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Recommended Citation
Colby Library Quarterly, Volume 19, no.3, September 1983, p.155-166

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The Art of the Healer: 
Women in the Fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett

by LAURIE CRUMPACKER

In 1884 Sarah Orne Jewett described the life of a female doctor as both "blessed" and "useful." She added that doctors and other healers should be "fitted by nature with a power of insight" into the human spirit and also a "God-given" talent for discovering and using proper remedies.¹ Throughout her later works, from 1884 to 1900, Jewett was frequently preoccupied with the question of what is true healing and who is gifted with the talent of caring for other human beings, whether healthy or ill.

It is not surprising that this daughter of a country doctor, who actually accompanied her father on his rounds, should ask such questions. What is remarkable is the variety and creativity of her responses. This paper examines her concept of healing in A Country Doctor (1884), "The Courting of Sister Wisby" (1887), and The Country of the Pointed Firs (1896).² In these works Jewett suggests that not only doctors, but also herbalists, ministers and writers have special parts to play in the preservation of the health of a community. She also emphasizes that women are uniquely gifted and available for these roles. Jewett's descriptions of the healing arts and of women healers in these works are neither quaint nor limited to a particular region. Rather her ideas are eclectic, far-reaching, and advanced for her time.

When she began to write of women healers, Jewett was aware that she was part of a long tradition, and she acknowledged her debt to Harriet Beecher Stowe. She certainly knew Stowe's strong healing women, Mary Scudder and Candace of The Minister's Wooing (1859), Roxy and Ruey Toothacre of The Pearl of Orr's Island (1862), and Grandmother Badger of Oldtown Folks (1869). But especially, she drew from Stowe an appreciation of coastal Maine communities as ideal settings for fiction. Stowe's Orr's Island and Jewett's Dunnet Landing are essentially communities of women. The young men have left for the sea, the war, inland factories and logging work or even for the West. The men at


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home are either too old, too unassertive or too much "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought" to wield much power. Thus these are matri-focal communities where widows and spinsters, lonely wives and sweet-hearts can play leadership roles without significant male interference. Jewett experiments with gynocracies, in domestic, religious and commercial affairs and in health care.

The coastal Maine communities never recovered from Jefferson's embargo of 1807 and the railroads' later incursions into trade, and Jewett lets one of her characters compare the present with a once-glorious and prosperous past. In *Pointed Firs* Captain Littlepage laments, "I call it low-water mark now here in Dunnet" (p. 32). The author may have intentionally given these lines to a man—an aged sea captain—for the female protagonists seem exempt from the "low-water" depression which afflicts the old men. Unlike the elderly men, nearly all of Jewett's women seem energized by the struggle to survive under adverse conditions.

True, a few of Jewett's women do suffer from disorders connected to their lonely village life. She sees unfortunate marriages, poverty, and lack of options as productive of illness and sometimes even death in some characters. Joanna Todd of *Pointed Firs* becomes a sad recluse because her young lover deserted her for a "better match." In *A Country Doctor*, Nan Prince's mother married a difficult man, turned to alcohol and died young. Nan can escape a similar fate only by not marrying and instead following her true vocation in medicine. In saving herself this way, Nan illustrates Jewett's belief that individuals need first to heal themselves before they can become effective healers of others. Almira Todd of *Pointed Firs* also survived the losses of her true love and of her husband and was strengthened by these adversities. With these women, Jewett suggests that survival of difficulties produces fine counselors and healers.

According to Jewett, preventive medicine is an important principle in avoiding illness and adversity, and active outdoor living is the first prerequisite for a long and healthy life. Indeed some of Jewett's characters spend so much time in the fields and are so closely connected to their outdoor environment that they are nearly indistinguishable from other living things. For example, in "The Courting of Sister Wisby," Mrs. Goodsoe (who reaps as "good" as she sows) is discovered by the narrator on an August day, kneeling, "bending over the turf . . . hardly taller than the luxuriant junipers themselves" (p. 220). Mrs. Goodsoe is closely in tune with natural rhythms of sun and season and embodies Jewett's contention that communion with nature is essential to good health.

