December 1972

The Rise, Decline, and Rise of Sarah Orne Jewett

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Recommended Citation
Colby Library Quarterly, series 9, no.12, December 1972, p.650-663
Although Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909) published her first short story before she was nineteen and breached the redoubtable columns of the *Atlantic Monthly* shortly after her twentieth birthday,¹ she was no novice who stopped the show one night and bloomed as superstar the next. In keeping with the easeful tenor of her work, her rise in reputation is gradual, undramatic, and assured. Numerous appearances between 1870-1876 in magazines of national circulation—*Riverside, Independent, St. Nicholas, the Atlantic*—effectively impress her unique hallmark on the public mind.² Four years prior to the issuance of her first book,³ usually the commencement point for critical reactions in print, the *Nation* discovers “very agreeable reading” in Miss Jewett’s “The Shore House” (a preliminary Deephaven sketch in the September 1873 *Atlantic*), “more like talk than reading, and talk of a very fresh, unaffected kind.”⁴ What excellent luck that her first notice should fix upon three of her most attractive and durable qualities.

The benevolent wind does not hold too long. The New York *Times*, eyeing *Deephaven* (1877) from a height of urban contumely, brings her down with the roughest rebuke she is ever to receive. Spraying derisive ironies over the rusticity of locale, local characters, customs, and commonplaces, nor sparing the two city-girl protagonists, the *Times* writer archly concludes: “In fact, if condensed considerably, the book would read well in letters, and at the manuscript stage; it is by some mistake, ¹ Respectively, “Jenny Garrow’s Lovers,” *Flag of Our Union*, XXIII (January 18, 1868), 46; “Mr. Bruce,” *Atlantic Monthly*, XXIV (December 1869), 701-710.
² In 1870: 1 poem, 2 stories; 1871: 1 poem, 4 stories; 1872: 1 poem, 4 stories; 1873: 1 poem, 4 stories, 3 essays; 1874: 2 poems, 2 stories, 2 essays; 1875: 1 poem, 5 stories, 1 essay; 1876: 2 poems, 3 stories.
³ *Deephaven* (Boston, 1877), comprising ten chapters collected from sketches published in the *Atlantic Monthly* between September 1873-September 1876—some newly revised—and three new chapters interpolated in the reshuffled order of presentation.
⁴ Brief quotations of this type are too numerous in this essay to be documented individually. Precise volume number, date and place of publication, and pagination for particular items may be determined by consulting Clara C. & Carl J. Weber, editors, *A Bibliography of the Published Writings of Sarah Orne Jewett* (Waterville, Maine, 1949), or Clayton L. Eichelberger, compiler, “Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909) : A Critical Bibliography of Secondary Comment,” *American Literary Realism*, II (Fall 1969), 189-262.
JENNY GARROW’S LOVERS.

BY A. C. BAINTON.

This story of mine may interest some reader, and though it may seem like a great many other stories which one sees in all the magazines, and very unnatural at that, it’s true enough, God knows. I’m not much used to writing—I may as well tell you, I’m not used at all to it, for you will find it out soon enough—but I’ve heard people say that sometimes it is the telling, and sometimes the story, and my story is interesting enough, with an old woman to write it, even, instead of one of those young men or women who use such long words, and have the same story over and over again, with different names. Well, that’s nothing to me.

I have always meant that this story should be told, and now it will be. The people whom it concerned are all dead, long ago, so it can never trouble any one.

Well, Jenny Garrow was the best friend I ever had, and as pretty a girl as there was in the country, I thought so, and so did the young fellows from “the Hall,” who used to come, after the day’s shooting, for a drink of Farmer Garrow’s cider. I never thought the cider had as much attraction as she, though. Jenny never minded what they said to her, she was so innocent and childlike at heart, always. I remember once, the gentlemen were there, and Sir John and my Lady Tarrow, and many ladies who had been hunting with them, and there was one whom everybody was very polite to. I heard afterwards that he was a very great man from London. He hadn’t much to say to them. When Jenny and I went in to serve them, he started up, and looked after her. She went in alone next time, and told me, afterwards, that they were having a very merry time over the cider, and they called on the strange gentleman for a toast, and he stood up, and kissed his hand to Jenny, and said:

“Tho’ the fairest maid mine eyes have looked upon.”

