

12-13-1994

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Insanity as Escape:
A Kristevan reading of Shirley Jackson's novels

by

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An Honors Undergraduate Thesis
presented to the
Department of English and to the
Honors College of Louisiana State University

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana

December 13, 1994

INTRODUCTION

In Shirley Jackson's novels, the protagonists, always women, struggle to attain personal identity and power within rigid social structures which deny them both. The difficulties the heroines have living within a reality which Jackson shows to be oppressive, bleak, even cruel, are reflected in their strange use of language and their willful destruction of the structures which order reality (i.e. time, law). They attempt to achieve autonomy and self-importance by creating narcissistic fantasy worlds which gratify their un-fulfilled desires. To live within these worlds they must regress to a state of pre-consciousness. This theme re-occurs in her novels and delves into many issues which Julia Kristeva will later articulate coherently. Kristeva's theories help explain the experiences of Jackson's characters as they are torn between the real and the imaginary.

Julia Kristeva's belief in the importance of the maternal experience, an importance ignored in most accounts of identity formation and language acquisition, illuminates Jackson's heroines's struggles against social orders. She believes that these orders, while adequately expressing the male's social reality, offer the female only a partial and tentative relation to this reality. The novels mirror Kristeva's psychoanalytic language theories, and Merricat's

successful alter-reality, in We Have Always Lived In the Castle, resembles resolutions Kristeva proposes. Thus Jackson validates these theories by having her characters enact them prior to Kristeva's writings.

Kristeva reviews Lacanian explanations of child development, placing new emphasis on the mother-child union. In early infancy the child does not distinguish between himself and the external. If the child is to function in a structured society, he/she must separate from the mother, with whom the child was as one before and after birth. The communication between mother and child, constituted by expressive sounds lacking symbolic meaning (the rhythmic wailing of the infant, the soothing nonsensical syllables of the maternal voice) is then replaced by a linguistic system from the outside. The father, who is separate from the mother-child-as-one, becomes the emblem of the symbolically structured world of language, as does law, which structures social behavior, and time, which imposes structure onto experience. Language, law, and time are structures external and prior to the individual, and they are structures the individual must learn to abide within. Jackson's heroines experience these structures as hostile and restricting, concurring with Kristeva's assessment that, as these structures do not allow one to venture beyond ascribed meanings, they constrict expression.

Before the child enters into these symbolic orders, he/she is engaged in a "dyadic relation" in which mother and

child are "whole and unitary" (Homans, 6). During this period the child shares with the mother what Kristeva has called "the semiotic chora [which exists] before the law, in the maternal body" (Oliver, 8). The chora is an imaginary territory, a maternal space, where "body language and nonrepresentational sounds" (Representation, 6) communicate the primal drives of the mother and child, linking them as one. As there is no differentiating child from mother, to achieve an independent identity the child must repress the "unqualified pre-verbal euphoria, the timeless, effortless, bodily bliss" (Dinnerstein, 144), and trade love of the chora for love of the phallic, which is outside and other than the maternal body. The child must accept the physical limitations of his/her separate body, "the enragingly puny flesh" (Dinnerstein, 132), in order to separate from the all encompassing presence he/she experienced in the chora. This unity and fusion remain a source of seduction and terror throughout life. An individual longs for the infantile bliss, but fears the loss of personal identity that it entails. Jackson's characters too are attracted and repulsed as they approach a loss of consciousness which resembles this infantile state. In The Haunting of Hill House, Eleanor will openly court a re-merger because she is so revolted by the limitations of her separate body.

Achieving separation from the maternal is particularly problematic for the female child whose body physically resembles that of the mother. The male child, in rejecting

the maternal space, can identify himself as masculine, as 'like father'. Thus becoming other than mother is fairly easy for him. Whereas, "girls in identifying themselves as female, experience themselves as like their mothers thus fusing the experience of attachment with the process of identity formation" (Gilligan, 8). "When the female child makes her mother abject in order to reject her, she makes herself abject also" (Oliver, 61). The daughter's separation from the mother entails a confusion of identity since "splitting from the mother means splitting herself also" (Oliver, 8). Therefore, the woman's "attempts to release the hold of the maternal entity...is a violent clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (Kristeva, 13). Jackson's characters too feel this identity confusion, especially Eleanor, in The Haunting of Hill House, who will continually experience this difficult process of separating from the maternal. She exists on the borderline between the semiotic chora and the symbolic phallic, lured by each side, but not able, until the end, to commit to either.

Kristeva's criticisms focus upon syntactical language which is the "supreme example of the signifying systems of culture" (Belsey 60). The acquisition of language requires the child to use signs (words) as symbols of objects and thoughts. The child learns that "a sign has meaning only by dint of its difference from other signs and learns also that

a sign presupposes the absence of the object it signifies" (Homans, 7). Thus language is based on the separation of the signifier and the signified. Representational language, founded upon absence and lack, strongly contrasts the mother/child communication which is a language of presence. This language of absence is unsatisfactory, especially for women whose full separation from the maternal (into this system of symbols) would result in gender confusion. Jackson's characters have difficulties expressing themselves in this representational language.

