Dear Workshop Friends,

Thank you for reading this early version of my first chapter on the emergence of nostalgia. There's still a lot not written. I've tried to use the intro to give a sense of what my project wants to do eventually with nostalgia and attention. With this and the next chapter on Henry Adams, Henry James, and T.S. Eliot, I want to give a solid redefinition of nostalgia and, in the process, define what I mean by historical attention, thereby setting up the claim in the last two chapters that nostalgia is modernism's way of reading historically. I don't think I do this work well. Any help with these and other issues would be greatly appreciated. See you Wednesday!

– Jon

## Nostalgia and the Aesthetics of Historical Attention

Slow Reading Sarah Orne Jewett

> To desire to give to prose the rhythm of verse (while leaving it prose and very much prose) and **to write ordinary life as one writes history** or epic (without denaturing the subject) is perhaps an absurdity. Here is what I ask of myself sometimes. And yet this is perhaps a truly original and great venture!
>
> – Gustave Flaubert to Louise Colet, March 27, 1853

"The history of a life is written by signs," each of which "bear[s] mute witness to the successes and failures of a finished career."[1] In Sarah Orne Jewett's world, making silent objects speak requires an education. By training one's eyes to see the things that provoke feeling, the spectator finds movement and narrative in the material deposits of a life. A series of photographs of an individual can speak volumes, but only to the person who sees lines growing around a mouth, eyes taking on a new cast, and immediately feels compelled to reanimate this life embalmed in the image. Each successive portrait, each connected story, the ability to reconstruct a life out of these scant resources – this is the first step toward an aesthetic education. Beyond an alertness to how somatic and material signs affectively indicate historical change, the spectator must also learn to heed how communities use a whole range of objects like the photograph to keep the past alive. The core drama of Jewett's fiction lies not in people reproducing, the habitual telos of the novel, but in how the past is and will be reproduced. Scenes of storytelling, the sharing of souvenirs, the safeguarding of heirlooms or a childhood toy – these are important occasions for witnessing how people use things to make their pasts meaningful. The way these scenes affect the sensitive spectator helps her decide not only how these pasts should be understood, but, ultimately, how they can help give meaning to *her* own biography.

Thus Jewett urges her readers to develop an acuity that comes not just from ethnographic observation and philosophical reflection, but is preceded by an empathy as quick and upfront as intuition or proprioception. In looking at photographs, handling objects and observing others with their things, feeling and seeing must come together almost instantaneously for there to be any worthwhile transfer of meaning. Jewett's own career testifies to how an *historical* understanding can spring from sustained attention to the small details and everyday occurrences, and to the imaginative reconstruction of gaps in the documentary, visual, and material records. The publication of *A White Heron and Other Stories* in 1886 signals a shift to these considerations of how the past gains new life through its representation of how vision can operate in relation to the emotions. By modeling this circuit of impassioned seeing and critical reflection over the remaining sixteen years of her writing career, Jewett's visual aesthetic represents an attempt at finding a form that does justice to the full range of encounters with the past and asks writers and readers to meet each other halfway by learning how to make objects reveal their histories. I believe it is for these reasons that Jewett kept pinned above her writing desk the bolded part of the quote I use as my epigraph. Flaubert's line, written to his lover during the composition of *Madame Bovary*, tasks the writer with devising a prose style that brings out the historic qualities of ordinary life. At the same time, the line serves to remind the reader of the second line Jewett kept in front of her – that if a person looks closely and long enough at the beauty of the everyday her senses can be "made to dream."[2] With this aesthetic education, people can aspire to transform historical loss into not just a way of tracking the temporalities of social and political life, but of renovating social and political life itself.[3] When citizens start to see the dreamlives of small objects

as something great, the work of invigorating the spirit of public and private life has already begun.

Jewett's method of deciphering the past through emotionally charged visual signs is an early and elegant formulation of an important turn in the historical imagination. This new mode of historical attention is the focus of this chapter. In 1900, William Dean Howells called this increasingly popular body of writing "retrospective fiction," because instead of "taking us out of ourselves," like bad historical romances, it takes "us into ourselves."[4] Retrospective fiction is history approached through the sensory experience of the subject, and, above all, through vision. At a time when people are noting the waning of the historical novel's power to use the past for life, this body of writing flashes up to illuminate how a subject increasingly defined by her complex relations to the material world should ground herself in history.[5] More than other literature of the period, the sentimental fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett asks its readers to join the affective, material, and visual.

Around 1889, when writers like Edward Bellamy start "looking backward," fiction begins rendering history through new points of view in an effort to make readers into historical observers; taken as a whole, these perspectives point to an aesthetic mode that has since become a major way Americans read their pasts for signs of who they are and who they want to be.[6] As later chapters will more fully demonstrate, Jewett's injunctions to look to the past with clear eyes and full heart inaugurates a tradition of formal experimentation whose full fruit is visible in American modernism. Because the call to readers to take up the therapeutic practice of historical attention is never made explicit and is always only modeled in the fiction itself, her work places a great degree of importance on aesthetic form as a vehicle for changing people's practices. The visually

arresting and emotionally compelling method of attending to the past is instrumental in forming what we now call nostalgia, and nostalgia is pivotal in forming what we think of as modernism. While Howells finds examples of writers whose fiction is "more reminiscential than historical" as far back as Stendhal and Manzoni, it is crucial that his impulse to classify these works into a discrete genre emerges at this moment, precisely when fiction begins to urge its readers to approach the past in ways that by the 1920s will be called nostalgic.

The emergence of historical attention marks a turning point in the history of the subject. During this period, personal life and history are increasingly interwoven, and in the process what is meant by each term is dramatically altered: as its imagined boundaries are extended, subjectivity comes to be defined in terms of objects, images, and other people, while history is charged with the affective importance associated with maintaining a sense of one's identity. Identity, of course, has always been unstable. With the emergence of mass culture, however, as Vincent Scully writes, there arose "a self-conscious generation, tormented, as men of the mid-century had seldom been, by a sense of history, of memory, and of cultural loss."[7] This is the space of historical desire, which Scully argues is one of the defining conditions of 1890s America, and can be witnessed in the explosion in popularity of historical romance, historical preservation and biography. When the psyche becomes entropic and relies on investments in objects outside the mind to give it narrative viability, the imaginative space of the subject necessarily expands to include these prostheses. Historical attention is a method of defining the lines of force this expanding imaginative space encompasses; the goal is to preserve a sense of belonging in a world where objects proliferate and where the question of selecting and simplifying one's object-relations is at a premium. Like the *fin-de-siécle*'s many cures

(the faith-cure of Christian Scientists, the rest, outdoor and mind-cures of psychiatry, and Roosevelt's "West" cure), the fiction of historical attention joins together the intensities of affective life to produce a therapeutic encounter with the past that promises the subject the ability to reside more successfully in the present.[8]

While we have largely forgotten this therapeutic context today, the name for this experience of our immersion in the past has become ubiquitous: nostalgia. Nostalgia, I argue, is the motor of historical attention. Historical attention is formed as a vehicle for the transmission of nostalgia. Both appear in tandem: nostalgia largely stops being a specialized pathological diagnosis in the 1890s and becomes a form of affective maintenance built around regret and fond longing in large part because of the role it plays in constructing forms of historical attention.[9] Nostalgia both makes the act of paying attention to one's own past desirable, and rewards this act afterwards through the production of memory. It is thus sustainable because its practitioners come to rely on how this way of looking makes them feel (and how this way of feeling makes them look). The nostalgic mode of history is thus the opposite of the historical novel's history: rather than a character getting swept up in the transpersonal affective landscape of a major historical event, this fiction shows how ordinary encounters with familiar things can generate intense affective experience. In the words of a student of psychologist G. Stanley Hall, nostalgia is history tied to "the love of home," rather than to the "migratory impulse," a description that aptly describes the adventure chronotope of the historical novel.[10]

Nostalgia emerges in response to the belief that textuality can no longer generate the kind of feeling it once did. The historical novel in particular loses its relevance because it relies on just such a model of text-based history (though it still remains immensely popular, as it still is today). The nostalgia orienting retrospective fiction, on

the other hand, argues that the new outwardly oriented subject best apprehends history through the experience of images and not words. Whereas the historical novel up through Hawthorne typically asserts its true connection to the past by presenting itself as a written relic of the past, such as the claim that the narrative of *The Scarlet Letter* was discovered in the attic of the Salem Custom House, retrospective fiction takes the people and objects of the "palpable-*intimate* present" as images that call out for narrative.[11] Jewett's stories are not lost and found in a forgotten corner; they only emerge through the selective attention of a sensitive individual, someone who knows how to talk respectfully to friends and strangers alike. History is everywhere around us – it is simply illegible or considered unimportant and it only emerges through attention to the attachments subjects have with their pasts. The magic of reading retrospective fiction is that it gives a person the ability to identify with a kind of history that seems incapable of being written – because it is so close to your own history and therefore ought not to have a proper role in the public sphere, or because it is simply unexceptional. Retrospective fiction capitalizes both on the attraction of images in a public sphere still mostly dominated by print, and on the tremendous explosion of biography and the historical romance. By foregrounding the role of the observer, and coercing the reader to become an attentive observer in turn, this writing argues that the affective life of the present is saturated with unrecognized history.[12] Making this past visible entails showing how immersing oneself in historical material and images helps put in right relation one's feelings about oneself and others, how it represents a kind of education. For retrospective fiction, this is the precondition of historical understanding.

Unlike the familiar argument where attention is put in the service of making laborers more productive in Taylorized workplaces, historical attention here is part of the

therapeutic apparatus erected to relieve the strain of overwork.[13] While T.J. Jackson Lears has located the emergence of a therapeutic worldview within the story of secularization and linked it to an antimodern reaction centered on the self's quest to find psychic harmony, Lears borrows the by-now classic tropes of the recent distrust of nostalgia to make his argument.[14] Nostalgia is not necessarily therapeutic as an end in itself, as a way of healing the individual by sealing her off from the world. Rather, at the point of its emergence, and in the hands of critical practitioners, nostalgia was part of a comprehensive apparatus of visual attention which aimed to make Americans examine, rather than evade, the banality of everyday life. For this tradition, it is in the banal where the meaning of the past is thought to reside and where subjects form new attachments. Nostalgia does not need to be a turn away from historical understanding or a compensating measure for its blockage; rather, it can be an ethical practice offering the individual the opportunity to learn how to care for others through the close examination of how ordinary objects gather historical meaning.

