Corporate hierarchies: communities of women in the fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett

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Introduction

If I were asked to name three American Books which have the possibility of a long, long, life, I would say at once The Scarlet Letter, Huckleberry Finn, and The Country of The Pointed Firs. I can think of no others that confront time and change so serenely. The better books seem to me fairly to shine with the reflection of its long joyous future. It is so tightly yet lightly built, so little encumbered with heavy materialism that deteriorates and grows old fashioned. I like to think with what pleasure, with what sense of rich discovery, the young students of American Literature in far distant years to come will take up this book and say, "A Masterpiece!!" as proudly as if he himself had made it. It will be a message to the future, a message in a universal language.

Willa Cather 1925

American Literature, we have long been told, is about heroes who leave civilization and domesticity to forge their own destinies. Huck Finn lights out for the territories;

Ishmael boards a whaling ship; and Natty Bumpo triumphs in the wilderness. Such heroes embody Emerson's vision of a self-reliant man and Thoreau's notion of a man marching to the beat of a different drummer. Willa Cather's classification notwithstanding, The fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett is not traditionally classified with the 'greats' of canonical literature.

Many feminist scholars and critics argue that Jewett's excommunication may be in part because her writing doesn't fit the pattern of most American classics, those novels that Nina Baym labeled, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood." There is no search for the father, no hunt to kill, and no discernable plot. Instead, Jewett depicts the world of female rituals, female relationships, and female initiations, or rites of passage. Her atypical style and format may not fit the classic pattern of adventure and initiation, but she offers a glimpse into a part of Americana that is not portrayed by Melville, Hawthorne, and the like.

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1 Nina Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors," American Quarterly 33:2 (Summer 1981): 123-39. In her essay, Nina Baym attributes three possibilities for the absence of literature by and about women in the American Literary Canon. For one, she suggests simple bias, literature has traditionally been selected by male authors and they simply have a male bias, perhaps because they don't like the idea of women as writers or because they don't believe that women can be writers. Furthermore, she suggests the reason for their absence is because women are not regarded as "excellent" as men, meaning that because traditionally women lacked the education that men had, and their literature reflected that poverty in its lack of classical allusions and metaphors. Finally she indicated that the lack of literature by and for women may relate to gender restrictions; anachronistically we view literature from current standards, and the standards have traditionally been male.
Theodora Sarah Orne Jewett was born September 3, 1849 in South Berwick, Maine, a town about ten miles from the Atlantic Ocean and 65 miles from Boston. It was her proximity to Boston, then the publishing hub of America, that allowed her to achieve success at an early age. The house in which she was born and lived most of her life is a large handsome Georgian structure in the center of South Berwick, which today is cared for by the Society for The Preservation of New England Antiquities.

Theodora Sarah Orne Jewett’s parents were Caroline Frances Perry (1820-1891) and Theodore Herman Jewett (1815-1878) a physician. Through her mother’s side Sarah was related to two other well-known American authors, Anne Bradstreet and novelist Tabitha Tenney. Jewett’s grandfather was Theodore Furber Jewett (1787-1860), a prosperous shipowner and merchant in the West Indies Trade. It was his financial success that established the family economically and meant that Sarah never had to worry about income. Indeed she once remarked that, for her, writing was never a “bread and butter affair.”1 Her Grandmother was Sarah Orne (1794-1819), for whom she was named, although her first given name was Theodora, after her father and grandfather, and she never used it.

Jewett’s writing career began under the auspices of William Dean Howells, who was an associate editor at The Atlantic Monthly in 1869 when she submitted her story “Mr. Bruce.” Howells accepted it and encouraged her to submit other stories that realistically portrayed her Maine locale. She submitted other sketches that were published by The Atlantic in the 1870s, and they were later collected, at Howells’ suggestion, as Deephaven in 1877.

The editor-in-chief of The Atlantic at this time was James T. Fields. It was through Fields and especially his wife, Annie Adams (1834-1915), that Jewett gained access to the Boston literary world. For Annie Fields turned their house on Charles Street into America’s most famous literary coffee house. Nearly all the literary greats of the day—Dickens, Hawthorne, Lowell, Longfellow, Emerson—passed through. Annie also provided a haven for women writers as well with Harriet Beecher Stowe, Celia Thaxter, Rebecca Harding Davis, Louisa May Alcott, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Willa Cather, Jewett and others found emotional support and professional encouragement from Annie, who often served as an unofficial editor for her husband.

After James’s death in 1881, Annie’s relationship with Sarah intensified. Their intimacy was undoubtedly the most important relationship in Sarah’s life. Such commitments were not unusual in the nineteenth century, as historian
Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and other scholars have discovered. While it is anachronistic to use the twentieth-century term lesbian to describe them, it is clear that the emotional intensity of these relationships was such that they would be so labeled today. Scores of Jewett’s and Fields’ letters remain documenting their devotion to one another, and they were treated as a couple by numerous correspondents.

Much has been made of Jewett’s own lengthy relationship with Annie Fields. In her study, *Surpassing The Love of Men*, Lillian Faderman sees Sarah and Annie’s friendship as a prime example of what was then called the “Boston Marriage,” a long term monogamous relationship between two otherwise unmarried women. In fact, Faderman argues that because Boston was such a “sex-hating society” many people believed that “love between women was asexual, unsullied by the evils of carnality.”

Although Annie Fields remained the central figure in Sarah’s life, Sarah had numerous loving friendships with other women. They reveal not only Jewett’s charm but also

1 Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing The Love of Men*, p. 190.
2 Faderman, p. 191.
the emergence of a network of professional women whose lives centered on their cultural contributions rather than their family and domestic duties. These women included: Sarah Whitman, a founder of Radcliffe College; Sally Norton, a cellist; Alice Brown, a short story writer; and later, Willa Cather, another writer. Thus Jewett, in a sense, practiced what she preached. Her close relationships with many women served as positive models and communities that can be seen in her writings. It also appears that Sarah and her circle of peers had their own hierarchy with Annie Fields at the top.

In addition to several collections of short stories, Jewett wrote three novels: *A Country Doctor* (1884), *A Marsh Island* (1885), and *The Tory Lover* (1901), as well as sketchbooks *Deephaven* and *The Country of The Pointed Firs*. In 1902 she was thrown from a carriage and suffered a spinal injury from which she never recovered and on June 24, 1909, she died of a cerebral hemorrhage in South Berwick, where she is buried.

Willa Cather, who was the writer perhaps most influenced by Jewett, singled out *The Country of The Pointed Firs* as one of the three works destined for immortality. It was her [Jewett’s] style, that “very personal quality of perception,” Cather noted, that made Jewett’s work stand out. “Among fifty-thousand books,” she observed, “you find few writers who ever achieve a style at all.” But Jewett’s faithfulness to
Jewett has come to be known for her pioneering work in portraying the plight and condition of women in New England. Yet, the age-old debate of whether New England is simply a geographic entity or an actual state of mind has not yet been determined. Many critics would argue that what Jewett portrays in her writings is the best depiction of the New England Mind-set, both in setting and characterization. It is here that Jewett's voice and imagery show a true knowledge of the society and its operatives. Perry Westbrook comments that Jewett, "is our most truthful recorder in fiction of New England village life." It, however, is only in recent years and because of the growth of feminist scholarship, that we have come to recognize Jewett's writings from a feminist perspective, which helps us to better understand the communities of women that Jewett so laboriously tried to portray.

Critics have often grouped Jewett with other local color writers of her time, notably Harriet Beecher Stowe, Rose Terry Cook, and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. Because the

1 Cather's comments are found in her 1925 preface to The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1925), reprinted as The Country of The Pointed Firs and Other Stories, (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), and in Not Under Forty (New York: Knopf, 1936), p. 95.
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term local color is faintly pejorative, it is useful to distinguish it from regionalism, the larger literary school to which. Hugh Holman identifies regionalism as "fidelity in literature to a particular geographical section; the accurate representation of its habits, speech, manners, history, folklore, or beliefs." ¹ Holman further explains that such writing "cannot be moved, without major loss or distortion, to any other geographic setting" and also notes that nineteenth-century regionalism includes American local color writing. Readers of Jewett finds in her stories the "fidelity" and "accurate representation" demanded by Holman of regionalism. Local color writing in contrast, according to Holman, is "writing which exploits the speech, dress, mannerisms, habits of thought and topography peculiar to a certain region." ² The term "exploits" relates to the author's purpose, and indicates the repeated tendency of local color writing to heighten the color by caricaturing the inhabitants and exaggerating the dialect of speech patterns of the area.

In a limited sense perhaps, Jewett is a local colorist who has made significant contributions to the genre. Yet why limit her only to that tradition? If one follows Annette Kolodney's argument for a revisionist rereading of literature, Sarah Orne Jewett is more than just a local

² Holman p. 249.
colorist.\textsuperscript{1} She is also a woman writer with a feminist voice. As Adrienne Rich states, a feminist book is:

...a book which demands of us activity, not passivity, which enlarges our sense of the female presence in the world; a book which uses language and sensual imagery to impart a new vision of reality, from a woman centered location; a book which expands our sense of connections among us in the bonds of history; a book which drives us wild, that is, help us break out from the tameness and repetition into new trajectories of our own.\textsuperscript{2}

In looking at Sarah Orne Jewett from a feminist viewpoint, the characterization and relationships in her works of fiction can be seen in an entirely different perspective. By creating fiction that reflects a sense of female presence in the world, that reflects sensual imagery of setting and characters, and that expands the view of women as an integral part of history, Sarah Orne Jewett, perhaps before her time, has created a unique type of feminist literature. Her stories explore timeless issues and situations that not only faced New England women of the late nineteenth century, but that still face women today.

While Jewett accurately portrays the intimacies and support networks of New England women, she also illustrates

\textsuperscript{1} Annette Kolodney, "A Map for Misreading: Or Gender and The Interpretation of Literary texts," New Literary History (1980).
the individual power struggles, hierarchies, and governing social ordinances or codes that occur within this feminine community. Jewett’s women oppose the limitations and expectations that New England culture places upon them, and concurrently attempt to define an independent female power structure and hierarchy among themselves. Auerbach calls these communities "Emblems of female self-sufficiency which create their own corporate reality." Jewett portrays these "corporate realities," those corporate-like structures of hierarchy and support networks, with poignant illustrations of language and silences, as well as active physical illustrations. The physical examples of structure can best be seen within social settings within families and communities, among sisters that live together, and among widows in relation to the surrounding community.

Jewett is noted for her characterizations of strong, defiant, and rather unconventional females. Her intricate studies and representations of these women and their relationships is what makes her stories and novels realistic and genuine. Jewett portrays the women in her fiction as participants in intimate and exclusive female communities that teem with a rare presence of women, a connection to the past, and a sense of interconnectedness, or community. It is within these communities that Jewett’s most important messages are contained.

1 Auerbach, p. 5.
This project examines some of the specific communities of women within the Fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett. I have chosen a selection of short stories that best illustrate the relationships and communities of women in Jewett’s fiction. The first section examines the community and close relationships among sisters. Specifically it identifies hierarchies and power relationships with examples of action and language. The second section distinguishes spinsters and their relationship to the surrounding community. In many cases the spinsters create their own sense of community, either with animals or children. Finally, the last section examines specific communities of families and friends. The examples show the power struggles and hierarchies that can be seen in physical illustrations and patterns, such as seating arrangements or physical placement.
Relationships and Hierarchies among Sisters

Much of Jewett’s fiction is comprised of elderly sisters or spinsters that live together and depend upon each other for support, mental stimulation, and financial help. Jewett portrays these sisters as partners or companions for life, who often share the family home, a place in the poorhouse, or at least the heritage left by a once-large family. Many times the women are the survivors of a large family, and as such, are aware of their responsibility as the last keepers of the flame. Cary observes that, “Miss Jewett usually equips her more feminine or inept ladies with compatible and complementary sisters” who “have lived so long together in self-contained seclusion that there is little to distinguish between one and the other.”¹ A careful analysis of the sister stories however, shows, that the two women are not as much alike as Cary suggests, but are different in both role and personality. The sisters compose an intimate community among themselves that serves as a basis for emotional and physical support. Within a sister community, however, there are specific “corporate structures” or relationships among the women that define their actions and reactions among themselves and within the community. These unwritten codes or social mores set up a “corporate-like” structure among the women. Much like the corporate order of CEO, clerk, and

secretary. Each has a specific function within the group, and each has a place with an established hierarchy.

