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Progress, Process and the Critique of Development:  
The Interplay of Gender and Genre in The Morgesons

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Honors Thesis

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Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard's work received little public attention or critical acclaim during her lifetime. Only now, more than a hundred years after her best work was completed, has Stoddard begun to find an enthusiastic audience. Stoddard wanted badly the success which eluded her, yet she was not willing to sacrifice her intellectual and artistic integrity in order to sell books. She had only contempt for the countless women writers of her day, "the tribe of intellectual gardeners and vegetable growers," who gained widespread popularity with their frothy, ornate, and romantic fiction.<sup>1</sup> She wanted to be seen as a consequential and powerful author-- recognition that was characteristically ceded only by men to other men. Stoddard was an outsider who looked on the inner circle with a mixture of envy, distaste, admiration, and ironic distance. In several columns written for the Daily Alta California, Stoddard focuses on the role of the serious female artist or intellectual as a "valiant" outsider who must struggle to enter the "domain appropriated by men to themselves."<sup>2</sup> That struggle to be accepted is characterized as warlike: "Men are polite to the woman, and contemptuous to the intellect. They do not allow women to enter their intellectual arena to do battle with them..."<sup>3</sup> In a letter from 1856 Stoddard sheds light on her own adversarial relationship as a woman writer to the prevailing--male--standards:

The Literary Female is abroad, and the souls of literary men are tried. I am afraid to think of writing a book, and only intend to keep up a guerilla kind of warfare by sending out odds and ends.<sup>4</sup>

If Stoddard's early poems and short stories were "guerilla warfare," small covert forays into hostile territory, the first novel would express an ~~extended~~<sup>ex</sup> extended, although no less subtle, attack on male literary formulations.

The Morgesons (1862) is Elizabeth Stoddard's first novel. It chronicles the coming of age of its protagonist, Cassandra Morgeson, in middle-class, mid-nineteenth-century New England. In this novel, Stoddard embraces the traditionally male genre of the Bildungsroman while substantially altering the form, and ultimately, undercutting the values embodied by the genre. The nature of genre itself allows Stoddard this maneuverability. For if genre is an "invitation to form," as Claudio Guillen maintains, it is also an "invitation to reformulate and an invitation to reform," according to Heather Dubrow.<sup>5</sup> She continues, "In other words, one motive for writing in a genre is the urge to question some of the underlying attitudes that shape literary mode."<sup>6</sup> Stoddard's position as a woman writer on the fringes of marketability and critical acclaim also gave her exemption from an overinvestment in the literary status quo which would prohibit experimentation. In other words, because Elizabeth Stoddard felt herself to be outside of male literary codes--or genre--and "at war" with the masculine literary world, she had the freedom to transgress, adapt, and alter generic prescriptions.

I believe that examining the ways in which The Morgesons differs from the traditional Bildungsroman--peering into the gap between the male ideal posited by the genre and the model of Cassandra's development offered by Stoddard--reveals a profound

critique of the assumption that a male model of development is a universal, gender-neutral ideal. In addition to positing an alternative route for female development, The Morgesons also calls into question how possible any development can be given in the physical and social constraints for nineteenth-century women.

After discussing the perimeters of the traditional Bildungsroman genre I will explore the ways in which The Morgesons conforms to this model. I will then present an alternative model for the novel of female development based on recent theories of female identity formation. Applying this approach to The Morgesons highlights the novel's presentation of development as specifically female and unlocks Stoddard's concealed critique of prevailing models and goals for women's development.

In Seasons of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding Jerome H. Buckley articulates the classic Bildungsroman pattern to which Stoddard reacts: a single protagonist, usually from a provincial background, leaves the constraints of home and its limited horizons for the lessons of life abroad or in a big city, where the hero develops -- through defection of the father, alienation, one debasing and one exalting love, conflict with the social order, and a questioning of life's values-- into a mature, fulfilled, individuated self.

