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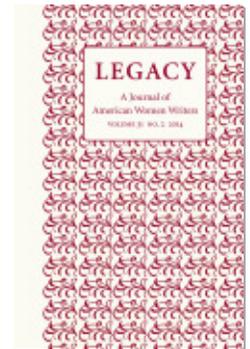
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*The Morgesons: Elizabeth Stoddard's  
Ars Erotica*

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This essay takes up the often noted but seldom analyzed rage at the heart of Elizabeth Stoddard's novel *The Morgesons*. I argue that the outsized anti-social feeling that pervades the book comes out of Stoddard's profound dissatisfaction with dominant social models for being and belonging in Victorian America. While her counterparts internalized their anger with existing models and opportunities for women, Stoddard externalized hers by staging sadistic scenes that bear no trace of the baroque interiority of the sentimental novel. Yet for all its negativity, her rage is generative, enabling alternatives, however unsustainable, to conventional notions of family and romantic love. Drawing on insights from what has been termed the antisocial thesis in queer theory, I read the bad behavior in *The Morgesons*—frustration, anger, narcissism, stubbornness, sadism, masochism—not as behaviors that need to be domesticated but as alternatives to the dominant life narrative and the institutions that perpetuate it. Informed by a nasty sensibility, this coming-of-age story enacts an anti-pedagogy against the domestic novel's lessons of romantic love, family life, and private property.<sup>1</sup> Stoddard foregrounds the life of her anti-heroine, Cassandra Morgeson, from childhood to adulthood as beset with frustration at the limitations that the prescribed passage to maturity entails. As such, *The Morgesons* chronicles the rage of a frustrated woman sensing foreclosure, not unlike Harriet Beecher Stowe's broad social vision whittled down in her later novels to the pleasures of shopping, decorating, and bossing one's spouse around. Yet unlike her contemporary, Stoddard lets her heroine's rage and the non-normative intimate possibilities it brings into being stand against the meager pleasures of domestic ownership and privatized sexuality.<sup>2</sup>

If the nineteenth-century domestic novel draws the reader into its world as if welcoming one into the comfort of a home, *The Morgesons* keeps the reader at arm's length in a disinviting gesture: difference is maintained, subjectivity remains opaque, and intimacy is weird. In its coldness, the novel enacts an anti-pedagogy through its bossy sensibility aimed at reorienting the coordinates that make possible intimate interactions. The novel will let you in only if you play by its rules and follow the heroine's instructions. Reading it is a disorienting experience that requires a readjustment of sensibility for readers accustomed to being eased into scenes of sociality and readability.

The nineteenth-century angel in the house may exist in that half-life of disembodied grace, but Cassandra Morgeson is all appetite. She comes first, second to none, "cruel hungry" for experiences inconsistent with her gendered subject position in late-nineteenth-century America (Stoddard 67). Cruelty becomes her own nourishment, an affective modality that functions as a check on the culture's insistence that women identify with the submissive position in the spectrum of power. Unlike her sister and mother, Cassy is not going to starve herself on a diet of abnegation and feminine propriety. She wants to eat her mother and everything she represents; she wants to eat like a man.

In fact, Cassy takes her father as a gender model for a good part of the novel as aggression and dominance are traits she cultivates. Yet this is not to say that Cassy wants to be a man, but that her identification with power is not organized along feminized, masochistic lines. She wants to occupy the dominant position in social and intimate contexts, a position usually afforded men. It is as if, lacking the upbringing accorded a young man, Cassy shapes her identity and desires in a do-it-yourself way that makes this Bildungsroman at once compelling and alienating. Her very own special creation, an embodiment of a Nietzschean will to power, Cassandra experiences pleasure when her romantic love interests are symbolically castrated or killed off.

Her sadism returns the erotic to the body in a familial setting that seeks to disembody sexuality. Strategizing within a position of limited privilege, her actions remain within the domestic: Cassy's BDSM drama is staged in dining rooms, drawing rooms, greenhouses, and carriages.<sup>3</sup> And, of course, there must be the other players, her requisite masochistic counterparts. Cassy's sadistic intensity, then, is not the only form the negative takes in the novel. Her younger sister, Veronica, and male beaus find in their masochism new and different ways to feel their bodies in a culture that encourages women to lose theirs and men to resist vulnerability. More specifically, Cassandra's sadism allows those with whom she has contact to break with the stifling

script of proper gender identity. These characters create alternative modes of being and belonging beyond traditional gender roles and forms of intimacy. If critics of the novel have mostly ignored, moved past, or read as pathological its unconventional pleasures and power dynamics, I am interested in identifying the social radicality of *The Morgesons*, specifically its manifestation in Cassy's cruelty, as a laying bare of the structures of dominance implicit in the Victorian home.

Recent critical discussions of the novel focus on desires of a different, more normative sort: property ownership.<sup>4</sup> Critics argue that Cassy's dominant desire is for the security and stability that property promises and that this desire betrays Stoddard's aspirations for the same. While I agree that Stoddard's novel reveals some anxieties about women's vulnerability vis-à-vis property, *The Morgesons*, in contrast to recent critical opinion, short-circuits the linkage between subjectivity and ownership, transforming domesticity from an imagined sphere divorced from market forces into a space of contested power dynamics that offers an alternative to normative sex and gender models. For Cassandra, owning her father's house is ultimately a limited means to autonomy. The mobility she longs for throughout the novel, to which her childhood obsession with reading travel narratives attests, is never fully realized. Cassandra sojourns at various houses finally to find herself stuck in her own. Without discounting the great historical importance of women being able to own property, I want to call attention to how contradictory responses to this social goal are registered in Stoddard's novel.

An act of rebellion against domesticity, sometimes minor, sometimes major, appears on every page of *The Morgesons*. The novel's honesty about family life and the limited options for people—both men and women—is brutal yet breathtaking. The frankness of the text and the ways that frankness finds expression have caused critics to remark on its strangeness in terms of form and content. Again, *The Morgesons* is a weird read. As Christopher Hager writes, "*The Morgesons* simply is not what we thought fiction of this period, by women or men, was like. It does not take aim at the coarseness and competition of a male public sphere, nor does it valorize the antidotes of hearth and home" (699). Julia Stern describes the novel as "gnomic and elliptical in style, gothic in characterization and plot, and presciently modernist in form" (107). With its staccato dialogue and fragmented style that break with the familiar pattern and script of the sentimental, domestic novels Stoddard writes against, *The Morgesons* has no telos, no clear-cut direction and pre-set ending. The plot is difficult to discern: its heroine spends extended periods of time at distant relatives' homes, as if the narrative consisted of nomadic episodes with no end goal. The flatness of the dialogue discourages readers from identifying

too easily with the characters and underscores the fact that intimacy between the characters is based on difference and complex power dynamics rather than conventional sexual consummation and the sameness of sympathetic fellow feeling we see played out in sentimental novels.<sup>5</sup>

Scenes that may strike us as incomprehensible and pathological, which critics are quick to aestheticize as stylistic faults or innovations, might in fact point to our inability to recognize different forms of intimacy, however strange or vicious. The negativity that electrifies the novel—emanating from a dissatisfaction with dominant social models—takes on new forms in acts, identities, and intimacies that come out of rage, demand, refusal, cruelty, and pain. Building on what Stoddard's father referred to as his daughter's "talent for the disagreeable," I am particularly concerned with the negative acts and affects that pervade the text, not as antisocial behaviors that need to be domesticated or repaired but as alternatives to the dominant life narrative and the institutions that perpetuate it, in Stoddard's time and our own (qtd. in Putzi and Stockton xv).