## Reading Matter

> Human nature is the same the world over, provincial and rustic influences must ever produce much the same effects upon character, and town life will ever have in its gift the spirit of the present, while it may take again from the quiet of hills and fields and the conservatism of country hearts a gift from the spirit of the past.
>
> Sarah Orne Jewett, "Preface to the Second Edition of *Deephaven*" (1893)

By the time Sarah Orne Jewett published *The Country of the Pointed Firs* in 1896, some critics believed that regional fiction had exhausted itself as a genre.[15] Indeed, if the genre itself seemed almost dead, so too did many of the rural New England communities like Dunnet Landing, which had been transformed by the mass-migration of younger men and women to cities and factory towns into what Eric Sundquist calls "a ghost world of

spinsters, widows, and bereft sea captains."[16] The novel meditates on the consequences of Dunnet Landing's economic metamorphosis from a cosmopolitan shipping port to a region of Maine increasingly dependent on tourist's money, which, as Jewett remarks, "was apt to be used to sweep away the quaint houses, the roadside thicket, the shady woodland, that had lured him" there in the first place.[17] In response to this predicament, Jewett frequently urged her friends and readers to adopt an ethical prescriptive she took from Plato: "the best thing that can be done for the people of a state is to make them acquainted with one another."[18] In this injunction to communicate, the tourist and villager must learn to understand each other for the present and past times they represent. From the perspective of the metropolitan reader/prospective tourist, becoming acquainted with one's rural neighbors is equivalent to learning how to read one's own past self. We can only discover who we are by remembering what we have ceased to be.

Jewett's preface to the 1893 edition of her first novel, *Deephaven*, draws this equivalence between past self and rural folk, as it connects her own changes as a writer with the changes in rustic life brought about by the Civil War, economic prosperity, and the expansion of the railroad. Yet she writes from a position that seems to upset the general assumption that her fiction is nostalgic for the traditions rural people represent and modernity destroys. The preface is written as a dialogue with her self twenty years before in 1873, when she would have been starting out as a writer at the age of 24:

> In those days, if one had just passed her twentieth year, it was easy to be much disturbed by the sad discovery that certain phases of provincial life were fast waning in New England…Tradition and time-honored custom were to be swept away together by the irresistible current [of tourists coming to the country and provincials going to the city].

In contrast to these prior-held beliefs, the middle-aged Jewett appears to be post-nostalgic: tourism will not displace rural traditions, which are "better nourished and shine brighter" than before because of the increased mobility of peoples. Incredibly, she writes in a year when state officials estimated that 200,000 different tourists had visited Maine during the summer season, when there were more than 250 summer hotels and thousands of private and shared cottages available for sale and rental (see figure 1).[19]

"[W]e can refuse to believe," she writes, "that all the individuality and quaint personal characteristics of rural New England were so easily swept away, or are even now dying out." In fact, the author claims she only held this belief because she made the mistake of imitating the nostalgic tone of the local informants whose stories she borrowed for her own fiction. The older Jewett moves away from the nostalgia of the locals and her own naïve imitation of their storytelling styles. This kind of mimetic writing does a disservice to the earlier storytellers by focusing exclusively on the past at the expense of recognizing their role in framing the stories and their present status as contemporaries. Jewett writes: "It is as hard to be just to our contemporaries as it is easy to borrow enchantment in looking at the figures of the past." A new ethics and aesthetic form must replace a nostalgia for the past. The writer must adopt a different form from the one the folk remember themselves by; in doing so, the writer must distinguish herself from the rural characters she creates. Thus Jewett invests the aesthetic form of her stories with ethical significance, as she implies that her future fiction will portray the folk justly, in large part by rejecting any nostalgic enchantment with the past. This new fiction may help, in Jewett's words, "to make amends for the sad use of riches after the war, for our injury of what we inherited…"

The form she chooses two years later for *The Country of the Pointed Firs* – sketches modeled on the photograph – marks just such an attempt to depict the folk without causing caricature through stereotyping, distortion through nostalgia, or economic upheaval. The sketch appears to be a form exactly congruent with the people and objects of Dunnet Landing: its still-life quality lets the evocative associations of people and things dictate what can be told (stories based around images and objects) and where the narrative can go (day trips and brief events taking place in the surrounding region). The twenty-one loosely connected episodes of the novel strongly suggest that this novel represents a reimagining of the formal possibilities of *Deephaven*, which is also written in episodic form, the only one of her three previous novels to do so. Just as significantly, Jewett's novel returns to the first person perspective, a point of view she used extensively in her first three books but had abandoned almost completely after 1881.[20] Whereas in the earlier novel, the first person is used to synthesize after the fact what Kate and the narrator done, in *Pointed Firs*, the narrative point of view becomes adheres closely to the text's present and rarely editorializes. Rather than betraying the privacy of interiority, the novel's form and content and the perspective of the narrator call attention to the surface of things – to the materiality of ink on the printed page, to the serialized publication format, and to the legibility of things as the meeting place of matter and spirit. It is only through attention to surfaces that one can see "the inward significance of things, the mysterious sorrows and joys of human life."[21] It is only through reading that one can access, as well as revive, the past life of things.[22]

The task of representing the place where word becomes thing and thing becomes word is what Stephen Crane calls "transcendental realism"; the gambit of Jewett's novel is to safeguard the folk on the side of the aesthetic in order to imaginatively transform

materialist definitions of people (constituted by particular things and places) into sources for universal inspiration.[23] The epigraph heading this section testifies to this kind of transformation. By using the sublimation of the imagination, whereby the written word seems to acquire dimensions and volume, the novel works to protect the places of memory from the possibility of erasure.

The example of the *Deephaven* preface serves as an entry point into the larger discussion of the role of nostalgia in Jewett's work and American culture during this period. Jewett's novel anticipates some of the contemporary distrust for nostalgia, as her preface considers her own participation in a nostalgia that has served destructive ends. Yet critics tend to conflate the nostalgic comments of the Dunnet Landing individuals with the stance of the narrator, assuming that the narrator's sympathy for these individuals points to a shared belief in what nostalgia means. In the novel, for example, Susan Fosdick says to herb-gatherer Almira Todd, "What a lot o' queer folks there used to be about here…Everybody's just like everybody else, now."[24] I want to argue that, rather than endorsing sentiments such as this, the narrator is instead fascinated by the rural folk's nostalgic absorption in the past. While the narrator does desire to learn about Dunnet Landing's past, she is most interested in witnessing the affective scenes of storytelling and finding out how individuals make the past meaningful. If, as I have suggested, the novel salvages the folk by giving their status as the "spirit of the past" a new worth, then this revaluation also entails making them useful for urban readers and tourists who discover in themselves a new value to the pasts they find in stories and on vacation.

In *Looking Awry*, Slavoj Žižek contends that the fascination with the other's nostalgia is how nostalgia always works. For Žižek, then, Jewett's nostalgia is perfectly typical. "The function of the nostalgic object," he writes:

> is precisely to *conceal* the antinomy between eye and gaze—i.e., the traumatic impact of the gaze *qua* object—by means of its power of fascination. In nostalgia, the gaze of the other is in a way domesticated, "gentrified"; instead of the gaze erupting like a traumatic, disharmonious blot, we have the illusion of "seeing ourselves seeing," of seeing the gaze itself. In a way, we could say that the function of fascination is precisely to blind us to the fact that the other is already gazing at us.[25]

According to this kind of thinking, Jewett's post-nostalgic stance is in fact a masked form of nostalgia; her relation to her former self is split between an ironic distancing and a fascination with a time when nostalgia was still possible. Like Jewett's local storytellers, this former self does the work of nostalgia, allowing her to disavow her own participation in a naïve belief system. When applied to herself, then, nostalgia ensures the continuity of the subject with the past; when applied to others, like the rural inhabitants of Dunnet Landing, it makes of objects extensions of the subject's self and reduces their potential to threaten narrative legibility.

Žižek finds this nostalgia-by-proxy everywhere in retrospective viewings of *film noirs* of the 1940s, and it is very tempting to see in retrospective fiction the moment when nostalgia assumes this modern shape. To latter day eyes, the movie plots now appear as implausible as Jewett's old nostalgia appears to her current self. We need to hold off from historicizing, however, because historical attention does much more than provide historical specificity. In particular, it highlights the inadequacies of psychoanalytic theories of nostalgia and prompts us to reconsider the foundations of the contemporary distrust of nostalgia. Indeed, Žižek's theory is problematic because it imagines that the subject retains a coherent identity solely through defensive strategies

like disavowal. According to psychoanalysis and Levinasian ethics, the fantasy of finding one's old nostalgia in somebody else's current nostalgia is always just another way of refusing to confront the other as truly other. In keeping the subject together, nostalgia's visual deceptiveness makes the subject unaware of *how* she sees and is seen. Ironic distancing turns out to be simply self-serving. "Without commemorative vigilance," Pierre Nora writes in a famous essay:

> history would sweep the places of memory [*lieux de mémoire*] away. We buttress our identities upon such bastions, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them…Indeed, it is this very push and pull that produces places of memory [*lieux de mémoire*]—moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded.[26]

Unlike Nora's seaside remains, which only appear lifelike, and unlike Žižek's model of self-sovereignty, the vigilance Jewett's fiction calls for demands not the strict effort to preserve and maintain buildings, artifacts, and customs that we associate with preservation movements and historical societies. Rather, Jewett's later fiction posits a more radically creative possibility: that because the elderly rural folk inhabiting her fiction are on the brink of dying, and because the majority of their children have moved to cities, factory towns, or died at sea, it is the responsibility of tourists from cities to embrace these traditions as their own. The elegiac tone of the novel's closing, which is often confused with nostalgia, derives from the fact that the narrator understands this need but also mourns in advance the loss of these people. Traditions need to be both felt and understood in order for them to gain a separate life from the people and places that created them. To preserve and to disseminate a tradition requires evocative storytelling capable of sending others into reverie while they read retrospective fiction or witness someone reminiscing. "In our reverie which imagines while remembering, our past takes

on substance again," writes Gaston Bachelard.[27] In a period where readers no longer put as much faith in reading as they once did, Jewett looks to the image to catalyze the individuals' sense of individual and social well-being. More than simply the assumption of a responsibility, though, the work of renovating social and political life begins with a nostalgic attachment to people who cannot perpetuate the traditions they have for some time. "The best thing that can be done for the people of a state is to make them acquainted with one another."