Following the appearance of Mrs. Goodsoe, Jewett's view of the woman healer continued to evolve, reaching its most mature formulation in the character of Almira Todd nine years later. While Mrs.

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Goodsoe is a coastal resident who grew up on the mainland and is attuned to its seasons, Mrs. Todd was raised on an island and feels the rhythms of tides and waves. In a related story, a storm at sea affects Almira so that she trembles at the gusts of wind until the narrator encourages some tale-telling to loosen her spirit from the hold of howling wind and pounding waves. But Mrs. Todd is equally at home on the land where she ranges far and wide to find wild plants and even communicates with trees. The narrator notices this talent one day while they are traveling along a country road:

Mrs. Todd suddenly reined in the horse as if somebody had stood on the roadside and stopped her . . . but I discovered that she was looking eagerly at a tall ash tree . . . “I thought ‘t was goin’ to do well. . . . Last time I was up this way that tree was kind of drooping and discouraged. Grown trees act that way sometimes, same’s folks; then put right to it . . . and start all over again with real good courage.” (p. 83)

In this passage, Jewett reminds us that one can learn a good deal about human growth and potential from other living things in one’s environment.

In the earlier story, Mrs. Goodsoe is seen in a remote hillside pasture and appears to be a bit wild herself, like the herbs and juniper bushes among which she wanders. Mrs. Todd, on the other hand, has moved beyond her predecessor and cultivates a luxuriant kitchen garden. Her garden, with its rows and fences, lets us know that some of her wildness has been tamed and that she represents nature integrated into the community. She is thus further differentiated from the solitary Mrs. Goodsoe by her central role in community affairs. Mrs. Todd appears to know everyone, and hers is the first advice sought in times of trouble or illness.

Mrs. Todd’s important role as community healer is clarified by her relation to the other town healer, the doctor. The narrator tells us that “the village doctor and this learned herbalist were upon the best of terms” (p. 15). And when a child is very sick, Mrs. Todd cautions the parent, “you send right after the doctor if she ain’t better in half an hour” (p. 67). Later she describes her working relationship with the doctor: “He’s got too many long routes now to stop to ’tend to all his door patients, especially them that takes pleasure in talkin’ themselves over. The doctor and me have got to be kind of partners” (p. 81). Clearly, Almira Todd is in the business of well-patient care, preventive medicine, and dealing with minor complaints. She knows her limitations and respects the work of the local doctor, as Jewett respected her own father’s medical work, especially with seriously ill patients.

Because they search out plants and harvest their own herbs, Jewett’s healers understand the plants’ real curative powers; but they also respect

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their often mysterious potency and strange links with the past. For example, in Mrs. Todd’s garden:

There were some strange and pungent odors that roused a dim sense and remembrance of something in the forgotten past. Some of these might once have belonged to sacred and mystic rites, and have had some occult knowledge handed with them down the centuries; but now they pertained only to humble compounds brewed at intervals with molasses or vinegar or spirits in a small cauldron on Mrs. Todd’s kitchen stove. They were dispensed to suffering neighbors, who usually came at night as if by stealth. (p. 14)

Jewett’s diction here associates the herbs with witchcraft and reminds us that early European witches were healers and priestesses, not dealers in “evil magic” as their Christian conquerors taught. She also suggests that Mrs. Todd may have inherited some of this potent magic: “It seemed sometimes as if love and hate and jealousy and adverse winds at sea might also find their proper remedies among the curious wild-looking plants in Mrs. Todd’s garden” (p. 15).

