

ABSTRACT

Liminal Landscapes and Liminal Lives in Sarah Orne Jewett's
Strangers and Wayfarers

Anna E. Beaudry, M.A.

Advisor: Dan Walden, Ph.D.

Sarah Orne Jewett's short story collection, *Strangers and Wayfarers*, unifies itself around explorations of liminal places and liminal people and dramatizes themes central to liminality and borderlands studies, postcolonial theory, and ecofeminism. I examine the representations of liminal settings and liminal subjects in the light of these theoretical frameworks in order to draw attention to Jewett's tripartite purpose of recovery, preservation, and advocacy for the most vulnerable landscapes and people of her day. The first chapter of this project looks at the three categories of liminal space in the collection, the physical, cultural, and supernatural, culminating in amplifying Jewett's call to action against the homogenization of modern urbanity. The second chapter considers the types of liminal figures found in the collection, the transient, the queer, the monster, and the perimenopausal and the ways in which these characters reflect aspects of Jewett's own authorial liminality.

Liminal Landscapes and Liminal Lives in Sarah Orne Jewett's
Strangers and Wayfarers

by

Anna E. Beaudry, B.A.

A Thesis

Approved by the Department of English

Kevin Gardner, Ph.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

Approved by the Thesis Committee

Dan Walden, Ph.D., Chairperson

Julia Daniel, Ph.D.

Natalie Carnes., Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School

May 2020

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Copyright © 2020 by Anna E. Beaudry

All rights reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
DEDICATION	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
Introduction	1
Liminality and Borderland Studies	2
Environmental Humanities and Ecofeminism	7
Sarah Orne Jewett and <i>Strangers and Wayfarers</i>	12
CHAPTER TWO.....	17
“The countryside that bounded them”: Landscapes of Liminality in.....	17
<i>Strangers and Wayfarers</i>	17
Physical Frontiers and Solitary Spaces	19
Cultural Crossings and Dichotomous Domains.....	30
Haunted Homesteads and EcoGothic Eidola	39
Beloved Community and “The White Rose Road”	46
CHAPTER THREE.....	50
“I’m a lonesome creatur’, an’ always was”: Liminal Lives in	50
<i>Strangers and Wayfarers</i>	50
Jewett’s <i>Wayfarers</i> and Social Liminality.....	55
Gender Queering and Role Redefinition	61
Jewett’s Metaphorical Monsters	66
Perimenopausal Protagonists.....	72
Jewett’s Authorial Liminality and “The White Rose Road”	82
CHAPTER FOUR	86
Epilogue.....	86
Works Cited	89

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Driving across the border from New Hampshire into Maine, I always release a sigh of happiness and roll down the windows of my car. There is no better smell than the scent of coastal Maine: it is a mingling of wild blackberries, pine sap, and salt. Maine provided a stark contrast to the smells of my childhood in the limbos north of Washington, D.C., which mingled automotive oil, hot concrete, and political angst. Both of my parents have their roots in the North, and my father's side of the family has hailed from Maine for over 200 years. My family unit was the "southern" branch that had moved to the deep south of Maryland when my dad took a job at Johns Hopkins. Growing up in Maryland, we never had a sense of rootedness there, but we would make almost yearly summer pilgrimages back to Casco Bay, Maine to see our family, primarily my great-uncle Charlie who was everything that I wanted to be when I grew up. Charlie was a professor, a sailor, an endless practical jokester, and a cheap Yankee to the core. He told the best stories about his adventures living on Bustins Island, including rescuing two nuns he found stranded in a row boat, the time he and his wife Nicki shot rats with Colt 45s at the island trash dump on their first date, and his lore of pirate gold buried way out on Jewell Island. Every year, those journeys felt like a homecoming. Even though I couldn't claim Maine residency, it was the place where all the stories came from. It was the place where I made sense to myself.

When I read Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* for the first time, I again experienced that sense of homecoming. Her vivid descriptions

painted the craggy, glacial coastlines I loved so well, and her faithful renditions of the Down Easter parlance conjured up the harsh, yet loving intonations of my great-uncle Charlie and my cousins. Jewett's stories imparted everything I loved about my heritage: the stoic exteriors that covered the hearts of gold beating within Mainer breasts, the tidy and rustic New England gardens, the stubborn embrace of the cold, the dogged thriftiness I witnessed in the attic and basement collections of my grandparents (or was it just hoarding?), and the ability to be deeply nostalgic without committing the crime of romanticizing the past.

As someone who has lived in many places and travelled much, I find it challenging to feel a sense of home, community, and connection. As modern society becomes increasingly fast-paced and transient, I think our culture as a whole suffers from the instability of liminal existence; we simply were not built to spend out our lives in hotel rooms, carpool lanes, and airport terminals. Writing this thesis has drawn me closer to my roots and reinforced the importance of home. All of Jewett's fiction, but specifically *Strangers and Wayfarers* extends the invitation of home to all who read it. I had the privilege of teaching her work to a group of college students recently, and each of them said that reading her work conjured up their own memories of home, whether that was a place, a group of people, or just a feeling of belonging, but that they also felt scared about graduating from college and finding ways to build rootedness and community on their own. I think that Jewett offers comfort for those who harbor fears or carry past traumas connected to the notion of home. Her fiction lets her readers know that they are not alone. There are other strangers and wayfarers walking beside us, and, perhaps, through offering one another the

dignity of notice, maybe we can walk alongside each other, sharing our tales and our time until we find the place where all the stories came from.

* * *

I am deeply grateful to Natalie Carnes and Julia Daniel for generously giving their time to support this project as readers. Eternal thanks goes to my thesis director, Dan Walden, who introduced liminality studies to my world and whose steady guidance and humor has made this process a remarkably enjoyable one. Thank you for keeping my thesis journey drama-free. To my family, thank you for always checking in, praying for me, and loving me from Boston to Statesville to Pittsburgh. To my friends, thank you for listening to the infinite updates on my writing (a warm thanks to Luke Mitchell for saving me from the embarrassment of a large-print text, to Christina Lambert for amiably and hilariously answering my endless questions about everything thesis and life, and to Shannon McClernon for braving this storm together). Finally, to Troy for uprooting so graciously that I could pursue this dream, thank you for doing the dishes for the last six months (okay, the last six years). I love you so.

To the memory of my great-uncle Dr. Charles E. Kitchin, the truest Mainer to
ever draw breath

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Writing to a close friend early in the year 1900, Sarah Orne Jewett remarked, “it takes a good bit more time to live in two places than in one” (*Letters* 168). This kind of “in-betweening” lifestyle dominated much of Jewett’s social and physical life, as she primarily split her time between urban Boston and rural South Berwick, a shipwrighting town along the Maine coastline. Her transient life led her to a fascination with liminal places and people in her fiction writing. Jewett’s 1890 collection *Strangers and Wayfarers*, in particular, organizes itself around explorations of liminality, not only of place, but also of person. Jewett’s settings and characters struggle in the void between defined spaces, fighting, however quietly, for a sense of identity and home.

Jewett’s writings have long been categorized as regional or local-color fiction, which is accurate but restrictive, for they are also far more. Jewett saw the coastal, small town world of her childhood disappearing in the wake of industry and urbanization. She saw young people such as herself moving to cities, while their parents and grandparents lingered on in their hamlets and villages. Jewett’s stories primarily follow the lives of those left behind in the modern age: the old, the feeble, the disabled, and the poor. Jewett’s fiction witnesses to the liminal paralysis experienced by the people who find themselves caught between the old ways of the world and the new, unable to traverse space and cast themselves upon the shores of arrival.

Strangers and Wayfarers is a diverse collection of eleven short stories, linked solely by the thematic schema noted in its title, that of marginal and wandering figures. The settings are alternately urban and rural, inland and coastal, industrial and agricultural. The protagonists are by turns male and female, young and old, fit and feeble, rich and poor. In spite of the collection's wide range, however, the book maintains a sense of coherence, established by the liminal settings and the liminal status of one or more characters in every story.

Liminality and Borderland Studies

Liminality studies in literature rose out of the socio-anthropological works of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner who each studied cultural and tribal "rites of passage," but found specific interest in the "between and betwixt" transitional phase that every rite of passage contains (Turner 97). As Turner put it, "The transitional being or 'liminal *persona*' is... at once no longer classified and not yet classified" (95-6). Turner notes that the liminal *persona*'s invisibility of status has always been perceived as threatening to social groups, going so far as to say, "liminal *personae* nearly always and everywhere are regarded as polluting to those who have never been... 'inoculated' against them" (97). This perceived pollution was of profound significance to both van Gennep and Turner's work, resulting in broader application to other fields of study. For instance, borderlands studies, a close relative of liminality studies, explores physical *loci* where the edges of cultures and domains meet and mingle, pollute even, creating a no man's land where neither/nor and both/and dialogues can occur. Borderlands author Gloria Anzaldúa echoes the findings of van Gennep and Turner in her explorations of *mestiza* culture, writing, "A borderland is... in a

constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (25). The field of borderlands studies was borne out of the works of van Gennepe and Turner but applied their theories to place and setting, specifically to places and settings that can be described as “imperial fringes” (Hämäläinen and Truett 341). Van Gennepe wrote that “crossing frontiers... interests us,” a truism that only became increasingly so in America particularly as the American frontier morphed and, eventually, disappeared (15). Theorists such as D. Emily Hicks, Pekka Hämäläinen, Samuel Truett, and numerous others have offered groundbreaking insights into borderlands as a “new social history, with... attention to peoples and spaces at the margins” (Hämäläinen and Truett 340). Abroad, these theories greatly impacted post-colonial theory, as the collision of differing cultures created an in-between space called “contact zones,” places where two or more cultures fought and even merged in the brackish waters of their liminality (Pratt 6). The post-colonial writings of Mary Louise Pratt articulate the sort of cultural crossings that are possible in these contact zones. Pratt borrows the term “contact” from the field of linguistics, where philologists have long studied the creoles or hybrid languages that emerge when two or more languages rub up against each other through the proximity of conquest, economics, or border spaces. Pratt contends that a similar creole or pidgin culture is borne out of imperial contact zones, generating a liminal way of life for those who find themselves a part of both and neither culture. Liminal spaces are inherently unstable territories, due to the conflict that takes place in them. Frontiers, coastlines, battlefronts, none of these contact zones are sustainable homes for existence. Liminality studies, borderlands studies, and postcolonial theory all

recognize the need for movement out of the liminal phase. Each of these evolutions of studies in liminality find an application in Jewett's short fiction.

In *Strangers and Wayfarers*, Jewett juxtaposes spheres of existence in order to point out the conflicting natures of their manners, expectations, and likelihood of offering survival to her subjects. She employs multiple settings in her collection, using her trademark descriptive language to establish the "in-between-ness" of the spaces. For example, "A Winter Courtship" is set on a lonely, wilderness road between pockets of civilization, while "Going to Shrewsbury" takes place on a train travelling between country and city. Other stories are set in a gothic framework, such as "In Dark New England Days" and "The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation," which allow for the exploration of supernatural liminality, the space between this world and the next, the seen and the unseen. Borderlands writings provide a framework from which to consider Jewett's juxtaposition of spaces and the thresholds between which her characters are caught. Hicks opines, "border writers ultimately undermine the distinction between original and alien culture" (xxiii). Though Jewett hardly falls into the category of the racial border writer on whom Hicks focuses, Jewett was certainly a writer who catalogued the clashes between dichotomous ways of life and the resultant traumas it could cause not only to those who inhabit the in-between, but also to the in-between place itself.

Jewett did not merely depict borderlands and wildernesses in her writing, she also depicted border peoples, from the Irish immigrant to the homeless widow. Her stories narrate the ability of each character to traverse spheres of existence, some moving beyond their liminality, like Captain Ball of "The Taking of Captain Ball," while others are ultimately unable to code switch, like the

Knowles sisters of "In Dark New England Days." Pratt describes contact zones as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (4). While Jewett's clashing cultures are hardly as drastic or global as the colonialism and slavery that Pratt examines, they are in tension nonetheless, and imply effects just as profound, if only on a more localized scale.

Though Jewett was a member of white, dominant culture, as a woman and an acutely observant lover of dying ways of life, Jewett lent her voice to overlooked members of her society: the female, the elderly, the immigrant, the mentally and physically handicapped, the unmarried, and the homeless. Sarah Orne Jewett's preference for the unpreferable in her writings reveals a posture not often found in dominant cultures: a respect for the "weak" things of the world (Mason). British scholar Emma Mason, in a 2019 keynote address, discusses the binary and highly oppositional posture modern religious and political culture has assumed, a posture that has been absorbed by literary scholarship as well. Mason offers up a verse from the Christian scriptures for consideration, I Corinthians 1:27-28, where St. Paul writes, "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are...." Mason fully acknowledges the problematic nature of using the term "weak," as those who find themselves in subordinate positions must have a vast well of strength that those in dominant positions do not. Nonetheless, she continues to use the term as it captures the inherent inequality bound up in cultural power dynamics. Mason goes on to argue the necessity of inhabiting a more "weak" posture in scholarship, as it

allows for the nuance and shading of degrees not accepted by more “strong” postures and positions, pointing to poetry as a starting place for learning to hold multiple truths and interpretations at once with open hands. Jewett’s fiction accepts the “weak” posture that Mason suggests. By instilling dignity into these marginal lives, Jewett “shames the strong” of her culture, castigating them for neglecting those on the borders of life. Jewett makes the liminal central, thereby offering an alternative to the dominant ways of being that her culture presented as exclusive and authoritative.

Though from time to time, scholars have contended that Jewett is a romantic, Jewett decidedly does not idealize liminal life; in fact, she honestly discloses that liminal places and people are vulnerable and unstable, and most often experience a death of some sort, whether it is a literal death or the loss of a former way of life. Nonetheless Jewett’s writings firmly reject the binary choices available to her characters, insistent that there must be alternatives for those who do not fit within prescribed boundaries. Anzaldúa articulates the flexibility that liminal *personae* require, writing,

The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior... Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is [the liminal person] able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically... away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (101)

Minority theorists and critics like Anzaldúa have created frameworks from which to advocate for those who are not offered a place in dominant culture or are even barred from seeking a place. Every culture has marginal voices that are relegated to border spaces; Jewett’s *milieu* was hardly an exception. *Strangers and Wayfarers* captures the difficulties of liminal existence, by no means offering a

rosy reading of a life lived in the “betwixt” but insisting upon an alternative where strangers and wayfarers can thrive.

Environmental Humanities and Ecofeminism

The field of eco-feminist criticism is an intersectional field, purposefully existing in the space between feminist theory and ecocritical theory, offering subversive readings of texts in order to disrupt dominant ideologies and deconstruct monolithic boundaries. Intersectional theories are of particular use to liminality studies, as they embrace the boundary-blurring inherent to the concept of liminality. Ecofeminism, according to Greg Garrard, not only “identifies the anthropocentric dualism humanity/nature as the ultimate source of anti-ecological beliefs and practices, but... also blames the *androcentric* dualism man/woman” (26). Karla Armbruster probes a little deeper, defining ecofeminism as “explicitly work[ing] to challenge dominant ideologies of dualism and hierarchy within Western culture that construct nature as separate from and inferior to human culture (and women as inferior to men)” (98). Just as liminality or borderland studies endeavor to destabilize ideological dualisms around identity of self and place, ecofeminism endeavors to destabilize the ideological dualisms that wreak havoc on women, the earth, and other vulnerable natural bodies by viewing them as connected to “irrationality, emotion and the human or non-human body as against culture, reason, and the mind” (Garrard 26). Jewett’s stories do not discriminate against characters who express emotion or irrationality, though as a New Englander, she often expresses the characteristic discomfort at overt displays of strong emotion typical of her region. Humor aside, her characters are portrayed with dignity and sensitivity,

and Jewett often resorts to metaphors rooted in nature, both flora and fauna, to further express the emotions and traits of her characters. Jewett's clear connections between nature and her female characters provide a link between liminal places and liminal people, as Jewett erases even the human/non-human binary. Josephine Donovan, an ecofeminist Jewett scholar, has written poignantly on Jewett's equivocating between women and their places of residence, while elsewhere Donovan has detailed Jewett's work of preservation, capturing "reality before it is transformed into an object by signifying texts" (*ELC* 79). Catriona Sandilands adds that "Jewett's writings about strong women and pastoral nature are essentially elegiac... Jewett is composing a memorial to a way of life that she sees passing away before her" (58). Sandilands and Donovan's readings of Jewett are ripe for liminal applications, as they describe how she carves out a space for nature to exist, somewhere between the problematic readings of nature as passive or dumb and nature personified, which holds up humanity as the measure and standard for all things. Though she does not expressly use the language of liminality, Donovan reads Jewett as having paved a middle way, an interstitial space for nature to exist without being confined by an incomplete and unhelpful identifier. This project builds upon Donovan's writings, offering a broader application of Jewett's eco-feminist leanings towards the encapsulating field of liminality studies.

Jewett's status as a regionalist writer, though it has certainly been seen as limiting and even dismissive of her importance, actually places her deep within the ecofeminist purview. Patrick D. Murphy, in his essay on contemporary literature and ecofeminist critique, points his readers toward numerous female authors who "demonstrate a significant awareness of the interdependence of

women's oppression and environmental degradation" (24). Though he does not mention Jewett, he brings up other regionalist and borderland writers, starting with Pat Mora, who also writes about *mestiza* culture in the American Southwest like Gloria Anzaldúa. Mora's *modus operandi* is similar to Jewett's, in that she argues,

Pride in cultural identity, in the set of learned and shared language, symbols, and meanings, needs to be fostered not because of nostalgia or romanticism, but because it is essential to our survival. The oppressive homogenization of humanity in our era of international technological and economic interdependence endangers us all. (36)

Like Mora, Jewett saw the homogenization of increasing urbanity as a danger to particular ways of life, namely the small-town New England coastal and agrarian lifestyles she grew up with. Though it can be argued that some of her writings are nostalgic, they are not romantic. Jewett saw that urbanization hit hardest upon those who were too old, too weak, or too dependent on a life close to nature to accomplish the code-switching required to acclimate to city life. Jewett saw the old women and old men of her rural Maine towns as deeply co-dependent on nature. When nature suffered, so did human bodies. When human bodies suffered, so did nature. Jewett's characters are defined by their natural surroundings, just as she saw her landscapes shaped by those who inhabited and loved them. Jewett's fiction accomplishes the sort of ecological culture crossing described by Murphy, where "place is not determined by national boundaries because such boundaries often cut apart ecosystems and watersheds, even dividing lakes between states and countries. Cultures can and must traverse political boundaries to remain true to their places of existence" (27). *Strangers and Wayfarers* uses liminal places and people to redefine cultural spaces, championing the ecological and relational work of cultural preservation.

