

Kali: Hey everyone, welcome to the very first episode of Quote Me. A podcast where we're going to talk about authors. This episode is all about Shirley Jackson.

Kali: My name is Kali. I'm your co-host and over here I've got Anna.

Anna: Hi Kali, I'm Anna. Today I'm going to be walking a little bit about Shirley Jackson's life, kind of giving some background on her, just a general biography of her life. We also have Ian. What are you walking about?

Ian: Hello, I'm Ian and I will be talking about the historical context of her life and work.

John: Hey everybody, I'm John, I'm also going to be joining in today and we're going to be talking about the author's works and how her life and life experience factored into the works and their creation.

K: So Anna, can you go ahead and get us started? Tell us a little bit about Shirley Jackson's life.

A: I would love to tell you about her life. Jackson is one of those writers that you probably know, even if you don't realize it. She's most known for her short story, "The Lottery", in which a drawing takes place. It deals with traditions and how they may be problematic. Most people read this either in late middle or early high school. She also wrote *The Haunting of Hill House* which has recently been turned into a Netflix series. But she has done so, so much more than that. She wrote six novels and over one hundred short works including those I just mentioned.

A: Jackson was born on December 14th, 1916 to a rich family of Christian Scientists in San Francisco, California. Her mother's name was Geraldine and her father's name was Leslie Jackson. To put it in perspective of what her upbringing was somewhat like, they were completely unaffected by the Great Depression. Jackson thought that she came from an under-privileged home because her father's country club didn't have a swimming pool.

[Everyone laughs.]

A: That's not to say that her life was without conflict though. Geraldine was on all accounts a very bad mother. She admitted that she did not want to be pregnant so early in her marriage and was devastated to give birth to a red-headed little girl. Both of which were highly-undervalued during the time. Being red-haired and being a little girl. Geraldine constantly spoke badly about her daughter and criticised her weight, her general appearance, how she dressed, the fact that she was messy and Shirley did her best to somewhat appease her mother's wishes. In her early teens we see that she kept a debutant diary in which she tried to portray herself as the perfect daughter. When she would sway away from that charade a little bit she scolded herself in her writing. But she left her genuine emotional processing of what was going on with her mother and in her life to her semi-biographical fiction works that she began writing in her early teens.

A: At sixteen, the Jackson family moved to Rochester, New York for her father's job. Shirley adjusted as best she could but she still ended up being kinda like the new weird girl from across the country. She didn't keep the debutante diary anymore. She frequently lamented in her only diary now, that she hated that Rochester didn't have any avocados or pomegranates.

K: She would fit right in to the twenty-first century.

A: Oh she would love to be here right now! There are so many avocados.

K: Mrs. Jackson, would you like your avocado toast?

[A: laughs]

A: I'd like my avocado sliced, not mashed, please.

K: Oh, my bad.

A: Disgusting.

[Everyone laughs]

A: But she would say the kids in her class didn't really like her very much. They kinda had the same opinion about her that her mother did. They were like, "Oh, you're messy, you're ugly, you're chubby." Kids are mean. So she wrote in her diary a lot. One time she wrote, "I hate this school, I won't ever go back because they are so alust to me. I hate them and they are all lousy to me and I wish I were pretty." Which makes me kinda sad for her.

K: Yeah, makes me sad too.

A: But she did manage to make it through high school. Good for her! And she enrolled in the University of Rochester. She still had some problems adjusting but she was very smart. And clearly smart enough to pass her classes. She was just struggling with some mental health conditions that didn't let her have the motivation to go to class. And those mental health concerns would continue throughout her life. She did have this kind of idea that she was a social outcast likely reinforced by her mother and peers.

A: Yea it would be nearly impossible not to internalize some of that. Or all of it. And to your self concept. During her college experience she began to find her niche a little bit. She gained some friends. She wrote in her diary in college, "I went to college and I had a friend and she was kind to me and together we were happy. She introduced me to the man who didn't laugh at me because I was ugly and I fell in love with him and tried to kill myself but I was happy all the same." So here we really can see that she's starting to come into herself but she's still struggling with those mental health concerns that she was having from the beginning. At this point in Jackson's life we start to see her fiction writing still reflecting some of the sentiments that are in

her diary. We see a lot of motifs of suicide and depression but we're starting to see more friendships rather than the lone female protagonist. We're also seeing a good bit of LGBT content in her writing, especially for the time. She may have felt personally connected to that. She does say at one point that she and her friend were lesbians but some scholars speculate that was just to emphasize her feelings of being outcast from society. So it is kinda up to interpretation.

K: Wasn't there a quote about her actually insulting the LGBTQ community?

A: There was? Which could be taken either as an example of internalized homophobia or just general standard homophobia.

K: The usual kind.

[A and K laugh.]

K: Yeah, no that makes a lot of sense for a woman in the 50's.

A: Yeah.

K: You see it a lot in movies with the Hayes Code and how you can kinda characterize yourself as quote unquote, "fruity" but you never want to be like explicitly gay because kind of when you put yourself in a position to be attacked by the community.

A: Yeah, and she does write explicitly gay characters which is very unusual for the time but when she's later interviewed about her potential queerness she outright rejects it. She says that she could never be, "a sexual deviant".

K: Oof!

A: Which obviously today, is a problematic thing to say.

J: Just to be clear, what time period are we currently in? Talking about Shirley's life.

A: We are currently in the mid 1930's. 7:26 at this point Jackson took a year off of school she was actually asked to leave the University of because she was doing so poorly in her classes just from lack of attendance she left she took a year off she told her parents that she would love to go back to school but they didn't really see a point her mother at this point was convinced that she was not going to get married ever and that was the only reason for a woman to go to school in her eyes and her father saw it as a waste of money to send someone back to school but especially to send his daughter back to school he dissolves like a double Financial laws so what she did she committed herself to writing 1000 words per day to improve her writing which she did for an entire year and that finally convinced her father to send her back to school because he could see the motivation in her so she enrolled at Syracuse University where she did so

much better at Syracuse University she met Stanley Hyman she likes that he was just as smart and quirky as she was she often writes in her diary is she finally felt like she had that her intellectual Superior which he would later use against her repeatedly in terrible way she also likes that her parents didn't particularly approve of him he was an atheist from a Jewish Family and this is during World War 2 they didn't think that marrying or dating outside of the religion was acceptable and to reiterate they were Christian Scientists

I bleed we'll talk about what Christian Science is momentarily but she was super infatuated with Stanley Stanley I guess had some appeal to him also but he was super emotionally manipulative the way he would talk to her and let her sometimes would make her very uncomfortable he would be very sexually explicit which she was very uncomfortable with and he was constantly unfaithful to her he thought that men should be able to have multiple partners at all times without the woman being able to but that a woman should only have one partner

and she doesn't love that so much

I think you're correct

I think that is a tactic to her but they got married in 1940 so congratulations to the Hyman family that was the same year that she and Stanley both graduated. On their marriage certificate Jackson wrote that her birth date was in 1919 rather than 1916 so she would seem younger than her husband so going into it there was already a good bit of insecurity. Her parents did not attend the wedding.

J: Based on what you said, that makes sense.

K: Yeah.

A: Yeah. Which I think she is probably okay with since she enjoyed that they didn't really like him that much.

J: As much as she seems to like Stanley he seems to be a way to really stick it to her parents so yeah that totally makes sense, seems in character.

K: Interesting, because thinking back I got her writing. She talks a lot about her relationship with her mom but I mean I don't know if I've ever seen it parallel to her husband. I think all of her female characters just don't get married.

J: I think that's right I can't really think of an instance where there is

K: Yeah that's interesting.

A: There was something where I got most of my information from was the biography by Ruth Franklin titled *Shirley Jackson: a rather haunted life* and in that biography there were a couple

themes of domineering husbands but typically it was someone who is already married to a domineering husband not someone who is getting married too so it was a good already established relationship Stanley and Shirley had four children together two boys and two girls Ivan was a militant atheist and enforced a very strict no religion policy in his home one day his daughter was reading the Bible at the dinner table and Hyman came up and slapped the book out of her hands and sent her to her room without dinner

K: That's what you get for reading.

