

MCDONALD, SAMANTHA, M.A. "Had I a right to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?": Mary Shelley's Subversion of Primogeniture Inheritance in *Frankenstein* and *Matilda*. (2019)

Directed by Dr. Anne D. Wallace. 22 pp.

While Mary Shelley's literary works are collectively impressive, it is *Frankenstein, Or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) that has steadily received critical acclaim and popularity in recent decades. The scholarly discussion surrounding this novel is as lively as ever and scholars are continually searching for new analytical avenues to understand Frankenstein and his creature. In contrast, Shelley's *Matilda* is understudied and many classify the novel as purely autobiographical. While interesting, such views are reductive and discourage further analysis. In response, this thesis analyzes Shelley's novels consecutively and expands Terry W. Thompson's interpretation that Robert Walton is a figure of reanimation for Victor Frankenstein. *Matilda* is a figure of reanimation for *Frankenstein*; close analysis of the texts reveals intertextualities that comment on nineteenth-century primogeniture laws. Shelley's novels critique nineteenth-century primogeniture laws through the construction of female characters who subvert traditional lines of familial inheritance and suggest that strict patriarchal traditions are destructive to feminine life and social progress.

MCDONALD, SAMANTHA, M.A. "Do ghosts remember long?": Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard's Neglected Poetic Past. (2019)
Directed by Dr. Karen L. Kilcup. 31 pp.

Scholars began assessing Elizabeth Stoddard's literature shortly after her death in 1902. A few contemporary scholars have explored Stoddard, believing that her popularity today depends principally on renewed recognition. Jennifer Putzi's recovery efforts expanded the author's body of work with the discovery of 700 "Lady Correspondent" articles Stoddard wrote during the Civil War. These articles establish her as a political analyst and war correspondent, thus interesting wider audiences in her writings and dismissing earlier beliefs that Stoddard's main concerns with the war were wholly personal and not political. My thesis will analyze Stoddard's poetry and reorient previous scholarship to present her as a Civil War poet. The "Lady Correspondent" pieces will provide necessary historical and cultural contextualization, and I will use other Civil War poems for further comparative analysis. This essay may attempt to answer the question "is it any good?" but will, more importantly, move Stoddard beyond analyses embedded only in sentimentalism, revealing her poetry as a feminine lens through which to understand the Civil War, a viewpoint scholars have often overlooked.

“HAD I A RIGHT TO INFLICT THIS CURSE UPON EVERLASTING
GENERATIONS?”: MARY SHELLEY’S SUBVERSION OF
PRIMOGENITURE INHERITANCE IN
FRANKENSTEIN AND MATILDA
AND
“DO GHOSTS REMEMBER LONG?”: ELIZABETH BARSTOW STODDARD’S
NEGLECTED POETIC PAST

by

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Approved by

Committee Co-Chair

Committee Co-Chair

To my Papa,

Thank you for always loving and encouraging me.

I wish you could've seen me graduate, but I know you're happy in Heaven.

I love you forever,

Sammy.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by SAMANTHA MCDONALD has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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“HAD I A RIGHT TO INFLICT THIS CURSE UPON EVERLASTING
GENERATIONS?”: MARY SHELLEY’S SUBVERSION OF PRIMOGENITURE
INHERITANCE IN *FRANKENSTEIN* AND *MATILDA*

Introduction

While Mary Shelley’s literary works are collectively impressive, it is *Frankenstein, Or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) that has steadily received critical acclaim and popularity in recent decades. The scholarly discussion surrounding it is as lively as ever and scholars are continually searching for new analytical avenues to understand Frankenstein and his creature. In contrast, Shelley’s *Matilda* is understudied and many classify the novel as purely autobiographical. While interesting, such views are reductive and discourage further analysis. Deviating from this discussion of *Matilda* as autobiography, Michael Macovski argues that “subversions of Gothic primogeniture become even more pronounced during the Romantic era—to the point where authors begin to promulgate directly transgressive ideas of meritorious inheritance, redefined property, and truncated paternity” (1). Expanding on his argument, I assert that through the lines of inheritance and establishment of “property,” Shelley’s novels *Matilda* and *Frankenstein*, subverts traditional primogeniture and reveal her critique of nineteenth-century primogeniture laws.

Written between 1819 and 1820, during the time of primogeniture law in England, Shelley’s novels invoke a subversion of such laws through delineating a non-traditional

familial inheritance of sins and passions, rather than land, from father to daughter or creature, rather than from father to son. In these fictional revisions of expected inheritance, those who inherit from their fathers are destined for failure, destruction, or both. We see this destruction through Matilda's inheritance of her mother's passion for education and for her husband made corrupt by inheriting her father's sinful secret: that of inappropriate love between a father and daughter. She knows her father's secret, but she cannot ever know how her relationship with her father will develop long-term as one, or both, will surely die by the end of the novel. Similarly, Victor searches for the secrets that bind the creation of life, discovers those secrets through obsessive study and focus on this project, and, in turn, passes on this tendency to pursue information and the unknowable until a solution is found. As such, the creation learns how to communicate, read, and think on its own, at the expense of learning how it was created. The creature is left cursing its creator for its existence and identity—a creature in-between the supernatural and natural world, the human and non-human world—is destroyed; the creature does not want to continue its existence, but it also wants to exact revenge on its creator “father.”¹

Literature Review

Scholarship on *Matilda* is quite limited. Charlene E. Bunnell writes about *Matilda* as romantic tragedy. Melina Moore writes about the struggle for female subjectivity in

¹ For more on the familial aspects of *Frankenstein*, see “Far from the Tree: Choreographies of Family Obligation in the Ballet of *Frankenstein*,” by Rosemarie Garland-Thompson; “So Guided by a Silken Cord”: *Frankenstein's* Family Values,” by Adam Komisaruk.

the novel. Some scholars write about the incestuous ties between Matilda and her father, often connecting the characters to Mary Shelley and her father William Godwin.² Such interpretations of *Matilda* are interesting, but do not take into account Shelley's subversion of familial inheritance through the construction of Matilda and her father. On the other hand, scholars are continually adding to the *Frankenstein* discussion. Anson Koch-Rein connects transgender affect with the novel. Martha Stoddard Holmes is one of many scholars now approaching the text with Disability Studies. Many scholars also write about the science and magic of Frankenstein's experiment, often positioning Shelley as the forerunner of science fiction novels.³

Connecting the two texts seems obvious, but few have attempted such analytical routes. Pamela Clemit discusses *Matilda* and *Frankenstein*, but roots her analysis in the lives of Shelley and Godwin. Katherine Montwieler and Mark Edelman Boren write about expanding our understanding of Shelley's critique of the "Romantic ego" through *Frankenstein's* and *Matilda's* intertextualities: "reading both novels consecutively illumines more than Shelley's critique of the Romantic ego; it allows us to understand how alienation and melancholia function for the archetypal Romantic subject in nature and opens another path for that subjectivity to take" (2012). Montwieler and Boren use Freud to analyze the melancholic elements in the novels and predominantly rely on psychoanalysis to support their argument. While scholars' use of the psychoanalytic lens

² See, Ranita Chatterjee and Susan M. Bernardo.

³ See, Benjamin Eldon Stevens, Carl Freedman, and Edward T. Oakes among others.

is interesting, this mode of thought relies more on Freud's texts rather than the texts themselves.

In response, this thesis analyzes Shelley's novels consecutively and expands Terry W. Thompson's interpretation that Robert Walton is a figure of reanimation for Victor Frankenstein.⁴ *Matilda* is a figure of reanimation for *Frankenstein*; close analysis of the texts reveal intertextualities that comment on nineteenth-century primogeniture laws. Shelley's novels critique these laws through the construction of female characters who subvert traditional lines of familial inheritance and suggest that strict patriarchal traditions are destructive to feminine life and social progress.

Analysis of Shelley's Texts

Matilda (1959) is an epistolary novel constructed of the journal entries from the eponymous character's point of view. The intention of Matilda's writings is to provide an autobiographical account of her life for her dear friend Woodville. After lamenting about her life's tragic events, Matilda writes "but enough of this. I will begin my tale: it is my last task, and I hope I have strength sufficient to fulfill it" (152). Matilda opens her story with the dreary description of her current situation: "I live in a lone cottage on a solitary, wide heath: no voice of life reaches me." She continues,

I am alone— quite alone— in the world— the blight of misfortune has passed over me and withered me; I know that I am about to die and I feel happy— joyous.— I feel my pulse; it beats fast: I place my thin hand on my cheek; it

⁴ As Thompson writes, in his "...short time together aboard ship, Robert Walton becomes the hands-on reanimator of Victor Frankenstein, in effect, bringing him back to sentient life in a dark and private chamber—but this time in a most positive way—Victor's earlier gift to the monster of reanimation" (296).

burns: there is a slight, quick spirit within me which is now emitting its last sparks (*Matilda* 151).

