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SARAH ORNE JEWETT'S FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE

Mark Storey

HOW DO WE READ nineteenth-century letters? Almost any significant published work by a nineteenth-century American is now freely and instantly available online, whereas an individual's private letters continue to pose a significant research challenge. Anyone wishing to compile or even simply read the correspondence of many prominent nineteenth-century figures faces major logistical and institutional hurdles, and once the letters are finally collected together there is the potential for a distorting soliloquy effect because an inherently dialogic form is being presented as a series of unidirectional instances.¹ While the status of the letter as a valuable and autonomous literary form is increasingly accepted (as this current volume attests), such a status necessarily asks how we are to read its private 'literariness' as distinct from the conventionally public forms of the novel, the poem, the essay, and so on. There is perhaps nothing surprising in this preamble, but I offer it in order to underline the point that when it comes to reading those letters that have been made available in published editions we are frequently only being granted access to carefully selected and sometimes bowdlerized selections that collectively constitute a highly controlled and conspicuously partial version of the writer they seem to be revealing in all their unguarded intimacy. Treating published editions of letters as literary objects – as distinct from compendia of biographical data – requires a bifocal critical attention that keeps the particular publishing and editing context as much in view as the raw content of the letters themselves.

An exemplary case of this duality, I will argue, is to be found in the letters of Sarah Orne Jewett, a writer celebrated in her own lifetime for her 'local color' stories of New England, and institutionalized in the later twentieth century as the quintessential American regionalist. Turning specifically to the published editions of Jewett's correspondence does not entirely undo these characterizations, but it does begin to allow for a reading of her work that resists much of the way it has traditionally been categorized, revealing the letters to be a kind of 'counter-archive' (however partial and fragmentary) that unsettles the geographically discrete accounts of her fiction that have tended to dominate critical discussion. Invariably treated by the numerous critics of her work as little more than contextual grist, Jewett's letters are in fact self-consciously literary (or more accurately *writerly*) pieces in their own right; not simply records of lived experience, but actively engaged in an aesthetic and political dialogue with her fictional material.

The first of the two existing editions of Jewett's letters appeared in 1911, just two years after her death, and was edited by her closest friend and companion (and possibly her lover) Annie Fields. The second, an avowedly more scholarly volume, was assembled by a long-time professor of English at Maine's Colby College, Richard Cary, first in 1956 and then as an expanded edition in 1967. Jewett's letters are presented in both of these editions as important biographical material that aids and deepens our understanding – either of the woman herself (which is Fields's emphasis) or of the professional and imaginative labor that went into her fiction (which is Cary's emphasis). Fields, for instance, opens her collection with a characteristic conflation of subject and place: having described South Berwick, Maine, and its immediate vicinities, she states that: 'Here, and among these descendants, Sarah Orne Jewett grew up with hills and waters and a large open country all about her. This wild land she knew and loved well, as her books show.'² Cary's introduction, meanwhile, occupies a similarly admiring territory, and again posits in Jewett's surroundings the same qualities he finds translated into her fiction:

She concerned herself with the commonplace, propounding observations and attitudes lightly, without pretension. Constantly she displays the same eagerness 'to know the deep pleasures of simple things, and to be interested in the lives of people around me' that brought instant success to her train of books from *Deephaven* to *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. In these letters lie discoverable the rhythm and the flavor of Miss Jewett's daily round of living, exhibited coolly, gaily, enthusiastically, thoughtfully, affectionately.³

Such passages are revealing of the assumptions that swirl around Jewett's work in seeking to locate an authentically ethnographic and geographic origin for her fiction in the biographical 'truth' of her day-to-day life. They suggest as well how the presentation of her letters has been used to solidify Jewett's reputation for an intimate and deeply personal connection to the New England region she metonymically comes to embody. She is, in Cary's words, 'Maine's most representative writer,' a view echoed by a more recent, influential critic of regionalism, Richard Brodhead, who argues that Jewett's 'literary identity bears an inescapable mark of local derivation.'⁴

What emerges when examining both Fields's and Cary's volumes together, however, is the extent to which this ongoing emphasis on an autochthonous relationship between the aesthetics of Jewett's writing and the region she repeatedly described is literally misplaced, a critical and public hemming-in of a writer's reputation and material that her letters often break free from. Looking closer at the published editions of Jewett's letters, then, not only exemplifies the vested politicization involved in publishing public figures' correspondence, but more strikingly questions the geographical parameters of even that most localized and bounded of American literary genres. In particular, and as befits a writer so closely associated with the fictional inscription of a particular place, it is worth emphasizing an aspect of letter-writing that is often overlooked. Many epistolary scholars have commented on the correspondence between specific – often prominent or public – individuals (indeed, numerous published editions of letters are premised on this idea), but less frequently has attention been paid to what it means to write *from* a particular location. Such details frequently form the paratextual frame for letters, of course, but with Jewett this takes

on a special significance because of the mutual relationship that has been posited between the seemingly limited geographical territory of her life and the quiet rural communities she invariably described in her fiction.

