

# Class and Temporal Disorder in *The Little Stranger*

Ya-Ju Yeh

Department of English, Aletheia University, Taiwan

Received December 24, 2019; Revised February 28, 2020; Accepted March 12, 2020

Copyright©2020 by authors, all rights reserved. Authors agree that this article remains permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License

**Abstract** *The Little Stranger* (2009) depicts the story of the old gentry Ayres family in Hundreds Hall, an eighteenth-century magnificent estate that has lasted long past its former glory in the late 1940s Warwickshire. Faraday, the first-person narrator in the novel, a country physician summoned to treat a new maid in Hundreds Hall, became entwined with the obscure fate of the estate thirty years ago. Through deliberate contacts with the Ayres family, Faraday gradually befriends them. Yet Faraday's frequent visits and aggressive interference with the household chores triggers a sort of temporal disorder from the Ayres family. Since the house is intertwined and laden with secrets and tricks, as if there is a sinister presence, the Ayres family members lapse into their underlying fear and anxiety so that their lives oddly fall apart; at last, it leads to the inevitable collapse of the Hall. This paper examines different layers of temporal disorder which exerts profound influence on the protagonists in Hundreds Hall in *The Little Stranger*.

**Keyword** Class Identity, Temporal Disorder, Sarah Waters, *The Little Stranger*

## 1. Introduction

*The Little Stranger* (2009) depicts the story of the old gentry Ayres family in Hundreds Hall, an eighteenth-century magnificent estate that has lasted long past its former glory in the late 1940s Warwickshire. This novel, Waters' fifth novel as well as a third novel shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, is rich with historical and architectural detail of an old estate. Waters' works contain lesbian themes with the only exception of *The Night Watch* (2006) and *The Little Stranger* (2009). In the novel, the Ayres family comprises the twenty-six-year-old unmarried daughter Caroline, her younger brother Roderick, the heir who continues to heal physically and mentally from his war experiences, and their mother Mrs Ayres, the Lady of the estate. Established in 1733, the

house has long been an extraordinary landsite itself with "the worn red brick, the cockled window glass, the weathered sandstone edgings" [1, p.1]. Embellished with many lovely ageing details, Hundreds Hall has "its handsome faces, and its cool marble passages, each one filled with marvelous things" [1, p.4]. Its solid brown stone boundary wall and broad grand front door, symbolic of the Ayres' fame and mastery, remain high and forbidding in the neighbourhood. The hall has stood straight up as "an absolute mansion" for more than two centuries [1, p.1].

The Ayres of Hundreds Hall, nevertheless, began its steady decline and withdrew from the upper-class social circle after the master Colonel Ayres was deceased. Faraday, the first-person narrator in the novel, a country physician summoned to treat a new maid in Hundreds Hall, became entwined with the obscure fate of the estate thirty years ago. Faraday's mother was at one time a nursery maid at the Hall. When he was a child, he had visited it once to receive a commemorative medal awarded by Colonel Ayres in an outdoor ceremony and became entranced with the building then. His first visit to Hundreds Hall gave him the first impression of amazement in addition to aspiration. Thirty years later, Faraday returns to Hundreds Hall and feels much astounded by the sight he beholds: "sections of the lovely weathered edgings seemed to have fallen completely away... The steps leading up to the broad front door were cracked, with weeds growing lushly up through the seams" [1, p.5]. Almost losing its classical definite Georgian outline, the house faded fast, with its neglected splendid saloon and rooms. Signs of decay are ubiquitous: the windows streaked and dusty, the broken clock on the disused stable door, the crystal chandelier without electricity, the oak-panelled walls ruined by cigarette smoke, and the dysfunctional servant call-bells, to name just a few. Multitudinous objects in the mansion, mostly ancient and shabby, create an atmosphere of a dilapidated mansion. Previously as a glorious mansion adorned with grandeur and colour, Hundreds Hall of the Ayres, now appears as abandoned gloomy ruins and insubstantial in the suburbs.