As Matilda begins to craft her autobiography, she first details the histories of her biological parents. The lives of Matilda's parents directly influence Matilda's own life and foreshadow and limit the path she may choose in the future; this influence suggests that Matilda was not given the chance to craft her own life. Matilda inherits her painful isolation, and early death, from her father. Quite like Frankenstein's creature is abandoned and isolated from the world after its "father" creates it, Matilda is doomed to inherit the so-called "sins" of her father; in other words, in both works, the sins of the father are visited upon the child.

As Matilda reminisces about her life, she notes the need to recount the life histories of her parents, as well. While the rest of the novel does pertain to Matilda's own retelling of the events preceding the destruction of her life due to the inheritance of her father's secrets, previous descriptions of her life are cut down to a few words. The novel revolves around the reappearance of Matilda's father; the descriptions of her life are tainted by his presence. Therefore, a detailed account of her life before her father's reappearance is unknowable. Readers are left with a picture of a young woman who, after facing lifelong abandonment, must too face lifelong isolation and despair. In Matilda's own words:

I was born in England. My father was a man of rank: he had lost his father early, and was educated by a weak mother with all the indulgence she thought due to a nobleman of wealth. He was sent to Eton and afterwards to college; and allowed from childhood the free use of large sums of money; thus enjoying from his

earliest youth the independence which a boy with these advantages, always acquires from public school. (*Matilda* 152)

Matilda's nameless father was born into a life of monetary and emotional luxury. Although without a father, he is blessed with a mother who tends to his every need, spoils him with material possessions, and ensures his secured place in what can only be described as "high society." With this place secured, his mother eventually passes away and he is left to find comfort in the arms of Diana, Matilda's future mother. From the above selections and arguments, one might suspect that Matilda will inherit the negative aspects of her father's upbringing. This supposition appears to correctly reinforce Matilda's own upbringing. However, before analyzing Matilda's childhood in this way, her mother's childhood, and early interactions with Matilda's father, must be discussed.

Diana was a beautiful girl who caught the attention of Matilda's father from a young age. The two were inseparable playmates and developed a love for one another as they grew into adulthood. However, for reasons unknown to the reader, Matilda's father feared the "ridicule" he might receive from his collegiate friends if they learned of the "intensity of his passion" for Diana (*Matilda* 153). Of her father, Matilda writes: "Yet he had one secret from these dear friends; a secret he had nurtured from his earliest years, and although he loved his fellow collegiates he would not trust it to the delicacy or sympathy of any one among them. He loved" (*Matilda* 153). Readers should question this decision to keep such a seemingly positive aspect of life hidden from such close comrades, especially when considering the depth of his love and the fact that "Diana was fully worthy of his deepest affection" (*Matilda* 154). This act of forming, and acting on,

secret desires permeates the rest of the novel until Matilda ultimately inherits her father's destructive secrets. These secrets also suggest that Matilda's father is incapable of complete transparency, encouraging readers to question his motives when he unexpectedly, and shockingly, reenters Matilda's life. This sudden reappearance is similar to that of the creature's reappearance in Victor's life.

The creature finds Victor at the top of Mount Montanvert; ironically, Victor finds himself at the peak of his happiness as he rests upon the peak of the mountain moments before the creature happens upon him:

My heart, which was before sorrowful, now swelled with something like joy; I exclaimed— "Wandering spirits, if indeed ye wander, and do not rest in your narrow beds, allow me this faint happiness, or take me, as your companion, away from the joys of life." As I said this, I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed...I perceived, as the shape came nearer, (sight tremendous and abhorred!) that it was the wretch whom I had created. (*Frankenstein* 117)

Due to Victor's inability to fully sever himself from his creature, he is destined to chase it forever until one or both of them die. Similarly, Matilda's relationship with her father may be equally impossible to destroy. On the other hand, Victor is both drawn to, and repulsed by, the very creature that he worked so hard to create, quite like Matilda's father's feelings for her. Victor continues to both run from, and chase, his creation; through subverted textual inheritance, Matilda is destined to run from, and after, her father as well.

In order to fully understand Matilda's relationship with her father, we must understand the relationship between her father and mother. In continuing the story of her parents, Matilda discusses her mother's childhood and disposition,

There were few who could boast so pure a heart, and so much real humbleness of soul joined to form a reliance on her own integrity and a belief in that of others. She had from her birth lived a retired life. She had lost her mother when very young, but her father had devoted himself to the care of her education. (*Matilda* 154)

This construction of Diana paints her as almost faultless; keeping in mind that Matilda is writing these descriptions of her parents, it is interesting to note the information that she chooses to include or exclude. We know that Diana is beautiful, intelligent, well-liked, and compassionate. Diana's daughter, who did not have the luxury of knowing her, writes of her fondly. However, Matilda does insert a subtle, but important detail that both foreshadows coming disaster and invokes a connection to *Frankenstein*. Diana, with a belief in that of others—in other words, with a tendency to see the most positive aspects in a person—makes herself vulnerable to ultimate demise. She is susceptible to her husband's destructive nature. Again, Matilda's father feared his friends would ridicule his marriage to Diana, so he pursued her secretly, then so easily discards his friendship with such "frivolous" people (*Matilda* 155). Readers may question the progression of events here; after spending so much time in fear, keeping his relationship and *true feelings* hidden, Matilda's father finally opens up about his love and then promptly leaves his past friendships. The justification for such acts? Well, "Diana filled up all his heart: he felt as if by union with her he had received a new and better soul" (*Matilda* 155). He received a

new and better soul and his heart was filled up with Diana. Here, we see that, through Matilda's father, Shelley again subverts traditional lines of inheritance. He inherits a soul from his wife through their union; however, this inheritance implicates a loss for Diana. She cannot give him a new soul without losing her own. As such, Diana dies ten days after giving birth to Matilda; here, we see both fulfilled and unfulfilled connections of inheritance. Either Diana or Matilda's father needed to die after Matilda's birth due to their intense connection. Because Diana's soul is given to her husband, she must die after childbirth. The traditional family structure is never set in stone and the remnants continue to disintegrate after Diana's death.

After the admission of her father's "secret grief" (*Matilda* 171), Matilda learns that he intends to end his life. In a series of frantically composed letters, he writes, "You will never hear from me again: receive these then as the last words of mine that will every reach you; and although I have forfeited your filial love, yet regard them I conjure you as a father's command." "The sun of youth is not set for you," he continues, "it will restore vigour and life to you; do not resist with obstinate grief its beneficent influence, oh my child! Bless me with the hope that I have not utterly destroyed you" (*Matilda* 181). Matilda's father believes that with the passage of these letters that his daughter will forgive him, forget him, and move on with her life without hesitation. He recognizes that he has enacted in a sinful love for his daughter and has wrought her life with pain much like an "angel of destruction" and must remove himself from her life (181). Upon reading these letters, Matilda believes that her father is in mortal danger and sets off to find him before he ends his own life.

Much like Elizabeth in *Frankenstein*, Diana spends the majority of the novel's beginning "on the periphery, patiently waiting for her opportunity to secure an important position within the family unit" (Mitchell 114). As Elizabeth replaces Caroline and transitions into a maternal figure, she is ultimately targeted for death, because "Elizabeth's death is a necessary exchange" for the corpse of Victor's creature to be reanimated into a living being (Mitchell 115). This exchange, seen with both Diana and Elizabeth, implicates maternal lines of inheritance as destructive until readers realize that this is largely rooted in the inheritance issues with the fathers. Matilda's father steals Diana's soul in order to reanimate himself, his "corpse," into a living being that can interact with the world. Elizabeth dies on her wedding bed, before she has the ability to consummate her marriage and securely position herself as both wife and mother; she is, of course, killed by Victor's creature. Elizabeth's death still falls on Victor because he abandoned his creation, mistreated and abused it, and then left it to its own devices. Matilda's father would inherit this method of dealing with his unnatural creation.

Like Matilda, Diana lost her mother at an early age and was without a loving maternal figure. Unlike Matilda, Diana was raised by a loving father who allowed her education to consist of literature that she both enjoyed and understood. In the end, Matilda's own father was indifferent to her education and childhood.

He loved her for her beauty and for her amiable disposition but he seemed to love her more for what he considered her superior wisdom. They studied, they rode together; they were never separate and seldom admitted a third to their society. (*Matilda* 155)

Matilda's description of her father, here, has a subtly ironic undertone. It is important to note that *Matilda* is written retrospectively: Matilda's explanation of her family's history comes after the destruction ensued upon her life by her father. The fact that Matilda specifically mentions that a third was never admitted to their society implicates the death, or removal of one or more of her parents with her arrival. Because her parents are so emotionally attached their bond prohibits the addition, or integration, of another being:

Thus my father, born in affluence, and always prosperous, clombe without the difficulty and various disappointments that all human beings seem destined to encounter, to the very topmost pinnacle⁵ of happiness: Around him was sunshine, and clouds whose shapes of beauty made the prospect divine concealed from him the barren reality which lay hidden below them. (155)

Because Matilda's father is wholly consumed with his love for Diana, the arrival of Matilda should alert concern in readers. Contextually, readers should anticipate Diana's death, especially upon connecting the lines of inheritance: Diana's mother dies, Matilda's father's mother dies. Maternal figures are not safe in this novel. Each and every mother introduced in the text is eventually led to certain demise. Similar to the destruction of Victor's fatherhood, the paternal figures in this novel are also not safe from destruction. Matilda's father is the root cause of all evil, pain, and inherited loss, which echoes the eventual demise of every character affected by Victor and his creature. That is not to imply, or attach, a sense of morality to the creature, but rather to the father who willingly abandons a helpless child/creation and does not take responsibility for its wrongdoings.

