



September 1990

Age and Life's "Great Prospects" in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*

Helen Westra

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq>

Recommended Citation

Colby Quarterly, Volume 26, no.3, September 1990, p.161-170

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby.

Age and Life's "Great Prospects" *in Sarah Orne Jewett's* *The Country of the Pointed Firs*

by HELEN WESTRA

IN A CHAPTER appropriately titled "The Backward View," the narrator of Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* completes her written recollections of a summer among the elderly inhabitants of an isolated community on the coast of Maine. Recalling her last glimpses of this remote place, she remarks, "When I looked back again, the islands and the headland had run together and Dunnet Landing and all its coasts were lost to sight" (160). Though the coast vanishes from her observing eye, the narrator's detailed retrospective descriptions become ample proof that the landscape, events, and especially the people live on in her imagination. She has moved beyond her summer at Dunnet Landing, but she has learned unforgettably from her elderly friends there that the gifts of love, the play of memory, and the examples of life lived with dignity and purpose need not be wholly lost with passing time or physical separation.

Jewett locates her narrator's remembrances in a vividly particularized setting, one in which, as Josephine Donovan has aptly noted, a symbolic "correspondence exists between moral and physical landscape" (99). In her visit to Dunnet Landing and its neighboring islands, the narrator is exposed to the transcendent values and enduring human qualities emblemized by the boundless sea, endless sky, and heaven-pointing firs that inform life in this quiet community which on the surface "appeared to be retired and sheltered enough from the world" (14). Like the sentinel evergreens pointing skyward, Jewett's fiction points to matters of the spirit, and one of the most carefully developed subjects in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is old age as a vital stage in the continuum of life. Jewett's celebration of age appears not only in her positively presented elderly characters but also in the setting, events, and details she selects to underscore advancing years as a stage of life that can offer "the sense of liberty in time and space which great prospects always give" (46).

An aging Walt Whitman in 1888 wrote a poem called "Old Age's Lambent Peaks" about such views or prospects, referring to them as "the loftiest look at last" (452). Similarly, in *Pointed Firs*, without denying the physical realities of pain, loss, and limitations that can come with accumulated years, Jewett presents elderly characters whose memories and affectionate relationships provide significant strength and content in the face of passing time and physical decay. The wisdom and quiet stateliness of sixty-seven-year-old Mrs. Almira Todd and the hospitality and self-forgetfulness of her eighty-six-year-old mother, Mrs. Black-

ett, make them worthy illustrations of lines from another of Whitman's poems:

Women sit or move to and fro, some old, some young,
The young are beautiful—but the old are more beautiful than the young. (259)

As an extended work of fiction focusing largely on aging women, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* remains an unusual achievement in nineteenth-century American literature. Jewett's elderly female characters are not minor figures appearing momentarily to complete a family picture, nor are they caricatures or mere curiosities. They are remarkable in their sturdiness, serenity, and vigor and in what Willa Cather terms an "inherent, individual beauty" (Preface *Country of the Pointed Firs* iii).

The nameless middle-aged woman narrator of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, a writer who ferries from a bustling city to quiet Dunnet Landing, deliberately seeks a temporary summer haven in which to complete a literary project. Almost immediately, however, she is drawn beyond her own agenda, invited to share in the community's "great prospects"—not only the splendid scenic ones but also the remarkable human and spiritual ones, some of the most memorable being the vistas available to old age, that time when individuals have the largest, longest backward view of life's complex meanings and patterns.

The elderly women whom Jewett's narrator comes to know well are marked by a lively sense that in old age there is much to be savored and cherished. Elsewhere in a short work titled "Looking Back on Girlhood," Jewett had attested that precious moments and friendships of youth need not disappear into a forever completed past. As experiences are collected and stored in the treasure house of mind and imagination, says Jewett, "one grows rich in memories and association" (*Uncollected Stories* 12). In much this same spirit and language, the narrator of *Pointed Firs* expresses a certainty that after the Bowden family reunion, participants were "rich with the treasures of a new remembrance" (98). Through reflection and memory, the fuller meaning of their personal experiences as part of a larger social context became more susceptible of comprehension. Distance, the passing of time, and unhurried review—all of which age largely provides—can give previous experiences greater value, much as time brings mellowness to well-aged wine or a patina to fine old furniture. Thus it is highly significant that in the final days of the narrator's stay at Dunnet Landing the world took on a unique "northern look," an autumn luster in which everything "gained a deeper color and a sharper clearness" (157).

