Eyes Under The Stairs: The Influence of the Panopticon on the Master-Servant Relationship in Edith Wharton's Ghost Stories and Henry James's The Turn of the Screw

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the relationship between the master and the servant in Edith Wharton’s ghost stories and Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*. I have used the theory of Michel Foucault’s Panopticon to investigate how the idea of being watched and observed can influence the behavior of both the master and servant and how this impacts their relationships. In Wharton’s ghost stories, I argue that she is opening a discussion on the ruling class versus the serving class and how societal pressures influence and often control these relationships, or, in many cases, imagined relationships. I am not arguing that Wharton is taking sides with either the serving class or ruling class. Instead, her stories are reflective of the cultural shift occurring in the economic classes and her own person experiences as being a wealthy member of society.

Similarly, Henry James uses the servants in his story, *The Turn of the Screw*, to provide commentary on the servant master relationship as well as the search for personal identity in the serving class during this time of cultural shift. His heavily the serving class and how they are affected by being watched. Through watching, he is able to showcase how behavior and personal identity can be manipulated in the serving and ruling classes.
Eyes Under The Stairs:
The Influence of the Panopticon on the Master-Servant Relationship in Edith Wharton's Ghost Stories and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*

by

Alisha LoRe

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Montclair State University
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Introduction:

The economic class structure and the separation between the rich and the poor have always and continue to be a repeated theme in literature. In a number of gothic writings, we see this theme repeatedly addressed. In particular, we see the struggle that exists between the ruling class and the serving class. As Fred Botting tells us in his text, *Gothic*, "In Gothic fiction certain stock features provides the principal embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties" (1). He continues to call out certain recurring aspects of Gothic literature that are used to help expand the discussion of cultural and societal anxieties.¹ As I will investigate in a number of Edith Wharton’s ghost stories and Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, oftentimes a relationship between master and servant is present, regularly highlighting the imagined sanctity of the relationships that existed in the eyes of the upper class with their servants versus the reality of their relationships. As a result of these imagined relationships, many of the protagonists in gothic writings are fearful of accepting or recognizing their own identities. They attempt to deny who they are and hide behind falsities, avoiding conforming to socially accepted class norms. The upper class, as we will explore, often aligns themselves with their servants, seeing them as mere extensions of themselves, void of their own identities. They even go as far as to assume that any personal identity the servants do have is shaped solely by their roles as servants. Likewise, there are some servants that do not fully recognize their place as the upper-class society would have viewed them. Sometimes, they even begin to look upon their employers as family or potential family. In both ill-conceived views, the relationship is doomed to fail. I am not suggesting that these relationships are being

¹ Botting calls out the reoccurring images used in Gothic texts to showcase cultural anxieties such as: "Tortuous, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits...spectres, demons, monsters, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, etc. (1).
presented as completely ill-conceived or that Wharton and James are attempting to suggest that there needs to be a distinct, elitist separation of class. Instead, I think that by showcasing the master-servant relationship in this way is meant to symbolize the unsteady social and cultural climate of the time. As I will further explore, in the early to mid-1800s, there was a shift in society where the wealthy were being criticized and judged by the lower classes. This shift is represented in Wharton’s and James’ stories through their character relationships. The stories, in particular, showcase the false ideas of the rich in regards to the servant class. They often show that only the servants and masters who are able to accept and recognize their socially accepted place in society are able to come out of these stories unscathed. As we read the texts, we are able to see, page by page, the destruction of these unnatural relationships as the protagonists are forced to accept their true identities. I argue that this recognition of one’s self is revealed through the use of Michel Foucault’s theory of the Panopticon. In particular, we see the panoptical situation presented in a number of Edith Wharton’s most famous ghost stories, “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell,” “All Souls,” “Pomegranate Seed,” and “The Looking Glass.” This is also a prevalent theme in Henry James’s novella, *Turn of the Screw*.

Foucault applies the theory of the Panopticon developed by philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, in his essay, “Discipline and Punish.” His Panopticon is an architectural figure that is described as a large building with a center tower. From that center tower, a watchman is able to see all of the prisoners who reside in the surrounding building in modular cells. The prison guard can see them, but the prisoners themselves are unable to know when and how often they are being watched due to the structure of the building. It is this constant insecurity about when one is being watched that then dictates behavior
according to Foucault. He does not limit this to the prison system, however, but views it as a theory that can be adapted throughout all walks of society. He argues:

If the inmates are convicts, there is no danger of a plot, an attempt at collective escape, the planning of new crimes for the future, bad reciprocal influences; if they are patients, there is no danger of contagion; if they are madmen there is no risk of their committing violence on one another; if they are schoolchildren, there is no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste of time; if they are workers, there are no disorders no theft, no coalitions, none of the distractions that slow down the rate of work, make it less perfect or cause accidents. (554)

By using this theory as a method of control and exercising power, one does not even necessarily need a prison guard or "watcher" constantly stationed and observing the inmates. All that is truly needed is a way to ensure that the inmates believe that they are or may potentially be under constant surveillance. Foucault believes that in society, this same theory can be applied where everyone polices everyone else. In this way, they, the "inmates," or people being observed, modify their own behavior out of the mere fear that someone might be watching them. As Foucault continues, "...the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary[;]...power should be visible and unverifiable" (555). It is the fear of being caught that is strong enough to dictate behavior without any true punishment being administered. What is key to note is the solitary nature the inmates are kept in. As we are told, "...individualities merging together as a collective effort is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individuals" (554). The inmates cannot be influenced by other inmates. In this scenario they are alone and
are therefore influenced solely by their own identities. It would seem that the true prison
guards and dictators of personal behaviors are therefore the individual inmates
themselves. A form of the theory of the Panopticon is prevalent in the gothic texts I will
further discuss in this essay by both Wharton and James. We will see how the fear of
being observed by unknown or mysterious watchers will dictate the behavior of the
individual and force them to recognize their personal identities particularly in the area of
social class.
Chapter 1: The Betrayals of the Trusted Servants and Their Naïve Masters

In an examination of Edith Wharton’s short story, “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” we clearly see the theme of servants as family come to light in addition to the ever present theme of being watched. What is important to note about this story is that we are seeing the servant-master relationship dilemma played from both the servant and master perspectives. Through the protagonist, Hartley, a lady’s maid, we see how a servant can so easily develop family-like affections for her mistress. We are also given a glimpse through the story’s mistress to how those same types of affections can easily be bestowed from a master to a servant. Much of this story takes place in a secluded country estate where the mistress of the house spends most of her time living alone with her servants. Her domineering husband only returns on occasion, but usually spends months abroad at a time. The fact that in this story, as well in Wharton’s later story “All Souls” which I will exam further in this essay, the woman of the house lives, for all intents and purposes, alone with only servants is very reminiscent of Edith Wharton’s personal life. As biographer Gloria C. Erlich tells us in her book, The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton, “Her pleasure in St. Claire was modified, however, by her inability to share a home with anyone other than servants or to fill it with family”2 (51). In “Lady’s Maid’s Bell” as well as “All Souls” the female protagonists live in their homes without any real family. They live only with their servants who they begin to look upon as something similar to family. The unhappiness experienced by this arrangement is comparable to what Wharton seems to have dealt with in her personal life and is especially prevalent in “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell.” Mrs. Brympton, the lady of the house, is sickly and seemingly depressed. She is

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2 Erlich reveals that Wharton was constantly buying homes and decorating them. She tells us that “Ceaselessly, she sought the place that would feel to her like a true home. First in America and then in France she decorated houses with great zest and then restlessly moved onto others. (50)
longing for the kind of love she had only felt between herself and her lady maid who had previously passed away. She does not have any children despite the fact that she is married. Her home is devoid of any true family ties—no children and an absentee husband. This is, in some ways, reminiscent of Wharton’s constant moving from house to house throughout her life. She was unable to find a place she felt truly comfortable and happy in. Although Mrs. Brympton is not shown moving from home to home, we do learn that she has a hard time keeping people—mainly maids—in the estate which causes her to feel uncomfortable and unhappy in her life. Her husband is constantly travelling and she cycles through lady maids on a regular basis. While Hartley is in town she meets an old friend who states, “All I know is she’s had four maids in the last six months, and the last one, who was a friend of mine, told me nobody could stay in that house” (Wharton 21). This showcases the unhappiness of the home, similar to Wharton’s own inability to find happiness in a home. Wharton cycled through homes just as Mrs. Brympton cycles through maids. In both instances, the two women, real life Wharton and fiction Mrs. Brympton, are searching for a way to feel happy in their home and failing.

The apparent misery in the house is coupled with Mrs. Brympton’s sickly nature and a husband who is never home. This also makes her, as with Wharton herself, devoid of any prominent sexuality. Both the lack of and fear of sexuality present in “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” can be seen in Wharton’s own upbringing. It has been claimed that Wharton’s mother raised her in a way which stunted her sexual growth. We learn, “Given her sense of maternal omniscience, she must have felt that she was being observed even in the ‘secret garden’ of her fantasy, and judged herself guiltily for
enjoying substitute forms of eroticism” (Erlich 88). Mrs. Brympton appears to also have a stunted sexuality. This could be reflective of Wharton’s own insecurities that were caused, in part, by her fear of her mother “watching” her. Much like Foucault’s Panopticon, it is the expectation that one is being under constant surveillance that dictates Wharton’s behavior. This behavior is then reflected in her writing. In this instance, it is not merely her mother physically watching her as a child, but all through her young life and into adulthood. Wharton felt paranoia that her mother was somehow always watching and had an ability to constantly observe her even when she was not physically present. This watchful eye prevented her from understanding her own individual sexuality.

