THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATURE AND CHARACTER
IN THE WORKS OF SARAH ORNE JEWETT

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by
Carolyn Stines Davies, B.S.
The Ohio State University
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Approved by

[Signature]
Advisor
Department of English
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INTRODUCTION

Born in South Berwick, Maine, in 1849, Sarah Orne Jewett was reared in the atmosphere of a declining, rural seaport. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century this seaport, like other Maine ports, was active and prosperous. At this time shipbuilding was an important trade, which made use of both the land and the sea, for the raw materials came from the inland forests while the route for shipping was the sea. Most of the occupations of the area depended on this trade. Many men were sailors whose families often accompanied them on voyages around the world. This connection with foreign ports had its influence on a port such as South Berwick, for it brought a type of cosmopolitanism to the area. Thus, the way of life of which Miss Jewett heard stories when she was young was of an active and vigorous nature, and in these tales the physical presence of the sea and the land played an important role.

The sea and the land brought the prosperity, but they also brought the decline. By 1835 a gradual decline had begun, one which Perry Westbrook attributes to a combination of the following causes: (1) the British Blockade of 1812-1813, which reduced trade; (2) the loss of the whale fishery as coal oil
replaced whale oil; (3) the depletion of the forests on which shipbuilding depended; (4) the introduction of the railroad, making it easier to stop only at large ports; (5) the obsolescence of the sailing vessel for transoceanic commerce.¹

By the 1870's this decline had reduced these once prosperous seaports to mere fishing villages. Miss Jewett, writing in the last three decades of the century, had witnessed this change; however, she preferred to look back to the South Berwick of her childhood and to see only the early decline. Accurately recording its way of life and the physical surroundings as she remembered them, she presents a personal view of the decaying grandeur of the Maine coastal region in her works.

A major force in the way of life in this region of which Miss Jewett writes is that of physical nature, for it is nature that provides the means of livelihood for the villagers. Because of its importance, it is a force that must be dealt with, and Miss Jewett has the ability to record in her writings the significance of the role of nature in the lives of the Maine inhabitants.

To write of nature with such sensitivity and awareness suggests an appreciation of the external world. Her love and understanding of nature she attributes to her childhood experiences. Most significant seems to be her relationship with her father, the local doctor. A sickly child, Miss Jewett
was often given permission by her father to accompany him on
his rounds instead of attending school, for he believed she
would grow healthier in the out-of-doors.

'The joy of what she learned on these truant
trips more than compensated for the prickings
of her New England conscience. As they drove
over rutted roads to seacoast shacks and inland
farmhouses he pointed out with the skill of a
botanist and zoologist the wonders of nature.
Before long the child had absorbed every detail
of plant and animal life within the circumfer-
ence of their travels. 'Now, as I write my
sketches of country life, I remember again and
again the wise things he said, and the sights
he made me see.'

She further expressed her fondness for her father and the
nature lessons he gave her when she dedicated Country By-Ways
to him in 1881.

It is, in part at least, these early lessons about nature
that account for Miss Jewett's excellent descriptions of nature
and her subtle uses of the physical world as a technique in
her fiction. Her treatment of the theme of nature is, I believe,
one of her chief merits as a writer. She has the ability to
portray quite realistically the particular sights, smells, and
sounds of the Maine coastal area and has been able to grasp the
atmosphere that the rocky land, the sea, and the climate have
on the life along the coast. Her descriptions and references
to nature have a freshness and a vitality, for she possesses the
artistic technique to make her reader feel what she describes
as she herself felt it.

Because Miss Jewett's use of nature is such a dominant
feature of her writing and because no single study has been made
in depth on this phase of her work, the subject of this study is her treatment of nature.

The paper will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with Miss Jewett's manner in which she treats nature from the point of view of the artist and the "social historian." As an artist she describes the various phases of the natural surroundings -- the shoreline, the farm land, the seasons, the climate. When all of her descriptions are considered together in a composite, a mural of the Maine coast is the result. I intend to record some of her descriptions, which will reveal the accuracy and fineness of detail in her "verbal" portraits. As a "social historian" Miss Jewett carefully records the influence of the physical world on the character of these Maine residents. Nature is a dominant influence on the physical, moral, and spiritual characteristics of these people, and I will discuss this influence in the second half of the chapter.

Chapter two is interpretive, for it treats Miss Jewett's uses of nature as a technique in her writings. Her methods include theme, analogy, and symbol, making her use of nature quite varied.

In the final chapter of this study is a shift from an internal analysis of Miss Jewett's writings to an evaluation of her position as a nineteenth century writer. Because her
treatment of nature reflects the influence of such writers as Wordsworth, Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne, I will discuss her relation to these men. As she is often categorized in American literature as a local colorist, she is considered in relation to this school. Also, Miss Jewett's use of nature will be compared to such writers as Mary Wilkins Freeman and Stephen Crane.

The purpose of this study is, then, to suggest that while Miss Jewett is ranked as a minor figure in American literature, her position as a "nature writer" is significant, for she looks backward to an earlier romanticism and points forward to a new realism.
Footnotes: Introduction


3. Westbrook, p. 58.
CHAPTER I

Portrayal of Nature

Descriptions of Nature

"In both her short and her long narratives her achievement was to paint imperishably the decaying grandeur of New England, symbolized in the towns, once great seaports, which live on memories of former splendor."¹ As Miss Jewett recalled the days of her childhood, she selected those features that she wished to portray; then she depicted the life and setting of coastal Maine for her reader, who sees this world through the eyes and emotions of the author.

Viewing the natural surroundings through Miss Jewett's eyes is not, however, to see a narrow view, for she displays a panoramic mural through her writings. Her descriptions are so vivid and picturesque that they are deserving of note for their own sake. The two general areas of Miss Jewett's settings are the shoreline and the inland regions. Included in the first are the village, the rocky and pine-covered shore, the sea, the lighthouse, and the near-by islands. The latter includes the farms, the fields, the forests, and the winding dirt roads. Inland in this setting refers to an area extending
inward rarely more than several miles from the sea. Providing continuity between the country and the shore is the general factor of the weather, for it is a most important aspect of the physical world of the coast.

That Miss Jewett's descriptions of nature are very accurate is suggested by the fact that often her fictional world was mistaken for the actual coastal area. When asked to reveal the location of Dunnett Landing, Miss Jewett explained that it was not any "real harbor" or "landing"; it was just "along shore." Also in the "Preface" to the first edition of Deephaven, she explained that "Deephaven was not to be found on the map of New England under any other name...."\(^2\) This accuracy of description is one reason that Sarah Orne Jewett is considered among the local colorists; one requirement was that the nature references "bear an unmistakable note of authenticity."\(^3\) Considering, then, a composite view of her settings will best illustrate how graphic Miss Jewett's nature passages are.

Appealing to the visual sense, she describes common sights that one would see along the shore. She pictures the high and low tides in Deephaven and includes fine points of detail which add to the visual image: "The tide was coming in, and the spray dashed higher and higher."\(^4\) "It was low tide; the wind had risen a little, and the heavy salt air blew toward us from the wet brown ledges in the rocky harbor " (p. 100). She continues
her descriptions of the sea: "...further down the shore the
land rose more and more, and at last we stood at the ledge of
the highest rocks of all and looked far down at the sea,
dashing its white spray high over the ledges..." (p. 204).
Including shadow, color and detail, she describes a panoramic
view in *The Country of the Pointed Firs:*

The tide was in, the side harbor was surrounded
by its dark woods, and the small wooden houses
stood as near as they could get to the landing...
The gray ledges of the rocky shore were well
covered with sod in most places, the pasture
bayberry and wild roses grew thick among them.
I could see the higher inland country and the
scattered farms.5

A common sight in Miss Jewett's shore descriptions is the
sea gulls, for they are so much a part of the natural scene.
In *Deephaven* she describes the motions of the shore birds:
"Two gulls were swinging lazily to and fro; there was a flock
of sandpipers down by the water's edge..." (p. 100). Likewise,
she refers to the gulls in *The Country of the Pointed Firs:*
"...the busy gulls agree and turn, and sway together down the
long slopes of air, then separate hastily and plunge into
the wave" (p. 212).