**Reading Backwards**

"There is a fascination in reading character backwards," Jewett writes in "Human Documents," published in the first issue of *McClure's Magazine* in June 1893.[28] Jewett's essay introduces a pictorial series that helped to distinguish the soon-to-be-prominent magazine for its extensive use of illustration. The series would run for the first thirty issues of the magazine, which proclaimed that "[n]o such collection of progressive portraits of great men has before been published."[29] The Progressive era was quite literally concerned with interrogating what constitutes progress. As part of a longstanding interest in photography and seriality, the famous muckraking magazine used the "Human Documents" series to spotlight prominent individuals – writers, politicians, intellectuals, aristocrats, and the occasional editor, actor, or activist – and reproduce successive portraits of them at different periods of their life. For example, there are nine portraits of William Dean Howells between the ages of 18 and 53, and four of Alphonse Daudet from age 21 to 53 (the naturalist writer from whom the magazine borrows the title for its series; see figures 2-5).

By the mid-1880s, publishing houses had made the reproduction of portraits of famous authors at different ages in their lives a standard marketing tactic. Jewett's essay, I will presently argue, offers an antidote to what she calls "our insatiate modern eagerness to know the best and worst of our contemporaries," exemplified by newspapers, magazines and publishers. While we now associate this species of curiosity with the cult of celebrity, Jewett finds biographers equally susceptible to this fascination with the personal information of prominent people. Aside from providing typical details like the price, size, and binding material, advertisements and book reviews had recently begun mentioning the number of portraits of an author in each volume or set. An 1886 book review informs its audience that the Riverside Edition of Longfellow's poetry and prose includes five portraits of the author. A 1900 advertisement makes a special note of the "5 Portraits of Mrs. Browning at different periods of life, and a few Illustrations" in a new edition of her work.[30] During this span of time, serial biographical portraiture came to be used frequently in deluxe, multi-volume sets which were advertised as better ways to read an author. By the turn of the century, New York publishing houses Collier's, Harper's, and Scribner's were competing to release deluxe editions, of which Henry James's 1907-1909 New York Edition is probably the best known.[31] By including what was called personalia, meaning esoteric biographical details and facsimiles of unpublished works by an author, publishers sought to encourage the purchase of new editions of authors consumers were already likely to own. Harper's 1898-1899 *Biographical Edition of the Works of William Makepeace Thackeray* includes reproductions of the author's own paintings and drawings, as well as facsimiles of handwritten manuscripts. Each of the twenty volumes of Collier's 1902 crown edition of *The French Classical Romances* is appended with an essay by the French bibliophile Octave Uzanne. These essays

reproduce portraits of the authors for "documentary value," and to narrate how traces of a literary career were imprinted on the authors' countenances (see figure 6). According to one reviewer, with the publication of the *Biographical Edition*, "it can be said, therefore, that Thackeray has attained to the dignity of serial reproduction."[32]

All these works argue two things: that the retrospective evaluation of an author's career is important in and of itself, and that this evaluation can be best conducted by purchasing a deluxe edition, with its biographical information, wide margins, and status as a complete, chronologically ordered collection (the scholarly edition is a clear relative of this genre). The "Human Documents" series is released at a midpoint in this transition in publishing. By announcing its intent to portray "men of today," the series underscores the fact that collected editions were increasingly being released during or at least closer to an author's lifetime, and that public interest in famous individuals increasingly demanded retrospective evaluations *before* their deaths. More broadly, it suggests that the explosion in popularity of biographical writing is tangled up with the rise of modern celebrity. Whereas the generation of the mid-nineteenth century looked to handwriting for an index of fame, Americans at the *fin-de-siécle* turned to the photo. When the eponymous hero of an 1897 novel, known only as "the Celebrity," writes a bestselling book of short stories, he "at once became the hero of the young women of the country from Portland, Maine to Portland, Oregon, many of whom wrote him letters and asked him for his photograph."[33]

By focusing exclusively on what it means to look at serial photographs of individuals, Jewett's essay identifies a formal problem in the established practice of using fictional and biographical material to understand posthumously both the quality of an author's *oeuvre* and the author's character. A true retrospective evaluation of an individual's character can only be conducted in the visual field. Retrospective history is

not possible with traditional novel or newspaper reading because the "public demand to be told both the private affairs of noteworthy persons and the trivial details and circumstances of those who are insignificant" is in fact a narrative desire. While biography can limit itself to comparing public images with personal behavior, this is merely curiosity, and not "honest interest," which requires the point of view provided by retrospective history:

> We seldom stop to get the best point of view, either in friendly talk or in a sober effort, to notice the growth of character, or, in the widest way, to comprehend the traits and influence of a man whose life in any way affects our own.[34]

While the connections presented here are no longer apparent to us, the essay argues that a proper point of view is necessary to write the history of a life. In practice, establishing a viewpoint amounts to an entire methodology of reading.

For the most part, we read a text linearly, and to read words backwards would be to undo their meaning. Photographs, on the other hand, offer a potential, "sober" narrative for reading backwards which can accommodate the overlapping scales of history and biography (so long as there is a well-chosen point of view). For Jewett, this is the narrative of character, of tracing the continuity of the self through the otherwise alienating process of finding "an old likeness of yourself" in "old family daguerreotypes." Reading multiple photographs backwards from the most recent to the oldest takes the reader from her familiar self to the "strange remoteness of outgrown youth." Newspapers or traditional novel reading presumably do not give the reader the unknown past distinguished "from the known and discovered countries" of the observer's present. People become legible as we move photo by photo from the relative legibility of the present image into the increasingly less legible territory of "former selves," where we

may “discover [our] dawning consciousness.” We learn how to read multiple photos of an individual for the “traces upon the countenance” that mark the outward “aspect of the spiritual body,” elsewhere known as character. To read backwards, then, means to note when certain somatic signs associated with the present *fail* to appear, thus restoring potentiality, innocence, spirituality, and foreignness to a life. And so the reader approaches the inaugural moments where she can be distinguished from the type.

The interested person finds continuing satisfaction in paying attention to the spaces between the successive photographs, and thus distinguishes herself from the curious person. The act of comparing one photo to another photo, and thus two succeeding periods in a person’s life, asks that we not just pay attention to the things being compared, but to what comparison normally overlooks, the spaces between objects and the act of comparison itself. This is where feeling is intensified – in attending to these gaps, we imaginatively reconstruct the trajectory of another person’s affective history, which, according to Jewett, can only be done sympathetically by imitating the emotions of that person at a particular time and place of the photograph. Thus, while facial markings must be compared to a database of emotional characteristics, the affective connection of the spectator comes from recognizing “the deep mark that sorrow once left, or the light sign-manual of an unfading joy.” By attending to how one is feeling for the photographed person, by witnessing oneself in the act of feeling, by moving back toward a life with increased potential, this feeling is positively amplified.

This secondary feeling is nostalgia. Nostalgia is not necessarily a compensation for the absence or blockage of feeling, but can also be an amplification of it as well. To say that nostalgia drives historical attention is to run squarely against received understanding, which holds that history and nostalgia are opposed. Most famously,

Fredric Jameson has argued that the rise of nostalgia corresponds to a waning or blockage in historical consciousness. Rather than perceiving the present with the critical distance of the historian, the subject is thought to divorce her nostalgia from its historical context. I think it is likely, however, that nostalgia is not tied to the photo per se, but rather that the act of looking at a photo delimits a convenient space for nostalgic reading practices to occur. In this space, a kind of sight can take place outside of the movement of the everyday, a sight that is as connected with what the spectator sees in the environment around her, as it is with the imaginative and mnemonic world that she envisions in her mind's eye. The photograph is perhaps just easily conducive to emotional cathexis. By virtue of the fact that images denote a field of details, rather than a succession of them, each photograph in a series requires examination and thus constitutes an interruption in the typical practices of biographical narrative. Nostalgia emerges in a period where images are not only reproducible but also widely available in print form, a product of technological advances in and increased economic feasibility of lithography in the 1880s.

While retaining an awareness of her acts of affective reading, the spectator also develops newfound sense of the image's importance because it is invested with the felt weight of the lost time of another human life. Despite an awareness of the artificiality and artifactuality of the image, the photograph becomes a stand-in for what is lost in that person. Yet, rather than a consciousness of one's own mortality, which is often cited as a characteristic of the photograph, reading backwards directs the spectator's attention toward moments when there was more life to be lived, thus asking the spectator to meditate on not just how a life was led, but how *a life* should be led. While Jewett's essay is not always explicit on this matter (these themes become prominent in her late fiction), it draws much of its emotional resonance from this area. For this affective metamorphosis

to take place, though, the observer has to put herself in the position of the person she is looking at. It is not surprising then that the essay exemplifies this method of reading not with photos of famous people but with old photographs of oneself and one's family to exemplify the sentimental and gothic discovery of one's "former selves." The family photos and the family album have long served as a focal point for expressions of nostalgia:

> This very day, perhaps, you chanced to open a drawer and take in your hand, for amusement's sake, some old family daguerreotypes. It is easy enough to laugh at the stiff positions and droll costumes; but suddenly you find an old likeness of yourself, and walk away with it, self-consciously, to the window, with a pretence of seeking a better light on the quick-reflecting, faintly impressed plate. Your earlier, half-forgotten self confronts you seriously; the youth whose hopes you have disappointed, or whose dreams you have turned into realities. You search the young face; perhaps you even look deep into the eyes of your own babyhood to discover your dawning consciousness; to answer back to yourself, as it were, from the known and discovered countries of that baby's future. There is a fascination in reading character backwards.

Looking at photos of oneself, and therefore looking into one's own past, is a way to recall a moment just prior to individuality wherein "the savage" still exists. "Even individuality," writes Jewett, "sways us only for a time"; "the return to the type compels us steadily; at last it has its way." If Jewett here is observing how the act of aging makes the face hyper-legible to the point of indecipherability, then she also suggests that reading backwards is a move toward the type. "You may be as local as you like if you are only typical," Jewett notes on the back of a manuscript page for her 1892 "Looking Back on Girlhood."[35]

The conjuring act performed by old photos affords a chance to return to a past's youthful self by means of something on the order of Smithian sympathy whereby the

spectator imagines herself in another person's shoes and feels what he would feel in that position. The nostalgia of witnessing one's "half-forgotten" self in the photo requires the same imaginative dislocation in one's own past self. In Jewett's words, "an early portrait" makes "early thoughts and impressions…revive again in spite of you." Ironically, at a time when people are trying to collapse words into things, Jewett says that the word must become image before it can revive a person's past, which exists just beyond the boundaries of legibility in the unknown territory of the former self. We can only recover our lost memory by imagining out of the nonsensical aspects of our past selves new meanings which are also the most primitive ones. What needs to be remembered, in some sense, is how to make memory itself.