Jenny was frightened at it, and said she turned and came out, as soon as she filled their glasses.

Of course she had plenty of lovers, and no wonder; for, besides the nice girl she was, Farmer Garrow’s purse was well filled. She was the only child.

Jenny didn’t care much for the lovers, however
doubtless, that it got into print at all."

Reception in other quarters is moderate and mixed, ranging from superficial to appreciative to frankly confused. The Saturday Review of London passes off the volume as "a collection of tolerably clever social sketches of New England life and character," whereas Cottage Hearth, a New England publication, embraces Miss Jewett's New England as "an actual place" and her country folk as "actual personages." In the Atlantic Monthly William Dean Howells characteristically sharpens this blunt attribution of reality. "These [sketches] are all touched with a hand that holds itself far from every trick of exaggeration, and that subtly delights in the very tint and form of reality; we could not express too strongly the sense of conscientious fidelity which the art of the book gives." No one deigns to call the book a novel, in those uncomplicated days a virtually inviolate concept within which people are born, develop, and die, usually in chronological order and at considerable length. Those who feel impelled to squeeze Deephaven into a genre declare it an assembly of related "sketches." The Eclectic, stumped, throws up its hands. "Deephaven is neither a story, nor a series of descriptive essays, nor a mere collection of character studies." It never does venture to say what. Some years are to elapse before critics and general readers can come to terms with Miss Jewett's atypical, uncompromising esthetic.

Only one entry of seven in her next book for adults, Old Friends and New (1879), may legitimately be classed a sketch, yet the Atlantic Monthly, Scribner's, and others point out the absence of "strong motive" and address them all as "slight and delicate sketches." On this quibble the Saturday Review redeems itself to the extent of identifying them as "brief and graceful stories." Good Company is the first of many to apply the adjective "perfect" to Miss Jewett's stories, carefully appending "in their way," a reservation honest and indispensable to her special, circumscribed endowment. She is cited for "irreproachable" felicity and naturalness of style, the likeableness of her people, and the purity of her sentiment ("pure without prudery," says Harper's). Scribner's deprecates the "very ju-

venile air” pervading a number of her stories, “as if they were originally intended for publication in a Sunday-school paper”—an irrefutable charge inasmuch as a majority of them up to this point have appeared in magazines for children or with religious affiliation. One journal predicts that she will attract a “less numerous” audience but of the finest quality; the New Orleans Daily Picayune thinks her sketches will please “the very sentimental.” To a degree, they were both right. Her books have moved steadily, this side the bestseller, and her nostalgic aura has defined their readership in successive generations of differing accent.

The 1880s is Miss Jewett’s decisive decade. During this period she begets four collections of sketches and short stories, two novels, and a piece of commissioned hackwork, The Story of the Normans (1887), which is alien to her central vein and best forgotten. In her four self-selected anthologies can be traced the unfaltering growth of her power and perceptions, as well as the persistence of her opaque areas. Both the Times and the Picayune undergo salutary changes of heart: the former lauds Country By-Ways (1881) as “remarkable for excellence of style and purity of language”; the latter, which had previously scored her work as “more or less melancholy,” now greets it as “sprightly” and “comforting.” Reviews are longer and tend to analyze rather than pontificate. The Critic’s reader ruminates on the pith of Miss Jewett’s appeal—“a subtle charm; flavor rather than shape; essence rather than body”—the first really to enunciate without prejudice her detachment from the common practice of fiction in her day. “Perhaps genuineness comes nearest being the name of her secret,” he muses, recognizing her refusal to trade in the counterfeits and affectations of current literature. Finally, he rates her “marvelously accurate” dialect superior to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s or Howells’ or Rose Terry Cooke’s, and her New Englanders, “New England’s own.”

