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Jewett's Natural History of Sexuality

Travis M. Foster

Sarah Orne Jewett's 1884 bildungsroman, *A Country Doctor*, can be summed up quickly. On the cusp of death, an alcoholic mother returns to her hometown and leaves her infant daughter, Nan Prince, in her own mother's care. Nan's grandmother and the local doctor then respectively provide Nan a loving, largely happy childhood. During her adolescence, Nan declares her intention to become a doctor rather than a wife, a plan she succeeds in fulfilling by the novel's conclusion.

Yet a majority of the text seems unconcerned with plot, a fact that led reviewers, as well as Jewett herself, to conclude that qua novelist she failed utterly.¹ "I understand that 'The Country Doctor' [sic] is of no value as a novel," Jewett wrote to a friend, "but it has many excellent ideas."² Put differently, even if the text fails as a bildungsroman, it succeeds as a case study—an extended inquiry into the "ideas" explaining Nan Prince's unconventional life through which Jewett explores human deviance and variation more generally. Time and again, Jewett departs from the plot of her heroine's childhood in favor of extended conceptualizations wherein multiple authority figures provide their own versions of the same theory for Nan's difference or *queerness*—a term I'm using here to indicate Nan's implied homosexuality, her masculinity, and the radical openness of possibility that comes from her rejection of marriage and its prescriptions. In describing Nan as queer and therefore linking theories about her and her sensibilities to the field we now know as queer theory, I follow both narrow notions of queerness as same-sex desire and deviation from compulsory heterosexuality's gender assignments, and also recent academic—and, indeed, nineteenth-century—uses of the term referring most frequently to possibilities and practices deviating from the norm.

For twenty-first-century readers, the novel's explanation for queer difference might very well seem like an all too familiar and reductive naturalization of deviance: we are told that Nan has been allowed to grow "as naturally as a plant grows," following the "law of her nature"; she is, in short, deviant

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because nature made her that way.³ Yet the novel stymies an essentialist account of nature as the stable foundation in a cause-and-effect relationship, upon which one's fate depends. Instead, Jewett develops ideas about natural processes—and the temporalities in which those processes unfold—that depart from what Sam See aptly refers to as “the ideological fiction of nature as passive and unchanging that still permeates critical theory today.”⁴ As we will see, nature for Jewett describes an ecology that places life, human and otherwise, into a crisscrossing, fluid, often imperceptible relation.

In this article I ask what happens if we consider Jewett, who spent most of her adult life at the epicenter of New England intellectual culture, as a pivotal figure in the Western history of theorizing sexuality, and her novel as a significant document in the history of theorizing sexual and gender deviation, perfectly poised in between the sea changes of evolutionary biology and Freudian psychoanalysis. Jewett's fiction tends to get treated within a history of representing queerness, a focus that occludes her contributions to the history of ideas for understanding queer life and queer flourishing. Rather than understanding her as a historian and theorist in her own right, Jewett has been made to speak as evidence for the histories and theories of others. Yet positioning Jewett within the history of queer ideas reveals her to be among the first to apply Darwinian insights to questions that psychoanalysis would later take up about human sexual behavior and expressive variation. By exposing an undercurrent of what we might call ecological understanding that runs through twentieth-century models for the formation of gay identity, Jewett invites us to recognize Darwin's subtle influence on Freudian thought and offers an alternative model to conceptualizations of sexual behavior that rest on interior subjectivity.

To make this case, I will first trace how Jewett connects her heroine to plants and plant life, and thereby develops a model for nature's influence that incorporates Darwinian notions of cause and effect as a dispersed, rather than a strictly genealogical, relationship. I then place Jewett alongside Sigmund Freud, arguing that Jewett's ecological model for queerness and other forms of human difference can highlight registers of psychoanalytic thought that too often recede to the background. This reveals, I suggest, the often elided ways that psychoanalysis offers a model for how what is external—natural forces, social meanings, cultural processes, other people—interacts with and circulates alongside what is internal.

I.

From the opening pages, Jewett depicts her heroine as a plant: not merely natural but, somehow, closer and more intimately aligned with nature than her fellow humans. Nan Prince's dying mother delivers her as an infant to her own mother's Maine hometown on a November day that feels "like spring," such that "the buds of the willows had been beguiled into swelling a little."⁵ Her rural Maine upbringing, the doctor's insistence upon free-range child-rearing practices, and her vulnerable status as an orphan—all place her "closer to life."⁶ The result is that Nan makes "friends with the disordered company of ladies-delights and periwinkles," is on "familiar and friendly" terms with apple trees, experiences periods of "hibernation like the winter of a plant," and is described as "wild" at least fifteen separate times.⁷ Depicting her heroine as intimately associated with the plants around her, Jewett integrates Nan's characteristics, growth, and behavior patterns into the unfolding processes of biological life. Jewett thereby foregrounds not her heroine's queer subjectivity, but rather her queer ontology, emphasizing a state of being that stems from and functions within both human and nonhuman influences, constraints, and growth trajectories.

