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A Feminist Analysis of Shirley Jackson's "Hangsaman" and "We Have Always Lived in the Castle"

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A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF SHIRLEY JACKSON'S HANGSAMAN
AND WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE

by
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Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 1986

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
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ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of three chapters. The first is a review of selected existing criticism about Shirley Jackson's work. The criticism is analyzed from a feminist perspective in order to illustrate three things: (1) The overall shortcomings of criticism that aims to universalize Jackson's work. (2) The unjust treatment, or rather lack of treatment, that Jackson has received from the academy. (3) The agenda that will be followed in the rest of the thesis.

The remaining two chapters analyze two of Jackson's novels, Hangsaman (1951) and We Have Always Lived in the Castle (1962), from a feminist perspective, using various feminist critics. Among these are: Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Jane Gallop, Bonnie Zimmerman, Catharine Stimpson, Shoshana Felman, Annette Kolodny, and Toril Moi.
CHAPTER I

Shirley Jackson: An Examination of a Feminist Vision or Heaven Forbid That She May Be a Feminist

Very little criticism has been written about the work of Shirley Jackson, best known for her short story, "The Lottery." Most of the existing criticism is of a liberal humanist nature, wanting to speak of Jackson's theme of "man's inhumanity to man," focusing on the innate "evil" present in the individual rather than examining the power structures that define such terms as "evil." Terry Eagleton, in his book *Literary Theory* (1983), argues that "political argument is not an alternative to moral preoccupations: it is those preoccupations taken seriously in their full implications" (208). According to Jane Gallop, the liberal humanist tradition "always threatens to re-cover our discoveries of obscene truths" (21). Liberal humanism tends toward this end in the name of aesthetics—specifically the separation of aesthetics from politics. Liberal humanism is intertwined with patriarchal ideology, because the unified self that the tradition seeks to express is in fact a phallic self that disallows any contradiction or ambiguity (Moi 3). The very words, liberal humanism, hide an insidious hypocrisy because of their suggestion of inclusion, but the feminine is
subsumed under the masculine in the name of the very unity it
professes to value. The reason for this exclusion of the feminine
is that liberal humanism fails to consider the social context
and political realities.

Jackson's work lends itself well to a feminist reading. In
fact, I will argue that to read her work without filtering it
through a feminist lens is to universalize what cannot be
universalized—woman's oppression in a patriarchal society.
Many critics and even her recent biographer, Judy Oppenheimer
(1988), want to excuse Jackson from any association with a
feminist perspective, thereby implying that such a label will
taint the respectability of her work. Heller writes (1983), "Her
relevance to feminism seems more a result of a possibly
unconscious choice of subjects than a deliberate strategy. Her
desire was to write well-crafted and interesting novels" (1427).
This statement is surpassed in its dogmatism only by a remark
made by Steven Hoffman:

Through her skillful depiction of young girls, and
not-so-young women, fighting the world and them-
selves for a comfortable and independent existence,
Miss Jackson has created fiction, if not the equal of
that of Faulkner and Fitzgerald, at least deserving
of a ranking in the second tier of modern American
writers. (206)

Both of these writers make very definite assumptions about
what is worth studying, what gives an author credibility, and
both are blind to the kind of value judgments that support and feed the patriarchal notion of a piece of literature's worth and an author's rank on the literary ladder, a ladder with rungs that collapse when any writer who challenges its authority tries to climb it.

I will concur that any label at all can be reductive, including the label of feminist, but linking Shirley Jackson's work with feminist concerns is less reductive than calling her a writer of "supernatural," "psychological," or "horror" fiction, as many critics do. Criticism about Jackson appears in anthologies entitled *Supernatural Fiction Writers* and *Discovering Modern Horror Fiction*. Critics are tempted to categorize Jackson's work because they don't know what else to do with it. Categorizing, even though it really doesn't do anything or work toward any end other than neatening things up, at least gives one the illusion that some mastery is to be had over one's subject.

Lenemaja Friedman's *Shirley Jackson* (1975), the only book-length critical study written about Jackson's work, appears to be one long exercise in neatening up the messy terrain of Jackson's several novels and dozens of short stories. She divides the short stories into several categories within a chapter, and supports her division by summarizing the plots of these stories. Friedman also categorizes Jackson's novels, interestingly entitling the chapters "First Novel: The Road Through the Wall," "The Psychological Novels," "Novels of
Setting: The House as a Personality," and "The Family Chronicles." It is not that these divisions are inappropriate, they just cannot contain the texts completely. Messy spillage is inevitable when discussing Jackson's work. Friedman herself elaborates on the ambiguous and mysterious nature of Jackson's work, calling her "a master of the ambiguous ending" (82), but in fact she seems frustrated with this ambiguity, wanting to impose order and clarity.

Friedman, in an exasperating manner, ignores the obvious scenes of sexual molestation that occur in Hangsaman and The Bird's Nest, preferring to call the incidents "seductions" or "affairs" instead. About the character, Natalie, in Hangsaman, she writes:

She, herself, has been a victim of a seduction in the early evening of one of the cocktail parties at home when she willingly wandered off with one of the guests; but, because her thoughts are fragmented, one never knows the exact circumstances. (91)

Friedman goes on to argue that the reader cannot gauge the incident's "long-lasting effects," because it is given no more attention. This last statement is simply untrue. Natalie attempts to repress the psychic pain that the molestation has caused her, but the memory threatens to erupt more than once in the novel. Friedman also writes of Elizabeth's molestation by her mother's lover in The Bird's Nest. "She had, unless the
incident is purely imagined, an affair with Robin before she supposedly chased him away by threatening to tell her mother" (98). Both of these incidents of molestation occur offstage, in a sense. They occur in the gaps of the narrative, and the reader must infer their presence. But Friedman, like society which refuses to believe the rape victim, wants witnesses.

Friedman displays her dogmatism as well in this critical study. Throughout the study, she refers to Jackson as an "entertainer" or a "teller of tales," implying somehow that her work is inferior to that of the "real" artist. Friedman is sure of Jackson's lesser status as a writer by the end of her book. She writes:

Miss Jackson is not, however, a major writer; and the reason she will not be considered one is that she saw herself primarily as an entertainer, as an expert storyteller and craftsman. (161)

Friedman goes on to share her reasons why Jackson is a minor writer:

Her handling of the material... may not [display] the attributes of the more serious writer who wishes to come to grips with the strong passions of ordinary people in a workaday world, who prefers to deal directly with the essential problems of love, death, war, disease, poverty, and insanity in its most ugly aspects. (161)

In 1940, when Jackson was twenty-one, she wrote a piece called
"Three Sonnets" for Spectre, Syracuse University's literary magazine. Following is the last section of the work:

Black Woman's Story

And when they came and took him, I was sure that they'd be hot and weary from the ride and ask him for a drink, and ask me: "You're his new young wife?" and he would smile with pride; Yes, looking at the sky with tightened eyes, and if by chance I spoke they'd turn to me and answer, growing shy like men who talk to women. Yes, I thought they'd come like that, in friendship. But, instead, they came and took and tied him like they'd caught some killing dog; and not a word was said. A neighbor let me know, when it was light, that they had hanged and burned him in the night. (24)

I would argue that this passage alone "deals directly" with many of the "essential problems" that Friedman lists. This is not a passionless piece, and considering Jackson's background--white, upper-middle class, very sheltered--it only reinforces her extraordinary range and proves that the criteria used to rank a writer's ability are arbitrary and loaded with value judgments that are based on a masculine system of aesthetics. There is nothing wrong with judging the value of a writer's work, but the criteria used to do so must be given serious consideration. Friedman ends her book by stating:
Despite the lack of critical attention, her books continue to be popular with those people who are sensitive, imaginative, and fun-loving; and perhaps, in the long run, that popularity will be what counts. (161)

Maybe, but Friedman seems to doubt it, since she describes Jackson admirers with adjectives that have a feminine or child-like ring to them. Who wants to associate herself with a writer that "serious" people can't take seriously?

John G. Parks is more favorable toward Jackson's work in his criticism. In an insightful article (1978) about The Sundial, he examines the psychology of the apocalyptic mind, saying that it is "elitist, seeing only itself as worthy of survival and salvation" (87). In an article Parks write for Studies in Short Fiction (1978), he argues that "The Possibility of Evil," one of Jackson's short stories, "provides a key to much of her fiction" (320). There is nothing wrong with this piece; he delineates quite nicely characteristics common to much of her short fiction:

... a sensitive but narrow female protagonist, a gothic house, economy of language, intimations of something "other" or "more," a free-floating sense of depravity, experiences of dissociation, and a final turnabout in events or a judgement. (320)

However, it is interesting to note that in neither article does Parks give prominence to the protagonist's position on the social scale. Mrs. Strangeworth in "The Possibility of Evil" is
obviously a moneyed pillar of the community, and here she is, committing these cruel acts upon those of lower status. The Hallorans of The Sundial are very wealthy people, and they consider themselves the "chosen ones." Obviously class could have been used to raise some questions about just what Jackson is critiquing in these pieces—is she defining a universal moral vision or is she dealing with something more concrete like class consciousness?

In a later article (1984) entitled "Chambers of Yearning: Shirley Jackson's Use of the Gothic," Parks examines the use of gothic conventions in Jackson's work using the backdrop of contemporary thinkers Robert Jay Lifton, Rollo May, R.D. Laing, and Lionel RubinoFS, all of whose works examine contemporary culture's fragmentation. In this article, he seems to be realizing that Jackson's fiction must be examined using gender as a category of analysis, but it appears that he's not sure how to go about it. He includes a quote from Chesler's Women and Madness that, even with his commentary, seems out of place, but that is meant, I think, to differentiate between Laing's fragmentation of the "self" in the modern world and woman's madness because of patriarchal oppression. But Parks takes this idea no further until he abruptly states that "the gothic mode serves well Jackson's purpose to explore the depths and contours of female violation in the modern world" (26). Once again the reader prepares for a feminist reading, and once again is disappointed. In his concluding paragraphs,
Parks finally breaks down and gives in to an essentialist reading:

Shirley Jackson’s gothic fiction is an effective mode for her exploration of the violations of the human self—the aching loneliness, the unendurable guilt, the dissolution and disintegrations, the sinking into madness, the violence and lovelessness. (28)

Was he trying to demonstrate a raised consciousness, but just wasn’t sure how to do it? Elaine Showalter questions the motives and implications of the male feminist critic, wondering if such a stance is a form of critical cross-dressing (134). We cannot legitimately call Parks a male feminist critic; he is instead a liberal humanist in feminist clothing, and isn’t that the most dangerous kind of cross-dresser?

The critics discussed thus far, Friedman and Parks, are the ones who have written most prolifically about Jackson, and obviously I feel that their critical methods fail to do justice to her work. The remaining critics of Jackson fall loosely under five rubrics. (After I have reduced categorization to a useless exercise, I suppose I should be ashamed, but one needs an illusion of order.) There are those critics who seem ambivalent about Jackson’s feminist vision, wanting to both notice and deny its presence; those who are able to recognize a vision but who don’t articulate its feminist nature; those who speak of Jackson in purely feminist terms, a small number indeed;
and those whose work focuses solely on the "The Lottery."

But before discussing any of the above, I must first
condemn a critic who constitutes the missing fifth class.
Hoffman's work (1976) exemplifies the deplorable "systematic
blindness" that Shoshana Felman speaks of in her review of
Women and Madness (1975). Felman undertakes a reading of a
Balzac text ("Adieu" which deals with woman and with madness)
and examines the way it has been traditionally perceived and
commented upon. She finds that the criticism fails to comment
upon either woman or madness, and so concludes several things:
That there is an "ideological pattern of textual amputations
and cuts in which only part of the text is made visible to the
reader" (5), that critics display a "conspicuous and flagrant
misogyny without even realizing it" (6), and that there is an
"ideological conditioning of literary and critical discourse to
neglect or omit significant facts and the oversight is a symbolic
eradication of women from the world of literature" (6). She
juxtaposes real with unreal in order to show how society
valorizes the real (in Balzac's story the real being men and
their wars) over the unreal (women and madness, the "real"
point of his story). And so she calls the critic who deliberately
obscures, the "realistic critic, arguing that he has a "nostalgia
for a transparent, transitive, communicative language, where
everything possesses a single meaning which can be consequent-
ly mastered and made clear" (10). She concludes by arguing
that:
For the realistic critic, the readable is designed as a stimulus not for knowledge and cognition, but for acknowledgement and re-cognition, not for the production of a question, but for the re-production of a foreknown answer. (10)

With Felman's framework in mind, let's turn to Hoffman, who wants to argue that "there are strong parallels between Jung's conception of individuation and Jackson's idea of character development" and that "her characters seldom reach a new center of self because of their inability to deal with two major archetypes, the shadow and the animus" (196). Now right away we should guess that this "realistic" critic will allow no play, that his model of analysis must not be tampered with by introducing anything that would produce contradictions or questions. And indeed everything is black or white. He argues that "the personal manifestation of the shadow is most evident in Hangsaman" (197), and he refers to Tony as "an ebullient thief, liar, and temptress" who is the protagonist Natalie's "alter ego." Never mind that Tony is the first person to truly nurture and care for Natalie. He compares Tony to The Bird's Nest's Betsy whom he calls "the destructive essence in the personality, wanton, insolent, and coarse" (197). Never mind that Betsy is that part of Elizabeth's personality that endured the molestation by her mother's lover. Thus, Hoffman's first obvious textual amputations display a chilling misogyny in their description of both Betsy and Tony, the two most overtly
sexual characters ever created by Jackson. He calls them "evil" and insists that they must be conquered in order that the "real" characters may achieve individuation. Obviously, he equates woman's sexuality with "evil" and wants to perform a metaphorical clitoridectomy in order to aid these characters in their individuation.