Although she suggests mystery, Jewett also describes these remedies as plain and ordinary potions brewed on a kitchen stove. Some of her herbs, which continue to be used today, include mullein, which acted therapeutically for the lungs by controlling consumptive coughing. It was also used as a sedative and was helpful to treat hemorrhoids and diarrhea. Pennyroyal, which was abundant on the Maine coast, was hung in sleeping rooms as an air freshener and disinfectant; it is also considered beneficial for menstrual cramps. Camomile, with its relaxing qualities, was a delicacy saved for very special occasions, useful either to calm anxiety or to enhance pleasure. All of these herbs in Jewett’s stories were dispensed sparingly, and some were even accompanied by whispered instructions. Because herbalists were often visited by women seeking abortions, the whispered directions may indicate that an abortifacient was the drug prescribed.

These herbalists reserved their scorn for those who used herbs mistakenly or improvidently. Mrs. Goodsoe explains that brewing some herbs as tea may dilute their strength and healing properties, and using herb teas constantly may build resistance when the herb is needed for a real illness. The narrator of the story asks her, “Do you think it did much good when everybody brewed a cracked quart mug of herb-tea?” Mrs. Goodsoe’s answer is a clear guide for her young learner: “I’ve always lifted my voice against the practice, far’s I could, an’ I won’t deal out none o’ the herbs I save for no such nonsense” (p. 222). For further emphasis, Mrs. Goodsoe tells her listener that her mother used to laugh at neighbors who were always brewing tea with medicinal herbs, “sick or well.” While the practice “never done ’em a mite of harm” when well, Mrs. Goodsoe remembers a great deal of “quawkin’ . . . when they was indulged with a real case of sickness” (p. 222).

Mrs. Goodsoe also teaches her apprentice that it is important to know and use local herbs. Her mother, she says, “always used to maintain
that folks was meant to be doctored with the stuff that grew right about 'em; 'twas sufficient and so ordered" (p. 222). In this passage Mrs. Goodsoe states a simple healing principle for her apprentice: a life in tune with the rhythms of one's environment is likely to be a healthy one. She also implies a major premise of which she is certain city doctors are unaware—that the healer's task is to facilitate natural processes and to provide the necessary linkage to nature by choosing the proper herbs and giving appropriate counsel in their use. This is in contrast to what is taught in the city medical schools, as Mrs. Goodsoe comments scathingly: "There! I can tell you there's win'rows o' young doctors, bilin' over with book-larnin', that is truly ignorant of what to do for the sick, or how to p'int out those paths that well people foller toward sickness. Book-fools I call 'em, them young men, an' some on 'em never'll live to know much better, if they git to be Methuselahs" (p. 221).

Mrs. Goodsoe credits her mother with teaching her the exceptional lore she uses in her practice. "Mother," she says, "really did sense the use of herbs and roots. I never see anybody that come up to her. She was a meek-looking woman, but very understandin' mother was ... [and] I don't hold a candle to her" (p. 221). Here as elsewhere, Mrs. Goodsoe tells the reader that hers is a healing art based on secrets and knowledge handed down in an oral and matrilineal tradition. In this story, the narrator's meeting with Mrs. Goodsoe on a late August afternoon continues the oral tradition.

The young narrator of "The Courting of Sister Wisby" feels called ("tempted") to take her walk in the first place, and she begins a process of discovery as she moves along by herself. In this late summer, she notices that "Every living thing grows suddenly cheerful and strong; it is only when you catch sight of a horror-stricken little maple in swampy soil—a little maple that has second sight and foreknowledge of coming disaster to her race—only then does a distrust of autumn's friendliness dim your joyful satisfaction" (p. 217). The narrator's afternoon walk stirs curiosity about winter survival, and she spots a "belated bobolink [and] wished [to] ask him a few questions" (p. 218). Already she realizes that appearances can be deceiving. The summer sun is still on the Maine hills, and most living things retain their summer cheer, but one little maple, whose roots in damp, swampy soil pick up the evening chill, foretells winter to come, the "coming disaster to her race" (p. 217). What questions does the narrator have for the bobolink? Would she ask what winter will bring or how one can guard against cold and chill and illnesses? We learn later that she also wonders how many winters Mrs. Goodsoe will survive.