Writing in *Deephaven* of an evening by the shore, Miss Jewett
has captured the mood and stillness of the scene by her selec-
tion of common sights: "...some late sea birds would fly inland...
the marsh fog would show faintly white...we should see the
lighthouse lamp shine out over the water, and the great sea
would move and speak to us lazily in its idle, high-tide sleep" (p. 254).

Miss Jewett is just as accurate when she is writing for the
other senses, hearing and smell, for she makes the sounds of
the seacoast accessible to the reader, as are these recorded in
The Country of the Pointed Firs: "...there came a sound of distant
voices; gay voices and laughter from a pleasure-boat that was
going seaward..." (p. 132) or "the plash of the water could be
heard faintly..." (p. 163). In these same sketches she also
records the poignant odors of the sea coast: "the world was
filled with a fragrance of fir-balsam and the faintest flavor
of seaweed from the ledges..." (p. 143). The damp air and the
freshness that often permeate the coastal regions are smells
described in A Marsh Island: "the salt breeze that came in
from the sea as the sun grew low sent a delicious freshness
through the house" and "the damp sea air was flavored with [the
fragrance of the willow] and that of the newly mown marshes."6

Miss Jewett's descriptions of the inland region are just
as detailed and as colorful as those of the shore. Again,
color and shade are important, and the names of the various
plants and trees are given, adding to the realism of the scene.
Sights from a typical country road recounted in these passages,
the first from Deephaven and the second from The Country of the
Pointed Firs, reveal Miss Jewett's attention to details: "...we passed straggling thickets of upland sumach, leafless, and
holding their ungainly spikes of red berries..." (p. 209) and "the woods stood close to the road on the right; on the left were narrow fields and pastures where there were as many acres of spruces and pines as there were acres of bay and juniper and huckleberry, with a little turf between" (p. 151).

Being familiar with this coastal area, Miss Jewett notes, in the same series of sketches, that even in the inland area the sea is never very far away: "the grove...was a thick growth of dark pines and firs with an occasional maple or oak...on three sides we could see the water, shining behind the tree-trunks, and feel the cool salt breeze that began to come up with the tide..." (p. 164). To make the sights of the inland area complete, she often includes references to the animals as she does in this one from *Deephaven*: "we saw a sleepy little owl muffled up on the dead branch of a pine-tree; we saw a rabbit cross the road and disappear in a clump of juniper, and squirrels run up and down trees and along the stone-walls..." (pp. 208-209).

Presented with similar vividness are the sounds and smells of the inland area. This passage from *Deephaven* records the memorable smells in the woods after a rain:

> We went for a walk through some pine woods, which were beautiful after the rain; the mosses and lichens which had been dried up were all freshened and blooming out in the dampness. The smell of the wet pitch-pines was unusually sweet" (p. 167).

The most common sounds inland in the evening are those of the cricket and the loon to which Miss Jewett often refers as in this
quotation from *A Marsh Island*: "the crickets...kept up a ceaseless chirping about the house and the sober exclamations of the lonely seabird in the lowland..." (p. 41) were heard.

Just as she has given an accurate picture of the Maine coast in her many descriptive passages, Miss Jewett presents a full account of the changing seasons of the region. As she describes each season, she records a clear image of the visual scene as well as the atmosphere created by the weather. The mood of mid-summer is clearly present in this passage from *The Country of the Pointed Firs*: "the early morning breeze was still blowing, and the warm, sunshiny air was of some ethereal northern sort...it was a glorious day early in July, with a clear, high sky; there were no clouds, there was no noise of the sea" (p. 142). Miss Jewett's sensitivity to the area around her is seen in her detailed account of the changes as the months pass. In the same series of sketches she describes August:

    The month was August, and I had seen the color of the island change from the fresh green of June to a sunburnt brown that made them look like stone, except where the dark green of the spruces and fir balsam kept the tint that even winter storms might deepen, but not fade" (p. 129).

As September appears she recounts its beauties in *A Marsh Island*:

September came early...the country was brilliant with autumn tints...the water was low in the creeks and the black mud at the sides...made a pleasant framing" (p. 107). In the same story she describes the dreary, dead atmosphere of winter:
The meadows...in winter look so dead and desolate, with great black cracks in the ice, like scars...the leaves had fallen off all the trees except the oaks, which make in cold weather one of the dreariest sounds one ever hears" (p. 183).

Descriptions of two prevalent phenomena of coastal weather, fog and storms, add to Miss Jewett's total picture of the weather. The growing brightness is a part of this scene from Deephaven:
"...there was a slight fog over the sea, lifting fast, as the sun was coming up, and the brownish sails disappeared in the mist...when the sun had risen, everything looked much the same as usual..." (p. 95). Also in Deephaven Miss Jewett's recollection of the New England storm, the nor'easter, is quite accurate and striking:

The weather was wet and dreary...there was a magnificent storm, and we went every day along the shore in the wind and rain for a mile or two to see the furious great breakers come plunging in against the rocks...such a wild stormy sea...the rage of it was awful, and the whole harbor was white with foam...the wind had blown northeast steadily for days" (pp. 240-241).
Influences of Nature

Richard Cary, in his book, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, states that "the power of nature to influence human lives physically, morally, and spiritually is a theme twining through four of Miss Jewett's novels, almost all of her sketches, and a majority of her short stories."* While her descriptions of the physical world of nature are, as I have suggested in the previous pages, worthy of merit for their own sake, her ability to transfuse "the physical with the ethical and spiritual properties" is a greater achievement.* These moral and spiritual influences that physical nature has on the inhabitants of the Maine coast are the subject of this section of Chapter I; the techniques with which Miss Jewett accomplishes this transfusion are the topic of the next chapter.

Nature has its influence on the physical lives of these Maine inhabitants. Making a living from the sea or the rocky land is not an easy job as nature seems to resent man's claims to her regions. The old mariners of the coast have spent their lives at sea and have come to know it better than the land. Quite self-contained, these old fishermen have the hard complexions, the bent shoulders, and leathery skin that years of wind, sun, and work have given them. As stated in *The Country*
of the Pointed Firs is this effect: "at sea there is nothing to be seen close by, and this has its counterpart in a sailor's character, in the large and brave and patient traits that are developed, the hopeful pleasantness that one loves so in a seafarer" (p. 76). Even their way of living in old age is from the sea, for their way of lives involves baiting trawls, mending nets, repairing lobster pots, and fishing. That the sea has claimed the lives of many of their companions and that the storm and the cold have been fought often are reasons for the respect these men feel for the sea. They do not accept it as commonplace; rather, "they have an awe of the sea and of its mysteries, and of what it hides away from us."

The sea is, however, more profitable living than the land, which is poor and produces little. "The land alone was not enough to live upon in that stony region; it belonged by right to the forest, and to the forest it fast returned." In this area nature places many hardships on the people who are usually poor and discouraged. Typical of the poverty is a family described in Deephaven who live in this rural area. Drink and illness kill the parents, leaving the children to be separated from each other as they go to make-shift homes. Similar in tragic effect is the story of Mrs. Martin in The Country of the Pointed Firs. A widow living alone on her poor land, she tries to escape her situation by living in a delusion that she is the twin of Queen Victoria.
It seems that those who try to control nature often suffer, while those who adapt to their surroundings succeed. In the series of sketches mentioned above is the episode of Esther Hight who did adjust, for she began to raise sheep on her farm land which had previously only brought a mortgage. However, as the new industry took hold, the farm prospered. In general, all of these individuals living in the rural area seem to possess the characteristics of patience and fortitude, both of which are necessary to meet the rigors of the inland area.

