

(POST-)MODERNISM AND CYBORG WRITING IN GEORGE EGERTON'S "THE REGENERATION OF TWO" (1894)

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Abstract

Taking into account Rita Felski's (1995) discussion on stereotypical representations of women in modernity and the New Woman movement, in this paper we analyse George Egerton's short story "The Regeneration of Two" (1894) from the perspective of Donna Haraway's cyborg imagery and the concept of cyborg writing. We demonstrate that "The Regeneration of Two" dialogues with Haraway's proposition of a cyborg writing as it opposes an oppressive patriarchal system with the creation of a women's community. To do so, we explore two main aspects of cyborg imagery present in the short story: the fractured identities and the community of political kinship, resulting in a subversive "cyborgian epiphany." This epiphany informs Egerton's progressive and intersectional representation of gender relations and of women's writing part and parcel of the late 19th-century radical feminist New Woman movement.

Keywords: New Woman; Cyborg Writing; George Egerton; "The Regeneration of Two".

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In *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski (1995) discusses how “the changing status of women under conditions of urbanization and industrialization further expressed itself in a metaphorical linking of women with technology and mass production” (20). The representation of women in modernity is marked by some stereotypical figures, one of them being the woman-machine. In a direct allusion to Walter Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), Felski explores the duality of this woman-machine figure arguing that this representation of women on the one hand helps to demystify the established norms and notions applied to women and “to destabilize the notion of an essential, God-given, femaleness” (20), but on the other hand, the machine-woman can serve to reinforce gender differences, and to reaffirm a “patriarchal desire for technological mastery over woman” (20). In discussing this dubious representation, Felski refers to Donna Haraway’s cyborg as the most recent manifestation of this machine-woman figure, pointing out that “there is a crucial ambiguity in the figure of the woman-as-machine—does she point to a subversion or rather a reinforcement of gender hierarchies?—which continues to mark her most recent reincarnation in Donna Haraway’s cyborg manifesto” (20). The concerns towards gender issues and female representation implicit in such questioning are legitimate; however, we argue that Haraway’s cyborg, which proposes the integration of women in a technological era, not only advocates for a positive interpretation of the woman-machine figure, but also stands as metaphor for gender politics in face of changes brought by society’s progress. What Haraway calls the “integrated circuit” serves as a metaphor to the structure of the late 20th-century society, reflecting on the reformulation of a multitude of identities, and examining the rearrangements brought by technology, as well as the new webs of power operating in the household, market, paid workplace, state, school, hospital, and church. Haraway does so by proposing theoretical tools to examine the unique aspects of women’s integration within these webs of power and asserting the impossibility of a universal female experience. Such universalisation creates and perpetuates gender inequalities. Haraway’s cyborg works on the basis of difference, as much as Felski is engaged in exploring “the hybrid and often contradictory identities” (22) in *fin de siècle* women’s writing.

Taking into account Felski’s discussion about women’s writing in modernity and the New Woman movement, we analyse George Egerton’s (Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright’s pen name) short story “The Regeneration of Two” from the perspective of Donna Haraway’s cyborg imagery and the concept of cyborg writing. Although Haraway’s notion of the cyborg was formulated in the late 20th-century, we contend that such a notion can be useful to examine Egerton’s representation of the New Woman. This postmodern reading of the short story is possible due to the fact that it reassesses women’s roles in late 19th-century by means of a critique of Victorian society and a scrutiny of patriarchal norms in women’s lives. Upon making connections between these two moments in history, and highlighting how Egerton anticipated not only modernist tropes in her writing but also postmodern and recurrent concerns, we demonstrate how “The

Regeneration of Two” can be read as cyborg writing. Additionally, by examining some of the important topics present in the short story, we establish links with the cyborg imagery, culminating in what we propose here as a cyborgian epiphany. Felski describes modernism as a diverse movement and a “mobile and shifting” (1995, 8) category, which allows the inclusion of New Woman writers in this male-dominated period. When does modernism start—somewhere around the end of the 19th-century? When did it end—if it has indeed ended at all? Coupled with Felski’s ideas, such considerations speak of the impossibility of placing rigid limits as to how or why one author or another could be categorised as realist, modernist, postmodernist. Particularly modernism and postmodernism often overlap in their common concerns towards Western society, and share plenty of important features. Approaching these movements as mobile and flexible, both in terms of their potential periods and main characteristics, we intend to place Egerton’s short story in the blurred lines between the two movements, since characteristics of both can be identified in her innovative fiction. Tina O’Toole draws attention to the uniqueness of Egerton’s style, suggesting that it surpasses modernism. She argues that,

those who have tried to label her work “modernist” find themselves caught on the horns of her more didactic pieces. Somewhere between the fissures of these different categories, using influences and absorbing ideas from them all, Egerton’s work flourished. Her texts are truly “transitional” and could be said accurately to reflect the spirit of the fin de siècle. (2000, 155)

