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THE REINSCRIPTION AND QUALIFICATION
OF THE FEMININE IN ELIZABETH STODDARD'S
THE MORGESONS

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English Honors Thesis
Lawrence Buell, Advisor
April 21, 1989

"A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange
a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing.
All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling.
The difference is spreading."

Gertrude Stein²

When we come to literary works already installed within the canon, we come as visitors whose opinions have traditionally been of little value; in fact, our reactions are frequently predetermined, or assumed to be, by the reputations of the so-called Great Works. Often, when discussing "the canon" with friends less exposed to formal literary studies than I, it is necessary for me to provide a definition of *this term*. This is hardly surprising, given the somewhat amorphous nature of this conceptual institution. However, what is surprising is that many of these friends have never even heard it named before. My definition, then, is not acting as a clarification of a problematic term, but is instead the first explicit indicator these persons--persons exposed to the workings of the canon by virtue of their high school education, if not also during their undergraduate years--have of this powerful institution. It is as though those works most often taught are somehow *naturally* determined, *naturally* selected, and *naturally* labeled Literature. One of the most powerful aspects of the canon, then, is the extent to which it affects those of its prescribers who are unknowing perpetuators of certain traditions that really have nothing to do with *naturalness*.

What I'm getting at here is the power privileged texts have, by virtue of their manner of presentation, over their readership. Following from this, it becomes clear that reading a

canonized work is a categorically different experience than reading a work either outside of, or marginally a part of, the canon. When reading The Scarlet Letter, for instance, we are taught who Nathaniel Hawthorne is (a bizarre indicator of the work's greatness) and we are at least implicitly expected to see his representation of Puritan New England as somewhat historically accurate (an indicator of the work's importance). We may also be asked, though probably less frequently, if we like the work; but, even if we don't, it's still literature, it's still good for us, it's still what every *educated* person reads. The importance of its preservation has presumably already been established, and so we become mere *visitors* to the text; it is part of our cultural (and now, having read it, personal) history, instead of our becoming a functionary part of its history, a vital part of its perseverance.

When reading a work that is not canonized, however, we find ourselves more empowered. Such a work has not been guaranteed a future readership; it is not necessarily presumed to be historically accurate; and it lacks the intimidating power privileged texts possess. Instead, it is subject to a variety of responses and interpretations that will serve to chart its future course. Tempering this sense of readerly freedom with the fact that the canon, though now thrown into a revisionary existence³, still often perpetuates itself as a pragmatic and thorough institution, we see that it is quite difficult to introduce a previously ignored work into its scope.

My concern in this paper is primarily with Elizabeth Stoddard's The Morgesons, though I will close with a few observations about the canonization and exclusion of literary works. Stoddard's novel, published in 1862, holds great interest because, among other things, it is in the position of possibly attaining a wider readership, if not canonization, and yet its success is hardly assured. Independent of its particular fictive character, it is a rewarding and strange work to read because of this positioning. Its 1984 republishing, edited and with an introduction by Lawrence Buell and Sandra Zagarell, has been variously received, achieving a degree of success and suffering a degree of rejection; presently, it's selling fairly well but it's future is yet to be determined. Far from a privileged text, it is open to the kind of

criticism discussed above, where individual readers have a greater sense of empowerment. I am aware of placing too much emphasis on the power latent within canonized texts, for surely they too are often criticized (and are becoming moreso, thanks to revisionary practices), but their future is more certain than is that of The Morgesons. My primary point here is that the experience of reading the novel includes an implicit demand for a judgment of its literary merit. This sense of immediacy has to do with the very nature of canon revision, that installing a lost work requires more critical effort than maintaining a privileged work's place in literary history.

I have many reasons for writing this paper, but I clearly wouldn't engage in such a task if I didn't have some personal attraction to The Morgesons as a pleasurable reading experience, an important part of which is rediscovering its overlooked literary merit. Because of its unique character, which in many ways suggests a deep sense of struggle with its very own ambitions, it is deserving of the attention it has for so many years been denied.

In The Morgesons we find what I believe has been mistakenly referred to as a female *bildungsroman*; I'll consider why this label is a misnomer later in the paper, but for now this term might at least begin to hint at the novel's primary concern, the development of a female protagonist. What is most interesting about such a development is that it must occur within a society that assumes the development of a woman to be more an acquisition of place--usually, the domestic sphere occupied by a devoted (that is, self/ess) wife and mother--than a realization of identity or relative independence. So at the very outset of the book we see that Stoddard's intention is, in a sense, in direct opposition to the social assumptions of her day. This seems like a rather large statement, as I believe it is, but it is not *large* in the sense of a generalization, rather it is *large* in the sense of its implications for Stoddard's eventual success or failure. At present, she is being reconsidered, and it is through this new attention that the implications of her mid-19th century feminism are now being considered. More generally, it is through such present day reconsiderations of

previously lost works that we can come to understand some of the fallacies inherent in tendencies toward canonization.

Of greatest importance to my agenda, then, is the continuance of Elizabeth Stoddard's re-evaluation, but this is probably the most easily discerned of my intentions. More important is the necessity of providing a reading of The Morgesons that will present it as a work worthy of a greater readership. Ultimately I will suggest that the novel will most benefit by maintaining--or, perhaps more accurately, affirming-- its position as a partially canonized work. This suggestion has to do with my contention that the intimidation fully canonized works yield is somewhat counterproductive to criticism, and that though their privileged status may sometimes be deserved and desirable, from the standpoint of historical preservation, the impediment to pleasure such status often creates is not to be envied.

I would now like to say a few things about my methodology. One of the most innovative aspects of Stoddard's novel is, as James Matlack describes it, its "cragginess," its somewhat erratic pacing and temporal manipulation. I will return to this in more depth later; for now suffice it to say that, contrary to Matlack's view, that this "cragginess" is somehow a liability or a flaw, I see it as an imaginative narrative device. Of its many functions I shall discuss later, one of the most important is that it acts as a source of energy for the plot. As Stoddard's central character, Cassandra, moves through her *bildung*⁴, we are taken sometimes through three years in 50 pages, or through one year in 22 pages; and often a number of years pass between the close of one chapter and the opening of the next. In a sense we might even say that the novel is more a succession of episodes, each linked to the other (and sometimes the linkage is vague), rather than a traditional sequential tale of maturation. I have taken my lead from Stoddard in this respect, and it is my intention to set out a series of observations on various issues pertaining to my agenda and my overall interest in The Morgesons as both novel *and* as critical endeavor.

As I believe it to be of greatest importance in explaining Stoddard's exclusion that she was a woman, and as I believe the patriarchy of canon formulations to be the most operative

flaw in the construction of literary histories, most of my concerns at least touch on, if are not permeated by, gender issues. In particular, I am interested in the manner with which Ibsa Morgesons constructs--and critiques the construction of--gender. Cassandra is herself acutely aware of the differences in gender, especially as those differences are played out and affirmed by social structure. This awareness, it seems to me, is one of the novel's greatest strengths. As Sybil Weir notes, Elizabeth Stoddard is somewhat of a "latent modernist"⁶ in terms of her inclination toward analysis which often serves to punctuate the novel with moments of cynicism. As we shall see later, not only is Stoddard critical of the social structure (which, at least we would presume, is roughly equivalent to a refutation of the right to power of the patriarchy), she is also critical of how her fellow women act within that structure; it is important to note, however, that criticism and compassion are not mutually exclusive. Because there is a great deal of difference between a male and a female coming of age, and because those differences are so vast in our understanding of 19th century New England culture, I feel that the issues of gender so pervasive in the novel will be of great interest to late 20th century readers, who perhaps find themselves acutely aware of the degree to which genderization *is* a primary means of enculturation.

I. THE NOVEL

At that time The Morgesons was originally published, it was fairly well reviewed but didn't sell nearly as well as Elizabeth Stoddard had expected. At this time in American literary history, a great number of writers (and best-selling writers, at that) were women, many of whom Nathaniel Hawthorne subsumed under the derogatory heading, "thescribbling women." However, Stoddard, like Hawthorne, Balzac, Stowe, and the Brontes, sought to achieve a certain artistry in her writing. By this problematic (because inherently subjective) term I mean writing that is both stylistically sound and philosophically motivated. In a sense, this is where my argument for the re-evaluation of Stoddard gets its impetus: she sought to be remembered, she engaged herself as an artist and not as a literary marketeer, and, I believe,

she went beyond the conventions of her time to a significant extent and in an admirable fashion. Ironically, and sadly, it might be the case that her innovativeness was what kept her contemporary readership low.

Though, as noted, the novel was well reviewed in most American journals of criticism⁶, there was a certain ambivalence in many of the responses to the novel. As James Matlack notes, "The constant references to (Stoddard's) unusual 'genius' betray this uncertainty"(Matlack, 285). Her style was described by George Ripley, literary editor of the *New York Tribune*, as marked by an "uncommon terseness and piquancy" and as expressive through its "short transparent, incisive sentences, showing a masterly command of idiomatic English"(Matlack, 286). Clearly, these remarks as well as the general sense of critical discomfort with the novel show that it was not a standard piece of writing. And Stoddard was certainly not included in Hawthorne's condescending typology of authors mentioned above. In fact, he personally wrote her a letter of encouragement and praise, saying, among other things, "There are very few books of which I take the trouble to have an opinion on at all, or of which I could retain any memory so long after reading them, as I do of The Morgesons"(Matlack, 278). As the self-important tone of these comments indicates, this is not the idle praise of a mere contemporary; at this time, Hawthorne was among the most respected of authors. The reactions to her first novel, as well as her own deep attachment to it, would seem to indicate that she had achieved the degree of artistry she sought; and her contemporaries' comparisons of her to other celebrated authors--mostly male, of course--make her exclusion from American literary history all the more conspicuous.

