Sarah Orne Jewett: Transcendence in Nature

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SARAH ORNE JEWETT: TRANSCENDENCE IN NATURE

by

Kathryn Leenay

A Thesis

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SARAH ORNE JEWETT: TRANSCENDENCE IN NATURE

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Sarah Orne Jewett wrote about people and things "just as they are" (Silverthorne 35). Her father had given her this advice and, in a way, she made it her mission in life to acquaint people with each other. Despite her simple language and seemingly simple characters her work is full of wisdom and touches on many universal themes. Willa Cather believed Jewett's last novel, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, deserved a place alongside *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Scarlet Letter* (Cather vi). Although some critics in Jewett's time complained of "very little plot" (Silverthorne 143) in her stories, other influential critics and publishers, such as William Dean Howells, enjoyed and revered her "free movement, unfettered by the limits of plot, and keeping only to the reality, which no other eye than hers has seen so subtly, so humorously, so touchingly" (Silverthorne 207).

I will analyze *The Country of the Pointed Firs* using the 1925 edition, which includes the three appended stories: "The Queen's Twin," "A Dunnet Shepherdess," and "William's Wedding." Natural settings in the novel and in the appended stories allow characters in *Country* to transcend apparently conventional human limitations such as physical and emotional isolation from community, linear time, traditional Christian religions, and gender.

The anonymous narrator in the novel develops pliant and enriching relationships with other community members as she "returns" to her true self. In the first few chapters of *Country*, she realizes that isolation from community can renew the soul and make one a stronger member of a community in the long run. This Transcendentalist tenet is expanded
throughout the original novel, as well as the appended stories. Using natural settings as a "school" for transcendence, Jewett also touches on the Transcendentalist tenet of "the great and small," as seen in examinations of linear time and traditional Christian beliefs in the novel. Most of the characters in the novel are of a mature age, appearing to be beyond the years of parturition. Despite this "limitation," the characters are able to prosper on seemingly infertile, rocky land. They also appear physically younger than their true age, thereby continually contradicting the limitations of linear time on a body. The merging of the two extremes, great and small, is a collapse of a traditionally linear, hierarchical structure. In other words, when the two extremes are brought together as one there is no longer a need for a bipolar relationship between youth and age, good and bad, and man and woman. An embodiment of all forces in oneness, as seen in the work of two of Jewett's influences, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Emanuual Swedenborg, leads to transcendence.

The Christian belief that the greatness of God was born into the microcosm of a human baby, Jesus Christ, is an example of the "great and small" collapsing into one. Jewett uses and, in a way, redefines this image when she juxtaposes the maternal Mother Earth figure, Mrs. Blackett, with the conventional Christian minister at the Bowden Reunion. She introduces a woman-centered Christianity in her book where the church is found in the domestic setting of the home. Finally, Jewett transcends gender role limitations (again using natural settings for her place of education) by allowing characters to visit both their maternal and
paternal selves.

*Country* is a subtle novel that reveals Jewett's own exploration and, essentially, reconstruction of many traditional nineteenth century beliefs. Jewett does not work with young heroines like Alcott's Jo or Bronte's Jane Eyre to convey her message, but rather she returns, as the title of *Country*'s first chapter implies, to the teachings of the past and chooses an older woman, Almira Todd, as a guide and mentor for both the reader and the narrator. In her characters, Jewett reveals the wisdom of all ages and so taps into perpetual knowledge, growth, and a youthful spirit.
Chapter 1--Nature

A subtle conflict between the desire to be secluded and the desire to belong to a community is seen in the anonymous narrator of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Her perception of Almira Todd as an "enlarged" character capable of taking on characteristics of a Sibyl and Mother Earth enables the narrator to transcend the physical limitations found in isolation, as well as in community. While these two physical states are commonly set in opposition, the narrator finds that a balance can be attained. Jewett's approach to this balance, however, is less traditional than some of her contemporaries because communities, as well as individuals in isolation, are "growing" in natural settings. Many of Jewett's contemporaries used the natural world to symbolize a return to self. Once this individual is reengaged with their own needs, they return to fulfill their contribution to a society away from nature. Ironically, the narrator begins with a conscious removal of herself from a large society and into the quiet village of Dunnet Landing. She soon learns that the growth she seeks is not simply achieved by leaving a community. A person's sojourn is much more subtle, and often times "growths" in self are seen both in settings of community and isolation.

The narrator's first relationship in nature

The narrator of *The Country of The Pointed Firs* goes to the small town of Dunnet Landing to enjoy the seclusion of the quiet town. She is also hoping to use this isolation to write. In the first few chapters, we
see that the narrator has a sincere love for the area and the community members of Dunnet Landing, but we also see that she has a desire to be alone. She goes to the town seeking solitude, but finds that there was "one fault to find with this choice of a summer lodging-place, and that was its complete lack of seclusion" (Jewett, *Country* 14).

The narrator refers to herself as "a lover of Dunnet Landing" (Jewett, *Country* 13). In her retrospection, she understands that being a lover, or being in love, can be a transitory state, and that true friendship is a process: "The process of falling in love at first sight is as final as it is swift...but the growth of true friendship may be a lifelong affair" (13).

After a few days in Dunnet Landing, the young writer seeks the isolation of a deserted school house to write because she cannot concentrate in Almira's house. She leaves "during a particularly spirited and personal conversation," and "[flies] further temptation" by walking out "past the fragrant green garden and up the dusty road" (Jewett, *Country* 18). Her exit appears to be a retreat from the community and an escape from the many conversations that fall on her "cotton-less ears" (18). At first the narrator says "unkind words of withdrawal to Mrs. Todd" (16). Her leave-taking is not negative in the mind of her land-lady, however, because Almira becomes "more wistfully affectionate" (16) with each complaint. Although the narrator rents the school house to work in, she finds that when she returns to Almira's home each evening she is "welcomed back as if from a long absence" (19). She had assumed that her landlady would become upset if she left. But, when Almira responds with
kindness and understanding, rather than the expected resentment, she begins to understand that she and Almira were "not separated or estranged," and that they are developing "a deeper intimacy" (16).

In these first chapters of Country, Almira shows the narrator that isolation can be a positive experience and that it need not jeopardize a person's relationship with a community. Soon, she learns to enjoy her solitude, but is also happy to rejoin the community, as seen when she leaves the schoolhouse in the evening "feeling most businesslike" (19). Margaret Fuller, a transcendentalist who lived some fifty years before Jewett, states:

If any individual live too much in relations, so that he becomes a stranger to the resources of his own nature, he falls after a while into a distraction, or imbecility, from which he can only be cured by a time of isolation (1602).

In Jewett's Victorian America, a society faced with technological and communication advances, some people moved away from the small towns. Modern advances drew people away from these communities and introduced them to the fast-paced urban settings that understood little about the quiet world of communities like Dunnet Landing. With such a shift, there is a potential for losing touch with the "resources of [one's] own nature" (Fuller 1602). Perhaps, the narrator of Country has come from a large city hoping to redefine these very resources of self through positive isolation, and finds she is able to do so with the guidance of Almira.
Positive isolation was an important tenet of Transcendentalism. Henry Thoreau and Margaret Fuller described its benefits in *Walden* and *The Great Lawsuit* respectively. But, the American Victorian age made available new technologies that made this process difficult. Two of these technologies, the train and the phone, Jewett met with both excitement and anxiety. Although she enjoyed traveling and the modern conveniences, she also worried that this new, fast paced society would forget the quieter life pleasures that she remembered from South Berwick, Maine where she grew up and lived until her death. The communication that developed brought forth a new sense of isolation.

Much of Jewett's trepidation regarding modern advances centers on the destruction of forests (Silverthorne 88), and the ability of people to survive in a society dependent on technology. The latter conflict is seen in one of Jewett's earlier short stories, "A Late Supper," where the protagonist, Miss Catherine Spring, discovers she may lose her home because the dividends she depends on from the railroad company are not being paid to her. Jewett has resolved this type of anxiety in her characters by the time she writes *Country*. These later characters seem unfettered by the advances made in their lifetimes, but interestingly they are aware of the modern, social habits. Even Mrs. Blackett, the eldest member of the community, has a best room that is "indeed a tribute to society" (Jewett, *Country* 42), and William is able to make an old song "Home, Sweet Home" sound "quite new" (51). The richness of the past and the present in these characters leaves the reader with an impression of completeness. While Miss Catherine Spring's security is
derived from an outside world with which she has little knowledge or concrete connection, the characters of *Country* turn to nature for their resources. Importantly, the characters of *Country* have not only a concrete connection with nature, as seen in the use of the land by Elijah and the herbs by Almira, but also great knowledge. Drawing on the Emersonian thought that Nature is in a constant state of regeneration and so transcends the limitations of time and becomes timeless, Jewett frees her characters by bringing them into a deep relationship with the natural world. In many ways, *Country* may be Jewett's conception of a Utopian society.

The physically aging society of Dunnet Landing suggests a "dying" society. But a careful reading of *Country* also suggests opportunity where it is not obvious, at first. "William's Wedding" is a story about a new beginning that transcends the limitations society places on marriage. For many, marriage was for the young and its primary purpose was procreation. William and Esther marry late in life and will not have children. But birth and regeneration are seen as Esther walks through the village carrying a lamb, a Christian symbol of innocence, rebirth and Jesus who was born from the Virgin Mary. The latter is perhaps the oldest "unconventional" birth.

Jewett never finished "William's Wedding" so it is difficult to turn to the story for insight into the author. Possibly, Willa Cather finished the story for Jewett. We know that they developed a strong relationship towards the end of Jewett's life. The childlike descriptions used in the story that suggest perpetual youth also pervades the earlier text, so it is
reasonable to argue that Jewett was making a statement on marriage in *Country*. As an unmarried woman, Jewett probably faced numerous questions about why she never married. Much of the criticism written on Jewett today addresses her single status. Jewett did not shun marriage. Instead, she wrote a love story in unconventional terms and made it fruitful when she allowed William and Esther to marry and to carry the lamb together. In her observation of William and Esther the narrator saw hope and a new beginning: "he [William] shook hands with me, and looked me full in the face to be sure I understood how happy he was, and stepping into the boat held out his arms to Esther--at last she was his own" (Jewett, *Country* 157).

The relationship between the narrator and Almira is also fruitful. It is shaped in spiritual terms, but is grounded in the practicality of everyday life. The narrator admires her landlady, but it is an admiration not only of her mystic qualities but also her practical qualities as seen when the narrator, returning from the school house, says she does not smell the "herb garden, but rather Mrs. Todd's cooking" (Jewett, *Country* 19). In this scene, she exchanges the more poetic descriptions of scents that distract her in her writing place for the practical side of nature. Almira's use of herbs (and so nature) is a lesson to the young writer. As a writer, the narrator must learn to use her environment. The writer's block that she suffers from may be a result of trying to glorify her surroundings out of existence. To write, one must place themselves in a situation and use it. For example, when the narrator observes the funeral procession of Mrs. Beggs, she puts herself in the position of distant observer, even
though she had attended the service. She feels detached and stifled because she has not engaged her environment. The chapter ends with her lamenting this knowledge about herself. She sits at her desk feeling like a dull, "anxious scribe" (Jewett, Country 21).

