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EXCEPT, OF COURSE, LANGUAGE

The Canterville Ghost contains one of those witty[•] remarks for which Wilde has become famous: “We have really everything in common with

America nowadays, except, of course, language”.

The British and the Americans, thanks to their '**special relationship**',

- **aristocratic:** of the highest social class
- **law:** rules of a country that people must follow
- **mocks:** makes fun of
- **pragmatism:** practical attitude

- **prestige:** respect and admiration
- **ridiculing:** making fun of
- **sociopolitical:** of society and politics
- **witty:** funny in a clever way



SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

Special relationship is an unofficial term that is used to describe the political and cultural relationship between the UK and the US. The term was made popular by **Winston Churchill**, the British prime minister during World War 2.

share a lot in terms of history, traditions, law, and, of course, language. Wilde's remark reflects the British aristocratic attitude of the time towards the English spoken in the US and seems to suggest that the two peoples can't effectively understand each other, despite sharing a common language. Taken out of context, the quotation might lead us to believe that Wilde is making fun of the Americans. However, in the book, he mocks both the traditions of the English – by showing them as amusing stereotypes through the eyes of the Otis family - and the pragmatism of the vulgar Americans, “people on a low, material level of existence” – by ridiculing their idea that there is a commercial solution for every problem.

Wilde's statement should be considered in its proper context, that is, in a time of great change in sociopolitical power in England. The aristocracy was losing the importance it once had, and is shown in this book to have become unsuited to contemporary life. While the American nation was growing in power and prestige, the British empire was falling in various and different ways. Under the form of a cheerful ghost story, Wilde describes the conflict between the old-fashioned vision of life of the British aristocrats, with their sense of politeness, their traditions and their values, and the practical modern American approach to life of the Otis family, whose ignorance, arrogance and pragmatism make them indifferent to aristocracy and its values.

The Canterville Ghost



The Canterville Ghost



Mr Hiram Otis



Mrs Lucretia Otis



Washington Otis



Virginia Otis

the twins




Mrs Umney



Cecil
The Duke of Cheshire

BEFORE READING

GHOSTS AND THE SUPERNATURAL

- 1  What is a ghost? Write your own definition, then get into groups and share your ideas to write a group definition.
- 2 Do you believe in ghosts? Why/why not?
- 3 What sort of things are ghosts supposed to do? Look at the verbs in the box below and write sentences using these words to give examples of ghosts' behaviour. Use a dictionary to help you, if necessary.

appear clank cry frighten groan
haunt rattle scare shriek vanish

- 4 What do ghosts look like? Write a description of a ghost.
- 5 What stories have you read and what films have you seen with ghosts as the main characters? Choose the one you liked most or can remember best, and write a summary of the plot.





THE AMERICANS AND THE BRITISH

1 What differences do you think there are between the American and the British people? Make a list. Write words you associate with each nation.

The Americans

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

The British

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2 How different is the English spoken in Britain to that spoken in America? Tick US or UK for the words below.

	US	UK
a candy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b elevator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c gas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d handbag	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e lift	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f pants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g pavement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h petrol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3 How are some words spelt differently in British and American English? Rewrite the following words with a British English spelling. What are the rules for spelling?

- a color
- b center
- c program
- d traveling

1 When Mr Hiram B. Otis, the American Minister, bought Canterville Chase, everyone told him he was doing a very foolish thing, as there was no doubt at all that the place was haunted. Indeed, Lord Canterville himself, who was a man of absolute honour, had felt it his duty to mention the fact to Mr Otis, when they came to discuss terms.

‘We have not cared to live in the place ourselves,’ said Lord Canterville, ‘since my grand aunt, the Duchess of Bolton, was frightened into a fit from which she never really recovered, by two skeleton hands being placed on her shoulders as she was dressing for dinner; and I feel bound to tell you, Mr Otis, that the ghost has been seen by several living members of my family, as well as by the rector of the parish, the Rev. Augustus Dampier. After the unfortunate accident to the Duchess, none of our younger servants would stay with us, and Lady Canterville often got very little sleep at night, because of the mysterious noises that came from the corridor and the library.’

‘My Lord,’ answered the Minister, ‘I will take the furniture and the ghost at a valuation. I come from a modern country, where we have everything money can buy; and with all our young men painting Europe red, and carrying off your best actresses and prima-donnas, I reckon that if there were such a thing as a ghost in Europe, we’d have it at home in a very short time in one of our public museums, or on the road as a show.’

- **bound:** forced
- **cared:** (here) wanted
- **carrying off:** taking away with them
- **Chase:** large country house where you can hunt
- **fit:** condition of shock and hysterics
- **mention:** say
- **painting Europe red:** enjoying themselves in Europe
- **prima-donnas:** most important female singers
- **reckon:** guess
- **rector:** man of the church

‘I fear that the ghost exists,’ said Lord Canterville, smiling, ‘though it may have resisted your enterprising impresarios•. It has been well known for three centuries (since 1584, in fact), and always makes its appearance before the death of any member of our family.’

‘Well, so does the family doctor for that matter, Lord Canterville. But there is no such thing, sir, as a ghost.’

‘If you don’t mind a ghost in the house, it is all right,’ answered Lord Canterville. ‘Only you must remember I warned you.’

MR OTIS

Why do you think Mr Otis doesn’t believe in the ghost?
Do you believe in ghosts?

A few weeks after this, the purchase was completed, and the Minister and his family went down to Canterville Chase. Mrs Otis, who, as Miss Lucretia R. Tappan, of West 53rd Street, had been a celebrated New York belle•, was now a very handsome middle-aged woman, with fine eyes, and a superb profile. She was in very good health, and had a really wonderful amount of animal spirits•. Indeed, in many ways, she was quite English, and was an excellent example of the fact that we really have everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, language.

