical gift compensates for her lack of social skills and the violation of the feminine ideal as represented by Madame Ratignolle. As an artist, she is held to different standards. Mademoiselle Reisz is allowed her eccentricities and social digressions because she conforms to the prevalent conventional idea of an artist: single, fully dedicated to her music, eccentric, and demanding.

Edna is positioned between these well-defined characters – Madame Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz who can be clearly assigned to a character type. In contrast to them, Edna is neither a conventional mother nor an artist. The juxtaposition with her friends underlines the qualities that Edna

lacks. Madame Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz are presented as authentic. Madame Ratignolle devotes herself to her family and marriage while Mademoiselle Reisz is devoted to her music. Therefore, both women fully embrace and advocate these roles and do not perceive them as masking their identities since they identify with the roles convention sees them in. Both have found their place as mother or artist and Edna remains to find hers and Edna admires them for finding happiness and certainty in the well-defined character types they represent. Contrary to Edna, both women do not see a reason to question their respective roles in society. Edna feels unable to settle for her current situation and rather seeks to find a way of her own to create a place for herself that will fill the gap she feels in her own life.

Edna finds that she is able to relate to Mademoiselle Reisz more than she is able to with Madame Ratignolle due to the emotional reaction that her concert performance triggers in her. Once she starts to perform, Edna is overwhelmed with her emotions and moved to tears.

The very first chords which Mademoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier's spinal cord. It was not the first time she heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth. She waited for the material pictures which thought would gather and blaze before her imagination. She waited in vain. She saw no pictures of solitude, of hope, of longing, or of despair. But the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her.

(Chopin, "The Awakening" 71–72)

The performance brings out Edna's apprehensions about her conventional life. Frustrations and doubts that she keeps to herself are released in her emotional response to the music played by Mademoiselle Reisz. The inexplicable feelings that arise in this scene are reminiscent of what Betty Friedan termed sixty years later as "the problem that has no name" (15) in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Similar to the housewives Friedan addressed, Edna's life evolves around the care of others: her children, her house, and her husband. The other-directedness of her domestic duties inhibit Edna's ability to assess what she wants for herself. The music helps Edna to embrace her feelings of discontent and voices her perceptions of marriage and motherhood as personal burdens. Although, the music does not give her clarity as to how Edna should change her life exactly but she gains the awareness for the need for

change and her obscure desire for life beyond the domestic sphere.²⁸ This performance thus unleashes her suppressed emotions. Contrary to her private nature, Edna can no longer hide her true sentiments from the public eye.

She had all her life been accustomed to harbor thoughts and emotions which never voiced themselves. They had never taken the form of struggles. They belonged to her and were her own, and she entertained the conviction that she had a right to them and that they concerned no one but herself.

(Chopin, "The Awakening" 96–97)

The music allows her to let her guard down and lose control of her emotions in that very moment. In face of her surfacing feelings, Edna feels confused and relieved at the same time. In this scene, we witness how Edna's awakening is ignited by this performance and allow her private emotions to surface. The private becomes public, albeit in an imprecise and undefined way. The emotional outburst thus demonstrates Edna's ambiguity as a character that "had apprehended instinctively the dual life – that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (Chopin, "The Awakening" 57). The function of music is two-fold in this scene: on the one hand, music serves to release emotions that Edna withholds from the public and probably has withheld from herself; on the other hand, music is found to enable the "subversive voice that disrupts patriarchal discourse" (Cutter 94) and helps Edna to articulate her desires. Therefore, Edna's reaction to the performance is an indicator of her inner world making a first public appearance and can be considered as the onset to her awakening.

The emotions that arose during the music performance pave the way for Edna's path of liberation. The emotional revelations encountered reoccur with Edna's swimming in the ocean. Taught by Robert, Edna experiences the ocean as a sensual place that allows her to feel like herself. Learning how to swim is thus learning who she is. The ocean functions as a place of escape from the conventional restrictions she despises and as a place in which

²⁸Betty Friedan's description of the numbing life as a housewife reflects Edna's state of mind well. However, I do not intend to imply that the feminist movement has not made significance progress between the first and second wave of the feminist movement. Instead this reference is meant to underline the foresight with which Chopin described Edna's situation. "As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and brownies, lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – "Is this all?" (Friedan 15).