What I find most objectionable is Hoffman's treatment of We Have Always Lived in the Castle. Here he does more than amputate parts of the text; here he blatantly presents a misreading in order to bend the novel to his individuation model. He argues that the protagonist, Merricat, is the "evil" shadow who prevents Constance from "developing her personality in society at large" (198). He implies that Constance has grudgingly taken the blame for the murder of her family even though it "rightfully belongs to her sister, Merricat" (198). Rather than allowing himself to see that Constance is happy in her self-imposed isolation ("imprisonment" as he refers to it) with Merricat, he chooses to believe that she can't wait to leave. He deliberately ignores the deep bond between Merricat and Constance, and only views Merricat as a hindrance to Constance's assimilation to society. He minimizes the true "evil" of the townspeople and he fails even to mention the part cousin Charles plays, with his desire to control the Blackwood estate, preferring to see him as Constance's last savior. Not only are these things Hoffman sees not true, but this interpretation makes absolutely no sense. The narration is first person told
through Merricat's eyes, not Constance's, and nowhere in the novel do we even suspect that she is an unreliable narrator. Shirley Jackson's novels may not fit into Hoffman's repressive model without amputating integral parts, but Hoffman's "analysis" certainly fits into Felman's model of the "realistic" critic with room for a dozen more where he came from.

Three articles of Jackson criticism are ambivalent in their treatment of her work, on the one hand wanting to affirm Jackson's feminism and on the other wanting to dissociate both her and themselves from it. Heller's work on Jackson in Critical Survey of Long Fiction (1983) displays this ambivalence. His was the quote near the beginning of this chapter that spoke of Jackson's relevance to feminism being a result of "unconscious choices." Heller's analysis appears consistent if we overlook his assurance that Jackson wasn't conscious when choosing her subjects. He acknowledges gender as an organizing category, arguing that Jackson's "major novels share the elements of an unfulfilled female protagonist who must transcend or evade typical female roles" (1428). He argues that We Have Always Lived in the Castle is the "... only completed novel in which the unfulfilled woman establishes a stable life for herself" (1431). But when he questions the reliability of the narrator, his ambivalence becomes apparent:

Her way of life appears good in her world and she appears to save Connie, first from her parents' unattractive life and then from Charles and his world,
offering her instead a richer, more colorful, and more essential life of true affection. (1431)

He perceives that Constance's life is fuller and better outside the patriarchal order. He can't help but perceive this, because the beauty and richness of their life is conveyed very effectively by Merricat in her narration, but he wants to refuse or deny his belief. The only way he can do this is to call her reliability as a narrator into question; if he can dismiss Merricat in that way, then he won't have to confront his ambivalence about the patriarchy, and its destruction. He further argues that "only eccentric women such as Merricat and Constance are likely to find anything approaching fulfillment" (1432). Even though he seems to recognize the need for Merricat's and Constance's isolation, he still makes a value judgment by labeling them. Labels serve a political purpose in one's argument. There is nothing inherently wrong with labeling a thing; context is everything. Heller's labeling serves to perpetuate negative assumptions about women, and so my task must be to take his use of labels to task. Annette Kolodny in her article, "Some Notes on Defining a Feminist Literary Criticism" argues that "to cavalierly label" (She is as guilty of labeling here as Heller by calling those who label "cavalier." But her labeling suits our political purpose.) characters:

... is to ignore the possibility that the worlds they inhabit may in fact be real or true, and for
them the only worlds available, and further, to deny the possibility that their apparently "odd" or unusual responses may in fact be justifiable and even necessary. (84)

This argument of Kolodny's helps us question Heller's word choice, indeed helps us question all those critics who imply or even insist that Merricat is "mad." I am perplexed as well by Heller's choice of labels. The word "eccentric" is discussed by Merricat in We Have Always Lived in the Castle, and she takes to task the person who uses it to label her Uncle Julian. Her commentary on the word indicates her puzzlement that other realities are considered abnormal, and that the accepted reality with its intrusions and violations is never called into question:

"He's a touch . . . eccentric," Helen Clarke said, smiling at Constance as though it had been a secret until now. I was thinking that if eccentric meant, as the dictionary said it did, deviating from regularity, it was Helen Clarke who was far more eccentric than Uncle Julian, with her awkward movements and her unexpected questions, and her bringing strangers here to tea; Uncle Julian lived smoothly, in a perfectly planned pattern, rounded and sleek. She ought not to call people things they're not, I thought. . . . (36-7)

Jack Sullivan, in his article for Supernatural Fiction Writers (1985), begins by asserting his approval for what he
calls the "open-endedness" of Jackson's work, arguing that she "refuses to provide a denouement" but leaves the reader in "breathless suspension" (1035). Sullivan utilizes a very sexual language here, implying that Jackson's work is one long extended climax or jouissance, to use Cixous's terms. The acceptance, indeed embrace, of the uncontainable, the irreducible, indicates Sullivan's readiness to explode the traditional reductive structures that confine a text. But then, in the guise of a compliment, he too labels Jackson's work, calling We Have Always Lived in the Castle a "peerless depiction of madness," a "participation in psychosis" (1035). He calls Merricat "her maddest, most dangerous character" (1035). Both Heller and Sullivan wish to valorize Jackson's feminist vision, but both continue to doubt their own perceptions. In Mary Kittredge's article "The Other Side of Magic: A Few Remarks About Shirley Jackson," the ambivalence she holds toward a feminist perspective is less discernable. She writes:

In most of the novels, disorder is characterized by mental instability, and in all of them the main character retreats or is driven from the real world, into a life of the imagination. The heroine's perceptions, however mad, are presented as reasonable and her actions as well-justified. (6)

Perhaps Jackson is able to justify her characters' perceptions because they are justifiable and reasonable. Kittredge's discussion is written using a complimentary tone, but it also
presupposes that the "life of the imagination" is somehow less than that of the "real world." I don't believe, as she seems to, that "the life of the imagination" can be equated with "madness" with all of the value laden baggage attached to the term.

Heller hasn't always been ambivalent toward a feminist perspective. In an earlier piece about Jackson, for Critical Survey of Short Fiction (1981), he doesn't label but instead tries to justify another reality:

Several stories show a woman's loss of an ordering dream. These divide into stories about women who experience the terror of loss of identity and those who may find a liberating superior order in what would ordinarily be called infantile fantasy. (1670)

Here he is able to see the characters' other realities and valorize them rather than doubt them. Though not articulated as feminist, his work in this article seems to display a consistent vision of an alternative reality. He writes:

Jackson's middle-class American women seem especially vulnerable to losing the security of a settled world view. Their culture provides them with idealistic dream visions of what their lives should be, and they have a peculiar leisure for contemplation and conversation imposed on them by their roles. (1669)

This statement seems to do what Kolodny argues the feminist
critic should do—"discover in literary terms what the world looks and feels like to that segment of the population which is taught the 'only one way . . . to control her future' is to 'choose her man'" (85).

A short mention of Stuart Woodruff's article "The Real Horror Elsewhere" (1967) as an example of another piece that displays an affinity with a feminist vision is in order here. Woodruff provides a consistently sympathetic reading of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* and shows that the horror is not caused by Merricat's murder of her family, but by the villagers subsequent victimization of the Blackwood women. He seems able to glimpse and even long for the other reality that Merricat and Constance have created. He also performs a task that critics of this novel thus far discussed have failed to do when he very convincingly illustrates the deep bond between the sisters, using textual quotations.

Finally, there are those critics who examine Jackson's work using gender as their organizing category. Lynnette Carpenter (1984) examines *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* from a feminist perspective, offering insight into this novel in terms that other critics fail even to consider. She argues that "female self-sufficiency threatens a society in which men hold primary power and leads inevitably to confrontation" (32). Her treatment of Merricat, viewed by most critics as mad, is especially illuminating. Carpenter instead argues for her sanity, her deliberateness, because she realizes that to say she is
"mad" is to deny her rage at the patriarchal order. She writes:

Within the context of feminist psychology, rage is the most appropriate response to oppression. In Jackson's time as now, it was also the most dangerous, the most likely to be labeled madness and treated by institutionalization. (36)

Carpenter doesn't say that woman's rage is typically turned inward (eating disorders or other harmful excesses and ultimately suicide), and that Merricat's actions, though violent and shocking to patriarchal sensibility, are revolutionary and should be viewed as a triumph. Carpenter's analysis is unique also in its speculation of a romantic connection between the sisters. She sees the possibility of a lesbian relationship between them because of their deep bond and also because Merricat believes that "heterosexual romance is a dangerous illusion, that patriarchy is an inherently destructive institution, and that no compromise is possible" (36).

A reading of We Have Always Lived in the Castle by Carol Ames for her dissertation, Love Triangles in Fiction: The Underlying Fantasies (1973), offers an interesting and radical perspective on the sisters' relationship. She argues that Merricat is "every man's nightmare of the woman as artist" but:

Merricat demands no more from Constance than many male artists have demanded of a mother, a wife, or a sister. These men's demands have been culturally approved. They have, therefore, been met without
forcing the artists to resort to murder or other
extreme measures to satisfy their needs. (336)

Ames, then, sees Constance as Merricat's muse and views the
murders as justifiable in order that Merricat may produce
great works of literature.

Cleveland, who wrote an article for And Then There Were
Nine...More Women of Mystery (1985), offers a good discussion
of The Bird's Nest, Hangsaman, Road Through the Wall, We
Have Always Lived in the Castle, and Haunting of Hill House.
She illustrates more than how Jackson's novels are a reflection
of human nature and seems to recognize gender as a determinant
of oppression by society. She writes:

The protagonists of three of these novels are young
women, and the ordeals they undergo are intensified,
if not caused, by that fact. Jackson was not on
record as a feminist, but she undoubtedly noticed
that girls are more easily imposed upon, if not
murdered, than boys. (217)

A very understated way of putting it, but the point is
conveyed quite well, nonetheless.

Mary Rice's article, "Unrequited Vision: The Writing of
Shirley Jackson" (1981), is regrettably short. Rice speaks about
things that other critics want to deny or silence, in particular
the rape of Natalie in Hangsaman. She uses the word. Even my
use of molestation to describe Natalie's experience sounds lame.
She also comes right out about Tony's lesbianism, and in a
positive way. Other critics, if they mention it at all, only do so to quell the suspicions of readers that Tony might be one of those dreaded lesbians. Even Cleveland (and I suppose she should be in the ambivalent category for this), who elsewhere in her article seems consistently bias free, states: "One critic took Tony to be a real person and a Lesbian. Tony is something much more dangerous, a creation of Natalie's hyperactive imagination. . ." (205). Perhaps the suggestion was not intended, but as it stands, she is implying that lesbianism is dangerous to some degree. Even though lesbianism is dangerous to the patriarchy which rests on the granite foundations of the exchange of women, one senses that is not the way Cleveland meant it. But Rice, in her article, celebrates Tony's lesbianism calling her a "visionary" and arguing that she "invokes a matriarchal past" (60).

One would imagine that "The Lottery," Jackson's most famous work, would have generated an enormous amount of criticism, but that isn't the case. Much of what has been written takes a predictable stance. For example, Nebeker's article (1974), while more interesting and thought provoking than that of Shyamal Bagchee (1979), which simply points out the symbols in the story, really doesn't do anything different. She argues that "The Lottery" contains a "below-the-surface" story that reveals humanity to be victims of "unexamined and unchanged traditions" and argues that nothing will change until enough people "are touched strongly enough by the horror-
of their ritualistic, irrational actions to reject the long perverted ritual" (107). In an almost identical article (1980), Barbara Allen argues the same thing as Nebeker but asserts that an examination of the folkloristic elements present in the story is necessary to "prove" the argument on theoretical grounds. James Gibson (1984) argues that the closest analogue or even source for "The Lottery" is an Old Testament story found in the book of Joshua. He then compares the two, concluding that where Jackson's characters are ruled by "chance and caprice, the story world of the Book of Joshua is carefully ordered and its moral laws are carefully defined" (195). A more puzzling study than any I've encountered on "The Lottery" is Richard Williams' "A Critique of the Sampling Plan Used in Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery'" (1979). I call it puzzling, because I'm not sure of its point other than academic acrobatics. Williams gives a statistical analysis using equations and charts to determine the mathematical fairness of the lottery, determining finally, that Tessie's protest, "It isn't fair, it isn't right," is accurate.

Peter Kosenko, however, in an article entitled "A Marxist/Feminist Reading of Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery'" (1985) approaches the text from a much more workable angle. I agree with him when he notes that previous criticism of "The Lottery" falls short when it says the story is about "man's ineradicable primitive aggressivity" (27) or that it is about "unexamined and unchanging traditions which man could easily
change if he only realized their implications" (Nebeker 107). Kosenko argues that the lottery is "no mere irrational tradition" but rather an "ideological mechanism" (27). The lottery reinforces the hierarchy of the social order by filling the villagers with an "unconscious fear that if they resist this order they might be selected in the next lottery" (25). Using five major points, Kosenko clearly shows that the lottery is bound up with the capitalist social organization, finally arguing that:

The lottery functions to terrorize the village into accepting, in the name of work and democracy, the inequitable social division of labor and power on which its social order depends. (31)

My only complaint about this reading is that while Kosenko doesn't neglect gender as a determinant of oppression, gender is still subsumed under class in his analysis. Women's status is not just determined by her "distinctly subordinate position in the socio-economic hierarchy of the village" (29). Yes, the system offers "men power over their wives as consolation for their powerlessness in the labor marked" (32), but this seems to imply that the destruction of capitalism would ensure woman's higher status and ignores the psychic misogyny that is embedded in the patriarchal system.

As the reader should be able to see, most of the criticism about Jackson just doesn't do enough with her work. Because its scope, for the most part, tries to encompass the universal
human condition, i.e., masculine condition under the guise of neutrality. Jackson's full meaning or potential meaning is obscured. (Moi reminds us that the designations masculine and feminine represent social constructs, i.e., patterns of sexuality and behavior imposed because of cultural and social norms. The terms male and female refer to the biological difference. Patriarchal oppression, Moi says, "consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order to make us believe that the chosen standards for femininity are natural" (65). Jackson's work contains experiences and perceptions unique to the feminine condition and to universalize is to destroy the power and impact of that work.
Hangsaman (1951) is a very complex novel that examines and implicitly criticizes the disguises a woman must don in order to be accepted by this society; it examines the ambivalence one feels over donning these disguises, especially if one suspects that they are life-threatening; and finally it examines, though without resolving, an alternative to taking one's place, filling one's niche, in patriarchal society. I intend to read Hangsaman using the theories of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous as a framework. These writers examine the lack of recognition of woman in a masculine world and the difficulty that woman faces defining herself in this world and with this language from which she is excluded. Irigaray, in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, demonstrates the political strategy of mimicry of masculine discourse. She contends that the feminine must mime or parody phallocentric discourse in order to undermine its effectiveness.

