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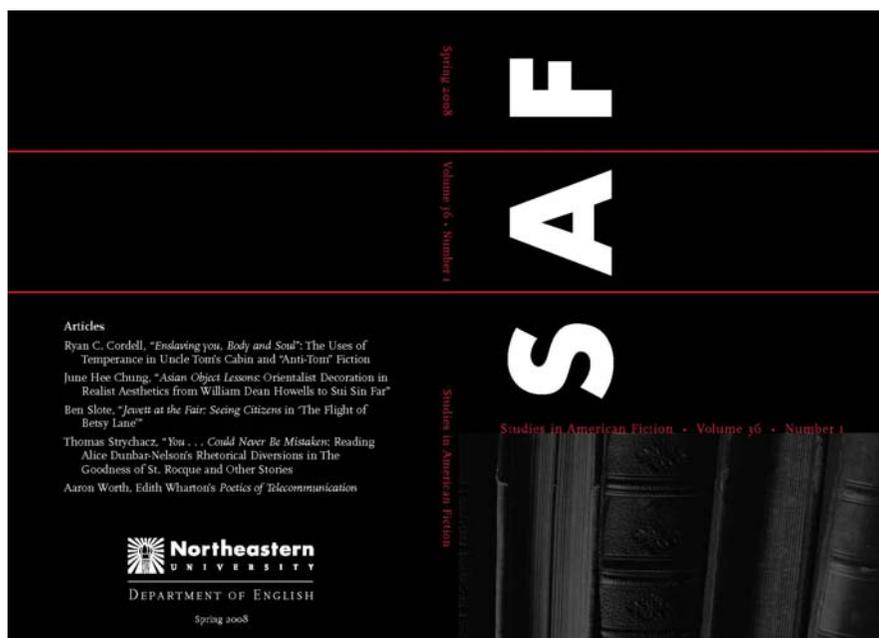
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Ben Slote, *Jewett at the Fair: Seeing Citizens in "The Flight of Betsy Lane"*

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JEWETT AT THE FAIR: SEEING CITIZENS IN “THE FLIGHT OF BETSEY LANE”

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Twice in 1876, when she was 26 years old, Sarah Orne Jewett traveled with family members from her home in South Berwick, Maine, to Philadelphia for the Centennial Exhibition. Seventeen years later, despite mounting physical infirmities, she made the long, westward excursion to Chicago to take in the Columbian Exposition of 1893. This should not surprise us. Like many well-educated people of her time, class, and race, Jewett was a dutiful student and celebrant of her nation, its history, its “development,” and its presumed shining future in the world. Her regional identity deepened and refined these impulses, growing up, as she did, in the midst of New England’s colonial revival movement, when the region’s elite labored, in the face of increased industrialization and demographic disruptions, to restore or create old farmhouses, village centers, and a semi-fictional historiography that enshrined this group’s foundational position in the country’s growth and identity.¹ By 1893, this form of identification reached a kind of inevitable expression for Jewett when Exposition organizers hung a portrait of her in the State of Maine building.² Her professional commitment to regionalism, we might say, over-determined her fair-going. Her literary representations of New England had become definitive enough that an emblem of her career, the portrait, could signify that region in a national framework, replicating through curatorial context the mutually constituting relation between “region” and “nation” that helped enable regional fiction in the first place. She went to Chicago because, in some real way, she was already there.

In complement to the metonymic promise of the two fairs—their invitation to fairgoers to know whole regions, nations, and the world through their exhibited emblems—was a way of seeing the world more generally that biographers ascribe to Jewett’s personality and which her own work suggests is central to her sense of authorial aptitude: a faith in the expressive power of objects and what Paula Blanchard calls her “nearly inexhaustible . . . capacity for wonder.”³ “Never mind people who tell you there is nothing to see in the places where people lived who interest you,” Jewett writes from England to her artist friend Sarah Wyman Whitman in 1892, after a visit to the Brontës’ home at Haworth. “Nothing you can ever read about [the Brontës] can make you know them

until you go there.”⁴ Nine months later she stands in Chicago “with tears in [her] eyes before the Statue of Lincoln in Lincoln Park.” As she writes to an old Berwick friend and editor, “nobody can see the great sights of that Exposition . . . without being proud of his country, which is in itself one of the best things in the world.”⁵ This is the same writer, the same extractor of patriotic “wonder” and pride, who hopes the story she would be most remembered for is “Decoration Day” (1892), a tale about old, down-on-their-luck Civil War veterans reviving their small town’s parade and the nearly extinct patriotism that goes with it (*Letters*, Cary, 95, n. 2).

In a confined historical sense, then, Jewett’s enthusiasm for American fairs and other nationalizing events is deeply predictable. As a figure of future importance in U.S. literary history, though, she would have been wiser to stay away—and to have kept such enthusiasm off her literary pages as well. Canonical twentieth-century literary sensibilities and the historical and cultural forces that helped produce them have left very little approbation for unironic patriotic writing. (That the last working title for Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* was “Under the Red, White, and Blue” may say enough for us on this subject.⁶) And the patriotism these world’s fairs bespoke was of course something more than the commemorative variety invoked by local parades. As many cultural historians now recognize, the fairs, especially the Columbian Exposition, constituted early signal expressions of this country’s new imperial self-regard. Birthplace of the Pledge of Allegiance and Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, grand platform for monumentalist architecture, advanced industrial technologies, and “exotic primitives” from distant lands, the Exposition meant, in Robert Rydell’s words, to “convince an American mass audience that the future progress of the United States depended on overseas economic expansion and, if necessary, on extending America’s political and military influence to secure economic ends.”⁷ Seen in this light, Jewett’s fair-going brings us close to sore subjects in contemporary Jewett criticism. It might reinforce for some the political suspicion that her genre fell under in the 1990s when critics considered how fully some late-nineteenth-century regional fiction seemed written for a leisure-class readership and how snugly the cultural work of the genre seemed to fit with the country’s post-bellum, “reunified” imperialist aspirations and new socio-economic order—how “deeply,” that is, it was “implicated in the logic of empire.”⁸ Jewett’s own best-known literary approach to what one of her narrators calls the “great national anniversaries our country has lately kept,” the Bowden reunion sequence in her 1896 novel *Country of the Pointed Firs*, has certainly aroused critical alarm.⁹ For Sandra Zagarell, that passage, with its ritual celebration of the Bowden clan as descendants

of Anglo-Norman world adventurers and founding figures in the region, its erasure of Native Americans, and its exclusion of a “Chinese-looking” local woman, reveals the book’s association “with a racist, Nordicist version of Euro-American history which shades into racism, white supremacy and nativism.”¹⁰ The quasi-martial procession that Sant Bowden leads to the feasting grounds has, according to Elizabeth Ammons, “clear protofascist implications . . . affirming” this group’s “racial purity, global dominance and white ethnic superiority and solidarity.” For Ammons, what readers are most invited to commemorate near the end of Jewett’s elegiac text is “white imperialism.”¹¹ These sharp critiques have themselves helped inspire a counterwave of criticism that means to exonerate the politics of Jewett’s fiction or, in the case of Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse’s *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (2003), to assert, robustly, that regionalist texts, very much including Jewett’s *Country of the Pointed Firs*, “challenge turn-of-the-century U.S. imperialism.” For Fetterley and Pryse, the Bowden Reunion passage resists national significance (despite the narrator’s assertions) because the “regional subjectivity” it represents “cannot be appropriated”; it instead “offers the region’s values as alternatives to those of the nation.”¹²

Given what Fetterley and Pryse rightly call “the often acrimonious critical debates concerning Jewett” and “ideological questions,” we might be grateful for her decision in 1893 to make a literary subject of *both* of these “great national anniversaries,” the Centennial of 1876 and the Columbian Exposition of 1893.¹³ By bringing a local narrative framework to a national, even imperial site, this text might help resolve the debate. That is, unless we study the story in question, “The Flight of Betsey Lane,” first published in *Scribner’s Magazine* in August of 1893. That story, both as a distinctive entry into the high-cultural discourse that surrounded these national spectacles at the time and as a quiet departure from the norms of Jewett’s own *oeuvre*, suggests how imperfectly the generalizations of contemporary political criticism can predict the socio-cultural performance of specific narratives—both when that criticism indicts and when it exonerates. “The Flight of Betsey Lane” implies no critique of U.S. hegemony; yet it also often works against a perspectival regime its leisure-class readers had presumably come to expect, a way of seeing that constructed some human subjects as inherently more qualified for “othering,” annexation, and exploitation than others. The story corrects for this national myopia, not through new insight, but by asserting as an alternative the personal, imaginative power of an immediate, authorial eye-witness, granting that “capacity for wonder” to its otherwise dispossessed title character, and meanwhile keeping it from its audience.