Another way of life which nature makes necessary is that of isolation. The sea widowed many women, leaving them to lonely existences; the land would not support many farms, so the distance from one to another limited communication. Miss Jewett expresses this effect of rural life on a woman, Cynthia West: "poor Cynthia! I saw at first that she was one of the faded-looking country-women who have a hard time, and who, if they had grown up in the midst of a more luxurious way of living, would have been frail and delicate and refined, and entirely ladylike."\textsuperscript{11} Weather also plays an important role in the isolation that these people know. Miss Jewett at one time stresses the isolation winter brings: "they did not expect to see one another again very soon... the difficulty of getting from place to place, especially in winter when boats were laid up, gave double value to any occasion which could bring [a group] together."\textsuperscript{12} Then she explains the strength of the New England character to meet the elements:
Yet winter is the leisure time of country people, and it is then, in spite of the frequent misery of the weather, that their social pleasures come into stunted bloom...[she continues] Life is no surprise on the banks of the fertile old Nile, it could not help being, but the spirit of the North seems destructive; life exists in spite of it....

Thus, the influence of the physical elements on the lives of these Maine residents was a rugged and unfriendly one. To exist in this area was a constant struggle against the forces of nature, the result of which was a rather hearty group of people. Miss Jewett recognizes this conflict and expresses it in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*:

> There was a vigor of growth, a persistence and savagery about the sturdy little trees that put weak human nature at complete defiance; one felt a sudden pity for the men and women who had been worsted after a long fight in that lonely place; one felt a sudden fear of the unconquerable immediate forces of Nature, as in the irresistible moment of a thunderstorm" (pp. 307-308).

According to Miss Jewett's view of the nature-man relationship, this struggle and man's ultimate loss are to be expected as a phase of the organization of living things. In "October Ride" she expresses a part of her philosophy. Paramount to all of Miss Jewett's beliefs is that God is in control of all life and that he is behind the plan of the universe. She states this belief: "there can be no confusion to God in this wonderful world...it is only God who can plan and order it all." From this position she tends to justify the good and the evil as part of the ultimate plan. This idea is an important factor in her treatment of nature and will be further examined in the concluding chapter of this study.
A further look into this sketch reveals several other beliefs held by Miss Jewett. In the physical relationship between man and nature, she envisions a type of interrelated system in which man claims a portion of nature for himself during his lifetime; after his death nature reclaims her possessions. She explains this eternal cycle in these words:

The old patient, sublime forces were there at work in their appointed way, but perhaps by and by, when the apple-trees are gone and the cellar is only a rough hollow in the woods, some one will again set aside these forces that have worked unhindered, and will bring this corner of the world into a new use and shape. What if we could stop or change forever the working of these powers! But Nature repossesses herself surely of what we so boldly claim: (p. 102).

Living in such close proximity with nature lends more than just this physical influence, however. From nature man also derives an ethical and spiritual influence if he is close enough to the source. In her "Preface" to the 1893 edition of Deephaven, she states that "human nature is the same the world over, provincial and rustic influences must ever produce much the same effect upon character...."15 By this statement Miss Jewett implies that this relationship between man and nature is of universal application, and that these influences are general forces. Therefore, her references to these influences on her characters are both specific ones for her Maine residents and general truths about men living close to nature.

Nature, according to Miss Jewett, is an integral part of the lives of men as a phase of God's plan. Again referring to
her ideas in "An October Ride" she states the closeness of man and nature in these terms: "I am a part of one great existence which is called nature. The life in me is a bit of all life, and where I am happiest is where I find that which is next of kin to me, in friends, or trees, or hills, or seas, or beside a flower..." (p. 101). She sees nature as an eternal source from which man may borrow during his life. From this source he may also draw moral and spiritual truths.

The men and women of Miss Jewett's stories are influenced by this ethical source in nature; they are influenced, perhaps unconsciously, by "the strength and purpose which is at work with them on their farms." These people living close to the natural elements where instinct governs are more likely to accept their own instinct as truth than their reason. Thus, they "may have a more complete sympathy with Nature and may hear voices when wiser ears are deaf."17

Because these rural people learn their lessons of life from nature, they are apt to live a better life than the urbanite lives. The man living in harmony with his surroundings seems to possess a basic goodness and a nobility of character. Close to nature man sees more essentially the basic human values. Miss Jewett suggests this type of influence when she describes Esther Wright in The Country of the Pointed Firs: "she was untouched by the fret and fury of life; she had lived in sunshine and rain among her silly sheep, and she had been refined instead
of coarsened..." (p. 246). Nature has provided a similar beneficial influence on Sylvia in "A White Heron." Although she had lived her first eight years in an industrial city, it did not seem as if she had ever "been alive at all before she came to live at the farm."\textsuperscript{18} Quickly adapting to her new surroundings, she became a type of "child of nature." From these associations she gathered strength to make her moral decision in which she remained loyal to nature. So, this young girl was influenced in a moral judgment by nature.

Not only does a moral sense seem to be a part of nature's secrets, but a spiritual strength also exudes from the elements. For not only does God provide an orderly world whose moral purpose and sense of right is known in and told through nature, but, in her own type of pantheism, Miss Jewett sees that God's actual thoughts are existing in physical forms of nature; "the strength of the hills and the voice of the waves are no longer only grand poetical sentences, but an expression of something real and more and more one finds God Himself in the world, and believes that we read the thoughts that He writes for us in the book of nature."\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, the rural people who are in close contact with nature have a direct communication to spiritual strength and knowledge through these physical forms.

One way of experiencing this oneness with nature is described in \textit{The Country of the Pointed Firs}:
If there is one way above another of getting so close to nature that one simply is a piece of nature, following a primeval instinct with perfect self-forgetfulness and forgetting everything except the dream consciousness of pleasant freedom, it is to take the course of a shady trout brook...the amazing importance of what one is doing, and the constant sense of life and beauty make a strange transformation of the quick hours (pp. 221-222).

A living example of this spiritual relationship with nature is Israel Owen in A Marsh Island; he represents a type of "oneness" with nature. His love of his land and his working with it seemed to open a communication between the two, and nature imparts her secrets to him: "he could read at a glance all the slopes and hollows of the woodland and fields of the neighboring county..." (p. 86). Owen also serves as an example of "the repose and peace to be gained from country life" for a city dweller.

This urban man, Dick Dale, is an illustration of the fact that nature can work to transform and strengthen an individual. This influence is a gradual one, awakening in Dale as he stays at the Owen farm. A painter, he sees the beauties and serenity in physical nature; it is the calm of the lives of the residents of this rural haven that reveal to him the powers of nature. From this association he is transformed from a shiftless, purposeless wanderer to a man who is seeking some goal in life. As the story closes he realizes his debt: "he had at least gained a new respect for his own life and its possible value" (p. 290).
Perhaps the best representative of this moral-spiritual influence is that of Mrs. Todd in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. She suggests a oneness with the forces of nature which is ageless; this insight into the secrets of nature is imparted to her through her herbs. These most ancient of all remedies "might once have belonged to sacred and mystic rites..." (p. 4), and the knowledge, they have passed on to Mrs. Todd. She has always felt at home in "the woods and all wild places..." (p. 309), and she has been an active and self-sufficient individual. Her closeness with the elements is suggested in this statement: "life was very strong in her, as if some force of Nature were personified in this simple-hearted woman..." (p. 309).

In these previous pages I have intended to reveal that Miss Jewett portrays nature in both its pleasant aspects and in its more violent and unfeeling moods. In general, however, she stresses the beauties of nature and its beneficial influences on man. In the next chapters I will develop her view of the man-nature relationship as it relates to her techniques and to her position as a writer in the nineteenth century.
Footnotes: Chapter One


CHAPTER II

Function of Nature

Influences in Miss Jewett's Background

To be familiar with the techniques of Miss Jewett's art of fiction is first to be familiar with her understanding of the nature-man relationship which was introduced in the previous chapter, for much of her art, especially in her more mature years, is based on this association. For example, she sees man and nature so closely related that there is a sympathy between the two; therefore, she uses nature as a backdrop to reflect and to create the mood of the characters and the atmosphere of the story. Likewise, seeing this intimacy between man and the elements permits her to use these objects in nature to explain characteristics of man and society, so that her analogies are based on this relationship, also. The oneness of man and nature is also suggested when Miss Jewett uses an object in nature to symbolize some aspect of human life or emotion. The themes of several of her sketches evolve from this relationship. Miss Jewett is even guilty of committing the "pathetic fallacy" in order to reveal this unity.

