

Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons: A Bildungsroman* Exploring Women's Possibilities  
(エリザベス・ストダードの『モーグソン家の人々』  
—女性の可能性を探究した教養小説)

Yuko Nakagawa\*

**SUMMARY IN JAPANESE:** エリザベス・ストダードの『モーグソン家の人々』は、主人公カサンドラについての教養小説である。彼女の成長が、身近な女性達の生き方を否定し、自己を形成していくという点で異色といえよう。その女性達は、ニューイングランドゆえの厳格なピューリタニズムと the Cult of True Womanhood に支配されていた。産業化されつつある変遷期のアメリカ社会の本質、特に女性に対する抑圧が主人公の目を通して明かにされている。

このような教養小説を描くことによって、ストダードは、不安や疎外感を伴うが、個人として、人間らしく自然に生きるという女性の可能性、同時代の他の女性作家とは異なる見解を示したといえる。

With revision of the canon of American literature, an increasing number of novels written by nineteenth century women are being revived, read, and discussed in universities and in critical works. Nina Baym defines the genre called woman's fiction as that fiction written by women, addressed to women and telling the story of a protagonist "who, beset with hardships, finds within herself the qualities of intelligence, will, resourcefulness, and courage sufficient to overcome them" (Baym, *Woman's Fiction* 22). Such protagonists struggle for survival and learn to value inner independence. Woman's fiction was also women's assertion of their right to define themselves for themselves (Ammons 268).

---

\* 中川優子 Associate Professor of English, Faculty of General Education, Gifu University, Gifu.

Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*, published in 1862, is among these revived works: Lawrence Buell and Sandra A. Zagarell edited a paperback edition of the novel in 1984<sup>1</sup>. It certainly belongs to the woman's fiction Baym analyzed and defined in *Woman's Fiction*, though it is not discussed there and is accorded only one paragraph in the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (Baym 302-3). *The Morgesons* is a *Bildungsroman* set in New England and narrated by Cassandra Morgeson after her marriage. During childhood in Surrey, Cassandra is a being of nature and instincts; she is whimsical. In her teens, she is sent to Grandfather Warren's in Barmouth for religious education, but she rejects the Puritanism that dominates the place and also sees how her mother was nearly crushed by it. Sent to Rosville to complete her education, she instead falls in love with Charles Morgeson, a married man, and acknowledges her sexuality. Before any consummation of this love, however, Charles dies. In Belem, Cassandra meets Desmond Somers, whom she will eventually marry and whose brother Ben is to marry her younger sister Veronica. She wins his love by being more prudent than heretofore in expressing her passion. On her mother's death Cassandra takes over the family house back in Surrey and shows that she can accept responsibilities. How she matures in each of these four places, all located in New England, is depicted in the novel.

In this paper Cassandra Morgeson's growth and self-realization in the four places she lives, that is, Barmouth, Rosville, Belem, and Surrey, will be discussed. The novel limns Stoddard's view of a woman's possibilities. In addition, the lives of the women Cassandra faces will be examined, for it is they who are the alternatives to Cassandra's way of life. By turns, they become Cassandra's role-models. Some of them Cassandra recognizes as agents of society, sacrificing their instincts. In Barmouth and Surrey, Aunt Mercy and Cassandra's mother represent Puritan victims and agents. Cassandra's mother is an especially crucial figure in Cassandra's self-realization. Cassandra continually evaluates her mother's way of life, even after her death, which is natural, for as Chodorow theorizes (159-170), female identity is shaped primarily by the fluctuations of symbiosis with and separation from the mother. In Rosville, Charles' wife Alice is a societal feminine ideal from whom

Cassandra learns feminine skills, while her school friend Helen Perkins is an exemplar who is wildly in love yet able to control her passion. In Belem, Desmond's mother functions as an example of decadent materialistic society. Cassandra rejects the ways of life of all these models, consequently rejects the society that produced them, and constructs her own world.

Elizabeth Ammons distinguished *The Morgesons* from other popular domestic novels for its "experimentation and individuality" (282). Susan Harris did so for its first-person narration and the emphasis on female sexuality (35). Yet there is more that distinguishes *The Morgesons* from other women's fiction. Hiroko Sato regarded the novel also as a denial of New England history, for Cassandra sees through what makes up the society of each of the four towns she visits and denies all of it (Sato 151). I believe that it is Cassandra's denial of the role-models in the four towns she experienced which constitutes denial of the very societies that produced those models. What Cassandra achieves by this denial as well as the possibilities for women it suggests will also be taken up in this paper.

## I. Surrey and Barmouth

The first role-model Cassandra encountered was her mother, who represents the conventional woman. The discrepancy between the mother and the daughter is presented in the very first scene of the novel. Cassandra, a child of instincts, was "moved and governed by [her] sensations" (*M* 14). Puritanism labeled such a child "possessed" (*M* 5), and Mrs. Morgeson, who took a Puritan stance, tried to reshape her daughter into a civilized, pious child. She criticized Cassandra's reading books of adventure and romance as "unprofitable" (*M* 6) and offered her religious education, including a pamphlet for children. Cassandra's response to this pamphlet was that the best part of it was the baked potatoes scene that made her hungry. Cassandra, of course, was responding to what attracted her physically. More than that, she showed her defiance of Puritan-inspired expectations of behavior by covering her ears when Aunt Mercy tried to guide her by a religious

song. Cassandra unmistakably resisted such education.