Development is portrayed as an additive progress leading to autonomous identity and self-reliant existence.<sup>7</sup> Though it shifts the thematic and narrative emphases of the Bildungsroman, The Morgesons does share in particular recognizable, albeit superficial, structures of the traditional genre. But even these

structures are somewhat altered by Stoddard. Like Buckely's Bildungsromane, The Morgesons begins as a child "of some sensibility" grows up in the provinces. Cassandra, we are told in the novel's opening line, is "possessed."<sup>8</sup> She is willful, undisciplined, and contentious. She briefly attends school in the village of Surrey, where her father is one of the most prosperous sea merchants. Cassandra is, from the beginning, in conflict with the social institutions which attempt to tame her. Cassandra is "moved and governed by ...sensation" (14) and events in Surrey make "small impression of dramatic interest." (23) Cassandra, indeed, must leave her village to begin making sense of the potent and random sensations which make up her life.

As in the cases of her male counterparts, Cassandra's development centers around a series of journeys. Cassandra leaves her home three different times. At age thirteen she leaves Surrey to spend a year in the house where her mother grew up. She attends Miss Black's school where she learns that she is "uncouth, ignorant, and without tact." (35) Her grandfather's domineering, Puritanical ways attempt to break Cassandra's spirit at home while the spitefulness of her classmates demoralizes her at school. Although Cassandra resigns herself to the year at Barmouth, she withstands not only the attempts to tame her but also the town's Revival. She returns to Surrey undiminished: "I was as much an animal as ever--robust in health--inattentive, and seeking excitement and exhilaration." (27) After a few unremarkable years in Surrey, Cassandra's second journey occurs.

The second journey is prompted by a visit from an unknown cousin, Charles Morgeson. Charles is, from the beginning, a

magnetic and mysterious character. He invites Cassandra to visit him and his wife in Rosville. Feeling already the pull of Charles' force, Cassandra accepts with trepidation. In Rosville Cassandra again attends school but what she learns then is secondary to what Cassandra learns in the house of her cousin:

I toned down perfectly within three months. Soon after my arrival at his house I became afraid of Cousin Charles...My perception of any defect in myself was instantaneous with his discovery of it. I fell into the habit of guessing each day whether I was to offend or please him, and then into that of intending to please. (74)

Charles and Cassandra fall in love and she experiences the potency of her own sexuality: "An intangible, silent, magnetic feeling existed between us, changing and developing according to its own mysterious law, remaining intact in spite of the contests between us of resistance and defiance." Although the sexuality of the relationship never reaches anything other than symbolic expression, its intensity and validity in Cassandra's life are forever awakened. Cassandra experiences a new sensitization to life:

I found that I was more elastic than before, and more susceptible to sudden impressions; I was conscious of the ebb and flow of blood through my heart, felt it when it eddied up into my face, and touched my brain with its flame-colored wave. I loved life again. (77)

Cassandra is in every way experiencing sensation with a new intensity--internal awareness, external events, intellectual excitement. This potency does not continue undiminished, however. Charles is killed by a wild horse he had been trying to tame. Cassandra is injured and permanently scarred by the same accident. When Cassandra has regained her health she returns to Surrey, considerably diminished in spirit and in hope.

Cassandra's third journey is a trip to visit the Somers family in Belem. Ben Somers, a friend she had met at school in Rosville, had fallen in love with Cassandra's sister Veronica, and invited Cassandra to his home to clear the way for his marriage to Veronica. In Belem Cassandra meets the first intellectual women of her acquaintance. With these women Cassandra experiences a "new pleasure"--women who engage in the world of ideas. (170) Cassandra also falls in love again--with Desmond Somers, Ben's brother. Desmond is dissipated and frequently drunk when Cassandra arrives but by the time she leaves they have made a pact to be together once Desmond has overcome his alcoholism. Cassandra, having learned the lessons of Rosville, is in full command of her desires and is capable of finding a man who will respect her needs for self-determination. She asserts this change 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,--once, Ben, only once; the firetipped arrows rarely pierce soul and sense, blood and brain." (226)

Cassandra and Desmond are full and equal partners in this relationship.

Though Stoddard's use of the journey device conforms to generic standards, the journeys function differently for Cassandra than they do for a Buckley hero. This difference in the male and female Bildungsromane is suggested by Abel, Hirsch, and Langland in their discussion of female fictions of development. Cassandra is not free to explore her autonomy and her relation to the larger world during these journeys. Rather, she "merely exchange[s] one domestic sphere for another."<sup>9</sup> As Sandra Zagarell points out, "Cassandra's journeys



are always by invitation or family decree and they always confine her within other people's homes..."<sup>10</sup> Although these journeys present Cassandra with experiences not available to her in Surrey and expose her to relationships which shape her development, the nature of Cassandra's interaction with the larger world is highly circumscribed.