In her extensive treatment of nature and its relation to man, Miss Jewett has often been accused of being too romantic and too idyllic. That her treatment of nature and man is
"imaginative," somewhat idyllic, and often delicate seems to be a reflection of her upbringing and her age; on the other hand, that her treatment of this relationship is "realistic" seems to be the result of both her relation with her father and her initial purpose for writing.

The age in which she was born, as well as her birth and breeding, appear to be quite influential on the type of fiction that Miss Jewett writes. In an age when William Dean Howells, prominent male author and editor of the Atlantic Monthly, was accused of writing only of "the smiling aspects of life," it does not seem very strange that an aristocratic female writer, a spinster and a Brahmin, should be accused of a similar charge. Likewise, when Howells, the avant-garde of the realistic movement, said that he would not write a book a young girl could not read, it does not seem unusual that Miss Jewett's work should sometimes be considered "idyllic."

Miss Jewett's upbringing is also influential on her writing, for growing up in a sea-coast village, which, as Dr. Holmes states in Elsie Venner,¹ was the origin of the Brahmin tradition, she learned the conservative and refined manners expected of a woman in her position. The white colonial home of the Jewetts' in South Berwick was representative of the comfort in which she lived. V. L. Parrington suggests that it was Miss Jewett's Brahmin temperament that made her "see the idyllic
rather than the grotesque."² She would have had little opportunity to come in contact with the "grotesque;" she saw the decadence of the coastal region, but chose not to emphasize this in her fiction.

The materials which she chose to present, nature and the people of Maine, were those which she learned about from her father. Already mentioned were his lessons in nature; however, on these trips he also introduced her to the country people, and she acquired her father's patience and understanding of them. In this fashion she gained a familiarity with the common people that a woman in her position would not have ordinarily had. Thus, while she was a Brahmin by birth, "she was also a thorough-going democrat in the social sense of that word."³ Out of her understanding of both the aristocrats and the country people grew her purpose for writing; she made this statement in the Boston Journal:

When I was, perhaps, fifteen, the first 'city boarders' began to make their appearance near Berwick; and the way they misconstrued the country people and made game of their peculiarities fired me with indignation. I determined to teach the world that country people were not the awkward, ignorant set those persons seemed to think. I wanted the world to know their grand, simple lives; and so far as I had a mission when I first began to write, I think that was it.⁴

Following the advice of her father who told her: "don't try to write about people and things, tell them just as they are....,"⁵ Miss Jewett recorded the life and setting of the
Maine coast as she saw them. This makes the basis of her sketches realistic. It is her enthusiasm concerning the out-of-doors as well as her quite feminine nature that lend the emotional aura in her writings and that suggest a romantic quality in her work. Also, this quality reflects characteristics of the "Genteel Tradition" which was influencing New England letters during the second half of the century. A sweetness and almost "over-refinement" may be seen in her correspondence, where one will notice her feminine, delicate touches. She often uses such phrases as "little story book," "dear little picture," and "charming little book." Similarly in her letters, she explains her sentiments concerning nature, which are most pleasantly optimistic: "Nobody knows how I love the sea;" or "I have always liked my out-of-doors life best." In short, Miss Jewett's own emotions, memories, and personality tend to color her treatment of nature and man.

Methods and Philosophy

In order to achieve greater insight into the various ways that Miss Jewett uses nature, I have turned to passages from her works. One of her most significant uses, whether she is developing the idea by analogy, symbol, or theme, is expounding her personal views on heredity versus environment as the major force in molding a man's character.
One such sketch that has this subject for its theme is "River Driftwood." Here she utilizes the biography of a river to illustrate ideas about individualism. She discusses first her view of man's position in the social pattern of the world; this pattern is a God-ordered "chain of being" with man just below the angels. She explains:

Who can say, however, that our death may not be simply a link in the chain? One thing is made prey of another. In some way our present state ministers to the higher condition to which we are coming. The grass is made somehow from the ground, and presently that is turned into beef, and that goes to make part of a human being. We are not certain what an angel may be, but the life in us now will be necessary to the making of one by and by.8

This merging and combining and this preying on lesser things is necessary to make more room in the world. Order in human life is needed like the order of the river's course:

If all the orders of life were self-existing, and if all the springs that make up the river flowed down to the sea separately and independently, there would be an awful confusion and chaos still..." (p. 8).

Although she sees value in the blending of life to fulfill the plan of the universe, she places equal value on the strength and character of the individual. As she discusses the course of the river, she explains that it is heredity, the internal source of traits, that is important, not environment:

...the individuality of a river must come mainly from the different characters of its tributaries. The shape of its shores and the quality of the soil it passes over determine certain changes about it, but the life of it is something by itself, as the life of a man is separate from the circumstances in which he is placed (p. 2).
Similar ideas concerning society, individualism, and heredity are themes in "A Winter Drive." Through one of her favorite analogies, the relation of man and trees, she expresses her opinions. She suggests that there is a similarity between a forest and society:

There is a strange likeness to the characteristics of human beings among these trees crowded together in a forest; there is the same proportion of ignorant rabble of poor creatures who are struggling for life in more ways than one, and of self-respecting, well-to-do, dignified citizens.\(^9\)

Again she shifts from consideration of the crowd to that of the individual, for by comparing man to trees she states that it is the force within a man or tree that is important, not his surroundings:

It is not wholly a question of soil and of location any more than it is with us. Some trees have a natural vitality and bravery...they grow tall and strong, and in their wealth of usefulness they are like some of the world's great men who rose from poverty to kingliness" (p. 168).

Favoring heredity and the pride of individualism, Miss Jewett continues her analogy: "...there are no two trees that look alike or are alike, any more than there are two persons exactly similar in shape or nature" (p. 171); "...if a man or a tree has it in him to grow, who can say what will hinder him" (p. 169); "there is a nobility among trees as well as among men, not fancied by poets but real and unaffected" (p. 171).

That Miss Jewett maintained her belief in the value of the individual and in the influence of heredity, not environment,
as the significant force of character traits is suggested in her work. The two sketches referred to above were written in 1881, and later in her 1896 novel, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, and she uses the same analogy between a tree and man to express the same belief:

'There's sometimes a good hearty tree growin' right out of the bare rock, out o' some crack that just holds the roots; right on the pitch o' one o' them bare stony hills where you can't seem to see a wheel-barrowful o' good earth in place, but that tree'll keep a green top in the driest summer. You lay your ear down to the ground an' you'll hear a little stream runnin.' Every such tree has got its own livin' spring; there's folks made to match em.'

Likewise, in this same series of sketches she stresses the affinity between man and nature by using various objects in nature to express the same theory; Miss Jewett uses a young plant to explain that a good environment is only valuable if the individual is already worthy:

There's a great many such strayaway folks, just as there is plants...I know of just one sprig of laurel that...grows in an open spot where you'd think it would do well, but it's sort o' poor lookin' (pp. 167-168).

Having traced one theme through several of Miss Jewett's sketches, I believe that consideration now should be given to the individual techniques she uses in her treatment of nature.

Miss Jewett's use of nature as a theme is best exemplified in one of her best sketches, "A White Heron." In this story she dramatizes two different approaches toward nature: one is
that of a city dweller who, in order to add to his collection of birds, thinks nothing of destroying nature for his personal gain; the other is that of Sylvia, the city girl turned country girl, who has learned to appreciate nature in its natural state. The conflict is presented through the little girl; Miss Jewett concludes the story with the triumph of "loyalty to nature" being both morally right and personally rewarding. She implies that the life of the country girl, living in communication with nature, will be far richer than that of the man living in the city.