Edna is in control of her sense of self. In this way, swimming continues and intensifies the process of awakening.

Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. . . . But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. How few of us ever emerge from beginning! How many souls perish in its tumult! The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation. The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.

(Chopin, "The Awakening" 57)

The sea is presented as the patron of Edna's agency. Learning how to swim allows her to immerse in the sea, which in turn provides her with a sense of autonomy. Only in the comfort of the open water does she achieve the state of contentment and a sense of belonging. The oceanic experience stimulates her eagerness to claim the unknown as a space of her own, and therefore, an identity of her own. As a result, Edna gains the audacity to let go of her conformist façade. In the course of the novel, she seeks more and more often the comfort of the ocean marking her entrance into a distressing and invigorating process of change. Edna's metamorphosis is fully initiated by the self-awareness she experiences when she swims in the ocean. Correlating with this discovery of a new sense of self are her affair with Robert and her move into a house of her own. With Robert, she experiences a passionate relationship outside of marriage and awakens emotionally. Beyond the classic definition of an adulterous relationship, Edna also values Robert as the one who lifted the burden of conventionalism off her life. Robert and her own house thus signify changes to her physical and social environment that are compatible with her new sense of self.

It was you who awoke me last summer out of a life-long, stupid dream. . . . Now you are here we shall love each other, my Robert. We shall be everything to each other. Nothing else in the world is of any consequence.

(Chopin, "The Awakening" 168)

Robert is not only a temporary escape from her unhappy life as mother and wife. To Edna, Robert is the catalyst for her conscious mental and

physical awakening. The affair opens Edna's eyes to her urge to love and live passionately. In contrast to the emotional eruption encountered during the performance of Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna does not conceive of her affair as a puzzling experience that she is unable to place. She fully embraces her emotions for Robert and considers them means to gain a deeper understanding of herself. Therefore, her affair with Robert contributes to the maturation of her unconventional character that aims to distance herself more and more from her marital and family life.

Edna develops a confidence that allows her to pursue artistic work and to claim a space of her own. She seeks a space outside her current family home to create a realm that is not tainted by conventional expectations. Therefore, the process of change is continued to suit Edna's newly discovered instinct for artistic and personal freedom rather than conventional conformity.

I have a little money of my own from my mother's estate, which my father sends me by dribblets. I won a large sum this winter on the races, and I am beginning to sell my sketches. Laidpore is more and more pleased with my work; he says it grows in force and individuality. I cannot judge of that myself, but I feel that I have gained in ease and confidence. However, as I said, I have sold a good many through Laidpore. I can live in the tiny house for little or nothing, with one servant. Old Celestine, who works occasionally for me, says she will come stay with me and do my work. I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence.

(Chopin, "The Awakening" 134)

Mademoiselle Reisz' music and Robert's swimming lessons are external factors that initiated Edna's transformation. Nonetheless, Edna is shown to carry on this process on her own with her own means. Her artistic work earns her recognition and financial independence. Despite Mademoiselle Reisz' doubts about Edna's talent as an artist, Edna is praised by her patron and is enabled to live a life free of conventional pressure. The dawning dissatisfaction described in the early stages of the novel is finally articulated and met with a concrete plan to amend this dissatisfaction. Edna finally understands that there was a desire for autonomy and liberty under the surface of her resigned conventional self. With her family funds and her artistic work, she is able to rid herself of the roles as mother and wife and transcend the conventional restrictions of her female life.