Kathy Fedorko, in her book, Gender and the Gothic in the Fiction of Edith Wharton, notes that early Gothic stories by Wharton reveal a struggle that exists between female sexuality and autonomy and the attempts by men to suppress it. In “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” the wife is left home very often by her husband for long periods of time. When he returns, it is clear that he is an overbearing and brutish man. The servants reveal the mismatched marriage to Hartley: “The servants said very little about their master; but from what they let drop I could see it had been an unhappy match from the beginning” (Wharton 19). Cynthia Murillo notes this fact as well, stating, “The story suggests that Mr. Brympton has so sexually victimized his wife that she remains locked in her room, an invalid coerced into her grave” (117). Although some critics such as Murillo suggest that there is an implication of physical rape and sexual bullying by her husband throughout the text, I believe that real abuse is more prevalent through neglect and emotional abuse. Fedorko suggests that this vision of an incompatible marriage and
domestic tension can be just as terrifying as the typical plot of older Gothic tales in which we see a “chaste single woman being pursued by a villain” (Fedorko 29). The fear of the husband due to this incompatible marriage clearly prevents Mrs. Brympton from accepting her own sexuality. In fact, the only subtle glimpse of a possible sexual side we have of her is in her relationship with her neighbor and close friend, Mr. Ranford.

Although the text never confirms any relationship between the two other than friendship, it is the closest thing to a compatible romantic relationship we see with Mrs. Brympton. The text states:

The servants all liked him, and perhaps that’s more of a compliment than the masters suspect. He had a friendly word for every one of us, and we were all glad to think that Mrs. Brympton had a pleasant companionable gentleman like that to keep her company when the master was away.

(Wharton 19)

The story goes on to reveal that while Mr. Brympton was away, Mrs. Brympton would spend much of her time with Mr. Ranford, often trading books and, Mr. Ranford, on occasion, would even read aloud to her. It is clear that he would have been a much more agreeable match.

Michelle Massé continues the discussion of female fear and lack of sexuality in Wharton’s tales in her article, “Gothic Repetition: Husbands, Horrors, and Things That Go Bump in the Night.” She takes an in-depth look at repetition in various gothic works with a specific focus on husbands and their influence and treatment of females. By doing so, she makes a statement on female identity, or lack-there-of, in many Gothic stories. The passivity of the female characters is a direct result of societal norms which prevent
them from moving ‘toward their object of desire.’ Society would not look kindly on sexually aggressive women; as a result, Massé tells us that they become a type of ‘passive victim.’ This type of female character in the gothic continually denies her own ‘sexual longing’ (Massé 680). The inability to “fit” within a society can, overtime, be considered a trauma in which one (a female) in the gothic loses her identity. This trauma is furthered by the gothic husbands who are often depicted as believing that their wives should be extensions of themselves. Wives become “physically and psychologically” destroyed because they are unable to “merge their own identities entirely with their husbands” (Massé 696). The husbands hold an unreasonable expectation that their wives are in something closer to a servant position, existing to merely service their husband’s needs. The women are unable to accomplish this, never able to “merge” with their husband’s identity and retain their own individual identity in the process.

Both stories, as she points out, involve husbands who essentially terrorize their wives and eventually kill them. Massé’s arguments revolve around the basic idea that a heroine in a gothic story is not “one of self-awareness in which the burden is the individual’s alone” (Massé 709). Instead, it is the culture and society that refuse to hear a woman’s voice that is implicated. It is this societal influence that furthers this lifestyle for Mrs. Brympton. Similar to Foucault’s theory of the Panopticon, individuals can be controlled just by being or thinking they are being watched. If we see the general idea of “society” as stepping in as the watcher, than we can that it is society that influence and in some ways, control behavior. Although we have no insight into Mrs. Brympton’s inner voice to be able to know for certain if she actively believed she was being watched, we

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3 Massé uses Wharton’s short stories, “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” and “Kerfol” to showcase this argument in her essay.
can assume that to some extent that there was some force that held her from recognizing her sexual identity and caused her to passively accept the cruelty of her husband.

The fear of the controlling husband, as Massé suggested, is a constant presence in gothic writing—not just Wharton’s tales. For example, when reading Foucault’s essay, “in conjunction with Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper,” one cannot help but notice certain similarities just as we have been examining in Wharton’s tale. This is especially true in regards to the idea of the husband as ‘watcher.’ A short examination of the physical holdings of the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” immediately brings the idea of the Panopticon to mind. The structure is described as having not doors, but “zig zag openings” and should be fully lit (Foucault 182).

Although the room in which the narrator is kept in is not exactly the same as what is described by Foucault, there are many undeniable similarities. For example, the yellow wallpaper within her room seems to mimic the brightness that there is supposed to be for a true architectural Panopticon. Additionally, the undecipherable pattern of the wallpaper is reminiscent of the aforementioned zig zag pattern. The windows in the room provide for the unconfirmed ability to view the narrator. It is important because her husband, John, who is the ultimate observer at the start of the story, insisted upon this specific room because in the other room option “He said there was only one window” (Gilman 1). This suggests that he is purposefully using a room with more windows and more opportunities for his wife to be watched. We further see John’s position as observer when our narrator comments “There comes John, and I must put this away, --he hates to have me write a word” (Gilman 2). This reveals that the narrator not only knows her husband is watching her, but also that one of the main points of a Panopticon is being
followed—that of discipline. If one of the major reasons behind Panopticon is to enforce discipline in those being watched, then the narrator’s fear of being caught writing is certainly telling. She has been ordered not to write and is in constant fear that her observer will see her doing so. Our narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is being held “prisoner” in a room which can be considered a version of Foucault’s Panopticon. She is locked away and being monitored on a regular basis.

Although Mrs. Brympton, in “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” is not physically being imprisoned by lock and key as the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” she is imprisoned in the home both by her own fragility as much as from entrapment in a loveless and mismatched marriage. Her sickly body physically holds her to the home where her husband can come observe and watch her at any point in time. Even during the long spans of time when her husband is not at home, Mrs. Brympton rarely travels much farther out than her own garden. Even though her husband is not there keeping a constant eye on her, her frailty of mind and body holds her to the estate. It would appear that even when he is not physically present Mrs. Brympton still fears his watchful gaze, unable to leave the home or escape the marriage.

When looking briefly at another of Wharton’s ghost stories, “Pomegranate Seed,” we again see the loss of female identity. Although the protagonist, Charlotte, does not lose her sense of personal sexuality by a terrorizing husband, she is instead unable to come to terms with another major part of the female identity—her role as wife and mother. After marrying a widower and taking on the role of mother to her husband’s children from a previous marriage, Charlotte must deal with the non-physical presence of the diseased wife. This presence appears at first through the home that she decorated and
a painting of her. After the painting is moved into the children’s nursery, we learn from
Charlotte:

Knowing herself to be the indirect cause of this banishment, she spoke of
it to her husband; but he answered: “Oh, I thought they ought to grow up
with her looking down at them.” The answer moved Charlotte and
satisfied her; and as time went by she had to confess she felt more at home
in her house, more at ease and in confidence with her husband, since that
long coldly beautiful face on the library wall no longer followed her with
guarded eyes. (Wharton 224)

Thinking it is the right thing to do, Charlotte tries to tell her husband she is OK with
leaving the painting where it was and therefore makes an unspoken statement that she is
secure in her new role. But we quickly learn that the removal of the painting does allow
Charlotte to more easily accept her position. Without the painting ‘watching’ her, she
immediately feels relief and is able to take on her role and wife and mother as she saw fit.
Without the eyes of another woman judging her and causing her to question her every
move, she is able to more readily accept her own individual identity. However, once that
unseen watcher presence returns to her life in the form of mysterious letters, we quickly
see Charlotte fall back into a place where she begins questioning her role as wife and
place in the household. It does not matter that she is doing “everything right.” Just the
thought of someone watching her home is enough to cause despair and fear in her. Much
like Wharton’s fear of being watched by her mother, the watchful eye will always cause
one to question themselves. Even though Wharton’s sexuality should have been a natural
part of her life, the feeling that her mother might be watching her caused her to question every move.

This element of watching is furthered as we continue looking into “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell.” It is not just the upper class mistress, Mrs. Brympton, who is unable to recognize her individuality as a result of finding herself in a Panopticon-like situation. We also see Mrs. Brympton’s new servant and the protagonist of the story, Hartley, being controlled and influenced because of a “watcher”. As the story opens, we meet Hartley, an out of work maid who has just recovered from typhoid, looking for a new position. A wealthy friend of her former employer decides to help her and sets her up with a position at her niece’s home. She reassures Hartley, “My niece is an angel. Her former maid, who died last spring, had been with her twenty years and worshipped the ground she walked on” (Wharton 13). This statement is greatly reminiscent of the sentiment later expressed by the protagonist, Sara Clayburn, in Wharton’s “All Souls.” It showcases the idea that members of the upper class did not always recognize their servants’ individual identities beyond their own needs and wants. In “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” there is a search by the mistress of the house for sisterhood. She looks for this sisterhood in the people she finds herself closest to, her lady maids. Despite the fact that these servants are hired, paid and expected to serve their masters’ needs as part of their job, not necessary because it is something they want to do. Wharton suggests in her tales that there is still somehow the idea held by the upper class that the servants are not only happy to hold the job, but truly love their employers and love to serve them. This type of arguably unnatural relationship cannot exist as we see illustrated in “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell.” It is important to note that this story was published in 1902, well before, “All Souls,” which
was written very late in Wharton’s life and published posthumously. When reviewing both tales, it is clear how Wharton’s view of the serving class changes in her life. In this tale, she expresses a more romanticized view of the master-servant relationship.