The citizen-reader whom “The Flight of Betsey Lane” implies cannot be “made to know” or even enjoy the fairs or the new nation they invoke by reading about them. As with studying the Brontës, literary tourism will not do. One must “go there” oneself—and once one has, there’s no transcribing the vision for readers situated locally, back home. What the story describes most dramatically is Jewett’s own attempt, sometimes faltering, sometimes remarkable, to imagine an enlightened national consciousness as the personal preserve of almost anyone.

Ostensibly, “The Flight of Betsey Lane” is about only one fair, the Centennial, and then just barely. One spring morning Betsey Lane, a sixty-nine year-old “inmate” of the Byfleet poorhouse in rural New England, is visited by a young woman for whose “large and flourishing family,” the Thorntons, Betsey had been a “much trusted and valued” maid a generation earlier, when the visitor, Katy Strafford, was but a baby (“Betsey Lane,” *Novels and Stories*, 788). When Mrs. Strafford privately gives Betsey one hundred dollars, the old woman hides the bills down the front of her dress, “brook[ing] no interference” from her always curious poorhouse friends and associates—or from the local selectman (801, 807). Betsey had “always hoped to see something of the world” (789) and lately has rued her inability to attend the Centennial in Philadelphia, which, as she says, “everybody talks about” (794). With her sudden windfall Betsey eventually seizes her chance, sneaking out at dawn weeks later and boarding the local southbound train along a remote stretch of tracks after encountering railroad workers who bring her onboard when she offers to mend their clothes. She has a delightful time at the Fair, combining her personal pleasures with the buying of small gifts for her Byfleet inmates and the securing of future medical attention for her old poorhouse friend Miss Peggy Bond, who suffers from cataracts. (Betsey meets a doctor at an oculist’s shop near the Fair who happens to summer near Byfleet; he agrees to attend to Peggy that August.) The story ends with Betsey’s return and her promise to tell her friends all about the Centennial—there is “enough,” she says, “to think of and tell ye for the rest o’ my days.” The great experience has transformed her, at least temporarily (she looks “quite young and gay, and wears a townish and unfamiliar air”), and will bring, through her material, medical, and narrative gifts, new pleasures to the little poorhouse world (807). The only contrary note at the end is comical: during Betsey’s unexplained absence, Mrs. Lavina Dow, Betsey’s other poorhouse crony, has become increasingly attached to her theory that her friend has drowned herself in the poorfarm pond. Recalling that Betsey had an aunt who committed suicide years ago, Lavina

is certain that “somethin’ sprung [Betsey’s] mind” (806). When the returning Betsey greets her old friends, Lavina and Peggy are standing by the pond, waiting for the body to rise; and as the three slowly start back to the poorhouse, Lavina, very old and very heavy, “turns ponderously, in spite of herself, to give a last wistful look at the smiling waters of the pond” (807).

This humor, like many of the features of the story—its careful presentation of poorfarm social relations, its fine-grained attention to homely details, its sympathetic, non-tragic, and sometimes amusing portrayal of the elderly inmates, its granting of emotional consequence to such neglected figures, even as it narratively contains their desires—suggests that Jewett is on familiar ground in this story. Most familiar is the story’s almost exclusive devotion to a circumscribed, remote realm of rural deprivation and dignity. While regional writing can be said always to imply and speak to a putatively national consciousness (most obviously by its appeal to a well-educated, non-local readership), “The Flight of Betsey Lane” bears very few explicit marks of the national. Its title refers exclusively to Betsey’s sudden, surreptitious departure from the local; in this way it anticipates the narrative proportion of the whole story: Betsey’s adventure is a round trip—to the Centennial for nine days and back—but only three of its twenty-one pages describe her time at the Fair, and even then the description is provocatively constrained. The setting that predominates, the Byfleet poorfarm, is as far from the Fair’s public, international, forward-looking realm as we are to imagine, a distance the story underscores by situating its whole first section (twice the length of the Philadelphia section) in a superannuated shed chamber at the back of the poorfarm, wherein sit Betsey, Lavina and Peggy, shelling beans. The narrator calls this spot “the favorite and untroubled bower of the bean-pickers, to which they might retreat unmolested from the public apartments of this rustic institution,” the poorfarm, itself two miles from the village of Byfleet (789, 787). The temporal outlook at the poorfarm is similarly withdrawn. It’s a surprisingly cheerful place, the story insists; the old, dispossessed inhabitants are almost all “possessed of a most interesting past,” yet, the narrator adds in kind understatement, “there was less to be said about the future” (787). The story’s confinement to the local, remote, and backward is reinforced further when Betsey flees it to see “the world,” and everyone—characters and readers alike—is left behind; the narrative does not record her departure, just the sudden fact of her absence from the point of view of the poorhouse residents: hers is “a strange disappearance,” her presence replaced by an empty bed. After a week of this absence, inquiries in the area suggest only that “she had disappeared altogether from her wonted haunts,”

worrying her bereft old companions (797, 798).

Eventually, however, “The Flight of Betsey Lane” does move to unfamiliar territory, in part because its reach, through plot and narrative reference, becomes expressly national and historically broad, a perspective that, in the story’s original form, includes the Columbian Exposition of 1893. The narrative point of view catches up with Betsey Lane in Philadelphia for the Centennial Exhibition of 1876, where she sees “the wonders of the West and the splendors of the East” and, as she later tells her friends, speaks with people from China, Australia, and western Pennsylvania (802, 807). For the original *Scribner’s* readers of the story, this section begins with a paragraph that makes explicit Jewett’s interest in both fairs:

Nobody in these United States has ever felt half grateful enough to the promoters of the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia. It was the first great national occasion of general interest and opportunity for cultivation; as a people we were untravelled and unconvinced of many things until we were given this glimpse of the treasures and customs of the world. Without it we should never have been ready for the more advanced lessons of the great Columbian Fair at Chicago.¹⁴