The scene discussed above reflects what is central in Cassandra's conflict with her mother and the society in which she lives: Cassandra is more of nature. She is put in touch with life by the wild sea of Surrey. She always misses and needs to return to the sea even after she grows up, for the wild sea assures her of her instincts. She sets her experiences "in the frame of the wild sea and shores of Surrey" (*M* 201).

What compelled Cassandra to resist her mother was Mrs. Morgeson's Puritan attitude of suppressing Cassandra's free spirit. Wilderness was pitted against civilization with its demands that instincts be strictly controlled. Puritanism had its typical way: it denied physical comforts and "the emollients of life" (*M* 28) that brought pleasure. Cassandra always suffered from hunger and from the stingy hearth fire in the winter and was denied the reading of "a secular book" (*M* 32) on Sundays in Barmouth.

Stoddard revealed here how Puritanism imprisoned individuals: the denial of one's well-being entailed denial of sensations and eventually led to the denial of individual self, which conformed with the Calvinistic emphasis upon the individual's sinfulness. In her view, such restriction was not only unnecessary but even harmful.

Cassandra's natural awakening to moral conscience in the free atmosphere of Rosville contradicted the Calvinist stress on the natural depravity of human nature. Pondering her time in Rosville later, Cassandra relates, "When I felt an emotion without seeing the shadow of its edge turning toward me, I discovered my conscience, which hitherto had only been described to me" (*M* 74). In Barmouth, piety was equated with repression. Sally, one of the workers at Grandfather Warren's shop, indirectly verbalized this Puritan principle while referring to Cassandra's uncontrollable spirit: "If things are cut off, kept out of sight, or never mentioned before [Cassandra], she may behave very well, not otherwise" (*M* 31). We can see in her statement that Puritanism placed no trust in the individual's independence or conscience.

These Puritan attitudes prevented individuals from having natural contact with each other, a condition exemplified in the relationship between Aunt Mercy and Grandfather Warren. Aunt Mercy emerged as

a role-model in Barmouth. She was a pious churchgoer and a rigid Puritan, concealing a speck of humor she had shown in Surrey. She is presented as a victim of Grandfather Warren's "morbid conscience, which reiterated its monitions against the dictates of the natural heart" (*M* 28). Since, according to Puritan doctrine, a Puritan was to be fulfilled within his or her God-given state in life and those who were given salvation were elected by God naturally, Puritanism "leveled all needs and all aspirations" (*M* 26) in individuals. Typically, Aunt Mercy had "no dreams, no enthusiasm" (*M* 26). The result was not pleasant, as seen in the girls who worked at Grandfather Warren's shop.

Stoddard thus presented women as victims of a patriarchal religion; in fact Grandfather Warren was the dominant figure in Barmouth. His lack of gentleness and tenderness reflected the Puritan deprivation of human warmth. We, however, should not ignore the fact that Grandfather Warren was also repressed: Aunt Mercy repressed him with her "respect and timidity" (*M* 28), while his sons had abandoned his house. Puritanism repressed both men and women.

Another Puritan agent for Cassandra was Miss Black, the teacher at the school Cassandra attended in Barmouth.<sup>2</sup> Her school was conducted after the manner of the seminary where she had been educated. The subjects taught were limited to those which contributed to the bringing up of pious Christian girls who would not put Christian-centered society in disorder. Miss Black's attitude towards Cassandra perfectly exemplified the Puritanism Grandfather Warren represented: Miss Black blamed Cassandra for her faults and deficiencies in order to crush her independent spirit. The ineffectiveness of her sort of education in a child's growth is evident when contrasted with that of Mrs. Lane at the Academy in Rosville, which Cassandra later attended, who tried to encourage Cassandra to sing without repression. What was worse, Miss Black used her teaching partly to fulfill her desire for recognition in society; her morality conformed to purely social mores. Cassandra observed that she flattered students from Barmouth's upper classes, who were dressed in luxurious clothes, and was hypocritical in other ways. Grandfather Warren was merely a tailor, in spite of his reputation in the church, and so his granddaughter Cassandra merited no attention from Miss Black.

Stoddard justified Cassandra's antagonism towards Puritanism by confirming her skepticism. Witnessing Aunt Mercy baking the sacramental bread for a church service and herself finding no spiritual effect from it, Cassandra concluded that it was devoid of sacredness. Aunt Mercy's baking the remnants of the sacred bread into a pudding further impressed her with its materiality and only reinforced her skepticism. We may see in this episode how integrated were religion and domestic life, but Cassandra's reaction impresses on us how formalistic the rituals actually were. Cassandra observed even the symptoms of conversions at the revivals coldly.