Buckely asserts that the Bildungsroman's hero experiences two love affairs, "one debasing and one exalting."<sup>11</sup> Stoddard also provides Cassandra with two love affairs--one aborted and one successful. Each offers exploration of self as well as a threatened loss of self. Although Cassandra blossoms during her love for Charles, the threat of diminished selfhood always looms during that alliance. Cassandra's love affair with Desmond indeed flourishes. After several years of separation, during which Desmond travels to Spain and overcomes his alcoholism, the two marry. Cassandra has found a partner who she can share her life with--its passion, its stagnation, its losses, its sacrifices. Cassandra has found someone who will live beside her, not attempt to overmaster her will.

It is clear that The Morgesons adheres to generic prescriptions enough to render it recognizable as a Bildungsroman but even the ways in which The Morgesons conforms to the male genre are qualified. Stoddard goes beyond subtle alteration in The Morgesons, however. While Cassandra's developmental process sometimes shares in the male pattern, the emphasis in The Morgesons is on how female development is psychologically and materially different in its process and goals. For Cassandra, development is marked by tensions between ambivalent options, a circumscribed sphere of influence, and no recognizable culmination of identity formation. Cassandra's life, as depicted in The Morgesons, displays no single-minded march toward a finish-line

marked "Maturity." Rather, Cassandra's growth consists of a process of shifting acceptance, challenge, resignation, and alteration of self and society--always within a matrix of familial relationships. To provide a framework for the examination of these differences, it will be helpful to look at some recent feminist scholarship which attempts to articulate how and why women's writing differs from men's.

Judith Kegan Gardiner's essay, "On Female Identity and Writing by Women," explores the connection between new theories of female identity formation and women's writing. Although Gardiner does not explore the genre, her ideas provide the basis for an exploration of the female Bildungsroman and, by extension, The Morgesons' critique of male values and assumptions in the traditional Bildungsroman.

Gardiner's analysis contrasts the new feminist-inspired theories of female development with the traditional models offered by Heinz Lichtenstein and, particularly, Erick Erikson. Erikson's theory hinges on the concept of the identity crisis--an individual proceeds through various stages in order, each stage providing the degree of maturation--biological and emotional--necessary to move to the next stage. Gardiner stresses that although Erikson describes identity as an "evolving configuration" he, in fact, presents identity formation as "a developmental progress toward the achievement of a desired product, the autonomous individual, the paradigm for which is male."<sup>12</sup> Erikson's theory of identity formation, then, stresses a predetermined developmental progress with biological bases, the focus of which is rejection of previous identification (especially the mother) in order to achieve autonomous functioning.

Nancy Chodorow's The Reproduction of Mothering provides the feminist counterpoint explored by Gardiner. Says Gardiner, "Chodorow

portrays female personality as relational and fluidly defined, starting with infancy and continuing throughout womanhood."<sup>13</sup> According to Chodorow, the girl's gender identity is formed positively--as opposed to negatively, as the boy's must when he individuates from the mother--in regard to the mother. The girl becomes like Mother. Summarizing Chodorow's theories, Gardiner writes that girls "must develop in such a way that she can pleurably re-create the mother-infant symbiosis when she herself becomes a mother."<sup>14</sup> The girl must individuate but she cannot entirely reject the mother without penalty. By example the girl child develops capacities for empathy, nurturance, and dependence. ~~And~~ because identity is shaped differently in women than in men, the results are different. Culmination of identity formation is not permanent and unyielding. Throughout life, "self is defined through social relationships; issues of fusion and merger of the self with others are significant, and ego and body boundaries remain flexible."<sup>15</sup>

It is this flexibility in the developmental course and culmination that Gardiner focuses on in her discussion of female identity and its influence on writing. In Chodorow, Gardiner finds a "model of female personality [that] is cyclical as well as progressive."<sup>16</sup> Gardiner adds her own thoughts to Chodorow's configuration:

I extend her insights into identity theory with the formula "female identity is process." Thus I picture female identity as less fixed, less unitary, and more flexible than male individuality, both in its primary core and in the entire maturational complex developed from this core.<sup>17</sup>