Dinah Mculock Craik suggests that the balance and structure of power gives significance to these relationships, noting that the relationships between two women exist because there is "a difference--of strong or weak, gay or grave, brilliant or solid-- answering in some measure to the difference of sex."¹ The old adage that "opposites attract" not only functions in marriages, but also seems to function in a situation where sisters are partnered much like husband and wife. Whether they are molded by time and circumstance rather than by a heredity into their respective roles is a moot question. Most often, the more dominant member of the pair, corresponding to the masculine role in the family structure, achieves her status by age, by social position, and by personality. This same obedient dominant pattern appears in both the friendship and the sister relationship in the story.

Jewett herself was one of three sisters who grew up in a house adjoining the South Berwick family home. After sister Caroline married, Sarah and her older sister Mary continued to live in the family home together until Sarah's death in 1909. Although the characters she writes about in this group of stories are very diverse in social and economic status,

¹ Dinah Mulock Craik, A Woman's Thought About Women, American ed. (New York: Rudd and Carleton, 1858), pg. 163.
they show a sensitivity to the relationship understood by one who has experienced it for herself.

In long years of living together, the sisters in Jewett’s fiction have established and accepted an unvoiced but clearly understood hierarchy. Consistently, the older sister exhibits a dominance over the younger, and assumes the power to make decisions that will affect both of them. The younger sister tends to yield more to external influences, to be unsure of herself, and to succumb to melancholy and depression. Richard Cary notes that:

> when Miss Jewett’s elderly spinsters live in pairs, they intensify rather than dilute their miseries. Two old people jointly suffering affliction exert a sum effect greater than one plus one— a calculus of pain familiar to any compassionate eye witness. (p. 114).

The experiences of the various pairs become intensified for the reader as the sisters interact with each other and verbalize their concerns to each other. Two vibrant examples of this so called “corporate-structure” are The “Dulham ladies” and “The Town Poor”.

The much anthologized “Dulham Ladies” (1886) is perhaps the most famous of Jewett sister stories.¹ The portrayal of the social and physical deterioration of the two sisters exemplifies Jewett’s writing at its best. Within the story,

Jewett carefully chooses detail, balances past and present, and juggles idealism and reality. The story comments on the decaying social and economic conditions which victimize the two naive elderly ladies. In addition, the story examines the relationship of the two sisters as well as to their surrounding community.

As is common to Jewett sister stories, the two sisters are relatively indistinguishable to the local community. Yet to one another, they are drastically different and live according to a clearly defined hierarchy. Their names are a perfect example of this hierarchical distinction. The elder sister Harriet, is always called Miss Dobin, while the younger sister is always called Miss Lucinda. This distinction allows for the family surname to be preserved for the older, as befitting her rank. This ranking, as established by the social code, clearly sets Miss Dobin as the leader and “CEO” of the family. In addition, Miss Dobin usually leads the conversation while Miss Lucinda simply responds, again outlining her place within the family as the “administrative assistant.”

The Dulham sisters are living a life bound in heritage and tradition. Born of “a once-eminent-socially prominent minister” and a socially prominent mother, the Dulham ladies have lived a life among the upper crust of the community. Because the sisters were always thought of as children while
their mother was alive, marriage would have effected the transition to adulthood, and thus it never occurred for either of them. Consequently, they maintain in their own eyes a perpetual state of youth. The sisters are oblivious to their own physical changes in age, yet the community witnesses the changes in their physical stature and often mimicked them:

"Of late years, though they would not allow themselves to suspect such treason, the most ill-bred of the young people in the village made fun of them behind their backs, and laughed at their treasured summer mantillas, their mincing steps, and the shape of their parasols" (p. 124).

Thus a problem develops: the Ladies still see themselves as eternal "Dobin ladies," never aging and who feel "no older than they ever have" (p. 126) while the community sees them as simply the "old ladies" (p. 132).

The ladies are disgusted at the activities of the town and of being labelled as "behind the times." Miss Dobin states, "You would think it had been a hundred years since our mother's death, so completely has the effect of her good breeding and exquisite hospitality been lost sight of, here in Dulham" (p. 135). Miss Lucinda, anxiously responds that "we must not let them think we do not mean to keep up with the times, as we always have... I do feel as if perhaps--our hair---" (p. 135). It is Lucinda who first verbalizes the
discussion concerning the problem of the thinning hair. "The straightness and thinness had increased so gradually that neither sister had quite accepted the thought that the other person would particularly notice their altered appearances" (p. 136). The ladies become embarrassed and aware of the problem when confronted by a tactless child at a sewing party, "Do Miss Dobinses wear them great caps because their bare heads is cold" (p. 136)? Miss Lucinda and Miss Dobin are so overcome by shame at what they perceives as their social disgrace that "It was certain that they must take some steps to retrieve their lost ascendancy" (p. 135).

The hierarchical pattern of the sister's relationship continues, with the elder Miss Dobin leading and the young Miss Lucinda following in her footsteps. Miss Dobin's, elected the "CEO" simply by age and position within the family, leads while the younger Miss Lucinda, "the administrative assistant", accompanies. Most often, it is the oldest sister that is the leader of the two women. The younger sister, often meek and quiet, simply follows along and does what she is told. Miss Dobin remembers that a relative of theirs had "Passed away a few summers before, and the sisters had been quite shocked to find that the pretty young woman wore a row of frizzes, not originally her own, over her smooth forehead" (p. 137). While the two women had criticized this deceit at the time, they now realize that she was "not only a relative by marriage and used to good
society, but also that who came from town, and might be supposed to know what was proper in the way of toilet" (p. 138).

Thus, Miss Dobin makes the arrangements for the two sisters to go to town. Upon their arrival the two sisters "came to a stop together in front of a new, shining shop, where smirking waxen heads all in a row were decked with the latest fashions of wigs and frizzes" (p. 140). Miss Dobin boldly goes into the shop, as per her position of leader, followed by the quieter sister Lucinda. Miss Dobin says, "My sister and I were thinking of buying some arrangements to wear above the forehead." The shopkeeper who sees this as a golden opportunity to dispose of unwanted wares replies that "nothing was so suitable as some conspicuous forelocks that matched their hair as it used to be." The hair pieces don't even match the current color of their hair!!

Miss Dobin, as the eldest and leader of the two sisters, has the honor of trying on the first hairpiece. "She turned to Miss Lucinda and saw a gleam of delight in her eager countenance." "I like the way it parts over your forehead," said the younger sister. Miss Lucinda, following after her sister, tried on hers and stated, "I feel as if anybody might look at me now, sister... I confess, I have really suffered sometimes, since I knew I looked so distressed" (p. 144). The younger sister reacts, responds
to, and reinforces her sister’s decision, while concurrently trying to upholding her family’s reputation.

To the outside world, the two sisters may appear “as alike as two peas in a pod” yet in reality, the two sisters are by birth and disposition tightly cast into leader and follower roles. One is the “CEO” and the other the “administrative assistant.” They give way to this overt and silent structure in every aspect of their lives, both significant and trivial. One wonders whether Jewett, whose older sister Mary assumed the role of housekeeper while Jewett pursued her more literary interests, found this a dominant pattern in her own life. At any rate, in the sister stories, this hierarchy consistently applies and provides structure and meaning to this type of nuclear family.

If the Dulham sisters portray social decadence, the sisters in “The Town Poor” (1890) illustrates abject poverty. Yet despite the economical differences and ramifications of the two stories, the relationships between the Bray sisters, just like the Dulham sisters, operates within the same kind of hierarchical structure. The unspoken balance between older and younger, or of “CEO” and “administrative assistant” can be seen no matter what economic and social conditions are present.

Two friends, Mrs. Trimble and Rebecca Wright are very aware of their respective roles as they return from a church. Again, much like the “Dulham Ladies,” the use of “Mrs.” for one name and the first name of the other immediately marks the distinction between the older and the younger. Mrs. Trimble, holds the position of authority by virtue of her social standing in the town, her wealth, and also her role as widow over the less prosperous, spinster Rebecca. Spinsters, as you will see in the next section, are always on the bottom of the social rank and order.

The dialect of the two ladies also reinforces the disparity and differing social positions of the two women. Rebecca’s speech is far more colloquial and “countrified” than her more socially prominent friend. Rebecca also also acknowledges the distinction between them by meekly asking Mrs. Trimble’s permission to stop for a visit at the home of the Bray sisters: “You don’t suppose, Mis’ Trimble--I ain’t seen the girls out to meetin’ all winter. I’ve re’lly been covewtin’” (p. 38). The Bray sisters have been forced out of poverty to relinquish their own home and go on the town. They are presently staying with an impoverished family who has taken them in merely for the five dollars per month paid to them by the town. Mrs. Trimble’s dominance continues to be evident throughout the story. She is the one to take the selectmen to task for their inhumane treatment of the Bray
sisters, and she is immediately given the preferred seat at the Bray sister's house.

Like the other stories, a hierarchical relationship is seen with the Bray sisters too. Ann, the elder, has been the strong, happy, comforting one, while the younger sister, Mandy, has been the weeper and the complainer. Even as Mrs. Trimble watches Ann comfort Mandy, she is aware that "it was not the first time one had wept and the other had comforted" (p. 52). By stature and age within the family the older sister is once again the leader. Both sisters are physically impaired and the visitors soon realize that the sisters have not been put on the town because of their own lack of resourcefulness, but rather they have been victimized by the men in their lives.

Their father, Deacon Bray, chose to give to the church to liberally, rather than make provisions for his family. The deacon's failure to provide for his family was in no doubt encouraged by the local pastor, whose concern for the church building far exceeded his concern for the parish. Mrs. Trimble states that "[A] Man ought to provide for his folks he's got to leave behind him, specially if they're women" (p. 43). Jewett goes on to also peg the Selectmen, (the italics are in the text and leave no doubt in the readers mind that Jewett was emphatic on the sex of those in power), and Mr. James, the man who took the Bray sisters in. His wife
clearly admits that her husband undertook the task of boarding them simply out of a desire for the money.

Although the Bray sisters are confined to one small back room and resemble hostages rather the guests, the social code of behavior requires that they somehow entertain their guests. The seating arrangement indicates the power structure of the group of women. Mrs. Trimble, as the "higher guest" is given the one chair. The other three sit on the bed. Mandy later moves to a trunk, and Ann moves around seatless, as befits the elder sister and the senior hostess. Despite the poverty that they live in, "the poor place was filled with a golden spirit of hospitality" (p. 51). Ann, the older sister, also takes responsibility for proportioning the remaining bit of peach preserves, taking her share only after she offers it to the others. As Ann slowly takes her portion Jewett describes the scene:

Then there was a silence, and in the silence a wave of tender feeling rose high in the hearts of the four elderly women. At this moment the setting sun flooded the poor plain room with light; the unpainted wood was all of a golden brown, and Ann Bray, with her gray hair and aged face, stood at the head of the table in a kind of aureole. Mrs. Trimble's face was all a quiver as she looked at her; she thought of the text about two or thee being gathered together and was afraid. . . . (pp. 55-56).
The act of generosity in sharing the last of the preserves the sisters have causes the small community to transcend the physical, for the sister’s selflessness has converted the simple meal into a last supper of communion. Even in this significant moment, however, the natural social and familial order is maintained. Ann the older sister, has initiated the rite, and Mrs. Trimble responds to it. The relationship among the four operates in a respectful hierarchy working within the parameters of wealth and social standing.

Although published in the same year and centered around two sisters, “In Dark New England Days” (1890) is much different in tone and style than “The Town Poor.” "In Dark New England Days" is the story of two sisters who, in a feminine version of the Silas Marner theme, discover a chest of gold after their father’s death, only to have it stolen in their sleep. Here again the two sisters operate within the hierarchical structure with the eldest as the leader. Much like the Bray sisters in “The Town Poor,” the sisters are at the mercy and whims of outsiders. Yet through all their problems and troubles, the hierarchy of power is maintained.

In this story, a neighbor, Mrs. Peter Downs, delays her departure after helping with the funeral supper for the sister’s father, making herself unwelcome with her constant

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conversation and busy "buzzing." Betsey the older sister, finally takes the upper hand and suggests with finality that she depart. Hannah the younger sister immediately reinforces her older sister's decision by saying, "They might as well get used to staying alone, since they would have to do it first or last" (p. 221).