Although she still recognizes a sister-like relationship between a lady and her maid does not work, Hartley is shown in a favorable light. As I will discuss later in “All Souls,” as Wharton ages, her view of the servant-master relationship shifts. Not only does she show that there is a definite breakdown of the classes, but the servants in that tale are treated with an element of suspicion and fear which is also reflective of societal changes at that time.

In the early twentieth century, there existed a growing resentment between the upper and lower classes. Sherrie Inness, in her essay, “Loyal Saints or Devious Rascals: Domestic Servants in Edith Wharton’s Stories” argues that Wharton is using servants in her writing to showcase unrest among the classes. She suggests, “…she uses maids for a number of different purposes, including as a vehicle for critiquing upper-class values and for suggesting the instability of the class system in which she grew up” (338). As a result, these types of loving relationships between the lady, Mrs. Brympton, the wealthy mistress in the tale, and her lady’s maids were always doomed for failure. She may have wanted “a companion” but that could never truly be. We do, however, soon discover in the text that the first maid, Emma Saxon, may have truly had a sister-like love for her mistress that crossed the lines of an acceptable employer-servant relationship. The other servants in the household reveal the relationship further telling Hartley, “My mistress loved her like a sister” (Wharton 17). Although a caring relationship and mutual relationship between master and servant may not outwardly appear as something
inherently “bad,” when transposed against the social climate of the time, one can see how this becomes problematic. In “Economic Hauntings: Wealth and Class in Edith Wharton’s Ghost Stories,” Karen J. Jacobsen states:

This unease 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. For example, in an early ghost story, “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” the apparent loyalty of Emma Saxon and Alice Hartley is overshadowed by the smoldering animosity of the other servants in the household. (108)

As a result of this, it would appear that both the servant and mistress are eventually punished for their relationship, both dying mysteriously. Not only does Emma Saxon get punished by death, but as we will learn, her death results in her never taking “possession” of estate as the other servants of the house do. Although this second punishment may seem far less severe than the initial, dying, it is actually the ultimate punishment. By crossing boundaries between master and servant, Emma becomes class-less. She will never be upper class no matter how much she loves her mistress and no matter how much her mistress loves her. She also loses her place amongst the household servants and is therefore unable to take control over the home as they do. Emma’s death is merely a means to bring her to her ultimate punishment, the loss of her identity. Neither excepted fully into the ruling class or the serving class, Emma floats in a purgatory in between the two existences, never able to make the leap in either direction, never fully grasping who she truly is. Sarah Clayburn, in “All Souls” as I will further investigate, loses her identity because she did not allow herself to recognize the individual lives of her servants.
Although she may not have explicitly seen them as family like Mrs. Brympton appears to have, she does put a tremendous amount of trust in them. Her resulting terror (as I will discuss later) is not based just because she is physically alone in the house, but because it forces her to realize she is still “alone” even when the servants are there.

Hartley, the new maid and protagonist of the tale, narrowly manages to escape a similar fate of that of Emma Saxon or even her own mistress. Although it is clear that the potential exists that Hartley will step into the sisterly role that Emma previously occupied, she avoids it as a result of finding herself in her own Panopticon. Emma Saxon steps into a role of an all-knowing benevolent watcher. Although she is not a “prison guard” in the traditional sense of the Panopticon, her watchful gaze still manages to elicit control over those she is watching, in this case, Hartley. After moving into Brympton estate, we see that Hartley is never quite at ease. She describes, on more than one occasion, the inexplicable discomfort she felt in the house, stating, “I had nothing to complain of; yet there was always a weight on me...the moment I caught sight of the house again my heart dropped down like a stone in a well” (Wharton 19-20). The unseen watchful eyes on her influence her behavior enough to keep her from becoming the next Emma Saxon in two ways. She prevents Hartley from stepping into the new sister role for Mrs. Brympton, but also appears to be watchful of both women against the abuse of Mr. Brympton.

We see that Hartley has a deep compassion for her kind mistress, but there is something in the house that holds her back. As a result, she never fully becomes the sister-like companion to Mrs. Brympton. She cares for her, but the distinction of servant and master is still retained. Even though we see that she very quickly takes a liking to
her new mistress at the start of the tale stating, “...when she smiled I felt there was nothing I wouldn’t do for her” (Wharton 15). The reader, however, is quickly reminded of the class distinction when Mrs. Brympton ends the conversation stating, “I am tired tonight, and shall dine upstairs” (Wharton 15). By doing so, she is brought back to her upper class status and Hartley back to her servant role—no longer a doting family member. By using the word “upstairs,” the reader is reminded of the well-known differentiating description between classes. The lower class is downstairs while the wealthy class is up. The class distinction is further presented when Hartley finally meets Mr. Brympton, the master of the household, and it becomes clear to her the feelings that the other servants have towards him. We learn, “It was plain that nobody loved him below stairs” (Wharton 17). Once again, we see the mention of the stairs to highlight the proper place of Hartley in the home.

Within the first few minutes of her time in the household, Hartley is presented with the first glimpse of her “watcher.” She sees an unexplained ghostly figure in the darkness and from then on, Hartley begins to feel that she is being secretly watched from behind an empty bedroom door across the hall. Hartley reveals:

I grew so nervous that the least sound made me jump. Somehow, the thought of that locked room across the passage began to weigh on me. Once or twice, in the long rainy nights, I fancied I heard noises there; but that was nonsense, of course, and the daylight drove such notions out of my head. (Wharton 20)

This feeling of being watched prevents Hartley from ever fully taking over the true role that Emma Saxon once held, that of a loving companion instead of just a mere servant.
Although Emma Saxon is ultimately a benevolent watcher, Hartley does not know this at first and appears to react with fear not because of who is watching her, but merely based on the fact that she feels the gaze of someone unknown and unseen on her. As Foucault describes in his theory of the Panopticon, the mere thought of some unknown entity watching you from an unseen location is enough to manipulate and modify your behavior. At one point she becomes so terrified of the unseen watcher who she is starting to suspect is Emma Saxon, she nearly exclaimed, "Whoever you are, come out and let me see you face to face, but don't lurk there and spy on me in the darkness!" (Wharton 29). Hartley quickly begins to believe Emma Saxon as her unseen watcher. The fact that she believes that she is being spied upon by someone of her same status and same position is telling. It suggests an internal struggle within Hartley regarding her position. Having a stern and watchful gaze on her by what appears to be the previous maid seems to hold her in place as a servant and keep her from crossing the line into family. She cannot give her full attention to her mistress because part of her mind remains wary of those watchful eyes. She becomes suspicious of the house and therefore the separation of the classes remains strong. She stays as the servant and never becomes the “sister.”

Unlike the Bentham’s traditional Panopticon where the watchers remain an unknown entity, the watcher of Hartley is eventually revealed as the ghost of the former lady’s maid, Emma Saxon. By having the watcher revealed as Emma Saxon shows that one of the major goals of this Panopticon is to prevent to mixing of the classes. The mystery required for the Panopticon still exists since the watcher is not a real person, but a mysterious ghostly entity. Although it seems real in the text, there is no telling if she is actually there because Hartley is the only one to ever see her. Because of this, the
watcher remains conspicuous and unknown. As a ghost rather than a flesh and blood human being, this watcher remains just as much a mystery as the unseen watchers in the traditional Panopticon. It serves the same function as well, that is, keeping the prisoner, in this case Hartley, "in check." Because of the paranoia of being watched, Hartley does not stray far from what the acceptable social norm of her station in life. She remains a servant—saved by her watcher, Emma Saxon, who could not do the same and was therefore punished. Society would not accept a servant becoming so emotionally attached to their employers that they believe, by both parties, that they are family. This distinction is made clear to Hartley in "The Lady's Maid's Bell." As a result, upon the death of Mrs. Brympton, the servants, including Hartley, are able to take control of the house. As the story closes, the reader is told, "...Mr. Brympton jumped into the carriage nearest the gate and drove off without a word to any of us. I heard him call out, "To the station," and we servants went back alone to the house" (Wharton 35). Although the servants do not literally now own the house, the mistress is gone and the master, although still alive, has fled the home and will have little reason to return on a regular basis now that his wife is gone. The death of Mrs. Brympton prevents Hartley from ever becoming the sister servant. Instead, it is clear that Hartley remains in her station, her last statement identifying herself as a "we" when she refers to the servants. She takes her place among her new "family" which is made up not of her mistress or master, but of those in her same socioeconomic position.

At first reading, one might argue that Emma is trying to force Hartley to help her beloved mistress in the same way she would have in life. After following the ghost of Emma from the house, Hartley herself even states, "I knew well enough that she hadn't
led me there for nothing. I felt there was something I ought to say or do—but how was I to guess what it was?” (31). Many have argued, such as the previously discussed theory by Massé, that the death of Mrs. Brympton was caused by her brutish husband. Could it be that Emma’s mysterious death was also caused by him when she attempted to step in and help her? As a servant, she could not protect her mistress from her master. It would seem that Emma, by leading Hartley from the home to Mr. Ranford, was trying to force Hartley to help her mistress is a way more appropriate to her position—by going to the wealthy friend and possible true romantic match to their mistress. This act also seems to suggest that the true way to save Mrs. Brympton would be with a more appropriate marriage. Mrs. Brympton, it is clear, is trapped not only in her home, but trapped in an unsuccessful marriage. By having The reader is coming to understand that Emma Saxon is an all-knowing and benevolent watcher. As a result of this, when she sends Hartley to the more “fitting” marital match for her mistress it is revealed that only he could be the savior for her—physically and emotionally. This would also serve to showcase that despite the prospect of a sisterly bond between the maid and servant, the true savior of the lady is found amongst true family and someone of her class, not someone from the serving class.

