

FROM DEEPHAVEN TO THE COUNTRY OF THE POINTED FIRS:

JEWETT'S GROWTH AS WRITER

by

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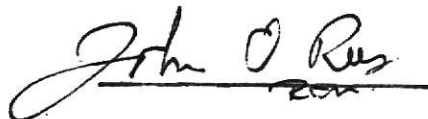
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Sarah Orne Jewett's early book, Deephaven (1877), has many similarities with her later masterpiece, The Country of the Pointed Firs (1896). Both books are narrated by a woman from the city who spends the summer in a small coastal village in Maine; the Deephaven narrator and her best friend are still girls at twenty-four, and the Country narrator is of more mature years. Both books consist of a series of loosely connected sketches characterizing the inhabitants of the towns. Both focus on similar themes. A comparison of the two works is instructive, however, not in demonstrating these obvious similarities, but in examining the differences that reveal Jewett's greater maturity in the later work. According to Richard Cary, she returns to the format of the earlier book "with a depth and tone impossible for her in 1877."¹ Important in explaining that depth is the realization that Jewett's themes in Country are presented with deeper understanding. This paper will first compare three closely related themes handled in both books, themes which sometimes seem to overlap but which retain distinctive features. They include a presentation of economic decline and the death of old values, an examination of man's relationship to nature, and a portrayal of human lives that are disappointed and frustrated by circumstance.² Jewett's more skillful use of the narrator, which contributes to the handling of theme, will be examined in the last section of the paper. Her treatment of both theme and narrator reveal a more affirmative vision of life.

The only important theme of the loosely connected sketches which comprise Deephaven centers on the decline of shipping and commerce, with the subsequent death of human vitality. Warner Berthoff explains that the energy "that went into commerce and community affairs now is spent in nostalgia and regret."³ The young leave the town for factory jobs in the city and the old citizens grow older, clinging to a past way of life that is doomed to extinction. Deephaven "never recovered from the effects of the embargo of 1807, and a sand-bar has been steadily filling the mouth of the harbor."⁴ The slowly growing sandbar only emphasizes the fact that the prosperous shipping days are over.

The reminiscences of Captain Sands help explain the change to the girls. He describes a past where "there was hardly a day in the year that you didn't hear the shipwrights' hammers, and there was always something going on at the wharves" (p. 156). Now however, there is nothing for the old captains to do but sit reminiscing about some "voyage and its disasters and successes" (p. 86), or arguing about "the tonnage of some craft that had been a prey to the winds and waves, dry rot, or barnacles fifty years before" (p. 87). Now the dories and whaleboats lie disused and rotting along the shore; the schooners are left to disintegrate by the wharves.

An emphasis on age permeates the book. It seems as though "all the clocks in Deephaven, and all the people with them, had stopped years ago" (p. 740), and the old folks continued doing whatever they had been doing before time stopped. People continue to wear old-fashioned clothes, and they even look like "exact copies of their remote ancestors" (p. 79). The girls feel somewhat uneasy in parts of the old Brandon house: the portraits in the best parlor seem to have taken a dislike to them and

"even the stair-railing was too high to slide down on" (p. 22). When the girls stop for old-fashioned tea at the Carews, they feel a sense of timelessness as if the "house and the people had nothing to do with the present, or the hurry of modern life" (p. 85). The only young people in the town are visitors from outside, and the narrators spend their summer getting acquainted, instead, with the aging residents of the community.

Deephaven emphasizes, in particular, the demise of the aristocracy. Indeed, the whole social class will disappear when its current old members die. The town's greatest pride is its connection with a rich shipowner and merchant, Governor Chantrey. Though he and his family have been dead for years, though only a few clumps of lilac are left to mark the spot where his elegant mansion once stood, and though his wharves are rotting, the town remains proud of its association with the gentleman. The members of the old families who do remain are treated with great respect, but they are "a feeble folk" (p. 70). These remaining aristocrats cling blindly to a past that has long since disappeared. Sunday church service is an occasion to wear old finery and to assert "their unquestioned dignity" (p. 75). The Carews continue to serve tea from their antique china, and Miss Honora is enobbishly thankful that no foreign element has intruded on the town. Deaf old Joshua Dorsey wears his hair in a queue and carries his father's cane. Among all the gentry there remains a "fierce pride in their family and town records, and a hardly concealed contempt and pity for people who were obliged to live in other parts of the world" (p. 71). The dying aristocracy so stubbornly clings to its old fashioned customs and attitudes that it refuses to acknowledge its own approaching death. Its members are insulated from reality because they direct their unwavering gazes backward.

The death of Kate's aunt, Miss Brandon, is typical of the general decline of her class. She has been honored and respected in her lifetime and has lived her life devoted to the old customs and attitudes. Her single-minded vision of the world is typically aristocratic. She must "have had the highest opinion of its good manners" (p. 44). Despite her lofty opinion of the world, however, Miss Brandon lapses into insanity before her death. She dies with only the Widow Jim Patton to care for her. No blood relatives are able to come to the funeral, and even Mrs. Patton must admit that the mice and moths have made their way into the once-immaculate mansion.

A more devastating portrayal of the decline of the aristocracy can be seen in the situation of Miss Sally Chauncey. Her father had lost his money at the time of the embargo, gone partially insane, and died after years of poverty. Miss Chauncey lives in the crumbling mansion of her girlhood so immersed in fantasies of the past that she is unaware of the present. In the house, the once polished floors are dangerously rotting, empty fastenings on the wall mark places where portraits once hung, and cobwebs festoon every door. When Kate tells Miss Sally that her Aunt Brandon is dead, the old woman responds, "Ah, they say everyone is 'dead' nowadays. I do not comprehend the silly idea" (p. 233). Miss Chauncey remains paradoxically content in her illusion that the past is not gone, that she is still a girl wearing party dresses for fancy balls. Her death from exposure is not unexpected.

Much emphasis in Deephaven is placed upon the worth and merit of the old.⁵ Kate and Helen praise their newly acquired friends by saying that it is "a great privilege to have an elderly person in one's neighborhood" (p. 44), and "to us there never will be such imposing ladies and gentlemen

as these who belong to the old school" (p. 45). They take pride in their association with the older members of the community, enjoying the rounds of visits and teas, the talks with the old captains, and their visits to the pleasant country cemetery. But though they verbally glorify the "romance and tragedy and adventure which one may find" (p. 65) in a quiet town, their observations belie their enthusiastic and optimistic words. Stevenson notes that although the town's immutability "may be attractive to the visitors, its effect on the inhabitants is not necessarily healthy."⁶ No amount of youthful adulation can modify the fact that Deephaven and its inhabitants are inexorably and sometimes painfully dying.

The theme of decline and death permeates the Deephaven sketches; indeed, this is the only sustained theme in the series. Jewett's nostalgia for the past—for fading ways and old-fashioned values—is the single most important element of Deephaven.