To aid in expression, Kristeva suggests a "recuperation of the lost maternal force, an instinctual force of the pre-symbolic" (Belsey, 102). To allow articulation of individual meanings she proposes a semiotic dialect, not as an alternative to the symbolic, but as a type of activator within the linguistic structure. The semiotic is "the rhythm and music which expresses drives" (Belsey, 98). As with maternal communication, the semiotic's emphasis is toward expression and not toward signifying specific meanings. The semiotic articulates drives inexpressible in linguistic structures which repress thoughts and experiences that exceed its symbolic function. Thus it is able to push ordinary linguistic meanings onto frontiers of psychological understanding which can not be attained otherwise. Using sounds and poetry, an individual can "break and redefine the limits of language" (Belsey, 101). Jackson's characters speak this semiotic voice as they attempt to express

themselves. This voice articulates pure drives, love as well as fear and horror. However, Kristeva contends that the semiotic cannot stand alone. It needs to be constrained by the symbolic in order not to become so individualized that it communicates nothing but "psychotic babble" (Besley 101). Likewise, in Hangsaman, when Natalie reverts exclusively to this semiotic voice, she finds herself in an orderless territory which is terrifying. Thus the semiotic is not itself a solution. Kristeva proposes combining the symbolic and the semiotic.

The language of Jackson's characters reflects their struggles to live within their fantasy realms. This language differs from Jackson's wry criticisms of society which permeate the novel. Her characters do not use words only to represent objects and ideas, but they also have a fascination with sounds and rhythms. This lyric babble is part of their attempt to live beyond the normative social orders as reflected in language. The characters' language is similar to what Kristeva defines as the semiotic drives of language. However, this language has no order in itself and therefore cannot exist outside of the symbolic, representational order of language. Hence most of her characters fail in their attempts to replace reality.

Jackson's early novel, Hangsaman (1951), describes a young girl's brief descent into madness. Natalie refuses to remain attached to her weak unhappy mother who acknowledges this refusal when she says to Natalie "Poor little girl. No

mother" (46). Thus Natalie willingly enters symbolic reality only to be confounded by her father (the emblem of this reality), who allots her no personal power. Since she experiences symbolic structures as restrictive, she defies these structures (law and time) and uses her creativity to forge a territory which lacks any restriction. Her use of language reflects this movement, for, as she escapes reality, she trades representational language for a language which resembles Kristeva's semiotic voice. However, as this created territory lacks symbolic order, like an infant, Natalie can no longer distinguish between herself and the external. She finds this self-absorption terrifying and eventually accepts conventional reality. However, she feels her decision to return to reality is a failure. And indeed, by portraying reality as dismal, Jackson shows her decision to be a defeat.

In Jackson's later novel, The Haunting of Hill House (1959), Eleanor too faces a reality which does not grant her desires realization. Eleanor modestly desires a home and a place to belong. Indeed, she has "no home, no place at all" (239). She sleeps on a cot in her niece's room, "genuinely hates her sister. . . and has no friends" (6). Ironically, Eleanor's mother is a strong emblem of symbolic realities. Disgusted by her mother, Eleanor is unwilling to enter these realities, coveting instead a symbiotic relationship related to the original mother/child unity. She comes to believe that the haunted house she lives in

offers her such a unity which would assure her of no distinct identity and hence home and security. Since Hill House mirrors what Kristeva what later describe as the maternal chora, Eleanor defies symbolic structures as she attempts to merge with the house. However, Eleanor doubts her decision to enter this purely semiotic territory and abdicate reality altogether. Jackson reinforces this doubt in the last sentence of the novel when she writes "whatever walked there [at Hill House] walked alone" (246). Thus, Eleanor does not merge with the house. Her hope of finding a positive symbiotic relationship is mere delusion.

In Jackson's last novel, We Have Always Lived in the Castle (1962), Jackson proposes the possibility of living outside of social structures. Mary Katherine deserts reality without regrets because her sane sister, Constance, joins her, blending Merricat's bizarre views with Constance's grasp of reality. Natalie and Eleanor both fail because they choose either reality or fantasy. In this novel reality and fantasy combine successfully. Merricat physically destroys symbolic structures, yet is never faced with a loss of consciousness. Constance, who exemplifies order, restriction, and limit that are non-threatening, assures Merricat that the semiotic drives she voices will not consume her. Merricat infuses Constance's order with fantastical meanings, assuring Constance that their new reality will never become boring. Thus the novel is a narrative rendition of Kristeva's revolutionized poetry which combines the symbolic with the semiotic.

