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INTRODUCTION



As she began work on her first novel in May 1860, Elizabeth Stoddard presented James Russell Lowell, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, with a starkly honest assessment of herself as an artist. After having been warned by Lowell that she had a dangerous tendency to go too “near the edge” in her writing, she asked him, “Do I disturb your artistic sense by my want of refinement?” and insisted, “I must own that I am coarse by nature. At times I have an overwhelming perception of the back side of truth.” She claimed she was incapable of “do[ing] that [which] will not show up in my constitution.” Despite her protests, Stoddard was indeed eager to be published, and she sought Lowell’s advice and that of other editors on how to balance her originality with the demands of the literary marketplace. She was unsure, however, as to the merits of actually acting on such advice: “Tell me,” she asked Lowell, “whether in writing, one should aim at entering a circle already established—or making one?”¹ The idea that she *could* do one or the other, join a circle or make her own, depending on what Lowell thought one *should* do, is distinctly Stoddard—arrogant, perhaps, but also refreshingly self-assured at a time when American women writers were rarely and reluctantly recognized as serious literary artists.² Ultimately, Stoddard did both: she took what she needed from established literary circles while making her own unique contribution to nineteenth-century American literature, a contribution that has only begun to attract the attention it deserves.

Stoddard's artistic "constitution" was certainly distinct from that of any other writer of the nineteenth century, male or female, and, as several scholars have noted, it is impossible (and indeed unproductive) to reduce her body of work to any single literary movement or style. She was neither a strictly romantic nor a strictly realistic writer, a sentimentalist nor a regionalist; rather, she took advantage of shifting American literary tastes to craft a different kind of narrative fiction. She was committed, as she tells Lowell, to the unflinching truth, no matter how uncomfortable it made her or her reader. She objected especially to the idealized representation of women in the fiction of her contemporaries and insisted that her "mission" was "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" ("Lady Correspondent," Aug. 3, 1856). Stoddard was also an innovative stylist, particularly in her use of dialogue. Influenced by the theater, she often relied upon dialogue to do the work of her fiction, consequently frustrating readers who wanted more authorial direction. "It is Mrs. Stoddard's practice," a disapproving young Henry James wrote in an unpublished review of her second novel, *Two Men*, "to shift all her responsibilities as story-teller upon the reader's shoulders, and to give herself up at the critical moment to the delight of manufacturing incoherent dialogue or of uttering grim impertinences about her characters. This is doubtless very good fun for Mrs. Stoddard; but it is poor fun for us." He concluded the review by insisting that "Mrs. Stoddard's notion is to get all the work done by the reader while she amuses herself in talking what we feel bound to call nonsense" (qtd. in Kraft 272, 273). Quite simply, Stoddard had a reputation for being difficult.

Stoddard's seemingly deliberate perversity discomfited friends and critics alike. While one family friend labeled her "the Pythoness," another suggested (in a letter to Stoddard herself, no less) that she was an "incorrigible bundle of contradictions and constancies, of whims, philosophies, absurdities, truth, and grandness."³ A female friend more generously insisted on Stoddard's social brilliance, but still described her as an overwhelming personality. Looking back at her acquaintance with Stoddard, Lillian Aldrich called her a "singular woman, who possessed so strongly the ability to sway all men who came within her influence. Brilliant and fascinating, she needed neither beauty nor youth, her power was so much beyond such aids. On every variety of subject she talked with originality and ready wit; with impassioned speech expressing an individuality and insight most unusual and rare" (*Crowding Memories* 14). Throughout her marriage, Stoddard's passion and "individuality" were at the heart of constant disagreements between the Stoddards and their friends, who, one after another, dropped out of her life after a brief period of intimacy. For better or worse, she understood her own character and the problems it caused, telling a new friend, "There is not one particle of 'nonsense' about me. I cannot stand blarney, roundaboutedness. As I have not many good qualities of disposition I feel sure of this, which as many a member of my family have told me, makes me often hateful. My father said once he never saw any human being with such a talent for the disagreeable."⁴

