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THE POWER OF JEWETT'S DEEPHAVEN

By ROBERT L. HORN

The cloying narrative frame and the obvious technical unevenness of Deephaven too often obscure the fictive power of Sarah Orne Jewett’s first book. The precious young Boston visitors—Helen Denis, the narrator and her friend, Kate Lancaster—must be relegated to their deserved status as an awkward vehicle for the exposure of the world of Deephaven before the reader can fully appreciate how compelling that world is. Miss Jewett herself, in the Preface to the 1893 edition of Deephaven, begs the reader’s indulgence for the youthful excesses of the work. If her advice to smile at these flaws is taken, a view of Deephaven emerges that reveals some of the most devastating portrayals of isolation, frustration, self-delusion, human dry-rot, and, at times, indomitability in all of Jewett’s fiction.

Much of the work’s structural unevenness can be attributed to the fact that the sketches had already been published separately in the Atlantic Monthly before William Dean Howells convinced Sarah Jewett to gather them into a book. The rewriting and rearranging involved was tedious work for a young writer accustomed to the rapid depiction of singular inspirations, and the result was not uniformly successful. As the narrator, Helen Denis is meant to unify the work, but she spends too much time distorting the focus and trying to get the reader to love and admire her friend Kate Lancaster (an effort doomed to failure from the first page) to fulfill her purpose effectively. Ironically, Helen Denis’ failure can often be the reader’s gain.

1 Richard Cary in Sarah Orne Jewett (New York, 1962) sees a parallel between the appearance of Henry James’s The American and Deephaven in the same year (1877): “As James must have been trying to write The Ambassadors, so Miss Jewett must have been trying to write The Country of the Pointed Firs. Both lacked the experience, the maturity necessary for the subtler execution” (p. 133).
2 Francis Otto Matthiessen, Sarah Orne Jewett (Boston, 1929), 54-55.
Her frequent insistence on sentimentalizing the experiences of that summer in Deephaven with “dear Kate” only underscores the often grim reality of the lives of the permanent residents. The saccharine naiveté of the proper young Bostonians not only insulates them from much of what they witness in Deephaven, but also serves on occasion as an effective counterpoint to the entrapment of some of the Deephavenites. For Helen and Kate, Deephaven is a quaint summer retreat; for many of its residents, Deephaven is a creeping state of spiritual atrophy—whether they realize it or not.

To the young Boston visitors much of Deephaven’s charm resides in its isolation from the outside world they know so well. It seems “more like one of the lazy little English seaside towns than any other.” But if the village is picturesque, the history of how it came to be that way is a chronicle of relentless decline. Deephaven is utterly out of fashion. It never recovered from the effects of the embargo of 1807, and a sand-bar has been steadily filling in the mouth of the harbor. There were some schooners and a small brig slowly going to pieces by the wharves, and indeed all Deephaven looked more or less out of repair (p. 69).

Spatially it is removed from the mainstream of life: the railroad is twelve miles away, and the ocean that was once its lifeline might as well be. Many of the coasters come in sight of Deephaven, but none put in. There is no longer any reason to. The people of Deephaven don’t really mind. They have no desire to engage themselves in a wider involvement simply because they have come to like their isolation.

Rather than look to the future, Deephavenites immerse themselves in memories of the past. The clear gradations in Deephaven society are based on a world that has vanished in reality, but remains the ultimate verity in the minds of its inhabitants. The Deephaven aristocracy blithely ignore the fact that the area is slowly being reduced to two classes, fishermen and inland farmers. They use the Sunday church service to walk “with a stately step up the aisle” and thereby display “their unquestioned dignity in public” (pp. 71-72). Their provincial smugness is insuperable.

3 Deephaven and Other Stories, ed. Richard Cary (Masterworks of Literature Series: New Haven, Connecticut, 1966), 84. Pagination for subsequent citations from this edition of Deephaven are in the text of this essay.
Even the commonest fishermen felt a satisfaction, and seemed to realize their privileges in being residents of Deephaven, but among the nobility and gentry there lingered a fierce pride in their family and town records, and a hardly concealed contempt and pity for people who were obliged to live in other parts of the world (p. 69).

