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剑桥美国小说新论·16
(英文影印版)

New Essays on

*The Country of
the Pointed Firs*

《尖枞树之乡》新论

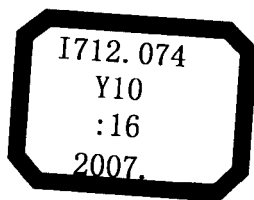
June Howard 编



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导 读

北京大学英语系教授 陶洁

近年来,美国文学在我国很受欢迎。大专院校英语系纷纷开设美国文学选读和专题课,学生从中学到的大部分内容是美国小说。不仅如此,在本科毕业论文、硕士论文或博士论文方面,学生所选题材也大多为关于某部美国小说或某个美国小说家。然而,我们的学生往往热衷理论而对作品或作家缺乏深入细致的了解和分析。他们往往先大谈理论规则,然后罗列一些例证,不能很好地把理论和文本融会贯通,恰如其分地结合在一起。在这种情况下,我们需要一些好的参考资料来帮助学生更好地认识和理解他们在阅读或研究的作品和作家。《剑桥美国小说新论》正是这样一套优秀的参考书。

这套丛书的负责人是曾经主编过《哥伦比亚美国文学史》的艾默里·埃利奥特教授,并且由英国剑桥大学出版社在上世纪 80 年代中期开始陆续出书,至今仍在发行并出版新书,目前已有五十多种,不仅出平装本还有精装本。一套书发行二十多年还有生命力,估计还会继续发行,主要因为它确实从学生的需要出发,深受他们和教师的喜爱。

《剑桥美国小说新论》的编排方式比较统一。根据主编制定的原则,每本书针对一部美国文学历史上有名望的大作家的一本经典小说,论述者都是研究这位作家的知名学者。开篇是一位权威专家的论述,主要论及作品的创作过程、出版历史、当年的评价以及小说发表以来不同时期的主要评论和阅读倾向。随后是四到五篇论述,从不同角度用不同的批评方法对作品进行分析和阐



释。这些文章并非信手拈来,而是专门为这套丛书撰写的,运用的理论都比较新,其中不乏颇有新意的真知灼见。书的最后是为学生进一步学习和研究而提供的参考书目。由此可见,编书的学者们为了帮助学生确实煞费苦心,努力做到尽善尽美。

这五十多种书有早期美国文学家库珀的《最后的莫希干人》,也有当代试验小说大师品钦的《拍卖第49号》和厄普代克那曾被《时代》杂志评为1923年以来100部最佳小说之一的《兔子,跑吧!》;有我们比较熟悉的麦尔维尔的《白鲸》,也有我们还不太了解的他的《漂亮水手》;有中国学生很喜欢的海明威的长篇小说《永别了,武器》,令人想不到的是还有一本论述他所有的短篇小说的集子。有些大作家如亨利·詹姆斯、威廉·福克纳等都有两三本作品入选,但它们都分别有专门的集子。丛书当然涉及已有定论的大作家,包括黑人和白人作家(可惜还没有华裔作家的作品),但也包括20世纪70年代妇女运动中发掘出来的如凯特·肖邦的《觉醒》和佐拉·尼尔·赫斯顿的《他们眼望上苍》,甚至还有我国读者很熟悉的斯托夫人的《汤姆叔叔的小屋》。当年这部小说曾经风靡美国,在全世界都有一定的影响,后来被贬为“政治宣传”作品,从此在美国文学史上销声匿迹。70年代后随着要求扩大文学经典中女性和少数族裔作家的呼声日益高涨,人们才开始重新评价这部作品,分析它对日后妇女作家的影响、对黑人形象的塑造,甚至它在美国文学的哥特式传统中的地位等等。

这样的例子还有很多,例如威廉·迪恩·豪威尔斯和他的《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》。以前人们只肯定他在发展现实主义文学和理论方面的贡献,对他的作品除了《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》评价都不太高。但在这本新论文集子里编者对已有定论进行挑战,强调豪威尔斯的小说、他的现实主义跟当时的社会经济文化现状有很大的关系。他的小说既有其文学形式,又是一种社会力量。另外一位19世纪新英格兰作家萨拉·奥尼·裘威特过去一向被看成是乡土作家,现在学者们用女性主义观点强调她的《尖枞树之乡》对美国文学的贡献,分析当年的种族、民族主义和文学市场

对她写作的影响。用封底宣传语言来说,这本集子对美国文学研究、女性主义批评理论和美国研究等方面都会引起很大的兴趣。

还有一本书似乎在我们国家很少有人提起过——亨利·罗思的《就说是睡着了》。此书在20世纪30年代曾经风靡一时,此后长期销声匿迹,60年代又再度受到推崇。现在这部小说则是上面提到的《时代》杂志100部优秀小说中的一部,被认为是上个世纪头50年里最为出色的美国犹太小说、最优秀的现代主义小说之一。评论家认为集子里的文章采用心理分析、社会历史主义等批评方法探讨了有关移民、族裔和文化归属等多方面的问题。