With Susan's departure, the scene shifts to the bedroom where Betsey immediately asserts her authority as the older sister. Betsey suggests that father, a miser who virtually held the girls as slaves for years, would not approve of the girls taking over his bedroom downstairs which is warmer. In fact, Hannah, "who is still a child at heart," is fearful that her elder sister, "who favored their father's looks, might take his place as stern ruler of the household" (p. 226).

Betsey, the eldest sister takes charge and sets out to open their fathers great sea chest. Betsey has the great silver keys in her pocket and Hannah assists by holding the lamp. Therefore from the beginning, the sisters live out their assigned hierarchical roles with Betsey as the "CEO" and Hannah as the "administrative assistant." The sisters are too concerned with their task to see a stranger lurking outside the window. When Hannah trembles at hearing a noise outside, Betsey explains away her fears by saying, "It's nothing but a stick falling down the woodpile." Accustomed
to accepting her sister’s word as law, Hannah looks wistfully at the treasures contained in the chest. Betsey again maintains the upper hand of control and power by reminding her younger sister that they must “preserve assemblance of mourning even to themselves” (p. 233). Betsey finally discovers the gold hidden away under the sashes and scarves which their one-time seaman father brought back from India. Betsey stands “exultant and hawk-eyed,” jingling the coins. Betsey again proves that she is the “Boss” when Hannah wishes to take the money upstairs for safe-keeping. Betsey belittles Hannah’s foolish desire for “such precautions” and further decides that the next week they will take the money to the bank. It is also Betsey who forgets the large trunk key and leaves it lying on the coverlet in the bedroom. Thus Betsey who has controlled the search, found the money, made decisions as to its disposal, has virtually taken over her father’s role, and is the one who provides easy access to the thief.

More examples of the hierarchical relationship between the sisters can be seen during the trial scene. The hapless sisters are trying to establish Enoch Holt’s guilt, but since they have no actual evidence, and they are hopeless in a man’s world, they are unable to do so. Bribed acquaintances provide testimony to establish Enoch’s innocence in spite of the overwhelming evidence and strong public opinion favoring a guilty verdict. It is here at the trial that Hannah,
resisting, "the sterner, older sister's efforts to pull her back" speaks her mind in such a way that "everyone [in the town] said that they should have looked to Betsey to say the awful words that followed, not to her gentler companion" (p. 240). Hannah's curse on Enoch is out of character and even the town knows it. Betsey is the recognized leader of the two.

After the trial the two sisters themselves withdraw to their home and "live their lives out like wild beasts in a lair" (p. 254). Betsey changes little, but Hannah late develops a cough. Yet, like so many of the other younger sisters in Jewett's stories, who function only by not telling things to those older sisters who control them, she tells a neighbor, "not to speak of it before Betsey" (p. 246). Thus, while Hannah appears outwardly docile to Betsey, inside she is trying to preserve her own person.

Jewett introduces a mystical note into the story which goes beyond the effect of the curse and yet makes important statements about the relationship of the sisters to each other and about their subordination to the evil men in their lives. The two sisters arrive at Enoch's trial, "like two of the three Fates: who would make the third to cut the thread of their enemy's disaster?" The allusion to the three fates is significant. They too are elderly women, one spinning, one measuring, and one cutting the thread of life. However,
that third blindfolded fate who can vindicate them is missing from the story of the two sisters and has, been in fact, supplanted by a man. For more than sixty years their father, The Captain, had kept the sisters in poverty and virtual slavery. In spite of their "facility for spinning and weaving, mending, and making" (p. 230), they never get to wear the embroidered scarves or their sprigged muslin, or to carry the China silk handkerchiefs hidden in the sea chest. The thematic interweaving of the actual loom with the three spinning fates provides a continuing metaphor throughout the story. The final powerful image in the story completes the picture. Enoch, now an old man, worn and bent, crosses the field looking like a malicious black insect." The web he has spun will hold the sisters in bondage. Their brief night of freedom from servitude and poverty achieved by the death of their father and the discovery of the gold, is too fleeting to become reality. Jewett, fearful that the reader will miss her point, concludes:

The old captain was a hard master; he rarely commended and often blamed. Hannah trembled before him, but Betsey faced him sturdily, being amazingly like him with a feminine difference; as like as a ruled person can be to a ruler, but for the discipline of life had taught the man to aggress, the woman only to defend. . . (p. 230).

In "In Dark New England Days," Jewett makes a strong statement about the contrast between the freedom of her own
time and the bondage of women who lived in earlier years. In contrast to these helpless ladies, the women she describes in other sister stories may be temporarily victimized, but they manage to break free and assert themselves. The sisters Betsey and Hannah operate within their hierarchical structure throughout the entire story.

In a lighter vein than "In Dark New England Days," "Sister Peacham’s Turn" (1902) not only explores the hierarchical relationship between two sisters but also explores the abuses of the relationship. The two women, Mrs. Pamela Fellows and her younger sister, Mrs. Lydia Ann Peacham, do not live together although they are "all that’s left out of a very large family." Both have lost their husbands: Pamela’s husband went down with his ship; Lyddy Ann’s died and left her "in the best o’ circumstances."

Physically and emotionally, the sisters are very different. In typical Jewett style and candor, Mrs. Lydia Ann Peacham (the younger) was as "thin and precise as her sister was round and easy-going" (p. 373). Lydia Ann was inclined by nature toward the economics and excuses of life, and often complained about being left alone, "when no mortal soul could have prevailed upon her to accept permanent companionship" (p. 373). Pamela is well aware of her responsibility as the older of the two to handle the problems

and difficulties of life with greater complacency. "I for one like to have some snow for Thanksgivin' time; I ain't like Lyddy Ann; she sets right down an' weeps when the first flakes come" (p. 372). Pamela as the oldest is the physical and emotional leader of the two. She feels it is her responsibility to be strong for her sister yet, in typical Jewett style, Lydia Ann, "had once been the prettiest of her family," with reddish-gold hair, a fact for which her older sister, "the eldest and plainest," never quite forgave her.

The two sisters have maintained the family tradition of sharing Thanksgiving dinner for their entire lives. This year, Pamela realizes that, instead of alternating holidays at each other's homes in the time honored family pattern, she has been talked into making the dinner for the past several years. Lydia feels that it is easier for Pamela to hold the holiday at her house and hopes "that sister Fellows'll feel as if she can ask me there again, I've got such a habit of going there to keep Thanksgivin" (p. 274). Prompted by the pressing desire to rectify what she considers as an injustice, Pamela sets out for Lyddy's house on a cold, late fall afternoon to force Lyddy into taking her fair turn at the holiday activities. At the sight of her younger sister, all of Pamela's planned tact and prepared words abandon her, and she steps into the room with the question on her lips. "Well Lyddy Ann, what be you goin' to do for Thanksgivin'?" The startled younger sister, although provoked, manages to
maintain her dignity, and suddenly declares, obviously with no previous thought, "I may invite the minister." Fortunately for both him and for Pamela, the minister chooses just that moment to pass by the house. Rapping on the window, Lyddy Ann invites him in and extends the invitation which, a moment before, had existed only as a wild defense in her mind. The good-hearted Pamela feels guilty at Lyddy's maneuvers but she also delighted with her success at rectifying the Thanksgiving rotation back to its original order.

Lyddy's reaction to the situation surprises her older sister. Rising out of her lethargy and "set ways," Lyddy begins to tale "all the glory of these unforeseen Thanksgiving hospitalities to herself" (p. 376). Pamela's sweetness of victory at having forced Lydia to do her fair share is somewhat mitigated by the glory which comes to her younger sister the following Sunday when the minister preaches a sermon on "the beauties of hospitality." Even Lydia's moralistic repentance scene at the end of the story cannot fully balance the account. Pamela has gotten her wish, but in doing so has had to give up the limelight. Older sisters, in Jewett's stories, may be wiser and more controlling, but life does not frequently treat them fairly because they must give far more than they receive.

Sister stories span Jewett's literary life from her younger, moralistic days to the end of her career when she
had selected detail, and refined plot situations. The stories differ greatly in tone, mood, and style. The sisters are family and that is what is most important. The sisters operate in a hierarchical tradition; the older one tends to be the leader of the group, while the younger tends to be the follower. Most of the sisters are elderly and either widowed or never married. The relationship they have to their sisters is, in some cases, all they have. The sisters may be alone, but they are never lonely--for they have a community of their own for companionship, friendship, and support.

Another large group of Jewett's women, belong to that larger class of which Cary has labeled "spinsters and widows." In portraying these ladies, Jewett writes some of her finest work. Louis Auchincloss refers to some of these ladies as Jewett's "flawless gallery of old maids" and asserts:

The old women are her [Jewett's] particular trademark, with their shrewdness and humor and plain common sense and dutifulness and, above all, their ability to look the world straight in the eye without being the least bit impressed.

While Perry Westbrook describes some of them as "old maids whose lives had gone off on tangents," Alexander Cowie sees them as women who "have the air of survivors," exhibiting "a quiet stoicism" in the face of insurmountable odds. Yet it is Richard Cary who describes them best when he calls them "self-sufficient, self-reliant New England women, speckled products of the Protestant ethic, Emersonian optimism, and indestructible heredity." No study of the women characters in Jewett's work would be complete without these very special ladies.

Jewett herself describes spinsters in a paragraph which opens "Miss Debby's Neighbors" (1882):

There is a class of elderly New England women which is fast dying out:-- those good souls who have sprung from a soil full of the true New England instincts; who were used to the old-fashioned ways, and whose minds were stored with quaint country lore and tradition. The fashions of the newer generations do not reach them; they are quite unconscious of the western spirit and enterprise, and belong to the old days, and to a fast-disappearing order of things.

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Jewett then hastens to assure the reader that this lack of communication with the present generation does not imply mental malaise, but quite the contrary, since these single ladies are often noted for their sound judgement.

The ever present problem of encroaching industrialization appears to haunt Miss Debby and her seamstress trade. The ready-made garment industry has rendered her personal artisanship almost unnecessary to the modern generation, except for an occasional assist with her ready needle, which she always accompanies her equally ready gift for punctuating her stitches with tales about the past.

Miss Debby shares her views with "her most devoted listener," one of Jewett's less defined but recognizable outsider-narrators who tell many of the Jewett stories. Miss Debby's immediate concern is another problem relating to modernization and industrialization. The young, who now dress alike in store-bought clothes, and the homes, which display the "same chromo pictures hung up," indicate a loss of individuality and a new measure of wealth. No longer computed in terms of quantity of land, which has a humbling effect on the owner by simply increasing his workload, riches are now assessed in "all sorts of luxuries and makeshifts o' splendor" which serve no useful function" (p. 195).
Miss Debby's evaluation of modernity indicates that she is an astute social observer rather than a disgruntled, anachronistic, old lady who measures out her complaints along with her stitches.

Miss Debby has developed a somewhat impersonalized "they" who are the object of much discussion and rhetoric rebuttal. As the narrator points out:

It was always significant of a succession if Miss Debby's opinions when she quoted and berated certain imaginary persons whom she designated as "they," who stood for the opposite side of the question and who usually merited her deepest scorn and fullest antagonism (p. 192).

Miss Debby addresses these disembodied listeners in a kind of third person, indirect discourse, prefaced by, "I tell 'em."

As the narrator notes, "to the listener's mind, 'they' always stood rebuked, but not convinced, in spiritual form it may be, but most intense reality; a little group as solemn as Miss Debby Herself" (p. 192). And although, in Miss Debby's mind, "they" never materialize into a clear entity, they most often represent either the unsatisfactory present generation or the shiftless, squabbling neighbors, the Ashbys, whose unfortunate family feuds range from the ludicrous to the pathetic. In a sense, "they" provide the isolated, elderly lady with an impersonal but real forum for reminiscence and remonstrance, and thus "they" are most satisfactory.
Miss Debby must also be understood in the context of another thematic concern which recurs in Jewett's work, the importance of a mother figure. As with much later figures, such as Mrs. Tolland's dead mother in "The Foreigner" (1900), Miss Debby's departed mother continues to play an important role in her thinking. "mother" somehow had the ability to cope with the variety of concerns that confronted her: she sat with the neighbors as they lay on their deathbeds; she provided blackberry preserves to cure a neighbor's sore throat; even when feeble with age, Mother would not allow her grown son, Debby's brother, Jonas, to participate in a cruel Ashby prank. Only mother could somehow "get along with anybody, and not always give them their way either" (p. 209).

