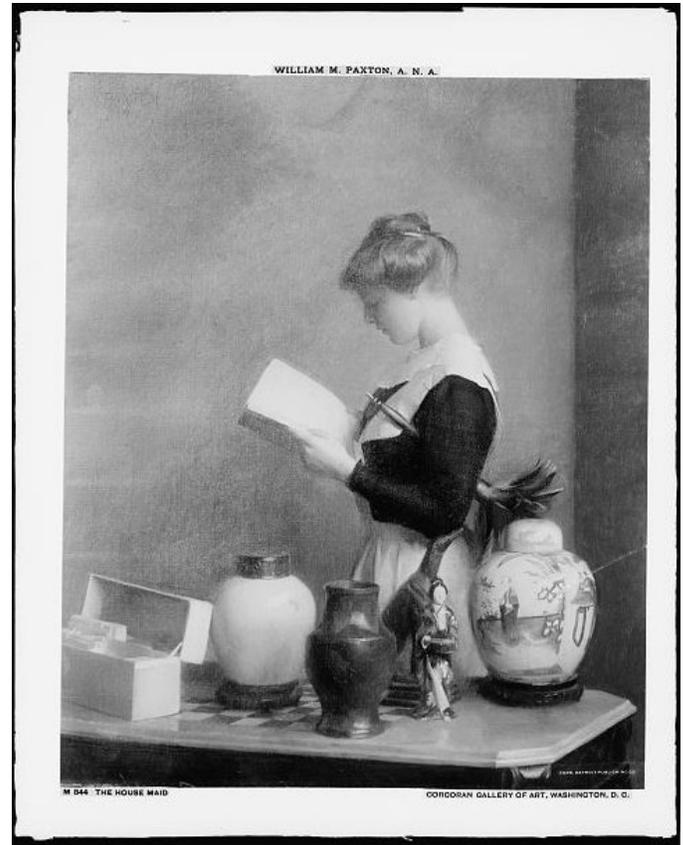


Synopsis

TWO SISTERS, Solange and Claire, work as maids for a wealthy woman they refer to only as “Madame.” Each night while Madame is away they recreate a sadistic and subversive ritual in which they impersonate both Madame and one another. The two women play out meticulous scenes together, fantasizing about how Madame might abuse them and how they will ultimately murder her. The play begins in the midst of one of their rituals – the sisters switching in and out of portraying their characters and their own selves. The ritual is ended by an alarm, signaling the imminent return of Madame. As they hasten to conceal the evidence of their role-play, they receive a call and learn that Monsieur, Madame’s husband, has been released from jail. Claire and Solange panic at the news: it was their false accusations that put Monsieur in jail and now that he has been released, Madame is sure to find this out and punish them. They decide that they must kill Madame that night and arrange a poisonous tea for her to drink when she gets home.

When Madame arrives home, it becomes clear that she is not the maniacal Madame of their fantasies, and although she is exceedingly melodramatic and extravagant, seems to somewhat dote on her maids. Despite their best attempts to conceal it from her, Madame quickly discovers the truth about Monsieur’s release from jail and orders them to fetch a taxi so she can go to him immediately. While Solange lingers in her attempts to locate a taxi, Claire tries every tactic to get Madame to drink the poisonous tea, knowing that if Madame speaks with Monsieur, he will tell her everything. The maids ultimately fail in poisoning Madame and as she drives away, the two women fight desperately about their failure. Solange then enters into a lengthy reverie about death, about the subversion of power-structures and class, and about the possibilities of upward mobility through murder. As Solange brings her fantasy to an end, Claire insists on drinking the fatal cup of tea herself. She forces Solange to reenter their role-play world with her: in this world Solange embodies Claire while Claire embodies Madame. Solange as Claire fulfills the task the real Claire failed to do: successfully poisoning Madame with the cup of tea. Only it is the real Claire who fulfills the role of the poisoned Madame and as Claire dies, Solange continues her reverie, imagining that the real Madame is dead and that Claire and Solange can live on, finally free from Madame’s oppression. ♦



Paxton, William McGregor. *The House Maid*. 1910. Oil on Canvas. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.



Exterior of Théâtre de l'Athénée. Photograph. Paris.