
Here/There, Now/Then, Both/And

Regionalism and Cosmopolitanism
in Edith Wharton's *Old New York*

JUNE HOWARD

It may seem strange to turn to Edith Wharton's *Old New York* for insight into the international and cosmopolitan dimensions of her work. Indeed, this relatively little read volume sits slightly askew in any easily available category. It is not a novel but a complexly connected group of four "novellas." It could be called local color because, as the title proclaims, it portrays a very particular place. But it hasn't been, as it is located in the metropolis, and that term is usually reserved for tales set in rural New England landscapes like *Ethan Frome* and *Summer*. It is focused on the nineteenth century, with the subtitle of each tale specifying a decade in sequence from the 1840s to the 1870s; yet its publication in 1924 makes it a relatively late work, and its perspective is clearly modern. This essay argues for unsettling literary-historical categories, reading through the lens of regionalism to help us to recognize the volume as a sophisticated rendering of the paradoxical place of cosmopolitanism in American cultural history and the recursive relation of those fundamental categories: time and place. Each of these four stories can stand alone, and they have an interesting history of separate publication. They are also linked by common themes and techniques and are far more resonant

when read—as Wharton intended them to be—together.¹ Each is firmly set in New York City and frequently invokes European, usually Italian, associations and travel. Each addresses a successive decade of the nineteenth century. Wharton shows the increasing independence of American culture by making Europe less prominent in the story of each successive decade; throughout she maintains her focus on the relation between cultivated tastes and human integrity. In *False Dawn*, an encounter with John Ruskin transforms the perceptions of an heir on the Grand Tour. He is awakened to a prescient appreciation of Italian “primitives” that estranges him from his father and ruins him—or does it, perhaps, save him? The story of his Italian-born wife is also visible as the reverse side of Wharton’s subtle weaving. *The Old Maid* tells the story of two cousins whose lives are shaped by longing for something beyond the everyday, embodied in an unworthy painter whose European sojourn is inextricably connected with his appeal and his inaccessibility. *The Spark* and *New Year’s Day* foreground retrospection, as each narrator pieces together information from different settings and moments to penetrate the character of someone older and admired and finds himself required to acknowledge the disjuncture of literary taste and ethics.

In all these stories, as Wharton deploys connections and contrasts between places, she constantly correlates them with eras. Understanding the book as a whole means engaging its representation of time through theme and form—more precisely, through metaphorical patterns and abrupt temporal shifts in the narrative. The reader is asked to be here and there at the same time, and to imaginatively inhabit both the present and the past. And—continuing to occupy the paradoxical space of the slash—throughout the volume, Wharton examines how artistic and literary tastes establish distinction in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense and are defined and compromised by their links to social hierarchy. Particularly when we read them as interconnected, the novellas of *Old New York* enable the articulation of alternative values while remaining publishable and legible in their own place and time.

False Dawn—and therefore also *Old New York*—opens in the 1840s, at a sumptuous meal at the summer home of the Raycie family overlooking Long Island Sound, a short distance from their Canal Street townhouse. The reader quickly learns that the original cottage served as Benedict Arnold’s headquarters during the Revolutionary War and that the remodeled and enlarged building appears as a “Tuscan Villa” (10) in Downing’s *Landscape Gardening in America*. Looking back from the perspective of the

whole, it seems that turncoat Arnold and this American/European architecture already place us in the realm of divided loyalties and the “both/and.” More immediately, the scene is dominated by the massive, smug patriarch but soon enters into the point of view of his slight, sensitive son Lewis. The occasion is his twenty-first birthday, and he’s being sent off to Europe, both to grow up and—as revealed in subsequent scenes—to assemble a collection of paintings. His father’s dearest ambition is to “found a Family” (29); he sees a Raycie Gallery as part of that project and tells his son exactly which painters he wants—all Italian (Mr. Raycie has worked hard to learn to pronounce names like Sassoferrato and Giulio Romano).

