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Shirley Jackson' s Portrayal of Female Characters iri Conflict

Judith Moran Dirks

Shirley Jackson's Portrayal of Female Characters in Conflict

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Judith Moran Dirks

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789 East Eisenhower Parkway
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Thesis Committee:

Name	Department
Joan Breeden	Secondary Education
John J. McKenna	English

Bruce A. Baker, English
Chairman

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Date

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PREFACE

Shirley Jackson is best known as the author of such horror pieces as The Haunting of Hill House and her most famous story, "The Lottery." Although the frightening aspect of her work is unique and effective, readers and critics often respond to this alone. It seems that a more significant effect of her work lies in her portrayal of characters who must react to a wide variety of strange situations. Jackson combines her characters with unusual settings and incidents in a carefully balanced presentation that helps her portray human nature deeply. This paper will focus on a study of Jackson's development of definite patterns followed by her female characters: patterns which convey Jackson's view of humanity in which these characters function.

Jackson's real forte seems to be in characterization of a special type. She deals almost entirely with female characters, who all face their respective ordeals in contemporary settings. These female characters are presented as reacting to the disturbing world around them, either through personal psychological problems or in serious conflicts with other women. When dealing with an individual woman's reactions, Jackson may represent a character as being mildly disillusioned with life or at other times as being extremely disturbed psychologically. The conflicts between such female characters

as mothers and daughters, sisters, and friends or associates are also focused upon by Jackson to reveal certain unpleasant aspects about feminine nature. She explores formerly stereotyped characters such as the "hysterical female," "scheming woman," or "vulnerable girl," making them not only believable individuals but also useful instruments through which to comment on all of human nature.

The major part of this paper will deal with a critical interpretation of primary sources, including eight novels, two autobiographical books, and selected short stories. Since Jackson is a contemporary writer whose earliest story copyright is 1938, there were more problems in locating both primary and secondary sources than one would expect. Many of the critical articles on Jackson appear in teachers' manuals for fiction textbooks: books rather difficult to locate in most libraries.

The following people or firms proved most helpful in obtaining essential materials. The William A. Graf book company in Iowa City, Iowa, was able to locate personal copies of most of Jackson's books. Keiser's Book Store in Omaha, Nebraska, also special-ordered some materials. Ms. Maureen Pastine, bibliographical librarian, and Ms. Elizabeth Laird, interlibrary loan director, at the University of Nebraska at Omaha library, offered valuable assistance in the initial research for this paper.

WOMAN IN CONFLICT: THE NEUROTIC FEMALE

Shirley Jackson's main character type is a female who displays extreme neurotic tendencies and often becomes completely psychotic by the end of a story. This character usually pursues one of two courses of action; she will either become involved in a frantic search for self (an identity loss or crisis) or attempt to escape from her world as best she can. Both of these courses of action result from the character's inability to cope with her present situation. Unfortunately, most of these attempts to change are futile, with few characters actually arriving at a satisfactory solution for their problems by the end of the story.

Although all age groups are represented as having such problems, Jackson seems to favor working with young characters. Many identity problems and disillusions with life in general occur during late adolescence and Jackson has the majority of her characters fall into this age bracket. Four of her novels alone have a young central character, these include: seventeen-year-old Natalie Waite in Hangsaman, twenty-four-year-old Elizabeth Richmond in The Bird's Nest, the young sisters Mary Katherine and Constance Blackwood in We Have Always Lived in the Castle, and of course, the group of young teen-age girls in her juvenile novel, The Witchcraft of Salem Village.

In addition, the character of Eleanor in The Haunting of Hill House is thirty-two years old but much younger in attitude and experience. Jackson occasionally varies the pattern effectively by reversing her approach and having elderly women act in a manner more fitting to adolescents. She does this with her two major characters, Mrs. Orianna Halloran and Aunt Fanny in The Sundial and also with an unnamed character in her story, "The Bus."

The plight of these various characters reveals a type of distortion of reality as seen only in the eyes of the seriously disturbed. Jackson has an excellent ability to describe a person's inner feelings and thoughts. Most of her major characters assume the role of first person narrator, and through their comments, a reader can follow along with them in their attempts to cope with life and finally to share in their individual views. All of these characters are keenly sensitive to the world around them. By evoking a reader's sympathy with a character's helplessness Jackson often conveys her comments about humanity.

Jackson's first published story entitled "Janice," was published in 1938 in Syracuse University's creative writing publication, Threshold. Only one page long and consisting mostly of dialogue, it is actually more of a character sketch than a true story. In it, a young college girl, Janice, tells friends of her attempt earlier in the day to commit suicide. There is no background given to justify any reasons for this;

the emphasis lies in her off-handed way of referring to the incident. When asked how it felt to be dying, she responds, laughing, "Gee, funny. All black."[1] In this story, Jackson seems already to have discovered the major character explored in the rest of her work: a woman with neurotic tendencies who has come to a point where she is dissatisfied with life as she sees it and makes a futile attempt to change. Here, Janice seems to be enjoying the attention resulting from her daring; but, later characters will be more serious both in their attempts and subsequent responses.

The story, "My Life with R. H. Macy," printed in The New Republic on December of 1941 was Shirley Jackson's first commercially published piece. In it, as in "Janice," Jackson deals with a young, central character who cannot adjust to her life in society. The girl of the story is in training to be a sales-clerk for Macy's department store and is overwhelmed by its meaningless bureaucracy. To her, all the supervisors become identical "Miss Coopers" and she finds herself lost in a mass of identification codes and department numbers. After two days' attempt at trying to act normal in what seems madness to her, she gives up, disregards a sale purposefully and walks out--ignoring the employee's designated exit. Still in desperation, the girl writes a farewell letter to the store and signs it, not with her name, but with a number selected by adding all her identification codes together and dividing them at random.

Many of Jackson's short stories deal with characters who are only mildly disillusioned with life as they see it. The characters in these stories could not be considered hysterical or insane, yet they certainly display aspects of their personalities that do not suggest normal adjustment. Three excellent examples of this type of character can be found in the short stories "The Intoxicated," "The Villager," and "Elizabeth."

In the story, "The Intoxicated," Eileen, a precocious girl of seventeen, speaks to a drunken adult guest at her home about a homework assignment topic, "the end of the world." She is as sober in viewpoint as he is intoxicated. Neither one of them holds any regard for the other's opinions, and they end up offending each other. This scene is very similar to one early in the novel, Hangsaman; there the daughter, Natalie, also views her parents' friends as absurd, but she is too frightened of them and unsure of herself to really confront anyone. The refusal of such girls to accept their parents' values as representative of the entire world, often leads to an eventual suspension of belief in all reality.

In "The Villager," a would-be professional dancer, Miss Clarence, finds herself still in her "temporary" secretarial job after twelve years. Her only distinction in life is that she is a villager from "artistic" Grenwich Village while all her old friends are still living in Ohio. An incident in the story where she is at a young couple's apartment to buy some furniture reveals her true feelings. This couple is abandoning

all security to pursue an artistic life in Paris. Alone, she answers their phone and rather than telling the caller who she really is, assumes the identity of the wife and nonchalantly explains their plans; thus revealing her own dissatisfactions and secret yearnings.

Likewise, the character of Elizabeth Style from the story "Elizabeth," has had to compromise her career ideals. She finds herself in the job of assistant literary agent in a small firm, reading and rejecting others' manuscripts rather than writing her own. She is dissatisfied with her boss-lover of nearly eleven years and with her own image; she is full of good intentions of taking better care of her appearance and finding a more "stylish" position, yet she lacks the initiative or imagination to change things.

A few of the secondary characters in Jackson's novels act in ways similar to Eileen, Miss Clarence, and Elizabeth Style from the above mentioned stories. The harried, young wife of a professor in Hangsaman acts much like Elizabeth. She is disillusioned with the not-so-glamorous role of being a faculty wife and turns to drinking where Elizabeth Style relies upon good intentions; but they both are refusing to admit how bleak things really seem. The recently widowed wife of the family heir in The Sundial also displays an unhappiness with her lot in life. Rather than returning to her former job as a librarian, she remains a hanger-on at her in-law's home and lives in a land of movie-star hero worship. These women,

by choosing to ignore the stark reality of their situations in life, actually are being deluded as much as Jackson's other characters whose minds become totally involved in fantasies. To Jackson, refusal to face facts is not that different a situation from the inability to distinguish fact from fiction.

In "The Summer People," rather than frustration over the lack of change (such as felt by the characters in "The Villager" and "Elizabeth"), Jackson treats the theme of sensitive human vulnerability to any type of change. In this story, an elderly couple, the Allisons, decide to stay on at their summer cottage beyond their normal departure date. Things seem fine at first, but then the Allisons begin to realize that the townspeople are trying to force them away by cutting off all supplies, even the bare essentials necessary for survival. The couple is alone, helpless, and quite shaken by the thought of this malice being directed toward them and their resultant loss of control over their own destiny.

The overwhelming frustrations often experienced by Jackson's characters is perfectly expressed by an angry and upset Mrs. Arnold in "Colloquy." She seeks counselling with a psychiatrist, asking him if she is going insane. She tells him that she is fully aware of the insanity of the entire world around her, yet is disturbed because no one else seems to recognize it. She can no longer cope with society and all of its absurdities. Ironically, the doctor supports her very argument

by diagnosing her case in sheer double-talk terminology. She finally cries out, "Is everyone really crazy but me?" and storms out of the office.[2] This "Catch-22" concept of reality is shared by many Jackson characters, and presumably by Jackson, herself. The resulting exasperation from such hopeless predicaments causes many characters to search for meaning in society or life in totally irrational ways.

When the present becomes totally unbearable, Jackson has many of her characters desperately seek solace in flights of fantasy. Some characters fall into occasional daydreams, but many lose all concept of reality and become completely absorbed in their illusions. Stories containing a fully detailed account of a character's private fantasy world include: "A Day in the Jungle," "Beautiful Stranger," "The Bus," "The Tooth," "Pillar of Salt," "The Daemon Lover," and "A Visit." Every single novel traces at least one major character's fantasy escapes. Usually, as these characters grow more desperate and their searches become frantic, they suffer greatly from varied delusions. Their fantasies almost always arise from a gradual then quickening crumbling of reality.[3]

A story where a character becomes greatly frightened by her own fantasies is "A Day in the Jungle." Jackson relates this story of a young wife who feels trapped by her marriage and seeks excitement and freedom by leaving her husband. Fully anticipating a life of luxury, she packs her bags and checks

into a local hotel. She is amazed at her own confidence and ease, but is soon overcome by neurotic, paranoid feelings. Walking along a city sidewalk to meet her husband for a "date" she imagines such things happening as the sidewalk shifting, falling glass, explosions, hit and run accidents and more. Thoroughly shaken, she welcomes the security her husband presents and abandons her one day's liberation to return home willingly.