Miss Honora Carew, the unquestioned queen of and spokeswoman for Deephaven society since the death of Katherine Brandon, keeps the tone high; she thinks it “very nice” that no unpleasant “manufacturing element” has ever been introduced and “could not feel too grateful, herself, that there was no disagreeable foreign population” (p. 70). One further manifestation places the seal on the town’s temperament: “The Deephaven people used to say, sometimes complacently, that certain things were ‘as dull as East Parish’” (p. 150)—a smaller community located on a river bank a half mile inland whose only fault is that it is disintegrating more rapidly than Deephaven.

The interplay of protective isolation and self-sufficient condescension sustains the lives of those Deephavenites who give themselves without qualification to their grand delusions. Living in the past, the present takes on a vicarious vitality, and the future can be conveniently ignored. Deephaven is a state of mind for them—one that requires a singular devotion since its inherent value must remain unquestioned.

Despite Helen Denis’ fascination with the charm of Deephaven society, subtle implications and telling details find their way into her narrative that reveal the essential meaninglessness, and sometimes the absurdity of Deephaven life. The unmarried sister-brother combinations of Dick and Honora Carew and Reverend and Miss Lorimer will leave no one to take their exalted places in Deephaven society. The stories Honora and Mrs. Dent tell over evening tea about their venerable forebears will die with them. The endless series of theological arguments between Dick Carew and Mr. Lorimer typify the sterility of their existence: “each was sure that he had vanquished the other, or their were alternate victories and defeats which made life vastly interesting and important” (p. 75). Another member of the distinguished set, Mr. Joshua Dorsey, wears his hair in a queue, is very deaf, and carries “a ponderous cane which had belonged to his venerated father—a much taller man than he” (p. 70). Deephaven society may venerate and imitate the
past, but it never quite measures up; it is dry-rotting as surely as the wharves that once symbolized its involvement in the wider world, and is about as aware of it.\footnote{Cary (Sarah Orne Jewett, p. 138) points up a symbolic analogy in the big flounder trapped inside the hull of a half-submerged old schooner in the “Cunner-Fishing” chapter: “Like the rightly named flounder—partially disabled, lethargic, and self-satisfied—Deephaven is trapped in a world from which no escape seems possible.” Even if escape were possible, few Deephavenites would wish it. Escape means change, and Deephaven sees no need to change.}

The two women who were not born to the Deephaven élite yet attempt to identify with it, Widow Tully and Widow Jin, do so to escape the effects of their personal pasts. Despite having been the “much-respected housekeeper of Old Captain Manning for forty years,” Widow Tully, “a prominent link in society,” is plagued by the rumors about her past. “The existence of Mr. Tully seemed to be a myth . . . . She was apt to be ungrammatical when excited, and there was a whispered tradition that she used to keep a toll bridge in Connecticut” (pp. 70-71). The pose she strikes smacks of second-rate Deephavenism, and is appropriately appraised as such by those who know: “She wore mourning for the captain which would have befitted his widow, and patronized the townspeople conspicuously, while she herself was treated with much condescension by the Carews and Lorimers” (p. 71). Widow Tully fittingly reaps what she sows in Deephaven.

The case is different with Widow Jim Patton. The lively little woman is highly valued by the Deephaven élite for the many services she performs for them. She helps the Lorimers and Carews with housecleaning and entertainments, has no equal in sickness, “is privy to everyone’s secrets, knows how to brew every variety of herb-tea, is commander-in-chief at funerals, and has all town pedigrees at tongue tip.”\footnote{Ibid. Cary also observes that in many ways she is the prototype of Almira Todd in The Country of the Pointed Firs.} For Widow Jim, attachment to Deephaven society is a vast improvement over the life she led with a shiftless, drunken husband who left her with a dent in her forehead from the impact of a stone bottle hurled at her in one of his alcoholic rages. If the Widow Jim has been rescued by Deephaven society, she remains in a basically subservient position. The Deephaven aristocracy occasionally favors a deserving outsider, but it never admits one. In the rigid social stratification of Deephaven society, birthright is all.