Reading multiple images not just for their status as a compilation of details but for how they signify affective history requires slowing down one's speed of reading, which often follows a desire to have narrative (critics speak of narrative desire, but I think that reading is often a matter of the desire to receive narrative). All this mental and affective processing requires time taken out from the quickness of mass consumption characteristic of many of the places one encounters photographs. Of course, people are never good enough readers: "[i]f we could read one human face aright, the history not only of the man, but of humanity itself, is written there." Jewett thus encourages a species of attention that is patient, but not invariably taxing, because it merely aims for improvement – in forming affective connections and in attention itself. "*There is no such thing as voluntary attention sustained for more than a few seconds at a time*," reads a heading of William James's *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). People only differ from one another in terms of their ability for stringing together series of attention.

> In the genius, these form a concatenated series, suggesting each other mutually by some rational law. Therefore we call the attention 'sustained' and the topic of meditation for hours 'the same.' In the common man the series is for the most part incoherent, the objects have no rational bond, and we call the attention wandering and unfixed.[36]

Looking at serial photographs thus provides the mind with natural slots for attention and inattention, while also serving the pedagogical function of training individuals to attend better via an apparatus that resembles the theory of attention in physical form. Once trained, the individual becomes a better recipient of the benefits of attention, which improves how we perceive, conceive, distinguish, and remember.[37] James explicitly calls for individuals to strengthen their powers of attention; Jewett models an exercise in attention and, in doing so, suggests that attention and affect logically should work symbiotically to reinforce one another. Readers are enjoined to adopt a new rhythm of reading, the rhythm that associated with reading photographs.

**Slow Nostalgia, Fast Nostalgia**

A comparison with a concurrent form of serial photography is instructive in bringing out the cadence and rhythm of reading advocated in Jewett's exercise, where imagination and memory work in conjunction with the movement of the eye. In a flourish at the end of *Animated Pictures* (1898), early motion picture inventor Charles Francis Jenkins describes the most exciting scientific application of his projecting machine, the Phantoscope:

> A stalk of corn, say, is photographed with a compound camera through color screens day by day or hour by hour from the time it springs from the ground until it withers. These pictures are projected with a special lantern and are viewed by the audience through the new binocular eyepieces. Each onlooker sees upon the screen a green shoot spring up, sees it grow, sees its leaves

> or blades unfold, sees it put forth tassel and silk, sees it wither and decay, all in the space of two or three minutes. Nothing could be more interesting, it would seem. The growing stalk in all its beauty of form and color stands out from the screen, its height and location being as easily ascertained as though one were looking at the actual stalk of corn instead of a picture; surely a veritable realization of the philosopher's dream.[38]

According to Jenkins, his Phantoscope projector (a name he dismisses, ironically, as "fanciful") practically fulfills the dream of bringing inanimate objects to life, which is to say, it creates the illusion of life by tricking the eye. Jenkins builds the first projector that employs what would be known as intermittent motion. "The impression which the picture makes on the eye, is, therefore, more than ten times as strong as that of the movement," a number Jenkins fixes at around twenty-five frames per second. "Consequently, as the eye can not distinguish two impressions, but perceives only the stronger, the substitution of the pictures is not perceptible" (31).

In the motion picture projector, Jewett's dream of an aesthetic education afforded by slow reading appears to be destroyed. Without recognizable gaps between images, reading facial hieroglyphics backwards for character is not possible. Film creates the illusion of movement by presenting enough images to overwhelm the eye's ability to process discrete information. For scientists and motion picture pioneers, of course, this is the point; chronophotography, capable of recording up to 500 images a second, is supposed to reveal things heretofore invisible. As Etienne-Jules Marey states: "In a series of portraits taken at different periods of life, anybody can see the changes wrought by time upon the features of any particular face."[39] Even if a film camera recorded the life of a person through their face and not an ear of corn, though, and even if this film were slowed down and run in reverse (as sometimes happened), there is something antithetical about the process of aging to the medium. The film industry at this time rarely afforded

spectators the opportunity to become aware of their own involvement in producing the spectacles they were watching; rather, the accent in these films is shifted squarely onto the possibilities the new technology creates. The movement of the eye is mimicked not in the movement of the camera at this point in history, but in the speed of the film moving through the projector. One article, "Animated Life" (1898), uses the analogy of a man "slowing walking past a high picket fence and gazing intently at some moving object on the other side" with the same man, walking more quickly and seeing "a seemingly continuous view of the object in question" due to the combination of uninterrupted sight and the persistence of afterimages on the retina.[40]

Backed by this kind of positivist thinking, early film innovators take what had been the product of an injunction for people to channel their interest into the imagination, and produce an apparatus that does the affective work of attention for its audience. Though films were sometimes projected in reverse, such as a film of a man smoking a cigar or the tearing down of a Broadway theater (see figure 8), commentators marveled not at the transformative impact of these films on viewers but at the compression of time made possible by the medium.[41] The filmic record of the life of an ear of corn does not ask the spectator to reconstruct imaginatively gaps in the visual record by slowing down his or her attention, but to imagine new narrative not formerly available to perception. This kind of film demands no change in visual attention, instead embodying the visual desire to fill in the gaps between images – suggesting, implicitly, that the effort to do so is too taxing for the individual. I believe that apparently seamless chronophotography plays a significant role in generating the nostalgia that has engendered suspicion in modern critics.

The motion picture does precisely the opposite of what historical attention is supposed to do: by providing the illusory embodiment of reverie to early filmgoers who no longer have to shape their own images, and by charging money for the privilege of having the illusion of an experience apparently uncompromised and unmediated by the observer's "reactive spontaneity" (William James's phrase to describe attention), serial imagery takes on the structure of addiction. At the very least a strong reliance is inculcated in the spectator. Jenkins's apparatus, which he set up on the boardwalk in Atlantic City for the season of 1895, makes this logic clear. When a customer walked up to one of twelve viewing slots which looked into three compartments (see figure 9), he then dropped a nickel in a slot machine and was given forty-seconds of "life-sized pictures" (38). The coin sets a circuit in motion, "furnishing current to run the motor, light the lamps, etc." What it does to the rhythm of the visual attention necessary for reverie is put a new limit on sight that is precisely the opposite of the obliviousness to time the daydreaming spectator finds in Jewett's scheme. The temporal and spatial separation needed for Jewett's imaginary process is eliminated from the image and displaced into the economic sphere. Thus even if the film is projected in reverse, the separation of the spectator – now between independent viewings of apparently seamless images – is now felt as impending absence and not a move to potentiality whose limits are only set by the length of the chain of attention the individual is capable of.

At its heart, Jewett's injunction to slow down the work of everyday life through reminiscence and imagining is a prescription for the quickness and excitation that innumerable Americans had been complaining about since the 1870s. George Beard famously termed these symptoms "neurasthenia," and, more sensationally, "Americanitis," and it is clear that Jewett and other authors have neurasthenia in mind

when they use adjectives like "listless" or "uninterested" in their work. Neurasthenia, according to one prominent medical dictionary, is "a condition of *irritable weakness*."[42] Neurasthenia was thought to be caused by "nerve-excitation," and was diagnosed most frequently among "brain-workers," especially young women and professional and businessmen who "have borne the burden of anxiety and various physical excesses." Because of the vagueness of the feeling and the irritation this causes, it "leads naturally to introspective attempts on the patient's own part to interpret the change that he has experienced."[43]

What Jewett offers in her fiction is a way to let the Brownian motion of the fast-moving individual sort itself out through slow and patient observation of others and of oneself observing others. Traveling to the countryside for its slower pace of life, now a cliché, is not an end in and of itself, but a model for overtaxed urbanites. It is no accident that Jewett represents her rural folk as unprovincial – as people who happen to live provincial lives out of necessity, because the shipping industry collapsed, and not choice. The provincialization of rural inhabitants, whereby they become insignificant parts of the national economy (the factory has replaced the ship as the industry for their children), is meant as a demonstration of how important values persist even without much opportunity for their expression. Thus the slowness of looking at photographs, and the slowness of a vacation are part of a cure to enhance the quickness and immediacy of the emotions and the perception, which Jewett and other writers at her time associate with attention and specifically attention to the past. The editor of *Popular Science* opines, "[a]mid the ever-increasing multiplicity of luxuries and novelties of every kind that are spread before the people to tempt the outer senses, the needs of the inner man are apt to be thrust aside and forgotten…nothing is the left to the imagination."[44]

Indeed, it is precisely by redefining fantasy and imagination that women writers like Jewett, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Pauline Hopkins (among others) sought to create a therapeutic alternative to the cures for neurasthenia and hysteria prescribed by doctors, most prominently by Silas Weir Mitchell, who advocated exerting self-control to suppress fantasy and reflection on one's condition.[45] While finding little use for his infamous rest cure, Jewett reinvents Mitchell's lesser-known "camp cure" in her regional writing.[46] Originally a rest cure for overworked men which involved camping in the woods and following leisurely pursuits like hunting, fishing and botany, Mitchell later included women, though with a significant difference: the female patient is supposed to keep a private diary of simple descriptions of stimulating scenes and objects. According to Mitchell, these "word-sketches" are a way of practicing on oneself in the relative isolation of the campsite; the patient-tourist is supposed to learn "the habit of taking sketches in words which, glanced at afterward, swiftly recall the scene" as if it were present again, thus presumably providing pleasing memories when needed.[47]

In Jewett's hands, this exercise in rerouting one's emotions into what one sees becomes a way to generate nostalgic reading practices that open her readers up to the possibility of cultural and historical difference; by switching the accent from word-sketches onto "figure drawing," she encourages her readers to fantasize about other people's histories through imagism. In the process of asking her readers to attune themselves to historical feeling, which doubles as an investigation into character, Jewett invests the traditional sketch form of regional fiction with a therapeutic function. Thus constituted, the sketch allows for the folk's storytelling to take place without the threat of material destruction connected with naively nostalgic modes of representation. Rather,

because it is always halfway between observation and fantasy, nostalgia is meant to be a safehouse between the animated materiality of objects and the materiality of the body.