Starkly obverse, the Literary World flays almost every aspect of this book. It is not “so choice” as the last; it indulges in “little preachments”; it fails of her customary spontaneity; its examples of “crystalline” prose are sparse among many “instances of careless writing”; it forces the question of her limited range. The Independent injects a saving counterweight, closer to fact than that wholesale detraction. “Sarah Orne Jewett has
achieved for herself an enviable reputation in American literature, and each new book that comes to us from her leaves us the impression that she has not yet touched the high level of her capacity."

The next three collections consolidate her station and exude omens of supremacy in her consciously astricted art. The major critical sources agree that “her work shows quiet continuous growth,” that her stories “need no commendation.” Roundly honored as the acutest delineator of New England scene, character and mores, as an adherent of simple truth (“simplicité not simplesse”), as a poetic realist, and as a consummate stylist, she is nevertheless made to bear her role as “lady in a firelit study.” In *The Mate of the Daylight, and Friends Ashore* (1884), *A White Heron and Other Stories* (1886), and *The King of Folly Island and Other People* (1888) critics look vainly for passion and action, even, in one case, humor. They dismiss her as a landscape painter with a few indigenes in the setting, devoid “of creative ability or of fine idea.” They deplore her intrusive moralizing, as they do her cramped “scale of coloring” with its resultant repetition and monotony. They equate her with Björnson and with Howells, though he is said to be “much better” than she in rendition of provincial life. Throughout recurs the dreary impeachment that her stories are no stories at all, “rather an episode in a story of which the beginning, or the end, or both remain untold.” “Sketches,” “sketches,” “sketches,” they fling at her, as though she commits obscenity in giving them birth. So preoccupied are they to establish this trivial formalistic point, they miss the point of her profounder accomplishment, cogently aired by the *Nation* (January 17, 1884): “The world is accustomed to such positiveness and downrightness of fact and motive that it does not often realize the force of what does not happen—the meaning of not doing.” Be damned with Aristotelian imperatives. For the matter and manner of her short stories Miss Jewett was drawing from the deeper well of percipience. The *Critic* glimpsed this, hailing the publication of every new volume by her “a red-letter day in the annals of New England story-writing.”

One would expect a distention of viewpoints respecting her two novels of the mid-80s, which she cast in conventional mold. Not so. Like multiple foghorns bleating compulsive refrains,
the critical chorus chants the same solemn clichés about uncertain construction, limitation of scope, simplicity, slackness of drama, accurate observation, and lovely style. *A Country Doctor* (1884) is denied novel status by the *Nation* ("strictly a sketch") and the *Atlantic Monthly* ("an extended short story"). The *Dial* chides her for "little invention" in *A Marsh Island* (1885), and Horace E. Scudder praises her for "wise timidity." She is three times voted "perfect"—granted she remains within her qualified zone. All concur that the books are satisfactory, pleasant reading save the *Critic*, which insists that "There is nothing in the world to find fault with [A Country Doctor], except the one fact that we cannot read it." What immobilizes this reader is "not the poor people, nor the country, nor the commonplace story . . . but the life is so still . . . it may well be called photographic." One year later, possibly the same critic decrees the *mise en scène* of *A Marsh Island" perfect" but the people "still." Two reassuring periscopes are trained upon Miss Jewett's freedom from formula: *Cottage Hearth* welcomes *A Country Doctor* as contrast to the "vapid society novels" clogging the market, and the *Dial* asseverates, "American fiction of to-day shows no more healthful sign than that which is given in her stories and sketches." As for fame, Miss Jewett tallies second only to Anne Isabella Thackeray. Despite the endless cavils on technical grounds, in all, the balance is greatly in favor of Miss Jewett's artistry during 1880-1889 and her popularity is solidly certified.

