

“THE TERROR OF IT”
SERVANT REBELLION IN EDITH WHARTON’S GHOST STORIES

THESIS

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I. EDITH WHARTON: PREJUDICES AND ALLOWANCES

Edith Wharton, like many authors, focused her fictional work on what she knew, and for Wharton that was the lifestyle of the financially carefree. Although both her life and her work fit quite neatly within this upper echelon of American society, she was seemingly also conflicted about the issue of class. In her personal life, she exhibited a number of dualities with regard to class and privilege. She considered herself decidedly anti-leisure class, yet she herself enjoyed a life of leisure. She was independently wealthy, but earned her own substantial money as well. She supposedly treated her servants extremely well, but evidence shows that she believed the servant class to be an inferior one. She was vehemently capitalist; even so, a select division of her works, her ghost stories, assumes a decidedly Marxist quality. Wharton offers the lower class a much more substantial role in her ghost stories than in her non-fantastical ones: in many cases, the servants are even allowed an opportunity to rebel against their masters, who would naturally be people of Wharton's own class. However, it is only in her ghost stories—in her stories that are not “real”—that Edith Wharton allows the servants and working class an avenue for rebellion and equality. Although these stories appear to grant a much needed voice to the often neglected working class, in the end, by only proffering such freedom in her ghost stories, Wharton reaffirms the prejudices of her class.

Unquestionably, Edith Wharton led a privileged life. Despite her considerable means and upbringing, she rejected “society” from a very early age: “She describes

herself, in relation to her parents' lavishly described social life, as an attentively watching outsider" (Lee 17). Her aversion to high society extended beyond her youth and well into her older age. Several critics have observed that her written work often comments on the leisure class to which her parents belonged. In her analysis of *The House of Mirth*, Ruth Bernard Yeazell notes connections between it and Thorsten Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, concluding that Wharton considered "the study of the leisure class [to be] above all a study of waste" (714). Benjamin D. Carson similarly concludes that the heroine of *The House of Mirth* embodies Wharton's lifelong commentary on the leisure class: "Lily is both an insider and an intruder. She, like Wharton herself, is both complicit with the ideology of the leisured class and in rebellion against that ideology" (707). So while Wharton by birth belonged to the leisure class, she revolted against it. One such means of rebellion was in simply earning her own income. Although her prosperous heritage initially facilitated the free time necessary to devote her life to writing, Wharton did ultimately earn her upper class status. Her income from her publications was indisputably remarkable: "by 1919 Wharton was one of the leading money-earners of her literary generation, with \$40,000 a year (a sum equivalent today to nearly 400,000 pounds)" (Preston 138). Her earnings dropped considerably during the Depression, but rebounded relatively quickly. By 1936, her income had bounced back to \$130,000 for the year (Lee 743). Wharton thus essentially fell into two different classes: she inherited a substantial volume of capital, but she also worked to maintain her privilege. Such a duality enabled her to comment on multiple classes in her work, both the independently wealthy and the working class.

Nevertheless, her own experiences as a member of the elite colored Wharton's commentary on the working class. Her unparalleled privilege and wealth bred a subconscious sense of superiority, which exhibited itself primarily in nonfictional writings, such as her memoirs and letters. She claimed to be very close to her servants, even going so far as to consider them more like family than her own relations. However, the nature of a master-servant agreement simply does not allow for familial tendencies. Under the surface of benevolent mistress, Wharton harbored deep-seated prejudices against those of a lower class than herself, servants in particular.

Edith and Teddy Wharton held a number of servants under their direction, and by all accounts, both Whartons seemingly treated them well. For example, they installed an elevator at The Mount, their home in Lenox, Massachusetts, to spare the servants' backs when moving heavy luggage (Lee 149). Likewise, Wharton designed the servants' sewing room at The Mount so that its numerous windows created a bright and airy setting (The Mount). As testimony to the Whartons' fair treatment, several of their servants remained under their employ for decades, even until their own deaths. Catherine Gross spent most of her life working for Wharton, from her early thirties until her death at the age of eighty-one (Lee 72). Although originally hired by Teddy Wharton prior to their marriage, Alfred White remained with Edith through the Whartons' divorce, also until his death (Lee 81-82). Hired much later than Gross or White, but still employed for twenty years, Elise Devinck too remained with Wharton until she died in 1934 (Lee 446). Because they stayed with her through their own old age, Wharton transformed to the role of caregiver for her servants. Both Catherine Gross and Elise Devinck fell ill around the same time, Gross with sudden dementia and Devinck with "pernicious anaemia" (Lee

711). That Wharton unswervingly cared for them gives further evidence of her good treatment towards her servants. She was evidently comfortable assuming this role, whereas other masters might well have pushed the ailing servants aside. In her own life, Wharton seemingly subverted the master-servant relationship, assuming the role of caretaker for her caretakers.

Despite this apparent benevolence towards her servants, the innate brutality of the master-servant dichotomy cannot be ignored. Wharton's servants undoubtedly performed necessary maintenance and housekeeping functions, but they also served as a status symbol. Daniel E. Sutherland explains in his book *Americans and Their Servants* that there is a dangerously fine line between live-in servants and their employers:

Nineteenth-century Americans were burdened with an anachronistic master-servant (as opposed to employer-employee) relationship in which servants lived with employers and depended upon them for food, shelter, and sometimes clothing. . . . Unlike modern contractual agreements based on economics, service arrangements remained largely informal, based on social relationships or "status."

(5)

This particular brand of employment fosters an unnatural degree of power for the employer. The servants do not rely on their employer only for money, as in modern arrangements. Rather the servants must depend on the master for everything; they are utterly at the mercy of their employer for all the basic necessities of life. The Whartons who, like many of the primary characters in Wharton's fiction, held onto this "anachronistic" system of servitude and subjugation, actively perpetuating social

inequality. They may have treated their servants well by comparison to other masters, but that does not change the reality of servitude.

Wharton's autobiographical works reveal confirmation that Wharton actually viewed the servant class as a fundamentally inferior one. Her memoirs, *A Backward Glance* and "Life and I," contain subtle substantiation of this. In "Life and I," she laments being denied "first-rate teachers" during her childhood and describes her governess in less than complimentary terms: "My good little governess was cultivated & conscientious, but she never struck a spark from me, she never threw a new light on any subject, or made me see the relation of things to each other. My childhood & youth were an intellectual desert" (1089, ampersands in original). She obviously held no respect for this woman who fostered this "intellectual desert" during her childhood, but furthermore, employing a phrase such as "good little governess" implies a latent condescension. In *A Backward Glance*, she similarly questions the intelligence of Henry James's servant, Burgess:

He seldom gave any sign of comprehension when spoken to, and I remember once saying to my Alsatian maid, who was always as quick as a flash at the uptake: "Do you know, I think Burgess must be very stupid. When I speak to him I'm never even sure that he's heard what I've said."

My maid looked at me gravely. "Oh, no, Madam: Burgess is remarkably intelligent. *He always understands what Mr. James says.*" (969)

Wharton here draws a subtle distinction between her servants and the servants of others. Within the same sequence, she indicates that she thinks James's servant is "very stupid," yet she shows her own maid's quick wittedness. In this brief interchange, Wharton

portrays her own maid as a sharp, clever woman, while simultaneously describing the servants of others as simpleminded. Wharton took pride in surrounding herself with intelligent and interesting people. As a class, however, Wharton considered servants to be mentally inferior. In addition to such examples, where Wharton overtly questions the intelligence of the working class, she also deployed more subtle prejudices against them through diction. Wharton takes special care to portray servants' accents "accurately" throughout *A Backward Glance*, spelling linguistic characteristics phonetically. For example, an exchange with her friend Howard Sturgis's maid Christina is peppered with Scottish dialect: "Did ye say I was to tek a note, mem, to Mr. Sturgis?" (956). By positioning quotations such as this in the midst of her own, perfectly constructed prose, she intentionally places herself in a position above those who cannot speak properly in her opinion. Wharton lived and travelled all over the world. She certainly encountered and befriended people of all cultural backgrounds, but her peers do not warrant such visually differentiated dialects in these texts; only the lower class receives such a distinction.

It is her personal correspondences, though, that most overtly betray her true views of both the servant class and economic theory. In a letter to her friend Daisy Chanler, Wharton emits unmitigated prejudice: "The servant class can never grasp anything like that . . . If they *could* [. . .] they wouldn't be servants, but Presidents and Prime Ministers" (qtd. in Lee 711). At the core of her economic beliefs is that one must work in order to be rewarded financially. Even her charity work in France during World War I was founded on the concept that one should earn what one receives. She chose not to supply handouts to people in need. Rather, she offered employment to seamstresses, out

of work due to the slow down in the fashion industry. Edith Wharton believed that people should make their own living, just as she did, epitomizing that great American ideology—work hard and be rewarded.

Since the majority of her significant characters are of the upper class, it is almost startling when Wharton strays from this inclination and writes instead from the vantage point of the working class. Barbara A. White observes that in her later stories—those stories written after World War I—Wharton devotes more attention to women and the lower class: “The characters in the late stories are overwhelmingly female and include more lower-class types than ever before. Although male narrators and reflectors still predominate when the late stories are taken as a whole, Wharton was gradually using more female and more lower-class reflectors” (88-89). White argues that in these later stories, the servants become actual characters, not just names or a part of “the background as part of the furniture,” as in the prewar stories (92).

Wharton’s later stories, if for no other reason than the sudden appearance of lower class characters, require a Marxist evaluation to grasp fully their meaning. The nature of servitude necessitates and perpetuates a culture in which one faction clearly stands over another, and this ubiquitous class struggle between “oppressor and oppressed” lies at the core of Marxist theory:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that

each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. (Marx and Engels 241)

The eternal struggle that Marx and Engels propound in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* may at times be obscured, but it is always present. The struggle never sleeps; even if it resides below the surface, we should expose the struggle in all our endeavors, including in the study of literature. The American Marxist literary critic, Fredric Jameson, attempts in his treatise *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* to prove that such a Marxian viewpoint is indeed necessary to understand a given piece of literature. In a claim particularly relevant to the study of Wharton's work, Jameson considers the representation of the lower class in extant literature and, more importantly, who composes the representations:

. . . since by definition the cultural monuments and masterworks that have survived tend necessarily to perpetuate only a single voice in this class dialogue, the voice of a hegemonic class, they cannot be properly assigned their relational place in a dialogical system without the restoration or artificial reconstruction of the voice to which they were initially opposed, a voice for the most part stifled and reduced to silence, marginalized, its own utterances scattered to the winds, or reappropriated in their turn by the hegemonic culture. (85)

Jameson asserts that the only present voice in the supposed "dialogue" of literary representation is that of the ruling class. Wharton undoubtedly belonged to that ruling class, and she published from and for it. It should not be surprising that the overwhelming majority of her work reflects and immortalizes the experiences of her hegemonic class. Interestingly, though she herself typically silenced the societally

disenfranchised in her work, she also undertakes the challenge to offer an “artificial reconstruction of the voice” to these servants in a selection of her stories.

