

Kate's Hovering between Mind and Emotion

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As Edith Wharton wrote, “The visible world is a daily miracle for those who have eyes and ears” (*A Backward Glance* 379). In her autobiography, *A Backward Glance* (1934), Wharton tried always to be sincere and positive volunteering throughout World War I to help many people. This was the hardest and most difficult period for her as a highbrow. However, many critics agreed that she is not a mere optimist but also struggled with negative feelings. “Life is the saddest thing there is, next to death” (379). Cynthia Griffin Wolff says “there is still an underlying sense of pessimism, the legacy of the failed sense of trust in childhood” (97), and moreover, “this pessimism leads her to explore the plight of the unhappy women” (97). The heroine of *The Mother's Recompense* (1925), Kate Clephane, is easily considered a typical unhappy woman.

Though Edith Wharton was born into the privileges of New York's, she fought against many invisible barriers in society. As a child, she loved reading books and writing novels and finally decided to be a writer as her vocation at the age of 29. She got divorced from her husband despite the fact that it was incredibly difficult in society and that it took 13 years to finish the dispute. She lost many friends and acquaintances during the ordeal of the divorce. As Gloria C. Erlich tells us, “She suffered for extended periods from eating disorders, hysteria, migraines, claustrophobia, and asthma” (xi). Wharton struggled with various kinds of illnesses which contributed to the specific descriptions of many sickly characters in her stories. She seemingly led a rosy life but undeniably, her life had thorns even until the age of 75 as she was a cultivated sentient artist. Wharton's greatest life-long challenge came not only through her everyday life but also through her many works. She was criticized for over-using tragic endings in her works.

The Mother's Recompense, a typical Wharton's tragedy, has borne the brunt of the criticism. There were many harsh criticisms. Such as, “The theme of *The Mother's Recompense* is very difficult” (Tuttleton 405), and “Mrs. Kate Clephane is pathetic. …… It leaves us cold and a little scornful at the end of the novel” (Tuttleton 401). What's more, “Mrs. Wharton …… will only injure her fame by this conventional gesture in novel form” (Tuttleton 402). On the other hand, this same work was given some well-deserved praise. “Kate Clephane will stand beside Lily Bart as one of Edith Wharton's most lasting creations of women, …… her [Wharton's] consummate art” (Tuttleton 399), that is to say, “The novel is Mrs. Wharton's best since *The House of Mirth*” (1905) (Tuttleton 400). Also, “*The Mother's Recompense* is, it seems to me, the best story Mrs. Wharton has ever written” (Tuttleton 406). John

Farrar trusted that the work gained an advantage over *The Age of Innocent* (1920) that won the Pulitzer Prize in 1921.

As Percy A. Hutchison comments, “the gigantic, soul-searing and never ending irony of life of which every human being is the victim” will be discussed (Tuttleton 398-9). The word ‘irony’ will be changed to ‘mystery’ because of Wharton’s honest way of life and her tendency to include mysterious endings in her stories. Edith Wharton was deeply disappointed that the Germans, a people with great rational and musical sensibility, stirred up the tragedy of World War I. At the time, she ceased from writing novels, focusing instead on writing as a journalist. She wrote many articles on the antiwar campaign to inform the people as much as possible about the war situation and also established homes for orphans and the aged in France.

The word ‘irony’ tends to be associated with ‘dramatic irony’ or ‘tragic irony’ based on the Greek tragedy. This word, therefore, leads to negative thoughts. Here, Kate looked so miserable at the end of the story. Although, at the age of 40th, there is possibility to achieve happiness, Kate prepares for a lonely life built on her self-reliance and independence. The word ‘mystery’ is defined in OALD as something that is difficult or impossible to understand or explain. The word does not only have a negative image. It also contains the meaning of dramatic change to be happy or to receive something wonderful. Though we can not deny the sad image of the word, the word itself keeps its neutrality in essence. The main message of Edith Wharton is the uncertainty of the future, life is a mystery that only time will tell the truth.

First, Kate Clephane’s social and historic backgrounds will be examined. Secondly, the relationship between Kate and her daughter Anne, the mother-daughter relationship, as well as the relationship between Kate and her former lover Chris Fenno, her sexual relationship, will be discussed. Thirdly, focus will be given to Kate’s conflicting feelings and her spiritual growth through her tragic suffering. Finally, the historic and social backgrounds of the publication and the reason why Wharton passionately created the heroin Kate Clephane will be considered.