From this hypothesis on the "processual nature of female identity," Gardiner finds explanation for the ways in which women's writing--

particularly about female experience--differs from men's. for Gardiner that female identity is processual, cyclical, and not fixed illuminates "diverse traits of writing by women, particularly its defiance of conventional generic boundaries and of conventional characterization."<sup>18</sup> When women write about the experience of identity, Gardiner has found that such twentieth-century women writers

...communicate a consciousness of their identity through paradoxes of sameness and difference--from other women, especially their mothers, from men; and from social injunctions for what women should be, including those inscribed in the literary canon.<sup>19</sup>

Although Gardiner deals with novels which "communicate a consciousness of...identity," she does not take up how these ideas about female identity might come into play in a novel that is consciously formulated as a story about the development of that identity.

Gardiner's article presents several implications for the study of the female Bildungsroman. If, as Abel et al. suggest in their introduction to The Journey In, the nature of female development has profound effect on how that development will be depicted in fiction, then Gardiner's ideas can certainly be extended to provide a model for the female novel of development. I offer the following as formulations of that model. If female identity is seen as non-static and processual rather than a settled culmination of progressive stages, this accounts for how the female novel of development differs in narrative structure and thematic emphases from the linear quest model of the traditional genre. That female identity is relational and not fixed reflected by the focus on relationships among the protagonist and other characters as factors in development rather than upon events. And because identity is shaped by conflicts between

desires for merger and individuation, independence and dependence, self and other, <sup>these conflicts</sup> will be reflected in the thematic concerns portraying development in the female Bildungsroman. These concerns are important not only in understanding how the female novel of development differs from its male counterpart, however, These differences help one to recognize the underlying structures that, once uncovered, reveal a critique of traditional notions of development. This model for the female Bildungsroman, which is an expansion of Gardiner's theorized connections between female identity and writing by women, will serve as my structure for examining exactly how The Morgesons comments upon, while participating in, the traditional genre.

In examining the processual and relational quality of Cassandra's identity formation the focus will be on how this model describes experience that is specifically female as well as upon how Stoddard critique of nineteenth-century possibilities for female development grows out of this same model for identity formation.

Unlike the traditional Bildungsromane which depict a straight progress toward a static identity goal, The Morgesons presents Cassandra's developed identity as fluid and processual. This element of Cassandra's identity is most clearly and fruitfully explored on a symbolic level. In addition to providing a dramatic and omnipresent geographical backdrop to The Morgesons, the sea functions as a many-layered symbol for Cassandra's identity. At different times and simultaneously, the sea represents Cassandra's familial, sexual, and spiritual identity. That the symbolic reflection of Cassandra's identity is an ocean of course underscores that identity remains fluid and changeable throughout her life.

In her connection to the sea Cassandra inherits a potent family legacy with powers to both give and destroy identity and livelihood. Locke Morgeson, Cassandra's "visionary" great-grandfather, turned his back on the land and the family occupation of farming to face the sea and founded a shipping career which his male descendents would thereafter pursue. To Cassandra, a female inheritor, he endowed his strong individualism and passionate "scale of enthusiasms." (9) From this man Cassandra received her name--a key to identity, if nothing else--and her kinship to the sea. Thus, familial and individual identity flows to Cassandra through the elder Locke Morgeson who was born, like Cassandra, "under the influence of the sea." (9) But the influence of the sea is, by nature, an unstable one. Just as the sea once gave to the Morgesons a distinguished life in Surrey it is also the sea that defames them. The younger Locke Morgeson, Cassandra's father, is forced into bankruptcy by the unreliability of his sea trade. As easily as the family fortune and status is lost, it is regained when two ships return from successful voyages. While the sea forms a potent family legacy for the Morgesons it is a variable one, both enhancing and depleting.

The sea also represents a more intimate yet equally variable force in Cassandra's life: her sexuality. A rarity in nineteenth-century fiction, coming to terms with sexuality is an important element in Cassandra's development. In The Morgesons Cassandra is allowed to explore sexual identity without a loss of status in the community or a loss of empathy in the reader. Stoddard presents sexuality as something truly belonging to Cassandra. In connecting the sea with the symbolic representation of sexuality, Stoddard marks sexuality, as Sandra Zagarell points out, "as part of Cassandra's birthright, the

potential for full experience bequeathed her by old Locke Morgeson."<sup>20</sup> But as the sea's role in familial identity has revealed, birthright does not remain unchanging or one-sided. Cassandra learns that sexuality can be at once self-affirming and self-effacing.