Italy is also invoked through Lewis’s love for Beatrice “Treeshy” Kent, the orphaned, half-Italian niece of one of the family connections present at the celebration. How closely Mr. Raycie controls his family is demonstrated when Lewis sneaks out before sunrise the next morning to see her, carrying his bed-quilt. He cannot bestow his affection where he likes and must conceal their relationship; he does not even have his own sailboat and must contrive one out of a rowboat to get across the water to visit her. He lashes the oars together to make a mast and rigs the quilt on them—the same story that Wharton tells about her father courting her mother in *A Backward Glance*. (It is, according to Hermione Lee, apocryphal.) Treeshy’s own family history fills out the other constant association of Italy throughout the book: the first is art and generally cultivation; the second, the risks of embodied life. References to people in ill health being “shipped off to Italy to die” recur in the subsequent stories as well (239).

Such vulnerability is implicitly linked with sensuous experience and sexuality. In the period Wharton is representing, *spes phthisica*—the notion that consumption heightened desire and creativity—was indeed a cultural commonplace; she, of course, is writing decades after the 1882 identification of the tuberculosis bacillus decisively shifted discourse about the disease. Wharton deploys the topos to evoke adventurousness and risk taking, an openness to experience that loops back to sensitivity to art and literature. The question of taste is so fraught partly because the aesthetic practices that are prized as markers of distinction can also be dangerous. The link is underscored in *False Dawn* by a subplot about Mr. Raycie’s fearful scorn for Edgar Allan Poe, whose wife is wasting away down the lane. As Lewis steals out to meet Treeshy, he encounters his sister secretly taking food to the poet’s family.

False Dawn is the only story in *Old New York* that includes a scene actually set in Europe. Lewis meets Ruskin at the “sublime spectacle” of Mont Blanc (39). But the transformative friendship that ensues and the rest of the trip are seen mainly through their consequences back home. Lewis makes a collection of Italian primitives that gets him ridiculed and disinherited. His belief in the beauty of the paintings does not waver, and he marries Treeshy, but he is unsuccessful in his persistent efforts to get the collection seen and appreciated. As the story’s title implies, Lewis’s taste is vindicated after his death. One of the small pleasures of the story is being one-up on the overbearing Mr. Raycie; in the 1920s, as now, educated readers would have known the names he does not—Ruskin, Rossetti, Fra Angelico, Giotto—and perhaps even recognized his “Carpachter” as Carpaccio. That identification is confirmed when the ending cuts to the present (that is, the moment of the story’s publication). The paintings, packed away for decades, have been discovered in an attic, and at last “the Raycie collection” becomes “familiar to all art-lovers” (71). But the collection was immediately broken up, we learn, and the pieces were auctioned off to collectors and museums; the distant relative who inherited them did not keep a single one except “in the shape of pearls and Rolls Royces” (80).

Lewis’s prediction that “the collection would some day be very valuable” has been fulfilled (58). The paintings’ beauty is further attested, in the story’s present day, in a vivid speech by the narrator’s friend; we are not invited to question it. Yet the question of their value remains troubling. The paintings have appreciated, but are they appreciated as art or as good investments? Has day truly dawned when these new New Yorkers turn art so readily into cash and continue to use them as props to prestige? A glance at the twenty-first-century art market, in New York or elsewhere, certainly does not allay the suspicion that exchange value can displace or corrode aesthetic value. Adeline Tintner has traced the rising and falling reputations of the painters Wharton mentions in detail. She concludes that Lewis’s project of aesthetic education has failed and adds the further irony that toward the end of the twentieth century some of Mr. Raycie’s affinities are more prescient than his son’s: “the name of Angelica Kauffmann stimulates more interest than that of Fra Angelico” (160). As Tintner suggests, one is left with the conclusion that taste changes. What persists is that, in Bourdieu’s memorable slogan, taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier.