Before turning from this basal span of years, three phenomena which have roots within it should be accorded their place in the scheme of her evolvement. First, the yeoman labors in Miss Jewett's behalf by Th. Bentzon, pen name of Marie Thérèse Blanc. They had not met or corresponded—they became dear friends later—when Madame Blanc wrote for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in February 1885 a thirty-five page resumé and review of *A Country Doctor* (a truncated version of her French text is presented in translation as the first essay in the Cary *Appreciation* volume). It is the most imposing notice taken of Miss Jewett to date and it cracks the shell of her American-British confinement. Seven months thereafter Madame Blanc translates "A Little Traveler." In the *Revue* of September 15, 1887 she celebrates "A White Heron" as "un
parfait échantillon du genre,” and ranges Miss Jewett in the tradition of the

groupe des grands peintres de paysage ideal: Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Cowper, Chateaubriand, Wordsworth, Byron, Lamartine, George Sand, sortis de l’école de Rousseau, qui, lui même, selon Lowell, dérive à
son insu de Thomson, ce poète incomplet, mais sincère, le premier qui
essaya de rendre avec des mots ce qu’avaient fait à l’aide des lignes et
des couleurs Salvator Rosa et Le Poussin (p. 449).

And this is but the beginning. Madame Blanc also translates
“A White Heron,” “Decoration Day,” “A Native of Winby,”
issues an omnibook in French comprising A Country Doctor,
eight short stories and a sketch, and considers Miss Jewett’s
achievements in several volumes of her literary criticism. 6

The London Saturday Review must also be dealt fair share
of credit for disseminating Miss Jewett’s name and facility be­
yond her national borders. Starting with Deephaven, as noted
above, the Review allots space to each of her books as it comes
off press. Often condescending—witting or not, only once com­
pletely captivated (by her “poetic sympathy and perception,”
herr command of Irish brogue and Negro dialect in addition to
New England twang), the magazine’s staff sometimes puts her
down (“fair average specimens”), but most frequently tenders
the standard platitudes concerning her ladylike mien, her “rather
wearisome monotony,” misnames her stories nouvelles, and
describes her pictures of village life as “perfect within their
sphere.” On the high side, it matches her novelistic skill with
that of Howells and James for “slow movement and . . . uninter­
rupted introspection.” Most important, throughout the stretch
of her writing days the Review keeps the commonwealth of
British readers consistently in touch with her newest endeavor.

A third manifestation of Miss Jewett’s maturing prestige is
discernible in the literary histories of this period. As early as
1884 Oscar Fay Adams records her list of books and a salute
to her “exquisitely simple, natural, and graceful style” in A
Brief Handbook of American Authors. Within three years
Charles M. Barrows includes a short profile of her life in his
Acts and Anecdotes of Authors. Momentum picks up in the
first years of the 90s as Allibone’s Dictionary of American Au-

6 For a full-bodied account of this relationship, see Richard Cary, “Miss
Jewett and Madame Blanc,” Colby Library Quarterly, VII (September 1967),
467-488; also Madame Blanc’s Le Roman de la Femme-Médecin,” 488-503,
translated by Archille H. Biron.
thors overtakes her in a supplement, Selden L. Whitcomb files her titles in *Chronological Outlines of American Literature*, and George Bainton announces unequivocally in *The Art of Authorship* that “Sarah Orne Jewett is one of the best literary artists amongst the American writers of short stories.” Her notability, even as she struggles toward the summit, is permanently inscribed in the chronicle.

Three more compilations of new stories emerge before Miss Jewett produces her masterpiece, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). The thirty stories incorporated in *Strangers and Wayfarers* (1890), *A Native of Winby and Other Tales* (1893), and *The Life of Nancy* (1895) submit anew to the old epithets “essay-story,” “discursive,” and “diffuse.” With somewhat bumbling chivalry, the *Nation* attempts to parry this arrainment: “There was a time when she trembled on the verge of fashionable art, the art of writing a tale wherein no tale is discoverable; but she never went over to the unintelligibles, and is now firmly reestablished on the old, sure ground of something to tell.” (She is in fact catching and holding life palpitant in a loose, peculiar web of her own devising.) Her stories are compared with the best models by Hawthorne and Elizabeth Drew Stoddard; Maupassant’s are on the average not “so good” as hers; she evokes parallels with Miss Mitford and Mrs. Gaskell. The *Nation* proclaims *Nancy* “perfectly well done” and, understandably, the Boston *Pilot* caption for its *Winby* review is “Two Perfect Irish Stories.” Miss Jewett’s success in Irish-American ambience, says *The Writer*, is “no less great” than in her familiar New England. The *Critic*, which had searched fruitlessly for humor in *The King of Folly Island*, now exults that *Winby* is “filled with humor.” The hypergenial *Picayune* avows from far-off New Orleans that anything Miss Jewett writes is worth reading.