I

Kate Clephane has been purposefully chosen for the following reason. “Mrs. Wharton, as a general thing, has shown greater interest in her women than in her men” (Tuttleton 399), Edith Wharton tends to develop her women characters more beautifully than her men characters. Kate Clephane is described as charming and vivid compared to her ex-lover Chris Fenno who is obscurely depicted in spite of his importance. Anne also is another essential character but her description is not so complicated. Rather, she is quite simple and strong. *The Mother’s Recompense* is talked exclusively from Kate’s point of view. Wharton concentrates her attention on representing Kate’s struggle from start to finish. In this way, Wharton completely draws the readers into Kate’s tragic world.

Kate was married to John Clephane in New York but she could not bear a conventional life. In order to escape, Kate deserted her husband and three-year-old baby Anne. The reason was simple; "I couldn't breathe — ' that was all she had to say in her own defence" (13). Two months later, the situation had not improved in that "she couldn't breathe any better The asphyxiation was of a different kind, that was all" (14). At first, she had many struggles in her life with her husband and family. She left the house choosing her lover, Hylton Davies. She, however, did not find happiness with him because of other dissatisfactions that she had not realized. In her depths, she was dissatisfied with the patriarchal society and old-fashioned marriage system which women had no choice but to obey men.

Briefly, American history and the background of the society need examination. Americans are a people, mainly the men, who fought to realize their dreams such as religious freedom or economic prosperity despite crossing oceans to change life. There were only a few women there because of the difficulties. As the word 'Ladies first' show, women were treated cherishingly because of their posterity. Women's human rights were not considered. Sexual discrimination was natural at the time. A woman's achievement was found through child birth. This way of thinking incorporated with the 'serious,' 'honest' and 'integrity' based beliefs of the Puritans led to the so-called 'maternity myth.'

Men used this 'maternity myth' to establish a patriarchal system. They emphasized the greatness of the duty of childbirth, encouraging every woman to fulfill her greatest potential through reproduction. The basic importance of the relationship between mother and child was also upheld, stressing the value of women to stay at home for the sake of her family. In this way, the system which all females shall "remain under male control" (Rich 13) was gradually constructed. Under patriarchy,

two ideas flow side by side: one, that the female body is impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, 'the devil's gateway.' On the other hand, as mother the woman is beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing; and the physical potential for motherhood — is her single destiny and justification in life. (Rich 34)

The former thought leads to ultimate suffering for women such as witch hunting. The latter is deeply connected with the image of an angel. The fundamental thought of these conflict views is that "the power of the mother has two aspects: the biological potential or capacity to bear and nourish human life, and the magical power invested in women by men, whether in the form of Goddess-worship or the fear of being controlled and overwhelmed by women." (Rich 13)

Social necessity has created this patriarchy leading to women's misery. It has controlled society in the United States of America for a long time. Strictly speaking, "motherhood is earned, first through an intense physical and psychic rite of passage — pregnancy and childbirth — then through learning to nurture, which does not come by instinct" (Rich 12). That concept of motherhood under patriarchy generated many unhappy women who were unable to conceive. Considering the fact that the old

derision word “barren” still exists in the twenty-first century, it is clear that patriarchy lowered the social status of women and the underprivileged. At the time, women without children were unfortunately regarded as unfulfilled and empty. We can not but emphasize that “motherhood as an institution has ghettoized and degraded female potentialities” (Rich 13). In addition, it is safe to say that “Patriarchy would seem to require, not only that women shall assume the major burden of pain and self-denial for the furtherance of the species, but that a majority of that species — women — shall remain essentially unquestioning and unenlightened” (Rich 43). What is more,

These two forces — the humanitarian concern for child welfare and the fear for patriarchal values — converged to provide pressure which led to legislation controlling children’s and women’s labor, and the assertion that ‘the home, its cares and employments, is the woman’s true sphere. (Rich 49)

Under the clothing of patriarchy, an impregnable system was established. We, however, could not overlook the reality that the tendencies in the characteristics of women are “masochistic, patient” and “pacific” (Rich 97-8). This is why it took so many years to get rid of the system of patriarchy. This story was written in the above-mentioned social background.

In the beginning of the story, Kate Clephane lived in a shabby cramped room in a third-rate hotel in Riviera with her trustworthy maid Aline. One morning, Kate received two telegrams from her now wealthy grown-up daughter Anne who was living in a far-off town, New York. The first was “Mrs. Clephane dead —” (7) and the second, “I want you to come home at once. I want you to come and live with me” (10). Mrs. Clephane refers to Kate’s mother-in-law. Due to her passing, Kate, finally, had the chance to see her beloved daughter, eighteen years after leaving her.