Jewett depicts development as a dispersed and nonlinear process. Her tomboy heroine grows from queer childhood into queer adulthood along two simultaneous tracks: on the one hand, through vertical genealogy, in which genetic predispositions lead to certain behaviors in causal chains of connection; and through horizontal influence on the other hand, in which slight, often imperceptible causes interact with beings in dispersed assemblages of relation. According to Nan's guardian, Dr. Leslie, children "up to seven or eight years of age are simply bundles of inheritances," vertically acquired via genetic transmission at conception. Later, however, "individuality" prevails, where "individuality" signifies not atomized personhood, but an open path into nature's abundant variation. Nan's particular individuality has been given broader latitude for influence and development because, as the doctor continues, Nan is "a child of the soil. . . not having been clipped back or forced in any unnatural direction."⁸ Nurturing Nan's plantish wildness means exposing her—and allowing her to expose herself—to the vertical influences of internal nature and the dispersed influences of external nature-culture. Thus, while Nan's past, present, and future here unfold through the linear process of aging, the gradual yet inexorable passing of years and generations

also emerge simultaneously through deeper temporal influences that contract and elongate according to unpredictable, asynchronous movements and processes, traceable only partially and retrospectively.

In the novel's concluding chapter, Jewett's narrator therefore accounts for Nan's trajectory into adulthood through a logic of retro-causality: "Her early life was spreading itself out like a picture, and as she thought it over and looked back from year to year, she was more than ever before surprised to see the connection of one thing with another, and how some slight acts had been the planting of seeds which had grown and flourished long afterward."⁹ Even as the passage speaks from a specific vantage point in time, it disperses rather than concentrates the past. Jewett's phenomenological rendering of the past as a picture removes her heroine's childhood from genealogical time, as if the past can be represented by an image that will shift depending on the shifting perspective of the present. In so doing, she disassociates compositions of human meaning—the stories we use to explain who we are and why—from the teleologies of cause and effect.

To be sure, Nan's ultimate path towards becoming a spinster and the novel's eponymous country doctor remains the only outcome that works within its narrative logic. From the very first page, Jewett's narration—through which the child expresses, acts upon, and realizes her queer desires—makes this outcome at once tenable and, even more radically, desirable. Yet the novel's notions of natural logic or illogic run directly counter to the general conventions of novelistic chronology, opening the necessary possibility of plural outcomes, none of which could have been determined in advance. Moreover, even as the story closes with Nan as both doctor and spinster, the novel permits these identifiers to be read as particularly capacious: here "doctor" serves as a stand-in for any particular professional calling a woman of this period might have had (this includes "writer"), and "spinster" serves as a wonderfully open-ended mode of living which, as Peter Coviello puts it, is characterized by "the multitude of ways a small world might be knit into coherence [. . .] in other than strictly hetero-familial terms."¹⁰

The point here is not, as Stacy Alaimo argues in her analysis of the novel, that "women's domestic confinement is [. . .] 'unnatural,'" but instead that any overly homogenous outcome—any restriction in natural variation—is what would be unnatural.¹¹ Thus, when Nan reassures an interlocutor who is skeptical of her decision to pursue medicine and spinsterhood that "nobody persuaded me into following such a plan; I simply grew toward it," Jewett

implies that she could just as easily have grown otherwise. Jewett uses the novel to begin crystallizing an alternative model of temporality and futurity in which cause and effect operate intransitively.¹² Jewett fashions the future not as “the precipitate of acts we can directly trace,” as Sarah Ensor puts it in an essay on Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), but instead as “the result of processes and conditions more entangled and polydimensional than we typically allow ourselves to acknowledge.”¹³ To borrow from Jewett’s narrator, the future toward which life grows is that which leaves us “more than ever before surprised.” Or, if we borrow the word Jewett uses to describe how Nan’s wildness affects her text’s most hetero-familial oriented young man, we might say that the future is “bewildering.”¹⁴

In this sense, Jewett predates Freud as a theorist of childhood development and she anticipates a temporal argument about queer children that has only recently been articulated. As Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley put it, the queer child remains “caught between the future and the future anterior”; she can only ever have been queer because her “queerness is assumed to be incompatible with her future.”¹⁵ To the extent that the queer child has “no established forms to hold itself in the public, legal field,” writes Kathryn Bond Stockton, it does not exist, which makes queer childhood an experiential phenomenon that can only be signified after the fact. Stockton calls this a “backward birthing mechanism,” which makes “the hunt for the roots of queerness a retrospective search for amalgamated forms of feelings, desires, and physical needs.”¹⁶ Yet given the way these critics focus primarily on a twentieth-century history, they hinge such retrospection on the existence of established adult forms—queer subject positions—from which queer childhood can be retroactively reconstructed. While we can debate the degree to which Jewett, in 1884, also had access to these subject positions, what is clear is that in *A Country Doctor*, whether through active resistance or blithe ignorance, she does not grant her heroine even the fiction of an identitarian foothold.