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The ultimate demise of the upper layer of Deephaven society is prefigured in the fate of the recently deceased Miss Katherine Brandon, Kate Lancaster’s grandaunt. After the fleeting days of a lively, romantic girlhood, now symbolized by the packet of letters “tied with a very pale and tired-looking blue ribbon” (p. 48), Miss Katherine became the repository of Deephaven decorum. She withdrew more and more into the antiquated elegance of the family home, maintaining her inheritance with a precision bordering on fanaticism. The impressionable Helen Denis is immensely taken with the fact that Miss Brandon was proud, conservative, and lived in a stately fashion—intolerant of sham and useless novelties, clinging “to the old ways of living and behaving as if it were part of her religion” (p. 55). Yet this imperious embodiment of “noblesse oblige” went insane before she died. Miss Katherine’s legacy seems to be an unavoidable comment on the value of her life: in the six months since her death the moths and mice have threatened to take over the Brandon mansion. There wasn’t a blood relative in the family pew to hear Mr. Lorimer’s eloquent eulogy. Her vicarious immortality resides solely in the memory of the Deephaven people who revered her, and it will vanish with them. The pattern for the Deephaven elite is set, and it is irreversible.

The members of the second layer of Deephaven society, the arthritic old seamen, are also addicted to living in the past. They can be found “every pleasant morning sunning themselves like turtles on one of the wharves.” Helen Denis finds that “it was etiquette to call them each captain, but I think some of the Deephaven men took the title by brevet upon arriving at a proper age” (p. 78). They characteristically occupy themselves by arguing about “the tonnage of some craft that had been a prey to the winds and waves, dry-rot, or barnacles fifty years before” (p. 78), by trying to outdo each other in narrating harrowing tales of adventure on the high seas, and by rehearsing the clever, daring way in which Captain Carew beat the embargo and made a fortune doing it. Their condescension, which parallels that of the Deephaven aristocracy, reveals itself in their refusal to accept Captain Lant, who deserted the sea to take up farming and now signs his letters “(condemned as unseaworthy)” (p. 83).

The most fully delineated of the group of retired seamen,
Captain Sands, is typical. An expert spinner of sea yarns and devout believer in mental telepathy, Sands criticizes the “low” set of foreign sailors that currently infest the sea, yet delights in reminiscing about the unethical dealings of the seamen in his time and his own part in them. He maintains that seafaring is “a dog’s life . . . and the risks and chances against you are awful” (pp. 122-123), yet is obsessed with his memories of that life. Much of Captain Sands’s time is spent in an old warehouse filled with the dusty relics gathered over a lifetime on the sea. His nagging wife cannot convince him to part with any of the relics, much less the obsolete warehouse, because they are his life: “There’s nothing that’s worth anything . . . to anybody but me” (p. 94).

The Deephaven captains are as doomed to extinction as the wharves on which they sun themselves—or Deephaven society. The era that made the life of Deephaven and their own pursuits meaningful has passed, but they don’t really care: like the Deephaven aristocracy, their memories are enough to sustain them.

Although Helen Denis maintains that none of their friends were more interesting than the fishermen, the reader learns very little about these Deephaven commoners. Besides being fishermen, most of them are “farmers in a small way” and are out making a living for themselves and their families before the young Brahmins are awake. These people are too busily engaged in present realities to spend much time venerating the past. Besides, for them the past is not that different from the present, or the future. They stand in awe of the sea and its mysteries but witness them first-hand, not in retrospect. The one among them that does fascinate the girls, Danny, is unique because he is mysterious. The young visitors draw out the rather pathetic past history of this bashful bachelor whose capacity for love has had few outlets. In spite of his earlier attachment to life on the high seas, Danny reveals that he has become as much of a realist as his fellow fishermen.

“I don’t know but if I was a-going to begin my life over again, I’d settle down ashore and have a snug little house and farm it. But I guess I

6 Captain Sand’s reputation as a visionary and his indictments of contemporary life mark him as a possible prototype of Captain Littlepage in The Country of the Pointed Firs.
7 In his combination of reticence and concealed romanticism, Danny resembles William Blackett in The Country of the Pointed Firs.
shall do better at fishing. Give me a trig-built topsail schooner painted up nice, with a stripe on her, and clean sails, and a fresh wind with the sun-a-shining, and I feel first rate” (pp. 111-112).

The fishermen have their daydreams, but they recognize them for what they are and find their fulfillment in the everyday business of life.

Helen and Kate’s summer in Deephaven takes them beyond the streets of the village itself and brings them into contact with people who do not belong to the clique of Deephaven aristocracy, the august company of beached captains, or the hearty group of fishermen. Two of the most delightful characters they meet, Mrs. Kew and Mrs. Bonny, live in relative isolation. Yet their lives are happy and meaningful because they have arrived at a state of secure self-awareness amid the realities of their present surroundings—a trait that sets them apart from the Deephaven élite and the windy captains.

