

FEMALE POWER IN SHIRLEY JACKSON'S “*WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE*”

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Abstract

The history of American literature stretches across more than 400 years. It can be divided into five major periods, each of which has unique characteristics and with works that are notable, and representative. The colonial and early national period is between 17th century and 1830. The first American novel is “*The Power of Sympathy*” by William Hill Brown published in 1789. The American novel took on a dizzying number of forms after World War II. This paper aims to explore the female power in Shirley Jackson’s “*We Have Always Lived in the Castle*”. Shirley Jackson’s is very significant twentieth century American novelist. She is awarded ten best novels of the year includes “*We Have Always Lived in the Castle*” in 1962. And Shirley Jackson was also awarded for outstanding achievement in the literature of psychological suspense, horror and the dark fantastic in 2007. In her novel “*We Have Always Lived in the Castle*” deals with the female power the female character revealing a desire for revolt against the patriarchy.

“*We Have Always Lived in the Castle*” written just a few years before the radical social movements of the 1960s and ’70s began, is a reaction to the return to traditionalism that occurred in the United States after World War II. During the 1950s, women were expected to stay at home to cook and clean and support their husbands in every possible way. The family is seen as the center of society and it is supposed to create peace and harmony. Just as one’s response to oppression is anger, Merricat’s violent tendencies may be Jackson’s reaction to finding herself in this stifling social climate. The book also refers to an earlier means of oppressing women: witch hunts between

the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries in which hundreds of thousands of women were tortured, hanged, or burned at the stake in North America and Europe on suspicion of practicing witchcraft. This phenomenon has been interpreted as a means of suppressing women who tried to gain some power in their society. Merricat can easily be read as a witch who escapes burning and the madness of a mob.

Shirley Jackson was born in 1916 in San Francisco to middle-class parents who soon moved the family to Rochester, New York. After briefly attending the University of Rochester, Jackson ultimately completed her degree in 1940 at Syracuse University. As a student, Jackson worked for the campus literary magazine, where she met her future husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman. Hyman was also a lover of literature and went on to become a successful critic. After Hyman and Jackson married, the pair moved to North Bennington, Vermont, where Jackson spent the rest of her life. Hyman worked as a professor at Bennington College, and Jackson spent her time writing. Both husband and wife enjoyed socializing and hosting events, and they had a wide circle of literary friends, which included Ralph Ellison. However, Hyman was a domineering husband who had affairs with his students and forced Jackson to act as a conventional wife despite her literary successes. Furthermore, Jackson felt estranged from the people of North Bennington, and probably based some of her crueller depictions of village life on her experiences with them. Near the end of her life, Jackson struggled with severe agoraphobia and obesity and remained secluded in her room. She died in her sleep due to heart failure in 1965, when she was only 48 years old. Jackson is best known for her short story "*The Lottery*" (1948) and her ghost story "*The Haunting of Hill House*" (1959).

Jackson is best known for her short story "*The Lottery*," is of a ritual stoning in an imagined American town. This story's focus on an unthinking cruelty inherent in human nature shocked readers so deeply that the *New Yorker*, which had published the story, received a recorded number of letters about it, and South Africa banned its publication. "*We Have Always Lived in the Castle*" echoes some of the themes of "*The Lottery*," particularly in its depiction of a hostile group of townspeople whose mob mentality allows them to commit horrible acts with a minimal sense of conscience. Additionally, the novel has served as inspiration to a number of writers whose works

play around the edges of horror, speculative fiction, and yet also a level of realism, including Neil Gaiman and Joyce Carol Oates.

Throughout the novel, the actions of the female characters reveal a desire for revolt against the patriarchy. Due to family tragedy and social isolation, Merricat and Constance have power over their day-to-day lives that is unusual for young women in the 1960s, and the book is concerned with the sisters' struggle to defend that power from men who would usurp it. The sisters' ultimate triumph is that they succeed in banishing these men from their lives. Jackson, then, presents a vision that could be seen as a kind of feminist utopia, in which the sisters reject many structures and icons of male power, such as money and the traditional nuclear family, and are able to make a woman-centered life for themselves that includes only the two of them. In this book, male power is especially sustained by money, as men have traditionally been breadwinners and have used this position to control women. Blackwood men in particular base their identity and success largely on their ability to make money. By entirely disregarding the value of money, Merricat and Constance simply deny the power of men. Their money sits in their father's safe, and they use it only to buy necessities. When Charles arrives, he's scandalized by the sisters' indifference to their wealth, but they simply laugh at his attempts to get into the safe and put a price to all the objects in the house. Essentially, they shed much of the power that men may have over them by choosing not to rely on or value money.

Additionally, witchcraft has long been associated with women who transgress social expectations, and Merricat creates her own brand of witchcraft as she buries protective objects all over the property and decides on words that she believes are powerful. Her cat, Jonas, even acts like her familiar, an animal believed to aid witches in their work. The destruction of the house by fire and the villagers' throwing of objects mimics the execution of witches by burning or stoning—except in this instance, Merricat and Constance not only survive the symbolic execution, but find themselves happier than ever after it, as it leaves them entirely out of reach of the male-centric world, with only each other for company. Merricat and Constance also rely on feminine power as vested in the traditional female connection to food preparation. In fact, their lives revolve almost entirely around food, and by the end of the book, they spend practically all of their time in the

kitchen, with Constance preparing food and Merricat eating it. Though women have long been made responsible for preparing food for their husbands, the sisters subvert this patriarchal tradition by enjoying their food alone, without any men, after Uncle Julian's death. Despite the outside pressures of society, Merricat and Constance ultimately find happiness being alone together, to the exclusion of all male company besides their cat. In a world that largely believes that women need men, the sisters' preference to live without them amounts to a bold statement.

Women have found power in a variety of ways though out history in their struggle towards justice and equality. Though personal power can take many forms, this paper will primarily focus on power found through gender solidarity, class issues, race or sexuality. Elizabeth Cady Stanton found power through gender solidarity. She was a true feminist concerned with not just suffrage but total equality for the sexes. Her Declaration of Sentiments brilliantly transformed the words of men who sought freedom from their oppressors into words of women seeking the same. Presenting her political position by using a document that the men of that time held sacred.

Females and males leadership shows that women, gender, and leadership mean very different things to different people. Females usually have to work harder and perform better, but they are perceived as having more opportunities. Women in management are desirable because females bring a different style of leadership. For example, females bring a less aggressive and more intuitive style, also they tend to keep the authoritarian masculine style. These softer skills are more in demand today rather than the aggressive, dominating style of men. At the same time females need to be more motivated and encouraged by them and family because they fight for promotion. Since women combine job with family, so they pursue their selfish ambition to place their careers ahead of family responsibilities. Women managers are succeeding in leadership by drawing on what is unique to their experience as women.

According to practice, men and women in similar managerial jobs make the same amount of money and experience. But in leadership styles there are differences: Male are much more likely than women to view leadership as a series of transactions with subordinates, and to use their position and control of resources to motivate their followers. Female, on the other hand, are far more likely than men to describe themselves as transforming subordinates' self-interest into concern for the

whole organization. Women are using personal traits like charisma, work record, and interpersonal skills to motivate others. Women leaders develop and practice interaction or interactive leadership. They are trying to make every interaction with coworkers, positive for all involved in participation, also encourage, share power and information, make people feel important, and energizing them. In general, women have been expected to be supportive and cooperative. This is one of explanation why women leaders today tend to be more interactive than men. But interactive leadership should not be linked directly to being female, since some men use that style and some women prefer the democratic style.

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