As she walks, she reaches a safe distance from the village, "far enough" to allow some real communion with her natural surroundings, but not yet as far as she needs to go for conclusive answers: "Still the high pasture land grew more and more enticing." Finally she arrives at
the pasture that had “sent an [earlier] invisible messenger,” and she
invites the reader to share “the winter provisions [she] harvested that
day” (p. 219). In the high pasture, Mrs. Goodsoe greets her with
complete foreknowledge of her arrival. “I’ve been thinking o’ you these
twenty times since I come out o’ the house. I begin to believe you must
ha’ forgot me at last” (p. 220). We are immediately assured that Mrs.
Goodsoe, like the little maple tree, also has foreknowledge of winter;
for she is gathering mulleins to make cough syrups. Now the narrator’s
learning begins in earnest—not merely about the healthful uses of
pennyroyal, mullein and goldthread but also about preservation of
mental health and spiritual vitality.

Mrs. Goodsoe imparts the larger truths in two stories: the first, of a
young widow who lost all three of her children to scarlet fever in one
week’s time. Because she would not cry, the neighbors feared for her
sanity; and Mrs. Goodsoe’s mother sent for the local fiddler. His sweet
and mournful song caused the young woman to “come right over an’
... into mother’s lap and there she cried herself into a blessed sleep”
(p. 225). Through this first story the apprentice learns that the key to the
healer’s success is a kind of empathy with the sufferer, a sympathy so
deep that she is able to settle at once on the appropriate “local” cure.4

Mrs. Goodsoe’s second story concerns decisions about marrying.
Sister Wisby, so this story goes, chose Deacon Brimblecom to live with
as a prospective mate. Later she kicked him out because he did not live
up to her expectations. (Perhaps he drank too much as his nickname,
“Deacon Brimfull,” implies.) At any rate, she had not yet married him,
so there were no legal entanglements. Still later, when faced with the
spring plowing, Lizzy Wisby invited the Deacon back; they married and
“got along as well as most folks” (p. 232). Sister Wisby was care­
ful, however, to leave her land and money not to the Deacon but to his
daughter, who was a loyal and reliable friend. This story within a story
suggests to the narrator that a strong woman had better be careful either
to choose a man who can tolerate her strength or not to marry at all.

The final lesson of the day concerns aging and death. In answer to the
narrator’s unspoken question about her teacher’s death, Mrs. Goodsoe
promises to plant the pits of the peaches they have shared and to be
around in four years when the peach tree will bear. She implies that
after that the narrator must begin to think about her own adulthood and
healing potential without the presence of her mentor. As a provision for
the encroaching winter, the narrator is “kindly measured for a pair of
mittens” (p. 233). All of these gifts are provisions for the time when she
will no longer have her good friend’s presence.

Taken together, the lessons of that August day underscore Jewett’s

4. Marcia Folsom explores the term “empathic style” to describe Jewett’s fiction in “‘Tact is a Kind
of Mind-Reading’: Empathic Style in Sarah Orne Jewett’s Country of the Pointed Firs,” Colby Library
Quarterly, XVIII, 1 (March 1982).
insistence that good health is a composite of spiritual, mental and physical components. And like her predecessor, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Jewett feels that women are particularly well suited to provide this kind of "holistic" health care. All of the female healers have the capacity for both physical and spiritual healing, and in these skills they usually surpass both established ministers and professional physicians. Jewett's lessons for ministers are not too different from those she wishes the country doctor to learn. In "Miss Manning's Minister," the author tells us that, like the country doctor, the wise minister should not "expect too much . . . from [himself] or other people." The "only chance of success [is] to put yourself as nearly as possible into your parishioners' places; for it [is] next to impossible that they should always see life from your standpoint" (p. 82). Jewett adds that most "zealous young men took little note of this" (p. 82). In fact, for this minister, a crippling stroke and Miss Manning's nursing are necessary to humanize him to meet the community's and Sarah Jewett's standards.