#### STODDARD'S ANTISOCIAL TURN

Opaque, difficult, and alienating, *The Morgesons* does not easily offer itself up to critical scrutiny; neither is its prickly heroine a helpful guide to its nasty universe. Perhaps there is something to be learned by respecting its uninviting qualities. Our impulse as readers to want to domesticate *The Morgesons*, to make it historically recognizable, to turn it into something it actively resists, might give us pause, instructing us in an ethics of difference predicated on antisociality. In a way, Stoddard's novel anticipates the recent preoccupation in queer theory with the negative, the intractable, and the antisocial. Leo Bersani's influential work on the negativity that is intrinsic to intimacy, specifically the ways that sex is not future-bound and redemptive but rather self-shattering and destructive, has greatly influenced recent queer scholarship's focus on the sociality, counter-publics, and coalitions that come out of what often gets read as unhealthy and pathological. For instance, Lee Edelman argues that different subjective formations and socialities that counter heteronormativity emerge from the negativity of the death drive, which "names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability" (9). Freightened with a negativity analogous to Freud's death drive, according to Edelman, queers ought to embrace the negativity ascribed to them, reimagining the world in antisocial terms, rather than aspire to the ranks of our own late Victorian notions of sociality.<sup>6</sup> The social radicality, ugly feelings, and negativity that animate *The Morgesons* pull us back to a pre-Stonewall iteration of unconventional intimacy that is not concerned with

fantasies of safety, futurity, or normativity. Although Cassandra moves toward that fateful end that all Victorian heroines must inevitably confront, she inhabits what I call a now temporality that has no business with the future, the deferral of pleasure, or the strictures regarding gender and intimacy.

Stoddard's antisocial turn breaks with sentimental novels that uphold fellow feeling as the proper mode of intimacy. Intimacy, in Stoddard's universe, does not require deep knowledge of the other. Of her mother, Cassandra says, "I never understood her, and for that reason she attracted my attention" (17). While the logic of sentimentality would posit same-sex and blood identification as ready-made conditions for intimacy, Cassy and her mother are radically different in character and temperament, and neither wants to close those gaps between them. Little traditional communication exists among family members, yet everyone seems to communicate well without saying much, without the typical disclosure required of sympathy and fellow feeling.<sup>7</sup> The unconventional intimacies that structure Stoddard's novel leave difference intact, thus creating conflict, interest, and engagement. In *The Morgesons*, constant eruptions and breaks make possible a reimagining of conventions of love, family, and intimacy. The novel demonstrates ways to have pleasure and intimacy without surrendering mystery and secrecy.

In a word, Cassy allows the people in her life to stay other. Richard Brodhead has argued that people are rendered docile not through punishment but through forms of disciplinary intimacy where structures of power are made invisible and internalized, ministered in the name of love (18). In her obstinate cruelty, Cassy resists the lesson of disciplinary intimacy and prefers to lay structures of power bare through her actions. This kind of honesty about who has the power and how power works allows Cassandra and the people she has contact with to negotiate the power relations structuring their lives.

Stoddard's exploration of intimacy beyond sameness is an anomaly not only when considering her contemporaries' work; it may strike some as odd today as well. Readers may not see these relationships as normal or healthy or ideal, as scholarship on *The Morgesons* often attests. The questions and challenges the antisocial turn in queer theory raises center on what counts as intimacy and the multiple ways that people do experience intimacy beyond sameness and deep knowledge, exemplified by the "don't talk to strangers" instruction parents often give children. Countering such logic and asking "*Why should strangers not be lovers . . . ?*" Tim Dean upholds gay male cruising cultures as historically and affectively important forms of intimacy for the very reason that cruising does not require full disclosure.<sup>8</sup> Using cruising as a way to think about intimacy and alterity, sexual and otherwise, Dean argues: "It is the intimate encounter with the other that does not attempt to eliminate otherness

that I wish to advocate as ethically exemplary” (180). What kinds of intimacies, pleasure, and affinities are possible if one resists domesticating the other’s otherness in an effort to override differences? The idea of domesticating someone’s otherness, translating her differences and strangeness into a benign sameness, may provide an illusion of safety and control, especially in one’s intimate life, “a privileged domain in which we encounter otherness” (180). Conversely, what might it mean to protect the other from our desire to colonize her alterity and reject the language central to the sentimental novel’s standard model of sociality, a language that still informs the ways we talk about intimacy?<sup>9</sup>

With Dean, Stoddard articulates in her dramatizations of social/sexual encounters kinds of intimacy where knowledge is not paramount, emotional reciprocity is kept to a minimum, and the interiority of the other remains opaque. However, intimacy, pleasure, intensity, and sensation are not dependent on conventional sexual consummation in Stoddard, whereas Dean ultimately depends on sex in the very literal sense to make a case for the virtues of opacity and difference. Stoddard’s *ars erotica* allows for a redefinition of pleasure and eroticism along broader lines than those suggested by Dean. For instance, Cassandra begins a passionate love affair with her married, older distant cousin Charles Morgeson when she stays with him and his wife and children. They do not sexually consummate their relationship in traditional ways but rather via their power games: Charles purposefully courts Cassandra following the romantic script that he knows she despises, acting the part of the domineering man, making gestures to tame and refine her, as he does with his wild horses and exotic orchids. Cassandra responds perfectly by ignoring or lashing out at Charles, which is exactly what this man who yearns to be broken desires (74). When trying to explain to others her relationship with Charles, she finds that she lacks a script or language that fully explains their intimacy or domesticates its strangeness (101).