Invigorated by Robert and Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna claims her newly gained confidence as means of self-authorization. Rather than conforming with the expectations found in society, she decides to follow her own in-

instincts and be comfortable with her own decisions. “She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to ‘feed upon opinion’ when her own soul had invited her” (Chopin, “The Awakening” 151). Music and art are paired components that enable Edna to disregard the restrictions of her female existence. She reinterprets her life according to opportunities she creates for herself as an artist and as a woman with her own financial means. As a result, Edna’s transformation pivots in her understanding that no one but herself has to accredit her decisions. At this stage, her intangible uneasiness with motherhood and marriage is met with the tangible idea of her leading a life as a free spirit expressing her autonomy artistically.

Edna’s awakening is based on “self-construction and self-destruction” (Bronfen 142). The independence she seeks requires her to violate conventions and abandon her conventional self. Leaving her husband and children, declaring her love to Robert, celebrating her new self in her own space, are all aspects that underline Edna’s atypical idea of womanhood. These violations render her in-between conventions of motherhood and marriage. She is neither just a conventional wife and mother, nor a conventional adulteress. The final scene of the novel reinforces the idea of Edna as a liminal character unable to find her place in the conventions of the Creole society. Despite the progress she made and the efforts she sought, the novel demonstrates how Edna cannot be the nonconformist character outside the ocean. Between her domestic and public life, the ocean is depicted as a third space; a space in which Edna can realize her idea of womanhood as free, individualistic, and continuous. Her self-image has been transformed from a static endurance of conventions to a dynamic and intuitive response to her current situation. Therefore, it is not surprising that the ocean marks the beginning as well as the end of Edna’s awakening. Her suicide is indeed an act of “self-destruction” (Bronfen 142) and signifies her return to the only place that endorses her unconventional self. However, her death also signifies a form of rejection, the rejection of “possession – by her husband, by lovers, by children” (DuPlessis 17) and thus constitutes an act of “self-construction” (Bronfen 142). Edna chooses to go her own way and the ocean alone can take her “back into her own life, back to her vision, back into the imaginative openness of her childhood” (Gilbert 31). Chopin thus drafts the New Woman as a liminal concept that presents modern womanhood as dynamic, fluid, and ever-changing.

Conclusion: *A Mirror for Womanhood & The Awakening*

Kate Chopin and Kimura Akebono narrate stories of female emancipation through the creation of independent and liminal images of womanhood. Both protagonists defy the restraints of conventional womanhood to develop an image of womanhood outside the given conventions. Kimura and Chopin both apply the New Woman to challenge conventional restrictions to marriage and domesticity. The idea of female agency is enhanced by the significance of the ocean as a space of personal growth, female empowerment, and mobility. Hideko's rites of passage requires her to travel overseas and leave the restrictive context of Japan. The transgression of geographical borders between East and West fosters her ability to create a self-image that merges the Western notion of female agency and the Eastern ambitions for modernization. She is also able to escape the rumors about herself and start clean. Edna, on the other hand, immerses herself in the Gulf of Mexico to indulge in an unprecedented sense of self and escape the conventions of her social environment. The ocean thus acts as a space that encourages unrestricted and sensual development. Nonetheless, there are differences in the utility of the ocean between Hideko and Edna. Hideko returns to Japan to share her experiences. The factory she establishes is bound to reintegrate her as an active member in the Japanese collective, proving women's ability to contribute to Japan's modernization beyond their roles as mothers and wives. While Hideko seeks inclusion in Japanese society, Edna withdraws from society to shield herself from the conventions she struggles with. The ocean is Edna's final resting place that accommodates her new self, whereas Hideko traverses the ocean to return as a changed person to bring change to Japan. To Hideko the ocean is both empowerment and means of inclusion; to Edna the ocean signifies empowerment and means of self-imposed exclusion.

However, the transformations of both characters are also enabled through the support of benevolent characters other than the father or the husband. Hideko can only travel abroad because her friends in Japan organize her trip despite the fact that her father does not support her. Edna's awakening is first triggered by Mademoiselle Reisz' music performance and then through Robert's encouragement to learn how to swim. Hideko and Edna are initially dependent on external resources to build their autonomy. However, they continue to shape these opportunities for change at their own terms.