Natalie Waite in Hangsaman also approaches the brink of a frightening fantasy world before bringing herself back into touch with reality. Natalie is an extremely sensitive and intellectual seventeen-year-old. Her father, an egotistical author, has taught her to be cynical and aloof. He chooses a progressive, permissive college for her to attend. Instead of preparing her to competently face an adult world, this institution robs her of the small amount of emotional stability that she had.

Natalie cannot adjust to the life style of the other college girls, partly because their interests all seem trivial to her. Friendless and lonely, she spends more and more time alone in the privacy of her own room. This room becomes her place of retreat and is stripped of as many things suggestive of the college or outside world as possible. She hates the "proper college style" clothes chosen for her by her mother and packs these all away, wearing the same outfit constantly. Natalie hears voices in her head (usually a detective accusing

her of some murder; her own--her parents?) and writes a secret journal to herself.

Desperate for a friend and someone to help her find some meaning in life, Natalie becomes attached to another college girl, named Tony. Some reviewers disagree as to Tony's actual mortal existence; but she is physically described by Jackson and plays an important part in the story's action, so presumably is meant to be empirically real.[4] Tony and Natalie live in a never-never land of skipping classes and childish excursions into town. Both girls display definite Lesbian tendencies (sharing Tony's single room, bathing together, embracing) and Tony, as her masculine name would imply, forcefully leads Natalie not to the discovery of meaning in life but into an even more bewildering fantasy existence.

Natalie finally turns herself away from this unreal life when frightened and shocked to her senses. The girls go to a deserted amusement park in late November. To Tony, this is the perfect retreat; but the darkness and dreariness of the place disturbs Natalie. Refusing to follow Tony deep into some woods, she becomes frightened and lost. Cruelly abandoned by her so-called friend, Natalie seeks the way back to town alone and is comforted for the first time by the real, concrete sight of the college campus.

This novel has been called one of initiation, and it is true that Natalie does emerge from a troubled adolescence into a promisingly stable adulthood.[5] The abruptness of Natalie's

reversal of attitude has been questioned by certain critics, however.[6] It does seem to occur quickly, yet Jackson, as in "A Day in the Jungle," does not suggest that the life being returned to is perfect; she only permits the character to regain her narrow grasp on sanity. After having partly experienced the dark, frightening woods, Jackson's symbol for the darkened chaos of the disturbed mind, Natalie willingly reenters the real world.

Another novel of Jackson's presents its characters as remaining lost in a fantasy world by choice. The plot of We Have Always Lived in the Castle, is concerned with two sisters, Constance and Mary Katherine Blackwood. When she was twelve, Mary Katherine had poisoned all of her family, excluding her sister; but she has escaped detection and prosecution. Her physical age is eighteen but her mental age remains that of a twelve-year-old. Spoiled by her sister's protective care, she is allowed to live in a child's fantasy world.

Like Natalie in Hangsaman, Mary Katherine spends much time alone in a place of retreat. She has discovered a fully enclosed bower in a field where she has a bed of leaves, warm fuzzy blankets, and a cat to "tell her stories." This place can easily be interpreted as a womb symbol, especially with Jackson's descriptions of the security and protection it seems to represent to Mary Katherine's child-like mind. This type of symbol is used frequently by Jackson; there are two "secret places" in The Road Through the Wall that are described almost

identically to Mary Katherine's. Each "secret place" or retreat represents perfect peace and escape for the characters who cherish them. All of these characters are young, so would be especially inclined to seek the lost comfort of the womb. Jackson never shows these characters going to their retreat merely for relaxation, but always in desperation, fleeing there to hide from something they feel is threatening to them.

At the end of We Have Always Lived in the Castle, Jackson has Mary Katherine convince her sister to join her in her fantasy world. Constance, after being tried and acquitted of the poisoning episode in place of her sister, has lived the life of a recluse to avoid notoriety. She is gradually beginning to emerge into society when a male cousin unexpectedly visits and presents a threat of the outside world to Mary Katherine. Mary Katherine starts the house on fire in an attempt to scare him away, but this only brings all of the townspeople out to watch the fire. Afterwards, they vandalize the home and torment the girls in a mob scene very similar to that in "The Lottery." In a state of shock, Constance is persuaded by Mary Katherine to remain in the boarded up shell of the house and to totally reject any further interchange with the outside world.

The majority of Jackson's stories involving frightening fantasies end with the character completely out of touch with reality and seemingly forever lost in a nightmare. The story, "Beautiful Stranger," begins in a similar manner to "A Day in

the Jungle," but does not end with even a compromised acceptance of reality. Here, again a young wife, unhappy with her married life and feeling trapped at home with her children, resents her husband's frequent business trips. Waiting at the train station for his return from one such trip, she meets a stranger who has assumed her husband's shape, uses his name, but acts in a completely different manner. She is thrilled with her romantic life with this new man and only hopes that her "real" husband can find no possible way of returning. Coming home from a shopping trip with some new, daring clothes, she loses her sense of direction. She can no longer discern which is her own house or recognize any people on the street. Her willing indulgence in a pleasant fantasy results in her becoming hopelessly lost, with little promise of any regaining of her senses. To Jackson, such disintegration of one's senses is a special danger in modern day urban life and one of the first steps towards a complete breakdown.[7]

Another virtual nightmare appears in the story "The Bus." Jackson not only has her main character doubting reality in this case, but also plays a trick on her readers' senses as well. This story relates the incident of an elderly lady's interrupted journey on a bus. In the beginning, she is shaken by the bus driver and told to get off at her stop, only to find herself at a deserted crossroads in the middle of a stormy night. Reluctantly accepting a ride from a passerby, she is dropped

off at a near-by roadhouse. Her acceptance there is ill-mannered and mocking, and she soon finds herself placed in a room very similar to hers as a child. In the middle of the night she imagines her dolls in the closet attacking her and she runs out into the hallway screaming for her mother. Now, Jackson twists things a bit, and again tells of the woman being awakened by the bus driver. She disembarks only to find herself at the same crossroads. "The Bus" has an eerie setting, similar to The Haunting of Hill House, but again, it is the emphasis on the panic going through the woman's mind that gives the story its full impact.

Oftentimes Jackson's stories involving fantasy can be nearly as disturbing to a reader's senses as to a character's. Both "Beautiful Stranger," and "The Bus," deal with situations that seem impossible yet are described as actually happening; Jackson presents that fine line between the real and unreal as invisibly as possible. The style Jackson often displayed in such stories involves "establishing with meticulous detail a concretely realistic setting, and then allowing the story to crumble . . . ."[8] She can treat commonplace situations in a special presentation that makes everything seem strange and terrible. As Anne Whitmore has observed, "[Jackson] can twist a seemingly normal situation into something that leaves you squirming."[9] For example, a setting such as going to a dentist sounds as mundane as one could get, yet Jackson uses exactly that in one of her most powerful examples of a fantasy world-

turned nightmare for a female character. In "The Tooth," a rather plain housewife, Clara Spencer, finds herself in such a situation, riding on a bus to New York City to have a tooth pulled. She is very groggy from codeine pain pills and has haphazardly prepared for this trip. Feeling very disoriented, she meets a stranger who comes to her aid, buys her coffee at the stops and generally watches out for her. He speaks to her almost lyrically of a beautiful land and she listens in trance-like fascination.

A living nightmare, similar to that in "A Day in the Jungle," follows as Clara tries to find her way from one dentist's office to another in the city. She becomes lost and panicky and is totally disoriented by the time she is put under the gas for the extraction. While under, she envisions the land that was described by the stranger and is very angry when the dentist awakens her.

She makes her way into a public restroom and there undergoes a strange identity crisis. Looking into a mirror, she refuses to recognize the haggard reflection of a face as her own. She lets her hair hang loose from its barrette, discards a torn stocking, smears lipstick badly over her swollen lips, and finally throws away a costume jewelry initial pin (wondering what the "C" stood for). Thus ridding herself of her old identity she leaves the building planning to find the stranger and follow him to his beautiful land. This character had to have been dissatisfied with her identity already, to part with

it so completely. Loss of a positive self-concept seems to be another major step towards suffering a total breakdown in many of Jackson's characters.

Jackson's story "Pillar of Salt" is one of her best examples of a character who loses all ability to cope with both herself and society as she sees it. This story is especially effective since the major character appears to be mature and completely in control of herself in the beginning; therefore, her subsequent breakdown carries all the more impact. This strategy, used to create a shock effect, is similar to that applied in "The Lottery," where Tessie Hutchinson appears calm and carefree at first before facing her horrible fate.

In "Pillar of Salt," both husband and wife (Margaret and Brad) are embarking on a trip to New York City; but (not as in "The Tooth") this trip is to be solely for pleasure. Margaret is excited about the prospects of a few days away from their normal routine and finds herself humming a tune that was popular when she was young. All goes well initially, but the pleasant facade of the vacation soon wears thin. At a party, she finds herself unable to get anyone's attention about a fire danger and ends up running outside unnecessarily; from then on, things in the city appear frightening to her. Jackson's description of the panic going through her character's mind in this story evokes the reader's empathy and responses so that the frightening events Margaret experiences seem almost too real.

An eerie event on the beach develops into a sort of deja vu experience for this female character. Margaret is disappointed that the beach does not seem as exciting as it used to. Then she realizes that, likewise, the tune that had been haunting her was one she associated with her past romantic memories of the city. Suddenly, a human leg is discovered washed up on shore and this grotesque sight makes her arrive at the conclusion that the city makes people "come apart" literally as well as figuratively.[10] As in the obvious biblical allusion in the title, she is not able to endure the danger of the city (with New York representing Sodom and Gomorrah) and she feels compelled to turn her back on it and flee immediately before she is completely destroyed by it.

The early part of The Haunting of Hill House is quite similar to the beginning of "Pillar of Salt." The main character Eleanor, on her way to take part in a great adventure, finds herself humming a long-forgotten tune, also. Eleanor's case is a pathetic one; at thirty-two years of age she finds herself leading a very empty, unsatisfying life. She has cared for her invalid mother for years and since her mother's recent death, has been sleeping in a cot at a married sister's home. Having no purpose in life and feeling very much unwelcome at her sister's, Eleanor jumps at the chance to take part in a pseudo-scientific experiment. She has been invited to spend a summer at a so-called haunted house and she sneaks away, hoping to find excitement and maybe even romance.

Shirley Jackson leaves it up to her readers to decide if what Eleanor experiences is caused by her own fantasies or outside, supernatural influences. For the first time in her life, Eleanor begins to feel special and wanted; initially because she was specifically chosen to take part in the experiment and later, because the house seems to be trying to communicate with her, alone. She is frightened only for a time and then seems to seek a union with the forces she feels present in the house. The other members of the experimental party realize the unhealthy attitude that Eleanor is developing and try to send her away for her own good. It is too late; Eleanor chooses to remain by committing suicide rather than being forced to return to her previous, drab existence.