The themes of Country are more subtly drawn and more varied than those of Deephaven, not focused on the single idea of the decline and death of the shipping village. As a matter of fact, Jewett includes a number of contrasting details which demonstrate that even though Dunnet Landing's best days are behind it, the village is thriving in a way that Deephaven is not. The dying aristocracy, so much a part of the Deephaven sketches, is omitted entirely from Country. Instead, the narrator involves herself with members of the thriving middle class. Moreover, the narrator is met at the wharf by a fine crowd of spectators, and "the younger portion of the company"⁷ follows her with excitement up the street of the town. Unlike Deephaven where the only young people are summer visitors or up-country farmers visiting town for Sunday services, Dunnet

has its share of hometown youth.⁸ The capable Johnny Bowden rows Almira Todd and the narrator to Green Island, fishes with the men, and acts as unofficial taxi-boy, driving a wagon for local travellers. On the narrator's second visit to Dunnet, in "William's Wedding," she shows surprise at his growth, explaining that "it had never occurred to me the summer before that Johnny was likely, with the help of time and other forces, to grow into a young man" (p. 148). Though Johnny is the only youth well known to the narrator, she also mentions others. The narrator tells Mrs. Hight of an engagement between a Caplin and "one of the younger Harrises" (p. 123). Captain Bowden's oldest is twenty-two. Mothers who have children sick with colds come to Mrs. Todd's door for cough remedies. And of course, the many young people of the Bowden family, though not from the village, reveal this family to be in no danger of extinction. Neither is commerce dying in Dunnet: a "smart young wholesale egg merchant" (p. 104) lives at the landing, and the fishermen do a lively trade. The town possesses a newspaper, and the citizens debate political issues fiercely. The narrator comments that she "felt a warm sense of comfort in the evident resources of even so small a neighborhood . . ." (p. 67). These details reinforce the impression that Dunnet is not a dying community.

Of course Dunnet is certainly changing, and, without doubt, some changes are for the worse. Jewett uses one character, Captain Littlepage, as the primary spokesman for the glory of the old days and the shortcomings of the present. He describes the advantages of the shipping days when folks "were some acquainted with foreign lands an' their laws, an' could see outside the battle for town clerk here in Dunnet; they got some sense o' proportion" (p. 25). He voices a valid viewpoint here,

and the narrator agrees that the loss of shipping "accounts for the change in a great many things,—the sad disappearance of sea-captains,—doesn't it?" (p. 25). But when Littlepage goes on to criticize the current society even more strongly, Jewett uses the narrator to temper his vehemence. He comments, "There's no large-minded way of thinking now; the worst have got to be best and rule everything; we're all turned upside down and going back year by year" (p. 26). The narrator tries to placate his anger by responding gently, "Oh no, Captain Littlepage, I hope not" (p. 26).

It is true, of course, that Littlepage helps to confirm, in John Eakin's words, the sense of Dunnet's "shrinking horizons . . . where the restless energy of the mind seeks an outlet in memories, fantasies, and visions."⁹ But it is also important to note that while many characters in Deephaven echo and reecho the theme, Jewett uses only one character in Country who dwells upon change as a completely negative phenomenon.

Jewett's direct comments about her attitude toward change reveal that her increased maturity has modified the nostalgic (and negative) feeling she held toward change when she wrote Deephaven. Just three years before the publication of Country, in her preface to the 1893 edition of Deephaven, Jewett explains her youthful sentimentality by writing, "In those days . . . it was easy to be much disturbed by the discovery that certain phases of provincial life were fast waning in New England."¹⁰ She goes on to say, "Tradition and time-honored custom were to be swept away together by the irresistible current. Character and architecture seemed to lose individuality and distinction" She notes that the money left behind by the tourist was "apt to be used

to sweep away the quaint houses, the roadside thicket, the shady woodland, that had lured him first" (p. 4). Yet in 1893, Jewett could write with hindsight given her by the passage of fifteen years. She could also say that "it was impossible to estimate the value of that wider life that was flowing in . . ." (p. 4). With greater insight she could now see that the "individuality and quaint personal characteristics of rural New England" (p. 5) had not vanished. "It appears, even," she writes, "that they are better nourished and shine brighter by contrast than in former years" (p. 5).

Certainly Jewett saw the destruction of old customs as regrettable, but the Dunnet she describes as a mature writer is not a rotting dying Deephaven. To repeat, then, Dunnet is changing, but it is not dying. This essential difference lends a different tone to the two books.

Most important in creating this tone is the emphasis on living over dying and on youth over old age. In Dunnet, the energy of youth can be exhibited in a character as elderly as Mrs. Blackett. Mrs. Blackett does not sit over high tea mourning the passage of old customs, like the Deephaven Carews. Instead, she is involved in living in the present—in chores around her house: sewing, gardening, and cooking for her son. The eighty-six year old woman turns her own carpet and then wonders why she feels somewhat tired the following week. She describes happy "Sunday nights in winter: we have a real company tea 'stead o' livin' right along just the same . . . an' we get a talkin' together an' have real pleasant times" (p. 50). She is interested in happenings in town, and Almira tells her "all the news there was to tell of Dunnet Landing and its coasts, while the old woman listened with delight" (p. 46). As Stevenson notes, old age in Country is often much like childhood.¹¹

Mrs. Blackett is described "as if she promised a great future, and was beginning, not ending, her summers and their happy toils" (p. 41).

William, too, seems younger than his middle-aged years. The narrator compares him on the trouting expedition to a "growing boy" (p. 115). When he talks with Esther, he looks "oddly like a happy young man rather than an ancient boy" (p. 126), and the "William's Wedding" sketch ends the collection on a promising, not despairing note. "They were going to be young again now, she and William, to forget work and care in the spring weather" (p. 151). These older characters are quite different from the "feeble folk" (p. 70) of Deephaven.

The most important difference that lends an air of vitality to Dunnet is the presence of Almira Todd. Eakin calls her the "essense of the village world"¹² for she is involved with the activities of the community, and is known and depended upon by all. With her herbal remedies, Almira is a life-giver, vital and strong, resisting the ills of age. She is "alert and gay as a girl" (p. 95) on her way to the reunion, and says of herself, "Keep me movin' enough, an' I'm twenty year old summer an' winter both" (p. 131).

For the most part, then, the characters of Country are involved in living in the present, not in mourning the past. Cary notes that only two females, Joanna and the Queen's Twin are abnormal.¹³ Littlepage might also be added to the ranks of the infirm. The alternatives clearly exist, however, in the person of Almira and her family. Decline and death, although still comprising a significant theme in Country, no longer have the paramount importance they were given in Deephaven.

In her early book, Jewett explored briefly a second theme that was to be developed more fully in Country, man's relationship to nature.

In Deephaven, however, some natural images seem miscellaneous and random rather than thematically important, for though they may be interesting picturesque details, they do not contribute to a unified view of man and nature, nor do they create a sustained impression. A few natural images do further a continuing concern, for the most part emphasizing the destructive power of nature as implied in natural images stressing death and in those emphasizing situations in which man is dominated by nature.

Details which fall into the "picturesque" category include descriptions like that of the Brandon house where "the lilacs were tall, and there were crowds of rosebushes not yet out of bloom; and there were box borders, and there were great elms at the side of the house and down the road" (p. 20). Additionally, some of the description of local fishing customs or superstitions are interesting local color but not developed as part of a sustained impression of nature. "When the moon is very bright and other people grow sentimental, we only remember that it is a fine night to catch hake" (p. 85). Helen also recalls a superstition about the stripe on a haddock: "they say that the Devil caught a haddock once, and it slipped through his fingers and got scorched; so all the haddock had the same mark afterward" (p. 112). To be sure, some natural description in Deephaven is precise and lovely. "After dinner Kate and I went for a walk through some pine woods . . . ; 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, and we wandered about for an hour or two there . . ." (p. 168). Other descriptions make fresh comparisons. The old sailors are described in terms of creatures from the sea: "their hair

looked like the fine sea-weed which clings to the kelp-roots and mussel-shells in little locks" (p. 78). Yet as interesting as these random images may be, they do little if anything to establish a greater pattern of unity within the book.

The natural images which do emphasize a clear thematic point are focused in one way or another on the disabling power of the Deephaven environment or on death itself. Cary points out a natural metaphor of Deephaven's decline: a big flounder the girls find trapped inside the hull of an old rotting schooner. "Like the rightly named flounder—partially disabled, lethargic, and self-satisfied—Deephaven is trapped in a world from which no escape seems possible."¹⁴ The sunset viewed from the lighthouse provides another image which relates to the emphasis on death elsewhere in the book:

. . . I remember best one still evening when there was a bank of heavy gray clouds in the west shutting down like a curtain, and the sea was silver-colored. You could look under and beyond the curtain of clouds into the palest, clearest yellow sky. There was a little black boat in the distance drifting slowly, climbing one white wave after another, as if it were bound out into that other world beyond. (p. 39)

This image is striking, but the weakness of much of the natural imagery in Deephaven is that the meaningful or even symbolic images are haphazardly arranged and seem to have equal weight with the merely picturesque.