Furthermore, a few unnatural incidents continue to

happen in such a grotesque, dilapidated mansion. First, the normally gentle family dog bites a child guest at the family party; then strange black marks appear on the ceiling and curious childish scribbles on the walls; what follows more horribly, the maids' bells ring without anyone calling them, the phone rings in the midnight and no one is at the other end, Mrs Ayres being eerily locked in the nursery room, and so forth. Those ancient and shabby household items, left unattended for years in the corners of the house, terrify the inhabitants as if they had come back to life and were struggling for attention for the last time. The Ayres are very confused about all the strange, unnerving phenomena and remain speechless regarding these queer household objects. Coincidentally, these mundane objects start behaving queerly at the same time that the Ayres started to accept Faraday's friendship. Through deliberate contacts with the Ayres family, Faraday gradually befriends them. Faraday concerns himself more and more with the past of the Hall while he makes frequent visits and aggressively interferes with the household chores. Since the house is intertwined and laden with secrets and tricks, as if there is a sinister presence, the Ayres family members lapse into their underlying fear and anxiety so that their lives oddly fall apart: Roderick is compellingly sent to a mental clinic, Mrs Ayres unpredictably hangs herself, and Caroline's death occurs in a suspenseful manner. The condescending aristocratic family thus ends in tragedy, with Hundreds Hall being left in place "in the chaos like some wounded, blighted beast" [1, p.508].

At the outset, Faraday acts as the very disinterested, unflattering outsider who unfolds his fragmented memory and makes sensible deductions of the incidents while the Ayres have been continually agitated by certain spectral forces or evil spirits. However, the significance of the house diverges greatly for the Ayres and Faraday. For the Ayres, the house is quite a burden to bear; two centuries of wear and weather have taken their toll, and the taxes on the British gentry are too high for the family to bear. They are in dire financial straits and gradually sell their lands and furniture in order to keep the mansion as complete as they can, despite the house being "in danger of crashing down" [1, p.157]. They attempt to reconcile their family legacy with the reality of having no money to keep it up, yet it is never an easy task. In their eyes, Hundreds Hall is indeed "lovely," but also "a sort of lovely monster" that "needs to be fed with money and hard work" [1, p.69]. On the other hand, accompanied with his class complex and dissatisfaction with reality, Faraday vacillates between affection for Hundreds Hall and memory of his mother, repeatedly referenced in the novel. He imagines that if he could have grown up in "a house with so many spare rooms" [1, p.62], it would be like a maze full of novelty and curiosity. He is also fond of walled gardens and eager to take a look at the flora and fauna and the uneven mellow red brick. His romantic fascination and nostalgic memory, in many senses, contradict the Ayres' more negative

perceptions.

The fact is that Faraday's frequent visits and aggressive interference with the household chores triggers a sort of temporal inconsistency from the Ayres family. There is a temporal inconsistency existing in Faraday's and the Ayres' presuppositions and explanation of incidents. The traditional hierarchy and order underpinned by the Ayres before is now overturned and challenged. Faraday's perspectives and interpretations, albeit somewhat problematic, underline the faults and fallacies derived from the Ayres' preceding manners and concepts. In short, Faraday interrupts the usual temporal order the Ayres are used to, stirring a dissimilar temporality to that of the family. The past or the history of the Ayres thus has been sinuously and ominously corroded by the power of Faraday's class resentment, both materially and mentally. Hundreds Hall then serves as a carrier that accommodates the social and psychological changes of its inhabitants. The Ayres members are pervasively falling into the invisible temporal inconsistency, and at the last, it leads to the inevitable collapse of the Hall. This paper aims to articulate distinctive layers of temporal significance linked to both Faraday's and the Ayres' perceptions. The first section analyses how class implication is disputed under contemporary social states and the second section discusses how Faraday's intrinsic struggle is intermingled with the fate of the Ayres and the mansion.