⁵ Shelley's spelling.

The ironic, almost sarcastic, tone in regard to her father is maintained as Matilda continues to discuss his early years as a husband to Diana. The two were not married long and were often together: “From this dizzy point he was dashed at once as he unawares congratulated himself on his felicity. Fifteen months after their marriage I was born, and my mother died a few days after my birth” (*Matilda* 155). Matilda’s skewed familial views are continued throughout her descriptions of her parent’s lives. It is important to note that Matilda, as far as can be perceived by readers, has never known what we might regard as a traditional family structure. She has been abandoned and left with an aunt who does not entertain, or nurture, her. Matilda’s strong, and immediate, attachment to her father is understandable—thus setting up the ultimate dismantling of their relationship as being all the more powerful and shocking. As Mitchell writes, “the ‘child’s’ eventual rebellion against the parent illustrates how the literary Gothic offers tales that challenge the power relations of the traditional family unit, and question the stereotypical qualities associated with each gender and their corresponding parental roles” (106). Therefore, Matilda is forced to rebel against her father’s unnatural affections and left to end the cycle of negative inheritance on her own—although this cycle ends with either her death or her father’s death.

As Mary Shelley’s *Matilda* concludes, Matilda’s father’s hope that she will live untouched by his sinful and unconquerable love for her is proven to be beyond the bounds of possibility. He is wrong in hoping that Matilda will not inherit his destructive desires to pursue and conquer. Matilda’s father believes that Matilda will not follow him to his death, but she immediately orders a carriage the moment she finishes his letter: “the

words of his letter by which he had dissuaded me from this step were those that determined me” (*Matilda* 181). Instead of freeing Matilda from her father, these letters only work to push the two closer together and, in effect, firmly establishes their relationship as one of total connection. Her father writes, “I have betrayed your confidence; I have endeavoured to pollute your mind and have made your innocent heart acquainted with the looks and language of unlawful and monstrous passion...we must separate and divide for ever” (*Matilda* 177). Matilda’s following remarks supplement the idea of their inescapable connection: “he must yet live for if he were dead all would surely be black as night to me!” and “Oh do not leave me; or I shall forget what I am about” (*Matilda* 181). Matilda seems to begin to associate her father with her own identity, environment, and ability to live—much like her father who is unable to enjoy life without associating everything he experiences to the beauty he sees in his daughter.⁶

Consequently, *Matilda* is a novel that appears to be deeply invested in certain kinds of inheritance, specifically, social and patrilineal inheritance. As Donna Mitchell puts it, “the figures of absent mothers and unnatural children arise when the traditional family unit is challenged by the subversive nature of the Gothic genre. The mother, who is usually a fundamental presence in their child’s life, is suddenly removed, while the newborn creation becomes an anomaly of the natural order” (106). This theme is reflected in *Frankenstein*; motherless, the creature is subsequently abandoned by its “father” and is left to wander the world as an unnatural existent. Similarly, Matilda is

⁶ “If I saw a lovely woman, I thought, does my Matilda resemble her? All delightful things, sublime scenery, soft breezes, exquisite music seemed to me associated with you and only through you to be pleasant to me” (*Matilda* 178).

abandoned by her father, who deems her unnatural, and she is left to navigate a fenced-in world. Matilda is neither completely restricted, nor is she entirely free. Without the guidance of her parents, Matilda is left to find maternal guidance in her nanny (for a limited time), and her cold-hearted aunt. She does not have an example of traditional family dynamics, and longs for positive attention, which makes her susceptible to her father's manipulation. Matilda is unable to inherit her mother's knowledge and, therefore, views her father's affections as positive, in expressing that "the voice of affection was so new to me that I hung with delight upon words when he told me what he felt concerning me during these long years of apparent forgetfulness" (*Matilda* 162). In actuality, readers are not yet given any reason to suspect that his love for Matilda is anything but fatherly.

Quite like the creature curses its existence after learning the method Victor pursued to create it, Matilda eventually curses her own existence and interrogates the inherited misery she is forced to endure:

I had no idea that misery could arise from love, and this lesson that all at last must learn was taught me in a manner few are obliged to receive it. I lament now, I must ever lament, those few short months of Paradisiacal bliss; I disobeyed no command, I ate no apple, and yet I was ruthlessly driven from it. Alas! my companion did, and I was precipitated in his fall. (*Matilda* 162)

Matilda calls upon biblical allusions to supplement her innocence. In turn, Shelley highlights one of the most famous instances of inherited misery of all time: the biblical story of Eve and the Apple. Upon eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Eve is punished by God and dooms all succeeding women to a torturous life marked by painful childbirths and menstrual pains. Matilda finds Paradise with the prodigal return of her father, but is

disenchanted to learn that her father's affections for her are far from filial. She is neither daughter or lover, child nor adult, girl nor woman, knowledgeable nor unknowledgeable. Readers are ultimately left in the dark about her fate. Matilda is writing her story down for Woodville to read; if her story is preserved, does that imply her death, or does that enter us into an abstract discussion about the presence of the physical novel, *Matilda*, itself? The fact that Matilda is writing down her "own story" implies an ironic sense of self-ownership over her life. The novel suggests that Matilda never had control over her own life and was merely waiting for the return of her father. Ultimately, she is destined to replace the maternal figure absent from her family structure.

Now, to shift the discussion, but maintain focus on subverted lines of traditional inheritance, we must look at Walton and Woodville. Many connections may be drawn between Walton and Matilda, Walton and Frankenstein, but the connection that interests me is that of Walton and Woodville. Both are subjected to deal with the aftermath of their friends' misdeeds and both exist in a state of unresolvable ambiguity—Walton's ultimate fate is never revealed to the readers, as he only exists to us in the letters that he wrote to his sister, and Woodville is never physically present in *Matilda* as Matilda only references, and writes, to him. When Victor is pulled aboard Walton's ship, Walton inherits the life stories of Victor, his creature, and everyone who was involved in the events following the creation. This passing on of history from one to another implicates Walton's uncertain demise. While, again, readers will never know what "happened" to Walton, the fact that Victor is essentially giving him his life and Walton is receiving and recording it, suggests that Victor will surely die. With this passage of his soul, Victor is

left without a life-source and must await the creature's revenge. At the same time, Walton passes this story to his sister, through letter written from the ship, which suggests a fate similar to that of Elizabeth and Diana.

Walton begins his letter to his sister, Mrs. Saville, with "you will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil forebodings" (*Frankenstein* 51). In the letters following, Walton continues in the same manner, "no incidents have hitherto befallen us...Be assured...I will not rashly encounter danger. I will be cool, persevering, and prudent" (*Frankenstein* 57). This promise of prudence is immediately broken with the appearance of Victor. Walton is overtaken with his feelings of enchantment directed toward Victor's intellect, somber nature, and polite language. Because Walton is without his "native land" (*Frankenstein* 57) or native family, he is left vulnerable to Victor's destructive path. Similarly, although Woodville is not "physically present" in *Matilda* due to the novel's epistolary nature, he is left to deal with the fate of Matilda—another fate that is truly unknowable to readers. In other words, Woodville is only talked about, and information about him is related to readers through Matilda's journal entries. Quite like the creature who, through the framed narrative of *Frankenstein*, is not actively "present" in the novel; his story is told to Victor, who recounts it to Walton while Victor tells his own story that is then written down by Walton and sent to Mrs. Saville. *Matilda* takes on the same ambiguous elements found in *Frankenstein*, but the absence of Woodville seems to suggest an end to the cycles of familial destruction. If Walton were to be involved within *Matilda*, he would have had to find Matilda's lifeless body and the journal she was keeping, which

contained her story, and then proceed to share her story with others. In order to bring reanimation to Matilda and her story, that is to say if she did ultimately die as she expected, Walton's own death is then necessary to the continuation of the story. Because we do not see him, Shelley seems to construct an answer to the problems surrounding primogeniture inheritance: painlessly end the cycle before further destruction is enacted. Unfortunately for Matilda, such a cycle is only in the beginning stages upon her father's reappearance in her life.