As the story progresses, the narrator develops a more intimate relationship with the powers of nature by watching her friends Almira and William. One moment of transcendence for the narrator comes as she walks through the woods with William. She becomes aware of the power of silence and understands that she does not need to tell William about the beauty in nature that they are both witnessing (Jewett, Country 119). She realizes that by not speaking they still had "thoughts in common" (119).

Still, a conflict, albeit subtle, exists between the desire to be alone and the role each individual plays in a community. The narrator "flees" not once but twice: first to the small country community and then, ironically, she flees this setting to the schoolhouse. Before the narrator actually goes to the schoolhouse, however, she becomes "aware of the school in which {her} landlady had strengthened her natural gift" (Jewett, Country 18). Almira's school is nature. Unlike the narrator's, it is a school that thrives both in isolation and in community.

The reason Almira's school thrives is because its space is fluid. The schoolhouse is a space that the narrator attempts to structure. The narrator "hung [her] hat and luncheon-basket on an entry nail as if [she] were a small scholar, but [she] sat at the teacher's desk as if [she] were that great authority" (Jewett, Country 18). The hierarchy associated with a school is also seen when Captain Littlepage visits her. In this scene,
Captain Littlepage enters and takes "the lower place of a scholar" by sitting in one of the student chairs while the narrator remains seated in her "fixed seat behind the teacher's desk" (22). The space that the narrator seeks in the schoolhouse is different than the opening description of Dunnet Landing, and in particular, the description of Almira's house. The houses of Dunnet Landing are personified and are said to have "made the most of their seaward view" (13). They have "knowing eyes that watched the harbor and the far sea-line beyond, or looked northward all along the shore and its background of spruces and balsam firs" (13).

Because the houses of this village are like people themselves, they act within a fluid space. Almira's house is also filled with life with its "bit of green garden," and "gay hollyhocks" (14). Almira's many visitors change the narrator's first impression that her landlady's home is "retired and sheltered" (14). Ironically, however, the schoolhouse fits this description. The difference between the narrator's "school" and Almira's "school" is seen in their use of space.

The schoolhouse is not only a physically isolated place, but also one that attracts the most isolated character in the novel, Captain Littlepage, to its door. Almira is able to point out some impressive tansy that grows outside the schoolhouse, however. This tansy which is "scuffed down all spring" (19) is stronger than any that Almira has found. Almira's observation of the tansy is, also, an observation of the narrator. In the next chapter, the narrator begins to "wish for a companion and for news from the outer world" (21). The narrator, who has been "scuffed down" by her own burdens, soon returns to the community of Dunnet Landing and
begins to make friends. She releases much of the anxiety that she had when she arrived at Dunnet Landing and begins the process of rejoining the community.

Almira as a mythical and prophetic character

The language used to associate Almira with mythical and mystic characters such as The Sibyl, Mother Earth and a woman of wisdom give her something that the narrator needs to see in order to free herself from the constraints of society: agelessness. Agelessness gives a person a sense of endless time that is often lost as an individual tries to balance the various roles needed to maintain their individuality and the roles needed to function in society. This agelessness is sharply contrasted with a community that at first seems stagnant and docile. Almira's home and so much of the community are very much alive with not only "blooming things" (14) but also "loud and cheerful voices" (Jewett, Country 17). Although the village is largely made up of aging people, it is by no means retired or barren for its lack of youth.

Almira is "land-lady, herb-gatherer, and rustic philosopher" (35), says the narrator. She is love, wisdom, and truth in her "own habitation" and her counterparts are in "every village in the world" (151). By expanding Almira's presence into "every village in the world," the narrator sees her universal, enlarged characteristics. The novel begins in the setting of a small town where characters, at first, appear to interact only briefly, and live for the most part in isolation. The novel ends, however, with an image of a world community. The language Jewett uses is
precise, and each image of Almira, as an enlarged character, implies that she steps outside the typical lines of a country herbalist.

Almira towers over her herb garden. "Being a very large person," the narrator states, "her full skirts brushed and bent almost every slender stalk that her feet missed" (Jewett, *Country* 14). She is large and steps "heavily on thyme" (14), but also possesses "a kind, motherly voice" (67). The play on the word "thyme" suggests a mystic power associated with her herbs, and of course a play on the word "time." She is not limited by her physical age and transcends linear time in her relationship to the Sibyl and Mother Earth. In *Walden*, Henry Thoreau states: "Time is but a stream I go a fishing in" (1770). The fluidity of time suggested by Thoreau is accessed by Almira in *Country*. On the way to Green Island, Almira takes command of time and nature. The boat they are taking is not going fast enough for Almira, so "she took a firmer grasp of the sheet and gave an impatient look up at the gaff" (Jewett, *Country* 38). She urged "the wind like a horse," (38) and it seemed that the boat doubled its speed. Linear time, and so the aging process it outlines, can be adjusted to an individual's needs. Almira cannot reverse the hands of time, but she will not sit idly by or lament its passing either. Instead she takes control, as needed. Earlier, I mentioned how the characters of *Country* appear unfettered by the modern advances of the Victorian Age. Unlike Miss Catherine in "A Late Supper," they make their living from the natural world. By engaging with nature in this way, the characters of *Country*, Almira in particular, are able to reap benefits other people lack. While Miss Catherine was carried away by a train, a symbol of modernism,
Almira uses the technology of a boat and calms the winds. The boat Almira rides in is not grand or new. In fact, it relies on nature for its sail. A lesson from both of these stories is that human-made technologies must work in relationship with nature. The boat is also a biblical symbol of the fishermen whom Jesus taught to cast their nets with not only skill but also with faith in a higher being. In both interpretations humans do not work alone or against the natural world.

Like Mother Earth, who is known for her power and "large offspring" such as the One-Eyed Cyclopes and Typhon (Flaum, 108-09), Almira is also physically large and strong. The winds sweeping up behind her give off a powerful, mysterious fragrance, and during one evening with the narrator the "large hostess returned to the little room with a mist about her from standing long in the wet doorway, and the sudden draught of her coming beat out the smoke and flame from the Franklin stove" (Jewett, Country 67-68). In this image, Almira seems larger than the natural elements of wind, fire and water.

Almira does not have the temper of Mother Earth, however. She demonstrates remarkable balance and affection in all her encounters. Her strength and knowledge are used to heal, as seen in the numerous herbal remedies she gives to the community members (Jewett, Country 14). She is understanding when her friend feels a need to work in the schoolhouse and she shows her support for her decision by going up to the school house to visit. The narrator says that Almira came to the schoolhouse "partly out of amused curiosity about my industries" (Jewett, Country 19) which may very well be true. However, a sense of pleasure and respect between
the two is also seen. Although the narrator may, at first, misdirect herself by attempting to escape into the solitude of the schoolhouse where she thinks she will find structure, she is actually engaging isolation as a positive means toward enlightenment and transcendence. Alimra alludes to this during her visit to the schoolhouse. She refers to the "snap" (19) of the tansy as if she is also reflecting on the well being of the narrator.

According to the earliest mythology of the Olympians, Mother Earth emerged out of chaos. She then gave birth to the "grass, flowers, trees, rivers, lakes and seas, and the beasts and birds that were proper to each," (Flaum 108). This Creation Myth changed when Mother Earth lost her power to Zeus. But, the image of Mother Earth emerging out of chaos demonstrates a unique, woman power and is similar to Almira's birth place in Country. Almira's birth place, her mother's home on Green Island, is an image of ordered chaos:

The front door stood hospitably open in expectation of company, and an orderly vine grew at each side; but our path led to the kitchen door at the house-end, and there grew a mass of gay flowers and greenery, as if they had been swept together by some diligent garden broom into a tangle heap. (Jewett, Country 40)

The "orderly vines" are contrasted with the "tangled heap of greenery." Both have a natural order, however. The narrator observes that Almira is "an ardent lover of herbs, both wild and tame" (14). Almira does not discriminate, but rather she appreciates nature in its multiple states.
Mother Earth formed out of a state of chaos and brought order to it while respecting its multiplicity. Almira and her mother sprang from a similar state. Almira, also, knows many of the secret places to find pennyroyal and tansy. Most importantly, perhaps, she has come to an "understanding with the primal forces of nature, and never trust[s] any preliminary promise of good weather, but examines the day for herself in its infancy" (76). The primal relationship places her in the creation process, and directly relates her to Mother Earth.

Almira is not only associated with the earth and its primal forces, but also with prophetic figures and mystics. Almira had the "look of a huge sibyl, while the strange fragrance of the mysterious herb blew in from the little garden" (17). Near the end of the novel Almira beckons the narrator "as if she were a sibyl" (152). Just as a sibyl guided Aeneas through the underworld to see his father, Almira guides the narrator in her education. Even Almira's birth place is a guide as it stands "high like a beacon" (37).

Almira is not limited to one period of time. She "might belong to any age, like an idyl of Theocritus" (56), the narrator observes. The reference to Theocritus, one of the earliest known pastoral poets, reinforces another enlarging image used in the novel, that of lamb and shepherd. During one of Almira's journeys, a bleating lamb catches sight of Almira and runs toward her. The Christian story of a shepherd and his lost lamb is another example of a guide. The purpose of this guide imagery may be to reinforce that growth is a process.

Almira is not directly compared to Saint Teresa of Avila, a mystic
and writer in the 16th century, as she was to the Sibyl. However, the words the narrator cites from Teresa is similar to the advice Almira may give: "Santa Teresa says that the true proficiency of the soul is not in much thinking, but in much loving" (151). This quote is an excellent summary of the gift that Almira gives to the narrator. Almira teaches her to look at nature and at people to gain knowledge. She tells the narrator about the history of an ash-tree as they pass by it, as if it were recorded with her own family history, and compares the growth of that tree to human nature (84). Whether it is the tansy or oak-tree a message can be found in natural settings.

The narrator's encounters with William, Elijah, Esther and many of the other characters leave her with a new sense of knowledge. Interestingly, the encounters all begin with a subtle nudge from Almira. It is important that Almira does not use ancient stories or proverbs to educate the narrator. Instead, Almira helps the narrator recognize the truths that reside in everyday living. For example, the narrator enjoys a "wisdom-giving stroll in Mrs. Todd's company" (16). Similar to the Book of Proverbs, from the Old Testament, where father instructs son, Country is instructional and practical. Proverbs, also, includes an instructional narrative by Wisdom. As stated earlier, Almira remarks on the growth of an ash-tree. Almira associates the ash-tree that was "drooping and discouraged" (84) to a person in a similar state. She suggests the tree "strikes its roots off into new ground and starts all over again with real good courage" (84) just as people do. The narrator states: "It was this peculiar wisdom that made one value Mrs. Todd's pleasant company" (84).
Almira's wisdom is also "an intimation of truth itself" (56). Similar to Wisdom in Proverbs who was "as one brought up with him" (8:30), Almira is one with truth.

If the narrator in Country came to Dunnet Landing seeking seclusion, what she left with was a greater understanding of community. The characters of Country, Almira in particular, spend much time alone, but they do so knowing that it is a time in which to find the resources needed to rejoin community. When they do rejoin the community, they find their counterparts in "every village in the world" (Jewett, Country 151).

The enlarging descriptions of Almira come from the narrator's observations. We see the entire story through her eyes. She is the person who undergoes the major transition. It is the narrator who observes the transitory existence of first love, and it is the narrator who observes the universality of Dunnet Landing as a community and Almira as an enlarged character.