Natalie Waite is the seventeen-year-old protagonist who reluctantly leaves for college even though it means finally escaping from a father who dominates and tries to determine her
every thought. At college she is a better than mediocre student, although her journal consumes her more than her studies. Socially, she is inept, wanting to be accepted by the popular crowd of girls and at the same time wanting to be alone. She meets Tony, an androgynous lesbian, who has a powerful impact on her life, but who affirms her rather than dominates.

Natalie spends much of her time in her own imagination, an imagination in which she is all-powerful, where color and beauty reside. In her imagination Mr. Waite's smug dominance cannot intrude:

... she had lived completely by herself, allowing not even her father to the farther places of her mind. She visited strange countries, and the voices of their inhabitants were constantly in her ear; when her father spoke he was accompanied by a sound of distant laughter, unheard probably by anyone except his daughter. (4)

Very early in the novel we see Natalie's resistance to her father's language, her attempt to hold some of herself in reserve. Natalie wishes, though at this stage her wish is an unconscious one, "to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter" (Cixous 258). Masculine truth is dualistic, static, enclosed. In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous writes of the multiplicity of the feminine, and the following passage reveals its similarity, almost affinity with the above description of Natalie:
She alone dares and wishes to know from within, where she, the outcast, has never ceased to hear the resonance of fore-language. She lets the other language speak—the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death. (260)

Natalie's father tries hard to immasculate her, to make her speak the masculine discourse, but on some level she remains aware that there is danger in this total identification. Even though she is pulled toward the masculine, the following passage indicates that she doesn't wish to repudiate her womanhood, her femaleness either:

Natalie smiled secretly, moving her shoulders stiffly under her thin white shirt, agreeably conscious of herself going from the flat line of her shoulders all the way down to her feet far below, so that she was, leaning back with her shoulders against the solid intangible of the air, a thin thing, a graceful thing, a thing of steel and subtle padding. She breathed deeply, satisfied. (9)

The passage also suggests a desire to be androgynous, a state which offers power in its ambiguous nature.

Every morning Natalie meets her father in his study and they go over what she has written the night before. Mr. Waite is arrogant enough that he demands an intellectual progeny, and since his only son is ineffectual, his daughter must suffice. He is trying to train her in masculine discourse, and she is a
good student, usually able to anticipate his desires of her. She is unlike her mother, Mr. Waite's wife, who has given up trying because he can only hear what she says through his grid of logic and reason. Mr. Waite says of her, "I never could have found anyone else so unsympathetic as your mother, and so helpful" (13). He says this with laughter, indicating his puzzlement and belittling attitude toward what he sees as a contradiction. He is unable to see that Mrs. Waite, while uninterested in his scholarly pursuits and unable to feign genuine interest, still operates under the code of wife and must provide nurturance.

Even Natalie, who has been schooled so well that she can fantasize adventures during her sessions with her father, finds herself tripped up sometimes when she is caught off guard. Her father seeks her presence in his closed and confusing world, but at the same time he won't allow her full entry:

Sometimes, these mornings in the study, Natalie was uncertain whether or not to laugh at her father's statements. It was difficult, usually, to tell if his remark was a joke because it was a point of conduct with him not to laugh at his own jokes, and with herself the only audience Natalie had only her own reactions to depend on. (11)

This passage demonstrates her absolute alienation; she knows the rules because she's played each game so often, but she is still afraid to trust her own perceptions. Mr. Waite forces Natalie to assume a precarious balance wherein she begins to question
and doubt her every action and thought. Natalie tries to be like
the man she thinks her father wants her to be, but there is
no place for her as equal. The father wants her accomplishments
to mirror his own and to challenge him, but not too much.

At this point in the text, Natalie seems unaware of any
resistant feelings she has toward her father's indoctrination.
There is only the laughter in her head that her father cannot
hear. Natalie is a writer, and she believes that her father is
trying to help her find her voice, but she hasn't realized yet
that he has her writing in a discourse that she will never under-
stand or be able to embrace. He makes the rules and she must
guess what they are. He berates her for a description of him
that he believes serves no purpose. He gives her an assignment
where she is to describe him, and then expects her to remember
a rule that no description must be unattached from a useful place
in a narrative:

"Apparently, I say," he went on. "I don't think
you yourself quite realize the work you have given
to this little sketch. Under any other circumstances
your weighting of it would be meaningless, but I
gave you this on purpose to try you out, and you
did exactly as I expected." (15)

Mr. Waite, using his authority as father and teacher, commands
Natalie to perform a given task, knowing she will not remember
a rule he mentioned long ago, thereby setting her up to fail.
The two are operating under different codes which illustrate their incompatibility. Natalie operates under a code that says her father would not wish to deliberately trick her. Mr. Waite operates under a code of masculine "logic" that valorizes this type of gameplaying in order to one-up the other person.

Natalie may not be aware, yet, of her desire to be subject, to be defined other than by man, but she recognizes her distaste for the status of object. She is contemplating her seventeen years of existence, speculating about the future in seventeen more years:

... she would be thirty-four, and old. Married, probably. Perhaps—and the thought was nauseating—senselessly afflicted with children of her own. Worn, and tired. She brought herself away from the disagreeably clinging thought by her usual method—imagining the sweet sharp sensation of being burned alive. ... (11-12)

She sees what is available to woman in society and realizes that it cannot define her to her satisfaction. Her tone is one of reluctant resignation. She is witness to other women's inability to find satisfaction in the role of wife with its narrow confines that leave one "worn and tired"--or alcoholic like her own mother. Even as she is being groomed, in a sense, by her father in the masculine discourse with all of its arbitrary privileges, she senses it is just a game that her father is playing to entertain himself. She must become aware of her
capacity to mimic the discourse rather than try to imitate it. She must make it a game for herself as well. This is a world she can never hope to enter, because she would have to enter as a man, or rather, like a man, and so she "accepts her lot" as woman, but we can see that she would actually prefer death. She is unable to see an alternative; she can't yet conceive of a possibility that she could reject her place in the patriarchal construct of family, but she knows that entering that state only offers numbness and destroys a woman's creativity. She sees marriage as a metaphorical death anyway, though one that is drawn out. She prefers a glorious death, one which lets the person know she is dying. Pain is more desirable than nothingness.

On Sundays Mr. Waite entertains, and Natalie must help her mother in the kitchen. Each Sunday she listens to her mother's soliloquies on marriage, witness to her mother's slow death. Her mother says:

"See that your marriage is happy, child. Don't ever let your husband know what you're thinking or doing. That's the way. My mother could have done anything, anything she wanted, my father would have let her, even though probably he wouldn't have known. Of course, by the time he died she was too old." (22)

Though told in a tone of caution, the assumption is still that Natalie will marry too, will renounce everything in order to succumb to the inevitable. Mrs. Waite speaks the truth, though she
does warn Natalie to resist, "I guess all young girls get to hate where they're living because they think a husband will be better. What happens is that a husband's the same, usually."

(24) Natalie is able to recognize her mother's anguish, but she feels no pity for her, only a frustration at the tedium of these speeches. She needs to bring some sensation to the void. She acts out her fantasy of being burned alive, only on a more modest scale:

Natalie had discovered that by a slight pressure on a back tooth she could make a small regular stirring pain that operated as a rhythmic counterpoint to her mother's voice; she would not for the world have told her mother that she had a cavity in her tooth, but it was a pleasant change in her body since the day before, and she enjoyed it. (24)

Natalie is confused over her place in the world. She cannot assume the role of her mother with its stifling restrictions, and yet she cannot enter the world of her father, because masculine discourse will always be foreign to her. Her utter confusion is demonstrated by the language used to describe her:

Sometimes, with a vast aching heartbreak, the great, badly contained intentions of creation, the poignant searching longings of adolescence overwhelmed her, and, shocked by her own capacity for creation, she held herself tight and unyielding, crying out silently.
something that might only be phrased as, "Let me take, let me create." (29)

Repressed power is revealed in this passage, power that cannot be articulated using her father's language. Natalie longs to speak, but she is unable at this point in the text, to allow the eruptions, the disruptions that her creations would cause. She holds herself, literally, in check. Irigaray, in "When Our Lips Speak Together," writes:

They neither taught us nor allowed us to say our multiplicity. That would have been improper speech. Of course, we were allowed—we had to?--display one truth even as we sensed but muffled, stifled another. Truth's other side--its complement? its remainder?--stayed hidden. Secret. (73)

"Improper speech" is that which wants to move away from what the father values. Mr. Waite believes in the life of the mind, logic and reason must not be disrupted by messy emotions. For example, one can admire something for its aesthetic value and discuss it analytically, but one mustn't revel in it. To do so is a disruption:

The mountains, full-bosomed and rich, extended themselves to her in a surge of emotion, turning silently as she came, receiving her, and Natalie, her mouth against the grass and her eyes tearful from looking into the sun, took the mountains to herself and whispered, "Sister, sister." "Sister,
She feels an affinity for that which is supposed to be inanimate, an object, according to the masculine. The immense emotions reveal anguished confusion, but also ecstasy, a kind of jouissance. The language used in the passage more than implies a desire for a sexual and psychic union of the feminine. Catharine Stimpson, in "The Lesbian Novel," writes that the term "sister" signifies a character's search for a moral and psychological equivalent (376). Right now the impact of this desire for a union is unable to be expressed, to be realized in any creative activity. She must "display one truth" to her father and the other must "stay hidden," "secret" for now. She can only whisper her desire. "... the gap between the poetry she wrote and the poetry she contained was, for Natalie, something unsolvable" (29). Unsolvable, because irreconcilable. The poetry that "her body" contains is that "improper speech," and it cannot be held in a form dictated by the father, the only form she knows or dates to use. In the same way that Cixous links poetry with theory in order to decenter our established notions of genre, she also links sexuality with textuality in order to undermine phallocentric logic. The body is not supposed to have a place in language, to grant it a place causes eruptions in the order.

At her father's literary party, Natalie meets Verna, an obese, though graceful woman who has changed her name from Edith, a name that didn't suit her taste. Verna, when she was
Edith, used to be interpreted by those around her, and now she interprets herself. The name Verna means spring equinox, signifying a new beginning. She has named herself, in a way, and advised Natalie to do the same. She tells Natalie: "Somewhere deep inside you, hidden by all sorts of fears and worries and petty little thoughts, is a clean pure being made of radiant colors" (37). Natalie is grateful and feels that someone has glimpsed her soul, and understood. Because of Verna's words, she is able to recognize the vision that is yet unnamed. Verna, though she is obese and therefore undesirable by society's terms, doesn't feel threatened by Natalie's youth or more attractive appearance. She affirms her, calling her "a chosen child" (38).

We can juxtapose Verna, who almost seems like a female deity, with the character who is only referred to as "the man in the big chair." Verna helps empower Natalie, urges her to find her "radiant colors." She feels no loss to her own self when helping to elevate Natalie's self. "The man in the big chair," however, wants to belittle Natalie, put her in what he sees as her place, wherever someone young and female is supposed to reside. Their conversation consists of the man trying to assert his dominance over Natalie. He says, "Your father tells me that you're quite the little writer" (51). Natalie is aware of what he is trying to do and resists by saying, "I suppose you probably want to write too?" (51). She exults then, because he reacts in surprise to her "one-up-Manship," but her inexperience and
insecurity defeat her and she becomes confused, losing the thread of the conversation. Irigaray writes, "If you're reluctant to speak, isn't it because we are afraid of not speaking well?" (75). Under this system of mastery, Natalie does not "speak well."

"Perhaps someday, Natalie thought quickly, chiding herself, I'll learn to talk for a longer time and not stop to think about it in the middle" (50).

Her confusion is apparent: she cannot speak, she can't even hear what he is saying anymore, but because she is trying to operate under "the man's" code, she dares not ask him to repeat himself. Finally, "I didn't hear you," she said suddenly, frightening herself almost to tears, "I was thinking about myself instead" (51). Right away, she knows that this answer isn't acceptable to the system, but she's too far along now. She has already created a disruption by her almost involuntary admission of narcissism:

"Thinking what about yourself?" the man asked.

"About how wonderful I am," Natalie said. She smiled. Now I can get up and walk away, she thought, the faster the better. She started to get up, but the man got up first, and took ahold of her arm.

"About how wonderful she is," he said as though to himself, "Thinking about how wonderful she is." (51)

The man can't bear that she should speak this aloud. To him, it is an insult, a detraction from his proven superiority. He leads her into the woods, demanding that she "Tell me what she
thinks is so wonderful about herself" (52). He can only focus on what she said, but Natalie cannot remember or is unwilling to tell him. The narrative masks its position at this point in the text, mirroring Natalie's own disorientation. There is no definition of time or space. A fantasy about an imagined murder for which she is a suspect is embedded in the narrative. Her conversation with the imagined detective overlaps with her conversation with the man. The narrative also contains a running internal dialogue which is a reminiscence of her childhood. We are jolted into the present tense, though, by the man's repeated insistence that she "tell [me]." Natalie's narrative is multi-level; he has only one.

He finally gives up and there is silence, a silence that is frightening and even more disorienting to Natalie. She has forgotten why they are in the woods: "When the man beside her spoke she was relieved: there was another human being, then caught in this silence and wandering among the watchful trees, another mortal" (54). She doesn't remember his rudeness, his arrogant behavior toward her; she thinks of him as a human presence that will help ease her loneliness and fear. To Natalie's thinking, a lifetime has passed since they were at the party, but the man's single mindedness is still focused on her outrageous statement:

"Tell me what you thought was so wonderful about yourself," the man said; his voice was muted. (54)
The change in verb tense from present to past and his direct address of Natalie is ominous. The song-song tone that occurs when the man says "Tell me what she thinks" is so wonderful about herself" is one of an adult to a child and less threatening. By changing the pronoun to "you" he indicates a shift in his perspective of her; he confronts their adversarial position to each other. And by changing the verb tense, he indicates that what is wonderful will soon be no more. He will see to that by raping her. His dominance and her subordination will be realized then in the most literal way. The actual rape occurs in a gap of the text, but Natalie's last reflection should be enough to indicate her feelings on the subject, and to silence those critics who call this incident a "seduction."