This primary faith in the rightness, wisdom, and capability of mother lends a stability to the Jewett characters which is both a heritage to respect and a difficult standard to follow. A mother who could discern the right response to

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even the most difficult people and situations, such as those
created by the feuding Ashbys, is a gift which has lingering
repercussions on the present generation of women.

The importance of heredity as a source of both good and
bad characteristics again surfaces in a symbol Jewett uses
more than once (See “A New Parishioner”). Miss Debby
clarifies the virtue of the gray cat, who has better
opportunity to seize the mouse because nature has given her a
neutral color which is less apparent to mice. One cannot
help being a black and white cat, however, any more than he
can help being an Ashby, a shiftless squabbler. But the
quiet, subdued grayness of the cat, obviously a parallel for
the spinster herself, provides a distinct asset which enables
her to deal with challenges effectively. Therefore, if one
is to make the application to Jewett, under the unobtrusive,
inherent grayness lies an inherited strength which enables
Miss Debby, and others like her, to overcome the debilitating
moments of life.

“Miss Sydney’s Flowers” (1874) is an earlier story which
contains many of the character types that Jewett develops
with great effectiveness in her later works. Miss Sydney, a
wealthy spinster who lives alone, is subject to all of the
vices that wealth and self-interest can produce. Her selfish
isolation is suddenly jolted by the city’s decision to create

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1 S. O. Jewett, “Miss Sydney’s Flowers,” Old Friends and New
a new street in front of her greenhouse. Miss Sydney, who has been, “a good woman in a negative kind of way” since “one never heard of anything wrong she had done” (pp. 145-46), gradually develops a relationship with poor Mrs. Becky Marley, who sells candy made by her older sister Poly, to passers by. Becky has discovered the business is more productive on the newly opened road since the same people who buy candy stop to enjoy the formerly concealed view of the beautiful flowers in Miss Sydney’s greenhouse.

Mrs. Becky Marley and her elder sister Polly are rescued from their hopeless garret by Miss Sydney’s promise of a different job for Becky. She will become a housekeeper for Miss Sydney. Polly, will no longer have to struggle not to burn the candy mixture with her arthritic hands and poor eyesight. Cary encapsulates the theme in one statement: “one touch of nature makes the whole world kin.”¹ The transformation in Miss Sydney, and, consequently, in those around her comes not so much from a deliberate desire to change, but from the redemptive quality of the flowers which have a good effect on all who see them. The passers-by are moved to stop and be uplifted, John, the coach and gardener, is inspired to give his best effort to cultivate the flowers; a wayward son is redirected in the paths of righteousness by “the sight of a tall, green geranium, like one that bloomed in his mother’s sitting room way up in the country” (p. 158).

¹ Cary, In Appreciation of Sarah Orne Jewett, p. 100.
Flowers are, indeed, in Jewett, the domain of the female sex. Many of the stories emphasize the woman's love for flowers and the man's disregard for them. The story, for all its weak points, makes itself clear, one may become selfish and greedy, but with the help of nature and some personal effort, people can change.

As Jewett learns to eliminate the lengthy moralizing, to make the character transformations more subtle, and to develop more skillfully the difference between two elderly sisters, such as Polly and Becky she moves into more effective character development. But even in an early story such as this one, she introduces many of the elements which will later become an intrinsic part of her milieu.

Unlike Miss Sydney, Miss Catherine Spring in "A late Supper" (1878) lives close to the brink of financial disaster. She is like most of Jewett's spinsters, "a very good woman," who lives in a town which Jewett views as a microcosm of the world:

One never hears much about Brookton when one is away from it, but, for all that, life is as important and exciting there as it is anywhere; and it is like every other town, a miniature world, with its great people and small people, bad people and good people, its jealousy and rivalry, kindness and patient heroism (p. 80).

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Also, like many of the other spinsters, Miss Spring is the last of a large family, now alone after the death of her father. Living alone for so long has also made Miss Spring aware of the privileges of singledom. "It is, after all, a great satisfaction to do as one pleases" (p. 81). Also Miss Catherine's life has been closely associated with her house, a comfortable home with its narrow mirror, stiff portraits, and steady ticking of the old clock.

As indicated, her present situation is jeopardized by the impending financial crisis. No longer having the means to maintain her home, she is ready to seek the ever present niece or nephew who will provide a shelter for her in exchange for the care and assistance that a loving aunt can bring to the children of the family. In the midst of this great crisis, Miss Catherine is visited by a nephew, his wife, and a friend. Nieces and Nephews play an important role in the lives of these elderly women who have lost all the members of their more immediate families and yet are loathe to "depend on the kindness of strangers." Jewett was aware of these young men, for her own nephew lived in the family homestead for a time with her and often took time from his medical practice in Boston visit South Berwick.

Miss Catherine invites her guests to both tea and dinner and discovers that she has already been supplanted by another needy aunt. Her niece's husband's older sister, a widow, has
recently moved in with the young family. The news creates a sense of displacement and confusion. Giving up one’s home represents, to the older woman, a sense of sacrifice dictated by pragmatism. Jewett’s single ladies view their homes as extensions of themselves and of the family which are no longer there. Yet, if one is willing to leave the home, at least temporarily, if economic conditions dictate such a move, a lack of a place to go causes even more distress. Jewett goes on to describe a lengthy adventure which in turn teaches Miss Catherine’s family that she needs their help and concern.

Unaware that the subtle insights into the single lady’s condition, her dilemma, her attitudes, and her family relationships have all made “A Late Supper” a significant story, Jewett overextends the ending into a moral platitude which destroys the spontaneity she seeks to create.

With the story “A New Parishioner” (1883) Jewett again places the setting among the places and people she knows best.¹ In this story she explores the inner conflict in the heart of a spinster, Lydia Dunn, her inner turmoil is never evident because she is always calm and composed. Lydia is a typical spinster in many ways. After the death of her invalid mother, she lives alone in a home purchased by her grandfather, the much loved Parson Dunn of Walton. Miss

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Dunn's social standing in the community, her secure, if not affluent, financial situation, and her own good judgement and understanding have created a place of respect for her in the small community where she continues to live. After the initial adjustment of learning to live alone, she has begun to establish a household of one by making regular meals and by treating herself, "as if she was a whole family." Life soon settles into a pattern, and she follows the unwritten rules so closely that she is annoyed at Jonas Phipps, the handyman, when he does not remember that she doesn't wash the Monday before Thanksgiving, the yearly pattern is as clearly established as the regular weekly washday itself.

But the changing community also affects the single lady. In a penetrating social comment, Jewett notes that the frequent intermarriages of the past among the members of the small community created a "community of interest and clannishness which had many advantages in spite of its defects" (p. 193). The present tendency of the young people to move away and marry outsiders has left a spinster like Miss Dunn with no relatives to turn to. Thus she has no one to share with or who will care about her personal needs and wants. Her only friend and confidant is the handyman, Jonas Phipps, who lives with his aged mother and serves as an informant and sounding board for Lydia's ideas. Although he and his mother are the objects of Lydia's benevolence, since they are one of the few poor families left in town to be
cared for, she gives nothing without providing the opportunity to earn it. Thus she employs Jonas to chop wood and to do the heavier chores and while he is enjoying the meals he earns, he also serves the as as sounding board for her ideas and thoughts.

Lydia’s one opportunity for romance came at the age of fifteen or sixteen in the form of Henry Stroud, who had recently returned to Walton, old and ill, after an absence of forty years. Family disapproval, and the fact that Henry’s father had cheated Lydia’s grandfather out of a great deal of money, put a stop to the original budding romance. Lydia clearly understood at the time that the two families had very little in common; Henry’s sudden return does not change that feeling, even though his seeming affluence, his generous gifts to the church and his eloquent and lengthy prayers soon win the hearts of the parish. He also finds a strong ally in the new minister, whose own selfish interests have led him to an involvement with programs rather than people.

Mr. Peckam, the present minister, stands in direct contrast to both the well-beloved Parson Dunn and also his more immediate predecessor, Old Mr. Duncan, “an old school parson, preaching sound and harmless sermons twice on every Sunday.” Whom the people both “Loved and respected” (p. 110). The effect of industrialization and its attendant materialism has not escaped the church, and Mrs. 

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building a new vestry for Sunday School and evening meetings even though they are attended by just a few women and children.

Lydia's refusal to join in the adulation accorded the new parishoner alienates her from the community and causes people to question her once respected judgement. At the same time, in the recesses of her own heart, she undergoes a troubling and introspective evaluation of her own views, and the result troubles her. The desire to find someone to share her life with, to do things for, and to replace the company of the often dull books which fill her evenings tempts her to weaken and overlook the problems in Henry, so obvious to her and yet so obscure to everyone else.

A creative symbol in the story as Cary notes, the play on the black and gray cats. After a visit from Henry during which he presents a note to repay the money his father stole from Lydia's grandfather, she again tries to convince herself that her lifelong prejudice against the family and her present feeling that Mr. Stroud is being "too good" are unfair. She rationalizes to herself, "I might as well blame the cat because she isn't a dog" (p. 130). After Henry Stroud has departed from the community, leaving worthless notes as contributions to the new vestry and church libraries, and the community has finally been forced to acknowledge the

rightness of Lydia’s initial judgement, the cat symbol again emerges. Lydia tells Jonas Phipps, “I don’t know as some folks know what honesty is. You might as well blame a black and white cat for not being a good mouser.” Jonas changes the symbol to reality, “hows that little gray cat turned out you started to raise along in the winter?” Miss Dunn’s reply, “not without a smile, that she seemed to be a likely kitten” merely proving her point that family breeding and inherited traits will always emerge, and that Henry Stroud’s facade of goodness merely covered his total inability to become the man that he appeared to be. Even as she speaks, Lydia feels guilty at the thought that she has come so perilously close to forgetting her familial values. The disconcerting knowledge that “for a few hours she had been in peril of being bought over like the rest”(p. 145) cannot be driven from her mind. She almost sacrificed her principles in exchange for a moment’s companionship. She has come through the experience with the renewed self-realization that the price of living alone is not as high as the price of compromise, a conviction that most Jewett spinsters would share.

Although “A Garden Story”(1886) may be classified as a simple city versus country motif, it makes some important statements about women and life as well as represents
Jewett’s writing at its best. Miss Ann Dunning’s vocation as a seamstress is far less compelling than her love for her garden, which has become an entity in her life. The sewing business has suffered, like most private businesses in this time and age, by the arrival of a “younger, more fashionable person” who is drawing away Miss Ann’s less faithful, more youthful clientele. The increasing lack of money in the town has also encouraged the steady customers to make fewer dresses or to sew them for themselves after Miss Ann has cut and basted them.

The garden brings Ann Dunning both pain and pleasure. Setting out flowers and watching them grow has become more than a hobby—it is an obsession. Every spare moment during the summer is taken with the cultivation of sweet peas, poppies, and marigolds. Making delicate plants grow is both a challenge and a delight, but “when frost came it brought terrible sorrow every year” (pg.106). Miss Dunning’s agony at abandoning her friends, the flowers, is mitigated only after feverish struggles to preserve what she can for the coming year.

The garden also brings guilt. Miss Ann’s conscience is constantly pricked by the fact that she is “indulging herself selfishly” by spending her carefully hoarded money on new flowers. She finally reaches the point that “if a

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contribution box passes her by in church after she had been buying a new row or a named geranium of high degree, she felt as guiltily as if she had directly robbed it, and had been caught by the deacons" (p. 107). Although she is generous in sharing her blossoms, she still suffers from an awareness of her own extravagance.

In order to placate her troubled conscience over this selfish use of money, Miss Ann responds to an advertisement which encourages those enjoying the permanent benefits of the country to "give a little city child her country week." Miss Ann carefully qualifies her invitation by imposing a definite limitation on her offer. "No boys," she writes on her invitation to the committee, "in her plainest hand, with two or three underlinings" (p. 107). Like many of the other Jewett spinsters, Miss Ann had little love for and great fear of those little boys that run through flowerbeds, carry mud into the house, and soil clean floors. Another grandmother, telling the story of her childhood to a beloved member of the younger generation sums it up:

. . . and as for the boys, why, they weren't anybody's favorites; they used to be always stretching themselves up beside the barn door, for they had the promise of going to sea when they'd grown enough; they herded together, the boys did, and were a wild pack when they were little, though
they were good hands to work and biddable boys about waiting and tending.¹

The same mistrust of the male generation extended to the older members of the sex as well. Old Mike, who helps Miss Dunning with her gardening, does well enough with “six short rows of beans and forty hills of potatoes,” but he can never be trusted with flowers and mistakes the best of the lillies for weeds.