A: Yeah, I don't read in the Hyman-Jackson household.

Another thing that I've been was insecure about was it Jackson very quickly began to earn him with just her writing and he had to take a job as a university professor at the University of Bennington which he hated he began to like heavily critique her writing which in a way helped cuz it did make him make her better he was a very good literary critic but apparently not a very good writer cuz she does so much better than him so as she began to earn him he'd be and overcompensate for that disparity between their incomes and there are rumors that he was very cheap that could either be back or it could be a stereotype of the time while I'm it was teaching at Bennington University he came across a group of Communists and decided to join them this was kind of right in the middle of the Red Scare so maybe the best life decision but that's what he was he was going for their family was promptly investigated by the FBI for being communist and this was well Jackson was being commissioned to write a story about the Salem Witch Trials she did her best to cover up the parallels but it didn't seem to work and it kind of worked against them but neither of them were ever sent to prison for being communist it was just kind of a constant nuisance having the FBI hovering around so they were they ever confirmed communist oh they were definitely communist the people at Bennington University word similar to Shirley Jackson very rich but there were a part of a very strong countercultural this movement where they were focusing on and all so much dismantling gender roles but not putting so much emphasis on women having children Shirley and Stanley had four children together which was kind of a disconnect from their friend group cuz they weren't heavily into like the family Dynamics so they word continuous how to like ask her poke fun at Jackson for having had children and she would defend herself saying she genuinely loves being a mother that she thought she was doing a good job at it and that she loved her kids as individuals her son Lawrence she couldn't know how to handle it first because he wasn't exactly like her she wasn't really big into like reading or writing he was more like in the sports and music and things like that so it took this it took them a second to adjust to a different set of skills but they were able to do it and moved on pretty quickly she had a daughter who was similar to her she was very excited about her education she would she loved to read and write she wanted to be a writer when she grew up but unfortunately there was some of use in a classroom by one of her teachers that should not have taken place Jackson tried to stand up for her daughter but there was a great deal of backlash from local parents would also have the teacher they would say things like I had that teacher and I turned out fine so obviously it's not that bad but it was that bad her daughter was like feigning illness and like shaking when she had to go to school and not eating and they would take her to the doctor over and over again and they could tell the

doctor was saying there's nothing physically wrong with her it seems like this is just very very severe anxiety and there were try to get to the bottom of it when they finally did that was how it unfolded was that there was a lot of backlash from it Jackson often wrote about her experience as a mother so she wrote *Life Among the Savages* and *Raising Demons* about bringing up her family. But this is one of those things that was just too heavy for her to right about there are a couple of dress folding around where she tried to write about experience but it ended up being too much when her kids were all but grown up person Lawrence was dating Lawrence is the one who is athletic and When her kids were all the grown up her son Lawrence was dating Lawrence is the one who is athletic and like musical he was dating a young woman named Karen Briggs at college they had an unexpected pregnancy and because of the time we're kind of forced to get married around the same time Shirley's help took a very sharp downward turn she began having attacks where she would pass out unexpectedly 200 doctor for it and he recommended that she lose weight she did her best to do so this list one of the things that Geraldine had constantly picked at when she was a child so she wrote to her mother seeking guidance and her mother was very supportive kind of for the first time in her life this is one of the first time that Geraldine was very supportive of her especially in her adult life but surely was not able to stick to any particular diet partially because the diet was so restrictive the doctor had her on like a thousand calories a day and then Geraldine was offering her advice that if you skip one so you can have another drink after dinner and things like that just weren't really helpful and kind of contribute to Jackson had some alcohol abuse issues both Geraldine and Shirley actually and so Geraldine's quote unquote advice was further detrimental to her health and then on top of the stress of trying to lose weight the negative effects of her on her body from yo-yo dieting severe calorie restriction the excess of Alcohol and Other stimulants that on top of stress here comes the stress part one of Shirley's best friends and her husband fell on Hard Times the Shirley and Stanley were very kind to let them move into the guest house so kind even that Stanley decided it was a good idea to start an affair with Shirley's best friend .

J: Going above and beyond being just a good host

K: Thank you, John.

[I: laughs]

A: But Jackson did become very anxious and struggled a lot with being in public after that

J: So at what point did she become aware of the affair and was her friend's husband aware of the affair?

A: Her friend's husband was aware of the affair. Sshe became aware of it after they moved out. They came into some money and ended up moving overseas. They were not living in the Jacksons guest house but they did continue their Affair through letters. Jackson became very anxious and struggled to be in public. She saw a psychiatrist for her symptoms and they did begin to lessen but she was still struggling to perform ordinary tasks like going grocery shopping. there is one point where she was doing such a good job she likes to the grocery store

and had her basket halfway full and then just had a complete panic attack and had to go home and like called the store and she she had them like fill the rest of her order and send it to her which is very smart. How did Shirley Jackson invent Uber food she might have it's amazing but she wasn't able to complete it on her own her anxiety and depression took another Berry shark debt and she wrote almost daily about the darkness creeping in and an obsession that you never been named she would frequently say Lily if she names the national shoes won't be able to let it go that she felt like she was almost able to shake it sometimes but if she said out loud or wrote down what it was and it would just never go away and the author of the biography that I wrote does point out that these thoughts became so all-consuming that when JFK was assassinated she made no comment about it in any of her personal or professional writing which is interesting because she was very politically active yeah she and her husband were both very politically active and it was something as far as my understanding I wasn't around but people say that it was only that everybody paid attention to it like every I turned and everybody was talking about it so bright tonight even be a blip on her radar she was very deep into depression. Diary which is her second to start another one but the Diary of with a repetition of laughter as possible laughter as possible black dress possible and then this is coming directly from the biography of Shirley Jackson or rather on his life on April 27th 1965 Shirley Jackson took the stage of Syracuse University Crawford Auditorium wearing a bright red dress with her hair loose down her back she began to read the opening chapter 4 new novel speaking slowly and carefully I always believe in eating when I can I had plenty of money and no name when I got off the train and even though I had had lunch in the dining car I like the idea of stopping off for coffee and I do not lie decided exactly which way I intended to go I did not believe in turning one way or another without consideration but then neither do I believe that anything positively necessary at any given time I needed a name and a place to go and garment and excitement and a fine High gleeful this I knew I could provide on my own this comes from Shirley's new novel she was intending to write a happy story about a woman whose husband had recently passed and she was being ever released into the world for the first time since then I think she went to 5 different colleges during this time to talk about her book and try to promote it but less than three months after this presentation she was found dead in her home Shirley Jackson passed on August 8th 1965 she went upstairs to take a nap after lunch which was common for her and she never woke up she was found by Stanley that afternoon Bo Jackson I think it really shows her attitude and her personality a good bit this poem is titled song for all the editors writers nearest political Economist idealist communist liberals reaction Bruce bliven Marxist critics praised nurse and pasta leaders and groups my father religious Fanatics, political Fanatics men on the street, fascists, Ernest Hemmingway, All Army members and Advocates of military Raining not accepting those too old to fight the ROTC and the Boy Scouts Walter Winchell the terror organizations Vigilantes all Senate committees and my husband I would not drop dead from the lack of you my cat has more brains than the pack of you.

J: Anna, thank you for sharing all of that very informative stuff. One of the things I want to say that really struck me about it is how there's a constant tension in Shirley's life and that seems like the overarching theme of it in its entirety and that tension between her and her parents, with society at large, her husband, and with herself even. SHE's just constantly at war with everyone, herself included, expectations for who she is and how she should be. And I think that's really

interesting. I think that's actually something that carries over into her work and I'm going to try to elaborate on that a little bit but I'm so glad you brought that up. That was super informative, thank you for doing that.

K: Yeah, I would definitely agree, I think that tension that she feels between herself and society and between herself and her expectations from her parents is very formative in American Gothic literature because it makes you uncomfortable when she like, points it out when she makes you See Society for what it really is and takes you out of your comfort zone

J: And that's one of the things I thought was really interesting. It doesn't seem like she has a true comfort zone for herself.