What does the enlargement of Almira say about the relationship between individual and community? As a wise character, Almira naturally seeks a balance between her own needs and the needs of community. Wisdom literature of the Old Testament "most explicitly addresses character and praxis of both the individual and the community" (Brown 4). The conflict and resolution in Proverbs is a good example. Two dialogues exist in Proverbs. The first, between a father and son, occurs in a house. The second is between Wisdom and the community. Wisdom walks the streets to speak her words, while the father and son remain isolated in their home. By the end of Proverbs, the son has taken his position with
the elders as a member of the community and his wife, the remaining female figure, has taken over the domestic duties of the house. Interestingly, however, the wife also feeds the poor, as Wisdom had preached. Although she has taken a less "public" position than her husband, she still goes into the community and addresses its needs on a practical level. Unlike her husband, who merely speaks of wisdom, she acts as a wise character. Country offers a similar preference for action over speech. Proverbs suggests that a wise person will seek a balance between the public and private domains established in society, and that this balance will be based on action. Almira Todd conceptualizes and lives in the example of the sage. Her role is not established in one domain. Perhaps this is why she is seen in various forms of woman power.

In a way, Almira becomes her own mythical character: a character contemporary to Jewett's time. If Jewett is attempting to create a new symbol of woman power in Almira, she allows her to escape one limitation faced by her predecessors. That is, she allows Almira to live in a woman-centered world. Mother Earth lost her power to Zeus. Sibyl was strong, but used her strengths to help male power. They worked within a male-centered world. Like Saint Teresa, Almira is strong and is central to the community around her. She stands in the center of the braided rug, she lives in a village that seems "the center of civilization" (Jewett, Country 13), and she remains the center of the narrator's journeys by providing her a home and acting as her guide. For one of the first times since Mother Earth lost power to Zeus, a woman is central in a civilization.

The Sibyl and Mother Earth characteristics in Almira show the
narrator that people are not bound by age and location. The attributes enable Almira to transcend the limitations established by society. These limitations may take the form of a belief that the aged cannot breed new life. What we see in Country, however, is an abundance of life. The narrator comments at one point that she herself is no longer young (100). She says this near the end of the novel and when she does say it she is surprised by her own youthful spirit. The reader does not know at the beginning of the novel why the narrator wants to be alone. Perhaps it is the social pressures that exist in community, or the pressure she feels to understand the world that she writes about. Margaret Roman suggests the narrator, as a writer, has "subsumed more about the world of men than the world of women" (207), and is seeking to release herself from the male-centered world in an attempt to return to her true center. For whatever reason, the narrator seeks solace in isolation before she rejoins the community.

Conversations in nature

The herb gardens of Almira Todd are "odd" and "puzzling to a stranger." (Jewett, Country 14) The narrator is aware of both the practical and mystical powers found in the herbs, however. She notes how the odors "rouse a dim sense of remembrance of something in the forgotten past" (14). In the first chapter of Country, the reader is shown the dual role of herbs. One role is that of "sacred and mystic rites" (14). The other is one of practicality because herbs are made up of "humble compounds" (14). In the tradition of the Wisdom literature, Almira's herbs
express spiritual as well as practical education.

Herbs bring people into conversation in *Country*. The local doctor respects Almira and is at once "professional" (15) in their conversation concerning remedies. There are connections between "friendly gossip and medical opportunity" (18) showing the reader that medicine is not a cure-all, but rather part of the healing process. Almira is brought into conversation with all the people to whom she prescribes remedies.

Gardens and nature in *Country* are places where communication and understanding bloom, as seen when Almira tells the narrator about her husband (48). The narrator and Almira enter a haven between nature's powerful elements, rock and water:

> We went down to the edge of short grass above some rocky cliffs where the deep sea broke with a great noise, though the wind was down and the water looked quiet a little way from shore. Among the grass grew such pennyroyal as the rest of the world could not provide. (48)

In this natural flower garden on Green Island, the narrator listens as Almira speaks about her husband: "I had never heard her speak of her husband before, but I felt that we were friends now since she had brought me to this place" (48-49). The garden is a place of unity. People are not bound to the past, but rather they are free to enjoy its memories.

The conversations in nature, also, allow the characters to enjoy the past without regret. The narrator observes:

> I do not know what herb of the night it
was that used sometime to send out a
penetrating odor late in the evening, after
the dew had fallen and the moon was high,
and the cool air came up from the sea. Then
Mrs. Todd would feel that she must talk to
somebody, and I was only too glad to listen.

(17)
The conversation developed as if they had fallen "under the spell" (17). They are picking pennyroyal "as the rest of the world could not provide" (48) when Almira begins to talk about her husband.

It is interesting that Almira chooses to speak about lovers in these natural settings. A sense of loss hangs over both conversations, but because they are set in bountiful, natural settings the memories of the lovers take on positive qualities. This shows the narrator, perhaps, that although a relationship ends in linear time, it is not forgotten or lamented. This idea is very much what the narrator brings away from her stay at Dunnet Landing.

In the final chapter, the narrator sits "for a while by [her] window looking out on the green herb garden, with regret for company" (158). She has learned to turn to nature when dealing with the pains of friendships. The narrator also understands that friendships, relationships within community, last. This is seen when she waves to Elijah, who had been a stranger but is now "a warm friend" (160). Sadly, but wisely, the narrator learns that "some chapters of our lives come to their natural end" (159), and that she must now treasure the memory.
Conclusion

The narrator of *Country* completes a complex journey from isolation into community. She begins in the structured space of the schoolhouse where she learns to listen to both people and nature. The enlargement of Almira outlines the narrator's understanding that individuals possess universal qualities. In the final scene of the novel, she understands that when a balance between individual need and community need is created people can enjoy memories without regret. Her constant guide throughout her growth is Almira, and her solace is continually found in natural settings.
Chapter 2 -- Time

As an adult, Jewett laughingly referred to herself as a child of nine (Silverthorne 39). She resisted the conventional restraints set on adults in her own life, and enjoyed giving her literary characters similar latitude. Despite their physical age, the characters of *Country* often appear childlike in both action and appearance. At the same time, however, the characters easily shift from the role of child to the role of mother/caretaker. In both roles, characters are wise and attuned to the natural world. In order to transcend the conventional lines of time, they engage a physical experience rather than the language that describes that experience. Experience provides a fluid, circular existence whereas language, by its very structure, is linear in movement. Language must move toward a finite point in order to maintain meaning while the silent experience has more latitude and is based on relative qualities.

**Silent Experience**

Emerson states in *Nature*:

> In the woods, too, a man casts off his years, as a snake his slough, and at what period so ever of life, is always a child (995).

Paula Blanchard, author of *Sarah Orne Jewett: Her World and her Work*, describes *Country* as a novel where "the opposition of the word to experience reminds us that Jewett's universe is still, almost 20 years after *Deephaven*, very close to that of Emerson" (296). Although
Emerson expressed his feelings in words he repeatedly acknowledged their inadequacy next to the experience itself. In a similar way, the long-winded characters of Country such as Littlepage and the minister, tend to be the least endearing and most limited people in the stories. Littlepage, for example, is constrained by his words. He is in effect a "little page" of inadequate words. He is also old and feeble in the eyes of the narrator, as seen when she helps him back to town from the schoolhouse (Jewett, Country 32). William, on the other hand, is a man of few words. He prefers experience over conversation and, despite the fact that he is as old or older than Littlepage, he does not need a caretaker.

Age is fluid in Country. Although characters are physically old they appear "younger." Being neither young nor old, but somewhere in between, makes characters seem ageless. This is a different agelessness than what developed when Almira takes on mystic and mythical characteristics. This agelessness is very physical, while the other was a spiritual transcendence. Mrs. Blackett and Mrs Todd both seem younger--not young --after traveling through the woods to the Bowden Reunion. The state is fluctuating not absolute. William and Esther, however, are perhaps the finest examples of agelessness. Both characters have dedicated their lives to their mothers, until a time when they can come together. The dedication and love for their mothers have enabled them to see a finer beauty, and to transcend into a youthful presence. The fact that both their mothers are living through most of the novel, also, reinforces the image of youth and child. Almira says: "you never get over being a child longs you have a mother to go to" (Jewett, Country 55). Jewett's dear friend Celia
Thaxter died right before *Country* was written. The memories that Thaxter shared with Jewett may have been the inspiration for the character Mrs. Blackett (Blanchard 292). Blanchard suggests, also, that Jewett's friendships often took on the dual role of mother/child, and that "clearly the repeated emphasis she gives this duality in *Pointed Firs* reflects the importance she felt it deserved in human relationships as a whole" (293).

The relationship between daughter and mother is one of balance. Joseph Church says:

> Mrs. Todd maintains a vital bond with her parent, one in which the women meet as equals, both willing to play the part of mother and daughter. Rather than succumb to various possibilities of dependence, they proceed as two cooperating adults who sustain one another (55).

Church suggests the relationship between mother and daughter is cooperative. The first time the narrator sees Mrs. Blackett she describes her as bright eyed and states that she has an "affectionate air of expectation like a child on a holiday" (Jewett, *Country* 39). Before the Bowden Reunion, Mrs. Blackett arrives at Almira's house "triumphant as a child" (79). Almira, who has been a mother figure to the narrator in many ways loses her authoritative "heavily domestic" (95) air at the reunion. Being around her mother again, Almira becomes "gay as a girl" (95).

Mrs. Blackett is able to take on childlike qualities without a mother
present, however. In a way, Mrs. Blackett appears too ideal. She does not have the temper of her daughter or the self-consciousness of her son. For this reason, she is more of an "idea" than a person of flesh and blood. Her example, however, allows other characters to participate in this cooperative relationship, and so serves a purpose to the novel. The narrator sums up this cooperative relationship in "William's Wedding":

> It is difficult to report the great events of New England; expression is so slight, and those few words which escape us in moments of deep feeling look but meagre on the printed page. One has to assume too much of the dramatic fervor as one reads; but as I came out of my room at breakfast-time I met Mrs. Todd face to face, and when she said to me, "This weather'll bring William in after her; 't is their happy day!" I felt something take possession of me which ought to communicate itself to the least sympathetic reader of this cold page. It is written for those who have a Dunnet Landing of their own: who either kindly share this with the writer, or possess another (150).

The narrator's address to "those who have a Dunnet Landing of their own" implies universal qualities in the characters of *Country*. Jewett and the narrator visit readers today just as they did in 1896. In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" Walt Whitman immortalizes this transcendental belief: "It avails not, time nor place--distance avails not, / I am with
you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence" (2108).

"William's Wedding" is a scene of timeless happiness. "The repression of Mrs. Todd's usual manner was swept away," and the characters were "free from their usual fetters of self-consciousness" (Jewett, Country 156). William, normally a recluse, never shrank from the "sympathy and public interest in so great an occasion" and "welcomed both the first group of neighbors and the last with heartiness" (156). The marriage between William and Esther, also, transcends conventional limitations of reproduction when Esther arrives with a lamb. Although she and William are past the "time" to bear children, Esther finds herself in the role of mother:

Esther carried the lamb on one arm; she had found


time to tell me that its mother had died that morning


and she could not bring herself to the thought of leaving it behind. (157).