Kate fretted about her appearance, wanting to look like a suitable mother figure. At the clothes store, she said, “Show me something darker, please: yes, the one with the autumn leaves. See, I’m growing gray on the temples — don’t try to make me look like a flapper” (16-7). Kate’s preparation expressed her maternal love although she had not been with her daughter since age three.

Kate Clephane summoned up her courage and sailed to New York to meet Anne. Her daughter welcomed her mother to the house where Kate had been trapped in tradition through her marriage long ago. Regardless of her old scandal, the high society of New York also welcomed Kate as Anne’s mother. “They were all delighted to have her back” (56). Kate and Anne enjoyed their reunion, thanks to Kate’s careful effort to be an ideal mother and to Anne’s diligent consideration for her mother. Kate felt rewarded for her long lonely European memories melting by the happiness found in being with her daughter. Finally, Kate’s dream to live with her daughter came true. “Kate felt as if they were two parts of some delicate instrument which fitted together as perfectly as if they had never been disjoined” (60). Kate was completely satisfied. “This is peace …… this must be peace” (59). Although Kate felt fulfilled, the roles of mother-daughter had seemingly reversed. Now Anne had become the woman of the house. Anne had to make family decisions based on society’s traditional rules.

Old New York in the latter of nineteenth century where is the stage of Kate's struggling needs to be considered as it is the birth place of Edith Wharton. The hero, Newland Archer in *The Age of Innocent* (1920), a work which contains many specific descriptions of the society, says, "a first shake made it seem more of a kaleidoscope, turned out, in the end, to be a smaller box, with a more monotonous pattern, than the assembled atoms of Fifth Avenue" (*Age* 125) where Anne's house is located. It is obvious that the society is so small that, in other words, "there are not more than three families in it who can claim an aristocratic origin in the real sense of the word" (*Age* 49).

The concept of the society is described in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1957) written by Thorstein Veblen. "The leisure class stands at the head of the social structure in point of reputability" (Veblen 84). He continues, "The basis on which good repute in any highly organized industrial community ultimately rests is pecuniary strength" (Veblen 84). In this paper, the Old New York is regarded as the same as the leisure class or the upper class. The society of New York differs from the original society in Briton in their history and in their view of word labor. Briton has an upper class with a long history as compared to the United States. "The upper classes are by custom exempt or excluded from industrial occupation" (Veblen 1). The society in New York was tolerant in its view toward labor and moneymaking. Fred Landers who supported Kate's return from Riviera was a lawyer. Many other characters in Wharton's stories also had occupations. Another remarkable feature of this society is: "The leisure class is the conservative class" (Veblen 198). Kate was rebuked when she eloped with her lover and left her husband and baby. Thanks to a change in thinking in the society, Kate felt welcomed by society for the first several months. She, however, gradually understood the reality that some of the old generation still held traditional views.

Before examining the essential point of this story or Anne's problem related to her marriage, the marriage system in Old New York must be considered. In the story, *The House of Mirth* (1905), the heroin, 29-year-old unmarried Lily Baer, who has beauty and charm, had to secure a prosperous husband to remain in the Old New York because she was dependent on the charity of her aunt after she lost her parents. Lawrence Selden, whom she fell in love with, asked Lily "Isn't marriage your vocation? Isn't it what you're all brought up for?" (8). Lily answered "I suppose so. What else is there?" (8). She continued, "That is one of the disagreeable things I was asking for" (*House* 8). Lily stresses the diversity of meaning on marriage between male and female that "there's the difference — a girl must, a man may if he chooses" (*House* 10). This expression symbolizes Lily's miserable situation. She had no way to survive regardless of her desires through marriage.

In the story, *The Age of Innocent*, which presents Old New York in 1870's, the married life between Newland Archer and May Welland was "a dull association of material and social interests held together by ignorance on the one side and hypocrisy on the other" (44) as same as other couples in the society. "Conformity to the discipline of a small society had become almost his second nature" (*Age* 321) for Archer even though he felt a kind of emptiness. The fundamental way of thought of both Lily Bart and

Newland Archer was expressed as follows:

It was the Old New York way of thinking life “without effusion of blood”: the way of people who dreaded scandal more than disease, who placed decency above courage, and who considered that nothing was more ill-bred than “scenes,” except the behavior of those who gave rise to them. (*Age* 335)

In this way, women’s equal rights did not exist in the society in New York because of the lack of freedom. Lawrence Selden explained, “My idea of success …… is personal freedom …… To keep a kind of republic of the spirit — that’s what I call success” (*House* 64). Newland Archer said, “Women should be free — as free as we are” (*Age* 43). Edith Wharton depicted the women’s desire to be free to choose. That is to say, the marriage system of the day restrained women’s freedom and their happiness. Although our most important unalienable rights are “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” written in The Declaration of Independence, women had no way to realize these rights without entering into a marriage as was the case for Lily Bart.