"Oh my dear God sweet Christ, Natalie thought, so sickened she nearly said it aloud, is he going to touch me?" (54). And if that isn't enough, her words the morning after indicate that she is not someone who has just been "seduced." She repeats almost as a chant, "'I don't remember, nothing happened'" over and over again, thus beginning her fairly successful repression of the act.

But it has changed her. It has made her realize the danger of embracing the masculine, the danger of trying to emulate, trying to compete on masculine terms, because one is always doomed to failure. The masculine cannot bear to witness one who celebrates herself, in herself. The masculine always must intrude. The split between the masculine and the feminine is made apparent here. The patriarchal binary opposition of
father/mother subsumes the mother to the father, forces the child to choose her model of identification, and of course, since all binary oppositions are set up to reflect the masculine positively, the child cannot help but choose the father. Now, after her rape, this binary opposition is thrown into confusion. Because she can be raped, Natalie's choice of identification becomes dangerously ironic, and she must return to the mother. At the party, Natalie's mother, in her drunken state, warned her about what Mr. Waite would do if he felt threatened: "All he wants is no one to think they can be the same as he is, or equal to him, or something. And you watch out—the minute you start getting too big, he'll be after you, too" (46). Because of the rape, Natalie realizes that she has been brought down a peg. Though she was not brought down by her father as her mother predicted, she still realizes that he played a part in her rape. She wouldn't be able to recognize his complicity if she had not been introduced to how the masculine system operates. At breakfast she is silent:

She knew, incredibly, that if she spoke she would tell them what had happened; not because she so much desired to tell, that she wanted to tell even them, but because this was not a personal manifestation, but had changed them all in changing the world, in the sense that they only existed in Natalie's imagination anyway, so that the revolution in the world had altered their faces and made their hearts smaller. (58)
This passage illustrates her new-found ability to see how the patriarchy works. It is as though the violation of rape has forced her to look at the structures that she formerly ignored or denied. The construct of the family is one of the structures that helps firmly ground the patriarchy; it is made visible to Natalie now and all of its falseness and danger is revealed. The realization is painful and she doesn't know what to do with it. "I wish I were dead, Natalie thought concretely" (58).

Natalie is sent to an all girls liberal arts college. She may have recognized her oppression before she left home, but she hasn't yet found an alternative, so for the present, she just wants to fit in. Since she isn't a former prom queen, though, she has a difficult time being noticed. Her ambivalence is clear during the scene of freshman initiation. She wants these girls to notice and like her but at the same time their actions are abhorrent to her. The initiation itself appears as an enactment of their own oppression under patriarchy, with the older girls willingly playing the part of the oppressor. Natalie and the girls entering first are pushed because they answer a question but: "After the first few girls, their mentor was tired of pushing them—perhaps she had worn out her rage, or her arms?" (75). Natalie sees what the other girls fail to see, that they are imitating the power structure of the patriarchy with all of its infliction of pain and humiliation on others. They are imitating, not mimicking, because mimicry implies a consciousness of the mimicked object's flaws. The
girl's rage is caused by her own powerlessness under such a system. The initiators then interrogate each girl, asking her whether or not she's a virgin and making her tell a dirty joke. This scene is important in its mirroring of patriarchal values. Virginity is defined only by its relation to the masculine; the masculine has placed an arbitrary value upon it. No woman is a virgin in and of herself. Virginity is an indicator of whether a woman is, in Irigaray's words, "one as yet unmarked by them, for them" (74). This initiation can be seen as an initiation to their own internalization of oppression.

And the girls want to pass the tests; the first girl off the stool is described:

... she had at that moment taken on a protective coloration among the general run of girls in the house; she was not in any way eccentric, but a good, normal, healthy, American college girl, with ideals and ambitions and looking forward to a family of her own; she had merged. (77)

Natalie knows that she can never achieve the status of one that is untouched, therefore marketable. She has been raped, but one's willingness or unwillingness in the act is irrelevant. When she assumes the stool and defies the order, refusing to say if she is a virgin, she thinks she is helping the other girls to resist as well. But she realizes the futility of this when they begin chanting that she is a "bad sport." An interesting authorial comment is inserted into this scene:
What a silly routine, Natalie thought, not realizing . . . she was jeopardizing . . . her own future for four years and perhaps for the rest of her life; how even worse than the actual being a bad sport was the state of mind which led her into defiance of this ring of placid, masked girls, with their calm futures ahead and their regular pasts proven beyond a doubt; how one person . . . might lose a seat among them by questions, by rebellion, by anything except a cheerful smile and the resolution to hurt other people. (79)

She does "lose a seat among them" because of her unconventional actions, but at this point, she doesn't understand why. As she leaves the room of initiation, she thinks: "Follow me, she prayed to the girls sitting in the ring, follow me and a new world is made; but no one . . . noticed Natalie by now" (80). Of course they will not follow her; she has broken with the rules and she is already invisible to them. Later she will learn that the girls think she is "crazy." A refusal to conform, to submit, is always more easily dismissed if the patriarchal order can categorize the refusal as "madness."

She is torn by her resistance, feeling a compulsion to preserve the status quo and feeling herself explode. The contrast between her letters home to her father and the entries in her secret journal illustrates the rupture. Her letters home are those of a girl who has no conflicting feelings about anything:
"I'm looking forward to coming home for a weekend but guess I'll be too busy for a while yet. I'm working hard and having a fine time, and I'm very glad to be here." (83). The tone is perfunctory and passionless. Irigaray writes, "Indifferent one, keep still. If you move, you disturb their order. You cause everything to fall apart. You break the circle of their habits, the circularity of their exchanges, their knowledge, their desire, their world" (71). Natalie cannot help moving, evolving with her new level of consciousness, but Irigaray is right; to move too much or too rapidly is to destroy their perceptions of order, and Natalie, in her ambivalence, still feels the need to protect her father. Irigaray asks, "And what about your life? You must pretend to receive it from them" (71). So Natalie pretends, while in her journal, she gives herself life, "writes herself":

Dearest dearest darling most important dearest darling Natalie--this is me talking, your own priceless own Natalie, and I just wanted to tell you... you are the best, and they will know it someday, and someday no one will dare laugh again when you are near. (91)

When she meets Elizabeth Langdon, her English professor's wife, her ambivalence toward the patriarchal constructs, particularly marriage, becomes more profound. Like Natalie's mother, Elizabeth Langdon is an alcoholic dying a slow and boring death. Natalie is witness to the decay of a person, "Elizabeth Langdon, her own door closed behind her, had
changed, as a bird stepping again inside its cage is no longer a creature of circle and parabola, but a hopping thing" (99). Mrs. Langdon, who is only twenty-one, confides that she was married before she finished school. "You didn't finish college before you married?" asked Natalie with interest; here was an achievement to be envied" (103). Even after all she's seen regarding marriage's destruction of a woman, it is still viewed as an "achievement." This double vision illuminates Natalie's terror of not existing, because she knows that society demands that woman be defined by her marital status. Heterosexuality assumes that the correct sexuality is the kind that has a One/Other construct. Irigaray, in This Sex Which Is Not One, argues that this kind of construct really posits a sameness, rather than a difference, because the Other is subsumed to the One anyway, allowing for no play. Natalie senses this static arrangement and fears it, but realizes no alternative yet.

Not only is Natalie caught by society's and her own assumptions that "normal" women marry, indeed want to marry, but she still desires the supposed status that a knowledge of the masculine discourse brings. She wants Arthur Langdon to value her words and thoughts, not realizing that the words and thoughts she presents to him are not her own, but instead an imitation of masculine discourse. She must learn to consciously mimic in order to empower herself in the language. This is after all that has happened: the rape, the other girls' rejection of her, and her partial rejection of her father's imposition of
his discourse upon her:

He was subtly familiar to her, as though his words were meaningful on more than one level, as though there were an established communication between them in the course of five minutes, as though, actually he were clearly aware that she could talk more intelligently than this, and was waiting indulgently for the strangeness of the environment to wear off before any conversation began. (106)

Of course he is familiar to her, he is really just another version of her father who only saw in Natalie what suited him. Mr. Langdon will not see Natalie either, but only a reflection of himself, as long as the reflection is favorable and not too large. When she meets Vicki and Anne, two of Mr. Langdon's other students, she is puzzled by the attention he bestows on such vacuous creatures. Her impression was that he valued the intelligence she was capable of displaying, not coquetry. She doesn't realize that he values whichever pose feeds his ego the most at the time, and that she really has nothing to do with it other than to serve as an interchangeable vehicle for his self-satisfaction. We are witness to Natalie being ulled in both directions when she begins to assume both the traditional feminine pose and to speak in the masculine discourse. She visits Mr. Langdon in his office:

She moved respectfully into the room, thinking that she was the kind of woman who knows when to keep
quiet, and sat docilely in the chair beside the desk, her hands folded, and her eyes discreetly turned away from him to show that she was not in the least interested in what he was doing. (129)

To choose one or the other as one's point of reference is too confining; to attempt to embrace both simultaneously appears ridiculous. The most telling example of her conflict surfaces at the cocktail party given for the Langdons by Vicki, Anne, and Natalie when Natalie says, "He [her father] said if you hadn't read his piece in the latest Passionate Review, I could use its arguments to confound you" (160). The context of this statement is a superficial cocktail party conversation with both Vicki and Anne displaying their capacities for coquetry. Natalie speaks, using Anne's and Vicki's flirtatious tone, because she is able to see the attention they receive for adopting such a pose. They are rewarded for assuming their disguises. And she indicates her possession of the father's words; she literally possesses the words. She will make no mistakes, no eruptions are possible now that she owns both modes of speaking. In a sense, she is emptying her arsenals, bringing out both weapons. And the metaphor isn't so far off, since both frames of reference are very combative, both destroy either oneself or others.

Arthur Langdon's level of tolerance is as shallow as Mr. Waite's. He must have his logic and reason, his correctness. There is no room for probing, seeking questions that disrupt the imposed order. He forces Natalie to second-guess herself in the
same way that her father does. She asks him why it is so important to create, genuinely desiring an answer, not realizing that their reasons for creating would be vastly different from each other. He is impatient with her, though, chiding her for her silly questions:

It was precisely as Natalie’s father would have rebuked her; she sat back in her chair and thought, I will never ask him this again, and then thought, what a silly person I am, and now he does think I am a fool. (132)

Thus, he effectively silences her originality with derision. She becomes even more afraid of "not speaking well."

Her developing state of mind, her gradual movement away from what is expected of her, is revealed in her journal:

And of course now I know that it isn’t important about other people, and only the people who don’t dare be all alone need friends. I don’t suppose I will need any friends or anything for the rest of my life, now that I am not frightened. (136)

Along with her wish for autonomy she also exhibits her shifting of patriarchal definitions. She writes of being in love, saying that she could only love someone “who was superior to me in everything” (137). Here she seems to be saying that the person must be superior by patriarchal standards. Natalie recognizes the impossibility of this. She expresses her desire to tell either her father or Mr. Langdon about her discovery, but she knows
she cannot: "... it is not really possible to go up to some man and say that you could never really love any person who was not superior to you in everything and let them see clearly that they are not that" (137). She is not able to speak her desire to the two men who are most integral to her life, because she knows that their egos couldn't help relating such a confession to themselves. Here she glimpses the self-absorption of the patriarchy. She tries to undo the phallogocentrism. Phallogocentrism denotes a system in which the phallus is privileged as the symbol or source of power. Derrida calls the conjunction of phallogocentrism and logocentrism, phallogocentrism (Moi 179). Natalie's definition of superiority is not the opposite of inferiority as the dualistic thinking of the patriarchy tries to dictate. Rather, it is an ability to synthesize, to become symbiotic. She writes of this process:

... he would have to be very close to me so that our minds were running exactly together, coinciding, and what I told him would not be told, really, but only an echo of the way both our minds were going, and would sort of cancel out. And there, you see, is what I mean by superior, because after all this he would have to have enough left over after he had taken all my mind, so that he could keep on thinking by himself, after I was nothing. But of course I don't believe anybody really exists like that. (138)

The relationship described above implies that "the canceling out"
can work both ways, thus allowing the meaning of superiority to slide into inferiority and back again. By loosening up the definition, Natalie is, as Cixous explains, trying to "undermine the dominant phallogocentric logic, split open the closure of the binary opposition and revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality" (Moi 108).

Many thoughts and events contribute to Natalie's eventual break with patriarchal values. She remembers as a child finding a "wishing stone" and telling her mother that she had wished for a bicycle, and her mother had begged Mr. Waite for the bicycle, only to be laughingly vetoed:

... these cynical later days, Natalie suspected that her mother had been right. It was less important, Natalie thought, to allow her father's humor to be transmitted to his children than to keep alive her mother's faith in magic. (139)

Faith in magic indicates a leap from the harsh cause and effect logic of patriarchy. Her desire for magic, even though it isn't spoken, will help facilitate her departure.

Primarily though, it is her witnessing the slow moral and physical deterioration of Elizabeth Langdon that leads her to reject the whole system, want to move outside of it. She may have witnessed her mother's decline, but it was from a child's perspective, a child who was favored by her mother's oppressor, so her memories cannot help being clouded. But this situation is different; she is given the part of an adult. The first explosion
of the facade occurs when Natalie enters the Langdons' home to find a drunken Elizabeth passed out on a couch that is on fire. Natalie saves her, and Elizabeth confides her unhappiness in marriage. When Arthur returns to the chaos, Natalie feels "the same familiar shock of finding him slightly smaller than she had remembered him" (145). His stature is diminishing in her mind as she witnesses his cruel indifference toward his wife, the same indifference that she wasn't able to see before with her own mother and father.

