

Susanne Opfermann and Yvonne Roth, eds., *Stories* by Elizabeth Stoddard. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2003. xxxi + 238 pages.; ISBN 1-55553-562-3, paper, \$18.95; ISBN 1-55553-563-1, cloth, \$45.00.

More than one hundred years after her death in 1902, Elizabeth Stoddard finally seems to have found a sizeable audience and achieved the recognition as an author that she looked for during most of her adult life and that she most certainly deserves. Her ambitions and frustration can be compared to Herman Melville's, in that she stopped writing novels when the public failed to acknowledge their value by buying them. However, unlike many of his novels, hers were mostly favorably (even if scantily) reviewed when first published, and they were re-issued twice in her lifetime, but to no avail in terms of sales. It is not until the past twenty years that one of her novels (her first), *The Morgesons*, has reached a wider audience.

Stoddard worked in a number of different genres: she wrote a semi-monthly column for the San Francisco *Daily Alta California* 1854-1858, a periodical which later also included Mark Twain among its contributors, and in 1854 some of her poems were published in *Knickerbocker Magazine*. In 1859, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* printed a short story by Stoddard, which was the first of almost fifty short stories that she published in different periodicals over a period of more than three decades. Her three novels were written in the 1860s, and in 1874 she published an unusual children's book. In all her writings she challenges social and literary conventions. She pays very little attention to and shows absolutely no respect for the prevailing religious discourse and the ethics of sentimentalism, and, unlike many of her contemporaries, she questions rather than reinforces the nineteenth-century ideal of domesticity and true womanhood. In many instances her style is humorous, quirky, elliptical, and experimental.

Last year (2003) three books were published indicating that the interest in Stoddard's work will be sustained and that her writing will eventually take its rightful place in literary and literary history contexts, even though or perhaps rather *because* it upsets established categorizations of literary schools and periods. The three books are *American Culture, Canons, and the Case of Elizabeth Stoddard* edited by Robert McClure Smith and Ellen Weinauer – a collection of essays by American scholars covering a considerable part of Stoddard's writings; Regula Giovani's monograph *I Believe I Shall Die an Impenetrable Secret: The Writings of Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard*; and *Stories*, the volume under review, which includes sixteen short stories edited by Susanne Opfermann and Yvonne Roth. It is noteworthy that the writer of the monograph and the editors of the short-story collection are European, which together with earlier critical work on Stoddard in Europe shows that she has gained a strong foothold on this side of the Atlantic in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. For a transgressive American author, whose writings are filled with references to European literature, this connection can only be beneficial as, for instance, Opfermann and Roth's notes in *Stories* clearly demonstrate. Another case in point is the fact that Opfermann is currently working on a German translation of *The Morgesons*, which will make the novel accessible to even more readers.

The emphasis on *The Morgesons* in criticism on Elizabeth Stoddard's writings is a sign of how important it is that a text is in print and readily available to critics, university teachers and students, and readers in general. Lawrence Buell and Sandra A. Zagarell's invaluable scholarly 1984 edition of the novel – a volume that also includes the two short stories "Lermorne Versus Huell" and "Collected by a Valetudinarian" and some other shorter pieces of writing – introduced many readers to Stoddard, a writer who the editors rightly argue "belongs among the important American novelists."¹⁸ A Penguin Classics edition of *The Morgesons* made the novel available to a larger readership, but very few of Stoddard's other texts were and are in print. In 1990, two more short stories were reprinted: "The Chimneys" in *Legacy 7.2* and "The Prescription" in *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, Vol. 1.

