
Crossing Borders in Elizabeth B. Stoddard's Paradoxical Voyages

Audrey Fogels*¹

¹Université Paris 8 - Vincennes-Saint-Denis – Université Paris VIII Vincennes-Saint Denis – France

Abstract

Focusing on three short stories in which Elizabeth B. Stoddard presents travelling as the basis of the plot - "Lucy Tavish's Journey" (1867), "Out of Deeps" (1872), "Waiting at the Station" (1873) - this paper proposes to look at the ways in which Stoddard shifts her attention away from the description of the journeys per se to what those journeys enable, namely an exploration of gender relationships, a theme that is at the heart of her work, as well as an investigation into class and race issues, something highly topical in post-civil war America. Indeed, the interest of Stoddard's narratives lies not so much in the voyages themselves as in borders they have readers and protagonists cross as well as in the cultural tensions and moments of revelation the different journeys provide: if travelling is the motivation of the plot in the three narratives under study, opening up the space for narration, it soon becomes clear that the focus of the stories lies elsewhere. While "Lucy Tavish's Journey" (1867) leads nowhere but back home, the narrative gives rise to indirect albeit pointed incursions into political and racial issues. In "Out of Deeps" (1872), the supposed death of the female character on her way back home makes room for an unexpected homoerotic relationship between her husband and his best friend, while the sentimental ending of "Waiting at the Station" (1873) cannot mask the more disquieting exploration of the power struggle at the heart of Stoddard's view of gender relationships. In all three stories, Stoddard's modernist poetics characterized by indirection, irony and ellipsis together with her sentimental tone and highly inter-textual writing cross another border, that of neat generic categories and provide the reader with a renewed vision of America's 19c literary map.

*Speaker