In these later stories in which Wharton offers representation to the underrepresented, she opts for a fantastical genre. The stories White selects to prove her argument, “After Holbein,” “All Souls’,” “The Looking Glass,” and “Bottle of Perrier,” also share a notable characteristic that she neglects: all the stories using “more lower-class reflectors” all also contain fantastical qualities. The true tendency in Wharton’s attention to the lower class lies, then, in the ghost stories. In her book *Fantasy: Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson reinforces Jameson’s estimation that the silenced must be granted a voice in order to gain visibility. That fantastic literature is thematically revolutionary; that is, it often concerns itself with the oppression of subjugated people, is in itself a revolt against the literary tradition that typically repressed such groups of people. As such a revolt, Jackson claims, the genre naturally assumes characteristics that are in opposition to the core literary traditions of the elite:

The fantastic is predicated on the category of the “real”, and it introduces areas which can be conceptualized only by negative terms according to the categories of nineteenth century realism: thus, the im-possible, the un-real, the nameless, formless, shapeless, un-known, in-visible. What could be termed a “bourgeois” category of the real is under attack. (26)

Fantastical literature as we know it today originated in response to the very tradition that Wharton employed in much of her work. That literature hailing from the Victorian era preferred an adherence to verisimilitude, to the definite and stable. Fantastical literature takes those voices that are lost in this favored, “realistic” literature and provides them

with a forum to be heard. Fantasy thus makes the figuratively unseen visible: “Themes of the fantastic in literature revolve around this problem of making visible the un-seen, of articulating the un-said” (Jackson 48).

The genre of the fantastic, then, takes the traditional understanding of “real” and inverts it, forming a metaphorical real to combat the injustices of the “real.” Tzvetan Todorov, one of the foremost theoreticians of fantastical literature, identifies the hesitation that the characters and reader feel when presented with the events of a fantastical story as “at the very heart of the fantastic”: “The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us” (25). Within the realm of Wharton’s ghost stories, the characters encounter situations that do not follow the generally accepted rules of the universe—they are experiencing scenarios that are not “real.” Between Wharton’s own privileged background and her usual propensity to avoid the servant class in her works, it seems unlikely that she consciously employed the fantastical genre as a political statement to animate these typically neglected characters, but rather as a subconscious way to reveal conflicts in the world around her at the time. Her unconscious prejudices seems to be at work in these fantastical works, revealing the metaphorical “real” at play in the fantastic: revealing those concerns that we cannot talk about openly.

Wharton had a unique relationship with fantastical texts—as a child and young adult they relentlessly frightened her: “till I was twenty-seven or eight, I could not sleep in the room with a book containing a ghost-story, & . . . I have frequently had to burn

books of this kind, because it frightened me to know that they were downstairs in the library!" ("Life and I" 1080, ampersand in original). A relapse of typhoid fever, combined with a "robber-story," transformed her from a "fearless child" to one haunted by "chronic fear":

To an unimaginative child the tale would no doubt have been harmless; but it was a "robber-story", & with my intense Celtic sense of the super-natural, tales of robbers & ghosts were perilous reading. This one [story] brought on a serious relapse, & again my life was in danger; & when I came to myself, it was to enter a world haunted by formless horrors. I had always been a fearless child; now I lived in a state of chronic fear. . . . I was never able to formulate my terror. It was like some dark undefinable menace, forever dogging my steps, lurking, & threatening; I was conscious of it wherever I went by day, & at night it made sleep impossible, unless a light & a nurse-maid were in the room. ("Life and I" 1079-80, ampersands in original)

Even before her fear of the fantastical set in, she exhibited a general distaste for it. When discussing her habit of telling stories as a small child, she notes that fairytales never interested her: "Of the substance of these endless improvisations I remember nothing, save that they were always about 'real people,' & *never* about fairies. Fairy-tales bored me" ("Life and I" 1077, ampersand in original). In *A Backward Glance*, she is more cryptic in her explanation, saying only that she disliked fairytales: "I never cared much in my little-childhood for fairy tales, or any appeals to my fancy through the fabulous or legendary" (779). She never explains why, or when, this indifference lifted, but towards the end of her life, she had clearly abandoned her intolerance for the fantastical, writing a

number of ghost stories. She even expresses in her Preface to a collection of ghost stories why she now finds writing them a valuable exercise: “But when I first began to read, and then to write, ghost stories, I was conscious of a common medium between myself and my readers, of their meeting me halfway among the primeval shadows” (*Ghost Stories* 8). Her acceptance of ghost stories as a viable genre coincides with a desire to connect with her readers, that is, normal, everyday people. Through these works she seems to address her subconscious prejudices against both fantasy and the lower class, forging a connection with her waning readership.

Despite Wharton’s eventual embrace of the fantastical in her writing, critics have not been so welcoming, apparently on account of a broad combination of factors. A rather disproportionate percentage of the scholarly attention to Edith Wharton’s works leans in favor of her realistic works. White attributes this uneven attention to two works: “It becomes clear that Wharton survived in the canon of American literature, when so many other women disappeared, only because of the adaptability of *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence* to the critics’ preoccupation with the ‘American dream’” (xii). Furthermore, White contends that although she was well known during her life as a prolific writer of short stories, the critics have largely ignored them: “Despite Wharton’s reputation as a story writer during her lifetime, she is seldom mentioned in the books on the short story published in the last fifty years” (xi). In her 1999 article “‘Loyal Saints or Devious Rascals,’” Sherrie A. Inness notes the want of scholarship on the servant stories: “Servants are particularly intriguing to study in Wharton’s short fiction because the subject has been inadequately addressed in previous studies” (338). Jackson reminds us that ghost stories, as well, are often overlooked in critical study: “The dismissal of the

fantastic to the margins of literary culture is in itself an ideologically significant gesture, one which is not dissimilar to culture's silencing of unreason" (173). Whatever the reason for their neglect—short story over novel, servant- over elite-centric, fantastical over realistic—these stories deserve critical attention because they are so clearly different from the majority of her other work.

The working class in Wharton's non-fantastical works rarely assumes more than a secondary role. They make no significant contribution to the story or plot, simply answer the door or bring in tea. In the few works featuring lower class characters at the heart of the action who are not servants, the *dénouements* seldom fair particularly well for the lower class. Unlike the ghost stories in which such characters have an outlet for equality, in the realistic works, the penniless characters live and die as such. "Mrs. Manstey's View," for example, seems specifically to punish a member of the working class for attempting to secure her scanty means. In it, the title character, the widow of a poor clerk, essentially sacrifices her life in an attempt to preserve her meager existence. Stricken with gout and a cripplingly arthritic body, Mrs. Manstey's lonely existence is comforted by one simple pleasure—the view from her apartment window. When one of her neighbors begins construction on an excessively tall extension to her house, threatening to obstruct Mrs. Manstey's view, she takes action. After talking to the neighbor and even offering a bribe does not stop the building, she takes more drastic action, setting fire to the construction site. Her action does little to slow the progress, but she is taken with pneumonia and dies shortly thereafter. In this short story, a woman driven to desperate measures to secure her only asset is punished with death for her attempt.

Some of Wharton's better-known longer fiction also handles issues of the lower class, but again, the outcome is often not positive. *Ethan Frome* follows its title character through his fruitless existence in a poor, rural community. *Summer* forces Charity Royall to choose between a life of squalor with her birth family and a life of financial security with her adoptive father and would-be husband. Wharton's most widely known treatment of class, though, can be found in *The House of Mirth*. In this work, Lily Bart vies to secure a seat in high society, but ultimately fails to a tragic extent. What could be interpreted as a work in support of those struggling financially—Lily Bart, after all, is a sympathetic, honest, and loyal character—is really a commentary against the business of marriage and the leisure class of Wharton's upbringing. In her memoir, Wharton recalls her exposure to such a ruthless society when she discusses *The House of Mirth*:

In what aspect could a society of irresponsible pleasure-seekers be said to have, on the "old woe of the world," any deeper bearing than the people composing such a society could guess? The answer was that a frivolous society can acquire dramatic significance only through what its frivolity destroys. Its tragic implication lies in its power of debasing people and ideals. The answer, in short, was my heroine, Lily Bart. (*Backward Glance* 940)

Wharton uses Lily Bart as a forum to condemn a society that can essentially and thoughtlessly destroy a human being. While Wharton does address financial hardship in *The House of Mirth*, the novel is decidedly more anti-leisure class than it is pro-working class.

Ultimately, Wharton's commentary on frivolity in *The House of Mirth* extends to her ghost stories as well. The ghost tales, however, assume a decidedly more pro-

working class stance within Wharton's pervasive criticism of waste. Unlike the realistic works that address concerns of the lower class, the ghost stories ultimately offer empowerment to the characters at play. Here lies the fundamental difference between these "realistic" works that depict class issues and the ghost stories—the ghost stories provide the servants with the framework necessary to exact revenge on those who have exploited them. The three stories under detailed discussion in the following chapters, "Mr. Jones," "Afterward," and "All Souls'," published in 1928, 1910, and 1937, respectively, particularly demonstrate this tendency in Wharton's fantastical short fiction. These stories show Wharton granting the servants a sizeable, and even subversive, voice and position, offering them a forum to speak—and act—out against the injustices forced upon them. Most significantly, in each of these stories, the servants actually emerge victorious over their masters and mistresses.

II. UPTURNING THE MASTER-SERVANT DICHOTOMY IN “MR. JONES”

Like a true autocrat, Mr. Jones rules the Bells estate through fear—he sets the rules, he controls the distribution of information, he makes examples of people who defy his will. Mr. Jones is no typical tyrant, though: he is a servant and a ghost. In perhaps the most subversive of possible moves, he adopts the behavior of his oppressors, essentially reversing the roles of oppressor and oppressed. In Wharton’s “Mr. Jones,” the title character accomplishes just that through his dominance over the Bells estate. Mr. Jones inverts the usual master-servant dichotomy in this story, hijacking the role and characteristics of “master,” although he was in his life a servant. Through his ultimately deplorable actions in this role, he forces the upper class in this story to face their status and cruel actions.

“Mr. Jones” opens with Lady Jane Lynke inheriting the long neglected Bells estate from a distant and unknown relative. From her first visit and throughout her residency there, the staff of the house, Mrs. Clemm and her niece Georgiana, acts under the direction of a Mr. Jones, who is heard only, not seen. The power of Mr. Jones becomes more and more mysterious as the story progresses. No one has yet laid eyes on Mr. Jones, yet he calls all the shots, for example who can go where and what family archives can be reviewed. The staff members of the house are clearly terrified of him, but Lady Jane and Edward Stramer, her friend who joins her for much of her time at the house, cannot understand why. It is revealed at the end of the story that Mr. Jones has

long since died, but his ghost, who we now know that Jane saw earlier in the mysterious, forbidden “blue parlour,” is controlling the affairs of the estate from beyond the grave.

As often occurs with Wharton’s fiction, the main character of this tale enjoys great privilege and wealth. The first three words of the story set the tone for the level of financial advantage throughout: “Lady Jane Lynke” (497). Before we know anything at all about the direction of this story, we learn that at least one character warrants the title “Lady.” Jameson reminds us that “for Marxism classes must always be apprehended relationally, and that the ultimate (or ideal) form of class relationship and class struggle is always dichotomous” (83). Within this story, we have the two sides of the Marxian class dichotomy: Lady Jane Lynke chiefly deals with the servants, Mrs. Clemm, Georgiana, and Mr. Jones. As the story progresses, however, the roles of servant and master actually change hands several times. The concept of master and servant can really only be interpreted in context, because, as Jameson explains, the definitions must be “relational”:

For Marxism, however, the very content of a class ideology is relational, in the sense that its “values” are always actively in situation with respect to the opposing class, and defined against the latter: normally, a ruling class ideology will explore various strategies of the *legitimation* of its own power position, while an oppositional culture or ideology will, often in covert and disguised strategies, seek to contest and to undermine the dominant “value system.” (84)

Interestingly in this story, Mr. Jones, a member originally of the “opposition culture” of the servant class, actually destabilizes the ideology of the ruling class with the effect of exposing the flaws of the ruling “value system.” Through Mr. Jones’s ultimate display of corrupted power, he demonstrates to Lady Jane the essence the power that she herself

enjoys. Mr. Jones displays the characteristics of Lady Jane's class, and thus expands on Jameson's dichotomous class struggle and adopts a new level—a member of the generally oppressed class has become an oppressor.