**The Backward View**

The title of the final chapter of *Pointed Firs*, "The Backward View," recalls the serial method of reading photographs, though not as much as a practically unknown facet of Jewett's fiction: like Faulkner, most of Jewett's stories belong to a single world. Beginning in the 1880s, Jewett begins reusing characters from earlier works, sometimes as integral parts of new stories and sometimes just in passing. The character Abby Martin, for example, appears in one story merely as a sister consoling her widower brother; four years later, readers learn in "The Queen's Twin" that she believes she is the spiritual twin of Queen Victoria, and has been separated only by chance and distance. According to Mrs. Todd, "She's been collectin' [pictures and articles of the Queen] an' cuttin' 'em out o' newspapers an' magazines time out o' mind…She's most covered her best-room wall now; she keeps that room shut up sacred as a meetin'-house!"[48] This story, published simultaneously in America and England, is manifestly about how reproducing words and images changes individuals' sense of place. More importantly for present purposes, it is the first work since *Pointed Firs* set in Dunnet Landing (Jewett would eventually write three more such stories). These stories reconstitute Jewett's novel as an open-ended series only limited by the narrator's discrimination – while the narrator's summer has ended, the number of incidents she can recount has not. They also connect the village of Dunnet Landing with Abby Martin's town of Fairfield, with all its characters like the lonely widow, Mrs. Bickford, who spends her days thinking of which of her three dead husbands deserves the single rose she has grown. These are the typical

characters inhabiting Jewett's stories, but they represent but a few of the people who *might* be found there. The generic New England names of her towns, names like Dulham, Ashford, and Dunnet Landing similarly suggest the possibility of other settings. These places, however, are not interchangeable, but geographically imprecise. A specific geographical location would only interrupt the transference of true feeling, as Jewett says to an inquiring thirteen-year old girl. Dunnet Landing "is not any real 'landing' or real 'harbor' but I am glad to think that you also know that beautiful stretch of seacoast country, and so we can feel when we think about it, as if we were neighbours."[49]

The weak links Jewett establishes between her stories are directly equivalent to the spaces between portraits Jewett says is best suited for a nostalgic attention to character. These spaces afford the careful reader of her work a place for educated and strongly felt guesses about characters' histories and backstories that are only hinted about elsewhere. The links point outward not only to contemporary scenes and characters, but backwards to earlier moments in Jewett's writing career, and earlier moments in characters' lives. Like the housemaid in "Martha's Lady," who sees her mistress's niece only twice over a span of fifty years, the reader is apt to encounter characters at significantly different points in their lives. By giving readers the sense that her characters' lives are ongoing even if they are not described at length in her work, Jewett suggests that author and reader should establish a kind of improvisational contract. She makes available to the reader a multitude of objects, images, and countrified speeches, but how successfully these things can become prisms for generating narrative is a matter of readerly attention. Inattentive readers/prospective tourists like the rich businessman in the 1886 story, "The King of Folly Island," learn nothing about how to think and feel from what they see because they do not come to get to know the people in their places;

they come solely to escape from the city and their own lives, from the listlessness, restlessness, and lack of interest that cosmopolites complained of and doctors devised cures for.[50]

*The Country of the Pointed Firs*, more than other Jewett works, presents through its narrator a perspectival model of vision for establishing and fixing attention on these kinds of objects. At the end of the novel, as the narrator leaves Dunnet Landing by boat, she sees the "little town…s[i]nk back into the uniformity of the coast, and bec[o]me indistinguishable from the other towns that looked as if they were crumbled on the furzy-green stoniness of the shore" (487). In this passage, reminiscent of Hardy's *Return of the Native* with its furze and long sightlines, the individuality of the village, earlier described as a series of "securely wedged houses," is largely dependent on the perspective one takes toward it. "When one really knows a village like this and its surroundings," the narrator writes, "it is like becoming acquainted with a single person" (377). Dunnet Landing acquires the status of the past self, and in the region at large, the unknown and "known territories" of the self find a place. That this place exists nowhere exactly like it does in this fiction, as Jewett often reminded her readers, is part of a strategy of foregrounding the process of getting to know one's past and how to look at it.

The arrival and departure of the narrator establish two different fields of vision and are thus instructive to compare. In the first chapter, the narrator describes herself entirely in the third person, thus tricking the first-time reader temporarily into believing the novel will center on someone other than the narrator. She is both "a lover of Dunnet Landing" and "a single passenger" landing on the steamboat wharf. In a novel that is prominently concerned with vision, the narrator's own vision is conspicuously absent; looking out at her and the approaching steamboat, however, are the houses. "[Making]

the most of their seaward view," the houses are "like knowing eyes that watched the harbor and the far sea-line beyond…" (377). In light of her own diminished subjectivity, the houses appear animated, lifelike. Like Tom Outland's discovery of the stone buildings of the Anisazi cliff-dwelling society in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, Jewett's narrator has found a place with a superior design, where form follows function to the letter. The spectators who watch her disembark are of a piece with the houses because they are the living embodiments of the village's nautical and rural traditions.

The narrator only gains a first-person perspective once she becomes the guest of Mrs. Todd, from whom she rents a room; the summer over, an hour to kill before her steamer will arrive, the narrator looks out from the schoolhouse, the private space where she had reflected, written and lived for the second half of the summer. The narrator "sat there thinking of things, and looking off to sea, and watching for the boat to come in sight." She looks out to far-off Green Island, then tracking to the houses of the village, then to the pastures beyond, where she sees Mrs. Todd herself. "At such a distance, one can feel the large, positive qualities that control a character" (486). What the narration leaves off from stating, as attentive readers may understand, is that the narrator's gaze reproduces in its movement her earlier bodily movement through the novel: beginning from the schoolhouse, where the daft old Captain Littlepage has told her outlandish stories of flickering, photographic or ghostlike men near the North Pole, out to Green Island to visit Mrs. Todd's mother and brother, back to the town to meet Susan Fosdick, out to the pastures to ride upcountry to Mrs. Todd's family reunion, and finally back to town again. The visual reproduction of the body's movement stands as a sign of what she has learned, of a vision embodied not only with fond memory but also with the capacity

to make new memories, to judge and select the things that are worthy of a future reminiscing.

As "the little coastwise steamer" pulls out of port, the narrator stands on deck, looking backwards at the town, in a position which itself looks back to the protagonist of Shelley's "Mont Blanc," who, rowing away and facing backwards, contemplates the mountain as it grows smaller and smaller. Jewett's narrator represents an early version of the pose that has supplanted Shelley's and has become the classic expression of nostalgic historical attention. She no longer moves away under her own power, but looks backwards while being carried away by steampower; the scene thus looks forward to the ending of *The Great Gatsby* ("so we beat on, borne back ceaselessly into the past") and to Benjamin's *Angelus Novus* ("he would like to pause for a moment so fair, to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed").[51]

It is pivotal that something disrupts this pose, however. While looking backwards here partially exhibits the narrator's newfound capacity to parse and recognize different natural phenomena, and to take pleasure in these things, the narrator's attention is shifted once she recognizes in passing a fisherman she met late on her own initiative (Mrs. Todd acts as the conduit for everyone else). Taciturn, crag-like Elijah Tilley, an inconsolable widower whose home is like a museum to his late wife, is precisely the type who lacks a voice and merges into the background of a Romantic painting or poem. As a representative of the picturesque, he is the figure that a tourist would be last to talk to on account of these kinds of aesthetic conventions; he is the ultimate instance of the figure the tourist incorporate into a naively nostalgic vision of the coastal village – and indeed fishermen are part of the photographic iconography of New England villages. Equipped with a knowledge of the "elaborate conventionalities" of Dunnet Landing, which

contributes an appreciation of scale, the cosmopolitan narrator's recognition is thus invested with an alternative aesthetic – an aesthetic that is the product of an education in the perspectival uses of nostalgia as a mode of reforming one's affective relations.

**History and Slow Nostalgia**

I conclude with a contemporary case. Like many nostalgic statements, nostalgia itself is the subject of the following note by anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo, written just before she fell to her death on a 1981 trip to conduct fieldwork in the Philippines. "Much of me wanted to write an article," she writes in her field journal, "a sort of nostalgia for a time when my nostalgia seemed to make more sense."[52] This sentiment is not shocking by itself – private expressions of longing and frustration in field journals are as old as anthropology itself. It only becomes upsetting when we consider that the note appears in Renato Rosaldo's well-known essay, "Imperialist Nostalgia." How should we read this moment? Is it heartbreaking, a case of a husband mirroring his wife's yearning for her younger nostalgic self in his own mournfully nostalgic citation of her journal? Or is it ethically irresponsible to open the memory of his dead wife up to political scrutiny by publishing her private longings? In ways that are not immediately clear, Renato Rosaldo's own display of nostalgic longing in an essay about the dangers of nostalgia seems somehow to be precisely the point. While imperialist nostalgia describes the modern compulsion to mourn the passing of what one has in fact destroyed, Renato Rosaldo's nostalgia for his dead wife seems to announce itself as different.[53]

With Jewett's poetics of nostalgic attention in mind, we can reconsider Renato Rosaldo's oddly placed nostalgia for his late wife. Throughout the essay, Rosaldo, in order to avoid nostalgia's capacity to divert attention from historical transformation, in

order to mourn fully the death of his wife, opens himself up to public censure as a way to vindicate or condemn his own role in the events surrounding his wife's death. In the face of a freak accident that offers no explanation, he sublimates his desire to do justice to her memory into the attempt to fix the injustices of the entire anthropological and colonial project in the Philippines through a sort of open tribunal. Any concern with who his dead wife was is transformed into a judgment on how each of them has practiced their profession. This switch from questions of identity and ontology to questions of ethics and adequate formal representation is characteristic of critical nostalgia. Rosaldo's grief of separation and nostalgic longing for reunion produces a moment where his wife can live side by side with him once again – on the published page, as public intellectuals before an audience.