Memory not only preserves the past; memory collates and animates it. Mrs. Todd, who becomes the narrator's friend as well as landlady in Dunnet Landing, notes this power of memory when she remarks that "those that enjoyed [the Bowden family reunion] best'll want to get right home so's to think it over" (99). For Jewett, for her narrator, and for the elderly that live on *in* recollections and *with* recollections, the play of memory is crucial in deepening the value of experience and asserting the transcendent over the temporal. Jewett's extensive correspondence reveals her practice of gathering—from friendships, contacts, pictures, landscapes, events—countless stored recollections against which dis-

tance and advancing age held little threat. The generating force of memory, then, is a way of holding fast to life, of recollecting in tranquility, of escaping a morbid sense of loss as times change and loved ones depart. For example, after the death of Madame Blanc, Jewett's dear friend and the Parisian editor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Jewett wrote:

I shall always be missing her as new things and new days come and go without her, but the old days—nine years writing before we met and fifteen years since, are mine, with all she was and all the friendship gave me. (*Letters* 102)

When Jewett was confined for a long time to her home after a crippling accident, she the more cherished past conversations with friends and the opportunity to write letters in which she could share thoughts and memories. She knew well the truth that a short visit can yield a bounty of continuing pleasure. In referring to the coming of a friend as a "quiet hour such as was to be long treasured" (*Letters* 99), Jewett points to memory's capacity to transcend time and place, to "feel when we think about it as if we were neighbors" (*Letters* 89). Of the deep pleasure she found in shared experiences and correspondence, she tells a friend: "I shall be always reading between those dear lines and remembering days we both remember" (*Letters* 60). In Jewett's case, memories produced literary offspring and additional memories; she once remarked, "I have *always* seen all my story people after they were written" (*Letters* 99). This memorability so characteristic in *Pointed Firs* is described pointedly by Willa Cather as "a quality that one can remember without the volume at hand, can experience over and over again in the mind, as one can experience in memory a melody, or the summer perfume of a garden" (Preface *Pointed Firs* v).

Memory, then, for Jewett and for her characters in *Pointed Firs* is not merely a gathering of historic details or a nostalgic brooding over times past. Healthy memory is that which actively and creatively celebrates, affirms, and recovers the past and thus becomes an essential part of the imagination's complex aesthetic sensibilities capable of synthesizing past and present, reversing or modifying a present state of mind, and even nurturing memories within memories. Many years after visiting a dear friend living near Florence, Italy, Jewett wrote:

I have never forgotten that . . . spring day when the flowers were growing along the banks of your brook like the foreground of one of Botticelli's pictures. I begged a little flowered bowl of you, and I keep it on a shelf in my bedroom for an outward and visible sign! (*Letters* 102)

This impulse to cherish visible, outward signs of what is memorable manifests itself vividly both in Jewett's art and in the elderly characters in *Pointed Firs*. The herbs which Mrs. Todd collects trigger some of her most poignant memories: "This penny'yal always reminded me, as I'd sit and gather it . . . of—the other one [the man who was her first love]" (49). Mrs. Blackett's carefully kept "best room" with its accumulated treasures embodies her conscious relationship to a larger world of established social order and refinement. In a somewhat more eccentric way, Mrs. Martin's parlor, filled with pictures of the

Queen, becomes an "outward and visible sign" to nourish memory and make the present more meaningful.

Clearly, the narrator's retrospective descriptions of the characters and activities of Mrs. Blackett, Mrs. Todd, old William, Elijah Tilley, and Mrs. Martin, the Queen's Twin, keep the past alive and become a strikingly affirmative answer to the poetic question Whitman asked in 1881: "Do you know that Old Age may come after youth with equal grace, force, fascination?" (221). In her artistic rendering of the stage of life in which "our outer framework fails and shows the touch of time" (100), Jewett does not offer great physical heroism, virility, or prowess. Nor does she present life conducted in strong surges of mobility and daring. But she does celebrate the force of life in old age as a spiritual beauty (gentleness, generosity, integrity, inner strength) that can glow warmly in the subject and grace the life of the observer. In this way *Pointed Firs* deliberately offsets a grim, one-sided view of old age which would show only the failing power of muscle and sinew. For Jewett, that "sense of liberty in time and space which great prospects always give" (46) becomes a simulacrum of the breadth of vision, the accumulation of wisdom and insight, the freedom of spirit that can be found in those whose long years have been lived meaningfully and responsibly.