Although the Lynke family is as a whole of the privileged class, there is a clear hierarchy within it. The executors of this once extravagant estate presumably had money in days past, but this subsection of the family was ultimately less fortunate than Jane's side: "No one had lived at Bells since the last Lord Thudenev, then a penniless younger son, had forsaken it sixty years before to seek his fortune in Canada. And before that, he and his widowed mother, distant poor relations, were housed in one of the lodges, and the great place, even in their day, had been as mute and solitary as the family vault" (497). The language employed in these two sentences reinforces the feeling of hopelessness that accompanies financial ruin. Words such as "no one," "solitary," "forsaken," and "vault" imply a separation from the rest of the family. "Penniless" and "poor" then imply that this isolation is due to the financial standing of this side of the family. Lady Jane, on the other hand, is clearly from the more affluent side; she is the "daughter of a different branch" of the family, "to which an earldom and considerable possessions had accrued" (497). Within the familial hierarchy, Jane sits above the others. Because she has both status and money, the principal character is the ultimate upper character, even of the upper class.

Although undeniably of the uppermost status, Lady Jane, holds a skewed view of her privilege:

One of several daughters, moderately but sufficiently provided for, she had gone early from home, lived in London lodgings, travelled in tropic lands, spent

studious summers in Spain and Italy, and written two or three brisk business-like little books about cities usually dealt with sentimentally. And now, just back from a summer in the south of France, she stood ankle-deep in wet bracken, and gazed at Bells lying there under a September sun that looked like moonlight.

(498)

Nothing about this description of her upbringing sounds “moderate.” She is well educated and well travelled. She even enjoys the leisure time necessary to write a few books. Such a lifestyle far exceeds the working class definition of “sufficiently provided for.” To her servants, “sufficiently provided for” may mean securing food and shelter. Jane’s first visit to Bells serves as an illustration of the variant definitions of adequate means. Jane rather effortlessly produces a small bribe, and Georgiana desperately clutches it. Lady Jane, accustomed to getting her way and confident in the power of money, resorts to bribery to convince a woman of lower class to submit: “The woman twisted her apron-strings in perplexity. ‘Come, you know,’ Lady Jane urged, producing a half-a-crown. The woman turned pale” (500). Georgiana is clearly made uncomfortable by the prospect of disobeying her tacit orders not to let anyone in the house—she fidgets and blanches at the bribe. Ultimately though, the prospect of extra money convinces her, as Lady Jane knew it would, to try again to gain permission.

As further evidence of Jane’s distorted understanding of privilege, Bells is incongruously described as “not nearly as large as it looked” (502). The physical descriptions of the property, however, indicate otherwise. The vantage point is critical in this assessment of the house: the house was smaller than it looked, but to whom? For the servants who are solely responsible for the upkeep of the estate, the house likely feels

larger than it looks. The house has only one story, which may initially give the impression of a smaller house. The “great saloon” and the “blue parlour,” though, prove that there are several sitting rooms in the house, making it larger than the narrator’s assessment of it in the opening of the story.

Such a misperception in the house’s magnitude seems to foster a strained relationship between Jane and her new home. After a rocky first visit to her new home, Lady Jane feels that the house has embraced her when she actually moves in: “Lady Jane looked up with a smile of ownership at the old walls which seemed to smile back” (506). Despite her apparent sense of entitlement that comes with “ownership,” Jane soon feels the house is rejecting her in a way. Anxiety quickly overcomes her, and she feels compelled to invite people to in the house:

Lady Jane had exulted in her resolve to keep Bells to herself till she and the old house should have had time to make friends. But after a few days she recalled the uneasy feeling which had come over her as she stood on the threshold after her first tentative ring. Yes; she had been right in thinking she would have to have people about her to take the chill off. The house was too old, too mysterious, too much withdrawn into its own secret past, for her poor little present to fit into it without uneasiness. (509)

Wharton clearly draws upon the Gothic tradition of situating a fantastical story within a spacious, spooky setting. Jane attributes her restlessness to the house itself. The main character, and by extension, the reader, is troubled in this space. Jackson argues in *Fantasy: Literature of Subversion* that space plays a critical role in fantastical literature: “Enclosures are central to modern fantasy, from the dark threatening edifices and castles

of Gothic fiction and Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*, through the threatening architecture of nineteenth-century tales of terror, to new enclosures of modern metropolitan nightmare in Dickens, Kafka and Pynchon" (47). Lee similarly contends that the house in a story such as "Mr. Jones" prepares the reader for what is surely to come: "the ancient other-worldliness of the house gets the reader ready for a ghost" (722). The house is simultaneously a possession and seat of power for Lady Jane Lynke, but the forces at play within it will ultimately be her downfall. The house is haunted by a former servant, who is determined to maintain his own status within the house. Since Lady Jane almost immediately feels uneasy in her new home, it appears that she senses the looming struggle.

As Lady Jane attempts to settle into her new surroundings, she realizes that she knows startlingly little about her own family. For example, she recognizes some faces and names among the memorials in the chapel annexed to the house, but not others: "Some [of the monuments and brasses] hailed her with vocal memories, others whispered out of the remote and the unknown: it was a shame to know so little about her family" (498). Jane admittedly knows very little about her family, and this ignorance haunts her throughout the story. One tomb particularly interests her—it enumerates the titles and positions of one "Peregrine Vincent Theobald Lynke," followed only by "Also His Wife." Later, Jane "racked her memory in vain" to recall who "Also His Wife" might be (499). "Also His Wife" is the impetus for Jane's sudden interest in her heritage. She eventually uncovers this woman's identity as the "daughter of Obadiah Portallo Esqre, of Purflew Castle, Caermarthenshire, and Bombay House, Twickenham, East India merchant, senior member of the banking house of Portallo and Pres—and so on and so

on” (520). Lady Jane’s ancestor has suddenly become akin to one of Whartons: “My great-grandfather next became an East-India merchant, and carried on a large and successful trade with foreign ports” (*Backward Glance* 787). Herself from similar ancestry, Wharton would have surely understood the implications of such a financial past. Both Wharton and Lady Jane inherited their money from people who earned it exploiting the people and resources of others. Such a tradition of exploitation continues through the present generations. Jane is perhaps the most dangerous kind of master, for she does not appreciate her own power. Mr. Jones, who most certainly knows this family’s history can therefore justify his actions against the residents. Ultimately, it is clear that a love of power drives Mr. Jones’s actions, but such ancestral ammunition might provide the premise needed for Mr. Jones to continue his terrorization of this household.

From Jane’s first visit to Bells, it is clear that her usual privilege and sense of entitlement do not apply here. The estate now belongs to her, but when she attempts to visit it, Mr. Jones circuitously denies her admittance to the house. Upon returning home, her friends scoff at the fact that Jane did not insist to see the house or speak with Mr. Jones: “‘Didn’t see him either? But I never heard such nonsense! Why in the world didn’t you insist?’ / ‘Yes; why didn’t you?’ they all chorused; and she could only answer, a little lamely: ‘I think I was afraid’” (501). They consider it preposterous that Jane did not force her way into the house—she is, after all, a person of high status and entitled to do so. They find it equally absurd that Lady Jane, a woman of paramount social standing, should be frightened by a mere servant. Although her company laughs at the suggestion, Jane knows the seriousness of her response and reaction.

Jane soon discovers that her friend Stramer had a similar indirect encounter with Mr. Jones many years before; it surprises her to learn that Mr. Jones worked at Bells so long ago. The manner in which she phrases her response, though, betrays subtle prejudice against people of lower class: ““Ah—he was in possession already?”” (502). The use of the word “possession” is clearly loaded in the context of human beings and servant-hood. Lady Jane’s true opinion of the servant class is that they can be possessed or owned by others. As it turns out, though, her choice of words proves ironically true: Mr. Jones carries the entire household, servants and Lady Jane included, in his possession. His possession also extends to a metaphysical level—the house is possessed by his spirit. Mr. Jones has in fact always possessed and controlled the house. During Stramer’s earlier visit, he too senses that he simply could not cross Mr. Jones’s wishes:

“It is queer, though, that at such a distance of time we should have been given exactly the same answer.”

She glanced up at him curiously. “Yes; and you didn’t try to force your way in either?”

“Oh, no: it was not possible.”

“So I felt,” she agreed. (502)

Inexplicably, and singlehandedly, this servant subverts all prior expectations of upper class privilege. These two separate, wealthy people, on two disparate occasions were both rendered powerless, despite their status. Mr. Jones, who currently forces Jane to submission, has indeed always had this unnerving and unsettling effect on the upper class.

Upon Jane's permanent arrival at Bells, however, Mr. Jones appears to be the model servant. When Lady Jane questions Mrs. Clemm about Mr. Jones, she describes him in terms that equate him to the ideal servant: "‘he's never once been away that I know of.' / 'What a wonderful record!'" (505). Mr. Jones, so dedicated to Bells that he has never left it, appears the perfect servant, especially in comparison to Mrs. Clemm. Mrs. Clemm's actions often present her as an undesirable employee, deceptive and insubordinate. In Lady Jane's attempt to gather information about the mysterious Mr. Jones, Mrs. Clemm purposefully misleads Jane. Her answers direct Lady Jane to believe that Mr. Jones is a living, breathing person, not the domineering spirit of a former servant: "it's hard to say, isn't it, what an old servants' duties are, when he's stayed on in the same house so many years?" (505). In the end, Mrs. Clemm does intentionally mislead Lady Jane, but she does so because she is frightened of Mr. Jones. Her fear ultimately proves well-founded, as he eventually murders her. At this point, though, her lies seem like simple insubordination. She carefully selects words that technically relay the truth: "Well, my lady, he's more dead than living" (504). Mr. Jones is, in fact, dead. Jane naturally assumes that Mrs. Clemm's meant her answer metaphorically: that Mr. Jones is so old that he is closer to death than life.

Lady Jane does not, however, give credence to Mrs. Clemm's seemingly effusive portrayal of Mr. Jones for long. She soon tires with his veiled control, and attempts to take a stand against the ubiquitous Mr. Jones. She does so by insisting that she and Stramer spend the evening in the forbidden blue parlour. Mrs. Clemm's nervous attempts to dissuade her seem to aggravate Lady Jane:

“Is there anything wrong about the saloon, my lady? Georgiana understood—”

“That I want the fire in the blue parlour. Yes. What’s wrong with the saloon is that one freezes in there.”

“But the chimney smokes in the blue parlour.”

“Well, we’ll give it a trial, and if it does I’ll send for some one to arrange it.”

“Nothing can be done, my lady. Everything has been tried and—”

Lady Jane swung about suddenly. She had heard Stramer singing a cheerful hunting-song in a cracked voice. (510)

Lady Jane has already been ridiculed once by her friends for not asserting her authority over this household. With Stramer’s approach, Jane quickly turns around, as though she is concerned about what he will think should he witness her inability to control her servant. Her move halts Mrs. Clemm mid-sentence, though, demonstrating the authority that she does wield over the household. For the time being, it puts a stop to Mrs. Clemm’s insubordination, silencing Mrs. Clemm’s objections. Jane wins this momentary battle, asserting her authority in the household.