Jackson reveals some of her views on reality versus the world of fantasy through Dr. Montague's advice to Eleanor: "I think we are all incredibly silly to stay. I think that an atmosphere like this one can find out the flaws and faults and weaknesses in all of us, and break us apart in a matter of days. We have only one defense . . . when we feel ourselves endangered we can leave . . . ."[11] Why any of the experimental party chose to come to Hill House in the first place is never fully explained. The motivations Jackson preferred to study in her characters were never those of pure reason but of deep psychological drives.[12] Eleanor was the most unstable of the group and so succumbed to the pressures first; but Jackson seems to imply that any of them, or for that matter, any human could ultimately suffer a similar breakdown under such circumstances.

Three more instances where Jackson's characters succumb to delusions occur in "The Daemon Lover," "The Visit," and The Witchcraft of Salem Village. All of these involve sinister characters or forces that could be considered either supernatural or figments of a character's imagination, as were the forces in The Haunting of Hill House. Readers who consider these works as mere examples of Jackson science-fiction miss the allegorical implications in much of her work.[13]

In both "The Daemon Lover," and "The Visit," Jackson describes a character becoming involved in a romance, of sorts, with a mysterious character. In "The Daemon Lover," a thirty-four-year-old woman is nervously anticipating her elopment. After a very short acquaintance with her prospective groom and a relatively long life alone, she seems both amused at her own nervousness and shocked at her daring. Her fiance does not show up on the day of the wedding; when she can no longer believe her own desperate rationalizations, she goes out to search for him. Her embarrassed humiliation turns into desperation as she asks total strangers if they have seen anyone fitting her lover's description. Finally, she is sure that she has traced him to a certain apartment where she hears voices within but no one will answer the door. Pathetically she returns to this place, daily, searching not only for this lost lover but for the lost hopes of a new life that he represented. The woman's constant reassuring of herself that his intentions were good, almost makes a reader wonder if she has also convinced herself

of his proposal in the first place. If so, the pathos of her suffering is deepened since it reveals that the woman's desperation has led her willingly to deceive herself.

All of the characters in the story "The Visit," seem illusive and not quite of this world. A young girl, Margaret, is visiting for the summer at a school friend's magnificent home: a mansion unbelievably elaborate as is the genteel life style of its inhabitants. As a matter of fact, everything seems to be existing under some fairy tale spell of timelessness. The girl discovers a mosaic resembling herself with the inscription, "Here was Margaret who died for love," an aunt (also named Margaret) who lives the life of a recluse in the mansion's tower, and a handsome, soldier brother who does all the proper, charming things.[14] When he announces his departure for the summer, the entire family acts as if life were going to halt for them until his return, and Margaret realizes that she is now helplessly under the influence of the same nameless power as the rest of them.

Jackson never fully defines the nature of forces influencing her characters, because she seems to want to allow room for ambiguity and varying interpretations. The closest she comes to offering a direct comment on the nature of the influences working on her characters is in The Witchcraft of Salem Village; perhaps she does so here because this book was written as historical fiction for children rather than adult fiction. In this book, Jackson describes the bleak life forced upon Puritan

children of the era and then relates the story of the group of teen-age girls who started the panic in Salem. Here, Jackson strongly suggests that these characters were never possessed by any supernatural beings but were only acting in a way to arouse some attention and excitement. Whether any of the girls actually believed that they or their friends were bewitched is never stated, but Jackson includes notes on many of their later recorded confessions that do admit to strong feelings of guilt over their behavior.

An example of a Jackson personality who does fully believe in supernatural powers and their influence on herself can be found in The Sundial. In this case, an eccentric old lady, Fanny Halloran, believes that she has seen visions of her dead father. She tells the rest of her family that he has predicted the coming end of the world. The other family members are all a bit mad themselves, and readily believe her.[15] Through later visions Fanny discovers that her father's spirit will save all those who remain in the family mansion during the ensuing holocaust. Jackson again leaves her readers guessing as to the reality of the whole affair, although the old lady is never in doubt. The book ends with the family waiting out a terrible storm which may or may not be the end that they anticipate, and a reader wondering how literally the book should be taken.

The self-acclaimed medium, Mrs. Angela Motorman, in Come Along With Me is something of a comical version of Fanny from The Sundial. Shirley Jackson had written only twenty-seven pages

of this novel at the time of her death, but practically all of it consists of character description. Bothered by visions and strange voices all of her life, Mrs. Motorman has decided to deal with them practically. After her husband's death, she moves, changes her name at the spur of the moment, and sets herself up in business. She blithely announces to her landlady, "I dabble in the supernatural. Traffic with spirits. Seances, messages, psychiatric advice, that kind of thing."[16] Jackson describes a seance held by Mrs. Motorman rather ambiguously; but the eager, whole-hearted acceptance displayed by those in attendance can easily be taken as a subtle Jackson commentary on the wish of the human mind to be deluded. Many reviewers predicted that this might have been one of Jackson's best books, since the change in tone from frightening to comic probably would have diverted reader attention more to the characters. For example, Granville Hicks says that the book projected, ". . . great possibilities for comedy (of a blackish hue, of course), for excitement, and for a steady look at the evil of which mankind is capable."[17]

Many times Jackson's works have been criticized as reading more like psychiatric case histories rather than fully developed fiction. The novels Hangsaman, The Bird's Nest, and We Have Always Lived in the Castle do deal with characters who are psychologically disturbed in various ways, but Jackson's style is not scientific, dealing only with cause, procedure and result. "Well-informed about the views of the Freudians and

of other schools of psychology, Miss Jackson was never interested in psychological theories for their own sake, but only for the literary use she could make of them."[18] Her choice of characters who are neurotic or even schizophrenic is done to provide herself with workable literary metaphors through which to comment on the troubled times her characters--and all people--find themselves in.

Undoubtedly, Jackson's most thoroughly psychologically-oriented novel is The Bird's Nest; but it is at the same time one of her most complete character studies. The Bird's Nest is about a young female character who undergoes an identity crisis, similar to but much worse than that found in Hangsaman or "The Tooth." In this novel, the main figure, Elizabeth Richmond, is suffering from a type of complex schizophrenia where not two but four distinct personalities co-exist in the same person.[19]

Chapters dealing with the emergence of each dominant personality interchange with those written as journal entries of the old doctor treating Elizabeth. Even the doctor's journal entries are more literary than scientific, as he insists that he is "not one of your namby-pamby modern doctors, with all kinds of cures for ailments that don't exist, and none of them able to look a patient in the eye for shame."[20] He becomes personally involved in the case and insists on treating each personality as if it were representative of a total individual person. He renames his "girls" Elizabeth, Beth, Betsy and Bess; taking the idea from a nursery rhyme spouted at him from the

third personality while under a hypnotic trance. "Elizabeth, Lizz, Betsy and Bess, all went together to seek a bird's nest; they found a nest with five eggs in it; they each took one and left four in it."[21] This rhyme not only explicates the title, but also alludes to a general summary of the book's major issue, that being a person's struggle to attain a whole and satisfactory identity.

Jackson devotes much time to identifying major factors about each personality in The Bird's Nest and then develops a conflict among the four. Each aspect has a different temperment, concept of life, family regard, and self-image. Each one is too extreme to be that of a normal, adjusted human being; and a power struggle for dominance ensues. Thankfully for her readers, Jackson clearly defines the heart of the problem as a traumatic experience that Elizabeth went through at the time of her mother's death. "Betsy" represents the childish reaction of refusing to accept the truth; "Bess" the bitter, resentful feelings that have been bottled up for four years; "Beth" the adjusted emotions of sweetness and potential pleasantness that cannot be adequately expressed; and "Elizabeth" the troubled, shy confused person who has put up with everyday life complicated by losses of memory when the other three personalities gain control.

After many hypnotism sessions, several set-backs, and finally a battle royal where "Bess" tries to murder "Betsy" the doctor is able to diagnose the case and begin therapeutic treatments. It is true that Jackson has used a specific type

of psychological disorder in the portrayal of Elizabeth; yet, the story can be read on a more universal level as an example of how complex a human being's mind and manner can potentially become. Even as Elizabeth improves, she must struggle to know herself and understand her concept of life. Jackson seems to consider this as a major problem facing all of her fictional characters and humanity in general.

In his article, "Dark Psychological Weather," Guy Davenport offers an excellent description of the type of female character most often developed by Shirley Jackson. Davenport states that Jackson "liked characters whose minds seemed to be untidy and a touch hysterical, but whose frantic grasp of reality is in some inexplicable way deeper than we can understand."[22] Jackson's purpose seems to be to present such characters hoping that through contemplation of their problems, readers may gain a deeper insight into their own concept of reality in today's troubled world.

Probably the most important aspect of Jackson's style is that her characters remain believable and convincing while at the same time suffering from extreme mental delusions or serious personal conflicts. In fact, the very power of her style may come from the shock that she creates through the juxtaposing of such unusual characters and situations. A reviewer in the New York Times described Jackson as ". . . expert, deft in suggesting emotional atmosphere and adroit in conveying nuances of feeling . . . . Her characters may be bizarre and involved in terrifying circumstances, but they are convincing . . . .

There is a logic to her people's thoughts and actions that has nothing to do with reasonable motivations of the workaday world."[23]

It is through representation of her various characters' logic and concepts of reality, that Jackson is able to express her own unique views on the real world as she perceived it. Jackson presents pictures of reality as seen through the eyes of insane or disturbed characters, to give readers a different perspective of what the world around them is really like. By arousing reader sympathy with her unusual characters she permits them to compare the respective value systems of "normal" and "abnormal" people. Quite often by the end of a work, Jackson has convinced her readers that her "abnormal" characters' actions and outlooks are actually more appropriate than those a "normal" person would take. In many of her works Jackson presents a type of "absolute" reality of her own where the world appears more mad than anything that could possibly be dreamed up by a madman.[24]

Most critics praise Jackson for her finesse in the treatment of psychologically-oriented subjects in a strictly literary way, avoiding the "trap" of sounding merely like case-history reporting.[25] Her use of supernatural elements was strictly for literary purposes also. Through having her characters suffer from so-called "supernatural" incidents, Jackson was able to point out some of the problems she saw existing in the "natural" world. Jackson's repeated use of supernatural

elements may be misleading unless a reader also concentrates upon her unique characterization; the depth of her approach lies "beyond the mere mechanism of terror by exploring psychological dilemmas that work upon her protagonists from within."[26] In short, Jackson's portrait of the neurotic female allows for individuals' varied reactions to their world and the variety of problems they face constantly.

NOTES--CHAPTER I

[1]Shirley Jackson. Come Along With Me (New York: Popular Library, 1968), p. 47. Hereafter cited as CAWM.

[2]Shirley Jackson. The Lottery; or, The Adventures of James Harris (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1949), p. 147. Hereafter cited as TL.

[3]Robert Halsband. "Sketch Potpourri," Saturday Review, XXXI (28 February 1949), 18.

[4]J. D. Scott. "New Novels," New Statesman and Nation, XLII (27 October 1951), 466.