At two other points in the book Jewett returns to this theme of nature's destructive force. In her final Deephaven chapter, Jewett describes the fury of an autumn storm:

It was a treacherous sea; it was wicked; it had all the trembling land in its power, if it only dared to send its great waves far ashore. All night long the breakers roared, and the wind howled in the chimneys, and in the morning we always looked

fearfully across the surf and the tossing gray water to see if the lighthouse were standing firm on its rock. It was so slender a thing to hold its own in such a wide and monstrous sea. (p. 242)

Nature is an overwhelming power in this description, but neither is the effect continued in the passage nor is the idea further examined. In the next line Helen forgets her fear. "But the sun came out at last, and not many days afterward we went out with Danny and Skipper Scudder to say good by to Mrs. Kew" (p. 242).

But in only one chapter, "In Shadow," does Jewett use natural imagery to create a single sustained impression. In this sketch, Kate and Helen return to visit a poor family, only to discover that both parents have died since their first visit and that the father's funeral is to occur that very afternoon. The stark natural imagery reinforces the harshness of life for these poor people. There are "gnarled pitch pines" that stand "close together, as near the sea as they dared" (p. 205). These trees look as if "their savage fights with the winter winds had made them hard-hearted" (p. 206). The girls thoughtfully leave the house to climb on the rocks and into "some of the deep cold clefts into which the sun could seldom shine" (p. 214). They wonder, "What could it be in winter when there was a storm and the great waves came thundering in?" (p. 205). The poor man had died at the moment when the tide began to ebb, and the sky grows cloudy as the funeral procession leaves. The girls note that "a strange shadow had fallen over everything. It was like a November day, for the air felt cold and bleak" (p. 220). A forlorn kitten with faded braid around its neck runs across the road in fear.

The futile struggle of the poor dead man is further reflected in some natural details. "There were some great sea-fowl high in the air, fighting

their way toward the sea against the wind, and giving now and then a wild, far-off ringing cry. We could hear the dull sound of the sea, and at a little distance from the land the waves were leaping high, and breaking in foam over the isolated ledges" (pp. 220-221). The girls predict a desolate future for the little cottage. "It is not likely that anyone else will ever go to live there" (p. 222). The thistles which the poor farmer had fought for so long "will march in next summer and take unmolested possession" (p. 222). And the narrator imagines a "fireless, empty, forsaken house, where the . . . snow has sifted in at every crack; outside it is untrodden by any living creature's footstep. The wind blows and rushes and shakes the loose window-sashes in their frames, while the padlock knocks--knocks against the door" (p. 223). Wild nature reclaims the cottage, and the family is beaten: the parents are dead; the children are separated. The situation seems utterly without hope.

Although the impression of nature in this one chapter in Deephaven is strongly unified, Jewett shows greater skill in her handling of the theme of man's relationship to nature in her later book. In Country, she moves beyond the one-sided emphasis on death in "In Shadow" to explore the theme more thoroughly. Thus in the later book, man can both struggle against the natural world and live in harmony with it; nature can dominate him or it can uplift him. The contrasting images provide a better balance and develop the theme more completely.

For example, sometimes in Country the power of nature serves to overwhelm and dwarf man, making him appear as insignificant and ineffectual as the "In Shadow" farmer. The view of Mrs. Begg's funeral seen from the schoolhouse window is described in these words:

"The bay-sheltered islands and the great sea beyond stretched away to the far horizon southward and eastward; the little procession in the foreground looked futile and helpless on the edge of the rocky shore" (p. 20). The narrator stands watching until the funeral procession "had crept round a shoulder of the slope below and disappeared from the great landscape as if it had gone into a cave" (p. 21). With the wide vista of sea and shore as background, man appears unimportant; his concerns seem petty.

However, an expansive vista is just as likely to uplift the heart and make one feel above those petty concerns. At the highest point of Green Island, the narrator describes the view before her. "It gave a sudden sense of space, for nothing stopped the eye or hedged one in,—that sense of liberty in space and time which great prospects always give" (p. 46). William describes a similar sense of connection with space and time when he comments happily that Esther can see the sea from the top of her pasture hill. It is as if the contact between them is maintained throughout the solitary year by the remote visual assurance that they share the same world. Stevenson notes that Esther is "visually and symbolically in touch with the sea," which can be seen as "a principle of life, growth, and future possibility."¹⁵ On her way to the Bowden reunion, the narrator again experiences a sense of freedom when she glimpses the sea:

When I had thought we were in the heart of the inland country, we reached the top of a hill, and suddenly there lay spread out before us a wonderful great view of well-cleared fields that swept down to the wide water of a bay It was a noble landscape, and my eyes, which had grown used to the narrow inspection of a shaded roadside, could hardly take it in. (pp. 84-85)

Man's struggle against nature, the deadly contest for existence, is only occasionally portrayed in Country. Robert Rhode suggests that in Jewett's writing "nature—in the form of trees, water, and wind—was . . . waiting to repossess the land that the New Englanders, a dying society, must ultimately relinquish."¹⁶ Though this is not the dominant impression of nature in Country, this element does exist, most notably in the "Queen's Twin" chapters.

"Poor land, this is!" sighed Mrs. Todd "I've known three good hard-workin' families that come here full o' hope an' pride and tried to make something o' this farm, but it beat 'em all Seems sometimes as if wild Natur' got jealous over a certain spot, and wanted to do just as she'd a mind to." (p. 136)

The narrator echoes this sentiment in her description. "There was a vigor of growth, a persistence and savagery about the sturdy little trees that put weak human nature at complete defiance" (p. 136). But it is important to note that Mrs. Todd limits her comments on "wild Natur'" only to a "certain spot." Nature is not always savage.

Fike makes this point clearly. "But nature in the book crowds out human life only where the human beings involved fail to understand and accommodate themselves to its laws."¹⁷ He mentions Joanna and Esther as two examples of humans who have adjusted to their natural environments. Joanna manages well on the little rocky island of thirty acres, where the trees are stunted, and the ground is likely to be covered with spray in a winter storm. She braids rushes into mats for the floor of her hut and makes sandals for her feet. She keeps hens, raises a garden, and gathers clams. Almira comments, "'You can always live well in any wild place by the sea when you'd starve to death up country, except 't was berry time" (p. 64). Berthoff makes a similar observation about

the "Green Island" chapters, which make the reader feel "the power of nature along this coast to sustain an equable degree of life."¹⁸

Even "up country" it is possible to make a living as long as one has an understanding of the ways of the natural world. Esther uses the poor land of the high ledges as sheep pasturage, and she makes her venture successful by carefully shepherding. Left to themselves, the sheep would fall prey to dogs, but Esther's understanding and patient devotion keep her sheep thriving.

Perhaps of even greater significance than the more balanced handling of the nature theme in Country is the additional focus on nature provided by Almira Todd. Her understanding of the natural world is both mystical and down-to-earth; it can make her feel sorrow or sustain her with strength. The theme, then, reaches a complex depth in the person of Mrs. Todd that is nowhere evident in Deephaven.