Richard Stoddard, Elizabeth's husband, once wrote that the novel "was not intended to be a moral, or an immoral book, but just to paint life, which I think it does truly."⁷ Such an assertion--indeed, such an aspiration--forces certain problems to the forefront of our mind when considering the book at this point in history. Certainly, its depiction of New England life, whether or not we label it realism or romance, is not wholly flattering. The concept of the Deity of the Illicit (which lurks beneath the piety of post-puritan culture, according to

Cassandra), the corruption of moral clarity, and the insistence on the primacy of sexuality--all of which the novel concerns itself with--serve to mirror (if we agree with Richard) a society that may not have fancied its own image. Richard's seemingly mundane and harmless comment, which can be fairly accurately assumed to have its origin in the author herself, in fact carries beneath its surface a very dangerous implication. If the novel seeks to find an audience of realists rather than of romantics, as I believe it does, then it must also find within that readership a willingness to engage in and accept criticism. Stoddard's critical audience, the male critics then in control of structuring literary histories, clearly did have a difficult time with her representational realism.. In short, had the novel been seen, as it probably was by some, as a romance, as an American gothic image of contemporary values, it would not have represented the same threat to its necessary readership. At its very inception, then, it asserted itself strongly and all too threateningly.

In much feministic scholarship in general there is the contention, easily understood, that male critics often assume certain points in feminist writing, both fictive and critical, to be more vital than others. Certainly, this is no crime and is even somewhat necessary for any interpretation to exist. However, the potential problem with such interpretations is the fact that they often miss the point of a particular piece of writing and then continue on in an illusory dialogue. To clarify, I will add that I am talking about intended *primary* themes being overlooked in favor of *secondary* or even *subtextual* themes. This error or failing can occur in all interchanges of criticism to be sure, but my interest here is with a recurring pattern of male misinterpretation of--or, perhaps more accurately, misemphasis on--important concerns found in various forms of women's writing.

James Matlack, one of the first contemporary critics to find Stoddard's work in need of attention, falls prey to such an error in some of discussion of The Morgesons. Like many critics, he often places greater emphasis on stylistic concerns than he does on thematic and plot considerations. Though he ultimately praises the novel, his one serious criticism is that it loses its "realism" in the closing chapters, resulting in a "predictable" ending that causes

"the reader to regret that Elizabeth could not finish her work in the same splendidly realistic manner in which she began it"(Matlack, 294). His argument here focuses, first, on the rush of events that signal the close of the novel and, second, on her style which "tends to become rough for lack of smooth transitions"(Matlack, 293). The first component of his critique is thematic, the second stylistic. The problem, as related to my comments on male *misemphasis*, is in divorcing these two aspects of writing. Stoddard, as a "latent modernist," does not honor this division, and this is perhaps one of her most modernistic innovations. If her style is "rough," it is not for lack of smooth transitions but as an attempt at a mimesis of Cassandra's development. And if the rush of events in the last fifty pages is predictable, which I find hard to agree with anyway, it is certainly *unpredictable* in its sense of generic disarray. My discussion later of the ending--which is, perhaps ironically, where I see the novel most asserting its innovativeness and imagination--will grapple with the difficulty of comprehending the novel's final developments and its bizarre final words.

The problem with making too strong a delineation between theme and style is glaringly found in Matlack's work, as well as in many of the initial critiques of Stoddard's novel. After making this division, the next gesture, whether somehow *natural* or simply learned, is to value one over the other, and it is often the case in male criticism that style is elevated over theme. The implication of this gesture takes on special significance when considering a novel of female development, where the objective of the plot is to present a kind of psychological equilibrium or *fitness* within the protagonist. This is where male *misemphasis* most clearly devalues the very project Stoddard is engaged in.; by letting the critical focus of his writing shift from thematic issues to an obsession with craft (and, as I would have it, an all too narrow obsession at that), Matlack devalues Cassy's development and fails to see its reflection in the disjoinedness of the narrative and in the ensuing illusion of lost realism. Rather than seeing these "flaws" as possible signifiers related to theme, he writes them off as authorial inexperience. I, yet another male critic, hope to break with my unfortunate heritage and seek the resonances between content and form within Stoddard's work.

Bildungsromane and Woman's Fiction

In the sense that both seek to represent some sort of *bildung*, *bildungsromane* and Woman's Fictions have a great deal in common. However, gender roles figure prominently in any such development, though this observation has been made more often in considerations of Woman's Fictions than in considerations of *bildungsromane*. Sandra Zagarell provides one excellent reason for this differing level of attention to gender concerns:

The hero of a *Bildungsroman* can make choices and mistakes, but a heroine's education includes learning the constraints of her gender; she can grow only by adapting that education to her ends rather than being subdued by it.²⁹

This difference of what education means to the respective protagonists of the two related genres acts to delineate them. Though it is perhaps mistaken to say male protagonists have unlimited opportunity, it surely is true that they have a less circumscribed realm of possibilities than do their female counterparts. Lending credibility to this contention is that fact that most fiction falling under these two headings was written at a time when women had very little control over, or access to, the public life of their communities. In other words, the public/private distinction, as it manifests itself in gender roles (public/male;private/female), is often quite operative in fictions of development. In *The Morgesons*, this distinction—or opposition—exists, but it is, along with many other conventions, critiqued and, we may even agree, overturned or at seriously qualified.

I don't intend here to map out thorough definitions of Woman's Fiction and *bildungsroman*³⁰, but it is necessary to clarify a few of their respective traits, and, more important, to note some of the more problematic circumstances surrounding any usage of them in considering works of fiction. Jerome Buckley, in his *Season of Youth*, discusses many of the conventions of *bildungsromane*. He suggests that "childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and

a working philosophy--[answer] the requirements of the Bildungsroman..."¹⁰ Any novel that leaves out more than three of these does not belong to the genre. Nina Baym, in her Woman's Fiction, insists that works considered under *this* label meet the following criteria:

They are written by women, are addressed to women, and tell one particular story about women. They chronicle the "trials and triumphs" (as the subtitle of one example reads) of a heroine who, beset with hardships, finds within herself the qualities of intelligence, will, resourcefulness, and courage sufficient to overcome them.¹¹

Baym's definition stresses what's *within* the central character, whereas Buckley is more concerned with events and phases contributing to a final, developed character. One reason for this may be that a developed hero must always assume some public role, even if it is, as Stephen Dedalus' is, vague or unrealistic: "...to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race."¹² His obsession goes beyond himself, and emphasizes the public, his "race." A female counterpart--Cassandra Morgeson, for instance--would most likely not have such an inflated and pseudo-social culmination to her development.

Cass, we might even say, seeks no culmination, but rather wishes to understand (and then perhaps rename, we would hope) her "Nemesis," self-analysis. To do this, she of course must realize--or create--a self out of her circumstances.

It may be reductionist to view all male developmental fiction as ends-oriented--as the continuance of Stephen's tale in Ulysses would surely imply for my above example--but my point is that Woman's Fictions tend to have as their agenda the delivery of an equilibrious person, one who can act healthily in her environment while not necessarily be entirely satisfied with it; in other words, these works seek to create central figures with imagination *and* a certain strength of patience. The locale of such a "culmination" of character is almost always going to be the home, where life (as opposed to a public career) is lived. The home, after being recognized with this association of day to day life, is not an end, per se, but rather is a process. *Bildungsromane*, on the other hand, tend to be much more concerned with *culminating*, at least to some extent. While they share the same

need for delivering equilibrrious persons, they also have the imperative of creating social actors, characters who will perpetuate, among other things, the phenomenon of patriarchy begun by their predecessors. As such, we then see, the locale of their *culmination* is, for the most part, in the public arena; this holds true for professional men as well as for the forgers of consciences. The *bildung* achieved by the male and the female genres is of course bound to be spiritual, since it is, first and foremost, the creation of a self; but the space within which this self acts, or is expected to act, has a necessarily pervasive effect on the nature of the *bildung* itself.

Considering this, it is no surprise that the two forms, though akin in purpose and even somewhat in structure, have some significant differences. For instance, while The Morgesons may satisfy Buckley's above criteria, the experience of those elements of the developmental narrative are reinscribed as a reflection of Cass's gender. Her ordeal by love, which occurs, metaphorically, with Charles, must leave her untouched, or she will immediately suffer social ostracization. The very fact that it is metaphoric underscores this realization on Elizabeth Stoddard's part. Also, her self-education, in lieu of Zagarell's observation, is not the male luxury of wandering and adventure, but is instead the painful lesson of learned gender-based limitation. As Zagarell has noted elsewhere, "Cassandra's journey's are always by invitation or family decree, and they always confine her within other people's homes, circumstances which, though commonplace for women, would have been disastrous for Sir Walter Scott's Waverly or even Melville's Redburn"(Zagarell, 46). The point of noting the differences between the two genres is to understand better the effects of gender on the agenda of Woman's Fiction.

There is yet another problem, however, and it has to do with the inherent nature of the developmental novel as a generic, or recognized, form. No one work placed under this heading will satisfy all the critical criteria mapped out by Baym and Buckley. In fact, Woman's Fiction is an especially diverse--or, better yet, open--form. The very nature of its agenda, which must always take at least some of its impetus and action from the society it

is acted out within, affirms the impossibility of closure or rigidity of critical definition. Surely there are conventions--maturation, education, and a degree of adventure (often, intellectual adventure)--and there are recurring themes--money, domesticity, religion--but not all novels handle these elements in the same manner. Many works considered "developmental fictions" obeyed contemporary social opinions, but it is only through breakages with this conformity--with which The Morgesons is filled--that a particular work can come to assert *its* own identity; often, of course, this is done through the central character. Given this, and given Cassandra's strength *and* intelligence, we are able to see that the novel, aware as it is of the constraints placed on it, critiques itself, or at least critiques the genre it is most likely to be placed within. But, more important, it refuses these constraints to a large extent. Annis Pratt asserts the following:

In spite of the generic intent of the bildungsroman to trace a hero's progression from childhood into adulthood, the novel of development persists in mirroring a society in which such a progression is inappropriate for women. The young woman in modern society cannot "grow up": she must remain "one of the girls."¹³

Surely, The Morgesons does not meet this definition of a "female novel of development."

It is not enough to see the novel as critical of genre, however; it is also self-critical, which may explain James Matlack's dissatisfaction with the end. Prior to the end--in fact, prior to any event in the book--its self-criticism is manifested in the novel's very tone. Lawrence Buell writes that what is most "piquant" about Stoddard's narrative tone is

that its reserve ultimately forces us to reread its ironies not just as astringencies directed against Ben, Grandfather Warren, or provincial stupidity but as the self-recoil of a disenchanted mind that in retrospect perceives but stubbornly clings to its own dissatisfied self-constraint by striking a posture of ironic reserve.¹⁴

We again see the validity of Weir's comment on Stoddard's modernism; before her narrator even enters into the events of her story, the tone that is to shade those events mirrors the underlying tension of the spiritual *bildung*, restraint.