The characters’ differences and alterity engender curiosity and engagement in the novel. Veronica tells her mother, “We are all so different; but I like you mother” (64). Cassy’s friend Helen tells her, “What is the use of talking to you? Besides, if we keep on we may tell secrets that had better not be revealed. We might not like each other so well; friendship is apt to be dull if there is no ground for speculation left.” Helen never “invaded” Cassy’s sentiments, and for this Cassandra is grateful (151). Cassy corrects her friend and future brother-in-law Ben Somers, who assumes the sisters don’t love one another, telling him, “I think I love her [Veronica]; at least she interests me” (101). As these examples lay bare, Stoddard finds full disclosure repellent. Cassy prefers to maintain distance in her intimacies. What critics have identified as psychological pathologies are in fact necessary impediments for the continuation of

sociality. What Cassy finds attractive in people is their lack of transparency. Her rage and antisociality are her ways of keeping others at arm's length yet simultaneously within her sphere. Unsurprisingly, not everyone sticks around, and the body count is high.

#### HOW DO YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE CASSANDRA?

An upbringing in Surrey, an isolated New England seaport town cut off from the world, and dissatisfaction with the kind of subjectivity that her mother represents leaves a young Cassy to her own devices as she experiments with the power dynamics that make up the Victorian home, testing limits and figuring out what gives her pleasure. The cold weather keeps her indoors, bored and obsessed with reading travel narratives that betray a desire to break out of the house. Not content with staying home to “read the bible and sew,” Cassandra, from a very early age, shows no signs of paying her mother any mind (64). Intractably active, Cassandra is unsuited for domesticity. The novel's opening lines give voice to feminized frustration with her impish determination: “‘That child,’ said my aunt Mercy, looking at me with indigo-colored eyes, ‘is possessed.’ When my aunt said this I was climbing a chest of drawers, by its knobs, in order to reach the book-shelves above it, where my favorite work, *The Northern Regions*, was kept” (5). “Possessed” certainly does not describe someone who is content with the domestic, as a docile young girl should be.

Cassandra is possessed with a drive for constant action and movement, made evident as she climbs the drawers as if trying to escape her aunt's judgmental gaze. The overdetermined qualifier conflates supernatural and economic registers, foreshadowing the conflicts that will define the book, both aesthetically and politically. Cassy soon realizes that she owns herself and not much else. Her attempt to escape her aunt's critical gaze illustrates a feminized version of Huck lighting out for the territory, except Cassy really has no place to go between her travel books and the desolate view from her window. Fleeing to the top of the dresser telegraphs her future position as mistress of all things domestic.

At a young age Cassy defines herself against her mother, the prototypical angel in the house who has abstracted herself almost to the point of nonexistence. Mary does not bother to tie her shoes, and when she wants exercise, she watches the sea from her window: “her eyes roved over it when she wanted a little out-of-doors life” (24). Mary has no sense of self; she does not so much live in the house as haunt it like a ghost. Her unlaced shoes are a sign that she is not going anywhere. Mary's sole function is to model for her daughter the virtues of femininity, which involve internalizing the violent process of making girls into women. Stoddard illustrates the result of this process through

Cassandra's descriptions of Mary: "her hand was pressed against her breast, as if she were repressing an inward voice which claimed her attention," and "I thought she wished me to believe she could have no infirmity in common with me—no temptations, no errors—that she must repress all the doubts and longings of her heart for example's sake" (53, 64). When Cassandra is sent to stay with her maternal grandfather to be tamed, or, to use her word, "crushed," she learns that her mother was once somewhat like her. Stoddard repeatedly evokes the times that Mary "rode the white colt bare-back round the big meadow, with her hair flying" to convey who Mary once was as a young girl, or to put it more precisely, the independence Mary tried to cultivate before being crushed by her own father (39).

If Cassandra dis-identifies with her passive mother, then she overly identifies with her father's phallic power and ability to leave the home and be in the world. Sometimes enabling models are found in unlikely places—in this case, in patriarchy. As a young girl, Cassy fantasizes about being her father by snapping his riding crop at their dog, as he does to the horses, and imagining a suit for herself "to match his," thinking "how well we should look calling at Lady Teaze's house in London" (12). Because she is not allowed her father's mobility in the world and is not raised with the freedom that young boys are often afforded, all Cassandra can do is read books set in faraway places and fantasize about her possible travels if she were a subject with power like her father. His suit signifies the masculinity that affords such agency, and his riding crop implies not only the horses and carriage necessary for mobility but also the sadism attractive to Cassy that empowers her to act on others rather than being acted upon. Unlike her mother, whom Cassandra sees as a permanent, decorative fixture in the home, her father is a transient figure in the house. Cassandra does not incestuously desire her father or want to be a man; rather, she desires what she perceives to be his power. Cassy's parents model for her an unequal relation of power. She does not exhibit a protofeminist sense of outrage at this imbalance. Rather, unless she is on top, Cassandra won't play. That is why, to be sure, Cassy's identification with phallic power has nothing to do with her father's gender. She rejects him when he loses his wealth and redirects her admiration to his second wife, Alice, the wealthy woman who bails him out.

If Cassandra dis-identifies with her mother by over-identifying with her father, her younger sister does the exact opposite. Veronica is a caricature of their mother, exaggerating and performing femininity to the point of high drag. Starving and infantilizing herself, Veronica subsists on a baby's diet of milk and toast. Cassy describes Veronica's masochism: "Verry was educated by sickness; her mind fed and grew on pain, and at last mastered it. . . . Upon each recovery a change was visible" (59). Veronica states that she "need[s] all

the illnesses that come,” for she “acquired the fortitude of an Indian; pain could exhort no groan from her” (67, 59). Over-identifying with the role of the proper white lady, Veronica is weak, helpless, homebound, and desexualized with a vengeance. She performs femininity to such a degree that its artificiality is revealed in its extravagant performance. I wrote that Veronica is Mary in drag, but with an important difference. Her staged performances of illness telegraph the ways that Veronica is actually in control of her body. By submitting to her various illnesses—embracing, understanding, working through, and surviving them—she comes to master the pain and her body. As Gilles Deleuze argues, the masochist moves between states of powerlessness and domination (88). Through her masochism, Veronica is able actively to perform an identity that allows for her empowerment by submitting to the strictures of proper femininity and pushing them to enabling and pleasurable extremes.

As Marianne Noble counterintuitively argues, the Victorian angel in the house lived in a state of subservience she manipulated in order to feel the (masochistic) pleasure denied the evanescent self she was supposed to be (4).<sup>10</sup> Veronica tells her mother and Aunt Mercy, “I believe . . . that Grand’ther Warren nearly crushed you 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). As her statement makes clear, Veronica is keenly aware of the structures of power that govern and limit women’s lives. Her masochism allows her to avoid losing her own body and being “crushed.” She is fierce and powerful: “I feel evil still. You know . . . that my temper is worse than ever; it is like a tiger’s” (52). Veronica’s anger, which she expresses in masochistic acts, is a negative affect that enables her actively to maintain control over and feel her body. Her choice of animal, the tiger, shows that her self-abjection has a powerful dimension.