Today, the situation is much improved for readers who would like to read Stoddard's short stories without having to scour the shelves of American university libraries. They can find eighteen of her stories, including the four mentioned above, in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, which is available on the Internet in Cornell University's electronic *Making of America Journal Collection*.¹⁹ Opfermann and Roth have included seven of the stories from *Harper's New Monthly*, five of which have not been reprinted earlier, among the sixteen in *Stories*. In this version, they are provided with notes that are indeed helpful to the modern reader, who would otherwise easily miss pertinent references and information. The remaining nine stories are from seven different periodicals, which is an indication of the scope and importance of Opfermann and Roth's collection. One of these stories, "A Summer Story," has not previously been listed among Stoddard's works. In their "Acknowledgements," the editors of *Stories* point out that "the process of selection ... was a difficult one," and having read through most of the short stories on James H. Matlack's check-list of Stoddard's works,²⁰ I am convinced that there are enough worthy candidates for a second collection. However, apart from the omission of "My Own Story," which Opfermann and Roth have left out for reasons of space but which definitely should be reprinted, I do not question their judicious selection on any grounds, although it would have been interesting to know more about the process of choosing the stories.

Opfermann and Roth have arranged the sixteen stories that represent the full range of Stoddard's "work in terms of tone, topic, and mode" (xx) in three thematic sections: "Geography and Character: New England Stories"; "'A Wonderful Promise of Misery': Stories of Love and Other Disappointments"; and "The De/Construction of Happy Endings." The presentation of these sections in the introduction is a piece of high-quality literary criticism in its own right and sorely needed, since there are only

18. Lawrence Buell, and Sandra A. Zagarell, eds., *The Morgesons and Other Writings, Published and Unpublished, by Elizabeth Stoddard* (Philadelphia, PE: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), xxiii.

19. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1850-1899). Cornell University's *Making of America Journal Collection*. <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/browse.html>. Accessed 16 January, 2004.

20 James H. Matlack. "The Literary Career of Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1967, 625-31.

two published essays to date that have discussed more than one of Stoddard's short stories.²¹ In contrast to Opfermann and Roth's discussion these two essays focus exclusively on stories from *Harper's New Monthly* (with the single exception of "My Own Story" from the *Atlantic Monthly*, which Timothy Morris includes in his discussion). In itself, the fact that the stories were published in *Harper's New Monthly* implies some limitations on subject and plot since, as the editors of *Stories* point out, the Harper brothers preferred a certain type of story for their periodicals: "love stories that end happily in marriage" (xxv). Opfermann and Roth state that "Stoddard consistently fulfilled the formulaic requirements of the typical romance, but she also expanded its range with variations of her own in terms of both plot and narrative strategy" (xxv). One variant in the collection is the "delayed happy ending," which Stoddard used to show "what it takes to build an egalitarian relationship" (xxv).

In addition to competently introducing and discussing the short stories in the collection, the introduction to *Stories* presents and contextualizes Stoddard's life and career in a knowledgeable and dynamic way. New readers of Stoddard are provided with a nuanced introduction to this fascinating author's life and work, and the relation between her writings and other authors and literary schools and contexts. Like me, Stoddard scholars may find nuggets of valuable new information: the inscription on her grave, the information that Elizabeth B. Leonard is most likely not a pseudonym for Elizabeth Stoddard, etc. In other words, it is a pleasure to recommend this significant, aesthetically pleasing and affordable volume to prospective and old admirers of a unique voice in American literature.

Maria Holmgren Troy

Karlstad University

Cornelis A. van Minnen & Sylvia Hilton, eds., *Nation on the Move: Mobility in U.S. History* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2002); 184 pages; ISBN 90 5383 839 2, £23.00; £29.50 paper.

Social or geographic mobility invokes strong ramifications in American history. Arguably, mobility, the abstract idea and actual reality, constitutes one of the most important and complex forces in the American experience reflecting ideological connotations of individual freedom and social equality so imbedded in American national conscience and mythology. Public notions that champion the freedom of movement as a mythic embodiment of the American psyche should be countered with scholarship of the harsh and complex realities of mobility. Slavery, conquest of Native

21. Timothy Morris, "Elizabeth Stoddard: An Examination of Her Work as Pivot Between Exploratory Fiction and the Modern Short Story," *American Women Short Story Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Julie Brown, ed. (New York, NY: Garland, 1995), 33-44; Jaime Osterman Alves, "Home Coming and Home Leaving: Interrogations of Domesticity in Elizabeth Stoddard's *Harper's Fiction*, 1859-1891," *American Culture, Canons, and the Case of Elizabeth Stoddard*, Robert McClure Smith and Ellen Weinauer, eds. (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 149-79.