I: Not till the end of her life. Then towards the end when she was going to divorce Stanley and her works started to get a little more upbeat.

K: She wanted to write happy things. I think she just felt compelled to write horror because that's how she felt, like that was the life she lived.

I: Even as a child she mentioned that she was very lonely

K: yeah, I think her characters really show that.

J: There's a gravity that comes with that she sort of pulled into and that definitely something we will dig into here in a little bit.

K: Yeah and in talking about the tension between her and society and expectations, Ian can you go ahead and tell us a little bit about what was happening in the time she was alive?

I: Sure, I was going to start off my section with a quote so I was conducting the research for the podcast on the historical context and wanted to find a definition which I did and quote historical context refers to the social religious economic and political conditions that existed during a certain time or place. It is all the facts that a particular time and place in which an event occurs instead of analyzing works of literature by contemporary standards we can use historical context to analyze literature. No works of literature can be fully appreciated or understood without historical context and without historical context we are only seen a piece of the picture not fully understanding the influence of the time and place in which the story was written.

I: So, not to get quote heavy on my introduction but I have one more that I found that I don't think I could say any better so here it is, "literature is part of our cultural heritage that leads up intellectually and emotionally and deepens our understanding of our history, society, and our individual lives. History plays a fundamental role in shaping literature. Every novel, play, poem one reads is influenced by the political context in which it was written; the people that the author knows and the wider society that frames the entire work. How can we even consider Reading literature without understanding the work through the historical context?"



I: So, So as mentioned Shirley Jackson was born in 1916 and this was the height of World War I. Growing up her parents like Anna said were conservative Country Club people who were sheltered for most of the struggles middle class Americans of the time growing up her family were followers of Christian Science which started with Jackson's Grandma who at that time was a Christian Science faith healer who lived with the family. Christian Science faith healer basically means that if one of the Jacksons had an ailment they would try and pray the ailment away. Jackson dead recall years later how angry she was when our grandma and her mother prayed over her little brothers broken arm instead of seeking medical attention and later she did put Christian Science as religion while filling out a college application so I don't know how religious she was but there was a little bit of religion in her life.

K: I do want to point out that's similar to her views on LGBTQ and how she seemed to go back and forth and she kind of was inconsistent.

I: A lot of conflict.

K: yeah and I think it could be her fear of her parents which could make her want to like, say that she's a Christian Scientist or say she's not gay but in reality she's not being true to herself.

I: For sure.

J: As with other things there's always that back and forth, tug of war. Am I or can I be my own person or am I what others want me to be?

A: She did play into spiritualism also which if you don't know a lot about the spiritualist movement it's pretty fun to listen and learn about but a lot of like spirit boards and tarot and things like that she would kind of dabble or experiment in. And she kinda saw herself as somewhere in between the Christian Scientist and the witch.

K: Oh, I like that! That's fun.

I: Interesting.

I: Like Anna mentioned earlier during this time Jackson grew up in Burlingame, California an affluent suburb in San Francisco. Naturally I needed to go do some research on Burlingame and found this quote from the Burlingame Historical Society Burlingame California is a special place to go 16 miles south of San Francisco Incorporated it in 1908 is becoming a Treeline suburb with a variety of Home Styles ranging from English Tudor and American Bungalow to Spanish Revival and streamline Moderne. Rich and diverse history reflects the influence of the Spanish Ranchos as well as the area's turn of the century wealthy Elite. in 1920 the population was 4107 by 1930 it was up to 13270 so another small little town. So Jackson admits that Our first published novel *The Road through the wall* was loosely based on Burlingame and her childhood growing up in a rich California neighborhood. It is one of the first examples that I can find of the historical context of her life and environment influencing her writing. She also later admitted that

the novel was written to stick it to her parents who she was angry at for their Prejudice and greediness stating that quote a writer's first novel that has to be one in which they get back to their parents. So the story's about an upper-class neighborhood in California that is separated from a lower-class neighborhood by a wall And when the residents of pepper Street find out that the wall will be knocked down to make new housing they worry that the unsavory elements of the lower class will pour into neighborhood while not realizing what horrible people they are.

I: So I kind of picked up in 1940 when Jackson and Hyman eventually moved and settled in North Bennington, Vermont in 1945. Jackson kept the house they lived inconspicuously in the town known to most as just Mrs. Hyman, the quiet life of a new professor. Just a few years after moving to North Bennington Jackson wrote *The Lottery* which was published by the New Yorker.

He learned that most of the people in North Bennington did not read the New Yorker which came as a pleasant surprise since she had faced some of the townspeople in the story of the real people in the community. Obviously it only took a couple months though for the story to circulate around the neighborhood and needless to say the neighbors were not too happy about it.

K: I'm not surprised.

I: "The general consensus in town was as the nasty story made them all look bad and uncivilized." This showed some of the historical context surrounding the setting of *The Lottery* I also have is a little side note *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, her last completed novel, was also set in the Bennington-esque town full of suspicious and hateful villagers.

Kali: That's interesting. I can see the parallel now that you mention it. They were very hateful.

[everyone laughs]

K: They are so mean!

I: Everyone- all of the neighbors are mean in her stories! A large majority of them are.

J: I think everyone in her life is mean. To her. It doesn't seem like there is a single nice person that she has ever knew ever.

K: Except her one friend from college.

J: Is that the one that slept with her husband?

K: No. Wait, was it?

A: No, it wasn't that one. So she had two friends in college. Juno and then I don't remember the other lady's name. She was a Russian pianist studying at the University of Rochester and it

was one of her friends who was the man who didn't make fun of her for being ugly. So she did have a few friends. She did kinda come into herself a little bit and find her niche. But still the majority of people were pretty bad to her.

I: Yeah.

J: It does read overwhelmingly negative minus that one time in college.

[everyone agrees]

I: But it makes for great American Gothic literature.

A: That it does!

I: She lived in North Bennington which is a small village to the north of the town of Bennington so it's kind of weird. You have the town of Bennington and then in the north-west you have a little village called North-Bennington. It is Call college town and was the first town established west of the Green Mountain the town is comprised of about 112 acres and the 2010 census stated that the village only had about 1643 residents.

K: So she's lived in small villages and small towns her whole life.

I: For sure, very small towns.

K: Of course everyone was mean to her.

I: Small town girl.

A: Yea Small town suburbs

I: fun fact about North Bennington is that Robert Frost had a farm there and is buried there.

K: Really?

[J and A hmmm]

I: Yes, that is where he wrote one of his famous works.

K: When was Robert Frost alive?

I: I think the 1880's to the 1960's from what I remember.

K: Do you think they ever met?

I: Now she did host parties where famous authors came to her house but was that in North Bennington?

K: I don't know.

A: They could have met. He was born on March 26th 1874 in San Francisco and then died January 29th 1963 so just a couple years before she did in Boston.

I: Okay.

A: That is just a quick search, coming straight from Wikipedia to you.

K: I choose to believe that Robert Frost and Shirley Jackson were best friends.

I: They were both born in San Francisco.

A: What if he was the man who was nice to her?

[K gasps]

J: Was Robert Frost the nice man?

K: The nice college man?

I: In 1945 obviously everyone knows the world war ii ended as Shirley was getting settled in North Bennington. WWII had a profound impact on most everyone alive during the 1940s and Shirley Jackson was no different. The war impacted some of her work themes of the war can be found throughout her writings and just five years the world found out about the Holocaust, saw World War 2 end and the start of the Cold War. The influence of the Holocaust and the Cold War can be seen in *The Lottery* and other works. Systematic persecution, Conformity to society, the common element of people blindly following law without any thought of their own would have resonated deeply during that time. So obviously when the war ends you get a lot of gender roles and female discrimination. Women were fired from pretty much all their jobs and let go to make room for the male soldiers returning home. This meant the women were expected to return home to the role as the Homemaker for their families, education for women was looked down upon, and sexism in the workplace was rampant.