Theories of Feminine Personality

Nancy Chodorow, a sociologist and Women's Studies professor, asserts that "in any given society, feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does."¹⁵ Because of this, she further contends, women tend to have more "fluid ego boundaries" than do men; meaning, men are more individuated and less reliant upon others, both in terms of identity and in terms of acting. Also, she writes, "A kind of guilt that Western women express seems to grow out of and to reflect a lack of adequate self/other distinctions and a sense of inescapable embeddedness in relationships to others"(Chodorow, 58). The consequences of this have dangerous implications for a woman like Cass, who seeks not to tie her fate, nor have her fate tied, to others. If she allows her ego boundaries to become or remain fluid, she will not even achieve the mildest of *culminations* to her spiritual development. Instead, she will have an identity determined almost entirely by locale and circumstance, and scarcely at all by her own will to selfhood. Obviously, this is not the case with the story of her growth, but it does remain at the end, just as it functions throughout the novel, a threat that she must deal with.

The two characters perhaps most embodying and illustrating this threat are Veronica and Aunt Mercy. Their psyches are much more in line with Chodorow's paradigms. Mercy is her father's keeper, as well as one of the most devoutly religious characters in the book, and Veronica, who is in one sense the antithesis of her aunt, would not exist at all without the help of others. These two characters serve almost as a kind of bizarre set of poles around which the issues of dependence and weakness turn. Mercy needs to care for others in order to enact the ritual martyrdom that defines her character, and Verry needs others to care for her perpetual illnesses in order to maintain her bizarre sense of identity. Placing them in such roles, we are able to see just how *theoretically* unfeminine Cassandra is. It is a strange comment on the narrowness of conventional cultural notions of gender roles that she

must violate her own social femininity in order to become the person of will, the *woman of will*, her story takes as its task.

Aunt Mercy, as her name suggests, is in many ways the perfect 19th century vision of patience, forbearance, and selflessness. Early in the novel, Cass narrates that her aunt "had not paid us a visit in a long time, being confined at home with the care of her father, Grandfather Warren. She took charge of Veronica and me, if taking charge means a series of guerilla skirmishes on both sides."¹⁶ Even at the age of 13 Cassandra is aware of the serious deprivation of freedom; her use of the word "confined" is not to be taken lightly. The humor of the second comment, concerning the skirmishes, is typical of Cass's tone toward her aunt throughout the book. The implication is clear: she does not see herself as one in need of Mercy's care and attention. Her tone further gives us the sense that she views her aunt as a somewhat ridiculous person, perhaps even an absurd person; in other words, she has neither the capability nor the desire to understand Mercy's obsession with caring for others. It is interesting to recall that it is Mercy who suggests that Cassandra come to Barmouth; when narrating this, Cass notes that her aunt refers to her "non-improvement" in Surrey. Whereas it may be difficult to see Mercy as possessing fluid ego boundaries (her consistency in the novel would make such a claim difficult to substantiate), it is certainly true that her life is defined by, and consumed with, her attention to others' needs. If there is a fluidity emergent from this inclination it is in the direction of a sense of lost control over the condition of one's life. This is exactly the loss of control that Cass seeks to avoid. If we can agree that, among other things (such as religious sensibility and a narrowness of imagination), Mercy stands as a symbol of obsessive dependence, we see that her niece's method of dealing with this danger is quite impressive. Rather than falling prey to a sense of fear, and regarding her aunt as a threat, she patterns her reaction, one of near-flippancy, to undermine her aunt's inclinations. She toys with Mercy's self-view, as the serious and concerned observer, and by doing so cautiously informs her that she does not share a similar understanding the world of women. In a brief passage illustrative of Cass's

view of, and demeanor toward, her aunt, she notes that "Aunt Mercy had a spark of fun in her composition, which was not quite crushed out by her religious education"(26).

Veronica is perhaps most functional in the novel as a figure representative of what Cassandra must avoid. Unlike Verry, who remains at home and is often bed-ridden, Cass goes out into the world, even if it is by family decree or invitation. Her three trips serve, among other things, to present her as a dynamic figure who refuses to accept domestic passivity. This helps to explain the tension between the two sisters. Simply put, Cassandra has imagination and drive whereas her sister has only the most gothic, perverse, and masochistic of imaginations, and a drive, if any, that directly reflects this negative energy. In one of the many conflicts between them, we find a kind of metaphor for their differences. On the day of their mother's tea party, Cass returns home with a nest of mice she has found on a walk in the fields. Veronica, too, has found something, "a splendid balok butterfly, spotted with red and gold," but her object of affection has come to her through no real effort on her part: "God blew it in through the window," she tells Cass, "but it has not breathed yet"(18). So, we see that Cassandra's mice, which are alive, are *brought* into the house, while Verry's presumably dead butterfly merely *floats* into the house. Also, there is already an association between Veronica and religion, something we never find in Cassandra. Even the colors of the creature, we might say, have a certain relation to the church. However, their differences don't end here. When Cass tells her sister about her find, Verry immediately asks "Where is the mother?" Cass responds, somewhat surprised, "In the hayrick, I suppose, I left it there"(18). This unawareness with regard to the importance of family upsets Verry, and she proclaims, "I hate you... I would strike you, if it wasn't for this holy butterfly"(18). Again her physical passivity is evident and has an association with religion. This interaction underlines her "imbeddedness" in a way of thinking that assumes, and even insists on, the importance of the family unit. And, equally, it reveals Cass's independence, though it casts it in somewhat harsh terms. In order to get back at Cass, Verry steals the mice; then, in a fashion typical of their conflicts, Cass retaliates by

taking the butterfly (which Verry had placed in a Bible), crushing it in her hand, and showing it to her sister. Now, with the cruelty done, the two share a laugh when Verry tells her sister that she has placed the mice in one of the ladies' knitting bags. But, though the tension is broken for a moment, it returns when Cass tries to verbalize the unity perceived in the shared moment: "'I am sorry about the butterfly, Verry.' And I attempted to take her hand, but she pushed me away, and marched off whistling"(20). In a sense, then, it is Verry who seems first to recognize--or at least to sense--the impossibility of reconciliation between herself and Cassandra.

What is most bizarre about Veronica is that her *self* is most clearly enacted, and structured, through its reliance upon others. In light of Chodorow's discussion of the self/other distinction, we see that Verry makes little, if any, effort to stand alone or to define her *self* through strength or independence. Her illnesses most clearly show this indifference toward defining a life outside of either the home or the relations which make up the metaphoric home of the Morgesons in Surrey. Cass notes the effects of this on her mother:

There was a conflict in mother's mind respecting
Veronica. She did not love her as she loved me;
but strove the harder to fulfill her duty. When Verry
suffered long and mysterious illnesses, which made
her helpless for weeks, she watched her day and night,
but rarely caressed her.

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The "conflict" in Mary Morgeson is most likely a manifestation of her own duality of character. Certainly she is aware of the power and energy Cassandra possesses, which we know is a primary reason for sending her to Barmouth; however, her decision to do so is not without ambivalences. Similarly, she is aware of Veronica's condition, which has certain resonances with the gothic tradition of womanly weakness and physiological vulnerability. However, Stoddard deepens Verry's character by augmenting her feeble constitution with a rather assertive--or at least demanding, though inconsistent and undirected--psychological component. We see this augmentation in the scene just discussed and throughout especially

the early and middle sections of the novel; by its close, however, this assertiveness is replaced by a certain paranoia about being left alone in the world. Stoddard's elaboration of Veronica's potentially monolithic and highly conventional characterization is a result of her attempted realism. In the world of The Morgesons even weakness cannot assert itself as a strength; after all, it is Verry's dependency on others that keeps Mary Morgeson--and perhaps later Cass-- bound to "duty." By including scenes wherein Verry displays her psychological pettiness, Stoddard individualizes the character of the *unhealthy woman* and also manipulates her broadened characterization to function as a kind of representative warning to Cass and other motivated women that the dependency of ill health, and perhaps even illness itself, have psychological origins and consequences which manifest themselves in neurosis. This is hardly a landmark observation, especially in lieu of contemporary feminist re-evaluations of 19th century literature, but in this novel Verry's character is "educated by sickness," as Cass sees it; what I mean to suggest by noting this is that she completes an *education*, in nearly direct opposition to the one undertaken by her sister, that negates her capacity to be assertive. In other words, she is moving, as the term "education" suggests, through phases that culminate in her own self-dispossession, which, after her mother's death, leaves her filled with anxiety, albeit an anxiety itself incapable of intensity, about who will care for her, who, in effect, will be the *other* she needs to rely upon for a *self*. The culminating moment of this "education" comes when Mary Morgeson dies:

Veronica shed no tears, but sighed heavily. *Duty* sounded through her sighs. 'Verry, shall I take care of you? I think I can.' She shook her head; but presently she stretched her hands in search of my face, kissed it, and answered, 'Perhaps.'

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This, as I shall discuss later, is a crucial moment in the book; it represents the greatest threat to Cassandra's development, and to the possibility of her independence. As such, it is Verry's last, and greatest, assertion. However, before coming to understand the issues

involved, it will be beneficial to move through some of the other aspects of gender consideration within the novel.

Time

As noted earlier, an important part Elizabeth Stoddard's technique in The Morgesons is both the manipulation of narrative pacing and the disruptedness of movement from one episode to another. Thus, before we are even ten pages into the novel, three years pass by between the close of chapter two and the opening of chapter three. And, similarly, the number of events--Mary Morgeson's death, her husband's insolvency, his marriage to Alice Morgeson, Ben Somers' marriage to Veronica, and Cassandra's marriage to Desmond Somers, among many other things--in the final 50 pages of the books jumps up the narrative pacing a good deal. The effect of these manipulations of time is to rewrite the notion of chronology to satisfy the demands of Stoddard's agenda; that is, Cassandra's *bildung*. Annis Pratt suggests that developmental fictions of women are often characterized by a sense of alienation with respect both to time and space, and that, as a consequence, such works tend to be cyclical and often surreal in their depictions of the flow of events and the location--usually the domestic sphere--of those events.¹⁷ I think it would be a bit overblown to associate The Morgesons with this theory, but the consideration of time in fictions of development suggested by the theory is still important.