- **animal spirits:** liquid that doctors once thought was in our blood and which we needed to feel and move
- **belle:** beautiful young woman
- **enterprising impresarios:** inventive businessmen

Her eldest son, christened• Washington by his parents in a moment of patriotism (which he never ceased to regret), was a fair-haired, rather good-looking young man, and in London was well known as an excellent dancer. Gardenias• and English nobility were his only weaknesses. Otherwise he was extremely sensible. Miss Virginia E. Otis was a little girl of fifteen, lithe• and lovely, and with a fine freedom in her large blue eyes. After Virginia came the twins, who were delightful boys.

As Canterville Chase is seven miles from Ascot, the nearest railway station, Mr Otis had telegraphed for a horse and carriage to meet them, and they started their drive in high spirits. It was a lovely July evening, and the air was delicate with the scent of pinewoods. Now and then they heard a wood pigeon or saw a pheasant. Little squirrels looked at them from the beech trees as they went by, and the rabbits ran away into the bushes with their white tails in the air.

As they entered the avenue of Canterville Chase, however, the sky became suddenly overcast• with clouds, a curious stillness seemed to hold the atmosphere, and, before they reached the house, some big drops of rain had fallen. Standing on the steps to receive them was an old woman, neatly dressed in black silk, with a white cap and apron. This was Mrs Umney, the housekeeper. 'I bid• you welcome to Canterville Chase,' she said in an old-fashioned way. Following her, they passed through the Tudor hall into the library, a long, low room, panelled in black oak•, at the end of which was a large stained-glass• window. Here they found tea laid out• for them, and they sat down and began to look around while Mrs Umney waited on• them.

- **bid:** (old) wish
- **christened:** called
- **gardenias:** type of flowers
- **laid out:** ready on the table
- **lithe:** slim and flexible

- **oak:** type of wood
- **overcast:** dark with clouds
- **stained-glass:** coloured glass
- **waited on:** served

Suddenly Mrs Otis caught sight of a dull red mark on the floor just by the fireplace and, quite unconscious of what it really meant, said to Mrs Umney, 'I'm afraid something has been spilt there.'

'Yes, madam,' replied the old housekeeper in a low voice, 'blood has been spilt on that spot.'

'How horrid•,' cried Mrs Otis; 'I don't care for blood-stains• in a sitting-room. It must be removed at once.'

The old woman smiled, and answered in a low, mysterious voice: 'It is the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville, who was murdered on that very spot by her husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, in 1572. Sir Simon survived her by nine years, and disappeared suddenly in very mysterious circumstances. His body has never been discovered, but his guilty spirit still haunts the Chase. The blood-stain has been much admired by tourists and others, and cannot be removed.'

'That is all nonsense,' cried Washington Otis; 'Pinkerton's Champion Stain• Remover and Paragon Detergent• will clean it up in no time,' and before the terrified housekeeper could interfere, he had fallen upon his knees, and was rapidly scouring• the floor with a small stick of what looked like a black cosmetic. In a few moments no trace• of the blood-stain could be seen.

'I knew Pinkerton would do it,' he exclaimed triumphantly, as he looked round at his admiring family; but no sooner had he said these words than a terrible flash of lightning lit up the dark room, a frightening clap of thunder made them all jump to their feet, and Mrs Umney fainted•.

- **blood-stains:** marks left by blood
- **horrid:** horrible
- **detergent:** cleaning product
- **fainted:** lost consciousness and fell

- **scouring:** rubbing hard
- **stain:** mark
- **trace:** sign

AFTER READING VOCABULARY

1 Use FIVE of the words in the box to complete the sentences.

grabbed trace bald distressed dagger
drowned pulse refined

- a Thanks to Paragon Detergent, no of the bloodstain could be seen.
- b Your is the point in your wrist where you can feel your heart beat.
- c Lady Stutfield herself after being shocked by the sight of the ghost.
- d The adjective 'upset' is not always a synonym for '.....'.
- e The horrible spectre's head was and shiny.

2 Make three sentences with the words left out in Exercise 1

3 Complete the table with the correct adjective or noun.

ADJECTIVE	NOUN
EXISTING
.....	MYSTERY
WEAK
.....	PUBLIC
STILL
.....	EXCELLENCE
GUILTY
.....	FEVER
LONG
.....	DEPTH
ACCURATE
.....	RUST
VULGAR
.....	WOOD

P B1 Preliminary English Test Reading Part 5

- 1 For each of the following sentences from the book, choose the best word (A, B, C or D) for each space.
- 1 Suddenly Mrs Otis caught of a dull red mark on the floor.
A sight B glimpse C fire D hold
 - 2 As Virginia was in the of going out to the garden every evening, Mrs Otis was not at all alarmed at first.
A use B custom C routine D habit
 - 3 He had gone a couple of miles when he heard somebody galloping after him.
A yet B hardly C completely D well
 - 4 If there were a thing as a ghost in Europe, we'd have it at home in a very short time.
A even B only C just D such
 - 5 They sat down at the table and began to look around while Mrs Umney waited them.
A with B on C for D along
 - 6 The blood-stain couldn't be
A cancelled B moved C removed D erased
 - 7 From his wrists and ankles heavy manacles and rusty chains.
A hung B came out C emerged D sprang
 - 8 The next morning they discussed the ghost at some
A distance B length C depth D time
 - 9 The spectre was up against the wall in an uncomfortable way.
A standing B reaching C lying D leaning