Margaret Roman argues that Jewett postpones marriages in her stories to save women from the "biological doom that would encrust them in a mass of stereotypical roles" (183). Although this point is well argued for many of her stories, Jewett actually reinvents the symbol of regeneration in Country by allowing Esther to mother the Christian symbol of the son of God. Jewett uses another Esther in her short story "Miss Esther's Guest." In this story Esther is referred to as "Easter" by her friends. It is arguable, then, that Jewett associated rebirth with the name.
Circles

In the first chapter, I argued that the relationship between people and nature is one of mutual respect and intuition. Natural settings, also, provide the environment for a shift from linear time to out-of-time experiences. Thoreau reveals nature's time in transcendentalist terms when he says: "Morning brings back the heroic age" and "vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual morning" (1765). These are examples of out-of-time experiences. Similar out-of-time experiences are seen in a number of scenes in Country. Some of these moments are physical, as seen when characters take on childlike attributes, but there is also a unique sense of community that develops in this group of characters. The community is made up of the older people who live for the most part in isolation. The narrator observes:

There were enough young persons at the reunion,
but it is the old who really value such
opportunities; as for the young, it is the
habit of every day to meet their comrades,--
the time of separation has not come (Jewett, Country 97).

The old understand the benefits of isolation. That is to say, they appreciate the use of isolation to regenerate the soul that has spent too much time in community, and no longer appreciates its benefits. Because of this, they now enjoy time together. The Bowden Reunion, for many critics of Country, is the spiritual center of the book because it is the culmination of community to which the novel has built itself. The reunion is, also, an out-of-time experience in that it establishes a strong sense of
history, but also enables characters to feel younger. It is a gathering where "the primal fires break through the granite dust in which our souls are set" (Jewett, Country 86).

In "The Dunnet Shepherdess," the value of experience over speech introduced in the main text of Country is expanded. The narrator is able to understand that William and "his mother usually spoke very little because they so perfectly understood each other" (119). In "The Old Singer" chapter of Country, however, the narrator is not able to make such an astute observation. She is, in fact, unreliable due to her own lack of growth up to this point in the novel. She believes that singing "was the silent man's real and only means of expression" (51) and also believed that William and Almira "could not speak their deeper feelings before each other" (50). In the later stories, the narrator learns that the reason for the silence is not lack of communication, but rather a deep understanding of each other.

Elijah Tilley is an example of a man who, not appreciating community in his youth, gains wisdom in later life. In "Along Shore," the narrator meets Elijah Tilley who is not the "evasive and uncomfortable" (101) person the narrator first believed he was, but rather he is an old man in relationship with nature and he is able to transcend the limitation of death to connect with his wife. Elijah Tilley is fully awakened into the power of transcendence after his wife's death. Her death is not forgotten over time. He misses her "just the same every day" (106). It is a love that does not fade with time, but it is also a love that remains positive. His memories of her do not lament the past, but rather cherish it in the same
way Almira cherished the memories of her old lovers. Like Almira's, Elijah's land is fertile. While most of the surrounding land is clogged with stone (104), his land grows healthy crops. The connection between Tilley and the fertile earth shows that he is a living character attuned to his maternal side. Land and soil are often associated with the maternal or feminine side of humans because of their regenerative qualities, but the characters in Country who are in relationship with the earth are androgynous. While Elijah is an adventurous seaman who has seen the world, he is also skilled at mending socks and growing fertile crops. Almira, the herbalist, is also very secure on the sea. Although Jewett uses these symbols of male assertiveness and female reproduction, she does not limit the characters by simply reversing the male and female roles. As Margaret Roman points out: "Isolating and accentuating only certain dimensions of the human person can never result in integrated wholeness and satisfaction of either sex" (143).

The discussion Elijah and the narrator have about braided rugs touches at the heart of his transcendence of time. At the beginning of the novel, Almira is associated with the braided rug:

She stood in the center of a braided rug, and its rings of black and gray seemed to circle about her feet in the dim light. Her height and massiveness in the low room gave her the look of a huge sibyl, while the strange fragrance of the mysterious herb blew from the little garden. (Jewett, Country 17)
In "Along Shore," Tilley admits he cannot master the "womanish tricks" (110) of mending a rug, but he understands the process when he says: "ours is braided for the most part, an' their good looks is all in the beginnin'" (110). Although Tilley cannot take back what has happened in the past, he can look to the beginning where innocence and wisdom exist. His wife left him that gift. When the narrator leaves Tilley, she sees that he sits "with his head bowed over his knitting, as if he were hastily shortening the very thread of time. The minutes went slowly by" (107). By accessing his feminine side through knitting, Tilley also accesses transcendence of time.

Emerson sees time as a stone in water. In "Circles," he shows that each ring of water forms another further from its center of power: "The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which from a ring imperceptibly small, reaches on all sides outward to new and larger circles and that without end" (138). Tilley's wife was his center. Even after the center disappears, the rings continue. Tilley may see the invisible center as a womanish trick, but he also understands that the wisdom and beauty of the form can be understood intuitively. Perhaps the center of the rug is similar to the chaos from which Mother Earth emerged. It is a symbol of the unknown element that begins all myth and religion.

Richard Geldard summarizes Emerson's words in "Circles" by saying that "the key to increased capacity is to know that the power does not reside in us, but that we reside in it" (135). Linear time does not exist because "there are no fixtures in nature" (Emerson, "Circles" 137). "The universe is fluid and volatile." (137) Without the heavy burden of
linear time characters in *Country* transcend the assumptions or presumptions on which we base our facts. The narrator in *Country* comes from the busy city to Dunnet Landing, a town that has the "childish certainty of being the center of the civilization" (Jewett, *Country* 13). Emerson states in "Circles" that "culture is the predominance of an idea which draws after it this train of cities and institutions" (137). The city and high culture are missing from *Country*. They are ideas in the distance and are unneeded. During a time when cities were becoming more important to a society's progress, Jewett excludes them. Helen Levy suggests city life is not seen in *Country* because it has no position in the woman-centered community of Dunnet Landing. Levy depicts an accurate description of *Country* in her description of domestic fiction:

> Domestic fiction most often depicts a socially isolated heroine who establishes a family and redeems a network of supportive friends and family from a barren and often mercenary social order, thus reversing the repeated male plot of the individual moving away toward a promising frontier and leaving a corrupt social order behind. (35)

The characters in *Country* build homes on rocky shores and find fertile soil and precious herbs in tangled woods. As William and the narrator travel toward Thankful Hights [sic] to see Esther, the narrator observes "the forlorn look of the farms," and wonders why "people did not raise more sheep when that seemed the only possible use to make of their land" (Jewett, *Country* 118). William is pleased by her observation and explains
that Esther does raise sheep. Instead of leaving the area when sheep herding became difficult, Esther stayed and prospered in what appeared to be a dying occupation.

Transcendence at Thankful Heights

The narrator wonders how William "had come to be so curiously wrinkled, forgetting, absent-mindedly, to recognize the effects of time" (Jewett, *Country* 118). The narrator forgets that William is not a young man. To be with William, the narrator feels is to "live on a different level, where thoughts served best because they were thoughts in common; the primary effect upon our minds of the simply things and beauties that we saw" (119).

Again, the sharing of common experience is more significant than words. The physical environment in "The Dunnet Shepherdess" is forlorn (118) and William is physically older, yet there is beauty, youth and peace in the characters and landscape. Emerson wrote in "The Over-Soul":

> We are often made to feel that there is another youth or age than that which is measured from the year of our natural birth. Some thoughts always find us young and keep us so. Such a thought is the love of the universal and eternal beauty (1064).

As the narrator and William forge through the woods to see the Thankful Hight's folks, the narrator understands the preference for experience over expression. The narrator says:
Once when I caught sight of a lovely gay pigeon-woodpecker eyeing us curiously from a dead branch, and instinctively turned toward William, he gave an indulgent, comprehending nod which silenced me all the rest of the way. The wood-road was not a place for common noisy conversation; one would interrupt the birds and all the still little beasts that belonged there. But it was mortifying to find how strong the habit of idle speech may become in one's self. (Jewett, Country 119)

Language may also be considered a part of male power. Levy suggests Jewett transcends the dilemma of male power as the only legitimate power through a woman centered language and environment where womanly creativity is cooperative, not just a biological demand (5). Jewett shows us a woman-centered creativity because she is a woman, but the result transcends even gender limitations. Emerson achieved a similar transcendence. What Jewett transcended was the assumption that written language can capture the essence of an experience. Emerson states that "experience is converted into thought, as a mulberry leaf is converted into satin" (American 1026). There is an inexpressible step in the process that can only be left for intuition to understand.

The narrator awakes from a sleepy conscious state at the beginning of "The Dunnet Shepherdess." As the narrator and William move from the woods and trout fishing into the bright fields of Thankful Hights another awakening occurs. In the beginning of the story, the narrator is engaged
by and awakened into "a spiritual conversation" (Jewett, *Country* 111) between Almira and William outside her window. As she walks with William, however, she is awakened into the power of silence. In a subtle observation, the narrator connects consciousness and growth: "I was conscious, after we parted, and I turned to see if he were already fishing, and saw him wave his hand gallantly as he went away, that our friendship had made a great gain" (117). A successful friendship is an act of growth for Jewett. Sandra Zagarell describes *Country* as a "narrative of community" (499). She suggests:

narratives of community ignore linear development
or chronological sequence and remain in an open
geographic place. Rather than being constructed
around conflict and progress, as novels usually are,
narratives of community are rooted in process. (503)

This is the same process seen in Jewett's balancing of experience and language. Marjorie Pryse, also, highlights Jewett's view of friendship as process. When the narrator leaves William, process is measured in terms of their friendship. Narratives of community do allow for a fluid space to exist within a structure. For example no visible middle ground exists between language and silence, conscious and unconscious: "The high woods grew squarely against an old stone wall and a sunshiny open field, and we came out suddenly into broad daylight that startled us and even startled the horse, who might have been napping as he walked, like an old soldier" (Jewett, *Country* 120). They entered a wild, "Titanic sort of pasture country" and there was "no half-wooded strip of land" (120) between the
woods and this pasture. A sense of division and isolation, associated with nature in so much of nineteenth century literature, does not exist in Jewett's work. There is no middle ground or in-between that defines the distinct halves. Instead, there are the two opposites maintained in the wholeness of nature. In androgyny, the sexes join or form as one without separation. The pasture and woods are also whole and, no "half wooded" (120) area marks their separation.

The balance between Good and Evil

Evil is present in Thankful Heights. A constant reminder that "the dogs are apt to be after the sheep" (Jewett, Country 124) fills the air, and the landscape is both looming rock and fertile soil. Yet this is where time is transcended, where William and Esther meet and exchange "a serious chapter of Romance" (125). Esther becomes anxious at times, according to her mother. She is aware, then, of the negative, but Esther has built "a kind of a fold, she calls it, up there in a sheltered spot," and sleeps in a shed that's "always pleasant in any weather" (124). By accepting the Jungian shadow, or in Thomas Moore's words by allowing "both the Old Man and the Youth to have a place" (15) a person allows the soul to "speak and show itself as it is" (15). Esther's acceptance of all forces eliminates her anxiety.