## 2. Temporal Disorder in the House Hundreds Hall

The first layer of temporal inconsistency involves class hierarchy already existing in the magnificent mansion. A major problem that primarily haunts Hundreds Hall is the servant problem. All elegant households, like that of the magnificent Hundreds Hall, need servants to help with the numerous domestic chores, including keeping the house and grounds immaculate, cooking and serving meals, raising children, sewing, washing, and providing comfort, to name but a few [2, p.30]. Domestic servants became the largest group of working class in the 1840s Britain. The bourgeoisie employed domestic servants for the sake of showing off their fortune and social status. Hundreds Hall also had servants until the Second World War. However, the post-war society is in flux: The National Health Service has not yet arrived, poverty afflicts the country gentry, and domestic service of servants gradually vanishes. As Caroline admits, it is "almost impossible to get girls in the past few years"; since the hall is "too far from the bus-routes", nobody wants to work in such outlying areas [1, p.16]. Their last maid stays only three days and soon quits out of traffic inconvenience.

The problem lies not simply in the remote location of the house, but the system of servants. The trouble originates from Betty, the new fourteen-year-old maid,

who pretends to be ill by virtue of her homesickness. Faraday sincerely advises Caroline to have more compassion for little Betty because Betty is too young to adapt into such a grand house. Under traditional circumstances, servants must accomplish their duties silently and efficiently, until finally escaping to their narrow cells downstairs. Faraday indicates that the living space downstairs, where now Betty sleeps alone at night, is not appropriate for her: "That must be lonely for her. She mentioned a set of back stairs, said she finds them creepy" [1, p.15]. The quiet, dreadful atmosphere of the great yet empty mansion provokes Betty's fear and disorientation, sensing a ghost that naughtily pops out. Also, Betty is requested to wear the Victorian style uniform, which Faraday criticizes as an ugly, outdated costume itself, "she *was* rather quaintly dressed, in a black frock with a white apron, and with starched cuffs and a collar dwarfing her childish wrists and throat; and on her head was a fussy frilled cap, the kind of thing I couldn't remember having seen in a Warwickshire drawing-room since before the war" [1, p.73]. Her uniform seems incompatible with working costumes in fashion. As domestic servants are not a popular occupation in contemporary social trends, the maid in her Victorian old uniform creates a weird everyday life scene.

Roderick and Caroline realize that the servant's status has changed. They request Faraday to treat Betty well because neglecting servants is considered a capital offence and servants should get better treatment in post-war society [1, p.6]. Although Roderick and Caroline do not need servants for themselves, they do their utmost to keep servants for Mrs Ayres' sake: "And the world's a changed place, isn't it? That's why we've been so keen to hang on to Betty. I can't tell you what a difference it's made to Mother's spirits, our being able to ring for a servant in the old-fashioned way, instead of having to traipse down to the kitchen for a jug of hot water, or something, ourselves. That sort of thing means such a lot" [1, p.46]. Since Hundreds Hall is no longer as grand as it once was, the Ayres sell land for more income to maintain the household. Even servants can be too luxurious for them. As Caroline mentions, Mrs Ayres is "a true Edwardian at heart", Roderick and Caroline exert all their strength to hire a maid in order to please or soothe their mother [1, p.63]. In defence of their benignancy to Betty, Caroline argues rather forcibly: "Well, we don't treat her badly. . . We pay her more than we can afford. She eats the same food as us. Really, in lots of ways she's better off than we are" [1, p.16]. For Roderick and Caroline, Betty is more than an ordinary maid to deal with routine domestic chores; instead, she works for Mrs Ayres' comfort, convenience and sense of security, for the most part, for her old habits and convictions in the conventional organization of servants. Hence, they would do a great deal to keep Betty at ease and happy for their mother's sake; they "can't afford to lose her" [1, p.16]. But this considerable house needs more than one servant; in that sense, Caroline helps with most kitchen and

household chores, with her short split nails and reddened knuckles. The maid's existence marks that of Hundreds Hall and the living evidence of the Ayres family.