II

It is only natural that the close-knit mother-daughter relationship does not last perpetually. Anne’s marriage partner, Chris Fenno, gradually overshadowed the ideal relationship between Kate and Anne. He is Kate’s former lover in Europe. When Kate realized he was Anne’s lover, she secretly rushed to his house to ask him to give up his plan to marry Anne. Chris, a fortune hunter, was surprised to learn that Anne was Kate’s daughter. Kate tried to reason with Chris but he refused to listen. Kate meddled as peacefully as she could without influence. In an inextricable labyrinth, her agony gradually increased. Finally, Kate understood Anne’s “absolute determination” (177), and resigned her opposition to the marriage, choosing instead to help her daughter with the wedding preparations. Anne said “I want you both!” (197). Anne’s hope was to continue to live with Kate in the house after the marriage as Anne had no idea of her mother’s former love affair. Although Kate, at first, could not make up her mind as to what to do about her daughter’s proposal, she, ultimately, decided to go back to Riviera alone. Kate realized that Anne wanted Chris infinitely more than herself. Anne believed her mother was at peace in separating ways, trusting Kate’s story that she would marry an old acquaintance, Fred Landers, after Anne’s wedding.

It is said that, “nothing is stronger than a mother’s love for her child” (Rich 113). Adrienne Rich also says “After acknowledging that the essential human bond, the foundation of all social bounds, is that between mother and child” (113). The bond was also strong between Kate and Anne, despite a shortened relationship when Anne was a baby. Kate deeply regretted abandoning her daughter at an early age. The new daughter-mother relationship after the death of Kate’s mother-in-law was ideal thanks to their bilateral efforts.

What is a mother's *raison d'être* or her primary function? In general, if daughters feel completely loved by their mothers during childhood, they would be gentle and tender. We, first, must love ourselves, and secondly, to others. In fact, we "need a very profound kind of loving in order to learn love ourselves" (Rich 246). In this case, as the mother-daughter relationship was cut short disabling a perfect bond, Kate tried to compensate for long time. Kate, therefore, gradually rebuilt maternal love over time. In this process, as R. W. B. Lewis says, "The transformation of Kate Clephane over the chapters from a formerly unfaithful wife to a dedicated mother is done with a sure hand—to the point where her identity is fixed in references to her simply as 'mother'" (465). In addition, as "The quality of the mother's life is her primary bequest to her daughter," (Rich 247) Kate's decision have revealed her attitude and beliefs to Anne.

Next, the relationship between Kate and her former lover, the fourteen years younger Chris Fenno, will be examined. Even though she understood Chris did not love her any more, she could not forget their sweet memories, waiting for his return as Chris "had loved her and waked her" (16). When Kate happened to encounter him in New York, she had no idea about his present situation since he had left her. He had bravely faced the battlefields during the First World War and had been given the Legion of Honor and the D.S.M. Kate did not easily believe that the War had made a man of him because "He liked money, she knew, for all his careless way; he wanted to have it, but he hated to earn it" (96). Kate found it hard to accept the bitter fact that Chris was Anne's lover. Considering the generation, it is safe to say that Anne and Chris are due proportion. From the relationship of mother-daughter, there are many similarities between Kate and Anne. As Dowling states, "Daughter is the alter ego, after all, the one who is most like mommy" (115). Thus, it is possible for the two to fall in love with the same person. Had Anne's husband been someone other than Chris, Anne's request that her mother lived together with the newlyweds would have been ideal. As Anne's mother, Kate's desire was for Anne's happiness, "the one thing she really valued: her daughter's love and confidence" (70). It is clear that Kate put the welfare of her daughter, not her own bliss first. In the process of this difficulty, Kate realized that "she didn't love him any longer; she was sure of that" (92). Kate could not oppose the matter for her daughter who knew nothing about her mother's former love affair. Though Kate tried to bring out the truth, she was stopped by Anne's strong love for Chris. His scheme to become a celebrity in New York as Major Fenno must be left alone. Kate submitted to fate. Kate was forced to accept the marriage and she lost her comfortable place in New York as Anne's mother. Moreover, one day she saw the couple embracing by Anne's bedroom, she felt as follows:

Jealous? Was she jealous of her daughter? Was she physically jealous? Was that the real secret of her repugnance, her instinctive revulsion? Was that why she had felt from the first as if some incestuous horror hung between them? She did not know—it was impossible to analyze her anguish. (221)

Lewis explains the relationship between Kate and Chris, "There is a familiar image of marital distress

and of extramarital sexual fulfillment” and continues, “But this is subordinated to the potent issue of the parent-child relationship”(465). Kate could not possibly live under the same roof as the couple. She knew she should go back to Riviera as an exile one more time. For Anne to miss her mother was much better than learning the truth about the past relationship between Chris and her mother.

When Edith Wharton decided to depict the heroin, Kate Clephane, she did not have the image of ideal motherhood for Kate. Wharton also did not waver in her depiction of motherhood and womanhood. In the nineteenth century, a woman’s role was only one as a mother. The view of equal rights for men and women in the United States did not exist under patriarchy. But as the society and public thought changed in the twentieth century, women could choose their own way of life. The people were forced to accept women entering occupations or filing for divorces. Consequently, Wharton decided to rob Kate of a part of her motherhood. Kate brought up her daughter until three. As we mentioned above, “Motherhood is earned …… through learning to nurture, which does not come by instinct” (Rich 12). Kate’s new life with Anne, therefore, awoke Kate’s maternal instinct. As a result, Kate’s final decision was based on her humanity as a decent human being.

III

Kate’s conflict between mind and emotion will be further examined. Anne’s marriage partner, who was Kate’s former lover, caused Kate a great deal of distress. Kate who had given up her fragile love for him had to overcome the immediate problem to avoid being beneath her dignity. There was no way for both Anne and Kate to be happy. The happiness of one or the other was at risk. Although admitting the truth of her affair was difficult, Kate tried to make a confession to Anne several times in order to prevent Anne’s future misfortune in the marriage. She was unable to succeed because of their blood ties. Kate realized her past mistakes did not guarantee Anne’s unhappiness. At the moment of Kate’s standstill, she bravely decided to give up on preventing the marriage. Dowling states, “Something unique lay in that bond of female to female. Something unique, something positive, and something suffocating” (115). The relationship between mother-daughter, Kate and Anne, was often very hard to deal with like this situation. Kate was left with one wish that Anne would come to her own realization in the future.

Edith Wharton believes “real drama is soul-drama” (*Writing* 93). She draws Kate into her suffering although her new life looked seemingly happy. Kate had to search for the meaning of life through her struggle. Anne’s future was in conflict with the Kate’s past. Kate realized that “if there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering” (Frankl 67). As Adrienne Rich says “The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy” (337). Kate could not bear, any more, life without Anne. Kate gradually groomed herself as Anne’s mother as well as an excellent human being. She finally came to the conclusion that “Nietzsche’s words, ‘He who has

a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*” (Frankl 76). The notion lead to the meaning that “Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual” (Frankl 77). That is, “*it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us*” (Frankl 77). Kate, therefore, bravely reconciled herself to a lonely life. She finally admitted the truth of her affair with Chris to Fred Landers who had proposed her. She returned to Riviera on her own without saying anything to anyone else.

In this severe end, Kate's bitter future filled with a deep loneliness and desolation is easily imagined. Although some criticized the dreadful ending, Wharton's aim was as she said, “The business of the artist is to make weep, and not to weep” (*Writing* 86). Wharton suggested that Kate had to survive on her own, hereafter, without Anne, her important and precious daughter. Moreover, Kate had to find the solution to her problems as life is not always as short as a story. Wharton also stated “the quality the greatest novelists have always had in common is that of making their people live” (*Writing* 111). Her purpose is not a happy ending but the depiction of the truth of real world. The end of the story, then, did not end happily instead the process and humanity of Kate's life was brought out. As Dowling states, “As we come to accept ourselves, we can accept others. As we gain respect and esteem for ourselves, we can esteem others” (252). One more different idea is that “Coming to terms with our own imperfections allows the possibility of deeper and more satisfying relationship with others” (Dowling 252). Kate deeply regretted her past in Europe. Regretting one's past is a natural human condition. Anne also had a possibility to realize her imperfections in choosing a future partner like her mother. The two, then, will have a chance to rebuild their relationship, forming a strengthened mother-daughter bond.