A superficial biographical sketch certainly suggests a life lived in unvaryingly close proximity to South Berwick: she was born there, in the family home, the same place she would die sixty years later, and for a large portion of her adult life would spend spring and autumn in the town, while summering in Manchester, New Hampshire, and spending winter in a well-appointed townhouse on Charles Street in Boston.⁵ These seasonal rhythms suggest a certain degree of mobility, but hardly a roving cosmopolitanism; all of these residences are within seventy miles of one another. The critical and popular image of Jewett has consequently been one of a woman who moved almost exclusively within the discreet environs of upper-class New England, to the point that by the time F. O. Matthiessen published his biography of Jewett in 1929, the condescending implications of his opening line were virtually a distilled convention: 'The first thing she could remember was a world bounded by the white paling fences around her house.'⁶ According to countless synoptic literary histories, anthologies, and tourist brochures ever since, she remains the representative practitioner of a localized and 'bounded' form of nineteenth-century writing.

Reading Jewett's letters reveals someone who came to conceive of that region from far broader geographical horizons than these characterizations tend to suggest, and indicates a degree of internationalism that became harder and harder to reconcile with the critical compartmentalization of her work in the years after her death. Between the Fields and Cary editions of her letters, a more bounded and more 'regionalized' version of Jewett emerged, but at the cost of a more accurate sense of where the distinct stylistic tone of her work derives from. This is not to say that refocusing on her international reach leads to a re-assessment of her political reputation; in fact, what we find in the letters Jewett wrote from outside New England is someone for whom traveling seemed to largely reinforce existing prejudices. The point, then, is not to suggest that Jewett has been a secret multiculturalist all along, but that her letters reveal someone who identified with a far more transnational sense of rural identity than her nativist reputation has allowed for. They reveal a conception of New England regionalism that was able to find cultural similarity not just with historical lineages of Old World ethnicity but also with geographically distant regions of contemporary rural life.

Because the truth is that, despite her homely image, Jewett was a fairly well-seasoned traveler. From her thirty-second birthday until her death in 1909 at the age of sixty, she would make five trips abroad, spending a combined total of over two years away from the U.S. This time was spent mainly in France, Britain, and Italy, but she also visited several other European countries (including Greece and Turkey), as well as taking a two-month cruise around Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Haiti. She wrote many letters while away on these trips – Paula Blanchard claims that on Jewett's first visit to Europe she reported back on a daily basis – and although some of these letters have made it into the published editions, many have not.⁷ The question of archival absences (and making up for editorial gaps or biases by simply adding previously excluded material) is perhaps less interesting, however, than the question of what those few foreign letters that have been made widely available, if we choose to emphasize rather than sideline them, do to an understanding of Jewett's work.

Comparing the two editions of Jewett's letters with this geographical emphasis in mind, we can see how significantly more 'regionalized' Jewett appears to be in the Cary edition. Of the eighty-six letters in the Fields edition where the place of origin is identified, eighteen of them (more than 20 per cent) are from abroad, while the 142 letters in Cary's edition include just four, or under 3 per cent, sent from non-U.S. locations.⁸ Cary supplemented his own efforts by publishing further letters in the *Colby Quarterly*, including, in 1975, thirty-three between Jewett and her friend Louisa Dresel (of these, one is marked from Rome, another from St. Rémy de Provence).⁹ It is crucial not to place too much interpretive weight on these numbers, mainly because a wide variety of circumstantial and institutional factors contribute to the partiality of both editors' end results – not least the fact that Cary seems to have worked almost exclusively within Colby College's own archives. Equally, we cannot be sure, especially with Fields, how many available letters were excluded from the finished edition or on what grounds such exclusions might have been made. But something worthwhile does become clear from this brief enumeration: that general readers and scholars have so far had available to them two editions of Jewett's letters that imply a markedly different geographical range, with the transnational flavour of an edition nearly contemporary with Jewett's own life, and prepared in idiosyncratic fashion by her closest acquaintance, being succeeded by a more modern and scholarly volume that barely registers Jewett's life outside of New England. In effect, the more international Jewett discernible in the earlier edition represents someone whose reputation for politicized localism was still in the process of being canonized and institutionalized (before the days of American literature degrees and the academic study of 'American regionalism'), while the Jewett we glimpse in the later edition seems to solidify the exegetical industry that had by then attached itself to her work. The ways in which the international Jewett was largely silenced and ignored as her canonization took hold might therefore be read across these two editions, so that a return to the 1911 collection not only allows this perhaps surprising element of her life to be recovered, but does so in a way that tells us something important about the scholarly production of American regionalism's reputation and categorization.¹⁰