Though ecofeminism is undeniably a profound aspect of Jewett's corpus, it is not without its problems. Ecofeminism is often criticized as inherently defensive, reacting against the human/non-human and male/female binaries, but only reinforcing their existence by such a reactionary stance. Jewett's writings resist the defensive posture often criticized in both liminal and ecofeminist frameworks.¹ Jewett embraces what eco-philosopher Wendell Berry describes as "a beloved community" where the binaries of nature and culture or non-human and human intentionally abandon their dichotomous positions and seek to exist together in the liminal space of cooperation and compromise, setting aside the self in order to seek the good of the other (Berry 85). Berry borrows the term "beloved community" from the writings of both Josiah Royce and, more popularly, Martin Luther King Jr., who saw beloved community as embodying the biblical notion of *agape* love, a Greek word meaning "the spontaneous, unmotivated, overflowing love of God operating in the human heart" (Burrow 42). *Agape* love informed King's rejection of all forms of violence and hate towards his fellow human beings, a posture Berry adopts and frames in a specifically ecological way, emphasizing the importance of self-giving love for and by physical environments in the establishment of a symbiotic, *agape*-infused community. The notion of "a beloved community" echoes the work of Martin Buber and his emphasis on the "I/Thou" relationship as central to thriving.

¹ See Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett's essay "On Borderlands" or William Boelhower's article "The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix" for a discussion of the oft-inherently defensive posture that theories like these tend to assume. Additionally, Patrick Murphy concludes his essay "'The Women are Speaking': Contemporary Literature as Theoretical Critique" with the injunction that "critics need to demonstrate... that ecofeminist literary criticism is a necessary component of literary studies," not merely an extension of the rereading, recovering, and criticizing done by previous feminist theorists (46). Karla Armbruster also fleshes out the complexities and limits of ecofeminism in her essay "'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight': A Call for Boundary-Crossing in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism" where she describes ways to avoid essentialism in reading texts.

Many works of social criticism tend to set out with an agenda accomplished via the means of its characters and landscapes, rather than allowing the characters and landscapes to live and breathe on their own. This agenda-driven scholarship takes on the “I/It” posture of objectification that Buber cautions against. Ann Petry, the modern African American author and essayist, wrote of the importance of writing a story first, allowing the social criticism to emerge naturally:

When society is given the role of fate, made the evil in the age-old battle between good and evil, the burden of responsibility for their actions is shifted away from the characters.... Once the novelist begins to manipulate his characters to serve the interests of his theme they lose whatever vitality they had when their creator first thought about them. (780)

Jewett commits no such travesty. Her characters are vital; their hearts beat within their breasts. Her landscapes teem with life, or, as is the case in some of her stories, the land lies fallow and barren, but it is always real. Jewett’s people and places are agents, not props. She honors the dignity inherent in all living things, pursuing an “I/Thou” vision where human and non-human life are equal forces and partners in existence. As she wrote to one of her writing protégés John Thaxter, “Don’t write a ‘story’ but just *tell the thing!*” (*SOJ Letters* 120). Josephine Donovan, also drawing on the language of Buber, interprets Jewett’s advice as a refusal to “impose a prefabricated script upon the literal; ...For the ‘thing’ itself is animated with a spiritual presence; do not allow this ‘thou’ to be silenced as an absent referent” (*ELC* 81-82). Jewett wrote her “beloved community,” where agendas and politics were background, never foreground. Her characters may have agendas and her landscapes may be political, but she resists the sermonic style that uses its “convenient platform from which to set forth... pet theories

and ideas” (Petry 781). Jewett’s cultural work, both advocacy and recovery, are accomplished through the hard work of responsible storytelling.

Sarah Orne Jewett and Strangers and Wayfarers

Jewett spent considerable time among the *literati* of her time from both sides of the Atlantic, including Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, and many others. Despite these friendships and associations, Jewett’s writings were never taken as seriously as the writings of her more canonical contemporaries. This was in part due to the shorter nature of Jewett’s writings. She had a long-standing relationship with several generations of editors-in chief at *The Atlantic*, where much of her fiction saw print, which ensured a wide distribution. Jewett’s writings were fairly popular and well-received during her lifetime, but she did not achieve the lasting status of many of her literary friends and acquaintances whose writings were seen as more contributive to the American identity that was later cultivated through the resurgence of patriotism during the early twentieth century. Even amongst Jewett’s critics, very little attention has been paid to her short stories in comparison with her longer works like *Deephaven*, *A Country Doctor*, and *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Of her short stories, “A White Heron” by far dominates the scholarly response. Despite the lack of critical response, *Strangers and Wayfarers* was received well at the time of its publication. Many of the short stories had previously been published in numerous popular magazines including *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Scribner’s*, *Harper’s*, and *Century*. William Dean Howells, Jewett’s editor at *The Atlantic*, praised Jewett after the publication of *Strangers and Wayfarers*, writing

...it made the tears come to my eyes out of the everlasting ache in my heart for all that is poor, and fair and pitiful. You have a precious gift, and you must know it, and can be none the worse for your knowledge. We all have a tender pleasure in your work, which there is no other name for but love. I think no one has shown finer art in a way, than you, and that something which is so much better than art, besides. Your voice is like a thrush's in the din of all the literary noises that stun us so. (Howells 15)

Howells's praises highlight Jewett's tender handling of "all that is poor, fair and pitiful," the very subject matter of *Strangers and Wayfarers*. Her work provided a stay against "the changes inevitably advancing in the life of small towns in New England" (*Letters* 3). *Strangers and Wayfarers* commemorates those for whom "The bustling world was always too much" (32).

Jewett scholar and critic Sandra Zagarell has considered portions of *Strangers and Wayfarers* in a 2002 article, writing that "the pieces in *Strangers and Wayfarers* establish modernity as a palpable presence" (252). Zagarell's words offer a helpful through-line with which to consider the collection as a unified whole. Each of the characters in the collection encounters modernity in a unique but tangible way, but the fallout of that encounter is what Jewett cares about most. She knew that the result of an encounter with modernity, whether positive or negative, depended upon a character's security in a community. Jewett often created her characters from real people she met in her travels. She wrote to a friend in 1889 that she was basing the character of travelling salesman Mr. Teaby off of a delightful "funny old man in the linen duster" whom they had met at a train station (*Letters* 57). For other stories like "The Town Poor," she drew from her visits to the elderly and the disabled, sharing their stories and dignifying their experiences (64-65). In a letter to her closest and most significant friend, Annie Fields, Jewett articulated her motivation for writing the way that she did: "People talk about dwelling upon trivialities and commonplaces in life, but a

master writer gives everything weight, and makes you feel the distinction and importance of it, and count it upon the right or the wrong side of a life's account. That is one reason why writing about simple country people takes my time and thought" (82). Jewett labored over her characters and settings in order to give them the same weight in the minds of her readers as they had for her and for the real inspirations behind the narratives. Her approach can most perfectly be summed up in a letter she wrote to Sarah Whitman (to whom *Strangers and Wayfarers* was dedicated) as she toured Europe and looked at countless pieces of art: "The partings, the promises, are immortal and sacred, they are Life and not only Lives; and yet the character in them is almost more than the art to me, being a plain story-writer, but full of hopes and dreams" (173). In her art, Jewett walked the thin border between the immediate and the transcendent, carving out an in-between space for her characters and her region to live eternal through print. Though the pointed firs of her youth are long gone, and the stalwart country women of South Berwick have passed away, their memory lingers on in the liminal sanctuary of Jewett's stories. And yet, despite their marginality, Jewett's characters find a way to live in the in-between. Not all of them are successful, and even fewer genuinely thrive, but Jewett saw their liminal existences as worthy of note because they indomitably preserved traditions and ways of life that would otherwise have been lost.

This project will begin by exploring the landscapes and settings of *Strangers and Wayfarers* and continue on to examine Jewett's characters. While Jewett's characters are what make her fiction so beloved, these characters would not be who they are without the formative influence of their physical location: the region of New England. Many books have memorable characters, but

regionalist literature is unique because of the importance of place on the lives and identities of those characters. The first chapter of this project expounds the liminal landscapes and settings of Jewett's stories, identifying the labors of recovery, advocacy, and preservation Jewett undertakes, noting the ties to ecology and ecocriticism. The second chapter turns the focus to the characters who inhabit these landscapes, describing the identities the characters are caught between, and how their liminal status destabilizes the binary nature of dominant ideologies. Jewett's writings touch on archetypal monoliths, such as those challenged by post-colonial theory, borderland studies, and ecofeminism. Though some of these theories may seem an odd pairing for a white, affluent New England writer, Jewett's fiction accomplished important cultural work by offering the dignity of notice to the most marginal characters of her race and region. These theoretical lenses, though an unlikely crew, provide readings of Jewett that place her on par with the greatest cultural writers of her day, such as Emerson, Twain, and Stowe. In the words of Ann Petry, "The moment the novelist begins to show how society affected the lives of his characters, how they were formed and shaped by the sprawling inchoate world in which they lived, he is writing a novel of social criticism whether he calls it that or not" (777). This interplay between setting and character has always been a definitive quality of Jewett's fiction but has not always been considered from a more intentional perspective. Jewett scholar Rebecca Wall Nail contends that the "interaction of setting and character that provides much of the interest of Jewett's work is thus more than a technique; it is, instead, the matrix from which her art begins" (196). Jewett's writings are works of recovery, advocacy, and preservation. She did not set out to write novels of social criticism, nor has she regularly been accused of it,

but this project offers a reading of Jewett as a cultural critic, scaling her cultural criticism to the size of her locality, tackling the world's biggest problems on the level of her regional purview. It is my hope that this project will create a space, as Jewett did, for readers to dwell in the tension of ideologies, resist the homogenization of the American identity, and advocate for the most marginal people and places in our culture through the dignity of notice.

CHAPTER TWO

“The countryside that bounded them”: Landscapes of Liminality in *Strangers and Wayfarers*

As a regionalist writer, setting held great importance to Sarah Orne Jewett’s works, providing a source of identity and singularity to her stories. Jewett harnessed everything from weather and seasons to superstitions and lore in order to bring vibrancy to her narratives. Not only do these elements serve to establish Jewett’s trademark verisimilitude, but her settings also contribute to the liminality at the core of *Strangers and Wayfarers*. Jewett unifies her collection through the titular themes of strangers and wayfarers, not only through strange and wayfaring protagonists, but also through her liminal settings. The settings of the eleven stories contained in *Strangers and Wayfarers* center on themes of physical, cultural, and supernatural liminality, often imbuing a quality of agency into the settings themselves.

Jewett set herself apart as the high-water mark of regionalist writers through the physical descriptions of her settings. Jewett was a member of the first female cohort of the Maine Historical Society, and she was “elected a trustee of the Maine Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals” (*Novels and Stories* 930). Clearly recovery, advocacy, and preservation were deeply important to her. Jewett was a proud Mainer, and that pride registers in the faithful depictions of coastal villages and pine and fir-lined country roads. Jewett’s own sentiments are echoed in two of her characters in “In Dark New England Days” who find themselves “bewildered by the marvelous beauty... of their own green farms

and the countryside that bounded them" (*Strangers and Wayfarers* 255). These nostalgic descriptions are an essential part of Jewett's activist *ethos*. *Strangers and Wayfarers* recovers disappearing landscapes, advocates for the land, and preserves lost ways of life in the lasting form of the written word. This work is particularly significant, given the liminality of the settings. Because they often resist classification and ideological parameters, liminal spaces can easily be lost to history. The stories of *Strangers and Wayfarers* offer a home to landscapes of liminality.

No project has examined *Strangers and Wayfarers* in full, and no study has suggested a consideration of the unity of any of Jewett's several short story collections. Though the stories had been published previously and individually, Jewett collected these eleven stories unified by the theme of liminality, indicated by her choice in title. Considering these stories as a part of a unified narrative purpose offers a new reading of Jewett not only as the environmental advocate she is already accepted as, but as a social advocate as well, lobbying through her writings for the "weak" places and people of her region (Mason). As leading ecocritical scholar Patrick Murphy said in an interview, "Any ethically based criticism... is a type of *intervention*, and therefore can function as a form of activism and certainly a method of encouraging others to become activists" (Claaren et al. 106). Jewett's intervention and activism culminate in the final story of the collection, "The White Rose Road," where after detailing the physical, cultural, and supernatural liminality of her stories' settings, she finally offers a gentle call to action, writing: "I think that the need of preaching against this bad economy [toward nature] is very great" (*Strangers* 278). She acknowledges the temptation to declare that "Man has done his best to ruin the world he lives in,"

but ultimately concludes that a gentler approach is required, promising that “with a little more time we should grow wiser” (278). As a unified collection, *Strangers and Wayfarers* recognizes the vulnerability of liminal spaces and advocates on their behalf through dignifying these spaces with notice and loving detail. These stories subvert the traditional dichotomy between nature and culture, fostering “the sense of building a community with nature, being able to empathize with non-human animals, and learning to comprehend nature’s signs” (Estévez-Sáa and Lorenzo-Modia 130). Ecofeminist scholar Lori Gruen argues that this process of building community with nature requires “imagination” and “perception,” uniquely human traits that can be offered in service of nature and the non-human (Gruen 369). Jewett’s fiction blends the two, imagination and perception, in movement towards a co-equal relationship with nature.

Physical Frontiers and Solitary Spaces

Of all the liminalities found in Jewett’s fiction, physically liminal spaces are the most obvious. They are visible, tangible, and clearly delineated by her language. Jewett uses indicative words and phrases like “between,” “solitary,” “waiting,” “way station,” and “lonely coast” to establish the liminality, marginality, and temporary status of her stories’ settings. Out of the *Strangers and Wayfarers* collection, five of the eleven stories have physically liminal settings that break down the rigid boundaries of traditional identities, specifically those of nature and culture, human and non-human, strange and familiar, permanent and impermanent. New, more fluid identities emerge out of this disruption,

moving “toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (Anzaldúa 101).

Jewett’s physically liminal settings are those that take place in “in-between” or border spaces like roads between towns, on trains, at train depots, or houses built at the far reaches of civilization, abutting the wilderness. “A Winter Courtship” takes place on the solitary mail road between North Kilby and Sanscrit Pond where Mr. Briley typically makes “his seven-mile journey in entire solitude” (*Strangers* 1).¹ In the story, the reader, along with the characters, spends the story traversing liminal space, finally reaching a place of arrival at the end of the story, accomplished through the literal arrival at the destination and through the relational arrival accomplished by Mr. Briley’s engagement to Widow Tobin. Both “The Quest of Mr. Teaby” and “Going to Shrewsbury” introduce the industrialized liminality of trains and train stations. Trains accomplish traversal of space, and like the depots, trains are simultaneously somewhere and nowhere. Finally, “The Town Poor” and “By the Morning Boat” introduce borderland settings, homes situated at the margins of civilization. The former story takes place at a farmstead on the edge of the wilderness, while the

¹ There is significance in the setting of a road, as Mikhail Bakhtin set out the special role that roads often play in fiction in his essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel.” He defines a chronotope “(literally, ‘time space’) [as] the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). Bakhtin continues: “The road is a particularly good place for random encounters. On the road... the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people—representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages—intersect at one spatial and temporal point. People who are normally kept separate by social and spatial distance can accidentally meet; any contrast may crop up, the most various fates may collide and interweave with one another” (243). According to Bakhtin, roads function as a chronotope of liminal space where boundaries and categories meld and disappear, due to roads’ unique role as both a functional imposition of order into chaos and a connecting line between endpoints, but also as an artery or umbilical cord for civilization. On the road, time and space collapse what Bakhtin called “social distances” or the categories that normally separate people and places from one another (243). The collapse of social distances allows both the characters and the readers to enter liminal space and, hopefully, emerge on the other side with a redefined understanding of social categories.

latter is set on a remote island off the Maine coast, a liminal space on the threshold of where land meets the sea. Each of these physically liminal settings are “anchored in spatial mobility, situational identity, local contingency, and the ambiguities of power” (Hämäläinen and Truett 338). The indefinability of these settings create space for identity redefinition and monolithic destabilization.

The solitary nature of the setting for “A Winter Courtship” opens up space for breakdown of the human/non-human binary. On this lonely road, removed from the encroaching definitions of human society, other entities assert their agency. Mr. Briley, the mailman who has travelled the quiet road six days a week for eighteen years, is typically accompanied on these journeys only by his mailbag, an unloaded pistol, and his beleaguered horse. Here in the wilderness, where the restrictive rules of culture do not apply, these non-human companions are imbued with agency and personality. Again, Bakhtin’s exploration of the chronotope of the road allows for this kind of “collapse of social distances” and the queering of cultural norms and set definitions (Bakhtin 243). For instance, Jewett writes of Briley’s mailbag that it “had almost a personality to him, born of long association” (*Strangers* 1). In his solitude, Briley has made companions out of his surroundings. He is only an aging mailman, but the abandoned road, the mailbag, and the “awful weapon” (Jewett’s sarcastic description for the unloaded pistol) create a setting for Briley to imagine himself in a Wild West frontier setting, where he must brave robbers and desperadoes (2). Briley’s pistol becomes an empty representation of the non-existent danger that he invents for himself. Briley remarks several times throughout the story that he finds the New England frontier “tamer here than I like” (10), and longs for the adventure of the western frontier. Briley finds borderland spaces attractive due to their

indefinability. He is free to fill the void with the products of his imagination, where his decrepit mailbag has a personality, his unloaded pistol strikes fear into the hearts of desperate men, and he, Jefferson Briley, is a valorous pony-express driver.