What traditional critiques of nostalgia cannot account for that we find in this scene is an ethic of undefendedness. Lauren Berlant argues that this aspiration to make the world more workable by opening up oneself to it is a defining convention of the women's intimate public sphere; one legacy of the retrospective fiction of Jewett and Hopkins seems to be that it helps create a nostalgic subject capable of reflecting critically on her own nostalgia.[54] Thus, on closer inspection, the Rosaldos can be seen as continuing this tradition when they willingly open themselves up to examination. In *Knowledge and Passion*, at the same time as Michelle Rosaldo describes herself as "overwhelmed with gratitude and nostalgia" for the tribal people she has met through her profession, she firmly argues that she is "certain that this book embodies my desire to celebrate these Ilongots in the context of political and economic developments that seem more than likely to crush them – developments that I have not learned how to change."[55] By participating in this convention, subjects like the Rosaldos keep their past selves at

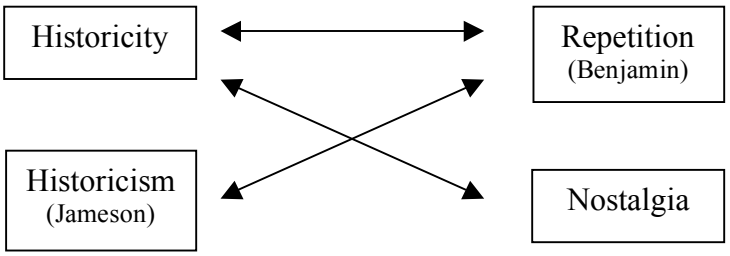
bay not as a way to disavow their own nostalgia but to display it as if in an act of confession, of being held accountable before their peers and before the context of history. By acknowledging the alliance of the nostalgic structure of feeling with economic destruction and aesthetic distortion, retrospective fiction attempts to subvert nostalgia's myopic attention to the self. We ought to be nostalgic instead for what we could have done to avoid destruction; we must imagine ourselves back into a lost self and those who have experienced this violence; knowing what we do now, we must work to imagine new modes of relating to historical loss that are commensurate with our own lives as well as the lives of others.[56]

We are now in a position to address one final problem, namely the postmodern opposition of nostalgia and history. In his next book, *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, Žižek recasts this debate by asking how it is that Fredric Jameson and Walter Benjamin could believe that diametrically opposed methods would each produce historical truth. How is it possible that Jameson's historicism is built on the impossibility of repetition, while Benjamin's dialectical image relies on the production of this very same repetition? For Žižek, the answer is to split repetition into good and bad forms – a good repetition that calls attention to the political formation of historical tradition, and a bad nostalgia that both creates room for the historicist's critical distance and obscures the place from which one conducts history. In order to establish critical distance, the historicist needs to be nostalgic in order for periodicity to make sense. Without nostalgia, history could not be written as the succession of one period after another because desire would repeatedly make itself felt. "The most succinct definition of historicism is therefore," he writes:

> historicism *minus* the unhistorical kernel of the Real—and the function of the nostalgic image is precisely to fill out the empty place of this exclusion, i.e. the blind spot of historicism. In other

> words, what the nostalgic image conceals is not the historical mediation but on the contrary the unhistorical traumatic kernel which returns as the Same through all historical epochs.[57]

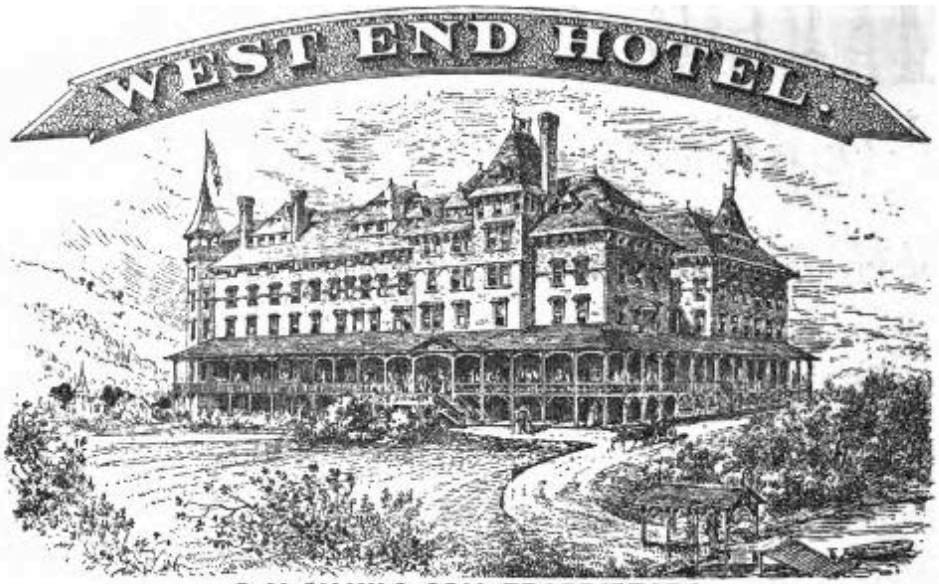
Thus historicity (the ability to detach oneself from the present and think critically about temporality) can be opposed to nostalgia, which for Žižek is a bad return to the same (as we have already seen) – as we see in the semiotic square he draws:




Historicism is supposedly necessary because the logic of nostalgia has occluded our sense of belonging to history. As a result, historicism aims to set aside a space where individuals can reassert their membership in tradition through a kind of elective reeducation. Benjamin's repetition, on the other hand, reverses this logic, because it is precisely the sameness associated with nostalgia that provides access to history. Unlike the recognition of one's own membership within a tradition, which characterizes historicist thinking, repetition promises to deliver historical understanding through the suspension of the historical continuum.

When nostalgia is no longer viewed as a compulsion to repeat a damaging way of feeling about loss, however, our view of this logic changes considerably. Nostalgia not only implies structurally a good form of nostalgia (here called repetition), as the logic of the semiotic square indicates; it serves as the means by which critical nostalgia thinks ethically about history. When nostalgia is imagined as a mode of visual and affective *attention*, it becomes easier to see that nostalgia is always defined in terms of its opposite, inattention. The tendency to split nostalgia – into good and bad forms of repetition, into

normal and pathological and critical and restorative forms – harms our understanding of exactly how nostalgia generates ethical and historical judgment.[58] Critical nostalgia is not founded on compulsion, but on the precondition of attachment: the nostalgic subject is constituted in the act of redressing the material remains of past experience for the violence tacitly condoned by inattentiveness. The danger of nostalgic inattention is a running concern that catalyzes the historical consciousness, both as a dangerous possibility running up through the present and as a challenge to the injuries performed in the past. Training in the historical mode of attention is expressly an effort to regain control of one's impressions by attaching them to the material deposits of the past. For Benjamin, whose writings will be important to my project, nostalgia is inseparably linked to the effort to escape from the centrifugal force of subjectivity through the centripetal action of affective investment in the object world and its traces of the past. Yet even here subjectivity provides the conditions of possibility for this effort at reinventing subjectivity.

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OPEN FROM JULY 1, TO SEPT. 15. BAR HARBOR, ME.