First, Mrs. Todd's association with the natural world is often characterized by folksy down-to-earth common sense. Her knowledge of plants allows her deeper understanding of her fellow man. Nature often acts as a mirror of human weakness and strength. She explains that the tansy in the schoolhouse lot grows so well because it is scuffed by the school children all spring "like some folks that had it hard in their youth, and were bound to make the most of themselves before they died" (p. 19). She greets particular plants as if they were friends in need of encouragement, and she comments approvingly on an ash tree that is growing 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 they'll put right to it and strike their roots off into new ground and start all over again with real good courage" (p. 84). She describes

Sarah Tilley as a plain flower, and her relative Sant Bowden is like a sprig of laurel which doesn't grow well, being out of place (p. 92). Whatever she describes, Mrs. Todd seems thoroughly at ease in the natural world. "Some folks is born afraid of the woods and all wild places, but I must say they've always been like home to me" (p. 137).

Almira's herbs not only make homely potions for coughs and fevers, but they also have a mystical significance that emphasizes a more mysterious side of her character. The narrator says of the herb 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" (p. 14). The fragrances of the garden often blow into the narrator's window, arousing in her a sense of mystery or enchantment. On one occasion, Mrs. Todd offers her a mug of spruce beer that has in it the taste of camomile and another herb that the narrator does not know. The narrator comments, "I felt for a moment as if it were part of a spell and incantation," and she calls Mrs. Todd "my enchantress" (p. 34). The narrator grants Mrs. Todd greater curative power than simply over the common illnesses she usually treats, for it seems "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).

This sense of a mysterious connection with the past, a communion with forces beyond the ordinary, gives the impression that Mrs. Todd is larger than life. She is, in Martha Shackford's words, "shadowed by the consciousness of eternal truths."¹⁹ According to Cary, she

has a universality that arises from her "involvement with nature and the tragedy of her love,"²⁰ and Eakin calls her "a priestess of experience, embodying an elemental life force drawn from the primeval strength and greatness of nature."²¹

It is interesting to note that images of Almira's secret sorrow are also closely tied to her association with nature. After hearing about her friend's love for a man who was above her in society, the narrator describes Mrs. Todd standing with the rings of a braided rug circling her feet. "Her height and massiveness in the low room gave her the look of a huge sibyl, while the strange fragrance of the mysterious herb blew in from the little garden" (p. 17). Later, picking herbs with the narrator, Almira again reveals a painful detail of her past. Whenever she had picked pennyroyal with her husband on Green Island, she had always been reminded of her earlier love. The painful necessity of keeping her secret from her husband and the sad reality of life without true love make the description poignant.

There was something lonely and solitary about her great determined shape. She might have been Antigone alone on the Theban plain An absolute, archaic grief possessed this countrywoman; she seemed like a renewal of some historic soul, with her sorrow and the remoteness of a daily life busied with rustic simplicities and the scents of primeval herbs. (p. 49)

As in the earlier scene, the image of mystery and isolation is paired with Mrs. Todd's confession of lost love.²² Fike notes an important point about this scene. Mrs. Todd's grief is revealed "precisely while she is standing in a patch of pennyroyal, as if to emphasize those healing resources which come from within the very source of grief."²³ Similarly, in the earlier scene, the scent of herbs floats in the open window. Not only is Mrs. Todd a character possessed by grief, but she

is also one who is nurtured by close association with nature.

The final description of Mrs. Todd is somewhat reminiscent of the earlier funeral scene. The narrator views both from the schoolhouse hill, and the distant figures in each scene seem to vanish against the wide backdrop of nature. Though the two scenes are connected, the latter does more than simply "evoke the presence of death," as Eakin suggests.²⁴ It also provides a subtle contrast. The narrator watches her landlady, far below, walking along the footpath that follows the shore:

At such a distance one can feel the large, positive qualities that control a character. Close at hand, Mrs. Todd seemed able and warm-hearted and quite absorbed in her bustling industries, but her distant figure looked mateless and appealing, with something about it that was strangely self-possessed and mysterious. Now and then she stopped to pick something,—it might have been her favorite pennyroyal,—and at last I lost sight of her as she slowly crossed an open space on one of the higher points of land, and disappeared again (p. 159)

The original funeral scene emphasizes the smallness and seeming insignificance of man when seen against the larger overpowering background of nature. Mrs. Todd, however, is not dwarfed, defeated, or "futile and helpless" (p. 20). Instead, the vitality of her life allows her to rise above her sorrow; though she has lived with sadness, she is not dominated by the emotion. Even as she walks along in the last scene, she stops to pick an herb, reaffirming her connection with nature and her continual concern for life and the living. Almira's response to nature is an essential part of her character; and her character is, at the same time, a significant part of the overall nature theme in Country.

Thus, although there are, in Berthoff's words, "great natural contingencies determining the forms life must take" in this region,²⁵ the emphasis in Country is not on those determiners but on those resourceful

characters who are able to overcome them. According to Fike, Jewett "is not as interested in portraying the way in which natural forces determine human behavior . . . as to demonstrate the timeless, universal durability and resourcefulness of human character when confronted with these forces."²⁶ The inclusion of characters with more positive attitudes toward nature does lend a different emphasis to Country than is present in the nature theme of Deephaven where the only developed response to the natural world is a pessimistic one. And, additionally, the many natural images associated with Almira Todd help provide a focus for the later book that the more random details of Deephaven lack.

In addition to exploring in both books the decline and death of the shipping village, as well as man's relationship to nature, Jewett also focuses her attention on the responses of various characters to disappointment and frustration. The source of personal disappointment may be, of course, man's frustrated relationship to nature, as in the case of the "In Shadow" farmer. But in many other situations, the personal unhappiness has different roots. Deephaven and Country differ both in the amount of emphasis placed on this negative side of human existence and in their ultimate response to it. As in the other themes, Deephaven is more one-sided. It contains more examples of human waste and suffering, frustrated hopes, and bleak futures, but, perhaps more important, it does not fully explore alternate responses to unhappiness.

In Deephaven, three sources of personal frustration may be noted: the loss of love, the insecurity brought on by changes in social structure and the personal paralysis of characters trapped in sordid circumstances that they cannot change. For example, the barren nature of Katherine

Brandon is emphasized when Kate and Helen discover evidence of a youthful unfulfilled love. A packet of letters bound with worn blue ribbon, a lock of brown hair, and an ivory miniature are the only remaining evidence of a girlhood romance. The narrators speculate that the young man may have met an untimely death on the sea, but he remains a mystery. Miss Brandon had lived as a proper spinster: proud, admired by the community, but essentially alone; she had never discussed her youthful sorrow with anyone.

A very different character, the shy fisherman Danny, also lives with the memory of unfulfilled love. A kind Catholic nun nursed him back to health in a foreign hospital after a boating injury. "'I 'most wished I could be sick a while longer,'" he comments, noting with frustration his inability to communicate with the woman. "'I never said much of anything either, and I don't know but she thought it was queer; but I am a dreadful clumsy man to say anything, and I got flustered'" (p. 110). Danny's "love" is so separated from him by language and his own shyness that he is unable to express gratitude. The fact that she is a nun, pure and physically untouchable, only emphasizes the distance between them. In a different vein, another character, the kindly Widow Jim, carries with her a physical reminder of an unhappy marriage. Her love was not removed and unrequited but, instead, a love gone sour. Her husband had become a shiftless drunk; his insensitivity—even brutality—is permanently recorded in the scar the widow wears on her forehead. She received the injury when he hurled a stone bottle in a rage of temper.

Some Deephaven characters emphasize a different source of personal unhappiness: the changing world that no longer holds a place for them.

The Widow Jim is a useful hard-working member of the community: "She had no equal in sickness, and knew how to brew every old-fashioned dose and to make every variety of herb-tea, and when her nursing was put to an end by her patient's death, she was commander-in-chief at the funeral" (p. 55). Yet sad as it may seem, her patients are gradually succumbing to old age, and her usefulness may soon be at an end. The death of her much-admired friend, Katherine Brandon, makes the trend all too clear, and the Widow can hardly talk of Miss Brandon without crying.