In one of Edith Wharton’s most well-known ghost stories, “All Souls,” we again see investigation of the often blurred lines that exists in the master-servant relationship. This tale, published posthumously in 1937, showcases a protagonist who is a “master” rather than a servant as Hartley was in “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell.” This story, being written so late in Wharton’s life, suggests that a life-time of experience as a wealthy member of society as a “master” may have been a strong influence on the protagonist,
Sara Clayburn. I am not arguing that the story is in any way biographical or that Sara somehow is Edith Wharton, however, I do believe Wharton’s own life may have been infused into the master-servant relationship as it is presented in this tale. This insecurity of Edith Wharton regarding servants is suggested to have stemmed as far back as her infancy. As Erlich tells us:

Receiving most of her nurturance from a surrogate mother added a deep insecurity to Edith’s young life. Although Doyley remained with the Jones family well beyond Edith’s infancy, she must have had days off when the child feared she might never return. Knowing that Doyley was a salaried employee, Edith must have also feared that she might be dismissed. (24)

This fear of abandonment by trusted servants is showcased in “All Souls.” Sara Clayburn’s fear about being abandoned by her trusted servants is reflective of Wharton’s own personal insecurities.

As a member of the upper class, the protagonist is surrounded by servants who take care of her as well as the house. This “ruling class” would typically be viewed as the ones in charge. They are the home owners, they pay the salaries of the servants and therefore, it would be expected that they would have all of the power. Oftentimes, however, it is the servants who gain the upper-hand in these tales, not merely taking care of the homes and their wealthy occupants, but controlling them as well. As we investigated earlier in “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell,” an inability to draw the line between classes can result in such an occurrence. If one is unable to recognize their true identity, in these cases, their proper societal class, they lose themselves. Using a system very
much like Foucault’s Panopticon, the servants are able to quietly, and often, anonymously, take control of the entire household, often influencing the behavior of their so-called masters. It is this fear of being watched experienced not only by society at large, but by their very own servants that seemingly drive their behavior. In these stories, in particular, “All Souls,” the protagonist is both paranoid and fearful that she is being observed by unknown eyes. They are driven into a metaphorical (and sometimes literal) prison where they are controlled by an unseen and unlikely set of prison guards—their very own servants.

In, “All Souls,” the protagonist, Sara Clayburn, experiences her fear in many ways while trapped alone in her own home. Although one major terror experienced in this occurrence stems from the fear of a male intruder, there are also a number of more subtle, but just as substantial, fears that surface. In particular, the fear that comes from class difference and an inability to fully know and trust servants that may have previously been seen as something close to family. For the protagonist to be forced to realize that some of her “family” were, in actuality strangers, adds to a loss of personal identity and confusion over economic status. This is not the result of something to do with a husband or other patriarchal figure as past critics, such as Fedorko, have argued, but instead the result of social and wealth barriers between the classes with the additional layer that the wealth acquired is often a result of work done by the husbands or fathers—not the women.

As the story opens, we see that Sara is seemingly in total control of herself and her life. After the death of her husband, she refuses to do what is expected of her and remains in her home called Whitegates. She even appears, at some level, to control her
own life and death, stubbornly outliving Preston, her deceased husband’s cousin, who stood to inherit the house. However, as the story progresses we see that this is not the case. Sara does not have a true understanding of her own identity and, through fear, is forced to come to terms with her own inability to remain independent. She also begins to fear that her growing age will continue to make her more helpless with each passing year.

When Sara awakens to find herself alone in her house, practically immobile from an earlier leg injury, the “horror” of the ghost story begins. The injury coupled with the isolated location of Whitegates serves as Sara’s panoptical prison. Although the home does not necessarily mimic Foucault’s traditional idea of a Panopticon in design exactly, the various rooms and stairways allow for the same feeling that someone unseen might be observing her every move. Much like a traditional Panopticon, Sara is trapped in a well-lit prison. As Foucault highlighted, it is necessary for the “prison” to be lit. He states, “Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap” (554). Sara’s electricity may be out, but she makes it clear that there is a certain brightness throughout the home coming in from outside. There was a “deep nocturnal silence in that day-lit house” (Wharton 283). The text later goes on to state, “the house had retained in daylight its nocturnal mystery, and was watching her as she was watching it” (Wharton 286). This light does not diminish the fear of the previous night’s darkness, but instead it enhances what Sara finds more terrifying, the complete and utter silence. There is no escape for her in her present state and the lingering fear that she is being watched forces her to reevaluate what she had previously taken for granted—her relationship with her servants.
She grapples with the rising awareness that although she may have had absolute trust in her servants almost as she would for her own family, this is not and cannot be the case. Her life rests in the hands of people she does not truly know. As Kathy Fedorko points out, Sara has an “inevitable unsettling realization that her servants are animate individuals, not inherited pieces of property whose only purpose is to service her every need” (159). Sara’s realization that the hired help can never truly be considered something similar to family exposes, to the reader, that Sara is either unable or unwilling to fully embrace the social expectations of her economic class. This is a struggle that can be seen as a direct reflection of Wharton’s own life. As discussed earlier, she was not able to find the maternal love she wanted from her own mother, but could never fully replace it with the love of a servant.

It is clear to readers early on in the text that Sara went against the typical gender roles. When we are first introduced to her, we learn that she went against societal expectations by remaining in her home after her husband’s death. It is her inability to accept and abide by the social norms related to her wealthy economic status that is the most dangerous and damaging. She has managed to falsely convince herself that she can put her full trust in her servants in part because they are so engrained in her day to day life. The simple fact that Sara, in her growing age, was still insisting on remaining alone with the servants at Whitegates reveals how much she trusted them. When that trust is broken and they leave Sara truly alone, the true horror of the story is revealed. Sara does not seem to understand that her servants have lives outside of their duties to her. She sees her servants as extensions of herself whose sole existence she believes is to service and care for her and does has trouble grasping that they have individual identities. They are
fully aware of their status in life as servants and, one might argue, they are fully aware that Sara Clayburn is unaware of hers, putting her in a vulnerable state.

Although the servants seemingly have disappeared without a trace, there are some clues that give rise to the suspicion that the incident is not a fluke and the servants are potentially revealed as one version of "the watchers." I am not arguing that the text has suggested the servants serve as watchers during the actual "incident" where Sara is trapped alone in the house; however I believe that the text does present the reader with clues that indicate that they can be seen as the consummate watcher during Sara's daily life. The fact that it is twice noted that her maid has left her provisions (an uncommon occurrence) near her bedroom is very revealing of this. When Sara is first put to bed the night of the incident, she notes that "Agnes, before leaving her, had made everything as comfortable as possible. She had put a jug of lemonade within reach, and had even (Mrs. Clayburn thought it odd afterward) insisted on bringing in a tray with sandwiches and a thermos of tea" (Wharton 280). When Sara returns to her bedroom at the end of the incident, she is very grateful of the servant leaving both food and alcohol, even though the reader is told:

She recalled noticing that a flask of brandy had been put beside the thermos, and being vaguely surprised. Agnes' departure, then, had been deliberately planned, and she had known that her mistress, who never touched spirits, might have need of a stimulant before she returned."

(Wharton 291)

It would seem that Sara's servants have been watching her for so long that they know better about her own needs. It does not only reveal that the servants had known that this
night was going to happen, but this further exposes the fact that Sara is completely reliant on her servants.

The revelation of her true economic and social status is revealed to Sara throughout the incident. It leads Sara to accept her own demons, causing her to come to terms with her inability to accept and understand her appropriate social status, coming face to face with reality. The reader sees this growing realization as Sara begins her journey through the house, first in her maid Agnes’s bedroom where she comments on her lesser quality of clothing, “On the shelf above were Agnes’ few and unfashionable hats, rearrangements of her mistress’ old ones” (Wharton 285). By noticing the difference in clothing and allowing herself to voice it, we see the beginnings of her realization of class difference that exists between her and her servants.

It is important to note that these revelations do not come to Sara simply because she is alone in the house. These revelations appear to coincide with her growing concern of being watched. Earlier, it was discussed that the servants, to some extent, served as watchers in Sara’s life. It is clear that during the incident, the idea of the watcher transcends specific servants and is instead equated to the house and silence of the house itself. The text reads, “The deep silence accompanied her; she still felt it moving watchfully at her side, as though she were its prisoner and it might throw itself upon her if she attempted to escape” (Wharton 289). We also see in the text that Sara makes the odd decision to use the main staircase rather than the servants’ staircase even though the main staircase is far more inconvenient in her present injured state. We are told, “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 that moment she was past
reasoning, and had better obey instinct” (Wharton 286). Logic would seem to dictate that in her injured state that it would make the most sense for her to take the closest stairwell, which was the one at the back of the house. However, she felt compelled to use the front stairs meant for the “masters” of the house. This “unknown” compulsion she is having is the subconscious realization of class distinction. Rather than using the same stairs as her servants, she takes the more difficult route ensuring that she used the staircase that is more class appropriate. As she continues her way through the home, the separation between her and her servants is further highlighted as the narrator points out Sara noticing things such as an empty coffee cup that was left out overnight by her servants and discussing her upscale way taking her meals, “She was not the kind of woman to nibble on a poached egg on a tray when she was alone, but always came down to the dining room, and had what she called a civilized meal” (Wharton 289). Despite the fact that Sara is riddled with fear as she makes her way through her empty house, there are repeated examples that show her becoming more aware of her upper class status compared to her lower class servants. The fact that such a thing would be constantly at the forefront of her mind at this time suggests its importance in the text.