Combined with Stoddard's stylistic innovations, critics feared this "talent" rendered Stoddard's fiction unreadable, even immoral, in a literary marketplace that frequently valued the didactic, the virtuous, the inoffensive. A reviewer for *Godey's Ladies' Book*, for example, admired many technical aspects of Stoddard's

first novel, *The Morgesons*, but balanced these compliments with a caveat: “It is not such a book as we would place in the hands of the young, whose taste for reading is forming. . . . There is a morbid tone about it, which is apt to have an unhealthy effect upon the mind, to say nothing of the morals of the reader” (301). Another reviewer acknowledged that “critics are undoubtedly right in crediting Mrs. Stoddard with powerful and unique talent,” but added that “the public is also right in tacitly pronouncing her books unacceptable for its entertainment” (*Literary World* 324).⁵ All three of Stoddard’s novels—*The Morgesons* (1860), *Two Men* (1865), and *Temple House* (1867)—elicited a similar combination of reluctantly good reviews from critics coupled with limited popular acclaim or sales. Most critics agree that the disappointing response to her three novels caused her to forgo novel-writing for periodical publication, which was both more lucrative and less painful. Despite a reissuing of her novels later in the century, she never achieved the kind of literary success of which she dreamed.

For more than eighty years after her death in 1902, Stoddard remained a footnote in American literary history—that is, when she was remembered at all. Many critics of American literature knew her only because her fiction was quite famously held up as a point of comparison when Thomas Wentworth Higginson first visited the Dickinson family in Amherst: “I shan’t sit up to write you all about E. D. dearest,” he wrote to his wife, “but if you had read Mrs. Stoddard’s novels you could understand a house where each member runs his or her own selves.”⁶ It wasn’t until 1984 that Stoddard’s work was reprinted and given serious scholarly consideration. Lawrence Buell and Sandra A. Zagarell’s edition of *The Morgesons* (which also included two short stories, early journalism, a handful of letters, and Stoddard’s only

journal) introduced students and scholars to the author's work and made a thoroughly convincing argument for her recovery.⁷ They placed special emphasis on her three novels, claiming that "Stoddard was, next to Melville and Hawthorne, the most strikingly original voice in the mid-nineteenth-century American novel" (xi). Attention to Stoddard's work has since grown over the past twenty years, with professors teaching *The Morgesons* (as well as Stoddard's only anthologized short story, "Lemorne Versus Huell" [1863]), publishing articles about the novel and her short fiction, and increasingly exploring more of her oeuvre. In 2003 Stoddard's work became even more accessible with the publication of *Stories*, collected and edited by Susanne Opfermann and Yvonne Roth. An edition of critical essays on Stoddard's work—the first of its kind—was also published in 2003, edited by Robert McClure Smith and Ellen Weinauer. Notably, the collection includes essays on a broad range of Stoddard's work, including her biweekly column for the *Daily Alta California* (published from 1854 to 1858), her poetry, her short fiction, and all three of her novels. While very few of these primary texts have actually been reprinted, the essays demonstrate the need to extend our understanding of Stoddard's work beyond *The Morgesons*.

The project of recovering Elizabeth Stoddard continues in this edition of her second novel, *Two Men*. As in much of her fiction, in *Two Men* Stoddard transgresses the boundaries of what was considered acceptable (especially for women writers) in nineteenth-century American fiction: her second novel features unhappy marriages, complex female characters, semi-incestuous relationships, and miscegenation. For its daring and unconventional plot alone *Two Men* deserves recognition. The novel is also an exemplary specimen of Stoddard's experimentation with nar-

rative structure and style, as well as her blending of romanticism and realism. Finally, it is the most political of Stoddard's three novels, a reflection of the time in which it was written: a Civil War novel that ignores the war itself, *Two Men* is an exploration of the politics of race and citizenship that concerned the North throughout the war, but especially at its close.