All the captains who gather to discuss old times no longer have a place in the world. One in particular, Captain Lant, is doubly lost, living on an up-country farm, removed from the solace of his old companions. He describes his feelings of uselessness to the girls, saying that it tries his patience to "be called gran'ther by clumsy creatur's goin' on fifty and sixty, who can't do no more work to-day than I can" (p. 90). He signs his letters, "Jacob Lant (condemned as unseaworthy)" (p. 97). The sad plight of Miss Chauncey and the other members of the aristocracy, of course, also emphasizes this point. Whether or not they entirely realize it, the changing world of Deephaven has no place for them; their customs are outmoded, and their days are numbered.

Additionally, Deephaven's clearest portrayals of personal stagnation focus on two characters who are unable to change their unhappy situations: the fat lady at the Denby Circus (originally a Deephaven girl), and the farmer of "In Shadow." All the details about the circus accumulate to make a dismal picture of a world lacking in vitality and purpose. The animals in the show look tired, as if they had been on the road for years. Helen explains that "there was a great shabby elephant whose look of general discouragement went to my heart, for it seemed as if he were miserably

conscious of a misspent life" (p. 130). Every detail of the show is dismal and depressing. The snake pictured in the circus advertising is dead. One poor man has the distressing job of stirring up the lions with a stick. The performers, says Helen, look like "they never had a good time in their lives" (p. 134). Even the girls' escape from the tent is disagreeable in the frantic press of the crowd; while from somewhere underneath come "the wails of a deserted dog" (p. 138).

The culmination of this unhappy catalogue of details is the visit to the Kentucky Giantess. The ad promises a 650-pound woman, but even this dubious claim to distinction proves false. The woman confesses that she weighs only 400 pounds and asks the girls not to mention this, "'for it would spoil my reputation'" (p. 140). The fat lady tells Mrs. Kew the story of her hard life, making clear her shame and regret. The girls are ashamed to witness the woman's pathetic situation, realizing that it would be "horrible to be stared at and joked about day after day" (p. 138). They attempt to assuage their consciences by looking steadfastly at the monkeys, and they speak politely to the woman, but their uneasiness is obvious. The giantess is even more pathetic because of her refusal to take responsibility for her own life.²⁷ She says of her job, "'I took up with his offer because I was nothing but a drag and never will be!" (p. 140).

In the "In Shadow" sketch, Jewett describes a poor family trapped by the circumstances of their lives. Whereas the giantess may be held partially responsible for her sad fate, the poor family in this chapter has struggled to improve their situation, but life has simply proven too difficult. The father's health prevents him from fishing for a living, and his land is so poor that "even the trees looked hungry" (p. 205).

He tells the girls, "'I've done the best I could . . . and I'm willin' and my woman is, but everything seems to have been ag'in' us; we never seem to get forehanded. It looks sometimes as if the Lord had forgot us . . .'" (p. 207). The mother is "kind and patient and tired" (p. 208), and though the children are neatly dressed in an effort to look like more fortunate children, they are "thin and pitiful" (p. 206).

The girls return for a second visit in time only for the father's funeral. They learn that after his wife had died, the man had succumbed to drink, unable to face the long winter without sufficient resources. Horn comments, "The now cloudy sky, the chill in the air, the rigid funeral etiquette of the small band of mourners and the bitter grief of the eldest son, all bespeak the finality of death" ²⁸ In the words of Arthur Hobson Quinn, death in this sketch "is treated with absolute reality." ²⁹ A relative comments on the sad life of this unhappy family. "'I guess they done the best they could. They weren't shif'less, you know; they never had no health; 't was against wind and tide with 'em all the time!'" (p. 212). Jewett's portrayal of this barren life is her most vivid description of human suffering in Deephaven.

Although there are many examples of personal disappointment and suffering in Deephaven, they are somewhat softened by Jewett's inclusion of several characters who seem more vital and alive than their unhappy neighbors. Unlike Almira Todd in the later book, however, these Deephaven characters are not fully developed, appearing only briefly in the novel. Consequently, they do little to affect the book's overall tone. In each case, too, the happier characters of Deephaven do not reveal a workable solution to the problems faced by other residents who find themselves in sadder circumstances.

Captain Sands, for example, keeps busy fishing and spinning yarns about the sea. Even though he seems somewhat content in his warehouse full of sea relics, his mind is usually focused on the past. The Captain's stories are witty and lively, but they are always about days which will never come again. His wife urges him to burn his old keepsakes, but the Captain resists, explaining that "'there are some things here that I set a good deal by'" (p. 117). It is worth noting that the Captain clings to the past as clearly as do the Carews or any member of the Deephaven aristocracy. The sword-fish sword, found fifty-nine years earlier, the wooden figurehead, the few remaining possessions of a long-dead sailor, all remind the Captain of the vigorous days of his youth when shipping and sailing were the life of the town.

Another relatively happy character, salty old Mrs. Bonny, lives in isolation from the community on a remote inland farm, going about her independent life with total disregard for social convention. She is notorious as a poor housekeeper, "and none of the wise women of the town would touch her butter" (p. 193). Kate and Helen discover the reason for her reputation when they ask for a glass of water. Mrs. Bonny produces her only tumbler, filled with an odd assortment of old buttons and squash seeds, from the back of a cupboard which contains an old boot and a number of turkey wings. She smokes tobacco, wears what Kate thinks is a nightcap, and comes to town on an unkempt old nag. In spite of the fact that she is essentially likeable, Mrs. Bonny, too, is getting old, and her trips to town have become infrequent. Though her independence allows her a measure of freedom, she does not supply more than a fleeting note of happiness to the story.

Mrs. Kew is another character who has arrived at some measure of contentment. She enjoys her life at the lighthouse and is happily married, but like Mrs. Bonny she lives in relative isolation. Despite the fact that she has a "wonderful memory for faces" (p. 126) and can tell Kate and Helen the names of all Deephaven residents, she is not a part of Deephaven society. She explains, "'I was raised up among the hills of Vermont, and I shall always be a real up-country woman if I live to be a hundred years!'" (p. 18). Her physical isolation on the island and the circumstances of her birth remove her from the immediate involvement in the dying community.

Some of Mrs. Kew's tart comments do reveal her to be an early model for Almira Todd. She describes a picture of her sister-in-law with unique insight. "'She's well featured, if it were not for her nose, and that looks as if it had been thrown at her, and she wasn't particular about having it on firm, in hopes of getting a better one!'" (p. 35). Her kindhearted acceptance of the poor fat lady at the circus is worthy of Mrs. Todd, as is her wry comment, "'I had it on my tongue's end to ask her if she couldn't get a few days' leave and come out to stop with me, but I thought just in time that she'd sink the dory in a minute!'" (p. 142). Unfortunately, Mrs. Kew remains pale and undelineated compared to Almira in the later book, having little effect on the tone of Deephaven because she is not fully developed as a character. More often, Jewett allows the focus to shift to her girlish narrators. The girls describe Mrs. Kew as "shrewd and clever" (p. 20), funny and cheerful, but the reader sees only fleeting evidences of this in the elder woman's actual speech. At their visit to the lighthouse, Helen mentions that Mrs. Kew "often related some of her Vermont experiences" (p. 39),

but the girlhood memories are not related. Similarly, on the road to the circus, Mrs. Kew is silent while Helen exclaims, "Mrs. Kew was funnier that day than we had ever known her . . . and we should not have had half so good a time if she had not been with us" (p. 126). Mrs. Kew is undeveloped for yet another reason. Although she appears in several chapters, there is no continuity of development or gradual revelation of character as there is with Almira. Neither is Mrs. Kew a thematic focal point, not being intimately involved with the decline of the village. She is certainly a likeable Deephaven resident, but she does not have the stature to provide unity for the book.

