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Women's Writers

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How the Mundane is Extraordinary

The story of the Country of the Pointed Firs began as a slow read, but very quickly became one of my favorite stories. The connections that the author, Sarah Jewett, hopes the reader makes, spoke volumes to me. She was immediately able to enchant me. And the first connection I made was through my love of sheep. They are my favorite animal, due to their incredibly cute fluffiness. So, when they were mentioned 14 times, I was surprised. I became excited and dove into finding the reason why. Once I began digging into the biography of Sarah Jewett, I found out that she was not a very religious woman until later on in her life. (Heller) This spoke to me immediately since I am also on a quest of faith and learning as much as I can about religious views. She was able to connect many of her personal convictions through her delicate story writing and metaphor use. She is able to expose her audience to much more than just a story of a fellow writer seeking inspiration. Jewett threw away all traditional concepts and begged the reader to love all the moments in our lives and to see more than just what is in front of us. She wants us to understand how extraordinary life truly is, in all aspects.

Jewett has us experience her connection and her journey to her faith and how significant it became in her life. She began her young adult life as mostly agnostic and eventually she met a man, Theophilus Parsons, who was a Theologian that focused on

the Episcopalian beliefs. (Heller) This is where she began her journey of finding her faith in God and how it connected to her already deep admiration for the world around her. Sarah Jewett believes that every small and mundane moment contains excitement and value. She is able to use her Episcopalian faith and personal values to express this idea: the vision of God is found in everything around us and this is how we, as individuals, are able to connect to our faith and see the beauty of each moment in our lives.

Jewett's Episcopalian faith is most easily seen in how much attention she gives to nature in her story. One moment, early on, is when the narrator is introduced to William and he takes her to a hillside to experience the beauty. The narrator is immediately appreciative to the vast expanse of the trees and the world around her. She is overtaken with the beauty and states, "that sense of liberty in space and time which great prospects always give."(Jewett) In this passage we experience the environment with the author. This is her first attempt in persuading her vision of how beautiful nature is and how we can see God in these moments. The Episcopalian belief expresses how God is all around us and in everything we see, touch and hear. In this, we are able to understand that everything has a message for us from God. In the *Holy Bible*, it is stated from The Book of Job:

Speak to the earth, and it will instruct you. Let the fish in the sea speak to you.

For they all know that my disaster has come from the hand of the LORD. For the life of every living thing is in his hand, and the breath of every human being.

(Biblegateway)

Through this passage we are being introduced to the significance everything has and how God speaks to us through many of His creatures and creations.

In the Episcopalian *Common Prayer*, there is a passage that greatly enforces the significance of placing value in everything around us. The importance of sheep in this story is highly important and each moment with them, explains an idea. The *Common Prayer* states:

“Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend your servant N. Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Receive *him* into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light. *Amen*. May his soul and the souls of all the departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. *Amen*.”

This passage enforces Jewett's devotion to her faith. One main aspect is her symbolism of sheep in the story. They are mentioned 14 times and each one is surrounded by a significant moment for the narrator. She connects sheep to every sense that we have in order to associate God's words and our connection with him. In the *Holy Bible*, sheep heavily symbolized one's strength to their faith. This allows her to place them in her story and hope that her audience understands that she once was on her own religious journey. She places them so often in different forms to express her own personal conflict with faith and finding her own truth.

Esther the character in the Book of Esther was an orphan and a harem to the throne when King Ahasuerus ruled. He had been betrayed by his former wife, his

Queen. He sought a wife that he would be able to trust, but that had literally fallen in love with for her beauty and kindness. She had been able to save the King from being murdered because of her devotion and loyalty to him.

Esther Hight tended to a flock of sheep to support herself and her elderly mother. She sacrificed her own happiness to care for her elderly mother. She had been in a romantic relationship with William Blackett for over 40 years. After the death of her mother, she marries William. I think the author Sarah Ome Jewett tried to correlate both women, Esther the Queen to Esther Hight in portraying them as strong and loyal women. Esther the Queen was not only loyal to her own Jewish people, but the king as well. Esther Hight was strong in keeping the sheep healthy, since they were hers and her mother's sole lively hood. She was also loyal to her mother in caring for her as best she could even if it meant she would have to put her love life on hold. Lastly, because she was loyal and devoted to one man, she waited for 40 years, until she could finally marry him. The love and devotion that a woman has for her faith is synonymous with marriage. Jewett valued the idea of it and how significant it is, especially in the life of a religious woman.

Jewett tied every bit of her personal beliefs and her faith into her works and she delved into her own doubts and worries to magnify them. She wished to steal the audience away in every word, motif, and metaphor of how much she believes that every moment matters. This is so significant to the society today. With the immense progressions of technology, we need to continue to see more, hear more, and speak more. Every moment that we can respect and value the smallest details will enhance

our lives. She truly was a woman who understood that personal and natural connections are so significant and can strengthen our lives, one small detail at a time. The mundane is capable of being extraordinary.

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