In response to her letter, Miss Dunning is rewarded with a visit from a little Scottish orphan girl whose love for the garden matches Miss Ann’s. Indeed she is much like one of Miss Ann’s struggling plants. Miss Ann discovers that in sharing with the little girl that she doubles her blessing, for the little girl falls into her heart, her garden, and her home. The final proof that the child is a kindred spirit is her refusal to “murder the petuny’s” which grow untended on the path. Peggy does return to the city, but it is only to share the glories of the garden with those who are less fortunate, for Ann has invited the little girl to become a permanent member of her family. Miss Ann’s self indulgence with her garden, which has brought so much guilt, has now become a way of sharing the benefits of the good country life with the larger more industrialized and underprivileged world.

¹ S. O. Jewett, “Pegs Little Chair,” Uncollected Short Stories p. 172.
The story "A Village Shop" (1888) which first appeared with the publication of The King of Folly Island, is an excellent illustration of Gwen Nagel's thesis that Jewett women are the preservers of past tradition, culture, and houses. As the lone female survivor of a wealthy, aristocratic family, Esther Jaffrey tries to hold tenaciously to the "Jaffrey Code" in an era when "the times are out of joint' and it is no longer possible to do so" (p. 230). Jewett once again reminds the reader that the Embargo Act (1807) and industrialization both "gave a killing blow to the prosperity of Grafton." Contrary to Esther's belief that the Jaffrey ancestry was "a solvent bank of distinctions" (p. 231), the Jaffrey men no longer have the business mind of Marlborough Jaffrey, who established the family fortune, nor the wisdom of the great family jurists and clergymen that follow him. In fact, Esther's brother, Leonard Jaffrey, is a "traitor on the very throne" because he refuses to do anything but remain a perpetual student and an acquirer of books, rejecting any endeavor that will either replenish the family fortune, restore honor to the family name, or be of some service to the community. Nor does Esther have the option of fulfilling these expectations herself, for the unverbalized family code makes it clear that these

responsibilities rest on the men of the family, rather than on the women. "A Jaffrey of Grafton could not lead public opinion in unfeminine directions" (p. 232). Although Esther realizes that she far outshines her brother in almost any skill, she is not a "social reformer, but fiercely conservative at heart" (p. 233).

Thus Esther is fighting to preserve an outdated code that no longer functions because of both societal changes and the personal deterioration of the men in the family. The story concerns the tensions created by Esther's efforts to respond to new problems with old solutions. As the old answers do not work, she moves to justify the new solutions (totally contrary to the old code) in light of the immediate and pressing situations.

The Jaffrey code demands that the family live off inherited wealth accumulated by the illustrious Jaffrey men. Since the wealth is gone, and Leonard refuses to do anything productive, Esther is forced to open a village millinery shop. In doing so, she evokes the disapproval of the villagers and also the dismay of Leonard, who returns after a long, unexplained absence to find a room in the Jaffrey home desecrated by merchandise. Esther brings all of the graciousness and upbringing into her work. The millinery becomes a stopgap measure in the families relentless descent into poverty.
Even the initial success of the shop wanes as it loses business to the newer and larger commercial enterprises. By scrimping and saving, Esther provides Leonard with a Harvard Education, not realizing that the present cost of education far exceed the prices paid by her former family alumni. Confronted by Leonard’s refusal to find an occupation, even after graduation, she again tries to confer and gives him the title, “a man of letters” and uses this term with friends and neighbors. Once labeled, Leonard’s state of perpetual unemployment becomes much easier to accept.

When a neighboring farmer comes to Esther to request that she provide a finishing school for his daughter, Nelly, the Jaffrey code allows her to accept the task under the guise of bringing culture to a yeoman’s daughter. Later when it becomes obvious that Leonard and Nelly have become interested in one another, Esther deceives herself into seeing the relationship as one between adoring student and teacher. Esther’s frequent interpretations of reality allow her to confront each situation, at least temporarily, with a new adaptation of the code.

Fortune and fate seem to smile more kindly on the weak men than on the struggling women who seek to maintain a sense of dignity in spite of all the odds against them. Leonard escapes disgrace by his sudden appointment as town librarian. While, Esther will not accept the marriage of Leonard and
Nelly, simply because of Nelly's yeoman background. She is also unwilling to abandon the now hopeless village shop which was an earlier solution to the problem.

Leonard's marriage is the end of the aristocratic house of Jaffrey. Circumstances are no longer in Esther's control, and the old code cannot be bent to accommodate the final desecration of the family she has tried so long to maintain. Esther is one of Jewett's more poignant examples of a woman caught in the dilemma of the industrialized age and at the mercy of an emasculated man. Esther's attempts to superimpose the structures of the past upon the realities of the present may be futile, but they bespeak dignity rather than defeat, optimistic determination rather than fatalistic acceptance. Most readers will admire her efforts to order chaos, to put the best construction on a bad situation, and to hold her head high when there is no longer any reason to do so.

During the same year, Jewett published "The Growtown Bugle" (1888), a very different kind of story which looks to the future rather than the past, concerns itself with the westward expansion rather than the old aristocracy, and describes a business adventure which is wonderfully lucrative rather than a financial disaster. Miss Prudence Fellows, "who never belied her name," which indicates a combination of

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good judgement and a typically more masculine interest in business, stumbles upon her chance to make money when she notices an advertisement in a newspaper. As the words, "WHY DON'T YOU MAKE YOUR FORTUNE?" leap out at her, she realizes that the newspaper is wrapped around the asparagus that she purchased at the store, showing that Miss Fellows no longer keeps a garden, a neglect which the townspeople think is a neglect of your own resources and those around you. The paper is an enigma. It comes from Kansas, which in the eyes of the New England spinster, is a place peopled by "nobody but Digger Injuns or some other make-shifts o' humanity out there" (p. 125). Although the western expansion was a very real influence on the times about which Jewett wrote, the widows and spinsters were far more closely tied to the England of their forefathers than to the untried wilderness with its heathen Indians and braven explorers. Fascinated by the glowing reports of the new enterprise of Growtown, Kansas, Prudence suddenly becomes enthralled with the idea of making her fortune. She first sends a dollar for a subscription to the newspaper and later, ever larger amounts of her "investment of five hundred dollars, which has been pinched by its owner out of her narrow income from mill stocks and woodlands left by her father" (p. 125).

Prudence's other life is a secret to the people around her. They see only her "closeness and lack of concern for others around her" (p. 127). Although she finds it easy to
send large sums of cash to Growtown, she is too miserly to help her neighbors. When a neighbor stops by to tell her that the people down the road are starving to death, Prudence breaks down. She realizes that in her effort to make money she has been made poorer than it ever was before. Although she lives alone, and the community allows her certain idiosyncrasies, Jewett's single lady is part of society which holds her accountable for gross neglect to those around her.

In striking contrast to the positive roles of community in spinster's lives, Jewett paints the lonely pictures of isolation and loneliness in a few of her stories. One of the most extreme examples of the effect of isolation on the female psyche in all of Jewett's writing is found in the character of "Poor Joanna" in The Country of the Pointed Firs (1896). By her own volition, Joanna, who has been betrayed by her lover, chooses, like George Quint of Folly island, to live alone beyond the reach of human fellowship. She sees her decision as an act of penance for her wicked thoughts toward God when her lover abandoned her for another woman. Confined to perpetual spinsterhood, she sets up a neat but humble home on Shell-heap island. Jewett portrays Joanna through the sane and sympathetic eyes of Almira Todd, the herbalist healer of Pointed Firs, who sees the hermit not as an unbalanced woman, although she admits that Joanna is "one

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"o' your peculiar persons." Unlike most of the Jewett personae, Joanna exists only as she is recreated in conversation or memory, for she has been dead for twenty-two years.

Early in the novel, Almira offers her listeners a mild warning. "I never want to hear Joanna laughed about." Her sensitive understanding of the dead woman who became a victim of her circumstances and her own twisted logic helps to establish the ambivalence that Jewett uses to create a real person rather than an oddity.

Joanna is first, a victim of her own psyche. She has inherited a kind of reticence and melancholy from her mother, who as Almira points out, "had the grim streak and never knew what 'twas to be happy." Mrs. Todd realizes that this failure of Joanna's mother to communicate her love for her daughter is somehow at the root of Joanna's heartache; attempting to provide a substitute, Almira thinks of her own loving mother. "I must get mother to come over an' see Joanna; the love in mother's heart would warm her, an' she might be able to advise." The mother-daughter relationship is again, a bane or a blessing.

When her lover runs off to Massachusetts with another woman, Joanna's rage causes her to be both angry at the man and angry against God. Her faulty religious views compel her to equate this unforgiving spirit with the sin at hand.
Since she assumes that God has rejected her, Joanna feels that she has no right to live among his people and departs for the secluded island. Jewett, whose theological views were more Anglican than Calvinistic, didn't agree with the rigid, morbid introspection and views of sin which enslaved her ancestors, and felt them almost a burden rather than a means of salvation.

Almira Todd also points out that Joanna's retreat is not unlike many of the withdrawals to "shut-up converts" in earlier times. The theme of religious withdrawal for penance is reiterated by the young narrator's musing that "there was something medieval in the behavior of poor Joanna" (p. 69). She is not simply a misguided hermit or recluse. She is an "anchorite" whose little Bible lies on the shelf near-by. Mrs. Todd also likens her to "one of those Saints in the desert" (p. 79). As they talk, Joanna's voluntary isolation takes on a religious, almost mystic nature; it is the deliberate, self-inflicted penance of one who has abandoned hope and then excommunicated herself from the community of God.

Joanna's appearance when the visitors arrive confirms her sanity. She wears a simple gingham dress and her home is decorated with dishes, flowers and shells. She talks little and exhibits "quiet desperation" far more than a disordered mental state. Quietly and deliberately, she avoids contact
with curiosity seekers, with another would-be lover, and with all those who care about her, displaying the kind of religious commitment worthy of a committed sister.

Jewett use of bird metaphors enhances the great loneliness which is the over-riding factor in Joanna's life. Mrs. Todd introduces the story of the doomed spinster by saying, "All her hopes were built on marryin' an' havin' a real home and somebody to look to; she acted just like a bird when its nest is spoilt" (pp. 65-66). Like the wounded bird, Joanna flies away to the seclusion of an uninhibited island. Mrs. Fosdick, whose interpretation of the Joanna story constantly needs refinement and correction by the more sensitive Mrs. Todd, suggests that Joanna might have found companionship in the hens that she raised. Mrs. Fosdick even agrees, "There was the hens, I expect she soon came to makin' folks o' them" (p. 67).

As Joanna and Mrs. Todd talk on the beach during that long ago visit, they are accompanied only by the many birds and by the rolling sea, both images intensify rather than relieving the awful loneliness. Over the years, Joanna, whose sensitive, quiet nature surely found little in common with the cackling hens, had tames wild sparrows with her kind, quiet ways. During her funeral one perched on her coffin and began to sing. The minister, Mr. Dimmick, whose visit had done nothing to relieve Joanna's pain years before,
is dismayed at the birds interruption, Yet, Mrs. Todd realizes that between the minister and the sparrow, "The poor little bird done the best of the two" (p. 82). Again, as the narrator visits Shell-Heap Island twenty-two years later, the tame birds fly around her and she wishes that the birds had, "the safety of nests and good fellowship of mankind" (p. 82). The story ends with a sense of fatalism that is rare in Jewett. Mrs. Todd says, "Some is meant to be the Joanna's in this world, an' 'twas her poor lot."

The greater message conveyed by "poor Joanna" is not fatalism but the failure of those who could have helped her—her mother, the church, her lover, and even the community. Deprived of all of these human supports, she chose to withdraw as a solution to her guilt of the gradual hatred that continued to grow inside her. And with the strength that is so often seen in Jewett's spinsters, she remained faithful to her commitment to solitude in the most desolate of all physical worlds—Shell-Heap Island.