At the same time that she is participating in the Langdons' marriage, her father is becoming more god-like in his letters to her, demanding her allegiance. He writes: "My ambitions for you are slowly being realized, and, even though you are unhappy, console yourself with the thought that it was part of my plan for you to be unhappy for awhile" (151). This statement reveals the arrogance and self-centeredness of the masculine system. Thinking oneself the cause of another's happiness or woe gives one the feeling of great power. Mr. Waite cannot see that Natalie may be working from a perspective other than the one he has chosen for her. He even wishes to dictate her beliefs in the name of her happiness: "Do not under any circumstances allow Arthur Langdon to convert you to any philosophical viewpoint until you have first consulted me" (152). He is well aware of the desire the masculine system feels for reproducing itself. Then he reminds her of the pact that Irigaray writes of: "And what about your life? You must pretend to receive it from them.
You are only a small, insignificant receptacle, subject to their power alone" (71). Mr. Waite writes: "If you abandon me, you lose yourself" (152).

Natalie's final, psychic break with the existing system occurs because of the cocktail party she, Vicki, and Anne give for the Langdons. At the party she watches while Anne and Vicki get Elizabeth drunk in order to be alone with Mr. Langdon. They are unable to make the connection that Elizabeth's condition is due to her marriage to Mr. Langdon, and only want to usurp her position. Natalie is the one who must take the now undesirable Elizabeth home. She hears her repeat again and again, "I want to die," finally saying helplessly, 'Anne is a bitch and I used to be a bitch and now I'm not anymore!' (172). She thus speaks her hopeless situation. Under patriarchy, the only power a woman has comes when she attains the precarious position somewhere between virgin and wife, the position of bitch. Only the bitch is able to make demands, even though those demands can only lead toward two ends: the respectability of wifehood or the notoriety of whore. Either way the bitch is tamed. And both situations sap a woman's power in herself and make her a slave to her function under patriarchy. Natalie wants to remain within the gaps of the virgin/wife opposition, because that is where a woman's power is. She flees to the space between the either/or.

When Natalie returns to the rooms which Vicki and Anne share, the three of them are gone as she expected. Her visits to
The Langdons become as perfunctory as her letters to her father.
She doesn't know why she even comes anymore, because she is able to see behind the mask. She has seen how masculine love operates, that it is a cyclical, dangerous dance which appropriates a woman and then annihilates her without killing her. She has seen the annihilation of both her mother and Elizabeth and knows that Anne could very easily be next. The patriarchy is indiscriminate in its choices. She is disoriented by this knowledge and angry because now there is no place for her that she is able to see. She leaves one of the Langdons' parties and, once outside, meets Tony. She tells her of her confusion:

"This damn place," Natalie said, "it always turns out not to have the things I want, after all. I get up inside and I knock over an ashtray and everyone looks at me and here I come rushing outdoors because I think it's where I want to be, and then when I get out here it turns out to be the same old place I passed coming in." (191)

This mundane little speech becomes a metaphor for Natalie's dilemma—her discomfort in assuming either disguise, masculine or feminine as the patriarchy defines the two in opposition to each other. Irigaray writes of the pain woman feels in this disguise:

On the outside, you attempt to conform to an order which is alien to you. Exiled from yourself, you fuse with everything you encounter. You shine where...
comes near you. You become whatever you touch. In your hunger to find yourself, you move indefinitely far from yourself, from me. Assuming one model after another, one master after another, changing your face, form, and language according to the power that dominates you. Sundered. (73)

Tony realizes that Natalie must make her own move away from his system and toward her, but she gives her a clue. "That's because you came out the same door," suggested Tony (191).

This is an important point in the text. Natalie is manipulated by patriarchal assumptions about what constitutes a woman. A heterosexual identification is the primary assumption, with the Other subsumed to the One, ignoring all difference. And Natalie holds the same assumption, because isn't she a product of the patriarchy after all? She has rejected the imposed role, but she has not yet learned that there is any alternative other thanaloneness. It is here that the text becomes a lesbian text, lends itself to a lesbian reading. Bonnie Zimmerman, in her article "What Has never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism," speaks of the difficulty of defining the lesbian text, arguing that "the critic must first define the term 'lesbian' and then determine its applicability to both writer and text, sorting out the relation of literature to life" (187).

First of all, the definition of lesbian. So as to avoid a meaning that ignores distinctions and tends to universalize itself, lesbian must be strategically defined as an affectional and
sexual identification with women. Adrienne Rich argues for a "lesbian continuum" that is wide enough to include all women who affirm each other, but Zimmerman argues that to "so reduce the meaning of lesbian, is to eliminate lesbianism as a meaningful category" (184). And though it isn't necessary or desirable to focus entirely on the physical aspect of lesbian identification, to ignore the body altogether is to overlook the revolutionary possibilities evoked by women bringing pleasure to women. How is the term lesbian applicable to the text and to Shirley Jackson? Jackson was married her whole adult life, and there is no biographical evidence that she identified herself as a lesbian, but as Zimmerman admits: "If a text lends itself to a lesbian reading, then no amount of biographical 'proof' ought to be necessary to establish it as a lesbian text" (185). And for the critic to ignore the lesbian 'nature of Hangesaman is to exhibit a heterosexism that is shocking in its refusal to see.

In a letter to her father, telling him of her inability to come home as planned, Natalie reveals her conscious shift of perspective when she writes of Tony:

By the way, you remember Tony? the girl I wrote you about? Well, I finally met her and I like her a lot. She lives in a house on the other side of the campus and yesterday afternoon we walked about four miles through the country just beyond the campus. I think she's terribly interesting. (193)

She chooses to stay with Tony rather than go home to visit her.
father. Her transfer of identification is masked by her use of superficial language, and in fact at this point in the text, the reader really does not know of Tony's and Natalie's intensity of feeling for each other. Their relationship develops in the gaps of the narrative, and the reader only learns of its existence when Natalie returns from the visit home she had to make over Thanksgiving break. At this stage, though, we can only witness the necessary breakdown of Natalie's formerly held beliefs under the patriarchal system, her necessary questioning of everything, including herself: "... suppose that some minute, any minute, she should suddenly turn, move her head, speak strangely, and find herself not at all real?" (194). She needs to realize, in order to reject, that the person called Natalie Waite, is defined solely in relation to her function in the patriarchal system. That this definition has been constructed by others.

Natalie's visit home on Thanksgiving is a painful journey marked by the realization made concrete that she is not who she thought she was, but rather someone "made up," invented. Her new knowledge evokes a dramatic emotional response toward her father, her creator:

She was almost irresistibly tempted to tell him all about herself, to justify somehow the facts of herself that he did not seem to understand, and which, so horribly acute to her, seemed to him only to point up a statement about general personalities; she wanted to pound on the desk before him and
shout, "What do you know?" walk wildly up and

down the room, pulling words from the very air to
tell him about herself, and she wanted to shout, and
to stamp, and to cry. . . . (205-6)

Her renunciation of a rigid patriarchal definition is complete
when she decides to leave a day early, even though it means
returning to a lonely dormitory. She takes up her raincoat to
go. "... the raincoat was in itself a symbol of going and
coming, of wishing and fearing, or the going out of a warm,
firelit house into the heartbreaking cold" (211). Natalie would
rather leave the "security" of the family construct, because she
sees it as illusory. She would rather reject the complacency and
exist outside of it. Even though one may be cold and heart-
broken, at the very least, one is able to feel.

She no longer sees herself as an object, defined and
dictated to by those around her who can only see her in
relation to themselves. She feels a sense of completeness in
herself, a sense of her subjecthood:

... there was no time now for remorse over the
perfunctory way she had treated her loving mother
and father and even her brother--what was important
at this moment was the quick control of muscles all
up and down her leg, bent now . . . the narrow
solidity of her fingers . . . the unity that began
with her eyes and forehead and tied to her back and
into her legs again. . . . (214)
The relationship of Natalie and Tony is one of marginality to the patriarchy, and there is power in their marginal position, power in their rejection of a rigidly defined "normalcy." But they must face the ridicule of an unaccepting society. The patriarchy displays its immense capacity to ingrain its values deeply when the other girls in the dormitory are the ones responsible for the attempted public humiliation. Natalie visits Tony: "When she hesitated before the door, she heard the great mocking silence up and down the hall, and an echoing burst of laughter and jeering which almost obscured her knock" (227). But once inside, Natalie, and Tony especially, are indifferent to their cruel taunting; they would be oblivious if it weren't for the noise. Tony is able to go "casually over to the door," opening it. "'Get away,' she said amiably" (229). Eventually, she must resort to scare tactics: "Tony again went almost silently to the door, opened it, and with a large and menacing gesture drove away the girls outside" (230). She is aware that her difference should be enough to send them shrieking away. Ambiguity is not allowed by the patriarchy, particularly sexual ambiguity. But the girls' curiosity is piqued to an extraordinary degree by the presence of this oddity. They venture back to Tony's door, and she must ask them to leave once again. "A confused murmur outside, and then Tony said, 'What would I expect of you, poor things? Go off to bed--there won't be another sound from here'" (231). She understands that their consciousness is submerged, that they will probably never be
able to realize their oppression enough to attempt to subvert it, but instead will do just the opposite, aid in their own oppression by rooting out and inflicting pain upon the ones who stray.

Natalie and Tony valorize the things that the patriarchy tries to suppress. Through Tony, Natalie has found her way back to a sense of magic. They read the fortune telling cards called the Tarot, and "of all the suits, Tony most favored swords, and the card named Page of Swords was always her particular card; Natalie liked the card named the Magician, and thought that the face on the card resembled her own" (229). These cards that they have chosen are called their significator cards. Natalie's card, the magician, is the first card in the entire suit of the Tarot. The magician is called the conductor of souls, changing things from one to the other, male to female, light to dark, etc. The magician points to creative abilities which have not yet been made manifest in one's life. Tony's card, the page of swords, marks a sense of freedom or childlike curiosity but also denotes that one has made oneself a victim. He has made or will make another a victim. It is a card that indicates a refusal to accept responsibility. The cards that Natalie and Tony have chosen for their significators are both androgynous. This interpretation of the Tarot is a commonly accepted one.

In choosing androgynous cards, both women indicate that they see freedom in claiming sexual ambiguity. By actually reading the cards as they are laid out in the narrative, Tony's
ambivalence about a movement toward womanhood, toward matur-
ity, is revealed. Not that androgyny is a sign of immaturity, 
but Natalie's magician, though androgynous, is a card of 
change, a card of inclusion; while Tony's card of choice is one 
of pettiness. "... the page of swords lay upon the queen of 
cups" (228). The queen of cups is one of the most powerful 
cards in the Tarot, personifying the mother instinct but 
remaining completely inaccessible to males. It is a card that 
shows an encounter with the world of feeling, a time of 
mystery, and a deepening of inner life. For Tony to lay her 
significator card across the queen of cups, thereby acting as a 
barrier, indicates her inability to accept her own development of 
self. Later when another, similar card appears, she says: 
"'Damned queen of pentacles'" (230). This card is another of 
the most powerful of queens, archetypal of the earth mother 
goddess. The appearance of the queen of pentacles indicates a 
need to understand the expression of true sensuality and value 
of the body. Even the title of this text, Hagsaman, finds its 
origin in the Tarot. The Hanged Man card implies an acceptance 
of waiting in darkness, a state of suspension where one is 
tortured by anxiety and fear that one's sacrifice might in the 
end come to nothing. One must be willing to abandon all that 
was previously held sacred so that a greater consciousness 
might be obtained. This elaborate explanation of the cards' 
positions seems a digression, but to claim a valorization of the 
embrace of magic without actually examining the magic's possible
meaning is contradictory. Besides, I think that the meaning that is coded in the Tarot reading provides answers to the problematic ending of this text.

Tony's positioning of the cards indicates an ominous self-centeredness, but for now she introduces Natalie to a sense of freedom in herself. They are able to move in and out of the imposed order because they are indifferent to the rules and to the people who enforce them. Their total rejection allows this indifference to form, time, or decorum:

They got out of bed together, enjoying the quietness of the morning when everyone else was asleep, and enjoying too, the feeling of being together without fear... Together, warning one another not to laugh, they went down the hall full of the sounds of sleep from rooms on either side, into the showers, where they bathed together, washing one another's backs and trying to splash without sound. (232)

They use the early morning as their special domain, a practice that allows them to slip in and out of the rigorous routine, unnoticed. Tony sees herself as being completely outside the established system. In a sense, she has internalized her marginal position to it. On the bus, during their flight from the school, she says:

"Imagine, always pretending to run a world. Always imitating the sort of people they think they might be
If the world were the sort of world it isn't.

Pretending to be words like 'normal' and 'whole-some' and 'honest' and 'decent' and 'self-respecting' and all the rest, when even the words aren't real. Imagine, being people." (260)

With Tony, Natalie is able to be honest and childlike without fear that she will be ridiculed. Their conversation is a mixture of an ongoing Tarot reading, revelations about their childhoods, and a make-believe dialogue about make-believe people. It follows no logical pattern, enforces no rules, but it serves their need and they are able to understand it. Their conversation is outside the masculine discourse, indeed contrary to masculine discourse. They make a joke out of Arthur Langdon's name, using it to designate people in their made-up world. And animals, in particular, dogs. "'Dear old pathetic old Langdon, she'll be so glad to see us, jumping all over everybody and barking!'" (243). The name of Langdon, formerly one associated with a respectful attitude, is now treated with irreverence. By so manipulating his name, using it wrongly in a sense, they are able to strip the name of its previous power, its ability to command respect.

The ending of this text is problematic. It is ambiguous, and it reveals an ambivalence that was seemingly resolved earlier. In the middle of their aimless journey, Tony asks Natalie, "'Will you come somewhere with me? It's a long way'" (255). Natalie, who trusts Tony completely, agrees without even
asking where they are going. Tony then takes her to the edge of town to some woods. It is dark by the time they reach the woods, and Tony's erratic behavior causes Natalie fear, makes her remember those other woods, where she was "raped. "... was it that way? Twigs over her mouth?" (270).