In "From a Mournful Villager" Miss Jewett's discussion of "the approaching extinction of front yards" becomes an extended metaphor of her theme, the vanishing of a type of New England character and civilization. This old-fashioned, provincial society was the one Miss Jewett so admired for it represented old traditions. One of the changes that the disappearance of the front yard represents is that "of the altered position of woman." It represents "a stronghold on her way from the much talked-of slavery and subjection to a coveted equality" (pp. 120-121). Miss Jewett explains the transition for women:

She used to be shut off from the wide acres of the farm, and had no voice in the world's politics; she must stay in the house, or only hold sway out of doors in this prim corner of land where she was queen. No wonder that women clung to their rights in their flower-gardens then, and no wonder that they have grown a little careless of them now, and that lawn mowers find so ready a sale. The whole world is their front yard nowadays (p. 121).
The growth of these gardens also represents the growth of an easier and more comfortable life in New England, for more time could be devoted to the yard as more leisure was gained. In contrast, the tearing down of the fences around these yards further depicts the decline of this old life. This author sees the loss of the fence as a loss of privacy and individuality: "People do not know what they lose when they make way with the reserve, the separateness, the sanctity of the front yard of their grandmothers" (p. 127). She sees this break-down as leading to an unpleasant familiarity. That more privacy is a need is suggested by her statement: "...we Americans had better build more fences than take any away from our lives" (p. 127). Miss Jewett's love of the old ways is prominent in her mourning the loss of the front yard.

The basic source of Miss Jewett's symbolism is the external world about her. Man and nature living in such close proximity to one another as they do in the rural Maine area seem to have developed a type of interdependence, according to this writer's views. Thus, she turns to nature, a living counterpart to man, to symbolize his actions, emotions, and thoughts.

Two of her most common symbols are the rosebush and its bloom. In "A Native of Winby," "some thorny twigs of an old rosebush" symbolize an older man's remembrances of his youth and family, especially his mother. Just as this man's love and memories were still alive, one branch of the old rosebush was
blooming yet: "So much had changed in the world, so many had
gone into the world of light, and here the faithful blooming
thing was yet alive." In *A Marsh Island*, the rose petal be-
comes the symbol of a young man's fleeting hopes of marrying
the girl he loves:

...Lester saw a late wild rose almost within
reach of his hand, and with the sudden thought
of Doris that was always linked in his mind
with anything beautiful, he tried to catch and
break the twig. But he had been carried just
too far beyond... he watched the flower, as
if the loss of it foretold his fate.13

In "From a Mournful Villager" a rosebush becomes the symbol of
the length of time that civilized New England has been in
existence: "It is strange to think that civilized New England
is no older than the little red roses that bloom in *June* on
that slope above the river in Kittery" (p. 122).

The sketch, "The Only Rose," revolves around its central
symbol, a single rose blossom. When Mrs. Bickford discovers
one rose in bloom, she must decide how to use it. She is pre-
paring three bouquets for the graves of her three deceased
husbands, and her problem lies in the question of which man
deserves the rose, for "by this time it had ceased to be merely
a flower, and had become a definite symbol and assertion of
personal choice."14 As Mrs. Bickford recalls the merits and
faults of each husband, she concludes there is no favorite.
Her insolvable situation is ended when her nephew volunteers
to place the flowers on the graves. When he returns, he is
wearing the red rose with intentions to give it to his fiancée; thus the rose is presented to a "favorite" in the end.

Other objects in nature become symbols in "A White Heron." One is the old pine tree which symbolizes Sylvia's introduction or pathway into a knowledge and understanding of the world of nature and its secrets. She begins her journey by climbing an oak tree to a place where she could make "the daring step across into the old pine tree." Her climb was more difficult than she had anticipated, but she continues, and as if nature were giving help to this girl: "...the tree stood still and held away the winds that June morning...who knows how steadily the least twigs held themselves to advantage this light, weak creature..." (p. 154). That Sylvia has earned her way into the knowledge of the deepest secrets of nature is symbolized in the flight of the heron, in which the bird reveals the hidden location of its nest. As Sylvia silently watches the heron leave his nest, fly and perch on a branch by her, and return again to his nest, she has become a child of nature and will keep its secrets.

Symbol of primeval "loneliness of sorrow" is Shell-heap Island in The Country of the Pointed Firs. The physical setting of this island lends to its symbolic meaning, for it is a "bad place to land" as it is surrounded by "ledges" and "shoals." On the island "the few wind-bent trees...were mostly dead and gray..." (p. 129). "...'t is off the thoroughfares..." (p. 99), and "'there can't be much of it that the salt spray don't fly
over in storms'" (p. 105). It is on this island that "poor Joanna" lived her solitary life after being disappointed in a love affair; yet Miss Jewett sees something universal in Joanna's story: "'some is meant to be the Joannas in this world...'" (p. 126). "...Joanna was like one of the saints in the desert; the loneliness of sorrow will forever keep alive their sad succession" (p. 127). Though Joanna's story will be forgotten, persons will continue to come to Shell-heap Island because it is the symbol of her loneliness, and "...there are paths trodden to the shrines of solitude the world over, -- the world can not forget them, try as it may..." (p. 131).

This writer perceives Shell-heap Island as symbolizing a certain loneliness in each of us: "In the life of each of us...there is a place remote and islanded, and given to endless regret or secret happiness..." (p. 132).

Just as her symbols express the oneness of man and nature, her analogies reflect the similarities. As nature is the more permanent of the two as she suggests: "the sky, the sea, have watched poor humanity at its rites so long...", 16 her comparing man to nature makes his affairs seem more universal and important. She adds stature to man and his struggles when associating him with the never-ending cycle of nature. The physical world is a very dominant force in Miss Jewett's philosophy which is stated in "An October Ride." She explains: "...there
cannot be such a thing as life that is lost,"\textsuperscript{17} nature and man must go on living. Yet man lives on in the spirit: "...God keeps them yet; somewhere in His kingdom they are in their places, -- they are not lost..." (p. 103). While man moves to his ultimate place in God's realm of heaven, nature knows a type of "spontaneous generation" on earth: "The tree falls and decays, in the dampness of the woods, and is part of the earth under foot, but another tree is growing out of it; perhaps it is part of its own life that is springing again from the part of it that died" (p. 102). Thus, Miss Jewett sees life on earth in relation to this dominant force of nature and considers it as part of God's plan.

Characteristics of the autumn season suggest the following analogy with elderly persons. In this association she senses a pathos and a sadness in the season. In autumn, as in the lives of the elderly: "we have seen how the flowers looked when they bloomed and have eaten the fruit when it was ripe; the questions have had their answer, the days we waited for have come and gone. Everything has stopped growing."\textsuperscript{18}

This writer's Brahmin sympathies are reflected in her analogy between the cardinal flowers and the aristocracy. She pictures these flowers as proud members of the "old nobility among flowers."\textsuperscript{19} They have such prominent individuality that only one belongs in a vase. Admiring their station, she states what
a shame it would be if common elements should crowd their land: "It would be a pity if the rank marsh grass overran them, or if the pickerel weed should wade ashore to invade them and humble their pride." (p. 13).

While she stresses the value of the individual, she also recognizes the necessity of a concern for and a communication with others, for without this an individual can become stagnant: "one sees the likeness between a harborless heart and a harborless country, where no ships go and come; and since no treasure is carried away no treasure is brought in."20

Also typical of Miss Jewett’s work is her very feminine touch which is exemplified in these passages. The first represents the delicate and fine description she writes: "In winter the tracery of the bare branches against a white cloud or a clear yellow sunset is a most exquisite thing to see."21 Quite feminine and romantic is this passage:

I suppose my feeling toward this place a farmhouse was like that about a ruin...I remembered the Enchanted Palace and the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood and it seemed as if I were on the way to it, and this was a corner of that palace garden."22

Sometimes her feminine tone borders closely on the side of being too sweet and maudlin; this occurs most often when Miss Jewett commits the "pathetic fallacy" in her efforts to indicate the oneness of the man-nature relationship. These rather immature figures of speech are not worthy of detailed consideration except as examples of her weakness in her treatment of nature.
Representing these inferior passages are these two: "the white birches' bark looks out of season, as if they were still wearing their summer clothes,"23 and "...a bee blundered in and took me for an emeny...I rapped to call the bees to order as if they were unruly scholars..." (p. 24).

Stylistic Devices

While with these previous techniques Miss Jewett has been interested in expounding her philosophy and in developing the closeness of the relationship of man and nature, she also uses nature as an aspect of style. She makes nature an instrument in her sketches; for example, nature serves as a backdrop to reflect the mood of her characters and to create the desired atmosphere.