Not only is Egerton considered one of the mothers of the Irish short story, but her work is also regarded as the precursor of *modern* short story. Elke D’hoker asserts that Egerton’s “experimental and innovative short stories [...] prepare the stage for the impressionist, mood dependent, and psychological short story which would flourish in modernist literature” (2016, 15). We argue that these so-called innovative characteristics of her short fiction, described by D’hoker as her unique use of narrative techniques, plot structures, and stylistic devices, however, not only foreshadowed aspects of what would be later defined as modernism, but also of some postmodern traits, such as social criticism and self-awareness. As a harbinger of modernism, Egerton’s main influences on the short story are ellipses and omissions, the abrupt beginnings of her stories, open endings, as well as “symbolic patterns to evoke the situation or state of mind of a protagonist” (D’hoker 2016, 27). D’hoker reads Egerton’s attempt to “explore different narrative ways of achieving psychological realism” as well as her “use of third-person narration with focalization—and free indirect discourse—to faithfully record the individual protagonist’s consciousness” (28) as characteristics that would later influence modernist writers such as James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, and Virginia Woolf. Nonetheless, we contend that postmodern concerns can also be identified in her writing, especially in the self and social criticism developed in “The Regeneration of Two,” where, according to Anne Fogarty, “Fruen adapts a Nietzschean slogan and proclaims the overturning of

all values as the basis for revolutionizing the position of women” (2014, 149). Being so, Egerton’s acknowledged inspiration on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, who is considered one of the precursors of postmodern thought, informs the more-than-modern aspect of her visionary thought and writing. Other scholars have also pointed out the influence of Nietzschean philosophy on Egerton’s writing. O’Toole discusses Egerton’s migration and contact with different cultures, especially her Scandinavian influences, and the adoption of a Nietzschean philosophy to explore the decadence of society (2014, 829). Moreover, O’Toole mentions how Egerton’s contact with the writings of Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Knut Hamsun, and Ola Hansson led her to those of Friedrich Nietzsche (841). Similarly, Sarah Maier highlights Egerton’s relationship with these authors and her early familiarisation with Nietzsche’s ideas (1997, 9), and argues that she “reacted strongly against the social conditioning that left women constrained by an artificial morality, believing instead that there was strength in women’s chaotic nature” (10). Complementary to this is the fact that being fluent in German, Egerton got in touch with Nietzsche’s work, even before it was translated into English (Jusová 2000, 29). Iveta Jusová, however, points out that “Nietzsche’s derogatory or blatantly misogynist remarks concerning women (while encouraging her unrelenting censure of the feminine ideal) kept Egerton from uncritically adopting his philosophy in its totality” (30). Thus, Jusová demonstrates that Egerton was inspired by his philosophy, but critically interrogated Nietzsche’s misogynist thought in the development of her female protagonists (33), which demonstrates how Egerton was ahead of the perceptions of society of her time. Whether Egerton’s female protagonists are a direct response to her criticism of Nietzsche, we cannot affirm, but her characters do question misogynistic constructions and provide alternatives to female existence, and to gender inequalities, as we perceive in “The Regeneration of Two.”

Looking at Egerton’s revolutionary writing in the *fin de siècle*, we see the cyborg figure as a continuation of the New Woman’s ideals and propositions. Egerton’s writing in the end of the 19th-century vis-à-vis Haraway’s cyborg, a figure of the late 20th-century, can be approached in parallel regarding the concerns of both towards gender relations. While Egerton’s experimental writing dealt with the clash of Victorian values against the rise of modern concerns, the cyborg is a figure that deals with the challenges brought forth by the subsequent turn of the century, this time in a society immersed in abrupt digital transformations. Hence, the understanding of Egerton’s fiction historical and social context is essential to analysing the possible convergences between the New Woman movement and the figure of the cyborg.