In *An Old Town by the Sea* (1893) Thomas Bailey Aldrich congratulates Miss Jewett for preserving in “an atmosphere of long-kept lavender and pennyroyal” the few surviving “old-fashioned men and women... who linger in little, silvery-gray old homesteads strung along the New England roads and by-

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7 Not a single one of these would be classified other than a short story by any criterion except sophomoric rigidity of terms. Most would be considered exemplars of construction as against current default of classic short story standards.
ways.” Godey’s mourns her want of kaleidoscope style, her “histories of the inconsequential,” and her plots “smothered in a mass of detail ill-chosen and lazily narrated.” So, it may be seen, the mixture remains as before—laurel for her obvious graces, demurr al at her recusancy, myopia toward her quintessential worth. Perhaps more momentous than entree to Britain and France in these years is Miss Jewett’s penetration of California. The San Francisco Bulletin, on September 13, 1895, authenticates her coast-to-coast magnetism with a feature, “Sarah Orne Jewett at Home.”

The upsurge culminates in The Country of the Pointed Firs. “More eager, more positive, more convinced . . . more strenuous” than Deephaven, exclaims the Critic, and none dissent. In the Book Buyer Alice Brown writes reverentially: “No such beautiful and perfect work has been done for many years; perhaps no such beautiful work has ever been done in America.” Hamilton Wright Mabie sets for Miss Jewett a place among our writers as “distinct and secure” as that of Jane Austen in England, and the National Cyclopaedia of American Biography (1898) countersigns his claim. With this book Miss Jewett etches her name irremovably in the annals of American literature.

Afterward come The Queen’s Twin and Other Stories (1899), which is greeted with respectful murmurs, and The Tory Lover (1901), a stab at an historical novel, as universally disprized as The Country of the Pointed Firs was universally acclaimed. Pained by the anomalous mummer y in The Tory Lover, Henry James implores Miss Jewett to “come back to the palpable present intimate . . . that wants, misses, needs you, God knows, and that suffers woefully in your absence.” Sadly, it is too late. In September 1902 she sustains a crippling fall which, to all intents, puts an end to her writing career.

Up to this juncture in her life Miss Jewett has received no purely critical attention of any length or import. All notices are sparked by and concern themselves with a specific title, lately issued, which now and again inspires some fairly manifest generalizations. Edward Garnett, though primed by the announcement of another English reprint, breaks loose from the thrill of a single volume in July 1903 to poke into the larger design of Sarah Orne Jewett. The first independent excursion
is that of Julia R. Tutwiler (November 1903), but it is relatively thin, having to concede at least half of its deliberations to a contrast with Mary Wilkins Freeman. Not until October 1904 does a truly exclusive and competent overview of Miss Jewett's *oeuvre* come into being, Charles Miner Thompson's "The Art of Miss Jewett." It is the only one published during her lifetime. This interval between accident (1902) and death (1909) is also brightened for her by translations of *The Tory Lover* into Italian and French (not by Madame Blanc). Miss Jewett dies, after seven years of galling curtailment, a figure esteemed but already a little remote.