It would be difficult, at least structurally speaking, to make a case asserting the cyclicity of the novel's plot. In fact, this may be where it most obviously borrows from the *bildungsroman* archetype; Cassandra's development, excluding the last section of the novel, is centered around three separate journeys, which presentherincreasing maturity. There may be correlaries between the episodes, but there is scarcely the sense that she is enacting similar experiences in any sort of recurring pattern. If there is any sense of cyclicity in the novel it would best be located in those periods between episodes when Cass is at home. This use of patterning, if we consider it such, provides an interesting

comment on the home--usually associated with cyclicity in a positive way--where Cass is generally bored and restless; it would seem that she prefers the more paradigmatically male experience of lineality, though an important part of that experience, at least for us, is her feminine reinscription of it. In the sense of development, then, time is linear; meaning, it brings forth new experiences and new settings.

However, this is not to imply that each episode suggests a similar experience of the movement of time. Cassandra's narration is, to a large extent, a distillation of events she perceives relevant. Often, she lets time, and her narration, pass without making explicit how long she has been in particular place. In a few sentences, like the following, she clarifies the day-to-day schema of her life:

It was early June when I went to Rosville; it was now October. There was nothing more for me to discover there. My relations at home and at school were established, and it was probable that next year's plans were all settled.

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This resting place of sorts re-orientates us to the proceedings of her life, and allows for the novel--though "craggy," as Matlack would have it--to remain comprehensible. We should not, however, exclude summaries like the one above from Cassandra's experience. What I mean by this is that, though such summaries may appear as though they are outside of the text of events, they are, from our standpoint, within Cass's progression or development. For instance, the tone of the above passage is calm, mechanical, even somewhat bored; it is as though she has the possibility of actually knowing, as she says she does, that there is "nothing more for (her) to discover" about either herself or her environment. But, as the continued tension between her and Charles, as well as his eventual violent death, suggest, she has a great deal more to learn. A part of her *bildung* is a certain tendency toward a perception of boredom, and sometimes this perception is quite mistaken and even rather self-inflicted. The inclusion of her wrongful perceptions--especially when they reveal such a strong sense of self--become, for us, a part of her character. Returning to pacing, when

the narrative is thrown back into actual events, rather than ruminations on the past or on particular persons, it often moves quickly, noting only those details Cass finds relevant to her cause, to her story. It is the dialectic between reflection and action that holds the greatest imperative over the chronology of the text.

The importance of this dialectic, and its subsequent imperative, is that it often results in our removal from time, or, more likely, our ignorance of Cass's age. She resolves this ignorance from time to time by explicitly stating her age of course, but this only serves to underscore her manipulation of time. In a sense, it seems to me, her manipulation suggests a kind of indifference to time, or at least to the conventions of what a particular amount of time (or a particular age) mean. For instance, Cassandra is, at the time of her mother's death, approaching age when she *should* be getting married, if she is to satisfy social expectations. Yet she really has no plans of the sort. Significantly, her trip to Belem, which is nominally as a kind of envoy on behalf of Veronica (who wishes to marry Ben), occurs when her sister is 22, a conventional age for marriage at that time; once again, Verry is obeying convention, and this time, again significantly, with the assistance of her sister. Cassandra's *indifference* to time--which, in many ways, empowers her rather than, as Annis Pratt's theory of *alienation* would suggest, disempowers her--is an important part of her growth because it results in a form of patience that is necessary for her success. She is acutely aware of this, and in fact appears to learn it during her very first experience away from home. After describing the restrained nature of her existence in Barmouth, she informs us that her father, during his visits, would offer to take her for a ride to nearby Milford; however, she sadly confesses, "the motion of the carriage, and the conveying power of the horse, created such a fearful and realizing sense of escape, that I gave up riding with him"(42). This is not learned martyrdom, but is rather learned patience. It is during this visit to Grand'ther Warren and Aunt Merce that the young woman realizes both the necessity and the difficulty of her attempt to maintain her will. Significantly, it is just prior to returning home that she realizes she is beginning to take on a "womanly shape."

As Sandra Zagarell has suggested, a vital part of Cass's education--and one that begins to occur in Barmouth--is the recognition, understanding, and relative transcendence of gender-based limitation. Patience, as suggested through the flow of textual time, is a primary operative of such transcendence. Surely, *indifference to time and patience are not at root the same thing, but my contention is that a vital part of Cass's strength and intelligence of character is her ability to achieve an empowering degree of patience by virtue of her refusal to focus directly on temporality, as the narrative itself suggests.*

Marriage

In fictions concerning female protagonists marriage is often employed as a resting place or safe harbor from a difficult world of opportunity. As may be suspected, such a definition would hardly be adequate for Cassandra Morgeson. For her to achieve her *bildung* she must either remain single or, more likely, find a mate who is both loving and liberating, at least as liberating as any monogamous situation can allow for. We should also recognize that, for her, liberation is related to strength. If it true, as Sandra Zagarell believes, that Stoddard envisioned "kinship, marriage, property ownership, and inheritance as interlocking systems which disadvantaged women"(Zagarell, 46), then we see the importance of Cassandra's choice for a mate. Certainly, the young Cass would choose not to marry at all, as she states while living in Rosville. But upholding this decision would surely be a mistake, given that she knows of her love for Desmond in the final section of the novel, and given her extreme loneliness in part attributable to that love. She may be a woman of strong will, but a part of her education she cannot ignore (which we would best locate in the final section) is that her sense of longing cannot be mitigated by intellectualism or self-assertion; the recognition of this painful and complicated sense of selfhood comes at the close of the novel, when she accepts, at least implicitly, that longing is is a part of herself. The task then at hand, for our purposes, is to consider her approach to marriage,

whether or not it follows from, or is a detriment to, her strength and intelligence of character.

Ben Somers, whose love for and dependence upon Cassandra offer a potential threat to her growth, is exactly the kind of man that would ruin her. His "pedigree" as a Bellevue Pickersgill is that prestigious family's history of alcoholism, a disease, particularly at the time of Stoddard's writing, often associated with weakness. At the outset, Cass understands this weakness on his part, and it is clear that she is uninterested in him. At one point, when he is still attempting to court her, he asks her to "come away" with him. Her response, typical of her attitude toward his advances, is the following: "'Fool,' I answered; 'leave me alone, and go'"(109). This, in many ways, signals the end of his ill-fated courtship, though it doesn't conclude their interaction.

Ben travels to Surrey, where he meets Veronica. They are nearly perfect mirror images of one another, each being plagued by their respective weaknesses. It is for this reason, and because of Ben's attachment (a kind of assertive dependence) to Cass, that the two eventually get married. At one point, prior to their marriage, Alice Morgeson (a witness to Ben's foolish attempts to win Cass) says, "How strange it was that to him alone Veronica gave her hand when they met! Indeed, she gave him both her hands"(125). And, when asked about Ben's reaction, Alice says that he "took them, bowing over them, till I thought he wasn't coming up again"(125). Here we have a lasting image--really, a metaphor--of their mutual weakness. Cassandra, by refusing Ben, avoids a direct tie to his various maladies, but, as I shall consider later, she is still to suffer from his inability to govern his own life, much less the life of Veronica, who we may assume marries him out of spiritual weakness, as much as love. The important thing to remember, for our present purposes, is that Cassandra never falters in her refusal of Ben and the weakness of will he represents. Had she done so, and had she allowed herself to be trapped in a relationship with him, she, like so many undesirable gothic and romantic women figures, would have denied herself the possibility of a developed identity.

Desmond Somers, much unlike his brother, is a man of strength as well as intrigue, both of which make him appealing to Cassandra, and acceptable, from our standpoint, as a possible spouse. Like Charles Morgeson, who is really her first love (and first metaphorical lover), he is brooding and mysterious, a kind of Byronic hero, as some critics have pointed out.¹⁶ Unlike Charles, though, he isn't obsessively controlling. However, he too is plagued by the Bellevue Pickersgill "pedigree." Unlike the other men in his family (his father, we'll recall, is quite ill and spends much of his time in bed), Desmond recognizes his weakness and its negative effects. During Cass's visit to his family's home in Belem, the two begin their romance, though it is somewhat hampered by Cassandra's discomfort for the upperclass society and by Desmond's alcoholism. The greatest of the many indicators of their attraction is, for us, almost wholly textual. The scars from Cassandra's accident with Charles, which have the symbolic weight of a profound association with sexuality, attract Desmond's curiosity. Cass claims that she got them "in battle." To this he responds, "And women like you, pure, with no vice of blood, sometimes are tempted, struggle, and suffer"(183). Such dialogue of latent energy, both sexual and coyly intellectual, underlies many of their interactions. Whereas Ben was pompous and irritating to Cass, Desmond is anomalous and melancholic, as though his own self-perception was so acute as to be a kind of self-haunting--something akin, we'll recall, to Cassandra's "Nemesis."

Perhaps the single most important event of the visit to Belem occurs when Desmond bangs his head against the edge of a marble shelf. This incident takes place after he has of course been drinking and when the two are alone for a moment. After it occurs, Cass "involuntarily" closes the door to the parlor and awaits Mrs. Somers' return, signalled by her weight against the door. It would seem that Cass intuitively understands the linkages between Desmond's alcoholism and his mother's attempts at dominating him, of making him feel his weakness rather than perceive, and subsequently overcome, it. When Cass later comes to understand her feelings for Desmond, she locates the origin of this knowledge as their shared experience in the parlor, where, for a moment, Cass became his protector and

seemingly unconscious confidante. Later, just prior to leaving, she confesses her love for Desmond to, of all people, Ben. He of course condemns it, saying:

'If you marry Desmond Somers...you will contradict three lives,—yours, mine, and Veronica's. What beast was it that suggested this horrible discord? Have you so much passion that you cannot discern the future you offer yourself?'