This interchange is only the first in a series between Lady Jane and Mrs. Clemm revolving around the elusive Mr. Jones. Lady Jane, although she is the supposed mistress of the estate, utterly depends the servants for information that the servants presumably have, but are unwilling to divulge. Mrs. Clemm and Lady Jane endure a vicious power struggle over this transfer of information. Mrs. Clemm, who evidently knows what horror Mr. Jones is capable of, openly defies Jane as she gets closer to revealing the truth about him. After the mysterious sighting of Mr. Jones, Jane asks Mrs. Clemm where the bricked over door in the blue parlour leads. Her initial response, as demonstrated by her subsequent answers, is a blatant lie: “Nowhere, my lady. I mean; there is no door” (517).

Upon further questioning, Mrs. Clemm nervously shifts her answer to admit the existence of the door, but she knows nothing about it. As Mrs. Clemm's answer continues to morph, Jane clearly does not believe the series of answers: "The two women stood for an instant measuring each other with level eyes; then the housekeeper's were slowly lowered, and she let the curtain fall from her hand. 'There are a great many things in old houses that nobody knows about,' she said" (517). Mrs. Clemm opens questions Jane's authority, but Jane wins this round. As the mistress of the house, Jane tolerates no mysteries or secrets there: "There shall be as few as possible in mine" (518). As usual, Lady Jane assumes that she knows best, that her position of wealth has by default prepared her best to handle the truth about Mr. Jones. Furthermore, her position as administrator of this estate thus enables her to go wherever she pleases and to look wherever she pleases. In her desperate search for information on "Also His Wife," she determines the answer must be in Mr. Jones's desk. Mrs. Clemm likewise asserts her authority, though, desperately attempting to stop Jane from doing so: "The housekeeper still stood in pale immobility between her and the desk. 'No, my lady—no. You won't do that'" (518). Mrs. Clemm does not politely and subserviently ask Jane to abandon her proposed plan. Rather, she demands it. Unfortunately for Mrs. Clemm, this is the last standoff between the two. Lady Jane does not submit to her servant. She immediately, despite Mrs. Clemm's objections, takes all the papers from Mr. Jones's desk, thus sealing the eventual doom Mrs. Clemm knows awaits her.

The servants in "Mr. Jones" work under the direction of a ghost, retaining his own seat of power into the afterlife. Sutherland claims in his book *Americans and Their Servants* that servants often assumed a hierarchy of their own: "Despite their contempt

for middle- and upper-class pretensions, servants adopted their own class system and hierarchy” (82). Through the lower class sub-hierarchy in “Mr. Jones,” Wharton comments on very the existence of the class system. It seems almost absurd that a servant should clutch to his role as a servant, doing whatever it takes, even kill, to maintain that position. Equally as absurd, then, is the vehemence with which members of Lady Jane’s class, and Wharton’s, clutch to their own social positions. Lady Jane is so blinded by her own social grandeur that she allows one of her servants to fall victim to Mr. Jones. Lady Jane all but ignores Georgiana’s pleas for help when she reports that her aunt is unresponsive, because “[s]he was growing rather *blasé* with regard to Georgiana’s panics” (521). Lady Jane here dismisses Georgiana’s “panic” because she cannot believe that anyone other than herself could be in a position of power over her own servants.

Mrs. Clemm’s death forces both Lady Jane and Stramer not only to examine the nature of this mystical Mr. Jones’s power over the household, but also to relate that power to their own. By the very last page of the story, Lady Jane and Stramer still believe Mr. Jones is a living human being. Stramer demands to speak with him, commanding Georgiana to fetch him: “Georgiana, moved by the old habit of obedience, struggled to her feet and stood unsteadily, her heaving shoulders braced against the wall. Stramer asked her sharply if she had not heard what he had said” (523). Georgiana here displays an innate impulse to do as her superior demands, demonstrating the culmination of generations of servitude. She knows the prospect of bringing Mr. Jones is ludicrous, yet “the old habit of obedience” compels her to try. Georgiana subconsciously responds to Stramer’s stern “master” voice and is moved to fulfill his request. Finally, when the truth of Mr. Jones’s nonexistence is revealed, Georgiana dejectedly utters the Marxist

message of the story: “That’s the terror of it...that’s why she always had to do what he told her to...because you couldn’t even answer him back...” (523). In articulating the fear that Mr. Jones instilled in the servants of the house, Georgiana truly relays the reality of all servants. That is the terror of all servitude—forced to do as you are told without the opportunity to refuse. In fact, Georgiana had just demonstrated this very terror in obediently standing to fetch Mr. Jones at Stramer’s demand.

Karen J. Jacobsen concludes that “Mr. Jones” can be distilled down to the corruption of power:

Although terrifying for the upper classes, Mr. Jones's triumph has the potential to bring about positive change, to effect a victory for the servant classes, who have been laboring for centuries at Bells. But instead Mr. Jones illustrates perfectly that power corrupts. Rather than replacing the status quo at Bells with a new, liberating model of relationships, Mr. Jones replicates the old hierarchical system of power with essentially the same pecking order, except he is now at the top. He once served an oppressive master; now he is the oppressor. (111-12)

“Mr. Jones” does serve as a cautionary tale against the corruption bred by power, but the character Mr. Jones is not the only display of corrupt power. Lady Jane reinforces Mr. Jones’s traits and tendencies. She has spent her life ignoring or taking for granted the power that she wields. Her privileged position is one that she simply does not recognize. As a result, she is domineering over her servants, putting them in awkward, and ultimately life-threatening, situations, without a second thought. Mr. Jones’s final action of killing Mrs. Clemm is an attempt to show Lady Jane that she too is complicit in this cycle of destruction brought on by generations of greed and power. Jacobsen further

claims that Mr. Jones is ultimately a treacherous character, usurping the power and refusing to submit: “When ‘Mr. Jones’ is read in terms of its economic and class anxiety, then, the servant Mr. Jones becomes a much more complex, explosive figure. More than a loyal servant, protecting the patriarchal status quo even after death, he is a renegade servant who has taken over the Bells estate and is unwilling to give up his power to anyone” (111). Mr. Jones is, in fact a renegade “servant”—he has “served” Bells for generations. Margaret B. McDowell claims in her pioneering examination of Wharton’s ghost stories, “Edith Wharton’s Ghost Stories,” that “Mr. Jones” is less successful than other of Wharton’s ghost stories because the motives of the ghost are not fully explored or explained: “The story fails because Mr. Jones’s motives for suppressing the family history are trivial, his implication in the destinies of the family does not run deep, and little of significance results from his relationship to the present owner and friends” (144). We may not be able to speculate on Mr. Jones’s motives, but his significance is certainly not trivial. His purpose within this story’s structure is ultimately transparent and unclouded: to reveal the injustices of the servant and class system to the upper members of that system.

In the end, Mr. Jones performs as a surrogate master, behaving with all the dominance and cruelty of a typical master. When Lady Jane and Stramer see his action for what they are—that is, as a stand-in for behavior of people of their class—they finally see the inequality there before them. In this story, Mr. Jones, the eternal servant and simultaneously subversive master of Bells, reveals to Lady Jane the gravity of servanthood, and masterdom. Although Mrs. Clemm dies at the phantom hands of Mr. Jones, Lady Jane holds equal blame. More importantly, Jane understands this: “As she

crossed the threshold [into the Mrs. Clemm's room], Lady Jane remembered the housekeeper's attempt to prevent her touching the contents of the desk" (522). She understands her culpability in the death of her housekeeper. Had she heeded Mrs. Clemm's warnings—if she had been willing to admit that a person such as Mrs. Clemm might have some knowledge that she did not—Mrs. Clemm might still be alive. Just as Georgiana and Mrs. Clemm could not resist the power of Mr. Jones, so they could not defy their mistress. This inability to refuse is what killed Mrs. Clemm, and this is what Jane realizes at the end of the story. Mr. Jones emerges from this battle the winner—he has brought awareness to Jane of the cruelty of her own class, and he retains control of Bells. Mr. Jones has adopted the truly subversive means, adopting the tendencies of the upper class, to, as Jameson says, “contest and . . . undermine the dominant ‘value system.’” His as master in this story forces the “master” to face the reality of that position, thus making Mr. Jones the victorious character in the story.

III. DEVIIOUS ADHERENCE TO SOCIETAL ROLES IN “AFTERWARD”

Whereas in “Mr. Jones” and “All Souls” the subversive contributions of the servants are easy to see, in “Afterward,” the servants play a far subtler role. The primary lower class rebellion comes in the form of Elwell’s ghost, who is actively seeking retribution for his wrongful death at the figurative hands of Ned Boyne. The Boynes’ household servants, however, make a significant contribution towards the completion of Elwell’s mission—they lead the ghost directly to Ned. Elwell and the servants are similarly exploited by the Boynes, and ultimately, they work together to exact revenge against them. In “Mr. Jones,” the servant figure subverts the social hierarchy by commandeering the characteristics and thus usurping the power of the upper class, but in “Afterward,” the servants undermine the class system by doing exactly what is expected of them as servants. By fulfilling the expectations of them as good servants, they both expose Ned Boyne’s trespasses and introduce the ghost of Elwell into the Boyne’s house, allowing him the opportunity to take his revenge.

At the opening of “Afterward,” Edward “Ned” Boyne and his wife Mary move to the English countryside, cashing in on years of hard work in the mining industry in the American Midwest. Their leisurely escape proves relatively short-lived, however, when it is revealed that Ned has engaged in some unsavory business practices. His unethical behavior resulted in the financial ruin of a former business partner, Robert Elwell, who in turn attempted suicide. Unfortunately, though, he botched the attempt, leading to a long

and painful death. Upon Elwell's eventual death, his ghost visits the Boynes' estate, Lyng, and Ned mysteriously vanishes.

This story, like "Mr. Jones," clearly demarcates two definite classes at odds, and by the end of "Afterward," the servants have taken an undisputed stand against their oppressors, the Boynes. Sutherland observes that the relationship between master and servant was often not a mutually pleasant one: "Americans and their servants were not always on the best of terms. Their relationship was oftentimes comparable to that of two warring yet interdependent nations, with employers defending class lines against insurgent servants, and servants taking courageous stands against the mighty forces of middle-class convention" (121). Sutherland's language in this passage is reminiscent of classic Marxist principles, particularly the evocation of warring nations. The servants and the Boynes do have a "warring" relationship in this story, with the roles of oppressor and oppressed unequivocally filled. But, as Sutherland suggests sometimes happened, the servants in the Boyne household execute their "courageous stand" against the Boynes. Jameson claims that revolution truly evolves through an extensive tradition of oppression: "overt revolution is no punctual event . . . but brings to the surface the innumerable daily struggles and forms of class polarization which are at work in the whole course of social life that precedes it" (97). The servants in "Afterward" stage their uprising by following, to perfection, the behavioral expectations laid out before them. In other words, by maintaining their "everyday struggles," the servants can revolt, on behalf of both themselves and of Elwell, against their oppressors.