Jewett's most devastating critique of the contemporary New England ministry occurs in her accounts of the doings of the Reverend Dimmick in The Country of the Pointed Firs. From the first, Mr. Dimmick has little to recommend him. He is young, inexperienced, a Calvinist and, perhaps worst of all, from an inland background. Almira Todd summarizes his faults in a conversation with her friend Susan Fosdick: "Parson Dimmick was a vague person, well meanin', but very numb in his feelin's." "I do think they ought not to settle them landlocked folks in parishes where they're liable to be on water," says Susan. Mrs. Todd adds kindly, "Well, there's a difference in gifts. Mr. Dimmick was not without light." But crusty Susan Fosdick concludes that if he has any light at all, it must be the dim "light of the moon" (p. 66).

In this novel, the story of "poor" Joanna Todd allows Jewett to crystallize her opposition to Calvinism and to present spiritual alternatives. When Joanna was a young woman she had been disappointed in love and, in her despair, had committed the unpardonable sin of blaspheming God. Raised amidst Calvinist doctrines of humiliation and self-punishment, she elected to spend the rest of her life doing penance on deserted Shell Heap Island. After she had been on the island for a time, her cousin Almira Todd and the Reverend Mr. Dimmick paid her a call. On the voyage out, it became clear that Almira was in charge. The minister nearly capsized the boat because he insisted on fastening down the main sheet. Mrs. Todd takes up the story:

"There was a fresh breeze, an' he went on talking rather high flown. . . . All of a sudden there come up a gust, and he give a screech and stood right up and called for help. . . . I knocked him right over . . . getting by to catch hold of the sheet an' untie it. He wasn't but a little man; I helped him right up after the squall passed, and made a handsome apology to him, but he did act kind o' offended." (p. 66)

On the island, the minister does no better as pastor than he had as a sailor. He seems embarrassed to talk to Joanna, and when he asks her "if she felt to enjoy religion in her present situation," she responds that she "must be excused from answering." Almira wishes "'e might have seen the little old Bible a-layin' on the shelf close by him, an'... lay his hand on it, an' read somethin' kind an' fatherly 'stead of accusin' her." But the minister persists in his errors and reads a prayer about the awful might of God. Mrs. Todd finds this a ridiculous verse to read to a person who "spent the... cold winter all alone on Shell Heap Island." In fact, Almira is so provoked that she "opened [her] eyes and stared right at him" (p. 69).

Finally the minister is sent out to collect shells, and Almira Todd can administer the healing balm which brought her there: "'When Joanna returned from the door, an' I could see that man's stupid back departin' among the wild rose bushes, I just ran to her an' caught her in my arms. ... I hugged her tight, just as if she was a child’" (p. 78). Although Joanna refuses to give up her penance on the island, she is comforted by Almira. For the future, Almira plans to send another minister, her own mother, Mrs. Blackett, because "the love in mother's heart would warm her, an' she might be able to advise." And finally, it is only Mrs. Blackett's ministry which Joanna wants. She tells Almira, "'If I should be sick [your mother] mustn't wish I could get well, but I want her to be the one to come’" (p. 70).

Here and elsewhere, Jewett's criticism of nineteenth-century religion is based on her own Swedenborgian beliefs. The eighteenth-century Swedish philosopher and theologian, Emmanuel Swedenborg, taught that "love and wisdom, united in use, constitute [a] personal God... The human individual is the highest end of creation [and] human happiness to eternity in heaven is the ultimate object of all divine action." In this scheme, humans control their own destiny, and a life which conforms to divine order is one of charity and service to others. Swedenborg's world is made up of natural and spiritual components which are really shifting planes of one unified reality. Thus one may pass briefly from the real world into the spirit world as Mrs. Todd does in the story, "The Foreigner," when she communicates with the ghost of her dying friend's mother. Jewett's belief in communication with the dead explains Captain Littlepage's strange story of a world beyond this where spirits wait. Among women Jewett feels that the capacity to "cross over" is particularly strong. In the story, "Miss Tempy's Watchers," for example, the dead woman's spirit lingers long enough after her death to have a positive effect on the relationship between her two old friends. Swedenborgian affinity between natural and spiritual