What does it mean, then, that the most carefully described artistic work

in the story is one for which no aesthetic claims at all are made? It is “a three-crayon drawing of a little girl with a large forehead and dark eyes, dressed in a plaid frock and embroidered pantalettes, and sitting on a grass bank” (75). The narrator saw this portrait as a child, and it constitutes a fragile thread connecting him to the Raycie Gallery. We never learn who drew this image of Lewis and Treeshy’s daughter Louisa—only that she “died of a decline” at the age of eleven. A whole world of hope and grief is implied. Wharton tells Beatrice Kent Raycie’s story only indirectly, but she conveys much about it as she shows both Lewis’s ambivalence about seeing her as his guide, his Beatrice, and his recognition of her heroism. Her baby is the decentered center of the scenes that conclude Wharton’s narrative of the 1840s. Louisa’s death embodies a theme central to *False Dawn* and pervasive in Wharton’s work: disappointment, loss, the waste of human potential. Its figurative power gains from that context. That such a humble work of art conveys such meaning becomes more significant in the context of *Old New York* as a whole—although we are very much in the paradoxical space of the both/and, as the image comes to us through Wharton’s own ambitious artistic creation. These gendered themes are interdependent—both separate and connected. The subordinated story of the Raycie women, once considered, seems so fundamental that although the two lines are unequal, they are undecidedly so. Wharton dedicates the last line of the story’s frame narrative to the little girl: “Poor Little Louisa! I sighed” (80).

The publication history of the novellas that compose *Old New York* is similarly double. Unlike Wharton’s other collections, this one was conceived in advance, in exchanges with her agent, as a linked group deriving from the genealogies of the Manson and Mingott families she had prepared for *The Age of Innocence*. (That novel’s working title was “Old New York.”) The first story Wharton completed was *The Old Maid*, set in the 1850s and appearing second in the volume, but it dealt with illegitimacy and was repeatedly rejected—“a bit too vigorous for us,” said the editor of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* (Lewis 435). Then *Age of Innocence* won the 1921 Pulitzer Prize, certifying Wharton’s work not only as distinguished but as wholesome and putting her on the front page, and *Red Book Magazine* accepted the story. *New Year’s Day*, the last story in the collection, also appeared in *Red Book*, and *Ladies’ Home Journal* took *False Dawn* and *The Spark*. The stories circulated initially, during 1922 and 1923, as quality fiction in domestically oriented women’s magazines with broad readerships. Then, in 1924,

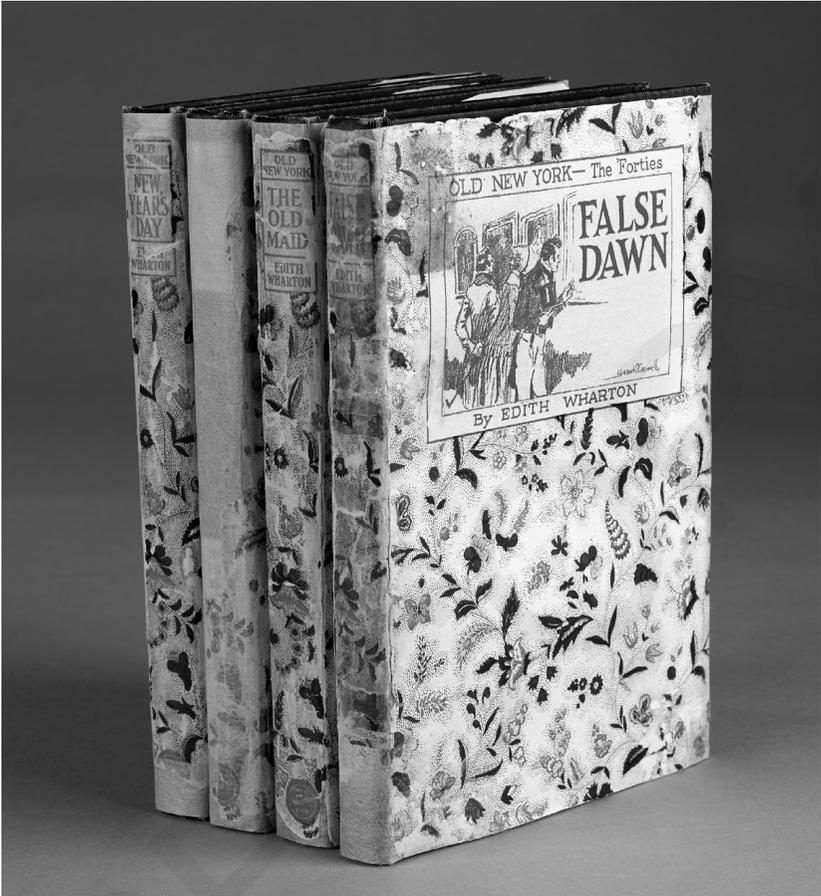


Figure 7.1. The four volumes of the first edition of *Old New York*, published by Appleton with illustrations by Edward Caswell. Courtesy of the University of Michigan Library.