Jewett later excised this passage for the story’s publication in her 1893 collection, *A Native of Wimby*. The deletion, like the paragraph’s inclusion in the first place, suggests the time-sensitivity of the story’s original conception. It is first written for 1893 readers, and specifically for readers of *Scribner’s Magazine*, an off-shoot of the defunct *Scribner’s Monthly* (which itself became *The Century Magazine* in 1881). Like its predecessor, *Scribner’s Magazine* served the elite and the socially aspiring, and devoted much of its space and editorializing that year to the Columbian Exhibition. Jewett, a student of what she called the different “personalities” of different magazines, was well aware of *Scribner’s* Chicago focus that year.¹⁵ She had been asked to contribute a story for an earlier (May, 1893) special World’s Fair issue, a “Great Representative Number,” as she refers to it and what the *Scribner’s* punning editors describe, in a “Point of View” column, as another “‘exhibit’ of real interest in the great Exposition of our [country’s] progress” (690). (Jewett’s submission was “Between Mass and Vespers.”)¹⁶ Indeed, the “inserted” paragraph in “Betsey Lane” appears tailored exclusively enough to this initial, more journalistic publication context that it risks violating basic formal unities of the story itself. Most conspicuously, the story’s narrative point of view does not, before or after this paragraph, so thoroughly detach itself from any character’s immediate perspective. Although like many Jewett narra-

tors this one has all along opened gaps between its educated, knowing sensibility and the more “rustic” thoughts and words of its rural characters, here we leave the plain of narration altogether and enter a different discursive arrangement, an earnest historical discursus, in which 1876 and 1893 are equally accessible, and a national “we” (“as a people we were untravelled . . .”) can be summoned and directly addressed. This is a citizenry of readers that by the passage’s diction and temporal reference seems to exclude the figure who brought “us” here—to Philadelphia and to this national subject—that “plain old body from Byfleet,” Betsey Lane (802). (To begin with, we cannot imagine her living until 1893.) It’s a moment not unlike the narrator’s dwelling on “the great national anniversaries which our country has lately kept,” near the end of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, a moment of authorial “claiming” that “appears” to the critic Bill Brown “as a chronotopic rupture” in that narrative.¹⁷

Consistent with the paragraph’s apparent departure from the story is the extent to which Jewett labored over it, as suggested by its busy emendations in an otherwise lightly emended original manuscript. In fact, as she first drafted it, the paragraph ran roughly twice as long as the *Scribner’s* version, elaborating more fully on the Centennial’s role as a crucial first step in the march of national cultural progress, and ending with these telling lines (see figure 1):

. . . but how many Americans never had seen a good picture of bronze until [the Centennial], or knew that anything existed like the Japanese and their wonderful works and ways? Merely to see the men of different nations was an Enlightenment in itself and an enlightenment that was very good for us.¹⁸

The insistence of these lines recalls Jewett’s adamant testimony from the Brontës’ home and Lincoln’s statue in Chicago: nothing “enlightens,” nothing gains one the meaning of a place or event, like the personal, direct visual encounter of it.

Surprisingly, these temporary words in “Betsey Lane” suggest that the whole “extra” paragraph and the authorial claim it articulates do not represent as complete a narrative departure from the story as the diction and temporal reference suggest. The idea that “enlightenment” and cultivation might come from “merely seeing” more of the world (a basic act Jewett emphasizes in the manuscript by moving this verbal phrase to the beginning of the sentence) explicitly glosses Betsey’s own motive and method for seeing. This is not a complete chronotopic rupture after all. The *Scribner’s* paragraph is finally dispensable as much for its thematic redundancy with the story as for its stylistic inconsistency. The great surprise of this tale is that it imagines Betsey Lane, of all people, as a kind

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World's fair at Chicago caused ~~us~~ ~~the~~
 half so great a surprise ~~delighted~~
 and inspiration ~~delighted~~
~~delighted~~ as that was for it finds many
 of us on ~~that~~ ^a higher level of experience
 than the Philadelphia Exposition
 left as ^{as a people} ~~we~~ were untraveled and
 unacquainted ^{of many things} ~~as a people~~ until Europe
 Asia & Africa were brought to our
 doors - The ~~splendors~~ ^{perfections} of ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~manufacture~~
 and buttons and edge tools ~~knives~~
 and ~~machinery~~ were all valuable
 in their way, but how many ^{Americans} ~~of us~~
 never ~~before~~ had seen a good picture
 or piece of bronze ^{or Eastern woodcarving} ~~or Eastern~~
 drapery, until then, or knew ^{that} anything
 existed like the Japanese and their
^{wonderful} works and ways, ~~so~~ ^{thereby} to see the men
 of different nations was an ~~enlightening~~

Figure 1: The original opening to the Philadelphia section of "The Flight of Betsey Lane." A revised version of this paragraph was included in the story as it appeared in *Scribner's Magazine* in August, 1893, but was excised for the story's republication in *A Native of Wimby* later that year. (From the Modern Books and Manuscript Collection, MS Am 1743.14 [7], by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.)

of prototype for “merely seeing,” an original sort of visual receptivity without which, Jewett asserts, national cultural progress would not have been possible. In the national chronology that the story gestures toward, stretching from 1876 to 1893, Betsey seems to be first among Jewett’s citizenry of readers.

The story’s narrative commitment to this idea crystallizes directly after the *Scribner’s* paragraph, when it puts readers on the ground at the Centennial, with Betsey as their point of view. Significantly, readers “see” next to nothing. From Betsey’s own watching at the Fair the following items are mentioned: “a Turkish person parading by in his red fez;” “the barrier of a patent pop-corn establishment” (“Betsey Lane,” *Novels and Stories*, 802); establishments “where free luncheons were afforded by the makers of hot waffles and molasses candy and fried potatoes;” and “samples of spool cotton and nobody knows what” which Betsey “crammed” into her “pocket” (803). Even in so short a list, the elaborative detail that usually constitutes literary description is remarkably absent. (In comparison, the contents of the plain shed chamber at the Byfleet poorfarm are inventoried in lavish detail.)

What the narration pays attention to instead is Betsey herself, not as another object on exhibition for readers, but as a particular sort of social agent and receptive consciousness. The visual scene becomes nearly eclipsed by her own surprisingly formidable subjectivity. When she sees the patent pop-corn establishment, for example, she recalls a detailed memory of “winter nights when the sharp-kernelled little red and yellow ears were brought out, and Old Uncle Eph Flanders sat by the kitchen stove, and solemnly filled a great wooden chopping-tray” (802). This quick conversion of new public sights into the personal, domestic, and familiarly particular has its equivalent in Betsey’s interactions with exhibitioners: “she was such a pleasant, beaming old country body, so unmistakably appreciative and interested, that nobody ever thought of wishing that she would move on. Nearly all the busy people of the Exhibition called her Aunty or Grandma at once, and made little pleasures for her as best they could” (803). While Betsey’s “appreciative and interested” way imports the comforting ethos of “local color” into this “busy” national realm, it also elevates her above Jewett’s typical fairgoer, the unparticularized, uncultivated “public” of the Fair, suggesting that through her unlikely heroine Jewett means to dramatize (if obliquely) what that cultivating form of “merely seeing” actually looks like. As the narrator tells us, “[Betsey] was a delightful contrast to the indifferent, stupid crowd that drifted along, with eyes fixed at the same level, and seeing, even on that level, nothing for fifty feet at a time” (803). Almost maddeningly, Jewett creates a point-of-view character

equipped to see and relish what most people miss, inserts that character in an environment of significant visual curiosities, and then produces visual deprivation for her reader. The effect is replicated at the very end of the story when Betsey's return to Byfleet promises a substantial, entertainingly specific Betsey-narrated description of the Fair, until readers find out that this telling will happen off stage, deferred beyond our narration and reserved for the private audience of Lavina and Peggy. "You just wait till we're setting together up in the old shed chamber!" Betsey tells them, as they return to the poorfarm. The deferment is made all the more enticing by her off-hand reference, a moment earlier, to remarkable Fair objects never revealed to readers when they were "at" the Fair with Betsey three pages back:—"di'monds . . . as big as pigeon's eggs" and "hogs . . . that weighed risin' thirteen hunderd"(807). (Jewett adds to our deprivation by excising from the original manuscript Betsey's brief encounter of "two enormous stuffed hogs of fabulous size and weight."¹⁹) The text seems in fact self-conscious about both this teasing denial of visual gratification and the authorial power it implies. The long paragraph in the Philadelphia section that contrasts Betsey with the see-nothing crowd begins,

There was something delightfully companionable about Betsey; she had a way of suddenly looking up over her big spectacles with a reassuring and expectant smile, as if you were going to speak to her, and you generally did. (803)

Suddenly indeed. At the very moment when Jewett describes how her point-of-view character literally sees, the reader is directly addressed—something the story does nowhere else—and abruptly shifted from the comfortable, touristic position as Betsey's "companion" spectator to the object of her gently commanding vision. The effect is to place readers at the Fair without agency and without sight.