[5]John O. Lyons. The College Novel in America (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1962), p. 63.

[6]"Hangsaman," Catholic World, VLXXIII (September 1951), 473.

[7]"The Lottery," New Republic, CXX (9 May 1949), 26.

[8]Halsband, p. 14.

[9]Anne Whitmore. Library Journal, LXXIV (1 April 1949), 547.

[10]TL, p. 248.

[11]Shirley Jackson. The Haunting of Hill House (New York: Popular Library, 1959), p. 89.

[12]Guy Davenport. "Dark Psychological Weather," New York Times Book Review, (15 September 1968), p. 4.

[13]"Come On Everyone," Time, LII (23 May 1949), 105. (Shirley Jackson has been compared to Hawthorne in their respective treatment of the underlying causes of horror and hysteria. This aspect of her style is especially obvious in these works: "The Daemon Lover," "The Visit," The Witchcraft of Salem Village, and The Haunting of Hill House.)

[14]CAWM, p. 104.

[15]Harvey Swados. "What Is This World?" New Republic, CXXXVIII (3 March 1958), 19.

[16]CAWM, p. 20.

[17]Granville Hicks. "A World of Everyday Demons," Saturday Review, LI (14 September 1968), 33.

[18]Granville Hicks. "Nightmare in Reality," Saturday Review, LXIX (17 September 1966), 31.

[19]Shirley Jackson. The Bird's Nest, in The Magic of Shirley Jackson (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1965), p. 199.

[20]Ibid., p. 175.

[21]"Strange Case of Miss R." Time, LXVI (21 June 1954), 108.

[22]Davenport, p. 4.

[23]Orville Prescott. "Books of the Times," New York Times (5 October 1962), p. 31.

[24]Edmund Fuller. "Terror Lived There, Too," New York Times Book Review (18 October 1959), p. 4.

[25]Patrick F. Quinn. Hudson Review VII, 3 (Autumn 1954), 464.

[26]John W. Aldridge. After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of the Two Wars (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958), p. 194.

WOMEN IN CONFLICT: MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

Another way that Shirley Jackson uses specific characters to comment upon humanity and its complexity is in the development of crucial relationships between central female characters in her works. These usually constitute the major conflict in her short stories and help build the tension in her novels. Quite often such conflicts provide the impetus which finally results in a character taking desperate actions to find meaning in life. Almost all of the conflicts involve some type of power struggle for dominance, with one character scheming against and manipulating the other. Very seldom is the main character the stronger, dominant one in a relationship. Jackson makes the weaker character seem quite vulnerable not only to the other character, but to forces in life beyond her control or even comprehension.

Three major types of relationships seem to appear and reappear: conflicts between mothers and daughters, sisters, and friends or associates. All three of these relationship patterns are evident from her earliest short stories to her last completed novel. The development of conflicts between mother-daughter pairs is one of the most effective character patterns used by Jackson to reveal unique personality traits.

More often than not, Jackson's characters inherit or learn many of their neurotic tendencies and unusual outlooks

on life from their own mothers. Several Jackson short stories deal specifically with types of power struggles or major confrontations that frequently occur in such relationships. Usually Jackson portrays mothers as being extremely domineering and manipulative of their children's (mostly daughter's) lives. Very seldom is the child's welfare first in mind, and even less often do either the mother or child live a happy life as a result of this interference.

Two novels specifically deal with a strong mother-daughter conflict; they are The Bird's Nest and The Haunting of Hill House. All of the other novels have at least one such minor development and many of the covered short stories are specifically concerned with such character confrontations. In most of the mother-daughter problems either the daughter has sacrificed a life of her own to cater to her mother's demands or she has striven to please and somehow still has never been able to live in harmony with her parent. In both such cases, the character continues to be influenced by her mother even beyond the time of her achieved independence, with the influence resulting from guilt over either the mother's death or the character's unpleasant memory of family ties.

An effective variation of the mother-daughter conflict pattern is that of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law personality clash. Shirley Jackson goes beyond any standard use of cliches in her treatment of such relationships. Quite often she places the mother-in-law in the role of matriarch of a strong, important family; when this is the case, the difficulties

closing in on the weak daughter-in-law make endurance even more impossible. In some of the short stories a character may represent a type of surrogate mother; usually these relationships are only one-sided with either the older woman assuming her guidance is needed or the younger female becoming overly dependent on another to replace her need for a mother.

Two of Jackson's first stories (printed in The New Yorker in 1943) are early examples of the dominant mother characterization which she would repeat so often throughout her later writing. In "After You, My Dear Alphonse," Miss Jackson portrays a racially bigoted mother who attempts to boost her own ego by acting "charitable" towards her young son's black friend. The children here are more perceptive than she is and her self-image suffers quite a blow by the end of the story. Her son excuses her patronizing comments to his friend by saying, "She's screwy sometimes," and his friend responds, "So's mine."[1] A grandmother character is used in the story "Afternoon in Linen," but the conflict developed between her and her granddaughter is merely a variation of Jackson's mother-daughter pattern. In this story, Jackson shows the older woman forcing her granddaughter to attend a formal tea. The girl's resentment toward the whole affair is revealed as her grandmother tries to persuade her to perform in various ways for their hostess. The girl finally rebels and makes her grandmother appear like a fool. In both these stories, the dominant female character is represented unfavorably so that reader sympathy will be directed toward the child.

Jackson's first novel, The Road Through the Wall, contains almost every type of mother-daughter conflict that appears in her later works. Actually, this book is more of a complex study of characters than a fully developed novel. It relates scattered incidents from the lives of individuals who are all neighbors in a small California town. The mother figures here interfere, manipulate, compete with, and sometimes even neglect their children, with only one really experiencing something approximating a balanced relationship with her child. One character, a widow named Mrs. Mack, who is involved in a situation in which she treats her dog literally like her own child is perhaps the most pathetic of all.

A strange representation of a mother-daughter pair in this same novel is that of Mrs. Marguerite Desmond and her three-year-old daughter, Caroline. This little girl is pampered, dressed, and treated more like a doll than a human. Mrs. Desmond moves her child's small bed into her room and moves her husband out; and then proceeds to decorate the place all in ruffles and pastels. Mother and daughter dress alike, are inseparable, and live in their own completely private, feminine world. Little Caroline seems to represent the "perfect" child to all the other neighborhood women, which implies that to them, the ideal child is one who is completely obedient and displays no independence whatsoever.

The two families considered "undesirables" by the rest of the people in The Road Through the Wall both involve cases

where mothers are guilty of neglecting their children. One mother, a Mrs. Martin, is divorced, works nights as a waitress, and permits her daughter complete freedom. The other character, a Mrs. Terrel, is never fully described but only alluded to. She has two daughters, one who is retarded and the other who assumes all responsibility for the house and care of her sister. When quizzed by neighbors, the competent girl tells them her mother "just sleeps all day"; yet both girls are extremely defensive and genuinely affectionate toward their mother. A scene at a neighborhood party in this novel reveals something very important about the mother-daughter relationship of Mrs. Sylvia and Virginia Donald. Mrs. Donald is fairly young to have a teen-age daughter, and as the two simultaneously flirt with the neighborhood men, she calls out that Virginia is really her sister. This statement is probably more indicative of her inner feelings and wishes than the woman realizes.

Probably one of the best examples of Jackson's interfering, dominant mother type is the character, Mrs. Josephine Merriam. Mrs. Merriam watches over her daughter, Harriet, like a hawk and has the girl completely subjected to her. Harriet is an unpopular and unattractive adolescent who writes poetry and secret journals and longs for a friend (very similar to Natalie of Hangsaman). Her mother at one time burns her notebooks in front of the girl and then proceeds to give her proper writing assignments, so she will not waste her time on the "foolish" things she had been doing. When it is discovered that Harriet

has formed a close friendship with another girl, Marilyn Perlman, from the only Jewish family in the neighborhood, Mrs. Merriam cruelly forces her to break off all ties with the girl. The scene in the book where she is explaining the "standards" that their family must maintain presents this woman in a most hypocritical light.

> "We must expect to set a standard. Actually, however much we may want to find new friends whom we may value, people who are exciting to us because of new ideas, or because they are DIFFERENT, we have to do what is expected of us."
>
> "What is expected of me?" Harriet said suddenly, without intention.
>
> "To do what you're told," her mother said sharply.
>
> "But what am I supposed to do?"
>
> "You may," her mother said, "in fact, I INSIST," she added with relish, "that you must see her once more, in order to tell her EXACTLY why you are not to be friends any longer. After all," Mrs. Merriam went on dreamily, "she ought to know why she can't hope to be your friend any longer."[2]

Mrs. Merriam, who is obviously insecure herself, also alienates her daughter from her own father. Harriet ends up losing her love of writing, her one and only friendship, her father's affection, and is left only with her mother's company and

directives. It is obvious that Harriet will never be allowed to assert the slightest bit of independence and lead a life of her own.

Jackson seems often to repeat the pattern of the interfering mother as represented by Mrs. Merriam. Probably Jackson's fullest development of a daughter's resentment over such interference is in her short story, "I Know Who I Love." In this story, both parents expect their daughter, Catherine Vincent, to lead a life that would be impossible for a saint to endure. In fact, her father (who is a minister) at one time actually demands of her, "Do you think you are satisfactory, in God's sight or mine?"[3] Her parents' extreme expectations and reprimands totally destroy the girl's self-concept. After enduring humiliations throughout all of her life (such as a birthday party with invited children who all hate her and the squelching of a one and only romance, because she "could do better"), Catherine is submitted to the torture of hearing her dying mother's accusations that she was always an "ungrateful child." In an encounter just prior to her mother's death, Catherine forces her mother to admit in a round-about way that she had never loved her husband. Relieved by her mother's death, Catherine throws her belongings away and, thus symbolically, rids herself of as much of her mother's influence as possible. She knows she will continue a lonely life as a misfit, yet is somehow reconciled by the thought that she has at least known a love once in her life, which makes her better off than

her mother ever was.

The two most extreme examples of a mother's harmful, long-lasting influence over a daughter are developed in Jackson's major novels, The Haunting of Hill House and The Bird's Nest. In The Haunting of Hill House, middle-aged Eleanor has cared for her demanding, invalid mother all of her life and has subsequently lost the chance to care for herself or live a life of her own. She feels responsible for her mother's death, since she had neglected answering her mother's call on the night of her death. Eleanor tries to rationalize her unfounded guilt, yet she continues to feel anxiety over the fact that she might have been able to save her. This anxiety grows into irrational fears that lead her into hysteria at the end of the novel. For Eleanor, almost all of the strange phenomena occuring at Hill House tie in some way to her mother; she sees writing on the wall telling her to "come home," senses her mother's presence in the house's library, and even hears her voice calling to her in the middle of the night. Eleanor's attempt at independence fails because she seems to need some type of security; the acceptance she seeks by the spirits of the house could be interpreted as her ultimate attempt to be reunited with the soul of her mother.