Mrs Ayres represents eighteenth-century aristocratic legacy. She holds her pride over servants without reservation, "I do think eighteenth-century houses the nicest. Such a civilized century. The house I grew up in was a great Victorian eyesore of a place" [1, p.71]. For her, the past symbolizes civilization, whereas the contemporary age is deemed an uncivilized society. Her convictions regarding the hierarchy of servants and masters are more compelling and unyielding than in the other Ayres. The relation of servants to employers is generally that of subordinate to superior [3, p.120]. Under the strict discipline of the steward or butler and the housekeeper, servants are often considered as "an efficient, well-trained labor force" with an image of dedication and diligence in their employer's imagination [4, p.1]. Unlike Caroline, Mrs Ayres does not worry about Betty's maladroitness, suggesting that "the house, like an oyster, was at work on Betty, fining and disguising her with layer after minuscule layer of its own particular charm" [1, p.74]. She is sufficiently confident to announce that Betty will be more like a maid in the future by virtue of the unfailing formative power of the house: "we must give her more time. I always remember my great-aunt saying that a well-run house was like an oyster. Girls come to one as specks of grit, you see; ten years later, they leave one as pearls" [1, p.73]. Servants are doomed to serve, and they will become more like the desired masters' servants as time goes by. The house has its particular appeal and discipline, which organizes servants into a dominant structure of its own.

Afterwards, knowing Faraday's family ground, Mrs Ayres asks Faraday about his mother's memory of Hundreds Hall. Mrs Ayres gives Faraday a family picture of the Ayres as a gift. The photo was shot at the peak of the Ayres family with their sizable staff of servants. In the photograph, in front is the mistress of the house, old Mrs Beatrice Ayres, Caroline and Roderick's grandmother, "seated in a deck-chair, her husband standing at her side, one hand on her shoulder, the other tucked loosely into the pocket of his creased white trousers" [1, p.29]. The family looks most at ease, yet servants from housekeeper, butler, footman, kitchen-girls, and gardeners are drawn away from their tasks or chores, reluctant to hurry for the gathering shot on the lawn. Checking closely at the group of nursemaids, Faraday is unable to recognize his mother because "the child had been in the process wriggling free when the camera shutter had snapped, so that the nursemaid had tilted back her head in fear of flailing elbows. Her gaze, as a consequence, was drawn from the camera, and her features were blurred" [1, p.29]. The maid's face is not clearly filmed, and more confusingly, he notices that "just behind the awkward-looking girl . . . was another servant, also fair-haired, and an identical gown and cap" [1, p.29]. In this photograph, Faraday cannot identify

which one is his mother because their faces are vague and their dresses are similar to one another. The photograph shows little information on the individual identities of the servants. Specifically, servants are, as required, identical according to the one and only rule and regulation set up by their masters.

In response to Mrs Ayres' inquiry, Faraday recalls some of his mother's stories about her time at the Hall. Most of the stories, to be honest, are sad and mean about the Ayres family; for instance, "how she had had to stand each morning with her hands held out while the housekeeper examined her fingernails; how Mrs Beatrice Ayres would every so often come unannounced to the maids' bedrooms and turn out their boxes, going through their possessions piece by piece" [1, p.30]. As a servant, Faraday's mother made the usual complaints about their master's harsh and emotionless treatment. In front of the Lady, he cannot speak true words but only say, "I think my mother made some good friends here, among the other girls" [1, p.30]. His response relieves Mrs Ayres, "I'm glad to hear it. It was a different world for servants then, of course. They had their own entertainments, their own scandals and fun. Their own dinner, on Christmas Day" [1, p.30]. Her comments once again confirm the intricate class relation in spatial terms: that servants have their own dinner on Christmas Day means clearly, masters and servants belonged to different worlds under one roof.