In Deephaven, then, the secondary theme of barren and disappointed lives is presented without any real alternative offered among the villagers in attitude, character, or personality. Those who do seem happy and content are either immersed in the past like Captain Sands, socially unacceptable and isolated like Mrs. Bonny, or simply uninvolved like Mrs. Kew.

On the contrary, in Country the presentation of this theme is multi-faceted. The carefully drawn balance between joy and sorrow in the lives of Dunnet residents is a more complex response to human suffering, and it provides internal structure to the novel.³⁰ With some characters, like Elijah Tilley, the response is an ambiguous mix of acceptance and unhappiness. Other characters respond to human frustration more negatively—notably Littlepage and Joanna. In addition, Jewett briefly explores religion as an answer to human suffering in her discussion of Joanna. More important, the sustained positive responses of Almira Todd and her family, responses which are gradually revealed as the novel progresses, provide a unifying dominant impression of greater optimism

that Deephaven does not have.

Jewett handles the question of human response to death with her portrayal of Elijah Tilley. He broods upon his beloved wife, Sarah, who had died eight years previously. The description of his grief clearly shows that death and sorrow are an inescapable part of life.³¹ Elijah keeps his cottage as neat as his wife kept it; the empty rocking chair, the best china, and "crockery teapot, large for a household of only one person" (p. 105) all bear silent witness to his loss. He reflects continually on his happy life with his "poor dear" (p. 105) and has "no thought for any one else or any other place" (p. 107). Yet despite his grief, he has an acceptance of life for what it is.³² Of his wife's death, he says with stoicism, "'Such things ain't for us to say; there's no yes an' no to it'" (p. 110). He faces his own death similarly. "'No; I sh'n't trouble the fish a great sight more'" (p. 107). In spite of his grief, Tilley is still able to remain a member of the community. He sometimes shares his catch with Almira and says of himself, "'No; I ain't one o' them that likes to set an' do nothin'!" (p. 109). He continues to work with the other fishermen, helping with lobster traps in bad weather, cleaning fish, carrying boats ashore. Captain Bowden comments on the group, "'They've gone together ever since they were boys, they know most everything about the sea amon'st them'" (p. 102). Elijah remains in contact with his old friends and his profession, even though he may not be able to forget his sorrow. In Tilley's response to death, Jewett reveals (yet again) a greater sensitivity to human ambiguity than she showed in Deephaven, for Tilley is neither as desperate as the "In Shadow" farmer nor as naively cocksure as the young narrators.

Captain Littlepage, who as I have already noted is the spokesman for the sad condition of modern life in Dunnet, provides a more negative view of life. His vision of a ghostly northern "waiting-place between this world an' the next" (p. 30) torments him because he cannot know whether or not the vision is true. He describes an eerie town two degrees farther north than ships have ever been. There, blowing gray figures frighten and mystify those sailors who have strayed too far into the arctic.

Mrs. Todd does not openly deny the veracity of his stories, but she speaks of him with sympathy and says that he "'wasn't what he had been once'" (p. 20). She makes "dark reference to his having 'spells' of some unexplainable nature" (p. 22), and she seems to view his morbid interest in the spirit world as a sad affliction. The narrator, too, identifies the Captain as a true eccentric. As she listens to Susan Fosdick and Mrs. Todd discuss the present lack of "queer folks" in Dunnet, folks "'that used to hive away in their own house with some strange notion or other,'" she is instantly reminded of the Captain. "It seemed to me that there were peculiarities of character in the region of Dunnet Landing yet I thought again of Captain Littlepage" (p. 60-61).

Littlepage and Tilley are both preoccupied with death, but they have responded differently. Tilley, though he grieves for Sarah, remains in contact with the community. Littlepage, on the other hand, has retreated into isolation. Jewett hints that Tilley's response may be more appropriate. The Captain is "the one strange and unrelated person" (p. 20) in Mrs. Begg's funeral procession. Later, as the narrator happily prepares for the Bowden reunion, she sees him sitting

behind a closed window in puzzled loneliness, "watching for some one who never came . . . as if the world were a great mistake and he had nobody with whom to speak his own language or find companionship" (p. 80). Littlepage longs for an absolute almost religious certainty, and he shows the danger of what Waggoner calls a "too determined assault on the unknown."³³ He will never find the stoic peace that Tilley has found as long as he seeks such an absolute. Jewett implies that the mysteries of life, death, and immortality will not be solved in this world. In Deephaven, her girlish narrators were much less willing to make such an admission.

Joanna Todd is probably the most desolate character in Country. She, like Littlepage, lives in isolation, but Joanna's physical removal from the community is complete. She retreats to a tiny island after the man she loves proves false, refusing to return to the mainland despite entreaties from family and friends, and remaining in exile until she dies. Mrs. Todd's visit to the island emphasizes Joanna's unwavering decision and points out the futility of a religion that imposes guilt and blame rather than forgiveness. This more ambiguous and somewhat irreverent view of religion is another difference in the later book. Here, Reverend Dimmick is revealed as pompously inept. Not only does he stand and screech when a squall hits the boat, but he inquires about Joanna's religious life in a "'cold an' unfeelin'!" manner (p. 69). Mrs. Todd's description is apt:

"I wished he knew enough to . . . read somethin' kind an' fatherly 'stead of accusin' her He did offer prayer, but 't was all about hearin' the voice o' God out o' the whirlwind; and I thought while he was goin' on that anybody that had spent the long cold winter all alone out on Shell-heap Island knew a good deal more about those things than he did." (p. 69)

Although Mrs. Todd tries to be understanding of Dimmick's limitations, her comment about Joanna's funeral clearly reveals her attitude toward him. A small sparrow had flown to the coffin and had begun to sing while Mr. Dimmick was speaking. "'He was put out by it, an' acted as if he didn't know whether to stop or go on. I may have been prejudiced, but I wa'n't the only one thought the poor little bird done the best of the two'" (p. 72).

Fike sees the portrayal of Dimmick as evidence that formal religion does not work in Dunnet.³⁴ Certainly, religion is not eulogized with the fervor found in Deephaven, and the uncertainty and ambiguity in answers to questions of religion are important elements in Country. However, Jewett focuses her criticism more clearly on the type of religion that Dimmick represents. It is not religion itself that Jewett criticizes but Dimmick's particular brand of it. Of Joanna, Mrs. Fosdick says, "'Some other minister would have been a great help to her,—one that preached self-forgetfulness and doin' for others to cure our own ills . . .'" (p. 65). Jewett implies that a religion preaching love, forgiveness, and kindness can be a sustaining element in a world of hardships. This is the religion that Mrs. Blackett's worn red Bible represents, or William's resolute blessing before the lunch on Green Island. What is important, and what Jewett emphasizes in Country, is the importance of love and self-forgetfulness, virtues which may or may not have their origin in formal religion.

It is interesting to note that Joanna is offered love as well as chastisement. Mrs. Todd reaches out to her with a hug and kindly words as soon as the preacher's back is turned. She offers Joanna the coral pin, sent by Nathan as a token of love for his cousin. Joanna is pleased by

the gift, but she tells Almira to wear it "'for love o' both o' us'" (p. 70). Even love and forgiveness will not cause Joanna to yield.

Berthoff states that Littlepage and Joanna reveal a man's and woman's options in the narrow world of Dunnet.³⁵ If the other characters of Country can be taken as evidence, however, Joanna and Littlepage represent, instead, extreme responses to the universal problems, not the only options. No other characters live in such unhappy isolation; no others are as violently unbending in their dealings with reality. Mrs. Todd explains Joanna's problem as one unique to such people. "'T is like bad eyesight, the mind of such a person: if your eyes don't see right there may be a remedy, but there's no kind of glasses to remedy the mind'" (p. 72). Joanna and Littlepage cannot face reality because they do not see reality clearly. "'Some is meant to be the Joannas in this world, an' 't was her poor lot'" (p. 73), explains Almira.