Twelve years after The Country of the Pointed Firs, and at the end of her writing career, Jewett created another story about spinsters. In "The Spur of the Moment" (1902), the closing moral states the theme of the story:¹

There is always the hope that 'our unconscious benefactions may outweigh our conscious cruelties,'

but the world moves on, and we seldom really know how much we have to do with other peoples lives (p. 371).

The three main characters in the story, although very different from each other in every way, are tied together by "unconscious benefactions," but the characters never see the ties and never realize the impact they make in each others lives. They are also subject to "unconscious cruelties" or at least 'foibles of personality which make them all unattractive and unhappy.

Mrs. Dartmouth, although a wealthy lady, is aware of all of the elements which make life dissatisfying. The weather is cold and wet, and the snow covered, deserted ground outside resembles the lonely, desolate countryside in contrast to the busy city. Although Jewett often presents the case for country over city, she is once again aware that the country is lonely and has less to offer in the way of culture and excitement. Mrs. Dartmouth spots her driver waiting outside and in sheer boredom sends the jobless driver to Miss Peet "to see of she has any errands for an hour or two." Jewett never clarifies the relationship between the two ladies, although both share a common unhappiness with life.

"Old Miss Peet," as most people call her, although she is not yet seventy, has "an unhappy way of telling you more things to other people's disadvantage than to their
credit" (p. 366). This tendency makes people avoid her. She lives a lonely life, but without the physical comforts of Mrs. Dartmouth. Jewett likens the old spinster to "the dried stalks of what had once been growing," although she adds that "One might feel a reasonable doubt as to whether poor Miss Peet had ever really been in bloom" (p. 366). She too, is unhappy over the dismal weather and is made even more so by the knowledge that no one has cared to send a carriage so that she may attend the funeral of her only friend and financial benefactor, Mr. Walton. "The scarcity of social invitations forced Miss Peet to make the most of those public or semi-public social functions that fell her way" (p. 367). Ironically, Mrs. Dartmouth's carriage arrives just in time to take Miss Peet to the funeral.

In the final scene, Miss Peet, who is overcome with emotion and remorse at the death of the only man who has been good to her, and finally realizes her ingratitude and selfishness. Jewett clearly indicates that Miss Peet's change of heart is neither total or instantaneous. It is evidently enough, however, for her to become the recipient of one final "unconscious benefaction." Mr. Walton's daughter, Mrs. Ashton, moved by her deceased father's goodness and by old Miss Peet's obvious need, determines to continue the monthly checks which have been Miss Peet's only sustenance.
The spinsters and widows in this chapter clearly reveal qualities of self-sufficiency, optimism, commitment to the Christian work ethic, and indestructibility. Self-reliance is a hallmark of these single women. Joanna, who needlessly ekes out a lonely existence on Shell-Heap Island because church and society have failed her, lives with the quiet dignity of one who has accepted her fate and made her peace with herself. She lives alone, without the world, but she copes with the problems of isolated living with simple charm. Even Old Miss Peet adapts to her surroundings with grace and dignity, even learning to give a few benefactions.

Self-Reliance is the source of another characteristic of these women—Optimism. Jewett has been accused of avoiding the darker side of life, but her women characters generally display or at least change to a positive view of their surroundings. All accept their places in life and work to make the best of things.

A third feature is the evidence of the Protestant ethic. The women all realize that they have a responsibility to "do unto others." From Ann Dunning who shares her garden with an orphan to Prudence Fellows, who is so caught up in making money that she neglects a dying neighbor, The ladies all try to help their fellow man. If not right away, but through growth and development. All the women recognize that to live right is to work in the service of mankind.
A final characteristic is what Carey calls "indestructible Heredity." Both Miss Debbie and Esther Jaffrey are aware that they are equipped by nature to do what weaker people around them cannot accomplish. Miss Debby is stronger than her weak neighbors and Esther is stronger than her emasculated brother. Jewett's gray cat, who by birth, is endowed with a greater gift for her task of catching mice—because she does not have loud black and white colors, becomes a metaphor for the women themselves. They are born to indestructibility and are thus able to withstand whatever vicissitudes befall them. The circumstances surrounding life may not be pleasant, but the Jewett spinsters and widows are "more than conquerors" in all the aspects of their lives.
Communities Of Women

By choice or by category as a Local Colorist, Jewett's finest work has revolved around her portraits of women, either singly, or in groups. These groups or communities of women not only became a natural part of Jewett's writings, but also a standard throughout the New England Regionalist period. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg proffers that these female communities and female relationships should be viewed "within a cultural and social setting rather than from the more modern exclusively psycho-sexual perspective."\(^1\) She also states that through the mid-Nineteenth-century, (although I would extend this time frame to include the Jewett era), men and women were often literally separated in society, and this also enhanced strong relationships between women.

Furthermore, in contrast to the present day, nineteenth-century American society did not taboo close female relationships but rather recognized them as a socially viable form of human contact-- and, as such, acceptable throughout a woman's life\(^2\). The common terms of endearment, such as 'dearest' or 'darling', found in many women's writings indicates how intense these relationships often were. Before


\(^2\) IBID., p. 27.
Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's article, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," there may have been some doubt whether or not female couples were lesbians. Yet since its publication, such an argument can only be seen from a position of ignorance, homophobia, and stubbornness.1

Nina Auerbach, who included Jewett in her broader study, Communities of Women, notes the significance of such intense female relationships:

The bonds of hospitality and sympathy between women that pervade the isolated landscapes in Jewett's volume are more potent than men's railroad tracks in keeping alive the human world and knitting it together.2

Auerbach adds that "all true communities are knit together by their codes, but a code can range from dogma to a flexible, private, and often semi-conscious set of beliefs." Noting the distinction between the masculine, more dominant code and the less defined one shared by the women, Auerbach observes that, "... In female communities, the code seems a whispered and a fleeting thing, more a buried language than a rallying cry..."3 The code then, is a series of unwritten rules or

3 IBID., p. 8-9.
guidelines that govern women's actions in relation to other women. This unvoiced set of norms or standards usually confer special privileges on one member of the group who is tacitly allowed to make decisions or to evaluate the group's course of conduct. Consequently, these codes are largely based on social position, familial order, and tradition. The ramifications of the code's application can be seen in many actions and reactions within Jewett's fiction. Positions of physical location and stature in social situations and the besetment of speaking privilege, can be viewed as results of the code concept which unlock the hidden hierarchies or "corporate structures" in many of the Jewett stories which center on these small communities of women. The next section examines several Jewett stories utilizing this code concept that show hierarchical strictures within the female community or, conversely, exploring the lack of it.

"The Hare and The Tortoise" (1883) is a noteworthy example of the hierarchy or "corporate structure" within a community of women. This corporate structure is best seen in the seating arrangements of the family at the dinner table. The physical act of "seating" establishes an order that is a prime example of the unwritten code of stature within the family and ultimately the community. The community, in this case, is created by a combination of several factors. Two

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1 S. O. Jewett, "The Hare and the Tortoise," *Uncollected Short Stories*, p. 66-80.
maiden aunts adopt an orphan, whose later marriage introduces a somewhat feeble wife and strong-minded daughter into their home. His subsequent death leaves the house with four women. The older aunt Sophia, by virtue of both her age and personality, and ultimately the code, continues her hold her place as the head of the community as indicated by her place at the head of the table. Neither Duncan Chester nor his wife had had the strength to challenge the existing structure, and with his passing, Sophia seemed likely to perpetuate the order until Mary, the young daughter, challenges her and wins.

From the beginning, Aunt Sophia establishes the physical order of the hierarchy by assigning the family their specific seating arrangements. Sophia maintains her place at the head of the table. Duncan Chester, the orphan, is given the foot and his wife is given an even lower position, a seat at the side of the table. Overtly this seating order appears to be a concession to both his wife's invalidism and her need to care for their young daughter, but in actuality it is because Sophia is exercising her power. Sophia's sister, Anne, a deaf, kindly person who is far more in tune with the natural universe than with the unverbalized power struggle around the table, accepts her own position on the other side, across from Duncan's wife. After Duncan's death in the war, Mary, his daughter, who is a "decided little person, the strongest nurtured of the three," assumes her father's seat, and the
four women are securely locked in a battle for control of the table that follow mimics the battle of power fought over many corporate leaderships.

Under Sophia's direction and control, the women, stay in their "Sophia ordered" seats until Mary's two suitors arrive to disrupt the family seating arrangement or power structure. From this point on, the story is constructed around three table scenes which show the silent struggle for power within the family. In the first scene, Mary arrives late and still wearing her hat, assumes her second-rank seat at the foot of the table. Sophia exerts her control and asks Mary, "Would you mind removing your bonnet, my dear?, I dare say I am quite out of date, but it never seems proper to me that young people should sit at the table in their street clothes. It appears like a restaurant. We shall have young men wearing their hats within doors presently." (pg. 67 Uncollected Short Stories) Sophia's objection to the hat is tactfully rebuffed by Anne, who suggests that eating in a hat is perfectly acceptable when one is dining out by asking the Butler, "Could you find some raspberry jam, do you think, Beckett? . . . Miss Mary likes it with cold grouse, though I don't know why." (Pg. 68). Anne's overtly shows her support of Mary by changing the conversation and confronts her older sister in an oblique but satisfying way, far less intimidating than standing up for her own rights.
The second table scene centers around a visit from one of Mary's prospective suitors, Henry Temple, the son of a prominent society woman. It is his addition to the family table that starts a battle for control over the family through the seating arrangements at the table. Sophia, who obviously supports Henry's suit for Mary's hand, places him at the foot of the table and Mary at the side, an obvious effort to recreate the arrangement when Duncan was alive. Sophia's placement of Duncan in a seat of power shows her enthusiasm for Henry as the suitor of her choice. But Mary notes to herself that Sophia's insistence of placing Henry at the foot, "had an inner meaning and suggestion to which she was not yet consenting." (pg. 712) Sophia used her position of power within the family hierarchy to place Henry in a seat of power at the table to show Mary that Henry was her choice and thus the best candidate to marry.

The third scene marks the arrival of a second suitor, Dick Dean. His arrival is marked by Sophia's disapproval and she places him in a lowly position of power on the side of the table. By placing Dick at her right hand rather than at the foot of the table, Sophia indicates that he is merely a guest who will not be allowed to disrupt the family order. She is not empowering him to a position of stature within her family order. Therefore, Sophia is reiterating her support for Henry, who is from a much more wealthy family heritage,
and obviously, through the seating power arrangement established by Sophia, her choice as suitor for Mary. Yet, Dick Dean is obviously Mary's choice of love. She is looking for a husband of the heart, rather than a husband of the pocketbook and social position. Mary tells Sophia, "Dick Dean is like champagne and pate, after Henry's sherry and soup." (pg. 77). Mary weds out of love rather than social position, ultimately upsetting Sophia's seating order and family hierarchy.

In spite of Aunt Sophia's manipulations, Mary prevails in her final choice of Dick Dean (the romantic Hare) over Henry Temple (the conventional tortoise) as her suitor. It is Mary who then upsets the seating arrangement and establishes a new hierarchy. A literal "corporate raider" if you like. Furthermore, Mary's rejection of social position and wealth as significant factors in the choice of a mate reveals the modern disregard for maintaining the disintegrating family by securing a firm financial base through marriage. In making her choice, Mary votes for individualism over community and for romanticism over practicality, helping to establish a new pattern for women of future generations, and a new pattern of power and "corporate" structure within her family.

"Aunt Cynthia Dallet," like "The Hare and the Tortoise," also illustrates the code or tradition of hierarchy within a community of women. Yet, rather than examining the
“corporate structure within a family of women,” Aunt Cynthia Dallet” (1895) portrays the facets of the hierarchical structure between friends and relatives. Jewett uses two different relationships to frame the story: The friendship of Abby Pendexter and Mrs. Hand, an older woman who serves as her confidante, and the kinship relationship between Abby and Aunt Cynthy, Abby's elderly aunt who lives in her mountainside home far away from their village.