Masochism and sadism are important erotic modes that allow Cassandra and Veronica to take control of their bodies, albeit differently, in opposition to the cruelty and violence that the process of proper gendering entails. Sadistic and masochistic relations affectively structure the novel: one sister’s action arouses the other, allowing them to break out of the monotony of their lives by eroticizing the quotidian. For example, as a young girl, Cassandra is kicked out of school for her bad behavior. Cassy comes home to report the news and doesn’t get much of a reaction from her parents. In response, she takes her father’s whip and strikes their dog. Cassy’s violent action arouses a climactic reaction in Veronica, who smashes a pitcher of milk on her own head in response. The sisters’ actions rouse Mary to attention and in an uncharacteristic manner to stamp her foot, clench her hands, and ask, “What have I done, to be so tormented by these terrible children?” (12). Now all three women are

finally acting (out); tellingly, Locke Morgeson simply leaves the room as the women take over. With the father gone, the scene is set for relations between women unmediated by the law of the father. "At the right moment," Veronica delivers the scene's final lines: "Help Verry, she is sorry" (13). As Stoddard's language suggests, what we just witnessed seems tellingly rehearsed. Even Veronica's self-referential lines in the third person illustrate a metafictional comment on their routine. By neutralizing parental authority, the sisters can temporarily disrupt domesticity and reclaim that space as a site of pleasure where the conventional rules of the domestic do not apply.

This early ludic scene is replayed later when the sisters, now much older, reenact their routine, this time including their servant, Fanny, in the theatrics. After one of her last extended stays away from home, Cassandra returns indefinitely, lonely and depressed with her lack of options: "I must be my own society. . . . What a dreary prospect! The past was vital, the present dead! Life in Surrey must be dull" (131). Cassandra finds herself isolated and homebound, facing a future not unlike her mother's. Her only reprieve, as when a child, involves accompanying her father on business. Cassy's trips outside do not last, though, when her mother reproaches her father "for allowing me to adopt the habits of a man" (142). Cassy now fills her days with shopping and decorating her bedroom, for she claims, "I had a comfortable sense of property, when I took possession of my own room" (129). Her only sphere of influence is her room, and she can only have a public life through consumption, in that shopping is one of the few ways for her to be out of the house. Her public self is limited to commodity consumption for the ends of redesigning private space.

After months of decorating, Cassy unveils her new bedroom to the family. Veronica's response is that the only "reality" in the room is the fire in the fireplace (a remnant of Cassy's once strong passion). She responds to Veronica, "What if I should say you provoke me, perverse girl?" To this Veronica replies, "I wish you would; I should like to hear something natural from you" (145). Disappointed with her sister's newfound interest in middle-class diversions, Veronica prefers the aggressive, nasty Cassy, whom she feels is the "natural" Cassy, to this faux version of her sister. The bedroom decor drama comes to a climax when Fanny, overhearing the sisters' exchange, exclaims, "with an expression of enjoyment," that Cassandra and Veronica are "sisters that don't love one another" (145). The passion that the fire symbolizes, the only reality in the room, according to Veronica, is now embodied in the intensity between the women:

Veronica's eyes shot more sparks than the disturbed coals, for Fanny's speech enraged her. Giving her head a toss, which swept her hair behind her shoulders,

she darted at Fanny, and picked her up from the wood, with as much ease as if it had been her handkerchief, instead of a girl nearly as heavy as herself. I started up.

“Sit still,” she said to me, in her low, inflexible voice, holding Fanny against the wall. “I must attend to this little demon.” (145)

No longer about showcasing middle-class taste, the scene in the room becomes charged with violent intensity. Veronica’s show of force rouses Cassy out of her depression and brings the sisters in close, interclass contact with Fanny, thus reinforcing the reality of economic inequality while also acknowledging Fanny’s presence, not as an invisible menial but as someone who dares to enter the sisters’ perverse game. Fanny insinuates herself into the sisters’ conversation, and Veronica, rather than ignore the servant, pulls Fanny into the scene, showcasing her strength, demonstrating that masochism does not mean a lack of agency or power, as Noble argues. Veronica’s act of slamming Fanny up against the wall complicates a reductive understanding of the masochist.

Frustrated with their limited options as women, all three lash out at each other rather than at patriarchy. Yet what the routine played out by Veronica, Cassandra, and Fanny produces actually works against the process of feminization. By acting up and experiencing their bodies, the women are not docile, desexualized subjects. Fanny responds to Veronica, “I do believe, Miss Veronica . . . that you are going to be sick, I feel so in my bones,” for Veronica’s touch has allowed Fanny to feel her own body. Fanny affectively identifies with Veronica’s masochism, for her bones ache, too. Fanny does not “express any astonishment or resentment at that treatment she had received,” hinting at the fact that she is just fine with Veronica’s violent outburst, perhaps experiencing some pleasure from the contact that is an excess of an abusive moment (145). Knowing that Veronica experienced pleasure from the scene she set up, Fanny predicts that Veronica will now have a masochistic release through one of her “illnesses,” which is indeed what happens next. Veronica dramatically exclaims, “It is the winter that kills little Verry,” and Cassy erupts in laughter, soon followed by Veronica. Their laughter embodies the pleasurable release their performance enabled. Fanny adds that she likes Veronica because she is “fond of people who have their ups and downs”: such a range of affect produces sensation that brings bodies together and engenders interest and contact, not pathology or weakness (147).

Although they do not have a conventional relationship and are very different people, Veronica makes it clear through her words and actions that she loves both Cassandra and Fanny. Veronica tells Fanny, “Are you, with your small, starved spirit, equal to any judgment against *her*? I admire her; you do, too. I *love* her, and I love you, you pitiful, ignorant brat” (145). What may be

read as the mistress's angry scolding of the servant becomes in Stoddard's work an honest expression of love across class differences and temperament. This is not to say that the Morgeson sisters are socialists, but, within the socially compromised conditions in which their lives unfold, the expressions of rage that punctuate the novel temporarily suspend the normal rules of society and allow for a different way of doing things, at least affectively. When Mary worries that Fanny is not "grateful" for her job as a servant, Veronica responds, "[W]hy must people be grateful?" (129). Veronica accepts Fanny as she is and does not expect her to act like the humble, self-deprecating servant. What angers Veronica is not Fanny's pride but that Fanny (purposefully) misreads the unconventional intimacy between the sisters.