In *Matilda*, as previously discussed, inherited abandonment, and death are interconnected and passed on through familial connections. However, upon Diana's death, Matilda's father isolates himself completely from the rest of his family. Interestingly enough, his sister, quite like Elizabeth, inserts herself into the subverted family structure after the loss of the matriarch:

A sister of my father was with him at this period. She was nearly fifteen years older than he, and was the offspring of a former marriage of his father. When the latter died this sister was taken by her maternal relations: they had seldom seen one another, and were quite unlike in disposition. This aunt, whose care I was afterwards consigned, has often related to me the effect that this catastrophe had on my father's strong and susceptible character. (*Matilda* 155)

With death comes isolation. For Matilda's father, the death of his own father resulted in the loss of his sister's presence. As *Matilda* continues to unfold, the presence of Matilda's aunt gradually fades away; as the action increases, her presence decreases. She is no longer necessary for the plot's movement. The aunt, like Elizabeth, is not a sufficient maternal replacement. Ultimately, "the consequence of a deficient substitute for the mother figure" results in the reappearance of the father figure, which results in isolation

and death (Mitchell 116). Following this line of logic, Matilda is the only remaining victim who may fulfill the maternal position of her family. Unlike *Frankenstein*, *Matilda* does not illustrate any instances of traditional family structures or values. With the example of the DeLaceys, the creature witnesses a “typical home [in] the novel that has a father-oriented family” (Mitchell 116). Matilda is never given an example of the traditional family structure, as discussed before, so she is left to fulfill the unnatural role of daughter-as-mother and daughter-as-wife within her own family structure. Of course, her father’s own monstrous passions lead to this structure:

...my mother I should never see, she was dead: but the idea of my unhappy, wandering father was the idol of my imagination. I bestowed on him all my affections; there was a miniature of him that I gazed on continually; I copied his last letter and read it again and again. Sometimes it made me weep; and at other times I repeated with transport those words,— ‘One day I may claim her at your hands.’ I was to be his consoler, his companion in after years. (*Matilda* 159)

It is important to note that these desires were written retrospectively, after Matilda’s father reentered her life. However, from these descriptions, it is clear that Shelley constructed Matilda to replace Diana: she was to be his confidant and life companion, after all. From this selection, what is also evident is that Matilda seems to have obsessive tendencies and thoughts directed toward her father. Without knowing him, Matilda literally worships the image she has of him in her mind. In a manner similar to that of religious worship of the Savior, Matilda creates an altar of her father, reads the “bible” he left for her, and prays that he will return so that she may serve him. His letter implicates his future return, albeit ambiguous and unplanned. Matilda, like her mother, has faith in her father. It is her father’s love that is far from filial that leads Matilda’s inherited love

for him to be corrupted. This love seems to comment on the “love” that the creature tries to forge with its creator, but due to its unnatural birth, the creature is unable to fulfill the role of son in the traditional family structure. Between Matilda and her father, it is clear that Matilda is influenced by the corrupt feelings of her father, even before meeting him. In this way, we can assume that from birth, both Matilda and the creature were never given the chance to live as individual beings; each was inescapably connected, and drawn to, the very life that sparked their own. Essentially, Matilda and the creature are doomed to follow in their father’s footsteps: obsession and pursuit of the unknowable.

As her father isolated himself after his wife’s death, Matilda isolates herself after learning her father’s secret. Similarly, Victor abandons his creature after learning the secret of life, thus animating with life his creation:

...by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. I beheld the wretch...but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. I took refuge in the court-yard belonging to the house which I inhabited where I remained during the rest of the night...fearing each and every sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life. (*Frankenstein* 84)

Victor’s life work is actualized, but he is immediately regretful of his work; although, it is important to note that this story is told to Walton after Victor learns of the creature’s own story. According to the creature, upon gaining consciousness, it was left blind, confused, and unable to perceive its surroundings. The creature, much like a newborn child, was left in this state until it was driven by intense hunger pangs to move from its birthing station. Matilda lives a “solitary life” during her father’s absence and reenters the

world upon meeting her father (*Matilda* 159). As her father expresses his attraction and love to her, Matilda immediately flees from him “with winged speed, along the paths of the wood and across the fields until nearly dead I reached our house and...I shut myself up in my own room” (*Matilda* 174). Matilda refuses to see her father and does not interact with him again until she receives the letter that causes her to chase after him and prevent him from ending his life. Like the creature chasing after Victor, Matilda chases after her father, but the tumultuous nature of their relationship implicates an inability to resolve their grievous familial issues. Matilda continues to search for her father; she states that the memory of her father sustains her life, all while cursing his wretched nature, quite like Victor’s creature. With abandonment comes the continuation of the deadly cycle. *Matilda* and *Frankenstein* seem to urge against thoughtless primogeniture inheritance and urge fathers to take responsibility for their children in order to prevent the passing on of the father’s sins to the children.

Matilda never fulfills her traditional role as daughter or her subverted role of wife to her father. The creature is neither son, nor human, nor friend. We see that characters like Woodville and Walton must witness destruction, but cannot intervene or prevent death from occurring. The two are given all of the information available, given access to both the knowable and the unknowable, but do not play active roles in the lives behind such information. *Frankenstein* ends with Walton being “ignorant whether [he is] ever doomed to see dear England again” and witnessing the “remains of my ill-fated and admirable friend” below the figure of the creature (*Frankenstein* 212, 217). *Matilda* ends with the eponymous character’s proclamation: “I go from this world where he [her father]

is no longer and soon I shall meet him in another. Farewell, Woodville, the turf will soon be green on my grave; and the violets will bloom on it." She continues, "*There* is my hope and expectation; yours are in this world; may they be fulfilled" (*Matilda* 210). The destruction of every family structure, whether traditional or non-traditional, in each novel prevents the cycle of primogeniture inheritance from continuing. There is no one left to give or receive.

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“DO GHOSTS REMEMBER LONG?”: ELIZABETH BARSTOW STODDARD’S
NEGLECTED POETIC PAST

Introduction

Life is not hurried, nor delayed,
The wheels of time run on and will,
Never since the world was made
Have they yet turned back or once stood still
—Elizabeth Stoddard’s final poem, 1902⁷

Scholars began assessing Elizabeth Stoddard’s literature shortly after her death in 1902. A few contemporary scholars have explored Stoddard, believing that her popularity today depends principally on renewed recognition. Jennifer Putzi’s recovery efforts expanded the author’s body of work with the discovery of 700 “Lady Correspondent” articles Stoddard wrote during the Civil War. These articles establish her as a political analyst and war correspondent, thus interesting wider audiences in her writings and dismissing earlier beliefs that Stoddard’s main concerns with the war were wholly personal and not political. My thesis will analyze Stoddard’s poetry and reorient previous scholarship to present her as a Civil War poet. The “Lady Correspondent” pieces will provide necessary historical and cultural contextualization, and I will use other Civil War poems for further comparative analysis. This essay may attempt to answer the question

⁷ This poem was written on the corner of a newspaper soon before Stoddard’s death (Stedman 9).

“is it any good?,” but will, more importantly, move Stoddard beyond analyses embedded only in sentimentalism, revealing her poetry as a feminine lens through which to understand the Civil War, a viewpoint scholars have often overlooked.

Literature Review

Scholarship on Stoddard is quite limited; much of the available contemporary discussion is flawed due to an ignorance of Stoddard’s place in Civil War literature. Elaine Showalter, echoing James Matlack’s assertion that Stoddard’s ties to the war were personal and not political, strongly believes that Stoddard disconnected herself from the war and ignored nineteenth century societal issues.⁸ Elizabeth Stockton writes about Stoddard’s subversion of patriarchal, gendered conventions in Stoddard’s novels; she writes, “Stoddard denounced the nineteenth century’s construction of female duty because it foreclosed women’s capacity for self-possession” (Stockton 415). Putzi continues the conversation surrounding female agency in *The Morgesons*.⁹

Putzi’s recovery work expanded discussion on Stoddard and refuted Showalter’s analysis. With the discovery and re-publication of The Lady Correspondent Letters, it is clear that Stoddard’s interests in the war were multimodal; her brother was a soldier, she lived in New York City, which was a major war hub; she wrote war poetry alongside hundreds of “war correspondent” letters. She was heavily critical of the war and encouraged readers to confront the harsh realities of battle: loss of arms and legs, mental

⁸ See, *A Jury of Her Peers: Celebrating Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* by Elaine Showalter.

⁹ See, “Tattooed still:” The Inscription of Female Agency in Elizabeth Stoddard’s *The Morgesons* by Jennifer Putzi.

anguish and trauma, death, survivor's guilt, national financial aftermath, and familial inability to live after a soldier's death.¹⁰

Unlike some Civil War poets who romanticized blind loyalty and bravery, Stoddard questioned the government's rush to war; she criticized the disorganization of military leaders, newspaper correspondents whose war interests and letters were heavily biased, and the care of soldiers injured on the battlefield. In an 1862 correspondent letter, she wrote:

When McClellan gave the order he was bid, give in our last fights, three brigades grounded arms, and refused to advance under Pope or McDowell. But who knows? If Pontius Pilate were here, who could answer the question he might ask again, "What is truth?" Unlike Pilate, no one wishes to wash his hands of a perplexing business. Every man wants to settle the affairs of the nation upon a certain plan of his own, which, of course, is the right one. (Stoddard qtd. in Putzi 409)

Stoddard's biblical allusion references the man who, literally and figuratively, washed his hands of the responsibility for Jesus' death after a crowd of his peers voted and took responsibility for his crucifixion; governor Pilate believed that Jesus was an innocent man who was delivered to him "out of envy" and, while he listened to the wishes of his people, he did not want Jesus' blood on his hands (Matthew 27.11-26). The author's use of this reference might allude to the blind loyalty of war leaders and government officials. For Stoddard, these men were directly responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of soldiers, and she urged citizens to question their acceptance of war methods.

