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The Country of the Pointed Firs (Classics You Should Know) (Volume 14)

Sarah Orne Jewett

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The Life Uncovered in A Lonely, Hard Fishing Village..

The Country of the Pointed Firs is an 1896 short story sequence by Sarah Orne Jewett which is considered by some literary critics to be her finest work. Henry James described it as her "beautiful little quantum of achievement." Ursula K. Le Guin praises its "quietly powerful rhythms."

Because it is loosely structured, many critics view the book not as a novel, but a series of sketches; however, its structure is unified through both setting and theme. The novel can be read as a study of the effects of isolation and hardship experienced by the inhabitants of the decaying fishing villages along the Maine coast.

Sarah Orne Jewett, who wrote the book when she was 47, was largely responsible for popularizing the regionalism genre with her sketches of the fictional Maine fishing village of Dunnet Landing.

Like Jewett, the narrator is a woman, a writer, unattached, genteel in demeanor, intermittently feisty and zealously protective of her time to write. The narrator removes herself from her landlady's company and writes in an empty schoolhouse, but she also continues to spend a great deal of time with Mrs. Todd, befriending her hostess and her hostess's family and friends.

In its elegantly constructed sketches, a worldly, anonymous writer spends the summer in a tiny Maine fishing village where she hopes to find peace and solitude. As she gains the acceptance and trust of her hosts, the community's power and complexity are slowly revealed.

While its episodes portray the difficulty and loneliness of rural life, they also display its dignity and strength, particularly as expressed in the bonds between women: mothers, daughters, and friends. Written during a time of rapid change and national conflict, surprisingly modern in its treatment of character and its literary techniques, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* addresses the delicate and uncertain art of understanding others.

About the Author: Sarah Orne Jewett (September 3, 1849 – June 24, 1909) was an American novelist, short story writer and poet, best known for her local color works set along or near the southern seacoast of Maine. Jewett is recognized as an important practitioner of American literary regionalism.

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