Jewett purposefully introduces evil into a seemingly utopian setting to show that a balance can be achieved. This balance contrasts the human elements that destroyed the utopia in The Blithedale Romance. Ticknor, Reed, and Fields published Hawthorne's novel in 1852. It is very likely
Jewett was familiar with both the novel, and the experimental socialist community of Brook Farm. In the final chapter of The Blithedale Romance, Miles Coverdale says: "More and more, I felt that we had struck upon what ought to be a truth" (Hawthorne 245-46). In a similar technique used by Jewett, Hawthorne has Coverdale speak directly to his reader. The difference between the two novels lies in the main character's ability to let go of time. Coverdale hates to tell his story, while the narrator in Country enjoys her growth and process. Evil is not presented on a hierarchy with good in Country. The narrator does not pursue "truth," but rather engages in the process of living. Even Coverdale's name alludes to his repression of time and self.

Esther's mother is very aware of age and the limitations of time, but she is also able to transcend these limitations with the narrator's help. It is important that the narrator has grown into a guide at this point. She is much different from the naive woman who exchanged nature and community for isolation, as seen in the earlier schoolhouse chapter. The narrator has not only learned a sense of self, but has also learned a sense of responsibility to community in this later story. The narrator says "it was long before we noticed the lapse of time" (Jewett, Country 124). She also sees the antiquity of Mrs. Hight's speech as an asset:

> It may be only a fancy of my own that in the sound and value of many words, with their lengthened vowels and doubled cadences, there is some faint survival on the Maine coast of the sound of English speech of Chaucer's time. (124)
"At last" (124), Esther's mother is aware of time and abruptly refers to William's age by asking if his hearing was all right. The old woman says William has been gone "some considerable time," but that "the time has really flown" (125). She appears to have accepted the fluidity of time and has learned to appreciate the experience rather than dwell on the limitations of time.

The narrator "had a sense of being the messenger of Fate" (126). This is an interesting comment considering that all characters seem in balance with time at this point in the novel. The word "fate" suggests a whimsical attitude. This passage may be read as the narrator's development of Sibyll-like characteristics, however. Sibyl had great prophetic abilities and wrote a person's future on dried leaves. Should a wind come up and carry all those leaves always, however, Sibyl accepted this and the lost fortunes (Bulfinch 119). As the narrator gains wisdom, she is still subject to a higher order. The comment reminds us that the narrator is still a believer in fate; a very human characteristic. Perhaps this is why she and Esther's mother comment so much on time. They have moments of transcendence, but remain grounded in time.

On the other hand, Esther and William were never aware that "it was so late in the afternoon" (Jewett, Country 126). Now that he has seen Esther he is no longer the "ancient boy," but rather he is "oddly like a happy young man" (126). It is not until the end of that story that we are told it has been a year since William and Esther met last. The reader does not receive clues to this, such as anxiousness or an initial distance between the lovers. The narrator, who is still at times very aware of
time, as seen by her comments on William's appearance and her connection with Esther's mother, is not overly concerned with this detail, however. She remarks that "the grave yearly visit had been changed from a hope into a happy memory" (128). This comment merges future hope with past memory to live in the present: the here and now.

Conclusion

Agelessness takes on physical attributes, as well as, the spiritual and universal qualities suggested in the first chapter of this thesis. The child/caretaker roles are cooperative in time, allowing characters to transcend the limitation of linear time. In the examples provided in the narrator's interaction with William and Elijah, we see that this transcendence progresses beyond physical (including gender) limitations, and that similar to the lesson the narrator learns from the natural world, transcendence of time allows memories to be enjoyed without regret.
Chapter 3 - Religion

The Great and Small

Religion in *Country*, and other works by Jewett, has been defined as a woman's spirituality. Almira's mocking of non-sea worthy ministers (Jewett, *Country* 66), and Silverthorne's note that "like many Victorians Sarah relished long-winded sermons if they had food for thought in them, but was quick to condemn those she found 'boring' or 'stupid'" (58) show that Jewett did not follow, blindly, one particular religious belief. One question that arises is whether or not Jewett is replacing traditional, organized religion with images of a woman-centered spirituality. Or, is she suggesting something closer to Carl G. Jung's idea of Christ as a reflection of self (Singer, *Boundaries* 393) when Almira says: "'It choked me right up to see mother at the head, walkin' with the ministers,'" (Jewett, *Country* 91)? It would be logical for Almira to relate to her mother as not only a biological companion, but also as woman. June Singer elaborates on Jung's concept in terms of a circle:

In principle, the circle must have a center,
but that point which we mark as a center is,
of necessity, larger than the true center. However
much we decrease the central point, the true
center is at the center of that, and hence, smaller
yet. The circumference is that line around the center
which is at all points equidistant from it. But,
since we do not know the length of the radius, it
may be said of any circle we may imagine, that our mandala is larger than that. The mandala, then, as a symbol of the self, has the qualities of the circle, center and circumference, yet like the self of which it is an image, it has not these qualities. (Boundaries 393)

The mandala, "the magic circle" (240) is fluid and reflective of its environment. As an image of self, religion is also fluid. God is not autonomous, but rather part of the embodiment of the great and the small. Singer explains the idea as presented in the Christian symbol of the son of God:

Is it any wonder then, that the man who was not a man should be chosen as a symbol of the self and worshiped throughout the Christian world?
Is it at all strange, when considered symbolically, that the belief arose that an infinite spirit which pervades the universe should have concentrated the omnipotence of his being into a speck so infinitesimal that it could enter the womb of a woman and be born as a divine child?" (Boundaries 393)

Singer's interpretation of religious origins is strikingly similar to Emerson's perception of great and small. Emerson states in Nature: "We are made aware that the magnitude of material things is merely relative, and all objects shrink and expand to serve the passion of the poet" (1011). Jewett's religion transcends the traditional position of minister as leader, by placing Mrs. Blackett at the head of the Bowden parade, along
side the minister. This simple old woman is the most treasured member of the reunion because she represents the rituals seen in nature. The minister, on the other hand, represents the rituals of the church. Jewett juxtaposes these opposites a number of times in *Country*. "The Queen's Twin" is another example. In this story, Jewett establishes a relationship between an unassuming New England woman, and the queen of England. In psychological terms, relevant to this paper, the "conjunction of the opposites" enables us to "break loose our idea of what we are from the self-images we have constructed in order to conform to what we imagine to be the expectations of our parents, our duties in life or our roles in society" (Singer, *Androgyny* 146). Jewett has created an unconventional society and in order for this society to succeed it relies on opposites. Religion for this society is central to everyday living, but it is also a religion that pays homage to people and nature rather than to a deity.

The Circles of Ritual

The "small and great" (89) of the Bowden clan enter the reunion as if they "might have been a company of ancient Greeks going to celebrate a victory, or to worship the god of harvests in the grove above" (Jewett, *Country* 90). The traditional, Western ritual merges with the pagan ritual in this scene. Jewett expands this image by personifying the sky and sea and brings the great into a small presence:

The sky, the sea, have watched poor humanity at its rites so long; we were no more a New England family celebrating its own existence
and simple progress; we carried the tokens and inheritance of all such households from which this had descended, and were only the least of our line. We possessed the instincts of a far, forgotten childhood." (90)

Religion and ritual become a circle that balances Christian and pagan, minister and Mother Earth, and son and daughter. Jewett's use of the word "instinct" in the quote above is Emersonian, and may also reflect the mariner's wisdom as he searched out unknown lands. New Englander's in the nineteenth century appreciated the treasures and mysteries that the seamen brought back from the Eastern lands they visited. This is seen in the way Mrs. Blackett treasures her gifts that came from far off lands, such as Tobago (50). These treasures represent the mystery and beauty of Green Island.

In 1885, Jewett made the following comment on Edwin Arnold's book India Revisited:

He has a grave conference with an old priest, who thanks him for what he has done for Buddhism, and then Arnold asks him if there are any Mahatmas, to which the priest answers no, none at all! If we had better interpreters of Buddha's teaching we might reach heights and depths of power and goodness that are now impossible; but we have fallen from the old wisdom and none of us today are so advanced.

(Jewett, Letters 26)
Jewett's frustration with some religious leaders is seen in this passage. She points out an important limitation of organized religion: it is based on interpretation. When a religion is engaged through the interpretation of another—e.g. the priest said there are no mahatmas—it lacks self. Ironically, in Hindi, the word Mahatma is spelled Mahatman and breaks down into maha, meaning great, and atman, meaning self or soul, (Soukhānov 716). Again, we see Jewett steering away from the closed walls of the church to a liberating relationship capable of encompassing all of humanity and of being truly inclusive.

The influence of Swedenborg

One of Jewett's early religious influences was Professor Parsons who taught the philosophy of the Swedish scientist and mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg (Silverthorne 59). Swedenborg wrote in Latin and was translated in the early eighteenth century for American audiences. He advocated a philosophy of charity not centered on freeing oneself of material wealth or merely doing good deeds, but rather, he wanted to see an embodiment: "Good done in bodily act may thus have the appearance of good to those who see only the external, but within lie will and intention" (4). When good deeds are taken for granted, they become norms. The narrator enters Dunnet Landing as a stranger, but is readily taken in by the community. The relationship that develops is so deep that she feels she is a stranger in her previous home, Boston. The generosity of the community, especially that expressed by Almira, is taken for granted as it would be with family, and transcends simple politeness. The narrator is never told
she should learn from a situation, but is continuously encountering new opportunities and dialogues that do lead to growth. In this way, she and the other characters in Country exemplify the embodiment of Swedenborg's principles.

Swedenborg believed an evil and a good person can do good, and that: "in a word, good is good to anyone in the same degree and of corresponding quality that evil is evil to the person. The one cannot be separated from the other" (15). This quote demonstrates Swedenborg's emphasis on embodiment rather than just single acts of good. William Blake makes a similar statement in "Songs of Innocence and of Experience" where he asks in "The Tiger": "Did he who made the lamb make thee?" (72). Blake's question is pertinent to questions of religion and gender. Did one God make all religion? Who made the male and who the female? As our lives are fluid, so are these questions of our origins. The answer rests in our ability to see multiple answers simultaneously. This is where Jung's shadow and concept of anima and animus become important. By acknowledging the evil within and by balancing the contrasexual anima and animus one is truly able to obtain embodiment.

The rituals seen in Country, the homeplace that is established, and the acts of forgiveness seen in the novel all capture Swedenborg's concept of embodiment. Jewett shows great respect for ritual as seen in Almira's herb gardens, the rituals of conversation and the bonding rituals of family seen at the Bowden reunion and on Green Island. On Green Island, for example, the narrator is asked to sit in Mrs. Blackett's rocking chair. The chair represents home and ritual: "here was the real home, the heart of the
old house on Green Island!" (Jewett, *Country* 52). The chair is not only a woman's chair (a rocker is often used by a nursing mother or in the traditionally female works of sewing or knitting), but also the chair is a symbol of constant motion, thus relating back to growth as a continuous process rather than a means to an end. Mrs. Blackett accepts the narrator into her homeplace with sincere generosity and with a sense of ritual and community.

In the short story "The Foreigner," published in 1900, a respect for organized religion returns. The story emphasizes, however, that religion is only beneficial when it is aligned with a sense of community and sisterhood. This sense of community is a common treatise found in many religions. What makes this story particularly interesting is that the sense of community develops around a death. June Singer puts it in terms of ambiguity. No matter how hard we may avoid them, there are certain things we all experience and can never control. Death is one of these things (Singer, *Boundaries* 419). The death of the foreigner's mother guides the women through a shared unknown. The sense of love and understanding that develops is not unlike the rituals people have developed since the beginning of time and the rituals used everyday. "Miss Tempy's Watchers" is another short story, written in Jewett's later years, that examines the rituals centered around death. Again, the "shared experience" of watching over a dead body brings the two female characters into a new sense of understanding with each other and themselves. Embodiment as presented by Swedenborg and in the work of Jewett must allow for a temporary release of control over self and a
joining together with another in a shared experience.