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The "beast" he refers to may be alcoholism. If so, it would seem that he is suggesting that Desmond, in a drunken moment, has asked Cassandra to marry him. Given this wrongful assumption, we see that the lines more likely reflect on Ben than they do on his brother. Of course the future that Cass offer's herself, as a result of the conditions of this love, is far more desirable than Ben would ever be able to imagine. Cass doesn't declare her love to Desmond in Belem because that love, which is of course mutual, cannot be acted upon until Desmond becomes a more suitable mate. Though we know how she feels—and how he feels—there can be no explicit agreement between them until he has overcome his weakness. The importance of this, aside from its obvious function as a kind of trial of will, is that by structuring the narrative circumstances in this manner, Stoddard refuses one of the most damaging conventions of women's fictions, that of the marriage of salvation, where an alcoholic marries a woman he is sure will reform him; Cassandra obviously seeks no such role in marriage and must be assured of her future lover's responsibility for his own life.

The situation is even further problematized by the fact that Cassandra, if she is to continue on her course toward relative independence, cannot allow herself to be placed in a position where she is waiting—at least explicitly waiting—for Desmond's assertion of strength. This may account for the intensification of narrative events in the final section of the novel. By distracting Cassandra somewhat from her love for Desmond, and placing her in situations where she must reach within herself for strength and imagination, Stoddard allows for her to continue her development without an excessive reference to Desmond. Also, prior to leaving for Europe, where we assume he is to recover from his dependence on alcohol, Desmond sends a watch and a note to Cassandra. The notes reads

'I am yours, as I have been, since the night I asked
you 'How came those scars?' Did you guess that I read
your story? I go from you with one idea; I love you and
I *must* go. Brave woman! you have shamed me to death almost. ↵

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Rather than placing himself in the hands of this "brave woman," as his brother wishes to do, he instead allows himself, and his weakness, to be shamed and subsequently motivated by her strength of character. He *must* go in order to match that strength and prove himself worthy of the power it possesses. The gesture of sending the watch without any reference to when he will return suggests their reunion without making the narrative, and therefore Cassandra's continuing *bildung*, contingent upon it; in other words, the ambiguity of the gesture somewhat minimizes the waiting effect discussed above.

Desmond's triumphant return, just three pages before the novel ends, helps to restore Cass's sense of self-responsibility by freeing her to some extent from the servitude she has been experiencing due to the dependency of Ben and Veronica. Since it can hardly be argued that it does not serve the same function for Desmond, considering that it has been at the heart of his efforts to salvage himself from his heritage, any criticism of the reunion as a violation of Cass's development must address itself to both genders. Ultimately, I believe, their marriage serves them both, not as a retreat from selfhood, but as a source of comfort in the face of what Susan Harris calls the abyss, "a world that continues to threaten the existence even of those who defy it."²⁹ As such, then, we see that the novel couldn't really be said to be deeply critical of the institution of marriage, though it is quite critical of what it perceives as unhealthy marriages.

As an interesting sidenote, regarding Stoddard's somewhat conciliatory conventionalism with regard to this traditionally sacred institution, it is Alice Morgeson who more or less rescues Locke from his insolvency. This innovative rewriting of the common scenario of a woman being saved by a man shows a certain awareness, on Stoddard's part, of the potential dangers marriage holds for one such as Cassandra. And though it is noted that his own ships return in due time with enough profit to deliver him from debt--a plot element we might easily regard as authorial caution--still, he does remain for a time, as does the

entire Morgeson household in Surrey dependent on a woman. If Stoddard does play to marriage conventions of her time, it is with a bit of bravado and an attention to the unavoidable compromise, often denied by male authors (as well as by more conventional female authors), that marriage demands from both genders.

Sexuality

One of Stoddard's greatest innovations as an American fiction writer is the firmness of her refusal to deny her protagonist a sexual identity. Indeed, as Susan Harris contends, what makes The Morgesons unique in its approach to this issue "is its honest portrayal of women's sexuality and its insistence that among women's many responsibilities, responsibility for their sexual lives had to be confronted and accepted"(Harris, 18). This *confrontation and acceptance* is undertaken by Cassandra in the form of dealing with Charles Morgeson. His primary role in the novel is as a sort of sexual mentor for, and threat to, the young Cassandra. As Sybil Weir notes, "In her account of the battle for mastery between Cassandra and Charles, Stoddard uses Charles's only two interests--taming horses and growing flowers--symbolically"(fn, p.432). She suggests that the flowers represent their passionate attraction (the scenes involving flowers are usually gentle and suggestive of their mutual desire for one another) and that the horses connote images of mastery and struggle, especially given Cassandra's comparison, earlier in the novel, to an untrained horse. We should also note that these two symbols have traditionally feminine and masculine connotations, respectively. Stoddard therefore casts sexuality--its attractiveness and its danger--in terms related to both genders, and the association with danger is manifested primarily in the masculine symbol. Weir's account of Cassandra's sexual awakening in Rosville depicts a battle for mastery between the two, whereas I would argue that it is Charles who seeks to master Cass and that it therefore becomes imperative for her to overcome his attempts. Cassandra's *bildung* seeks to *culminate* in an

equilibrium between independence and love, as evidenced by, among other things, her concern for her mother and her inability to fathom her mother's character. Her path is not directed toward, nor motivated by, a desire to assert herself over others; this form of dependence, however empowering its effects may temporarily be, would threaten her ability to claim responsibility for only her life.

After several instances of heightening sexual tension--and two illnesses, both of which are associated with the implied fragility of flowers--Cassandra agrees to ride with Charles on one of his business trips to Faintown. Implying the possibility of an accident, and related to the metaphor I'm about to develop, Charles uses Aspen, his most spirited and least tamed horse, for their journey. The entire day has been overhung with the threat of a rain storm (we might easily find the sexual significance of the weather), so after attending to their business in Faintown, the two decide to head back to Rosville before it hits. Just two miles short of home, "a splashing rain fell." In an attempt to raise the top on the carriage, Charles loses control of Aspen, who "has some disorder," and they crash. This episode lends itself very easily to a reading that suggests a metaphorical consummation of Charles and Cassandra's relationship.²⁰ The rain imagery, the placement of the event after so much sexual tension and unconventional courtship, and the reliance upon the horse as a symbol make such a reading quite believable. Also, Cass's depiction of the horse in the midst of the event is, to put it mildly, suggestive:

...Aspen stopped, turned his head, and looked at us
with glazed eyes; flakes of foam flew from his mouth
over his mane. The flesh on his back contracted and
quivered.

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Given these indicators, a metaphoric reading seems appropriate.

As a metaphoric event--and even as merely an occurrence in the plot--the carriage accident provides some powerful notions of sexuality. As Weir notes, the carriage ride--the "denouement" of Cass and Charles' *romance*, as she sees it--is delayed until Cousin Bill attempts his hopeless courtship of Cassandra, a significant part of which is his failure to

control a horse and carriage. Charles' similar failure, which in fact results in his death, suggests that he, too, is no match for the energy Cass possesses. Certainly, he is a powerful and attractive figure, related to a tradition of heroic lovers found in the Brontes and, as has been noted, in Byron. However, as indicated by his indifference to Alice (who, in some ways, accepts her position as wife and mother without any significant revision or individualization of what those roles demand), his drive, though passionate, is to contain and limit. It is directly because of his failure to satisfy this drive that Aspen is able to bring an end to his life. And, again metaphorically, the event suggests that he also fails to contain or limit Cass, who, though associated with flowers in Charles' mind (he is always the one to bring them up, either through words or through gestures), is far from fragile. The effect this has, in terms of Stoddard's depiction of gender, is to reveal the inadequacy of any traditionally feminine symbolism when dealing with a multifaceted and resilient figure such as Cassandra. And, similarly, the effect of turning Charles' paradigmatically male symbol against him is to undermine the validity--and believability--of the primacy of male sexuality. If there is a "battle" of sexualities, as Weir suggests and as Cassandra herself alludes to in Belem, then it is primarily a battle of Charles' assertion over Cass' independence, and as such it is Cass, who seeks only self-preservation, who ultimately wins out.

Considering the *plot* event of the carriage accident, we might see that it is a necessary way of removing a dangerous impediment to Cass's future development and as a tidy way of resolving, from Stoddard's viewpoint as a writer during the mid-19th century, the potentially dangerous situation that a sexual affair between an 18 year old woman and her married cousin would present. If this is true--if Stoddard was considering the sensibilities of her Victorian audience--we find that her realism *still* refuses to be entirely circumscribed by likely audience reactions; after Charles' death is made clear, Cassandra still feels compelled to tell Alice that she hungers "now for the kiss he never gave me"(123). It is moments like this, where Cassandra asserts her unconventionality, that

contribute to the book's uniqueness, and also, we might easily see, to its exclusion from a more passive tradition of woman's fiction, where women's sexuality, if at all discussed, is generally cast in terms far more agreeable to patriarchal assumptions about women.

Related to this critique of masculinist representations of women--and, in particular, of women's sexuality--are certain male notions of women as aesthetic objects. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar address this issue in The Madwoman in the Attic, in which they argue that "women must kill the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves have been 'killed' into art."²¹ Traditional male representations of women, they explain, have stressed either extreme beauty and a kind of self/ess quality of kindness or extreme ugliness coupled with maliciousness; they refer to this complex as an "angel--monster" dichotomy. Of course neither archetype gets near to describing Cassandra, nor, we might feel, any other literary character of any depth of interest--that of course is Gilbert and Gubar's point. However, for our concern, which is to see how Cass deviates from certain male-defined paradigms, we will consider the concept of "angel." The greatest violence such a mode of characterization does to women, according to the two critics, is that it denies them a self: first, it does so by sketching them as self/ess, other-defined, as has been already discussed; and second, it denies them the "inconstancy" of a mortal life, where one's perception of individualization takes some of its impetus from recognizing one's responsibility for one's own mortality, one's own physiological limitations and idiosyncracies. This second deprivation has a clear association with the need to rewrite--or, perhaps better, destroy--the aesthetic ideal so many male-created female characters have been representative of. This means that mortal vulnerability, rather than being an indicator of women's weakness, should instead be presented (or re-presented) as the necessary condition of all human beings, male and female.