Despite his imagined bravery, Briley is also weary of living his life in these liminal settings, both real and imaginary. Though he fears domesticity and defined spaces, he recognizes the inherent instability of borderlands and the problems that instability brings. Early on in the narrative, when Mrs. Tobin presses Briley to urge his horse to move faster, Briley bristles at her impatience. “‘Landy me!’ exclaimed the affronted driver. ‘I don’t see why folks expects me to race with the cars’” (3). Briley resents the technology and speed of the train, the way that it causes everyone to rush. Part of his resentment is the knowledge that this technology will inevitably put him out of a job. If robbers are holding up trains in the Wild West, surely it cannot be long before trains hold up the continuance of Briley’s vocation. More than trains, the 1908 invention of the Model T Ford would forever change the landscape of rural America, collapsing space and violating wilderness. Briley’s mode of transport is in harmony with its natural settings, and he recognizes the violence to nature that the trains and industrial technology commit. Though he may enjoy imaginary or distant violence sourced from wild cowboy dramas, he does not want that violence to transgress the woods he knows so well. Liminality often incites violence because liminality cannot be fully understood by the rigid lines of category. Every effort to categorize causes damage, physical, psychological, or emotional. The forcefulness of categorization transgresses the blurred edges of liminal space.

Briley has spent most of his life as a boarder; in a way he is homeless, despite having a rented place to rest his head. He prefers the unobtrusiveness of undefined spaces. He knows what it is to be undefined by space, and yet defined by that undefinition. In response to Widow Tobin's remark that seeing him pass by her house helps her know which day of the week it is, he replies, "I've got to be a featur' of the landscape" (12). Briley is more at home on the road than at the boarding house. Six days of the week he spends travelling between North Kilby and Sanscrit Pond, traversing undefined space, until, after eighteen years of this, the very undefinition of the space is defined to him. He knows every tree, every stump, every bend in the road. Briley identifies himself with his non-human surroundings, typical of the way that liminal spaces breakdown the human/non-human binary. As he says to his passenger, soon-to-be-fiancée, Widow Tobin, "Me an' the beast's done it eighteen years together, and the creatur' warn't, so to say, young when we begun it, nor I neither. I re'lly didn't know's she'd hold out till this time" (4). Implied in his remark about the horse is surprise that he, too, has held out this long. Throughout the story, Briley often pawns off his own feelings and thoughts onto his horse, with whom he has come to identify himself. As he begins to have doubts about his possible future with Mrs. Tobin, the horse also is described as "faltering" (10). As he describes his disgruntlement with the weather, he articulates this through the pronoun "we," including the horse in these emotions. Finally, when he agrees to marry Widow Tobin, he lays some of his justification on consideration of his horse, saying "I've been promisin' of her a rest this good while" (16). Widow Tobin even accepts this blurring of the human and non-human in order to win Mr. Briley. Briley says to her, "we'll have a good comfortable winter, me an' you an' the old sorrel," including the horse in

their new family unit (16). Mrs. Tobin acknowledges this by identifying herself with the horse, replying that Briley had “Better keep her a steppin’... She’ll stiffen up master, an’ disapp’int ye, come spring,” a remark that could apply as equally to Mrs. Tobin as to the horse (16). Widow Tobin accepts this blurring of distinctions as a necessary part of her life with Briley, who serves as an embodiment of the liminal space between human and non-human, nature and culture.

“A Winter Courtship” hints at the liminal complications caused by the development of train technology, a reality Jewett expands upon in both “The Quest of Mr. Teaby” and “Going to Shrewsbury.” Like Mr. Briley, the protagonists of both stories are wayfarers experiencing a kind of homelessness. Mr. Teaby is a travelling tincture salesman, hoping to court the determined spinster Sister Pinkham and settle down, while Mrs. Peet is a newly homeless widow who is emigrating to the nearby town of Shrewsbury, hoping to cast herself on the mercy of relatives. The action of both stories centers around train technology. Mr. Teaby and Sister Pinkham converse while seated at a way station as they wait for the train. Mrs. Peet converses with the story’s narrator while on the train to Shrewsbury. Both the station depot and the train car convey a second sort of physical liminality only possible through the development of technology.

Technology is itself an experience of liminality. There is no place of arrival. Technological advancement is a speeding train with no destination. Users exist between updates, between versions, between releases, and every time a development is revealed, users know that this too is only a way station; moving on is inevitable, but arrival is impossible. Advancement is a young person’s

game because of the energy and code-switching required to keep up; Jewett saw the trauma this fact had upon the aged. Though she handles this trauma with lightness and, at times, humor, readers cannot ignore the distress of her characters' feelings and experiences.

Mr. Teaby, like Mr. Briley, is a feature of the landscape. Sister Pinkham remarks to the narrator that if something were to happen to Mr. Teaby, "there's nobody would be more missed" (76). Mrs. Peet, too, is described in terms of the landscape. Early on in the story, when the narrator learns that Mrs. Peet has left her farm for the city, she worriedly muses to herself: "Mrs. Peet was too old and too characteristic to be suddenly transplanted from her native soil" (139).

Likened to a plant, when Mrs. Peet is uprooted from her village, she is uprooted from her native soil that informed her identity and personhood. This sense of rootlessness is echoed in the setting of each tale. Both "Mr. Teaby" and "Shrewsbury" are set in autumn, a time of transition between the ripeness of summer and the fallowness of winter. Additionally, the greater part of each narrative is spent in in-between time, the time between trains in "Mr. Teaby" and the time between towns in "Shrewsbury." In "Mr. Teaby," the wayfaring nature of the story is mirrored in the southward flight of the crows (61), and Mrs. Peet describes the feeling of being on the train as "jest like flyin' through the air" (143). The settings reinforce the unsettledness of the characters and their prospects.

The rootless nature of the settings is exponentiated by their technological components. The train depot where "Mr. Teaby" takes place only exists as a place of departure; it is not itself a place in the sense of destination. People arrive there only to leave; no one goes there to stay, only to wait. The same is true of the

setting of "Shrewsbury"; a train is somewhere and nowhere at the same time. It is constantly in motion and thus impossible to define or pin down. Jewett's transitory settings create an unsettled feeling in her readers, impressing upon them the tragedy of liminality. In the words of Mr. Teaby, "I feel as if everything was temp'rary" (71). Mrs. Pinkham implies that this temporariness includes Mr. Teaby's profession, mentioning that the products he sells door-to-door are "sufficient to the stores," indicating the redundancy of his proffered wares (70). Even though the tone of "The Quest of Mr. Teaby" is lighthearted overall, Jewett does not give her readers resolution at the end of the narrative. The story ends with Sister Pinkham pursuing Mr. Teaby to return his mended umbrella, but Jewett does not close the loop. There is no promise that Mr. Teaby will move out of his liminality, a lack of closure felt in the continued waiting of the narrator at the depot. The train still has not come, nor is there a definite feeling of resolution. Like her settings and her characters, Jewett's resistance to typical plot structures emphasizes her love for expressions of liminality. She refuses the Aristotelian classifications of development, climax, and denouement. Her stories are vignettes, glimpses through strangers' windows, suspended in the ambiguities of time.

Just as Jewett's technological liminalities do not find clean resolution, so too do her borderland spaces suffer from ambiguity and instability. Both "The Town Poor" and "By the Morning Boat" are set on edges of civilization, one on the edge of the New England wilderness, the other on a remote island off of the Maine coast. In her analysis of regionalist literature's gothic subtleties, Joanne B. Karpinski postulates how rural New England became "a species of frontier for the women who remained in its diminished ports and on its grudging

farmsteads" (140). Karpinski goes on to argue that "this unmanned New England landscape" generates spaces for marginalized people to pursue "opportunities for self-definition" otherwise unavailable to them (141). Jewett's fiction depicts a more nuanced understanding of this. Self-definition relies upon, in Karpinski's words, "economic and psychological conditions of autonomy" (154). Jewett's physically liminal settings depict both the autonomy possible when economic and psychological stability are assured as well as the inevitable captivity and isolation when economic and psychological stability are absent.

Jewett did not write her remote settings in a way that allowed for an easy existence, reflecting the reality of the world she saw around her. As Miss Wright of "The Town Poor" remarks about the New England wilderness, "I shouldn't like to live in them northern places" (*Strangers* 36). Miss Wright and her travelling companion Mrs. Trimble come across a remote farmstead that, while nearer than "them northern places" is still just as cold and inhospitable. The narrator describes the poor women, the Bray sisters, who live at this farm as "captives," recalling early American captivity narratives where prisoners of war were carried off into the inhospitable wilderness. They are isolated physically, socially, and spiritually, held captive to the slim charity of the Janes family who owns the "starved-lookin' place" (44). They exist at the fringes of no-man's land; they have no friendship apart from each other, and their physical handicaps prevent them from going into town to church. The language Jewett uses to describe the Bray girls' privations are amplified in the descriptions of the landscape and setting. The ground along the road to the Janes' farm is frostbitten and the farm itself is described as "stony and sodden. Somehow, even Parsley itself [a remote northern village] could be hardly more forlorn" (38). Like the

Bray girls who are physically disabled, the land appears to suffer as well; both, indeed, suffer from neglect. The Bray sisters offer their guests all the food that they have, echoing the starved nature of the land upon which they live. Jewett herself draws explicit connection between the women and their location: “the sisters felt their own uprooted condition afresh, and their guest for the first time really comprehended the piteous contrast between that neat little village house, which now seemed a palace of comfort, and this cold, unpainted upper room in the remote Janes farmhouse” (50). The Bray sisters, made liminal through their loss of property and economic independence, exist also in a liminal setting, one that can neither be characterized as wilderness nor as civilization. The farmstead defies definition, existing outside of traditional categories.

The island setting of “By the Morning Boat” also breaks down definitional boundaries, but in a very different way from “The Town Poor.” According to Willa Cather, Jewett confessed in a letter her own propensity to link old women and old houses, recalling that, “when an old house and old woman came together in her brain with a click, she knew that story was under way” (xvi) The narrative of “By the Morning Boat” also opens with a blatant comparison made between female bodies and the land: “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” (197). As the child of a seaside shipwrighting town, Jewett knew firsthand the particular traumas of sailor’s wives, the complex love/hate relationship they bore for the sea that could either bring them home their husbands and sons loaded with profit, or bear them home wrapped in sailcloth with a stitch through their noses. These anxieties are voiced by Elisha’s mother and grandfather who know firsthand the

“dangers ashore” (200). And yet, the grandfather insists upon Elisha being sent ashore to the city where he can make a living and become a man. The liminal space of the island is portrayed as the proper setting for women, the very young or the very old, and for nature, but not as the proper place for men in their prime.

Jewett begins the story at dawn, setting it at “the time of day when the world belongs more to birds than to men” (203). Nature has agency at this time of day, the time before the sun rises and bids men to their efforts at profit and preeminence. Elisha awakens to manhood’s time of day, “to a joyful sense of manliness and responsibility; for him the change of surroundings was coming through natural processes of growth, not through the uprooting which gave his mother such an aching heart” (203-4). Elisha views his incumbent departure from his frontier home as a step in his maturity, while his mother views it as a loss of community and place. Jewett seems to imply that it is both. Elisha will lose the “sense of his old identification with the home interests” (213), a loss that Jewett mourns through the visible isolation of Elisha’s family. And yet, Elisha is male. Jewett seems to imply that he cannot and ought not remain in the liminal spaces so hospitable to his mother and aging grandfather. Elisha will thrive in society, the space carved out for him by generations of virile young men before him. The mother and the grandfather, on the other hand, can only find home on the borders of the world, a place that accepts the autonomy they have carved out for themselves away from a culture that does not value them due to her sex and his age. The mother even expresses anger at the island for not being more hospitable: “Then she looked round at the poor, stony little farm almost angrily. ‘He’d no natural turn for the sea, ‘Lisha hadn’t; but I might have kept him with

me if the land was good for anything'" (215). As Karpinski reminds us, women are always assigned the leftovers; men, like Elisha, depart for "urban industrial centers" while women remain as "internal exiles" in the "wasteland" that men leave behind (140). The mother remains on the physical borders of existence while her son sprints toward the heart of civilization. And yet, Jewett seems to imply an irony in this; the mother, though she lives on the edges of civilization, rules her domain. She has found true autonomy through property ownership and centralized community. Elisha, on the other hand, is heading into society where he will be lost in the crowd and become a cog in the industrial machine. The story ends with his isolation: "Then the country boy went on alone to make his way in the wide world" (219). There is a broadness to the mother's tiny island existence, while Elisha's departure for the "wide world" feels narrower for his solitude.

Through her physically liminal settings, Jewett creates spaces where the marginal can be central, the inanimate can become animate, and existence can be redefined. These physical subversions, however, are only the beginning of her work. Jewett saw cultural liminality as a fruitful space where cultures and ways of life could collide, learn from each other and adapt. Jewett's culturally liminal settings provide opportunities for boundary breakdown and redefinition.

Cultural Crossings and Dichotomous Domains

Unlike the obvious marginality of Jewett's physical borderlands, her cultural margins can be more difficult to determine. Postcolonial writings provide a helpful framework, particularly those of Mary Louise Pratt who coined the term "contact zones" in her work *Imperial Eyes* to describe "the space of

colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (6). Pratt goes on to explain that she borrows the term "contact" from the field of linguistics where it refers to the sort of pidgin or creole languages that emerge from the inevitable improvisation which arises out of separate cultures that regularly rub shoulders with each other and develop a form of blended communication. This cultural closeness requires a treatment of "relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees,' not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (7). While Jewett's short stories are hardly the postcolonial frontiers described by Pratt, the tensions created by various ways of life in contact with one another creates a cultural liminality that Jewett liked to emphasize in her writings.

Three of Jewett's stories from the *Strangers and Wayfarers* collection center around cultural liminality and the contact zones created by the intersection of two or more ways of life. In similar ways to her descriptions of her physically liminal settings, Jewett uses language to establish the precarious nature of cultural contact zones. In "The Luck of the Bogans," Jewett describes her characters as "straying" (92, 94), and their happy times doomed to "end as summer days do" (96). In "Fair Day," Mercy Bascom constantly notes the pace of modern society, asking, "How do folks live that wants always to be on the go?", while she herself, though active enough, experiences "reluctance at being left behind" by her family who rather take her for granted (124, 116-17). In "The

Taking of Captain Ball,” Jewett establishes a dichotomy between sea and land in her opening paragraphs, foreshadowing the difficulties Captain Ball will face in adjusting to shore life, or, as he perceives his seaside retirement, “condemned to an inland town” (157). With each story, despite vast differences in tone, Jewett sets the stage for the tensions between cultures or ways of life. “The Luck of the Bogans” ends tragically, with Mike Bogan unable to code switch between his old life in Ireland and the difficulties of life in America. “Fair Day” ends happily with Mercy Bascom finding a new lease on life after a brisk walk to her old homestead, where she is able to reminisce about the old days but ultimately blazes a trail into the new opportunities her old age offers to her. “The Taking of Captain Ball” takes a third way, an intentional habitation of the contact zone, where Captain Ball produces what Pratt would call a “creole” culture, a mingling of sea life and land life in the liminal space of his coastal home. With each of these three stories, Jewett explores the simultaneous opportunities and dangers of the contact zone.

“The Luck of the Bogans” is one of several Irish stories Jewett wrote during her career, but the only one present in *Strangers and Wayfarers*. The Bogans are an Irish immigrant family who come to a presumably New England town to pursue their own American Dream for the sake of their only son, Dan. A story of immigrants clearly begs for a contact zone reading, as immigrants are themselves an embodied contact zone where their old and new worlds cohabit and inform the other, resulting in new traditions and practices. Delphine Fongang, in considering African diasporic literature and postcolonial liminality writes of the inherent liminality of the immigrant experience: “...the diaspora becomes a liminal space, a threshold where postcolonial subjects

constantly remake their identities through movements and migrations; searching for space and place in metropolitan spaces” (138-139). While modern readers might be inclined to lump Irish immigrants in with the rest of white culture, the Irish have long held a place as postcolonial survivors of British imperialism, as well as targets of American racism and prejudice during the mass Irish migrations of the mid-1800s after the Potato Famine. Many Irish, like the Bogans, came to America trying to find a better life. This is no American Dream success story, however. The dark fate of the Bogans is foreshadowed in the send-off they receive from their Bantry neighbors back in Ireland. When a passerby asks one of the Bantry craftsmen what all the hullabaloo is about, the shoemaker responds, saying, “’Tis the Bogans going to Ameriky, yer reverence... The folks gived them their wake whilst they were here to enjoy it” (83). From the beginning of the story, the reader knows that Mike is headed to his death, either literal or metaphorical. The story begins and ends with a death, the first figurative, the last literal, in the dual deaths of Dan and Mike Bogan. The Bogans hope that in America, their son Dan can become “a gentleman” (85). They bring their old-world ideas of class to America, where they have heard that anyone can make for themselves the noble life that they were denied in the old world. This family is entirely unaware of the high cost at which this American Dream comes.