From New Woman to cyborgs: a continuum of resistance

The idea of the New Woman, originally proposed by Sarah Grand (1894), was consolidated in the form of social activism embedded with radical criticism towards patriarchal norms, Victorian values, and culturally and strictly defined

gender roles. One of its most important social manifestations was, for instance, the fight for women's suffrage. As Felski explains, "the figure of the New Woman was to become a resonant symbol of emancipation, whose modernity signaled not an endorsement of an existing present but rather a bold imagining of an alternative future" (1995, 14). Felski also describes the ones part of the New Woman as those who "drew on and revitalized the promise of innovation as liberating transformation implicit in the idea of the modern to forge an array of critical and oppositional identities" (14). Lisa Hager goes further stating that the "New Woman fiction was about the possibility and potential of a cultural construct that embodied the chaotic potential of social disorder through its constructed instability as an identity; it was about questioning the unitary nature of subjectivity" (2001, 28). The attempt to forge this new understanding of women by placing them at the forefront of social change would invariably blur the boundaries of private and public lives, and put forward different identities that in many ways are akin to the cyborg's oppositional consciousness. Both the New Woman and the cyborg are concerned with the dismantling of unitary identities.

In *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, originally published in 1985, around a centenary after "The Regeneration of Two," Donna Haraway formulates the myth of the cyborg as a metaphor for a new subjectivity that embraces differences rather than creating homogeneity of identities. One of the purposes of Haraway's manifesto is to stimulate discussion on the ways in which the cyborg disrupts and blurs Western notions of duality. Although the figure of the cyborg is a palpable one in contemporary technologically-mediated times, Haraway explores it as a metaphor for understanding difference caused by societal changes brought forth by technology. This myth of resistance is "about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities, which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (2000, 295). The cyborg allows us not only to discuss the machine-woman as a literal technological being, but also to delve into the metaphorical meanings of this fragmentation of women's identities in the contemporary capitalist world, as well as in Egerton's imperialist context.

The imagery of the cyborg as theorised by Haraway is that of a fragmented being, which serves as a myth for resistance. Advocating for a non-unitary being, Haraway affirms that the cyborg's power of connection with others lies in its fractured identities, and it bases its relations on the idea of making kin and promoting affinity, rather than seeking wholeness, unity, or a single model for human beings. The attempt to conceptualise a figure that embraces difference and uses it to serve as a tool for resisting oppressive systems seems to be the answer to Felski's uncertainty about the ambiguous meaning of the machine-woman as well as to her questioning of whether this female representation suggests a potential of subversion of gender hierarchies, or their strengthening. Beyond exploring gender issues, Haraway's manifesto calls for the recognition of difference amongst all women, with the inclusion of marginalised women regardless of race and class, which is something also present in Egerton's *oeuvre* in her women-of-colour

protagonists, in her description of working-class women, and in her transcultural characters. As argued by Lyn Pykett, “the effect of the varied viewpoints afforded by her choice of the short-story form, and by her use of shifting perspectives within those stories, is to emphasise multiplicity and to focus on differences (between women) as well as difference (as a universal, essentialist gender category)” (1992, 173). Thus, we argue that Egerton’s fiction is aligned with the cyborg imagery due to her visionary perception of difference, translated into postmodern terms as Haraway’s blasphemous figure, whose existence “can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves,” an existence that insists upon “a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 316).

Haraway’s mythical cyborg has blasphemous origins in that it is a “creature in a post-gender world” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 292). In the very first lines of her manifesto, she states that “blasphemy protects one from the moral majority within, while still insisting on the need for community” (291). The cyborg is blasphemous as it disrupts order and established dichotomies, as well as confronts what Haraway refers to as “secular-religious” societies. In an ironic wordplay with the imagery of major Western religious beliefs, Haraway constructs her blasphemous figure:

The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household. Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world. Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein’s monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden—that is, through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos. The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust. (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 293)

Blasphemy can also be seen in “The Regeneration of Two,” considering communal effort, as well as the dedication to the self, aligned with the short story’s antagonisation of moral beliefs, as important topics in the plot of the short story.