Swedenborg talked about charity in terms of "disinterested service," that is a "concept of incarnation" (Wunsch xvii). The idea of disinterested service, or service done without self gain, may relate to an early quote by Jewett on country and city people. In an interview with The Boston Journal Jewett said:

When I was, perhaps, fifteen, the first "city boarders" began to make their appearance near Berwick; and the way they misconstrued the country people and made game of their peculiarities fired me with indignation. I determined to teach the world that country people were not the awkward, ignorant set those persons seemed to think. I wanted the world to know their grand, simple lives; and so far as I had a mission when I first began to write, I think that was it. (Silverthorne 66-67)

The purpose for her writing was to explore human nature through a small piece of it. When rereading this quote and understanding Swedenborg's philosophy and his influence on her, the relationship becomes not only one of city and country "getting acquainted" (Silverthorne, 66), but also, the self and the world it inhabits getting to know each other. It is an incarnation.

If we live in a country based on individualism, Helen Levy suggests, an alternative "homeplace" (7) can be found in such works as Country.

The homeplace rejects the polar thinking, the
body-mind division and the winner-loser model, prevalent within the social competition the writer and her creations leave behind (Levy 7).

This homeplace is the source of Jewett's spirituality. This place is also woman-centered, not dependent on linear time, and not focused on a condemning, all powerful God. The difference is seen in how:

Diana of Ephesus with many breasts loved
all her children equally, in contrast to the later
Father God whose love was conditional upon behavior
of the children: unless they were totally obedient
and conformed to his every dictate, they were
subject to the cruelest punishment, even to death (Singer, Androgyny 52).

In this passage, Singer highlights the myth of matriarchy that preceded the present beliefs of Christianity. The homeplace in Country allows a new woman-centered history to develop. For example, the narrator is shown pictures of Almira and her mother as they journey up the hill to find Pennyroyal (Jewett, Country 47). History in this novel is a woman's history. It does not exclude men, but it does focus on the maternal creation rather than the male creation found in Christianity.

Finally, forgiveness is seen in Jewett's incarnation of Swedenborg's principles. Almira must rectify her bad thoughts about others with self first. This is seen during the Bowden Reunion when she explains to the narrator how she did not like the cousins on her husband's side of the family (94). Almira admired the way Nathan told her not to be bothered by
Leenay - 50

this. He "didn't make a habit of always opposin', like some men" (94).
Almira's confession to her husband and his understanding express not only
an endearing, loving relationship, but also a person and a relationship
capable of accepting Jung's shadow. This acceptance of both good and bad
leads to transcendence.

The Religion of Littlepage

Littlepage quotes Darwin as if he is quoting from the Bible, and the
narrator wonders as she looks at him "if he had sprung from a line of
ministers" (Jewett, Country 23). A hierarchy is interestingly established
and dissolved when the narrator meets Littlepage. She notes the seat he
takes at the schoolhouse is the "lower place of a scholar" (22). He replies
with a quote that confirms his distance from not only true knowledge, but
also from Self. The hierarchy is dissolved when the narrator remembers
Almira's comment that Littlepage had "overset his mind with too much
reading" (22). The comment reduces the structure and hierarchy
Littlepage lives in, and has attempted to establish in the schoolhouse, to
the minor position it requires. The narrator smiles when Littlepage say
condescendingly that the village people "fancy that they comprehend the
universe" (23). Jewett's own words on city and country folk tell us that
she believes this to be true. The narrator seems aware of Littlepage's
limitations.

Littlepage is oblivious to the natural world, as seen when the
swallow beats against the window (24). Perhaps this interruption is
intended to stop the narrator from listening to Littlepage. The moment is
eerie and suggests impending doom, something seen in much of Hawthorne's or Poe's short fiction. Littlepage goes on to unfold a potentially intriguing, but ultimately failing, seaman's tale. The narrator reports that Littlepage is "a little dull" (24) in his introduction, but she is "quite awakened" (25) when Littlepage speaks about the "dog's life" (25) of a seaman, and how shipping is a terrible loss to this part of New England. Despite his rough beginning, his best occasionally shines through when he speaks about what he really knows. Like Esther's mother, Littlepage is drawn into transcendent moments through the narrator, but falls short when left on his own. Jewett's use of a teacher/student metaphor in the case of Littlepage illustrates the practical difference between the two levels of knowledge. For every teacher there can be two types of students: those who can reiterate information and those who can conceptualize ideas. The ability to re-engineer knowledge through self, the latter, is transcendence. In "The Waiting Place" Littlepage reveals the dark secret he had began to tell about earlier. The story is a dark and compelling picture of Hell, or a waiting place in between. But, the narrator is taken more by Littlepage's appearance than by the story:

I assented absent-mindedly, thinking more just then of my companion's alert, determined look and the seafaring, ready aspect that had come to his face; but at this moment there fell a sudden change, and the old, pathetic, scholarly look returned (31).

The narrator is obviously biased against the "scholar." The shift from
images of Hell in "The Waiting Place" to images of peace found on Green Island represent a sort of repentance in religious terms. A sharp contrast between Paradise Lost and these chapters in Country may be made. Milton writes about the Fall of Satan. In Country, we are brought from the loss, or Fall into darkness, as seen in Littlepage's story, to the silent paradise of Green Island: where "a gleam of golden sunshine struck the outer islands, and one of them shone out clear in the light, and revealed itself in a compelling way to our eyes" (33). The contrast is noteworthy since Littlepage felt Paradise Lost was "the greatest of poems" (22). Jewett is perhaps "poking fun" at the literary canon by having the "Little Page" admire one of the most famous works in Western Literature, but she may also be suggesting an alternative to the Christian belief of Heaven and Hell, and also the concept of original sin. The difference between the two philosophies is intriguing in that the presumption of the Christian belief is that humankind is flawed or evil by nature and so must spend a lifetime repenting for their original sin. In Country, the narrator is not threatened by "the waiting place" that Littlepage describes. She engages the story but understands it is only a story. As she looks out at Green Island she observes that "the sunburst upon the outermost island made it seem like a sudden revelation of the world beyond this which some believe to be so near" (33). She is noncommittal about the next world and, also, the concept of heaven and hell. Instead, she relies on the beauty in nature for its own sake. Unlike the Christian belief of "the fall" where a person must work back up to goodness, the narrator sees the beauty and pleasure of heaven in the natural world.
Littlepage's journey is quite different from Joanna's journey to Shell Island. Littlepage is scared in the arctic community. It gives him nothing, he feels. On the other hand, Joanna finds a home and life on Shell Island. She also has no need for a minister. The development of religion and our need for it is complex, but one element that relates to Country is that some people enter into a religious belief because they are afraid of being alone. They enter, perhaps the way Littlepage entered the arctic community, expecting to be given to, rather than to give. Littlepage considered the missionary station that provided help for him "a useless place" (27) because everyone was poor and in need. He did not see the beauty in the place that saved his life, and left it to seek company with another seaman (27). Joanna, on the other hand, attracted strangers to her after she left the shore. Mariners began fishing near the island, that had previously been considered fruitless, and there were "a good many old friends had Joanna on their minds" (63). Joanna also raised sheep that she let her brother tend. Sheep, a Christian symbol of community, enabled Joanna and her brother to make amends where they had never been able to before.

Mother of God/Mother Earth

Christianity presents "the Virgin Mary who is both the comforting Madonna and the mater dolorosa, the sorrowful mother" (Moore 43). Esther may be read as a Virgin Mary figure as she holds the lamb of innocence to her bosom after her marriage to William. She is a sainted, earthly character who comforts her flock by living on the hill with them (Jewett,
Leenay - 54

*Country* 124). She is also completely devoted to her mother. She is not sorrowful in the same way that the Virgin Mary was because she does not sacrifice her identity. The Virgin Mary often seems defined within her son. Esther, on the other hand, is complete before entering into marriage with William. Like her mother who "exhausted one subject completely" (123) before turning to another, Esther completed her work before moving on, and so felt no real sense of sorrow as she took a new step in life.

The Book of Esther, from The Old Testament, is a story of a brave young woman whose innocence and virtue capture the heart of King Ahasuerus. Esther has a strong sense of family. Interestingly, she is orphaned and she is taken in by a kind cousin. Her sense of family proves more important than her royal position when she risks her life to convince the King to stop the persecution of the Jews. In the end, she saves the Jews (her ancestors), but loses her husband when he submits himself to death for his evil deed. Like the biblical Esther, Esther in *Country* is committed to her family. This family becomes a mark of character that William respects and admires. Her sense of family is also evident when she carries the lamb whose mother has just died. The biblical Esther is a symbolic mother of the Jews because she gave them life. Esther in *Country*, as sheep tender and caretaker, is a mother of the natural world.

Thomas Moore in his book, *Care of the Soul*, suggests: "All mothering, whether in a family or within an individual, is made up of both affectionate caring and bitter emotional pain" and that in "both emotions, the mother is close to the child, allowing the child, even as she feels pain and anger, to becomes an individual through exposure to experience and to
fate" (43). Moore's philosophy is deeply rooted in his study of the classics, and his own experience as a psychiatrist. His book makes an interesting statement on popular perceptions of mothers. For example, in *Country*, Mrs. Hight, the mother, feels disappointed because she will never see "all them spots {Esther} lives in" (Jewett, *Country* 124). Viewing *Country* within the mother/daughter myth of Demeter and Persphone one may interpret these "spots" as the dark world of Hades, or the soul that a mother can never fully see in a daughter. A mother's role is then, perhaps, to guide as much as possible, but also to let go. Demeter has Persphone for only part of the year. The other part of the year she is in Hades. The mysterious forces that Persphone encounters in Hades are appalling because they exclude the mother, but appealing because they fulfill an individual need. Persphone was captured by Hades when she reached for the narcissus that the earth grew as "an enchanting lure" (Moore 40). Interestingly, Esther "stays out all night, them moonlight nights, when the dogs are apt to be after the sheep," but her shed is "a lovely spot and always pleasant in any weather" (Jewett, *Country* 124). She too is lulled by nature's terror and beauty.

Time is very important in the myth of Demeter and Persphone. A similar anxiety is found in *Country*. Time goes slowly as indicated by Mrs. Hight when she tells the narrator she will "have time to relate" (125) some more information. Time is regulated by the seasons in the myth of Demeter and Persphone. In *Country*, however, time is transcended and with this so is the sorrow of the mother who must wait. Mrs. Hight begins the chapter very aware of time. She never forgets it, but with the help of
the narrator she is able to transcend it, occasionally.