Stoddard, through her heroine, asserts exactly this kind of conceptualization of women and men as mortally vulnerable. And, interestingly enough, it is the man who is most vulnerable, at least in the instance of the carriage accident. Charles dies, whereas

Cassandra is merely scarred. It is through Cass's scarring that Stoddard is able to "kill" an aesthetic ideal under which so many women have suffered. Significantly, the scars later serve, in the fictive world of the novel, to intrigue Desmond Somers, rather than to turn him away from Cass. And in *our* association with the scars, as a recurrent motif of sexuality and recollected passion (albeit a somewhat threatening passion perhaps), we use them to understand--that is, create--Cass's character. In particular, we might consider them, as she does, as received "in battle"; as such, they remind us of her self-determination, a positive trait. We see then that Stoddard, through the inclusion of, even the *emphasis* upon, the scars anticipates a contemporary feminist critique of representations of women, and, in so doing, presents us with a figure of necessary inconstancy--that is, an individualized heroine, rather than an unrealistic embodiment of an aesthetic ideal. And, most important to the issue of unconventional depictions of female sexuality, much of this individualization relates to Cassandra's own awakening sense of a sexual identity.

Money and "the cult of domesticity"

Nina Baym, discussing one of the conventions often found in Woman's Fiction, writes that "Domesticity is set forth as a value scheme for ordering all of life, in competition with the ethos of money and exploitation that is perceived to prevail in American society"(Baym, 27). She also suggests that this ideological convention "assumes that men as well as women find greatest happiness and fulfillment in domestic relations, by which are meant not simply spouse and parent, but the whole network of human attachments based on love, support, and mutual responsibility"(Baym, 27). It must be understood, however, that this state of affairs, when it is found in Woman's Fiction, is self-consciously ideal, and that it offers itself in opposition to that other convention of the genre, the broken home or the cult of domestic misery. The realization of this more positive situation often acts as the denouement or culmination of plot in *some* examples of Woman's Fiction, but not in

all. The most important function of the convention is to decenter the importance of money, which is usually controlled by men, in favor of what's often called a contract of social love, a concept--stressing a form of love that is rational, responsible, and self-commanding--created by women and therefore empowering to women.

Elizabeth Stoddard, being the realist she is, refuses this idealized resolution. First of all, it would make little sense for Cassandra to adopt such an ideology of home considering that her character is shaped primarily through direct experiences, none of which would give her the capability to have faith in such an ideal. Of all the homes she acts or lives within, none correspond to the situation described by Baym. The two closest representatives are her own home in Surrey and Alice and Charles' home in Rosville. And given Locke's frequent business trips and Mary's pervasive melancholia, as well as Verry's continual demand for attention (a kind of self-love that works in direct opposition to social love), the home in Surrey hardly exemplifies any "cult of domesticity." As for the home in Rosville, Charles' indifference to his role as father and husband and Alice's obsessive manipulation of things reveal a lack of domestic bliss. And second, Cass is involved throughout the novel with breaking down distinctions or at least with redefining previously accepted paradigms and behavior patterns. It would not do for her--and, consequently, for Stoddard--simply to displace one conventional apparatus (money and financial matters, for example) with another (the home as ideal locale, as symbol of social love).

Instead, through Cassandra the novel blurs various distinctions. It does this as a result of its agenda--the presentation of a dynamic and "inconstant" self--and because of its attempted realism, though clearly these two things are inextricably linked. Cassandra enters into the world of business and money when she goes on a trip to Milford with her father. Before giving her money, Locke says

'Be Prudent... I am not so rich as people think me.
Although the *Locke Morgeson* was insured, she was a loss.
But you need not speak of this to your mother. I never
worry her with my business cares. As for Veronica, she

has not the least idea of the value of money, or care
for what it represents.' ← 136

Here we see a clear distinction between Cassandra and her mother and sister. She is allowed in on the "business cares" of her father, suggesting that he sees her as being either more intelligent or at least stronger than the other women in the immediate Morgeson family.

During the Milford trip, which we can assume is related to business, the two have a conversation in which Locke acknowledges how little he understands the "undercurrent" of his family's lives. Often, their conversation in the novel takes on this tone of confessional friendship, something we never see between Locke and Mary. Anyway, on the subject of his frequent trips between Milford and Surrey, Cass says, "I will go with you often"(138). In other words, she is to accompany him on some of his business outings, which again puts her in a position most women, especially most young women, would never experience in the mid-19th century. In a very certain sense, she is, as Locke's daughter and therefore a part of his private life, blurring the distinctions between his public and private life. And, in the process, she is redefining the traditional spheres of activity for women of her time. Through these trips, Stoddard presents Cass with a privileged access to "business cares" by virtue of the strength and intelligence of character she possesses.

Another female character, Alice Morgeson, also engages in rewriting the accepted spheres of influence for women; in fact, she somewhat self-consciously rewrites her own character in order to do so. After Charles' death she decides to manage their mills herself. She then defends herself to a skeptical Cassandra, saying, "I can. No wonder you look astonished...I am changed. When perhaps I should feel that I have done with life, I am eager to begin it. I have lamented over myself lately"(125). This "perhaps" is an important indicator, since it informs us that her new self-conception has had to forge itself in opposition to the sense of duty she has been plagued by as a mother and wife whose selflessness was debilitating. In terms of Baym's discussion of "the cult of

domesticity," Alice seems to have abandoned this ideal in favor of a life of action within existent, if deeply problematic, power structures.

Locke's insolency provides the greatest indication of Stoddard's refusal of gender-based assumptions regarding both men and women. In an interesting comment on Cass's own difficulty with fathoming the inadequacy of these assumptions, Stoddard presents her to us through the illusion of her own narration, which reads:

Finding time to look into myself, I perceived a change
in my estimation of father; a vague impression of weakness
in him troubled me. I also discovered that I had lost
my atmosphere. My life was coarse, hard, colorless!
I lived in an insignificant country village; I was poor.

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This Cassandra regrets the passing of comfort, and, furthermore, she understands her father's role in procuring that comfort. Rather than presenting her as some sort of ideal of understanding, Stoddard gives her character a sense of realism by making her the victim of her own bourgeois inclinations and expectations. Her father's weakness *troubles* her because it *limits* her possibilities. This suggests (and explains) the difficulty individuals have with surpassing or questioning gender roles. Even a figure such as Cass, who rejects and revises so many cultural assumptions, is herself subject to this difficulty as a person who desires the least circumscribed life she can acquire.

However, Cassandra is not to live this life of poverty for long. As noted, Alice and Locke get married and Locke gets out of debt by his own efforts and by "eking out what he lacked himself with the property of Alice"(248). Alice rescues him from his indebtedness and restores the home in Surrey, Cass's inherited dwelling place, to the Morgeson family. This narrative gesture, which we've already discussed from the standpoint of marriage conventions, certainly goes far beyond the associations women were perceived to have with the world of money, and as such acts as a fairly thorough rejection of the validity of gender-based assumptions.

Accompanying, or as a result of, Locke's insolvency is a blurring of public and private distinctions, as well as this refutation of the primacy of male business acumen and independence. Cassandra writes that their "house was thronged for days" by "the female portion" of her father's creditors. The significance of this is that his public failure results in a violation of private space--in particular, the domestic locale. Even more significant is the fact that Cass notes first the presence of *female* creditors (that is, once again, women with financial interests), though she does imply afterward that the largest creditors are male. These male creditors devise a plan that turns Locke's business life into a wholly public spectacle; Cass informs us that an arrangement was made

by which his property was left in his hands for three years, to arrange for the benefit of his creditors. The arrangement proved that his integrity was not suspected; but it was an ingenious punishment, that he should keep in sight, improve, or change, for others, what had been his own.

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This represents, then, a final resistance to the presumed boundaries between public and private. Locke's business affairs, which have until now only been carried out in public, are now divested of any private right he might previously have had to them, and are subject to the inquiry of his creditors.

We can fairly safely assume that his marriage to Alice, which the extended Morgeson family condemns, rescues him from this "punishment." If we do so, however, we see that one distinction, that between public and private, is upheld or restored by the implied refutation of another distinction, that of business as male and home as female, since it is Alice's financial stability which restores the Surrey home fully to the Morgeson family. The result of these plot developments is to refuse traditional associations of gender with agency and capability. The reality Stoddard creates for the Morgeson family demands that these associations--really, assumptions of limitation--be undermined and revealed as *situational* much moreso than *natural*.

The problematics of the end

Both James Matlack and Sandra Zagarell have criticized the ending of *The Morgesons* as being somewhat contrived. Matlack's primary difficulty is with what he perceives as Stoddard's hapless borrowing of provincial gothic conventions, most notably the use of dreamt prophecy (Verry's vision of Desmond on the eve of her own wedding) and of the reformed alcoholic (Desmond). Zagarell's criticism is more focused, suggesting that "[women] like Cassandra can prevail only because of the energetic good offices of their authors, and they are far from likely to exist except in fiction" (Zagarell, 54). Both criticisms center on the realism, or lack of realism, in the novel's final section, which I locate as beginning just after Cass's return from Belem and continuing to the close of the novel. It is my contention that the novel does not disintegrate into a kind of gothic narrative landscape, but rather that it shifts into a deeply cynical and critical mode befitting its problematic agenda, to present a female protagonist as capable of striking a balance between responsibility to herself and responsibility to others.

Stylistically, the novel undergoes a change in this final section that is quite obvious, though difficult to label in terms of genre. It is perhaps simplest and most beneficial to say that it moves from a developmental fiction (consisting of three clearly discernable episodes) to a blending of *fiction of misery* and provincial gothic. What the novel as a whole shares in terms of genre, at least in my estimation, is a commitment to representational realism. What most clearly comes across in the last section is a darkening of tone, a stylistic device that has a reflection—or perhaps an origin—in the turn of events, most of which are troubling and riddled with anxiety. Our greatest anxiety, it seems to me, is whether or not Cass is going to be able to preserve her developing identity. Lawrence Buell's comments on provincial gothic point to the depth of this anxiety: "At the heart of the provincial vision is always the intimation that it is less than what is capable of being envisioned. Of that intimation, provincial gothic is the most conspicuous

mark"(Buell, 370). Stoddard's move toward this genre--and, by association, toward its sensibility of loss or defeat--throws her protagonist into a disturbing narrative light. Also related to this ideal of the defeatist intimation of the gothic genre, Buell notes a certain tendency in New England post-puritan fiction toward a "vision of decay" which emphasizes loss. What remains to be seen in Stoddard's novel--and what is played out in its quirky final section--is whether this sense of decay and loss will, if present, be turned against historical patriarchal attitudes or against Cassandra's own *bildung*; given Buell's observation about the self-critical irony of narrative tone in the novel, it is not surprising that Stoddard has further problematized her--and her protagonist's--work. Her critical inclinations, which are what deepen the novel, are often a source of growth, albeit painful growth, for Cassandra.