D. Appleton published each of the four novellas as a well-printed small book, with illustrations by Edward Caswell and a flower-patterned dust jacket. The whole set was sold “in a period gift box,” to quote the dust jacket flap. Thus the stories were marketed as both fine literature and elegant objects (see fig. 7.1: all the illustrations for this article may also be viewed at <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/117670>).

The Old Maid was adapted for the stage and filmed with Bette Davis in the title role; it became, in the words of R.W.B. Lewis, “one of Edith Wharton’s most durably popular and profit-making stories” (436). Among scholars,

too, it is the most frequently discussed of the four novellas. Attention appropriately tends to focus on the revelation of the inner life of Charlotte Lovell, the apparently prim and prudent spinster who has borne a child out of wedlock and then adopted her. But the tale is focalized through her cousin Delia Ralston; it is not the story of one woman but of two (or three, if we include the daughter they share). Unlike the others in the volume, the story is located entirely in its announced decade, “The ’Fifties,” in what the dust jacket calls the “stuffy, self-satisfied” world of antebellum Old New York. At the opening, Delia is married with children and comfortable in that world. But when Charlotte confesses in order to enlist her help, it unsettles Delia—not just initially but more and more deeply over the years as it changes her sense of what is possible. There are “dark destinies coiled under the safe surface of life” (145). As so often in Wharton, the consequences of complex ethical choices play out over time. Delia intervenes powerfully in Charlotte’s life and displaces her in Tina’s affections; she eventually recognizes that the resentment between them—the word *hate* (174) is used in their confrontation the night before Tina’s wedding—is inevitable.

Charlotte’s affair was with Delia’s own rejected suitor, Clement Spender, and she tells her cousin that thinking of Tina (whose full name is Clementina), she has always been thinking of him. “A woman never stops thinking of the man she loves. She thinks of him years afterward, in all sorts of unconscious ways, in thinking of all sorts of things—books, pictures, sunsets, a flower or a ribbon—or a clock on the mantelpiece, Charlotte broke off with her sneering laugh” (175). The figure of Clem Spender connects *The Old Maid* with art, Italy, and the themes of *False Dawn*. Delia might have married him if he had not been too poor to support a wife “or if he had consented to give up painting and Rome for New York and the law” (89). Spender’s choice is equally consequential for Charlotte—by the time she realizes she is pregnant, he has returned to Europe to pursue his career as an artist. Spender never actually appears in the story and is eventually capitalized as “poor Clement, married years ago to a plain determined cousin, who had hunted him down in Rome, and enclosing him in an unrelenting domesticity, had obliged all New York on the grand tour to buy his pictures with a resigned grimace” (150). The man himself, it turns out, is less important than the romance and desire he evokes. The memory of Clem Spender is the memory of a youthful moment of possibility; Delia’s daydream of

marriage to him points toward “requited love,” sexual fulfillment, and a more expansive and satisfying life.

What represents such possibility, throughout the story, is the ormolu clock Delia receives as a wedding present from her aunt, Mrs. Manson Mingott. Clem Spender brings it to her from Paris, and it is of course the “clock on the mantelpiece” Charlotte refers to above. It represents “a shepherdess sitting on a fallen trunk” (which holds the dial) and a shepherd “surprising her with a kiss, while her little dog barked at him from a clump of roses. One knew the profession of the lovers by their crooks and the shape of their hats” (89). Although the family thinks such a gift ought to be displayed in the drawing room, Delia keeps it in her bedroom because “she liked, when she woke in the morning, to see the bold shepherd stealing his kiss” (90). Critics have considered this clock a key image in the story. Adeline Tintner, for example, notes how often it is mentioned and observes that it represents both the presence of the absent lover and the passage of time (79). The illustrations give a sense of what this French timepiece might have looked like. These are examples prized by collectors from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. (Spender’s assurance in the 1850s that this gift is “the newest thing in the Palais-Royal” [89–90] is inaccurate.)