**Figure 1: Advertisement for a notable Maine summer hotel, 1890**[59]

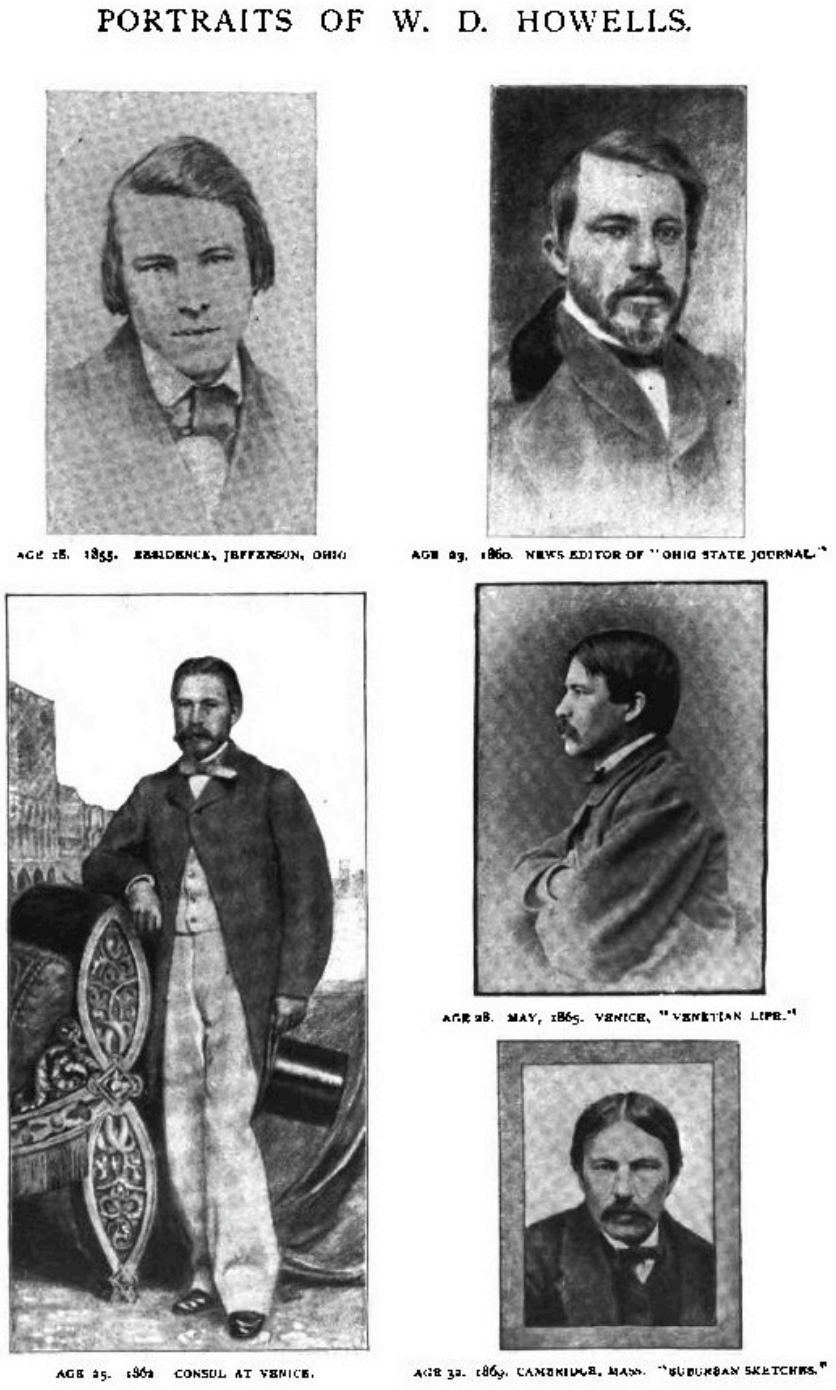





**Figure 2**

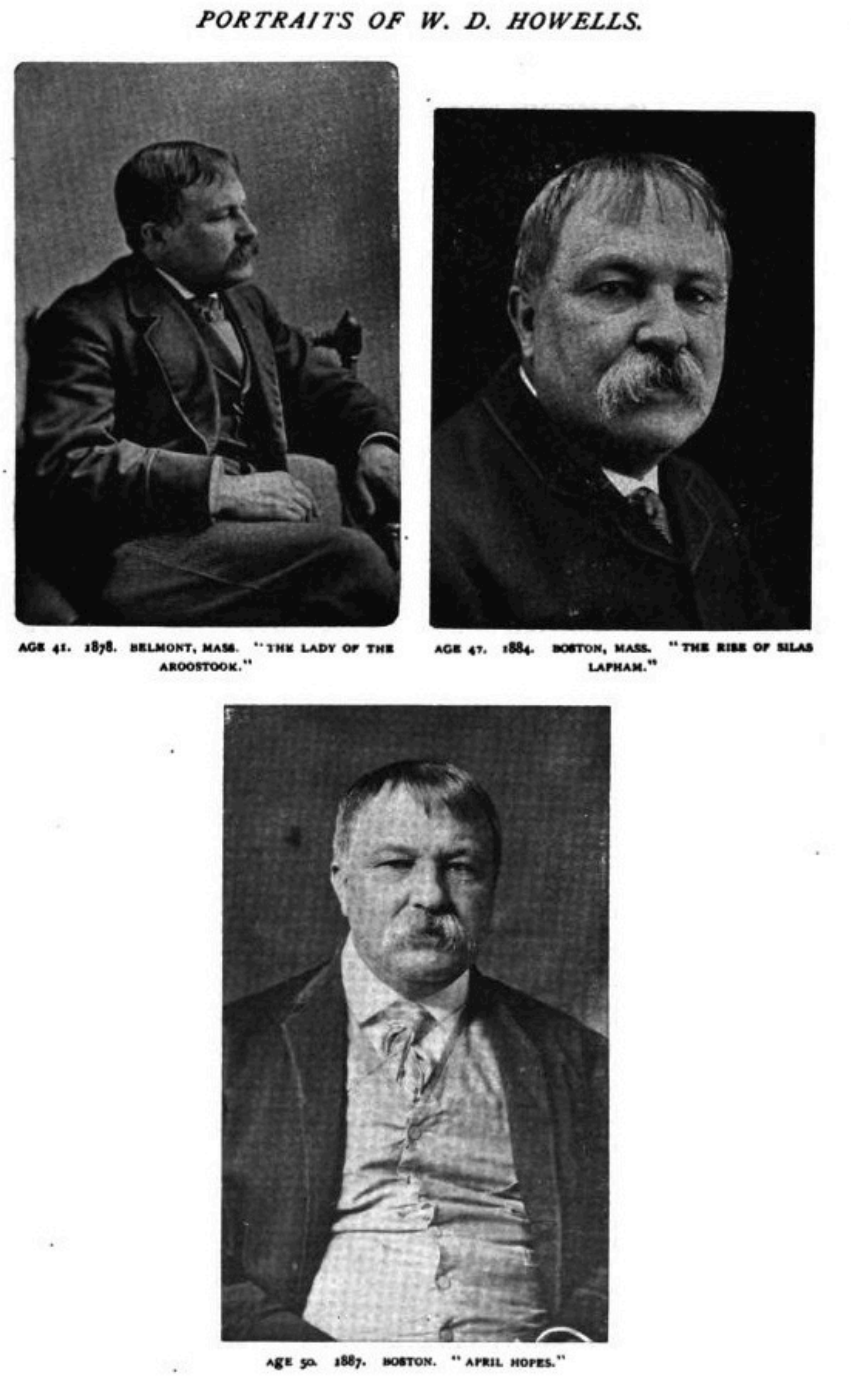


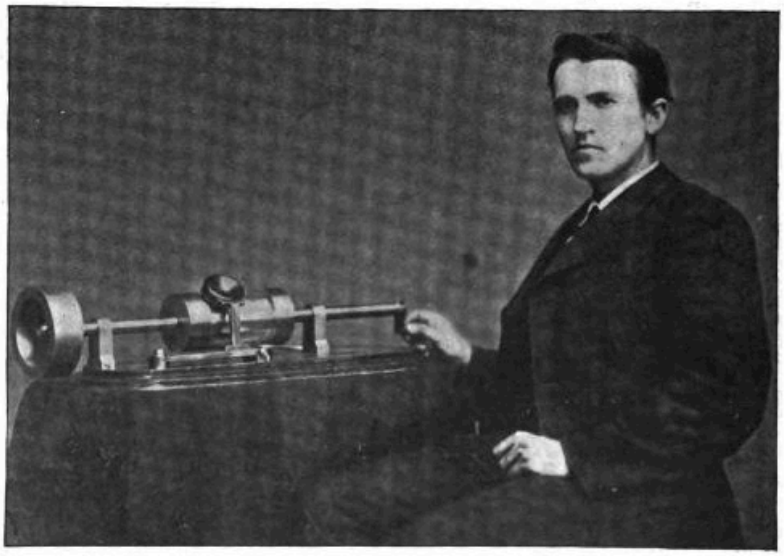



**Figure 2-3: William Dean Howells, from "Human Documents"**

THOMAS ALVA EDISON.

AGE 3. 1850.

AGE 13. 1860.

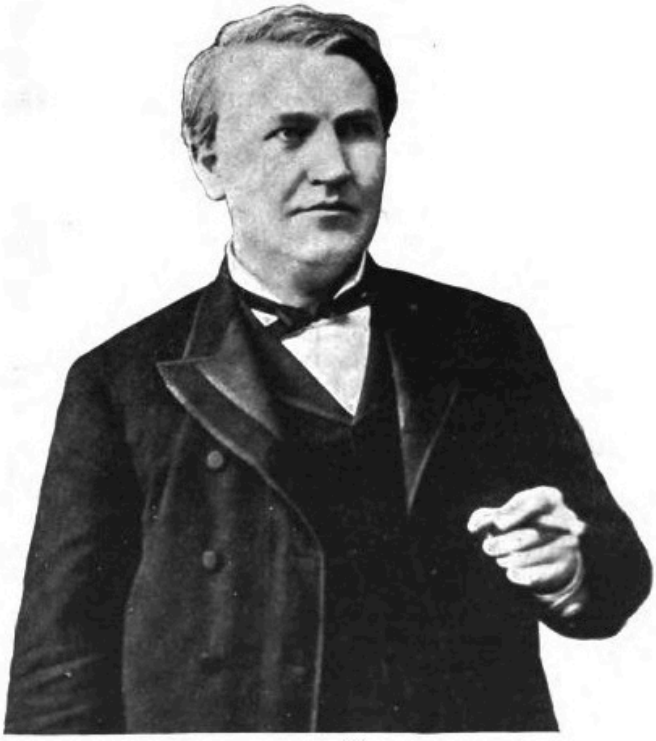


AGE 31. 1878. EDISON AND THE FIRST PHONOGRAPH.



**Figure 4**

AGE 44. 1891. EDISON AND THE IMPROVED PHONOGRAPH.



EDISON AT THE PRESENT DAY.



**Figure 4-5: Thomas Edison, from "Human Documents"**

# The Portraits of Alphonse Daudet

what has become of it. Many other sketches, medallions, drawings, and pictures made from Daudet between 1860 and 1870 must certainly have gone astray in the same manner, so true is it that more than half the portraits of a famous man are always lost to posterity. As to photographs of Daudet between twenty and thirty, they must have been very numerous, for this was the time of his first travels. Alfred Delvau was his companion at first, and has recorded their wanderings in a book called *Du Pont des Arts au Pont de Khel.* Then Daudet went to Algeria, where his impaired health made it necessary for him to spend a winter or two. Of this period of his life we have only a few photographs taken by his friend Carjat and other disciples of Daguerre. We reproduce a drawing after one of these, taken about 1867–1868, which shows the sharpened profile, the gazelle-like eyes, and the luxuriant locks of the exquisite writer who was then signing the *Lettres de mon Moulin*, one of his most perfect works.

ALPHONSE DAUDET
In 1876.
After a portrait by Feyen-Perrin.

ALPHONSE DAUDET.
After a drawing by De Liphart, 1882.





**Figure 6: From "Portraits of Alphonse Daudet" by Octave Uzanne (1902)**



**Figure 7: Early projecting device (~1892?) from *Animated Life* (1898)**

THE BIOGRAPH AS A RECORDER OF CURRENT EVENTS
Pulling down the old Star Theatre, Broadway, New York
By The American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., New York

**Figure 8: A Biograph Film projected in reverse**


JENKINS' SLOT-ACTION CABINET—LIFE-SIZE PICTURES.

**Figure 9: Jenkins's Phantoscope booths in Atlantic City, 1895**

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[1] The quote is from an unpublished manuscript of Jewett's essay, "Human Documents." MS Am 1743.21 (24), Houghton Library, Harvard University. It does not appear in this form in *McClure's Magazine* 1 (June 1893).

[2] "made to dream" is part of the other quotation from Flaubert's letters that Jewett wrote on her slip of paper. F.O. Matthiessen describes Jewett's writing room in *Sarah Orne Jewett*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1929. 80. In French, the quote reads:

> *Vouloir donner à la prose le rythme du vers (en la laissant prose et très prose) et écrire la vie ordinaire comme on écrit l'histoire ou l'épopée (sans dénaturer le sujet) est peut-être une absurdité. Voilà ce que je me demande parfois. Mais c'est peut-être aussi une grande tentative et très originale !* » lettre à Louise Colet du 27 Mars 1853, t. II, p. 287.

The other quote reads:

> *Le plus haut dans l'art, ce n'est ni de faire rire, ni de faire pleurer, ni de nous mettre en rut ou en fureur, mais d'agir à la façon de la nature, c'est-à-dire de* faire rêver. *Aussi les tres belles oeuvres ont ce caractere, elles sont sereines d'aspect et incomprehensibles; quant au procedes elles sont immobiles comme des falaises, houleuses comme l'Ocean, pleines de frondaisons, de verdures et de murmures comme des bois, tristes comme le desert, bleues comme le ciel.* » lettre à Louise Colet du 26 Août 1853. 307-308.
>
> The highest goal in art is not to make someone laugh, nor cry, nor to get them randy or angry, but to act in a natural fashion, which is to say, made to dream. So the most beautiful works have this character: they are serene and incomprehensible in appearance; as to the plot they are unmovable like cliffs, rough like the Ocean, full of foliage, greenery, and rustling like the forest, sad like the desert, blue like the sky. (translation, J.S.)