Conclusion

Religion in Country is a woman's spirituality, but more importantly it is viewed within the transcendental terms of "great and small." Emerson's "circles" and Swedenborg's "embodiment" influenced Jewett and these concepts are reflected in the religion of her characters. Ritual, the homeplace, and forgiveness are spiritual themes that mean different things for Littlepage, Joanna, and Esther, but as seen in the previous chapters of this thesis all are grounded in natural events and seek to turn sorrow into forgiveness and redemption.
Chapter 4 -- Gender

Androgyny in *Country* is seen in the landscape as well as in the characters. This transcendence of gender limitation is dependent on a character's relationship within nature, similar to that seen in the transcendence of nature, time, and religion. The definition of androgyny that I will use in this chapter is based on "the recognition of the psychological capacity within each individual to function freely, utilizing all his or her qualities, including those that {have} been assigned to the feminine or the masculine gender" (Singer, *Boundaries* 203). This definition by June Singer, based on the theories of Carl Jung's anima and animus, also emphasizes a process in which the androgen at first minimizes the differences between the sexes in order to maximize the similarities but, later the androgen rediscovers and cultivates his or her own masculine or feminine origins. In many ways, Jewett anticipated this "return" to one's own gender identity by enabling her characters to "visit" the opposite gender traits while never having to deny their own sexual origins. The result from this analysis is a realization that Jewett has reconstructed gender with her use of androgyny in order to free her characters from stereotypes. Jewett frees her characters in various ways. One example of androgyny is seen in Jewett's perception of friendships. It takes the form of shared experiences. Another form of androgyny is seen in the physical attributes of the characters. Some ways are as obvious as having Mrs. Fosdick cross-dress as a child, and some are more complex and rely on the cooperative relationships between male and
female. For example, when William sings with his mother: "they sang together, she missing only the higher notes, where he seems to lend his voice to hers for the moment and carry on her very note and air" (Jewett, Country 51). William not only takes on the higher, traditionally female voice here, but also, his voice becomes one with his mother's voice. Also discussed in this chapter will be a differentiation between empathy and my term "visits." All examples of androgyny seen in Country are grounded in the character's belief system and not extraneous social theories. What I mean by this is that the characters, and I believe Jewett herself, believe that androgyny is based on real life encounters and not simply a theory. In his work, Carl Jung never forgot the individual within the theory (Singer, Boundaries 385). He warned against the "fruitlessness of pursuing philosophizing and theorizing for its own sake" (385). In much the same way, Jewett gives depth to her characters by acknowledging their complexity in everyday life. By doing this, she confirms her ability to write about people and things "just as they are" (Silverthorne 35).

Androgyny in "The Queen's Twin"

"The Queen's Twin" begins with a description of how "each island of a single farm, has sent its spies to view many a Land of Eschol" (Jewett, Country 129). Jewett merges the rocky shores of New England with the "splendors of the Eastern World" (129). The image is one of androgyny when she says: "the sea captains and the captain's wives of Maine knew something of the wide world, and never mistook their native parishes for the whole instead of a part thereof" (129). Joined in an image of
oreness, the landscape and the people in *Country* become androgynous.

As with most "instructional" segments of this novel, the narrator first observes the enlarging characteristics of Almira who looked as if "she might have fallen in with the sea-serpent or the lost tribes of Israel, such was her air of mystery and satisfaction" (130). The path leading to Abby Martin's house, the Queen's twin, is inland. Almira explains how to find it because she knows the narrator "ain't so apt to strike inland as {she} be to go right along shore" (130). The journey they will take will not be easy. It is a journey toward enlightenment, perhaps toward a truer understanding of the androgynous imagery introduced in the main text. Almira says she must keep her eyes "on the sun and the moss that grows one side o' the tree trunks" (131) to avoid getting lost. Still, she manages to get "in deep enough, one place" (131). The journey is a psychological advance toward self awareness, and requires a person to enter uncharted ground.

The farms they travel past to get to the house of Abby Martin are aged "though the settlement was, after all, so young" (137). The descriptions are similar to those seen when the narrator travels to Thankful Hights. The land is again forlorn and seems to be overtaken by wild forests because as the narrator observes the land "belonged by right to the forest, and to the forest it fast returned" (138). Perhaps, Jewett is making a judgment not on the land itself, but on the people who try to tame it rather than work with it. Most of the farms are now deserted because people have moved on to more prosperous land. The narrator is "sad to see what poor bushy fields, what thin and empty dwelling-places
had been left by those who had chosen this disappointing part of the northern country for their home" (138). But, Abby Martin's place sits on "a grassy bank" (138), and has "a tangle of snowberry bushes and cinnamon roses" (139) growing as high as the window-sills. Her home is fruitful because, like Mrs. Blackett on Green Island, she has let nature grow in a "tangled" state instead of placing order on it. As Levy suggested in her observation of the homeplace, the redeemed characters are those who prosper with rocky soil and in chaotic forests.

Emerson suggests in *Nature*:

All the facts in natural history taken by themselves, have no value, but are barren like a single sex. But marry it to human history, and it is full of life (1002).

In this quote, Emerson suggests a single sex is incomplete, just as our facts are incomplete when taken out of context. Female is incomplete without male counterpart, and male is incomplete without female counterpart. This is not the well known polarization of the sexes commonly viewed by the American Victorians, nor is it the common belief system of our modern culture where The New York Times' Best-seller list holds such titles as *Men are From Mars and Women are From Venus*. Characters in *Country* are able to release the shadow. In Jungian terms, it is the anima, "the eternal feminine" and the animus, "the eternal masculine" (Singer, *Boundaries* 179) that must find balance in Self. The process needs the two parts. Although some animals and plants regenerate without a counterpart, it is only because that animal or plant
possess both parts of the regeneration process. The fact that characters in *Country* can grow crops on infertile ground shows that these characters already live in an androgynous nature. They do not need the conventional counterpart because they are already whole.

The description of the androgynous land sets the scene for the lunch with the Queen's twin. Although this story is comical by its basic premise, it is told with a great deal of seriousness and respect, and even ends with an important lesson of forgiveness. Abby acknowledges the outlandishness of her belief that she is a twin to the Queen of England, but she will not disallow the circumstances that have brought the Queen and her together: "Her Royal Majesty and I opened our eyes upon this world together, say what you may, 't is a bond between us" (Jewett, *Country* 140). She acknowledges that their "stations in life are set very different" (141). Interestingly, however, the narrator sees "unmistakable dignity" in Abby, and she feels "a faint apprehension" because there is "something distinctly formal in the occasion" (139) of having lunch with her.

If Jewett is attempting to present the Queen's twin as an androgynous figure, she is maintaining that although androgyny is unconventional, it is still very real. Abby daydreams that the Queen will visit her. Almira's response to this impossible fancy is that "such beautiful dreams is the real part o' life" (146). This line is important to not only this story, but to *Country* in general. As suggested in earlier chapters in this thesis, Jewett has created a woman-centered civilization where woman-centered creativity is a legitimate form of power, and now she is suggesting that androgyny is also a bond that, although seemingly
unattainable, possesses very real elements of life.

Jewett's knowledge of androgyne must have developed from her reading. Interestingly, most of Abby's knowledge about her twin, the Queen, comes from books. But, this knowledge Abby gains is only a confirmation of what she "expected was all true" (144). Her intuition, then, is her true educator. Like Emerson and Swedenborg who rely on intuition to achieve embodiment, Jewett is suggesting that an understanding of androgyne is already known and that it need only be unveiled.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I showed that forgiveness is an essential element of Jewett's woman-centered Christianity. Abby is given the opportunity to repent for an earlier lack of hospitality. As mentioned, Abby daydreams that the Queen will come for dinner. She puts her best sheets on the bed, and prepares a very special dinner because she believes in this twin relationship so deeply. But, the Queen does not come. This is actually a heart-breaking scene because Abby has completely embraced the belief that the Queen is her twin, and that their two parts will finally be joined as a whole. However foolish this idea may appear to the outsider, it becomes Abby's reality. Jewett has created a tragic character in Abby Martin, but unlike many traditional tragic characters, she allows her to repent and to forgive, thereby allowing her to be redeemed. Devastated by the realization that she is alone, Abby sits on her front stoop and cries. Just then her cousin, for whom she has little respect or kindness, stops by unexpectedly. Abby is so lonely that she embraces this cousin who "wasn't all there" (145). Abby is referring to
her cousin's mental ability, but this phrase also suggests that the cousin is a part looking for the whole. Then, she invites her in for the dinner she has reserved for the Queen. Almira states the obvious moral of this turn of events: "Now I hear all this it seems just as if the Queen might have known and couldn't come herself, so she sent that poor old creatur' that was always in need" (145). Who was in more need, Abby or her cousin, is not as obvious as Almira suggests. Jewett may be referencing a Christian belief that a person should take in the lowest person just as they would Jesus Christ. The reference is a bit trite to end this very powerful story but, looking at the story as a lesson about androgyny and putting it in terms of "great and small" as seen in the writings of Emerson, the parable is actually quite new. The embodiment that occurs with the converging of these seemingly opposite stations leads to transcendence and knowledge of Self. As June Singer suggests in her psychoanalysis:

when we have learned to disidentify from the persona, to recognize the shadow, and to admit into consciousness, the values of the contrasexual opposites, anima and animus, we will have found that, almost without knowing it, we have been close to the archetype of wholeness, the Self (Singer, Boundaries 191).

In an article on female friendships, Elizabeth Abel suggests:

Though it was Cicero who described friendships as a mingling of souls as almost to
create one person out of two, this description characterizes the dynamics of female friendship more accurately than male (415).

She cites Chodorow's research on mother-daughter relationships to show that "women's centrality to each other's psychic wholeness is an explanation of the urge to mother" (418). If Country presents a "kind of matriarchal Christianity," (Donovan 367) it is based on a theme of wholeness achieved through shared experiences between people rather than a conventional religious order that empathizes individual homage to God. Carol Heilbrun suggests:

in androgynous novels, the reader identifies with the male and female characters equally;
in feminist novels, only with the female hero.

Abel goes on to suggest that this merging of females sustains individual identity by establishing both children figures and older, wise women in novels. The result of this is evident in Country. The narrator, despite her acknowledgment that she is "no longer very young" (Jewett, Country 100), feels young and is also able to see many childlike characteristics in older characters. Empathy is not the same as a merging, however. Perhaps it was Jewett's intention to suggest this when she advised Willa Cather to stay away from male protagonists, or events in which she was not intimately involved.

Tilley is an example of an empathic character who attempts to build wholeness through reminiscence. After his wife's death he takes up
Leenay - 65

knitting and seemingly womanish habits. But, he also comments that his wife was not a good knitter. He takes on a womanly characteristic she did not have. Importantly, it is something he learned from his mother. When men take on androgynous traits in Country, they often take them from their mothers. Both Elijah and William have sisters. Elijah considers himself a caretaker for his sister but, "send[s] after her" (Jewett, Country 106) when he needs her. William, also, will take help from his sister. For example, before his journey to Thankful Heights she puts bug repellent on him. For the most part both men will accept help, but not openly ask for it. They acknowledge their mothers as providers of knowledge, however. Perhaps this is due to the age difference and the conventional role of mother as provider. On the other hand, women in Country seem to be able to draw off of other female relationships. This may be related to Abel's observation on female friendship. Regardless of gender, the transcendence of gender limitations becomes an example of what may be called "visits," rather than empathy. Characters in Country are extremely empathic, to the point where a merging occurs, but they always maintain an individual identity. What does this say about androgyny? It suggests androgyny is not simply the "projection of self into other" (Abel 421), but rather it is the complimentary balance of two opposites in one person.