Because of Mary Morgeson's death--and the ensuing disruption of the family unit, culminating in Locke's insolvency and subsequent marriage to Alice--Cassandra comes in this final section, as noted in particular by Zagarelli and Buell, to inherit her mother's place in the Morgeson's Surrey household. This inheritance--which in some ways is a positive indication of her ability to possess, a form of control generally assumed by men in this epoch--threatens the culmination of her *bildung* by saddling her with a number of significant responsibilities. As we have seen throughout the novel, caring for Veronica is an integral part of maintaining the Surrey home, and her eventual marriage to Ben will only compound the sense of suffocation Cass feels by then having to care for not one, but two, hopelessly weak persons. There are plenty of indications within the text that Ben's interest in Verry is really the result of his desire to be near to, and to be cared for by, Cassandra. His plan is somehow to buy the family's home (since Locke is insolvent) and then have Verry, Cass, and himself live there. Beyond this, he fantasizes outright that he and Cass will pass afternoons together on the sea, reliving the romanticized explorations of the vikings. It's of course clear that Cass doesn't share his enthusiasm for such diversions. Veronica's position is made clear when she tells her sister, "You must never, never go. You cannot

leave me, Cass!"(228) An important indicator of Cassandra's understanding of the combined weaknesses of the two comes just after their marriage, when we can assume they are to consummate their bond; after brushing aside Verry's reluctance, she watches her sister enter the room where Ben is and thinks to herself "Which will rule?"(243)

Cassandra's attempts to respond to her troublesome new situation are in part the result of her ruminations on her mother just after the funeral. Primarily her emphasis is on her mother's mysterious *character*, as indicated in the following:

The unthought-of result of mother's death--disorganization, began to show itself. The individuality which had kept the weakness and faults of our family life in abeyance must have been powerful; and I had never recognized it. I attempted to analyze this influence, so strong, yet so invisibly produced. I thought of her mildness, her dreamy habits, her indifference, and her incapacity of comprehending natures unlike her own. Would endowment of character explain it--that faculty which we could not change, give, or take? Character was a mysterious and indestructible fact, and a fact that I had little respect for.

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I quote this rather lengthy passage because it holds great value for our efforts to understand the bizarre change within Cassandra. Like her mother, she too has difficulty understanding natures unlike her own; indeed, she even faults herself for not recognizing her mother's *individuality*, an interesting term for her to use, considering some of my earlier observations about formulations of self. What seems to occur here is that Cass's desire to comprehend and relate to her mother causes her to assume a value in her mother's *selflessness* that she simply cannot share. She confuses an attempt to fathom her mother's character with an assimilation of what she considers that character's values and operatives to be, all the while dismissing the fact of her mother's unfulfilling life and lonely death. The final section, then, functions to deny her her own character or self until that self asserts itself once again when she realizes the power of her love for Desmond, a love both *for* herself and directed *toward* another. In a very real sense she confuses her effort to overcome "her incapacity of comprehending natures unlike her own" with an effort to live or

assimilate such a nature; specifically, she attempts to assume both her mother's position, which is more or less thrust upon her, and her mother's psychological orientation toward that position, an orientation, the narrative suggests, that is far from the equilibrious state Cassandra's *bildung* anticipates.

The symbol of the sea—which has often been a source of strength for Cassandra, though it also holds a certain powerful mystery for her²²—becomes decidedly overpowering in its association with her senses during a walk just prior to her thoughts about her mother's character:

'Have then at life!' my senses cried. 'We will possess
its longing silence, rifle its waiting beauty. We will
rise up in its light and warmth, and cry, 'Come, for we wait.'
Its roar, its beauty, its madness—we will have--*all*.'

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This passage finds Cass somewhat exalting in the strength of her sensuality, and yet it is just after these lines, when she returns home, that she begins to shape her life out of a newly recognized sense of *duty* to her family, a duty that demands, in her eyes, self-restraint. The assertion of her sensual being implies that she is to fail in her attempts to extricate, in effect, herself from her daily life. Merce, who epitomizes self-restraint (nearly, self-denial) for much of the novel, asks her niece point blank: "Oh, Cassandra, can you give up *yourself*?"(215). Her response is "I must, I suppose"(215).

Leaving the common spaces of the house, she retires to her room "in an irritable frame of mind, convinced that such would be [her]condition each day"(217). She soothes herself by tidying her room, part of which involves an act of great significance: "The box with Desmond's flowers I threw into the fire, without opening it, ribbon and all, for I could not endure the sight of them"(217). This is her attempt to rid herself of an attachment of *love*, not *duty*. In the culmination of this transition, she tells Veronica, "An idea of responsibility has come to me--what plain people call Duty"(219). She then asks her sister, who admits not feeling this sense of duty, to help her, for she has "contrary desires." Having done this, she then takes verbal control of the home, saying, "We have been shut off

from the world by the gate of Death; but we must come back"(219). Acknowledging the pain her new position will cause her, she notes that "The silent and serene currents which flow from souls like Veronica's and Ben's, whose genius is not of the heart, refuse to enter a nature so turbulent as mine"(219). We see, then, that though she is attempting to control her "nature," she is still aware of its strength, a strength that she associates, perhaps unconsciously, with her newly discovered sense of the turbulence of the sea, which has been storming throughout this entire transition. Aside from certain obvious associations the sea may have here with sexuality, it also seems to function as an indicator of *Cassandra's* own inner-restlessness

What most suggests that Cass is bound to fail in her attempt at "Duty," a term used consistently throughout the novel to connote self-denial and not merely responsibility, is her awareness and consideration of her feelings about this perceived necessary change. She has really made no steps toward any real loss of consciousness. What I'm asserting, paradoxically enough, is that it is exactly her undeniable sense of *self* that controls or demands her decision to be *dutiful*; in other words, her *self-assertion* is to be *self-less*, and as such she is bound to fail at the latter. Her "idea of responsibility" is just *that*, an act of reasoning empowered by her "genius" of the heart, by her post-mortem feelings of attachment to her mother. As she herself admits, she tends towards extremes, and this latest extreme willed transition of character is bound to be tempered by experience.

For the most part, until about the last ten pages of the book, she succeeds, at least behaviorally, in her efforts to be dutiful. She restores the house to some semblance of order (part of which involves a sort of financial management Mary Morgeson never engaged in), cares for Verry and Ben, and even helps to oversee their wedding, an event disclosed but not described by the narrative; in other words, it is a kind of non-event except in terms of its symbolic importance as a union of weaknesses. However, Cassandra still feels the pain of her new lot, and she is incapable of divorcing it from the narrative--or, from our standpoint, her *bildung*. On the subject of Ben's manipulative dependency, she thinks

'Ben is a good man; but for all that, I feel like blind Sampson just now. Could I lay my hands on the pillars which supported the temple he has built, I would wrench them from their foundation and surprise him by toppling the roof on his head.'

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This powerful biblical allusion hints at the depth of her resentment for her new position and for those--in particular, Ben--who have necessitated it. We know that throughout her development, even at the very beginning of the novel, she has been critical of religious belief. For her it is a threat to self-possession. In the story of Sampson we see just how deeply a religious orientation--or, more accurately, a dutiful commitment to a religious cause--threatens one's ability to maintain even a physiological self. By invoking this image of self-destruction--and through its negative connotations with something so threatening as religion is to Cassandra's profoundly secular, if not anti-religious, character--we again see her undeniable sense of self and her awareness of, and resentment toward, her suffering.

Following this renewed implicit awareness of her identity, Cass again declares her love for Desmond to Ben: "Can you remember that Desmond and I influence each other to act alike? And that we comprehend each other without collision? I love him, as a mature woman may love..."(226). Following this confrontation, Desmond begins to figure more prominently in her thoughts. Also adding to this is his note declaring his intention to defeat his alcoholism and the implication of reunion associated with his gesture of sending Cass a watch. To some extent, we see that the hope of a reunion with Desmond acts as means of maintaining Cass's self-possession. In some respects, this may seem itself a threat to her independence, but, as implied earlier, she too acts as means of maintaining--or regaining, as his eventual victory over alcoholism insures--his positive identity. Their mutual dependence, which acts to save them from threatening personal drives, is the healthy counterbalance to a life of isolated independence. Equilibrium, not disavowal of attachment, is what Cass's *bildung* aspires toward.

Just ten pages before the novel closes, Cass acknowledges the failure--or perhaps impossibility--of her attempt to be purely other-responsible:

I looked across the bay from my window. 'The snow is making 'Pawshee's Land' white again, and I remain this year the same. No change, no growth or development! The fulfillment of duty avails me nothing; and self-discipline has passed the necessary point.'

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Her explicit attention to whether or not she's changing, and her conclusion that her static role has passed "the necessary point" indicate that her development has not truly suffered from her decision to accept her inheritance of the Morgeson household in Surrency. Also, we note that this significant passage of self-analysis (certainly not her "Nemesis" any longer) includes, is even begun by, a reference to the sea; Stoddard switches the weight of the symbol once again, this time in Cassandra's favor. Her heroine continues:

I struck the sash with my closed hand, for I would now give my life a new direction, and it was fettered. But I would be resolute, and break the fetters; had I not endured a 'mute case' long enough?

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This conditional recognition of desire and her vow to act out of desire follow her intellectual refusal of her failed self-negation. Still, without Desmond and without another place for her to dwell, her ability to break her fetters is severely limited.

As not to make her too dependent on Desmond, whose arrival is significantly unforeshadowed and unannounced, Stoddard must allow Cassandra a sense of self-possession contingent only upon her own feelings. This occurs when Ben and Verry move to their own house, allowing Cass to regain "an absolute sense of self-possession, and a sense of occupation [she] had long been a stranger to"(248). However, this "ownership" *oppresses* her because there is "so much liberty to realize"(248). What this seems to suggest is that, while she cannot endure the fetters of selfless duty, she similarly perceives a sense of dissatisfaction with her solitary life.