To set the stage for one of her sketches she describes the natural world which seems to be in sympathy with the events of human life. Even if it is a summer day which is sunny and bright, a somber event will evoke a change in nature. This occurs in Deephaven when the elements respond to the soberness of an old man's funeral:

...a strange shadow had fallen over everything. It was like a November day, for the air felt cold and bleak. There were some great sea-fowl high in the air...giving now and then a wild, far-off ringing cry...we could hear the dull sound of the sea...25

Similarly, when Miss Jewett introduces Shell-heap Island in The Country of the Pointed Firs, she selects an appropriate evening: "It was a chilly night of cold northeasterly rain, and I made a fire for the first time..." (p. 98).
Again in Deephaven the elements in sympathy with men's lives set the mood for the action. As Miss Chauncey, an old woman too insane to realize the ruin of her life, reads to her two young visitors, the late afternoon setting lends the necessary serenity to the scene: "...the light had begun to grow golden as the day drew near sunset" (p. 285). The sense of decay and hopelessness is implied by a small corresponding incident in nature: "...a fallen leaf...had blown into the window recess as she was reading" (p. 286). When the mills close down in "The Gray Mills of Farley," the situation for the workers becomes desperate and bleak; nature responds to their plight: "It was late autumn, the elms were bare...a cold wind was blowing bits of waste and paper high into the air; now and then a snowflake went by like a courier of winter." 26

Nature is used as a backdrop to the atmosphere in "Between Mass and Vespers," and as the mood changes, so do the natural surroundings. At the beginning of the sketch when all is serene and happy, it is "a lovely May afternoon. The season was early, and maples were in full bloom:" 27 As Father Ryan and Dennis begin their ascent up the hill on their unpleasant errand of confronting a youthful swindler, the scenery gradually changes to blend in with the mood. First the seclusion is noted: "there were dark hemlocks and pines on either side...the light tread of the mare seemed to disturb the secluded region" (p. 232).
The plant life at the higher levels changes and suggests loneliness: "...the solemn little cypress plant, so often seen in country burying-grounds, was growing about the crumbling foundations of the house ...some roses still grew about it... a hop-vine was sending up its shoots near by, where it had nothing to twine upon" (p. 237). At the destination near the top of the hill, it is a "wild, deserted bit of country" (p. 244). Then, with the errand completed, hope present, and the descent about to begin, nature again responds to the changes and a softening is noted: "the May wind in the pine woods was like the sound of the sea..." (p. 289).

In The Country of the Pointed Firs the elements again mirror the atmosphere and mood. The occasion is that of the wedding of William and Esther and the mood is one of happiness:

It was a day of waiting, that day of spring; the May weather was as expectant as our fond hearts, and one could see the grass grow green by the hour. The warm air was full of birds, there was a glow of light on the sea instead of the cold shining of chilly weather which had lingered late" (pp. 338-339).

Thus, in keeping with the events of man's life, nature responds with warmth and brightness for a joyous occasion.

In certain instances Miss Jewett also uses a symbol to create the mood of a character. For example, in The Country of the Pointed Firs, she employes the fluttering of a bird to represent the mood of Captain Littlepage. The Captain's total
involvement in his delusions of having discovered an unknown land is evident when he is telling his story, for not even the most sudden noise disturbs his train of thought: "A swallow flew into the schoolhouse at this moment as if a kingbird were after it, and beat itself against the walls for a minute, and escaped again to the open air; but Captain Littlepage took no notice whatever of the flurry" (p. 25).

One recurring motif in Miss Jewett's work that almost belongs to her realm of symbol because of its prevalent use for one purpose is that of the lilac bush which is often accompanied by poplar trees. Remembering her own white clapboard house and its lilacs and poplars, she pictures all aristocratic old homes in her sketches in much the same design. Her singular use of the lilac bush as a part of the landscape of these old houses elevates it from the level of mere description to that of a symbol of a manner of life:

I wish that I had lived for a little while in those days when lilacs were a new fashion, and it was a great distinction to have some growing in a front yard. It always seems as if lilacs and poplars belonged to the same generation with a certain kind of New English gentlemen and ladies....

The similarity of references to lilacs and poplars may be noted in these various passages. The house in "A Lost Lover" is described in this manner: "This was a high, square house... with some lilac-bushes around it, and down by the road was a long, orderly procession of poplars...."
old house in "Martha's Lady" is similar: "...she stood back inside the gate behind the white lilac bushes." The condition of the lilac bushes in Deephaven represent the condition of the houses. The stately and proud old Brandon house "...stood behind a row of poplars which were...green and flourishing... the lilacs were tall and there were crowds of rosebushes..." (p. 23); however, beside the decaying house of the Chaunceys', "we noted the gnarled lilacs in the yard..." (p. 269).

As another stylistic device, the elements are used for dramatic effect in The Country of the Pointed Firs. By utilizing the natural surroundings Miss Jewett brings into striking focus Green Island, a major setting in this book. First she darkens the area: "it had been growing gray and cloudy...and a shadow had fallen on the darkening shore" (p. 45). Then, in the midst of this grayness "a gleam of golden sunshine struck the outer islands, and one of them shone out clear in the light, and revealed itself in a compelling way..." (p. 45). In this instance she has used shadow and light to introduce a setting.

In a like manner the weather serves as a device to add unity and symmetry to the novel A Country Doctor. The book opens with a discussion of November weather:
It had been one of the warm and almost sultry days which sometimes come in November; a maligned month, which is really an epitome of the other eleven, or a sort of index to the whole year's changes of storm and sunshine...This lovely day seemed like a reprieve from the doom of winter....

It is on this day that Nan, the heroine, is first introduced to the town of Oldfields, which will be her future home. Also, it is a day of great importance in the life of this infant, for her mother decides against her plan of killing herself and her child. At the conclusion of the novel, then, this weather serves a similar function. The day is like the first one.

It was a most lovely day of our heroine's favorite weather. It has been said that November is an epitome of all the months of the year, but for all that, no other season can show anything so beautiful as the best and brightest November days (p. 34).

Events of a comparable nature take place on this day of many years later. Nan again returns to Oldfields from the city. She visits her home and neighborhood of her childhood. Also on this day she makes a most significant decision to reject an offer for a job elsewhere, for she will probably remain in Oldfields. Thus, by placing parallel events against like backgrounds, Miss Jewett lends a sense of unity to the story.

This chapter has developed Miss Jewett's romantic characteristics. Her treatment of nature through analogy, symbol, and theme is based on the romantic notion that there is a sympathy between man and nature. That a river exemplifies her
faith in the individual; that a rose becomes a symbol of man's emotions; that a bird can represent man's state of mind; and that the elements respond to man's mood all suggest this close relationship. I have already touched on the realistic elements in her fiction in Chapter I. Her graphic descriptions of nature as well as her portrayal of the physical influences of nature on man represent her realism. In Chapter III these romantic and realistic elements will be further explored.
Footnotes: Chapter II

1. see O. W. Holmes Elsie Venner (Boston, 1861), Chapter I.


11. Jewett, "From a Mournful Villager," Country By-Ways, p. 120. Subsequent references, incorporated into the text, are to this edition.

12. Jewett, "A Native of Winby," A Native of Winby and Other Tales (Boston, 1893), p. 20. Subsequent references, incorporated into the text, are to this edition.

13. Jewett, A Marsh Island (Boston, 1885), p. 85. Subsequent references, incorporated into the text, are to this edition.


25. Jewett, Deephaven (Boston, 1877), p. 263. Subsequent references, incorporated into the text, are to this edition.


27. Jewett, "Between Mass and Vespers," A Native of Winby and Other Tales, p. 299. Subsequent references, incorporated into the text, are to this edition.


CHAPTER III
The "Romantic-Realist"

The Romantic Elements

Miss Jewett's attitude toward nature serves as an excellent indication of her place in her age.¹ Her basic philosophy concerning nature, previously mentioned in the discussions of "River Driftwood," "An October Ride," and "A Winter Drive," links her with the romantic and transcendental traditions of the early nineteenth century. While her treatment of nature is often romantic, it is also considered realistic and has won for her an eminent position among the local color school. Both her views of nature and her treatment of it, basically, separate her from the growing naturalistic tendencies which were prominent in the latter part of the century. However, she does evidence some objective realism. In order to illustrate Miss Jewett's relationship with these periods of the nineteenth century, I have selected passages from representative writers which I will compare and contrast with passages from Miss Jewett's work.