Class priority does not vanish with the fall of the house. The Ayres retain their dominant system, living in particular according to their self-image as a prestigious family. On the one hand, Roderick and Caroline seem to realize that servants have rights under current social public opinion; they continue to gossip about and laugh at their previous servants. Such despise and disrespect embarrasses Faraday though he does not show it: "Hundreds Hall had been made and maintained, I thought, by the very people they were laughing at now" [1, p.27]. This also generates "the faintest stirring of a dark dislike" on the part of Faraday [1, p.27]. The scene in which "the family sat, still playing gaily at gentry life, with the chipped stucco on their walls, and their Turkey carpets worn to the weave, and their riveted china" is built upon servants they despise and disrespect [1, p.27]. Without servants, the house would not have been what it has been for two hundred years. As servants begin to withdraw their labour from, and belief in, the house, the house is inevitably on its way of collapsing, just like "a pyramid of cards" [1, p.27]. The Ayres preserve the way the Hall used to be, whereas servants no longer comprise a major occupation in the late 1940s society. They realize how servants are important to them, yet their attitudes and convictions remain unchanged: "They both sat comfortably in their chairs, enjoying the tea and the cake that Betty had prepared for them, then awkwardly carried for them, then cut and served from them, from plates and cups which, at the ring of a bell, she would soon remove and wash" [1, p.73-4]. The Ayres' pride and

superciliousness excites Faraday's envy and hatred, and most important of all, extreme class retaliation.

For the Ayres, Hundreds Hall embodies traditional class power relations, which define the social standing and identities of masters and servants. Their everyday life is remarkably tangled with an old-fashioned system of class discourse. The eighteenth- or nineteenth-century class discourse is secured in the 1940 Hundreds Hall. From outsiders' perspectives, they "pride themselves on living like the Brontës out there, cauterizing their own wounds" [1, p.34]. The idea of respectable masters and coarse maids, unaffordable maids and impoverished masters were both prevalent and ironically coexisted in Hundreds Hall. Against the trends of the decline of domestic service, the pressure of financial expense, and the fading social status in an ever-changing society, the Ayres reveal how class hierarchy and its practice are rendered problematic in their solid domestic castle. The Ayres' perceptual inconsistency between the past and the present at once results in the disastrous decline of the mansion and family.

### 3. Temporal Disorder in Faraday's Identity

The second layer of temporal inconsistency is seen in Faraday, the foremost narrator in possession of an accumulated desire and indignant offense of the underprivileged stemming from the emblematic country house. He acts ostensibly as an objective town doctor indifferent to the history of the Ayres and the Hundreds Hall in the first place. The only connection seems that Faraday's mother was once a nursery maid in the hall. Faraday works as a town doctor, dwelling in a very plain place of "dispiriting decorations", which he has no time or money to brighten [1, p.37]. Compared to his colleagues, he is relegated to an "undistinguished" town doctor in the Warwickshire area [1, p.39]. For instance, Dr. Graham, who "entered the practice as a doctor's son, with money and standing behind him," was the Ayres' former private doctor, "a nice clean handsome sort of family chap" that patients trust [1, p.35, 36]. Dr Morrison knows how to please patients with "any amount of cough mixture and liver salts" [1, p.36]; Dr Seeley, in particular, has "his manners, his little ways with the ladies" [1, p.36]. Other local doctors may have more distinctive advantages so they are more outstanding and popular than Faraday. As a doctor with destitute family background, the upper-class patients do not consider Faraday as gentry and devoid of common "gentle" recreation with them: "I don't hunt or play bridge; but I don't play darts or football, either . . . I'm not grand enough for the gentry" [1, p.36]; paradoxically quite the same, the lower-class patients do not trust a doctor rising among themselves. They also have their preference for respectable doctors: he is "not grand enough for working people, come to that. They want to look up to their

doctor. They don't want to think he's one of them" [1, p.36]. For those patients in need of private doctors, Faraday is a doctor with a vague class origin because patients "have never been able to place [him]" [1, p.36]. He is, in general, a doctor of little money and standing behind him, and now little reputation and achievement.

In spite of the already set reality, Faraday struggles between dissatisfaction and inconsistency of his career due to his education debts and low-income life. The fifteen-year small country practice makes him neither "a decent income" especially when most of his patients are too poor to pay him, nor a confident and contented man; as he describes, his life as a doctor is "bitter and hollow and insignificant as a bad nut" [1, p.39]. He is often trapped by "every failure: the mishandled cases, the missed opportunities, the moments of cowardice and disappointment" [1, p.39]. A man without dream or fortune, Faraday's life before his eyes is that his poor patients will probably leave him when the National Health Service is put into practice soon. Under such circumstances, his income could have been vastly reduced, so his depression grows larger and larger.