This many-sided effect of sexuality in Cassandra's life is reflected by the sea imagery which attends her two love affairs. Cassandra views the sea as never before when Charles, her first love, stands beside it and he, in fact, first draws her attention to the sea's influence upon her. Immediately after Charles has invited Cassandra to accompany him home she feels the power of the sea in her life. The ocean, previously recognized only as the site of carefree child's play, holds new meaning for Cassandra: "[I]t was murmuring softly, creeping along the shore, licking the rocks and sand as if recognizing a master. And I saw and felt its steady, resistless heaving, insidious and terrible.(63) It is a revelation from which Cassandra cannot retreat. Perceiving the passivity which attends upon women's sexual expression, Cassandra has the knowledge to negotiate a balance between surrender and self-preservation. Although in the relationship with Charles Cassandra consents to their passion, the situation is clearly out of her control. Charles, after all, holds the reins of the wild horse in the accident which kills him and threatens Cassandra's life. The sea of sexuality heaved, "insidious and terrible."

The connections between the sea and Cassandra's sexual identity do not end there, however. Nor do the images of the sea remain static. For, even if Cassandra could not retreat from sexuality's revelation, she could learn to exert her will in mediating its power to overwhelm and diminish. When Cassandra begins to fall in love with

Desmond, several years after Charles' death, the relationship is marked by a different set of sea imagery. Cassandra is no longer on the beach with the waves seeking a master. The ocean itself is no longer the sole focus. When Desmond makes her think about the sea it is a fuller landscape inhabited by creatures that are of, but not ruled by, the sea.

As the tones of his voice floated through the room,  
I was where I saw the white sea-birds flashing  
between the blue deeps of our summer sea and sky,  
and the dark rocks that rose and dipped in the  
murmuring waves. (174)

Later that same night Cassandra experiences the ocean more directly and makes a choice about her love for Desmond:

Below...I saw a strip of the sea, hemmed in on all  
sides, for the light was too vague for me to see  
its narrow outlet. It looked milky, misty, and  
uncertain: the predominant shores stifled its  
voice, if ever it had one...I turned away. The  
dark earth and the rolling sky were better. (179)

Although unrestricted passion had proved disastrous in her relationship with Charles, Cassandra cannot completely deny passion its role in her love for Desmond without a substantial loss of freedom and expression. The narrow sea, seemingly constricted by land on all sides (a logical if not geographical impossibility for an ocean inlet) is robbed of its voice. Seeing this version of the sea below her, Cassandra turns away from this new vision of her own ocean. Cassandra chooses to defer her love for Desmond until they can be together, whole before the expanse of sea, in **S**urrey. This passage shows Cassandra's ability not only to accept the passionate sea's power in her life but also to exercise her own power to choose how and when it will be most appropriately given its sway. Presented as overwhelming and masterful in its association with Cassandra's feelings for Charles,



the sea later reflects the loss involved in controlling the passion too strongly. Cassandra learns to take on the sea's essence--in order to maintain an identity which is whole, she must remain fluidly responsive to circumstance in ways shaped, although not controlled by, experience and necessity.

The sea also represents Cassandra's spirituality as a processual element of identity that is highly sensitive to circumstance. Several days after the death of her mother, Cassandra visits the solitary beach near her home. Catching sight of her reflection in a tidepool, she watches unexplained currents wash darting creatures through the face that stares back at her. Cassandra recognizes that her identity is like this seemingly closed and distinct pool which is nonetheless crisscrossed by organisms "sailing on uncertain voyages." (214) Cassandra rises and is greeted by her flying Spirit echoing the words Desmond spoke to her when acknowledging their love: "Hail Cassandra! Hail!" (214) In turning from the tidepool to the ocean in its entire range and force, Cassandra faces the seemingly limitless potentiality of her life. Cassandra climbs down to be among the waves which are "baffled in their attempt to climb over" her. (214) Cassandra is in full possession of herself:

I stopped on the verge of the tide-mark; the sea  
was seeking me and I must wait. It gave tongue as  
its lips touched my feet, roaring in the caves,  
falling on the level beaches with a mad, boundless  
joy! (214)

The elements of Cassandra's sexuality are once again unleashed; this time, with full possession and fathoming of their powers, there is only joy. Postponement does not spell loss of self, it means an essential gaining of Cassandra's powers.