The need to seek out and renew a mother's love drives the character Elizabeth in The Bird's Nest into her struggle with insanity. The psychiatrist treating the girl discovers that her problems stem from the trauma she experienced at the

time of her mother's death. Jackson reveals the facts of the incident gradually; but it is finally revealed that the girl, upset and disappointed by her mother, had violently attacked her and shook her until she collapsed. It is implied that the mother was already near death since she had been living a wild, drunken life; but the girl feels she was the sole cause of the tragedy.

Elizabeth represses total memory of her part in her mother's death. After four years she has not fully adjusted, and the four emergent aspects of her personality all express different views on her mother and the event. The first personality (Elizabeth) remembers her mother as a vague stranger from the past; the second personality (Beth) refers to her dear mother as being one of the most perfect people she ever knew; Betsy (the third personality) is childish and actually believes her mother is still alive in New York City and runs away to find her; and the fourth personality (Bess) is resentful and represents the state of mind the character was in when she attacked her mother. Only after being forced to accept the truth about both her mother's personality and death, is Elizabeth able to free herself of her mother's deep influence and gain control over her own life.

One of the more disturbing aspects of the story, "The Lottery," is the seeming indifference on both mother and daughter's part in regard to the other's fate, which is in contrast to the deep-set influence Elizabeth's mother's fate had on her. When

the lottery announcement is made that all of the Hutchinson family members must draw individual lots, Tessie frantically demands that their married daughter, Eve, also participate. Likewise, when the younger daughter, Nancy, discovers that she has been spared, she spontaneously shows relief and happiness. Neither mother nor daughter consider the tragedy that might befall the other. Here Jackson shows the survival instinct as reigning supreme over familial love. This truth revealed in the story seems more horrible than the details of the later killing, because it is more personal and as Jackson seems to suggest, altogether too universal.

The daughter Mary Katherine in We Have Always Lived in the Castle is moved by an opposite type of compulsion than either Eleanor or Elizabeth felt. This character, like Nancy in "The Lottery," expresses no outward regret over her mother's fate, even though in this instance Mary Katherine was the one responsible for her mother's death. Mary Katherine, instead, has an ideal of what the perfect mother should be and she finds that embodied in her sister Constance. Being an actual ten years older than her sister, and even more mature emotionally, Constance does represent a loving, protective figure that is actually more "motherly" than Jackson displays in many legitimate parents.

There is another instance of a type of surrogate mother character in "Louisa, Please Come Home." In this story, Louisa resents her real mother's attention to her sister and interference

in her choice of friends. She runs away and becomes attached to her landlady, a Mrs. Peacock. Louisa enjoys, in a morbid sort of way, listening to her mother's voice pleading over the radio for her return and telling Mrs. Peacock lies about her family's depending on her work to support them. A twist at the end of this story has her real mother not recognizing her and Louisa realizing that the only mother or family she will ever have from then on will be Mrs. Peacock.

In "Flower Garden," Jackson shows how a mother-in-law's forceful influence destroys all of her daughter-in-law's hopes for a life of her own. The older woman's interference is resented at first, but ultimately the daughter-in-law not only accepts her inevitable fate but loses all of her own, separate identity. The beginning lines of the story foreshadow its eventual outcome: "After living in an old Vermont manor house together for almost eleven years, the two Mrs. Winnings, mother and daughter-in-law, had grown to look a good deal alike, as women will who live intimately together, and work in the same kitchen and get things done around the house in the same manner. Although young Mrs. Winning had been a Talbot, and had dark hair which she wore cut short, she was now officially a Winning, a member of the oldest family in town and her hair was beginning to grey where her mother-in-law's hair had greyed first, at the temples . . . ."[4]

The young Mrs. Winning lives with her in-laws although she has always dreamt of living in a certain cottage in town. A young widow moves into this coveted house and through

their association, Mrs. Winning watches the home being decorated just as she would do herself and helps with the type of flower garden that she has always wanted, but never been able to have. The young Mrs. Winning's vicarious enjoyment of an independent life in the cottage, through her friendship, is cut short when the neighbor ignores town tradition and innocently befriends a black man. Her mother-in-law is appalled by the woman's daring and viciously attacks her image in her daughter-in-law's eyes. Mrs. Winning has already lost too much of her own independence to act in defense of her friend; she breaks their ties and assumes more and more of her mother-in-law's character traits.

Jackson deals with another conflict between mother and daughter-in-law in The Sundial. The mother-in-law is again represented as the strong character here, but there is absolutely no resemblance or fusing of personalities between Mrs. Orianna Halloran and her daughter-in-law, Maryjane. The younger Mrs. Halloran is relatively sure that her mother-in-law killed her own son to assure herself of all control over the family estate. The novel opens with the family members returning from Lionel's (the husband-son's) funeral. Maryjane's suspicions are shown to be highly probable since the elder Mrs. Halloran displays absolutely no genuine grief. In fact, when reprimanded by her sister-in-law for immediately starting a game of backgammon, she outwardly declares: "I am sure that Lionel would have foregone dying, Aunt Fanny, if he thought

his funeral would interfere with my backgammon."[5] The senior Mrs. Halloran has been described as a Medea figure, and her other power-hungry actions along with the murder of her own son justify this comparison.[6]

Maryjane Halloran, like the young Mrs. Winning, also lives with her in-laws; not because of family tradition so much as for sheer convenience. She makes no attempt to hide her hatred for her mother-in-law and outwardly works to turn her daughter's affections against her grandmother. At one time, the elder Mrs. Halloran announced her plans to properly evict her daughter-in-law, by setting her up in an apartment in another town but keeping her granddaughter with her. This plan is interrupted by the family hysteria over the prediction of Doomsday; and the mother and daughter-in-law are forced to continue their spiteful co-habitation.

Another type of harmful influence sometimes exerted by mothers in Jackson's stories occurs when the mother imposes her biased opinions upon her daughter. An example of this type of conflict appears in the story, "Dorothy and My Grandmother and the Sailors." Here, in a humorous vein, Jackson indicates how receptive a young mind can be to an elder's unfounded suggestions. Both the narrator's mother and grandmother, for the girl's own good (of course), have drilled ideas into her head about sailors and "the fleet coming in." When she and a friend, Dorothy, happen to go to San Francisco to sightsee and later, by chance, sit by some sailors in a movie, they

become hysterical. Rather than helping the girls view the incident in perspective, the older women condone their behavior and thus perpetuate their own narrow-mindedness. These girls will no more be able to form their own life styles than was young Mrs. Winning in "Flower Garden."

A more serious example of the harm done from assuming a mother's biases is evident in The Witchcraft of Salem Village. When forced to accuse specific women as witches, the young girls' first thoughts fall to the women they had heard their own mothers criticizing and condemning. "It is certain that the girls knew a good deal about these women from local gossip--a vice heartily condemned by their church. Their mothers had surely talked among themselves of the shiftlessness of Sarah Good, and the slovenliness of Sarah Osborn, and had perhaps even told one another that such behavior was the devil's handiwork."[7] What had been innocent gossip on the mothers' parts turned into a much more serious matter when it fell into the girls' inexperienced hands. Out of this whole misguided affair, Jackson especially concentrates on one mother-daughter pair. To avoid suspicion herself, Ann Putnam, Sr., joins her daughter and the other girls in their claims of being bewitched. Mrs. Putnam leads a vicious attack against a woman she was known to be extremely jealous of and her daughter imitates her behavior completely.

Robert L. Kelly's article, "Jackson's 'The Witch': A Satanic Gem," presents a rather extreme interpretation of

Jackson's portrayal of a mother figure in that story. In "The Witch," Jackson portrays a young mother and her two children encountering a strange, sinister man on a train. He fills the little boy's head with ideas of murder (especially that of younger sisters) and the boy later comments that he "prob'ly was a witch."[9] Professor Kelly suggests that the mother may have actually been closer to being a witch than the old man, since she continues to ignore the boy and direct all of her attention to the baby girl. If the boy did not already have jealous and hostile feelings towards his sister before hearing the old man's remarks, Kelly says he surely will afterwards, especially since he has received no reassurance from his mother. To Kelly, the real evil here lies in the commonplace failure of the mother to fulfill her role as protector of her child's mind; if so, many mothers are witches to their children.[10]

One of the few stories where a mother's attempt to interfere is admirable and the children are presented unfavorably is "The Renegade." In this story, the family's dog, Lady, has been caught killing a neighbor's chickens. Everybody in town, including her own children, is swept up in the excitement of a possible extermination of the animal. Only the mother feels any compassion for the dog; but her attempts to sway her neighbor's or even her own children's attitude about the matter is hopeless. The mother here is trying to steer her children away from evil rather than passively allowing them to come in contact with it as in Kelly's interpretation of "The Witch."

Another mother who is frustrated in her attempts to communicate with her child is Mrs. Arnold Waite from the novel, Hangsaman. She is thoroughly disillusioned with the life she has had with her husband and tries to warn her daughter, Natalie, of the destruction her father's influence can work on her personality. Jackson describes a rather pathetic scene involving Mrs. Waite, compassionately urging her daughter not to marry a man like her father and to seek happiness before anything else in her life. "Her mother is an ineffectual woman who has somehow lost her way and is despairingly anxious to spare Natalie's missing hers but, Jackson here represents the father as being the dominant parent, making the mother in this instance unable to act effectively for her daughter's behalf.[11]

If any truly balanced relationship between mother and daughter exists in Jackson's works, it appears in the representation of Mrs. Perlman and her daughter, Marilyn, in The Road Through the Wall. Perhaps living with the burden of anti-Semitism has given this mother increased insight into human nature. Her daughter longs for a friend as did Harriet Merriam, and when the friendship between the two girls is abruptly ended, Mrs. Perlman sympathizes with her daughter and shows compassion without outwardly interfering. This admirable characterization is seldom seen in Jackson's works, but in this novel it is believable and satisfying.

Jackson probably describes so few cases of well adjusted relationships between mothers and daughters because her objective

is usually to study conflict between characters, and she sees the mother-daughter conflict as often present and terrifyingly real. Through the use of troubled characters (whether disturbed individuals or those involved in conflicts with another), Shirley Jackson is able to comment on the problems faced by many women. She does show happy mother-daughter relationships in some stories and especially so in her comical family anecdotes in Life Among the Savages and Raising Demons; but when her purpose is to comment creatively on the frailties of the female character, her approach almost always is through development of women in conflicts such as those presented between mothers and daughters in this chapter.

NOTES--CHAPTER II

[1]*TL*, p. 89.

[2]Shirley Jackson. *The Road Through the Wall* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1948), p. 206.

[3]*CAWM*, p. 53.

[4]*TL*, p. 103.

[5]Shirley Jackson. *The Sundial* (New York: Farrar, Srraus and Cudahy, 1958), p. 10.

[6]David L. Stevenson. "The Lost Audience," *The Nation* CLXXXVII (2 August 1958), p. 58.