An unexpected house call to Hundreds Hall changes his ordinary daily life saturated with everlasting impotence and dismay. After Betty's diagnosis, Faraday begins to treat Roderick's linger leg with a secret aim: "impressing the local gentry—who, hearing perhaps of my success in treating Roderick Ayres' ailments, might for the first time in twenty years consider sending for [him] to take a look at their own" [1, p.49]. Through the treatment of Roderick's leg muscle injuries, Faraday has routine visits and tea with Caroline and Mrs Ayres every Sunday, taking himself now for granted as "Rod's doctor" [1, p.152]. As the Ayres' doctor, Faraday becomes more involved in domestic affairs and chores. Later on, the Ayres spend their quite limited budget to throw a party for a potential husband for Caroline; the new neighbouring manor house settlers, the Baker-Hydes, bring their young daughter, who is unfortunately mauled by Caroline's gentle Labrador, Gyp. Faraday practices an emergency surgery on the guest girl at once to avoid a disastrous result. The Ayres are in a more distressing situation when the Baker-Hydes insist the dog must be punished, or they won't drop charges on the Ayres. Faraday helps with the problem and saves the Ayres' reputation in the town. Thereafter Mrs Ayres and Caroline later thank him, "You help us quite enough as it is . . . You know all our secrets" and confirms that Faraday is "not just [their] doctor," but a friend of theirs [1, p.244].

Faraday's intentional friendship with the Ayres opens an unintended entrance to his long forgotten memory of his own family thirty years ago. One-day Faraday meets a cousin on his mother's side in the built work site near Hundreds Hall. The cousin used to be Faraday's good pal; they "share[d] a desk in the two-roomed council school" [1, p.256]. Yet as Faraday studied in Leamington College, their destinies moved in opposite directions and their

friendship soured. The young cousin persecuted him, "lying in wait for with handfuls of gravel, as [he] came cycling back home in the late afternoons" [1, p.256]. The study in Leamington College separated them into different worlds of working class and non-working class. The cousin is among Warwick's working class people, who mainly receive little education and go straight into factory jobs or labour work. Faraday mirrors the cousin as what he would have become if he had not attended the College. The cousin's ripe Warwickshire accent also reminds Faraday of his own earlier accent [1, p.256]. The cousin is embarrassed to see Faraday again and even feels queer to "call [Faraday] 'Doctor'" [1, p.256]. The cousin even cannot address Faraday's Christian name, or as just 'sir', either [1, p.256]. The cousin, similar to those lower-class patients, considers Faraday not high and respectable enough. The encounter with his cousin brings back his childhood frame of mind again: he would have been one of them if he were not a doctor now.

As a matter of fact, what makes Faraday a qualified doctor is a result of his ever-plain family which is no better than his cousin's. Faraday's parents dedicate all of the family's income to his education and take on debt after debt in order to fund his education as a doctor. Their son becoming a doctor is what they hoped for with all their heart. For them, a brilliant son with a chance for success from a humble family is worth sacrificing their lives. As Faraday reflects, "about the struggle my parents had had, simply to keep up with the scholarships and grants that had got me through Leamington College and medical school: the debts they had taken on, the grim economies they had made, my father working extra hours, my mother taking in sewing and laundry when she was barely strong enough to lift the wet clothes from the copper to the pail" [1, p.257].

His parents' overwork to fund his education ruins their health for only one purpose: "they put everything they owned into making a doctor of [him]" [1, p.257]. Faraday at last accomplishes his task and becomes an ordinary doctor, leaving his factory jobs. However, with his false pride and vanity, Faraday admits that he is so ungrateful that he often feels ashamed of his parents' low status as servants: "They paid a small fortune for my education, and all I learned was that my accent was wrong, my clothes were wrong, my table manners—all of it, wrong . . . I never took friends home to meet them" as he despised their coarseness and clumsiness [1, p.257]. His pride in a high education does much damage to his familial relationship. Added to his stressful school work and busy career, Faraday never experiences family love and joy with his parents.