This realization leads to a further developed integration of self. Cassandra's being cries out for a coherent self lacking nothing.

"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." (215)

Cassandra has begun to possess her own identity with all its fierceness and in all its dimensions. The sense of potentiality is unconstricted, seemingly as open as the "wide, shimmering plain of sea--its aerial blue, stretching beyond the limits" of Cassandra's vision. (214) But like the sea bounded by land on one side, potentiality exists in relation to circumstance.

In a world where women have little power over the material circumstances they find themselves in, an ability to adapt to life's situations is a necessary component of identity. The survival of a cohesive identity, then, depends upon a fluid responsiveness to the events of one's life. This is true in Cassandra's development. Immediately after the revelation of her life's promise for wholeness, Cassandra is met at the door with household problems. In an ironic undercutting of the previous scene's symbolic expression of her freedom and personal expansion, Cassandra assures her aunt that she can give up herself. She says, "I never shall have any more colds, Aunt Merce; never mean to have anything to myself--entirely, you know." (215) As she says this, the spray from the sea, now storming, flies against the windows, a reminder that individual power is shut out once Cassandra is inside her family home and responsible for its smooth functioning. After the expansion she experiences at the beach

Cassandra must gather self around her, contracting in response to circumstance.

The fluid process of Cassandra's identity formation expressed in these representative sea images is echoed in The Morgesons' narrative structure. In the novel, personal expansion alternates with periods of stasis for Cassandra. Wedged between the year in Barmouth and her visit to Charles' house in Rosville, Cassandra spends many months in Surrey doing nothing but visiting, attending Bible class, entertaining family visitors, and cultivating personal idiosyncrasies for her acquaintances to imitate. There is little external activity or internal realization. The novel's narrative reflects this course of Cassandra's development. Fast-paced and quickly-sketched passages filled with events, people, and conversations alternate with long passages describing household details and family routines. Mirroring Cassandra's developmental expansion and contraction in the novel's narrative style highlights possible meaning behind Stoddard's quirky use of narrative pacing. Rejecting the linear quest model of most male Bildungsromane, Stoddard created The Morgesons' structure to reflect the processual nature of Cassandra's development as well as underscore that while the journey may be a primary focus in the developmental lives of male protagonists, it is, in fact, only a small part of female development. What Cassandra learns in Barmouth, Rosville, and Belem takes on meaning only when grounded in and commented upon by daily life in the Morgeson household. Accordingly, Stoddard's narrative style also reflects the fluid interaction among and within the elements of Cassandra's development.

The interaction of Cassandra and other characters in The Morgesons creates an important component of Cassandra's development. Chodorow's theory that female identity is relational--that a woman's identity forms in reaction and relation to the important figures in her life--rather than static and strictly individuated explains how the female Bildungsroman explores the protagonist's personal relationships differently than do the traditional examples of the genre. If female identity is defined by a woman's relationships, the characters in a female Bildungsroman do not merely serve as foils, teachers, and companions for the protagonist. Because identity occurs in the context of primary relationships, the protagonist's development must be viewed against the backdrop of other characters' lives. In consequence, Cassandra's identity formation cannot be understood without viewing it in relation to the lives surrounding her. The lives of Cassandra's father and brother-in-law point up failures in male development while her mother and sister serve as Cassandra's counterparts in female development.

Cassandra's successful maneuvering of developmental tensions is both shaped and undercut by the men in her family. Her father, whose needs were administered to by a series of women--wife, servants, and daughter Cassandra--is alternately absent, vague, and weak. Once a companion to his daughter, Locke Morgeson defects from the immediate family leaving his daughters to whatever fates they might. Ben Somers, who loved Cassandra before he decided upon her "counterpart," continually attempts to interfere with Cassandra's quest for self-definition and replace it with his own ideals. At one point he says to her, "You are as true and noble as I think you are, Cassy. I must

have it so, You shall not thwart me.'" (198) Ben is continually threatened by Cassandra's self-knowledge and power for self-definition, qualities he lacked. And like Locke Morgeson, Ben Somers' weakness undercuts the examples of male development presented in The Morgesons.