The gleam of the *ormolu*—“mashed gold”—material and the twining, elaborate ornamentation of such clocks are appropriately sensual. All kinds of figures were used on these decorative clocks—from the pastoral to the contemporary—as shown in the illustrations of a shepherdess (fig. 7.2) and an astronomy student (fig. 7.3). My review of examples suggests, however, that it was more common for classical scenes to convey “an invitation to love”—I am quoting the expert and dealer Jacques Nève’s commentary on fig. 7.4, a representation of Venus in bed. The seduction of Callisto (fig. 7.5) is equally erotic. The pastoral kiss that Wharton imagines is plausible, but I have not located nor does Nève know of anything like it.² What the figure Wharton invented does—I want to argue—is enlarge the connection with *time* already inherent in the choice of a clock as “indexical icon” (Tintner 79). Its inexorable passage is explicitly invoked, and the shadow of fate is implied, when in one confrontation between the cousins the click of Charlotte’s knitting needles “punctuate[s] the silence as once, years before, it had been punctuated by the tick of the Parisian clock on Delia’s mantel” (142). Introducing the pastoral, as well, puts into play the contrast between the

Figure 7.2. French Empire (1800–1815) patinated bronze and ormolu mantel clock, *The Shepherdess*, signed “Verdier horloger de Paris au Mans [sic].” Photograph by Jacques Nève.



Figure 7.3. French Directoire (1795–99) ormolu and green *vert-de-mer* marble clock by Gérard, depicting a young woman studying astronomy. Photograph by Jacques Nève.

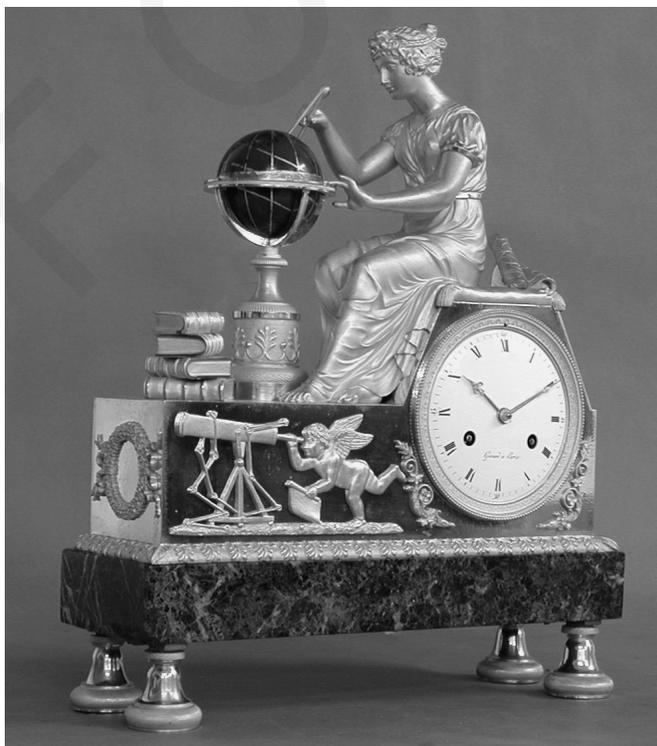




Figure 7.4. French Louis XVI (circa 1789) ormolu clock by Imbert l'Aine à Paris, representing Venus asleep. Photograph by Jacques Nève.



Figure 7.5. French Directoire (1795–99) ormolu and white marble clock depicting the Seduction of Callisto. Photograph by Jacques Nève.

country and the city, ascribed simplicity and sophistication, nostalgia and progress—that is, the whole apparatus of the mapping of time onto place that is fundamental to modernity.

The most prominent form that developmental narrative takes in *The Old Maid* is family history. The Raycies failed; the Ralstons prevail. The latter hardly seems preferable, when Delia wonders whether, “were she to turn her own little boy loose in a wilderness, he would not create a small New York there, and be on all its boards of directors” (86). Wharton deploys notions of breeding as she does images of tuberculosis—for thematic effect and from within the attitudes of the period—with implicit but not explicit skepticism. Her engagement with eugenics and especially her racial attitudes have been much discussed. Although Hoeller goes too far in reading Charlotte and Tina as black, I think she demonstrates effectively that the story can be read as a passing narrative and that it is full of racial anxiety: Tina’s uncertain ancestry as a foundling is one of the reasons she is unmarriedable. Being adopted as Delia’s daughter decisively solves the problem of her poverty, but it can only license prurient, erroneous speculation, not settle the question of her origins.