At the time of *The Lottery's* publication in 1948 the Cold War had started in the Red Scare was beginning to grow roots. Country was an anti-communist in hysteria as McCarthyism was right around the corner one historian wrote that quote "the outbreak of the Cold War had hardened American attitudes towards the ideology adopted by the Soviet Union." Another added that "American Society at the time was entering a phase of staunch Conformity as anti-communist sentiment and paranoia grew in the United States." This idea of conformity exploded into what would be known as the Red Scare. This conformity expressed itself is blind patriotism, fervent

consumerism, and ardent traditionalism. Marketing and advertising targeted these fears and the ideals through messages of Conformity such as fitting in or keeping up with the Joneses. During these early Cold War years as American patriotism grew masses of people practiced systematic persecution to those that did not hold the same American ideals. This would take form in McCarthyism in 1950. Now we're on to the 1950s and the cold war is in full effect. McCarthyism is sweeping the country. People are accusing people of being communist left and right, celebrities are losing jobs; getting fired. This led to the media controlling the navigation of the negative perception of Russian culture and the positive perception of American culture. Russian women were undressed and gunny sacks as they toiled in drab factories while their children were placed in cold and anonymous daycare centers. In contrast of the evils of Communism an image was promoted of American women with the feminine hairdos and delicate dresses tending to the Hearth and Home as they enjoyed the fruits of capitalism, democracy, and freedom.

A: Okay according to vintagenews.com in their article Great Depression food sacks became unnecessary and marketable fashion it is like Grain or food stocks that are then turned into clothes and I think I saw that at some point they started using like printed patterns on Food Sack bags so that like little girls to have cute dresses and feel nice about themselves while still calling me but probably in the end

K: So it sounds to me like wearing a gunny sack means that you can't afford clothing. So it's a sign of poverty?

I: Yeah, if you were trying to promote the American ideal that you need to like the extreme opposite.

K: American wealth.

I: Exactly, capitalism, wealth, all that.

K: Okay, got it.

I: So this was the Era of the "happy Homemaker" I said that in air quotes, happy homemaker. It started in the 1940s, for young mothers in the 1950s domesticity was idealized in the media and women were encouraged to stay home. Women who chose to work when they didn't need the paycheck were often considered selfish putting themselves before the needs of their families. Jackson was also expected to keep up the image of the good American housewife of the time she did the cooking, the cleaning, the grocery shopping, and the child rearing. All while writing amazing novels and short stories.

K: What did Hyman do?

I: He sat at his desk with his pen and had her refill it when it was out of ink.

K: Really?!

I: Yes. Dead serious.

A: It was a real thing.

K: Woooooow. Who's holding this household together?

A: It's almost like if he had been making money he could have a leg to stand on.

J: I know this is something Anna alluded to earlier but like Hyman's fragility really shines through, like what a power play to have to have her, the breadwinner, come and refill his pen. Like he's the one doing all this work.

K: Yes. Wow.

A: He's such a whiny little emotionally manipulative baby. Like when you get into the nitty gritty . I wanted to but some of the things just drive me crazy even thinking about the little things like that. Things he could have just done easily since he's not doing anything to take care of his four children.

K: But he needed to feel like a big man.

A: Seriously, I don't like that guy.

I: Me either.

J: He seems very domineering. In the way you guys are presenting him.

K: Yeah.

J: Not really doing a whole lot and very liberal in his politics but also dominating and overbearing and sort of conservative in social roles.

K: Yeah, and in his personal life.

I: Yeah, I did read that communism had something to do with that as well because It was like a very male-dominated and back then if you were a man you could have a bunch of wives.

K: Oh so that was a communist ideal in the 50s.

A: I didn't realize that was a communist thing. Hm!

I: That was according to one of the articles I read. It mentioned it briefly, not that it was a huge contributor. The Robert Fowler editor-in-chief of Publishers Live Right contended that Jackson was mostly overlooked by the predominantly male literature establishment of the 50's because of her looks. "I stand by my beliefs that if Patricia Highsmith or Shirley Jackson had looked like Sylvia Plath they would have never been condemned to the margins. There is this sense that people don't take Jackson seriously at the time because she is viewed as a dumpy, overweight housewife." It also did not help that the majority of her protagonists in her stories were women and this time in history almost all book reviewers were men who either looked down on stories about women or didn't understand what she was doing.

I want to talk a lot more about how her writing affected her Legacy later on. I think you're right, I think he's right saying that like her physical appearance and her being a housewife has a lot to do with why people disrespected or dismissed her. The Sylvia Plath comment gets me because yes, Sylvia Plath was a gorgeous woman but she also was a confessional poet which means that she was talking a lot about her mental health and her relationship and her emotional standing and it was all very personal and it was I think something that people could read and it could be a guilty pleasure it would like sustain that sort of macabre curiosity that we have and they could read it without feeling like a victim without feeling like they're being attacked. When we talk about Shirley Jackson she is deliberately criticizing the Community that she lives in people are going to read that insulting me personally they can't say that about Sylvia Plath. She attacks her dad for sure.

I: I agree with that. I got that same kinda feeling how it resonates and hits home with the community cuz they get in such an uproar. If it was all lies they really wouldn't care but there's obviously some truth behind it.

J: This is an interesting and important distinction to make and it really does underscore how deep seated the misogyny was in this time period for sure.

A: Well, I think that like the person you quoted said, still today an attractive woman is more likely to go further in a specific career than an unattractive woman. But what I think what's being overlooked is that an unattractive man is just as likely to be successful as an attractive man. Now granted in certain industries like in Hollywood and things like that it's not gonna be the same but a woman's success is somewhat dependent on her looks. And the fervour with which she raises her opinions and that's not the case for a man and that's something Shirley Jackson brings up repeatedly.

I: That's a good point.

K: I also think important to say the men in a female author's Life in Her proximity are also very important to how she's viewed and I say that because I'm thinking of Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley. and you know Frankenstein it's a classic everyone's read it we all know who Frankenstein is and I think that a lot of her Fame comes from the fact that she was friends with a lot of male authors her husband was successful and then we talk about Shirley Jackson's

husband who was not successful. he is a writer but he's he has nothing and he was a communist. he was actively othering himself from the community so she had no way of getting into the community.

A: right and even though there was a statistic *The Lottery* was the most responded to story published even still to this day the most responded to thing published by the New Yorker but even with that notoriety I mean we can get into like that all publicity is good publicity, Even with that level of publicity she still was not nearly as famed as her writing should be

I: Oh for sure, definitely overlooked.

K: Yeah and one point I wanted to make is that *The Lottery* is one of the most anthologized short stories in the west. probably top 10. I mean everyone pointed out we've all read *The Lottery* and then when you say the name Shirley Jackson almost everyone is like who? but you know Shirley Jackson.

A: I didn't know that I knew Shirley Jackson before Kali said, *The Lottery*. Then I realized I didn't even know that that was the same person who wrote *Haunting of Hill House* or *the Sundial* or any of that so it's just it's an interesting thing to get into.

[Everyone says for sure.]

K: All right John can you tell us a little bit about what Shirley Jackson wrote?

Has Anna mentioned earlier Shirley Jackson was a very prolific writer of 6 published novels 200 short stories I believe 2 Memoirs?

K: that sounds right

A prolific writer one of the things that you probably don't realize about Shirley Jackson though is the Shirley Jackson although primarily known as a Gothic horror writer of actually play with a variety of genres and tones as a matter of fact in *Monster* she wrote the women who pioneered horror and speculative fiction Lisa Kroger Melanie Anderson write, "*The Lottery* established Jackson as the reigning Queen of the horror genre though she wrote everything from campus novels to darkly comic domestic sketches about family life. People are complex and the Spectrum of genres and tones that Shirley Jackson wrote reflects what a complex individual she was. While it was true the three stories that she is most well known for *The Lottery*, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, and *The Haunting of Hill House* definitely falls squarely within the gothic horror fiction genre of and I definitely think there's a reason for this as we alluded to earlier. this kind of the gravity in Shirley Jackson's life where she's drawn towards the status of Father well maybe that are not drawn towards necessarily but she's kind of been cast in that and she's never really been able to escape it so I think that's a huge part of her pull towards that genre before we start talking about it we're going to talk about all three of those stories and one way shape or form and how her life kind of like fed into them and how they're kind of able to be



viewed as her perhaps working through them but I want to give you some background on what Gothic Horror fiction is and a little bit about history to everybody who might not be familiar with it if you guys will indulge me for a moment.