In other words, if Kate and Anne grow in awareness of their own weaknesses and ignorance, they can create a new relationship. Considering the viewpoint of ‘love,’ “Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meanings in his spiritual being, his inner self. Whether or not he is actually present, whether or not he is still alive at all, ceases somehow to be of importance” (Frankl 38). Through this, Kate, chose to reflect the situation through her long-term planning. Even if the two live far from each other, it is possible to keep their bond. This is really true ‘love.’

Kate's positive thinking revealed her determination and survival. Some enjoy happy lives by a stroke of good luck, others suffer from various kinds of diseases or sad incidents. Either way, the future remains a mystery. Acceptance of all that life has to offer is the best stance in life. Just as the future can not be known, the past can not be changed. The most important point is how to accept the matter, that is, our attitude to the matter is the key. The basic thought in our life should be positive because our existences are of worth. As was initially stated, “never ending irony of life of which every human being is the victim.” We have various kinds of accidents in our life and we have possibilities to be the victim any time. There are, however, many chances to change the situation by our differing attitudes and

acceptance. Because of this, we changed the word 'irony' into 'mystery.' Irony is negative word, while mystery contains uncertainties dependent on the situation. All of us need to dream of bright futures to survive everyday's difficulties. Mystery refers to the positive lifestyle or the hope even if it is the faintest. If we do not prefer the word mystery to irony, we have no reason to exist here.

It is necessary to consider one more thing of Kate's subconscious to fully understand Kate's actions. It is clear that the foundation of her decision is led by her 'frontier spirit' although unnoticed by Kate. 'Kate is the embodiment of the spirit' because she has "a resentment of being crowded or ordered" (Clough 22). She embodies the typical characteristic of the spirit of "Self-Reliance" (Clough 106) when she decides to return to Riviera on her own authority. The meaning of self-reliance is that "They, too, urge us to heed 'the voices which we hear in solitude,' to know that living, not expiation, is the goal, and to believe that 'nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind'" (Clough 106). As "each must cultivate his own field for whatever yield it is capable of giving" (Clough 107), Wharton tells us through the story that we have to accept our own life even if it is so difficult that we can not bear the situation for a while like Kate's case.

In addition, some of the other features of the frontier spirit are "self-respect, independence, mistrust of society in the large preference for the self-chosen path, taciturnity," and "wariness of self-delusion" (Clough 50-51). Kate possessed all of these characteristics. According to her daughter's request at the beginning of the story, Kate returns to Old New York from where she had once ran away. Kate was welcomed by her daughter as well as all the family members with surface politeness. Wharton depicted Kate as a real American who displayed the frontier spirit. Kate dreams of her happy family life with Anne and her partner because "America's vitality has always turned to the future, the potential within a smaller present, the possible not yet realized" (Clough 74). With the appearance of Chris, the ideal mother-daughter relationship was destroyed. Kate underwent terrible tortures and finally realized the fact that she should obey her real intention because it is obvious that "Not the accident of rank or status, but testing under strain proved the man" (Clough 48).

Build on the thought, "all was to be tried in the crucible of one's own judgment, one's own reflection," (Clough 98), Kate drew upon her courage to decide her future. She believed "the infinitude of the private man" (Clough 104). The frontier spirit which is deeply rooted in American thinking and is passed from generation to generation from the early years of the United States. The typical American's subconscious is like the following,

…… the frontier was neither theory nor abstraction; it was experience, it was memory, in the muscles, the knowledge of the walker afoot, the food eaten, the habits enforced, and the thinking apart, the pride and the confidence won of hard testings such as could never let the knower rest content within the conventional categories. It was, also, a white man's knowledge
…… (Clough 145)

As “an intense self-reliance; to exercise private judgment is not only a habit with them but a conscious duty” (Clough 19), Kate's way of thinking about women revealed, “Her female world was made up of three categories: frumps, hypocrites and the ‘good sort’ — like herself. After all, the last was the one she preferred to be in” (4). Kate gave up her comfortable New York life to belong to the ‘good sort.’ As it is said that “it is to be American when one is not one of the privileged” (Clough 51), Kate's final choice was genuine American way of behavior. Returning to Riviera showed a really typical American choice. Though she was a member of the Old New York society, in Riviera, she was merely an exile. The character of Kate Clephane portrayed a proper American who strongly believed in her own courage and self-reliance. Kate resembled Edith Wharton who stayed not only in the United States but in Europe as well, especially in France. Wharton has also been considered an extraordinary American as well as a unique cosmopolitan. Although her writing was unique, she never forgot her native land despite her mixed feelings towards American culture.