The Life of Elizabeth Stoddard

Elizabeth Drew Barstow Stoddard was born in 1823 to a prominent family in Mattapoisett, Massachusetts. She was one of nine children, only five of whom lived to maturity. Her father, Wilson Barstow, owned a shipbuilding yard with her grandfather Gideon Barstow and is best known for having constructed the *Acushnet*, the ship that carried Herman Melville to the Marquesas on the voyage that would inspire his first and most commercially successful book, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846). The *Acushnet* would go on to greater fame as the ship that served as the model for the *Pequod* in *Moby-Dick* (1851). Despite the superior quality of his vessels, Wilson Barstow's business failed a number of times throughout Stoddard's lifetime. This would often place the family in a precarious position within the Mattapoisett community, rendering her forever sensitive to social slights. Perhaps because of their financial instability and perhaps because she was a girl, Elizabeth's education was sporadic. The most important educational experience for the budding author was surely her access to the extensive library of Mattapoisett's minister, Thomas Robbins. Her husband would later claim that Robbins's library represented "the only education she ever had" (*Recollections* 110). Like many other New England shipping yards, the Barstow's business was ultimately closed due to the Panic of 1857, the Civil War, and the decline of whaling interna-

tionally. While Stoddard's mother, Betsy S. Drew Barstow, died in 1849, her father lived until 1891, when he was more than ninety years old. Two of Elizabeth's siblings were especially important to her: her sister, Jane, who died of consumption in 1848, and her brother Wilson Barstow Jr., who remained a constant friend and companion until his death in 1869.⁸

It was Elizabeth's relationship with Wilson that first took her to New York City to live in 1849. While she had visited before, this more permanent relocation established a lifelong pattern of movement between the city and Mattapoissett—the former a source of stimulation and excitement for Stoddard, and the latter one of inspiration and comfort. Most of her fiction would be set in small New England communities like Mattapoissett, but New York was also essential to her development as an artist. Here she attended the literary salon of Anne Lynch (Botta), where she became acquainted with prominent literary figures; one of these new acquaintances was Richard Henry Stoddard, a poet whom she married in December 1852. Although she occasionally complained of his inability to understand her work, Richard did, for the most part, support Elizabeth's writing career financially and emotionally. His career was at times more successful than hers, but he was never able to provide for his family entirely by writing, no matter how many unpleasant editorial positions he accepted. To help supplement his income he also worked for the U.S. Custom House in New York City—a position he held for seventeen years and which he originally obtained with the assistance of Nathaniel Hawthorne—and for the Department of Docks, also in New York City. The marriage between Elizabeth and Richard was marked by the painful loss of their three sons (their youngest, Lorimer, was the only one to survive childhood, and even he died before his parents, in his late thirties),

poverty, and disagreements with friends—usually thought to have been caused by the ill-tempered Elizabeth. Throughout, however, the two loved and supported one another in their constant battles with friends, critics, and, in Richard’s words, “that ASS the public.”⁹

In 1853 Stoddard began her literary career with the publication of sketches and poems, and the following year with a regular column for the *Daily Alta California*. While it isn’t known exactly why she wrote for this particular newspaper, scholars speculate that she may have wished to use the venue to keep in touch with Wilson, who had moved to California in February 1853.¹⁰ Whatever the reason, Stoddard published biweekly columns in the *Alta* between 1854 and 1858, writing about everything from literature and the theater to politics and women’s rights and roles in American society. The *Alta* columns allowed Stoddard to develop a distinctive personal voice, one that is evident in all of her writing, both private and public.