A: I would love that.

I: Absolutely.

K: Please, John.

J: And this is from the New York Public Libraries entry for gothic fiction so we've got the Bona fides. As a genre that was first established with the publication of Horace Walpole's dark foreboding *the Castle of Otranto* in 1764 in the centuries since gothic fiction has not only flourished but also branched off into many popular sub-genres. Early novels of the gothic horror sub-genre heavily featured discussions of morality, philosophy, and religion with the evil villains most often acting as metaphor for some sort of human Temptation the hero I must overcome. The novel's endings are more often than not unhappy and romance is never the focus. The battle between humanity and unnatural forces of evil, sometimes man-made, sometimes Supernatural, with an oppressive inescapable and bleak landscape is considered to be the true trademark of a Gothic horror novel. In addition to those things writer Patrick Kennedy has listed some additional features that I feel like they're worth mentioning. These employ dark and picturesque scenery Startling and melodramatic narrative devices and an overall atmosphere of exoticism, mystery, fear and dread. Often a Gothic novel or story will revolve around a large ancient house that conceals a terrible secret or serves as a refuge of an especially frightening and threatening character.

K: Can I also add another important part of Gothic literature is the pathetic fallacy because I love the pathetic fallacy, I think it's hilarious.

J: Tell us about the pathetic fallacy, please.

K: The pathetic fallacy is when people associate their own emotions with something that cannot feel emotion like whether or inanimate objects a good example would be like the rain is like my tears like my sadness. You know that kinda thing because the weather cannot feel your emotions. So silly.

A: But can't it?

K: It's raining because I'm sad right?

A: Obviously. I do love that.

K: I just wanted to throw that in there.

J: Fantastic, thank you Kali for contributing.

K: Oh you're welcome.

J: Much appreciated. You guys jump in whenever you want.

A: Oh and speaking of Architecture and studying Shirley Jackson comes from a long line of Architects.

I: Yes.

K: Really?

A: Yes.

J: Yes, she does. So one of the things I want to talk about I'm not so that's a nice setup for it part of it as we're saying is gothic novels or stories they revolve around a large into the house that conceals a terrible secret or serves as The Refuge of an especially frightening and threatening character. in two of the three works that she is most well known for, such a house or castle exists. *Haunting of Hill house* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Like animals saying she is descended from a long line of Architects and one such House built by her grandparents actually was the inspiration for *The Haunting of Hill House* we're going to touch on that It seems like architecture symbolically was very important to Shirley architecture you can look at that has the binds or bonds of a thing and as we've talked about before Shirley's life was bounded on all sides by Expectations, hers and other peoples and that's something she grappled with quite a lot it as something that actually did factor into these most memorable stories. That was a very raw personal thing for her. Now that we Do have the background which we all fleshed out a little bit now thanks to you guys it definitely is a little bit more transparent when you go through and read the works.

J: So it might be a bit counterintuitive but the first thing we're going to talk about is *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* which was her last published novel. So, to give a little background on *We've always lived in the castle*, this was a short summary provided by *Monster she wrote*, which was one of the text I primarily looked at when I was doing my research for this. the story focuses on the Blackwood sisters Constance and Mary Katherine nickname Mary cat who live with their infirmed Uncle Julian and their fenced-in Family Estate outside of a New England town Uncle Julian's poor health and the Scorn the townspeople feel for the surviving blackwoods are the result of the tragedy that occurred six years earlier. One night at supper for members of the Blackwood family the girl's parents, brother, and Aunt were poisoned and died. Constance who hadn't used the Arsenic placed sugar on the dinner table was arrested for the crime but not indicted. The townspeople believe she got away with murder or younger sister Mary Cat had been sent to her room without dinner on that fateful night and now is the only member of the household who ventures outside. She also practices magic rituals in order to keep Constance safe, out of the blue their cousin Charles swoops in later in the novel believing he is the rightful

inheritor of the state and establishes himself as patriarch of the family. So the reason that I want to start with this one first is because in a lot of ways this feels like the quintessential Shirley Jackson story. As we've talked about before and the previous section Shirley Jackson very much internalized the sense of the other throughout the life she always felt at odds with all the important figures her life, the community-at-large, it's something that they talk about in *Monster she wrote* at one point New England setting of the story was an integral part of Jackson's writing which often features main characters who are Outsiders and find themselves persecuted in a hostile environment it was a familiar experience for Jackson. he in Bennington was very much... Other people would talk about her and her penchant for practicing fortune-telling and Tarot cards. Jackson sort of Saw herself between being a witch and a Christian Scientist and that kind of put her Pause with the people around her this transferred over to Mary cat within the story she was a practitioner of magic and the townspeople viewed her with suspicion Mary cat would go into town to get groceries and this is something we talked about in the previous segment, People would view her with scorn they would talk about her. she would go into the grocery store and they would pull her groceries for her but she was always the subject of gossip and discourse because of the perception of her and her family.

J: *Monster she wrote* says Mary Cat Blackwood, like many of the other women in Jackson's work is an outsider but she maintains an imaginative spirit and a fierce Devotion to defending her sister and her home, something Jackson was also very passionate about, and cared very much about her family. The Blackwood sisters' experience at the margins of their Community reflects Jackson's own experience; she didn't quite fit in with other wives of her small University Town; she spent her days writing and tending to her children but her nights were filled with more exotic fare. A lover of the occult Jackson gave tarot readings to friends and family she claimed not to believe in ghosts but she owned a crystal ball and a Ouija board and seemed to relish her reputation as a witch. Whether or not she practiced actual witchcraft is debatable. This is of course found in *Monster She Wrote* the primary text I consulted for my research.

K: I want to bring it back to this that she is always inconsistent so say one thing and do something else same with the lgbtq same with Christian Science, same with believing in ghosts I think she just didn't want anyone to know the truth.

I: she actually said that she does not believe in ghosts.

K: I know, I know she said that.

I: she doesn't believe in ghosts while practicing.

K: Doing tarot and Ouija boards.

I: Okay, yeah.

K I think she didn't want anyone to know the truth about her.

A: She'd be really mad at us right now.

K: She would not like this podcast.

A: Not at all.

So this sense of constant tension with everyone around her that is reflected in the novel is also a part of Gothic literature. that sense of building dread and suspense in the atmosphere. They live in this house on the outskirts of town, a very nice fancy house the townspeople are resentful of it. It's mysterious because this tragic circumstance happened there. Similar to Jackson's own experience. She's having these parties with her husband, all of these counterculture figures are there things that the regular folks, the happy Homemakers that Ian referred to, might not understand this is just a Berry clear representation of Jackson's Life as a whole later in the novel there's actually a fire that leaves the house looking for desiccated and more like a castle and the table people actually show up to the house and while they help put out the fire they then turn against the family and start breaking and smashing things and I think this is pretty reflective about her feelings about how the world views her. The world is a harsh antagonistic place that doesn't understand her and you can very clearly see that reflected here in this work.

K: I think it also shows the jealousy of the townspeople. jealousy and also fear of what they don't understand.

I: A lot of mob mentality in her stories.

K: Yeah, exactly.

J: Yes. There is a story from when one of her children was being born she went to go to the doctors, she was being checked out by one of the nurses and the nurse asked her what her profession was she said I'm a writer and the nurse said oh we're just gonna put housewife. Was not understood and looked at condescendingly by other people, how dare you try and be more than what you are. That's very much something the Blackwoods are having to contend with in this novel.

K: Agreed.