IV

“It (literature) is first of all experience, deeply felt through a given temperament, for better or for worse” (Clough 171). Edith Wharton finished writing this story while remembering her precious memories of William Morton Fullerton, the Paris correspondent for the London *Times*, whom she had met in Paris. Being three years junior, he awoke in her a sexuality she had never experienced before. Their love affair lasted a little less than two years. This affair was deeply reflected in this story, especially through Kate's agony in watching her daughter, Anne, and her former lover, Chris. Looking back to her own bittersweet experience with Fullerton, Wharton repeatedly used the words “sterile pain” to describe Kate's suffering. The words portrayed Kate's agony over the loss of the two. Considering the connection between author and character, many parallels can be drawn such as the same generation, younger lover, broken-hearted sorrow and the last scene which they resigned to their fate. In reality, Wharton was a writer with many trusted friends who enriched her life without her lover, while we have no idea what Kate returned to Riviera. Her future may have been remote. Regardless, because of these parallels, the descriptions of Kate's sufferings were so vivid and realistic.

The original title of this unpublished story was “Disintegration” (1902) found in the Edith Wharton Collection in the Beinecke Library, Yale University. If this original story had been published in 1902, the description of Kate would have been completely different. It would not have depicted such a complicated conflict between Kate's mind and emotion similar to Wharton's own experience. Readers would not have accepted it because the publication was too premature. It was very difficult for women to stand on their own legs in the early 20th century under the patriarchy of the United States. This was especially true in New York where leading an independent life as a single woman was impossible.

It took about a half century for this message to be accepted through such works as *The Awakening*

(1899) by Kate Chopin. The publication was too early to be fully understood by the people in the United States. The heroin Edna Pontellier in the story finally committed suicide despite of her fight in the cause of woman's rights. Although Kate Clephane, the heroin of *The Mother's Recompense*, published about a quarter of a century later, has to return to Riviera by herself at the ending, she was not alone. Her trustworthy maid, Aline, a partner with Kate for many years, stands by her. She clearly could understand Kate's loneliness

In 1879, Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen published *A Doll House*. The theme was shocking to people all over the world. The heroin Nora escaped from the secure and wealthy house of her husband to pursue her own human rights. Kate was cut from the same cloth as Nora and Edna. There were many crusades worldwide for women's rights during the period from the end of the 19th century to the early 20th. Judging from the movements, it is clear that Wharton's notion that every woman is her own woman was essential in realizing women's dreams even if the Country did not realize the movement as quickly.

As Wharton explained her decision in the epigraph from Shelley, "Desolation is a delicate thing." Kate had to accept the tragic and seemingly endless loneliness. Such is the case with many who must part with loved ones. Loneliness is a reality. As far as Kate's loneliness, it is debatable as to whether her decision is for the better or worse. It is undeniable that Kate finds herself very much alone at the end. This sense of solitude touches everyone in their daily lives such as in Kate's case, "Sometimes, now that she had settled down into this new way of life, she was secretly aware of feeling a little lonely" (82) and "She felt indescribably alone" (74). Also, "How alone, she had never more acutely felt" (91). Kate gradually understood her place in New York when Anne said, "You gave up all your rights over me when you left my father for another man!" (160). Kate knew the bitter reality, "She was still a guest among them; she was a guest even in her daughter's house" (106). If Kate had continued to live in New York with Anne after the wedding, she would never escape the sense of loneliness. Wharton herself had a strong fear of solitude or loneliness throughout her life. Wharton beautifully portrayed her own loneliness through Kate's suffering.

Kate, nevertheless, still possessed the pursuit of happiness, despite her circumstances. This was also a reflection of Wharton's own life. Wharton's best years were in her later years of life. She fell in love with Morton Fullerton when she was 45. Her best income was at the age of 66. Also, Wharton not only wrote many novels, but she also had many reliable friends and servants in her later years. As the story ended, Kate's future was not clearly laid out. Although Kate opened a new window in her life by returning to her home, she did so with great risk. It is unknown whether good or bad may come. When Anne said "Mother, I want to make over all my money to you" (149), Kate naturally refused Anne's proposal. Kate also "preferred not to receive any money beyond the small allowance she had always had from the Clephane estate" (123). At least, Kate was not a hypocrite because she behaved decently. Incidentally, Aline was named by one of Wharton's beloved servants, Elise, who served as Wharton's

maid for many years until her death in 1933.