Her first novel, *The Morgesons*, was published in 1862. This female bildungsroman, based loosely on Stoddard’s own early life, features a young woman named Cassandra Morgeson whose passionate nature and fierce sense of independence were a rarity in nineteenth-century American fiction. While this unconventional portrait probably had much to do with the novel’s lack of success, Stoddard would also later claim that the timing of the novel’s publication was poor: “*The Morgesons* was published ten days before Bull Run,” she wrote. “It was selling but from that day stopped. *The Morgesons* was my Bull Run, but it had a success of esteem. A very great deal was said about it.”¹¹ The novel’s commercial failure did not stop Stoddard from commencing work upon *Two Men*, but it quite possibly delayed its publication; insecure and self-conscious, she wrote slowly and without con-

fidence. In July 1863 she confessed to her close friend, Edmund Clarence Stedman, “I *am* writing a novel. . . . It is an awful task and I write it by the square inch—I do not seem to gain any facility in composition with practice.”¹² A year later, she was still struggling with the book, thinking consciously about its marketability; in July 1864, she wrote to Stedman again, lamenting the fact that she could not join he and his wife on a tour through the White Mountains: “For refreshment and solace I am going to attack the ‘style’ of my Ms novel, and clock and drug it for the market.”¹³ To Stoddard’s great disappointment, however, responses to her subsequent novels were almost exactly the same as those to her first: critical acclaim, but limited popular sales. Stoddard’s only long work of fiction published after 1867 was a children’s book, *Lolly Dinks’ Doings* (1874).

Stoddard continued to be a prolific writer, however, and to focus on the novels that she *could* have written, had she received more positive recognition for her work, is to ignore the importance of periodical publication in her career. Like many writers of the period, Stoddard relied on periodical publication both artistically and financially; ultimately, she placed more than one hundred stories, sketches, and poems in publications like the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper’s Weekly*, *Putnam’s*, *Appleton’s Journal*, and *Lippincott’s*. The quality of this work varies considerably, but the best of it exemplifies her strengths as a creative writer—vivid, unconventional characters and intense, often elliptical, dialogue—and exhibits a tightness and control of plot and structure that was sometimes missing in her longer fiction.¹⁴

In the early 1880s, the combined efforts of literary friends and admirers—Stedman, Julian Hawthorne, and Junius Browne, most notably—convinced Stoddard that new editions of her novels would prompt a much-needed critical reassessment of

her work. With Stedman's promise to write a preface for *Two Men*, the novel he thought most worth reprinting, Stoddard made minor revisions and signed a contract with Cassell and Company, a British publishing firm, who released the novels in 1888 and 1889. The novels did indeed effect a reconsideration of Stoddard's oeuvre, with at least one critic telling her, "I have lately read *Two Men*, the power of which has made a very great impression on my mind. Why, what has the world been about, all these years — where have I been? — not to know more about this book and you?"¹⁵ Stoddard herself was both relieved and grateful for the reappearance of the novels and the attention from literary friends, but she continued to be dissatisfied with the response to her work. In an 1888 letter to a friend, for example, she lamented, "I would laugh bitterly when I think how I have been ignored, how often in the presence of those who have been lionized whom I *knew* were *not* my superiors I have been passed over and unnoticed. I have almost been crushed" (Oct. 5, [1888]).¹⁶ The republication of her novels, then, was a bittersweet triumph.

The success of the 1888–1889 editions of her three novels probably contributed to the publication of Stoddard's collected *Poems* in 1895 by Houghton Mifflin, and a reissuing of the novels by Henry T. Coates and Company of Philadelphia in 1901.¹⁷ This was not enough, however, to maintain Stoddard's health or spirits. On August 1, 1902, almost a year after the death of her only surviving son, Elizabeth Stoddard died at the age of seventy-nine. Her husband followed her less than a year later.

Links in the Chain: Stoddard's Literary Contexts

Critical responses to Stoddard's novels often highlighted what they saw as the author's originality; whatever her shortcom-

A NOTE ON THE TEXT



The present text of Elizabeth Stoddard's *Two Men* is based on the first edition of the novel, published in October 1865 by Bunce and Huntington. Silent changes in punctuation were made in a handful of places throughout the text, but only in those places when there is a sense that some sort of printer's error had been made. The flavor of Stoddard's style is retained wherever possible. A second edition of *Two Men* was published in 1888, and these plates were used for a 1901 reprint as well. Most of the revisions that Stoddard made for the second edition are insignificant—often matters of punctuation or word choice. Those revisions deemed significant are addressed in the notes appended to the novel.