That makes it the more surprising that this is one work of Wharton’s that ends with a happy wedding. Indeed, there “had never been a fairer June in any one’s memory. The damask roses and mignonette below the verandah had never sent such a breath of summer through the tall French windows; the gnarled orange-trees brought out from the old arcaded orange-house had never been so thickly blossomed; the very haycocks on the lawn gave out whiffs of Araby” (171). As Hoeller suggests, the dubious nature of the alliance may be exactly what enables Wharton to see it as a vehicle of possibility. Delia’s respectable marriage equals stasis; with her gaze fixed on the ormolu clock representing a past that never happened, she fails to “modernize” her bedroom as she had planned and knows in the end that its walls are “the walls of her own grave” (149–50). Tina and Lanning Halsey, who is explicitly likened to Clem Spender (140), are allowed to live out the previous generation’s frustrated desires. Yet, as the Arcadian language describing the June wedding suggests, Tina’s “bliss accepted” is also in some sense a suspended moment (168). This is a story of the 1850s, and the author and reader know the limits of the world the newlyweds will inhabit. Beyond the end of the story, they must sink back into ordinary time.

The Spark, the third novella in *Old New York*, centers on a man repeatedly characterized as dislocated in time. In his opening description of Hayley Delane, the narrator writes: "I could never look at him without feeling that he belonged elsewhere, not so much in another society as in another age" (185). He judges Delane's world harshly as frivolous and false; this is very much the high-bourgeois milieu of *The Age of Innocence*. As Dale Bauer eloquently puts it, in that novel Wharton has "dismantled the binary opposition between primitive and civilized cultures, by showing that civilized New York is as dependent on rituals of exclusion and scapegoating as any other pattern of culture" (11–12)—and her pitiless ethnographic gaze is very much on offer in *The Spark*. Yet the measure of Delane's compassionate spirit is, precisely, that he does not judge. His unerring ethical compass leads him to react passionately against "cruelty" (202) of any kind, but he is generous to lesser faults and fools. The tale is structured, in fact, as an account of the narrator's long effort to understand how Hayley Delane came to be so.

The Spark itself seems misplaced in time—it is billed as a story of "The 'Sixties," yet no part of the action takes place in that decade. We look back from the 1920s, from more than ten years after Delane's death (229), as the narrator reviews their encounters, beginning from the perspective of his "school-days" (186) and moving forward through time but also, as he gets to know the older man, gaining a view into Delane's past. He ran away from school to volunteer in the Union army, was wounded at Bull Run, but "fought all through" the Civil War (202). Caswell's paste-down illustration on the front cover (see fig. 7.6) represents a battle scene, but the text itself offers nothing so direct about the 1860s. Unlike other veterans, Delane declines to use his military title and does not like to talk about the war: with characteristic modesty and reticence, he simply changes the subject. Yet Wharton's title and subtitle, taken together, imply that this decade is the key to his character.

The narrator suspects that, in another age, Delane would "have been doing the equivalent of what he was doing now: idling, taking much violent exercise, eating more than was good for him, laughing at the same kind of nonsense, and worshipping, with the same kind of dull routine-worship, the same kind of woman, whether dressed in a crinoline, a farthingale, a peplum or the skins of beasts" (185–86). (In case the reader was tempted to overvalue Tina's romance, this is a cynical counterweight.) Yet while watching



Figure 7.6. Paste-down illustration from the cover of *The Spark*.