[7]Shirley Jackson. *The Witchcraft of Salem Village* (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 47.

[8]Robert L. Kelly. "Jackson's 'The Witch': A Satanic Gem," *English Journal* LX (December 1971), 1204.

[9]*TL*, p. 67.

[10]Shirley Jackson. *Raising Demons*, in *The Magic of Shirley Jackson* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), p. 645. (In *Raising Demons*, Shirley Jackson relates similar experiences of her own involving her daughter Sally's impressionability to stories about witches and magic.)

[11]Alice S. Morris. "Adventures Into Reality," *New York Times Book Review* XVII (17 April 1949), 4.

WOMEN IN CONFLICT: SISTER AND SISTER

If Jackson's representation of relationships between mothers and daughters seems strained, some of the conflicts she sees existing between sisters may seem even more spiteful and uncaring. Jackson develops relationships between sisters in two main ways; one to show the existence of traditional sibling rivalry and the other to reveal a unique type of interdependence between two characters. This second type of relationship is totally different from the power struggles and manipulation found in most of the mother-daughter problems and the other, more general style of sisterly conflicts. This character pattern does not appear in Jackson's earliest stories, but the same type of jealousy and rivalry as shown between sisters does appear in some of her earliest stories about friends who undergo drastic changes in attitude. Only two of her best stories, "The Rock," and "Louisa, Please Come Home," deal specifically with crucial relationships between sisters, but these two are paralleled almost exactly in more fully developed instances in The Road Through the Wall, The Bird's Nest, The Sundial, and We Have Always Lived in the Castle.

The most obvious case of sisterly rivalry appears in the story, "Louisa, Please Come Home." Here, a teen-aged girl, Louisa Tether, runs away from home on the day before her sister's wedding. Early in the story she says, "I admit I planned it

for the day before Carol's wedding on purpose, and for a long time afterward I used to try and imagine Carol's face when she realized that my running away was going to leave her one bride's maid short."[1] Louisa reads an account of her disappearance in the newspaper that includes a comment by her sister justifying their continuation of the ceremony that clearly defines their strained relationship. "Carol told one newspaper reporter that her sister Louisa would have wanted it that way; 'She would never have meant to spoil my wedding,' Carol said, knowing perfectly well that that would be exactly what I'd meant. I'm pretty sure that the first thing Carol did when she knew I was missing was go and count the wedding presents to see what I'd taken with me."[2] Jackson's style has been referred to as "etching in vinegar," and this phrase seems to describe perfectly her method used to reveal the often extreme hatred that can exist between sisters.[3]

In "Louisa, Please Come Home," the main character goes on to assume a new identity and new life style in another town; she deludes herself into believing she is happy with her new life. In the end of the story, Louisa ironically discovers a concern for her on the part of her sister and parents which she never realized or appreciated before. The conflict has thus been resolved but ironically it is too late to resume a normal family life.

Such sisterly jealousy and rivalry is also seen in Jackson's novel, The Haunting of Hill House. In this instance,

Eleanor's older sister, Carrie, has found independence in a life of her own, being married and living away from their invalid mother; but she wants to deny her younger sister any of the same rights. The two share joint ownership of a car, and when Eleanor asks to use it for the summer at Hill House, Carrie becomes unjustifiably angry and possessive. It is obvious that she and her husband "use" Eleanor and generally take her for granted. They are not worried at all about her safety but merely about their own possible inconvenience if she would leave. It is implied that part of Eleanor's excitement about going to Hill House stems from her feeling of adventure at daring to defy her sister. She runs off with the car and plans never to return; and like Louisa, she enjoys imagining how shocked her sister will be.

"The Rock" traces the disintegration of a fairly compatible relationship between two sisters-in-law to the point where mild resentment turns into outward hostility. In this situation the two women accompany their brother-husband to an island resort where he can recuperate from a serious illness. Both women have shared the responsibility for his care during the course of his illness, but as the brother recovers his strength, his sister's immediate usefulness and welcome diminishes. The two women in "The Rock," are opposites not only in their relationship to the same man, but in total personalities. Virginia, the wife, is conventionally feminine and helpless (at least in the eyes of her sister-in-law); while Paula, the sister, is the more masculine of the two (even her name suggests

this) and independent. Paula is drawn to the rugged terrain of the island while Virginia prefers to stay in the lodge and spend as much time alone with her husband as possible. Paula's loneliness and resentment is heightened by the uncanny observations and comments of another resort guest, until she reaches a point where she even doubts her brother's true affection for her. The reader is left to assume that Paula commits suicide on one of the island's rocky cliffs.

Jackson represents this same type of sisterly conflict, similar even in the display of a jealous, possessiveness for the other's husband, in The Road Through the Wall and The Bird's Nest. In her first novel, The Road Through the Wall, a semi-invalid sister, Miss Lillian Tyler, lives with her sister and brother-in-law, Dinah and Brad Ransom-Jones. Here the single sister delights in telling her sister what Brad would think about various topics, thus implying that she knows him better than his own wife. She even slips at times and refers to her sister as "that woman" who Brad married! Both sisters speak as if they are extremely close and affectionate; but their actions suggest otherwise. One instance shows Mrs. Ransom-Jones hiring a neighbor boy to "babysit" with Miss Tyler for an evening that she is going to spend socially. She says she will call often and return early, but does neither; she seems glad to be away from the burden her sister represents. These two women do flare up against each other in one encounter, but soon resume their false pleasantness. In the party scene at the end of the book, Jackson subtly and ironically comments

on the whole family relationship by describing Mr. Ransom-Jones as being "far too small for two wives."[4]

In The Bird's Nest, Morgen Jones admits to a psychologist that she has coveted both her sister's husband and her child. Morgen's sister was Elizabeth Richmond, Sr., the mother of her niece Elizabeth. Morgen, who had to take care of her sister for most of her life, greatly resented that burden. Her regard for her sister's dependence and her own strength is very similar to that of Paula in "The Rock." Morgen, like Lillian Tyler in The Road Through the Wall, also feels that her brother-in-law had grown to love and appreciate her more than his wife. She often talks about these feelings in front of her niece: "he saw me first . . . but of course then your mother, once he met my sister Elizabeth, then it was her of course, and of course there was nothing I could do. But I flatter myself, Elizabeth junior, I flatter myself, that my intelligence and strength showed him finally what a mistake HE made, choosing vacuity and prettiness. Vacuity,' Aunt Morgen said, enjoying the word, . . . 'Toward the end, I noticed he came more and more asking MY advice . . . ."[5]

Morgen prides herself on the fact that her brother-in-law left her in charge of his daughter's trust fund instead of his wife, knowing he could rely on her to be responsible. It is this overly righteous attitude of Morgen's plus her constant condemning of her sister as "pure mud" that makes her niece despise her. Morgen loves the younger Elizabeth in her own unusual way; but feels as if she has "earned" her affection

in return for her care. Only at the end of the novel can these two come to any reconciliation; and that occurs after they both have been forced to face the truth about their mutual relative.

A case of a sister's resentment of her brother's interfering wife provides one of the major conflicts in The Sundial. Fanny Halloran is forty-eight, unmarried, and considered as a type of "parasite" by her sister-in-law. The two women both obviously feel that they should be in charge of the family estate and business since Richard Halloran (their husband-brother) has become sickly and senile. Mrs. Orianna Halloran forcefully assures herself of command (even to the point of eliminating the threat of her own son's inheritance claims) and prepares to restrict Fanny to living in one isolated wing of the family mansion.

Fanny resents her sister-in-law's exploitation of her, but is not strong enough to challenge her outwardly; instead, she resorts to a fantasy life like many other Jackson characters. In the attic of the mansion, she has duplicated the small apartment that she and her brother lived in as children. She escapes to this retreat whenever especially threatened and relives the happy years of her life before Orianna robbed her of both her home and brother. Commenting on Fanny's reports of visions, one reviewer conjectured that they may have been only "self-induced attempts to elude her sister-in-law's domination and re-establish the protected world of her girlhood."[6]

Both Fanny's and Paula's (from "The Rock") jealousy of their sisters-in-law seem to stem from somewhat incestuous feelings for their respective brothers; but Jackson's brother-sister relationships are not always presented in this light. Two especially strong cases of a sister's indifference or even outright resentment of her own brother occur in Hangsaman (with Natalie and Buddy Waite) and The Road Through the Wall (with Virginia and Tod Donald).

Although Jackson usually tends to represent jealous, spiteful situations among sisters and other family members, some of her most powerful character portrayals are of caring, protective sisters. Such character types appear in We Have Always Lived in the Castle, The Road Through the Wall, The Sundial, and even in The Witchcraft of Salem Village.

A major explanation for the powerful effect of Jackson's novel, We Have Always Lived in the Castle, lies in her characterization of the two sisters, Constance and Mary Katherine Blackwood. To Mary Katherine, Constance not only takes the place of surrogate mother, but also represents the most wonderful person in the world. "Her older sister embodies all that Mary Katherine loves, and provides her with the assurance that she will always have what she has now and that nothing will ever change."[7]

Constance's extreme self-sacrifice of a life of her own to protect her younger sister is a type of unselfish attribute

displayed by very few Jackson characters. Stuart C. Woodruff, commenting upon the significance of a character such as Constance says, "Constance--her name, of course, is emblematic--epitomizes the regenerative powers of love and selfless devotion . . . . Through the figure of Constance we are shown qualities of human concern and sacrificial love rare enough to be either missed or misunderstood by the common run of mankind, rare enough to require withdrawal from the quotidian world for their preservation."[8] If the novel is read with this idea in mind, then Constance's ultimate divorcing herself from the world seems the only proper and sensible thing for her to do.

Mary Katherine is an extremely possessive character as are many of the other sister types; but she wants to have her sister's complete attention while the other characters seem to covet something owned by their respective sisters. To Mary Katherine's childish mind, Constance represents a type of fairy princess whom she must protect and keep hidden only for herself; thus, when their cousin Charles arrives she perceives him as an enemy prince who must be eliminated to protect the security of their "castle" home and privacy.[9]

Jackson seems to be anticipating the essence of Mary Katherine and Constance's relationship in her earlier portrayal of the sisters, Frederica and Beverly Terrel in The Road Through the Wall. In this first novel, Jackson briefly presents the Terrel sisters and contrasts their devotion with the selfishness of the other children in the neighborhood. Frederica, like

Constance, has had to assume full responsibility for the care of her "slow" sister. Both of these characters are extremely protective and concerned for their charges, showing no resentment (which would be justified here more than in any other instance). Frederica must keep an eye out for Beverly since she has a tendency to take the household money and wander into town, spending it foolishly with perfect strangers. Beverly shows absolutely no fear or distrust of anyone while Mary Katherine is extremely suspicious of everyone she meets; either way, both girls are extremely vulnerable and not able to care for themselves. The self-less devotion displayed by Frederica and Constance is one of the few admirable characteristics Jackson portrays in any of her female characters.