worlds lets the narrator of "The Courting of Sister Wisby" sympathize with a little maple tree or try to communicate with a bobolink. This talent also allows Almira Todd to understand trees and plants and explains in part her empathy with other human beings. Throughout Jewett's work, the most successful healers are those who are best able to bridge gaps between the physical and spiritual worlds.

Jewett recognizes that her strong women healers, Mrs. Todd, Mrs. Goodsoe, and Mrs. Blackett, cannot live forever. In fact, we witness the funeral of another renowned Dunnet Landing herbalist, Mrs. Beggs, in an early chapter of The Country of the Pointed Firs. However, Jewett suggests that their likely successors are the next generation's young women. In A Country Doctor, the healing legacy devolves upon Nan Prince, an orphan raised by her grandmother and by Oldfields' country doctor. She has chosen a career in medicine but she has first to give up the love of a worthy young man and the possibility of children of her own. She makes the sacrifice willingly, however, because she sees her goal in Swedenborgian terms as both her duty and her salvation. Nan explains the situation to her rejected lover: "I don't know why God should have made me a doctor, so many other things have seemed fitter for women; but I see the blessedness of such a useful life more and more every year, and I am very thankful for such a trust . . . . It isn't for us to choose again, or wonder and dispute, but just work in our own places, and leave the rest to God" (p. 327). Because she understands holistic healing with a missionary zeal, Nan will make an ideal doctor and a fitting descendent of Almira Todd. In Jewett's longest passage on the subject, Nan describes the special talents of the future healer:

[She] knew better and better that it is resource, and bravery, and being able to think for one's self, that makes a physician worth anything . . . . [and] there is something needed beside even skill and experience; every student of medicine should be fitted by nature with a power of insight, a gift for his business, for knowing what is the right thing to do, and the right time and way to do it; [he] must have this God-given power in his own nature of using and discovering the resources of medicine without constant reliance upon the books or the fashion . . . . the great doctor works for the body's health, and tries to keep human beings free from the failures that come from neglect and ignorance, and ready to be the soul's instrument of action and service in this world. (pp. 184-85)

The attributes which make Nan the practitioner of the future include her sex, her willingness to listen to the wisdom of her local community, her humility before nature and her belief in the human spirit. With these attributes, Nan will never permit a dichotomy between body and spirit in her work as a healer.

Because she is a realist, Jewett posits a future with certain limitations for her younger women healers. In the first place, they do not marry. We've seen that the narrator of "The Courting of Sister Wisby" is warned away from marriage by the central story. In Pointed Firs, Almira Todd's friend and lodger is a middle-aged woman with no plans
for marriage; and Nan Prince has given up her marriage prospects in order to be true to herself and to follow the healing arts. These women will impart their knowledge, as have their mentors, to adopted daughters, or younger friends, but not to their own offspring. Jewett’s women stand in contrast to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s earlier heroines. Influenced by mid-century optimism, Stowe had imagined a revolutionary future in which women’s spiritual healing and teaching would dominate. Her women healers would marry and give birth to new generations of men and women who would live in relative equality and Christian sisterhood and brotherhood.8 Jewett, however, reflects 1880’s and 1890’s realities for women. They were beginning to find useful, fulfilling professions in social work, medicine, journalism and writing; but venturing into these formerly male spheres meant denying heterosexual love, marriage and child-rearing. Of course this very denial opened whole new vistas of female friendships and lesbian relationships, which were often more satisfying than Victorian marriages. Jewett’s young women therefore stand at the junction between two centuries; the past is fast fading and the future uncertain.