Jewett instead imagines queerness as a roomy endpoint that originates in roomy beginnings. Nan’s queerness—or, put differently, the naturalness of her queer outcome—lies not simply in a biological predisposition or an inherited paradigm, but in an ontological process that erodes the uneasy and, for Jewett, unnatural tension we sometimes place between constructivist and essentialist worldviews. Likewise, the origin of her queerness lies not in the singularity of a biological gene or psychogenetic response to childhood

trauma, but in an impossible-to-quantify, largely unidentifiable range of influences or “slight acts” that mindlessly and without direction produce and multiply differences.¹⁷ As the narrator puts it, Nan belongs to a “class of women who are a result of natural progression and variation.”¹⁸

Nan was neither born deviant, nor does she make herself deviant; rather, she becomes—and is always becoming—deviant, impelled toward an open future and stemming from an origin that itself is scattered and diffuse, existing neither *ex nihilo* nor through chains of unbroken descent. For Jewett, this process is neither exclusively subjective nor entirely social, not strictly so at least, but instead what we might call *ecological*. To return to Jewett's depiction of the past “spreading itself out like a picture,” the novel theorizes origin as a dispersed yet interrelated variety of differences that, as with many of Freud's analyses of the psyche, ought to be drawn aslant linear cause-and-effect timelines of human development.

II.

Up to this point, I have been arguing that Jewett uses *A Country Doctor* to develop a model for deviance that links the social and the natural into webs of causality that can only ever be apprehended after the fact and, even then, only partially. I want now to turn to what, given Jewett's insistence on the impossibility of predetermined outcomes, might seem to comprise a paradoxical element of her thought: the way that Jewett's theories of queer origin fold into her political desire for a world that opens ever more space for ever more varieties of difference. For how does one fashion a notion of something as teleological as increase in the absence of vertically linear production and reproduction? Doesn't this desire for queer expansion—for more and greater variations of difference—believe the fundamental open-endedness of Jewett's inquiry?

In the novel's closing pages, Jewett's narrator obliquely addresses these questions by echoing Darwinian notions of fitness:

*He [Dr. Leslie] believed this class [Nan and those like her] to be one that must inevitably increase with the higher developments of civilization. . . . The greater proportion of men and women everywhere will still instinctively and gladly accept the high duties and helps of married life; but as society becomes more intelligent it will recognize the fitness of some persons, and the unfitness of others, making it impossible for these to accept such responsibilities and obligations, and to dignify and elevate home life instead of degrading it.*¹⁹

By replacing survival of the fittest, a phrase about which Darwin himself was ambivalent, with survival of multiple fitnesses, and refusing to specify her “others” in terms beyond what they ought not do, Jewett imagines non-normative sensibilities and expressions to increase along an evolutionary timetable generated by abundant variation. Coming as it does, after over two-hundred pages that warn against anticipated outcomes, Jewett’s future arrives through the evolutionary progression of time rather than interventionist politics.²⁰ So doing, Jewett builds on the post-Linnaean association between botany and sexuality, calling upon botanical values in which new behaviors, appearances, and even species are not only objects of excitement and interest, but also an eagerly anticipated production of variety.²¹

Intelligent societies, Jewett suggests, become more so when they treat their human variations as they do their plant variations. Jewett’s emphasis on the value of alterity and deviation thus anticipates the feminist and queer readers of Darwin who see his writing as a resource for non- or anti-teleological models of social change. Darwinian evolution, as Elizabeth Grosz depicts it, offers to social politics a model of the future that “emerges from the interplay of a repetition of cultural/biological factors and the emergence of new conditions of existence: it must be connected, genealogically related, to what currently exists, but is capable of a wide range of possible variation.”²² Such a politics invites human action, even if such action amounts largely to clearing space so that, to return to Dr. Leslie’s terms, life won’t be “clipped back or forced in any unnatural direction.”²³ Yet such efforts do not and cannot presume to know an endpoint in advance.