Earlier they had invented a game in which the whole world conspired to monitor the movements of Natalie and Tony. "Do you suppose," Natalie said, "that they are each assigned a certain area to guard, and that they have to get back to it to watch for the next ones?" (260). On a childlike level, this game serves to amuse them while they are riding the bus, but on another level it reveals their difference from everyone else, their separateness. This separateness must be maintained or else there is danger. A man with only one arm tries to initiate a conversation, and Tony sees it as an intrusion. She says:

"... it frightens me when people try to grab at us like that. I can't sit still and just let people watch me and talk to me and ask me questions... they want to pull us back, and start us all over again just like them and doing the things they want to do and acting the way they want to act and saying and thinking and wanting all the things they live with everyday." (255)

Tony's admission indicates that there can be no compromises in one's dealings with the patriarchy. Even a one-armed man, who, by society's standards, is emasculated, holds danger for
the two women.

In the woods their invented game takes on an ominous over-
tone. The coded words of the game function as a facade for
Tony's attempted mastery over Natalie, a mastery that is con-
fusing to the reader and to Natalie. Mary Rice explains this
scene by arguing that "For Tony, lesbianism is a reality and
like most realities, complex. Wanting to make love with Natalie,
she seems to see it as an initiation that Natalie must endure
and she must steel herself for" (60). This reading fails to take
into account that Natalie has not been resistant to Tony in any
way; previous passages would indicate that they have already
made love. Tony's behavior toward Natalie is inconsistent and
cruel, considering the direction their relationship had been going.

Natalie desires intimacy; Tony destroys their previous
intimacy by her actions in the woods, wants to back it up, in a
sense, return to a separateness even from each other. Why?
Perhaps her significator card has something to do with her
frame of mind. The page of swords is the perpetual child,
desiring no responsibility. And her refusal of the queen of cups
and the queen of pentacles indicates a rejection of a role where
she must be the mature nurturer. Or, perhaps she isn't able to
envision where she and Natalie are to go from here. It is less
threatening to remain hidden in the woods, taking one's pleasure
in forbidden doses, than to attempt to forge something different,
something where two could be separate together. "Of course
I've been here before," Tony said, surprised. 'How did you
think I knew how to "come?" (274) Tony's way of thinking isn't enough for Natalie, though. She doesn't want to lose the symbiosis that she thought she and Tony had attained, but she will not view their relationship as a trivial game. Natalie calls out, "'Tony, come on back with me,' but there was no answer" (276). Tony has made her choice to remain alone, and Natalie must return to the college by herself. "As she had never been before, she was now alone, and grown-up, and powerful, and not at all afraid" (280). This last line would indicate that she too, finds strength in the solitariness that allows her to pass unnoticed. "Pass" in the sense that the lesbian must hide her sexuality in a hostile, heterosexist world.

From a contemporary perspective, this ending, with its insistence on the separation of women, is unsatisfying. But Jackson was writing in the 1950s, a period absent of an organized women's movement, thus absent of a visible lesbian community to which she could look for a model. Because of Jackson's own separateness, as both a woman and as a woman writer, the inevitable outcome of Natalie's and Tony's together-ness is separation. But the process of rejection of patriarchal values and language, and the embrace of the feminine, for however brief a moment, is what makes this text revolutionary in its vision.
CHAPTER III

We Have Always Lived in the Castle

Defamiliarizing the Danger: An Inversion

We Have Always Lived in the Castle (1962), like Hangsaman, is a novel that concerns itself with the empowerment of its female protagonists. In this text, though, unlike Jackson's earlier Hangsaman (1951), the two women are allowed their togetherness and their separateness from the rest of the world. Natalie and Tony of Hangsaman seek a marginality, but they must remain within the stifling patriarchal order, and they must seek the empowering position of marginality alone without the strength that another like oneself can provide. Merricat and Constance of We Have Always Lived in the Castle, however, attain a position of marginality in every respect. They are able to renounce the restrictive patriarchal construct completely, removing themselves both physically and psychologically.

This text is subversive on many levels. On the level of content, our expectations are upset when we discover that the novel is about a young girl, Mary Katherine (Merricat), who murders everyone in her family except her sister Constance, and her Uncle Julian, who accidentally survives. Other than vague hints of her family's oppressive presence, no specific reasons...
are given for their murders. Since she is only twelve when she kills them, no one suspects that she would be capable of such a crime, so she gets away with it. In fact, we are well into the novel before our suspicions are confirmed and we learn that Merricat is the murderer. While the plot of the novel is subversive of patriarchy in its movement toward woman's taking control and venting rage, rather than relinquishing control and turning rage inward, the real subversion comes in our acceptance of, even applause for, Merricat's actions. The narrative is first person seen through Merricat's sharp eyes; by doing so, Jackson effectively legitimizes her actions. The point is not whether murder is or is not a valid response to oppression—many would argue that it is not—the point is that Merricat's actions, however they may contradict our own morals, are still justified by us as readers. We are forced to examine the ambivalence we feel toward the bourgeois morality of "thou shalt not kill" and its relationship with political oppression. Lynnette Carpenter, in her excellent article, "The Establishment and Preservation of Female Power in Shirley Jackson's We Have Always Lived in the Castle," touches on this point briefly when she includes a quote by a reviewer who tries to explain the novel's effect: "The book manages the ironic miracle of convincing the reader that a house inhabited by a lunatic, a poisoner, and a pyromaniac is a world more rich in sympathy, love, and subtlety than the real world outside" (36). This reviewer reveals his or her contradictory feelings, wanting to recognize the beauty of
Merricat's and Constance's world, but being reluctant to do so because of Merricat's extraordinary route to such beauty. Her actions are extreme by patriarchal standards; and extreme actions denote lunacy or madness. Other critics call Merricat "mad" as well. Jack Sullivan calls Merricat, Jackson's "maddest, most dangerous character," but he also says that she "is the only character to come out happy in all of Jackson's fiction" (1031). The ability of both of these critics to see the richness of Merricat's self-created world while at the same time labeling her "mad" reveals their struggle as readers to avoid being implicated in her deeds. If we argue for her madness, her actions remain on an individual level. Only individuals, usually women of course, go "mad." (We equate Merricat with an adult woman even though she was twelve at the time of the murders, and only eighteen at the time of her narration. Adult women are compelled to identify with female children because traditionally both positions offer little power or control over one's own life.)

If we allow ourselves to see the "sanity" that is really there, then we help to kindle a revolution, because if we approve of a "sane" woman killing her family to escape oppression, what's to stop other women from doing likewise? Our assumptions are that "sane" women do not try aggressively to avoid patriarchal oppression; our assumptions are that "sane" women submit.

Wolfgang Iser in "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," argues that:

The efficacy of a literary text is brought about
by the apparent evocation and subsequent negation of the familiar. What at first seemed to be an affirmation of our assumptions leads to our own rejection of them, thus tending to prepare us for a re-orientation.

(64)

Through Merricat as narrator, Jackson prepares her readers for a re-orientation, a world minus the patriarchy. And I think those readers who struggle against that re-orientation serve to illustrate just how effective the text is in its subversion. They want to participate in the beauty of the alternative world, but they resist being implicated in the task of getting there.

Merricat is not "mad," even by patriarchal standards. Readers cannot fail to see her sanity. Unstable individuals do not exhibit such consistency in their thoughts and actions. Carpenter states:

Many readers express discomfort at being made to identify with a madwoman, but is Merricat mad? If paranoia depends upon delusion, Merricat is not paranoid because the hostility she perceives in the villagers is real. Like most of Jackson's protagonists, she seems young for her age, but immaturity is not madness. (36)

Her actions must be viewed as deliberate for the book to have any point other than a perverse titillation. Not that there's anything wrong with a text that produces titillation, but the word implies an end in itself rather than a movement toward or away
from some kind of framework for viewing reality. Merricat's per-
ceptions shape our own and lead us to justify the murders and
subsequent rejection of the patriarchy. All of our assumptions
are called into question and threaten to explode in front of us,
but we welcome such a shattering by the time Merricat is
half-way finished with her narrative.

As narrator, she prepares us for a re-orientation, and she
does so in the way that we are most familiar with. She uses her
own unwavering logic and singlemindedness to illustrate just
how "illogical" masculine "logic" is. Merricat's logic valorizes
magic and omens, and as readers we come to view it as
perfectly plausible. Especially as seen in opposition to that
other logic which accepts cruelty and dominance as its "natural"
side effects. Patriarchal assumptions of what constitutes the
feminine are hidden or cloaked under the so-called masculine
logic, but Merricat explodes these assumptions by turning the
adversary's weapons back upon themselves. She appropriates the
logic that readers find so seductive and inverts it, in a sense,
in order to expose its weaknesses. Very deliberately, Merricat
presses the meanings of things, trying to uncover their illogical
nature, ultimately showing that a rejection of this "logical"
system is the only logical course for a woman to take. Her
vision remains unhampered throughout her narrative, until finally
she convinces the reader—and we are willing, even eager--to
elevate her to the status of Goddess.

Merricat will not allow the phallocentrism of society to
intrude upon her world. Jane Gallop in "Of Phallic Proportions: Lacanian Conceit," writes:

... the domination of the signifier—the external, material letter of language—over any individual speaking subject is critical, oppressive and even deadly. The signifier has "being," is materially present and enduring, whereas the subject "disappears," lacks being. (19)

Merricat speaks as Other but she is an-Other outside of phallocentric structures; therefore she is well able to recognize the phallic signifier and its attempt to dominate, even destroy, her subjectivity.

Merricat must rely on memory in order to relay her narrative. The narrative becomes a repetition of a recollection. Her story begins six years after the murders with her description of the everyday affairs of herself and Constance. On Fridays and Tuesdays, Merricat must venture into the village where she is frequently tormented by the townspeople. "In this village the men stayed young and did the gossiping and the women aged with gray evil weariness and stood silently waiting for the men to get up and come home" (9). Thus, her commentary effectively sets her apart from these women who are immersed in the patriarchal order. She is able to see what no one else can. She inverts the stereotype by showing that the men are not really the protectors of their women, but angry catalysts, serving only to hurry the women's premature aging. That is not to say that she has
softer perceptions of the village women. She dislikes children coming near her, because, she says, "I was afraid that they might touch me and the mothers would come at me like a flock of taloned hawks; that was always the picture I had in my mind—birds descending, striking, gashing with razor claws" (14). Motherhood, to women trapped within the confines of patriarchy, is not simply protective, it is vindictive, and serves as a guise under which one can vent rage at one's own oppression. And Merricat serves as a useful, handy scapegoat for the women's rage.

Only one person in the village receives the slightest approval from Merricat, and that is Stella, owner of the village cafe:

I sometimes thought when I wished all the village people dead that I might spare Stella because she was the closest to kind that any of them could be, and the only one who managed to keep hold of any color at all. She was round and pink and when she put on a bright pink dress it stayed looking bright for a little while before it merged into the dirty gray of the rest. (18)

Stella's apparent kindness is juxtaposed with the mindless cruelty of Jim Donell, the village's fire chief. His occupation would indicate that he should be the greatest protector of all the village men, but he wants only to make her miserable.

"Most people would have stayed down at the end of the counter . . . but Jim Donell came right to the end where I was
sitting and took the stool next to me, as close to me as he could come..." (19). He violates the space around her in order to show his capacity for greater violation, and Merricat recognizes just how capable he is of terrorization. He taunts her while stirring his coffee, and she thinks:

There was something so simple and silly about the spoon going around while Jim Donell talked; I wondered if he would stop talking if I reached out and took hold of the spoon. Very likely he would, I told myself wisely, very likely he would throw the coffee in my face." (20)

By recognizing his cruelty, rather than trying to pretend it doesn't exist, Merricat exposes the dangerous irony that pervades the village. The structures that hold the town together, i.e., family, social position, occupational hierarchies, are nothing more than structures, constructs to keep people in line. The ties that bind only serve as the greatest of rationales for cruelty toward another. Jim Donell, in his role of village protector, is able to rationalize his taunting of Merricat in the name of his role. He is protecting the village from what he sees as her evil. By allowing herself to see what is too painful for everyone else, Merricat reveals the hollow nature of our most deeply held social relationships. These social relationships, motherhood, community leadership, etc., are exploited rhetorically under patriarchy in order to preserve the status quo, and Merricat forces us to see their falsity.
Merricat, as narrator, does not directly attack the patriarchal order and that is important in the reader's eventual manipulation. And her narrative strategy is not to suggest her own innocence (Notice her violent wishes for the villagers' deaths: "I would have liked to come into the grocery some morning and see them all, even the Elberts and the children lying there crying with the pain and dying" (15).), but rather to demonstrate the lack of innocence in this "naturalized" ideology. She is reproducing the same structures in her narrative that we all are intimately familiar with, community, family, etc., but the important difference is that she remains an observer of these structures rather than one who helps contrive and sustain them. She makes the reader an observer too, by pulling her outside of the comfortable, yet constrictive structures and forcing her to see the structures anew.

The village children taunt Merricat as well, with a cruel rhyme: "'Merricat said Connie, would you like a cup of tea? Oh no, said Merricat, you'll poison me'" (24). Constance was the one accused and acquitted of the murders. Merricat questions the children's acquisition of the rhyme:

I wondered if their parents taught them, Jim Donnell and Dunham and dirty Harris leading regular drills of their children, teaching them with loving care, making sure they pitched their voices right; how else could so many children learn so thoroughly? (23)
How else indeed? With her shrewd but simple question she exposes how oppression is able to perpetuate itself so easily. She inverts the rhetoric ("loving care") and illustrates the irony of patriarchy's idea of love.

Merricat's recurring fantasy is one in which she no longer is tormented by the villagers' cruel pastimes, one in which a new kind of world exists. She introduces us to her own idea of beauty:

I was pretending that I did not speak their language; on the moon we spoke a soft, liquid tongue, and sang in the starlight, looking down on the dead dried world; I was almost halfway past the fence. (24)

Merricat is versed in the rules of masculine discourse. She would be unable to invert masculine language if she didn't have knowledge of it. She empowers herself by taking possession of the very language she needs to deconstruct in order to survive on her own terms. Merricat is aware of her mimicry. She is able, then, to refuse the invasion of masculine language, pretending she does not understand. Lack of comprehension is a ploy usually reserved for the masculine in regard to feminine language, but she appropriates the strategy in order to diffuse the rhyme's impact and scatter the meaning. And she invokes the moon, the eternal Great Mother. For alliances are contrary to the rigidity of patriarchy. The moon is associated with fluidity, i.e., the sea, the menstruation of women, and it
demands the empowerment of women (Walker 670). The moon is the only signifier that Merricat will accept, and this choice indicates another inversion of patriarchal definition. The moon, the lunar, is associated with lunacy, a frame of reference denigrated in phallocentric terms, but Merricat doesn't care for their static definitions. She appropriates the lunar, and her narrative becomes, in a sense, her moon-journey.