Through this event and these realizations, her greatest fear, the fact that she is truly alone, emerges. Without a family, she must address the possibility of dying alone and come to terms with her aging self. Fedorko argues that the “incident” that Sara experiences reveals to her what her death is going to be like (Fedorko 160). She is trapped, helpless and alone. The injury to Sara’s leg likens her, temporarily, to an invalid who can barely make it through a single night without the aid of her servants. As a result

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4 Fedorko likens the incident to another story by Wharton, The House of Mirth, in which the character of Lilly has a similar experience. Fedorko states of Sara, “She, like Lily, is feeling what death might be like (Fedorko 160).
of this, Sara begins to see herself in another light. As an aging woman, this could be her future. She can easily become an invalid as she ages and if she continues on this path, she will die alone. This is her ultimate terror. Her inability to accept this fate eventually causes her to run from the house to a cousin in the city, the narrator of the story, who takes her in and states, “She was not a woman to let herself be undressed and put to bed like a baby; but she submitted without a word” (Wharton 296). Allowing her cousin to take care of her in such a childlike way reveals that Sara has abandoned the person she was at Whitegates.

Sara, at Whitegates, thought herself an independent woman, unencumbered by the stigmas of class and gender. However, her experience alone in the house forced her to truly look into herself. She realized that much of what she convinced herself to be true was completely false. By ignoring the accepted norms of her economic status, she allowed herself to be lulled into a safe sense of security and family. She therefore, became completely reliant on her servants, essentially leaving her life in their hands. It takes the “incident” where she is alone in the house for her to understand this. Not only does being alone reveal her own ineptitude at taking care of herself, but the possibility that they, the servants, have been secretly observing her throughout her entire time at Whitegates, enables them to see and take advantage of Sara’s disconnect with social norms. This disconnect offers an opportunity to manipulate Sara into fleeing from the home, leaving the servants alone in the house they have cared for over a number of years. Although it is most likely that the house will now be sold to another family and the servants will not be able to remain alone with the house, the fact that Sara will no longer remain there shows the readers that, in the end, “society” has won out. Sara, living alone
in the home was against what was expected or thought proper for a woman of her status and age. She has now been put into a situation more fitting of what was culturally accepted and Whitegates will, in turn, be occupied, one can assume, by another wealthy family who behaves according to typical customs of wealthy.

Similarly, in a slightly earlier work of Wharton published in 1936, the story entitled “The Looking Glass” also addressed the element of aging and how society viewed this process. In “The Looking Glass,” we witness an upper class woman, Mrs. Clingsland, emotionally fall apart as her body ages. As she fears she is losing her beauty, the aptly named Mrs. Clingsland, clings to the words of her peers, only able to find happiness when she allowed herself to believe that they still saw her as beautiful and breaking down whenever she doubted how they saw her. Eventually, the narrator tells us:

What she wanted was a looking glass to stare into; and when her own people took enough notice of her to serve as looking glasses, which wasn’t often, she didn’t much fancy what she saw there. (Wharton 262)

She was no longer able to base her life around how she saw herself, but instead around how society viewed her and was consumed by society pressures of beauty and the female ideal. Although this differs from Sara Clayburn, it stems from the same basic issue—societal pressures and expectations of aging upper-class women. Sara refused to relinquish her home to a male heir as would have been expected and Mrs. Clingsland refused to accept her old age and instead spent all of her time focusing and trying to correct her failing beauty and growing age. This reveals to the reader how deeply engrained societal pressures of beauty and youth weighed on women—especially those in the upper class where style and beauty were so often admired above all else. The narrator
in “The Looking Glass,” goes so far as to point out, “Why, we don’t either of us know anything about what a beautiful woman suffers when she loses her beauty…to a beauty like Mrs. Clingsland it’s like being pushed out of an illuminated bathroom, all flowers and chandeliers, into the winter night and snow” (Wharton 262-263). It is fitting that when she lost the comfort of her own upper class peers supplying her with endless compliments as they viewed and judged her that Mrs. Clingsland’s only solace would then come from someone in the serving class. It takes someone below her socially to give her comfort because she can and does pay for her to do this. As we have seen already in Wharton’s stories, it is a common occurrence for someone of the ruling class to look for comfort and family-like affection from those that they are paying to be in their life.

Mrs. Clingsland is blind to the fact that the comfort she is getting from Mrs. Attlee is false. She sees her peers as watchers but is unable to see Mrs. Attlee as another watcher who uses this to her own advantage, ultimately swindling Mrs. Clingsland to pay more and more for her to come around. Mrs. Attlee’s false comfort is not because she cares for Mrs. Clingsland as she would her own family or a true friend, but because of what she will gain from her. The reader learns early in the tale that her, Mrs. Attlee’s, entire family fortune is a result of this scheme. It is important to note that “The Looking Glass,” addresses many of the same concerns as “All Souls.” These two stories were written late in Wharton’s life. As a result, both stories address the similar fear of the serving class taking advantage of an overly trusting mistress. Much like Mrs. Clingsland, Sara Clayburn relies heavily on the servants she took for granted. Sara, by the close of the story, realizes that her servants are people with their own lives separate from their
duties of caring for her every practical need and escapes to her cousin. She realizes that those she is paying to be in her life will never truly care for her like family unlike Mrs. Clingsland who never realizes this. Mrs. Clingsland even goes a step further with her affection for her "servant," Mrs. Attlee, than Sara does. Mrs. Attlee does not just serve Mrs. Clingsland practical needs, but she sees her as serving her emotional needs as well. She never makes the distinction that she is a paid servant and ultimately does not truly care beyond what she can gain from her financially.

In presenting this possible manipulation of Sara and Mrs. Clingsland by the serving class, I am not trying to suggest that the text reveals that they are meant to be seen as truly evil characters. As part of Foucault's discussion of the Panopticon, the idea of the presence of a watcher is enough to manipulate the "prisoners." There does not physically need to be a real flesh and blood person there serving as said watcher as long as those being kept prisoner are made to believe someone is there. The unknown factor of the incident furthers these fears in Sara. Even though she does not see her servants, or, as is suggested, some unknown force in the house observing her, the paranoia that someone might be is enough to drive her over the edge. This unconfirmed fear forces her to come to terms with her own inability to follow social norms, causing her to face her ultimate fear of being left alone and helpless. Allan Gardner Smith's essay, "Edith Wharton and the Ghost Story," considers the possibility that Sara's ordeal is a manifestation of her discomfort and worry over the inheritance. Since she took over Whitegates after her husband's death, there is the fear that something might go wrong with her strict regime in up keeping the household which "acknowledges the irrationality and instability of her financial and class-determined position beneath the rationality or
common sense of her acceptance of it” (Smith 91). Although the servants create the comfort in which she lives in, it is clear in this story that they also serve equally as a threat to this comfort.

Jacobsen discusses the ever present distinction between the upper and lower class. She suggests that “All Souls” exposes exploited labor and unease of inherited property. As Jacobsen informs us:

The period in which she wrote the ghost stories (1904-37) marks particularly anxious moments in the American public’s ambivalent relationship with wealth. On the one hand, average Americans believed they too could achieve great wealth and strove to emulate the rich. However, media stories exposing the corrupt fortunes of the “Captains of Industry” and the extravagant consumption by the wealthy fueled resentment in a public concerned about the increasing gap between the rich and poor. Frequent labor unrest, Populist reforms, the specter of Socialism, the 1929 economic crash, and subsequent Depression all contributed to the wealthy classes’ fear that they were under attack. (101)

These feelings regarding wealth and the upper-class present in Wharton’s ghost stories are reminiscent of the unease during the early 1920s. The American public was having

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5 Smith also discusses the Wharton short story, “The Looking Glass,” which he argues furthers highlights the concerns of the structure of social classes. Although the lower class character in this story, Mrs. Attlee, is not necessary an actual servant, she is able to dupe the wealthy woman who employs her. Her wealthy employer is an older woman terrified of aging and obsessed with a long lost love. The “servant” takes advantage under the guise of saving her employer from being exploited by others, despite the fact that it exactly what she is doing. Together, this story coupled with “All Souls” reveals issues involving a discomfort over women in male roles, mistrust between women and anxiety and fear over the master versus servant (or employee) relationships.

6 In this same essay, Smith also provides a second reading in which he suggests Wharton uses her story to address taboo and risqué situations without overtly discussing them.
similar feelings about the wealthy and there was a growing resentment fueled by the
economic gap between the rich and the poor which seemed to be further increasing.
Jacobsen argues that Wharton’s ghost stories reveal her “participation in and response to
America’s anxious debate over wealth and class during the rapidly changing economic
landscape of the early twentieth century” (Jacobsen 101). More and more people were
speaking out against the upper class often highlighting the tremendous differences
between classes causing resentment and unrest in the serving classes. Jacobsen goes as
far as to suggest that the true ghosts in these stories are actually Wharton’s own fear that
the upper classes have become “trivial and dispensable” (109). Not only is her fear of
dying alone highlighted by her dependence on her servants, but there is the added
concern that a changing society might not accept the lifestyle she has been living,
considering it to be undeserved.