These moments, like Betsey's discovery of the oculist's shop at the end of the paragraph, declare the story's preoccupation with the subject of visual comprehension; they also suggest that Betsey's visual authority at the Fair puts her at odds with conventional narrative expectations. As a reading experience, this way of "being at the fair" stands in suggestive contrast to the literary norm to which Jewett's original readers would have been accustomed. Two commonplaces in most *Scribner's* pieces about the Columbian Exposition were that the Fair, in all its glorious monumental architecture and aesthetic power, was too vast to be effectively absorbed and described; and (yet) that the Fair also contained many exotic sights (particularly at the midway pleasure), any of which were available to readers as visual souvenirs. J. A.

Mitchell's "Types and People at the Fair," appearing in the same issue as "Betsey Lane," asserts that the enormity and variety of exhibitions "wear out the energy and paralyze the brain," that the Fair's "bigness is beyond description," that "as an exhibition you can never grasp it."²⁰ (This formulation, as clichéd obeisance to the grand experience, had enough currency to help dictate personal experience: Owen Wister writes in his diary that "before [he] had walked for two minutes [at the Fair], a bewilderment at the gloriousness of everything seized [him] . . . until [his] mind was dazzled to a standstill."²¹) Meanwhile, *Scribner's* readers are offered elaborate descriptions of the Fair throughout the year, often accompanied by high-art illustrations. In "The Picturesque Side," F. Hopkinson Smith's illustrated sketch in the August issue, readers tour the genuine-seeming Turkish "village" and "little toy houses of the Javanese," the text coming to encircle Smith's illustration of his "old and valued friend, Far-away Moses" (that "superb old Shylock"), authentically garbed in tunic and sash. In a kind of male fantasy of imperial conquest, Smith eventually leads readers to the charms of a Javanese dancing girl:

When you tender her the coin she walks to where you stand without the slightest trace of either forwardness or timidity, drops on one knee . . . crosses both arms over her bosom, places the [coin] on her head, and then bowing low her face toward you, retraces her steps into the bungalow. With each gesture she intends some graceful service—she is your slave—her heart is always true, her head in subjection. It is only her way of saying thank you—this poor little half-clad, half-civilized, Javanese maid.²²

Had there been a Javanese maid for Betsey Lane to stumble upon at the Centennial, surely *this* would not be the presentation! Jewett disables such gazing. The nature and extent of readerly gratification imagined in Smith's sketch, what he is transacting through his addressee, *his* "you," helps us measure much of what Jewett denies her readers in "Betsey Lane." The objectifying, colonizing male gaze, the condescension across race, class, and national boundaries, the casual assumption of clubby collaboration with the reader—all of this is withheld through Betsey's point of view. The contrast also makes vivid Jewett's own feat of cultural escape in the story. As their mutual publishing in *Scribner's* suggests, Jewett and Smith occupy roughly the same cultural niche and write under the same "picturesque" expectations. They in fact wrote mutually admiring letters to each other in the 1880s and 1890s.²³ In Betsey Lane's own surprising subjectivity and occluding vision, Jewett eludes the well-defined discursive expectations so clearly

obliged by both her cultural position and this occasion of celebrating, in narrative prose, America's world's fairs.

Betsey Lane first comes to the reader as a figure whose social definition as a poor, old, geographically remote woman overqualifies her for cultural and political inconsequence. Yet by positioning her as the model student of the Fair's nationally ameliorative "lessons," the story flirts with a politics more deeply democratic than any other at play in Jewett's corpus. If Betsey is up to such "enlightenment" and "cultivation," so too might be anyone else. The Philadelphia section implies this possibility most dramatically by both stubbornly insisting on the privacy of Betsey's sovereign vision and suggesting that only such a vision can generate real cultural progress in America. Yet Betsey Lane's subjectivity and its democratic implications emerge earlier in the story, as well.

Consider, for example, the private moment immediately after Mrs. Stafford's visit at the poor-farm, when "for full five minutes the old woman stood out in the sunshine, dazed with delight, and majestic with a sense of her own consequence" (794). It is easy to read this as gentle belittlement: Betsey has had her head turned by the loyalty and old association of her elegant visitor; we can forgive her this brief escape from the humility of straightened circumstances—later her friends Mrs. Lavina Dow and Miss Peggy Bond do just that, knowing "well . . . that these high-feeling times never lasted long" with Betsey (795). But they are as wrong about this as Lavina is later about Betsey's "suicide." Almost immediately the text authenticates Betsey's elevation by granting her small but unironic signs of consequential autonomy. Alone after Katy Stafford leaves, Betsey "tucks the roll of money into the bosom of her brown gingham dress," her first overt act of individuating agency and an early sign of her imagining of private possibilities. When the poor-farm mistress asks about her visitor, Betsey's self-possessing response quietly flattens class difference: "'T was my dear Mis' Katy Stafford,' she turned to say proudly." The visit has, as Betsey says, "so carr[ied] [her] back" to lively times with the grand Thornton family that when the mistress tells her that dinner is ready and that she's sure Betsey and her friends "got along smart with them beans," Betsey's "mind" is elsewhere, even beyond readers' access, "rov[ing] so high and so far at that moment that no achievement of bean-picking could lure it back" (794).

Her mental roving is of course the necessary prelude to its physical complement, her flight, that which in turn enables that educational fairgoing that the narrator so prizes in national terms. Recall, from the *Scribner's* paragraph, that before the Centennial "as a people we were *untraveled*

and unconvinced of many things” (my emphasis). The original (pre-*Scribner’s*) manuscript extends the mobility trope further: the Centennial was “the first thing that sent us off on long journeys . . . [I]t made wiser and wider minds of every citizen of these United States”²⁴—journeying that presumably excludes the “stupid crowd” whose “eyes,” marks of their mental inertia, are “fixed at the same level . . . seeing, even on that level, nothing for fifty feet at a time.” The course of Betsey’s mental and physical departures—up and away, we might say—and the special discernment they make available to her evoke Jewett’s most sanguine and egalitarian model of American citizenry.