It is tempting in this analysis to ignore the class bias that seems present in Merricat's narrative, but now is a good time to confront it and grapple with it. As a member of the prominent Blackwood family, she first of all speaks from a position of privilege; in fact, without the security of position and wealth would she be able to speak at all? If she were one of the village women, would her narrative even exist? She speaks of feelings she had as a child:

> When I was small I used to lie in my bedroom at the back of the house and imagine the driveway and the path as a crossroad meeting before our front door, and up and down the driveway went the good people, the clean and the rich ones dressed in satin and lace, who came rightfully to visit, and back and forth along the path, sneaking and weaving and side-stepping servilely, went the people from the village.

(28)

These feelings, with their placement of moral values in proportion to the degree of wealth one possesses, are offensive to the
reader sensitive to an ideal of class consciousness. But perhaps she so blatantly displays these apparent feelings of superiority because she wishes to shatter them in front of us. She waves these offensive feelings before us, so that we might accuse her of blindness, at least in this area. But there are clues to her real awareness. For instance, her qualifier "When I was a child" indicates parental influence over her beliefs, and it was her father who blocked the path off from the village people. And her characterization of both classes of people seems exaggerated, almost a parody of an older voice more rigid in his ideas of what is proper. The repetition of moments of class structuring, so repressed in childhood, surface now that the oppression is inverted. The villagers were oppressed by the likes of her father, and now she is in turn oppressed by them. One would imagine that they should be grateful to whoever is responsible for their symbolic release. But because they are immersed within the larger system of patriarchy, they are incapable of gratitude, only able to see a young female deviating from the proscribed path and making no excuses for herself.

I think she recognizes any classist feelings she may have, though she never actually addresses the position of privilege from which she is speaking. She certainly does not ally herself with the wealthy class psychologically, and she absolutely does not see a greater morality there. The wealthy class is governed by the same patriarchal order, and its members commit the same cruelties in the name of the same structures, although they try
to exercise a bit more subtlety. Merricat illustrates this similarity with the visit of Helen Clarke and Lucille Wright. When referring to Uncle Julian, Helen Clarke calls him "eccentric," and Merricat presses the meaning of the word:

I was thinking that if eccentric meant, as the dictionary said it did, *deviating from regularity,* it was Helen Clarke who was far more eccentric than Uncle Julian, with her awkward movements and unexpected questions, and her bringing strangers here to tea. (36)

The word "eccentric" echoes throughout the text, begging to be deconstructed. (Readers anticipating a reference to Jane Gallop's excellent etymological analysis of eccentric/concentric will be disappointed. The focus is entirely different.) Merricat wonders at its meaning, "deviating from regularity," seeming to question the very concept of regularity by bringing the authority of the dictionary into question. "Eccentric" (OED) means "not centrally placed, not passing through the center, out of the center, moving in an orbit deviating from a circle." All meanings presume a circle. Its opposite is, of course, concentric, meaning "having a common center," but these two words have a connection only in reference to astronomy and geometrical positions. In reference to a person's behavior, eccentric has no opposition; it is therefore arbitrarily defined and used as a label primarily by those whose own "eccentric" behavior is then given license. Merricat is "out of the center," wherever that is, because she
has stepped out of line. Those in "the center" are incapable of recognizing the cruelty of their own acts simply because their path is worn and easy to follow.

To Merricat, "eccentric" means invasive, though Helen Clarke would never see herself in that light. Merricat questions the rights the role of neighbor seems to imply. Particularly if the neighbor is of the same class as you. She doesn't view these rights as 'natural" or good, but rather intrusive and unacceptable. Merricat knows that there is really no difference between the villagers and those like Helen Clarke as far as animosity toward the Blackwood sisters is concerned. The only difference is the degree of openness about it, though Helen Clarke assures them of her loyalty: "I've been saying right along that I was a close friend of the Blackwoods and not the least bit ashamed of it, either. You want to come to people of your own kind Constance. They don't talk about us!" (40). The reader senses that she assures people of her friendship with the Blackwoods for no reason other than the attention she receives for such a distinction.

The rupture of both propriety and the superior moral facade of the upper class occurs with Lucille Wright's gauche questioning of Uncle Julian about the night of the murders. The murders have become Uncle Julian's most cherished memory and he is eager for a fresh audience. Mrs. Wright tries desperately to remain within the bounds of what is considered proper:

And poor, poor Mrs. Wright, tempted at last
beyond endurance, was not able to hold it back any longer. She blushed deeply, and faltered, but Uncle Julian was a tempter and Mrs. Wright's human discipline could not resist forever. "It happened right in this house," she said like a prayer. (42)

As readers, we are placed in a dual position during this part of the narrative. We want to align ourselves with Merricat, who listens to the dialogue taking place in the dining room next door with absolute disdain, but we are also tempted by the morbid conversation and want only to hear every word. We are like Mrs. Wright who, Merricat says, "sounded more forceful, almost unwillingly eager" (48). Through this scene, we are forced to recognize our own complicity in this system that condones a false outward appearance in order to demonstrate one's supposed moral superiority. Because of our lack of knowledge, Merricat abruptly excludes us from her vantage point as outside observer and forces us to identify with the pitiful Mrs. Wright. And such an identification is distasteful. Our choices of identification are with Merricat who is consistent in her stance or with Mrs. Wright who appears desperate and uncertain.

Mrs. Wright and Helen Clarke are not any better than the strangers who tried to intrude right after the murders. Merricat describes them:

They drove cars up to the steps and parked there. . . . They had picnics on the lawn and took
pictures of each other standing in front of the house
and let their dogs run in the garden. They wrote
their names on the walls and on the front door. (71)
The irony in this passage in relation to "eccentric" should be
obvious. If "eccentric" means "out of the center," "deviating
from usual methods," it is as though these people desire eccen-
tricity. They literally step off the path by driving off the road
and intruding upon the lawn. Their "eccentric" behavior isn't
viewed askance, however, because they are only reacting to
another's behavior. They realize the freedom in acting out of
the ordinary, but can only do so when it is an act of
persecution against one who refuses the common route. They are
titillated by her eccentricity, but they don't realize it. They
are drawn to it, valorizing it, while believing they are
condemning it. This enemy is very apparent, makes its presence
known, even felt. But the adversarial position of people like
Mrs. Wright is more difficult to detect, because they refuse to
recognize that anything is amiss in their behavior. Mrs. Wright
is easily able to slip back under the cloak of propriety, thus
illustrating its ridiculous irony: "Mrs. Wright scurried out of
the dining room, distraught. 'I'm so sorry,' she said. 'We were
chatting and I lost track of time. Oh dear'' (49). She is unable
to see that "chatting" does not usually consist of speculating
upon the hostess's capacity for murder: "'She is such a charming
girl, your niece; I cannot remember when I have taken to
anyone as I have to her. But if she is a homicidal maniac---"
Deliberate acts of cruelty, whether they are overt like Jim Donell's and the strangers', or subtle like Mrs. Wright's and Helen Clarke's, become acceptable after awhile when one is numb to them. Merricat's task as narrator is to defamiliarize the structures that perpetuate such cruelty in order to reproduce themselves. She brings the stereotyped roles to the foreground so that we may witness the dynamics of their operation. Her narrative is a replication of these familiar roles and structures, but with one important difference. The insertion of herself into the comfortable, yet precarious, structure causes a disruption. The continuation of the patriarchy depends on the complicity of everyone involved—oppressor and oppressed. Merricat's disruptive refusal to cooperate serves as an irritant in the patriarchal machinery and it must work doubly hard to suppress her, thus revealing the cyclical danger from which no one is safe. The repetition of the familiar structures with the insertion of one who refuses her part serves to bring up the submerged ugliness and display it for all to see. Merricat places herself outside the codes, outside the conventional assumptions of a woman's place, and that makes the patriarchy want to assimilate her all the more.

Merricat's omens indicate that a confrontation is coming and she must protect herself and Constance:

I was on my way back to the house when I found a very bad omen, one of the worst. My book nailed to
a tree in the pine woods had fallen down. I thought I
had better destroy it, in case it was now actively
bad, and bring something else out to the tree.

(68)
She has already taken measures to ensure their safety: "I
decided that I would choose three powerful words, words of
strong protection, and so long as these words were never spoken
aloud no change would come" (55). Constance, because of her
notoriety as the suspect in her family's murders, is isolated
and not able to recognize as easily as Merricat the danger of
participating in the patriarchal system. Merricat's vision can
penetrate the facade and see the hidden motives of the
patriarchal agents.

"We'll always be together, won't we Constance?"

"Don't you ever want to leave here, Merricat?"

"Where could we go?" I asked her. "What place
would be better for us than this? Who wants us, out-
side? The world is full of terrible people."

"I wonder sometimes." (69)
Constance's apparent blindness to the oppressive nature of any
alignment with the patriarchy can be seen as a metaphor for the
reader's blindness to those familiar structures that sustain the
patriarchy. At this point in the narrative, the reader has
regained, or rather gained, some of her clear-sightedness and
can see what Constance is unable to see. We are aware enough
now to realize that something bad will happen if Constance suc-
cumbs and tries to enter society on patriarchal terms. But she has been wooed by Helen Clarke, who imposes her assumptions upon her: "It's spring, you're young, you're lovely, you have a right to be happy. Come back into the world!" (37). Helen invites her to step back onto the path. She views Constance as Other in her present state and wants to invite her into the circle. The word "eccentric" by now holds little meaning. Each party assigns it to the One who is Other to them. Mrs. Clarke wants Constance to come "into the world," into the circle as she defines it. Merricat questions, "who wants us outside," outside of their circle. But Constance has been worked on, in a sense, and made to feel somehow that her desire for sanctuary and solitude is unnatural, almost immoral.

Merricat, however, is impenetrable and remains incapable of being swayed. She does not mind that the Other exists, but she knows that herself as Other cannot exist if the patriarchal order has its way. So when the greedy Cousin Charles arrives unexpectedly under the guise of helping, she recognizes his true motives immediately:

I knew already that he was one of the bad ones; I had seen his face briefly and he was one of the bad ones, who go around and around the house, trying to get in, looking in the windows, puling and poking and stealing souvenirs. (69-70)

He goes "around and around the house" which serves as their protective circle, looking for chinks, trying to find a way to
intrude. Once again, another is drawn to their circle of eccentricity. She comes into the kitchen and is shocked to find that "he was sitting at the table in my chair" (72). Merricat knows that he has come to usurp her position with Constance, and that such an act will be condoned by society, both because he is male and because of the possibility of a marriage tie to Constance. The patriarchy privileges the heterosexual union over every other relationship regardless of its intensity. Contrary to this heterosexual privileging, a subtext of an erotic attachment between the sisters exists, an erotic attachment that is bound up in a kind of mother-daughter bond that shifts according to each other's needs for nurturance. The attachment is not explicit but rather reveals itself in the intensity of feeling the two have for each other:

When I was small I thought Constance was a fairy princess. I used to try to draw her picture, with long golden hair and eyes as blue as the crayon could make them, and a bright pink spot on either cheek; the pictures always surprised me, because she did look like that; even at the worst time she was pink and white and golden, and nothing had ever seemed to dim the brightness of her. She was the most precious person in my world, always. (29)

They refer to each other as "my Merricat" and "my Constance" and Merricat believes that nothing should interrupt their blissful
union. But when Charles is found "in her chair" and immediately thereafter Constance notes a resemblance to their father, Merricat and the reader know that he has come to be the new Blackwood patriarch. He wants to give the name legitimacy in the 'eyes of society, not realizing that Merricat holds no such values.

He violates the space around her the same way that Jim Donell did earlier: "'Well Mary,' he said. He stood up; he was taller now that he was inside, bigger and bigger as he came closer to me. 'Got a kiss for your cousin Charles?'" (72). Of course she does no such thing; she is unlike those women who die small deaths every day with their compromises, their concessions to keep the peace. She has lived too long on her own terms. Merricat has nothing to gain by conceding to his rude, presumptuous demand, and she has nothing to lose by overtly rejecting him. She has no need to compromise, because she knows that Charles views her only as an obstacle to be overcome in order to get first to Constance and finally to the Blackwood fortune. She is overwhelmed with rage and fear:

I threw the sweater on the floor and went out the door and down to the creek where I always went. Jonas [her cat] found me after awhile and we lay there, protected from the rain by the trees crowding overhead, dim and rich in the kind of knowing possessive way trees have of pressing closer. (72)

Since the tree is usually a phallic symbol, Merricat produces another inversion by focusing on the trees' enclosure rather
than their erect-ness. The trees represent a kind of protective womb that she returns to, usually just to meditate, but this time to escape the invasion of the patriarchy and renew herself. In Medieval literature, when characters fell asleep under trees they were sometimes transported to the domain of fairies and witches. The journey to a place not easily explainable was considered frightening. Another inversion is apparent here with the rejection of beliefs that destroy the validity of a woman-centered spirituality, turn it into something to fear. Merricat embraces those things that cannot be explained, seeming to find strength there. And indeed, "she does find herself magically empowered by the next morning: "I lay there laughing, feeling the almost imaginary brush of the mist across my eyes, and looking up into the trees" (73).

Merricat, as narrator, very deliberately associates the patriarchy with death imagery so that we as readers will make no mistake about the danger involved in compromising. Her power is scattered that morning when Constance reminds her of cousin Charles, invoking his name and therefore making it real. She is stunned: "I saw Jonas in the doorway and Constance by the stove but they had no color. I could not breathe, I was tied around tight, everything was cold" (77). Color is important in Merricat's world; it symbolizes life, hope, kindness. She defines someone by the amount of color they hold, as in her earlier description of Stella, the cafe owner. "She was round and pink." Constance, who is pink and blue and golden when
she is only Merricat's, is devoid of color when she begins to accept Charles.