Cassandra experienced all these aspects of Puritanism during her stay in Barmouth. The Barmouth section is depicted not as a heroic trial, but as a critical observation of Puritanism. Cassandra stands out from the protagonists of other contemporary works in her openly rejecting Puritanism and criticizing it in spite of her young age and in her feeling no regret at being disliked by Grandfather Warren or Miss Black or at not trying to conform with Puritanism as her mother had expected her to do.

The most crucial thing Cassandra came to understand in Barmouth was that her mother was not only an agent but also a victim of Puritanism, as Aunt Mercy was. In spite of the strict Puritanic education she had been given, Mrs. Morgeson's spiritual insight remained "confused and perplexing" (*M* 24) all her life. Had she really converted to Congregationalism like her father, she would have resolved her spiritual uncertainties and become like him. Instead she enjoyed her riches in Surrey and was never able to be as cold-hearted or moralistic as her father. In nature she was like Cassandra, full of life; in her youth, she had ridden a white colt bareback and even had some love problems with an uncle of Cassandra's classmate Charlotte Alden.

Grandfather Warren was not the only cause of Mrs. Morgeson's confused state; the age itself contributed. The ministers of the revivals encouraged women to be involved in church affairs. Many women, including Cassandra's mother and Miss Black, devoted themselves to religion, while men like Mr. Morgeson who saw "nothing beyond the material" (*M* 24), devoted themselves to business. In a scene in which Cassandra's mother offered tea to her neighbors, we see that their

conversation centered on such topics as “revivals” (*M* 18) or their need for another minister in their congregation. Women’s influence on church affairs was possible because what Buell and Zagarell call “‘moderate’ Calvinism” (255) dominated Surrey. Religious activities were also “a means used by New England women to define self and find community, two functions that wordly [sic] occupations more likely performed for men,” explains Cott (138). Here is Ann Douglas’ feminization of American culture in action.

In the Jacksonian Age,<sup>3</sup> while men, partly at the encouragement of the evangelists, were becoming involved in the business world, women became less involved in production in the household and in consequence were seeking another realm in which they might be acknowledged as members of society or might influence men to regard them as equals or even acquire power. Yet as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg asserts in her analysis of Victorian America, the new freedom or power women gained by the Second Great Awakening was “temporary” (144). Religious revivals were made use of by male preachers merely to destroy the older structure of Congregationalism at the time of social transition from a pre-industrialized society to a capitalist one. Until the reconstruction was achieved, male religious rebels continued to encourage women in their religious enthusiasm, but once their case was won, they started to emphasize the necessity for women to be subordinate to and dependent on their husbands and to claim that home was the place for salvation through women’s maternal love and discipline (Smith-Rosenberg 133). Thus women were silenced before the power-relation between man and woman changed, according to Smith-Rosenberg, by the 1840s (144–45). Moreover, a sense of spiritual inferiority, the perception that one is the lowest of the low, was evoked in women by the male preachers in the revivals.<sup>4</sup>

The assertion of inferiority seemed to contradict the religious self-assertion preached in the revivals, but it helped keep women home as soon as the zeal of religious reform abated. Submissiveness was not only emphasized as a Christian virtue by the evangelists; it also conformed with the Cult of True Womanhood for the bourgeois housewives (Smith-Rosenberg 154). Moreover, the more the Jacksonian Age progressed and egalitarian rhetoric came to dominate the world in the Era

of the Common Man, the more women's inferiority to all white men became the cultural assumption, "clothed in the new language of science and biology" (Smith-Rosenberg 159), and limited women's power. Mrs. Morgeson's confused spiritual state seems to be the result of her dissatisfaction with this contradictory religion which first emphasized women's self-assertion in religious matters and then discouraged religious ecstasy seen in the revivals as unbecoming to feminine piety.

Home was not a fulfilling sphere to Mrs. Morgeson, either. When Cassandra asked, "Say, mother, what shall I do?" (*M* 64), Mrs. Morgeson could only answer, "Do... read the Bible, and sew more" (*M* 64). It was one of the few spheres in which women could be active. Yet the Cult of True Womanhood, which demanded piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity, confined women's activities and power. As Cassandra noticed, the time when Mrs. Morgeson was able to travel with her husband seemed to be the happiest period in her life. Her more usual dissatisfaction and infirmities were betrayed when she admired Veronica, saying "Why should she [Veronica] find work for her hands when neither you [Cassandra] nor I do?" (*M* 64). When her only son, Arthur, was born, she claimed, "I am glad it is not a woman" (*M* 26). She even tried as a mother to repress "all the doubts and longings of her heart for example's sake" (*M* 64). Thus the Cult of True Womanhood had repressed her.

## II. Rosville

In Rosville, where Cassandra was invited by her distant relative Charles Morgeson to complete her education, Cassandra was liberated from the cold Puritanism which alone she had known thus far, for religion was far from dominant among women there. Alice Morgeson, Charles' well-liked wife, was not troubled by religion as were Cassandra's mother or Aunt Mercy. In fact, the whole town was non-religious; it was a county town with a freer, more secularized atmosphere, with no Congregational church. As the "rich and fashionable" (*M* 73) were Unitarians, material goods, so denied by Grandfather Warren, were valued positively in Rosville. This is evident in the



high living of Charles' family. Rosville represents the next stage in the development of New England society: the rise of the bourgeoisie.