In seeming contradiction, Betsey’s determined, independent roving also aligns this plain old body from Byfleet with the writer’s exclusive “lot,” as Jewett understood it. She declares in her famous 1908 letter to a young Willa Cather (herself snug in the busy offices of S. S. McClure’s) that “he is only the artist who must be a solitary; and yet needs the widest outlook upon the world.” For Jewett (sounding Emersonian) the writer “must find [his] own quiet centre of life, and write from that to the world. . . .”²⁵ As a woman-to-woman declaration of artistic independence, these lines helped found the feminist championing of Jewett in the 1980s. In her 1989 biography, for example, Sarah Way Sherman asked,

What happens . . . when a woman writes from her own “quiet center,” as Jewett advised Willa Cather to do? What happens when the “center” is feminine and, by definition, “marginal”? The paradox of the marginal center is crucial to every woman’s consciousness, as it is crucial to the consciousness of any person not identified with cultural authority.²⁶

As we shall see, Betsey’s sudden possession of cultural authority in the story transgresses hierarchies of class more than it does those of gender. For Jewett, the effect of well-accomplished fairgoing, that discursive province of elites, with its correction of provincial assumptions and self-limiting misjudgments, its discovery of mankind’s great variety and kinship (Betsey sees “folks away from Australy that ‘peared as well as anybody” [807]), is akin to the source and effect of good regionalist narrative. Two letters she writes around the time of “Betsey Lane’s” composition catch this kinship. She tells William Hays Ward, one week after her return from Chicago, that she supports the decision to have the Exposition remain open on Sundays for working-class visitors, arguing that “reverence and worship and serious thought are more likely to exist when Sunday afternoon at least is given *wider outlooks* and new experiences of nature and art, ‘the great revealer’”—a much better alternative, she asserts, to people’s staying “at home in their little houses, drowsing and chattering

or spying their neighbours" (*Letters*, Cary, 82, my emphasis). Three weeks later, she applies the edifying results of worldly exposure to "city-people" visiting or reading their way into the New England countryside:

When I was writing the Deephaven sketches not long after I was twenty and was beginning my *Atlantic* work, it was just the time when people were beginning to come into the country for the summer in such great numbers. It has certainly been a great means of *broadening* both townfolk and country folk. I think nothing has done so much for New England in the last decade; it accounts for most of the *enlargement* and the great gain that New England has certainly made. . . . But twenty years ago city-people and country-people were a little suspicious of each other—and, more than that, the only New Englander generally recognized in literature was the caricatured Yankee. (*Letters*, Cary, 84, my emphasis)

Jewett's central reference here is significantly open. What "has . . . been a great means of broadening both townfolk and country folk"? Either the increased practice of vacationing in rural New England or Jewett's own regional fiction—or both. Both certainly mean to lead people beyond caricaturing assumptions, the literary equivalent of that small-minded gossiping she imputes, in the first letter, to working-class people locked out of the Fair on Sundays. It is fair to say, then, that Betsey Lane, herself a defier of caricature, earns the "majestic . . . sense of her own consequence" she imagines for herself, in "dazed . . . delight," after Katy Stafford's visit. In her dogged, roving subjectivity, her own "quiet center of life" and the perspective it affords, she represents conjoined articles of faith in her author: that both international, geo-cultural exposure and literary regionalism are essentially "broadening," even mutually reinforcing in that effect.

Betsey Lane's authorial access and receptivity to the world does indeed constitute an unusually democratic, class-defying stroke for Jewett. From the start of her career such a sensibility, when it inhabits her characters, is typically reserved for those more predictably equipped for its use, characters who, by measures of age, class, and endeavor, look a lot more like Jewett herself. In *Deephaven* (1877) she gives early self-conscious expression to the human and literary value of sympathetic seeing—amidst an unseeing public—through its exercise by those young privileged Bostonians, Kate Lancaster and Helen Denis. As narrator, Helen makes a subject of such seeing early in the book as she and Kate walk the Deephaven burying ground reading the epitaphs, local texts which to their eyes are "beautiful, showing that tenderness for the friends who had died, that longing to do them justice," even if these epitaphs consist of "quaint

expressions and formal words . . . so soon to be looked at carelessly by the tearless eyes of strangers.” The moment expands into a declaration of the 27-year-old author’s distinctive *métier* and the readerly reception she hopes it cultivates:

We often used to notice names, and learn their history from the old people whom we knew, and in this way we heard many stories which we never shall forget. It is wonderful, the romance and tragedy and adventure which one may find in a quiet old-fashioned country town, though to heartily enjoy the every-day life one must care to study life and character, and must find pleasure in thought and observation of simple things, and have an instinctive, delicious interest in what to other eyes is unflavored dullness.²⁷

Deephaven repeatedly invokes or dramatizes a privileged, immediate vision for its readers, through Helen’s habit of wishing that the various people she and Kate meet could be seen by the reader “with your own eyes” (44), and through the book’s scenes of deepened or correcting vision, most memorably during their encounter with “the Kentucky giantess” at the circus at Denby. The privileged view there, made available by Mrs. Kew, Kate and Helen’s local companion for the day (who recognizes the “giantess” as a acquaintance from her youth), humanizes this side-show figure. Kate and Helen enter the side-show tent, eyes elsewhere, “ashamed of [themselves] for being there” (77); yet after they have politely interacted with the obese woman—listening to her sad private conversation with Mrs. Kew, noticing her “lose her professional look and tone,” and exchanging with her their own polite goodbyes—the shift in their perspective is clear enough, even without the juxtaposing that follows:

“Walk in! walk in!” the man was shouting as we came away.
“Walk in and see the wonder of the world, ladies and gentlemen. . . .”
(79)

The “young ladies,” our surrogate readers of this realm, have paid attention in the best ways, distinguishing themselves from the crowds “pushing fiercely” outside the circus tents whose “staring” and “joking” prompt such spectacles in the first place (77). Jewett will not bark for such attention, for the “tearless eyes of strangers.”

Of course it is through the narrator of *Country of the Pointed Firs*, she who so greatly resembles her author by profession and geographic habits, that Jewett most insistently means to usher readers into the special zone of high sympathetic discernment. Indeed, eventually, in the late

Dunnet Landing story “William’s Wedding” (1910), the narrator simply equates that zone with her out-of-the-way, physical setting. When Almira Todd tells her that William and Esther’s “happy day” has come, the narrator extrapolates feelingly from this bit of New England reticence:

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 its writer, or possess another.

Beneath their archetypal modesty these lines hold performative authority, not describing but simply claiming for this “cold page” the communication of that warm “something,” and thus also claiming for this whole narrative the ability to cultivate in readers what Helen Denis called, in her slightly pedantic way, “instinctive, delicious interest in what to other eyes is unflavored dullness,” what the narrator in “William’s Wedding” calls life’s “recognitions.”²⁸

Betsey Lane, on the other hand, would seem to belong to that large company of old “rustic” characters in Jewett’s corpus whose socially defining features—poverty, immobility, and habits of retrospection—disqualify them from an authorial perspective on the world. Elijah Tilley, for example, one of the “self-contained older fisherman” in *Pointed Firs* (473), sits at home, in silence, knitting, even during the narrator’s visit—she “kept the afternoon watch with him”—passing time in “his continual loneliness” and grief for his “poor dear,” eight years dead.²⁹ The temporal and spatial inertia of the scene recalls for Bill Brown the inclination in *Pointed Firs* toward tableaux, what Jewett herself described as her tendency to write “theatre” without “any play” or plot. Brown compares this tendency to the new use, in the 1890s, of “life-group exhibits” in natural history museums, historical displays of sculpted human figures posed using everyday objects, by which curators meant to lend richer ethnographic meaning to artifactual exhibition and bring historical “local culture to life.”³⁰ Brown’s larger interest in the objects and “object lessons” in *Pointed Firs* as expressive of a “materialist epistemology” newly “extensive” in the 1890s contextualizes, in fascinating detail, the longer-standing habit in “modern” cultures to see old people as things.³¹ In all her sympathetic renderings, Jewett often installs old characters in such tableaux: Mrs. Crowe and Sarah Ann Binson, for instance, in “Miss Tempy’s Watchers” (1888), elderly women who on the eve of the funeral of an old friend “watch” her body by “beguile[ing]” both “the long hours” of a “long spring night” and the story in its entirety, through “steady conversation,” sitting in her kitchen; or, in the often-anthologized story “The Town Poor” (1890), the elderly Bray sisters, two town wards living in decrepit isolation in the

garret of a “cheerless” home, who in their “bare and plain” room “look like captives” to their sympathetic visitors. In fact, the drama and pathos of both stories—the personal revelations produced by the watchers’ “unusual level of expressiveness and confidence,” the famous moment of sun-drenched transfiguration in the Brays’ garret—depend on these figures’ framed incapacitation.³² In both stories, too, the ability to see or read meaning in these scenes is reserved for those able to stand outside them—Mrs. Trimble and Rebecca Wright, the mobile visitors in “The Town Poor,” and, in “Miss Tempy’s Watchers,” the readers and, at the very end, the spirit of Miss Tempy herself.³³