In both of these stories, “All Souls” and “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” we are able to
see how the loss of identity existed between the classes. In both cases, the “masters’ in
the stories, Sara Clayburn and Mrs. Brympton, do not have a family. As a result, they
mistakenly attempt to create a closer bond with their servants. Mrs. Brympton, we see,
begins creating sister-like relationships with her maids. Sara, on the other hand, does not
explicitly refer or treat her servants like family, but she feels bonded enough to them that
she displays almost total trust in them by the act of remaining alone at Whitegates with
them. This relationship would be considered socially unacceptable by others in their same
station. Hartley provides us a glimpse into the servant world where the same type of
mistaken relationship sometimes existed. She was on her way into caring and becoming
as emotionally attached to her mistress as one would a true family member. It is the
watchers in both stories that help suggest they are in Panopticon and therefore influence the behavior of the characters to adhere to social norms. For Sara, she is forced to realize her identity as not only an upper class and wealthy citizen, but as a single aging woman with no immediate family to care for her. As a result of her realization, she must do as society would expect a woman in her situation to do, and flee to her closest true family member and allow herself to be cared for. Mrs. Brympton is in a similar situation, family-less in a home and unable to take care of herself. Her only comfort is her lady maid who she sees as a true family member. She is unable to come to terms with the fact that her servant is not family and Mrs. Brympton is therefore punished. She dies at the end of the tale leaving the servants with the home. Who ultimately “keeps” the home is ambiguous. It is unlikely that a group of servants would actually be allowed to take possession of a home, however if we assume that Mr. Brympton continues travelling as often as he does and does not sell the home, the servants will be left alone to care for it without a master or mistress there to order them around. Jacobsen considers this to be another way that Wharton is showcasing the unease between the serving and ruling class because the servants appear to, in some way, take the house from their wealthy employers.
Chapter 2: The Fight for Power and Loss of Identity

In Henry James’ novella, *The Turn of the Screw*, the relationship between the master and servant is further explored using Panopticon-like elements. In particular, the theme of watching and being watched is repeated throughout the text as is the feeling of solitude. As Beth Newman states, “Foucault’s discussions of surveillance, “Panopticism,” and the “clinical gaze” have from another direction contributed to more general suspicions of what is being called the “gaze” (43). These themes are crucial in highlighting the dynamics of the servant versus master relationship as well as investigating the dangers of behaving in a way that would have been thought of as unacceptable for someone of the servant class. Similar to Edith Wharton, Henry James lived a privileged life with servants. The complicated relationships that existed between masters and servants are reflected in writings of both authors. As previously discussed in Wharton’s, “All Souls,” and “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell,” the intimacy that often existed between master and servant did not only cause blurred lines between the social classes, but sometimes made it difficult for the masters to see their servants as having their own identity. Wharton, it would seem, was thought to have found it difficult to see the separation between herself and her servants, often viewing them as having a familial closeness. James may have viewed his servants with the similar amount of “closeness” however not in the familial sense as Wharton. He did not see them as family but instead, viewed them as tools or commodities, forgetting that they were people with actual lives behind their duties to him as servants. Viewing the servants in such a way causes James to overlook a key element of servant life, the fact that it was actually a life.
They both dismissed the idea that the servants had their own identities and instead only saw them as extensions of themselves. Stuart Burrows, in his essay, “The Place of a Servant in the Scale,” discusses James’s view of the serving class, pointing to a letter he wrote regarding his two longtime servants, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, who were reaching, as James described it, a state of decay as they aged. Despite the many years he spent with the Smiths in his life and home, Burrows tells us:

Such was the extent of his concern for the “decaying” Smiths that James simply listed them as a possession in a letter detailing what he intended to take with him in his move from London to a small Sussex town in 1896: “I take the Smiths of course and the dog and the canary bird.” (78)

The fact that James lists the Smiths along with his dog and bird shows that he considered them to be mere pieces of property. He did not view them as individuals with their own consciousness and identities but instead lists them in the same category as his pets.

It is further implied in James’s fiction writings that the servants were not viewed as having their own consciousness. Burrows argues that James’s fiction, in particular, *The Turn of the Screw*, is not reflective merely of his interest in class structure as some might suggest, but instead serves to showcase an interest in consciousness (74). I agree with Burrow’s argument that James’s fiction serves as an investigation of consciousness by the wealthy, but what I find most compelling is how the search for consciousness by the servants is presented in the text. As with the previously discussed Wharton’s stories, the use of the Panopticon is crucial for the characters to determine their own ambiguous identities. Similarly, in *The Turn of the Screw*, the use of Panoptical elements coerce the governess into facing her own identity as part of the serving class. Robbins states, “To
the extent that the story is about ghosts, it is not merely about ambiguity; it is also about the social production of ambiguity” (380). The governess in the story is in an unclear role and this ambiguity serves to further highlight the loss of personal identity:

“Governesses occupied an ambiguous divide between middle-class women, whom they usually resembled in manners and origin, and working-class woman who—like the governess but unlike the middle-class wife—had to support themselves by working out of the home,” (Newman 51). Although she is a servant, as a governess she is looked upon differently than a common housemaid and sees herself as different. Priscilla Walton tells us:

Governesses were single woman employed to act as mother substitutes.

Frequently lower class, or at least lower than the class of their employers, these servants were a source of controversy due to the problematic nature of single women and their sexuality. (349)

This confusion of station for the governess, coupled with having an absentee master who bestowed a very high level of responsibility and power onto her causes blurred lines regarding her role in the household. Burrows explains:

The governess’s place was so ill-defined that being an upper servant was generally thought to be infinitely preferable, since ‘the servant had the advantage of an unambiguous position, and there was apparently no small comfort in knowing one’s place.’ Whereas the housekeeper on The Turn of the Screw, Mrs. Grose, ‘knew too well her place,’ the governess herself does not. (89)
Burrows is making the claim that the text is suggesting that having a sense of one’s “proper” place was a more desirable position to be in for a servant. This would imply that a servant’s “place” in the social hierarchy is somehow tied to personal identity. Newman argues, “...the gaze is not necessarily the controlling pernicious enactment of power...It is better understood as one aspect of visual dynamics...and through which we achieve, however problematically, the sense of identity” (45). Although the thought that a servant’s personal sense of identity or consciousness is directly linked to his role as a servant would likely be considered an elitist idea, I still think it is worthy of a closer investigation.

In considering the idea of the gaze, one must consider “that other’s look is also necessary to one’s sense of self. It can therefore be desired as much as dreaded and resented” (Newman 45). What is key to take away from this idea is not that the claim is that a servant has no identity beyond their social class, but instead that in making this claim, what is ultimately being said is that personal identity is actually linked to societal and cultural pressures. It is not that servants don’t have their own identities, but that these identities are formed by outside pressures and expectations. Robbins makes the argument that the ghosts of Miss Jessel and Quint are marked as evil solely because they behaved outside of their proper stations while alive. He states, “Indeed, it seems at times as if the fact that Quint and Jessel appear to her as ghosts is less important and even less horrifying to the governess than the social violations they committed while they were alive” (381). Just as Sarah Claiborne’s identity as a “master” in “All Souls” is furthered by the cultural norms from outside society, so are the personal identities of the members of the serving class.
It has been highlighted repeatedly in the texts we have investigated thus far in this essay that the discovery of one’s self is directly influenced by the presence of a ‘watcher.’ It is the protagonists’ constant fear that someone or something is watching them that has pushed their self-reflection. As previously discussed, an important feature of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon is that the “prisoners’” behavior is a result of the presence (or fear of the presence) of a watcher. In an attempt to counteract this, it would appear that the governess makes an attempt to become the watcher herself, keeping a very close eye on both children. At one point she describes herself, “I was a goaler with an eye to possible surprises and escapes. But all this belonged—I mean their magnificent little surrender—just to the special array of the fact that were most abysmal” (James 83). By attempting to switch her position from the “watchee” to the watcher, she is making an attempt at control. In doing so, she is trying to go back to a view of herself when she was able to fantasize about being approved of for her successes. Newman points out:

She recalls feeling that to be seen in her “extraordinary flight of heroism” might enable her to “succeed where many another girl have failed[;]….she becomes less concerned with being seen—by the master or anyone else—than with maintaining an untiring surveillance over her two charges. (59)

It would appear that in some way, the governess understood that her own identity is at least partially tied to how she is seen by others. To be the one doing the seeing would therefore mean she was the one controlling her identity. If she is not prisoner to the watchers, they would therefore not be able to influence her behavior. However, by making this grab for power she ultimately still ends up giving the power to the watchers.
Her attempt for power is in direct response to the realization that she is being watched so she is still being controlled.

It might be argued that one’s outward behavior is not always reflective of personal identity. Although the presence of a watcher might influence behavior it does not necessarily control one’s inward thoughts. However, I would argue that is not always the case. Of course, it can be true that a person may find himself in situations where he is forced to behave in a way that is not reflective of his inner self or morals. However, this argument can only go so far. If a person continually behaves in a way that does not match his personal identity, then that personal identity becomes a mere daydream. Ultimately, the person who exists, lives and acts within a society is the person he or she is regardless of their internal thoughts. A person is not who he is based solely on how he views himself but how he interacts in the world. This is especially important when looking at the governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, whose behavior in the household is not only changed as a result of the imagined watchers of Quint and Miss Jessel, but her behavior is in direct response to them. Burrows suggests, “One way of reading *The Turn of the Screw* is as a record of the governess’s dawning sense that to be a governess is to be “nobody”” (94). As one progresses through the text, we see the governess struggling with her place in Bly. As I will further investigate in the essay, the governess’s ambiguous place within the household and her struggle to find her own consciousness is continually exposed through the two watchers, with a specific emphasis on their physical placement (Burrows 91-94).