The Bogans come to America from rural, pastoral Ireland. Jewett tries to ensure that her readers grasp “the change of surroundings” causing immigrants to be “heartsick with the homesickness” (88). She goes on to describe the “life in the open air under falling showers and warm sunshine, a life of wit and humor, of lavishness and lack of provision for more than the passing day—of constant companionship with one’s neighbors” (88). The description of the Old World is

certainly nostalgic and romanticized, but intentionally so. With it Jewett strikes a drastic contrast with her description of the urban jungle to which the Bogans arrive: "Their old neighbors were not housed in palaces after all, as the letters home had suggested... no more tumbling on the green turf among the daisies for [Dan]" (91-92). Mike goes on to take a smithy job in a "hot half-lighted shop" (93). Jewett subtly creates a sense of unease in her readers through the contrast between the pastoral life the Bogans were given and the industrial life they chose. She even describes how money went further back in Ireland, but how the Bogans struggle to make their pay stretch far enough in America (92). The reader senses the "radically asymmetrical relations of power" in the Bogans' contact zone (Pratt 7). They are at a disadvantage as immigrants, and if they want to succeed, then they will have to play by different rules. Jewett implies that the core trouble with the Bogans' new life in America is its divorce from the land. Dan Bogan is described by his neighbors as having the "divil" in him, the cause of which they cite as the lack of "a spade in his hand to touch the ground" (*Strangers* 108). The Bogans emigrated from a culture that prioritized agrarian life but transitioned to a culture where the land is erased to make room for industry, economic advancement, and cramped living. The Bogans are unable to create a liminal space that combines both, resulting in deep loss and tragedy. It would seem that the luck of the Irish does not equate with the luck of the Bogans, leaving them high and dry, powerless to assimilate. Mike Bogan is unable to traverse the contact zone and exit liminal space, resulting in the death of his overindulged son and his own death from a broken and despairing heart.

"Fair Day" is a very different story from "The Luck of the Bogans," and the domains in tension are far less obvious. Mercy Bascom hails from a

disappearing generation. She was widowed early in life, which forced her into a self-sufficiency particular to hardy New England women. A longtime favorite of Mainers, *The Maine Idea* is a collected anthology of dry, Maine humor. On one page, the book hosts a picture of a craggy old woman with wrinkles like tree bark, captioned with, "Us country women make good wives. No matter what happens we've seen worse" (Jennison 68). Mercy Bascom is this sort of country woman. She raised her four children single-handedly, ran the family farm, and managed to remain debt-free (*Strangers* 117). But as Mercy ages, she encounters a different way of life in the younger people of her region. Her daughter-in-law, a nice enough young woman, is constantly "in a state of trying to catch up with her work" and described as "given to undue worldliness and style" (117, 122). Mercy experiences cultural liminality brought about by her loneliness, caught between her own familiar way of life and the new ways of living natural to a younger generation: "It may have been that old Mercy began to feel a little lonely and would be glad to have somebody of her own age with whom to talk over old times. She never had known the people much in this Bassett region, and there were few but young folks left at any rate" (123). Mercy must attempt to create "interlocking understandings and practices" in order to find a way forward (Pratt 7).

Jewett accomplishes these "interlocking understandings and practices" by sending Mercy on, of all things, a walk. She is inspired to take a trip up to her old farmstead, which she has been renting out to a young farming family. This site of blending the old and new ways of life provides Mercy with a path forward through her alienation. Even her walk through the fields creates in Mercy a liminal space between her own old age and the youth she is encountering,

causing her to laugh aloud at the paradox she has become: "Why, I'm running away just like a young-one, that's what I be," while pages later she says of herself "What an old gal I be" (*Strangers* 127, 129). While she wanders over her old lands and peeks in the doors of her old house, observing the still life left behind by the family of renters, she begins to take stock of her own life. She feels useless with her son and daughter-in-law, longing to make herself of value. She also thinks back on her past and realizes that there is an unresolved feud in her past with her sister-in-law, Ruth Partlett. Seeing her old home as the site of fond memories from her past, as well as witnessing the way that the new renter family has also made a home creates a vision in Mercy's mind of a future where she can stride boldly into her old age with the vigor of a young woman. She determines to reconcile with her sister-in-law, making peace with the past, and offer herself as a help to her young renters, making peace with the future: "Whether this was the culmination of a long, slow process of reconciliation, or whether Mrs. Bascom's placid satisfaction helped to hasten it by many stages, nobody could say" (132). Mercy leaves her cultural liminality behind, interlocking her past and her future through reconciliation ultimately with herself. She goes to bed with joy, "strangely excited and satisfied, as if she had at last paid a long-standing debt. She could trudge across pastures as well as anybody, and the old grudge was done with" (137). Mercy Bascom embraces her present moment, reveling in the new way of life she has created for herself through the contact between old and new.

Jewett's final exploration of cultural liminality is accomplished in "The Taking of Captain Ball." This story is easily the most humorous of the stories found in *Strangers and Wayfarers*, providing a welcome reprieve from the

heaviness of the preceding story, "Going to Shrewsbury." Captain Ball is a career seaman who, after the death of his sister, has returned to shore and struggles to set up house amidst the landlubbers. Not only do the ways of the landbound baffle him, the ways of women are what really put him out to sea, so to speak. Jewett sets up a dichotomy between land and sea by emphasizing the tamedness of one and the wilderness of the other, but Captain Ball constantly tries to break this binary down. He describes his sister as "his superior officer," trying to create a language that makes a liminal space between his life on the ocean and his new life in society (158). He refers to his sister's friend Widow Sparks as "his sister's lieutenant" (162) and describes his housekeeper's domestic upper hand as "carr[ying] almost too many guns" (170). Jewett was hardly the first to emphasize the conflict between sea and land. "The Taking of Captain Ball" follows in the vein of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pilot*, which, "retain[s] the dichotomy between land and sea.... Wherein land is the realm of conflict while the sea offers resolution and freedom" (Walden 148). Cooper and Jewett reverse the usual terrestrial-centric view of land as civilization and sea as wilderness through their respective nautical characters, Long Tom Coffin and Captain Ball, who both balk at the restriction and social dangers of landed life, preferring their homes on the high seas. In an attempt to neutralize the threat of the shore and impending domestication, Captain Ball reads his new surroundings through his native language, just like the colonial explorers of Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*.² Pratt describes this process as a part of "navigational mapping," where

² While it may seem strange to consider "nautical language" as a language in its own right, numerous works have been written legitimizing nautical parlance. Jill Gidmark has published the *Melville Sea Dictionary*, a volume entirely devoted to cataloguing and analyzing the sea language in Melville's novels, while Robert Hampson has published an essay on Conrad's use of nautical language in his novels.

“the naming, the representing, and the claiming are all one; the naming brings the reality of order into being” (33). Captain Ball only feels at home at sea. The only way he knows how to exert control over the chaos his new environs evoke is to read this new culture through his native language of the sea.

The difficulty, of course, is that his new culture does not want to be read through the sea. The women of the town want Captain Ball to marry one of them, hope he will settle down and adjust to life on land. They attempt to read him through their landed gaze, laughing at the way that he runs his home like he is aboard ship (*Strangers* 176). Captain Ball, despite the merciless teasing of his female neighbors, manages to create what Mary Louise Pratt would call a creole or pidgin culture, where the customs of the sea and the customs of the land are blended, creating a liminal space where he chooses to dwell in peace. He concedes to his housekeeper, who, it is eventually revealed, is his niece Ann, that “Women-folks is cap’ns ashore,” offering a mingled space where his house is still run like a ship yet run not by him but by Ann (188).

Jewett’s culturally liminal settings offer diverse perspectives on the interactions of differing ways of life. Jewett, having watched the small villages of her youth erased by the dominating culture of industrial America, knew that not every contact zone conflict would result in a peaceful treaty between each way of life. Nonetheless, Jewett saw that the people, spaces, and cultures who survived the evolutions of time were those who were equally elastic in their approaches to new ways of life, while simultaneously remaining deeply rooted to their old ways of life. Mike Bogan, by severing his family from their land, ended up

Additionally, Janet Sorensen has written a book on the adoption of nautical jargon into the English language.

sealing his family's failure in the New World, while Mercy Bascom and Captain Ball, by seeking a blending of their past and their future, created a present where they could thrive. Even though Jewett wrote spaces where her characters could generate new boundaries of living, she also recognized that sometimes there can be elements outside of anyone's control, factors she considered by writing supernaturally liminal settings for her stories.

Haunted Homesteads and EcoGothic Eidola

As a woman of the 19th century who read authors like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and the Brontës, Jewett was fundamentally influenced by the Gothic novel.³ Her stories often include elements of the supernatural or details of local superstition and lore. Not only did Jewett incorporate supernatural elements into her stories, she also painted gothic or haunted landscapes for her stories. These haunted landscapes were hardly figments of Jewett's imagination, however. Scholars Monika Elbert and Wendy Ryden consider Jewett's use of gothic tropes in their 2017 article, pointing out that post-Civil War, "northern New England communities in the nineteenth century experienced change that registered for the human inhabitants as a crisis of decline... rural areas that lacked rail access were depopulating at an alarming rate," which ultimately led to the "iconic image" of the abandoned New England farmstead (496). Borrowing from Andrew Smith and William Hughes's term "EcoGothic," Elbert and Ryden conduct a gothically-bent ecofeminist reading of

³ Jewett writes in her letters about each of these authors. Stowe's *The Pearl of Orr Island* was a particularly impactful novel on Jewett's writing according to Annie Fields (*Letters* 8). Jewett also writes to Sara Norton of her delight in reading Sedgwick's biography and to Sarah Whitman of her pilgrimage to the Brontë home while in England (218, 157)

a handful of Jewett's ghost stories, concluding that, "through meditations on fallen nature, crumbling houses... Jewett's ghost stories seek to reconfigure nature and then to repopulate houses with the memories of the dead" (511). Though none of Jewett's stories in *Strangers and Wayfarers* strictly qualify as "ghost stories," there are two stories that harness uniquely gothic tropes in order to cast light upon the supernatural liminality generated by loss and transgression of home.

The notion of home is centrally important to both ecofeminist studies and gothic literature. Andrew Smith and William Hughes claim,

from its origins, women's Gothic fiction has undermined fictions of the human and the nonhuman, the natural and the unnatural by creating worlds in which the everyday is collapsed with the nightmarish. Distortion, dislocation, and disruption become the norm, and the domestic and the grotesque, the alluring and the terrible coexist. Because of its obsession with the role of place in subject formation and in the destabilization of the "home" as a foundation of myths of domesticity, the Gothic is a particularly appropriate genre.... (12)

Both "The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation" and "In Dark New England Days" exhibit the qualities of distortion, dislocation, and disruption that Smith and Hughes point to, blending the "domestic and the grotesque" to create a liminal plane of existence. According to Elbert and Ryden, this liminal plane is inhabited by the *unheimlich*, the uncanny, "which allows the gothic revelation of hidden confluences comprising prosaic realities. The notion of the haunted landscape is integral to this endeavor as is the tensive juxtaposition of the natural and civilized worlds" (Elbert and Ryden 498). Each of the two stories features a supernaturally liminal setting where the stability of "home" has been threatened or compromised, alongside an unsettling sense of familiarity (the uncanny) accomplished through dream-states or curses.

Other scholars have considered the uses of haunted houses to suggest gothic liminality in New England fiction, as recently as the stories of popular Maine author Stephen King. Rebecca Janicker quotes from King's novel, *Bag of Bones*, where King writes "In a house, especially an old one, the past is closer," a claim that can certainly be applied to Jewett as well (183). Janicker goes on to comment on King's use of haunting "to transmit memory and shape identity" through the way that liminal spaces "act as a destabilizing force" (184, 185). In this sense, King writes very much in the tradition of Jewett's gothic fiction. Jewett uses old houses, like the Knowles homestead or the Sydenham plantation, to collapse temporal boundaries and allow the living and the dead to walk amongst each other. These haunted limbos destabilize the identities of the characters, but also of the reader, as the narratives become increasingly uncertain and truth becomes unreliable.

Though Elbert and Ryden focus their reading of Jewett around the haunted New England landscape, Jewett did not confine herself exclusively to New England. "In Dark New England Days" is set, obviously, in New England, but "The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation" is set in Beaufort, South Carolina after the end of the Civil War. Jewett focused much of her efforts on preserving the disappearing ways of New England life, but recognized that regional haunting was not an exclusively northern phenomenon. Jewett frames the story around the quixotic quest of an aging and mentally decaying southern belle to visit her ancestral home, now a derelict plantation that has been handed over to her former slaves. From the beginning, Jewett establishes the narrative as liminal, choosing to set the story on Holy Saturday, the spiritually liminal day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday; it is a day of waiting, a day between death and

life. The story even begins with young women gardening in the church graveyard, another image of life amidst death, breaking down the boundary lines between the two. Into this liminal plane steps Mistress Sydenham, who Jewett likens to a ghost, describing her “like some shy, dark thing of twilight” whose life “was spent in a strange dream” (*Strangers* 21, 23). Mistress Sydenham is accompanied by a loyal former slave, Peter, a decidedly caricatured representation of the postbellum stereotype.⁴ However problematic the depiction of Peter may be, he serves as a shadow that follows Mistress Sydenham about, the dark figure who accompanies her wherever she goes, standing as an uncanny reminder of a bygone era.

These two wayfarers journey to St. Helena’s Island, the former home of the Sydenham plantation. Lost in her dementia, the Mistress has forgotten that the plantation was destroyed after the war and the land handed over to the formerly enslaved peoples who lived and worked on the property. The reader knows from the outset that this quest cannot end happily. This mock-fairy tale structure “evokes the supernatural” and “toys with the possibility of the sinister,” conjuring the uncanny through the use of familiar narrative structures (Elbert and Ryden 501). Mistress Sydenham’s quest is a source of distress to Peter, who does not know how to wake her from this dream-like state and worries that if the veil lifts from her forgotten past, “she would die of grief and

⁴ *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* published a piece in 2001 on Albion Tourgée, a journalist and carpetbagger from the North who visited the South and published a novel exposing the realities of postbellum life for the formerly enslaved peoples. After the Civil War, the racist and deeply problematic stereotype of the “happy darkie” emerged in white Southern literature, a depiction of blacks as passive and, as the article says, “content to be a part of a system in which they were well-fed and cared for” (67). This stereotype glossed over the actual atrocities being committed against blacks as the Jim Crow era entered in. Jewett’s short story “The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation” unfortunately participated in perpetuating this stereotype. For a discussion of Jewett’s mixed track record on issues of race, see Terry Heller’s 2011 article “To Each Body a Spirit: Jewett and African Americans.”

pain" (30). Peter refers to this fearful prospect as the "day ob judgement," a looming specter of reckoning (31). When they finally arrive at the ruins, the mistress is stricken by her confrontation with loss: "She was looking off into space. The cart jerked as it moved after the feeding steer. The mistress of Sydenham plantation had sought her home in vain. The crumbled, fallen chimneys of the house were there among the weeds, and that was all" (34). The separations between nature and culture are elided in the manor's ruins as the rubble and the weeds mingle, suggesting that "deteriorating household[s] are related to an outdoor landscape that is disorderly or in decline" (Elbert and Ryden 510). But even this moment of gothic horror and loss does not last. The narrator takes the reader forward in time by one day, and we watch Mistress Sydenham and Peter arrive at the church on Easter morning. The narrator tells us that "Even the tragic moment of yesterday was lost already in the acquiescence of her mind, as the calm sea shines back to the morning sun when another wreck has gone down" (35). Even the mistress's liminality is liminal, in a manner of speaking. Her instability is so unstable that one liminality is quickly replaced with another, coming and going like the tides. Mistress Sydenham's sense of distortion becomes distorted, her dislocation is dislocated, and the disruption of her mind is disrupted. This liminal trauma is the essence of Smith and Hughes's nightmarish collapse of existence, accomplished so artfully by the supernatural tints in Jewett's gothic pigments.

While "The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation" merely hints at spiritual or supernatural elements in the story, "In Dark New England Days" boldly includes them in the story's setting and plot. Jewett masterfully juxtaposes her typically lush New England pastoral with the "uncanny *frisson*" of gothic hexes, cursed

gold, and spectral fathers (Elbert and Ryden 504). Like “The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation,” this juxtaposition creates a liminal plane where traditional binaries like nature and culture, human and nonhuman are broken down. Elbert and Ryden write: “The agrarian landscape and community are not merely backdrop to the drama that unfolds but in effect enable and dictate the destinies of the characters and their communities as they live within the limitations of rural resources, both human and nonhuman alike” (504). Jewett breathes life into her settings, presenting the landscape as agent and character.

The title of this chapter is drawn from the agency of the landscape in “In Dark New England Days” where Jewett describes two of her characters as enthralled by “the countryside that bounded them” (*Strangers* 255). The reader feels, alongside the characters, the presence of the land, at times “like a revelation or an outlook towards the celestial country,” and at others like a “penetrating dampness” or “a kind o’ black shadder” (255, 222, 254). Jewett takes her ordinary New England farms and imbues them with heightened qualities like the landscapes of fairy stories. The story is filled with regular juxtapositions of the extraordinary with the mundane. The Knowles sisters uncover a trunk full of “devil’s gold,” money earned by their captain father through investments in slave ships (248). The sisters hope that this blood money will give them the life of which their father deprived them, being a “hard master” (230). But cursed money can reap no blessings, and the Knowles sisters are robbed blind by an unknown intruder, evoking “an atmosphere of gothic eeriness that proves devastating” (Elbert and Ryden 504). The thief is never caught, leaving the door open to surmises about the identity of the robber: was he a flesh-and-blood thief, or something more ghostly and sinister? Hannah Knowles unleashes a curse upon

Enoch Holt, the neighbor whom she suspects of robbing them, but the community believes it was “the spirit of the miserly father” maintaining his claim on the gold even in death (505). The supernatural interpolation of Hannah’s curse breaks down the stability of the community, which was already replete with tension before the curse. The Holt family suffers physical traumas as a result of the curse, and villagers see the Knowles sisters accompanied by “somethin’ [that] come an’ lived with ‘em... a cobweb kind o’ a man-shape that followed ‘em about the house an’ made a third to them” (*Strangers* 254). Both families suffer as they exist in the limbo between the natural and supernatural, rent by the potent *eidolon* of Captain Knowles and Hannah’s dark curse. These tensions are evinced most clearly in the final scene of the narrative “when the bucolic landscape is marred by the appearance of the cursed Enoch Holt” (Elbert and Ryden 506), who Jewett describes as a “malicious black insect” (*Strangers* 256). This breakdown of the human/nonhuman binary through the marring of beauty with malice creates a “gothic rift... rendered through specifically ecological terms” (Elbert and Ryden 506). Earth’s beauty seems impervious to Enoch’s accursed status, and yet, in the eyes of the women holding both the countryside and Holt’s beetle-ish qualities in their gaze, the landscape is haunted by humanity’s choices and maledictions. Jewett certainly saw Nature as a resilient agent, and yet she clearly bore concerns regarding the effects humanity had on its home, the Earth. Elbert and Ryden posit that “the emerging darkness of Jewett’s stories [is] steeped in a disturbing view of a wounded or haunting natural environment” (510). *Strangers and Wayfarers* depicts places that were relegated to physical, cultural, or supernatural liminality, highlighting their status as endangered species. This labor of preservation and advocacy

culminates in the final story of the collection, "The White Rose Road," where Jewett, for the first time in the collection, fully inhabits an activist tone and warns of the coming extinction of regional identities if the vicissitudes of humanity's encroaching practices cannot be changed.