Apparent already in the earliest pages of *Pointed Firs* is Jewett's choice of Dunnet Landing as a setting which reenforces her consciousness of and concern with the distinctive qualities of old age. Dunnet Landing in its cove away from the busy mainstreams of life is a retired, antique town. Once a vigorous sailing and shipping community, Dunnet with its grey, weather-beaten buildings has lost its vigor and youth to urban industrial centers. Although the town no longer carries on the enterprises it was known for, the tall masts of its old schooners still stand in the inner bay as visible reminders of a past era. With their gabled windows "like knowing eyes that watched the harbor and the far sea-line beyond" (13), picturesque old homes cling tenaciously to the rocky, tree-lined shores and face the island-dotted sea. The watery horizons stretching far to north and east evoke not only memories of the town's seafaring past but also a sense "of the worlds beyond this which some believe to be so near" (33), worlds of which the elderly become increasingly conscious as an imminent possibility.

Although Dunnet Landing can, as Michael H. Holstein suggests, be viewed as a waning town that is "old, weary, empty, impoverished, sick, and in its steep decline" (40), Jewett's narrator moves beyond such initial judgments of the aging community to discern that it and the tiny nearby islands at sea can be prison or paradise (*Pointed Firs* 37) depending on the disposition and attitudes of the inhabitant. The sweet kindness and hospitality of eighty-six-year-old Mrs. Blackett and gentle William, for example, make Green Island a "complete and tiny continent" of stability and love, "a quiet island in the sea, solidly fixed into the still foundations of the world" (120).

By contrast, the jilted Joanna Todd's anguished obsessions and self-imposed exile gradually shrink her Shell-heap Island into "a dreadful small place to make a world" (62). Also living unhappily in a shrunken world is Captain Littlepage,

who regularly resents the confinement and physical restrictions brought by his accumulated years. He finds Dunnet's limitations an offensive reminder of his own loss of leadership and mobility. His dour view of the town as a collection of loafers and lazy souls who have no "sense o' proportion" (25) is less a description of Dunnet than a commentary on his own impatient attitude toward being landlocked in an aging body. While Jewett does not ignore the truth that the last years of life can bring difficulties, loneliness, and melancholy, her focus always returns to figures such as Mrs. Todd, Mrs. Blackett, and William who find serenity and purpose in old age and thus see the movement of life and time as continuity rather than loss. Their vitality and warmheartedness animate their environments and become examples of what Mary Conrad Krause calls the "living human poetry" ("The Unifying Vision of Sarah Orne Jewett" 21) Jewett often discovered along less traveled roads.

As the narrator of *Pointed Firs* explores the world of the elderly, she undergoes a gradual shift of vision—from one of interested observation to affirmation and admiration. At first, so as not to allow the people around her to impinge too much on her daily schedule, the narrator places herself in a vacant schoolhouse where she can write as an undisturbed "miser of time" (21). But even in this isolated spot she is variously reminded of time's passing and human mortality. One day through the school window she sees a funeral procession in the distance, and a bit later she is interrupted by Captain Littlepage, the old shipmaster "wrecked on the lee shore of age" (30).

On the evening of this fragmented day, the narrator stands with Mrs. Todd on a hill overlooking the harbor, and here she experiences a kind of epiphany, a vivid reminder that a long view can indeed reveal beauties and patterns which remain unseen at close range. In what is clearly a change of perspective, the narrator's description of the landscape moves from a consciousness of autumnal, shadowy grayness suggestive of old age and mortality to a stirring glimpse of the beauty of a distant, sunlit island which seems a "revelation of the world beyond" (33):

It had been growing gray and cloudy, like the first evening of autumn, and a shadow had fallen on the darkening shore. . . . As we looked, a gleam of golden sunshine struck the outer islands, and one of them shone out clearly in the light, and revealed itself in a compelling way to our eyes. . . . The sunburst upon that outermost island made it seem like a sudden revelation. . . . (33)

Later in the summer the narrator and Mrs. Todd climb another elevation to see another "great prospect." This time they reach the top of a hill crowned by an "old house . . . facing southward—a mere forsaken shell of an old house with empty windows that looked like blind eyes" (135). From this great height Mrs. Todd points beyond the house to a splendid landscape of sea, shore, and islands. Patches of early autumn color are visible, adding beauty as "here and there at the edge of a dark tract of pointed firs stood a row of bright swamp maples like scarlet flowers" (136). As Mrs. Todd companionably shares insights she has gathered over many years, the narrator, much impressed by her companion's vigor, realizes that in Mrs. Todd, as in the autumn maples, life is "very strong" (137).