The intensity of the women's roughhousing aims to negate proper gender roles and foreground a plane of intensity charged with transformative possibilities. Deleuze has theorized that sadism negates the ego in an attempt to transcend secondary nature (the world of experience—the Symbolic) and reach primary nature (a plane of transcendence where identity does not exist—the Real) (27). Accordingly, Cassandra's repeated acts of aggression enable her to work against the fiction of a coherent, properly feminized self and the constraining mandates of the ego, opening her up to a kind of promiscuous sociality beyond the couple form and conventional domesticity. She can engage in pleasures and intimacies free from the restraints of proper femininity.

Michel Foucault takes Deleuze's philosophical understanding of the work of Sade and Masoch and develops a pragmatic model of sociality. Foucault writes about the ways in which BDSM allows people to remap their bodies beyond genital sexuality and requires a kind of bodily communication predicated upon affective response, not necessarily verbal disclosure. Foucault explains that "S/M is not a relationship between he (or she) who suffers and he (or she) who inflicts suffering, but between the master and the one on whom he exercises. What interests the practitioners of S/M is that the relationship is at the same time regulated and open. . . . The idea is to also make use of every part of the body as a sexual instrument" (132). In *The Morgesons*, sadism and masochism represent ways to recombine pleasure and power that work better and offer possibilities for intimacy that are not based on sameness and equality. Foucault's construction of modern-day BDSM practices is similar to the theatricalized, aggressive intensity in *The Morgesons*. Rather than forgo their bodies and get caught in the loop of desire in which pleasure is constantly deferred, the sisters take control of their bodies as surfaces of multiple pleasures and engage in relationships with others on their own terms, rather than those prescribed for them by dominant culture. In Stoddard's novel, sadistic and masochistic acts involve something one body does to another, therefore return-

ing the erotic to a body in a familial and cultural setting that tries to take everything out of the body, especially for women. BDSM floods the body with intense, diverse sensations. Veronica's frequent, self-induced bouts of illnesses, for example, allow her to master her body, not necessarily to suffer. Veronica's future husband, Ben Somers, describes her as "master of herself. . . . She is an extraordinary girl; independent of kith and kin" (100).

The Morgeson sisters lay bare and manipulate structures of power and their attending violence that make up the domestic for their own empowerment, however limited or unsustainable. Cassy does not desire to make the men in her life suffer; rather, she will not participate in conventional romantic relationships that require the woman to forgo the active dimension of her power. If, as Freud claims, women must be symbolically castrated in order to become docile feminine subjects, Cassandra is going to reverse that formulation and symbolically castrate her beaux (345). Rather than accept the impoverished notion of mature adult sexuality, Cassy adopts a sadism that allows her (and her male partners) to reimagine their bodies. Tellingly, no allusion to a traditional sexual consummation appears in any of Cassandra's relationships with men. Elizabeth Stockton argues that Stoddard, "like conventional novelists, condones sexual consummation only within marriage" (429). While true, this is a very narrow understanding of what constitutes sex. The eroticism in *The Morgesons* manifests itself differently, in far more compelling ways. This novel absolutely sizzles with passion. This is a sex-positive book. My students are always shocked to learn that it was written in the 1860s, imposing their own repressive hypothesis on antebellum America as they first want to read the period as sexually repressed. This novel challenges their assumptions about the nineteenth century as well as those about how intimacy and pleasure work today.

If women are supposed to lose their bodies, deny themselves pleasure, if inter-class intimacy, for instance, is prohibited, what might such contact, such sensation, look like? These intimacies have no script. Veronica's and Fanny's actions are still formless yet powerful. The affect that women are required to suppress in order to be proper feminized subjects comes out as Veronica throws Fanny against the wall. This eroticized act, grounded in negativity (violence), allows new forms of contact to begin to come into being. Lauren Berlant terms these unconventional intimacies not sanctioned by dominant institutions "minor intimacies," arguing that

desires for intimacy that bypass the couple or the life narratives it generates have no alternative plots, let alone few laws and stable spaces in culture in which to clarify and to cultivate them. What happens to . . . the glances, gestures, encounters, collaborations, or fantasies that have no canon? As with minor literatures,

minor intimacies have been forced to develop aesthetics of the extreme to push these spaces into being by way of small and grand gestures. ("Intimacy" 5)

The over-the-top acts of aggression and self-abjection that inform the novel represent Berlant's "aesthetics of the extreme," which bring minor intimacies into being. Through her feminized figures, especially her heroine, Stoddard pushes against the love plot, one of the few narratives available to women writers of her time. Non-standard intimacies in *The Morgesons* become occasions for rethinking the social beyond the predictable conventions most sentimental domestic novels give us. For example, when Charles buys Cassandra roses and declares his love for her, she tortures him by ignoring him, allowing him to feel vulnerable. The outbursts of rage, cruelty, and passion take us out of the conventional narrative of desire and its deferral: pining away for Prince Charming until the novel's concluding act of marriage where the relationship is finally consummated in the most conventional way imaginable. Stoddard's jagged, abrupt style is best suited to convey non-standard intimacies and pleasures not easily articulated.

BUT IF BABY YOU'RE THE BOTTOM . . . : KNOWING ONE'S  
PLACE IN CASSANDRA MORGESON'S *ARS EROTICA*

Cassandra's flirtation with her married cousin Charles becomes an instance where her play-acting with her sister and servant finds expression in everyday life. Stoddard is not just rehearsing the standard tragic plot of doomed love. Neither is she saying that if his wife, Alice, and their children were not in the picture, Cassy and Charles could live happily ever after. The point of having these two together, of creating illicit friction between them, is to have readers confront compromised passion. Charles and Cassy's affair is not just some cheap, titillating trick. Rather, Stoddard mines this romantic convention to scandalously subversive ends. Cassy does not want to take Alice's place and end up miserable like her. She enjoys the minor intrigue, the pleasures of thwarted desire, and violating the sanctity of marriage.

Clearly, Cassy is not easy to love, and her weaker suitors often do not survive the early stages of the romance. For instance, an early crush, the unfortunate Joe Bacon, dies of the measles while courting Cassandra, allowing her to move on to a more difficult conquest in Charles. Cassy is drawn to self-destructive men. She recognizes in their death drive a desire for the undoing of proper masculinity and an inversion of existing sexual relations consistent with her own enjoyment. This is not always apparent to them, and their courtship is marked by the internal conflict they exhibit when what they want clashes with what they do. For instance, Charles starts out courting Cassy in conventional

ways, which flatters her at first, but she soon grows impatient and begins to resist his romantic attentions. These gestures, in her mind, lead to the kind of relationship he has with his wife, which Cassy has no interest in pursuing. Her rejection of conventional advances prompts him to meet her challenges in increasingly self-destructive ways. Their relationship becomes a *fort da* game, a give-and-take of erotic power that is momentarily enjoyable for both of them but tragically unsustainable.