From his actions to his rewards, Edward Boyne is the capitalist success story. He typifies potential successes awaiting those who embrace the concept of rugged

individualism. His willingness to sacrifice conveniences and comforts, to take on the figurative wilderness and manipulate the resources available to him in order to attain his goal demonstrates his adherence to this ideology. Jacobsen implies that in presenting Edward Boyne as a man in search of a quick buck, Wharton really draws the distinction between old and new money: “But in describing Ned’s dishonesty as belonging to the nouveau riche entrepreneur class . . . Wharton is defending her class from the attacks on all the rich. For Wharton, then, Ned’s disappearance and death at the hands of Elwell is an act of justice, condemning dishonesty while still maintaining the goodness and dignity of the old aristocracy” (105). Jacobsen fails to make the most crucial connection, though, that the side effects of the capitalist machine are no different for the nouveau riche than for the hereditarily wealthy. Ultimately it is not important how the upper class ascended to a seat of wealth, only that they are “above” the servants and “above” characters such as Elwell. The fact that Edward has driven a man to a lengthy and unpleasant death does not seem to hold the Boynes back. There is a lawsuit brought against Ned, but even that is dropped upon Elwell’s death. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock concludes in his book *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women* that “Afterward” presents a commentary on capitalist ideology: “‘Afterward’ thus carefully critiques the mercenary nature of capitalist expansion and exploitation. In this story of a man intending to write a treatise on the ‘Economic Basis of Culture,’ Ned’s own cutthroat business maneuvers literally come back to haunt him” (103). Until the ghost of Elwell appears, though, there are seemingly no consequences for his actions. The Boynes still have the ability to take Ned’s spoils and enjoy a life of leisure on the English countryside.

Ned Boyne has indeed been rewarded heartily for taking chances. He exemplifies that classic America ideology is that if you work hard enough, if you are smart enough, if you have enough drive, anything is possible. The servants, on the other hand, do not take risks such as those the Boynes took. These individuals, the servants, most diligently adhere to these socially assigned roles as servants of the Lyng estate: they follow the rules and fulfill the expectations their employers have of them. In honoring the obedience expected of them, they introduce Elwell's ghost into the household, thus enabling the ultimate revenge against Edward himself. Through their decided lack of this timeless American principle, they win a symbolic victory for their class, and for Robert Elwell.

Both Elwell and the servants have been tyrannized in some way by the Boynes. Elwell was simply persecuted for trying to be decent person. He was not willing to cheapen his moral standards in order to get ahead, and he paid dearly for it. Even in death, Elwell contrasts the capitalist ideology that killed him. Upon his appearance at Lyng, rather than demand to see Mr. Boyne or find him on his own, he politely asks to see him. And so, because he refuses, even after his life ends, to embrace the capitalist tendencies so dear to Boyne, Elwell seems permanently affixed to a subservient position. He is still at the mercy of the Boynes, as are the servants. Beyond such a relegation to subservient status, the servants of the Boyne household are continually dismissed and mocked. In other words, the Boynes consistently remind the servants of their status as inferiors. The servants and Elwell, then, assist one another in the ultimate retaliation against their collective oppressors.

Elwell's case is straightforward—a shrewder person simply took advantage of him. Boyne essentially took him for all he was worth, leaving him with nothing. Ned's apparent indifference to Elwell's eventual financial ruin and death should be sufficient cause to question Boyne's ethics, but there is also the implication that Boyne targeted Elwell because he considered himself a superior businessman. At the end of the tale, when Mr. Parvis, Boyne's acquaintance from the Blue Star Mine, comes to visit Mary, he seems to channel the musings of the long-lost Ned Boyne: "Bob Elwell wasn't smart enough, that's all; if he had been, he might have turned round and served Boyne the same way. It's the kind of thing that happens every day in business. I guess it's what the scientists call the survival of the fittest—see?" (855). Such ideology resides at the heart of this story: Elwell should have been smarter; if he had been, he would not have been manipulated by the rich, and rendered impecunious and dead by them. Furthermore, what would have made the opportunistic Boyne and Parvis consider Elwell "smart" would have been for him to cut Boyne down first. Boyne's willingness to secure his own way of life—at any cost—set him, in his mind, above a person incapable of doing the same.

As they too are exploited by the Boynes, the servants seem to forge a symbolic alliance with the ghost of Elwell. Mary, who as the woman of the house likely has the most day-to-day interaction with the servants, is particularly unmindful of them. David M. Katzman comments on the daily reminders of the master-servant relationship in his book, *Seven Days a Week*: "At every stage of domestic service, a servant faced reminders of her subservient role and the distinction between mistress and servant" (236). The very nature of employment as a domestic servant means that the servant will constantly be

reminded of her lower status; the mistress is always in control. Mary's actions towards the household servants reinforce Katzman's assessment. For example, in one sequence, the parlour-maid interrupts Mary's daydreaming to inquire about serving lunch. Mary offers minimal response, as "[i]t was one of their jokes that Trimmle announced luncheon as if she were divulging a state secret, and Mary, intent upon her papers, merely murmured an absent-minded assent" (845). This "joke" can be interpreted a few different ways, but neither bodes well for Trimmle's position in the household. First, the Boynes could share the joke. In this scenario, the Boynes make a mockery of Trimmle's status as a maid with the preposterousness of a maid acting like a dignitary of some sort.

Alternatively, Mary could believe that she shares this joke with Trimmle, but surely Trimmle could not have found this joke funny, or even understood that it was intended as a joke. Mary's assumption that her servant would share her fantasies, so extravagant as to include "state secret[s]," shows her self-absorbed superiority. Surely a member of the working class would not readily indulge in daydreams about international diplomacy with her employer. In either reading of the scene, Mary Boyne emerges as an insensitive, even demeaning employer.

As a further illustration of the Boynes' unmindfulness, they have chosen to forego modern conveniences in their household, creating added work and hassle for their servants. The Boynes negotiated an unbeatable deal on the house for that very reason: "its remoteness from a station, its lack of electric light, hot water pipes, and other vulgar necessities—were exactly those pleading in its favor with two romantic Americans perversely in search of the economic drawbacks which were associated, in their tradition, with unusual architectural felicities" (830). The Boynes' selfish desire to "rough it" in

the English countryside would have create additional work for their maids, from the maintenance of the lamps themselves to the extra cleaning necessary when lamps are used (Sutherland 195). Furthermore, the lamps posed a physical threat to those who operated them. Through a chain reaction that ultimately leads to the introduction of Elwell's ghost to the household, one of the maids burns her hand changing the wick of a lamp which, "as Mary was aware, [Trimmler] had always been opposed to" (847). In not taking their employees' comfort and safety into consideration, the Boynes have created an unnecessarily dangerous and tedious work environment for them.

Even before we learn of any definite negligence towards either Elwell or the servants, the dichotomous class struggle, also exhibited in "Mr. Jones," becomes evident in this story. From the opening lines, as they sip tea and ponder which English home they should purchase, it is clear that the characters at play are of the upper class. Also like Lady Jane in "Mr. Jones," the Boynes show no understanding of their own privilege. Despite the apparent beauty and magnitude of the estate, the Boynes consider it quite quaint: "The mere fact that [the estate, Lyng] was neither large nor exceptional made it, to the Boynes abound the more completely in its special charm—the charm of having been for centuries a deep dim reservoir of life" (832). The descriptions of the property, though, make it evident that objectively, this is an unmistakably large estate. The house had "almost all the finer marks of commerce with a protracted past" (832). Its expansiveness warrants at least three household servants and one gardener. The house is multilevel, complete with a hidden passageway leading to the roof. The grounds include a fishpond, lime tree lined avenue, gardens, and greenhouses. These people, although presumably arising from humbler means, do not understand how advantaged they really

are, and so they do not appreciate, or even comprehend, the power and responsibility that comes with such privilege.

Both Ned and Mary demonstrate their own brand of oblivion in “Afterward.” Ned’s lack of sensitivity makes him arguably one of the more despicable characters in Wharton’s work. When Mary finally starts to question the nature of his business, his shifty answers reveal his true ethics—first, that business is business and second, there is no cost too steep to secure his financial future. His ambition driven tunnel vision allows him only to see his own success and money. When Mary discovers that there has been a lawsuit brought against him, Ned rather flippantly evades the questioning and misleads his wife:

“But what *is* it? I don’t understand. What does this man accuse you of?”

“Pretty nearly every crime in the calendar.” Boyne had tossed the clipping down, and thrown himself into an armchair near the fire. “Do you want to hear the story? It’s not particularly interesting—just a squabble over interests in the Blue Star.” (840)

Rather than provide an honest and forthcoming answer, Ned tosses the subject aside, practically chiding his wife for being too excitable about matters that do not concern her. This answer is particularly irreverent, given that we later discover that this “squabble,” a word somewhat evocative of a harmless schoolyard scuffle, actually ended a man’s life and left his family destitute. When Mary specifically asks who this Elwell is, Ned flippantly answers: “Oh, he’s a fellow I put into it—I gave him a hand up” (840). Ultimately, it is clear that Ned in no way helped Elwell, but accomplished quite the opposite. In a similarly dismissive fashion, Ned displays visible relief when he reads that

the lawsuit against him has been dropped: “‘It’s all right—it’s all right?’ [Mary] questioned, through the flood of her dissolving doubts; and ‘I give you my word it was never righter!’ he laughed back at her, holding her close” (842). In the most heartless of possible replies—he laughs when he receives word that Elwell has passed—Ned strives to convince Mary, and himself, that his character is sound.

Ned Boyne may be somewhat oblivious regarding the severity of his actions, but Mary displays her own naïveté and culpability throughout “Afterward.” An unmistakable divide arises between Mary’s apparent scruples and her actions: “Theoretically, she deprecated the American wife’s detachment from her husband’s professional interests, but in practice she had always found it difficult to fix her attention on Boyne’s report of the transactions in which his varied interests involved him” (841). Because she found listening to Ned talk about his job tiresome, she justifies her ignorance. Ultimately she chooses not to listen, not to inquire. She shows no concern for the manner in which her husband is suddenly bringing home a considerable sum. Furthermore, she prefers not to think about it because she so appreciates her new way of life:

Besides, she had felt during their years of exile, that, in a community where the amenities of living could be obtained only at the cost of efforts as arduous as her husband’s professional labours, such brief leisure as he and she could command should be used as an escape from immediate preoccupations, a flight to the life they always dreamed of living. (841)

She specifically chooses to relish their newfound fiscal freedom in ignorance. Mary rationalizes that Ned’s “arduous” labor has earned them this privilege and that they

deserve it. Because she never questions Ned or their income, she becomes equally complicit in Elwell's unfortunate ending.

In a further display of oblivion, Mary seems to ignore clear indications that something is troubling Ned. Mary notices a difference in his face, but, as usual, does not directly address the matter: "there were lines of perplexity between his eyes such as had never been there in his engineering days. He had often, then, looked fagged to the verge of illness, but the native demon of 'worry' had never branded his brow" (833). She also notices a hint of nervousness in his expression: "she had seen, as she glanced, a shadow of anxiety, of perplexity, rather, fall across his face" (835). Here she seems to coax herself out of concern. She quickly shifts her assessment of his expression from anxiety to a much more innocuous perplexity. In pondering what is bothering her husband, she arrives at perhaps the most naive and illogical of all possible explanations—that Ned is bothered by a ghost on the premises:

It was only within the last week that she had felt in him the undefinable change which made her restless in his absence, and as tongue-tied in his presence as though it were *she* who had a secret to keep from him!

The thought that there *was* a secret somewhere between them struck her with a sudden rap of wonder, and she looked about her down the long room.

"Can it be the house?" she mused.