In Jewett’s model for social change, “society becomes more intelligent” when it emerges within, rather than against, an ecological approach to life that accounts phenomenologically for ever-emerging variation. Hence elsewhere in the novel, Jewett uses the verb “conspires”—in the sense of breathing with—to mark the way that society works with rather than against the abundance of the external world; and in a similar way she uses “keep near” to mark the impediments society places on natural variations.²⁴ Increasing deviance, Jewett thereby suggests, depends on welcoming an intimacy between humans, the material world, and the interpenetrating influence of agents otherwise not recognized as such, and, relatedly, vulnerably breathing in and with life (conspiring) rather than defensively and hermetically guarding against it by keeping near. Put differently, increasing such variability depends on maximizing conditions for the permeability of the subject, such

that bodies and beings, surfaces and psyches, might exist in co-penetrating relationship with the external world. Such an intimacy—call it sexuality—challenges contemporary politics with regards to beings, bodies, and materiality. Dana Luciano, following Deleuze and Guattari, describes this sort of a sexuality as “molecular”: “The molecular names a level on which ‘sexuality’ breaks free not simply of the obligation to be reproductive (that is, of children) but also of the perpetual reproduction of a field marked out by the distinction between idealized and deviant sexualities, that locked-down game of opposition in which manifestations of queerness as Other ultimately come to bolster the normativity they supposedly subvert.”²⁵ As a model for social change, Jewett’s concept of an intelligent society points away from projects that would separate normativity from anti-normativity or presume to know in advance what might differentiate one from the other. Indeed, at her most utopic, she may be imagining a world in which these distinctions lose their explanatory power all together.

Jewett’s is not, therefore, the sort of queer ecology we have been recently seeing, in which an empirical-biological account of nature’s radical sexual diversity points back to the positivist truth of natural variety—what Myra Hird calls “the abundant queer behavior of most of the living matter on this planet.”²⁶ Jewett focuses instead on the ambient ecology of this variant matter and the temporal movements through which relational proximities create more abundance, more life. Grounding her ideas in the porous interplay between inside and outside, self and other, Jewett conspires with the unknown future in order to render the present stranger, less predictably bound to established form. In this sensual, biophilic intimacy with life, this love for the always-already-present strangeness of the planet, Jewett affirms an ever-different future for her heroine and, I like to think, for herself.

III.

Readers familiar with 1990s queer theory will already have noted that to travel with Jewett along her conceptualization of queer life is to betray the repeated and adamant contention that any inquiry into gay origins remains not only doomed from the outset, but also decidedly treacherous to queer people and queer potential. The queer theory canon affixes two highly compelling warning labels to such etioloical quests: first, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues, the search remains perilously and, perhaps, inextricably linked to “a hygienic Western fantasy of a world without any more homosexuals in

it"; and, second, as Diana Fuss, Leo Bersani, and Lee Edelman all argue, the search for origins confines inquiry within a tautological trap in which the terms of the question predetermine the range of the results.²⁷

My aim here is not to deny these perils. Indeed, Jewett's compulsive structure, in which multiple authority figures repeat the same explanation for queer origins, suggests that even as she engages in her own etiological investigation and explanatory narrative, she remains all too aware that her ideas and her autobiographical heroine will likely be misunderstood, misused, and scorned. Moreover, we might interpret her narrative structure of repetition as a nervous overcompensation, indicating that Jewett shares Sedgwick's conviction that "there is no unthreatened, unthreatening home for a concept of gay origins."²⁸ In this light, we can see Jewett's as a risky endeavor—one where she situates herself and her heroine at that precarious horizon where non-knowledge or new knowledge teeters between provisional understanding, on the one hand, and impossibility, on the other.

Even so, it is to our benefit that Jewett undertakes the risk. And if tentativeness motivates Jewett's circular, repetitive narrative form, vigor and clarity emerge on the other side as one of that form's most pronounced effects. Reading Jewett's surprisingly emphatic novel alongside 1990s queer scholarship thus helps to reveal latent energies seeping through the cracks of its justifiable and seemingly airtight skepticism. Take, as the clearest example, the closing of Sedgwick's fourth axiom, which warns us away from etiological inquiry: ". . . there is no unthreatened, unthreatening conceptual home for the concept of gay origins. We have all the more reason, then, to keep our understanding of gay origin, of gay cultural and material reproduction, plural, multi-capillaried, argus-eyed, respectful, and endlessly cherished."²⁹ After a thoroughly developed and, in her breathtakingly Sedgwickian way, utterly unimpeachable warning against etiological investigations, it is as if Sedgwick slyly winks before going on to prescribe not only how we might conduct the work she has just advised us never to conduct, but also to couple such an inquiry with an anti-homophobic, queer-affirmative analysis of "gay cultural and material reproduction."³⁰ Perhaps, I'd like to speculate, Sedgwick cannot help but extend her invitation. It is as if she wants to say that 1990 might not be the best time or place to tackle phobic origin narratives with affirmative, worldmaking ones and predetermined outcomes with, in her closing words, "endlessly cherished" investigations.³¹ Maybe, though, 2015 is; or, even better, 1884.