In the initial conversation between Abby and her friend, Mrs. Hand, Jewett sets up the framework of the story and ultimately the conflict. Abby and Mrs. Hand are discussing visiting Abby’s Aunt Cynthia who is “confined to her house altogether now.” Abby goes on to tell Mrs. hand that she often worries about her Aunt’s safety and that just the night before, “I waked up up ... with a start, thinkin’ if Aunt Cynthy’s house should get afire or anything, what would she do, ‘way up there all alone.” (pg. 196). Abby goes on to tell Mrs. Hand that she has tried to convince Aunt Cynthy to move in with her to save them both money and to keep each other company, but Aunt Cynthy ardently refuses. Mrs. Hand, a perceptive woman states that, “I know how you both feel. I like to have my own home and do everything just my way too” (pg. 198). Abby is comforted by the response which comprehends all of her fears. Mrs. Hand also offers to

accompany Abby on her traditional New Year’s Day visit: “suppose we both walk up to see your Aunt Dallett, . . . if it ain’t too windy and the snow keeps off?” (199). Thus parts of the code are portrayed at the opening of the story. Aunt Cynthy is following a code of action that does not permit her to ‘burden’ her family with her age and dependence, even when it is the best for both parties. Another example of application of a code is the tradition of New Year’s day visiting which will be continued once again thanks to Mrs. Hand.

Examples of the code of action surrounding differing social positions, is best portrayed when Abby and Mrs. Hand arrive at Aunt Cynthy’s. Once again, Jewett’s model of seating arrangements indicates power and social position. Mrs. Hand gets the best rocking chair which is carried out of the best room in honor of the prominent guest. Aunt Cynthy states, with the air and stature of an elegant hostess, “I seem to want Mrs. Hand to have it.” (p. 219). Thus establishing Mrs. Hand as the leader or focus of power, a regular corporate leader. Abby herself, sits “with the air of a good child”. Her singleness, her comparative youth, as well as her poverty and relationship to the hostess all combine to establish her lower rank in the social occasion. She is given the seat that best fits her social and family position in relation to Aunt Cynthy. Aunt Cynthy as the indebted host, goes out of her way to cater to the two
ladies. By the code, no matter how poor or old you are, you must always be a gracious host.

Mrs. Hand is not only respected because of social prominence, but simply because she is a guest. According to the code or social norms established by the community, a guest must be treated with the utmost care and respect by the hostess. The treatment of Mrs. Hand not only serves as an example of the application of the code, but her position of seating, speech, and guest illustrates the social hierarchy and the arbitrating position of power that an outsider can play in a family problem. When Abby and Mrs. Hand arrive at Aunt Cynthy's, Mrs. Hand tries to convince both women that they should live together out of necessity for aid, in Cynthy's case, and in financial need, in Abby's. Mrs. Hand finally gets Aunt Cynthy to commit to Abby and she states, "If you come stay with me, all I have shall be yours." (pg. 220). Aunt Cynthy goes on to acknowledge Mrs. Hand as witness to the solemn promise, adding, "Mrs. hand hears me say it" (p. 220). It is the presence of the older, wealthier, distinguished guest that formalizes the transaction. Without her position of a guest within the family, a deal could never have been struck.

Moving from her role as witness to judge, Mrs. Hand pronounces, "'T'll be best for both" (p. 221). Thus giving her blessing and encouragement. The ladies are all aware
that they have been participants in a formal transaction, wherein Abby has agreed to live with and care for her elderly Aunt in exchange for which she will receive a place to live and a future inheritance. Abby's financial predicament has been solved; Aunt Cynthy's refusal to move down to the village has been circumvented, and neither woman has lost face. Thus circumventing a problem of hurt pride that is not accepted within the code, especially among family members. This implies that this arrangement would never have been arranged without the presence of an outsider. Mrs. Hand served as an arbitrator and arranged things formally. Without her, Abby would never have brought up the idea of moving in with Aunt Cynthy for fear of insulting her and for defending her own pride. Aunt Cynthy, in return, never would have suggested Abby moving in out of concern of offending and feeling like a burden to her niece. With the presence of Mrs. Hand they are able to find an amicable, if not ideal solution to the ticklish problems of poverty, old age, and pride. Having truly lent a hand, and adding an air of authenticity to the entire transaction, Mrs. Hand declares that, "I feel as if we'd gained the battle of Waterloo" (p. 224). Thus with a friend to act as arbitrator, the social order and tradition was maintained and no one's pride was hurt.
"The King of Folly Island" (1886) in contrast to the previous stories, serves as a prime example of what happens to women when they have no grounds of female support within the community. It is the absence of a support network, and therefore a sense of a code of action or social order, that serves as the characters demise. The community is lacking a cohesive unit or body of women to look to for support, interaction, or role models. Specifically, the story illustrates the effects of the deprivation of community on a woman's well being. Jewett uses the outsider visitor-narrator technique, much like in Deephaven and The Country of the Pointed Firs, that allows the reader a detached view of the inside of the community. Jewett's message is clear: the absence of feminine companionship and the loss of one's mother have devastating effects on a woman.

The only inhabitants of Folly Island are "King" George Quint and his daughter, Phebe. George turned his back on society years before and has chosen to live out his life on the island. His disillusionment with mankind has prompted him to vow never to leave the island again. But as the narrator soon realizes, "There was no actual exile in the fisherman lot at all; he met his old acquaintances almost daily on the fishing grounds, and it was upon the women of the household that an unmistakable burden of isolation has

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fallen" (p. 25). George’s wife had died, overcome by the lonely exile brought to her by her husband’s rejection of society. His grown daughter, Phebe is all that is left, and she stays not out of compulsion, but rather of love and devotion to her father.

Phebe is clearly marked with the absence of society. The narrator, Frankfort, first wonders if Phebe is held captive, but he soon discovers that she stays out of choice, choosing to suffer socially, mentally, and spiritually. Both Phebe and her mother were aware of the lack of social contact imposed on them by George Quint. The women have no friends and George drives off all potential husbands for his daughter. The lonely figure of Phebe standing with a spy glass watching a funeral on a far away island is a poignant illustration of the young woman’s craving for companionship. The narrator even observes that “he was sure that his hostess [Phebe] had been wishing that she could share in the family gathering” (p. 36). Phebe is longing for a sense of community. She has no women in which to operate a code of action or social interaction.

Phebe seeks to fill her void of loneliness in other ways and ultimately follows part of a social order without a community. Phebe Observes established social graces by setting the table and keeping a neat house. Even without a community on which to look to for support, Phebe is
conditioned to keep the standards of the mainland community when it comes to her home. Other acts such as having a cat and a dog which follow her around the yard, and experiencing life through a spyglass, are also efforts at reaching out and mimicking the world of community and ritual of which she is deprived. George Quint, finally realizes the hardship that his selfishness has imposed on his daughter, and asks Frankfort if he wishes to marry Phebe and take her away for some months each year. Yet, Frankfort is also a man who has essentially divorced himself from the world. There is no meddling Aunt [Sophia] as in "The Hare and The Tortoise," to arrange a courtship and ultimately a marriage. George is too late and can never fill the shoes of an Aunt or older female family member.

Phebe's isolation is far deeper than mere social deprivation. Phebe's adjustment to living alone has been made possible only by her deliberate mental withdrawal from the world of literature and ideas. She contends herself with knitting, flowers, gardening, and maintaining a neat home. All very female oriented activities, yet she has to do them alone. There are no sewing parties, there are no social interactions, there is only herself. She admits that her desire to read only creates a new sense of loneliness; her desire to see Frankfort's book of Wordsworth's poems is only because it reminds her of her mother. She states, "I used to like to read, but I found it made me lonesome. I used to
wish to go ashore and do all the things that folks in books
did. But I don't care now..." (p. 39). Frankfort agrees
that it is better for her to "go on dreaming about the world
since she can no longer do all the things that folks in books
did" (p. 39). Reading would only excite her desire for
community and companionship. Therefore in order to maintain
her present state of mind, she has retreated to a more
passive state of existence. It is only by lulling her mind
into a depression that she can tolerate the acute loneliness
of her heart and mind.

Jewett's great statement of a lack of social
interaction and its effect on women is the portrayal of
physical afflictions in Phebe and her mother. Without a
community for nurturement and support, Jewett illustrates,
the women will only become sick and die. Phebe's mother died
an early and lonely death and Phebe herself is also in ailing
health. She is a "chippin' sparrow," who has little desire
for food, "a yellow leaf" whose autumn has come early. "She
looked ill already, so narrow chested and bent shouldered,
while a bright spot of color flicked in her thin cheeks" (p.
26). George's shallow attempt to treat her problem with
cough drops is an indication of his superficial concern for
both her physical problems and her mental state. Phebe is in
such a depressed state of mind that she accepts her fate and
says, "But I don't care now; I wouldn't go away from the
island for anything," but she realizes as she approaches the
end, "It seems as if I hadn't been any use to the world" (p. 47). Apparently her sense of usefulness is determined by her contribution to society and the people around her. Deprived of these, she loses the reason for existence and shrivels up to die, without even the satisfaction of a funeral, which exists only in society. The code of action cannot help Phebe for there are no women to nurture her back to health, place her to rest on her death, and arrange for her burial. The absence of other women leaves an absence of a code that leaves women to suffer and die alone. The theme of "Folly Island" is not the folly of man's rejection of the world; it is the terrible isolation and waste to which such folly subjects the women in his life. Without communities of support, Jewett shows that, women die mentally and physically.

"Martha's Lady" (1897)\(^1\) and "The Queens Twin" (1899)\(^2\), like "The Hare and the Tortoise", and "Aunt Cynthia Dallett," explore relationships between women. Instead of relationships specifically between families and friends, these two stories explore relationships between differing social classes, the relationship between a servant and her lady, and the relationship between a queen and a commoner. In addition to exploring the cognizant relationship between these women,

both stories also explore the sense of community that exists in the mind of friends. For both Martha and Abby, just knowing that there is a woman out there who connects with them, is enough to support and nurture their lives. Both stories teem with heritage, guidelines established by social position, and lastly, fellowship.

In “Martha’s Lady,” Miss Helena, a wealthy young woman, makes a summer’s visit to her Aunt Harriet’s home where Martha, a slow servant girl, is just beginning her services. The two are about the same age, and with Miss Helena’s encouragement, Martha, “inspired by love,” overcomes her dullness and learns to do her job with a competence akin to perfection. When Miss Helena departs in August to rejoin her parents, the friendship takes on a metaphysical reality for Martha. “All she lived for was to do the best she could for others had to conform to an ideal, which grew at last to be like a Saint’s vision, a heavenly figure painted upon the sky” (p. 154). Some time later, Helena exchanges her “happy Independence” for the “uncertainties of married life,” and Martha experiences remorse that the bond of love and friendship between them is broken by her new husband. “Her idol seems to be less her own since she has become the idol of a stranger” (p. 157).

Although Helena has invited Martha to her wedding, the older, wiser Aunt Harriet, unaware of the deep bond between
the two, thinks that Martha would be out of place and does not take her along. Thus once again proving that the social codes of action separate a Lady from her servant even in relationships of great love and friendship. The social hierarchy is again preserved. Servants are not allowed to join in social occasions as friends, they are always considered servants. Interrupting her wedding day, Helena sends small personal gifts to Martha—including a small mirror. As Martha looks into the mirror, she hopes to see "some faint reflection of Helen," but "there was only her own brown New England face to look back wonderingly" (p. 161). Martha, hoping for an external change in which she takes on the likeness of her idol, sees none in the reflection, unaware that the change produced by the relationship is internal. Through the years Martha is becoming more gracious until she is "unconsciously beautiful like a saint." The inner transfiguration is accomplished only after forty years of contemplation and emulation. While Martha's change is internal and unobservable to herself, she discovers to her dismay that, with the passing years, Helena has changed outwardly, physically taking on Martha's own external appearance. The not-so-subtle implication is that by becoming a wife, Helena has encountered the rigors of wifely duties and travel, exchanging her youthful freedom for voluntary servanthood. When Helena returns, Martha realizes that her idol has become an old woman like herself, "a tired,
bent little figure in black to her heart.” Martha sobs with the revelation: “This was the one thing she could not bear.” That evening a revelation comes to Helena and she realizes her unchanging love, throughout the years, despite their separation, has effected the change in Martha. The two part in the solemn ritual of a kiss—more ceremonial than sexual.