The emancipation of Hideko and Edna is directed against conventional notions of patriarchal authority. Chopin as well as Kimura question the conventional relationship of husband and wife or father and daughter to depict images of female empowerment. Hideko overrides her father's authority by traveling abroad without his consent. In her search for alternative ways of

living, Edna claims authority for herself and decides to live on her own irrespective of her husband's feelings or conventional authority. In both cases, the discovery and constitution of a new self-image results from the subversion of male-centered power schemes. Even though Hideko and Edna claim power for themselves at the expenses of their father and husband, Kimura demonstrates that female agency actually can be reconciled with patriarchal authority. Contrary to Chopin, Kimura paints a scenario in which an emancipated daughter experiences benevolence and sympathy of her father. The family reunion at the end of the story represents Kimura's utopian vision of inclusion of female agency in the family system. Kimura's collective reading of modern womanhood is contrasted with the individualistic and self-centered development Chopin outlines for Edna. Chopin's protagonist does not pursue modern womanhood as means of accomplishing a higher cause or because she perceives it as her vocation. The only purpose that Edna articulates for her transformation is the exploration of a sense of self she is comfortable with.

Moreover, the stories clarify that neither of the women is able to fully escape the conventions they are subjected to. Hideko stays true to her role as dutiful daughter and Edna is still expected to fulfill her duties as mother and wife. The conventions stay firmly in place and are not abrogated by the actions of the protagonist. However, each of them is shown in their attempt to alter these conventions from within and turn to these to their own advantage. Hideko succeeds in merging her progressive self with her role as daughter to her father and to the Japanese nation. Similar to Hideko Edna becomes a self-asserted individual. The difference with her though is that she is unable to settle back into the conventional life as mother and wife once she experienced the liberty to be herself. Whereas Hideko only withdraws temporarily from Japanese society to return as an active and recognized member of society, Edna fails to overcome her feelings of displacement and withdraws from American society for good by seeking the ocean as the only space accepting of her unconventionality.

Therefore, both authors link modern womanhood to being a social outcast. Hideko is considered a social outcast because she allegedly planned to have a premarital relationship abroad without the consent of her father. Hideko is declared an outcast by Japanese convention while Edna deliberately chooses to leave behind the conventions and people that hold her back. In Edna's case, being a social outcast is a conscious decision she made to rid herself of the conventional restrictions. The stories both imply that social stigma and exclusion no longer represent female subordination. Instead, the state of isolation is considered essential for the independent development of images of womanhood outside conventions. In this way, Chopin and Kimura reread the female outcast as an image of empowerment rather than an image

of failure.

The passage from conventional daughter or wife and mother to the New Woman is a process of subversion. The Japanese as well as the American short story depict their protagonists actively violating conventional codes of womanhood. They start to take matters into their own hands and rely on their own instincts. Therefore, Hideko and Edna emancipate themselves through the subversion of gender conventions. In this process, the sea acts as a generator of female empowerment and unearths “new gendered identities . . . [that bring] . . . together elements of the traditional and the radically new” (Heilmann and Beetham 3). Even though both stories stem from culturally distinct backgrounds, Kimura and Chopin similarly depict modern womanhood as a fluid process of self-creation enabled through the subversion of gender conventions.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In his assessments of Western influences on the literature of Meiji Japan, George B. Sansom aptly concluded that “of all cultural influences it is literary influences that are easiest to allege and hardest to measure” (404). In the preceding chapters I aimed to make a case for the rise of women’s writing as a feminist discourse that employed modernist modes of expression in the context of socio-historical circumstances that shaped Meiji Japan and Progressive America. Social change caused by similar processes of modernization shaped the perception of womanhood from a static to a dynamic concept and paved the way for social and literary discussion of womanhood. Women activists and women writers started to challenge established conventions of womanhood as represented by the true woman (US) and good wife, wise mother (JP) to offer alternative readings beyond the patriarchal scope that restricted women’s identity to marriage, motherhood, and family.