Even Almira Todd, the vigorous center of *Pointed Firs* who, as Sherman reminds us, “must leave Green Island to find ‘scope’ for her ambitions,” is subject to a studied, figural inertia that objectifies.³⁴ As many critics have noted, the narrator recurrently compares her to classical figures—a sibyl (*Novels and Stories*, 381, 561), an oracle (448), Antigone (417)—ostensibly suggesting her inaccessible, other-worldly depth of character, experience, and gnomic wisdom. Her “great determined shape,” we are told, bespeaks something “lonely and solitary;” she is the “renewal of some historic soul,” possessed of “an absolute, archaic grief” (417); her “wisdom [is] an intimation of truth itself. She might belong to any age, like an idyl of Theocritus” (424). Yet these elevating comparisons, as stylized representations of her substantial, transhistorical self, have the paradoxical effect of reifying Almira Todd, making her an object of museum-like fascination. In pointed contrast to her mother, Mrs. Blackett, whom she herself calls “one of them spry, light-footed little women” (400), Almira stands on the earth in a way that is, for the narrator, “grand and architectural, like a *caryatide*” (401). On Green Island, Mrs. Todd admires her mother’s remarkable housecleaning energy with the same results:

“There, what do you think o’ havin’ such a mother as that for eighty-six year old?” said Mrs. Todd, standing before us like a large figure of Victory.

As for the mother, she took on a sudden look of youth; you felt as if she promised a great future, and was beginning, not ending, her summers and their happy toils. (408)

Mrs. Blackett’s youthfulness only reinforces the effect here of her daughter’s figural stillness, “standing before” readers (especially those who can envision the classical Greek sculpture of Nike), removed from “a great future” or even the present of Jewett’s audience of the 1890s. If Elijah Tilley is for Bill Brown “a human statue,” expressing Jewett’s project of portraying, in Dunnet Landing, “an autonomous and self-contained culture” with all “fu-

turity . . . erase[d],” Mrs. Todd’s stylized objectification suggests this aim more emphatically.³⁵

Betsey Lane’s body gets none of Almira Todd’s aestheticized treatment. Her physical outline is utterly contained by the plain diminishments of local color: she is “sixty-nine and look[s] much older,” having suffered “much illness, which ended in a stiffened arm;” she is a “pleasant, beaming old country body,” as agreeable to “quaint” expectations as a Norman Rockwell portrait (789, 803). As we should now expect, though, this minimal, generic figuration accommodates her subjectivity, it does not close it off.

In fact, the closest she comes to sculptural representation makes explicit or (in post-structuralist terms) *admits* the gap between such constructions and their human referents. I refer to the “rustic attempt at statuary” within “Betsey Lane” itself, a scarecrow erected by poorfarm workers the year before, dressed in old damaged clothes of Betsey’s (“it was a time-honored custom to make the scarecrow resemble one of the poor-house family”). Jewett devotes a whole paragraph to the building of this year’s scarecrow, Lavina Dow’s “effigy;” the small scene lies at the end of Section Three, in the center of the story, immediately after Betsey finds a private spot by the corn field to count the money from Katy Strafford and starts to imagine its uses (797). The paragraph begins in narrative inconsequence (“The high spring wind of the morning had quite fallen; it was a lovely May afternoon” [796]) but turns into the story’s only moment of transcendent exhibition, something like those moments of classical elevation with Almira Todd in *Pointed Firs*. Behind two farm hands who kneel over some old clothes of Lavina’s stands

the foundation for this rustic attempt at statuary,—an upright stake and bar in the form of a cross. This stood on the highest part of the field; and as the men knelt near it, and the quaint figures of the corn-planters went and came, the scene gave a curious suggestion of foreign life. It was not like New England; the presence of the rude cross appealed strangely to the imagination. (797)

Here, too, Jewett’s staging for sudden revelation seems to depend on the curatorial logic of inert, life-group exhibition. It’s tempting to see the framed scene as some have seen the Bowden family reunion, an occasion in which Jewett elevates, iconographically, a rural New England ritual into something elementally Christian (perhaps specifically Anglo-Norman) and nationally foundational. The scene is “not like New England” because its European peasantry precedes, and implicitly prepares for, New England, the western avatar of civilization. But where is Betsey here? She is not within the frame. She is perhaps one of the “corn-planters” who “went

and came.” Narrative context more clearly suggests, though, that she stands just outside the scene, looking on, less anchored in time and place than those within, farmhands and scarecrow alike. The story extends this detachment by having Betsey “disappear altogether” from Byfleet immediately after this paragraph, at the start of section IV (798). And in the paragraph before the scarecrow-making, Betsey’s figural presence thwarts easy objectivizing by its “inarticulate” expression of her busy, internal self: the \$100 sum of Mrs. Strafford’s gift first registers on her as “a funny little shrug of her shoulders;” when Peggy, an eventual beneficiary of the money, draws near, “Betsey made a friendly, inarticulate little sound;” when she realizes a possible connection between the money and medical attention to Peggy’s sight—readers are not yet privy to the specifics—“Betsey Lane’s brown old face suddenly work[s] with excitement” (796). This is a woman not implotted but plotting, as hard to read as she is herself equipped to read scenic meaning.

Even before reaching the exoticism of Philadelphia, then, Betsey emerges as the possessor of just that agile sort of “imagination” to which the scarecrow scene, with its “curious suggestion of foreign life,” *could* “appeal strangely.” In the Philadelphia section Jewett lights on this idea explicitly: “the imagination can always outrun the possible and actual sights and sounds of the world; and this plain old body from Byfleet rarely found anything rich and splendid enough to surprise her” (802). Significantly, these lines echo a description of another of Jewett’s young, highly autobiographical characters, Nan Prince, in *A Country Doctor* (1884), who, when she first leaves rural Maine with Dr. Leslie and encounters the big city (in this case, Boston), sees it with “wide-open, delighted eyes” but also a “lack of surprise at strange sights, and [a] perfect readiness for the marvelous.” The result of this experience for Nan? She “becomes a citizen of the world at large.”³⁶

Much in “The Flight of Betsey Lane,” then, suggests that Jewett has created a poor old woman, confined by circumstances to the local and the past, and has narratively *insisted* that she join the author’s privileged company of self-possessed discerners, equipped with that edifying “capacity for wonder” through which the understatement of the local—the stiff epitaphs of Deephaven graveyards, the reticence of Dunnet Landing talk, the stylized minimalism of scarecrows—can imply their full human meaning, and the teeming “world,” bursting across geography and time, can settle into personal legibility, significance, and delight. Seeing Betsey in such company and recalling her contemporaneous position as edified citizen of the nation make clear the story’s remarkable utopian, even revo-

lutionary impulse, especially along class lines. Had this impulse full command of the story as a socio-cultural performance, “The Flight of Betsey Lane” would stand as perhaps the purest expression of what Fetterley and Pryse sees as the anti-imperialist motives in Jewett’s fiction, her attempt to make “region . . . a site of resistance to empire” and “to offer the region’s values as alternatives to those of the nation.”³⁷ Yet this utopian impulse does not dictate the full effect of the narrative. Other textual evidence suggests that, in the course of writing and revising the story, Jewett groped toward but did not fully realize its democratic implications.