The relationship between the two is an interesting one, for it transcends social status, time, and distance. Martha's love for Helena is self-redemptive in several respects. It provides her with a model to emulate as well as an object of contemplation which lends a mystical serenity to her life. It gives significance to minor acts which become ritualistic. Much like the sense of the traditional New Year's day visit in "Aunt Cynthia Dallett", Martha follows the tradition of Helena and takes a white bowl of cherries surrounded by green leaves to the minister, arranged as Helena has taught her; she feeds the sparrows carefully, and she surrounds her mistress, Miss Harriet, with the fragrances of fresh flowers; she marks Helena's travels in an old worn geography book while also learning the foreign towns and places as she goes. These ritualistic observances cause an unconscious inner transformation of Martha herself. Meanwhile, time works an physical transformation and the two are finally merged into one real likeness with no real differences between them except the social mark of distinction between servant and lady. The asexual goodnight
kiss acknowledges their spiritual union. Jewett's story confirms the possibility of such an intimate relationship among women is possible. They are separated by the social hierarchy of servant and Lady that is defined by the social code and traditions. It is not proper for a Lady and a servant to be such close friends. Their socially enforced separation, or "corporate" hierarchy, much like upper management and clerk, is well defined and rigid. Yet the two women are united spiritually in a community and relationship based on the love and nurturement they hold for each other.

"The Queen's Twin" (1899), like "Martha's Lady," also explores a concurrent metaphysical and mystical relationship between two women. The "corporate structure" between servant and Lady, in "Martha's Lady" is imitated in "The Queen's Twin" in the relationship between the queen and commoner. This story differs only in the means that the Queen and Abby have never met. The relationship is entirely within Abby's mind.

Abby Martin and Queen Victoria were both born on the same hour of the same day. Although Abby has followed Queen Victoria's life and career since her discovery that they are 'twins' she had never divulged her existence to the Queen herself. The similarities between the two are numerous, some accidental and others carefully planned. Both, by chance, married men named Albert; both had sons named Albert Edward. Abby does name her succeeding children after the queen's
offspring, Alfred and Alice. Both lost their daughters. As Abby puts it, "We do think alike about so many things... You see, there is something between us, being born just at the same time; 't is what they call a birthright" (p. 4). Noting that the queen was destined for greatness and herself of the 'humble lot," Abby reiterates, "There's something between us; she's been the greatest lesson I've had to live by" (p. 31). It is the hierarchy of social position, the difference between royalty, and commoner, that Abby uses to segregate herself from the Queen.

Although Abby has seen the Queen on only one occasion, she keeps the relationship alive by collecting photos and clippings for which she makes many different kinds of homemade frames. She also offers many prayers and constant thoughts for the queen's well being. "The Queen may feel my love stayin' her heart sometimes did not know where it comes from" (p. 27). The thought of the relationship sometimes takes Abby into a dreamworld where she envisions the two women walk happily through the meadow holding hands. On at least one occasion, Abby prepares for a visit from the Queen, using her best china and linens. According to the social gospel, a guest is always extended the greatest hospitality and no matter how poor one is you always use the best of everything you have. In the midst of preparing for one of her expected visits, Abby realizes that she has been foolish to expect such an important personage, but a poor old cousin

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arrives to enjoy the feast that she has prepared. The social mores, would never allow for a queen to dine with humble folk. Mrs. Todd, a friendly neighbor observes, "There now I hear all this and it seems just as if the queen might have known and couldn't come herself, so she sent that poor ol' creatur' that was always in need" (p. 34)! The reader is convinced that, even in the eyes of a realist such as Mrs. Todd, Abby is entitled to feel that "in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me." Thus, Abby's sense of community is her imaginary bond with the queen.

Mrs. Todd doesn't think that Abby's compelling interest in her birthmate is an indication of an unbalanced mind or the pipe dreams of a deluded old woman. Yet, at the same time, Mrs. Todd admits that it is a bit odd for a woman to feel so close to a woman she has never met. Nevertheless, it is the underlying support of the female community that allows Mrs. Todd to believe in Abby. If Mrs. Todd doesn't add authenticity to Abby's beliefs, what would Abby have to live for? Before Mrs. Todd and the Narrator visit Abby, Mrs. Todd announces, "She is the Queen's twin... and anybody can see how natural 't is. They were born on the same day, and you'd be astonished to see what a number o' other things have corresponded" (p. 7). Mrs. Todd also takes notice of Abby's genuine interest in factual history, which gives authenticity to Abby's relationship. It is Abby's ability to believe with
her heart that her relationship exists, that gives her bond and community with the queen merit. If Abby believes it is true, then Mrs. Todd and the other women of the community will support her in her endeavors.

Therefore, although the relationship admittedly exists in Abby’s heart and mind, it is a real one, confirmed by “correspondences” and by other people. The community, in fulfilling the code of support, endorses her belief out of respect and nurturement. It has provided communion for the lonely older lady with a person far removed from her. Yet it is more than a mystical relationship, it has veracity and uncanny similarities. As Mrs. Todd says, “Don’t it show that for folks that have any fancy in ‘em such beautiful dreams is the real part o’ life? But to most folks, the common things that happens outside ‘em is all in all” (p. 35). Mrs. Todd’s words and her parting comment to the narrator, “it ain’t as if we left her all alone,” convince the reader that although one does not understand the relationship between the two, it does exist even though it is only known to one of them. Should the reader be to skeptical to accept this the fault lies with the narrowness of his own vision not of Abby’s. If the bond is enough for Abby and the community, then the reader must accept it as a valid bond and relationship.

Richard Cary believes that, “Miss Jewett dramatizes the irony of self-delusion placently in the case of “The Queen’s
Twin." But both Mrs. Todd and the Narrator accept Abby's experience as valid out of respect to the code in their community. They are supporting Abby in the best way they can, out of belief. Abby believes in her birthright so much that she actually convinces others that her bond with the queen is real. Cary later comments that Abby is one of the "abnormal women" of Dunnet Landing, but notes, "Her otherwise arid life is enriched by this innocent delusion, underscoring the eternal question--how much of dream is reality." Jewett's own treatment of the story raises the question as to whether the "abnormalcy" lies with Abby, or with the reader, who is so confined to time and space that he cannot accept relationships that transcend both principles.

In contrast to the lonely death of Phebe and her mother, The death of Miss Tempy, in "Miss Tempy's Watchers", explores the "reuniting power of the funeral," and a fulfilling sense of community. Jewett portrays rites of passage, as an essential part of the unwritten code surrounding women's place within the community. Women were often called upon to serve in these times of need. Births, deaths, and nursing were all specific female roles as defined by the social code within the community. Jewett uses specific examples of these rites of passage in "Miss Tempy's Watchers" (1881).

2. Ibid. p. 51.
social observance of tradition that governs actions at rites of passage makes the communication, on a nonverbal level, with the deceased Miss Tempy a more credible, probable event. Jewett's uses rites of passage to change the living and explore traditions and guidelines for death and its acceptance.

"Miss Tempy's Watchers" is the story of a transfiguration in the lives of a community of three women--two watchers at a wake, and the deceased who is spiritually present. Richard Cary notes that, "one by one and gradually, the lights in the hearts of the three women become indistinguishable; one by one the features of an entire community emerge from the surrounding gloom."¹ The story is a lyrical commentary on the mysterious metaphysical bond between the living and the dead. Jewett ultimately proclaims that, death results in resurrection and renewal rather than an interruption of the fellowship among women.

Nina Auerbach notes that the two watchers transcends social standing or even physical life; she states:

But in the course of watching, the memory of "poor Miss Tempy" expands again into the magnanimous life, uniting the house of death in a sympathetic bond between the vague and the wealthy married woman (Miss Crowe), the "sharpest" impecunious spinster (Sarah Ann

The two women watching over Tempy's dead body are drawn together by memories. This sharing of the past prompts them to celebrate their new understanding by opening a jar of Tempy's best preserves, which she, "coaxed from a thorny lone quince bush." As they share the jam, the two watchers muse on Tempy's gift for love and friendship. By the stories end all the celebrated preserves are gone and the two women have found communion. In a mysterious way, the dead woman's spirit is preserved in her living friends and their bond of fellowship and community is made stronger by her death. The social governances of funerals allows the watchers to bare souls in a sense of confession and be reborn in the spirit of friendship, support, and love. Miss Tempy has accomplished in death what she could not do in life: She has effected a reconciliation between the two somewhat estranged watchers.

As the two watchers remain in the downstairs kitchen, Miss Tempy lies shrouded in a white sheet in the north corner of the house. The two watchers sense, "the presence of a third person with them." This presence permeates the house and makes them far more communicative than usual. The watchers observe a whispered silence. At midnight the

1 Aurbach. *Communities of Women*, p. 10.
watchers ascend the stairs to the death chamber "to give a
look upstairs." Seeing Miss Tempy's "wonderful smile" Sarah
Ann suggests that she may be in a kind of intermediate state
between life and death. "I do believe they kind of wake up a
day or two after they die, and it's then that they go"(p.
220). Her view is metaphysical rather than theological.
Mrs. Crowe emphasizes the transitory nature of the death
experience, "'Tis a great thing for anybody to have got
through, ain't it?" Suggesting that the bond of support and
love between the women has not been broken by Miss Tempy's
passing. Miss Tempy is in fact, now their watcher, for she
has experienced what they have yet to discover.

With the break of dawn, Miss Tempy, who once feared
death, has been resurrected. The night of watching is over
and the watched becomes the watcher. Jewett notes, "Perhaps
Tempy herself stood near, and saw her own life and its
surroundings with new understanding. Perhaps she herself was
the only watcher"(p.227). The roles of the watched and the
watchers is handled with a sense of delicacy and death is
portrayed, "as natural as bein' born or livin'"(p. 228).

The stories considered in this chapter on the different
kinds of communities existing in the world of Jewett's
fiction are varied in both quality and content. The
relationships themselves range from those between neighbors
and friends, brought together by an event or circumstance, as
in "Aunt Cynthia Dallett," to common experiences of a more spiritual nature, as in "The Queen's Twin". All of the stories give evidence to the real need for those 'others' who can supply companionship, insight, and the opportunity for women to reach beyond themselves and aid others. Without these communities, there is a tendency to shrivel up and die, to become ultimately selfish, like Phebe in "The King of Folly Island," or to form one's own community within one's mind, as in "The Queen's Twin." Jewett illustrates these friendships and communities in a very positive light, acknowledges they function by a code of social precedent, that operates much like a "corporate" structure, and accepts them for what they are.
Like Willa Cather, critic Francis O. Matthiessen was equally impressed with the prospects of Jewett's literary longevity: "[s]he has withstood the onslaught of time, and is secure within her limits." Yet while Jewett wrote over one hundred short stories and 4 novels, very few, other than "The Dulham Ladies," "A White Heron," and The Country of The Pointed Firs, are read. This limited selection of fiction pieces has had the effect of unjustifyably reducing Sarah Orne Jewett to the dimensions of a one-book author. The heritage that she so painstakingly tried to preserve on paper is in danger of being lost. Her fiction contains records of unique people in special circumstances that should not be allowed to drift into obscurity. And, since most of her fiction concerns the problems and communities of women, they should in fact be read more.

Jewett wrote about a time when codes and rituals defined almost every action within the community. Steeped in the ethos of her native past and present, Jewett saw no need to distort or embroider images, "Real Life is interestin' enough for me," she has Abby Harran say in "A Native of Winby." Jewett's ability to realistically portray the lives and codes of women that makes her work important for literary scholarship, feminist scholarship, and Women's Studies. By recognizing the underlying codes and hierarchical structures

within Jewett's texts, women today can better understand the heritage of the unique female past that is so often overlooked.

Jewett herself makes an oblique reference to unwritten social codes in a letter to her friend Mrs. Whitman. Noting the relationship between the writer and the reader of a book, Jewett writes, "It is one of this unwritable things that the story holds in his heart, if it has any, that make the true soul of it," further observing that many stories "go lame for lack of that understanding." The metaphor is apt, for the same tacit understanding forms the basis of the relationships between the women in her fiction, and there too, many of the misunderstandings are caused by the failure of the receiver to get the hidden message of the sender. Jewett goes on to say that "in France there is such a code, such recognitions, such richness of allusions; but here we confuse our scaffoldings with our buildings, and . . . and so!"

Jewett's texts often are, as Nina Auerbach has suggested, examples of a "buried language." Her stories of friendship and communion are punctuated by social codes and traditions, familial hierarchies, and fellowship among women. Thus, Jewett has constructed a scaffolding, or framework, that

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2 IBID., p.112.
3 Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women*, p. 144.
allows the reader to gain understanding of her story's "true soul" and the communities of women she depicts.
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