The town's relaxed atmosphere was crucial to Cassandra's self-realization. Physical comforts such as those denied in Barmouth and opportunities to enjoy riches enabled Cassandra to improve. Cassandra's exemplar at this stage was Alice; she represented the feminine ideal cultivated by the Cult of True Womanhood but without much emphasis on piety. From her Cassandra learned the skills of arranging the household, dressing herself, and visiting; in short, how to enjoy high living, to be a good bourgeois wife. She was also allowed to read romantic writers such as Corinne and Byron freely. Such an atmosphere encouraged Cassandra to become more elastic and more susceptible to sudden impressions than before and more likely to have her sexuality aroused.

Rosville, however, was not devoid of the oppression of individuals, especially women. Sexually freeing though the atmosphere was (and perhaps was designed to be), Cassandra's love would have been scandalous had it been revealed, for it was illicit and also defied the injunction in the conventional feminine ideal that women were to be devoid of sexuality. Female sexuality was usually euphemized as illness, a strategy whereby to label women weak.<sup>5</sup> When Cassandra suffered from sleeplessness and dull pains, Dr. White, apparently recognizing the awakening of Cassandra's sexuality, commented "I dare say, now, that after this, you never will be quite well." (*M* 84). Even her father remarked, on finding Cassandra fading a little because of her passion, "Let me tell you something; don't get sick. If you are, hide it as much as possible. Men do not like sick women" (*M* 101).

The linking of sexuality with illness reflected the Puritan view of sensations and led to the conception of women as depraved. Cassandra's talk with her mother about her recent affair with Charles discloses the Biblical underpinning:

"Cassandra, what does your bitter face and voice mean?"

"I mean, mother, all your woman's heart might guess, if you were not so pure, so single-hearted."

"No, no, no."

"Yes."

"Then I understand the riddle you have been, one to bring a curse."

"There is nothing to curse, mother; our experiences are not foretold by law. We may be righteous by rule, we do not sin that way. There was no beginning, no end, to mine."

"Should women curse themselves, then, for giving birth to daughters?"

"Wait, mother; what is bad this year may be good the next. You blame yourself, because you believe your ignorance has brought me into danger. Wait, mother."

"You are beyond me; everything is beyond." (*M* 133)

The mother-daughter conflict is again depicted, this time in the matter of sexuality. Mrs. Morgeson's phrase "one to bring a curse" evokes the Biblical image of Eve seducing Adam. In the Calvinistic view, women's sense of spiritual inferiority originated in the transgression of Eve's. Mrs. Morgeson guessed that, like Eve, her daughter broke the law, and likewise in a situation involving sexuality. In her view, what made Cassandra sin was the sexuality she inherited from Eve. This belief easily led to a common absolutist judgment: a woman was, if not an angel, that is, one devoid of sexuality or at least suppressed sexually, a whore. Consequently women were forced to suppress their sexuality. Mrs. Morgeson, who had had a love problem with Charlotte Alden's uncle, must have doubted the theology or she would not have said "You are beyond me" (*M* 133). She had never been able to voice nor be convinced of her doubt.

Cassandra, unlike her mother, was relieved of this religious view of women. Her statement "our experiences are not foretold by law" (*M* 133) implies that she did not believe in Original Sin. Instead she gave a positive value to sexuality. She called Dr. White's explanation of her health problems "his theories" (*M* 87) arrived at on the basis of his deformed wife, though it actually reflected the medical theory prevalent in the nineteenth century. Cassandra was critical of Alice Morgeson because she seemed to have little love for Charles and devoted herself to her children and the household. Alice's attitude, however, was ideal from the viewpoint of the Cult of True Womanhood, which demanded that women exercise their sexuality only for reproduction.

To Cassandra, sexuality, one manifestation of natural, instinctive behavior, was what made her feel alive; she refused to kill it. As Harris insists, she was aware of her share in the affair with Charles, that she was not just “a passive recipient of male passions” (163). Cassandra was challenging the conventional view of female sexuality, particularly the purity which was one of the qualities demanded of woman by the Cult of True Womanhood, and her rebelliousness was recognized. Cassandra daring to define her sexuality by herself spoiled her femininity and “unsexed” (*M* 226) her in the minds of others. Ben Somers admitted that Cassandra was unlike other women in following her own instincts, that she was “impious” (*M* 226) and confusing. He also confessed that “I could never affirm that you were wrong” (*M* 226).