Beloved Community and "The White Rose Road"

"What would the old farmers say to see the fate of their worthy bequest to the younger generation? They would wag their heads sorrowfully, with sad foreboding" (*Strangers* 273). Asking her readers to envision the tragic loss of rural landscapes, Sarah Orne Jewett takes a completely different tack in the collection's final inclusion as she offers a personal narrative entitled "The White Rose Road." The final essay serves both as a coda to the collection as well as a handing of the torch to the reader to answer her call to action regarding the preservation of endangered landscapes. The piece itself is somewhat liminal when held against the rest of the collection, a transitional piece out of the fictional world of the short stories into the waking world of at-risk landscapes and threatened ways of life. Jewett exposites the history of New Englanders' closeness to the land, everything from their troubled past with the land's original inhabitants, the native tribes and the native trees, to the way New Englanders go about establishing their gardens, a deeply hopeful project of investment in an unknown future. Over and over again, Jewett stresses the impermanence of these landscapes and the people who inhabit them; hardly a page goes by when she does not mention these things. Like her other stories, Jewett is nostalgic, but does not allow this nostalgia to elide the real difficulties of these coastal and agrarian lifestyles. She writes, "In spite of the serene and placid look of the old houses, one who had always known

them cannot help thinking of the sorrows of these farms and their almost undiverted toil" (262-63). The essay serves as a memorial to those who passed away to time and toil. Jewett directs her attention to the legacy of land that they left behind.

Jewett lingers over the loving relationship between these people and their particular places. For Jewett, the clearest representation of this relationship was the country gardens that lined her beloved White Rose Road: "everything in a country garden has its history and personal association. The old bushes, the perennials, are apt to have most tender relationship with the hands that planted them long ago" (268-69). While Jewett writes very fondly of these ancestral gardens and the ties between people and places, she pronounces their endangered status to her readers in no uncertain terms. She recalls a time when salmon were so prolific in New England that one could practically "walk across on them below the falls," but no longer; "they are unknown, simply because certain substances... are thrown from factories and tanneries into our clear New England streams. Good river fish are growing very scarce" (277). She continues, berating industrial powers for their "lack of a little thought and care in the factory companies and saw-mills, and the building in some cases of fish-ways over the dams. I think that the need of preaching against this bad economy is very great" (278). Jewett invokes the rhetoric of the pulpit, emphasizing that the devastation of the land does not only have physical consequences, but will also result in a spiritual poverty as well. Jewett's sermon resounds in the reader's mind, condemning mankind who "has done his best to ruin the world he lives in" (278). Nonetheless, this damnation is not where Jewett leaves her readers; she insists upon hope. She presents a vision borne of a redemptive imagination

where “with a little more time we should grow wiser,” and all might appreciate and work to preserve the “fresh and delighted consciousness of the possibilities of rural life” (278, 279). Jewett longed for a return to the loving relationship between men and women and their homelands, a realm where people sought the good of their place, and the place sustained the good of its people.

For eco-philosopher Wendell Berry, this loving relationship with the earth was what set Sarah Orne Jewett’s writings apart from all others. Berry dubbed this human/nature bond a “beloved community,” a term he borrowed from Josiah Royce and Martin Luther King Jr. and reframed as “common experience and common effort on a common ground to which one willingly belongs” (85). Jewett’s regional literature certainly meets these criteria. She shares common experiences with her characters, which Jewett harnessed for her efforts to recover, preserve, and advocate for their common ground. In writing on Jewett, who he felt had written the best and only depiction he knew of a beloved community, Berry says of her fiction,

it is not sentimental, for the work and suffering of the community are fully faced and acknowledged.... The community is happy in that it has survived its remembered tragedies, has re-shaped itself coherently around its known losses, has included kindly its eccentrics, invalids, oddities... The conversation wells up out of memory, and in a sense *is* the community, the presence of its past and its hope, speaking in the dumb abyss. (87)

Jewett’s unflinching portrayal of marginal New England life is notable for its nuanced portrayal of both human and non-human characters. She accords dignity and complexity to each, while still affirming a hopeful ideation of the human/nature relationship. Jewett’s own closeness to nature and dedication to the New England countryside made her firmly aware of the dangers that urban industry and American homogenization held for the future of this relationship.

The ending of the collection leaves room for more, a more that is hopefully centered on the recovery, advocacy, and preservation that Jewett carried so closely to her heart. Though the tenuous and liminal worlds of *Strangers and Wayfarers* may not see the perfect realization of this “beloved community,” it was a reality Jewett believed in and hoped for, a place where, as she wrote to a dear friend, “wonderfully one becomes part of nature, like an atom of quick-silver against a great mass” (*Letters* 51). The stories of *Strangers and Wayfarers* exemplify a community where humanity and nature mutually sustain and cultivate each other, a relationship borne out of cooperation, sacrifice, and investment in the preserved agency and thriving of the other.

CHAPTER THREE

“I’m a lonesome creatur’, an’ always was’’: Liminal Lives in *Strangers and Wayfarers*

While the charm of regional literature resides in its vivid landscapes and depictions of small-town life, what makes it a unique genre are the characters distinct to that part of the country. From her region-specific dialects and idioms to her characterization of people singularly shaped by their region’s weather, terrain, and seasons, Sarah Orne Jewett is most remembered and celebrated for her colorful cast of characters. An anonymous review published in 1888 regarding another of Jewett’s short story collections declares: “she has no rival in the gentle art of depicting two or three people in certain simplified relations and making them denizens of reality” (Anonymous 35). Indeed, Jewett preferred to draw many of her characters from real life, placing her constantly on the lookout during her many travels for people whom she could reincarnate as characters in her fiction. Jewett found herself drawn to the odd, the misfits, and the curious, gathering them all together and putting them in her collection, *Strangers and Wayfarers*. While many of her other short stories and novels contain characters who defy definition because of their liminal status, *Strangers and Wayfarers* stands as a unified and curated collection of glimpses into the lives of liminal persons.

The liminality of Jewett’s characters is defined in several different dimensions throughout the collection. Most obviously, many of Jewett’s characters are literally liminal in that they are transient or completely without a home, fulfilling the collection’s title as strangers and/or wayfarers. These

characters often wander from place to place, caught between pockets of isolation and pockets of culture. Some of them include travelling salesmen, immigrants, and the evicted poor. Through these liminal *personae*, Jewett considers the toll that a lack of rootedness and place take on human identity and communities.

The sort of liminality most explored by Jewett's critics, however, is a kind of gender liminality she carves out in her characters. Many of her characters blur or "queer" the line between traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity, creating a liminal space between the two where gender and gender roles can be redefined. Margaret Roman writes, "Jewett endeavors to rewrite [the gender dichotomy] script. Her characters, both women and men, often deflate these dichotomies, and where they cannot, Jewett often shows them as malformed beings who disintegrate in the concretized roles they have assumed" (x). This identity malformation is not unique to Jewett's exploration of gender but applies also to her explorations of human nature.

Jewett often establishes a character's liminality through metaphorical links to creatures. She spent much of her time out-of-doors, being an avid equestrienne, and would ride up and down the Berwick countryside, noting both flora and fauna, a practice that informed the descriptive bent of her writings. While these human/non-human comparisons are frequently positive, at times she uses her creature-metaphors to describe monstrous or hybrid qualities in her characters' souls, such as the moment she compares the maimed Enoch Holt, a suspected thief, to "a malicious black insect" sullyng the glorious evening landscape (*Strangers* 256). Enoch Holt has skulked along the edges of the story like a spider in the shadows, and Jewett's metaphor draws out the monstrosity of his marred interior, mirrored in his marred exterior. Jewett also uses these

comparisons positively, such as when she likens ancient Jerry Bogan to a pleasant old turtle (107). Their hybridity sets characters like Holt and Bogan apart as not quite human, not quite animal, existing in the space between the nature/culture binary. Occasionally these deformities are linked to physical deformities or handicaps, such as in the case of Enoch Holt, creating a comparison point between Jewett and the gothic tropes of southern authors like William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. Jewett, like O'Connor in particular, occasionally uses both physical and spiritual "deformities" to ground her characters' liminality, allowing them to speak from the margins of society into the broader moral "deformities" of culture at large.

Finally, Jewett's characters often find themselves at different thresholds of aging, either coming of age or in the midst of transitioning to old age, though most frequently the latter. While puberty is universally considered a liminal state, the parallel rite of passage from middle age to old age is not often considered. This transitional time is less defined for men, but for women who undergo the physical transformation and trauma of menopause, this life stage is just as formative as puberty.⁶ Jewett's aging female characters struggle to determine their new roles and places in the social hierarchy. Jewett frequently uses language to emphasize the both/and qualities of these characters, stressing their conflicting youthful and elderly traits and placing them in a liminal plane between youth and age where they must navigate the person they were before

⁶ Very little research has been done from a literary perspective into the representation of perimenopausal women in literature. On the American literature front, only Kim Kirkpatrick has published a brief article entitled "Dangerous Crones: The Menopausal Woman as Outsider," contextualizing the historic treatment of perimenopausal women, setting Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* against that backdrop. The subject of perimenopausal women in literature remains an as-of-yet untapped field of exploration and study.

and who they must become. In these situations, Jewett's propensity for advocacy comes through most clearly, as she saw society as a particularly difficult terrain for the aging to traverse. Jewett saw the abandoned coastal towns of her youth increasingly inhabited by the elderly and the infirm, as the younger generations left home for the opportunities and excitement of the larger towns and cities. Jewett's advocacy for the preservation of these liminal places and people are one and the same in her mind; the place made the people and the people made the place. If one were lost, the other would inevitably follow. Additionally, being a single, middle-aged woman, Jewett knew the trials of aging in a society built by and for men. While Jewett had ample financial resources and a strong community to draw upon, she recognized the privilege that these accorded her, noting that many women her age from different socio-economic backgrounds were often homeless, cast-off, or seen as useless. Her stories witness to their compound struggle against social, gender, psychological, and ageist pressures, a struggle unique to women's late-in-life liminality.

Throughout each of her explorations of human liminality's various forms, Jewett's writings remain a testament to the overlooked, the misfit, and the left behind. It seems curious that Jewett, celebrated for her talent, financially secure, and friendly with the greatest writers of her day, felt compelled to write the stories of strangers and wayfarers. But this is where the most profound expression of liminality enters into the conversation. Artist and author Makoto Fujimura's book *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life* establishes artists of all types as liminal figures in society. He borrows a term from *Beowulf*, used in reference to Grendel, to define the type of liminality artists submit themselves to: *mearcstapas*, "translated to 'border-walkers' or 'border-

stalkers.’ In the tribal realities of earlier times, these were individuals who lived on the edges of their groups, going in and out of them, sometimes bringing back news to the tribe” (58). While the term was applied to a monster in the original text, Fujimura reclaims the term as one equally applicable to artists who are often seen as freakish or even monstrous in the eyes of a utilitarian and capitalist society. Fujimura goes on to elaborate on his use of the term and why it is simultaneously a beautiful and unenviable role:

Mearcstapa is not a comfortable role. Life on the borders of a group—and in the space between groups—is prone to dangers literal and figurative, with people both at home and among the “other” likely to misunderstand or mistrust the motivations, piety, and loyalty of the border-stalker. But *mearcstapa* can be a role of cultural leadership in a new mode, serving functions including empathy, memory, warning, guidance, mediation, and reconciliation. Those who journey to the borders of their group and beyond will encounter new vistas and knowledge that can enrich the group. (59)

Artists of all types, whether painters, authors, dancers, or musicians, choose to exist both within and without society. Their work reflects social realities, but in order to gain their perspective, artists must also relegate their existence to outside of society. Artists have often been misunderstood souls, attempting to hold up mirrors to culture while endeavoring to both belong and not belong.

Jewett was no exception. She did not write the great sweeping epics or sentimental novels so popular at her time. She chose to write what she believed her culture needed, not what it wanted. Jewett chose a liminal existence as an artist, choosing the “freakish” vocation of spinster female author in order to offer the “empathy, memory, warning, guidance, mediation, and reconciliation” that Fujimura speaks of to her readers. Catriona Sandilands remarks that “many of Jewett’s most famous women stand as boundary-creatures, on the line between nature and human society” (59). It would seem that Jewett created her characters

in her own image. *Strangers and Wayfarers* offers a cast of characters who have been misunderstood by and estranged from mainstream culture in their own unique ways. Perhaps Jewett felt less like an oddity when surrounded by the kindred spirit strangers and wayfarers in her fiction. As she wrote to her protégé, Willa Cather in 1908, "To work in silence and with all one's heart, that is the writer's lot; he is the only artist who must be a solitary, and yet needs the widest outlook upon the world" (*Letters* 250). Jewett clearly understood herself as inhabiting the role of *mearcstapa* for her cultural moment. Her interstitial and misfit characters belie the broad outlook she cultivated in her artistic liminality.

Jewett's Wayfarers and Social Liminality

As aforementioned, the most obvious of Jewett's explorations of human liminality is found in her transient characters. These are the characters who are most literally the strangers and wayfarers of the collection's title. These characters are socially liminal, both a part of society by definition of being members of the human race, and yet decidedly outside of society due to their life of rootless drifting. Being a part of a culture or a community requires a large degree of rootedness and stability, qualities that these characters do not possess, either by choice or by circumstance. These figures were increasingly frequent features of the New England landscape as industrial progress marched on, leaving rural farmers and tradesmen unable to compete with the money and opportunities afforded by the bigger cities. As railway travel became a fact of life and city-dwellers could embark upon countryside jaunts and daytrips with relative ease, Jewett noticed that a snobbishness often accompanied their assessments of rural life and its inhabitants. In a letter to a Boston journalist,

Jewett wrote passionately that “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” (*SOJ Letters* 16). From this point on, Jewett made it her mission “to teach the world that country people were not the awkward, ignorant set those people seemed to think” (19-20). With this stalwart intention, Jewett painted vivid, human, and beloved depictions of country people and country life.

Jewett’s strange and wayfaring characters are the best examples of her intention to unveil the dignity and intelligence of her beloved New England folk. She preserves the quaintness of their regional particularities without allowing those particularities to become a means of objectification and reduction. Her characters are simply far too complex for reductionism. An excellent example of such a character from *Strangers and Wayfarers* is Mrs. Peet from “Going to Shrewsbury.” An elderly widow, Mrs. Peet has been tricked out of her fallow farmland by her conniving nephew Isaiah and finds herself forced to seek the aid of distant relatives in the city. Jewett tenderly depicts Mrs. Peet, extending that sympathy to even her background characters, the train passengers who ask about Mrs. Peet “with great sympathy, after she had gone” (*Strangers* 153). Jewett makes use of sensory language to draw in the reader’s sympathies, noting that the strain of the journey made her “look very old and pale... and said that she felt dizzy” and later on looked “ready to cry” (152, 153). This emotional depiction of Mrs. Peet humanizes her, allowing the reader to empathize with her anxious plight, rather than dismiss her as a prattling old worrywart.

Mrs. Peet is joined in the collection by other displaced, wayfaring characters like Jefferson Briley and Widow Tobin of "A Winter Courtship," the Bray sisters of "The Town Poor," Mr. Teaby of "The Quest of Mr. Teaby," the Irish immigrant Bogan family of "The Luck of the Bogans," and Mercy Bascom of "Fair Day." While some of these characters may technically have places to lay their heads, they have each been uprooted in one way or another from their "native soil," as Jewett describes it (*Strangers* 139). They are often solitary characters; in the words of Mr. Teaby, the travelling salesman, "I'm a lonesome creatur', an' always was" (68). They may have distant family and some acquaintances, but no one close who looks out for them, thereby making them a burden on society. These characters are typically "useless" in the eyes of utilitarian ideals, due to their inability to assimilate (like the Irish Bogans) or contribute productively to the industrial machine (like the aging and the disabled), which ultimately causes displacement and homelessness. By far, this type of liminality is the most profuse in Jewett's collection and reveals Jewett's priorities. As Richard Cary, an early Jewett scholar, proclaims, "The reign of poverty and apathy in a region once virile and self-reliant is the main spur to Miss Jewett's creative impulse" (42). Jewett's priority was the preservation of pre-industrial New England. She saw the threat industrialization posed to the most socially and economically insecure. Sandra Zagarell, in her analysis of Jewett's short stories surrounding exploited and homeless older women, writes,

The economic system which stands behind a number of the stories is the far-reaching nexus of trade, profit, loss, credit and debt endemic to capitalism over the long course of its consolidation and expansion: it is damaging New England. Culturally, socially and demographically, too, rural New England is unsettled by factors prominent in the nation at large: changes in the family as an institution and in the composition and

cohesion of local communities, increased immigration, and rural out-migration. (252)

The reality of this industrialized New England sat closely to Jewett's heart. Her stories encapsulate the same hunted fear she expressed in a letter to Annie Fields, fretting that she will be the "last wild thing that is left in the fields" (*Letters* 90). Mrs. Peet, as an elderly woman, is equally useless to society as her unproductive farmland is to her greedy nephew, just like the other "unproductive" characters made socially liminal by society and family such as the Bray sisters, Widow Tobin, and Widow Bascom. These characters are relegated to a category between human and not-quite human, determined by their ability (or lack thereof) to be productive and profitable. Jewett understood that an emphasis on productivity leads to exploitation, a removal of agency, and ultimately some kind of displacement.