One of the first letters reproduced in the Fields edition, which is simply dated to 'Monday evening, 1883,' includes Jewett's reflection that: 'The wet weather has kept us in, but we did manage to get a drive yesterday among the green fields and trees. Do you think the country ever looked so lovely as it does this summer? I seem to have brought new eyes home from last year's travels!'¹¹ Writing to Fields herself (probably from South Berwick, although neither writer nor editor mention it), Jewett here invokes 'last year's travels' in reference to the first European trip the two women had taken together in the summer of 1882; four months in Ireland, Britain, Italy, and, finally, France. Worth noting is Jewett's sense that these foreign excursions have apparently given her 'new eyes' through which to see and deepen her appreciation of the New England countryside. A writer celebrated for her affinity with the New England landscapes she so insistently describes thus acknowledges here that it has actually been other landscapes – those of Europe – that have conditioned her ability to see. The 'new eyes' that Jewett celebrates in this letter offer, in short, a useful route into thinking about how her correspondence more generally reveals a transnational sense of 'seeing,' a literary trope that uproots Jewett's Maine landscapes from their native

ground and makes us aware of how even these most local of sights might be involved in a constantly oscillating relationship with the landscapes Jewett knew and loved on the other side of the Atlantic.

Versions of these transatlantic experiences certainly filtered down into Jewett's fiction in various ways, perhaps most obviously in her collection of short stories published in 1895, *The Life of Nancy*. She had been on another trip to Europe by the time she came to write it – the whole spring and summer of 1892 were spent largely in Italy, France, and England – and whatever new eyes she had gained from her accumulating experiences of foreign places appears to have influenced what a character from the title story 'The Life of Nancy' brings back from his own lengthy excursion to the Old World. In this tale, the wealthy Bostonian Tom Aldis develops an intimate friendship with the eponymous Nancy, and with it an affection for her home village of East Rodney, a few miles outside the city. 'The society and scenery of the little coast town were so simple and definite in their elements that one easily acquired a feeling of citizenship,' Jewett writes. 'Tom had an intimate knowledge, gained from several weeks' residence, with Nancy's whole world.'¹² To have gained something like 'citizenship' from just a few weeks' residence seems to echo an intensity of located experience found again and again in Jewett's work, from Helen Denis and Kate Lancaster's vacation in *Deephaven* (1877) to a similarly consuming summer for the nameless narrator of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). We might wonder, though, where Jewett developed this temporally-condensed qualification for local affiliation; in the familiar communities of New England, or perhaps too in the extended vacations she had taken in Western Europe.

In 'The Life of Nancy' it is indeed to Europe that Jewett sends Tom Aldis, not for a lazy summer but for a new life that takes him away for 'nearly twenty years.'¹³ When he does return in the story's final part, he at first seems like a predatory developer intent on selling off the coast for exploitation, but his own 'new eyes' end up re-enchanting him as to the value of his native ground: 'I came down meaning to sell my land to a speculator ... or to a real estate agency which has great possessions along the coast; but I'm very doubtful about doing it, now that I have seen the bay again and this lovely shore. I had no idea it was such a magnificent piece of country.'¹⁴ Although the Europeanized Tom initially appears to have developed a cosmopolitan sneer toward simple rural types, being back amongst the contours of the New England coast reawakens his localist sympathies. The 'return of the native' trope had already been well-used by Jewett, and other regionalists, when 'The Life of Nancy' appeared, but here it is not the usual parable of a former resident arriving back in the honest and restorative rural community from an alienating New York or Boston that forms the geographical arc of the story. Tom is certainly an urbanite with yearnings for rural simplicity, but one whose adult life has been spent in cultured foreign cities rather than within a more confined national sphere. It is these experiences that allow him to see, for the first time, the 'magnificent piece of country' represented by East Rodney. First rehearsed in Jewett's letters as a variety of personal experience that also served as aesthetic conditioning, episodes in her fiction such as this can be read not just as autobiographical sifting but also as an engagement with the expanding range of her 'regional' optic.