Mrs. Kew, wife of the keeper of the lighthouse, lives within the Deephaven orbit, but is not of it. She was raised in the hills of Vermont and knows that she will always be an “upcountry” woman at heart, just as her husband would have preferred the excitement of the whaling voyages of his youth to the quiet of the lighthouse. Despite their preference for different lives, the loneliness of separation required a compromise; he agreed to remain ashore and she to life at the Deephaven Light. Their seventeen years on the little island have not been idyllic, but Mrs. Kew is wise enough to value their togetherness: “There isn’t great pay, but then nobody tries to take it away from us, and we’ve got so’s to be contented, even if it is lonesome in winter” (p. 42). Mrs. Kew knows everyone in Deephaven, but shows no inclination to try to attach herself to the upper layer of society. Passing a fortnight at the lighthouse without going ashore does not disturb her because she occupies herself so well in her solitude. She is a great reader, a shrewd observer of life, even tempered, and has a keen sense of humor. Mrs. Kew’s complaints are always lighthearted and often subtly self-deprecatory. She has learned to come to terms with life and, though living out her life in the confinement of the Deephaven lighthouse, she remains a free spirit, and an engaging one.

Mrs. Bonny, the eccentric old woman who lives high on a remote inland hill, has also come to terms with life in her own
peculiar way. Much of her appeal for the well bred, tidy young visitors is that she likes her isolation because it allows her to live exactly as she pleases. She no longer makes periodic journeys to Deephaven on her shaggy, burr-infested, mud-caked old horse to try to sell butter, berries, eggs, and choke-pears to the natives only because she no longer has to. Her philosophy is simple: "I'm getting old, and I tell 'em I'm going to take my comfort; since 'he' died, I don't put myself out no great; I've got money enough to keep me long's I live" (p. 136). Mrs. Bonny's consumption of prodigious amounts of tobacco, her preference for slovenly clothes, and her total unconcern for the business of housekeeping (her chickens and turkeys wander through the kitchen at will), reflect her unique definition of comfort and her obliviousness to the opinion of anyone else. She is a completely spontaneous old creature with a razor-sharp mind who has no patience with the failings and hypocrisies of her neighbors. In her one meeting with the young Bostonians, Mrs. Bonny criticizes the pallid preaching of Parson Reid (old Parson Padelford used to "get worked up" close the Bible, "and preach the hair off your head, 'long the end of the sermon"), and reveals how at an East Parish revival she routed old Ben Patey, the petty thief of the neighborhood, who "always lays out to get converted." She goes on to put down the lazy, shiftless, quarrelsome Beckett family, presided over by the self-righteous old "Mis' Hate-evil Beckett," and even gets a parting shot at Mr. Lorimer for not being up on his almanac (pp. 136-139). The irrepressible old widow is the complete master of her own existence. Like Mrs. Kew, she descends into involvement in the human community where and when she chooses. For the most part, to her the essence of life is contained in the natural world surrounding her shack—the woods, the animals, the herbs, the wild flowers, and especially the magnificent view from her doorstep.

The direct antithesis to the cheerful indomitability of Mrs. Kew and Mrs. Bonny is the "Kentucky Giantess," a side-show freak in the shabby circus that comes to Denby (a town eight miles inland). Mrs. Kew suddenly recognizes the fat lady as a girl she had known in her youth and draws out the woman's history, a singular chronicle of self-pity. Despite her plaintive tale of the hard life that has led to her current state of "help-
less” degradation, the giantess is a fraud outside and in. She
doesn’t want anyone to know that the circus poster lies about
her weight by two hundred pounds for fear that it might spoil
her “reputation.” Rather than attempt to reverse the pattern of
her life, she is content to rationalize her failure: “I do lose
heart sometimes, and wish I was a smart woman and could keep
house. I’d be smarter than ever I was when I had the chance;
I tell you that!” (p. 107). Mrs. Kew is disturbed by the chance
meeting, but she tells Helen and Kate that the giantess has had
a hard time of it “according to her account,” and then puts the
woman into perspective with the kind of incisive comment wor­
thy of Almira Todd: “She used to be a dreadful flighty, high­
tempered girl . . . She used to be real ambitious” (p. 108). It
is much easier for the giantess to attribute her spiritual paralysis
to an impersonal fate than to engage in any honest self-criticism.