In Dunnet Landing, where human activity is daily touched by land, sea, and sky, the inexorable rhythms and cycles of nature and landscape are insistent,

accepted reminders of time's passing. Dunnet's elderly inhabitants well know the "strange warning wave that gives notice of the turn of the tide" (26). They can interpret shifts in the wind and clouds and in the angles of the sun. The landscape noticeably signals the movement from summer to autumn: colors change gradually from the fresh green of June to the brown sunburnt grasses and frostbitten goldenrod of summer's end (137). And as summer passes, the narrator's view often moves from the elderly to their surrounding landscapes and seascapes, the wide horizons, the depth of vision possible from great heights and long distances.

It is certainly no accident that Jewett's narrator almost always experiences those great prospects in nature, those symbols of the long view one gains in old age, when she is in the company of elderly companions. Early in her visit to Dunnet, the narrator looks "far seaward" (33) with Mrs. Todd, who points to the outermost island (where her old mother lives at the outermost edge of life) and exclaims admiringly, "She's seen all the trouble folks can see, an' she's got a word of courage for everybody" (34). Subsequently visiting Green Island, the narrator pauses with Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Blackett on a hillside path to "regard the wide sea view" and to savor the names of all the neighboring islands. Later the same day old William takes the narrator to the highest spot on the island to share a spectacular view of ocean, mainland, and "all the far horizons" (46). In warmly valuing the "great prospects" visible from his tiny island, William embodies genuine acceptance of the circumstances life has dealt him: "There ain't no such view in the world, I expect" (46).

On the way to the Bowden reunion, the narrator sees yet another great prospect when the wagon carrying her, the fragile Mrs. Blackett, and the "majestic Mrs. Todd" moves along a shady road to the crest of a hill:

suddenly there lay spread out before us a wonderful view of well-cleared fields that swept down to the wide water of a bay. Beyond this were distant shores like another country in the midday haze which half hid the hills beyond, and the far-away pale blue mountains on the northern horizon. . . . it was a noble landscape. (84-85)

Mrs. Blackett, in looking out over this view, reveals in a particularly tender way her great gift of transcending time through the prospects alive in her memory:

"I do love to look over there where my sister used to live. . . . It seems as if she still must be there, though she's long gone." (85)

William Blackett likewise shows the narrator how the eye can travel across landscapes and weave invisible ties of love and connection between two hearts and two places. As he constructs an imaginary line between himself and his lifelong sweetheart, he fondly notes that "the ledges up there [in Esther's pasture] show very plain in clear weather from the top of our island, and there's a high upstandin' tree that makes a landmark" (128). This intangible thread from William's heart to Esther Hight's pasture is much like "the golden chain of love and dependence" (82) which Mrs. Blackett has forged between her distant island and her friends and kin on the mainland.

In Jewett's delicately handled representations of the mysterious human ability to move via memory through time and space are intimations of the soul's immortality and transcendence over the physical and temporal. As real and ever-present as the "distant roar and undertone of the sea" (67) in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is the fact of a "borderless sea of reminiscences" (56). On occasion, Jewett's use of chiaroscuro effectively suggests the mellow tints which memory can throw on the remote past and the warm glints which hope of immortality can throw on the future. Two such dramatic uses of light occur in the narrator's description of "the sunburst upon that outermost island [which] made it seem like a sudden revelation of the world beyond" (33) and "the last red glow of autumn sunshine [which] . . . touched the far sails of some coastwise schooners so that they stood like golden houses in the sea" (130).

Memory can carry present delights into the days ahead if one gathers insights and cultivates the gift of laying up "many pleasures for future joy and remembrance" (117). Memory can bring out the meaning of past events, as when Mrs. Fosdick recalls the perplexing episodes of poor Joanna's self-imposed isolation and declares: "I can see it all now as I couldn't when I was young" (65). The most admirable elderly women and men in *Pointed Firs*, however, are not wrapped up in misty contemplations of the past or the future. Their vision is balanced. They exhibit intense interest in the day at hand, the small pleasures, the glad details of life. Mrs. Todd's keen powers of observation, developed over a lifetime of noticing particulars and nuances, equip her with the gift of deciphering nonverbal signs: the smoke of a chimney; a field of backward potatoes; the "right pattern" of the pennyroyal; the scent of new doughnuts; the symptoms of illness to be attended by herbal remedies. And Mrs. Blackett has the gift of making ordinary days into special occasions; winter Sunday evenings become fine moments with "real company tea 'stead o' livin' right along just the same" (50), and turning a rug becomes a triumph and a great event. When the pace of life decelerates, as it obviously does for the elderly, joy can be found in simple things: sprigs of late-blooming linnaea; an old flowered-glass tea-caddy which evokes thoughts of distant places and a beloved person; an onion for the chowder; cool cellars; herb-scented mornings; a great wasp's nest; "a mite o' camomile" (38).