¹⁰ See, "Elizabeth Stoddard's Civil War: 'Gossip from Gotham' and the San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*" by Jennifer Putzi.

This reference could also allude to the disorganization of the war. The idea that every man's plan to settle the affairs of the nation is right also reveals possible efforts to distance government parties from blame.

While Putzi's scholarship allows scholars to view Stoddard as an active participant in Civil War literature, her poetry remains largely unstudied. Matlack declared her poetry to have no literary merit outside autobiographical revelations (372). Such views permeate the discussion and few have attempted to critically analyze her poetry. Robert McClure Smith and Susanna Ryan write about Stoddard in relation to other nineteenth century poets, such as Emily Dickinson; for Smith, though, Stoddard's poetry is useful only for its cultural work: "a study of the liminal position of Stoddard's poetry might facilitate an alternative understanding of literary gender representation in the nineteenth century" (Smith 38). He also heavily blames Stoddard for never reaching the success she wished to achieve due to the fact that she was self-deprecating, sarcastic, and ironic.

In response, this essay refutes the views of Matlack, Showalter, and Smith in regard to the efficacy of Stoddard's poetry and expands Putzi's assertion that Stoddard's works are responses to the war and reveal a "complex consideration of Civil War politics and national identity" (as in Smith 183). When read through the lens of the war, themes of "the war back home," first-person soldier accounts of battle, and survivor's guilt become evident. Stoddard's other poetic works are also helpful in defining her as a female poet who subverted aesthetic and social conventions; this subversion carries through to her war poetry and Lady Correspondent letters. Through each literary form,

Stoddard worked to reveal war's harsh realities, the complex struggle surrounding blind loyalty and nationality, and the ways in which the war affected everyone in the country regardless of gender.

Stoddard's Life and Struggles

Elizabeth Stoddard was born on 6 May 1823 in Mattapoisett, Massachusetts (Zagarell as in Smith 21-23). Her family owned shipyards and enjoyed a quiet and comfortable life. While she did attend public school for a short time, she gained a majority of her literary education from Thomas Robbins' extensive library (Matlack 532)¹¹. In the mid-1800s, Stoddard moved to Maine and entered many small literary circles; she met her husband, critically-acclaimed poet Richard Henry Stoddard, in one such circle and they quickly married. Due to her intense honesty and strong sense of self, she soon lost favor in many literary circles and subsequently worked to advance her literary work and reputation without others' help.¹²

Married life was not easy for Stoddard. She struggled to balance societal expectations for womanhood while fighting for literary recognition. Each of Stoddard's children died young, either at childbirth or after a few short years. Her one surviving son, Lorimer Stoddard, lived to become a wildly successful actor, but died in 1901, two years before his mother. It was Lorimer's death that greatly debilitated Stoddard. While she continued writing up until the day she died, it was many years before she again

¹¹ Thomas Robbins, leading pastor in Mattapoisett, became a family friend of the Stoddards.

¹² See *Elizabeth Stoddard and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Culture* by Lynn Mahoney for more on Stoddard's interactions with her contemporary poets and literary circles.

published.¹³ While Stoddard's novels, works of poetry, and correspondence may be read as doing purely autobiographical or cultural work, it is her poetry that highlights her inability to conform to aesthetic and social traditions.

Analysis of Stoddard's Poetry

Turning away from biographical readings of Stoddard's poetry, preconceptions about her personality, and her "views" about her own work allows her writing to speak for itself, as she intended; such earlier approaches have contributed to Stoddard's obscurity. Her poems "Nameless Pain" and "To An Artist" are important works that detail women's struggles and triumphs in the public creative sphere. These poems also highlight Stoddard's refusal to adhere to one poetic convention or form. "October," "The Colonel's Shield," "The Message," and "Christmas Comes Again," are Civil War poems written in various perspectives. These poems represent Stoddard's talent for crafting beautiful and honest poetry.

In *To Fight Aloud is Very Brave: American Poetry and the Civil War*, Faith Barrett writes that "poetry allows women writers the imaginative freedom to assume roles they could never assume in life, thereby suspending provisionally the complex boundaries that divide public and private spheres" (87). It was through poetry that Stoddard evidently sought to break free from this divide. Stoddard "takes up the question of the conflicting private and public identities of the woman poet" (Barrett 89) and seems to exemplify this questioning through her "Nameless Pain." While my analysis of this poem will not rely wholly on the facts of Stoddard's life, understanding her views on

¹³ See Matlack.

marriage and womanhood provide important contextualization. In *Writing for Immortality*, Anne E. Boyd discusses Stoddard's literary life and struggles. While many scholars agree that the author was bad-tempered, we should acknowledge that, as Boyd indicates, she also struggled with her sense of identity and autonomy as she navigated the nineteenth century as writer, woman, wife, and mother¹⁴:

As a married woman, Stoddard had...difficulty...in sustaining her career as an author. Her fears about giving up her independence in marriage led to the depiction of courtships as intense struggles between strong wills, with men trying to gain mastery over women who try to maintain their identity and liberty. In her fiction, marriage is often portrayed as a kind of death for one or both parties...Although marriage to Richard Stoddard initially meant the opening of a new literary world, she still encountered difficulties in combining her life as a writer with her wifely duties. (Boyd 76)

Stoddard, and many other female contemporaries, believed that marriage should not be womanhood's ultimate goal. Marriage was not a holy convention; rather, it was a prescription to erase women's autonomy. Although the nineteenth century was a time of great social advancement,¹⁵ marriage remained a patriarchal institution. Many women faced identity struggles due to their newfound freedom to enter various professions and universities coupled with the fact that they were expected to build families and perform perfect "femininity." Socially, these women were still bound by strict expectations, regardless of class, employment, or marital status. Stoddard seemed to understand that her contentedness as wife and mother determined her feminine value. Her poetry often reflects this swaying between acceptance and resistance of societal expectations, but

¹⁴ For more, see Stoddard's "A Queen Deposed."

¹⁵ See, *Women's Roles in Nineteenth-Century America* by Tiffany K. Wayne.

close analysis reveals a desire to remain autonomous and free. *Poems* includes a mix of masterfully written poems that were clearly written during earlier portions of Stoddard's life. Her work is not faultless but deserves recognition for its early groundwork in allowing female figures to express themselves freely and openly, no matter the content or form.

In "Nameless Pain," Stoddard wrestles with the expectations associated with motherhood and womanhood by questioning how familial obligations can mesh with literary ambition. "Nameless Pain" also utilizes traditional sentimentalism in order to subvert gender conventions. The title evokes a commonality of womanhood and the need to understand mental and physical afflictions. This ambiguous pain is indefinable but immediately understandable, especially for the author's contemporaries. She subverts gender expectations by crafting a female character who desires a life beyond motherhood; a woman who prefers connecting with nature and the social world rather than remaining isolated in her home.

In "The Living Child's Place in Piatt's Dead Child poems," Jess Roberts discusses Sarah Piatt's subversion of nineteenth century aesthetic and social conventions through her dead child poetry: "the very qualities that rankled Piatt's nineteenth-century contemporaries— her irony, ambiguity, and difficulty... have animated and excited students of nineteenth-century women's poetry" (Roberts 334). Like Piatt, Stoddard's writing style often confused her contemporaries which limited her work's popularity. Stoddard's elliptical style begins with what appears to be the speaker's distress. By the end of the poem, she returns to the idea of pain, but dismisses it entirely. In doing so, the

author critically examines the line between the domestic sphere and women's autonomy as the poem suggests that the two are mutually exclusive. Each stanza reveals her clear understanding of the pressure society places upon women; at the same time, "Nameless Pain" exhibits the challenges nineteenth-century women, especially mothers, face as they reclaim personal identity and autonomy:

I should be happy with my lot:
A wife and mother—is it not
Enough for me to be content?
What other blessings could be sent?

Stoddard opens with a gesture of maternal obligation, seemingly calling on readers to think about their own roles. The persistent questioning to an unidentified listener further opens up the poem for broad interpretation and personal connection. The speaker, an unhappy wife and mother, desperately seeks answers for her unnamed suffering; the questions allow readers to insert their own thoughts and feelings about what brings them unhappiness. The use of "should" implies an obligation and lack of autonomy; she does not take ownership of her unhappiness, and the poem suggests that she is unable to do so. Nineteenth-century societal expectations demand an ideal feminine form: a woman happy to bear and mother children, as well as take care of the familial home. The speaker immediately questions these expectations with what we might read as a hopeful final line: "What other blessings could be sent?"