The alternatives to human suffering are more realistically explored in Country than in Deephaven. This fuller development of the complex human condition again reveals Jewett's greater understanding. Except for the Deephaven narrator and her friend Kate—to be discussed presently—the more positive characters in the early book are undeveloped or relatively isolated from the problems of the other village residents. In Country, Almira and her family provide a continuous reminder that the difficulties of life can be faced without retreat into isolation. Although Mrs. Blacket lives on an island, she is not lonely, being full of loving concern for her mainland family and friends. On the way to the reunion, the narrator comments on the warmth with which her elderly friend is greeted. She sees "the constant interest and intercourse that had linked the island and these scattered farms into a golden chain of love and dependence"

(p. 82). William and Esther overcome time and separation with patience and love. Their wedding is a scene of complete happiness, revealing what Cary calls the "delayed heritage of the future."³⁶

Again, the most important development of the theme of man's response to human suffering and frustration is explored through the character of Almira Todd. She, too, has been crossed in love, but her sorrow does not overwhelm her life. She quietly carries a remembrance of her lost love with her, through her marriage to another man. Her involvement in life allows her to participate appreciatively in the marriage in spite of her secret pain. She explains, "'My heart was gone out o' my keepin' before I ever saw Nathan; but he loved me well, and he made me real happy, and he died before he ever knew what he'd had to know if we'd lived long together'" (p. 49). Mrs. Todd's life has been fuller and richer than Joanna's because she has not retreated into isolation.

In Country, then, Jewett does not deny that pain and frustration exist, but she presents a variety of possible responses to the pain of life, a variety not as evident in Deephaven. There is no certainty for those who seek answers to unanswerable questions, like Littlepage. Neither Mr. Dimmick's religion nor Almira's compassion can cure Joanna, and the grief of losing a loved one is real, as Elijah Tilley reveals. Yet other characters emphasize, in Edward Chapman's words, "the greater qualities of constancy, courage and faith, that give character to a people."³⁷ The optimistic vision (provided in great part by Mrs. Todd) is not a lighthearted dismissal of real problems, but an understanding that human difficulties need not overwhelm a resourceful person. The complexity, the unity, and finally, the greater optimism are all qualities which the early Deephaven lacked.

Contributing to Jewett's more skillful handling of theme in the later book is a final difference—her more effective use of the figure of the narrator. One of the most distracting elements of Deephaven is Kate and Helen's sentimental response to the problems they encounter. They have been rightly described as self-conscious and patronizing,³⁸ even as speaking in an "impudent, conspiratorial manner."³⁹ Their youth tends to insulate them from the harsh reality around them.⁴⁰ Their ideas are usually simplistic and their feelings saccharine; their didacticism sometimes detracts from serious passages, providing too-easy explanations for life's mysteries and problems.

Jewett takes a somewhat sentimental view of religion in the early book, and her narrators turn to religion as a simple answer to the human suffering they see. Their religious understandings are immature when compared to the already mentioned ambiguous and complex responses in Country. In Deephaven, Jewett offers God as a pat answer to human problems. Miss Chauncey reads the Bible with perfect contentment. "Through all her clouded years the promise of God had been her only certainty," states Helen (pp. 238-239). Despite her mental infirmity and her loss of friends and position, according to the minister Mr. Lorimer, "she was still steadfast in her simple faith, and was never heard to complain of the burdens which God had given her" (p. 240). This testimony to the comfort of religion ignores an essential point. Miss Chauncey is as much sustained by the madness that allows her to believe herself young as by her religion. Her "happiness" rests as clearly on pure illusion as it does upon religion.

The otherwise carefully drawn pathos of the "In Shadow" chapter is marred by Kate's comments on the sadness of the dead man's life—

comments that Helen clearly approves. "'I find that I understand better and better how unsatisfactory, how purposeless and disastrous, any life must be which is not a Christian life! It is like being always in the dark, and wandering one knows not where, if one is not learning more and more what it is to have a friendship with God'" (pp. 217-218). Again, the comments shift the focus away from the real point of the passage. Nowhere has there been any indication that the poor man's failure was caused by his lack of religious faith. The man has loved his family and has tried desperately to provide for them. The circumstances of his life drive him to alcohol after his wife's death; these dismal circumstances cannot be attributed to the absence of religion. Kate's naive answer reveals that she has not truly understood the bitterness and despair of total poverty.

The girls respond to the mysteries of death in a similar manner. "To Kate and me there came a sudden consciousness of the mystery and inevitableness of death; it was not fear, thank God! but a thought of how certain it was that some day it would be a mystery to us no longer" (pp. 221-222). The poignant description of the walking funeral makes the sad finality of death quite clear without Helen's unnecessary intrusion.

Additionally, when Captain Sands tells the girls of his belief in the strange mysteries of mental telepathy, his own thoughtful words are more fitting than anything the girls can add, yet they respond with a certain degree of condescension. Helen discusses the affinity between simple country folk and the mysteries of nature. "Because they are so instinctive and unreasoning they may have a more complete sympathy with Nature, and may hear voices when wiser ears are deaf" (p. 186).

In the Deephaven narrator, Eakin sees a "gap between the depth and penetration of her observation and her limited though sincere response

to it."⁴¹ It is possible to see an ironic contrast between what exists in the Deephaven world and what the girls think they see—although the irony was not intended, as Jewett's own later apologies reveal. In the 1893 Preface to Deephaven she notes:

There are sentences which make her feel as if she were the grandmother of the author of 'Deephaven' She begs the readers to smile with her over those sentences as they are found not seldom along the pages, and so the callow wings of what thought itself to be wisdom and the childish soul of sentiment will still be happy and untroubled. (p. 8)

The girls do represent a faulty attempt to do what Jewett did more skillfully in Country, to offset a bleak and one-sided mood with contrasting impressions. In Deephaven, since the descriptive details are much more miscellaneous, the girl visitors provide the only sustained positive note, but their pat sentimentality detracts from the book; it is a false note of happiness that they provide. Though the girls recognize the pathos of the Kentucky Giantess, the desperation of the farm family, and the bewilderment of characters whose place in society is being eroded, their final responses are too cheerfully simplistic.

The narrator of Country, on the other hand, is more skillfully utilized. She "has been made less conspicuous" than the Deephaven girls.⁴² Instead of intruding didactically, the narrator of Country allows characters to speak for themselves.⁴³ She does not assert her own identity, but instead she observes quietly and unobtrusively in "a fine compromise between self consciousness and detachment."⁴⁴ The narrator's "interest in all, her tact as listener . . . brings out much of the narrative."⁴⁵

Similarly the presence of the narrator helps to unify the chapters of

Country, but this is much less true of Kate and Helen, for the Deephaven girls neither grow in understanding nor have sustained contact with any other Deephaven resident. Jewett's Country narrator does have a changing and "developing response"⁴⁶ to her summer experience which helps to provide continuity for the sketches. Both Eakin and Voelkner note that the narrator's growing friendship with Mrs. Todd adds a sense of order to the sketches.⁴⁷ In addition, her own personal response to Dunnet characters shows an internal growth in understanding. Waggoner mentions that the narrator initially shows some patronage toward the village.⁴⁸ Voelkner traces her gradual acceptance of village life: at first, she seems to laugh at Mrs. Todd's growing herb business and uses the word "childish" (p. 13) to describe the villagers. When she leases the schoolhouse for the summer, she is acting upon her desire to remain separated from the community. But, as the summer progresses, the narrator begins to embrace life in Dunnet. By the time she makes her own solitary pilgrimage to Shell-heap island, she is able to sincerely empathize with Joanna Todd. She has "changed from a person who contracts and retreats into one who expands and embraces."⁴⁹

The narrator's own comments reveal her changed reaction to Dunnet. By the close of the book, she enjoys the daily bustle of activity at Mrs. Todd's house. "Once I had not even known where to go for a walk; now there were many delightful things to be done and done again" (p. 157-8). When she returns the following spring, she is slightly disappointed that a crowd does not meet her at the landing. For the narrator, Dunnet is "a return to happiness" and a haven from the "anxious living" (p. 147) of the city. The "usual distractions and artifices of the world" (p. 151)

do not control village residents. Dunnet can even be seen as a pastoral world.⁵⁰ The narrator is renewed and refreshed by her idyllic summer. She no longer seeks isolation in Dunnet, but, instead, she has found true friendship and a greater understanding of life.