Between the three stories We Have Always Lived in the Castle The Haunting of Hill House and The Lottery itself this seems to be that quintessential other story where you're really getting to see the world through Shirley's perspective where you're going down the street and you you feel the disdain and the scorn leveled at this person.

K: I really loveJust work because the horror aspect of it is not just the unsettling psychology of Mary but also the way that the townspeople look at them. Like imagine you live in a neighborhood and everyone in the neighborhood hates you and you're always you always fear for your life.

J: Yes.

K: You go out into town if you're like someone's going to rob me, someone's going to mug me, I'm afraid to exist in this world. It's not safe to exist in this world.

J: Everything becomes a survival story. It's an awful thing. That definitely seems to be Jackson's POV, especially later in her life. I think it's very well represented here. Moving on to the next book we are going to be discussing is *The Haunting of Hill House*. To give you guys some background about what the book is generally about and this is also from *Monsters she wrote* a very helpful resource you can check it out at your local library. Four characters from different walks of life converge on the titular property which has a bad past and bad reputation. Eleanor Vance the protagonist has answered an advertisement posted by Doctor Montague seeking assistance for a haunted house investigation. She sees it as the first adventure of her life which had until that point been spent taking care of her invalid mother. Once the action begins it's hard to tell if the four people are cracking under the strain of their isolation and the bizarre mansion or if the house truly is haunted. It doesn't help that every angle in the building is off by a few degrees and the decorations are well let's just say strange in addition to the usual cold spots, bangs and knocks, and even the seance of sorts Jackson adds. Eleanor's internal monologue in which she struggles to understand her morbid attraction to Hill House. Scripture we can see some of the hallmarks of the gothic horror genre. The psychological aspect of it, you're not sure what's real, you're being taken to this castle-esque environment where there is a malevolent and foreboding spirit possibly inhabiting. Yet to touch on Shirley Jackson's personal side, the character of Eleanor seems to be a stand-in in the sense that she's having to take care of her mother, there's a strain to that relationship which has been discussed previously. Jackson has with her own mother was a very contentious relationship going into the background for the book itself. Jackson at this point had never written a ghost story and the inspiration to write a ghost story from Miss Jackson according to her account in the article in experience and fiction she said that she was reading a book about a group of nineteenth-century psychic researchers who rented a haunted house order to study it and record their impressions of what they had seen and heard for the purpose of presenting *A Treatise on the Society for Psychic Research* as she recalls "they thought they were being a terribly scientific and provoking all kinds of things and yet the story that kept coming in through their dry reports was not an all the story of *A Haunted House* it was the story of several Ernest I believe misguided, certainly determined people with different motivations and background stories". It so excited her that she could hardly wait to create her own haunted house and her own people to study it.

J: So it was kind of the Genesis point for the story but this next section is where her personal history starts to bleed into it. She was on a trip to New York and at the end of 125th Street Station she saw a grotesque house. It was very, very evil looking, very imposing facade but on the backside it had actually been demolished and burned out so it was hollow. And backtracking a little bit that's actually a visual that would later show up in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. The fire that desiccated it made it look more like a castle sort of environment. So she was gathering more hard house research trying to find that perfect facade and she found a picture of a house in California and she contacted her mother about it who lives in California and she asked

her to see if she can figure out you know where the house was and it turns out that her great-grandfather had built the house in the picture but it had been burned down by townspeople at some point mysteriously. So yes her great-grandfather as we mentioned, she came from a long line of Architects, he actually built that house. This super creepy house that was apparently burned down by locals at some point. Her mother said that she was surprised the picture was still in circulation so this idea of the creepy ominous looking house is something that seemingly was in her DNA. The metaphorical concept of architecture and being bounded in and sort of like being surrounded by like all these predetermined angles. it's something that seems to relate to her personally of just sort of being entrapped within her life.

K: Ooo, so spooky!

A: It's Like she was literally made for American Gothic literature .

J: 100 percent. Her life is without a doubt is characterized strongly by Misfortune but it's sort of The Perfect Storm for having the life experience necessary to create stories like that a real sense of authenticity stop the the main things about Hill House that really seem to register is this idea of this place that is so uniquely defined by its crooked architecture and the angles that don't quite fit right. it's a ominous place and the Hill House Concept in general is it's a very unsafe place people tend to stay away from it at Wow that's the case the main character Eleanor who seems to be the stand-in for Shirley in this case she feels at home here she shouldn't want to be here but it's inescapable and that's something that is a return to a grapple with throughout the story. Without getting too heavy into spoilers.

K: Yeah, no spoilers here.

J: Except when we disclaim them.

[Everyone laughs]

Right now to round things that we're going to circle back around to the beginning the story that puts Shirley Jackson on the map and that The Lottery again surely returns to a New England setting the perennial setting for for all of these stories the one that she seems to feel truly comfortable and lends itself to that gothic sort of atmosphere.

Now spoiler alert, here is going to be our description of *The Lottery* for context: *The Lottery* tells the story of a Berry Tales of a small nameless Town annual summer ritual on every June 27th the father of every family draws a slip of paper from Black Box. one slip has a mark on it when one family is selected, every family member of that family then draws another slip of paper, one of which is again marked. When it is determined who is selected the mark paper that individual is immediately inexplicably and unemotionally stoned. Presumably to death by the entire Village including their own family members. The individual stoned this particular year is Tessie Hutchinson, wife to Bill Hutchinson, mother to Bill Jr, Nancy, and Little Davey. To whom someone gave a few Pebbles.

Spoiler alert for *The Lottery* summary also brought to you by... the summary was not actually brought To Us by *A Monster She Wrote*.

[Everyone: oh wow!]

J: It comes from a writer named Mitchelson.

K: Thank you, Mitchelson.

J: *The Lottery* tells the story of a Berry Tales of a small nameless Town annual summer ritual on every June 27th the father of every family draws a slip of paper from Black Box. one slip has a mark on it when one family is selected, every family member of that family then draws another slip of paper, one of which is again marked. When it is determined who is selected the mark paper that individual is immediately inexplicably and unemotionally stoned. Presumably to death by the entire Village including their own family members. The individual stoned this particular year is Tessie Hutchinson, wife to Bill Hutchinson, mother to Bill Jr, Nancy, and Little Davey. To whom someone gave a few Pebbles.

The story concludes with the haunting line, "It isn't fair, it isn't right! Misses Hutchinson screamed and then they were upon her."

K: Oh, I hate that.

J: No, it's very Very awful there's a whole lot to pull from right there immediately. This person's life through no fault of her own is taken away from her and through other people's traditions and ideas and Customs she is persecuted.

K: Not just persecuted but violently violently murdered.

J: Yes, violently murdered.

So one of the big things here is how quickly the protagonist of the story, Tessie Hutchinson, her family turns against her. In *Monsters She Wrote They Ride* the truth was the Jackson always struggled against her role as wife and mother or to be more accurate the roles of others Castor and professionally she was a successful author but at home in North Bennington she was Hyman's wife the mother of four children, her husband expected her to play the part of the faculty wife, to maintain the household, rear the children, to cook, to clean, and to entertain people he brought into their home. The residents of the college town never quite accepted her as one of their own, which likely informed how she wrote about various groups and tolerance of outsiders, as in *The Lottery*. As we talked about before, Hyman encouraged his wife's work especially because it supplemented his income but eventually her career Eclipsed his, Hyman no longer tolerated her and belittled her in front of his university colleagues. What's more he was frequently unfaithful, being particularly fond of his former students. We see here especially in *The Lottery* when the family of Tessie Hutchinson turn against her and stone her that sense of

betrayal that she probably felt in her personal life. Hyman would have an affair or belittle her talk down to her that really comes through here and it sort of seems like the ultimate betrayal for someone who had so little moments of joy and so few things in her life that she could really call positive and good and uplifting.

K: I would add that The ultimate betrayal comes in here with this headstrong following of tradition over family, over their loved ones. That you would rather contribute to a tradition that has harmed a society for so long, you would rather just play the part and hurt your own family rather than fight it. I think that's also like, I think where a lot of Shirley Jackson's idea of betrayal comes from, where her family sort of turned against her for their own traditionalism.