By far the most unstable and uncertain of all the narratives in the collection is found in "The Town Poor." This story follows the brief and overdue visit of two financially secure women to two sisters who exist solely upon the slim mercy of the town "selectmen" or council that doles out what was the 19th century equivalent of unemployment or welfare support. Upon seeing the squalor and isolation that the Bray sisters endure, Mrs. Trimble and Miss Wright are launched into alternate feelings of deep guilt for their inaction and righteous anger over the lack of provision offered by the town. The reader cringes right along with Trimble and Wright, but unlike these two women, is less certain of actual change being accomplished. At several moments in the story, both Mrs. Trimble and Miss Wright's ambivalence and tendency to turn a blind eye are exposed. Mrs. Trimble tends to offer excuses like "time does slip away with busy

folks” and “I forgit a good deal I ought to remember” (*Strangers* 41), while Miss Wright confesses that she bought the Bray sisters’ china for a very low price at the auction of all their earthly belongings, rather than having a more generous heart. The women end the visit full of indignation and bluster, but as Sandra Zagarell notes, not without reason, the reader is left with a distinctly uncertain feeling as to whether they will actually follow through on righting the injustice (260). After all, they plan to go “to-morrow morning,” a promise made by many noble-hearted procrastinators, and, as Mrs. Trimble says early on in the story, “’twas kind o’ rushed through, breakin’ of ‘em up, an’ lots o’ folks blamed the selec’ men [*sic*]; but when ‘twas done, ‘twas done, an’ nobody took holt to undo it” (*Strangers* 39). Thus, the Bray sisters are left with an uncertain future, no community, and disconnection from their town and home at the end of the story. A more positive reading of the motives of the characters can most certainly be conducted, but the fact remains nonetheless, that Jewett cuts the story off prematurely, leaving her characters caught in the liminality of their precarious circumstances and the fickle emotions of the townspeople, with the reader caught right alongside them.

As a regionalist, it makes sense that a loss of place or community would be one of the greatest tragedies Jewett could conceive. While it would be simple to reduce Mrs. Peet’s or the Bogans’ decline simply to being separated from their homes, these stories intimate that more is going on in their exile and death. Jewett scholar Rebecca Wall Nail describes the importance of place in Jewett’s fiction: “If place is this basic to character, then those who leave their native places risk a loss deeper than homesickness” (191). Rooted community plays a significant role in all of Jewett’s writing, and in order for a community to thrive,

there must be mutual cooperation, mutual sacrifice, and mutual investment. As her characters lose access to each of these elements by being removed from the eco-system of their homes and communities, both the characters and the *loci* of their homes suffer. Josephine Donovan notes the theme of community that began to take center stage in Jewett's later works: "Sarah Orne Jewett was drawn to the topic during her third decade of literary production. She seemed concerned to portray the evils of extreme individualism and to promote the virtues of association" (*SOJ* 73). Nail concurs, writing "To be out of one's proper place, mentally or physically, may be to have one's values disarranged, and the return may be a return to moral clarity" (191). For Jewett, displacement from home caused far deeper fissures to the soul than simple geography; it rearranged the entire person, their values and psyche. While some of her characters, such as Mercy Bascom, achieve the "return to moral clarity" that Nail describes, most do not. The social liminality that these characters experience due to homelessness causes an internal liminality as well, a disintegration of the self. These characters are both themselves and not themselves, caught in the not-quite between the two. While liminality can generate opportunities for redefinition and expansion of previously rigid ideas, it can also cause significant trauma and fragmentation of essential identity. *Strangers and Wayfarers* does the Good Samaritan work of refusing to turn aside from the vulnerable and weak (Zagarell 262). By prioritizing the socially liminal in her collection, placing their specific struggles centrally and preeminently in the text, Jewett advocates for those in positions of vulnerability, making it impossible to turn a blind eye to the strangers and wayfarers in our midst.

Gender Queering and Role Redefinition

One of the most revolutionary and countercultural aspects of Jewett's writings is her tacit rejection of traditional gender roles. This challenge to the gender binary is hardly exclusive to *Strangers and Wayfarers* but is in fact a pillar of her authorial identity. As Margaret Roman writes in her exposition of Jewett's gender deconstruction,

Jewett creates a woman's imaginative universe.... What women have thought, felt, and experienced about themselves as well as the patriarchal system, regulates the Jewett text. The dominant group no longer controls society's maxims or the structure of the fictional narrative. Whether men or women, if they subscribe to patriarchal norms, they become the inept, the distorted, the maimed. (xi)

For Roman, Jewett's flipping of the script deconstructs the power of "gender differentiation as a social construct" (xi). While Roman celebrates this deconstruction and Jewett would likely celebrate it with her in theory, Jewett also understood the distinctly problematic and undefined space this forced her characters to inhabit. When men and women renounce traditional gender roles, the world does not know what to do with them. They become undefined space, both men and not-men, women and not-women. Jewett knew the dangers of such renouncements and the hatred that accompanies the unknown and the new. She also understood that allowing women into male spaces and vice versa was not enough to end the vicious cycle of gender oppression. In one of Jewett's short stories not found in *Strangers and Wayfarers*, ironically titled "Tom's Husband," Jewett conducts a narratively-framed thought experiment, wondering if greater sympathy would be bred between men and women if their roles were reversed. Judith Roman posits that Jewett's conclusions were not hopeful, concluding, "Jewett makes it clear that role *reversal* is not in itself a solution to the role

problem. In a successful relationship, both partners must refuse to be limited to *any* single role, whether conventional or not" (128). Jewett saw that the existence of the roles themselves were the problem, not the empathic capacity of men and women. Her stories smash the rigid boundaries of socially defined masculinity and femininity, allowing her characters to wander across the borders or choose to remain in the liminal no-man's-land in between.

One such character who remains in the liminal no-man's-land of gender identity is Mercy Bascom from "Fair Day." Jewett writes that Mercy found herself a widow at only twenty-eight years of age, mother to four children, and a substantial farm to run (*Strangers* 117). Because of this change in circumstances, Mercy becomes both father and mother to her children, both master and mistress of the property. Jewett points out that Mercy was already primed for this role, as she had effectively been carrying it out even before her husband's death, for he "was not even the owner of a good name, and led her a terrible life with his drunken shiftlessness, and hindrance of all her own better aims" (118). Jewett's narrator comes just short of saying that the death of Mercy's husband was the best thing that happened to her, releasing her from the burden of their "damaging partnership" (118). Mercy succeeds in paying off all the family debts, sends all four of her children to school (both her son and daughters), and sees all of them happily married.

Because she is a widow, Mercy is accorded more flexibility in her gender role; she is not limited to housewife status but permitted to oversee her farm and finances in ways that married or single women would not have been permitted in the 1800s. Even after her son, the last to be married, moves out, Mercy continues to live on her own for a time, running the family farm. Though she

eventually moves in with her son and his family, in many ways she continues to be the head of household that she always was, overseeing the running of the home and renting out her old property. But Mercy longs for increased independence, saying to herself as she walks over to her farm, "I do like to be my own *master* once in a while" (126, emphasis added). Mercy calls herself a "master" not a mistress, indicative of long years occupying traditionally male roles. As she pokes around her property, she reminisces about the "time when she was a lawgiver and proprietor and he [her son] dependent" (134). Mercy holds authority and power in her hands alongside her domestic "feminine" skills, blurring the stark line between masculinity and femininity as defined by western society. Mercy is no less a woman for running her property and handling her finances. She can bake gingerbread just as well as she manages a farm.

While some might argue that Jewett's women are still "feminine" and her men still "masculine," it is not these qualities that Jewett allows to define her characters. Her female characters cannot be reduced to domestic mavens nor her male characters to winners of the bacon. Their roles are fluid, complex, and heartily resistant to the aggressive distillation of gender norms. What can be said about her characters is that her women want to be women and her men want to be men, but on their own terms, not those of outdated and clunky definitions.

One such example of a self-defined woman and man comes in "The Taking of Captain Ball," the story of a retired sea captain who enters into a gender role battle with his housekeeper. Captain Asaph Ball has spent his entire adult life at sea and feels much more at ease in the prow of a ship than in the parlor of a cottage. He returns ashore after the death of his sister, who alone

could claim to be her brother's "superior officer" (*Strangers* 158). As soon as he steps on solid land, Captain Ball finds himself at the mercy of conniving neighbors and eligible widows and spinsters who want to win him and his considerable means. Much of Captain Ball's difficulty in transitioning to land-lubber life resides in the fact that he has been able to avoid social gender norms for much of his career. Since women were not permitted to join the navy, all roles on a ship were considered fit for men, even the cooking and cleaning that would be considered woman's work on land. He struggles to navigate the treacherous waters of domesticity back on land. In his despair, he takes on a housekeeper who arrives unbidden, Mary Poppins-like, on his doorstep. She calls herself Mrs. French and immediately takes charge of his home. Despite her domestic role, the Captain notes that "he felt himself the weaker human being of the two" (164).

Mrs. French proves to be a formidable woman, and an attractive one at that, a fact that does not escape the notice of the Captain's unmarried neighbors. The Captain truly has no desire to marry, but this scruple is insignificant to the local gossips. They circulate enough rumors to render Captain Ball terrified of Mrs. French and her presumed designs upon his bachelorhood, despite the fact that he is truly pleased with her decisive running of the house and companionable manner. Despite the rumors, Mrs. French succeeds in "domesticating" Captain Ball. This domestication does not take place through marriage, but through her resistance to stereotypical femininity. She is an unparalleled housekeeper but resists the narrowness that often comes with staying at home in a small town, evidenced by the many other female characters in the narrative. Captain Ball even surprises himself with how easy he finds it to speak to her, "speaking as if to a brother man" (166). There is none of the clumsy

awkwardness typically found in conversation between members of the opposite sex at times when their spheres overlapped so little. This awkwardness is seen multiple times throughout the short story, from Captain Ball's initial intimidating encounter with Ann French, before they get to know one another, and in the limited conversation topics covered by the local grasping widows and spinsters who hope to catch Captain Ball. Once he and Ann move on from their first encounter, however, Captain Ball finds himself enjoying the hosting outlets that Mrs. French provides, causing "a little feeling of guilt when he remembered how many times in his sister's day he had evaded such pleasant social occasions" (170-71). He reaches the conclusion that "Women-folks is cap'ns ashore," submitting himself to Mrs. French's authority (188). The story ends with the revelation that Mrs. French is not a nobody, but is in fact Captain Ball's great-niece, which confounds all rumors spread that she wished to secure his hand in marriage. The local gossips are shut up and Captain Ball's bachelorhood is secure. Mrs. French resists cooption into a traditional marriage-comedy ending, remaining the head of the household without having to relinquish her independence. Captain Ball remains the confirmed old bachelor he wanted to be, but one who is rather more palatable to his neighbors, thanks to his great-niece's presence. Jewett refuses to reduce her characters to worn-out gender tropes, instead allowing them to take on qualities of both genders.

Unlike their narrow neighbors, Mrs. French and Captain Ball craft gender identities apart from traditional expectations. Captain Ball remains a man, but one who is not afraid of the "womanly" art of hospitality and is not too proud to surrender authority to a woman. Mrs. French remains a woman, but one who is the captain of her household and unfettered to a husband's or society's dictates.

The neighbors, however, remain crippled by their strict adherence to gender roles. Mrs. Topliff and Miss Hull are restricted in their conversation and their imagination to their socially-designated spheres, speaking and dreaming only of marriage, gossip, and comparison. Mrs. Topliff and Miss Hull, Jewett reveals, are actually unable to know others truly due to their limited scope and vision. As they gossip about the valuables in Captain Ball's house, Mrs. Topliff remarks that the Captain's late sister Ann "must have set the world by" those valuables, oblivious to the fact that Ann was really a generous-hearted soul who set very little store by physical possessions. These women can only think in terms of property, value, and acquisition, fueled by their jealousy that the devious Mrs. French might get to the valuables before they do. The narrowness of their gendered vision prohibits them from appreciating the true nature of Ann Ball and perceiving the disinterested spirit of Mrs. French. These women are such adherents to the stereotype of womanhood that they almost cease to be human. By blurring gender lines in characters like Captain Ball and Mrs. French, Jewett ensures their humanity. Humans are far more complex than gender roles allow for, a reality that Jewett reflects in her unapologetically human characters. Through an intentional liminalization of gender, Jewett queers the notion of what it means to be a man or a woman, honoring the flexibility that these designators hold, and proposing new understandings of what it means to be a man or a woman outside of traditional expectations.

Jewett's Metaphorical Monsters

Just as Jewett broke down the nature / culture binary through the settings of her stories, Jewett carried this work over into her human characters. The most

frequent type of metaphor found in her writing is the comparison of humans to the non-human world, specifically to animals and insects, generating a metaphoric hybridity of human and animal. These hybrids hearken back to mythological monsters like the minotaur and the centaur. This metaphysical monstrosity of human and non-human has long been an aspect of liminal studies, with considerable attention paid to the subject by Victor Turner in his work *The Forest of Symbols*. According to Turner, monster masks and totems “frequently appear[ed] in the liminal period of initiations” (104). Turner notes that many scholars have sought to explain the presence of monsters in liminal rites as proof that primitive peoples did not see themselves as separate from the animal kingdom, but Turner argues quite differently. He writes, “monsters are manufactured precisely to teach neophytes to distinguish clearly between the different factors of reality... Monsters startle neophytes into thinking about objects, persons, relationships, and features of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted.” (105). Turner goes on to explore the process of “monster- or fantasy-making” in liminal rites, suggesting that,

the monstrosity of the configuration throws its elements into relief. Put a man’s head on a lion’s body and you think about the human head in the abstract... it may be explained as representing the soul as against the body; or intellect as contrasted with brute force, or innumerable other things... More important that these, the relation between man and lion, empirical and metaphorical, may be speculated upon, and new ideas developed on this topic. Liminality here breaks, as it were, the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation. (106)

Turner’s explanation of the purpose of hybridity offers a lens through which to discern Jewett’s comparable uses of hybridity. Like Turner’s monster masks, Jewett’s monsters are inhabitants of liminal space, not necessarily liminal

creatures themselves. This separation, however slight, allows for the possibility of movement from liminality into settled space.

Some of Jewett's human/non-human comparisons are standard cultural clichés, such as describing a character as being "harmless as a fly" or being "hawk-eyed," but many of her comparisons probe much deeper, highlighting the creatureliness of her characters as well as the complexity of the relationship between humans and their non-human surroundings (*Strangers* 17, 234). In "The Town Poor," Mrs. Trimble criticizes Deacon Bray, the late father of the impoverished Bray sisters, for knowing less than nature about providing for one's family. "He might have took lessons from the squirrels: even them little wild creatur's makes them their winter hoards, an' men-folks ought to know enough if squirrels does" (44). Here, Jewett's comparison is by contrast, placing Deacon Bray as not only sub-human, but sub-creature for the neglect of his children. Throughout the collection, there are references to the speed at which mankind is advancing through the invention of trains, the proclivity towards store-bought items, and the draw of industrial jobs. But here, Jewett offers subtle reminders that mankind is perhaps not so advanced as we think, and if we cannot provide for the most vulnerable in our midst, then even the squirrels are better humans than humanity.

The hybridity of Jewett's metaphors and comparisons focus on the continued creatureliness of mankind, despite its advancements. In "The Luck of the Bogans" Jewett likens the disabled and homeless of Bantry to swarms of beetles (80), and in "The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation" she likens the singing of the black former slaves to "beetle drones or the cricket chirps" (28). On the surface, these may seem to be innocent comparisons, but Jewett was well aware

that the homeless, the disabled, and the oppressed would always be those first marginalized and left behind by society, seen as a burden or even an infestation.⁷ Her comparisons to insects in particular have a remarkable prescience, forecasting the extended extermination of the weak half a century later at the hands of the western eugenics movement, a movement that continues today in the form of the homelessness epidemic, the eradication of Down Syndrome-positive embryos in countries like Iceland and Denmark, and the astronomical incarceration rates among poor black men. Not all of Jewett's comparisons are so dark in nature by any means, but the darker comparisons do serve to spotlight the disastrous consequences when humankind chooses to forget its own creatureliness, moving out of the existential liminality that is the human condition. Jewett scholar Daniel C. Ernst writes, "Although evolutionary theory ultimately grounds humans in the domain of nature, humankind's conscious awareness of this natural law suggests it is somehow distinct from it" (71). Human beings are by nature liminal creatures, existing between the animal kingdom and the deities above imagined in every culture. Jewett uses the character of the Irish Catholic priest in "The Luck of the Bogans" to remind her readers that excesses of any kind "make beasts of ourselves" (*Strangers* 98). Jewett saw the fine line that human existence walked. Humans are animals, yes, but they have brain functions, creativity, and industry far beyond the ken of most of the animal kingdom. At the same time, humans are not gods. Jewett's comparisons offer a gentler version of the reprimand of the Tower of Babel and

⁷ Gerald O'Brien, in his 2013 book *Framing the Moron: The Social Construction of Feeble-Mindedness in the American Eugenic Era*, devotes a whole chapter to the use of metaphor in the dehumanization of marginalized groups, from the Nazi use of bacterial metaphors to describe the Jews ("the Jew as bacillus") to modern depictions of welfare recipients as "parasites" (18, 23).

the Fall of Icarus: be careful lest ye climb too high. Jewett's stories, in reminding her readers of their creatureliness, recall that we are but earth and no amount of technological advancement can sever the umbilical cord connecting us to the animal kingdom. Jewett's stories reveal that humans are, indeed, monsters. Not the bogeyman type, nor the variety that lurks under the beds of children, but monsters like those of mythology: hybrid creatures of dust and divinity, centaur, faun, and satyr. We may have evolved beyond tails and scales, but the material DNA of our souls stays the same.