In *The Turn of the Screw*, James highlights the governess’s ambiguity in the physical set up of the household. The common acceptance is that servants exist “below
the stairs” while the masters exist upstairs. Bruce Robbins, in his article, “‘They don’t count much, do they?’: The Unfinished History of *The Turn of the Screw,*” discusses in reference to the ghosts: “Each make a carefully stage entry ‘below’ the governess on the staircase. In a society which routinely referred to class difference in terms of ‘upstairs’ and ‘downstairs’, these staircase scenes are heavily charged with symbolism of hierarchy” (381). However, at Bly, the upstairs and downstairs are essentially switched. As Burrows points out, “To make matters more complicated still, downstairs at Bly is literally upstairs—in the sense that the servants live on the upper floors” (92). James continually makes reference to the physical locations of the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel. In doing so, the crisis of consciousness being experienced by the governess is repeatedly exposed to the reader (Burrow 90). She is unclear of her own identity and her place in the household. Burrows elaborates this argument pointing to the first incidence when the governess sees Quint:

The governess’s appreciation of the master’s place has caused her to forget her own place, a knowledge that she recovers by seeing a figure out of his proper place in every sense, who can this be taken as a reflection of her own situation. For not only should Quint not be on top of the tower after his death (because his proper place is in the ground), but he also should never have been on top of the tower even when he was alive (because his proper place was “downstairs). Quint’s appearance is scandalous because it disrupts the social hierarchy in which Master and servants all know their place. (91)
Moments before the governess spots Quint atop the tower, she is walking around the grounds of the estate, praising herself for her good and daydreaming about coming upon the master so he can witness how well she is handling her duties. She describes her daydream, “I dare say I fancied myself a remarkable young woman... Someone would appear there at the turn of the path and would stand before me and smile and approve” (James 39). However when a figure does appear, it is not the master as she imagined it, but instead she sees Quint gazing down at her from the tower, quickly squelching her fantasy. Here, we see a distinct change in the mood of the text. This change in mood is very reminiscent of how one would be expected to respond when put into a Panopticon. The governess, who just moments before was described as carefree while admiring herself and surroundings, is suddenly overpowered by a feeling of isolation. She tells us, “The place, moreover, in the strangest way in the world, had on the instant and by the very fact of its appearance become solitude” (James 40). She becomes confused about her own identity and paranoid. She is no longer shown happily fantasizing about impressing the master with her prowess in her role as governess.

Instead she becomes consumed with paranoia wondering who the man is and when he will appear again and, most importantly, what he is after. The text highlights these worries as the governess tells us, “Was there a “secret” at Bly—a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement” (James 41)? What is important to note here is that the governess’s earlier fantasy can be considered reflective of a person with a strong sense of personal identity. She fully believes in her own abilities in her role as governess and her thoughts project outward as she positively describes her surroundings. However, the moment Quint appears, she is
shaken to her core. Her sense of personal identity begins to unravel as she repeatedly sees both him and Miss Jessel, each serving as constant reminders about the dangers of behaving in a way outside of one’s class. As Robbins argues, there is minimal discussion on any relations between the governess and the master, however, “it has a great deal to say about her relations with the ghosts... it is her relations with the ghosts that lead us to the very heart of the story’s reflections on social hierarchy and its refashioning of social allegory” (378). The governess who we previously saw appeared to have a positive sense of self is replaced, upon seeing the ghosts, with a governess whose inner reflections and outward actions throughout the remainder of the text are dependent on outside forces—specifically the two ghosts. She is no longer forming her identity based on her own merits of her success in her job and is instead basing her identity off of how she is reflected by those watching her.

We further witness the placement of the ghost servants during a number of their appearances. Another such instance is described with one of the appearances of Miss Jessel, “Looking down from the top I once recognized the presence of a woman seated on one of the lower steps with her back presented to me, her body half-bowed and her head, in an attitude of woe, in her hands” (James 70). The description of Miss Jessel as being lower than the governess is clear here, but one must remember that the governess is, in fact, Miss Jessel’s replacement. By seeing her in such a way, it appears to foreshadow where someone in the station of governess may easily end up. When discussing the governess’s role in the home, with specific reference to her duty as Flora’s new governess, Walton contends, “The governess cannot offer Flora a model different from those offered by Miss Jessel or Mrs. Grose because she has not yet forged such a place
for herself” (356). Although the current governess is frequently shown as physically above Miss Jessel, the precariousness of her situation is evident as she loses more and more control. She is not able to offer Flora, her charge, anything beyond what the former governess or housemaid offered revealing that the governess’s identity is still bound to the station of “generic” servant.

The Panopticon “watchers” in this text are not as hidden as one would see in the traditional description. The governess, although the only character to ever admit to seeing Quint and Miss Jessel, is certain of their existence. As Wayne C. Booth discusses in detail in his article, “’He began to read to our hushed little circle’: Are We Blessed or Cursed by Our Life with The Turn of the Screw,” there have been many ways in which critics have “read” the ghosts, so much so that he claims “Because of all of this variety we have to ask our questions as if we were dealing with not one The Turn of the Screw but many different ones” (292). Although in this essay, I discuss the ghosts without an assumption if they are actually real or not, Booth’s argument does add another layer to ambiguity of the character’s identities. Depending on how one reads the text will determine what experience one has.7 There is no question in the governess’s mind if they are hiding away watching her or not. She is sure of it. Many critics, however, are doubtful of their existence as well as the overall fictionality of the narrative itself. As David S. Miall discusses in his essay, “Designed Horror: James’s Vision of Evil in The Turn of the Screw,” many critics have focused on what is meant to be real or not in the text, “As all students of the story know, the presence of ghosts in it had presented a serious challenge to modern orthodoxy…” (305). What Miall argues is that “James

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7 Booth states that different reader responses to the “same” story could even cause contradictory readings, He attempts to simplify the main types of “readings” often applied to The Turn of the Screw by referencing the three categories in Beidler’s Critical History: straight, ironic and what he calls “mazed” (292).
intended us to take the ghosts seriously but that this does not commit us to the reality of the supernatural” (306). Robbins’s also discusses if the ghosts are real or not. He argues that “whether or not the ghosts are real, they are definitely and unmistakably the ghosts of a former servant and a former governess. There is some doubt about what they are, but there is no doubt at all about what they were” (378). Whether they are real or not does not matter, the focus is meant to be on what their former stations were. I am not making the argument that James did or did not intend for us to believe the ghosts were actually there, but I am arguing in agreement with Robbins. It ultimately does not matter if they are real or not. I believe it even goes beyond just knowing what they were however. It is also important that governess believes that they are there and her reactions to them:

The threat of the ghosts is a profound one: a principal part of the story’s power lies in the fact that the governess feels the threat; she registers its reality at the emotional level, but is never able in full consciousness to articulate its precise nature. (Miall 307)

The focus of the story is not meant to determine if the ghosts are real, but to highlight and observe the reaction to them by the governess and her reaction to how those around her react to their supposed presence. Miall turns to Martha Banta in this argument, stating:

Banta argues that the point of the story is given in the set of relationships within which the governess finds herself. Our understanding of the governess according to Banta, resides mainly in her relation to the other characters, both real and supernatural. (315)

Our understanding of the governess and her own understanding of her personal identity are molded by her reactions to those around her. Her reactions in regards to Quint and
Miss Jessel are key in forcing her to accept her role as not only a servant, but as a replaceable one.

The function of a governess, as we have discussed, is an ambiguous one. It is a role that cannot be filled by just anyone: one must be educated and able to teach and care for children to be hired as a governess. Having that type of closeness with the children who can be seen as another set of masters to the servants is often what appears to cause the blurred lines between social classes. As earlier discussed, a governess is essentially in a sort of motherly role, but is not a true parent. The position of governess is stationary but the person who fills that position is replaceable. Burrows argues, "...but the knowledge that she is replaceable, that to occupy the office of governess is inevitably to step into someone else's place—in this case, that of the former governess, Miss Jessel" (90). Even Mrs. Grose tells the governess, "Well, Miss, you're not the first—and you won't be the last" (James 644). In Helen Killoran's essay, "The Governess, Mrs. Grose and "the Poison of an Influence" in The Turn of the Screw," she is addressing the bisexual tension she believes exists between Mrs. Grose and the governess. Although this sexual tension between the two female servants is not one I am addressing in this essay, Killoran makes an important observation about the relationship between the two women. She argues that "the evil is not ghostly, but human, emanating from the rivalry between the servants..." (Killoran 13). This is a telling statement. In regards to Mrs. Grose, the governess relays to the reader, "I had made her a receptacle of lurid things, but there was an odd recognition of my superiority—my accomplishments and my functions—in her patience under my pain" (James 73). Although it appears that the governess still considers herself above Mrs. Grose, the fact that at the end of the text she
loses Flora to her shows how unaware she is about her own sense of place and position. She competes and loses to Mrs. Grose for the affections of the children just as she competes with the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel. However, the fact that Quint and Miss Jessel are ghosts ultimately does not matter just as it doesn’t matter if they are truly there.

It is not the specific individual causing the crisis of identity for the governess, but the role of servant in general. Regardless of if she never saw Miss Jessel, the governess would still have to accept that she was a replacement and is therefore replaceable. The fact that Mrs. Grose even highlights that she is replaceable only adds to this. It is this sense of being disposable that increases the idea that the governess is “nobody.” It is not specific to the appearance of a ghost, but instead specific to the appearance of past servants. As Quint and Miss Jessel appear with more and more frequency, the reader witnesses the internal struggle the governess has where she is both fighting against this increasing knowledge that by linking her identity to her servant position, she is replaceable and against the others, in particular the children, being able to see her as such.

