

## **“Dinner Parties with Living Monuments, or Disabled Reading in Edith Wharton’s *The Spark*”**

It seems like the climax of Edith Wharton’s 1925 novella *The Spark*: The narrator has just witnessed a heated confrontation between two men, Hayley Delane and Bolton Byrne. It’s over polo . . . or Byrne’s violence toward a horse . . . or the infidelity of Delane’s wife. Her affair with Byrne is an open secret. Everyone attributes the confrontation to Leila’s infidelity—everyone except Jack Alstrop. He tells the narrator the cause is Delane’s “old wound” (199), a wartime injury “In the head—” (200). Arguing against the consensus of Whartonists on this under-studied novella from *Old New York*, my paper explores Alstrop’s recognition of Delane as a disabled veteran whose neurodivergence is ‘invisible’--except (crucially to this fiction) when he engages in literacy practices around the normate narrator. A neurodivergent read of this work by a neurodivergent critic shows the snowballing scandal of erasure connecting Delane’s disparate actions: to attack Byrne, despite being thought a cuckold; to attend a veterans’ dinner, despite being thought unfashionable; to tend at home to his father-in-law during the disreputable old man’s final days, despite the judgment of others of this care as “‘queer’ ” (225); and to reject as “rubbish” (234) a book of radical poems written by his wartime nurse, “Old Walt.” Centering disability in relation to masculinity, literacy, and care complicates the limited scholarship on the real scandal of *The Spark*. “This is not a story-teller’s story,” the narrator says suddenly, mid-story, and he’s right. It’s not about the boyfriend. It’s about the bodymind.