Charles's brooding character attracts Cassy. Uncertain of what he is thinking or wants, Cassy enjoys "guessing each day whether I was to offend or please him." Not content with merely pleasing Charles, Cassy prefers to engage him in "contests between us of resistance and defiance" (74). With each romantic gesture—a ring, roses, proclamations of love—Cassy responds by prodding Charles to take her on a carriage ride with his wildest horse, rejecting his silly tokens of affection. Whereas Alice worries that it is Charles who tempts Cassy into taking the carriage ride, Charles sets her straight: "Tempted! . . . Cassandra is never tempted. What she does, she does because she will. Don't worry yourself, Alice, about her" (98). Charles recognizes in Cassandra not a passive subject, but someone very much in control of her life who knows what she wants and is as daring and passionate as he is. She is not content to remain a spectator of his actions, but wants to be an active participant in them.

It is important to note that Cassy's relationship with Charles is not an instance of the Freudian family romance. She does not want to consummate her relationship with her father through her cousin. What I have been tracing throughout this essay are the ways that Cassy identifies with phallic power. She initially wants to be treated as an equal but eventually seeks to surpass the men in her life. Cassy and Charles's relationship is defined by her initial resistance to his attempts to make her a part of his life. He sees her both as a flower to be cultivated and a horse to be tamed, the two favorite activities that occupy his life. Her resistance to this process is what turns him on. Charles treats her like one of his possessions, but she refuses to be another object that he uses to sublimate his passions and cope with his constrained existence. Charles's courtship culminates in his proclamation of love for Cassandra, to which she responds, "Never say those frightful words again. Never, never" (109).

Stoddard does not give her characters many options. Cassy is not drawn to flowers, but her passion is mirrored in Charles's wild horses. She keeps asking to accompany him in a carriage pulled by his newest brute, a dangerous, untamed horse. But what appears at first a predictable metaphor for their frustrated love—the wild horse—is actually Stoddard's critique of the suicidal Byronic hero, who, unable to break with convention, chooses death. On the fatal ride, Cassandra notices the agitated horse but decides to ride on

even though Charles tells her, "If you are afraid, you must not come with me. I can have you sent home" (120). To make matters worse, it starts to rain, and Charles, clearly working out his death wish, insists on putting the top up on the carriage knowing it will scare the horse. Startled, the horse throws them from the carriage, injuring Cassy and killing Charles. A proto-femme fatale, Cassy incites Charles's desire for something other than heteroconventionality, but all he can do is flirt with the idea of reimagining his life. Unable to act on his desire, Charles is of no use to her and dies. One by one the novel disables the myths that make up the romantic sentimental tradition, hollowing them out from within the shell of this strange narrative.

When she awakes from the accident, Cassy "laugh[s] loudly" upon learning that Charles is indeed dead, and she does not cry (121). Stoddard thwarts sentimental identification by having the heroine feel no sorrow or guilt for her part in Charles's death. Once she returns to her father's home after the accident, depressed over her lack of options, Cassy is haunted by a "specter" of the deceased Charles. Rather than avoid facing responsibility for Charles's death, Cassandra chooses to confront the ghost. The specter asks if she feels "remorse and repentance" for Charles's demise, to which Cassy answers, "Neither!" (131).

We must be mindful not to make too much of Cassandra's agency here. After all, as Charles's counterpart, Cassy is often ridiculous in her Byronic postures. It is Alice who benefits most from Charles's death. Yet again deflating conventions of romanticism, Stoddard is not ready to dispatch her heroine. Rather, she uses Alice's assumption of her husband's business to highlight where power in a capitalist economy truly lies. Alice does not shrink from power and responsibility but steps out of the home and becomes a successful businesswoman, much to Cassandra's surprise. Alice makes Charles's death work to her advantage by running his mills. Cassandra says of Alice, "[I]t was no longer society, dress, housekeeping, which absorbed her, but a larger interest in the world. . . . None of her children were with her; had it been three years earlier, she would not have left home without them" (153). Alice's newfound independence enables her to voice her affinity with Cassy, noting that she understands her former rival "to the bone and marrow" (125). Yet Stoddard is careful to check this connection by having Alice marry Cassandra's financially ruined father, thereby thwarting the possibility of conventional sisterhood and burdening her heroine with the proverbial stepmother. Alice is involved in reproducing the hierarchy at the center of the family romance, whereas Cassandra seeks ways to divorce kinship from power. Stoddard's protracted analysis of these characters allows her to explore the limitations of romanticism in a society where kin and wealth are intricately intertwined, as suggested by the novel's title and the incestuous nature of Cassandra's mature love interests.

## CRUEL DOMESTICITY

With Charles's death, Stoddard signals an end to Cassy's passionate romanticism. The symbolic appropriation of phallic power that defines her youth becomes associated in the later part of the novel with the generational transmission of wealth, as evidenced in Cassy's final visit to her distant rich relations, the Somerses, and the erotic possibilities that ensue therefrom. In *Bellevue Pickersgill Somers*, Stoddard creates Cassy's most formidable rival and ideal ego. Mother to Ben and Desmond Somers, both of whom Cassy considers prospects, Bellevue lords her wealth over her family, going so far as having a son late in life with her sickly, bedridden husband to maintain control of the family's wealth. Bellevue's father, Simon Pickersgill, "tied up the main part of his money for his grandchildren. It was to be divided among them when the youngest son should arrive at the age of twenty-one." In an incredible scene at a dinner party, Cassy narrates, "With the walnuts, one of the ladies asked for the baby," prompting Bellevue to serve both on the table (169). Bellevue metaphorically serves her young to her other children, taunting her older sons to devour the impediment to their financial freedom. Stern argues that the baby on the table, "swallowing its fists and fretfully crying," is "the most heartbreaking dimension of the entire episode: he is the novel's youngest victim of motherly feeling gone to hell" (121). For this New England Medea, family ties are stronger when wealth is involved. But in this monstrous gesture it is not just motherhood that is emptied of sentimentality but also family life in general, given that the brothers wish the "brat dead" (191). Stoddard's critique of family is devastating: an older woman has to have another child, after her other children are grown, in order to secure her financial position, pitting every member of the family against each other.