Besides the tired circus, the only other entertainment during
the summer at Deephaven—a free lecture at the church one
rainy night on “The Elements of True Manhood”—also turns
into a portrait of self-delusion. The unnamed young lecturer
plunges into his prepared speech with sweaty intensity despite
the obvious fact that there is no one in the church to whom his
message applies: “There were fourteen people in the audience,
and we were all huddled together in a cowardly way in the pews
nearest the door: three old men, four women, and four children,
besides ourselves and the sexton, a deaf little old man with a
wooden leg” (p. 110). The young man concludes his lecture
to the restless, unresponsive audience with a flush of satisfac­
tion that underlines the totality of his self-delusion. The impact
of his message is measured by the response to his request for
contributions after the “free” lecture. The sexton is sleeping
too soundly to know it is over, much less perform his duty of
passing the basket, and the relieved “crowd” slips quietly away.
The lecturer’s determination to repeat his performance the next
night in hopes of better weather, a large crowd, and a more
responsive sexton, furnishes the appropriate final touch to an
episode that has been absurd from the start.

The function of the Kentucky Giantess and the unnamed lec­
turer can be expanded when they are compared with the natives
of the region. These two outsiders are not isolated by space
and time from the wider world, as the people of Deephaven are,
but rather wander through it aimlessly, carrying their isolation within them, because they refuse to face the reality of what they are. They travel the countryside seeking the patronage of people curious enough to think they are worth it and rationalize their inadequacies by thinking they are adding a bit of color and, in the case of the lecturer, deeper meaning to the mundane lives of these people bound to the region of their birth. They are fraudulent parasites whose motivation becomes far less harmless when contrasted to the often bitter struggle for survival of the honest people who try to farm the rocky soil that lies beyond the streets of Deephaven.

Helen Denis makes general references to the poverty of many of the coastal farm families at several points in the book and describes one whom she and Kate and Mrs. Kew encounter on their way to the circus at Denby. The wagon which contains Craper's five poorly dressed children looks "as if it might be wrecked by the least jar" (p. 100). When the haggard father stops to sit out a severe fit of consumptive coughing, one of the daughters cries softly, while the other children stare vacantly at the crowd of curious bystanders. Craper's determination to continue on to the circus so that his children may enjoy a rare entertainment is admirable, if ill-advised. As the three women pass the Craper family on the return trip the father is drunkenly flourishing his whip and hoarsely singing a meaningless tune. Despite Mrs. Kew's assurance that a Craper doesn't die easily, there can be no doubt that life on the Craper farm is a grim battle for subsistence and will never be anything else.

Miss Jewett's most fully delineated and most devastating portrayal of rural poverty in Deephaven is contained in the chapter "In Shadow." Early in the summer Helen and Kate take a drive up the desolate, rocky coast and come upon a lonely little farmhouse close by the sea. The desperate predicament of the family that lives there is revealed through telling details: the sickliness of the farmer and his wife, the neat but worn clothing of the children, the little girl's pride in a cheap string of beads, the farmer's gratitude for the dollar Helen gives him to tend their horse, and his wife's delight in talking with the distinguished young women about what one should wear. The portrayal of grinding poverty in this sketch rivals that of one of Miss Jewett's most memorable and oft anthologized short stories, "The Town Poor."
mer's despair is deeply moving because it is so utterly sincere. He and his wife have done everything in their power to better their lot, yet they "never seem to get forehanded." The man is a shipbuilder by trade, a victim of the commercial decline of the region who hasn't the stomach to engage in deepsea fishing, and, as he says, "you can see what my land's worth" (p. 207). The family's only hope for the future lies with their eldest son, who went to work in a Boston box shop that spring and has already sent home ten dollars for the family and a shawl for his mother.