Both the cyborg and the New Woman are concerned with criticising similar practices that resulted in the marginalisation and in the othering of women. The latter, placed against the values of Victorian society, questions and challenges the fetishised, limited, and stereotypical representations of women in the *fin de siècle*; while the former, immersed in a feminist critique of society, demonstrates the concerns of an uninterrupted struggle against patriarchal values and gendered hierarchisation of society. Looking at New Woman writing and its project to give voice to the voiceless, and to fiercely oppose modern representations of women

written by men, through the lens of the act of cyborg writing, which “is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but *on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other*” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 311; emphasis added), it is possible to observe how Egerton’s writing calls for the survival of women, helped by fellow women. We argue that Haraway’s myth of the cyborg, when placed in tandem with Egerton’s fiction forms a continuum of ideas about resistance and of alternative societies.

“The Regeneration of Two” as cyborg writing

Looking at Egerton’s “The Regeneration of Two” through the lens of the cyborg imagery and taking into consideration the act of cyborg writing, we approach its main characters as hybrid, multi-layered, fragmented, and flawed selves, in contrast with the idea of unity promoted by stereotypical gender roles and Victorian moral codes. Considering the cyborg a symbol for the dismantling of dualities, we explore the myth as one that not only does subvert conventions but that specially undermines the men/women duality. In order to analyse “The Regeneration of Two” as cyborg writing, we point out the characteristics of cyborg writing present in the structure of the short story. Then, aided with textual evidence, we critically examine the two main aspects of cyborg writing present in Egerton’s short story: the fractured identities and the community of political kinship, which leads to conclude with what we would like to call “the cyborgian epiphany.”

“The Regeneration of Two” is the final piece of the short-story collection *Discords* (1894) and is considered by many scholars as a point of balance in Egerton’s *oeuvre*. D’hoker considers the short story as a “resolution of all the discords of the previous stories in a grand finale” (2014, 34). Rosie Miles also explores this notion, but goes deeper by examining the musical elements displayed throughout the book, stating that the book opens with “a literal discord printed in musical notation” while, in the opening page of the second part of “The Regeneration of Two” “a resolution of this chord is printed: harmony is found in one of Egerton’s most utopian and positive stories in which she portrays the perfect union between a man and woman” (1996, 251). Still concerning structure, Hager points out how *Keynotes* and *Discords* are collections in which Egerton “destabilizes the genre boundaries that divide the short story and the novel so that her books become hybrids of both,” allowing, consequently, for “blending the intense focus of the short story and the larger breadth of the novel” (2001, 4). Also in relation to the blurring of the boundaries of the genres, Hager states that,

‘key’ stories in both of the books function as overture and finale respectively and, as such, “A Cross Line” and “The Regeneration of Two” provide a framework for understanding the variations presented in each of the other stories as Egerton moves her women away from a unitary sense of self toward a more indeterminate and temporary self. (6)

This notion of hybridity in structure and the transgressing of boundaries between genres is a relevant aspect to reflect upon Egerton's attempt to surpass gender norms.

Divided in two parts, "The Regeneration of Two" begins with the encounter of two nameless characters, a bored wealthy widowed *Fruen* and a poet. In their exchange, the Poet exposes his dissatisfactions with female behaviour, criticising their femininity and lack of purpose in life while also describing what he believes would be the ideal woman. In response to his criticism of female vanity, Fruen confronts his ideas by describing the restraints women suffer from patriarchal society. The second part of the story happens three years later, and Fruen is then leading an alternative micro-society where women fend for themselves and their children. That is when she meets the Poet for a second time, saving him and giving him shelter. He is surprised to see her very changed in appearance after she started dedicating herself to the purpose of helping other women. In part two, then, the woman's world view is explored, her own transformation from a woman of vanity into a practical woman who believes in free love and in the formation of a community of assistance for women in need, highlighting the importance of fraternity, or sorority. Fruen claims that the spark for her transformation was her first encounter with the Poet and their exchange of ideas. The short story ends proposing a different kind of relationship between the two, when she proposes to him a free love relationship out of wedlock and clear of responsibilities.