Charles's influence slowly infiltrates the house, filling it with ugliness and greed. He wants to take their father's place as well as Merricat's. He sleeps in the "master" bedroom and sits in their father's chair at the head of the table. And with Constance's approval as well: "He has a perfect right to sit there. He's a guest, and he even looks like Father!" (87). He is given Merricat's task of grocery shopping. He even wants to revise their memories. Uncle Julian, who never functioned as a dangerous agent of patriarchy because of his befuddlement and who was therefore safe to have around, is writing memoirs of the night of the murders. The women encourage his pursuit because they know it makes him happy. When Uncle Julian asks Charles what he remembers about that time, Charles is repulsed:

"I mean," Charles said, "can't it all be forgotten? There's no point in keeping those memories alive."

"Forgotten?" Uncle Julian said. "Forgotten?"

"It was a sad and horrible time and it's not going to do Connie here any good at all to keep talking about it." (82)

Just as the patriarchy has systematically attempted to eradicate a history of the feminine, so does Charles want to erase their past. His claim is that it will be for Constance's "own good," but in reality he cannot bear to speak of the event, because he is afraid that she may actually have killed them. He would
rather have her murder with impunity than have his conventional assumptions of what a woman is capable of, turned inside out. He is not so much repulsed by the family having been murdered as he is by the possibility that Constance is the murderer. As long as it is not spoken aloud, though, he can pursue her and her fortune and remain blind to any complicity he might share in the murders. If he knew for certain that she had killed them, to pursue Constance would be in bad taste, contrary to the dictated codes he must follow.

And notice his use of the diminutive Connie in place of Constance, thus mirroring his attempt to make her person manageable. Names hold power, particularly one like Constance, suggesting constancy in both thought and deed. Charles knows well the power of naming. Constance explains to Merricat the reason why Charles never visited before his own father's death: "'His father thought: very badly of us. He refused to take care of you during the trial, did you know that? And he never let our names be mentioned in his house'" (78). He believes, unconsciously of course, that the power of these women can only be contained by displacing them. He tries to invoke the rhetoric of the patriarchy, the rhetoric that says women must be protected and sheltered, and Constance falters in the face of this "naturalized" ideology, unable to trust what she really feels.

It will not do, though, for Merricat to overtly attack cousin Charles in front of Constance. Constance will only defend him then, calling upon the rationale used by the patriarchy.
Merricat cannot help trying a direct attack once, but of course it fails:

I took my glass and smashed it on the floor. "Now he'll go away," I said.

Constance came to the table and sat down across from me, looking very serious. "My Merricat," she said slowly, "Cousin Charles is here. He is our cousin." (77)

The "man-made" construct of family is privileged over Merricat's wishes. She must remove Charles from their lives by provoking him, forcing him to reveal his capacity for cruelty. If she can juxtapose the codes they live by with his codes, his real motives will surface, and Constance will not be able to remain blind to the falseness of the structures any longer. Charles's relationship with Merricat is on a level that is different than his relationship with Constance. Merricat will not follow the code of feminine deference to the masculine, and so there is no need for pretense. ""Cousin Mary doesn't like me," Charles said again to Jonas. 'I wonder if Cousin Mary knows how I get even with people who don't like me?"' (87). She knows very well that he would get even with her by eliminating her, by replacing her in Constance's life. He shortens Merricat's name as well, trying to reduce her presence.

In order to provoke him, she must upset the codes by which he lives. He desires those things valuable by patriarchal standards, so when she decides to nail her father's gold watch
to the tree to act as her new protective charm, he is furious. Even Constance doesn't understand his anger: "It's not important," Constance said. "Really Charles it's not important!" (94). He attempts to transfer his value system to her:

"It's worth money," Charles said, explaining carefully to Constance. "This is a gold watch chain, worth possibly a good deal of money. Sensible people don't go around nailing this kind of valuable thing to trees." (95)

His definition of sense differs sharply from Merricat's and Constance's too, at this point. From here on in the narrative, Merricat must rush to keep a tenuous grasp upon Constance's loyalty, though. She recognizes the insidiousness of the patriarchal system, how its values pervade one's thinking:

She was increasingly cross with me when I wanted Charles to leave; always before Constance had listened and smiled and only been angry when Jonas and I had been wicked, but now she frowned at me often, as though I somehow looked different to her. (96)

Merricat does look different to Constance when she is looking at her through a patriarchal lens. Before Charles came, her difference was seen as imaginative and exciting; now she is a wild child who must be tamed. But Merricat understands how the patriarchy operates, how it is able to pit the ones it oppresses against each other, so that their only loyalty is to it:
I could not allow myself to be angry, and particularly not angry with Constance, but I wished Charles dead. Constance needed guarding more than ever before and if I became angry and looked aside she might very well be lost. (97)

Cousin Charles begins to function for the reader as a representation of the patriarchal facade. Her relationship with Charles, with its angry confrontational stance in private, and its paternalistic condescension in public, mirrors the patriarchy’s attitude toward all women. Usually, though, the private confrontation is manifested in rape or other abuses that indicate the deep hatred. In other words, it is less honest. It is as though Merricat has produced a continuum of patriarchal facades, finally culminating in Charles, the falsest of all. We share Merricat’s vantage point, so we don’t understand how the rest can be so blind to patriarchy’s atrocities. But they are not privy to the scenes and conversations that are hidden, and that must remain hidden, because the truth is too painful and must be denied. So Merricat continues to provoke Charles, who has allied himself with the men of the village, thus revealing that it is not the Blackwood wealth the village despises but the gender of the holders of that wealth:

... when I saw him sit down on the benches with the other men I turned and went back to our house. If I went into the village shopping again Charles would be one of the men who watched me going past.
Charles thinks of everything in terms of its expense, so he is further angered to find more of Merricat's magic charms around the property—a scarf, a box of silver coins—and she puts leaves and broken sticks all over his room in order to drive him out. She hopes he will react strongly enough so that Constance will be able to recognize his meanness:

... if he ever forgot, or let his disguise drop for a minute, he would be recognized at once and driven away; he must be extremely careful to use the same voice every time, and present the same face and manner without a slip; 'he must be constantly on guard against betraying himself. (101)

By now, though, he has ingrained himself so well that he is able to wear only the thinnest disguise and still be allowed to stay. In front of Constance he scolds Merricat over the destruction of his room:

"I haven't quite decided what I'm going to do with you," he said. "But whatever I do, you'll remember it."

"Don't bully her, Charles," Constance said. I did not like her voice either because it was strange and I knew she was uncertain. "it's my fault, anyway."

That was her new way of thinking. (109-10)

Merricat recognizes the easy imposition of guilt upon those whom the patriarchy oppresses. The father oppresses, and in order to
save her children from his wrath, the mother takes the blame. The mother is forced to be self-sacrificing in order to protect.

Merricat must hurry now, because Constance is almost completely under Charles's influence. She begins referring to the two of them as "we." "I think," Constance said, "that we are going to have to forbid your wandering. It's time you quieted down a little'" (99). They are a disciplinary unit now, united to erase the uniqueness of Merricat, make her conform to the standard of propriety. Constance explains what she now views as her failure in keeping Merricat and Uncle Julian isolated. She concludes: "'You should have boyfriends,' she said finally, and then began to laugh because she sounded funny even to herself" (100). Heterosexuality rears its arrogant head, wanting to claim them both, but we see that there is still hope when Constance laughs at the ridiculousness of Merricat out on a date. If she is able to see that, perhaps she can still save herself.

Merricat must take extreme measures now to protect herself and Constance. Before dinner, she is sent to wash her face, and she enters Charles's room: "I had known all day that I would find something here; I brushed the saucer and the pipe off the table into the wastebasket and they fell softly onto the newspapers he had brought into the house" (120). In starting the fire, she creates the largest provocation of all. She can think of no other way that would erase his presence quite as well: "There would be nothing of Charles in there now; even his pipe
must have been consumed" (122). And Charles's true self-serving motives are exposed to Constance, finally: "'Get the safe in the study,' he said a thousand times" (123). He repeats this refrain again and again, referring only once to the safety of the women, and then only after someone asks: "'They had plenty of warning,' Charles shouted from somewhere, 'they're all right'" (124).

All the patriarchal facades are exploded in this scene. The people of the village come to watch the fire, and someone keeps shouting: "'Why not let it burn?' . . . one of the dark men going in and out of our front door turned and waved and grinned. 'We're the firemen,' he called back, 'We got to put it out!'" (125). It is their duty as firemen to protect the people and their property from the devouring fire. The fireman is reminding the bystander of the rhetoric that preserves those roles. Finally the fire is out, and someone asks Jim Donell, the fire chief, the same question:

Very carefully he put up his hands and took off his hat saying CHIEF and while everyone watched he walked slowly down the steps and over to the fire engine and set his hat down on the front seat. Then he bent down, searching thoughtfully, and finally, while everyone watched, he took up a rock. In complete silence he turned slowly and then raised his arm and smashed the rock through one of the great tall windows of our mother's drawing room. (126)
As chief he is duty-bound to protect, but without the restrictions that the role imposes he is able to destroy. The rest of the mob join him in the destruction of the house that they have just saved. By giving the villagers permission to discard the facade of proprieties and roles, they are incited to violence. The larger patriarchy reveals itself in the same way that Charles revealed himself to Merricat. The hollow structures holding everything together become visible for all to see, and the truth is obscene.

The irony of "eccentricity" echoes again in this scene when the mob turns on Merricat and Constance. They chant the children's rhyme and: "For one terrible minute I thought that they were going to join hands and dance around us, singing" (129). The circles of "eccentricity" are intertwining, illuminating the sense of connection the villagers feel toward the sisters. They have claimed repulsion, but they don't want to let them go either: "... they came around us again, circling and keeping carefully out of reach" (130). Finally they must release them, because Uncle Julian is dead of a heart attack, and they are shocked back into displaying a sense of propriety and reverence toward death.

Merricat takes Constance to her hidden trees, to the protective womb. Here the reader learns for the first time what she had suspected all along when Merricat expresses a wish to "put death in all their food":...
Constance stirred and the leaves rustled. "The way you did before?" she asked. It had never been spoken between us, not once in six years.

"Yes," I said after a minute, "the way I did before." (132)

Such an admission any earlier would have shocked the reader with its harsh truth, but after all that has occurred, the murders are legitimized by us. We trust Merricat's judgment; her sense of justice is wholly accurate and consistent in contrast with the patriarchal system's methods of meting out punishment. She wears no dangerous facade.

The fire serves its purpose in opening Constance's eyes. She says: "'We are going to lock ourselves in more securely than ever'" (140). And when Merricat reminds her that it is Helen Clarke's tea day, she states: "'Not again. Not here'" (140). She is won over to Merricat's uncompromising position; from here on they will remain completely marginal to society, living in the kitchen of their house, the only part that is livable after the fire. Constance will need time, though, to adjust to Merricat's frame of reference. She asks: "'Where are we going to sleep? How are we going to know what time it is? What will we wear for clothes?'" Merricat replies simply: "'Why do we need to know what time it is?'" (147). She thus exhibits her complete disregard for the patriarchal ordering system. There is no need for those things that the patriarchy has invented in order to keep people too preoccupied to question any
of the rules. Merricat must teach Constance that they are only constructs, not some "natural" way of living.

Still, they are not completely left alone. The Clarkes and Uncle Julian's doctor, members of their own class who didn't overtly participate in the pillage of their home, must check on them in the name of their good will. Helen Clarke speaks through the door to the sisters, who refuse to answer: "'We want you and Mary Katherine to come to our house until we can decide what to do with you . . . we're going to forget all about it!'" (146). She indicates that she has already begun to erect the facade again and that they should do likewise. They try to appeal to the sisters' feelings about Uncle Julian's death, speaking of his funeral. The funeral means nothing to them, though; it is just another man-made structure that robs death of its meaning, making it instead a meaningless ceremony. The women are operating under codes alien to those like the Clarkes. Finally their patience runs out when the women refuse to speak: "'We're not going to keep coming, you know. There's a limit to how much friends can take'" (153). They reveal their self-centeredness, a self-centeredness shared by the patriarchy they are a part of. They claim a desire to help, but only because it is expected of the roles they fill, and the help must be on their terms with them in control.

Merricat finally reaches her mood, and she brings Constance with her. They are happy there, and free:

"I am so happy," Constance said at last,
gasping. "Merricat, I am so happy."

"I told you that you would like it on the moon."

(171)

They have returned to a state of nature reminiscent of the Goddess. All their clothes were destroyed in the fire, except the ones they were wearing. Constance tries to convince Merricat to wear Uncle Julian's clothes, but she refuses adamantly, indicating her total break with anything having to do with patriarchy. Traditionally, the magic of men and their gods dwelt in the garments they wore (Walker 706). Merricat prefers to wear a tablecloth with a hole cut in the middle for her head. Her near nakedness is characteristic of worship of the Goddess (Walker 707). They have created their feminine enclave, separate from the rest of the world, and will make no compromises again.

The text ends with the suggestion of hope, of continuity. The villagers begin secretly leaving baskets of food for the sisters outside their door with notes that say things like: "'This is for the dishes,' or 'We apologize about the curtains,' or 'sorry for your harp'" (166). The fire not only destroyed the facade of the patriarchy in Constance's eyes, but in the eyes of the villagers as well. Too many terrible truths were revealed to be able to fully rebuild it, and atonement must be made as long as there are holes.

Merricat's narrative is revolutionary because it manages
to re-orient the reader to an alternative perspective. She reproduces our familiar structures that sustain the patriarchy, so that we may be awakened to their falseness. She never directly attacks these structures. If she had, we would have just defended them in our minds anyway, thus creating the same old story. Rather she alternately provokes and observes the structures, disturbing and disrupting them. By inviting us to assume her vantage point of just outside the structures, she, in effect, shatters the mise en abyme by defamiliarizing what we know so well and forcing us to see the terrible danger. If we read Barthes's *Image-Music-Text* according to Stephen Heath, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* is a text that produces a "radically violent pleasure" because it "shatters--dissipates, loses-[our] cultural identity, [our] ego" (9). And that is jouissance.
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