The chronologically impossible argument I'm making here is in keeping with Jewett's representation of Nan Prince as an asynchronous figure, moving between the regional and the cosmopolitan and between the pre-modern and the modern, a representational model that resists any overly neat passing of time, with its sharp distinctions between past, present, and future.³² It is in the spirit of this anti-chronology that I will now suggest how Jewett can be seen to take up Sedgwick's invitation and, in the process, allow us to read her novel alongside "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920), Sigmund Freud's hugely influential narrative of lesbian girlhood and queer origin. In this case study, which Jacques Lacan refers to as Freud's "famous case of a female homosexual," we find the first full psychoanalytic articulation of the theory's explanatory grounds for the longstanding and still pervasive association between female homosexuality, misandry, and penis envy.³³ My argument, however, does not quite track the neat contrast between Jewett and Freud that this description implies. Rather, after tracing their undeniable distinctions, I will suggest that Jewett helps us to reread Freud's case study apart from its ostensible emphasis on psychic and genital interiority, so as to recognize how Freud too seems to place sexual and gender deviance within a Darwinian, ecological process that builds on, interacts with, and generates variation.

Such a progression from Darwin to Jewett to Freud requires a different model of influence than we typically assume, one in which each figure is not so much the parent of a given set of ideas, but is instead a node around which ideas circulate or, put differently, a record keeper for ideas in circulation. Influence, in this sense, might be something akin to Jewett's notion of origin—that which is dispersed and imperceptible. It might need to be assembled after the fact through the crisscrossing entanglement of ideas rather than the empirical accounting of bookshelves. The advantage of such a model is not only that it is very likely to be closer to the truth than any neatly ordered genealogy of the ideas possessed by individual figures, but also that it allows us to recuperate the centrality of seemingly minor figures like Jewett, who Freud likely never read, but who nevertheless captured a set of circulating ideas that, if we look for them, become discernible in psychoanalytic writing and thought.

IV.

First published in 1920, a full thirty-six years after *A Country Doctor*, Sigmund Freud's case study, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality

in a Woman,” similarly traces the development of a young girl—famously, a “beautiful and clever girl of eighteen, belonging to a family of good standing.”³⁴ Though Nan Prince and Freud’s “clever girl” each deviate from compulsory heterosexuality in distinct ways, and though both authors strive to account for their heroine’s respective differences, Jewett’s novel barely touches on her heroine’s romantic affections. We hear only once that Nan has developed an intense attachment to an elder girl. Freud’s unnamed heroine, on the other hand, describes a long history of desire for women and “[can] not conceive of any other way of being in love.”³⁵

Freud traces the girl’s homosexuality back to her thirteenth or fourteenth year, and to a Vienna playground where the teenager developed, “according to general opinion, exaggeratedly strong affection for a small boy, not quite three years old,” which strong affection then morphed, shortly thereafter, into an abiding romantic interest in mothers and potential mothers.³⁶ The birth of a baby brother, some three years later, subsequently transforms this homosexual inclination into an all but permanent homosexual object choice and identification. This is because, Freud tells us, the patient’s homosexuality corresponds to her repressed incestuous desire to have a male child, specifically “her *father’s* child and an image of *him*,” and this repression has led her to become “[f]uriously resentful” against both the father and “men altogether.”³⁷ The analysis breaks down, Freud insists, due to the girl’s apparent contentment with her homosexuality and her resentment toward her analyst qua male. Freud had begun the treatment after the girl’s father entrusted him to restore “a normal state of mind,” but by the case study’s end he is protesting that psychoanalysis can scarcely be trusted “to solve the problem of homosexuality” while at the same time lamenting the “disturbing state of affairs” in which psychoanalysis cannot even adequately predict homosexual outcomes.³⁸ His work, he demurely remarks, is merely a tool for backwards narration, for connecting dots from present effects to psychic causes.

I dwell on this summary to underscore what I take to be an obvious point: Jewett and Freud could not be any more different. And indeed, though we might quickly list off stark contrasts by the dozen, two seem particularly relevant to this inquiry’s attempt to position both accounts in an overlapping region between the history of sexuality and the reconceptualization of nature. First, and perhaps most apparently, we see quickly that Freud uses his case study to amplify the turn to homosexuality as a stable identity and

subject position, while Jewett's insistence on queer ontology suggests that *A Country Doctor*, to the extent that the novel may already be aware of sexological knowledge, positions itself against the so-called taxonomic turn. Second, most readers would, I imagine, find it difficult to locate in "Psychogenesis" anything approaching the affirmative energies driving Jewett's depiction of the plantish Nan Prince. This point becomes even more accentuated when we consider this case study alongside Freud's other treatments of homosexuality, notably in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), where we observe a lingering over the bisexual universal and the impossibility for any sexual configuration, heterosexuality notwithstanding, to escape perversion—a fact that leads Tim Dean and Christopher Lane, in their edited volume *Psychoanalysis and Homosexuality*, to their claim that Freud "effectively 'queers' all sexuality."³⁹