The "yawning empty void" within her is described just prior to Desmond's triumphant return. It is perhaps significant that this void is never explicitly associated with a direct longing for him, though such is certainly implied. The importance of this unconsciousness of desire--which is most obvious in the "frantic longing" she feels when looking at the elements of nature interacting just lines before Desmond returns--is that it allows her to sustain a greater sense of self-possession than if she continually plagued herself with thoughts of her lover. Thematically, the implied universality of longing associated with nature suggests that Cassandra's sexuality persists with or without an actual figure in which to locate the culmination of her drives; in other words, once again Stoddard maintains that sexuality is a natural sensation, though its manifestations are culturally experienced.

The novel's final optimistic and cynical narrative shifts occur in direct succession and provide it more with a feeling of dropping off than of ending or completion. As Buell has written, the situation of the end suggests "a new cycle--not a new era"(Buell, 358). After a brief foray into describing the joy of their reunion--the most striking example of which is her noting of "a mortal paleness" overspreading Desmond's face²³--Cass dispenses with the details of her life in just a few lines. After noting a brief trip to Belem, she continues: "In a short time after we were married we went to Europe and stayed two years"(p.252). The significance of her narrative curtness is that it maintains the integrity of Stoddard's intention, to deliver her heroine, to the greatest extent possible, from the crippling dependence that many of the women *and* men in novel suffer from. She is not interested, nor are we, in a detailed account of Desmond and Cassandra's life. Either we accept it as desirable (Stoddard is not interested in presenting it as necessarily ideal), based on the many textual indicators that would suggest that it is, or we reject it as a conventional usage of the marriage denouement found in so many stories of women's lives, especially at the time of Stoddard's writing.

Our greatest indicator of Cassandra's successful creation of identity is that fact that she self-consciously locates herself, as both narrator and character, just before the novel ends:

These last words I write in the summer time at our house in Surrey, for Desmond likes to be here at this season, and I write in my old chamber. Before its window rolls the blue summer sea. Its beauty wears a relentless aspect to me now; its eternal monotone expresses no pity, no compassion.

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This final association with the sea, coming as it does right after she takes explicit responsibility for her story, holds great significance. It is as though she has conquered-- or at least overcome--the power of her own symbol. This resolution, it should be noted, is a kind of indifference or acquired independence from the sea, though she is still aware of its beauty.

As not to negate the value of cynicism, which acts as a mode of critical analysis in the novel, Stoddard places one final juxtaposition of pessimism beside Cass's optimistic remarks. The final event recounted, and the one within which Cass and Desmond last function, is Ben's death due to a disease associated with his alcoholism. Further compounding the sorrow of the close is the fact that Veronica and Ben's baby is the unfortunate heir of their combined weaknesses. At one year old, "[it] smiles continually, but never cries, never moves, except when it is moved"(252). It is the incarnation of their passivity, and as such functions as a powerful final symbol of failed self-possession.

When considering the implications of Desmonds bizarre final words--"God is the ruler," he said at last. 'Otherwise let this mad world crush us now'"(253)--Susan Harris suggests that

Unlike the happy endings of most women's novels, at the end of The Morgesons the heroine discovers that this mad world of disintegrating families, fluctuating fortunes, and self-destructive personalities, only the woman who can cling to her selfhood despite the criticism self-possession draws will survive the pitiless universe where neither history, religion, nor family unity can impose order on the forces of destruction.

Harris, 21

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For her, Desmond's plea is "a cry of anguish rather than an affirmation of belief, and the 'mad world' that he calls God to rule has already crushed those who could not summon strength to withstand it"(Harris, 21). The final tone of the novel, then, is sorrowful, and the final "plea" is a kind of lamentation of loss. Also, we might note that Desmond's last words call up an image similar to the one imagined by Cassandra at her mother's funeral, where she wished for the sky "to drop and blot out the vague nothings under it"(212). The two separate references to similar visions of obliteration serve, ironically enough, to link Desmond and Cassandra together. Their strength is in understanding the threat posed by the "mad world," and in understanding the importance of their respective *selfhoods* as a means by which to withstand Harris' abyss.

However, aside from the important linkage suggested by the similar invocations of destructive force found in Desmond's final words and Cassandra's thoughts at her mother's funeral, there is the possibility that the final words are intended to cast doubt on the ultimate success of Cassandra's *bildung*. It could be that, in one final unexpected implication of self-doubt, Stoddard closes the novel--with words again spoken, just as the opening words are, by a character other than Cassandra--and demands a conviction on our part as to whether or not the agenda of the novel has been realized. Such potential self-criticism seems quite feasible given Stoddard's inclination toward realism and the fact that offering any sort of monolithic *culmination* to Cass's development would encourage an undesirably didactic approach to the novel.

II. CANONIZATION

My experience of The Morgesons has provided me with an inroad into questions of canonicity. My attraction to the novel, and my belief that it is truly deserving of a much greater readership, have stirred within me a concern about how the construction of literary

histories--that is, canonization--functions and with what historical biases. It is not here my intention to probe the depths of this concern, but I do feel it is appropriate to my task to close with a few observations related to Elizabeth Stoddard's exclusion from American literary history.

Michelle Rosaldo, a social anthropologist, contends that "[an] asymmetry in the cultural evaluations of male and female, in the importance assigned to men and women, appears to be universal."²⁴ She develops this point to provide an argument that since men are generally in control of the institutions determining cultures, they are also in control of leveling so-called cultural value on certain created forms and on certain instances of those forms. Surely this gender asymmetry has been at work in the construction of American literary history; indeed, it is at the core of all canonizations of the past, and this core is not easy to revise. The very fact that Stoddard takes as her subject a young woman immediately makes her all the more likely to be forgotten, as time has shown. The implication provided by traditions of canonicity is that the experience of a woman, and therefore the author of that experience, is not as valuable, culturally speaking, as is the experience of a man, and subsequently the *author* of that experience. Such thinking is of course now more than outmoded, given, among other things, that women are now recognized as creators of culture as well as creators (co-creators, we would seem to have only recently learned) of the members of culture.

More particularly illustrative of this cultural tendency to value the male over the female are some of Nina Baym's observations in her essay "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors." She asserts that "from its historical beginnings, American literary criticism has assumed that literature produced in this nation would have to be ground-breaking, equal to the challenge of the new nation, and completely original."²⁵ Given Stoddard's stylistic innovations--her bizarre temporality, her terse dialogue, and her mimesis of form and content--she would seem to be up to the challenge her nation's infancy demanded. Also, her comparison to other respected authors, especially

Hawthorne, would suggest her historical success. But, as Baym points out, a concept of *Americanness* is not the same thing as a demand for innovation. Simply put, "[until] a tradition of American literature developed its own inherent forms, the early critic looked for a standard of *Americanness* rather than a standard of excellence"(Baym, 1-2). As may be suspected, this concept of *Americanness* was--and will remain, without necessary revision of the canon--male-determined, male-centered, and male-perpetuated. Basically, the criterion of *American* is simply that a particular work must take America as a nation for its subject. What this means is that truly *American* works must deal with a frontier--that is both conceptual and often actual--that defines the newness, even the perpetual newness, of the nation. Both the obsession with, and the activity within, this frontier are of course virtually exclusively masculine. Even more ironic than this kind of monolithic demand for diverse experience is the fact that this new nation so concerned with innovations of identity generally regarded content above form, at least according to Baym. When we understand the demands behind the concept of *Americanness* we see that it is not so surprising that Elizabeth Stoddard was not presented with the privilege of being a truly *American* author during her time.

Certainly America is really no more aware of what its national image is today than it was 150 years ago, but its penchant for innovation does continue. Fortunately, the issue of canon revision has become and does remain an important part of contemporary academic inquiries. With this fairly recent development, lost authors like Elizabeth Stoddard may finally receive the attention they have been for so long denied. And now that the concepts of quality and of *Americanness* (if it still lingers on) have been exposed as being deeply related to readership audiences--that is, interest groups--we will perhaps see a more diverse collection of works within an *American* canon that is more open to revision and therefore more empowering to its subscribers.

END NOTES

¹ Yes, a male writing on the subject of gender constructions--specifically, constructions of female. I note this self-consciously so as to make explicit my awareness of the limits of my capacity to empathize.

² From Stein's Tender Buttons, 1914.

³ I use *revisionary existence* in opposition to *revisionary phase*; meaning, I believe that the whole concept of canonicity has been revealed as problematic, albeit necessary, and that privileged texts are now perhaps less privileged.

⁴ By *bildung* I mean spiritual development or growth.

⁵ Sybil Weir, "The Morgesons: A Neglected Feminist Bildungsroman," p.436.

⁶ See James Matlack, "Hawthorne and Elizabeth Stoddard," in New England Quarterly.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.278.

⁸ See Sandra Zagarell, "Repossession of a Heritage," p.47.

⁹ See Nina Baym, Woman's Fiction, and Jerome Buckley, Season of Youth, for complete definitions of the two genres.

¹⁰ See Buckley, p.18.

¹¹ See Baym, p.22.

¹² See James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, p.253

¹³ See Annis Pratt, pp.33-34.

¹⁴ See Lawrence Buell (1986), p.363.

¹⁵ See Woman, Culture, and Society, p.44.

¹⁶ See Buell and Zagarell's The Morgesons, p. 26; all other references to the novel are cited in the text.

¹⁷ See Annis Pratt, p.23.

¹⁸ See Buell, Zagarell, Matlack, and Weir.

¹⁹ See Susan Harris, p.21.

²⁰ The tear in Cass's dress and her sore arm, from where Charles presumably grabbed her to help save her, indicate some use of force in the carriage accident. It is doubtful that this would be an indication of metaphorical rape, since most commentators have regarded the ride as Cassandra's decision to accept Charles. The use of force, however, does indicate how threatening a lover Charles might have been.

²¹ See Gilbert and Gubar, p.17.

²⁵ It would've been easy for Stoddard to have manipulated the sea symbol in a conventional way, given its traditional usage as a feminine symbol. However, by problematizing it--by making it somewhat "inconstant"--she makes it more powerful because it is more mysterious, sometimes soothing Cass and sometimes upsetting her or indicating her upsetment.

²⁶ The noting of Desmond's mortality relates to my comments in the *Sexuality* section, where I note that individualization has some associations with mortality.

²⁷ See Woman, Culture and Society, p.19.

²⁸ See Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," p. 3.

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