But this final line might also evoke further ennui and despair: what else is there for a woman except "wife" and "mother?" Unfortunately, Stoddard would lose several

children during her lifetime and, in fact, not one child would outlive her.¹⁶ She often asserted her authorial identity to her husband, but the death of her son Willy brought an existential crisis: “I am perplexed as to what I shall do, my occupation is gone, the sweet anxious cares and observances that have filled my life for six years and a half have vanished. My brain is smaller than my heart and I can do nothing with the former” (Stoddard qtd. in Boyd 77). With this loss, Stoddard realized that she was no longer a “mother” by societal standards, and she reflected on the trauma she experienced with his death. Stoddard continued writing, but she would no longer publish with the same frequency and would soon enter relative literary obscurity. Still, the haunting final question evokes desire for something *more*: perhaps, social status relying on individual merit rather than familial roles.

While her novel *The Morgesons* was already complete, and Stoddard would begin writing a second novel soon thereafter, Willy filled her life for several years and she felt his loss immensely. A dead son, while singularly devastating, also represented a loss of maternal purpose, as the subsequent stanzas reveal:

A quiet house, and homely ways,
That make each day like other days;
I only see Time's shadow now
Darken the hair on baby's brow!

No world's work ever comes to me,
No beggar brings his misery;
I have no power, no healing art
With bruised soul or broken heart.

¹⁶ See, *The Literary Career of Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard* by James Matlack.

By the second stanza, the speaker completely settles into her mournful tone. The imagery describes motherhood as tedious, unchanging. The personification of time suggests a deep loneliness further exacerbated by the reminder that there is no stopping its ceaseless continuation. This encroachment of Time could also imply a fear associated with the potential loss of the speaker's baby, perhaps due to the infant mortality rates associated with the early nineteenth century¹⁷ or the idea that a mother's worth is tied to her ability to bear and nurture healthy babies. The darkening of the baby's brow could imply the baby's premature death or a timeline for the mother's mourning. If the baby has already died, the poem seems to suggest the mother must now conclude her mourning and return to her duties.

The third stanza highlights the physicality of motherhood: bruised soul, broken heart. Mothers have no power or outlet for their suffering. The woman's battered interior is indicative of being metaphorically beaten into submission, perhaps to her husband or more intangible social expectations. As a woman, she must juggle her wifely duties while ensuring her child's health; the poem suggests that there is no time for the mother to ensure her own health, which may point to the inward pains she is facing.

As the poem continues, the speaker seems to find solace in art, but finds that Art—perhaps “high” art, or poetry—is inaccessible:

I read the poets of the age,
'Tis lotus-eating in a cage;
I study Art, but Art is dead
To one who clamors to be fed

¹⁷ See, “Fertility and Mortality in the United States” by Michael Haines.

With milk from Nature's rugged breast,
Who longs for Labor's lusty rest.

Here, there seems to be a shift in tone. The speaker now appears to be a well-off woman, evoked by the image of the lotus eaters. Of course, this image, derived from Greek mythology, suggests that the speaker spends her time indulging in pleasure rather than in hard work. The fact that she is in a cage could represent the speaker's inability to find freedom in elite poetry, possibly due to the strict constraints placed upon this art form. Because the speaker is in a cage, someone is supplying this poetry to her, which adds to the lack of freedom she finds in reading it. Yet, the poem does not clearly define who is keeping the woman in a cage. Whether the cage is physical or metaphorical, the speaker feels disconnected from both the material and the metaphysical world; she cannot leave her house and she also cannot find true pleasure, or escape, through poetry. Her roles of mother and wife prevent her from fully dedicating the time necessary to understand, and enjoy, poetry. Therefore, reading it becomes merely another way to fill her tedious life with activity, regardless of her dissatisfaction with what she reads.

The lotus-flowers suggest that this woman is well-off because her life is financed by someone else: perhaps her husband and his income. Not only does work not come to her, she is not expected or forced to work. She stays home, lives a tedious life, and tries to indulge in literature. However, she desires a more fulfilling life, perhaps one based in outdoor physical labor. "Clamoring" is often associated with loud shouting, and "one who clamors to be fed / With milk from Nature's rugged breast / Who longs for Labor's lusty rest" is someone who longs to change her current lifestyle in order to pursue the

rewards of working hard and connecting with nature. Without hard physical labor, rest is impossible. How can the speaker fully enjoy poetry, and art more generally, if it does not free her from her cage? The poem seems to suggest that work precedes the enjoyment of art.

For the speaker, poetry perpetuates her isolation and confinement. Therefore, the poem's elliptical structure is ironic because the woman is engaging in verse conventions as she speaks in rhyming couplets. "Nameless Pain" seems to criticize the gendered, and arbitrary, expectations associated with labor and leisure. The female speaker is expected to stay home, care for her child, and allow her husband to enjoy labor and rest. Art is dead to those unable to access life's pains and beauties, but women are barred from those experiences!

Stoddard's "Nameless Pain" thematically connects with "To An Artist" which appears in *Poems*. "To An Artist" furthers the conversation centered around art—what is true art? What is the value of art? Where do women fit in this discussion? The poem begins by establishing the dichotomy between "me," the speaker/the lowly artist, and "you," the addressee/reader/Artist, and it ends with a negotiation between two seemingly different art forms:

To An Artist

To me, long absent from the world of art,
You bring the clouded mountains, my desire,
The tranquil river, and the stormy sea,
The far, pale morning, and the crimson eve,
And silent days, that brood among lush leaves,
When, in the afternoon, the summer sun
Is gliding down the hazy yellow west,

Until I dream the boundaries of my life
May hold an unknown, coming happiness.
How shall I, then, to show my gratitude,
But offer you a picture drawn in words—
With all the art I have,—in black and white!

The speaker is “long absent” from the world of art, but still engages in making art. A transaction animates this poem: the speaker receives what appears to be paintings of natural scenes, which we see through the speaker’s description, followed by her offer of “a picture drawn in words.” The assertion this is “all the art I have” implies a need to validate the poem’s worth; the tone suggests that the speaker’s poetic art is not a fair repayment for the addressee’s art. Reading this poem alongside “Nameless Pain” opens up the discussion further, suggesting that entrance into high art relies on the artist’s gender. In the third stanza of “Nameless Pain,” the speaker laments her lack of worldly interactions due to her lack of power to work, create “healing art,” or help those in need. The notion of healing art permeates the tone of “To An Artist.” The speaker receives healing art, and such art can only be created by someone who can enjoy labor’s benefits and nature’s beauty without restriction.

As discussed previously, Stoddard’s poetry ranges in theme, tone, style, structure, and perspective. The author often uses social and aesthetic conventions in order to captivate readers before quickly shifting tone or inserting ironic twists. “To An Artist” is a direct address to an unknown artist, but the other major and minor details remain ambiguous. Although the poem contains elements open to interpretation, such as the speaker’s “long absence from the world of art,” Stoddard gives us every detail about the gift and the speaker’s reflections about her life. She seems free and hopeful, unlike the

previous poem's speaker. For the long-absent artist, returning to the art world is freeing: "I dream the boundaries of my life" may "hold an unknown, coming happiness." This speaker gains autonomy through art.

"To An Artist" ends with a tone of possibility and unrestrained emotion. This poem is written in iambic pentameter, but there is no rhyme scheme. This structure evokes stability and unrestrained creativity. This poem extends "Nameless Pain" and imagines an optimistic future for the previously powerless woman. In "Nameless Pain," readers are left wondering: Who is keeping the woman in a cage? The poem is stylistically constricted due to its three stanza construction, in which each stanza contains two sets of rhyming couplets, and each line contains eight syllables. This structure evokes the speaker's inability to create, work, or live as she desires. The stanzas also represent a basic story outline: beginning, middle, end. There is a clear tonal shift between each stanza and the final lines suggest an unwilling acceptance of fate, thus ending the woman's story. Overall, this poem has a dismal and discouraged tone.

Stoddard's poetry reflects literary accomplishment rather than mere self-expression. Her works reveal a subversion of gendered expectations and the desire for autonomy. Unlike Matlack and Showalter, I believe Stoddard's poetry holds high literary merit. While many Civil War poets used conventional sentimentalism, others chose to write about the harsh realities of the war in more lifelike ways. As Lee Steinmertz observes,

most Civil War poetry inclined toward the sentimental or melodramatic. Poets, regardless of their subject, ordinarily interpreted the war as a colorful, dramatic, emotional spectacle, as a pageant designed to bring to the surface hitherto

submerged heroics. But a minority voice...brought to light what the seventeenth century poet, Anne Bradstreet, had called man's "unregenerate part." This minority group excoriated their society variously commenting on men and events in a manner reserved today for the syndicated columnist (85).