Cassandra's mother lived a life of quiet influence; Cassandra observes that her "atmosphere enveloped" all those around her. (17) One could even say that Mary Morgeson's life was also lived in an atmosphere sealed much like an envelope. When Cassandra returns from the restrictive environment of her mother's childhood home, Veronica exclaims,

"I believe...that Grand'ther Warren nearly crushed you [Aunt Merce] and Mother when girls of our age. Did you know that you had any wants then? or dare to dream anything beside that he laid down for you?" (64)

Cassandra, having been sent to Barmouth to "comprehend the influences of her [mother's] early life and learn some of the lessons she had been taught," knows the answer. Mary Morgeson, like Cassandra, had been a spirited and rebellious young woman. But Mary, unlike her daughter, assimilated the lessons of submissive and pious femininity. While Cassandra can begin to understand her mother's life, Mary Morgeson cannot fathom Cassandra's: "You are beyond me; everything is beyond." (133) Mary Morgeson dies alone surrounded by the domestic life she had spent years maintaining. When Cassandra finds her mother's body she also discovers the empty cup of femininity her mother had died with. Although Cassandra learns through her mother and develops away from Mary's example, her mother's circumscribed and solitary fate serves as a counterpoint to Cassandra's own expansive existence.

Cassandra's identity does not replicate her mother but it must be seen in relation to the mother's identity and fate. Mary Morgeson, who had begun life as a bold youngster like Cassandra, developed in a path that diverged widely from the one her daughter would later follow. And while Cassandra makes choices which deliberately lead her away from her mother's life, the symbolic connection between them remains strong. After Mary's death, Cassandra, with her aunt's aid, takes on her mother's role in the family. The details of Cassandra's daily existence come to mirror a more efficient version of her mother's life. Given this merging of identities provided in the narrative, Stoddard portrays Mary Morgeson's fate as impinging on her daughter's developmental achievements--although not in a direct or active way. As a counterpart, Mary's fate diminished Cassandra's own.

While Cassandra's relationship to her mother highlights how the fate of the preceding generation of women comments upon Cassandra's own development, her relationship to sister Veronica explores how the lives of two women, close in age and circumstance if not temperament, present two alternative but inextricably related identities.

Though Cassandra and Veronica are frequently referred to as "counterparts," they appear at first to be merely opposites with no chance of interrelationship. Veronica is presented as the feminine ideal of sensitivity, artistic accomplishment, domesticity, and passivity. Against Cassandra's animal health and robustness there is Veronica's frailty and frequent lapses into feverish illness. Cassandra journeys out of Surrey and accumulates a body of experience which contributes to personal development. Veronica remains close to home, changing little in the course of the novel. A friend observes that Veronica "had genius, but will be a child always...She stopped in

maturity long ago" while Cassandra "advance[s] by experience." (158) One of the most effective examples of the differences between Cassandra and Veronica is expressed through the symbolism of the sea. The rooms of the two sisters are isolated together at the top of a flight of stairs. Cassandra's room faces the sea's movement, power, and changeable beauty. Veronica cannot stand the sight nor sound of the sea; the windows of her room open onto "a limited, monotonous view" of flat and featureless expanses of land. (135) Instead of the vitality, sensuality, and force represented by the sea, Veronica chooses the barrenness of a pathological femininity.

Although the differences between Cassandra and Veronica seemingly belie their designation as "counterparts," their identities, taken together, represent the range of female experience and identity possible in nineteenth-century New England. Veronica's life is the logical outcome of femininity turned in on itself, of female identity enclosed in a small space. Though Cassandra progresses and Veronica remains basically unchanged by the years, the sisters exist on the same continuum of development and within the same range of possibilities. And, as counterparts, Veronica's fate must also impinge on Cassandra's. Because Cassandra's identity is in part a response to Veronica, the outcome of Veronica's life(lessness) renders Cassandra's coherence and wholeness questionable.