In sharp contrast to Faraday's ordinary life as an ordinary doctor, abundant objects in Hundreds Hall provide material clues for his memories of humble parents. Very proud of a brilliant son, Faraday's parents carefully keep everything from his school certificates, records of prizes, to a newspaper cutting about his graduation from

medical school [1, p.38]. On the contrary, there are little records or remembrance of his parents' own lives. He hardly thinks of how his parents feel and live their modest lives. The estate is likely to accommodate his mother's work and life experience as the household always leaves traces of its inhabitants. As for the grotesque speaking tube, it reminds him of an intimate tie between himself and his mother: "This was a nursery servants' speaking-tube; my mother had been nursery-maid here. She must have spoken many times into this device, forty years before . . . I had the sudden irrational idea that, in putting my ear to the cup, I would hear my mother's voice. I had the idea that I'd hear her calling my name, exactly as I'd used to hear her, calling me home at the end of the day, when I was a boy playing out in the fields at the back of our house" [1, p.344]. Faraday's mother dies when he is still at school. He has little knowledge about his mother and even never realized that his mother was ill. His memory of his mother was vividly recalled again in the mansion. The more he becomes involved with the Ayres' domestic chores and objects, the more strongly his memory of his mother returns to his mind. His specific childhood memory is once again activated by what the past Hundreds Hall encapsulates.

Furthermore, Hundreds Hall awakens not only his nostalgia for his humble parents, but also his ambition as part of the gentry on the basis of the Ayres family. Faraday's underlying desire to be more than the Ayres' friend designates the very identity as a master of the Hall more than an identity as the Ayres' doctor or friend. Faraday has long been obsessed with the establishment, in memory of the first significant impression of the mansion, in comparison with its current obsolete state. Faraday confesses to knowing and loving Hundreds Hall at first sight; he remained enthralled with the building since then. His fascination with the mansion and desire to take possession of it flourishes as he sees the house across thirty years. The Ayres may be accustomed and insensitive to those quotidian objects in the house, whereas Faraday is dazzled by such a fantastic dreamy world of stunning objects as Caroline guides him around. In contrast to the magnificent estate, Faraday feels more empty and vacuous of his own dispensary "with its neat, plain, undemanding, utterly lifeless rooms" [1, p.152]. Though disappointed by the house's decline, Faraday still has romantic aspirations about living in Hundreds Hall. Faraday's affection for Hundreds Hall urges him to consider wedding Caroline as a means of changing his social status quo, which is to be the squire who takes charge of the estate. As he drives Caroline towards home, he remembers the road he carried food to his mother's brothers as they helped with the Hundreds harvest. He imagines that his uncles "would have been very tickled to think that . . . I would be driving up that same road in my own car with the squire's daughter at my side" [1, p.47]. To be Caroline's husband is to be a member of the family and part of a genteel life quite distinct from his

present life, a fantasy that may come true. His proposal to Caroline is definitely inseparable from the gentry life and the estate itself, "Marry me . . . And little Betty will be busier than ever, bringing us our eggs and bacon in bed in the morning, and nice things like that" [1, p.338]. However, Mrs Ayres is old-fashioned and contemptuous of Faraday's background, which is hardly "the match [she] planned for [Caroline]" [1, p.400]. Faraday perceives Mrs Ayres' abysmal class prejudice, which treats him not as a doctor, but a maid's son in the lower ladder of the grand mansion. His enmity against Mrs Ayres takes implicit shape in his mind and is transformed into an evil force of exploitation.

Faraday's juxtaposition of a maid's boy of the 1919 grand mansion and a would-be master of the 1949 declining mansion constitute his mental misconception. When he visits the hall for the first time, he is fascinated with every surface of the house, even trying to prise a decorative acorn from its dustless white wall setting [1, p.2]. It is his admiration that urges him to "possess a piece of it" [1, p.3]. Thirty years later, everything in the mansion still thrills him into a psychological yearning for the house itself. As he hears the Ayres' sarcasm about their previous servants, he detests the upper-class pride and arrogance over the lower class. Undertaking to expel the Ayres family member from the mansion, Faraday diagnoses Roderick as suffering from a mental problem and makes deductions unfavourable to Mrs Ayres, sending Roderick away to a mental clinic and causing Mrs Ayres hang herself. At last, Caroline recognizes Faraday's contrivance and determines to sell the mansion; however, she mysteriously falls from the high stairs, striking her head on the marble.