In this way, Jewett's treatment of her characters falls squarely in the realm of ecofeminism once again, this time because of her treatment of animals through her metaphoric language. In recent years, there has been a movement towards what scholars have called "material feminisms," or feminist theory that exists in the realm of matter, rather than the realm of the abstract. In their collection of essays entitled *Material Feminisms*, Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman write that, "Material feminists explore the interaction of culture, history, discourse, technology, biology, and the 'environment,' without privileging any one of these elements" (7). Material feminist scholars champion the celebration of biology and matter, *all* biology and matter, especially that of the natural world and the non-human. For a long time, feminist scholars have been wary of engagement with ecology, as the traditional connections made between female bodies and natural bodies have been detrimental to each.⁸ Jewett's connections between humans and

⁸ For an exploration of the complications of ecofeminism, see Lida Sarafrazarpatapeh's article "Ecofeminism: An Analysis." Deborah Slicer has urged feminist critics to move past the nature/culture binary that so many of them hold sacred due to the history of transgressions against female and non-human bodies through the equating of women and nature in folklore and tradition. While Slicer acknowledges the storied past of linking female bodies and natural bodies, she feels that this gnostic eschewal has inadvertently created the greater monster of portraying nature and bodies as somehow dirty and other,

nature make many feminist scholars uncomfortable because of the continued nature/culture divide. Alaimo calls these connections “trans-corporeality,” or, borrowing language from Mary Louise Pratt, “‘contact zones’ between human corporeality and more-than-human nature” (238). Alaimo reminds us that “the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world... [which] makes it difficult to pose nature as a mere background for the exploits of the human, since ‘nature’ is always as close as one’s own skin” (238). Jewett’s use of “trans-corporeality” in her metaphors reminds her readers of their own liminality, the embodied contact zone of their own existence.

Not only does Jewett’s use of hybrid metaphors expand the overlap and integration of the human and non-human world, her metaphors also extend an agency and significance to nature and the non-human. In “Fair Day,” when Mercy Bascom arrives at her old farm to explore, she likens her elation to that of a hermit crab, “finding its own old shell again and settling comfortably into the convolutions” (*Strangers* 133-34). Jewett’s imaginative language creates a world in which a hermit crab might experience delight at a homecoming, only to remind us that that world is our own, and perhaps shellfish do have a favorite shell. Jewett’s world, the world we all long to inhabit, is full of possibility, where roses are famous beauties, turtles are charitable old men, and woodchucks are eager young boys longing for adventure (97, 107, 208). Jewett renews our vision of the world in the way that G. K. Chesterton wrote about fantasy stories. In the chapter on fairy tales in his work *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton writes,

resulting in greater objectification and oppression. Slicer finds merit in considering “bodies as grounds,” à la Judith Butler, and pursuing the “material feminism” angle of fellow scholars Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (57).

These tales say that apples were golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green. They make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water... We have all forgotten what we really are. All that we call common sense and rationality and practicality and positivism only means that for certain dead levels of our life we forget that we have forgotten. All that we call spirit and art and ecstasy only means that for one awful instant we remember that we forget. (51)

Jewett's stories never cross the threshold into fantasy; one will never find golden apples hanging from boughs nor rivers of wine coursing through her stories. But her writings, particularly those in *Strangers and Wayfarers*, through their use of comparative language, do allow her readers to view the world with refreshed eyes and remember that they have forgotten how vivid, how—yes, even this—*magical* the world truly is. Mrs. Peet is no longer a pesky old lady on a train; she is a woman who wonders if, like her old cat, if there will be any “kind o’ mousin’ ... for me” (*Strangers* 143). Like her characters, hybrid creatures of high hopes and creaturely urges, Jewett's stories exist in between the harsh realism of New England life and the spectacular life of the mind where stalwart women are like sturdy cottages facing the sea, pesky gossips buzz like bees, and children are gifts like birds and flowers (197, 220, 267).

Perimenopausal Protagonists

While gender and hybridity are fairly apparent topics when considering liminality, age is more tricky territory, for it is one of the least obvious manifestations of in-betweenness. While puberty is universally acknowledged as a liminal state, being one of the key rites-of-passage investigated by van Gennep and Turner, considerably less attention has been given to the liminal state of moving from the prime of adulthood into old age. Much of this neglect has to do with the fact that women's “change of life” or menopause has long been a taboo

subject, and men do not experience such a stark transition. Another aspect of this neglect is due to a problem Luce Irigaray points out: “the patriarchal world... has confined women to motherhood... the framework of women’s existence is exclusively maternal” (134-35). Patriarchal society has long been baffled by what to do with women who are no longer or have never been mothers. Falling into this category herself, Jewett centers much of her fiction on perimenopausal women with whom society does not know what to do. Though Jewett does not write explicitly of menopause, as it would have been a proscribed topic for popular fiction, a majority of her characters are late middle-aged or elderly women who are around the age when women experience menopause. There are ways, however, that Jewett uses potentially coded language to indicate that her characters are indeed perimenopausal. In “The Quest of Mr. Teaby,” Sister Pinkham finds that she has overdressed for the unexpectedly warm late autumn day and struggles to cool down after her walk to the train depot. She remarks to Mr. Teaby, “It does appear to me as if I hadn’t been more het up any day this year” but rejects Mr. Teaby’s suggestion that she remove her shawl (*Strangers* 64). It is possible that Sister Pinkham is experiencing a hot flash but is unwilling to remove her shawl, as hot flashes are often accompanied by heavy sweating and noticeable red rashes. She spends the rest of the story fanning herself with a palm-leaf fan. In “The Luck of the Bogans,” Bidy Bogan is described in her late middle age as “a stout mother of a family, red-faced and bustling” (97). Weight gain is common in menopause, as the metabolism slows down. Additionally, Mistress Sydenham is portrayed as mentally unstable, a symptom commonly associated with menopause in Jewett’s day. Though the latter two of these characterizations are somewhat stereotypical, they are nonetheless plausible

representations of menopausal women based upon the age of the characters and the fact that stereotypes often evolve out of ignorance, and 19th century understandings of menopause were nothing if not ignorant.

As the daughter of a physician and having considered a medical career herself, Jewett would have been familiar with the pejorative and patriarchal treatment of menopause and aging female sexuality found in her father's medical books. Scholar Carroll Smith-Rosenberg writes that 19th century "medical and biological arguments helped... to rationalize women's traditional role.... They expressed... the age-old empirical understanding that puberty and menopause were... periods of stress—crises both of emotional and social identification and physical health" (60). Jewett's stories reveal the complicated identity trauma navigated by women as they moved out of their child-bearing years, the years most critical to their Victorian identities, and adjusted to the relatively undefined state of female old age. Unable to bear children post-menopause and facing the diseases of old age like cancer and dementia, Jewett's stories serve as witnesses to the unique difficulty aging women face in the liminality of perimenopause.

Of the eleven short stories found in *Strangers and Wayfarers*, it can be argued that ten of them include perimenopausal women, though an argument also could be made that all eleven stories do if we include Jewett herself as the narrator of "The White Rose Road," her non-fiction call-to-action at the end of the collection. Clearly, women at or around their change of life are important figures in Jewett's fiction. Her most famous novel, *Country of the Pointed Firs* features Almira Todd as a central character, a middle-aged herbalist and widow. Though the two main characters in *Deephaven* are young women, the friends they make across the course of their holiday are predominantly aging women.

Scholars have written of the ways that Jewett establishes a “social liminality of women in the domain of gender roles and relations,” and that “Jewett’s widowed and spinster women characters occupy a unique in-between position in society in which they are at a remove from male domination and patriarchal constraint” (Ernst 77). Jewett herself found her most productive writing years coinciding with perimenopause. While she may have found those years to be her most fruitful, she recognized that not every woman would experience her change of life in the same way, some mourning the loss of fertility or mourning the loss of unconsummated femininity, due to miscarriage, infertility, or singleness. Having never married or borne children, Jewett may have struggled with her own change of life as many women do, regardless of their satisfaction with life and situation. Her novels and short stories offer glimpses into the forms that the trials of age-liminality can take.

The perimenopausal women in *Strangers and Wayfarers* can be more or less divided into two categories: those who experience loss and death (literal or metaphoric) through their liminality and those who experience a renewal of identity and fruitfulness through their passage through their liminal phase, ultimately moving out of liminality into settled space. For Jewett’s fiction, the deciding factor in whether a character would experience loss or renewal depends upon their connection to community through both other people and place. Rootedness has always been a defining feature of Jewett’s work, whether that rootedness be to human community or to one’s regional identity, but most often both. Of the ten fiction stories in the collection, four stories have middle to late-middle aged protagonists who fail to move out of their liminality, resulting in loss or death. Three stories have protagonists who successfully move out of their

liminal phases, resulting in renewal of identity. The final three stories end on a more ambiguous note, leaving the reader trapped in the liminal space along with the female characters, unsure what resolution will be accomplished, if any.

The four stories that end with ultimate loss are “The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation,” “The Luck of the Bogans,” “Going to Shrewsbury,” and “In Dark New England Days.” Each of these stories have protagonists who are cut off from their human communities or the physical roots of their communities in the form of their homesteads or hometowns, leaving them without support as they navigate their aging bodies and minds. Doctors of Jewett’s day prescribed “for menopausal women... a regimen of quiet, avoidance of mental activities, the shunning of new activities and a commitment to domesticity” (Smith-Rosenberg 66). Jewett saw both wisdom and folly in these prescriptions. Her stories show the importance of a supportive domestic haven but also stress the isolation and despondency that a lack of purpose outside of the home can breed.

The tragic Mistress Sydenham endures the loss of her plantation after the war, as well as the loss of her husband and sons to the battlefield. Her mind begins to fail her, dementia being a symptom often associated with menopause (*Strangers* 66). For Mistress Sydenham, her isolation from the world, her grief, and her estrangement from her homestead contribute to her dementia. She leads the quiet cloistered life prescribed by 19th century medical professionals, but rather than freeing her from the traumas of her change of life, it exacerbates them. Jewett paints her as a character worthy of deep pity but also as a warning of what loss and loneliness can do to the aging. The Mistress remains a solitary figure throughout the story despite being accompanied by her former slave, Peter. Peter is not her equal in Southern post-bellum society and, thus, cannot

function as a substitute for community. He is, unfortunately, a human accessory. He walks behind her, mostly unacknowledged. At the end of the story, she is just as solitary as she is at the beginning, sitting “alone in one of the pews” on Easter morning, an object of pity to the Beaufort community, but not a member of it (35). Her damaged mind and aging body cut her off from community, permanently entombing her in liminal space.

Just as Jewett recognized the importance of community in traversing liminal space, the anthropological works of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner acknowledge this as well. They examine tribal rites surrounding liminal stages in a person’s life and development, such as puberty, marriage, childbirth, and death, specifically in the context of the communities that support the individual through these liminal passages. Indeed, as Turner points out, the liminal subjects become their own community, resulting in a “comradeship [that] transcends distinctions of rank, age, kinship position, and, in some kinds of cultic group, even of sex” (100). While these tribes may have supported their liminal neophytes, Jewett considers what happens to someone enduring a rite of passage both with and without proper community support. Rites of passage are already fraught with the inherent instability of liminality; they are increasingly so when undergone apart from community. Mrs. Peet of “Going to Shrewsbury” is a prime example of someone forced to endure old age without the comfort and context of family and a home. As noted in previous discussion of that story, Mrs. Peet finds herself unable to thrive separated from her native soil.

A significant aspect of adjusting to shifting circumstances resides in one’s ability to code-switch. This term is used by linguists to describe the mental aerobics required for “the use of two languages or two codes in the same

communicative event between speakers who are bilingual to a certain degree” (Argenter 378). The term has also been used by rhetoricians to describe the stylistic passage between different social situations. As we age, code-switching becomes more difficult; the brain loses the elasticity it had in youth, and identity also becomes more entrenched, making adjustment and change difficult, or at least accomplished at a greater mental cost.⁹ Many of Jewett’s characters suffer liminally because they become stuck between codes, particularly social ones. We see this paralysis primarily in Jewett’s older characters who find themselves adrift because the world has not moved at the same pace that they have. The Knowles sisters of “In Dark New England Days” exemplify this paralysis caused by inability to code-switch between their former life and the life that they anticipate. The Knowles sisters were brought up by a harsh and Scrooge-like sea captain father whose specter looms large over the narrative. Upon his death, they discover a trunk full of gold squirreled away beneath his bed, enough to set them up for half a lifetime of comfort as they enter late-middle age. Overnight, to everyone’s horror, the Knowles sisters are robbed, the money and the culprit never recovered. The sisters waste away, having set all of their hope on the future denied to them. The neighbors note the stark change in Betsey and Hannah Knowles, specifically the identity paralysis from which they seem to be suffering. One neighbor, Mrs. Forder, says to her friend Mrs. Downs that “The old Cap’n kept ’em child’n long as he lived, an’ then they was too old to l’arn different” (*Strangers* 254). The sisters were raised to be highly dependent upon

⁹ For more on this phenomenon, see Arturo Hernandez and Kathryn Kohnert’s study, “Investigation in the Locus of Language-Switching Costs in Older Adult Bilinguals” which was “consistent with the view that older adults show increased switching costs relative to young adults in tasks that require language switching” (62).

their father, like children as Mrs. Forder says. When they were presented with the new horizon of independence and self-sufficiency, only to have it so cruelly snatched from them, they find themselves at a loss for words and action, unable to code-switch and adjust. They are trapped in the child-like patterns of dependency of their youth, simultaneously too old and too immature to grow and change. As a result, the Knowles sisters find themselves caught in the limbo of late-middle age, unable to relinquish the immaturity of their past and equally unable to move into the independence of their stolen future. Additionally, because their father kept them so isolated and dependent upon him, the sisters lack a community to support them through their trial. There are neighbors willing to offer assistance, but the Knowles are wanting in their ability to accept support from the outside. As a result, they languish at the conclusion of the narrative, haunted by the ghost of their father and their purloined inheritance, eternally trapped in the liminality of their not-so-golden years.

While these tragedies weigh heavily upon the collection, Jewett is not such a pessimist as to believe that all her characters are destined for loss and liminal paralysis. Many of her stories contain protagonists who are able to code-switch from youth to old age, finding their later years full of vibrance and promise. In "A Winter Courtship," both Jefferson Briley, the mailman, and his newly minted fiancée, Widow Tobin, move into the renewal and security of a late-in-life marriage. Their engagement is not based on passion or love, but, like many of the marriages in Jewett's fiction, upon desires for companionship and financial security. Jewett's best characters are always New England pragmatists at heart, ever ready to pinch a penny and behave sensibly. This does not negate the significance of these marriages, but it does place them in a different category

from the sentimental novels so popular in the 19th century. Both Mr. Briley and Widow Tobin find themselves isolated, facing a future where no one really wants them and neither has a true home. Briley travels back and forth along his mail route, lodging in boarding houses and relying on the generosity of clients for mending and baked goods. Widow Tobin cannot manage her farm by herself and spends her year being shifted between the households of her adult offspring. Standing upon the threshold of old age, neither feels fulfilled. The two of them reject the liminal paralysis of late-middle age, opting for a marriage of convenience that will give them both security and identity, just when they thought they had lost both.

Finally, and perhaps the best example of the renewal Jewett thought possible for her female protagonists facing the uncertainties of perimenopause, there is Mercy Bascom, the heroine of "Fair Day." Mercy Bascom found herself widowed before age thirty and mother to several young children. By the time she reaches her change of life, she is living with her grown son, daughter-in-law, and young grandchildren. She tries to remain independent on her own land, but eventually finds the task of maintaining her farm alone too daunting. Mercy continues to run her son's household, her daughter-in-law not being particularly gifted at homemaking, but she misses her farm and her independence. On a whim when her son and his family are at the county fair, Mercy takes advantage of the "fair" day and walks over to her old farm, since let out to a young family of aspiring farmers. The walk does her good, and she realizes that she can offer herself as help to the young renting family, while still providing support to her son, but gradually shifting the burden of responsibilities to her daughter-in-law. Concurrently, Mercy remembers a falling-out she had with an old friend and

vows to make things right again. She has felt isolated and lonely, longing for community with a woman her own age, facing similar struggles and possessing a similar past. Though Jewett never married or had children, she was deeply sympathetic with the identity crisis that many women in their forties and fifties face as their children grow up and no longer need them. This crisis can be compounded by widowhood, loss of property, and isolation. *Strangers and Wayfarers* holds several women (and men) who become crushed beneath this crisis of identity, for legitimate and pitiable reasons. But Jewett also saw the strength that could be created out of the pressures of liminality, forming the diamond-hard character she witnessed firsthand in her beloved, hardy New Englanders. Mercy Bascom represents the best New England offers: the fierce determination to carry on and thrive in even the rockiest of soils.