The other minor appearances of devoted, rather than quarreling sister pairs occur in The Sundial and The Witchcraft of Salem Village. The two elderly women, the Misses Deborah and Caroline Inverness, in The Sundial, live together and share the responsibilities of a tiny gift and book shop. Each woman here feels that she is looking out for her sister's benefit; but what their behavior actually amounts to is making sure that the other does not do anything drastic to upset their routine life-style. One of the bravest and one of the few admirable women portrayed in The Witchcraft of Salem Village is Sarah Cloyse, the sister of accused Rebecca Nurse. This woman had the courage to speak out in defense of her sister's innocence at the witch trials and thus risks (and loses) her own

freedom. It was this type of action, however, that first brought some of the people in Salem back to a sensible frame of mind.

Although Jackson deals fewer times with sisterly conflicts than with conflicts between mothers and daughters or even two, non-related women, the cases she does develop in this category are all intense, effective, and memorable. Many of the motives which influence the actions of the sister characters are very similar to those shared by the women in the other two types of conflicts; especially those of competition, jealousy, and manipulation through unfair interference. Related or not, women involved in struggles or problems of some kind, will reveal much about themselves; and Jackson makes thorough use of such conflicts to develop extremely powerful and believable female characters who are altogether too representative of the jealousy rampant among human beings.

NOTES--CHAPTER III

[1]CAWM, p. 163.

[2]Ibid., p. 164.

[3]Orville Prescott, "Books of the Times," New York Times (15 April 1949), p. 21.

[4]Shirley Jackson. The Road Through the Wall (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1948), p. 230.

[5]Shirley Jackson. The Bird's Nest, in The Magic of Shirley Jackson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), p. 157.

[6]Alice S. Morris, "In the Halls of Halloran," New York Times Book Review (23 February 1958), p. 5.

[7]"We Have Always Lived in the Castle," The New Yorker, XXXVIII (13 October 1962), 231.

[8]Stuart C. Woodruff. "The Real Horror Elsewhere," Southwest Review LII (Spring 1967), 161.

[9]Miriam Ylvisaker. Library Journal LXXXVII (1 September 1962), 2918.

WOMEN IN CONFLICT: FRIEND AND FOE

The third area of female relationships portrayed in Jackson's works is not nearly as specific as those dealing with mothers and daughters or sister groups. In this third area, Miss Jackson deals with the relationships between non-related women, usually two friends whose friendship is altered noticeably by the end of a work, casual associates, or women in employer-employee situations. Quite often in these relationships, Jackson uses her characters to display the extent of callousness that one human being is often able to display to another. Many of her short stories evolve around such a relationship, depending on a character's personal behavior to justify Miss Jackson's often abrupt endings. All of the novels include at least one relationship of this type, with The Road Through the Wall, Hangsaman, and The Haunting of Hill House all depending on such a relationship to intensify the major conflict of the entire work.

The earliest story of Jackson's that really fits into this pattern of strained relations between friends is "Come Dance With Me in Ireland," which first appeared in The New Yorker in 1943. In this story, three women are visiting in one of their apartments. They range in age and personality from the oldest, a Mrs. Corn, who is full of advice; to young-married Mrs. Archer, who has to put up with Mrs. Corn's constant

comments; to the young neighbor, Miss Valentine, who gets overly excited about everything. These three women's afternoon is interrupted by the appearance of an old man who is both selling shoe laces and starving to death at the same time. The three women take him in but disagree on what to think of him and how to act toward him. These women do not become outwardly angry with each other, but have their eyes opened to the pettiness in their respective behaviors. For example, they decide to give the man some wine to revitalize him, but serve it in a dirty water glass from the sink. The man remarks on his second class treatment, insults Mrs. Corn who was the most reticent about taking him in, and leaves, mockingly, having planted disturbing questions in all of their minds about each other and their own motives.

Three stories that reveal pettiness of a competitive nature in female characters are "Fine Old Firm," "Of Course," and "The Dummy." All three of these consist almost entirely of dialogue; yet a woman's manner is often best revealed through her speech, and Jackson effectively uses this approach here. The story, "Fine Old Firm," presents a scene where two mothers meet and talk about their sons. One mother, Mrs. Friedman, calls unexpectedly on Mrs. Concord; introducing herself and explaining that their sons are both in the army together and have written suggesting that the mothers get acquainted. A conversation ensues very similar to that between the sisters Miss Tyler and Mrs. Random-Jones in <u>The Road</u>

Through the Wall, with both women not only acting possessive of their own sons but trying to sound more knowledgable of the other's son. Mrs. Concord announces her intentions of acting on behalf of the Friedman's son by providing him a position in their family business. His mother declines the offer, stating their own plans and boasting just enough to insult the first woman. It is obvious that the sons' desires and welfare is not in the minds of these women; but that this encounter was solely a chance for both to assure themselves of their own superior status in contrast to the other.

More such verbal jousting occurs in "Of Course." Here two women form judgments of each other upon their first meeting. A Mrs. Tylor watches while new neighbors move in; then, she goes over to introduce herself and offer assistance. It is obvious to a reader that Mrs. Tylor has come mostly out of curiosity, yet she does sound sincere in her comments about hoping to become acquainted and spend some time together. But Mrs. Harris' (the new neighbor) curt replies to each comment made by Mrs. Tylor initiates a verbal "contest."

> "Mr. Harris," Mrs. Harris said carefully, "feels that movies are intellectually retarding. We do not go to movies."
>
> "Naturally," Mrs. Tylor said . . .
>
> "Mr. Harris cannot bear the radio. We do not own one, of course."

> "Of course," Mrs. Tylor said. "No radio." . . .
>
> "What," Mrs. Tylor said, "what does your husband do for relaxation?"
>
> "He reads plays," Mrs. Harris said. She looked doubtfully at Mrs. Tylor. "Pre-Elizabethan, of course."[1]

After politely listening to all of Mrs. Harris' insinuations that the Harris' life style was far superior to hers, Mrs. Tylor leaves her, not defeated, but only all the more convinced to continue her own life style no matter how "barbaric" her neighbors may consider it. This need to impress the other of her superior status has deprived both women of the chance of developing a genuine friendship.

Such a compulsion to comment and criticize often results in outward meddling by many Jackson characters. Two meddling, older women interfere in a marital argument in "The Dummy," and are rightfully rebuffed by both the husband and wife. While at a restaurant, these two feel free to openly criticize a girl entertainer and later eavesdrop on her table conversation. The girl and her husband, a ventriloquist, are having an argument and the man directs insults to her through use of the dummy. The women are appalled and interfere by coming over to the table, slapping the dummy's face and knocking its head loose. The young woman immediately adjusts the dummy, thus symbolically refusing their aid and defending her husband.

The women are surprised at her reaction, but never question their own motives which were grossly inappropriate in the first place.

Another instance where Jackson deals with meddling older women is in "The House." Unfortunately, these women are not put in their rightful place and end up ruining another person's happiness. These women visit a young girl who has recently inherited one of their late friend's homes. The girl is very excited about the prospect of decorating the house and having a home of her own. These women commence to tell her their suspicions that the previous woman was murdered in the house and leave her only when they have her thoroughly convinced of this. Once alone, the girl realizes she is too afraid to stay in the house. She abandons it and all of her dreams for happiness that it represented. Jackson implies that these women knew what they were doing and planned the whole visit, not to extend any welcome to the girl but to assure themselves that things would remain the way they wanted them.

Likewise, Jackson often uses feminine gossip and distinct social incidents to further reveal her characters' personalities.[2] The female characters in The Road Through the Wall are good examples of this aspect of her work. The neighbor women here gather at each other's homes socially for sewing sessions, yet after years of acquaintance they still are uncomfortably formal in their behavior. These women seem so preoccupied with maintaining their social positions as accepted by the others that

they have not allowed themselves to form real friendships. Comments given as compliments are usually insincere and double-edged and the neighbor women not included at these gatherings are outwardly condemned and slandered.

As in The Witchcraft of Salem Village, these women's daughters also imitate their mother's mannerisms and seem to absorb their biases. The girls in The Road Through the Wall ". . . reflect the life of their parents with its bickering futility and its moral bankruptcy."[3] One particular instance in this light occurs when Virginia Donald leads the other girls into a conversation with the Jewish girl, Marilyn Perlman. Virginia very "graciously" offers to exempt Marilyn from all holiday activities to save her from embarrassment over Christmas; later, Mrs. Donald purposely eliminates Marilyn from a neighborhood drama club so she won't have to be exposed to the play, "Merchant of Venice." Jackson has once again provided insight into the not so pleasant side of feminine nature.

A very similar cruelty is apparent in the personalities of the college girls in Hangsaman. The central character, Natalie, cannot adjust to life in college for many reasons, but one major problem is that she, being extra sensitive, is repulsed by the others' true, vicious natures. One of the book's most powerful scenes describes an initiation of the freshmen girls. Awakened in the middle of the night, and rudely ushered into a candlelit restroom by masked upperclassmen, Natalie finds herself amazed at the nerve people have to act outrageously

when provided with anonymity (even as slight as that of a small mask).

Natalie, alone, refuses to cooperate in the older girls' interrogations and is immediately tagged as a "bad sport" (their worse condemnation, since nonconformity is scorned by most of them). The girls are shown to be involved in a type of struggle for domination similar to that in "Of Course." Each girl seems to be judging the other's potential for popularity and associations are formed on the selfish basis of whom it would be best to be seen with; true qualities of friendship are practically ignored. Status appears to be the major factor esteemed by these girls; Natalie's inability to function in such a false world and accept these priorities is implied by Jackson as being the only sane action to take in such circumstances.

What seems even more unfortunate to Jackson is that few people, like Natalie, are sensitive to the crassness of the world around them; but rather thrive in such an environment. Jackson describes many characters who enjoy taking advantage of those weaker than themselves. A powerful contrast of two such character types appears in Hangsaman, where Natalie becomes involved with two older girls, Vicki and Ann. Natalie cannot understand why these girls bother to include her in their activities since they are very popular, attractive, and have very few interests in common with her. After awhile she realizes that they are merely using her to get closer to an

attractive teacher who is especially attentive to Natalie (again, not because of her own attributes, but because he is interested in her influential, author-father). Natalie resents their treatment, yet is so desperate for friendship that she allows herself to be exploited by them for quite a while.

It is only when these two girls begin to torment this professor's wife that Natalie faces the truth about their inherent cruelty. One of the first people to befriend Natalie was this woman, Elizabeth Langdon, and Natalie is sympathetic toward her. She, like Natalie, feels like a misfit in the college crowd; and to escape her own frustration, Elizabeth Langdon resorts to heavy drinking. Jackson implies that the girl, Ann, is involved romantically with the professor and that these two girls outwardly exploit Elizabeth's drinking to belittle her in front of her husband. When Natalie realizes what they are doing to the life of another human being she is shocked and angry at herself for being even a small part of their dirty work.