Tracing how the international experiences that Jewett describes in her letters find themselves translated into the published work is not just a case of recognizing direct

allusions or citing references to apparently foreign objects – though, as Bill Brown and several others have demonstrated, Jewett's fictional world is crammed with a transnational material culture; the 'things' brought to New England by the shipping routes of a globalized mercantile economy.¹⁵ The substantive and tactile world of Jewett's New England – and in particular, its exhaustively documented topographical details – also seem less specifically local when considered alongside the similar obsession with European landscapes that we find in her foreign correspondence. Indeed, what we find again and again in the Fields collection is a desire to record and report back European experience in terms that emphasize its apparent contiguity with the life of distant Maine. Writing to her friend Alice Howe from Chailly (a village in the countryside southeast of Paris) in July 1892, for example, Jewett details a series of archetypal rural sights – a farmer cutting wheat with a scythe, a vine-covered old house, a pig pen – and declares that 'I feel very much at home, being in truth a country person.'¹⁶ The second part of this statement is standard fare in the critical sense of Jewett's life, but for her to insist on feeling 'at home' when she is in France is perhaps not. Nonetheless, the typologies of rural life here translate effortlessly – naturally, as it were – into her French context, so that Jewett's sense of rural-ness, her empathetic connection to a way of life marked by particular agrarian rhythms and forms, disembeds itself from 'the region' to become an emotional and cultural affiliation across geographical space.

This sense of finding home abroad recurs in Jewett's foreign correspondence at numerous times, to the degree that it must have seemed an essential part of her epistolary character as Fields was selecting and editing the letters for publication. Indeed, if Jewett included any lengthy descriptions of the cities she visited on these trips then Fields chose to omit them; the letters that constitute the volume spend considerably more effort in reporting back on rural scenes and village life than they do on the sights of London, Paris, or Rome. Thus, to Sara Norton in April 1898, writing from the 'green fields' and 'brooks' of a pastoral England this time, Jewett finds in a local Devon newspaper reports that a cuckoo has been heard in Brixham, heralding the new spring: it 'sounded homelike, because Brixham is a parish of the town of York next [to] Berwick.'¹⁷ Dwelling amidst the original place names of the Old World means that the names of her New England home return as the colonial echoes that they are, reinforcing the historical relationship that elsewhere in her work – most notably in the essay 'From a Mournful Villager' (1881) – she celebrates as essential to New England identity. This sense of a deeper historical, even ethnographic model of community is not only between Old and New England, however, as Jewett's well-documented fascination with French history attests: she also finds the same sense of homeliness in the genteel residences of rural Europe.¹⁸ The author Marie-Thérèse Blanc was a close friend and frequent host on Jewett's visits to France, and appears often in her foreign letters; over the years Jewett and Fields spent many weeks in Blanc's house in La Ferté sous Jouarre, situated between Paris and Reims.¹⁹ Arriving there in June 1898, Jewett promptly wrote to the artist Sarah Whitman in Massachusetts to say that '[i]t is almost like getting home, to find myself here with Madame Blanc at last'; and on the same day, to another correspondent, she again declared that 'I am delighted to be with Madame Blanc, and it is almost like coming home.'²⁰ This emphasis on homeliness (albeit qualified by that 'almost') is important to Jewett and important to her correspondents, but it is also important to Fields: the letters selected for the volume present these foreign trips in a somewhat resistant and self-controlling way, so that the

experience of Europe seems consoling and intimate rather than provocative or alienating. The comfort Jewett finds abroad is often in affective connections with new and old friends, but it is also clear from the letters that it is in more than this; the sensory familiarity of the rural environment itself feels reassuringly like home.

The letters also point to the way in which Jewett exercised her ability to capture 'local color' whilst away from home, so that the accumulating descriptions of European places and landscapes take on the same literary qualities of attentive miniaturism and aesthetic contemplation that seemed then as much as now to be a hallmark of her New England writing. Indeed, she explicitly tells Louisa Dresel, whilst writing from Aix-les-Bains in southeast France, that her time in Europe has inspired her fiction: 'It is a great temptation to write in this spirit about people you don't know [and] ... I find myself beginning to think of new story-people in these days.'²¹ Jewett finds in her own position as a tourist something akin to the empathetic observers who so often control the narrative point of view of her fiction. In Torcello near Venice in 1892, 'the stone shutters, the ... greenness, [and] the birds that sing' she describes in a letter to Alice Howe become a way to arrest a specific time and place in exactly the same way critics have argued her regional fiction operates: 'Well, when you wish to give me a happy moment of the sweetest remembrance, just say Torcello, and back I shall fly to it.'²² In the town square of Aix-les-Bains, meanwhile, Jewett 'found my old friends all alive' – meaning 'the funny old peasant women ... with their brown smiling faces'; and Whitby in Yorkshire (on the 1898 trip again) could easily be one of the Maine coastal villages of Jewett's fiction: 'It is a noble seacoast and a most quaint fishing-town, quite unchanged and unspoiled.'²³ Realist attention to caricature and place-specific detail typifies the foreign letters, just as an aesthetic of the sympathetic touristic gaze had become the primary signature of Jewett's fictional literary method. Her attraction to these foreign places is clear, but what the letters also show, not simply in the way they record her activities but in the precise stylistic manner in which these places are depicted, is a strong and growing sense of foreign correspondences: that Jewett found in Europe not only traces of her ethnic ancestry, but also something more simultaneous with the late-nineteenth-century moment, places that represented a continuing (even if always threatened) transatlantic republic of rural life. In this regard, the affiliation Jewett feels with the European countryside speaks of a shared way of life across national borders that at the very least questions any kind of fetishized or nativist American conception of 'region.'