The "Psychogenesis" case study, however, seems all too eager to sympathize with the phobic attitudes of the father, "an earnest, worthy man," over the "spirited" resistance of the daughter, who "was in fact a feminist" and who "had developed a pronounced envy for the penis."⁴⁰ No wonder, then, that *Psychoanalysis and Homosexuality's* only sustained analysis of "Psychogenesis," H. N. Lukes's "Unrequited Love: Lesbian Transference and Revenge in Psychoanalysis," departs starkly from the volume's impulse to recuperate Freud in the name of antihomophobic theory, using the case study instead to depict the lesbian analysand as the categorical limit of such a recuperation, the liminal figure who thwarts Freud and forces him to return to the more familiar terrains of heterosexuality and male homosexuality.⁴¹

Potentially the most chilling moment in Freud's case study is its concluding paragraph, which provides all the evidence we need for Sedgwick's fear that etiological inquiry will always and necessarily be attended by the hygienic fantasy of a world freed of its homosexuals. After disavowing psychoanalysis as the field for solving the problem of homosexuality, Freud leaves "the rest to biological research," generally and, specifically, to the glandular experiments of Eugen Steinach.⁴² Contrasting the ineffectiveness of psychoanalysis when it comes to "effecting a modification of inversion" with the "remarkable transformations that Steinach has effected," Freud relocates the father's initial desire to see his daughter cured by psychoanalytic psychotherapy to his preference for the removal of her "hermaphroditic ovaries" so that single-sex ones might be grafted in their stead.⁴³ Whether psychogenic or somatic, the causes here—and, thus, the solutions—come primarily from

internal sources that emerge along a macro scale: from multi-sexed ovaries, from suppressed incestual desire, from the major events that shift and upend nuclear family configurations. They do not, as they do in Jewett's narrative, come from a multifarious blend of internal and external touches, the slightness of which render them all but imperceptible.

Or do they? Reading Freud alongside Jewett brings to the fore a different sort of case study, one invested in the phenomenological network of early-twentieth-century Vienna, and allows us to question whether the projects of scholars such as Sharon Marcus and Peter Coviello, who work to read a nineteenth-century history of sexuality unscripted by sexological narratives, might also help us to rethink the twentieth-century epicenter of those very paradigms.⁴⁴ Might we take up Marcus's curiosity about "what remains to be seen if we proceed without Oedipus, without castration, without the male traffic in women, without homophobia and homosexual panic"—and, I would add, without penis envy or any notion that the love of women must always stem from the hatred of men? And might such an analysis constitute not merely a historicist agenda for reading pre-twentieth-century sexualities, but also a way to read the past into various historical presents so as to trace what Eve Sedgwick terms the "unrationalized coexistence" of contrasting models for understanding and categorizing behavior?⁴⁵ That is, by treating Jewett not merely within the history of representations of queerness, as she has been treated, but also within the history of the conceptualization and theorization of queerness, as she has not, might we refashion our genealogies such that psychoanalysis begins to look a little differently, shedding light on details that might otherwise go unnoticed?

Doing so reveals "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" to point—perhaps unwittingly—toward an ecology for the flourishing of queer life, one that draws our attention to the effects of *fin de siècle* Vienna on Freud's unnamed 18-year-old. As John H. Gagnon notes in his admirable attempt to craft a biography for Freud's "beautiful and clever girl," Vienna not only witnessed a host of erotic theater, literature, and fine arts during this time, but also was constituted through a density of proximate ethnic and religious differences that proliferated sexual desire: "The cross-cutting margins between ethnic groups and social classes, Jew and non-Jew, Austrian, Czech, Bohemian, and Hungarian, decaying aristocrats and rising bourgeoisie, employers and domestic servants are the fertile edges around which the erotic imagination and sexual practice flourished."⁴⁶ Implicitly

echoing Darwin's notion that life proliferates and emerges through the intensifying engine of sexual variation, Gagnon suggests a network of processes that influence the direction of life aslant the more hermetic vocabulary of psychoanalysis.⁴⁷