CHAPTER I



WHEN JASON AUSTER MARRIED Sarah Parke he was twenty years old, and a house-carpenter. As he was not of age, he made some agreement with a hard father by which liberty was gained, and a year's wages lost. He left his native village filled with no adventurous spirit, but with a simple confidence that he should find the place where he could earn a living by his trade, and put in practice certain theories concerning the rights of men and property which had already made him a pest at home. The stage-coach which conveyed him thence, traversed a line of towns that made no impression from his point of view—the coach window; but when it stopped to change horses at Crest, a lively maritime town, and he alighted to stretch his cramped legs, he saluted Destiny. Its aspect, that spring day, pleased him; he heard the rain of blows from broad-axes in the ship-yards by the water's edge, and saw new roofs and chimneys rising along the irregular streets among the rows of ancient houses, and concluded to stay. He unstrapped a small trunk from the stage-rack, carried it into the tavern entry, and looked about him for some one to address. A man who had been eyeing the trunk advanced towards him with a resolutely closed mouth, and hands concealed in his pockets.

“Do you keep this tavern?” Jason asked; “and do you want a boarder?”

“Yes siree,” the man replied, in a loud cheerful voice.

“What is board now?”

“Three dollars per week.”

“I think I will stop here. My name is Auster.”

“I agree; but maybe you had rather go to the other tavern where they sell liquor, with flies in it. *I* keep a temperance house.”

“Good,” answered Jason, pulling off his overcoat. “I have got a temperance lecture in my trunk; I wrote it last winter. I’ll lend it to you to read.”

“I ain’t much of a hand at reading handwriting,” the tavern-keeper replied with a dubious look; but catching sight of Jason’s carpenter’s rule, his face brightened. “Guess you are a carpenter,” he exclaimed; “just the place for you. We are growing like the mischief since whale-oil is so high.”

The arrangement for board was concluded, and Jason began life in Crest with ten dollars, two suits of clothes, and a few articles, which consisted of several shirts, two books whose titles were “Man’s Social Destiny,”³ and “Humanity in Limbo,” a pin-cushion with *Forget Me Not* embroidered upon it, and the temperance lecture.

Before night he had taken the bearings of Crest, and was satisfied that he had made a good choice. The week following he sent to a boss-carpenter a novel design for mantle-pieces, which proved the means of an engagement to work with a gang on the inside of a Congregational church about to be built. With the whistling of his plane he began to air his theories of Socialism, Abolitionism, and Teetotalism, and amused his fellow-workmen, who never mistrusted that he intended to be believed, or that he was in earnest, for his manners belied his words. He appeared shy, cold, and indifferent, self-forgetful, and forgetful of others.⁴

As the church progressed it became a place of resort, especially in the fine summer afternoons, when groups of young women

perambulated the aisles, sat in the doorless pews, or hung over the unfinished gallery. One day two ladies went up the pulpit stairs, while Jason was at work on its moulding below; looking up to caution them against stepping on certain loose boards in the flooring, he saw that he was too late, for the lady in advance was already half in the cavity under the floor, and only kept herself up by a clutch on the desk. Jason bounded up the stairs and extricated her; as he did this he heard a shrill laugh from her companion, which made him laugh too.

“I wish it had been you, Sarah Parke,” she exclaimed. “Thank you, sir,” she said stiffly to Jason, without looking at him.

“You are welcome to my help,” he answered quietly. “Of course, I owed it to you.” And he returned to his work.

“Who was the black-eyed girl that didn’t fall in?” he asked of one of the workmen, named John Davis.

“Squire Parke’s grand-daughter,” he answered. “It would be worth your while to walk into her affections; but she don’t look at carpenters, I tell you.”

“She looked at me,” Jason said grandly.