The affair was abruptly terminated, however, when an untamed horse pulled their carriage at such speed that Charles fell to his death and Cassandra bore a scar forever after. It is not that Stoddard questioned the morality of the affair, for Cassandra betrayed no regret about it in her narration. She did not shrink from saying to Alice Morgeson after Charles’ death, “I must tell you that I hunger for the kiss he never gave me” (*M* 123).<sup>6</sup> Cassandra thought her attitude better than a marriage with little love. To her, sin did not lie in breaking the law. In other words, her “conscience” resembles that acquired by Huck in Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* when he decided to rescue Jim in spite of his society’s moral code, which prohibited such an act. Cassandra did not doubt her righteousness; she went far beyond Huck, who regarded himself as committing a sin.

Yet I do not think we can deny that Charles’ death saved Cassandra from being labeled immoral in an age when even referring to female sexuality was exceptional. When one remembers the fate of Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, which was banned from public libraries, it is easy to imagine that *The Morgesons* would have been banned had their affair been consummated. It is true that within the novel, the illicitness of the affair emphasizes Cassandra’s passion and her rebelliousness, but it would have brought her ostracism if it had been revealed like Hester Prynne’s. Cassandra’s scar does not seem to me merely a sign of “her victory over a society which proclaimed women

sexual imbeciles and which would automatically condemn Cassandra for loving adulterously" (Harris 163) but also the price she had to pay for her unconventionality.

The affair also had to be ended in order for Cassandra to have the opportunity for growth, since she was quite dominated by Charles. As Harris notes, Charles was too powerful and tyrannical to allow Cassandra more self-realization (164). The example of his wife Alice corroborates it. Though she had first impressed Cassandra simply as a motherly figure devoted to her children and household, she later struck Cassandra with her wisdom in advising Cassandra's father to leave Cassandra a fortune and to teach her some trade (*M* 101), suggesting that marriage was not the only option for women. She proved it by taking over her husband's factory after his death.

Passion may be better than formalism, but avoiding unnecessary conflicts with others and protecting oneself are also necessary for survival. Thus Stoddard also offered Cassandra an exemplar who was not governed by her passion: Helen Perkins. Helen understood Cassandra's passion because she herself was engaged to a sailor cousin and had tattooed his initials on one of her arms. Helen, however, had revealed nothing about her affair to others. Her complicated family situation and the "scenes" (*M* 85) she had gone through had taught her never to show her spirits fluctuating. What Cassandra needed was common sense and a practical tinge which would clear her vision and prevent her from betraying her feelings. Helen exemplified the compatibility of love with calmness, just like many of the heroines described by Stoddard's female contemporaries.

### III. Belem

Cassandra's experience in Rosville helped Cassandra win Desmond Somers, another Byronic hero who had something of the animal in him and moved according to his instincts. Despite the passion Cassandra felt for him, she did not rush to consummate her love but instead waited two years for Desmond to recover from alcoholism. Her control over her passion turned her relationship with Desmond from a potentially

destructive one like that between herself and Charles into a constructive one. Thus Cassandra exhibited the practical tinge in feelings and the common sense which she so much admired in Helen Perkins in Rosville. She did not, of course, kill her passion for him or remain merely passive. Desmond's words to her, "Convince me beyond all doubt that a woman can reason with her impulses, or even fathom them, and I will be in your debt" (*M* 184) rooted in the sexist, belittling view of women as passive recipients of passion who were not able to direct their sexuality. Meeting his challenge, Cassandra controlled her passions and showed honesty in writing to him about Charles Morgeson. Her accomplishment so arrested him that it induced him to want to be "worthy" (*M* 250) of her, and therefore, recover from alcoholism. Thus Cassandra and Desmond were actually on equal terms, which is different from the one-sidedness in Charles's ruling Alice and Mrs. Somers' controlling Mr. Somers and her sons.

In Belem, Cassandra found Mrs. Somers and Mrs. Hepburn as role-models. They represented a society of appearances and money. While in Rosville riches were a means to enjoy life, in Belem money apparently underlay the power structure. People were evaluated by the amount of money they had and even more by their aristocratic heritage, their personalities forgotten or neglected, just as in the business world to which Cassandra's father belonged. The aristocratic heritage, manners, and tastes in cultural things such as poems were exploited by the aristocrats to hide their ugly money-chasing and to distinguish themselves from the emerging bourgeoisie. Gender did not matter, only whether he or she had a fortune. Mrs. Somers, a woman with no submissiveness and quite devoid of other characteristics of the Cult of True Womanhood, reigned in Belem with money. Mrs. Somers' presence in the novel might suggest a matriarchy, but one no better than Grandfather Warren's Puritan patriarchy. Her refusing any change, even in the household to the extent possible, reflects her refusal of any change in her supremacy within the hierarchy by the invasion of the nouveau riche. Mrs. Somers' dislike for Cassandra was strengthened by her fear of losing one of her sons, or in other words, money. The fortune of her natal family was to be divided among her sons when the youngest became twenty-one, so she gave birth to a late son in order to control

all of them longer. She functioned as a counter-model to Cassandra in regard to the uses of power.