Jewett's growth as a writer can be clearly seen in many aspects of the later book. The visiting narrator helps to unify the sketches, and Jewett's handling of her is more skillful than that of her naive and didactic Deephaven narrator. The central focus on Almira Todd gives Country a degree of coherence lacking in Deephaven. The themes which Jewett explored in both books are handled with greater maturity in Country. Her attitude toward change in the village is no longer one-sided; she realizes that change is not inevitably evil. Similarly, she shows deeper understanding of man's relationship to nature, death, and the varied problems that the villagers face, an understanding often revealed through the person of Almira and her family. The themes of the later book are more fully developed, and they have a rich ambiguity not present in Deephaven. Jewett has abandoned the easy answers that Kate and Helen give for a sometimes uncertain, but essentially more optimistic vision of life. For all these reasons, Country is a more enduring work.

Notes

¹ Richard Cary, Sarah Orne Jewett (New York: Twayne, 1962), p. 144.

² Although no critics have specifically compared the two works in terms of theme, Jewett's more skillful use of the narrator is discussed in Catherine Barnes Stevenson, "The Double Consciousness of the Narrator in Sarah Orne Jewett's Fiction," Colby Library Quarterly, 11 (1975), 1-12. Warner Berthoff, "The Art of Jewett's Pointed Firs," New England Quarterly, 32 (1959), 31-53, notes both the improved narrative technique and the greater structural unity of the later work. Paul John Eakin, "Sarah Orne Jewett and the Meaning of Country Life," American Literature, 38 (1967), 508-531, comments on the visit pattern which more clearly organizes the later book.

³ Berthoff, p. 37.

⁴ Sarah Orne Jewett, Deephaven (1877; rpt. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1919), p. 70. All textual references are to this edition and appear in parentheses after each quotation.

⁵ Susan Allen Toth, "The Value of Age in the Fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett," Studies in Short Fiction, 8 (1971), 433-441.

⁶ Stevenson, p. 2.

⁷ Sarah Orne Jewett, The Country of the Pointed Firs (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1896) rpt. in The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories (1925; rpt. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1956), p. 13. All textual references will be to this edition and appear in

parentheses after each quotation.

⁸ Francis Fike, "An Interpretation of Pointed Firs," New England Quarterly, 34 (1961), 481.

⁹ Eakin, p. 529-530.

¹⁰ Sarah Orne Jewett, Preface, Deephaven (1877; rpt. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893), p. 4.

¹¹ Stevenson, p. 7.

¹² Eakin, p. 531.

¹³ Cary, p. 148.

¹⁴ Cary, p. 137.

¹⁵ Stevenson, p. 10.

¹⁶ Robert Rhode, "Sarah Orne Jewett and 'The Palpable Present Intimate,'" Colby Library Quarterly, 8 (1968), 148.

¹⁷ Fike, p. 482.

¹⁸ Berthoff, p. 44.

¹⁹ Martha H. Shackford, "Sarah Orne Jewett," Sewanee Review, 3 (1922), 20.

²⁰ Cary, p. 149.

²¹ Eakin, p. 531.

²² Eakin, p. 526.

²³ Fike, p. 486.

²⁴ Eakin, p. 531.

²⁵ Berthoff, p. 39.

²⁶ Fike, p. 483.

²⁷ Robert L. Horn, "The Power of Jewett's Deephaven," Colby Library Quarterly, 9 (1972), 625.

²⁸ Horn, p. 628.

²⁹ Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction: an Historical and Critical Survey (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1936), p. 325.

³⁰ Several people have noted the structuring principle inherent in the alternating portrayals of happiness and sadness, fulfillment and frustration. Cary describes the pattern as wave-like, the "crests of gayety" being the narrator's arrival, the schoolhouse retreat, Green Island, the Bowden reunion, Esther's farm, and William's Wedding. The "troughs of sadness" include the funeral, Joanna's story, and the narrator's departure. Between the extremes are the "sliding walls of pathos and humor" which include Littlepage, Tilley, and the Queen's Twin, p. 150. Berthoff, too, sees the happiness of the Green Island and Bowden reunion chapters as contrasts to the "death and time" emphasized elsewhere, p. 46. Hyatt H. Waggoner, "The Unity of The Country of the Pointed Firs," Twentieth Century Literature, 5 (1959), 71, points out that the barren and frustrated lives provide a "needed contrast" with the brighter side of human nature. He says that the "pictures of waste and frustration . . . help to keep the work true to its realistic intention"

³¹ Toth, p. 261.

³² Paul D. Voellner, "The Country of the Pointed Firs: A Novel by Sarah Orne Jewett," Colby Library Quarterly, 9 (1970), 211.

³³ Waggoner, p. 72.

³⁴ Fike, p. 484.

³⁵ Berthoff, p. 46.

³⁶ Cary, p. 143.

³⁷ Edward M. Chapman, "The New England of Sarah Orne Jewett," Yale Review, 3 (1913), 170.

- 38 Berthoff, p. 32-33.
- 39 Cary, p. 145.
- 40 Horn, p. 618.
- 41 Eakin, p. 523.
- 42 Margaret Farrand Thorp, Sarah Orne Jewett, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 61 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 42.
- 43 Berthoff, p. 35.
- 44 Cary, p. 145.
- 45 Clarice Short, "Studies in Gentleness," Western Humanities Review, 11 (1957), 388.
- 46 Eakin, p. 524.
- 47 Eakin, p. 526, and Voelkner, p. 207.
- 48 Waggoner, p. 68.
- 49 Voelkner, p. 210.
- 50 Robin Magowan, "Pastoral and the Art of Landscape in The Country of the Pointed Firs," New England Quarterly, 36 (1963), 229-240;
David Stouk, "The Country of the Pointed Firs: A Pastoral of Innocence," Colby Library Quarterly, 9 (1970), 213-220.

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FROM DEEPHAVEN TO THE COUNTRY OF THE POINTED FIRS

JEWETT'S GROWTH AS WRITER

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

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A comparison of Jewett's early work Deephaven to her later masterpiece, The Country of the Pointed Firs, gives valuable insights into her greater maturity as a writer in the later book. A comparison of three themes handled in both works reveals a greater complexity as well as a more affirmative vision of life in Country. First, the theme of economic decline and death, so much a part of the early work, is less one-sided in Country, where inevitable change does not necessarily mandate the complete death of the village. Second, the theme of nature is handled with greater complexity. When the miscellaneous natural images of Deephaven convey theme, they emphasize death and decline. In the later book, however, natural images are unified and multi-faceted, revealing the sustaining power of the natural world as well as its destructive force. A third theme, that of barren and frustrated lives is again more complex in Country. Characters who are able to overcome difficulty and to face life with optimism play a greater role in the later book. Finally, Jewett's more skillful use of the Country narrator also contributes to the development of theme and provides a unified vision lacking in Deephaven.