Despite these success stories, Jewett also knew that fate is hardly ever black and white, success or failure, but that much of life rests in uncertainty. Her stories reflect the reality that the future is ambiguous, and she lets her readers feel the discomfort and anxiety of unresolved liminality. In "By the Morning Boat," Jewett juxtaposes the liminality of Elisha's youth with his mother's perimenopause, leaving the futures of both characters uncertain. As Elisha prepares to leave by himself to journey to the big city, a fraught rite of passage Jewett witnessed many young people of her day undertaking despite the tenuous outcomes, Elisha's mother stares down the barrel of an increasingly empty life lived as caretaker of her aging father and homesteader on a rocky island off the coast of Maine. Both Elisha and his mother find themselves lost in liminal space, unsure of what the future holds or what the act of arrival might even look like. Rather than offering neat and tidy resolution for either character, Jewett leaves

their future uncertain as she has done with other stories in the collection, creating unease in the hearts of her readers. This irresolution leads the reader to consider the anxiety of both puberty and menopause and the lack of proper support American culture offers to either of these rites of passage.

Jewett's Authorial Liminality and "The White Rose Road"

Every tale in *Strangers and Wayfarers* holds a liminal character, and Jewett's non-fiction call-to-action at the end of the collection is no exception, only this time, the liminal figure is Jewett. The essay centers around a lament for the passing-away of a former mode of life. Jewett self-acknowledged her hatred of change, writing to a friend in 1882 after the death of Longfellow: "it is change that is so hard to bear, change grows every year a harder part of our losses" (*Letters* 14-15). Writing to Annie Fields in 1892, Jewett remarked upon a plot of land along the Piscataqua River that a syndicate hoped to buy and develop, "Sometimes I get such a hunted feeling like the last wild thing that is left in the fields" (90). Jewett's fiction became a place where she could preserve the landscapes and the people of her childhood and roam freely without that hunted feeling as she ran her pen over her paper. But she could not always remain in the world of her stories, and in "The White Rose Road" Jewett shares the sadness and the hope she lives between as she canters about the Berwick countryside.

As she rides around observing the rustic homes and strawberry fields, she notices a funny little garden plot ruled over by a thin little country girl, who has planted far too much sage and little of anything else. Jewett treats the labors of the little girl with dignity, sagely observing that she will be prepared if anyone suffers an outbreak of the measles. Jewett knew that in all likelihood this young

maid would grow up and move to the city like so many of the youths in her stories, and she treats this time of childhood with tenderness and fond memory, as a testament to a dwindling way of life. Jewett also pays homage to the sorrows and suffering that many of the farms and their inhabitants have endured from war, weather, and toil. Jewett knew that farming life on the coast was not an easy vocation, but she did believe it a rewarding one, worthy of preservation or at least remembrance. Her essay secures the memory of “a type that is in fact passing away” (*Strangers* 265). Jewett invites her readers into the relationship she shares with the past and into the liminality she bears as a border-stalker, a *mearcstapa* whose sole purpose is to provide insight and perspective that can only be gleaned from a life lived in the in-between.

Upon viewing abandoned houses and derelict chimneys on the hillsides, Jewett wonders aloud, “What would the old farmers say to see the fate of their worthy bequest to the younger generation? They would wag their heads sorrowfully, with sad foreboding” (273). Though Jewett shares their concern, she also maintains a posture of hope. She concludes her essay with the observation:

It will be good to remember the white rose road and its quietness in many a busy town day to come. As I think of these slight sketches, I wonder if they will have to others a tinge of sadness; but I have seldom spent an afternoon so full of pleasure and fresh and delighted consciousness of the possibilities of rural life. (278-79)

Jewett spent her life in-betweening, moving from country to city, the “town day” she references at the close of the essay. Her life was lived as a wayfarer, and in some respects as a stranger, stalking the borders of two spheres of existence, never permitted to fully enter into either. While this role brought a considerable burden to accurately depict the ways of life that she felt so compelled to represent, Jewett sustained that it also brought her great joy and fulfillment to

inhabit the liminal role of *mearcstapa* for her time as it allowed her to “write to the human heart” as she said in a letter to Willa Cather (*Letters* 249). Fujimura explains, “Even for a *mearcstapa* who is skilled at living in the wider world, the welcome and safety of a sheepfold cannot be over-stated. Border-stalkers need a solid grounding, a secure place to which they can return; a parabola requires a center to spin out of” (92). For Jewett, that sheepfold was her home in South Berwick, Maine. She told Cather that a writer must “find [her] own quiet centre of life” (*Letters* 249). Jewett’s parabolas spun out to Boston, to England, to Europe, but she always came back to the fold of her small coastal town to be pastured and grounded. As she described it in a letter to Annie Fields, “. . .town life will ever have in its gift the spirit of the present, while it may take again from the quiet of the hills and fields and the conservatism of country hearts a gift from the spirit of the past” (*Letters* 8). Though Jewett found city life stimulating, she recognized that her connection to her roots kept the soul of her writing alive, “remain[ing] the spiritual fount of her art” (*SOJ CT* 219).

While Jewett had a “sheepfold” to return to, her collection centers on those who do not. Jewett found ways to manage her liminality, but her stories are replete with characters who are not so fortunate. By inviting her readers into her own liminality and the liminality of her characters, *Strangers and Wayfarers* represents Jewett at her best: a hybrid of regional narratives and social activism. *Strangers and Wayfarers*, through unified themes of liminal places and people, takes the lives of the most vulnerable and the most marginal and makes their struggles central, in order that they might not be overlooked and passed by. Most scholars consider *The Country of the Pointed Firs* to be Jewett’s greatest novel, and it is; but *Strangers and Wayfarers* is certainly her greatest collection of

short stories, and the place where her mission to “write to the human heart” meets her ability to depict the human heart, that fickle organ, caught in the in-between of life’s complexities.

CHAPTER FOUR

Epilogue

Throughout this project, it has become increasingly clear to me that Jewett was far more than a quaint chronicler of rural life and old ladies. Because of this recognition, it can be difficult to engage with Jewett's regionalism in an honest way. As noted elsewhere, regionalism has often been used as a term to denigrate the importance of authors' writings, particularly female authors. And indeed, Jewett has been relatively excluded from the average readership. Upon meeting strangers, I have to explain my research in a way that I would not have to if I were studying Mark Twain, who, though he was technically a regionalist as well, is not defined and certainly not belittled by his regionalist leanings. The average American knows Mark Twain, but outside of specific literary circles, Jewett remains largely unknown.

Thus, the question persists: can regionalism be reclaimed? Can the term be reframed in a way that allows for serious consideration of the genre in a way that does not feel gratuitous or pejorative? I believe that Jewett's fiction, because of its emphasis on liminality and the crossovers into borderlands studies, provides a means of reclaiming regionalist studies that is not only productive but also deeply urgent. If Jewett found industrialization and urbanization threatening to liminal places and people in the 1890s, then the 21st century finds itself facing a full-blown menace. With technology advancing at light speeds, biodiversity dwindling, and the earth facing a global climate crisis, the need for advocacy and preservation of at-risk lives and landscapes is imperative. Time has shown that

top-down initiatives are never as successful as the grassroots efforts that develop organically on local and regional levels. Just as Jewett wrote obsessively about the liminal souls and spaces particular to her home in New England, we too can actively seek to recover imperiled regions and ways of life in this modern age, taking cues from those who have gone before us.

But more than Jewett's obsession with liminal places and people, few scholars have considered her legacy as an activist. Scholars may acknowledge that her work can take on activist tones occasionally, but none consider her work as intentionally advocating for her region and its inhabitants. Her activism is gentle, but it is not mute. Her passion for endangered regionalist species echoes in those who benefitted from her writings and advice. Her protégé, Willa Cather, carried on Jewett's ethos in her own attentiveness to the disappearing American prairie. While some scholarship has been conducted into the Jewett/Cather relationship, much of it relates to queer theory or the little that does consider their shared regional and ecological themes has never moved beyond dissertations into publications. Cather was not the only young author whose writings were altered by the influence of Jewett. There is a "family tree" of bioregional activist influence both stemming to Jewett from backwards in time and branching from Jewett forward to today, trajectories that have yet to be uncovered and explored. Unearthing Jewett's received and projected influence would offer literary gene-mapping relevant to conversations far beyond her regional purview but would also expand and infuse her regional purview with the appreciation and recognition that it has long been denied. Jewett's sensitivity to liminal existence and her clear understanding that beloved community was the only remedy to the fragmentation of industry and urbanization offer an

entrance into understanding our own need for identity grounded in particular places and people.

WORKS CITED

- Alaimo, Stacy. "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature." *Material Feminisms*, edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, Indiana University Press, 2008, p. 237-264.
- Alaimo, Stacy and Susan Hekman. "Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory." *Material Feminisms*, edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, Indiana University Press, 2008, p. 1-19.
- "Albion Tourgée: The Carpetbagger Who Debunked the Romanticization of the 'Happy Darkie.'" *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 34, 2001, p. 67-67. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3134126. Accessed 28 Jan. 2020.
- Anonymous. "Review of *The King of Folly Island and Other People*." *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett*, edited by Gwen L. Nagel, G. K. Hall and Co., 1984, p. 35.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1999.
- Argenter, Joan A. "Code-Switching and Dialogism: Verbal Practices among Catalan Jews in the Middle Ages." *Language in Society*, vol. 30, no. 3, Sept. 2001, p. 377-402. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2002930835&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Armbruster, Karla. "'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight': A Call for Boundary Crossing in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism." *Ecofeminist Literary Critique*, edited by Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy. University of Illinois Press, 1998, p. 97- 122.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. E-book, University of Texas Press, 1981, <https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.baylor.edu/2027/heb.09354>. Accessed 27 Jan 2020.
- The Bible*. The English Standard Version, Crossway Bibles, 2001.
- Berry, Wendell. *What are People For?* Counterpoint, 2010.
- Boelhower, William. "The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix." *American Literary History*, vol. 20, no. 1/2, 2008, p. 83-101, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20492207. Accessed 4 October 2019.

- Buber, Martin, and Walter Kaufmann. *I and Thou*. 1st Touchstone ed., Touchstone, 1996.
- Burrow, Rufus, Jr. "The Beloved Community: Martin Luther King, Jr and Josiah Royce." *Encounter*, vol. 73, no. 1, Fall 2012, pp. 37-64. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001931799&site=ehost-live&scope=site. Accessed 6 March 2020.
- Cary, Richard. *Sarah Orne Jewett*. Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962.
- Cather, Willa. "Preface." *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett*, edited by Willa Cather, vol. I, The Riverside Press, 1924.
- Chesterton, G. K. *Orthodoxy*. Doubleday, 1959.
- Claaren, Almudena, et al. "Transversal Ecocritical Praxis—An Interview with Patrick Murphy." *Frame*, vol. 26, no. 2, Nov. 2013, p. 101-12.
- Donovan, Josephine. "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Reading the Orange." *Ecofeminist Literary Critique*, edited by Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, University of Illinois Press, 1998, p. 74-96. Referred to as *ELC*.
- . *Sarah Orne Jewett*. Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., Inc., 1980. Referred to as *SOJ*.
- . "Sarah Orne Jewett's Critical Theory: Notes toward a Feminine Literary Mode." *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett*, edited by Gwen L. Nagel, G. K. Hall and Co., 1984, p. 212-225. Referred to as *SOJ CT*.
- Elbert, Monika and Wendy Ryden. "EcoGothic Disjunctions: Natural and Supernatural Liminality in Sarah Orne Jewett's Haunted Landscapes." *ISLE*, vol. 24, no. 3, July 2017, p. 496-513. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isx042>.
- Ernst, Daniel C. "Sublime Spectrums: Human/Nature Binary Disruption in London and Jewett." *Kentucky Philological Review*, vol. 29, 2015, p. 70-80.
- Estévez-Sáa, Margarita and María Jesús Lorenzo-Modia. "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Eco-caring: Contemporary Debates on Ecofeminism(s)." *Women's Studies*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2018, p. 123-146, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2018.1425509>. Accessed 30 September 2019.
- Fongang, Delphine. "Cosmopolitan Dilemma: Diasporic Subjectivity and Postcolonial Liminality in Teju Cole's *Open City*." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 48, no. 4, Indiana University Press, Dec. 2017, p. 138-54, doi:10.2979/reseafritelite.48.4.10. Accessed 27 January 2020.

- Fujimura, Makoto. *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life*. IVP Books, 2017.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Routledge, 2012.
- Gidmark, Jill B. *Melville Sea Dictionary: A Glossed Concordance and Analysis of the Sea Language in Melville's Nautical Novels*. Greenwood Press, 1982.
- Gruen, Lori. "Revaluing Nature." *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, edited by Karen J. Warren and Nisvan Erkel, Indiana UP, 1997, p. 356-74. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=612&sitehost-live&scope=site.
- Hampson, Robert. "Conrad and Nautical Language: Flying Moors and Crimson Barometers." *Conrad and Language*, edited by Katherine Isobel Baxter and Robert Hampson, Edinburgh University Press, 2016.
- Heller, Terry. "To Each Body a Spirit: Jewett and African Americans." *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 84, no. 1, 2011, p. 123-58, doi:10.1162/TNEQ_a_00024. Accessed 27 January 2020.
- Hernandez, Arturo E., and Kathryn J. Kohnert. "Investigations into the Locus of Language-Switching Costs in Older Adult Bilinguals." *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, vol. 18, no. 1, Jan. 2015, pp. 51-64. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1017/S136672891300045X.
- Hicks, D. Emily. *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text*. University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Howells, William Dean. *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells*. Vol. 2, edited by Mildred Howells, Doubleday, 1928.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*. Translated by Alison Martin, Routledge, 1993.
- Janicker, Rebecca. "'It's my house, isn't it?': Memory, Haunting and Liminality in Stephen King's *Bag of Bones*." *European Journal of American Culture*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2010, p. 183-95, doi: 10.1386/ejac.29.3.183_1. Accessed 12 November 2019.
- Jennison, Keith Warren. *The Maine Idea*. Durrell Publications, 1954.
- Jewett, Sarah Orne. *The Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*. Edited by Annie Fields, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911. Referred to as *Letters*.
- . *Novels and Stories*. The Library of America, 1994.
- . *Sarah Orne Jewett Letters*. Edited by Richard Cary, Colby College Press, 1967. Referred to as *SOJ Letters*.

- . *Strangers and Wayfarers*. The American Short Story Series, Vol. 65, Garrett Press, 1969. Referred to as *Strangers*.
- Karpinski, Joanne B. "The Gothic Underpinnings of Realism in the Local Colorists' No Man's Land." *Frontier Gothic: Terror and Wonder at the Frontier in American Literature*, edited by David Mogan, Scott P. Sanders, and Joanne B. Karpinski, Associated University Presses, Inc., 1993, p. 140-155.
- Kirkpatrick, Kim. "Dangerous Crones: The Menopausal Woman as Outsider." *The Image of the Outsider in Literature, Media, and Society*, selected papers from the 2002 conference of the Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, 2002, p. 297-303.
- Mason, Emma. "Divine Pastoral: Wordsworth and the Weak Things of the World." *Ecology and Religion in 19th Century Studies Conference*, 19 September 2019, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK. Keynote Panel. <https://sites.baylor.edu/ecologyreligion/2019/09/19/keynote-panel-ecology-and-religion-in-19c-literary-studies-four-case-studies/>. Accessed 3 February 2020.
- Mora, Pat. *Nepantla: Essays from the Land in the Middle*. 1st ed., University of New Mexico Press, 1993.
- Murphy, Patrick D. "'The Women are Speaking': Contemporary Literature as Theoretical Critique." *Ecofeminist Literary Critique*, edited by Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, University of Illinois Press, 1998, p. 23-48.
- Nail, Rebecca Wall. "'Where Every Prospect Pleases': Sarah Orne Jewett, South Berwick, and the Importance of Place." *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett*, edited by Gwen L. Nagel, G. K. Hall & Co., 1984, p. 185-98.
- O'Brien, Gerald V. *Framing the Moron: The Social Construction of Feeble-Mindedness in the American Eugenic Era*. Manchester University Press, 2013.
- Petry, Ann. "The Novel as Social Criticism." *Ann Petry: The Street, The Narrows*. Library of America, 2019.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge, 1992.
- Roman, Judith. "A Closer Look at the Jewett-Fields Relationship." *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett*, edited by Gwen L. Nagel, G. K. Hall and Co., 1984, p. 119-34.
- Roman, Margaret. *Sarah Orne Jewett: Reconstructing Gender*. University of Alabama Press, 1992.

- Sandilands, Catriona. "The Importance of Reading Queerly: Jewett's *Deephaven* as Feminist Ecology." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2004, p. 57-77. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1093/isle/11.2.57. Accessed 2 February 2020.
- Sarafrazarpatapeh, Lida. "Ecofeminism: An Analysis." *The Global Status of Women and Girls: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, edited by Lori Underwood and Dawn Hutchinson, Lexington Books, 2017, p. 15-23. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2017400387&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Slicer, Deborah. "Toward and Ecofeminist Standpoint Theory: Bodies and Grounds." *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, University of Illinois Press, 1998, p. 49-73.
- Smith, Andrew, and William Hughes. "Introduction: Defining the EcoGothic." *Ecogothic*, edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes, Manchester UP, 2013, p. 1-14.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "Puberty to Menopause: The Cycle of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century America." *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3/4, 1973, p. 58-72. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1566480. Accessed 16 January 2020.
- Sorensen, Janet. *Strange Vernaculars: How Eighteenth-Century Slang, Cant, Provincial Languages, and Nautical Jargon Became English*. Princeton University Press, 2017.
- Turner, Victor. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Cornell University Press, 1967.
- Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. The University of Chicago Press, 1969.
- Walden, Dan. "'A False Phantom': The Coastscape in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pilot*." *Studies in American Fiction*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2015, p. 147-166.
- Zagarell, Sandra A. "Old Women and Old Houses: New England Regionalism and the Specter of Modernity in Jewett's *Strangers and Wayfarers*." *American Literary Realism*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2002, p. 251-64. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27747075. Accessed 15 September 2018.