这套集子里还出现了令人信服的新论点。很长时间内海明威一直被认为是讨厌女人的大男子主义者。但在关于他的短篇小说的论述里,作者通过分析《在密执安北部》,令人信服地证明海明威其实对妇女充满同情。不仅如此,这一论断还瓦解了海明威在《太阳照样升起》中充分暴露他的厌女症的定论。

然而,作者们并不侈谈理论或玩弄理论名词,所有的论断都是既以一定的理论为基础,又对文本进行深入的分析;既把理论阐述得深入浅出,又把作品分析得丝丝入扣,让人不由得不服。他们能够做到这一点完全是因为他们了解学生的水平和需要。

我认为《剑桥美国小说新论》是一套很好的参考书。北京大学出版社购买版权,出版这套书是个有益于外国文学研究教学的决定。

Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself – apart from history, biography, and society – there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretation has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many American novels had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered novels such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of *The American Novel* series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical guides to

American novels now widely read and studied. Each volume is devoted to a single novel and begins with an introduction by the volume editor, a distinguished authority on the text. The introduction presents details of the novel's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by four or five original essays, specifically commissioned from senior scholars of established reputation and from outstanding younger critics. Each essay presents a distinct point of view, and together they constitute a forum of interpretative methods and of the best contemporary ideas on each text.

It is our hope that these volumes will convey the vitality of current critical work in American literature, generate new insights and excitement for students of the American novel, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott
University of California, Riverside

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剑桥美国
小说新论

1

Introduction: Sarah Orne Jewett and the Traffic in Words

JUNE HOWARD

SARAH Orne Jewett published her first short story when she was eighteen years old, in 1868. The acceptance of "Jenny Garrow's Lovers" by a Boston weekly periodical was quickly followed by others; by the time Jewett turned twenty-one, she had published three more stories and two poems – including a story in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the leading literary periodical of the day (which paid her the respectable sum of fifty dollars). Although her strongest work was done later, in the 1880s and '90s, from that first pseudonymous publication until her disabling carriage accident in 1902 not a year passed without something Jewett had written appearing in print. In thirty-five years Jewett published more than two hundred magazine and newspaper pieces, ten collections of short stories and sketches, four books for children, and five novels. And despite the occasional negative notice, her work was consistently praised by critics during her lifetime; it has been admired by at least some readers and scholars ever since. Yet estimates of her importance in American literary history have varied. A certain language of diminution – her work is characterized as "small," "exquisite," "minor" – appears from the first in the commentary on Jewett and becomes the keynote of professional literary critics' assessments of her work as the twentieth century passes. Our understanding of Jewett's work has been profoundly revised in recent years, however, and we may again be ready to take seriously Willa Cather's often-quoted assertion: "If I were asked to name three American books which have the possibility of a long, long life, I would say at once, 'The Scarlet Letter,' 'Huckleberry Finn,' and 'The Country of the Pointed Firs.'"¹

One point that has never been disputed, however, is that *The*



Country of the Pointed Firs is Jewett's finest book – even, perhaps, a kind of summation of what is best in her work. Her reputation had been firmly established for many years when it appeared in 1896, first as a serial in the *Atlantic Monthly* and then in book form. It was a certainty that the book would be respectfully reviewed. But the response went far beyond that; most critics recognized immediately that Jewett's seventeenth book exceeded her ordinarily high standard. It was praised for intensifying the qualities consistently found in Jewett's work: for its vivid portrait of the human and natural landscape of rural New England, for the beauty of its style, for its capacity to evoke a sense of deep significance in everyday life. These are topics that, in various formulations, continue to concern critics today. Alice Brown, herself a regional writer of distinction, wrote a review that began, "*The Country of the Pointed Firs* is the flower of a sweet, sane knowledge of life, and an art so elusive that it smiles up at you while you pull aside the petals, vainly probing its heart" and went on to say that "the pointed firs have their roots in the ground of national being; they are index fingers to the stars. A new region unrolls before you like a living map." After praising specific characters and episodes, many of them the same as those receiving attention in the pages of this volume, Brown concludes, "No such beautiful and perfect work has been done for many years; perhaps no such beautiful work has ever been done in America."²