Because the relational nature of female identity means that Cassandra's identity is closely tied to the characters who surround her, Cassandra's development cannot be viewed meaningfully in and of itself. By the end of the novel Cassandra has learned to incorporate her energy, passion, and emotional acuity with duty, patience, and self-denial when necessary. She is married to Desmond in a mature and

loving alliance. In addition to a house the two of them own together, Cassandra owns her childhood house in Surrey--she possesses her past as well as a future. Marriage has not brought on geographical circumscription for Cassandra; she travels more widely than ever before. The narrator of her life story, Cassandra possess both her own life and voice. But as Cassandra concludes her narrative she looks out her old window to the sea. The book's final sea image reveals the counterface of Cassandra's development, the identity she must, in the end, share in. Faced with the broken or empty lives of her loved ones, Cassandra cannot find in the ocean the answering Spirit which had once touched her: "Its beauty wears a relentless aspect to me now; its eternal monotone expresses no pity, no compassion." (252)

Due to the relational nature of Cassandra's identity, her development must be measured against the fates of her counterparts. Thus viewed, the success of Cassandra's development is undercut. Sandra Zagarell points out, "As Cassandra's quest nears completion, the ironic counterpointing of other characters' fates makes the neatness with which her conflicts are resolved appear increasingly problematic."<sup>21</sup> Development is revealed as an extraordinary, singular achievement which contradicts the idea that the development of a coherent, full identity for women can be the result of ordinary experience. By revealing Cassandra's development in a context of failed and stultified lives, Stoddard presents that development as an achievement of questionable validity and viability.

In writing The Morgesons Elizabeth Stoddard created a many-pronged guerilla attack on the male literary establishment which attempted to deny her entrance to the closed circle of serious



fiction. Taking advantage of the freedom allowed outsiders, Stoddard altered the Bildungsroman genre to reflect and describe the unique developmental process of women, as reflected in the thematic concerns and narrative style of The Morgesons. Examining the book's portrayal of that process in terms of recent feminist scholarship makes clear Stoddard's critique of the limitations of male structure in portraying female experience and denies the universality of male experience. Stoddard goes beyond these concerns with the interaction of gender and genre, however. Ultimately, The Morgesons asks its readers to consider whether the development of a mature and integrated woman, however she might be depicted in fiction, is possible in the context of nineteenth-century constraints.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Stoddard, Daily Alta California, 8 April 1855, quoted in James H. Matlack, The Literary Career of Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1967), p. 158.

<sup>2</sup>Stoddard, Daily Alta California, 18 November 1855, quoted in Matlack, p. 156.

<sup>3</sup>Stoddard, Daily Alta California, 22 October 1854, quoted in Matlack, p. 156.

<sup>4</sup>Stoddard, Letter to R.W. Onswold, January 21, 1856, quoted in Matlack, p. 122.

<sup>5</sup>Heather Dubrow, Genre (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup>Dubrow, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup>Jerome H. Buckley, Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 17 and passim.

<sup>8</sup>Elizabeth Stoddard, The Morgesons and other Writings, Published and Unpublished ed. Lawrence Buell and Sandra A. Zagarell (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p. 5. All subsequent references to this work will appear in the text.

<sup>9</sup>Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, "Introduction," The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1983), p. 86.

<sup>10</sup>Sandra A. Zagarell, "The (Re)possession of a Heritage: Reading Elizabeth Stoddard's The Morgesons," unpublished article, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup>Buckley, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup>Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Female Identity and Writing by Women," in Writing and Sexual Difference, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 182.

<sup>13</sup>Gardiner, p. 182.

<sup>14</sup>Gardiner, p. 182.

<sup>15</sup>Gardiner, p. 182.

<sup>16</sup>Gardiner, p. 182.

<sup>17</sup>Gardiner, p. 182

<sup>18</sup>Gardiner, p. 179.

<sup>19</sup>Gardiner, p. 184.

<sup>20</sup>Zagarell, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup>Zagarell, p. 13.

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- Zagarell, Sandra A. "The (Re)possession of a Heritage: Reading Elizabeth Stoddard's The Morgesons." Unpublished article.

## Reading List

Charlotte Bronte, Villette

Kate Chopin, The Awakening

Charles Dickens, David Copperfield

George Eliot, Middlemarch

Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter

Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God

James Joyce, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man