Mrs. Somers also taught Cassandra another lesson through Mrs. Hepburn: that in a society of appearances, to make "the conventional mistake of a scene or an aside" (*M* 196), even when treated unfairly, would degrade her in the eyes of others. When Mrs. Somers, finding Cassandra and Desmond alone in the dining room late at night, insulted Cassandra by regarding the situation as Cassandra's "adventure" (*M* 186), Cassandra recognized Mrs. Somers' limits of self-control. Compared with Mrs. Somers' outburst, Cassandra's calmness marked her maturity.

Cassandra's withholding her anger and preserving appearances may seem a capitulation to the world of appearances that Cassandra actually disliked, yet it was a practical strategy to survive in the world and definitely a part of her growth. She never approved of Belem's two idiosyncrasies, its artificiality and imperturbability. Desmond was attracted to her because she was not a person of appearance but of passion and will, that is, a person of substance. His offering an extra allowance to Ben at the time of Ben's marriage and the division of the Somers' natal estate was an act contrary to the Belem strategy, evidently another result of Cassandra's influence. Cassandra could not abolish Belem, but her winning Desmond's love was definitely a challenge to the Belem world.

#### IV. Cassandra's Achievement

Cassandra resisted the conventions of New England and rejected various feminine role-models because of their self-denial or ill effects on others. She had become an exemplar of the woman who rejects conventional morality but is neither immoral nor amoral. Her achievement needed to be tested, especially against the demands of the external world. At this point Stoddard's protagonist joins protagonists in other woman's fiction in confronting her mother's death and father's bankruptcy, neither of them uncommon in nineteenth-century America. Surrey was always a place for consolidation. Here Cassandra would

undergo the most crucial test of her individual morality and independence.

The mother's death was depicted in other woman's fiction as an incident depriving the innocent protagonist of her mother's care and protection. In Cassandra's case, the situation was different. She was forced to reevaluate the way of life which she once had denied. Somebody had to assume the mother's role in the confusion, disorder, and powerlessness in the family after Mrs. Morgeson's death. Yet to do so demanded no less denial of self than ever, which was contrary to her independence. For Cassandra, taking over the house did not mean governing the family with no tenderness the way Mrs. Somers did. Nor did she want to run the house in her mother's way, suppressing her own desires for the sake of orthodox good example. She declared to Aunt Mercy, "I will reign, and serve also" (*M* 215).

Stoddard writes as if this were a new encouraging start for Cassandra (*M* 214). Indeed as Harris interprets Cassandra's decision, it was "a realization that she can consciously construct her environment as well as blindly confront it" (161). She was ambitious to change the mechanical life of her home, governed by "[t]he old asceticism which considered air, sleep, food, as mere necessities" (*M* 224), into something more consistent with her own insights. In short she wanted to prove that what she had accomplished in the other three towns was adaptable to real life.

The result was a disappointing one. Like other female protagonists, Cassandra proved that she was able to manage the household in spite of her father's indifference. With her clear vision of people and their feelings, she also contradicted Helen's assertion that "Marriage puts an end to the wisdom of women" (*M* 150) and produces only passive housewives. But Stoddard also emphasized the cruelty and bitterness of the unrewarding self-sacrifice demanded in the role of housewife. Cassandra's frustration rules her narration and gives, if not a sense of failure, at least no sense of success, especially when contrasted with Alice Morgeson's change into a woman with greater interest and attractiveness because of her involvement with the business world. Therefore, I agree with Lawrence Buell's remark that Cassandra's taking domestic responsibilities, which is usually a celebrated transla-

tion in other woman's fiction, is "a diminution" (sic) (Buell 358).

Yet Cassandra's taking over the house was also necessary for a sound life of her family. Her decision proved that she was better than her sister Veronica. Veronica was admired as a model of the Victorian feminine ideal by others, including her husband Ben. Her father said home was "her sphere" (*M* 60) and Cassandra recognized that Veronica was "a help to both sick and well" (*M* 60). As Habegger writes (92), this spirituality reminds us of Little Eva in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, who was also physically weak but strong in influencing the whole household. Cassandra herself had always been struck by Veronica's apparent superiority, such as her self-study and her excellence in performance on the piano. However, Stoddard impressed us with Veronica's eccentricity in the way she arranged her room, the way she dressed, the whimsical way she behaved. In reality, as proved at their mother's death and their father's bankruptcy, Veronica was never practical or useful. As Helen wisely perceived at Veronica's wedding, Veronica would always be "a child" (*M* 150), always be "delicate, pure, ignorant" (*M* 226), always be helpless and uncomprehending of the world, always too self-centered. Not surprisingly, she was unable to arrest Ben's alcoholism. Neither did she help Cassandra in managing the household. As Harris points out, Stoddard was subverting the code of the ideal woman in her rendering of Veronica (169).<sup>7</sup>

Cassandra's testing what she had learned in the other towns against the demands of the external world thus ended bitterly. High frustration and a sense of defeat governed her narration in this part as in the Belem section. She was liberated from the unrewarding role not by anyone's help but by Mr. Morgeson's remarriage with Alice, which was against Cassandra's wish.