A general view of nature held by the romantics and the transcendentalists was that "from nature man received his culture and his knowledge, and to it he must go for inspiration and guidance. The individual heart and soul can most safely be accepted as
guides when they have been subjected to the tutelage of nature, the great mother.\textsuperscript{2} This optimistic view of a benevolent and responsive nature was based on the idea that God's influence could be felt in nature; this "concept of God as the original spiritual substance, the guarantee of rationality, purposiveness and benevolence..." is the factor "...which makes nature worthy of the enthusiasm of its devotees...."\textsuperscript{3}

This author refers to this concept when she states: "...one finds God himself in the world, and believes that we read the thoughts that He writes for us in the book of nature."\textsuperscript{4} Similarly, Wordsworth makes reference to "Nature's holy plan..."\textsuperscript{5} and Emerson acknowledges God's presence in nature in this passage:

\begin{quote}
O, when I am safe in my sylvan home,  
I tread on the pride of Greece and Rome; 
And when I am stretched beneath the pines, 
Where evening star so holy shines, 
I laugh at the lore and the pride of man... 
For what are they all, in their high conceit, 
When man in the bush with God may meet?\textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}

Like Wordsworth and Emerson, Miss Jewett sees nature in pantheistic terms: God is present in nature and God orders the universe in a benevolent fashion.

Miss Jewett's view of this God-ordered universe was discussed in Chapter One; a review of this discussion will suggest echoes of the transcendental idea of the "Over-Soul." Emerson explains the "Over-Soul" in these words: "...within man is the soul of
the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which
every part and particle is equally related; the eternal one."7

This idea seems to be behind Miss Jewett's statement:

I wonder what I am; there is a strange self-
consciousness, but I am only a part of one great
existence which is called nature. The life in me is
a bit of all life, and where I am happiest is where
I find that which is next of kin to me, in friends,
or trees, or hills, or seas, or beside a flower,
when I turn back more than once to look into its
face.8

Furthermore, Emerson states that:

Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Our
being is descending into us from we know not
whence....When I watch that flowing river,
which, out of regions I see not, pours for a
season its streams into me, I see that I am
a pensioner; not a cause but a surprised specta-
tor of this ethereal water....9

Miss Jewett's idea of an eternal source holding all the truths
of the universe and that man must discover what is already there
seems similar to the above statement of Emerson's. Her idea
is expressed in these terms:

The world goes on year after year....There is
nothing new; we discover and combine and use....
The world is the same world. You find a diamond,
but the diamond was there a thousand years ago;
you did not make it by finding it. We grow
spiritually, until we grasp some new great truth
of God; but it was always true, and waited for us
until we came.10

Thus, because God is present in nature and his words are
there to be read, man can look to nature as a teacher. This
romantic principle is seen in Miss Jewett's writings. She
refers to the moral effects of nature: "...and it was found, long months afterward that a young man had been turned back from a plan of wicked mischief by the sight of a tall, green geranium, like the one that bloomed in his mother's sitting room way up in the country."11 Similar passages are found in Emerson's "Nature;" he explains:

Nor can it be doubted that this moral sentiment which scents the air, grows in the grain, and impregnates the waters of the world, is caught by man and sinks into his soul. The moral influence of nature upon every individual is that amount of truth which it illustrates to him. Who can estimate this? Who can guess how much firmness the sea-beaten rock has taught the fisherman? How much tranquillity has been reflected to man from the azure sky....12

Wordsworth, too, is a believer that nature is man's best teacher:

Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your teacher...

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.13

Because nature is God's domain and a moral influence, the romantics believed those living close to the elements were in closer contact with the true essence of life. The general belief was that "God made the country, and man made the town...."14 This doctrine finds expression in the works of both Wordsworth and Emerson. Wordsworth condemns the preoccupation with the city life:

The world is too much with us; late and soon
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon....15
In contrast, he lauds the poor peasants in the rural area:

Where on a small hereditary farm,
An unproductive slip of rugged ground,
His parents, with their numerous offspring dwelt,
A virtuous household, though exceedingly poor!
Pure livers were they all, austere and grave....

Emerson places great value on this rural life, also: "The rough and bearded forester/ Is better than the lord." Having inherited this romantic notion of the glorification of the rural life, Miss Jewett explains the sense of freedom and happiness that is felt when one moves from the city to the country:

The hurry of life in a large town, the constant putting aside of preference to yield to a most unsatisfactory activity, began to vex me... But the first salt wind from the east, the first sight of a lighthouse set boldly on its outer rock, the flash of a gull, the waiting procession of seaward-bound firs on an island, made me feel solid and definite again, instead of a poor, incoherent being... It was a return to happiness.

"In a world thus conceived of man, nature, and God intertwined and all bathed in divine goodness and peace, the existence of evil could hardly be admitted." Miss Jewett sees in this inter-relationship among these three a close sympathy between man and nature. She describes Sylvia in "A White Heron" in this manner: "There ain't a foot o' ground she don't know her way over, and the wild creatur's [sic] counts her one o' themselves." A similar sympathy is suggested in this passage:

"While she sat there... the river sent a fresh breeze by way of messenger, and the old cedar held its many branches above
her and around her most comfortably, and sheltered her as it had done many times before." Both of these passages reflect Thoreau's view of nature as expressed in *Walden*:

The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature, - of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter, -- such health, such cheer, they afford forever! and such sympathy have they ever with our race, that all Nature would be affected, and the sun's brightness fade, and the winds would sign humanely, and the clouds rain tears, and the woods shed their leaves and put on mourning in midsummer, if any man should ever for just cause grieve.22

Just as her attitudes and philosophy concerning the man-nature relationship are acquired from earlier nineteenth century writers, her use of analogy and symbol are quite similar to writers such as Thoreau and Hawthorne. Reflecting the oneness of man and nature, Miss Jewett uses the river in "River Driftwood" to explain the value of individuality;23 This seems to parallel Thoreau's use of the river to discuss his isolation:

I had withdrawn so far within the great ocean of solitude, into which the rivers of society empty, that for the most part, so far as my needs were concerned, only the finest sediment was deposited around me. Beside, there were wafted to me evidences of unexplored and uncultivated continents on the other side."24

Miss Jewett uses trees to express her thoughts on society and the individual,25 in the same manner that Thoreau uses a snake:

I saw a striped snake run into the water, and he lay on the bottom, apparently without inconvenience, as long as I stayed there, or more than a quarter of an hour; perhaps because he had not yet fairly come out of the torpid state. It appeared to me that for a like reason men remain in their present low and primitive condition....26
In a like manner, Miss Jewett's use of the rose as a symbol is reminiscent of Hawthorne's treatment of the rose in *The Scarlet Letter*. Her rose symbol becomes a central issue in "The Only Rose;" likewise, in *The Scarlet Letter* it becomes an underlying symbol which is used throughout the story. Introduced in the first chapter, the flower of the rosebush serves "...to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or [to] relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow." As this is to be Pearl's role, Hawthorne, in Chapter VIII, unites Pearl and the rose, making her "the sweet moral blossom." He achieves this unity in this conversation:

> Prithee, young one, who art thou...Pearl?--Ruby, rather! --or Coral!--or Red Rose,
> 
> After putting her finger in her mouth, with many ungracious refusals to answer good Mr. Wilson's questions, the child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison door (pp. 149-150).

**The Realistic Elements**

Thus, by comparing Miss Jewett's views of nature with certain writers representing the romantic influence, I have suggested that she is romantic in her basic concept of the nature-man relationship and in her use of analogy and symbol. When considering her descriptions of nature and its influence on the New England
character, however, I believe she merits a place as a forerunner of American realism. Writing just after the Civil War and limiting her fiction to the Maine coast area, Miss Jewett is usually ranked as a local color realist.