J: I would agree with that, Kali. I think that really puts a fine period on everything. just in all things she was just struggling to be herself and that ultimately wasn't something she was able to do fully in real life so her work was the way that she could come to talk about that and express those ideas. And I think that's best expressed in these three stories and that's probably why they are her most remembered stories because they are so raw and personal in that way they talk about these things it would have been very important to her.

K: I think they function as a mask or even as like a wall for her to like to show herself and be vulnerable but at the same time not expose herself.

J: Agreed. For sure. And moving forward as we start getting into your section I think that's probably a great way to begin how that affected her legacy.

K: Yeah, I guess Jump right into it. So before I get into Shirley Jackson's Legacy I want to go back a little bit to American Gothic and John you did a great job of telling us what American Gothic literature is but I wanted to point out that it started started as Victorian Gothic so there are a lot of themes Had to do with 1800's England and then as it metamorphose into American Gothic had a lot more to do with what was happening in America as we know there was a lot of nationalism the second world war had just ended and a lot of what Shirley Jackson talks about is those things that she had to experience in Society; racism, misogyny, bigotry, and that is really what shapes American Gothic the horrors of reality so since you just left off with *The Lottery* I'm going to hop right back on that bandwagon. The issue we run into with Shirley Jackson's Legacy and she didn't really have one because she was often ignored or dismissed by literary critics. As I mentioned earlier *The Lottery* is one of the most anthologized short stories in the West. We've already said it's been taught for years and yet we are still arguing whether or not it belongs in the literary canon. So this issue. We're running into his literary critics discrediting Jackson and her literary skill because of who she was when she looks like what she wrote about and I think The Lottery is a living breathing example of that. JOyce Carol Oates was an American Author short story writer and essayist who has written well over fifty books and was also an editor for the collection Shirley Jackson novels and stories. She was interviewed in 2010 by Ruth Kelly about the collection The Lottery she says quote is not so very different from the brilliantly rendered and unsettling short stories by Edgar Allan Poe but it was published in the New Yorker at the time far less than now a sort of Bastion of proper middle-class Caucasian



American values Jackson's story suggests that ordinary Americans like the readers of the New Yorker in fact are not so very different from the lynch-mob mentality of the Nazis and as you can probably figure out people didn't like that. As I mention, in the the fifties patriotism and nationalism were rampant so insinuating that red-blooded Americans were anything like the Nazis was a surefire way of putting a target on your back so it really didn't matter how great Jackson's writing was the literary critics were not going to acknowledge her and they're going to try pretty hard to ignore her. One way this is exemplified is by Harold Bloom in Bloom's *Literature*. He argues that *The Lottery* quote "wounds you once and once only"; he says that the story isn't worth re-reading and therefore has no place in canonical literature. The review *Who* is hardly a page long and in no way trying to analyze or understand Jackson Jackson's literature this reductive take on Jackson's work is a clear example of people not wanting to take women's issues and women's literature seriously Jackson spoke what she thought was the truth and that's what got her to ignore it however I think the very fact that we've been not only reading but teaching Jackson for decades disproves Bloom. In fact the recent Renaissance of her literature as a whole disproves Bloom. Why would we continue to be so obsessed with her if she weren't worth re-reading?

K: Fritz Oshlager in his article "the stoning of Mistress Hutchinson: the meaning and context in *The Lottery*" writes that "the goal of the ritual is to contain the potentially destructive force of an awakened female sexuality." And this is what I think captures Shirley Jackson's literature so perfectly in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* we see two sisters against the world, one so fed up with her patriarchal demanding family that she kills them all in *The Haunting of Hill House* we see young woman finally freed from taking care of her mother, who steals her sister's car and runs off to do one single thing for herself and in so doing gets to experiment with sexuality and relationships. So what we've learned from Shirley Jackson's writing is that she was haunted by misogynist societal expectations and she lets us. I believe that the critics of the time didn't value the perspective of women and therefore they didn't think Jackson's work had any merit. Ruth Franklin, author of *a rather haunted life*, says that Jackson's work quote constitutes nothing less than a secret history of American women of her era and I think the reason that we're seeing this Renaissance of her work now is that it is becoming more and more acceptable to question our societies hierarchy. Alexis Shotwell in her article "No proper feeling for her house: the relational formation of white womanliness and Shirley Jackson's fiction" talks about the normalization of the dismissal and silencing of housewives because Jackson was considered a quote "proper woman in many ways" she bore children, stayed home and took care of them, and the house. She wasn't taken seriously as a writer. She also wrote about housekeeping in women's magazines which was probably the bulk of her career. Literary critics could use that as an excuse to dismiss her writing.

K: So when Jackson critiques the middle class and the heteropatriarchy when she was a part of it she could easily be brushed off by "more serious" writers. Years after her death there was a renewed interest in Jackson that led to many film adaptations and new critical analysis. Jonathan Lethem for example and his 1997 *Solon* review of just an ordinary day: a posthumous collection said "to put it most simply Shirley Jackson wrote about the mundane evils hidden in

everyday life and about the warring and subsuming of selves in a family. Community and sometimes even in a single mind she wrote about Prejudice neurosis and identity. Jackson's Forte was psychology and Society people in other words. people Disturbed dispossessed misunderstanding or supported one another compulsively people colluding absently in monstrous acts she had a Jeweler's eye for the microscopic degrees by which a personality creeps into madness or relationship turns from dependence to exploitation. I just want to linger on that second cuz it was just a really interesting quote to me. you should just back up and listen to it again. It's beautiful. Based on that quote that makes me think a lot about Hill House and how Jackson likes to write untrustworthy narrators so the start of creeping Madness that Jonathan Letham mentions comes out in the ways that we see these narrators observing their lives and how what they do versus what is actually happening isn't always the same. I think that's a really cool literary tactic.

K: Angela Hague in 2005 wrote "by focusing on her female characters isolation and loneliness and fragmenting identities their simultaneous inability to relate to the world outside themselves or to function autonomously and their confrontation with an inner emptiness that often results in mental illness Jackson displays in pathological terms the position of many women in the 1950s. But her unveiling of the era's dark Corners is not limited to one gender for her apocalyptic Consciousness, Sinister children, and scathing portraits of nuclear families and their Suburban environment. Her depiction of a quotidian and predictable world that can suddenly metamorphose into the terrifying and the bizarre reveal her character's reactions to a culture of repression, containment, and paranoia." And that might as well be the dictionary definition of gothic fiction so to Harold Bloom who said she only wounds you once, to you I have to say, what?!

[Everyone laughs]

K: Did we read the same story? Did we read the same author? I just think that's wild. He only wrote less than a page.

[Everyone: Yeah.]

K: Then we go back and read these and it's like way more in depth. Like an actual analysis of what she was trying to say.

J: Mr. Bloom, did they lie? Did they manufacture all of this depth?

A: I think that Bloom's analysis is very obviously very dismissive and it's probably very indicative of the view of her work while she is alive.

K: Right. And I think that's important to think about is why we don't remember her. Why she's not part of the literary canon is because people like Harold Bloom just wanted to dismiss her because of what she was saying.

J: Unfortunately it seems like they were pretty successful.