The scene of Helen and Kate's return to the farmhouse in October is drawn with consummate skill. The serenity of the autumn day, the happy, leisurely pace of the drive along the coast, the brilliance of foliage, "the smell of the bayberry-bushes and pitch pines and the delicious saltiness of the sea" are all in ironic beforehand contrast to the emptiness that awaits the two young women at the end of their ride. The girls' unanswered knock on the door, their peek inside to find the furnishings intact but no one there, and the arrival of the farmer's half-sister and her husband to reveal that the farmer's wife had died of a fever early in August and that he, having given himself to alcohol after her death, was to be buried that very day, are stunningly dramatic. The stepsister's bitterness at her brother's assumed spinelessness, her resentment at having to take the two youngest children after she has just finished raising her own family, and her husband's unsuccessful attempts to placate her belligerent self-righteousness, combine to heighten the pathos of the situation.

"Now don't be hard on the dead, Marthy .... I guess they done the best they could. They weren't shif'less, you know; they never had no health; 't was against wind and tide with 'em all the time .... Who knows but they [the children] may do for us when we get to be old?" And then she turned and looked at him with utter contempt (p. 144).

Helen and Kate's somber attempts to rationalize the bitterness of the woman in terms of the hard-working, discouraging life she must have led do not erase their fear that the orphaned children will be reminded many times "that it was lucky they did not have to go to the poorhouse" (p. 145).

For Helen and Kate a beautiful, expectant day has been
ruined by the shadow of death. They watch the farmer's funeral procession but do not take part because they have "no right there." The now cloudy sky, the chill in the air, the rigid funeral etiquette of the small band of mourners, and the bitter grief of the eldest son, all bespeak the finality of death—the complete severance between the physical world and this humble, hard-working man who has asked of life only that it reward him with "his literal daily bread" (p. 146). One of the mourners puts it perfectly: "'He's gone aint he?' . . . That was it,—'gone" (p. 148). In one of Miss Jewett's most moving lyrical passages, Helen Denis describes the lingering effect of the farmer's defeat in his struggle with life.

The man to whom the farm was mortgaged will add the few forlorn acres to his pastureland, and the thistles which the man who is dead had fought for so many years will march in next summer and take unmolested possession.

I think today of that fireless, empty, forsaken house, where the winter sun shines in and creeps slowly along the floor; the bitter cold is in and around the house and the snow has shifted in at every crack; outside it is untrodden by any living creature's footstep. The wind blows and rushes and shakes the loose window-sashes in their frames, while the padlock knocks—knocks against the door (p. 149).10

The last character sketch in Deephaven, Miss Chauncey, brings the focus of the work back to the withering aristocracy, and, as in Miss Jewett's depiction of the grim reality of rural life preceding it, the chapter is devastatingly effective. East Parish, which is "like Deephaven, only on a smaller scale," has been eaten away more rapidly by the ravages of time, and the fate of its most prominent citizen is correspondingly severe. Where the antiquated elegance of the Brandon mansion in Deephaven was carefully preserved by its mistress while she lived, the Chauncey manor is already in ruins. Insanity overtook Katherine Brandon only in the last days of her life; Sally Chauncey has been deranged for years.

It is appropriate that the current leader of Deephaven society, Honora Carew, should tell Helen and Kate the sad history of the Chauncey family's decline. Ruined by the effects of the embargo, the grand life and proud heritage of the Chauncey

10 Cary (Sarah Orne Jewett, p. 138) points to the chapter "In Shadow" as an obvious refutation of Fred Lewis' "Pattee's absurd statement" that Miss Jewett "recorded only the things lovely and of good report." (The Development of the American Short Story [New York, 1923], 262).
family gave way to the horrors of poverty, insanity, and suicide. Old Miss Chauncey is the sole survivor of the family’s tragedy, and her survival is only physical. Garretted in an upper chamber of the disintegrating, spider-infested mansion, she surrounds herself with the musty relics of her happy youth. Her enfeebled mind is consumed by memories that never approach present realities. The town of East Parish provides her with a yearly allowance and makes no attempt to intrude on her pathetically contented isolation. In her personal isolation, dependent poverty, and incurable madness, Miss Chauncey is exactly what Honora Carew and the elite of Deephaven might have come to if they had not had the resources to sustain their illusion.

Kate Lancaster and Helen Denis’ attraction to Miss Chauncey is sentimental: she is a walking library of information about the glorious past and deports herself with unwavering elegance amid her pitiful surroundings. But, in spite of her quaint ceremonious speech, her delicately shaped hands, her stately posture, and her long stories of her coming out party—“when boat-loads of gay young guests came down from Riverport, and all the gentry from Deephaven” (p. 155), she remains a pathetic incarnation of a vanished world. When Miss Chauncey asks about her old Boston acquaintances and is told that they died decades before, her response defines the terrible irony of her situation: “Ah, they say everyone is ‘dead’ nowadays. I do not comprehend the silly idea” (p. 154). The young women have to lie to her thereafter to keep a conversation going. They must avoid any reference to unpleasant realities because this demented old woman remains, in the words of a little East Parish girl, “proud as Lucifer,” and has no patience with anyone who contradicts her.