Stoddard follows this scene of domestic cannibalism with one of spinsterly bliss. In contrast to the Somers family's barbarous conflict, Stoddard offers Cassy a view from the other side of family hell. On a visit to the unattached and intellectually impressive Miss Hiticutt, Cassy and Mrs. Somers confront economic privilege devoid of familial attachments. Even Bellevue finds herself in silent awe of Miss Hiticutt, for she was "of the real Belem azure in blood as well as in brain . . . she was rich and would never marry." In her company, Cassy experiences a "new pleasure" (170). By following the dinner party scene with the visit with Miss Hiticutt, Stoddard juxtaposes two models of sociality, both predicated on wealth and privilege, the second a same-sex fantasy that sublimates the recrimination and violence of the first. Contra Stern, I'm arguing that Stoddard does not inject a dose of maternal sentimentality into the dinner party scene; the poor baby swallowing its fist and crying is representa-

tive of maternal neglect. Rather, Stoddard's description of the scene is clinical, uninvolved. She is not interested in reforming Bellevue, making her a more loving mother. The juxtaposition of the scenes is designed to offer Cassy two fake choices. They are fake because, given her current situation, Cassy is cut off from any access to wealth. She is not born into it like Miss Hitcutt and Bellevue. The best she can do is mortgage herself to the Somers family via marriage to Bellevue's favorite son, Desmond.

To get to Desmond, Cassandra has to get past Bellevue, who sees Cassy as a social climber, an aspirant to her family money. Bellevue continually reminds Cassy that Desmond will break her, and not the other way around: "[H]e has played with such toys as you are, and broken them." Not content to play the submissive role to Bellevue's domineering matriarch, Cassy stands up to Bellevue in a way neither Desmond nor his brother can, for Desmond's bravado masks the fact he is really weak and self-destructive. Cassy warns Bellevue, "If you touch me it will rouse me. Did a child of yours ever inflict a blow upon you?" (193). Stripped of any form of symbolic authority, when confronted Cassy resorts to the threat of physical violence. She seems incapable of compromising, of going along to get what she wants. Imposing in their own ways, Cassandra and Bellevue are two of a kind. Not surprisingly, the Somers brothers are drawn to Cassy. In this contest, it is Cassy who has everything to lose.

Bellevue presides over Desmond and Cassandra's romance. In violent manner, typical of Stoddard's depiction of the relation between the sexes, Cassy and Desmond engage in flirtation of the "would you light my candle?" variety. Offering to light her candle before she goes to bed, Desmond takes it from her and begins "thrusting it between the bars of the grate," causing Cassy to grow "chilly." Surrendering the obvious symbol of desire does not sit well with her. Desmond must stoop to conquer, and he does, banging his head on his way up on "the edge of the marble shelf." Visibly flushed with excitement over Desmond's accident, Cassy shuts the door and "lean[s] against it" for support (185). Cassy is turned on by Desmond's failure at gallantry. This accident is a defining erotic moment for Cassandra. At the novel's conclusion, when the now reformed and weak Desmond comes back to her, Cassy tells him that she has loved him since "you struck your head under the mantel" (251). But before she can resume her courting, this time enjoying the upper hand, Bellevue thwarts Cassy's plans.

Fiercely protective of her wealth, Bellevue, who has been listening at the door, forces her way into the parlor. Having short-circuited her son's liaison, Bellevue disrupts Cassy's play with Desmond, setting Cassy off: "Anger raged through me—like the fierce rain that strikes flat a violent sea. I laid my hand on her arm, which she snapped at like a wolf, but I spoke calmly: 'Allow me to light my candle by yours!' I picked it from the hearth, lighted it, and held

it close to her face, laughing” (186). Cassandra is back in control of the token of phallic power, the candle, which she uses to neutralize Bellevue’s attempt to control the scene. Even after Cassy has gone to bed, her candle’s wick still “glowed in the dark like a one-eyed demon” (187). But this symbol of Cassy’s ongoing passion is cold comfort as her options become more limited. No match for Bellevue in her own home, Cassy exits the parlor and leaves the Somerses’ home shortly thereafter. In this last confrontation with Bellevue, Stoddard has her heroine realize something about herself and the society she lives in that was not apparent to her when she played with her sister. Whereas Cassy’s mastery of the earlier scene relied on the financial stability her father’s business afforded, her now-precarious situation hinges on her ability to secure a wealthy husband. Stoddard highlights the similarities between Cassandra and Bellevue, telegraphing her heroine’s path to maturity. Cassy loses this particular battle but eventually gains the upper hand when the baby dies and Desmond and Ben inherit the family fortune. With the death of her youngest son, Bellevue loses her power and vanishes from the narrative. Stoddard reduces the exuberant, passionate, and inarticulate outbursts that early on defied conventions of intimacy to a different kind of inarticulacy, one defined by familial and romantic conventions of intimacy, in the novel’s conclusion.

Some critics read the conclusion of the novel with Cassandra’s marriage to Desmond and ownership of her father’s house as Cassy’s “descent into ladyhood” (Alaimo 35). Stacy Alaimo argues, “Though Cassandra’s inheritance of the house should empower her, the close identification between Cass and her house suggests that she has internalized her external entrapment within the domestic realm” (35). In keeping with Alaimo, Louise Penner claims, “Cassy realizes the impossibility of ever ‘leaving the confines of [her] own life’ and resigns herself to the notion that she will ‘reign, and serve also’ in her home, a paradox that suggests both her self-possession and subordination of her own wants to the needs or desires of others” (144). Cassandra may (or may not) own her house, but her life is in some ways similar to Bellevue’s because her financial situation is dependent on men—Desmond and Ben. Stockton argues: “It is striking, for example, that the novelist fails to mention who actually owns the Morgeson house after the two [Cassy and Desmond] marry” (429). The possibilities for non-standard intimacies that define the first half of the novel come to an end when Cassy marries and takes over her father’s house.

Throughout the novel, Cassandra has found intimacy with men like Charles and Desmond who bring out her strength, who make her sadism possible—the sadism that allows them to be broken. Alice must rescue Cassy’s destitute father, and Charles lives out the limited plot of the Byronic hero. Yet Desmond comes back to her a shell of a man, but he stays. Pale, weak, and crying, Des-

mond returns, wanting to assume a submissive position. However, the cycle of sociality and the intimacy it makes possible comes to an end. Desmond stays and so does Cassy, but no one else comes or goes. No new contacts are made. At the novel's end, the Morgesons find themselves incestuously under one roof. The foursome of Veronica and her alcoholic husband, Ben, and Cassandra and Desmond embodies the limits of promiscuous sociality. Stoddard strikes against this already bleak picture, killing off Ben by having him drink himself to death, sending Veronica into a near catatonic state: her "eyes go no more in quest of something beyond. A wall of darkness lies before her" (252). Desmond is practically a ghost, for he simply appears out of nowhere at the novel's end. He speaks to Cassy "in a voice deathly faint" and is described as "spare" and "gray" (250). In this scene, the once powerful Cassy tells Desmond that she wants to "cry by myself," to which Desmond responds, "cry here then, with me" (251). Wait a minute. Has Stoddard's beautifully cold and cruel novel warped itself into a sentimental tale? We now have a crying circle as Cassy and Desmond let their tears roll, and Desmond proposes marriage to her (251). How conventional. I read the tears not as tears of joy but as a symbol of mourning for the death of the once powerful Cassandra who wanted to be in the world differently, the Cassy who never cried. Her pleasure is confined to the institution of marriage, and the activity, pleasure, and contact with others her sadism made possible is gone. She now wonders if "death is not a welcome idea to those who have died" (252).