The original manuscript suggests, for instance, that Jewett struggled to imagine her title character in full possession of an independent subjectivity. The opening scene, a near still-life of Betsey, Lavina, and Peggy sitting in the shed chamber, “close together, knee to knee, picking over a bushel of beans” and wearing identical “stout brown gingham” and “faded aprons of blue drilling,” evokes an undifferentiated state among the three that lingers in the manuscript (787). The manuscript at first gives Lavina traits that come to define Peggy—she’s “meek and friendly” and “apparently contented with being one of those who are forgotten by the world,”³⁸ a kind of inverse of Lavina’s eventual character, which Jewett self-reflexively corrects in the published version: “Mrs. Lavina Dow was a different sort of person altogether, of great dignity and, occasionally, almost aggressive behavior”(788). In the manuscript they remain three-peas-in-a-pod fully enough for Jewett to refer to Peggy later as “Peggy Lane” on many occasions.³⁹ Betsey’s first stroke of distinction in the manuscript is her superior singing—in a canceled sentence Jewett dubs her a “would be wandering minstrel,” a phrase not much less diminishing than the narrator’s comparing Lavina and Peggy’s singing to “autumnal crickets”(790).⁴⁰ Only eventually, it seems, does Jewett seize on Betsey’s other physical advantages, her mobility (which Lavina lacks) and her sight (Peggy’s problem) and their authorial implications. In a telling revision, when Katy Strafford asks Betsey what she can do for her before she returns to England, Jewett’s first draft has Betsey ask her to “stop in the village an’ pick me out a pretty flowered bowl an’ pitcher that I can keep for my own an’ have to remember you by”; in the revision, the request becomes “a pretty, little, small lookin’-glass” (793), a change that recognizes Betsey’s “new” vision and self-regard—and perhaps the story’s emerging commitment to Betsey’s commanding subjectivity.⁴¹

There are also times when the published story simply contradicts itself about Betsey’s authorial capacity. Katy Strafford’s news about her adult, cosmopolitan life in London at first overwhelms Betsey, prompting the narrator to explain that the old woman’s “imagination was not swift; she needed time to think over all that was being told her” (793). And the

possibility that Betsey's imagination quickly evolves after this point, so that at the Fair it can "always outrun the possible and actual sights and sounds of the world" (802), is compromised by what immediately precedes this praise of her imagination: "She had wandered and loitered and looked until her eyes and head had grown numb and unreceptive" (802). Correspondingly, Betsey never fully escapes the objectifying status so fully prepared for by the class dynamics associated with "local color" fiction. Even after her transformative time in Philadelphia, for example, her declaration to Lavina and Peggy that she doesn't "know how soon I be goin' to settle down" is punctured by the dialogue tag that follows, identifying her as "the rustic sister of Sindbad" (807). The smiling condescension here recalls occasions when she is sized up by upper-class figures in the story: near the beginning, as Betsy sings hymns with Lavina and Peggy in the shed chamber at Byfleet, unaware of an audience, the "lady in an open carriage" (soon revealed as Katy Strafford) overhears the "funny little concert" of quavering voices "with sympathy and amusement" (791–92); and in Philadelphia, when Betsey encounters Dr. Dunster at the oculist shop and describes, in her homespun way, Peggy Bond's vision problem—what Betsey, like all the poor house folks, calls "upsightedness," but what the doctor quickly diagnoses as cataracts—the doctor listens with "twinkling . . . eyes" (804).⁴² When she asks at the end of their conversation if he "'ain't got no bitters that'll take a dozen years right off an ol' lady's shoulders,' . . . [T]he busy man smiled pleasantly, and shook his head as he went away" (805). In their shorthand way, such cultivated, in-text audiences of Betsey model a reading of her character that, while recurrently "delighted," presupposes and reinforces her status as easily available or colonized object and the reader's epistemological dominance over her, a reversal of the hierarchy implied at the Centennial when she "suddenly looks up over her big spectacles" at "you" and compels "you" to speech.

The story's distance from transgressive egalitarianism may be most conspicuous, finally, in what it cannot bring itself to do as a full narrative experience. Betsey's trip is advertised as "flight," she is surnamed for the possibility, and the narration plays on the transgressive nature of her leaving—Betsey "steals out of the" poorfarm "like a plunderless thief . . . pleased . . . with her daring" and proud of her successful "escape" (800), her only witness an "old watchdog" who in her absence "looks wise, as if he were left on guard and meant to keep the fugitive's secret" (797)—but this is only eye-twinkling play, the humor of which depends on our first assuming the inconsequence of her "criminality." And of course Betsey returns. Hers has not been deep departure from "local color" and its inscriptions of class and political disempowerment, but contained, anoma-

lous “adventure” (800), what will be, back in that shed chamber, the material of diverting anecdote. The story in fact prefigures such telling when, in Section One, Lavina describes a woman she knew, a “real stirrin’, smart woman,” who “went clean round the world four times when she was past eighty” with her seafaring children (790–91). The parallel is pointed: on her trips she had, like Betsey, “fetch[ed] . . . home something real pritty” for her local friends “an could speak well o’ what she’d seen”(791); like Betsey on the train to Philadelphia, she “kep’ ’m mended up” on the ship, and, like Betsey at the fair, everyone “aboard all called her ‘gran’ma’am” (791). The risky, conventionally masculine roaming of both women is vouchsafed, by characters and readers alike, through the maintenance of these women’s local, domestic personae—*that*, as much as their own extra-local agency, is their passport—leaving for readers only the small surprise that some exceptional old women are capable, in brief spurts, of much more than most of us imagine. And again, that revelation presumes and reinforces the idea that most are not finally capable of much.

This is a story that *attributes* to a dispossessed, politically neglected figure the epistemological wherewithal of “enlightened” citizenship. It does not *explain* how she, or anyone else, can come into such a possession, just as it does not explain what this worldly “Enlightenment” consists of and how exactly it is, as the narrator states in the story’s “inserted” paragraph, “good for us.”⁴³ Are the “advanced lessons” of the Columbian Exhibition, for which Betsey Lane’s Centennial “prepared” the nation, little more than learning how to identify a Ming vase, to don a collector’s or museum-goer’s sensibility, just the thing for consumers of a new empire? Or, in its oblique way, does “The Flight of Betsey Lane” argue, against all discursive expectations, that anyone can possess what we might call real “upsightedness,” the ability to negotiate for oneself the foreign and ostensibly different, to delight in a realm of difference and also see above it so that one can relate to those who live in it as one does a local companion? Surely the story suggests both ideas. And in this way it demonstrates how reductively a literary text, expression of so much that is mercurial, contradictory, historically determined and historically resistant, can have its politics captured in the polarizing debates of contemporary criticism. Perhaps that is Betsey Lane’s surest escape of all.

Notes

¹ See, for example, Kent C. Ryden, “New England Literature and Regional Identity,” in *A Companion to The Regional Literatures of America*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), especially 201–2; and Stephen Nissenbaum, “New En-

gland as Region and Nation” in *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996), 38–61. The Arts and Crafts movement constituted another, conjoining force that “strongly influenced American artisans who exhibited” at both fairs and, with its focus on handmade domestic objects, also surely helped groom and deepen Jewett’s easy attraction to the events; see Paula Blanchard, *Sarah Orne Jewett: Her World and Her Work* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1994), 223–24.

² Blanchard, 265.

³ Blanchard, 140.

⁴ Blanchard, 254.