The fact that "The Regeneration of Two" is set in Christiania, the former name of the Norwegian capital, Oslo, reflects Egerton's own life experiences living in different countries in and outside Europe. Stefano Evangelista argues that Egerton mythically portrayed Norway as "an idealized, denationalized space of spiritual regeneration" and "as a location of literary modernity" (2021, 127). Besides, the construction of Christiania as modern metropolitan capital, and the "portrayal of women's mobility in her fiction is that the cosmopolitan ideal is both the means to an attractive empowering individualism that frees women from traditional social and moral ties, and something that exposes them to the practical and emotional dangers of dislocation" (130). For Nurbanu Atis, Egerton's "cosmopolitan background is indeed the most significant element that enables her to evaluate the Victorian society and values from a unique perspective. Her unconventional personal experience as a female enables her to perceive life and literature from different standpoints" (2016, 3). Thus, Egerton's multicultural identity is essential for the understanding of the Scandinavian setting of some of her stories. Based on Hager's assumption that "Egerton moves her utopia outside of England to the picturesque Norwegian countryside where the power of Victorian convention is decidedly weaker" (2006, para. 20), Atis complements that the Norwegian setting can be read as an escape from Victorian Britain and also as a hint that Britain at the time was not "prepared or ready for such radical changes in the name of gender roles" (2016, 101). This multicultural and cosmopolitan aspect of Egerton's life and fiction is also reflected in her consistency of not giving names to her protagonists. In this short story, the woman is called "Fruen," which means

“Lady” or “Madam” in Norwegian, while the man is just “Poet.” Both nameless, these two characters can serve the intention of collective transformation in the short story, making them more easily relatable.

We argue that “The Regeneration of Two” is in its own structure a piece of cyborg writing. By opposing the Victorian tradition, marked by very well-established notions of gender roles and social arrangements, Egerton’s story is structurally built to criticise such dualistic perception of life. Egerton also explores anti-religious values in the narrative, advocating for women’s freedom from marital ties and alternative forms of motherhood. While Haraway argues that the cyborg myth is born from blasphemy and ironically questions Western values, the structure of Egerton’s fiction is as just as blasphemous and ironic since it makes use of a dual structure to criticise the very notion of binary thinking that permeates strict configurations of gender roles. This can be observed in the division of the story in two parts in an attempt to establish a clear separation between before and after the regeneration of the two characters. A binary structure is used to explore the multifaceted possibilities for gender relations, indicating Egerton’s ironic exposition of society’s values. Besides, the very use of the word “regeneration” is ironic, since the regeneration that happens to both characters would rather be considered a degeneration instead according to the social values it criticises.

Therefore, when it comes to the dismantling of traditional values, the regenerative move from Part I to Part II is a movement of acknowledgement and pursuit of fractured and multi-layered identities, of terminating the struggle of living under a unitary model for femininity (and masculinity). The depiction of Fruen’s development and subversion demonstrates Egerton’s effort to use her writing to expose different facets of female experience, from raising children as a single mother to establishing a network of cooperation amongst women from all social classes. The community’s diversity is perceived when its foundation is described: “there were both smiles and headshakings when she espoused the cause of all women, without reference to character or exhortations to repentance. It began when Captain Sørensen turned his pretty daughter out of doors [...]. Then a gypsy woman brought her newly-born in her apron, and craved admission, and so the thing grew of its own accord.” (“The Regeneration of Two” 205). In a similar vein, Haraway argues that:

cyborgs are the people who refuse to disappear on cue, no matter how many times a ‘Western’ commentator remarks on the sad passing of another primitive, another organic group done in by ‘Western’ technology, by writing. These real life cyborgs [...] are actively rewriting the texts of their bodies and societies. Survival is the stakes in this play of readings. (2000, 313)

In this sense, not only can Fruen be read as a cyborg character, but also Egerton can be placed as a cyborg writer. In terms of the topics observed in the short story, one of the main ideas deconstructed through the encounter between

Fruen and the Poet is the notion of the ideal woman, which symbolises a search for a universalised idea of woman; hence, a unitary model of womanhood. Through their dialogue, Egerton rejects Victorian notions of femininity while at the same time criticising male attempts to find said perfect woman. That notion is particularly explored in the first part of the story, where, even though the Poet criticises Victorian femininity, he does not appear to be an advocate of women's freedom as he also searches in women a projection of what he judges to be an ideal woman, described as a motherly figure, someone who would look after him:

I hoped to find rest on her great mother heart; to return home to her for strength and wise counsel; for it is the primitive, the generic, that makes her sacred, mystic, to the best men. I found her half-man or half-doll. No, it is women, not men, who are the greatest bar to progress the world holds. ("The Regeneration of Two" 197; emphasis added)

He both idealises women in the figure of the caretaker and projects the failure of world's progress in women, due to his judgment of their inability to give men this motherly safety and stability.