A transnational sense of rural identity can even be found in the texture of landscapes seemingly an ocean apart. From Naples in March 1900, she writes to Sara Norton about the hills of Salerno on the Italian coast. The 'grey fig trees ... and the olives' she finds there would seem at first glance quite alien to the pointed firs of Maine, but Jewett sees in them something as 'thick and warm and tufted as one of my own hills of pines.'²⁴ The imaginative connection between life on either side of the Atlantic is, in other words, a reciprocal relationship that turns Europe into familiar terrain at the same time as rendering the American scene in European terms. 'You see what a New England – I may say State of Maine – person now holds the pen!' she declares to Norton, aware that the descriptions of her travels that fill the letters stem from the same aesthetic sensibility – the same writerly imagination – that by 1900 was famous for its deep associations with her home state.²⁵ The contours of Italian hills, and even their distinct indigenous flora, are transposed through Jewett's pen into details less tied to a specific physical place and more to a quality of association only possible in the literariness of her letter-writing.

Jewett's great passion for plants and gardening means that she repeatedly goes into detail about the flowers she identifies across her European travels, and the letters list, sometimes at great length, the names of the various flora she sees. The deep interest in botanicals displayed by Jewett has been well noted by critics, very often, as Bill Brown discusses, in terms of the 'culture of nature' that attends many of the uses of plants in her stories – usually, as in the case of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*' Mrs. Todd, as herbal medicines.²⁶ Rather than an interest in natural indigeneity that such attention might suggest, however, Jewett's constant reference to plants in her letters, and concomitantly the detailed way in which she locates her stories within New England landscapes, can be seen to derive from a more open and geographically expansive impulse. Brown traces in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* a use of botanical analogies that equates the acceptance of displaced peoples to displaced plants, so that foreignness achieves a kind of assimilation not unlike the cultivation of flowers and herbs in Mrs. Todd's garden. Typologies in botany lend their reasoning to typologies of human character, so that the narrator's 'recognition of types allows her to see characterological congruities between city and country.'²⁷ Breaking the assumption of regionalism's valorization of local determinism even further, Kaye Wierzbicki has recently argued that the 'metonymic traces' of England found in the plant names 'Canterbury Bells' and 'London Pride' that Jewett explicitly cites in 'From a Mournful Villager' demonstrate that the very material of the American landscape is intimately 'forged by foreignness.'²⁸ The recurring discussion of fenced gardens found here and elsewhere in Jewett's writing, she argues, implies a preference not for the apparent naturalism of 'bioregional authenticity,' but a designed formalism that encourages the cultivation of all kinds of 'foreign' plants within the controlled space of the garden – a space that amounts to 'an inclusion of foreign aesthetics in America.'²⁹

Fields's presentation of Jewett's letters from abroad – if we place them at the center of our consideration and begin to read them as literary texts – thus construct a more international figure than current criticism tends to emphasize, but the connection also extends beyond the touristic into a more fundamental relationship. A pattern of 'foreign correspondence' emerges, suggesting the regional aesthetic that Jewett developed and turned into a profitable authorial identity was honed and developed as much in her European experiences as out of intimacy with her New England locales. But is this to say that Jewett has been a closet cosmopolitan all this time? It would be hard to claim so, especially given the turn to critical historicist readings of her work in the 1990s that sought (often convincingly) to unveil her as a deeply conservative, racist, and even protofascistic defender of ethnic purity.³⁰ Any number of these readings might be cited – but Sandra Zagarell's damning analysis of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* in a now-classic 1994 essay is exemplary.³¹ Focusing on the novel's consistent concern with notions of community, Zagarell compellingly observes that 'it seems to me impossible to understand what "community" in the book is without exploring the racial attitudes, nativism, and exclusionary impulses that inflect [it].'³²