Helen Denis finally makes the inevitable evaluation of Miss Chauncey: “it was a blessed thing that her shattered reason made her unconscious of the change in her fortunes, and incapable of comparing the end of her life with its beginning” (p. 156). But Helen never carries the thought to its ultimate conclusion: Miss Chauncey’s insanity allows her to live entirely in the past; for the elite of Deephaven, rationalization serves the

11 There are many parallels between Miss Chauncey and two of Miss Jewett’s later creations, Lady Ferry and Mistress Sydenham. Sarah Jewett admitted in a letter that Miss Chauncey was the only character in Deephaven drawn from a real person, but added, “I remember her much more ghostly and not such a brisk and determined person as the artist drew.” (Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett, ed. Annie Fields [Boston, 1911], 113).
same purpose. Even the morbid circumstances surrounding Miss Chauncey's death the next winter—the result of her escapes from a neighbor's house to return to the frigid environment of the crumbling mansion which gave her life the only meaning it could have—suggest a parallel. Only by returning again and again to their visions of the past can the upper ranks of Deephaven society find a seemingly purposeful existence. As with Miss Chauncey, it must all end with their finally becoming a part of that past.

The conclusion to Deephaven is only slightly more effective than the opening chapters. Coming as it does after "In Shadow" and "Miss Chauncey," the nostalgic philosophizing of Helen Denis and Kate Lancaster in the last chapter only serves to emphasize the disparity between their view of the area and the reality of the everyday life lived there. The attempt by the two young women to underline the charm and "simple dignity" of a town that tries "to be loyal to the traditions of its ancestors" (p. 161) cannot, in the final analysis, hide the fact that Deephaven is dying: "By and by the Deephaven warehouses will fall and be used for firewood by the fisher-people, and the wharves will be worn away by the tides. The few gentlefolk who still linger will be dead then" (p. 165). The two young women retire from Deephaven before the onslaught of winter, a season symbolic of the rapidly approaching fate of the town itself.

The sea had looked rough and cold for many days, and the house itself had grown chilly—all the world seemed waiting for the snow to come. ... The houses were shut up as close as possible, and the old sailors did not seem cheery any longer; they looked forlorn, and it was not a pleasant prospect to be so long weather-bound in port (p. 164).

For Helen and Kate, Deephaven has been a delightful summer interlude. Their world is Boston, a place where they can savor their romanticized memories of Deephaven. One of Helen's casual remarks near the end of the book pinpoints the dilemma of many of the people they are leaving behind: "I suppose if we really belonged in Deephaven we should think it a hard fate, and not enjoy it half so much as we have this summer" (p. 160). The young Bostonians' detachment is related to that of the Deephaven aristocracy with whom they identify, but for the people who lack the resources to be able to live in
the past and are forced instead to come to grips with present realities in this declining region to earn their literal daily bread, the point of view is quite different. Beneath the facade of a fading but, to the visitors, still compelling charm, there lies a Deephaven laced with poverty, despair, insanity, and death. Isolation from the vital outside world may sustain the self-delusively way of life of the old captains, the Lorimers and Carews, and, by association, Widow Jim and Widow Tully; Mrs. Kew, Mrs. Bonny, and Danny may find a degree of personal fulfillment in spite of it; but the toll of its victims lingers—the Crapers, the coastal farmer and his family, Miss Chauncey, East Parish, and, inevitably, Deephaven itself.

The fictive power of Deephaven survives despite its intrusive narrator. Helen Denis' attempts to apply a veneer of sentimentality to her summer's experiences in Deephaven are often distracting, but they cannot blur the forceful realism that lies at the heart of the book. The Deephaven "sketches," as Miss Jewett consistently termed them, often have a vitality and clarity of vision that rivals some of her most admired mature works. Granting its obvious flaws, Deephaven retains a universal appeal. It is the lasting creation of a young artist who perhaps wrote better than she knew.