Heather Love's focus on pre-Stonewall moments of failed and impossible intimacy in American literature—the challenge to "feel backward" in order to understand these texts—can be of help in comprehending Cassandra's eventual loss and failure. For Love, feeling backward is a "disposition toward the past—embracing loss, risking abjection . . . the importance of clinging to ruined identities and to histories of injury. . . . [R]esisting the call of gay normalization means refusing to write off the most vulnerable, the least presentable, and all the dead" (30). Grappling with the complexities of Cassandra's example means embracing her failure. Yet her failure comes out of invention and risk, both of which are necessary for Cassy to make a life on her own terms beyond the scripts of proper gender identity and sociality.

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## NOTES

1. In using the term *anti-pedagogy*, I am influenced by Deleuze, who explains that the sadist is interested not in teaching or persuading but in demonstration: “The libertine may put on an act of trying to convince and persuade. . . . But the intention to convince is merely apparent, for nothing is in fact more alien to the sadist than the wish to convince, to persuade, in short to educate” (18). In not needing the subject-object relation, the sadist instructor stands in contrast to the masochist educator. The sadist may ask for what she wants but will not beg or plead or try to override differences in order to get others to act. She does not care about winning hearts and minds, unlike Stoddard’s contemporaries, who are invested in persuasion through masochistic, sympathetic identification.

2. As Douglas argues, the lack of change in dominant culture, specifically its ongoing unjust treatment of women, turned Stowe “bitter.” The “little girl” whose work surpassed that of her minister father (Lyman Beecher) and brother (Henry Ward Beecher) abandons her ethical work to write novels that center on “the scene of man abject under feminine rule” (244). Stowe’s horizon of possibilities narrows as her characters become solely concerned with domestic tyranny rather than with effecting change on a large scale. In novels like *My Wife and I* and *We and Our Neighbors*, Stowe whittles down women’s lives to shopping, decorating the home, and symbolically castrating their husbands. Douglas reads the circumscribed sphere of action of Stowe’s later heroines as indicative of Stowe’s own feelings of impotence borne of defeat and disgust at the economic and political marginalization and disenfranchisement of women in her culture.

3. The literature on BDSM (an overlapping acronym for bondage and domination, sadism and masochism, and dominance and submission) is vast. I refer the reader to Deleuze’s *Masochism*, Califia’s *Public Sex*, Rubin’s “The Leather Menace” and “Thinking Sex,” and Hart’s *Between the Body and the Flesh*. By BDSM I mean a set of consensual practices whereby power is eroticized in theatricalized scenes of dominance and submission.

4. Stockton, Penner, and Celikkol have addressed Stoddard’s preoccupation with property ownership. Stockton argues that Stoddard’s writings continually assert that women’s subjugation stems primarily from their inability to own property. If women cannot possess property then they cannot fully possess themselves. According to Stockton, Stoddard saw property ownership in nineteenth-century America as the ultimate form of independence and self-reliance for both men and women (416). Penner is more ambivalent about Cassy’s empowerment through ownership at the novel’s close, arguing that although Cassy chooses to isolate herself within the domestic sphere, Stoddard does not present Cassy’s decision as either positive or negative. However, Penner claims that Cassandra does indeed realize that her decision to become the family caretaker costs her independence and control over her life (143). Celikkol places Stoddard in an

even more impossible position. Celikkol argues that in Stoddard's moment, the market economy shaped everything from economic and social exchange to aesthetic production and was therefore inescapable. Those who tried to operate outside of the market economy found themselves lonely, powerless outsiders (30).

5. Stern finds an attack on sentimentality in the characters' pathological psychologies based on failed identifications with each other. She refers to Stoddard's novel as an "antisentimental project" (108). While I agree with Stern that the novel is populated with characters who exhibit antisocial behavior, I am less interested in pathologizing them—which I read as Stern's implicit move—and more concerned with exploring anti-sociality as a critique of existing conditions and a possible model for rethinking subjectivity, family, and intimacy.

6. On politics, sexualities, and socialities not governed by the lure of futurity or optimism, see Edelman, particularly chapter 1, "The Future Is Kid Stuff"

7. On the politics of sentimental affect, see Douglas 3–13, Tompkins 123–25, Brown 13–17, Barnes 1–18, Noble 11–17, and Berlant, *The Female Complaint* 33–37.

8. See Dean, especially chapter 4, "Cruising as a Way of Life." Arguing that all acts of sex and intimacy are based on risk, Dean reads gay male barebacking cultures specifically and the art of cruising in general as rejecting a hierarchy that upholds some forms of intimacy as safe and normal and pathologizes others.

9. Three critics in particular—Baldwin, Douglas, and Castiglia—have examined the disabling effects of sympathetic identification advocated in nineteenth-century sentimental novels. Baldwin criticizes the colonizing, narcissistic force of sentimental sympathy; for him, the cruelty at the center of sentimental fiction belies the insincerity of sympathy (11–13). Douglas argues that the politics based on right feeling and sympathetic identification passionately articulated in sentimental novels written by women displaced the best the Calvinist critical tradition had to offer while leaving its patriarchal structure intact. For Douglas, a "viable, sexually diversified culture" did not supplant Calvinism (13). Castiglia reads sympathetic fellow feeling as a promise to flesh out one's interiority, intimating one's affective, civic depth, ultimately predicated on another's suffering (114–19). For all three, sympathetic fellow feeling may lock one in a solipsistic, weepy cycle, orbiting around the necessary object of suffering.

10. Noble reads the masochistic strain in nineteenth-century texts written by women as a "double-edged sword" that articulates oppressive ideologies while at the same time serving as a mode of expression of female desire (6). Taking a provocative, complex view of the masochism found in several antebellum texts that foreground the experiences of women, Noble reads this pleasure in pain as a "form of self-expression, beautiful—or at least fascinating—once one can see beyond its weirdness" (4). According to Noble, working within the constraints of patriarchal culture, women writers were able to exercise power and experience pleasure via masochism.

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