Stoddard's letters evoke the perspective of a syndicated columnist due to her realism and honesty. Her poetry also exhibits her strong command of tone and ability to clearly, realistically demonstrate the war's horrors, thus placing her among Steinmertz's minority. She wrote war poetry from first-person soldier and family points of view. Unlike a handful of female war correspondents who wrote from the nation's capital, Stoddard wrote from her home in New York. During the war, New York had the highest number of journalists and correspondents sent to write about the war; the state became a major hub for war news. New York became preoccupied with the war, which Stoddard's poetry and her own Lady Correspondent letters strongly reflect. Her writing reveals the ways in which women were affected and consumed by the war despite not being on the battleground; her letters also reveal the war's far-reaching nature.

As a Lady Correspondent, Stoddard was one of "very few women" who "had sustained engagement with American newspapers" (Putzi 395). She was "prevented by gender for taking up the sword," but "prepared by nature and circumstance to wield the pen," so used her preparation and maintained her honesty while writing as the Lady Correspondent (Putzi 398). In a letter dated 12 May 1862, Stoddard observes:

On account of Palmetto, the palmy days of the *ordinary* newspaper correspondent are over for the present he cannot expect to hold his own in the face of the War Correspondent¹⁸... The War Correspondent may be called the prose-troubadour.

¹⁸ Stoddard's phrasing.

With his “pass” he wanders everywhere, and though faithful to the proclivities of his journal, into what regions does his imagination soar when he recounts his adventures! He tells us that Mrs. Gen. McClellan distributes tracts to the army of the Potomac, with her name written in every one; that Mrs. Gen. Fremont dresses her boys in Federal Uniform—that she insists upon knowing everything, and makes her exclaim that the “daughter of Benton and the wife of Fremont cannot be afraid.” (as in Putzi 401, my emphasis)

Stoddard openly criticizes battlefield war correspondents for the ways in which they, in her opinion, fabricated the truth. She directly connects “correspondents” with the gendered “he” and, in effect, criticizes the lack of on-site female war correspondents, questioning why this position is limited to men. The male correspondents seemed to care only to describe how the wives of generals interacted with soldiers. Stoddard questions why such content is included in war correspondence in the first place rather than in *ordinary* correspondence. She is even-handed and not blinded by blanket loyalty, understanding the human *costs* of war. In another letter she wrote about the gruesome reality for soldiers: “I could not help making surmises on the way, and on the place where many of their now active arms and legs would be left” (1 July 1862 qtd. in Putzi 396).

Stoddard then details how the war affects women: through heart and mind, shopping habits, “leisure” time spent learning about the war’s great generals, sending useful materials to the battlefield: “we shop for military and railroad maps, by reference to which strategic points can be seen, for *The Soldier’s Companion*, to send through the Central Relief Committee, ‘something useful,’ for the boys, who do not prize the ‘useful’ as they should” (Stoddard qtd. in Putzi 402). For Stoddard, the war “affects the pursuits and pleasures of women” (Putzi 402). Reading her poetry through the lens of the Civil War does not seem unreasonable. However, Showalter believes that Stoddard

...did not write about [the Civil War]... Stoddard's linguistic innovations are more self-indulgent than illuminating, and she had many serious flaws as an artist, especially her weak sense of construction and plot. Above all, her indifference to the great public issues of her time and her inability to identify with, let alone sympathize with, the suffering of others doomed her to insignificance. (150)

Showalter seems more interested in arguing that Stoddard was "self-important" rather than allowing Stoddard's work to speak for itself. If Showalter prefers biographical lenses to understand works, then *this* analysis keeps Stoddard in the realm of insignificance because it relies on third-party reports of Stoddard life rather than on Stoddard's thousands of personal letters and diary entries.

Showalter is critical of Stoddard's novels, and does not discuss the author's poetry, but as Putzi writes, we may read these works with a Civil War lens. The Lady Correspondent letters were discovered after the publication of Showalter's article, but Stoddard's poems entitled "October," "The Colonel's Shield," "The Message," and "Christmas Comes Again" are readily accessible. These poems are passionate, emotional, realistic, and empathetic to all affected by the war. Again, I reject the idea that Stoddard remains neglected due to her subversion of aesthetic and social traditions, or perceived lack of political involvement. Like Dickinson, Stoddard offered unique perspectives, writing styles and tones, and opinions about Americans' interior life during the war.

Stoddard's poetry serves as a subversive feminine lens through which to understand the war. "October" offers a glimpse into the war through the first-person account of a soldier on the battlefield. The poem opens with images of the cyclical theme of nature and human existence. "October" brilliantly reflects the author's tendency to use sentimental conventions ironically. This poem is inherently political and concerned with

every aspect of the war, from fighting on the battlefield to taking care of those who lost their lives. Stoddard positions her poetic “we” with soldiers on the battlefield and, in effect, involves readers in her calls to action: “We,” reader and speaker, are Civil War soldiers. Although relatively short, “October” addresses many of the concerns shared by soldiers and their families: unfathomable death, long-lasting war, and the inability for families to reunite after the war. It opens with a gruesome scene of numerous soldier’s deaths and connects these events to the seasonal passage of time:

Falling leaves and falling men!
When the snows of winter fall,
And the winds of winter blows,
Will be woven Nature’s pall.

From the onset, the speaker is directly, and actively, on the battlefield. However, the speaker does not yet confirm his identity. Regardless, the imagery of the falling snow acting as a funeral cloth evokes the image of a battlefield covered in fallen soldiers. The speaker has seemingly survived the attack that has led to the destruction of so much life, but is not alone:

Let us, then forsake our dead;
For the dead will surely wait
While we rush upon the foe,
Eager for the hero’s fate.

He then addresses someone near him on the battlefield; a strong connective sense of comradery connects the men. Those left on the field feel ownership over the fallen men, perhaps implying a shared identity. The speaker invites readers to share his perspective as

he discusses a future attack which further implies his association with the military, along with the assertion of victory over the “foe.”

As the war continues, Stoddard reinforces time’s progression through seasonal references, indicating the speaker’s hopeful sense of futurity:

Leaves will come upon the trees;
Spring will show the happy race,
Mothers will give birth to sons—
Loyal souls to fill our place.

The tense shift here indicates that the speaker is looking ahead and contemplating the war’s lasting effects. This quick shift also disorients readers. Just a few lines beforehand, the speaker was planning his next attack and hoping for, even anticipating, a hero’s fate. Suddenly shifting into this prospective point of view evokes possible backtracking of his previous calls for revenge. He expresses dreary hopelessness, or possibly acceptance of one’s fate, throughout this stanza. The speaker seems to understand that regardless of his own fate, ordinary life will continue.

Deriving such a meaning from Civil War poetry is provocative, especially considering that Civil War writers were concerned mainly with the events of the war. Here, Stoddard calls upon readers to think past the war and into the future. The poem suggests that war is cyclical and will persist; one group will be defeated, mothers will replace their lost sons with new sons, and loyalty will continue to drive men to war. Ultimately, the speaker begs the question: when will this madness end? For the author, the only real end to war is the enemy’s complete destruction—an extreme stance for a nineteenth-century woman. Without a foe, there is no need to fight.

Wherefore should we rest and rush?
Soldiers, we must fight and save
Freedom now, and give our foes
All their country should—a grave!

This stanza cements the speaker's soldier identity and establishes him as one willing to cover the country in graves if the outcome is freedom. But Stoddard also suggests that the soldier is contemplating the boundaries between hero and enemy. During the Civil War, brothers fought brothers, neighbors fought neighbors, friends fought friends. Here, the soldier might be considering the fact that if the foe is utterly destroyed in an effort to name a victor to the war, the entire country will transform into a grave. There is no real *return* from the Civil War; the soldiers did not deploy to foreign countries to fight faceless foes. The fight was happening in their own back yards and soldiers were fighting people they might have known.

Finally, this stanza seemingly comments on a Civil War soldier's liminality: there is no place to rest, there is no place to plan an attack, as "their country" is home to both sides. Overall, "October" acts as striking Civil War commentary. The author has clear emotional, moral, ethical, and political stakes in the war. In writing "October" in the soldier-poet point of view, as a woman, Stoddard subverts the boundaries of traditional Civil War poetry and offers readers an abundance of meaning and commentary through a short literary form. Stoddard wrote about an enemy's ultimate destruction as opposed to a sentimental poem written by a woman to her soldier husband. She writes in the male perspective, thus allowing herself a place on the battlefield.

If we explore another Stoddard contribution to Civil War poetry, “The Colonel’s Shield,” we find a major shift in tone, although it maintains the first-person soldier perspective. As we discover at the end, this poem elevates the speaker’s rank. The author again experiments with poetic style and form and constructs a song-like poem with a lighter tone than “October.” It opens with a direct address to a beloved back at home:

Your picture, slung about my neck
The day we went afield,
Sung out before the trench;
It caught the eye of rank and file,
Who knew “The Colonel’s Shield.”