In contrast, the anonymous reviewer in the *Bookman* comments favorably on the "picturesque delineation of character, the writer's close contact with nature, and her appreciative insight, [which] all contribute a reality and charm to the book which are very convincing," but concludes that "the little volume comes to its quiet ending, leaving the impression that, suggestive and delightful as such books are, they cannot, save in rare instances, leave any deep impression. Miss Jewett possesses the artistic power, the knowledge, and the self-control to venture more. These delicate sketches of life hold the same place in literature as do their counterparts in painting, but no artist can rest an enduring popularity on such trifles light as air."³ No other reviewer sounds so dissatisfied, but many characterize the book, and Jewett's work in general, in ways that suggest they view it as somehow inconsequential. One writes

that this "little book is marked by good taste" and is "at times gently pathetic, at others delicately humorous" and "always free from exaggeration." Others refer to Jewett's "slender song" and slight material.⁴ This note is struck even by Jewett's literary friends and acquaintances. For example, in a reminiscence written some years later, Henry James expresses intense, yet distinctly limited and even condescending admiration for her work: Jewett is "mistress of an art of fiction all her own, even though of a minor compass," with a "beautiful little quantum of achievement" that might have lived up to her gift if not for the "premature and overdarkened close of her young course of production."⁵ Jewett's career was, certainly, deplorably shortened by her death at the age of fifty-nine; but even in comparison with James's own remarkably long life as a writer, it is difficult to think of her career as unfulfilled. There is, we will see, something important to be understood in the curiously mingled tone of respect and depreciation found in so many assessments of Sarah Orne Jewett.

Suggestions that Jewett's work is fine but slight are usually linked to her regional subject matter and often (at least by implication) to her status as a woman writing mostly about women. The sources and significance of such suggestions can be understood only against the broad canvas of American literary history. In what follows I situate Jewett's career, and the trajectory of her reputation, in the history of American literary culture since the mid-nineteenth century. Jewett emerged as a writer through a small but very influential New England literary elite that had been consolidated during the 1850s, by an earlier generation. She worked successfully within this tradition even as it was being transformed into a broader middle-class American culture. But changes already at work during her lifetime reshaped literary institutions in ways that rendered Jewett's distinctive version of the genteel tradition less and less readable; attitudes that developed in the professionalized study of language and literature in universities, in particular, meant that Jewett's place in the revised American literary canon created in the 1920s was much reduced. Since the 1960s, another shift in attitudes has reversed the downward trend in Jewett's reputation. The canon has been challenged for its exclusions, analyzed from the perspectives of race, class, gender, and sexuality,

and has been opened up to new authors and concerns. And as has happened across the humanities, and increasingly in the social sciences, new approaches to the understanding of language, culture, and society – what is often called “theory” – have led to revised notions of the scholar’s tasks. It remains to be seen whether these are signs that yet another disciplinary order is emerging.

Feminist literary criticism, an important part of this most recent and still contested transformation, has fundamentally revised our understanding of Jewett, but what her place in American literature will be at the end of the twentieth century remains to be seen. Feminist critics have recovered information about Jewett’s role in the female literary culture of her day, articulated the distinctive formal qualities of her fiction, and insisted upon the importance of her subject matter. This introduction and the other essays in this volume build most immediately and crucially on that body of work, but they also represent a new departure. Deliberately revisiting the familiar landscapes of Jewett criticism, we historicize in frames of reference that have emerged as important since 1985 and offer a radically revised view of Jewett’s significance. Most strikingly, this volume reveals how deeply racialized and nationalist are the categories through which Jewett constructs her local solidarities. It also shows her as a participant in the culture industry, a highly successful writer negotiating a nexus of gendered institutions for producing literary meanings and commodities. Thus the currently received ways of understanding Jewett – as a regionalist and as a woman writer – are unified in an account of her implication in the process through which, at the turn into the twentieth century, a national culture was constituted. Less celebratory than feminist criticism of Jewett has been so far, it is nevertheless deeply respectful of her craft and seriousness; the essays in this volume seem to me to constitute the most historically informed and critically appreciative readings of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* published to date.

Theodora Sarah Orne Jewett was born in 1849, in South Berwick, Maine, a town of about five thousand inhabitants some ten miles from the Atlantic Ocean along the Piscataqua River. At the time of her birth, four generations of Jewetts lived in her paternal grand-

father's distinguished house on the village square (built in 1774 and purchased from its original owner in 1819). Not long afterward, her father, Theodore Herman Jewett, built a separate, smaller residence next door, and Sarah and her sisters, Mary and Caroline, grew up there. Her grandfather was a retired shipowner and a prosperous merchant, her father a doctor, her uncle a merchant and later a banker; her close-knit extended family included most of the town's leadership, and its connections reached into other New England communities.⁶ Jewett was deeply attached to her home in South Berwick, and biographers have, plausibly, identified it as an emblem of her family's solid social and financial standing and of her rootedness in family and community. After the deaths of her grandfather, father, and uncle, Jewett returned to live in the "great house" and made it her primary residence from the mid-1880s until the end of her life.⁷