The room itself might have been full of secrets. They seemed to be piling themselves up, as evening fell, like the layers and layers of velvet shadow dropping from the low ceiling, the rows of books, the smoke-blurred sculpture of the hearth.

“Why, of course—the house is haunted!” she reflected. (834-35)

Ironically, Ned perhaps is actually concerned about Elwell, the ghost soon to materialize, but Mary, of course, knows nothing of these troubles at this point. When Ned eventually admits, upon Mary’s pressing, the existence of a lawsuit against him, Mary finally concedes that “[n]ow, for the first time, it startled her to find how little she knew of the material foundation on which her happiness was built” (841). She may now be aware, but Mary still refuses to challenge the “material foundation” of her happiness. Such avoidance of the truth was allowed to her to indirectly facilitate Ned’s actions, ultimately solidifying her involvement.

Both Ned and Mary Bóyne are eventually punished for their respective trespasses—Ned for his carelessness toward Elwell in life, and Mary for her ignorance of her husband’s work and character. The ghost of Elwell is the primary deliverer of this retribution: he comes back from the dead specifically to seek out Ned. But as far as Mary, and the reader, are concerned, his role is really incidental. We do not actually witness him taking Ned away. The servants hold all the information regarding Ned’s disappearance. They not only know the only true account of the incident, but they also facilitate his it by escorting the ghost to his library. Elwell may be the catalyst for the Boynes’ punishment, but the servants really carry it through.

Since he has only limited power in the household, the servants act on behalf of the silenced Elwell, revealing Ned Boyne for who he is. As a result of the Boynes’ propensity towards the “romantic,” the maids bring in lamps at every evening at dusk. On the night before Edward disappears, “[t]he parlour-maid had entered with letters and a lamp” (838). Throughout this sequence, the servants are the bearers of light, in both

literal and figurative senses. The letters that Trimmle delivers inform Mary of Elwell's existence and Edward of his death, thus figuratively shedding light on the situation. The sequence leading to this climax, though, is punctuated by Trimmle's introduction of new lamps into the room. Until the truth about Ned's business is finally out in the open, Mary playfully interrogates him, following her prior theory that he is troubled by a ghost on the estate. She asks if he has given up his hunt for a ghost: "'Have I what?' he rejoined absently, the light bringing out the sharp stamp of worry between his brows as he turned over the letters" (838). Here the servant's light exposes the concern in his face, but when Mary presses him further about ghost hunting, he dodges that light: "Her husband, laying his letters aside, moved away into the shadow of the hearth" (838). The questioning continues, and Boyne bounces from light to shadows attempting to hide his anxiety about the concealed lawsuit. He prefers to keep his wife in the dark, providing vague, inconsequential answers. Finally, the parlour-maid appears with another lamp in tow, and "[w]ith the dispersal of shadows," Boyne is left with nowhere to hide (839).

With the room now free of shadows, Mary opens her letter that contains the newspaper clipping about the lawsuit against Ned, and Ned simultaneously opens the letter announcing Elwell's death. The maid, in simply fulfilling duties required by this old fashioned house, has delivered light and truth—lamps and letters—into the Boynes' consciousnesses, setting the groundwork for Edward Boyne's downfall. While we cannot know the servants' motives in this sequence of light and truth, Inness reminds us that we cannot forget the sentiments that servants often felt towards their employers: "The intense dislike of service by working-class men and women must be remembered when one turns to Wharton's fiction, since it helps to explain the hatred that servants sometimes display

in her stories toward members of the upper classes whom they served” (339). Ultimately the inconsiderate nature of the Boynes appears to have allowed the servants to use their chores—which they would not have at their disposal if the Boynes used electricity—to expose the true nature of both Boynes.

The maids further utilize a strict adherence to their roles as servants to subvert the social structure of the household at Ned’s disappearance. As Mary frantically tries to uncover what has happened to her husband, Trimmle only answers questions that are directly asked of her, refusing to answer questions that are merely implied. Although “Trimmle appeared to hesitate between the obvious duty of obedience and an equally obvious conviction of the foolishness of the injunction laid on her,” in the end she relies on her “duty of obedience” to guide her actions (846). She politely awaits the appropriate questions, and answers them “with the superior air of one who has respectfully waited for the question that a well-ordered mind would have put first” (846). Trimmle clearly prides herself behaving in a respectful manner, unlike the Boynes, in her interactions with them. Throughout this sequence, Mary practically barks questions at Trimmle, but in response, Trimmle exercises what little power she has: the power to uphold the politesse expected of her and use it to frustrate her mistress. On the surface, Trimmle is the model servant, strictly following a “speak only when spoken to” dictum. Through this stringent adherence to her social position, she ascends to a position of power over her mistress.

As this questioning continues, the maids finally divulge the haphazard series of events leading to Elwell’s admittance to the house. Neither of the first two maids in the chain of command was able to answer the door, and as a result, the far removed kitchen-maid was tasked with this duty. The hierarchy among household servants was often

clearly defined and closely followed: “An unwritten law, to which most servants adhered, made it taboo to perform tasks not strictly related to one’s position” (Sutherland 83). As a result of such an internal hierarchy, the kitchen-maid has difficulty articulating the circumstances of Elwell’s admittance to Mary, because “[t]he obligation of going to the front door to ‘show in’ a visitor was in itself so subversive to the fundamental order of things that it had thrown her faculties into hopeless disarray” (851). When Elwell’s ghost arrived at the front door, the social structure of the house had been momentarily disturbed. Trimmle, the first-in-command, was getting dressed. The second in line to answer the door, Agnes, was tending to the hand she had burned changing the wick of a lamp. The unnamed kitchen-maid was the next step in the servant hierarchy. She is the bottom of the social ladder, and yet she is the one who escorts the ghost to Edward. Had the kitchen-maid known the proper door answering etiquette, she surely would not have allowed the stranger at the door to follow her to Ned’s study and enter unannounced. Such a fundamental disturbance allows Elwell to be granted free admittance to the house and to his intended victim. This kitchen-maid, lowest of the lower class, not even granted a name in this tale, embodies the ultimate subversion of the system. She leads the ghost, and Ned’s downfall, straight to his study door. The mere fact that “[n]o one but the kitchen-maid had seen Boyne leave the house, and no one else had seen ‘the gentleman’ who accompanied him” places the person of the lowest class in the position of the most power, and it displaces the traditional capitalist success story (852).

With the maids’ introduction of Elwell to the Boyne household, justice is served, to both Boynes. It is not specified what happens to Ned after his disappearance, but since he does not reappear by end of the story, we assume the worst. Mary is also punished

also, but on a mental level. She is punished with the truth of her husband's business. She must live, alone, with the knowledge that Ned drove another human to his death.

Awareness is the ultimate punishment for a woman who spent her life avoiding exactly such knowledge.

The theme of misunderstanding until too late repeats throughout the story, even in the implications of the title, "Afterward." Mary does not know till long afterward the source of her husband's wealth; Ned does not know that his sordid dealings will have repercussions. Elwell, assisted by the servants of the household, forces the Boynes to face their ignorance and social negligence. The servants employ the little power that they have—doing their job well—and exact fitting revenge on both the Boynes.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED AND LESSONS LOST IN “ALL SOULS”

In all of the stories under examination in this study, the servant class is initially presented as an utterly unseen element: muted and subservient, as traditionally is the case in Wharton's fiction. But in these stories, the servants emerge triumphant and undeniably visible to the upper class. This tendency culminates in Wharton's final story, “All Souls'.” The servants' actual disappearance highlights their unseen status in society and the Clayburn household, forcing their mistress to face the nature of her privilege, and thus the injustices against their class.

In Wharton's story “All Souls',” the recently widowed Sara Clayburn remains in her husband's estate, Whitegates, despite the expectations that she will move in with a family member. The “plucky” mistress of the Whitegates opts to remain, alone, in the home she shared with her late husband. Alone, that is, with the exception of her “trustworthy servants.” On All Souls' Eve, Sara encounters a female stranger while taking an afternoon walk. Shortly thereafter, Sara slips on some ice and fractures her ankle, confining her to her bed until the doctor can return in a few days. After waking from a fitful night of sleep, Sara discovers that she is alone in the house—her servants have vanished. She drags herself through the house, aggravating her injury, desperately searching for any indication of life. She can find no sign of her servants anywhere in the house and returns to her bedroom, passing out from the exhaustion. By the next morning, the house has apparently returned to normal. The doctor chastises her for not following

the orders to stay off her foot, and Agnes, her faithful maid, claims not to have gone anywhere. She forces the terrifying occurrence out of her mind until exactly one year later when the mysterious woman reappears. Sara then realizes that both appearances have fallen on All Souls' Eve, and she frantically leaves Whitegates, never to return.

With such a large percentage of Wharton's work addressing the "real" world, trends in her fantastical works come to the surface when we examine them together. Critic Allan Gardner Smith draws an important distinction between Wharton's handling of social issues in her realistic works compared with her fantastical ones:

In the genre of the realist novel, . . . Wharton obeyed the constraints of the visible; she adhered, perforce, to what could be seen by her society, to the areas of consensus—however critical—about the 'real' state of that society and its interpersonal relations. In the genre of the ghost story, on the other hand, she was able to penetrate into the realm of the *unseen*, that is, into the area that her society preferred to be unable to see, or to construe defensively as super (i.e. not) natural.

(89)

Both a factual and a metaphorical "unseen" haunt Sara Clayburn in "All Souls'." On one level, her servants temporarily desert her, and thus are literally "unseen." But under this superficial plane, the story is really about those unseen in society—the working class. The servants' disappearance is not a trivial rebellion against their employer. It is their desperate attempt to be seen.

Jackson argues that the concept of invisibility often plays a central role in subversive fantastical works. From invisibility cloaks to phantasms and mysterious vanishings, the very nature of fantasy fosters disappearances and invisibility. From a

theoretical standpoint, however, such invisibility can underscore a distinct societal negligence:

An emphasis upon invisibility points to one of the central thematic concerns of the fantastic: problems of vision. In a culture which equates the “real” with the “visible” and gives the eye dominance over other sense organs, the un-real is that which is in-visible. That which is not seen, or which threatens to be un-seeable, can only have a subversive function in relation to an epistemological and metaphysical system which makes “I see” synonymous with “I understand.” (45)

If Jackson’s assessment that the unseen necessarily executes a “subversive function” within a visually oriented society is true, then the servants’ disappearance in “All Souls” must assume a socially significant meaning. An application of Jackson’s theory to “All Souls” would indicate that this story is not a horror tale about a woman’s sudden abandonment, but rather that the focus of the story is the servants who actually make themselves unseen. Through their temporary invisibility, they subvert not only Sara’s expectations, but also her understanding of her own superiority and the class structure itself. Wharton’s deployment of the fantastical element in this story has the undeniable effect of focusing our attention on the latent class struggle within Whitegates.

The servants in “All Souls” strive for a symbolic independence from their mistress, Sara Clayburn. Sara is genuinely shocked by her servants’ sudden defiance. She has clearly outlined her expectations, and furthermore, they have never let her down. It has never occurred to her that they would desire autonomy. After all, she does consider the servants her friends. She does not realize the significance of actually being in a position above another person, and this ignorance is precisely what the servants yearn to

accentuate through their sudden disappearance. By upsetting Sara's expectations of them, they expose her suppressed prejudice against them.