“How could she help it?” replied John satirically; “you have got such eyes!”

“Why shouldn’t she look at carpenters?” Jason persisted.

“The Parke family are next to the Lord, in this county, though it is not what it was once. One of ’em knocked off his heel-tap on Plymouth Rock the day the Pilgrims came ashore; one of ’em was a governor; one of ’em settled here—cheated the Indians, I guess, out of the pine woods that belong still to the old Squire, and died universally unlamented. I never heard any good of the name, nor any thing so very bad. There’s a streak in the family; one or two in every generation are all streak—which means that they go to the devil. I must say though, that most people have

a good word for the old Squire; he ain't meddlesome. I wonder what has come over this Sarah lately? I see her about with folks, as if she was tired of being by herself."

"The Parkes, I take it, have not understood the correct balance between Man and Wealth."

"Oh yes, they have, and have got all the wealth from every man they ever had any dealings with!"

"Such men delay the progress of social harmony."

"Speaking of harmony, will you go to the sing-to-night, with all hands? Miss Jane Moss, the girl you pulled up from the pulpit just now, is the head-singer in our choir. I sit behind her in the gallery, and pass cloves and cardamom seeds over to her every Sunday."

"What are you going to sing?"

"We are getting ready for the Dedication."

"If you will come round to the tavern for me, I'll go."

John consented, and, at seven o'clock, made his appearance dressed in his best, and found Jason in his best also. But notwithstanding the change of clothes, there was a strong piney odor about them; also a dryness of complexion, a roughness of hair and whiskers, and a cracked condition of the hands, which suggested beams, boards, and shavings. Jason had been nicknamed "The Lath."⁵ The physiognomy of "The Lath" promised to be interesting, if the soul should ever awaken; eyes of light blue, fringed with thick black lashes, now somewhat vague and wandering, would then flash with conquering power, or diffuse, tender, appealing rays. At present, Jason was not handsome; neither was there any fascination in his bearing, attitudes, gestures, or speech.

He did not confess on his way to the singing-meeting that he knew nothing of music, but when he arrived took a seat among

the singers, and turned the leaves of his music-book at the proper instant. Opposite him, in the place of honor, sat Jane Moss and Sarah Parke; he soon discovered that Sarah was no more of a singer than himself, though her lips moved, and her eyes followed the notes. She looked at him in the middle of a prolonged "Amen," and perceived that he understood the sham; she turned her head away to conceal a smile, turned back again, and learned, as the choir burst out again, that he was an accomplice in her fraud.

John Davis informed him, when the meeting broke up, that he had about made up his mind to ask Jane Moss if he might escort her home, though he didn't know but that it would make her mad.

"Go in," said Jason; "I'll support you."

John, with a stiff "Good-evening," thrust his elbow out before Jane, and she condescendingly placed her hand inside it. A moment after, Jason was introduced to Sarah, and shook hands with her modestly, and walked beside her without attempting conversation; he waited for her to address him. His deportment was so unexceptionable, that when he left her at her door, she expressed a hope of meeting him again.

It was known in Crest soon after that Jason had called at Squire Parke's. Then it was rumored that he spent whole evenings there, playing backgammon with Sarah, or whist with the Squire. And finally the town was surprised to hear that Jason and Sarah were to be married. It charitably said that she must be bewitched to marry a poor carpenter, and that he knew which side his bread was buttered on, but that he might not find it so pleasant to go up in the world after all. But it was not allowed to be present at the marriage ceremony, which was performed one evening in the Squire's west parlor. Two persons besides the minister were

present; the Squire and Elsa Bowen, the housekeeper. The next morning Jason took his place at the breakfast-table, as an inmate of the family. The household consisted now of six persons; the Squire, Sarah, his grand-daughter, Elsa Bowen, a middle-aged woman who had lived with the second wife of the Squire for years, as housekeeper, friend, and fourth cousin, a hired man, "Cuth," who had been in the Squire's employ from a boy, a youth named Gilbert, and Jason himself.