While Egerton uses the figure of the Poet to expose the patriarchal notions she means to criticise, she constructs in Fruen the self-awareness of a woman who lives a bored and purposeless life, as her widowed status dictates, and who must overcome the notion that her marital status defines her. In the move from Part I to Part II, Fruen is shown to have grown in different aspects of her life that once seemed impossible. She opposes the attempts to be placed in the modes of Victorian women, whose wholeness is defined by the norms she once submitted to, being a feminine woman (her relation to appropriate clothes and makeup, e.g. pp. 179, 182, 199), and respecting the boundaries between public and private lives (being limited by her widowed status and not being able to perform other activities than religious and philanthropic ones, e.g. p. 166). Thus, Fruen's realisation of her complexity, of her fragmented being, and of her varied needs as a woman is the act of female regeneration and resistance within this short story, which can already be perceived in her response to the poet:

We have been taught to shrink from the honest expression of our wants and feelings as violations of modesty, or at least good taste. *We are always battling with some bottom layer of real womanhood that we may not reveal; the primary impulses of our original destiny keep shooting out mimosa-like threads of natural feeling through the outside husk of our artificial selves, producing complex creatures [...] what is she but the outcome of centuries of patient repression? Repress and repress—how many generations has it gone on?* ("The Regeneration of Two" 198; emphasis added)

Although she acknowledges the Poet as responsible for her regeneration, the conversation with her maid that opens the story and thus happens before her encounter with the Poet is revealing. Right at the outset, she is already inclined to reject the universalising social norms she is inserted in, especially regarding the

consequences of marriage in women's lives. When Fruen complains about men's freedom to go out and socialise as they wish, while she is expected to behave according to her widowed status, her maid answers that she should be thankful for having had a rich husband, to what Fruen "interrupts cynically" saying that she buried him and "there is a measure of thankfulness in that" ("The Regeneration of Two" 167). Later, in the second part, she resumes the argument of how marriages limit women's life choices and their freedom of being themselves; Fruen admits that not even the love of the Poet "no matter if it be his whole love, will not fill her life completely; she has seen too many marriages not to know that every woman, except the few that go to prove the rule, chafes at the narrowness of the horizon that is simply confined to attending to one man's needs." (248).

The anti-marriage ideas that appear throughout the narrative operate as an anti-universalising reasoning in favour of women's freedom, for instance, when Fruen mentions that the strongest feeling she has felt toward her husband's death was "a fierce inward whisper of exultant joy that I belonged to myself again"; she then concludes her line of reasoning saying, "I fancy there must be many marriages like that in which the woman feels a dull resentment against the man because her love does not go with herself" ("The Regeneration of Two" 168). The maid, Aagot, also demonstrates she has anti-marriage ideas, when she states that she is marrying her cousin's widower not because of the man, nor because of marriage itself, but for her love towards his motherless children. Aagot's behaviour also makes explicit the relevance of fraternity and communal efforts within the short story, by exposing her concerns with the children's development, and, one could argue, by also demonstrating a sense of commitment with the deceased woman who could not care for her own family. Moreover, the different motivations for marrying in the short story are not based on the premise of a romantic union between a man and a woman, but on the need for a social arrangement. These ideas culminate in the free-love relationship Fruen proposes to the Poet, a relationship in which she asks nothing in return, for "I am sure of myself, proud of my right to dispose of myself as I will, to choose" (252). That in itself summarises Egerton's criticism of marriage as an institution that standardises female social and sexual behaviour.

Regarding Fruen's rejection of Victorian values, Charlotte Kelso argues that "Fruen undergoes a 'regeneration' through the self-fashioning of a new identity, using the body and its materiality as an interface upon which this new identity is constructed" (2019, 81). This change from a simulacrum of Victorian woman to an agglomerate of difference is noticeable in her visual and physical changes. While in Part I she is described as weak, anaemic, fragile, and shown to be dependent on her maid for the simplest of actions (e.g. pp. 164, 165); in Part II, she is a self-sufficient, matriarchal figure, whose uncorseted clothes and grand and capable body translate the strength she symbolises, not only in physical appearance, but as a leader to her community (e.g. pp. 203, 228, 231, 244). These bodily changes also symbolise the power she acquired against patriarchal notions of domination, perceived when the Poet admits: "I begin to fear you!" (244),

when he sees how changed she is after three years since their first encounter. The dismantling of notions of femininity and the defence for a fragmented being, a woman free to be the varied layers of her own self and free from societal and patriarchal constrains, is translated in one of Fruen's most impacting lines. When the Poet is rescued and brought to her community of women, he observes Fruen sewing, "with a kind of fascination, and the song of the wheel sings soothingly in his thoughts" ("The Regeneration of Two" 243), and asks questions about the activity, to which she replies:

No; I am not very good at it, I am only learning. *The wool in my gown holds all my first attempts—I like it*; I span an awful lot of thoughts into it, much of my old self, and when I was finished I was new. (243; emphasis added)

The mentioning of a wool made of all her first attempts alludes to a patch-worked fabric, a whole piece made of different smaller unities, fragmented on their own, but meaningful and forming a new whole when united. Then, her statement that both her old and new self are contained in that piece speak of her self-discovery journey through the uncovering of the different layers and possibilities of being a woman. In the depth of this metaphorical statement behind clothing, Hager brilliantly uses the verb "to quilt" to state that Egerton appropriates Victorian discourse on femininity "to quilt a self that can operate within that discourse without being totally contained by it" (2001, 21)

Another aspect that links "The Regeneration of Two" and the cyborg imagery is the short story's approach to communal efforts of resistance and collective representations of life. Inherent to the cyborg is an identity that "marks out a self-consciously constructed space that cannot affirm the capacity to act on the basis of natural identification, but only on the basis of conscious coalition, of affinity, of political kinship" (Haraway 2000, 296), which can be spotted in Fruen's foundation of the utopian community of women and children, based on their shared concerns and marginalised situations. Beyond the New Woman's notion of fraternity, Fruen's community offers freedom and the building of a safe living space as well as working place where women deviant from Victorian norms could live their own true selves. The notions of affinity and kinship are highlighted in Fruen's development from being "too selfish" and from thinking that "philanthropy is a masculine attribute" ("The Regeneration of Two" 166), to being the matriarch of a community of different women whose main convergent characteristic is to live outside the values of their own society regarding their private, public, religious, and sexual lives.

Consequently, embedded in this representation of community are also anti-marriage, as discussed, and anti-religious ideas, as both marriage and religion, in general, speak of institutions that possess power over women's lives. Going against them, Egerton approaches women's different life purpose and the exploration of their sexual desire, through the community's rejection of social norms based on marriage and the adoption of a different and somehow marginalised way

of life. This can be inferred from Fruen's answer to the pastor's accusations of her community and her women engaging in "promiscuous mothering" ("The Regeneration of Two" 208):

To-day is Wednesday, Herr Pastor, *your church* has been closed since Sunday, except for the christening of a baby, and the funeral of a granny; *mine* is open every day, and all day, and *my sinners* laugh and sing, and find new hopes and self-reliance in measure as they better their work, and then chicks will grow up to be proud of their mothers. For—with a mischievous smile—the fathers were only an accident. I can trust you and society to look after them, to welcome the erring rams to the fold; *the mothers are my look out*. Fathering is a light thing to the man, as light as the plucking of a flower by the wayside; he enjoys its colour, its perfume, then flings it aside, and goes his way and forgets it. (206; emphasis added)

Fruen not only points out the church's blame for the maintenance of gender inequalities, not helping women in need while the church turns a blind eye to the absent fathers, but she also does it by appropriating the 'offences' thrown at her community. Similarly to the New Woman movement and the concept of fraternity, the cyborg's proposition of a web of relations based on affinity and kinship symbolises the call for straightening relationships among women in a movement that subverts the oppressions they would normally endure in society. She refers to herself and the community members as sinners, and as "colony of sinners," in addition to her blasphemous criticism when comparing her "sinful" community to the "holy" church, as perceived in the emphasis on the word "mine," in the quotation above. When Fruen addresses the verbal offences her community receives from the pastor, she is not only disregarding his opinions, and consequently the church's notion of what is "sinful," but she is also forming a resilient community able to face traditional values, and to ironically incorporate in her empowering discourse the same words the pastor uses to try to diminish them.

The exercise of motherhood in a fatherless community constitutes the central criticism in the depiction of this alternative micro-society led by a strong matriarchal figure, along with the communal education of children. In addition to the anti-marriage ideas, women's sexual desire is deeply encouraged by Fruen by criticising patriarchal attempts to tame women's sexual nature and to blame them for non-marital pregnancies. In the resolution of Fruen's relationship with the Poet, there is the establishment of the possibility of love and sexual desire out of wedlock. The deconstruction of gender roles in relation to the institution of marriage, and female sexual desire, so much developed in Egerton's *oeuvre*, appears as a guiding force from the beginning of "The Regeneration of Two" to its free-love advocating ending. Although she later develops feelings for the Poet, they are not explicitly romantic at first, as when observing him asleep, before they met, she feels "a hypnotised sensation" which is described as "purely physical" ("The Regeneration of Two" 175), signalling that Fruen's primal interest in him was sexually driven.