Twentieth-century response to this nineteenth-century sensibility traces an erratic graph of deepening critical neglect, undeviating prevalence in anthologies and literary histories, and resurgent cultural and analytical interest. In the first decade following her death, there is no letdown in reissues of her books, indeed a uniform edition of *Stories and Tales* in seven volumes (1910) is offered under American and British auspices. Theodore Roosevelt recommends the neoclassic ideal of *utile dulci* in her stories; Willa Cather dedicates *O Pioneers!* to her memory; LaSalle Corbell Pickett and Harriet Prescott Spofford recall her generously in their memoirs; Henry James delivers belated homage in his essay on Mr. and Mrs. James T. Fields; Mrs. Fields edits a quantum of Miss Jewett's letters, shakily. She is inspected in John Macy's ground-breaking *The Spirit of American Literature* ("very much better" storyteller than Bret Harte), in Fred Lewis Pattee's *A History of American Literature Since 1870* ("a new realist whose heart was with the old school"), in the *Cambridge History of American Literature* ("a romanticist, equipped with a camera and a fountain pen"), and in Bliss Perry's *The American Spirit in Literature* ("as perfect short stories as France or Russia can produce"). The names of Hardy, Irving, and Poe are subjoined to the growing roster of

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8 Tutwiler, "Two New England Writers in Relation to Their Art and to Each Other," *Gunton's Magazine*, XXV (November 1903), 419-425; Thompson, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, XCIV (October 1904), 485-497.
9 These seven volumes consist of *Deephaven, A Country Doctor, Tales of New England, A Native of Winsbury, The Life of Nancy, The Country of the Pointed Firs*, and *The Queen's Twin*. They were brought out in two uniform bindings—red cloth and blue leather—by Houghton Mifflin Company in Boston and Constable & Company in London. The overall designation *Stories and Tales* does not appear on any of the individual volumes but was used in advertisement of the set.
her literary cognates. Notwithstanding, only the clipped assessment of Paul Elmer More and the more comprehensive one by Edward M. Chapman\(^{10}\) may be said to embellish the critical record before advent of the 1920s.

Two primary landmarks are erected between 1920-1929: Willa Cather's Mayflower Edition of *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett*, still the most widely distributed selection from her works, in which Miss Cather nominates *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as a third possibility for maximum longevity along with *The Scarlet Letter* and *Huckleberry Finn*; and Francis Otto Matthiessen's *Sarah Orne Jewett*, still the key biography however skimpy in detail and documentation, in which he pairs her with Emily Dickinson as “the two principal women writers America has had.” Otherwise, a mere triad of essays by Shackford, Forbes, and Grattan\(^{11}\) is worthy of retrieval. It is an era of anthological plenty during which Miss Jewett's stories are recruited for Howells' *Great Modern American Stories* and Grant Overton's more sweeping *The World's One Hundred Best Short Stories*, among scores of others. Backed by the authority of a lengthening perspective, Pattee remarks: “She refused to yield to the demands of her time.” And, after checking the current temper of the bookworld, William Lyon Phelps decides: “[She] refuses to stay dead.” The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* admits her to immortality on the twentieth anniversary of her demise.

In the 30s and 40s Miss Jewett becomes a fixture in academic anthologies, where she illustrates the northeastern wing of the now accredited local color school of American writing, and is specified the best of her sector excepting, occasionally, Mary Wilkins Freeman. Newspapers and magazines are barren, not a single viable critique from the first year through the last. She is more visible in books, mostly to her detriment in the bruising days of the great Depression. Vernon Louis Parrington decries her as a bleached-out Brahmin and an economic dolt; Granville Hicks as “merely a New England old maid who... believed in


piety, progress, and propriety”; Rebecca West as an unscrupulous emasculator. Ludwig Lewisohn stumbles between her excessive limitations and her unshakeable probity; Van Wyck Brooks stands up more staunchly for her though not without constraint; only Willa Cather applauds unstintingly. At the University of Paris (1936) Jean Sougnac submits the first doctoral dissertation on Miss Jewett; one other materializes in 1940.