While this claim is persuasive, I am less sure about Zagarell's sense that these reactionary attitudes configure Dunnet Landing, the setting for the novel, as 'entirely local, congruent with its particular geography and none other.'³³ Such an apparent congruence posits a circumscribed geographical correlative to Jewett's conservatism, conflating her attitudes toward cultural homogeneity and racial purity with an apparent veneration of the uniqueness and coherence of localized identity. 'Given Jewett's beliefs and

temperament,' Zagarell maintains, 'and her history of having lived much of her life in the coastal Maine village of South Berwick, it is understandable that *Country* features a long-lived, stable, and homogeneous community.'³⁴ If politicized readings of Jewett like Zagarell's were, and still are, important correctives to a persistently nostalgic strain of regionalist criticism that can feel entrenched in a mindset of pastoral antimodernism, however, we can again turn to another sample of Jewett's letters from the Fields edition to demonstrate the importance, aesthetic as well as political, of Jewett's foreign correspondence in the literary construction of her native region. In these letters, written during a two-month trip around the Caribbean in 1896, the 'transatlantic republic of rural life' that can be detected in Jewett's personal correspondence from her time in Europe fades from view and something more politically troubling makes itself clear.

Jewett's 1896 trip to the Caribbean was the first and only time she visited the area, and she seems to have done so in some style: along with Fields and their friend Henry Pierce, Jewett traveled with the writer – and former editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* – Thomas Bailey Aldrich and his wife Lilian aboard their private steam yacht the *Hermione*.³⁵ In her edition of the letters Fields includes just two missives from this trip, yet they contain some of the most often-quoted material from all of Jewett's correspondence (even if, as Patrick Gleason notes, it is precisely because of their troubling contents that they have tended to be glossed or quoted out of context by some of Jewett's more sympathetic commentators).³⁶ The first of these letters, addressed to Sarah Whitman on 16 January 1896, was written while the touring party's boat was docked in Nassau in the Bahamas.³⁷ Jewett initially seems to be offering the same kind of impressionistic 'local color' sketches that fill her European correspondence, but then moves suddenly and bluntly into an idiom of racial caricature:

It is a charming little town along the waterside, with its little square houses with four-sided thatch roofs; and down the side lanes come women carrying things on their heads, firewood and large baskets of grapes, and an idle man-person on a small donkey, and little black darkeys, oh, very black, with outgrown white garments.³⁸

Read against the other examples of her international letters, these comments from the Bahamas act in some ways to continue an already familiar anecdotal approach to representing local scenery, but the 'little black darkeys' sound a rather different and uncharacteristic note of pointed racial distinction. Whereas race is unsurprisingly never a part of Jewett's descriptive register when writing home about France or England, here it becomes essential to her writerly sense of scene-setting.

A couple of weeks later, moreover, she wrote again, this time to Louisa Dresel from Kingston in Jamaica, and here the integral relationship between touristic sightseeing and the locals that occupy those sights is even more in evidence:

I find Jamaica a most enchantingly beautiful country ... with its wild marshes and huge flock of flamingos, like all your best red paints spilt on the shining mud ... Then we went to Hayti, which was oh, so funny with its pomp of darkeys. Port au Prince was quite an awful scene of thriftlessness and silly pretense – but one or two little Haytian harbours and the high green coast were most lovely. And then Jamaica, with all its new trees and flowers, and its coolies, Loulie! with their bangles and turbans and strange eyes.³⁹

These letters together tell an important story about the insidious casualness of Jewett's racism, but they also relate in important ways to the previous and subsequent letters she sent from her travels in Europe. Writing in affectionate terms to Dresel from Jamaica, it is clear there is still much to positively relate in the flora and fauna of Caribbean landscapes, but the minstrelization of those 'darkeys' and the crude wonder at those 'coolies' (Asian laborers brought to Jamaica following the abolition of the slave trade), flatten the non-white population of these places into only another picturesque detail in the literary postcard Jewett is sending home. The affective identification of her European correspondence is replaced here with a more culturally distanced relationship to a part of the world that cannot be incorporated into Jewett's geography of affiliation because its land and its people together constitute only something strangely 'other.'

Such attitudes might well have been naturalized to the point of invisibility on board the *Hermione*. Patrick Gleason points out that Jewett's traveling companions Thomas and Lilian Aldrich were 'fervent nativists and outspoken opponents of immigration,' and Jewett clearly felt that her correspondents back home at least partially inhabited the same mindset.⁴⁰ What is more, these views are something Fields chose to include as part of her epistolary portrait; our understanding of Jewett's easy way with racial exoticism is only possible because of Fields's own ease, in 1911, with this kind of descriptive register. The Caribbean letters thus hint at a more widespread acceptance of such perspectives among Jewett's circle and her social class – so while they have served to impugn the individual letter-writer in the eyes of later critics, it is also important to acknowledge the cultural context within which such private letters could end up forming part of a public and laudatory edition of a well-known writer's correspondence.