Cynthia Murillo also discusses the inherent “sameness” that often exists for females in ghost stories—referring to them as their doubles. She specifically discusses this in reference to Wharton’s “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” but it is relevant to *The Turn of the Screw* as well. She states:

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8 Murillo draws from Kathy Fedorko, suggesting, “Where Alice Hartley is referred to by her last name, Emma Saxon is called by her first; thus both women can be said to figure as poles of one person: Emma’s first name is to Hartley’s last. Not only are Hartley and Emma’s room architecturally doubled, situated mirror like directly across from one another, but both Hartley and Emma occupy rooms that were once used by the other as a sewing room, each signifying a reflected double or counter-self. Yet, the reason the double appears is significant. The appearance of Emma as Hartley’s double that forces the
Drawing on Ellen Moers, Fedorko points out that Society's fear of female energy and articulateness in turn generates women's internal conflict between their "monstrous" hidden drives and their "nice" socially acceptable selves. Thus this gothic world gives "visual form to the fear of self," the monstrous knowing self. (118)

If the governess and Miss Jessel are merely different versions of a single identity, it begs the question, which of the two is the “nice” one and which is the “monster?” Is Miss Jessel the monster for her social indiscretions while the governess is the nice version trying to protect the children? It would appear that the governess may start out as “nice” but as she comes face to face with her “monstrous” half, she takes on that role as well, ultimately killing Miles, one of her charges.

Rather than determining her own identity, she attempts to replace others. Walton states, “The governess is in the process of assuming a position of (male) authority...” (353). James goes as far as showing us a scene where the governess literally takes Quint’s physical place. While in the living room, Quint appears to her outside the window gazing in. The governess then tells us that she goes outside to where he was to find him—he is not there, but once she reaches the spot where he was standing, she tells us:

I applied my face to the pane and looked, as he looked, into the room. As if, at this moment, to show me exactly what his range had been, Mrs. Grose, as I had done for himself just before, came in from the hall. With this I had the full image of a repetition of what had already occurred.

(James 45)

latter toward action where she would have previously remained a mere observer (118-119).
The fact that she is so quickly able to step into Quint’s place and that while she does so, Mrs. Grose is able to step into the space that she had just previously occupied, highlights how replaceable she and all servants were often thought to be. By allowing herself to be seen by others and to construct her own consciousness based around her role as governess, she would ultimately be admitting to herself that her own identity is replaceable and without a true consciousness.

The governess is also very focused on how the children, Flora and Miles, view her. She becomes convinced that the ghosts of the servants are there for the children. “She comes to believe that the servants want to appear to the children—that is, be recognized a desire that she thwart by acting as “a screen” between the children and the ghosts in order to stop them from seeing “nobody” (Burrows 96). This action illuminates the fact that the governess is starting to recognize servants as being “nobody.” However, it is clear that she is also struggling with the fact that her personal identity might be tied to the servant life, therefore making her nobody as well. By preventing the children from seeing the ghosts, she is making an attempt to prevent them from seeing her in the same light. The ghosts, as suggested by Banta, can be seen as symbols for something hidden within the governess. Their presence is meant to show her a realization about her deepest nature and expose what she adamantly has refused to admit she is (Miass 316). She is still struggling with her own sense of personal identity and is fighting against the idea that another’s gaze can have such an impact on her own consciousness. “The Turn of the Screw suggests that the other’s look is another source of ‘outside’ the subject of an image of the self-necessary for identity—for a sense of who or what one is when ones says I—and a threat” (Newman 50). For someone who is unable
to define herself, it is clear that the governess is threatened that the fear that another’s “look” will impact her self-identity. This is not to argue that the governess does not want to be seen at all, but she is particular about who she wants to see her and in what light.

In *The Turn of the Screw*, we do learn that the governess possesses a desire to be seen, but imagines herself being seen in a very specific way and for positive reinforcement of her ability as governess. Newman argues, “She wants to receive the recognition of an important other as confirmation of her identity” (52). Specifically, she wants to be seen and recognized by her absentee master. I find this to be problematic because the governess, throughout the text, is experiencing a crisis of identity because of the appearance of the ghosts. They are causing her to see herself in the servant role and identify her own consciousness by her social class. However, in wishing she is seen and approved by her master, she is still then identifying herself based on her social class. This can perhaps be justified, however, when one considers the factor of control. The governess has no control over the appearance of Quint and Miss Jessel or any real control over either of the children. Although she tries to control the children’s ability to see them, she is unable to even prevent that. She is, however, in full control of her fantasy where she is seen and is given approval based on her success in her servant role as of governess by her master. Newman argues that she has “a wish to see herself whole and in control” (54). This is revealing because it is not merely about who or what the governess is by, but her ability—or lack thereof—to control it.

Ultimately, the governess fails in her attempts to harness her own consciousness. She, as discussed earlier in this essay, had a strong desire for her identity to be tied to her success as governess and guardian of the two children. The governess finds herself
“steering between the roles of the good mother and the whore, [her] own place in the narrative indeterminate” (Walton 357). She is unable to accept and understand her proper place. She wanted to impress the master and, it would seem, she wanted her identity to be at the forefront of her place at Bly with the actual position as secondary. However, this cannot be. She steps into the position of governess and becomes that role, not the other way around. The position does not and cannot become synonymous with her personal identity.
Conclusion

In Wharton's ghost stories, it is clear that she is opening a discussion on the ruling class versus the serving class and how societal pressures influence and often control these relationships, or, in many cases, imagined relationships. It does not appear, however, that Wharton is taking a side in this discussion. She does not demonize the ruling or the serving class. In “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell,” she evokes sympathy for both Hartley as well as Mrs. Brympton. Although their relationship can never truly go beyond that of a master and servant, she allows the reader to see how they could have been so easily swayed to expect and push for a more family-like affiliation. Likewise, in “All Soul” neither Sara nor her servants are ever presented as being truly evil characters. Yes, it is true that they have their flaws, but there is never a point in the text where either side is proven to do anything that can truly be seen as evil or wrong. It is implied that the servants might be part of a witch’s coven but I do not believe the reader is meant to necessarily view them as villains because of this. These same servants do make an exaggerated point of leaving behind all the necessities their mistress will need while they are gone, never once appearing to want to cause her harm or discomfort. I believe that by suggesting the servants are part of a coven is actually a way to showcase how blind the ruling class is. Sara was so blinded by her upbringing, taking the presence of her servants for granted and unable to recognize them as having lives outside of their duties to her that she was never able to realize just how different a life her servants had. Instead, the ‘wrongness’ arises in the individual’s inability to truly see and understand their own personal places in life. If they are to accept their place as someone in the ruling class, as both Sara and Mrs. Brympton do, they must accept it fully. They cannot expect that they
can have it both ways. The servants are not and cannot ever be family as long as they are being paid to be in their lives. Even when looking at the story, “The Looking Glass,” neither side is fully presented as evil. Neither women in the stories are shown as upstanding characters, but what is important is that they are both equally unlikable. Mrs. Clingsland is a self-centered and shallow woman, but in contrast, Mrs. Attlee comes across as conniving and self-serving, taking advantage of the aging beauty. I am not suggesting that Wharton is trying to stand behind the separation of social classes, but I am suggesting that she is recognizing the reality of the situation. As long as the traditional dichotomy of the master-servant relationship exists, those living it must either accept it or make a true attempt to change it. One’s maid is not going to take on a role of sister just because one wants it to be true—if the barrier between upper and lower class is to be broken, it is not going to be by befriending the servants. Wharton’s stories seem to suggest that the barrier between the classes may be broken by simply recognizing that the servants do have individual lives out their own outside of their duties to their masters. Serving in the house is their job and not their entire life. A change like that could only come to pass by befriending the actual individual when they are not being paid to be a part of one’s life.

Henry James also uses the servants in his story, *The Turn of the Screw*, to provide commentary on the servant master relationship as well as the search for personal identity in the serving class. His focus, unlike Wharton, does not spend much time investigating class from the master perspective, but instead, he explores it using a number of characters from the serving class, including the current governess Ms. Grose, and the two ghosts, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel. James put a particular emphasis on the theme of watching
and gazing in his tale. Through watching, he is able to showcase how behavior can be
manipulated. This is especially true for the governess. Her behavior completely changes
as she begins to believe that she is being observed by the ghosts Quint and Jessel. She
becomes paranoid and obsessive over her wards, Flora and Miles. She even attempts, in
many instances, to try and become the watcher herself. She does this by keeping a
constant eye on both children but also by literally stepping into the physical places in
some instances where she has seen the ghosts.

It is through this struggle as to who is the ultimate “watcher” that the idea of the
servants being replaceable is showcased. The governess struggles to be the watcher after
she sees that Quint and Jessel become her watchers. She does not want them to have that
power and tries to take it from them. Ultimately, she does succeed in gaining ultimate
power over the children which culminates in her killing Miles. By killing him, she feels
vindicated because she believes she has saved him from Quint and Miss Jessel. She has
the final control of his life and death—which is the control she was desperately struggling
for. However, I argue that this struggle for power is actually the struggle for personal
identity. The “watcher” has the power, whether that is an unknown entity or society
itself. It is this power that controls one’s individual identity, revealing that the watcher
ultimately controls the identity of who he is observing.
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