Critical attitudes upgrade steeply after World War II. Howard Mumford Jones accosts *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as “the finest imaginative presentation of the values of New England life” and posts it twenty-seventh in a list of “fifty titles which would form the basis for a study of American civilization.” In the authoritative *Literary History of the United States* Carlos Baker rates it “the best piece of regional fiction to have come out of nineteenth century America” and Miss Jewett as the most distinguished “among all the writers of regional fiction.” In 1946 “A White Heron” invites an Argentine translation. For the centenary, Clara C. and Carl J. Weber assemble a *Bibliography* of published writings by and about Miss Jewett.

Approximating the fate of numberless authors now entrenched in the hierarchy of their respective literatures, Sarah Jewett underwent and overcame a season in limbo during the generation following her death. A reactivation of regard becomes evident with the publication of A. M. Buchan’s expansive monograph in 1953 and Richard Cary’s edition of Miss Jewett’s letters in 1956. These are succeeded shortly by the finest flowering of Jewett scholarship—the informed analyses of Eleanor M. Smith, Clarice Short, Ferman Bishop, Warner Berthoff, and Hyatt H. Waggoner, with an ampler listing in the 60s. Doctoral dissertations wholly or partially scrutinizing Miss Jewett’s work swell to fifteen (five in the 50s, eight in the 60s). No American literary history or collection of American short stories...

on historical principles in those two decades overlooks her imitable contribution. One attributes “highest degree of artistic perfection” to The Country of the Pointed Firs; another cannot see that it suffers by comparison with Winesburg, Ohio; a third values her stories as “the best that have been written since Hawthorne.”

Books about Miss Jewett increase apace in the 60s. John Eldridge Frost’s biography (she has achieved “permanence”) supplies much of the vital data missing in Matthissen’s; Richard Cary presents the first full-scale evaluation of her practice in several genres, poising her “without peer among her contemporaries in the reliable depiction of her chosen time, place, and personalities”; Margaret Farrand Thorp offers a highly compressed study. Louis Auchincloss and Larzer Ziff contemplate her accomplishments at length in their surveys of her time and kind. Mary Ellen Chase and David Bonnell Green bring out reprints of The Country of the Pointed Firs with applicable accessories. Cary uses Deephaven to same effect, and edits a second, enlarged volume of letters. Firs is translated by the Germans and Japanese, the latter spawning a Jewett minicult in additionally translating some of her short stories, publishing critiques of her works, and including her in at least a dozen English-language anthologies, with introductions and annotations, for academic instruction. In its issue of Fall 1967 American Literary Realism exhaustively revises, augments, and updates the bibliography of commentary. American Literary Scholarship (1968) marks not only “her increasingly elevated rank among local colorists” but also the growing insistence among critics “that she now be graduated from that school” and accorded a level of universality.

There seems to be no slackening of engrossment in the 70s. Already one notes a lively outflow from the scholarly journals, Cary’s compilation of The Uncollected Short Stories (of which “no fewer than seventeen” are “up to Miss Jewett’s optimum level”), and the seriatim issue of her Works in fourteen projected volumes, excluding stories and novels written for children.14 Forthcoming also, in the spring of 1973, is a comprehensive volume of critiques entitled Appreciation of Sarah Orne

Jewett: 29 Interpretive Essays, edited, with an introduction, by Richard Cary, to be issued by the Colby College Press.

The transcendental trend of the rising generation—rejection of complex, urban, material values; hankering after a more instinctual, intimate, ecological, uncomputerized past—perhaps bespeaks Miss Jewett’s gently real formulation as a world whose time has returned. It is not obligatory to contrive or demand for her a niche among the most adept or compelling prodigies of the arts. She functions—like George Lillo, Charles Ives, Henri Rousseau—in proprio motu, expounding the universe in an idiom intelligible to herself and, once encountered, unforgettable to the auditor. She transcribes existence in a minor key to which most of us are by daily iteration attuned. If serenity, reticence, guarded optimism, simplicity, honesty, tragedy without hysterics, and dispassionate self-knowledge are the realities Miss Jewett strove all her life to demonstrate, it would serve well that they regain posture in a society too long obsessed by their opposites. For her arc in the eonian cycle affirms nature and man and morality.