This tendency of the letter-form to ripple out from the private realm is certainly evident in those works Jewett chose to publish in her own lifetime. The trip to the Caribbean took place at a crucial moment in her writing career: the first two parts of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* had been written before she departed, and appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in January and March of 1896, during the time Jewett was actually in the Caribbean, but the story was not completed until Jewett had returned to Maine, with two more parts being published in July and September of 1896. The whole book, moreover, was thoroughly revised in the summer of 1896, including the addition of two new concluding chapters, so that Houghton Mifflin could publish it as a single volume later the same year.⁴¹ The trip around the Caribbean, in short, took place in the midst of Jewett writing her most celebrated and most scrutinized work, and this important biographical detail makes it possible to see those Caribbean letters not just as indicative of a worldview that many critics have detected in the later chapters of the book itself, but as pieces of writing that literally put into words the formative experiences she would revisit in more complex terms in her fiction.

Even if we just take the material world of Jewett's fiction as an indication of the global context of its regionalism, for example, there are numerous items of Caribbean origin that litter the book's carefully described interiors, including: 'West Indian curiosities'; a tea-caddy and cups 'brought ... from the island of Tobago'; and the 'West Indian basket' that the narrator receives as a parting gift from Mrs. Todd in 'A Backward View,' the final chapter added for the later book publication.⁴² Picking up on these references, Elizabeth Ammons cites such 'things' (to echo Bill Brown again) as the '[t]races of empire,' and they can indeed be read as the remnants of Dunnet Landing's historical connections to networks of trade and exploitation.⁴³ But there is

also a temporally immediate quality to Jewett's inclusion of these objects, for these souvenirs and trinkets are an objective correlative of the exotic 'bangles and turbans' Jewett details in her letters from the Caribbean. As Patrick Gleason has recently demonstrated, the short Caribbean trip Jewett took in early 1896 seems to have had a disproportionately profound impact on her work, so that by the time she wrote the strange and disquieting short story 'The Foreigner' (1900), one of four that she used to revisit and extend the fictional world described in *Country*, its gothic preoccupation with imperial and racial repression serve to 'bring Jamaica – and the complex maritime interconnections of the Atlantic slave trade – home to Maine.'⁴⁴ What is less often remarked is that these wider political circuits within Jewett's work, so well elucidated by the critics mentioned here and by many others, can be traced in letters that seem to be not just passive commentaries on her trips abroad but part of an active process of imagining and claiming those places (and their people) through an epistolary aesthetics.

The strain of recent criticism that emphasizes Jewett's nativism and the buried racial priorities of her fiction can tend to reduce her conspicuous focus on community to a crudely articulated veneration of New England localism and its roots in a historically distant white European ancestry. Reading her letters as 'local color' sketches in their own right, however, helps to complicate this critique of her work, because it insists that the connections between Europe and New England – the landscapes, the topography of plants and trees, the very material of the land itself – are an indication of Jewett's transnational bonds of affiliation with a particular kind of rural people, a conception of a 'rural culture' that may well be conservative, and certainly did include a strain of racial prejudice, but that was not necessarily about historical lineages of ethnicity, because it was also something contemporaneous and even aesthetically grounded. In using Jewett as the exemplar of American regionalism, scholars have tended to emphasize the importance of proximity in her work – whether that is the geographical proximity of the 'region,' or the physical proximity of like-minded and sometimes like-gendered people. In this regard, the geographer David Harvey's sense that 'for most people the terrain of sensuous experience and of affective social relations ... is locally circumscribed' is quite right, but a similar conception of affective geography in regionalist studies tends to miss the rather different spatial order that tentatively and inchoately emerges, for example, in Jewett's foreign correspondence.⁴⁵ In other words, it is possible to track a different conception of affiliation in Jewett's letters, one that is equally alert to emotional and geographical bonds across national borders in the contemporary moment; an affective geography that is non-proximate.

Conversely, however, Jewett's letters also help to nuance a different critical account of American regionalism, one which shifts from seeing regionalism as an inward-looking and wholly localized form to one that sees the region as imbricated in all kinds of globalized networks and exchanges. Very often this shift has been used to articulate a politics of space at work in the notion of transnationalism, as if affiliations which transcend or supersede or in some way negate the 'national' are always already progressive, cosmopolitan, and able to neutralize the iniquitous logics of American nation-building. These more positive accounts of the cultural work of regionalism might well look again at the version of transnationalism that finds voice in Jewett's foreign letters. What can be found there is an affective geography which does indeed circumvent the political entity of 'the nation,' but often only because it is on its way

to potentially more exclusionary, reactionary, and dangerous fantasies of cultural and racial alliance. These are conjectural points, and ones that these few letters cannot convey in themselves, but they do begin to suggest that the aesthetics of Jewett's private epistolary writing might usefully be read with the same critical attention that her published fiction continues to be afforded.