Along with this building of a community of women that fend for themselves and their children, comes the portrayal of working-class women, which is also one of the focuses of the cyborg imagery. “The Regeneration of Two” criticises British imperialism and the inequalities existent in society by both main characters. The Poet describes that he is tired of seeing “great monopolies eating away the substance of the people” (“The Regeneration of Two” 192), whereas Fruen’s community of working women stands as a criticism towards the marginalisation of working-class and independent women. This representation of working-class women can also be read through the cyborg imagery, which, in inveighing against capitalism, speaks of the “women in the integrated circuit,” and explores the “situation of women in a world so intimately restructured through the social relations of science and technology” (Haraway 2000, 304) and of how structures should be reworked within society in order to accommodate properly the presence of women in a technologically mediated working force, such as the reconfiguration of family, home, market, and school.

Besides the focus on gender, there are different approaches to work that appear in the comparison between Fruen’s life and her maid’s regarding issues of class. On the one hand, for Fruen, the heiress of her belated husband, work represents finding her purpose in life and the means to help other women. On the other hand, for the maid, a working-class woman, already placed in a marginalised social position, work is a necessity, and even though she provides for herself she still submits herself to marriage. Nonetheless, the environment of this community of women allows them to transform the purposes of work, which is carried out for the maintenance of the community itself—they live on what they produce. This invariably bears consequences in how they regard safety, independence, and motherhood. These aspects in the narrative demonstrate that Egerton’s attempts to criticise social norms go beyond gender issues, incorporating intersectional depictions of women’s experiences coupled with the economic system. Thus, Egerton’s writing also stands as cyborg writing in its formulation of subverted ideas for resistance, as well as in that it is a responsive writing to a variety of gendered oppressions, taking forward and at times even anticipating, although not its major focus, discussions on race and class. Fogarty draws attention to the “hybrid racial identities” of Egerton’s *New Woman* (2014, 149), and Jusová similarly exposes the depiction of liminal places of Egerton’s stories. According to Jusová,

[Egerton’s works] bring into contact (unexpected and uncontrolled) people of different classes, races, cultures, and sexes. The more typical Victorian obsession with purity and control of the contact between differences is replaced in Egerton with the promotion of intermixing and hybridization. Her women characters freely trespass the artificial boundaries and limits set by the social code in their socialization with prostitutes, maids, gypsies, homeless, and outcasts. (2000, 43)

These diverse aspects are translated in the construction of this community of women, where cyborgian concepts of political kinship, affinity, and coalition

are essential for the inclusion and acknowledgement of difference, primarily regarding gender, but also regarding differences among women, and their fractured, hybrid, and multi-layered identities.

Final remarks

Victorian hierarchised and standardised gender relations are deconstructed by Fruen's self-discovery and by the enlightenment of other women within the forming of her community. Thus, through her "regeneration," Fruen deviates from the norms of her society in order to put forward a reconfiguration that embraces women's experiences and that allows different women to act upon their own lives. What Egerton proposes as a regeneration of both male and female characters, which we previously referred to as the regenerative move from Part I to Part II in the story, we would like to call here "cyborgian epiphany," for two main reasons. First, because etymologically speaking, this expression embraces the blurring of lines between modernism and postmodernism by joining the postmodern cyborg imagery with aspects of epiphany; a narrative device key to the forming of modern literature. Second, due to the epiphany experienced by both Fruen and the Poet, brought forth in their awareness and realisations about themselves and their comprehension of the world, of their cyborgian selves, multifaceted lives, fragmented, and therefore disruptive existence, they thus experience a "regeneration" or a cyborgian epiphany. The experiencing of this cyborgian epiphany is the central point of subversion in "The Regeneration of Two," as it informs Egerton's progressive and intersectional analysis of gender relations and of women's writing in late 19th-century, which has proven to be revolutionary enough to be capable of dialoguing with recent symbols of feminism and other forms of progressive thinking such as the Cyborg Manifesto.

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