⁵ Sarah Orne Jewett, *Letters*, ed. Richard Cary (Waterville, ME: Colby College Press, 1967), 82; hereafter cited parenthetically as *Letters*, Cary.

⁶ See F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, ed. Matthew Bruccoli (New York: Scribners, 1992), 207.

⁷ Robert Rydall, John Findling, and Kimberly Pelle, *Fair America: World’s Fairs in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 9. Interpreting the significance of fairs has become a busy, multi-disciplinary activity in the academy, with various contesting viewpoints. As Rydell, Findling, and Pelle assert, though, one dominant approach is what they call “the cultural hegemony school,” which, following Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, “argues that the world’s fairs need to be understood as vehicles intended to win popular support for national imperial policies” (5). See, for example, Rydell’s *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984) and Tony Bennett’s *The Birth of the Museum* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁸ Stephanie Foote, “The Cultural Work of American Regionalism,” *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 34. The critique of the genre begins with the cultural historiographies of Eric Sundquist, Amy Kaplan, and Richard Brodhead; see Sundquist’s “Realism and Regionalism,” in the *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, ed. Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1988), 501–24; Kaplan’s “Nation, Region, Empire,” in *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 240–66; and Brodhead’s *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth Century America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press), 1993.

⁹ Sarah Orne Jewett, *Sarah Orne Jewett: Novels and Stories* (New York: Library of American, 1994), 469. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

¹⁰ Sandra A. Zagarell, “Crosscurrents: Registers of Nordicism, Community, and Culture in Jewett’s *Country of the Pointed Firs*,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 10 (1997), 357.

¹¹ Elizabeth Ammons, "Material Culture, Empire, and Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs*," *New Essays on The Country of the Pointed Firs*, ed. June Howard (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 96–97, 92.

¹² Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women and American Literary Culture* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2003), 29, 235. For another recent defense of the politics of Jewett's work, see Josephine Donovan, "Jewett on Race, Class, Ethnicity and Imperialism: A Reply to Her Critics," *Colby Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2002), 403–16.

¹³ Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place*, 391.

¹⁴ Jewett, "The Flight of Betsey Lane," *Scribner's Magazine* 14 (1893), 221.

¹⁵ Jewett, *Letters*, Cary, 89. Responding to a novice author seeking advice, Jewett writes that magazine writing "is, after all, a business like any other and a writer must go into its market and learn the laws of that, and what I might almost call the *personality* of the different magazines and the line of articles which seems to naturally belong to them" (*Letters*, Cary, 89). Bibliographer Phil Stephensen-Payne describes *Scribner's Magazine* as "a prestigious monthly, often beautifully illustrated, including colour plates. Authors included Robert Louis Stevenson, J.M. Barrie, Stephen Crane, John Galsworthy, Edith Wharton, Ernest Hemingway." See <<http://www.philsp.com/data/data293.html>>.

¹⁶ Jewett, *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*, ed. Annie Fields (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 104. "Point of View," *Scribner's Magazine* 13 (1893), 690. The editors' claim of national significance for their May exposition number includes a literary canonizing surely not lost on Jewett. The authors published there, they asserted, are "those in whose work the public of its readers is especially interested;" these writers are "an important representation . . . of actual contemporary literature at its best" (689). Other American contributors to this special issue included Henry James ("The Middle Years"), William Dean Howells ("The Country Printer"), Bret Harte ("The Reformation of James Reddy"), George Washington Cable ("The Taxidermist"), and Thomas Bailey Aldrich ("Broken Music," a poem).

¹⁷ Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003), 111.

¹⁸ Jewett, "The Flight of Betsey Lane," Modern Books and Manuscripts Collection, MS Am 1743.14 (7), 49. Used by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

¹⁹ "Betsey Lane," MS, 60.

²⁰ J. A. Mitchell, "Types and People at the Fair," *Scribner's Magazine*, 14 (1893), 187.

²¹ Quoted in Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 218.

²² F. Hopkinson Smith, "The Picturesque Side," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 13 (1893), 606, 608.

²³ Smith was also known as a regionalist; his first successful work was the 1887 travelogue, *Well-Worn Roads of Spain, Holland, and Italy: Traveled by a painter in search of the picturesque* (see *Letters*, Cary, 56). Jewett declares her affection for the book and her gratitude for his giving her a new edition of it in 1889. The book, she says, "will lop open always to the story of the nun and the hint of rose-madder." She then describes a bit of her "local color" in a way that reminds this reader why she is still read and he is not: "The river is frozen over today and the gulls, all breakfastless, are flying about to keep themselves warm, and flapping their wings like coachmen there is such an icy air a-blowing" (*Letters*, Cary, 59).

²⁴ "Betsey Lane" MS, 48.

²⁵ *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*, Fields, ed., 150, 149.

²⁶ Sarah Way Sherman, *Sarah Orne Jewett, an American Persephone* (Hanover, NH: Univ. Press of New England, 1989), 5.

²⁷ Jewett, *Deephaven*, in *Novels and Stories*, 36–37, 37; hereafter cited parenthetically.

²⁸ Jewett, "William's Wedding," in *Novels and Stories*, 559, 560.

²⁹ Jewett, *Country of the Pointed Firs*, in *Novels and Stories*, 473, 478.

³⁰ Brown, 99, 92. As Brown points out, Jewett probably saw an early, popular version of this kind of scenic exhibit, without human figures, at the Centennial in 1876. The exhibit, a display of Scandinavian folk life, arranged objects in mid-use: "a Bible . . . left open, a bedspread turned back. . . ." For the Centennial, background "scenery" was added and the scenes were sequenced "to mimic popular genre paintings" (93). Jewett's description of Tilley carries this same sense of inserting the human back into mediating representation. For example, when the narrator imagines how "Death [would] claim" Tilley and his tough old fishermen friends, "it could only be with the aid, not of any slender modern dart, but the good serviceable harpoon of a seventeenth century woodcut" (474).

³¹ Brown, 83.

³² Jewett, *Novels and Stories*, 680, 726, 728, 680, 731–32.

³³ The narrator speculates, "Perhaps Tempy herself stood near, and saw her own life and its surroundings with new understanding. Perhaps she herself was the only watcher" (*Novels and Stories*, 689).

³⁴ Sherman, 111.

³⁵ Brown, 99.

³⁶ Jewett, *A Country Doctor*, in *Novels and Stories*, 243, 244. Jewett first establishes a physician's authorial, ethnographic perspective in *A Country Doctor* when Dr. Leslie observes, from afar, a local funeral procession (a scene later reprised from the narrator's schoolhouse perch in Chapter Four of *Pointed Firs*): "It was forever a mystery; these people might have been a company of Druid worshippers, or of strange northern priests and their people, and the doctor checked his impatient horse as he watched the retreating figures at their simple ceremony" (172). As with the scarecrow-making in "Betsey Lane," this scenic arrangement transport locals into a more distant, closed past and secures the cultural and epistemological superiority of the observer (along with Jewett's readers). For commentary about the autobiographical nature of *A Country Doctor*, see, for example, Sherman (especially 169–73, 186–89), and Blanchard (especially 163, 171–75).

³⁷ Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place*, 235.

³⁸ "Betsey Lane" MS, 4.

³⁹ "Betsey Lane" MS, 59, 62, 64, 65.

⁴⁰ "Betsey Lane" MS, 8.

⁴¹ "Betsey Lane" MS, 22.

⁴² Jewett considered granting her narrator the authoritative diagnosis; in the manuscript she added and then struck the phrase "half blind from cataracts" in her first description of Peggy Bond ("Betsey Lane" MS, 3). Reserving the term for Dr. Dunster has of course the effect of enhancing his professional authority.

⁴³ "Betsey Lane" MS, 49.