The visits are also seen in "The Queen's Twin." It would be easy to see Abby as "not all there," just like her cousin, but instead her land is fertile and she has overcome many obstacles in her life. Most important, Abby is able to dismiss "the great Subject" of the Queen in order to speak "much of lesser persons" (Jewett, Country 146). Again, the merging
of the great and small is seen, and it does not entail a loss of identity. The narrator even notices that the cheeks of this old woman take "on a pretty color like a girl's" (146). As Abel suggests, the child figure is seen in or juxtaposed against the old, wise woman.

Almira leaves Abby understanding that she and the narrator have not "left her all alone" (146). On the other hand, Almira seems critical of Elijah despite his ability to "visit" his feminine side. She calls him a "ploddiin' man", and tells the narrator that "he can't say nothin' too pleasant" (111) about his wife. The opposite is seen in the dialogue between the narrator and Elijah. He speaks about his wife with love and respect. The narrator refers to Elijah as "poor dear" (111) just as Elijah had referred to his wife. As the narrator leaves him, she is thinking about the relationship between Elijah and his wife, and wonders if his wife knew "of the little world she left" (111) when she died. It is the world that Elijah visits. Perhaps Almira is testing the narrator to see what she has learned from Elijah or, perhaps Jewett as reflected in the character Almira is still struggling with the theme of androyny which she works out in her later piece "The Queen's Twin."

**Relationships in Time**

To understand the transcendence of gender stereotypes in Jewett's work, we must examine relationships in time. Most friendships spark, climax, and fade away during a lifetime. In the article "Archives of Female Friendship and the 'Way' Jewett Wrote," Marjorie Pryse examines Jewett's friendships and relationships. A common observation on Jewett's
life was that she had many male influences in her early life, her father and grandfather in particular, and that in her later life she formed a close knit circle of women friends. Jewett was an emotional writer and sought a similar emotional connection with her friends. Her letters to Annie Fields are full of thoughts like "I am bewitched with a story" (41) and "I have just been reading Mr. Arnold's essay on George Sand, and finished it with tears in my eyes" (Jewett, Letters 38). She felt and shared her passion for literature with her closest friends.

As a young girl, Jewett had adolescent "crushes" on many of her girlfriends. She had a passion for life that channeled into a passion for human contact. Pryse finds "new evidence for asserting Jewett's awareness of the generative and rhythmic reciprocity between love for friends and love for her work"(48) by examining Deephaven (1877) and The Country of the Pointed Firs (1896). Country explores a more mature understanding of friendship, according to Pryse. Jewett underwent a process of growth and self development that allowed her to find beauty in herself to use in friendships, rather than to rely on passionate fancies as seen in the characters of Deephaven. Pryse argues that Jewett went from childish crushes based on her own needs to a childlike wholeness where the characters are able to love others because, essentially, they love themselves. It sounds like a platitude, but the idea is psychologically poignant. I used the two adjectives derived from "child" for a reason. When considering sexuality and gender, a child is a rare example of an accepted androgen. Society allows for a short existence in androgynty where female and male play as one. Differences between the sexes are
quickly established, however; whether it is in the form of clothes or the more profound statement on socially acceptable sexual relationships and actions. Pryse understands the way Jewett wrote "required her to create fiction out of friendship and to teach her reader, also a potential friend, how to make friends with her characters" (48).

In an essay for Atlantic, Jewett described "the process of outgrowing friends as both loss and a gain" (Pryse 54). Jewett writes:

.... as we part sorrowfully we promise ourselves that we are to be friends always but a few years go by and letters do not serve to carry on the knowledge of each other; instead of our interest being renewed and strengthened it slowly decreases. We are not to blame; it is not inconstancy or fickleness. We are, in a certain sense done with that friend. It grows at length if we are advancing at all, to be like the fondness some people have for the playthings of their childhood .... To outgrow a friendship in this way is far less painful than any other -- because there seems less reason to accuse ourselves of faithlessness. (Pryse 54)

Androgyny, as I am using it, is a temporary state. Similar to the use of isolation seen in the first chapter of this thesis, androgyny is used to regenerate the individual's soul. Men and women do have different traits just as many same-sex friendships have different personalities. The relationships are developed with an understanding that they may someday end, as suggested in the quote from Jewett. If a friendship ends, it is not
considered "failed," however. Jewett is very careful to limit the stronger symbols of androgyny such as cross-dressing or mental anguish over wanting to be the opposite sex. It is, in fact, a very minor character, Mrs. Fosdick, who is the only cross-dresser in the novel.

There is a natural sense of anger felt toward existence when death or loss enter a life. Emerson says it well: "There is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population" (Nature 996). Elijah Tilley states a similar connection between the material world and existence when reflecting on the death of his wife: 

"There's that little rockin' chair o' her'n, I set an' notice it an' think how strang 't is a creatur' like her should be gone an' that chair be here right in its old place" (Jewett, Country 106). The pain is evident, but it is natural. The "natural end" (159) referred to by the narrator at the end of the novel is an understanding that we are not totally singular nor isolated, but rather that we are in a process of life and regeneration.

The Web-like Structure

Country has a unique growth process without traditional plot conflicts. It would be difficult to accept the novel without a growth. When writers begin to write, they generally present a conflict. It is the climax/anti-climax structure. A novel like Country is not so obvious.

What happens in the web-like structure of Country is an apparent break down of our accepted norms. The process cannot be confused with popular beliefs of androgyny. For example, the flat chested girl and thin
boned boys of Calvin Klein ads in no way reflect the androgyne found in *Country*. June Singer makes a strong argument against the popular beliefs of bisexuality that, similar to the Calvin Klein ads, "concerns itself primarily with interpersonal relationships" (*Androgyny* 32) and the physical attributes. "The new androgen is not in confusion about his or her sexual identity" (Singer, *Androgyny* 33). Singer suggests that extremes, as seen in my Calvin Klein example, "thrive in a culture that demands the repression of certain natural tendencies while people are developing the so-called 'masculine' and the so-called 'feminine' traits which society considers to be appropriate for each sex" (*Androgyny* 33).

William marries Esther at the end of the novel. Is this submission to social norms, or is it evidence of a mature writer? The fact that they will not have children does not inhibit the "girlish color" (157) of Esther's cheeks nor does it deter Almira from calling William "a king;" (Jewett, *Country* 156) a position that emphasizes lineage.

The narrator sees Almira as "mateless and appealing, with something about it that was strangely self-possessed and mysterious" (131). Sexual stereotypes of women needing a mate and children are transcended. Almira is still self-possessed and enlarged. Jewett was very community oriented in her life and treasured friendships as one of the most important aspects of life. At the same time, Jewett spent many hours alone and never married. Levy suggests in her writing that the homeplace was a place of creativity that was not dependent on a woman's biological factors. Perhaps this is why regeneration happens without the conventional participants, and sometimes in isolation.
Historically, the subject of regeneration is very important. Children enable parents to live beyond death. They, also, provide an opportunity to make right one's own mistakes. Literature through the ages, from mythology to the modernists of Jewett's time emphasized the importance of continuing the chain of humanity. Yet Jewett's world, woman centered as it is, is void of such needs.

This novel is also a return to a first love--that of the mother or maternal--and a process of enclosure of both sexes in Self. In a society of patriarchal rule, where much of mythology suggests a woman is merely the carrier of the child before the male takes over as the true guardian Jewett suggests an alternative. She is re-establishing the maternal or mother-centered power in an androgynous setting. Androgyhy breaks down the well established hierarchy that placed women as carriers, and also the hierarchy that establishes male as life taker.

Conclusion

The Bowden Reunion, a reunion of mainly blood relations, strikes an odd chord in a novel that, for the most part, is extremely familial in non-blood relationships. For example, the narrator and her encounters with not only Almira, William and Mrs. Blackett but also with Esther, her mother, and Elijah. Given this, the narrative on blood relationships seen in "The Festival's End" and the "The Bowden Reunion" seems to contradict the general intention of the work. On the other hand, the narrator does bring in expanded family when she compares the Bowden Reunion to "the great national anniversaries which our country has lately kept" (Jewett, Country
and when she says "one sees exactly the same types in a country gathering as in the most brilliant city company" (95). She goes further to say: "Clannishness is an instinct of the heart,--it is more than a birthright, or a custom; and lesser rights {are} forgotten in the claim to a common inheritance" (98). It is more than what you are born into and, more than a custom. These words describe the transcendence of gender stereotypes. Whether it is the Queen's twin or a child/mother relationship, androgyny is a shared experience and one that is dependent on a character's ability to grow and their relationship with Nature.
Conclusion

Referring to Tilley, Jewett writes: "a man's house is really but a larger body, and expresses in a way his nature and character" (Jewett, Country 104). This not only describes Tilley, but also characterizes Jewett and her work. Every person, every character in Jewett's mind was "but a larger body" (104).

When I visited Jewett's house, I became aware of the Victorian ideals that pervaded her life. The hallway is long and wide and bordered on the east and west by large wooden doors that allow the distant ocean breeze to sweep the home. The stairway is grand in the Victorian manner. At the top, one faces another long, wide hallway. It is on the east end of this hallway where Jewett did much of her writing. She sat at her desk looking out the window at the heart of Berwick's quiet industrial community. The house sat then as it does today, a still life in a moving community. It was perhaps from this center that Jewett wove the web-like structure we see in Country.

One question that inevitably arises out of the study of a writer and a writing period is: How does this relate to the artist today? Passing signs to "Walden Pond," en route to South Berwick, I was reminded of how little remains of the world in which the Transcendentalists lived. The four, sometimes six, lane highways marking the Eastern coast of Massachusetts and South Maine are shameful reminders of how far we have traveled from the transcendentalist ideal. The artists of the nineteenth century were the visionaries for the life we now live. Whitman said he knew us one hundred years in the future. Emerson told us that thought into experience was like
a mulberry leaf into satin, and Jewett assured us that there existed in the busy world of trains and cities a mariner village that created the semblance of "becoming acquainted with a single person" (Jewett, *Country* 13). The purpose and art of Jewett's novel may rest in the very first page of her masterpiece. The quiet wish of a woman to tell you about herself and her community.

By reconstructing the lines of community, linear time, traditional Christian beliefs, and gender, Jewett allowed her characters to speak about themselves unfettered by conventional beliefs. Jewett lived the American Victorian lifestyle of the wealthy. She was aware of its limitations and benefits, and she used the wisdom of a changing New England society to write about herself and those around her. Her characters are not perfect. Their flaws often make them engaging. They are also not always consistent, but in the inconsistency and contradictions one finds the fluidity of transcendence. Jewett's knowledge of her Transcendentalist predecessors and her love of nature may have been her reason for choosing natural settings as the place for her "lessons" in transcendence.

I have explored just one of the many works Jewett created in her lifetime. The rest may deviate from this general theme, but all demonstrate the same basic tenets. Jewett was true to her belief that one should write about what one knows and understands, and she was true to her Transcendentalist mentors when she saw the universe in a small mariner village. In her preface to the 1925 edition of *Country*, Willa Cather captures Jewett's purpose in writing the novel when she states it:
will be a message to the future, a message
in a universal language, like the tuft of meadow
flowers in Robert Frost's fine poem, which the mower
abroad in the early morning left standing, just skirted
by the scythe, for the mower of the afternoon to gaze
upon and wonder at -- the one message that even the
scythe of Time spares (Cather vi).


Fuller, Margaret. The Great Lawsuit. Baym, 1589-605.