In keeping his lover’s photo around his neck, the speaker-colonel rhetorically establishes himself amongst his fellow soldiers as a beacon of hope. The word “shield” elicits hope: shields protect those who stand behind them, keeping people safe. The speaker’s token symbolizes resistance for his soldiers:

I thrust it back, and with my men
(Our General rode ahead)
We stormed the great redoubt,
As if it were an easy thing,
But rows of us fell dead!

Your picture hanging on my neck
Up with my men I rished;
We made an awful charge:
And then my horse, “The Lady Bess,”
Dropped, and—my leg was crushed!

The blood of battle in my veins
(A blue-coat dragged me out),—
But I remembered you;
I kissed your picture—did you know?
And yelled, “For the redoubt!”

The Twenty-fourth, my scarred old dogs,
Growled back, "He'll put us through;
We'll take him in our arms:
Our picture there—the girl he loves,
Shall see what we can do."

The foe was silenced—so were we.
I lay upon the field,
Among the Twenty-fourth;
Your picture on my breast,
Had proved "The Colonel's Shield."

Through the description of battle, the speaker leads his lover, the addressee, through war's trials and physical pains. The speaker's leg is crushed by his horse, leaving him vulnerable to further attack and harm. Death looms over the speaker until a blue-coat pulls him to safety. As the speaker describes the man who saves him as a "blue-coat" and not "my soldier," or "my men," Stoddard leaves readers in a state of ambiguity concerning the colonel's allegiance. Like "October," this poem does not directly state loyalty to one side of the Civil War or the other. Perhaps it is this refusal to glorify sides that has led to the author's absence from Civil War anthologies and discussion.

As the poem ends, the colonel's survival depends on the picture tied around his neck. Perhaps the colonel was a grey-coat who was saved by a blue-coat who noticed the picture on his chest. Although there is no solid evidence to firmly declare the colonel as a member of the North or South, the conclusion suggests that he is the lone survivor of a horrific and bloody battle. Overall, this poem is quite straightforward in meaning and address, but seems to comment on the importance of hope and family. Many nineteenth century women wrote about such subjects, but Stoddard subverts this tradition through the use of the first-person soldier perspective. Poetry offered women the freedom to write

in various perspectives, but the fact that Stoddard, as a resident of the North, does not clearly vilify the South evokes an ambiguity that is difficult to navigate. She remains seemingly loyal, but skeptical of the manner in which her country worked to resolve major political issues.

In “The Message,” Stoddard continues to use the first-person soldier perspective in a different poetic form. This long-form poem consists of ten-syllable lines that create a steady, unyielding rhythm. The soldier addresses his comrades and urges them to remember their war-filled past:

To you, my comrades, whether far or near,
I send this message. Let our past revive;
Come, sound reveille to our hearts once more.
Expecting, I shall wait till at my door
I see you enter, each and every one
Tumultuous, eager all, with clamorous speech,
To hide my stammering welcome and my tears.
I am no host carousing long and late,
Enticing guests with epicurean hints;

Nor am I Timon, sick of this sad world,
Who, jesting, cries, "The sky is overhead,
And underneath that famous rest, the earth:
Show me the man who can have more at last."¹⁹

...

Though I have decked with amaranth my wall,
The testimony of a later loss—
His who long wandering in foreign lands,
Then dying, crossed the sea to die with me.²⁰

¹⁹ First stanza.

²⁰ Middle of second stanza.

This poem may again call upon the cyclic nature of war: as one war ends, another begins. The speaker seems to have died in battle, calls upon his comrades to return to the fields of victory and loss, and encourages them to reflect upon the “shadows of mighty men.” Stoddard uses the presence and absence of sound to indicate the return to the speaker’s violent past,

Music once triumphed here: the skilful²¹ hand
Of him who rarely struck the keys, and woke
My soul in harmony grand as his own,
Is folded on his breast, my soldier love.

Keeping true to her ambiguous and ironic writing style, Stoddard blurs the identity of the speaker. This inability for readers to clearly identify the speaker may speak to Stoddard’s own thoughts of conflict and confusion in regard to the war. The idea that music once filled the narrator’s life is further indicative of his death: there is nothing but silence now for him. But, because the speaker’s harmonious soul is folded on the chest of a soldier love, perhaps the soldier is responding to a dead friend.

The poem ends with an open-ended call to action as the soldier shifts from directly addressing his comrades to seemingly addressing an array of people affected by the war:

Comrades, return; the midnight lamp shall gleam
As in old nights; the chaplets woven then—
Withered, perhaps, by time— may grace us yet;
The laurel faded is the laurel still,
And some of us are heroes to ourselves.

²¹ Stoddard’s usage.

Here, the narrator seems to suggest that the past will repeat itself. The imagery of the everlasting, yet faded, laurel represents a previous victory that will carry the soldiers to future victory in war. He recognizes the passage of time, through withered war clothes, which may imply a distance from the Civil War or unresolved Civil issues. By stating “some of us are heroes to ourselves,” the soldier calls upon those who stayed home but contributed to the war in another form. This phrase also suggests that only soldiers will remember the war due to their heroic roles. It also suggests a lack of bravery in some soldiers, thus motivating these survivors to show courage fighting in the next war.

The stanza continues by highlighting a grim reality: life continues to move forward despite those who died in the war.

And amber wine shall flow; the blue smoke wreath
In droll disputes, with metaphysics mixed;
Or float as lightly as the quick-spun verse,
Threading the circle round from thought to thought,
Sparkling and fresh as the airy web
Spread on the hedge at morn in the silver dew.
The scent of roses you remember well;
In the green vases they shall bloom again.
And me—do you remember? I remain
Unchanged, I think; though one I saw like me
Some years ago, with hair that was not white;
And she was with you then, as brave a soul
As souls can be whom Fate has not approached.
But seek and find me now, unchanged or changed,
Mirthful in tears, and in my laughter sad.

Here, the poem’s tone dramatically shifts as the soldier reflects on his own mortality. It is unclear if the soldier is dead or alive, but the poem suggests that this message is based in memory of the past. The ambiguous mortality of the speaker forces the reader to confront

the war's reality. Suddenly, the soldier calls upon "you...as brave a soul / As souls can be whom Fate has not approached." The addressee/reader is now identified as a surviving soldier who has continued to live his life with the woman that the speaker and his friend perhaps loved. Through this convention, Stoddard places responsibility for the war upon the reader, regardless of gender, thus revealing her belief that the war affected everyone.

Stoddard wrote "Christmas Comes Again" in the perspective of a soldier, or family member, who lost a loved one in the Civil War. This poem, like "The Message," forces readers to confront the reality, and aftermath, of war. The speaker reflects on the coming Christmas holiday and evokes guilt for those who can no longer celebrate. Overall, the tone is sarcastic, as it calls out those who do not honor the memory of the war and remembers those who lost their lives on the battlefield: "We'll clink and drink on Christmas Eve, / Our ghosts can feel no wrong." Stoddard's refusal to directly identify the poem's speaker allows readers to insert their own interpretation:

His sword is rusting in its sheath
His flag furled on the wall;
We'll twine them with a holly-wreath,
With green leaves cover all.

So clink and drink when falls the eve;
But, comrades, hide from me
Their graves—I would not see them heave
Beside me, like the sea.

Let not my brothers come again,
As men dead in their prime;
Then hold my hands, forget my pain,
And strike the Christmas Chime.

Who is *he*? Because his sword is rusting in its sheath, we can guess that *he* is a fallen soldier. Who is *me*? Upon first glance, the speaker seems to be a family member, perhaps a widow or sister, of the fallen soldier. Although, with “comrades,” a word previously used to connect speakers with their fellow soldiers, the speaker’s identity is blurred; it becomes more unclear with the phrase “let not my brothers come again, / As men dead in their prime.” Of course, the speaker may be pleading for the prevention of another war that will take away her family members. Readers may also define the speaker as a surviving soldier who is left to deal with the pain, and guilt, of living through a deadly war. Regardless, Stoddard was clearly thinking about the lasting emotional and mental effects of war when other writers were focused on cultivating loyalty.

Conclusion

This essay has challenged the views of established scholars such as Matlack, Showalter, and Smith, in order to reveal the literary intricacy and value of Stoddard’s poetry. This argument was not possible without Jennifer Putzi’s recovery of *The Lady Correspondent Letters* and her assertion that Stoddard’s works are Civil War responses and reflections. I have established Elizabeth Stoddard not only as a person with a direct connection with the Civil War, but a poet who wrote about the events of the war. With poems like “October,” “The Colonel’s Shield,” “A Message,” and “Christmas Comes Again,” Stoddard entered the poetic landscape of the Civil War and discouraged overly romanticized interpretations of that catastrophe.

Through Stoddard’s war correspondence letters and novels, readers will quickly determine that she was an opinionated woman who did not submit to formal or traditional

gender conventions. It is through her poetry, however, that readers can see the depth of her empathy and understanding of the Civil War's trials and tribulations. She subverted social conventions by depicting both the unspoken existential crises of motherhood and the horrors of the battlefield. Stoddard's rejection of marriage, motherhood, and war mesh together and reveal her crafting literary works that modern readers will find both relatable and enjoyable.

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