Also poised between two worlds, Jewett’s style is elegiac. In a recent article, Marcia Folsom contends that Jewett’s narrators’ complete identification with characters from the past precludes ironic style and its possibilities for change. Instead, she says, Jewett’s “empathic style allows full expression to what is, but implies stasis . . . [and] tends away from action, change and the future.”9 While I agree that Jewett’s style is most often elegiac, I believe that she continues to hold out hope that her healing vision will have future relevance. Her valued traditions will remain alive in two ways. In the first place, they will live on in the secluded “islanded” places of our lives. Jewett tells us that “in the life of each of us . . . there is a place remote and islanded, and given to endless regret or secret happiness” (p. 75). Thus the narrator of Pointed Firs travels to Shell Heap Island, and there, as had “countless other pilgrims,” she understands not only the sacred Indian past but also the meaning of a more recent holy woman’s tenure on that island. In these isolated places, Jewett feels the positive lessons of the past will live on and can still influence future generations who take the time to seek them out.

In addition, the “islanded” repositories of true healing may send ambassadors to the “busy mainland.” Jewett’s women writers and doctors will, she proposes, carry the word to yet another generation. Nan Prince will practice medicine in rural Oldfields but, like her mentor Dr. Leslie, she will also teach young doctors and periodically visit city-centers of medical learning like Boston. Having a background of country lore

from her local herbalist, she will also learn scientific medicine from city-trained doctors and their books. She thus provides an important reconciliation between old and new healing practices.

In her suggestion that Nan Prince would indeed reconcile science and art in medicine, Jewett is almost forty years ahead of accepted medical practice. In the 1880's and 1890's, science and professionalism were beginning to dominate American medicine. All "irregular" medical practitioners, especially local herbalists and midwives, were being discredited by scientific studies culminating in the devastating Flexner report of 1911. The following years were "days of science" in Boston medicine, and not until 1927 were the lost arts of the healer remembered again. In that year Dr. Francis Peabody gave the lecture on medical ethics at Harvard Medical School. He began by stating, "the secret of patient care is in caring for the patient." He went on to say that "there is no more contradiction between the science of medicine and the art of medicine than between the science of aeronautics and the art of flying."

Although Peabody called for a reconciliation between science and the healing arts that is reminiscent of Jewett's prescription for future healers in 1884, he probably did not realize that this was a rediscovery of a centuries-old tradition. Nor was he advocating a look backward for models among nineteenth-century holistic healers like Almira Todd or Nan Prince. In fact, in spite of her advanced ideas, Nan Prince could never have attended Harvard Medical School, which did not admit women until 1945. Still, Peabody's speech is useful for us because it proves a point made earlier—that Jewett's suggested combination of art and science in medicine was indeed advanced for its time. It was also rather too visionary for the pragmatic medical profession of the early twentieth century and even too revolutionary for today's medical care.

Fortunately, Jewett does not attach all of her future hopes to a reconciliation between rural and city medicine. She makes her final point about healing in her last novel, and it concerns writers not doctors. In The Country of the Pointed Firs the narrator is a writer who learns lessons of empathy, spirituality and healing from Almira Todd. Like Jewett herself, this woman spends at least half the year in the city, and her "islanded" knowledge travels with her. Of course, also like Jewett, she needs to return frequently to Maine for inspiration and renewed strength, which she absorbs from the people and the evergreen land itself. Bound for the city by boat at summer's end, she looks back at the


coastal village and sees its capacity for renewal in its imperviousness to approaching winter: "The small outer islands of the bay were covered among the ledges with turf that looked as fresh as the early grass. . . . It looked like the beginning of summer ashore, though the sheep, round and warm in their winter wool, betrayed the season of the year as they went feeding along the slopes in the low afternoon sunshine" (p. 160). Sarah Jewett’s final message to the future is that the communities of women in her fiction are places of rebirth and renewal and at the same time transmitters of healing arts to the world beyond. Because in this novel her last ambassador is indeed a woman writer, Jewett may be suggesting that her fiction itself is a true healing art of the future.

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