him play polo, the narrator has a vision of Delane distinctively belonging in a particular era: “As he rode thus, heavily yet mightily, in his red-and-black shirt and white breeches, his head standing out like a bronze against the turf, I whimsically recalled the figure of Guidoriccio da Foligno [*sic*], the famous mercenary, riding at a slow powerful pace across the fortified fresco of the Town Hall of Siena” (192) (see fig. 7.7). I am reminded of Sarah Sherman’s analysis of how Sarah Orne Jewett elevates her character, Mrs. Todd, by comparing her to classical figures. In Wharton’s day, this equestrian portrait was thought to be by the important fourteenth-century painter Simone Martini. It is, in other words, an Italian primitive. The attribution is now contested (let us note that both taste and scholarship change), but the connection to *False Dawn* is unambiguous. On the other hand, it is highly speculative to suggest that the narrator would also have visited an adjacent room of Siena’s Palazzo Pubblico that contains an even more famous series of frescoes: Lorenzetti’s *Allegory of the Good and Bad Government*. That work, commissioned not by an aristocrat or cleric but by the fourteenth-century equivalent of a city council, has been characterized as containing the first vision of governing—not for the benefit of leaders but on behalf of the people. It was the inseparable combination of Siena’s artistic and civic

history that led to its being declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1995. Understood narrowly or widely, this allusion places the story in what I have been calling the space of the slash. Was the past heroic or primitive? Does connecting Hayley Delane with Guidoriccio da Fogliano, New York with Siena, tell us that we are advancing, declining, repeating? *The Spark* both invokes and disrupts the notion of progress.

In the story's denouement, Delane identifies a photograph in one of the narrator's books as the queer old fellow who nursed him during the war and whose influence has shaped his unusual perspective on life. Sometimes, he says, "I can't see things in any way but his" (221). This is, of course, Walt Whitman. The story contains considerable explicit and implicit commentary on the uses of literature: it shows the poetry Delane memorized in the



Figure 7.7. An equestrian portrait of Guidoriccio da Fogliano, circa 1330. Detail from a fresco depicting the conquest of the castles of Montemassi and Sassoforte in 1328, in the Salle del Mappamondo in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.

schoolroom to be a continuing resource for him (see Rubin, chapter 7), the triviality of fashionable people's opinions of current novels, the narrator's almost too-reverent attitude toward *Leaves of Grass*, and perhaps even alludes to the way the poet's photograph participates in the inauguration of celebrity authorship. But the central irony of the story is that although his Civil War experience and contact with "Old Walt" are clearly the source of his ethical vision, Delane cannot appreciate Whitman's poetry. In the last line of the story Delane remarks, "I rather wish . . . you hadn't told me that he wrote all that rubbish" (234). The story's structure depends on the prestige of the poet; yet Delane's integrity is confirmed by his indifference to his brush with greatness. Aesthetic value too is invoked, even affirmed, yet simultaneously undermined.

Lizzie Hazeldean, the central character of *New Year's Day*, is equally incapable of appreciating literature. The final story in *Old New York* is complexly crafted. It moves from a retrospective account of the narrator's perspective in youth, through a long central section about past events told in the third person from Lizzie's point of view, then back to first person as the narrator recounts his relationship with the older woman. As in *The Old Maid*, an ingenious plot enables revelatory insight into the unexpected inner life of a woman the inhabitants of Old New York think they know all about. The narrator's mother says, "She was *bad* . . . always. They used to meet at the Fifth Avenue Hotel" (237, repeated on 301). But in truth Lizzie is devoted to her invalid husband and only commits adultery to get the money to care for him. When he dies without ever suspecting or hearing the gossip about her, Lizzie has won her gamble and does not complain about being subjected to those "rituals of exclusion and scapegoating." She is lonely, however, and she regrets being shut out of the culture of letters he inhabited: "After his death I thought: 'There'll be his books. I can go back to them—I shall find him there.' And I tried—oh so hard—but it's no use" (306). Her husband's library does contain a few volumes that become accessible and meaningful to her when, at the very end of her life, she converts to Catholicism.