Nor was it different in Cassandra's marriage with Desmond. In conventional woman's fiction, marriage should bring a happy ending for the protagonists. Baym writes that one of the significant characteristics of many women's works is that in the end the female protagonist establishes some type of family or community which consists not only of blood-relations but also of close friends (Baym, *Woman's Fiction* 38). Cassandra does establish a family, but a small one. We do not see Cassandra herself happy with her own child after two years of marriage.



Instead is presented Veronica's baby that "never cries, never moves, except when it is moved" (*M* 252), giving grief to Aunt Mercy. Ben's death from alcoholism and the baby's retardation give an impenetrable darkness. "[S]urvival" (Harris 170) is the word that expresses the final scene. Moreover, nothing is changed in the people around them. None of the Belem idiosyncrasies is changed, nor was any improvement recognized in Desmond by the Somers after his recovery from alcoholism.

Even nature no longer supported Cassandra, as she writes at the end of the novel: "[The sea's] beauty wears a relentless aspect to me now; its eternal monotone expresses no pity, no compassion" (*M* 252). Is Cassandra still affirmative about the nature that had governed her and Desmond? It is true that Cassandra was describing the sea "as simply a natural element, without relevance to her life or to the lives of others" (Harris 170). Cassandra's statement reflects her helpless feelings. Yet without the power of nature, Cassandra would have been severely distorted or changed by the demands of society like her role-models. As Buell points out (358), Cassandra paid for her tentative freedom by compromising with social demands as exemplified in her controlling herself in the face of unfair treatment by the Belem people and her taking on domestic responsibilities. But we must remember she did not totally subordinate herself to the conventions.

As Sato points out, the final world Cassandra built with Desmond was dominated by a sense of isolation(159). Even before Desmond's return while she was living with the servant girl Fanny, Cassandra's independence was possible because her father was able to give her financial independence and because she kept her distance from the world, refusing to intervene between Ben and Veronica. Such behavior conformed with Helen's advice that they should not be too close to each other in order to avoid dull friendship or conflicts (*M* 151). Yet the outer world occasionally invaded her world. Ben's alcoholism is an example. Just as the utopian world Huck and Jim founded on the raft on the Mississippi was invaded by the Duke and the rascals, however isolated and free Cassandra tried to live with Desmond, she would not be able to escape from society and then would have to compromise again.

## V. Conclusion

Cassandra's moral accomplishment is apparent in her narration: no injustice to the people who oppressed her, calm analysis of a social system that demanded self-denial, and no regret for her rebellion. Above all, her accomplishment is attested by the clarity of her understanding; the analytical insight evident at Belem, to say nothing of that pervading these memoirs recorded as a mature woman, had fully replaced the incomplete understanding possessed in her childhood and adolescence. *The Morgesons* is indeed a *Bildungsroman*, a tale of personal development and self-realization.

Baym (*Woman's Fiction* 37) and Harris (13) generalized the plot in the genre of woman's fiction as follows: after challenging society midway through the novels, most of the protagonists become submissive as a practical necessity and in the final stage usually establish a harmonious relationship with the world, conforming finally with the societal feminine ideal. The purpose of this plot, however, was to obscure the subversive plot; it was "to disguise multiple hermeneutic possibilities" (Harris 13). Woman's fiction was women writers' attempt to define themselves by themselves. If woman's fiction were conceived as a "continuous discourse" (Harris 20), examining women's nature and possibilities, Stoddard's *The Morgesons* was an aggressive participation in it. She challenged her contemporary female writers by presenting a more rebellious female protagonist achieving a different goal from theirs. In the "Our Lady Correspondent" column in the *Daily Alta California*, Stoddard criticized the indifference of other writers' heroines to good food and comforts: "Is goodness, then, incompatible with the enjoyment of the senses?" (326). In other novels, the protagonists usually experience poverty in the form of coarse clothes and bad food as a rite of passage to their maturity, thus overcoming their selfishness heroically. In *The Morgesons*, the very hard even if not poverty-stricken life experienced by Cassandra in Barmouth effectively presented the negative effects of such lives. Stoddard confirmed her theory by allowing Cassandra's moral growth in Rosville where the Puritan moral sword was missing in the atmosphere. Stoddard's *Bildungsroman* was totally iconoclastic, not even offering a happy ending.

*The Morgesons* conforms with what Stoddard regards as her mission :

a crusade against Duty—not the duty that is revealed to every man and woman of us by the circumstances of daily life, but that which is cut and fashioned for us by minds totally ignorant of our idiosyncrasies and necessities. (Stoddard, “Our Lady Correspondent” 326)

Clearly Stoddard does not admire independence devoid of moral responsibilities. What she does oppose is Duty that is defined by conventions which neglect human naturalness. Yet as implied by Cassandra’s compromise and Desmond’s desperate cry at the end that ““God is the Ruler....Otherwise let this mad world crush us now”” (*M* 253), their accomplishment is hardly felicity and is, in fact, close to mere survival. In Stoddard’s view women’s development and independence are only possible at some price: alienation from the world or some amount of compromise. Her vision is neither blissful nor rewarding, and therefore, more realistic and powerful than that of her female contemporaries.