In comparing the social and literary articulations of womanhood against the backdrop of historical and social developments that occurred in Meiji Japan and Progressive America, I aimed to illustrate the correlations that exist between modernity, social change, the Woman Question, and the rise of New Woman fiction. Accordingly, chapter two introduced the historical context of Meiji Japan and Progressive America to point out similar and different circumstances of modernization that prompted Japan and the US not only to reassess its national identity but also existing conceptions gender, especially conceptions of womanhood. The Meiji era in Japan and the Progressive era thus represent phases of radical change that conditioned the formation of social and literary debates that discussed new images of womanhood.

Chapter three discussed the Woman Question in the speeches of the feminist activist Emma Goldman (US) and Kishida Toshiko (JP). Both women used the public stage to argue the flaws of conventional womanhood. Thereby, marriage constituted the common target of their criticism. Kishida

contended that education enables women to own their duties as mothers and wives as their vocation in life. In this way, women could be more than silent wives and actively educate their children as future citizens of a strong nation state. Goldman, on the other hand, considered marriage as means of female enslavement and promoted the abolition of marriage. Gender equality, so Goldman, could only be achieved if conventions that inherently subordinate women are abandoned.

Although, Kishida and Goldman relate their criticism of female subordination to different cultural conventions, the analysis shows that both women addressed the Woman Question as a marriage question. Thereby, Kishida and Goldman are connected through their feminist conviction that women should no longer be subjected to conventions that began to lose their validity in the changing societies of the US and Japan. Both women thus acknowledged the changes modernization brought about for definitions of womanhood and used their speeches to provoke new ways of thinking about women.

The final chapters presented a comparative reading of selected short fiction by American and Japanese women writers to demonstrate that the circumstances described produced similar works of fiction that relied on narrative strategies of modernist subversion. I contended that women writers from Japan and the US translated the feminist criticism articulated in the social debates of the Woman Question into a modernist discourse that deploys plot, theme and motif, characterization, point of view to subvert conventional images of womanhood. Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Higuchi Ichiyo described an alternative marriage plot that allowed their characters to claim a life of their own beyond the end of their marriages. Kate Chopin and Araki Iku portrayed women that found passion and empowerment as adulteresses to challenge patriarchal conventions of male dominance and female inferiority. On the other hand, Willa Cather's and Shimizu Shikin's women transgressed gender boundaries by being or becoming masculine women, women that claim the authority to decide for themselves. The final set of stories by Kate Chopin and Kimura Akebono traced paths of female self-creation in nonconformity and presented women that were empowered through the opportunity to find a new sense of self outside the realm of conventions.

Women writers discussed in this thesis thus responded to and shaped the Woman Question through their drafts of liminal and hybrid images of womanhood. They imagined womanhood in ways that were unheard of and contributed to the social debate of the Woman Question through literary means. Thereby, the New Woman functioned as a template of modern womanhood that writers were able to adapt to the particularities of their respective cultures. However, what the analysis also shows is, that the emergence of New Woman fiction went hand in hand with the emergence of social change in

Meiji Japan and Progressive America.

In light of my presented findings it is certainly possible to conduct a comparative analysis that is multinational and relational. In comparing Progressive America and Meiji Japan based on the idea that similar circumstances of social change possibly result in similar articulations of the New Woman in social and literary discourses, I demonstrated that modernization, the Woman Question, and New Woman fictions illustrate the similarities that both countries share with regard to their social and literary history. However, the analysis also drew attention to the idiosyncratic characteristics that distinguish the Progressive era from the Meiji era. Without imposing a national hierarchy, the comparison revealed the interrelations and cultural differences that inform modernity, the Woman Question and New Woman fiction. In this way, the comparison also provided a fresh perspective of the US and its inter-cultural relations during the Progressive era.

Indeed, cultures are different. However, as Appiah reminds us, cultural differences can connect countries and their socio-cultural developments. In aligning a national with a transnational perspective, the proposed approach created new avenues for a post-exceptionalist American Studies as it “address[es] the concept of the national and find[s] ways to go beyond it” (Fluck, “Surface Readings” 41). The analysis thus suggests that the future of American Studies lies in an approach that is not inhibited but driven by cultural difference.

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