Especially among the women of Dunnet Landing and environs, the narrator studies and refines the gift of listening, observing, sharing, and reflecting. This therapeutic gift puts her in further "sympathetic proximity to the inner lives of the people she visits" (Holstein 40) and allows her to discern the patterns by which individuals have triumphed and overcome or have succumbed to the struggles of life. Mrs. Todd, whose past includes the pain of disappointed love and her husband's drowning, nevertheless lives with vigor and purpose; she offsets harsh memories with congenial ones, and at age sixty-seven she continues as an herbalist to serve the community widely with her knowledge of folk healing and medicinal herbs. Mrs. Blackett likewise demonstrates how her collected memories have kept the past pleasantly alive, and she assures the visiting narrator that in the future "I shall like to think of you settin' here today" (52). Not surprisingly, having experienced Mrs. Blackett's hospitality and viewed life

from Mrs. Blackett's chair, the narrator later asserts, "I never shall forget that day at Green Island" (52).

Increasingly through her stay in Dunnet Landing the narrator observes that elderly persons such as the Blacketts and Mrs. Todd have moved beyond the "thick of battle" (158) to a life that manifests "the ease that belongs to simplicity" and "the gifts of peace" (158). Jewett certainly does not suggest that such gifts can be found only among the elderly—or in all elderly persons. But she does give much evidence that these gifts are best cultivated through years of sympathy, service, and affection for one's fellow humans. Although *The Country of the Pointed Firs* includes people as tragic as poor Joanna, as sadly confused as Captain Littlepage, as self-centered as old Mrs. Hight, and as negligent and small-minded as Maria Harris, the force of Jewett's fiction is that life does not necessarily conclude with gloom or resentment over diminished physical strength or unfulfilled hopes. Within the "outer framework [which] fails and shows the touch of time," the life of the heart and spirit continues in a way that transcends time. Thus Mrs. Blackett, in a moment of joy, appears to the narrator to take on "a sudden look of youth; you felt as if she promised a great future, and was beginning, not ending, her summer" (41).

Jewett's literary treatment of the elderly insistently reveals that under the old "outer framework" of the body lies remarkable alertness and vitality, especially in those who are generous and "self-forgetful." Indeed, "so undying is the spirit of youth" (45), notes the narrator, that the elderly manifest youthful traces which seem to defy the passing of time. Occasionally the narrator finds herself thinking of Mrs. Todd as "a young girl" and Mrs. Blackett as having the sweet sprightliness of a child. At the Bowden reunion Mrs. Blackett's thin old cheeks take on a youthful blush while the ancient sailors and farmers smile with faces like sunburnt school boys. As sixty-year-old William Blackett ate his lunch along the banks of a trout stream, recalls the narrator, he had

looked more boyish than ever. . . . Once I wondered how he came to be so curiously wrinkled, forgetting, absent-mindedly, to recognize the effects of time. (118)

Not surprisingly, Mrs. Blackett, the oldest person in the narrator's recollections, is also the most generous and gracious. With a full life of working, mothering, loving, and suffering already behind her, her remaining energies are channeled into the tenderest affections for others, an alertness to their unique needs and heartaches, a concern for the comfort and reputation of those around her—be it her son William or eccentric relatives whom she protects from unkind judgments. Mrs. Blackett's generosity exhibits itself in an exquisite hospitality and in "that final, that highest gift of heaven, a perfect self-forgetfulness" (46–47). Like William's, her communication is often the more tender because it is expressed "without speaking" (52). It is a kind of perceptive and tactful mind reading, an eloquent language of the heart, a silent warmth and love which speaks volumes in its gentleness and sensitivity.¹

1. Marcia McClintock Folsom's essay "'Tact Is a Kind of Mind-Reading': Empathic Style in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*," relates the gift of mind reading (*Pointed Firs* 46), the gift for which the narrator highly praised Mrs. Blackett, to Jewett's own intuitive, highly observant style.