As in *The Spark*, Wharton firmly separates integrity and taste. There are other aspects of *New Year's Day* worthy of attention beyond this essay and other ways in which it connects to my themes—for example, Charles Hazeldean is one of those who has been "shipped off" for his health (239, 280). But key for my purposes is Wharton's high valuation of a character who does not read. (This is not new in Wharton's work; consider Lily Bart.) As

literary scholars we tend to be drawn to the view that, as Wallace Stegner put it, “Anyone who reads . . . is to some extent a citizen of the world” (254). Yet we know also that book-learning is only one limited kind of knowledge and that it does not necessarily entail any virtues. Other essays in this volume will deal more directly with the intellectual shape of Wharton’s cosmopolitanism. Its narrative shape, as seen in *Old New York*, opens to questions like those raised by Craig Calhoun in an essay with a title that carries its argument well: “The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Toward a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism.” If we think in terms of the advantages conferred by privilege—say, for Old New Yorkers, leisured travel, expensive education, and leather-bound books—then apparently broad horizons have a narrow social basis. Like *civilization*, the term can be a self-justifying name for power. Yet as Calhoun concludes, we cannot do without the impulse that goes by the name of cosmopolitanism.

The stories in *Old New York* each organize an “ado” about characters who are unappreciated, even stigmatized, in the moment and the place Wharton is portraying.³ She does not undermine literary sophistication, although she invites us to look beyond it. The well-read, Harvard-educated narrator is reliable. The highly cultivated Charles Hazeldean is unquestionably admirable: although from a worldly perspective he is clueless about his wife, he is still more right than wrong about her. Charles is, somewhat paradoxically, a “born reader” (255); Wharton uses the same phrase in her essay “The Vice of Reading,” published in 1903 in the *North American Review*, for those who come effortlessly, admirably, to culture. We confront here the complexity of class—this is very much the space of the slash. I need the new conjunction emerging in young people’s speech, according to Anne Curzan, to say that class is “inherited slash achieved.” Of course, Wharton is now publishing in the very different forum of *Red Book*. Still, her valuation of Lizzie Hazeldean seems less egalitarian in the light of the earlier essay’s denunciation of the “mechanical reader,” who—motivated by a sense of duty and the kind of social aspiration Amy Blair analyzes in *Reading Up*—“invades the domain of letters” 515) and threatens to impose inferior judgment. A frank confession of incapacity is much preferable.

Lizzie too is in some sense suspended in time. She did one heroic thing, but “there was nothing in her to keep her at that height” (310). (Reading, in fact, would presumably help create the “inner life” she lacks.) The title itself, as with *False Dawn*, proposes temporality as a theme. The words seem

to promise a new day, a new year, a beginning, an opening. Yet the story locates us immediately in a discussion of an old-fashioned observance; the narrator writes that “my infantile memory barely reached back to the time when Grandmamma, in lace lappets and creaking ‘moiré,’ used to receive on New Year’s Day” (238). The family gathering that observes Lizzie’s exit from the hotel is its descendant. It is, of course, an appropriate title—this is Lizzie’s heroic moment. But in the perspective of the whole volume, we can also note that, as with *False Dawn*, Wharton has chosen a title that directs our attention to time and disrupts any simple sequence.

My purpose in this essay has not been to suggest that *Old New York* somehow “is” local color. Genre criticism is interesting not as a classificatory enterprise but as a pressure on interpretation. Thinking in terms suggested by regionalism strengthens the case for reading the volume as not just a collection of stories but as a whole. It opens up new perspectives and complicates our understanding of Wharton’s cosmopolitanism. It also underscores the value of reading works about *place* in terms of their figuration of *time*. In that light, indeed, we might refresh our understanding of a phrase that has become so familiar in discussions of Wharton that we no longer recognize it as an oxymoron. But it plays with time as I have suggested that *New Year’s Day* does and combines it with place. I mean, of course, the title of the book itself. Let me write it, as the last word, this way: *Old/New York*.

Notes

1. See the articles by Sharon Shaloo. In a 1921 letter to her editor at D. Appleton’s, Wharton indicates that she had begun working on *The Old Maid* and was already considering a linked group of stories (Shaloo, personal communication; box 33, folder 1034, D. Appleton correspondence at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University).

2. Please see <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/117670> (University of Michigan Library Deep Blue) for images that convey, more clearly than the black-and-white ones in this book can, the beauty of these clocks. See also the website of Jacques Nève at <http://www.horloger.net>. I would like to express my warm gratitude to M. Nève for consulting with me about the history of ormolu clocks and allowing me to illustrate this article with his photographs.

3. My reference is to Henry James’s famous comment in his preface to the New York edition of *Portrait of a Lady* that the novel organizes “an ado about Isabel Archer” (xiii).

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