The younger Ann Putnam in The Witchcraft of Salem Village is also presented as a cruelly selfish person who willfully uses other people. Ann was considered the "ring leader" of the other Puritan girls with none of them daring to defy her. Even the older girls in the village would copy Ann's actions and always agree with her ideas. The younger girls in town were totally intimidated by her; in fact, Ann's threats to the youngest girl (Elizabeth Parris) to remain quiet about a

forbidden club they had formed caused her to have the nightmares which were first interpreted as signs of witchcraft.

Many of Jackson's characters find themselves in helpless situations beyond their own control, suffering from another's cruel manipulation over their lives. Three of her stories are specifically concerned with relationships between women in employer-employee situations where unusual role reversals have taken place. In the stories, "The Island," "Tootie in Peonage," and "Men with Their Big Shoes," Jackson has the character who normally should be in charge of things completely usurped of all power by one who ordinarily would be taking orders. These ineffective women are frustrated by their own vulnerability but are not strong enough to escape their own predicaments.

"The Island," presents a pathetic picture of a rich, elderly lady, Mrs. Montague, who is being exploited by her hired companion, a nondescript Miss Oakes. The companion daily orders lavish room service dinners for herself while forcing oatmeal gruel down the throat of her charge. Miss Oakes treats Mrs. Montague as a child and as a result, Mrs. Montague becomes more and more childish in her actions, constantly doing things to spite Miss Oakes. Mrs. Montague fantasizes an escape to an island, where she runs freely nude on a beach and is only occasionally disturbed by a parrot (greatly resembling Miss Oakes) that squawks, "Eat. Eat."[4] The fantasy is not lasting,

though, and Mrs. Montague must face the unalterable fact that she cannot rid herself of this woman and her unfair treatment, since she is hired by her son and Miss Oakes has him favorably impressed.

Jackson also represents a role reversal between employer and employee in two of her stories about hired, domestic help. "Tootie in Peonage," and "Men with Their Big Shoes." In the story, "Tootie in Peonage," Jackson has a young, hired girl totally disrupting her employer's family life. Instead of relieving her employer, Mrs. Taylor, of her household burdens she merely adds more to her load. This girl is not only lazy but demanding as well. When the inevitable occurs and, pregnant, Tooties packs to return home, she comments about how nice the family had been to her. Thus, even when gone, she disturbs Mrs. Taylor, who now feels guilty over her previous resentment of the girl. If anyone was in peonage in this story, it certainly was not Tootie!

Add about thirty years to the character Tootie plus even more sheer nerve and the character of Mrs. Anderson from "Men with Their Big Shoes," emerges. This woman not only intimidates her young employer, a Mrs. Hart, about working conditions but interferes in her private life as well. Mrs. Hart is recently married, pregnant and unusually timid; she is as idealistic about life and love as Mrs. Anderson is bitter. Mrs. Anderson relates all sorts of frightening old wives' tales concerning childbirth and constantly criticizes her own husband outwardly

and Mr. Hart, implicity. When Mrs. Hart is beginning to realize the threat of Mrs. Anderson's presence and contemplating her dismissal, Mrs. Anderson delivers one last fatal blow. She suggests living in with them, taking over the nursery and the care of the child who is not even born yet. Mrs. Hart, not having courage of her own to confront the situation openly, resorts to a trick of Mrs. Anderson's. Blaming her husband, Mrs. Hart says that she is in favor of the idea, but knows that he would not allow it. Even this attempt at stopping the woman does not work and the story ends with Mrs. Hart realizing "with a sudden, unalterable conviction that she was lost."[5]

Competitiveness between business associates or petty social climbing, although not pleasant, seems inevitable to Jackson; but at the same time, the destruction of something as worthwhile as a meaningful friendship is senseless to her, Perhaps one of the most pathetic types of human relationships Jackson deals with is that of a lost or ruined friendship. Often friendships are destroyed as a result of the interference of an outside person. For example, the closeness so fulfilling to both Harriet and Marilyn in <u>The Road Through the Wall</u> was cruelly ended by Harriet's mother. This woman surely could not have understood her daughter and truly cared for her and still gone ahead with her demands. Harriet desperately needed a confidant and someone to accept her as an equal; her mother's denying her this, was like depriving her daughter the chance to become a whole person. Maybe subconsciously, this was her intention.

The cruel severing of ties by Mrs. Winning with her own friend, Mrs. MacLane, in "Flower Garden," is a meaningless self-denial. When Helen Winning yielded to town pressure and prejudice she also forfeited her slim hold on happiness and chances of personal fulfillment. Mrs. MacLane, although insulted and hurt at first, in the long run, will not suffer nearly as much loss from this broken relationship as Mrs. Winning.

Probably the most unlikely friendship portrayed by Jackson is that formed between Eleanor and Theodora in The Haunting of Hill House. These two women are completely different in appearance and personality, but are thrown together into a relationship, quickly established by mutual need and dependence. Some reviewers consider their playful amusements, conversations and attachment as homosexually oriented; but their extreme closeness seems justified more obviously by their mutual need for reassurance in the frightful house.[6]

A type of love-hate relationship develops between Eleanor and Theodora, aggravated by their mutual interest in the same man.[7] Both women begin to take advantage of each other's weaknesses (i.e., Eleanor's insecurity and Theodora's vanity) to bolster their own self-images. Theodora is the only friend that Eleanor has ever really known and even though she is made to feel inferior by her, desperately maintains her attachment. When Theodora becomes tired of Eleanor's clinging to her, she purposefully hurts her feelings in an attempt to end the relationship. Eleanor needs the stability and security of a personal

friendship desperately and when denied this by Theodora, is thus driven to seek union with the spirits of the house. Eleanor suffers horribly from the selfish and purposeful exploitation of a so-called "friend."

Likewise, the women in "The Lottery," willingly exploit one of their "friends," Tessie Hutchinson, rather than having to suffer themselves. This self-centered behavior is probably the most effective aspect of the whole story, excluding the shock of the ending for a first time reader. Something besides sheer survival seems to be at stake here. If that were all that was influencing the people in this story, the actual stoning would be grim but less exciting. The real horror of the story lies in Jackson's revelation of the enjoyment the townspeople (especially Tessie's female neighbors) get from witnessing another's tragedy, knowing that they, themselves, have been spared. Such a characteristic of the human race is evil and frightening; yet, Jackson seems convinced of its actuality.[8] She displays this trait in other works, especially in the mob scene in We Have Always Lived in the Castle where the townspeople revel in watching the house burn and then vandalize its remains. This scene is even more barbaric than the ending of "The Lottery." In Life Among the Savages, Jackson describes her own fascination at watching a house fire, and then comments on her own shock and humiliation when she realized why she had been so entranced with the scene.[9] Jackson seems to imply that all mankind possesses such an inner fascination with the horror of tragedy.

Stress caused by personal conflicts tends to bring out the darker qualities of a person's nature, and Jackson's use of such situations enables her to deeply probe the souls of her characters. These women are either extremely unlikeable or pitiful, but unfortunately painfully true to life. Jackson does not present the stereotyped, female gossip as is done in many satirical works; but deals with the underlying maliciousness displayed by many women to another of their same gender. When Jackson writes of character conflicts between non-related women she seems best able to comment on total humanity since she has fewer traditional behavioral expectations to contend with, as with family groups. Through the conflicts discussed in this chapter, Shirley Jackson clearly relates many of her opinions on the selfishness and cruelty underlying feminine, and indeed all, human nature.

NOTES--CHAPTER IV

[1]TL, p. 232.

[2]Donald Barr. "A Talent for Irony," New York Times Book Review (17 April 1949), p. 4.

[3]Robert Halsband. "Sidestreet, U.S.A.," Saturday Review XXXI (28 February 1948), 14.

[4]CAWM, p. 64.

[5]TL, p. 264.

[6]Maxwell Geismar. "Annals of Magic," Saturday Review XLII (31 October 1959), 19.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. "Interpretations," Understanding Fiction. 2nd ed., (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), p. 75.

[9]Shirley Jackson. Life Among the Savages, in The Magic of Shirley Jackson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), p. 495.

SUMMARY

As the preceding chapters have shown, Shirley Jackson's unique style often found its most successful expression in her characterization of female characters in conflict either with themselves or other women. Jackson powerfully presents neurotic female characters and their inability to cope with pressures in their lives. The struggle to fully know oneself and find contentment in a so-called "normal" life style is presented as a nearly impossible task for any sensitive female to achieve. Her characters may seem weak and vulnerable, but Jackson specifically develops such characters because they can be presented as being extremely sensitive to the world around them and therefore more vulnerable to the vicissitudes and complexity of all of life. Such characters will feel threatened by the evil in the world around them and suffer most from the inhumanity displayed by others they come into contact with.

Another way Jackson comments on the complexity and inherent cruelty of humanity is in her development of crucial relationships between female characters. Very seldom does Miss Jackson present a happy relationship between a mother and daughter because she seems to want to point out that such a well adjusted relationship is next to impossible to maintain when people adhere to distorted and selfish values. When a devoted sister character (such as Constance Blackwood or Frederica Terrel) is presented, she seems almost unbelievable--astonishingly

incongruent--since most of Jackson's sisters are shown to be devoid of any affection. But she does this to show, as with mother-daughter instances, how true affection is frequently totally absent in many families.

Jackson is especially able to probe deep into the soul of humanity in her presentation of the conflicts between non-related female characters. These women are not even compelled to maintain the thin guise of affection found in family associations; and so they outwardly display the selfish, spiteful, competitiveness that often motivates people. These characters have lost all regard for meaningful friendship or even proper business or social respect; they all seem to act compelled to assure themselves of superiority over all others they come in contact with.

Jackson's approach is always from a feminine stance, with her choice of symbols and incidents holding special significance for her female characters and likewise for her female readers. Time and time again Jackson relies on such traditionally feminine symbols as clothing, home furnishings, or cooking to relate a character's dissatisfactions, concept of status, and reaction to her world around her.

There is a relative lack of male characters in Jackson's work and they are almost never fully developed. Most often the men are presented as background influences who only serve to highlight a woman's dissatisfaction with life around her. A

male reader should not be confused or bored with Jackson's works, however, but rather gain a new perspective into human nature; not only seeing how the other half feels, but often how they feel about themselves or about him.

Jackson's husband, the critic Stanley Edgar Hyman, has commented that her works should not be considered as personal, neurotic fantasies but rather as a "sensitive and faithful anatomy of our times, fitting symbols for our own distressing world . . . ." Hyman predicts that the "future will find her powerful visions of suffering and inhumanity significant and meaningful, and that Shirley Jackson's work is among that small body of literature produced in our times that seems apt to survive."[1] If Jackson's work is read with attention being focused on her characterization her work may well endure and her achievement be more fully appreciated.

NOTES--SUMMARY

[1]Stanley Edgar Hyman. "Shirley Jackson, 1919-1965," Saturday Evening Post CCXXXVIII (18 December 1965), 63.

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