We can link the muffled presence of these processes in the case study itself to Diana Fuss and Sara Ahmed's compelling and related arguments that "Psychogenesis" simply cannot contain itself. For Fuss, the case study produces excess through its rhetorical self-fashioning: Freud's "mechanistic explanatory model is [. . .] overburdened and constrained by the heaviness of its terms, terms that increasingly come to exceed the bounds and conditions of their founding logic."⁴⁸ In a similar vein, Ahmed argues that excess emerges from queerness's failure to align with Freud's overly narrow and straight notion of genealogy, "which connects the line of descent between parents and children with the affinity of the heterosexual couple, as the meeting point between the vertical and horizontal lines of the family tree."⁴⁹ From this perspective, we can track what Ahmed terms the "slantwise" quality of queerness within the case study's interest in the atmospherics and influences of its heroine's setting.⁵⁰

Freud time and again not only places his heroine within Vienna's networks of sexual variation, but also renders her as a being particularly exposed to the city's influence. In so doing, he interrupts the vertical genealogy of his Oedipal narrative, breaks the even consistency of his temporal model, and opens his case study's governing question of homosexual origin to an ecology of open exposure. To be sure, unlike Nan, who was allowed to grow wild and plantish, Freud's young woman has been raised under the tight administration of a displeased and concerned father. Nevertheless, she is ever resourceful and proves herself a deft evader, creating her own Nan-like conditions for wildness: "No prohibitions and no supervision," Freud notes, "hindered the girl from seizing every one of her rare opportunities of being together with her beloved."⁵¹ She is, in short, a "spirited girl, always ready for romping and fighting."⁵² Nor, Freud adds, is she constrained by propriety; she does "not scruple to appear in the most frequented streets," she awaits her lover "for hours outside her door or at a tram-halt," and she displays her feelings with "harmful publicity."⁵³

Freud further emphasizes his patient's eagerness to expose herself to external influence. He describes what we might call his heroine's street smarts, her ability to perform herself publicly, and her awareness of how

sexual knowledge travels, when he details her tactic for getting revenge on her father “by showing herself openly in the company of her adored one, by walking with her in the streets near her father’s place of business, and the like.”⁵⁴ Freud underscores this point toward the end of his narrative when he concludes, in a seeming non sequitur, that “[v]arious clues indicated that she must formerly have had strong exhibitionist and scopophilic tendencies.”⁵⁵ Even when circumstances do keep Freud’s patient sealed from the dense intermingling on Vienna’s streets, the circulation of gossip, rumor and sexual knowledge lead her not only to experience and witness a range of sexual practices, but also to acquire a range of sexual knowledge. For instance, about the girl’s beloved Freud writes that “the parents asserted that, in spite of her distinguished name, this lady was nothing but a *cocotte*. It was well known, they said, that she lived with a friend, a married woman, and had intimate relations with her, while at the same time she carried on promiscuous affairs with a number of men.”⁵⁶ By shifting his setting so frequently from the interiors of analysis to the exteriors of the streets of Vienna, and by highlighting his heroine’s refusal to be contained, Freud dramatizes his case study’s accumulation of external, atmospheric, urban influences—influences that the girl, as both scopophile and exhibitionist, seems preternaturally positioned to experience, interpret, and exert.

In John D’Emilio’s justly famous history, which links the emergence of gay identity to urbanization, queer communities and identities arise after populations redistribute from the provinces into the cities. By contrast, the alternate reading of “Psychogenesis” that I am proposing finds Freud more acutely, if also implicitly, in tune with what we might call queer ecosystems rather than queer demographics.⁵⁷ Focusing on his patient’s exposure over time to multiple external influences in the city streets, Freud downgrades her psyche from the bearer of all subjectivity and personhood—the secret of the soul—to but one of many influences on her being. In this respect, turn-of-the-century Vienna comprises a lively, robust incubator for queer life, but its urban setting does not necessarily make it any livelier than the rural, nineteenth-century Maine of Nan Prince’s upbringing.

Taken together, *A Country Doctor* and “Psychogenesis” thus have a good deal to tell us about the asynchronous heterogeneity, or what Sedgwick calls “unrationalized coexistence,” that inflects even our most paradigmatic models for understanding the modern psyche and contemporary sexuality. For it may be, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, that Freud “wants above all to keep

sexuality in the limited framework of Narcissus and Oedipus, the ego and the family.”⁵⁸ Yet this does not preclude us from seeing that, like the rest of us, Freud cannot always get what he wants—that even Freud can operate on an alternate range, unable to sustain such a secreting of the psyche from the world. He also cannot sustain the notion of sexuality attributed to him most famously by Michel Foucault, and commonly understood to coordinate contemporary sexual identity categories: that of a private, internalized, supersaturating subjectivity that, ultimately, becomes a resource with prodigious explanatory powers. Given his case study's partial recognition of the interactive, open-ended sexuality that Jewett attempts to enact and disseminate in and with her novel, Freud discloses the possible meeting ground between Jewett's nineteenth-century future and his own—and possibly even our own—present: the possibility for sexualities that quicken to the aliveness of the material, phenomenological world and that refuse to be determined in advance; or, perhaps, sexualities that understand themselves as precisely such quickening.