#### Notes

- 1 Further reference to *the Morgesons* will be from the 1984 edition and will appear in text in this form: (*M* page number). Matlock writes that *The Morgesons*, published in June 1862, had “a modest sale and favorable reviews” (278) despite the prospect of civil war. In fact Hawthorne admired the first part of the book in his letter to Richard Stoddard (Matlock 295). William Dean Howells wrote that Elizabeth Stoddard had “failed of the recognition which her work merits” (77). In contrast, Henry James wrote that *The Morgesons* deserved “the obscurity to which it was speedily consigned” (614).
- 2 Miss Black was a product of the age of the feminization of religion. According to Cott, many pious young women took school teaching responsibilities with new, religious seriousness. Miss Black did not have to support herself; she established her school out of religious zeal.
- 3 James Matlack writes that Surrey where the Morgesons lived is modeled on Mattapoisett in Massachusetts where Elizabeth Stoddard was brought up (279). We cannot be sure of the specific time of the setting except that the *Boston Recorder*, the newspaper Cassandra’s mother read, was first published in 1827. Charles Dickens’s appearance in Boston is stated right before Cassandra’s visit to Belem, which should

Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*

have been in 1842. Judging from Locke Morgeson's business expansion, it was just the time when economic growth started to expand over the whole nation, influencing religion and home life. The prosperity also influenced his attitude towards religion.

- 4 The contradiction between the view that women were spiritually superior to men, which supports the Cult of True Womanhood, and the revivalist emphasis on their inferiority was resolved by claiming that because of that very superiority women were to be more sensitive to their sins and more demanding of themselves. The view that female sexuality originated in Eve, the temptress, seems to have been another factor in women's regarding themselves as spiritually inferior to men. Thus the idea that women were to "influence" men, not "order" them seemed natural in Victorian America.
- 5 According to Smith-Rosenberg, 19th century medical theories concerning puberty held that the existence of sexuality and becoming emotional were normal at adolescence but brought to women "increased bodily weakness, a newfound and biologically rooted timidity and modesty, and the 'illness' of menstruation"(186). Therefore, to avoid diseases, insanity, or death, the girls at puberty were advised to control emotions and limit their activities to the home. Dr. White's advice not to drink coffee corresponds to the general medical advice to avoid stimulating beverages and food, dances and party-going, which advice Cassandra totally ignored.
- 6 This attitude reminds us of Hester Prynne in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, who declared to Dimmesdale, "'What we did had a consecration of its own.'" (Hawthorne 480)
- 7 Harris explains that Veronica's subordinating herself to her physical limitations in her adolescence "so distorts her natural character that, for all practical purposes, she becomes dysfunctional"(168). Such discipline, however, "from the point of view of the dominant cultural values, lifts her above ordinary mortals" (Harris 168) and makes her into a Victorian ideal. Stoddard subverted the code of the ideal woman by making Cassandra, who battled openly with constraints, a more sound person.

### Works Consulted

- Ammons, Elizabeth. "Gender and Fiction." *The Columbia History of the American Novel*. Ed. Emory Elliott. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991.
- Baym, Nina. *Woman's Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1978.
- . "Women Writers and the New Woman." *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. Ed. Emory Elliott. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1988.
- Buell, Lawrence. *New England Literary Culture From Revolution through Renaissance*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986.
- Buell, Lawrence and Sandra A. Zagarell. Notes. *The Morgesons and Other Writings, Published and Unpublished*. 253-258.

- Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984.
- Cott, Nancy F. *The Bonds of Womanhood*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1977.
- Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Anchor Books, 1987.
- Habegger, Alfred. *Henry James and the "Woman Business."* Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989.
- Harris, Susan K. *19th-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretive Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter. The Portable Hawthorne*. The Centenary Edition. Ed. Malcolm Cowley. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976.
- . "To Richard Stoddard." 8 Jan. 1863. *NYPL*. Matlock 295.
- Howells, William Dean. *Literature and Life*. 1902. New York: Kennikat Press, 1968.
- James, Henry. "Two Men. A Novel. By Elizabeth Stoddard." "An Unpublished Review By Henry James." By James Kraft. *Studies in Bibliography* 20 (1967): 267-273.
- Matlack, James H. "Hawthorne and Elizabeth Drew Stoddard." *New England Quarterly* 50 (1977): 278-302.
- Sato, Hiroko. *Amerika-no-katei-shousetsu*. Tokyo: Kenkyu-sha, 1987.
- Stoddard, Elizabeth. *The Morgesons. The Morgesons and Other Writings, Published and Unpublished*. 5-262.
- . *The Morgesons and Other Writings, Published and Unpublished*. Eds. Lawrence Buell and Sandra A. Zagarell. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1984.
- . "Our Lady Correspondent." *Daily Alta California*. 3 August 1856. *The Morgesons and Other Writings, Published and Unpublished*. 325-326.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985.
- Zagarell, Sandra A. "The Repossession of a Heritage: Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*." *Studies in American Fiction* 13 (1985): 45-56.