Faraday's class self-perceived inferiority, simultaneously comprising both envy and jealousy for the Ayres family, is accumulated as his cordial animosity. Faraday's class complex looms from time to time as he recounts how his parents sacrificed everything to give him his elite medical education. As Caroline contends, "I thought you must hate us slightly. . . But now it sounds almost as though—well, as though you hate *yourself*" [1, p.257]. His hatred is directed not only at the Ayres family, but to his own modest background concerning his parents and perhaps the society that defines his social status to a certain extent. With so many efforts, his life remains ordinary. There is an omnipresence of conflict between his reality now, his humble past, and his imagination of Hundreds Hall in the future. His discontent with his humble background, a serious mixture of hatred and helplessness, is deformed by his subtle affection for Hundreds Hall and its grand social life. In a temporal vein, his consciousness retreats to the young boy simply enamoured of the beautiful acorn and tempted to take up or vandalize the house dating back to thirty years ago. He feels pride and elation in his exploitation. He considers that he deserves an infallible role rising from a maid's son to a master in the Hall. Both the identity as the maid's son obsessed with the thirty-year-ago estate and the identity as the heir of

Hundreds Hall are incorporated into him as an old-fashioned subject, who actually fails to escape the conventional convictions of class authority, as well as to keep pace with a rapidly changing world. Faraday's mental misconception, in its regressive nature, haunts Hundreds Hall until the Ayres family was banished completely from the mansion.

#### 4. Conclusions

Hundreds Hall itself is absolutely the very cause of Faraday's resentment and retaliation related to the Ayres family. Hundreds Hall has been a static enclosure secured by conventional out-dated concepts, whereas Faraday as an intruding subject takes chances to intervene or overthrow the Ayres' beliefs. After Caroline dies, Faraday becomes the advocate of Hundreds Hall, "treated less as the Ayres family physician, who might be companionably pumped for information about that dreadful business out at Hundreds, and more, almost as a member of the family itself, worthy of respect and commiseration" [1, p.432]. He also gets one of the keys of the Hall and a duplicate cut key to the garden door. He feels safer and happier because he "could come and go from the house as [he] needed" [1, p.430]. He wanders in the empty Hundreds Hall and muses in disrepair: "there is no trace of the Ayreses at all": nevertheless, it is "handsomer than ever" [1, p.509]. Finally, Faraday continues his solitary visits to the abandoned mansion as if "the house seems his now" [5]. The history of the Ayres of Hundreds Hall terminates with Faraday's mentality evident of "gaucheness and falseness" [1]. Faraday's longing has haunted him since his childhood; it was then internalized as a shadow-creature of incursion at his heart, "almost a ghost himself" [6]. The layers of temporal inconsistency, class and identity, emerge respectively and affect each other interactively. They form a vicious circle inevitably leading to the temporal chaos and the ironical predication of the Ayres family and Faraday while dealing with the Hall affairs. It then becomes the ghost that ambushes in the mansion and persists in haunting those who are unable to advance with the times.

*of Literacy*. London: Routledge, 2009.

- [5] Mullan, John. "Review: Guardian Book Club: John Mullan on the Little Stranger by Sarah Waters Week One: Pace." *The Guardian* 24 Jul 2010: 5.
- [6] Thomas, Scarlett. "House Calls." *New York Times Book Review* 31 May 2009: 20.

---

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Waters, Sarah. *The Little Stranger*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2009.
- [2] Hopley, Claire. "Servants' Lives Below Stairs." *British Heritage*, 31.4 (2010): 30-35.
- [3] Horn, Pamela. *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*. Stroud: Sutton, 1995.
- [4] Fernandez, Jean. *Victorian Servants, Class, and the Politics*