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Notes

1. For a useful summary of these reviews, see Gavin Jones, *Failure and the American Writer: A Literary History* (2014), 112–13.
2. Sarah Orne Jewett, *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*, ed. Annie Fields (1911), 195.
3. Sarah Orne Jewett, *A Country Doctor* (2005), 70, 92. All future references cited as *CD* in the text.
4. Sam See, “The Comedy of Nature: Darwinian Feminism in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*,” *Modernism/Modernity* 17 (2010): 647.
5. Jewett, *Country Doctor*, 3.
6. *Ibid.*, 29.
7. *Ibid.*, 139, 36, 104.

8. *Ibid.*, 70.
9. *Ibid.*, 232.
10. Peter Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America* (2013), 93. On the substitutability of "doctor," see Josephine Donovan, "Nan Prince and the Golden Apples," *Colby Library Quarterly* 22:1 (1986): 20.
11. Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (2000), 43.
12. Jewett, *Country Doctor*, 188.
13. Sarah Ensor, "Spinster Ecology: Rachel Carson, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Non-Reproductive Futurity," *American Literature* 84:2 (June 2012): 419.
14. Jewett, *Country Doctor*, 197.
15. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, "Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children," in *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, ed. Bruhm and Hurley (2005), xviii.
16. Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (2009), 6, 7.
17. Jewett, *Country Doctor*, 232.
18. *Ibid.*, 223.
19. *Ibid.*, 223–24.
20. It is significant here that the novel's one human attempt at grafting, crafting, and shaping an old apple tree, is "to no avail" and "proves worthless." *Ibid.*, 10.
21. On the interchange between botany and the history of sexuality, see Greta L. Lafleur, "Precipitous Sensations: Herman Mann's *The Female Review* (1797), Botanical Sexuality, and the Challenge of Queer Historiography," *Early American Literature* 48:1 (2013): 93–123; and Thomas Hallock, "Male Pleasure and the Genders of Botanic Exchange: A Garden Tour," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62:4 (October 2005): 697–718.
22. Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (2004), 91.
23. Jewett, *Country Doctor*, 70.
24. *Ibid.*, 129, 99.
25. Dana Luciano, "Geological Fantasies, Haunting Anachronies: Eros, Time, and History in Harriet Prescott Spofford's 'The Amber Gods,'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 55.3–4 (2009): 269–303.
26. Myra J. Hird, "Naturally Queer," *Feminist Theory* 5:1 (2004): 88. See also Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (1999).
27. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), 42; Diana Fuss, "Freud's Fallen Women: Identification, Desire, and 'A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,'" in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (1993), 45; Leo Bersani, *Homos* (1995), 58; and Lee Edelman, *Homographesis* (1994), xv.
28. Sedgwick, 43.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, 44.

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31. Ibid. I take the phrase "worldmaking" from Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24: 2 (Winter 1998): 547–66.
32. See Marjorie Pryse, "'I was country when country wasn't cool': Regionalizing the Modern in Jewett's *A Country Doctor*," *American Literary Realism* 34:3 (Spring 2002): 217–32.
33. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1977), 38.
34. Sigmund Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, volume 18 (1979), 145. All future references cited as "Psychogenesis" in the text.
35. Ibid., 153.
36. Ibid., 155, 156.
37. Ibid., 157, emphasis in original.
38. Ibid., 148, 171, 167.
39. Tim Dean and Christopher Lane, "Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis: An Introduction," in *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (2001), 5.
40. Freud, 169.
41. See H. N. Lukes, "Unrequited Love: Lesbian Transference and Revenge in Psychoanalysis," in *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*.
42. Freud, 171.
43. Ibid., 171, 172.
44. See Coviello, *Sex and the Untimely*; and Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2007).
45. Marcus, *Between Women*, 21; Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 47.
46. John H. Gagnon, "Who Was that Girl?" in *That Obscure Subject of Desire: Freud's Female Homosexual Revisited*, ed. Ronnie C. Lesser and Erica Schoenberg (1999), 78.
47. On Darwin, sexual selection, sexual variation and the intense proliferation of difference, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life* (2011).
48. Diana Fuss, "Freud's Fallen Women," 63.
49. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), 92.
50. Ahmed, 107.
51. Freud, 147.
52. Ibid., 169.
53. Ibid., 148, 147, 149.
54. Ibid., 160.
55. Ibid., 168, 169.
56. Ibid., 147.
57. John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed., Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, & Sharan Thompson (1983), 100–113.
58. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2009), 352.