Jewett's fiction thus suggests that in the aged person there can be a depth of character and insight which makes words redundant. The silences in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* are often eloquent, not symptoms of passivity or lethargy but of the presence of thoughts and feelings too complex or intense for words. Silences—those the narrator shares with William on the hilltop, with Mrs. Todd at the hour of twilight, or with Mrs. Blackett in the cottage bedroom—occur when life is felt to be almost overwhelmingly beautiful or gratifying. William offers a few sprigs of linnaea wordlessly: "he knew . . . that one could not say half he wished about linnaea" (45). Likewise, when the narrator sits in Mrs. Blackett's rocking chair and is moved by the peace and beauty of life viewed from the old woman's perspective, the two women understand each other "without speaking" (52). At the Bowden picnic, perhaps more than any other time, affection remains unstated. On this occasion when "the elder kinfolk and acquaintances had looked in one another's faces" and exchanged "lingering touches of their friendly hands," the narrator perceives how deeply the old treasure fellowship and the joy of reunion: "It is the old who really value such opportunities" (97). Certainly, the elderly who have lived patiently and purposefully know the truth of what Emerson says in his essay on love: "In silence we must wrap much of our life, because it is too fine for speech" (*Selections* 141).

Living for a summer among people who are aged yet not greatly "troubled by [the] burden of years" (100), sharing their lives and hillside paths, the narrator ultimately is the one in whom the passing months register the greatest changes. She finds that Mrs. Todd's claim—"the prospect from that hill is as beautiful as anything in this world" (132)—is a truth as applicable to old age as to landscapes. She comes to realize that she "too was no longer very young" and to hope that she might be like her vital elderly friends as she lived on into age (100). Literally and symbolically, during her last days at Dunnet Landing, "the sea, the sky, all the long shore line and the inland hill, with every bush of bay and every fir-top, gained a deeper color and a sharper clearness" (157). From her companions she had learned of the "great prospects" of life. She had stood with Mrs. Blackett, with Mrs. Todd, and with William on those high places Whitman calls "old age's lambent peaks," and she had viewed:

The calmer sight—the golden setting, clear and broad:
So much i' the atmosphere, the points of view, the situations whence we scan,
Bro't out by them alone—so much (perhaps the best) unreck'd before;
The lights indeed from them—old age's lambent peaks. (452)

Finally, then, Jewett's choice of a narrator who writes of her intimate and satisfying experiences among the elderly underscores the degree to which the elderly can influence and enrich life. Impressed by the depths of character and the "gifts of peace" so palpable in her new-found friends, the narrator feels moved to shape her memories into memoir so they can be further shared. She has been touched by the "grace, force, and fascination" (Whitman 221) in old age. Not only had she observed the elderly transcend time and space through their own lively memories. She saw how they lived on in other hearts and memories. Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Blackett especially, in offering the gift of themselves to the

narrator, share unforgettably the richness of their own great prospects. Jewett's words in a letter to Sarah Norton could well have been the thoughts of Jewett's narrator as she departed from her friends on a ship headed "through rough seas" (160) and the coast, hills, and islands around Dunnet disappeared from view:

There is something transfiguring in the best of friendship. One . . . sees over and over in life what the great shining hours can do, and how one goes down from the mountain where they are, into the fret of everyday life again, but strong in remembrance.

Works Cited

- DONOVAN, JOSEPHINE. *Sarah Orne Jewett*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1980.
- EMERSON, RALPH WALDO. *Selections From Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Steven Whicker. Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1957.
- FOLSOM, MARCIA MCCLINTOCK. "'Tact Is a Kind of Mind-Reading': Empathic Style in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*." *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett*. Ed. Gwen L. Nagel. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1984.
- HOLSTEIN, MICHAEL. "Writing as a Healing Art in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*." *Studies in American Fiction* 16 (1988): 39-49.
- JEWETT, SARAH ORNE. *The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories*. Preface by Willa Cather. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956.
- . *Letters*, ed. Richard Cary. Waterville, Maine: Colby College Press, 1956.
- . *Uncollected Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett*, ed. Richard Cary. Waterville, Maine: Colby College Press, 1971.
- KRAUSE, MARY CONRAD. "The Unifying Vision of Sarah Orne Jewett." Diss. University of Notre Dame, 1978.
- WHITMAN, WALT. *The Collected Poetry*. Vol. II. Deathbed Edition. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1948.