Sara's perception of her life and relationship with her servants before their disappearance intensifies the terror of her day alone. She trusts them and has no reason to suspect impending mutiny. In the opening pages of the story, we get a clear understanding of Sara's class: "When Jim Clayburn died the family all thought that, as the couple had no children, his widow would give up Whitegates and move either to New York or Boston—for being of good Colonial stock, with many relatives and friends, she would have found a place ready for her in either" (799). As evidenced by the phrase "good Colonial stock," Jane's family is not only wealthy, but rather, they hail from a long line of colonizers and rulers. She holds, as Annette Zilversmit notes, all the markers of the elite: "[Sara] has attained and accepted the emblems of status and success in her society: wealth, position, marriage, a large country house with the long Colonial pedigree of her husband's family and a maternal legacy of her mother-in-law's servants" (315). The community apparently also thinks highly of the Clayburns: "The Clayburns were always spoken of as a 'good influence' in the county, and the townspeople were glad when they learned that Sara did not mean to desert the place" (800). The Clayburns—the name, history, money, and estate—are a commodity in the community, but as the story ultimately shows, the servants do not consider her a "good influence." The servants are the only people in the story truly subjugated by the Clayburns. The very existence of the upper class to which Sara belongs demands subordinates. Even the most kind and caring masters are still, in fact, masters, thus perpetuating the continuation of a lower, inferior class.

Just as *Whitegates* is “a pleasant hospitable-looking house,” so its mistress gives off the impression of hospitality (799). Living in relative isolation in rural New England, Sara relies primarily on her servants for companionship. Several critics have theorized that in this story, written just months before her own death, Wharton writes herself into the character of Sara Clayburn, citing primarily the fear of abandonment and financial anxiety that plagued Wharton in her old age. Margaret B. McDowell, for example, claims in her 1992 article “Edith Wharton’s Ghost Tales Reconsidered” that Wharton rendered Sara Clayburn, at least partially, in her own image: “All these characteristics of energy, discipline, composure, self-assertion, and concern for neighbors and servants reflect Edith Wharton’s own behavior for most of her adult life” (310). However, the similarities between Sara Clayburn and Edith Wharton run deeper than superficial characteristics. Sara, like Wharton, holds certain subconscious prejudices against her servants. Beneath Sara’s apparent air of kindness, she harbors more traditional assumptions regarding the servants: “Luckily, however, Sara Clayburn had inherited from her mother-in-law two or three old stand-bys who seemed as much a part of the family tradition as the roof they lived under; and I have never heard of her having any trouble in her domestic arrangements” (799). This seemingly innocuous statement holds the key to Sara’s true opinion of her employees. Most alarming is the use of the word “inherited.” The word gives the impression that along with the heirlooms or antiques, people can be handed down from generation to generation. Furthermore, claiming them as a part of the “family tradition” implies that this subjugation results primarily from habit, not physical need: “many employers, especially after 1870, employed servants because family tradition and social status required it” (Sutherland 196). Technological advances by the

1930s significantly lessened the physical labor of housekeeping, making household servants more a convention of flaunting wealth and status than anything else.

Sara's apparent impression of her servants prior to their departure intensifies her utter bewilderment at their disappearance. Within the unique situation of household servants, the mistress of the house maintained a disproportionate level of control over her employees: "When she wasn't asleep, a live-in domestic was at the beck and call of her mistress. Work and rest time, other than time outside the house . . . , were allotted at the discretion of the employer" (Katzman 112-13). Since they have never given her any problems before, Sara naturally expects her servants to come tend to her the morning after her accident. As the hours drag on, though, their unexplained absence challenges Sara's assumptions about her servants. Initially, Sara is confident that her servants will knock at her door any moment, because she has trained them to start the day early: "She lay still and strained her ears for the first steps of her servants. Whitegates was an early house, its mistress setting the example; it would surely not be long now before one of the women came" (803). Sara does more here than listen for her servants' approach, she desperately "strains" to detect any reinforcement of her status and position in the house. For the first time in this long tradition of service, her servants have disobeyed her expectations and orders. The lurking realization that they have left her alone disturbs Sara not only because they have disappeared without permission, but, perhaps more importantly, because they have overtly defied her behavioral guidelines and rejected her authority.

Sara's position of authority and advantage bleeds into other aspects of life at Whitegates—we see Sara subconsciously separate herself from the lower class on several

occasions. The appearance of the strange woman on the property brings this tendency to the forefront, exposing her innate sense of superiority over people of a lower class. Upon Sara's first encounter with the mysterious stranger, she instinctively distances herself from this person she identifies as different from herself.

This mysterious woman, only appearing twice in the story, holds the key to the fantastic in this story. We see no direct correlation between her and the uncanny events taking place in the house, only a circumstantial connection when Sara encounters her again at the end of the story. The timing of the woman's appearances gives her an ominous quality, though. In all the time Sara has lived at Whitegates, this woman materializes only twice, both times on All Souls' Eve. Between the mysticism surrounding All Souls' day, a holiday commemorating the departed, and the peculiar occurrences at Whitegates immediately following her first visit, we can conclude that this character has some sort of supernatural control over the events of the next day. By her second meeting, Sara certainly classifies her as a magical being: "By that time it had got quite dark, as if a sudden storm was sweeping up over the sky. . . . We were standing by the clump of hemlocks at the turn of the drive, and as I went up to her . . . , she passed behind the hemlocks, and when I followed her she wasn't there" (818). Sara notes a sudden shift in the weather and the woman's apparent disappearance as evidence of a supernatural presence. If we acknowledge Sara's perception of the stranger, she appears to be a ghost. Whatever her state, she seems to drive the fantastical, and subversive, action in the story.

Two characteristics stand out to Sara about this woman: her appearance and her accent. When Sara first notices her, "plainly dressed" is the first description we

receive—before even the word “woman” (800). The image of a noticeably simple woman is repeated a few lines later: “[Mrs. Clayburn] recalled her as middle-aged, plain and rather pale” (801). Knowing Sara’s status, it is safe to assume that nothing about her appearance would be ordinary. The emphasis on this woman’s unadorned clothing thus immediately separates her from Sara, relegating her to a lower status. Sara also detects an accent in the woman’s responses, further distinguishing her from Sara. She describes it as “foreign” after her first encounter (801), then notes the “the same queer half-foreign voice” upon her second meeting with her (818). Inness notes that the significance of the strange woman’s accent, particularly in an age when “there was widespread hostility toward other racial and ethnic groups,” concluding that the accent gives us an early indication of the underlying direction of the story: “The woman’s accent already hints that this is going to be a story about the meeting of different classes and different ethnic backgrounds. The strange woman’s comment that she is going to see one of Mrs. Clayburn’s maids suggests that they might be as foreign as the peculiar visitor” (345). Long before any real action takes place in the story, we already know two significant items. First we see that Sara immediately recognizes this strange woman as someone fundamentally different from herself. Second, we can assume that the story will ultimately address this perceived difference.

The concept of difference is indeed at the core of “All Souls’.” The figure of the “Other,” Jameson reminds us, commonly recurs in theory, literature, and society:

Evil thus, as Nietzsche taught us, continues to characterize whatever is radically different from me, whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a real and urgent threat to my own existence. So from the earliest

times, the stranger from another tribe, the “barbarian” who speaks an incomprehensible language and follows “outlandish” customs, but also . . . the avenger of accumulated resentments from some oppressed class or race . . . : these are some of the archetypal figures of the Other, about whom the essential point to be made is not so much that he is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil *because* he is the Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar. (115)

This strange woman, so visibly different from Sara, becomes the Other to Sara’s superiority. Sara ultimately does consider this woman, this stranger, to be an evil influence on her and her household. The stranger primarily fills the role of the Other in this tale, and she is symbolically aligned with the servants in the story. She indicates that she’s going to “see one of the girls,” presumably one of Sara’s servants. But her clothing too, one of the characteristics that Sara clings to in her memory of the stranger, places her in the lower class, among the servants.

Although we only meet the woman twice, the sense of Otherness and foreignness is reinforced during one of the story’s most terrifying moments. At the height of Sara’s journey through the lifeless house, she suddenly detects a voice. The first voice that she hears in several hours is described as “foreign”: “The next moment she realized that he was speaking in a foreign language, a language unknown to her. Once more her terror was surmounted by the urgent desire to know what was going on, so close to her yet unseen” (811). The only certainty revealed is that a wireless radio on the kitchen table emits this voice. The text offers no other clues as to the significance of this odd presence, leaving it exposed for broad interpretation. Hermione Lee, for example, suggests that the foreign voice represents Hitler’s emerging presence: “it . . . suggests that, even in the

isolated, insulated American house, the voice of Hitler is making itself heard, more frightening than any ghost” (745). Gianfranca Balestra hones in on the fact that it is the only male voice in the entire story: “This product of modern technology, which, according to Wharton’s Preface, was partially responsible for the disappearance of ghosts, becomes itself the cause of terror, producing the male phantasm absent from the text and from Mrs. Clayburn’s life” (19). The word “foreign” may also support the fantastical forces at play in this story, that is, the lower class in their uprising against Sara Clayburn. The true terror for Sara lies not in this voice, which ultimately causes her to faint, but rather in the connotations of the voice. “Foreign” is only used in two contexts in this story: to describe the voice of the stranger and to describe the voice coming from the radio. This foreign voice then stands as a surrogate Other of the lower class, replacing the missing servants and further threatening Sara’s sense of control in the household. Both contexts of “foreign” represent something evil to Sara.

Jackson, like Jameson, comments on the tendency to equate the Other with evil: “A stranger, a foreigner, an outsider, a social deviant, anyone speaking in an unfamiliar language or acting in unfamiliar ways, anyone whose origins are unknown who has extraordinary powers, tends to be set apart as other, as evil” (52-53). During their first encounter, Sara instinctively distances herself from the stranger upon the recognition of her difference: “Mrs. Clayburn nodded and turned off from the drive to the lower part of the gardens, so that she saw no more of the visitor then or afterward” (801).

Superficially, it appears that Sara turns off the path and therefore cannot see the woman anymore. Two simple words in this passage—“so that”—transform its meaning from

innocuous to devious. “So that” implies intent, indicating that Sara turned off the path in order to no longer see the woman.

The terror of Sara’s solitary day is rooted in her tendency to separate herself from the lower class surrounding her. In her exploration of the deserted house, she is forced to examine portions of the house that she typically does not—the servants’ quarters. After she checks the servants’ wing for clues as to their whereabouts, she is faced with a choice. Sara had already dragged herself through the whole house on a broken ankle; her leg was surely throbbing. Despite certain agony, she opts for the longer way out of the servants’ wing:

Beyond the housemaid’s room were the back stairs. It was the nearest way down, and every step that Mrs. Clayburn took was increasingly painful; but she decided to walk slowly back, the whole length of the passage, and go down by the front stairs. She did not know why she did this; but she felt that at the moment she was past reasoning, and had better obey her instinct. (808)

Her instincts—her subconscious assumption of superiority—instruct her not to take the back stairs, used solely by the servants. Here Sara delves too far into the servants’ world for her own comfort. Like her conscious separation from the strange woman in her drive, the house was likely engineered to provide precisely such a spatial division: “Perhaps the most fascinating attempt to impress servants with class distinctions involved the architecture of American houses. The American ‘house’ was divided in order to minimize contact between employers and servants, to insulate as much as possible the American ‘home’” (Sutherland 30). Sara’s social position dictates that she should never have to enter these parts of the “house,” remaining instead confined to the “home.” Her

prized possessions, the servants, have vanished, and she senses her authority and status slipping. Continuing into the dwelling of the household's lowest class would only justify her fear of a complete loss of possessions, so she simply cannot bring herself to take the shorter path out of the servants' wing.