She credits the early New England local colorist, Harriet Beecher Stowe, for being a motivation force in her career; when Miss Jewett was only thirteen she read Stowe's *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, and she was influenced by it. The early chapters of this novel about the Maine sea coast "...showed her Miss Jewett that the familiar Maine village and country folk were worthy of literary treatment."29 In the Preface to *Deephaven*, she explains her debt to this book: "*The Pearl of Orr's Island* gave the young author...to see with new eyes, and to follow eagerly the old shore paths from one gray weatherbeaten house to another where Genius pointed her the way."30 However, Miss Jewett did see some of the weaknesses of this book, and she set her plan of writing in a similar style, but only with modifications. Her comment about the book's weaknesses offers the key to her own goals: "Alas, that she Stowe couldn't finish it in the same noble key of simplicity and harmony."31

Striving for "simplicity and harmony" in her own work, Miss Jewett accurately portrays the Maine coastal regions. In this phase of her work, she meets Howells' definition of realistic treatment: "Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful presentation of material."32 An example of her realistic
description which makes her a local colorist is this passage:

On the coast of Maine, where many green islands and salt inlets fringe the deep-cut shore line; where balsam firs and bayberry bushes send their fragrance far seaward, and song-sparrows sing all the day, and the tide runs plashing in and out among the seedy ledges; where cowbells tinkle on the hills and herons stand in the shady covers -- on the lonely coast of Maine stood a small gray house facing the morning light. All the weather-beaten houses of that region face the sea apprehensively, like the women who live in them.33

As a local colorist Miss Jewett is associated with her contemporary writer of the New England scene, Mary Wilkins Freeman. While their topics are essentially the same, their treatment is different. The former is more genteel and does not present the morbid and unpleasant aspects of Maine life as the latter does. Of particular interest to this study is the manner in which both treat nature. Being local colorists, both make use of accurate description of the natural surroundings as a comparison of these passages show. Miss Jewett states:

We saw a sleepy little owl on the dead branch of a pine tree; we saw a rabbit cross the road and disappear in a clump of juniper...We passed straggling thickets of the upland sumach, leafless, and holding sturdy bayberry-bushes along the lonely wayside...The blueberry-bushes made patches of dull red along the hillsides. The ferns were whitish-gray...and the asters and golden-rods...stood now in faded, frostbitten company.34

Of comparable detail is this passage by Miss Freeman:

There were harvest-fields on either hand, bordered by low stone walls. Luxuriant clumps of bushes grew beside the wall, and trees -- wild cherry and old apple-trees -- at intervals....Tall shrubs of blueberry and meadow-sweet, all woven together and tangled with blackberry vines and horsebriers, shut her on either side.35
While these two passages are similar, both giving precise details including the names of trees and bushes, a more typical passage from Miss Freeman's writings points out that she usually does not use such details. Nature in her work has a more secondary position than in Miss Jewett's work. These generalizations are representative:

There was no moon, but it was clear and starry. The blooming trees stood beside the road like sweet, white, spring angels; there was a whippoorwill calling somewhere over the fields. Lucy Tollet saw neither stars nor blooming trees; she did not hear the whippoorwill. That hard, whimsical old man in the little weather-beaten house ahead towered up like a grand giant between the white trees and this one old woman; his voice in her ears drowned out all the sweet notes of the spring birds.\[36\]

Even without specific details, Miss Freeman is able to present the mood of fear and apprehension of Lucy Tollet through the elements of nature; this, perhaps, suggests that Miss Jewett is more concerned with the descriptions of nature than is Miss Freeman. The former's concern for exacting description reflects her early training in the lore of nature.

In her attempts to portray the Maine coastal region with graphic accuracy, Miss Jewett does not ignore the more harsh aspects of nature. While this is a minor phase of her writing, it is a very important one, for it shows that Miss Jewett is more than a writer of a depleted romanticism. She achieves some of her most exacting realistic passages when discussing this phase of nature. This writer does not accept the materialistic view of a totally impersonal nature that the naturalists expounded, and her optimism and
her firm belief in a God-ordered world place quite a gulf between her and this group writing in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. However, by comparing selected passages of her work with several from Crane's "The Open Boat," I believe that I can best illustrate the "realist" and the "romantic" in Miss Jewett's treatment of nature.

Two representative passages of the concept of nature that Crane accepts are the following:

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple...A high cold star on a winter's night is the word he feels she says to him; and "Nature did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent" (p. 50). Likewise, Miss Jewett's recordings of a rather indifferent and impersonal nature in The Country of the Pointed Firs, though much milder than Crane's, are quite realistic. Miss Jewett states: "The sky, the sea, have watched poor humanity at its rites so long..." (p. 153), and "There was a vigor of growth, a persistence and savagery about the sturdy little trees that put weak human nature at complete defiance" (p. 307); and "...one felt a sudden fear of the unconquerable, immediate forces of Nature, as in the irresistible moment of a thunderstorm" (p. 308); and "The land alone was not enough to
live upon in that stony region; it belonged by right to the forest, and to the forest it fast returned" (p. 310).

Also, in this same series of sketches, she makes reference to a phase of nature's organization representative of the growing materialistic view, which she implies even the scientist can not justify: "It was not the first time that I was full of wonder at the wastefulness of human ability in this world, as a botanist wonders at the wastefulness of nature, the thousand seeds that die, the unused provision of every sort" (p. 174).

In these two comparable passages, the first from The Country of the Pointed Firs and the second from Deephaven, is her acceptance of the dominance of nature's forces over man. Warner Berthoff suggests that such a passage as the following reveals Miss Jewett's acknowledgement that "only society is dying, only human life: water, rock, woods, birds, vegetation are alive...." 38

She describes nature covering man's life:

It looked like the beginning of summer ashore, though the sheep, round and warm in their winter wool, betrayed the season of the year...Presently the wind began to blow, and we struck out seaward to double the long sheltering headland of the cape, and when I looked back again, the islands and the headland had run together and Dunnett Landing and all its coasts were lost to sight (p. 213).

The insignificance of man is also suggested in this passage:

I remember how far we could see, that day, and how we looked toward the far-away blue mountains, and then out over the ocean. Deephaven looked insignificant from that height and distance, and indeed the country seemed to be mostly covered with the pointed tops of pines and spruces... (p. 191).
The realistic treatment of nature that these passages reveal is quite a contrast to the romantic treatment so characteristic of her work. Instead of the rather impersonal nature is this responsive form: "The weather did what it could to prosper the dwellers on Marsh Island..."39 or "After all, there was nothing better than being out of doors, and the apple-trees seemed most familiar and friendly."40

By giving a romantic view of nature, Miss Jewett's writings are comparable to those of Wordsworth and Emerson. Like these two, she sees a spiritual source in nature from which man may derive his moral values. For this reason she, too, lauds the rural life, as man living in close proximity to nature is in contact with these basic and essential truths. Also similar to these writers is her aversion to city life, for it is man-made and distracts from these rural values with its complexities and artificialities. In her philosophy it is nature that is benevolent and good. Beside these romantic concepts are her realistic traits which are comparable to Miss Freeman's and in a limited fashion to Crane's. Like Miss Freeman's, Miss Jewett's graphic portraits of the scenery along the Maine coast are quite realistic. Looking forward to the realism of Crane is her presentation of the forces of nature which watch with disinterest man's impotent
struggle to maintain his way of life. Richard Cary sums up Miss Jewett's "romantic-realism" in these words: "Upon granitic surfaces she spreads a poetic spell not entirely idyllic; under the lovely sheath the harsh configurations are implicitly visible."41 Because she writes from both of these points of view, Miss Jewett may be seen as a figure of transition between the romantic and the modern attitudes toward man's place in nature.
Footnotes: Chapter III


4. Sarah Orne Jewett, Deephaven (Boston, 1877), p. 225. Subsequent references, incorporated into the text, are to this edition.


23. See Chapter II, "Methods and Philosophy."


25. See Chapter II, "Methods and Philosophy."


27. See Chapter II, "Methods and Philosophy."


34. Jewett, *Deephaven*, pp. 208-209


41. Cary, Sarah Orne Jewett, p. 60.
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