[3] I am echoing the language of Judith Butler's "Afterword" to *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Ed. David Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003. Esp. 467. In doing so, however, I want to try to excavate the optimistic side of loss, the way in which some losses continue to be remembered long after they have ceased to be grievable.

[4] See Howells, William Dean. "The New Historical Romances," *The North American Review* 171:529 (Dec. 1900): 935-48, especially 945-46. Howells contrasted retrospective fiction with circumspective fiction, aka the history found in the historical romance. This distinction seems strange to us in many ways, accustomed as we are to Scott's novels and Lukacs's definition of the historical novel: indeed, the classical historical novel generally tells the reader the provenance of the narrative within. Think of Scott's preface to *The Tale of Old Mortality*, which tells us that the historical narrative passed from "Old Mortality" to Peter Pattieson and finally to the amateur antiquarian, Jedediah Cleishbotham. We can only infer that Howells means something different by retrospective fiction: that it concerns itself with the recent past within living memory, that it is less all-encompassing because it continually reminds the reader of the presence of an outside observer or the effect of the past on a character in the present. Also see Allen, William Francis, "Historical Fiction," in *Essays and Monographs, Memorial Volume*. Boston: Geo. H. Ellis, 1890. 112-128.

[5] The metaphor here is borrowed from Nietzsche's *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Trans. Peter Preuss. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980 [1874]. 11. Nietzsche is quite clearly the continental philosopher who best expresses the subject's affective relation to history. Nietzsche's critical history is meant to "shatter and dissolve something to enable him to live," the critical history of the American writers I consider is considerably less violent, and can be seen more as a concerted effort to find an ethics of indexing and cataloguing the objects that are important to the individual – all in a mass culture that is becoming increasingly bewildering and taxing on the nerves.

[6] The proliferation of titles of literary works which have something to do with retrospection signals this shift: think of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, Walt Whitman's "A Backward Glance O'er Traveled Roads," or Sarah Orne Jewett's concluding chapter, "The Backward View," to *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Mark Twain sends his utilitarian Yankee back in time to King Arthur's court, and later, Edith Wharton will borrow Whitman's trope for the title to her autobiography, *A Backward Glance* (1934).

[7] For a list of the things people collected, preserved, and argued about, see Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*. New York: Vintage, 1991, and particularly part two. Quoted in Kammen, 146.

[8] Silas Weir Mitchell recommended that his female patients take up "word-sketching" to "regain health of mind."Mitchell, S. Weir. "Out-Door and Camp-Life for Women," in *Doctor and Patient*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1888. 157.

[9] The locus classicus for the medical history of nostalgia is Jean Starobinski's "The Idea of Nostalgia," *Diogenes* 54 (1966): 92-115.

[10] Kline, Linus Ward. "The Migratory Impulse vs. Love of Home," *The American Journal of Psychology* 10:1 (Oct. 1898): 1-81.

[11] This is Henry James's phrase for describing Jewett's fiction.

[12] Lauren Berlant argues that the function of the historical novel is to "embed the historical narrative in the intensities of affective life." See Berlant, Lauren. "Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event," *American Literary History* 20:4 (Winter 2008): 845-60.

[13] See Seltzer, Mark. *Bodies and Machines*. London: Routledge, 1992.

[14] Lears, T.J. Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformaiton of American Culture 1880-1920*. New York: Pantheon, 1981.

[15] Glazener, Nancy. *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Institution, 1850-1910*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997. 199-200. Glazener cites an editorial by Charles Dudley Warner. My citations to *The Country of the Pointed Firs* are from the Anchor Books edition.

[16] Sundquist "Realism and Regionalism." *The Columbia Literary History of the United States*. Ed. Emory Elliot. New York: Columbia UP, 1988. 509/

[17] Jewett, Sarah Orne. "Preface," *Deephaven*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1893.

[18] Ibid. The reference is to Book V of Plato's *Laws*. Jewett also uses this quote in letters to Miss Elizabeth McCracken, 28 December 1907, and to Louisa Dresel, 10 March 1893.

[19] The number of visitors is given in: *Public Documents of Maine: being the Annual Reports of the Various Public Officers and Institutions for the Year 1894* Vol. 1. Augusta: Burleigh & Flint, 1894. 33. The number

of hotels and cottages is listed in: *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics for the State of Maine 1887*. Augusta: Burleigh & Flint, 1888. 239.
[20] Jewett wrote 119 stories and 28 were in the first person. 15 of these 28 first person stories were written before 1881.
[21] Jewett, Sarah Orne. "Preface," in *The Poems of Celia Thaxter*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin & Co., The Riverside Press, 1896.
[22] Mark McGurl writes about this "aesthetic of absolute transcendence" (64). The possibility of non-Euclidean space "foregrounds the curious fact about fictional characters that their physical existence is realized in real space only as ink on a page, as collections of letters. Otherwise they are as invisible as spirits. From this substrate the character is 'raised' into a virtual three-dimensional existence that seems to leave behind its crudely material origins." See McGurl, Mark. "Social Geometries: Taking Place in Henry James." *Representations* 68 (1999): (65).
[23] See Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. 1893. New York: The Modern Library, 2001. (31). Jewett writes to one of her frequent targets, an audience of children: "it is not one's surroundings that can help or hinder – it is having a growing purpose in one's life to make the most of whatever is in one's reach." Jewett's articles, letters, and stories addressed to children testify to her concern with childhood as the adult's past and as a source for the present's future.
[24] Jewett, Sarah Orne. *The Country of the Pointed Firs* in *Sarah Orne Jewett: Novels and Stories*. New York: The Library of America, 1994. 429.
[25] Zizek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: an Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge: MIT P, 1991. 114
[26] Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*." Trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (1989): 12
[27] Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*. Trans. Daniel Russell. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969 [1960]. 119.
[28] Jewett, "Human Documents." *McClure's Magazine* 1 (June 1893): 16-18.
[29] "Human Documents," *McClure's Magazine* 5 (September 1895): 365. This short piece was written to advertise the forthcoming publication of a selection of the portraits, along with accompanying essays, in the second volume of "McClure's Magazine Library," entitled *Human Documents: Portraits and Biographies of Great Men of Today*. New York: S.S. McClure, 1895.
[30] "The Fall Announcements," *The Literary World* 17 (October 2, 1886): 332. "Advertisements," in *The Literary Year-Book and Bookman's Directory*. Ed. Herbert Morrah. London: George Allen, 1900. vii
[31] Scribner's began releasing the *Biographical Edition of the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* in 1908.
[32] "New Editions," *The Literary World*. (May 14, 1898): 156.
[33] Churchill, Winston. *The Celebrity: An Episode*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1897. 4.
[34] Jewett, "Human Documents."
[35] Jewett, "Looking Back On Girlhood." MS Am 1743.21 (24), Houghton Library, Harvard University.
[36] James, William *The Principles of Psychology*. Vol. 1. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1890. 423-424.
[37] James, 424.
[38] Jenkins, Charles Francis. *Animated Pictures: An Exposition of the Historical Development of Chronophotography, its Present Scientific Applications and Future Possibilities, and of the Methods and Apparatus Employed in the Entertainment of Large Audiences by means of Projecting Lanterns to Give the Appearance of Objects in Motion*. Washington, D.C.: C. Francis Jenkins, 1898. 106.
[39] Marey, Etienne-Jules. *Movement*. Trans. Eric Pritchard. London: William Heinemann, 1895. 103
[40] Barr, J. Miller. "Animated Pictures," *Appletons' Popular Science Monthly* 52 (December 1897): 177-188.
[41] The film of a man smoking a cigar, shown in reverse, is mentioned in a note in *The Photographic Times* of December 1897 and may refer in fact to the Lumière Bros. film "Card Game." The stills from the second film are from *Wilson's Photographic Magazine*. Ed. Edward L. Wilson. Vol. 38. New York: Edward L. Wilson, 1901. 473.
[42] Beard, George Miller. *American Nervousness* (1881). *Twentieth Century Practice: An International Encyclopedia of Modern Medical Science by Leading Authorities of Europe and America*. Ed. Thomas Stedman. Vol. 3. New York: William Wood & Co., 1895. 489.
[43] 490.
[44] "Editor's Table," *Appleton's Popular Science Months* 52 (December 1897): 265.

[45] "The Yellow Wallpaper" is of course the most famous critique of this method.
[46] In a letter to a Mrs. Ellis, Jewett recommends that the aspiring young writer "try a good deal of what Dr. Weir Mitchell calls word-sketching, writing down just what she has seen in a sunset or a look across the fields in a summer day – and carrying the sketch further into figure drawing: for instance, writing what she imagines to be the truth about an old woman who goes by down the street or somebody whom she has seen in the cars in the morning doing this with sympathy and all the understanding possible with humor and compassion together." Sarah Orne Jewett to Mrs. Ellis, n.d. Houghton Library.
[47] Mitchell, S. Weir. *Nurse and Patient, and Camp Cure*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Co., 1877. 69.
[48] Jewett, "The Queen's Twin," in *The Queen's Twin and Other Stories*. Boston and New York: Riverside Press and Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1899. 20.
[49] Jewett to Mary Mulholland, 23 December 1899
[50] Jewett, Sarah Orne. "The King of Folly Island," in *The King of Folly Island.* Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co. 1888.
[51] Fitzgerald's lines are ambiguous: does the boat beat on because people are rowing it, or is it motorized?
[52] Rosaldo, Renato. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon, 1989. 86.
[53] Rosaldo. 69.
[54] For the critique of Zizek's notion of fantasy as a defensive formation, I am indebted to Lauren Berlant's *The Female Complaint*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2008. 267.
[55] Rosaldo, Michelle. *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self & Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980. xiv.
[56] Jennifer Wenzel calls this "anti-imperialist nostalgia." This nostalgia, she writes, "acknowledges the past's vision of the future, while recognizing the distance and difference between the vision and the realities of the present." See Wenzel, Jennifer. "Remembering the Past's Future: Anti-Imperialist Nostalgia and Some Versions of the Third World," *Cultural Critique* 62 (Winter 2006): 15.
[57] Zizek, Slavoj. *Enjoy Your Symptom*. London: Routledge, 1992. 94.
[58] See Werman, David. "Normal and Pathological Nostalgia," *Journal of the American Psychoanalysis Association* 25:2 (1977): 387-98. Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.
[59] *Sherman's Bar Harbor Guide, Business Directory and Reference Book*. Bar Harbor: Bar Harbor Press Co., 1890. 86.