K: There has been a huge Renaissance of her work and we've gotten all these different adaptations, speaking of which I really want to talk about the Netflix show "The Haunting of Hill House" that adaptation came in 2018. Directed by Mike Flanagan, you might know him from The Haunting of Bly Manor, Dr Sleep or Hush. With The Haunting of Hill House I think he made a very interesting choice because instead of four strangers he went with this family. They're all these siblings who grew up in Hill House and are then still being haunted by the memory of what happened in Hill House. It obviously is a modernized retelling. You know it's not going to be the same story and I appreciate that, I like that it's an inspiration rather than a direct adaptation. It does feel like the purpose of the story was changed a little bit because in the original, Jackson's version, she's talking a lot about escaping this toxic and exhausting mother that she had to take care of and escaping from a sister that took her, she did take her into her home but was still like not kind to her is like I have to let you live in my house because you're my sister. Escaping this very toxic family and going to meet up with strangers to try to live her life and then it's sort of the opposite in the show it's more like reconnecting and I think I'll give him some credit because I do really like the way he handled the the story of the vagueness that Jackson had cuz in the book and this is going to be a spoiler I'm sorry, in the book Nel, our main character, was experiencing some what she thought to be a paranormal Normal activity there's banging on the doors you think it's a ghost going up and down the hall and then at the end of the book she's running around the halls banging on the doors in this sort of like parallel to what we imagined was happening and that creates this cyclical time structure but it is not explicitly stated and then in Flanagan's version he actually does have a very it is explicitly a sort of cyclical time structure and I'm not going to say how that comes about and we're trying to avoid that spoiler because this is you know a new show, you got to go watch, it but I think it is very well done.

A: I think it's very effective.

K: I really like the way that he expresses time and you'll have to watch the show to find out how.

J: You're right it is very well rooted in character, Kali. And just kinda seeing this experience through each member of the family's eyes. What their perception and take on it is. Because in the original novel it's very ambiguous about whether the haunting is actually real.

K: Yes, and I think that's where the unreliable narrator comes in. So I do like the way that he did the different perspectives that way we see the story in different ways and we don't know what the truth of it is.

J: Yes.

K: I think that was a really interesting idea.

J: Right. You're definitely not coming into this adaptation from the go thinking, alright this is 100 percent a haunted house. It's real. All these people are reliable, credible, sources of information. I feel good about it.

K: Exactly.

J: Ghosts.

K: But that's what I love about horror. It usually is very ambiguous . and you don't really know what's going on. And they play with that a lot I think in a lot of movies. It's usually between mental health stuff which is kinda questionable because some times that gets into this idea that we don't understand mental health And it's scary and sometimes that pushes us to like understand it better and sometimes such as demonize is it and I think that both Flanagan and Jackson did a good job of saying Mental Health is very difficult to deal with it is very scary but it is something that can be understood. So this is not the first adaptation of Haunting of Hill House. We also had a film in 1999 called The Haunting directed by a genda font it premiered the film instead of being a psychological Thriller was more of an adventure horror where the characters had to defeat the evil lurking in Hill house obviously a very different from the original story people hated it so much that it became the inspiration for Scary Movie 2

J:More people have probably seen Scary Movie 2 than The Haunting

K:Correct, but there was a version before that in 1963 the same name is also called The Haunting and that film was actually really important to the lgbtq+ community because Theadora was explicitly gay. We get hints of that in the book we get an ideal always think Theodore is gay but it's never like explicitly said so that was really great for the community especially in the 60's where again I'm going to the Hays code there was a lot of issue with creating clear characters you could lose your job you could lose the movie could flop Like Anything could happen so usually people wouldn't do stuff like that so that was a really great step forward in the 60s and in that version it was it was more similar to the original book in that it was a small group of people invited to a seemingly Haunted Mansion by a paranormal investigator in the film focus more on the mental breakdown of Eleanor rather than the haunting so that we may be a better person to go watch if you want a more direct adaptation of the book.

Now I wanna talk about why is The Haunting of Hill House is so important to Modern horror. Joe Hill says that, "Its aFoundational document the textbook on what a good ghost story can be and Paul Tremblay author of a head full of ghosts agrees by calling it quote haunted house novel all others stand in his shadow Joe Hill and you may know as Stephen King son or the author of the firemen and heart-shaped box also said that Jackson understood that quote "houses aren't haunted, people are and I think that really gets it that really gets straight to the point that it is there's nothing really in this house besides the ideas we put in there he also says that quote all the most terrible specters are already there inside your head just waiting for the Cellar Door of the subconscious to Spring open so they can get out sink their icy claws into you in the story The House toys with a the house toys with the minds of Our Heroes just like the cat with the mouse with a fascinated joyful cruel nothing is more terrifying than being betrayed by your own senses and psyche like he'll authors including Stephen King Neil Gaiman write a Kimball and Carmen Maria Machado were equally terrifier equally terrified and inspired by

Shirley Jackson so although literary Scholars still debate her place in the Canon it's obvious the love there is for her in the gothic literary tradition finally let's go back to you *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* which was adapted into film in 2018 also on Netflix that one was directed by Stacey Paxon in the film is much more of a direct retelling of Jackson's novel rather than plays Mary Katherine Blackwood and she is creepy meticulous and compelling while her sister Constance played by Alexandra Daddario is her complete opposite, cheerful, meek and trapped in a daydream. The show is good, I don't think it really captures the ideas that Shirley Jackson put down on paper when you read a Shirley Jackson novel it's very much this psychological Thriller you really Inside of Mary Catherine's head and your leg watching the world through her eyes and then when you look at the movie I think it really distances you from the narrative and so well the story is there it's not really as creepy as the book.

J: You're not really as immersed or enmeshed as the character.

K: Yes, Yes

A: That would be really difficult to convey through film

K: I think they tried. The scene where Mary Katherine is digging up her spells that she like buried to protect Constance and she finds things missing and like it shows the tension between her and their cousin and like I think it was done well I just don't think they captured the same creepiness. Is this row on the topic and we will always lived in the castle I do want to briefly talk about Paul Tremblay's book *A Head Full of Ghosts* and it was a little bit off topic but it is quite obviously a love letter to Jackson I mean is it features Mary Barret and Marjorie Barret as a two sisters are very much of parallel to Constance and Mary Katherine and if you've read *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* you generally have an idea how *A Head Full of Ghosts* is going to end but I'm not going to spoil that here the way that Paul Tremblay also does this is by using the unreliable narrator so his story is written from the perspective of Mary is also from an interview of Mary as an adult's talking about when she was 8 years old so obviously there's like the issue of memory and not remembering it correctly and also like being 8 years old so your life radically amplifying the way the things happened and I wanted to point that out because I Stephen King says the turn of the screw and *The Haunting of Hill House* are quote the only two great novels of the supernatural in the last hundred years so we're equating this incredible novel the turn of the screw with Shirley Jackson. Send which just keeps proving to me that she is worth more than the credit she's been given and she obviously has a place in the Canon because all of these authors have taken inspiration from her and have been writing because of her and horror has been shaped because of what she has done.

I: it's funny that you said that because and a completely different article I have a in my miscellaneous facts quote that Jackson use Supernatural elements in her work not to deliver cheap thrills but in the manner of Poe or James to plumb the depths of human condition and more particularly to explore the psychic damage women are especially prone.

K: Yeah, Absolutely and I think it's just the fact that she's humanizing women in the fifties and somehow there's still this debate about whether or not she belongs in the canon.

J: Well, it's absurd because in addition to comparing her to all of these preeminent horror figures in the past, these are some of the biggest names and voices in horror today that are citing her as an influence. Stephen King!

K: Stephen King! The biggest voice in horror.

J: Mr. Bloom if your goal was to strike this woman's name from the record you failed.

K: You have failed, sir.

J: She was a huge part of this and always will be. Her importance can't be understated.

K: Absolutely. So although We don't have this great literary resolution from Shirley Jackson we do have this long lasting Legacy and part of that can also be seen by the Shirley Jackson awards with if you aren't aware is a yearly award that was established in 2007 to recognize and celebrate outstanding works of psychological horror and Dark Fantasy. In fact, recent winner, Stephen Graham Jones, just visited the library in September digitally but he still visited us.

J: Lovely fellow.

K: Very funny guy, his book The Only Good Indians, Is novela night of the mannequins won the award in 2020 and to bring in to a close I do want to reiterate a quote that Anna has already given to us and that is :”laughter is possible.” Despite all the horrors that Shirley Jackson saw she was able to write some incredible literature and entertain us many many years after her death and we will not forget her.

K: Thanks Shirley .

A: Thank you Shirley.

J: Thanks Shirley.

I: Thank you Shirley.

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