Around the turn of the 20th century, as the period in the Industrial Revolution in Britain, great social changes took place in the United States. The economic structure changed dramatically from agriculture to industry. The United States gave priority to economic growth and closed their eyes to other ideas like women's rights. On the contrary, the period between the First World War and the publication of this story in 1925 was very important in a campaigning for equal rights for women. After the long struggle for Women's Suffrage, women eventually acquired the right to vote in 1920. The trend had started years earlier in 1893 when the Women's Suffrage movement won the right to vote in New Zealand. It should also be added that in the United States, women had to wait for the expansion of the Women's Liberation Movement or Feminism until after the Second World War had finished.

In her personal life, Wharton's running battle with her husband finished in 1913. She, finally, was granted a divorce. This is an important fact to stress. Wharton changed the press of this story from 1902 to 1925. She had matured in her life experiences as well had her character, Kate. The influence of Wharton's life and the social realization of what was happening in America prepared readers for this publication.

The change from patriarchy to society of sexual equality greatly impacted this story and it shows the changing of generations. Anne sent Kate a telegram about the death of her grandmother. This means that old-fashioned inconvenient conventions which Kate could not stand 18 years ago were disappearing along with the funeral. This seems to represent a new coming as if Wharton was born before day light and saw the light of day at long last. In Kate's own marriage, the importance of uniting families and ensuring social status were given more consideration than love. For Anne it was opposite. She was free to choose her man and of love, not having to ask her mother's advice or permission. A new way of thinking was dawning through the publishing of this work.

Gloria C. Erich comments that, "Invariably in Wharton's fiction, mothers-in-law freeze their son's wives with scowling disapproval. They find their daughters-in-law insufficiently attentive to their marital duties and all too ready to deviate from tradition" (146-7). Although Kate may have been in a way tortured by her mother-in-law by traditional conventions, it is very hard to research this deeply without it being a bit of a rabbit trail to the main purpose.

As Louis Auchincloss says "what she was really bringing out in Kate was the belated stand against the tolerance of post-World War I American society which in her view had reached a pitch of blandness that threatened to destroy all the old standards of taste and morality" (xii). On the contrary, the more important issue, however, is "self-reliance." Wharton really wanted to stand on her own two feet as a human being regardless of the gender.

Susan Polis Schutz writes the following in her book of poems, *To My Daughter with Love on the Important Things in Life* (1986),

I am glad that

you were born in an age
when women
don't always have
to fight so hard to be heard
The world is wide open
for you to be whatever you want

.....

You are living in an age
where womanhood is
finally growing
to be everything
that it can be
..... (29)

The world was not wide enough for Edith Wharton to live as she dreamed. She was born too early to realize her dreams such as sexual equality. Even now this process is still on-going. She could see signs of an age to come and tried to improve the situation with all her might not only in her own life but also in her many works as a writer. She never abandoned hope and strove to gain a foothold for the cause of women's rights.

Although ending of this novel was miserable, Kate's suffering was not wasted. As Wharton says, "the mind of a creative artist is a mirror, and the work of art the reflection of life in it" (*Writing* 44). It is clear that her own hope was deeply reflected in *The Mother's Recompense*. Kate had to accept her own destiny to create for herself a new start in life, not as Anne's mother or Fenno's ex-lover. It is fairly certain that the character of Kate Clephane was really a part of Edith Wharton herself, as she searched for meaning in her own part. Wharton stressed the fact that we have to accept our fate with resignation without regard to time, age, sex or difficult trials. Frankl also emphasizes that "Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated" (109). It is true everyone has the chance to satisfy their own dreams, to open new windows, even if it takes a long time as Kate in her relationship with her daughter, Anne. Moreover, everyone has the possibility to be a victim by a random coincident. We have to purely accept our fate without bitterness and go about our duties to survive this world and its difficulties. The simple idea that Kate has to meet her nemesis based on the proverb, such as a man sows, so shall he reap has been purposefully avoided. More importantly, Kate's tragic mental struggle has been the focus. Through the story, *The Mother's Recompense*, Wharton gave us, especially women, constructive suggestions such as the expression "Look forward, not back: that's the thing to do" (39). Kate's suffering can not be confined to any one rank of life, nor to any particular time.

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