Sara's manufactured separation from her servants and others of the lower class has compelled the servants to separate themselves completely, leaving the house devoid of life. Their absence turns into something far more frightening for Sara: the possibility that all her possessions are fleeting. Since her husband's death, the servants are Sara's primary source of companionship, yet she maintains a clear position of power over them. No matter how benevolent she may seem in day-to-day interactions, the servants cannot truly feel comfortable with Sara, the source of their oppression: "This unease [about the employer's power] is evident when Wharton's fictional servants, despite appearances of correct behavior and loyalty, display resentment toward their employers that sometimes erupts into open rebellion" (Jacobsen 108). In "All Souls," the servants' "open rebellion" manifests itself through the deafening silence of a household without servants. The interminable silence is the one element of Sara's experience that many critics categorize as the most terrifying aspect of the story. McDowell contends that the silence stands for Sara's loneliness: "Wharton communicates with skill and power the sense of absolute and unending silence, suggesting a total emptiness, an impenetrable isolation" ("Edith Wharton's Ghost Tales" 309). Balestra likewise observes that the silence itself houses the terror in this story: "Still determined to go through all the rooms, she knows that they will give no answer to her question: she knows it from the silence that envelops her. It is the silence itself that takes the role of possible aggressor" (19). From a strictly

mechanical standpoint, the silence provides the story with an eerie, panic-driven air, but this silence also produces more significant implications. As she hobbles through the empty house, the silence drives her to feel, for the first time in her life, a profound sense of loss and fear: “Had she the courage—? Yes, of course she had. She had always been regarded as a plucky woman; and had so regarded herself. But this silence—” (806). For Sara, silence—nothing, in other words—breaks down her defenses. This permeating silence signifies the truly terrifying prospect for Sara: an absence of possessions.

This silence spurs Sara to entertain a critical, albeit fleeting, enlightenment. The servants’ sudden absence forces Sara to recognize her position of privilege, possibly for the first time: “More and more the cold unanswering silence of the house weighed down on Mrs. Clayburn. She had never thought of it as a big house, but now, in this snowy winter light, it seemed immense, and full of ominous corners around which one dared not look” (808). The silence presses her to notice the excessive immensity of her home. It is undoubtedly an expansive estate, but it has never seemed so to her. During her fearful thirty-six hours alone, she experiences how people of lower classes live: “At the thought [that no one should ever know what happened there] her latent fear seemed to take on a new quality. . . . She understood now that she had never before known what fear was, and that most of the people she had met had probably never known either” (810). Sara realizes here the nature of her privilege. Not only she, but others of her class as well, has never experienced this unsettling sense of loss. Having spent her life sheltered from worry, Sara must suddenly face the prospect that she may not always have other people to care for her: “the afternoon passed in a haze of pain, out of which there emerged now and then a dim shape of fear—the fear that she might lie there alone and untended till she

died of cold” (812). Sara’s core fear is that her servants, the people whose duty it is to take care of her have abandoned her, leaving her “untended.” Her true fear is not that any harm has befallen them, but rather that they have chosen to abandon her. The magnitude of this apparent servant revolt registers, if only temporarily, and she fears that her property and privilege are at stake.

As terrifying and supposedly enlightening as this experience was for Sara, we expect her take her newfound understanding and change her ways. Unfortunately, her ephemeral revelation withers by the next morning; she quickly forgets the lessons she learned and does not undergo any long term behavioral changes. With the return of the servants the following day, Sara’s enlightenment fades: “[the mysterious thirty-six hours] had already lost something of their haunting terror, and she had finally decided not to reopen the question with Agnes, or to touch on it in speaking to the other servants” (815). Once the initial fear passes, Sara chooses to suppress her latent anxiety. Sara’s cousin, the narrator of the story, expresses surprise at Sara’s choice to dismiss the incident:

Knowing my cousin’s authoritative character, I was surprised at her decision not to speak to the servants of what had happened; but on thinking it over I concluded she was right. They were all exactly as they had been before that unexplained episode: efficient, devoted, respectful and respectable. She was dependent on them and felt at home with them, and she evidently preferred to put the whole matter out of her mind, as far as she could. (815)

With the reappearance of devoted and respectful servants, Sara reasons that everything must be back to its normal, natural order. The servants return to subservience, and Sara regains her “authoritative character.” As the servants reassume their standard roles, Sara

also eases into her old habit of dependence. As Inness reminds us, the societal implications run deeper than Sara Clayburn, though:

Mrs. Clayburn's dependency on her servants has not been weakened, even after her experiences with their desertion. Through her, we discover that the upper classes slowly learn that their dependence on servants is risky and troublesome and, ultimately, is based on the illusory belief that servants exist only to take care of the needs of their employers and have no independent lives. (347)

Having already forgotten the invaluable lesson taught to her by the vanishing servants, she is again dependent and needy.

As Inness claims, "we" may detect a slippage in the upper class's grip, but Sara does not. Sara's inability or unwillingness to retain the lesson learned that All Souls' Eve is perhaps the real reason for the stranger's reappearance the following year. The servants realize the potential of their power, but Sara refuses to surrender to it: "Servants in these stories do not relinquish their authority, because they know their own power. The upper-class world, the extinction of which consumed Wharton, is dangerously useless and irrelevant in 'All Souls'" (Blackford 241). The servants are determined to force Sara to a point of submission, and eventually, with the aid of the mysterious stranger, they succeed. When Sara again encounters her, she at first attempts to stand her ground, to protect the property and position she had vowed never to abandon. When her husband passed away, Sara averred: "Here I belong, and here I stay till my executors hand the place over to Jim's next-of-kin" (799). By "here," she means the physical estate, but also the social status, the servants, and the authority that come along with it. "Where" she truly intends to stay is in a position of power. This strange woman's reappearance

suddenly places Sara on the defensive, determined to avoid another terrifying exposure to the reality of the lower class. As before, when Sara moves off the path “so that” she cannot see the woman, here her vision is again restricted: “By that time it had got quite dark, as if a sudden storm was sweeping up over the sky, so that though she was so near me I could hardly see her” (818). Critics Janet Beer and Avril Horner conclude that: “the reader is meant to pay heed to Sara Clayburn’s admission of inadequate vision . . . and take it as the clue to what the story is really about: what cannot, in fact, be ‘seen’ or ‘told’ in such a society” (283). She understands now that the woman represents for her the decline of her power, and the uprising of her servants. At this time one year earlier, Sara “saw” for the first time the terror of the lower class’s existence. She is given on this anniversary the opportunity to reach again that enlightenment from last year, but refuses. Rather than risk enduring another shock of solitude and destitution, she flees her authoritative role. Sara would rather abandon her beloved Whitegates than face the prospect of losing her possessions again.

Sara has made clear that she is unwilling to relinquish the estate to her husband Jim’s family. When it was suggested that she leave upon her husband’s death, Sara vowed to maintain control of the estate until “my executors hand the place over to Jim’s next of kin—that stupid fat Presley boy...I’ll keep him out of here as long as I can” (799). She actually succeeds in keeping the Presley boy out—she attends his funeral “with a faint smile under her veil” (799). Even with the Presley boy out of the equation, the implication is that Jim’s family is anxious to get their hands back on the estate, and that Sara is equally determined to maintain the household. She may not be present physically any longer, but she would not readily leave her house to the hands of “Jim’s

next-of-kin.” Although the story does not explicitly reveal what happens to the estate and servants after Sara retreats to her cousin’s home, we can assume that she would prefer to keep the home under her control from afar rather than abandon the home completely.

With Sara’s apparent desire uphold her position in the family as Jim’s wife, the servants, then, win symbolic possession of Whitegates.

This story, outwardly a ghost story about a woman left alone for a night, actually reveals a fierce servant uprising, scoring an ultimate victory for the servants at Whitegates. Rather than accept or offer equality to her servants, Sara runs away, leaving the home in their control. In Wharton’s final piece of literature, she leaves a powerful and subversive message. The class of people so typically “unseen” in society—in Wharton’s world and in Sara Clayburn’s—secures their visibility, by subverting the expectations of their mistress. By moving beyond a figurative unseen to a literal unseen, the servants in “All Souls” can finally be seen.

CONCLUSION

Edith Wharton was a remarkably prolific writer, and in the vast majority of her works, she composed primary characters of similar advantage: the upper class. Of her dozens of novels and short stories, she diverges fully from this inclination in only a handful of works, tackling both the fantastical and the lower class in one division of her stories. The ghost stories—the servant stories—bring those often neglected in both literature and society to the forefront, openly addressing their tribulations. These comparatively few stories grant a voice to those frequently overlooked individuals and offer valuable insight into the mentality and prejudices of the elite, and of Wharton herself.

On a purely superficial level, the servants clearly have more presence in Wharton's ghost stories than in her non-fantastical works. They think, speak, and ultimately contribute to the course of the story—all actions that they typically do not enjoy in her work. The sheer existence of servants fulfilling substantial roles only scratches the surface of the significance of their presence, though. In these stories, Wharton actually allows the lower class an opportunity to speak out against the injustices perpetrated by her very class. The working class, neglected in society and in literature, can exact revenge against their oppressors in these ghost stories. Whether through usurpation of power, strict adherence to social expectations, or sudden disappearance, the servants in each of these stories ultimately reveal the inherent injustice of a social system

that fosters a master-servant dichotomy. Although the means of revolution varies, the outcome in each of these three stories is essentially the same—the servants emerge in some way victorious.

The three stories examined in this study accomplish more than simply placing the servants in a position of advantage. If the servants are victorious, then the privileged characters are therefore defeated. These defeated characters, though, are those who are generally, even in much of Wharton's fiction, the winners—they reap the benefits of a capitalist society. Barbara A. White distills Wharton's stronghold in the American canon to her focus in her novels on the "American dream." Her ghost stories, traditionally neglected by the literary canon, also show Wharton invoking the American dream, but in an inverted manner—they depict an utterly failed American dream. Rather than relishing their possessions, homes, and privilege, the primary characters in each of these stories must instead face the failings of the class system, perpetuated by their own hegemonic class. In fact, they are punished by the people they have most exploited in their quests for status. Wharton's commentary on the American dream serves as a bridge, linking two seemingly disparate factions of her work. Both the ultra-reality of many of her novels and stories and the fantastical elements of her ghost stories ultimately relay a similar message of a broken class system.

The difficulty in exulting Wharton as a social commentator, of course, is that she only permits true working class revolution to arise in her ghost stories. In each of these stories, the eventual triumph depends upon a fantastical element. In "Mr. Jones," the only character capable of defying Lady Jane is a ghost. The ghost of Elwell offers the servants in "Afterward" the opportunity to assist in his revenge against the Boynes. The

mysterious woman seems to push the servants to their final revolt against their mistress in "All Souls'." Without these fantastical circumstances and characters, the servants would presumably remain subjugated and exploited. The isolation of servant revolution to the ghost stories betrays Wharton's own prejudice against the lower class: that Wharton confines lower class revolution to the ghost stories reinforces her admitted sentiment that if servants were smart enough, "they wouldn't be servants." So while she seems to challenge her own subconscious prejudices by showing servants in revolt against their masters, these deceptively empowering tales betray her true attitude. The servants finally rise up against their masters, but by only allowing such upheaval in ghost stories, Wharton asserts that such revolution is simply not possible outside the realm of fantasy.

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