Jewett's health during her childhood was poor, and she attended school irregularly, although she did graduate from the Berwick Academy in 1866. From Jewett's autobiographical writing, we know that the many days she spent out of the classroom, driving through the countryside with her father as he made rounds for his rural medical practice, were formative for her; they served as an important source of her intimate knowledge of and sympathy for the human and natural landscapes of Maine. She credited her father with educating her as an observer, as well as guiding her wide reading and advising her about her writing, until his sudden death in 1878. She dedicated *Country By-Ways* (1881) to him: "My dear father; my dear friend; the best and wisest man I ever knew; who taught me many lessons and showed me many things as we went together along the country by-ways."⁸ Jewett's expressions of affection for her mother, Caroline Perry Jewett, are more conventional, and what has been written about the relationship between the two is more speculative; we know, however, that her mother and grandmother introduced her early to female authors such as Austen and Eliot who were immediately congenial.⁹ She was close to her sisters, and they corresponded voluminously when apart; she dedicated a book to each of them. Affectionate references to other family members fill her letters.

As Jewett grew up, others joined her family at the center of her

emotional life. The historical record includes detailed information about the ever-widening circle of Jewett's friendships – with, to name only a few representative figures, Edith Haven Doe, a married woman living a mile away who spent time with all of the Jewett girls; Kate Birkhead of Newport, Rhode Island, one of several early “crushes” and the model for Kate Lancaster in *Deep-haven*; Lily Munger, daughter of a Maine clergyman, younger than Jewett and recipient of a number of rather didactic letters during the late 1870s; and, most important, Annie Fields, who was her close companion from the early 1880s on. Even before she began spending a considerable portion of her time at Fields's homes in Boston and Manchester and journeying to Europe with her every few years, Jewett was scarcely secluded in South Berwick but traveled widely, visiting family and friends. She went frequently to Boston and Newport, stayed for some months during 1868 and 1869 with her mother's brother and his wife in Cincinnati, visited other sites in the Midwest, and saw the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia while visiting her mother's relatives there. Jewett enjoyed both her particular friends and sociability in general; on one busy day during an 1878 visit to Washington, D.C., where a friend's husband was sitting in Congress, Jewett reported that she “assisted in receiving ninety callers in the afternoon, then attended a reception given by President Lincoln's son where she saw ‘ever so many people we knew,’ entertained dinner guests, and went to a White House reception in the evening.”¹⁰ As a young woman Jewett formed connections that would continue to the end of her life, and she constantly added to their number.

Neither the institution of visiting – Jewett spent two months with her friend in Washington – nor such intense, durable bonds of female friendship are familiar to us in the late twentieth century. But historians enable us to make the leap of understanding necessary to see how fundamental they were in the fabric of Jewett's life. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg broke the ground for the study of nineteenth-century female friendship in a 1975 essay titled “The Female World of Love and Ritual.” Depicting a social world characterized by sharply differentiated gender roles in the family and in society as a whole, producing an “emotional segregation of women and men,” she finds a correspondingly strong, “unself-

conscious pattern of single-sex or homosocial networks." The diaries and letters Smith-Rosenberg examines show relatives and friends supporting one another in domestic work and in the rituals with which they surrounded marriage, childbirth, illness, and death, creating a female world of "mutual dependency and deep affection." Women wrote of "the joy and contentment they felt in one another's company, their sense of isolation and despair when apart. The regularity of their correspondence underlines the sincerity of such words." Smith-Rosenberg describes relationships ranging "from the supportive love of sisters, through the enthusiasms of adolescent girls, to sensual avowals of love by mature women," sometimes between women of similar ages and sometimes across generations. She notes that these intimate, long-lasting friendships "did not form isolated dyads but were normally part of highly integrated networks. Knowing one another, perhaps related to one another, they played a central role in holding communities and kin systems together."¹¹

Subsequent historical research has suggested that Smith-Rosenberg overestimated the degree of gender segregation among middle-class Americans in the nineteenth century; certainly Jewett, whose life in any case extended well beyond the period Smith-Rosenberg examines, included men in her friendship networks.¹² But Jewett's biography confirms the existence and importance of these powerful bonds among women. Willa Cather wrote that "her friendships occupied perhaps the first place in her life."¹³ Such connections both shaped daily life and carried deep spiritual significance. Jewett's sense of communion with friends and her religious faith were linked in her mind; in an often-quoted letter, with explicit allusion to the New Testament, she wrote, "There is something transfiguring in the best of friendship."¹⁴ She believed that powerful bonds might even enable communication between the living and the dead; as Elizabeth Ammons has detailed in an essay titled "Jewett's Witches," Jewett, like others of her period, took spiritualism, and the possibility that a supernatural order left its traces within the natural, quite seriously.¹⁵ The wide-ranging significance of these female bonds is a necessary context for understanding both the texture of Jewett's life and the centrality of relations among women in her fiction, including *The Country of the*