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Notes

1. Janet Gurkin Altman sees the 'particularity of the I-you' relationship, what she calls 'pronominal relativity,' as one of the central characteristics of epistolary discourse – something that must necessarily be inferred or interpreted by an outside reader if both sides of the correspondence are not present (*Epistolarity*, 117).
2. Fields, 'Preface,' 4.
3. Cary, 'Introduction,' 15.
4. *Ibid.* 13; Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 176.
5. See Bell, 'Chronology,' 920.
6. Matthiessen, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, 1.
7. See Blanchard, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, 140.
8. My point is to emphasize the image of Jewett we have got from her published texts, but it is worth reiterating that her collected letters represent only a fraction of those that have survived. Supplementary material has been published through the years, much of it now digitally reproduced by the Sarah Orne Jewett Text Project (see 'Letters and Diaries of Sarah Orne Jewett'). But as Stoddart notes, this leaves around 2,000 letters, spread across sixty-three locations, still unpublished (see 'Selected Letters,' 2).
9. See Jewett, 'Jewett to Dresel.'
10. Hence my decision in what follows to cite Jewett's letters as they appear in the Fields edition.
11. Jewett, Letter to Annie Fields, 1883, in *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*, 18.
12. Jewett, 'The Life of Nancy,' 11.
13. *Ibid.* 34.
14. *Ibid.* 36.
15. See Brown, 'Regional Artifacts.'
16. Jewett, Letter to Mrs. George D. Howe, 9 July 1892, in *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*, 92.
17. Jewett, Letter to Sara Norton, 19 April 1898, in *ibid.* 136.
18. Jewett had a lasting interest in the European roots of New England, articulated nowhere more strikingly than in her history book for young readers, *The Story of the Normans* (1887). She ends this volume with an assertion of a shared origin point for certain Atlantic families that is at once a statement of ethnic purity and a recognition of a shared topographical environment: 'Among the red roofs and gray walls of the Norman towns, or the faint, bright colors of its country landscapes, among the green hedgerows and golden wheat-fields of England, the same flowers grow in more luxuriant fashion, but old Norway and Denmark sent out the seed that has flourished in richer soil. To-day the Northman, the Norman, and the Englishman, and a young nation on this western shore of the Atlantic are all kindred who, possessing a rich inheritance, should own the closest of kindred ties' (366).
19. Jewett had translated Blanc's essay 'Family Life in America,' originally published in France in 1895, for *The Forum* in 1896. See Ammons, *Conflicting Stories*, 46.

20. Jewett, Letter to Sarah Whitman, 6 June 1898, in *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*, 143; Jewett, Letter to Sara Norton, 6 June 1898, in *ibid.* 146.
21. Jewett, Letter to Louisa Dresel, 14 June 1898, in *ibid.* 154.
22. Jewett, Letter to Mrs. George D. Howe, 1892, in *ibid.* 100.
23. Jewett, Letter to Sarah Whitman, 6 June 1898, in *ibid.* 144; Jewett, Letter to Sarah Whitman, 11 September 1898, in *ibid.* 159.
24. Jewett, Letter to Sara Norton, 18 March 1900, in *ibid.* 170.
25. *Ibid.* 171.
26. Brown, 'Regional Artifacts,' 201.
27. *Ibid.* 204.
28. Wierzbicki, 'The Formal and the Foreign,' 74.
29. *Ibid.* 77.
30. The accusation of 'protofascism,' a source of much discussion among Jewett scholars, is to be found in Ammons, 'Material Culture,' 96.
31. As well as the above see, for instance, Shannon, 'The Country of Our Friendship,' and Schrag, "'Whiteness" as Loss.'
32. Zagarell, 'Country's Portrayal of Community,' 40.
33. *Ibid.* 44.
34. *Ibid.* 43.
35. See Blanchard, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, 301.
36. See Gleason, 'Sarah Orne Jewett's "The Foreigner",' 28.
37. It is indicatively idiosyncratic of Fields that she wrongly labels both of the Caribbean letters as having been written in 1899. Biographers all agree that the trip actually took place in 1896, so I amend Fields by using the correct date here.
38. Jewett, Letter to Sarah Whitman, 16 January 1896, in *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*, 161.
39. Jewett, Letter to Louisa Dresel, 30 January 1896, in *ibid.* 163.
40. See Gleason, 'Sarah Orne Jewett's "The Foreigner",' 27.
41. See Homestead and Heller, 'Unpublished Chapter,' 336.
42. Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 384, 418, 485.
43. Ammons, 'Material Culture,' 92.
44. Gleason, 'Sarah Orne Jewett's "The Foreigner",' 24.
45. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 85.

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