Chapter one: BEYOND THE SYMBOLIC

"Natalie lives in an odd corner of a world of sight and sound past the daily voices of her father and mother and their incomprehensible actions."

In Hangsaman, Jackson explores the feasibility of escaping from reality into unreal worlds by introducing a young girl who will be increasingly unable to operate within within the social structures of reality which offer her no power, no self worth, and no individuality. At first Natalie's withdrawal from society only involves weaving fantasies into her experiences. These fantasies depict her defying the structures of symbolic order (law and time), which like symbolic language are pre-ascribed and constricting. Later, she openly opts "to brush away the solidarity of this world...to slip from a dull world to a bright one" (186). She attempts to form a counter-reality, a narcissistic realm structured to gratify her desires and wishes. However, in ordering a world around her drives and desires she loses a coherent self-identity. Completely rejecting symbolic structures entails a return to the infantile state of oneness where there is no differentiation between the internal and external. As her withdrawal becomes complete, she becomes as afraid of her created

world as she was of "being in reality no more than Natalie Waite, college girl, daughter to Arnold Waite" (195). She eventually accepts the restrictive normative orders for their stability, agreeing to identify herself unsatisfactorily within patriarchal restrictions (daughter to Arnold Waite). However, she senses shame and failure at the abandonment of her imaginary world.

In Hangsaman, Jackson shows the world of reality which Natalie flees to be, not only boring, but as psychically dangerous as the schizophrenia she delves into. Jackson describes Natalie's home, the college she attends, and the town near-by, with un-flowered and decidedly simple prose. These descriptions show Natalie's environment to be "dreary" in comparison to Natalie's own wistful visions and descriptive language. Throughout Jackson's bland narration, words such as "dourly" and "haggard", and phrases such as "fearless and extraordinarily biased" give credit to Natalie's desire to form her own world.

The unimaginativeness and dullness of reality is further illustrated by Natalie's patriarchal family. Her father, who laughingly says "God, I am God" (4), holds himself in high esteem, criticizing his family and colleagues amiably. This pretentious attitude does not allow Natalie to have, in his opinion, any novel thoughts or actions, for she always does "exactly as [he] expected" (15). Immediately before her break with reality she

"was almost irresistibly tempted to tell him all about

herself, to justify somehow the facts of herself... which, so horribly acute to her, seemed to him only to point to a statement about general personalities... she wanted to pound on the desk and to cry, yet before she had time to do any of these things she heard ahead of her his calm voice saying, when she had done 'Precisely, my dear Natalie, precisely what I was saying..' (206)

Thus her father, an emblem of the symbolic structure, threatens her sense of individuality, restricting all of her actions and thoughts by forcing them to coincide with pre-existent actions and thoughts. Jackson clearly proves this restriction to be debilitating, for Natalie's mother, in response to her father's constant un-enlightened dominance, is resentful and helpless, feeling "cheated" by life (43). This unhappy, often drunk, woman shows Natalie the dangers of a reality in which "instead of being different and powerful, you are tricked, just like everyone else" (44). Natalie's mother tells her that the way to have a happy marriage is to never "let your husband know what you're thinking" (22) Thus her mother's wretched state results from the domination of symbolic structures and incites Natalie to follow her mother's advice and mentally defy these structures.

At college, Natalie attempts to find a more positive male authority figure and thus a more positive emblem of social reality. She has a crush on her professor, Mr.

Langdon, entertaining vague daydreams of the "slim figure which moved gracefully before the class, speaking with humorous informality of Shakespeare" (97). However, after befriending his wife, an attractive but shallow former student, Natalie witnesses a relationship which strongly resembles that of her parents. Her involvement with the Langdons only reinforces her disgust with the constraining forces which order society. Elizabeth "has been deadened" (110) by marriage in much the same way that her mother has been deadened. (Natalie even thinks, when speaking to Elizabeth, "You should meet my mother.") Author Langdon, like Natalie's father, is an arrogant man as well as a selfish husband. He treats Natalie as her father does, with condescending authority. She resents the couple, and, through these two negative examples of marriage, comes to fear family settings intensely. The thought of herself "married, senselessly afflicted with children" nauseates her. The family situations in the novel credit Natalie's attempts to exist outside of such confining social structures.

Social relations outside of the family prove similarly constricting. At college, Natalie attempts to be unique and powerful. At freshman initiation she refuses to answer the masked seniors' questions. This defiance, however, makes her an outcast. For one "loses a seat among them by rebellion, by anything except a cheerful smile and the resolution to hurt other people" (79). The girls at college

call her "spooky", for there is no room within the social structure for individual power or resistance. Her friends, Anne and Vicki, infringe on her privacy and show her the extent to which the normative world intrudes upon individuality while offering no suitable defense against such intrusion. Anne and Vicki sneak into her locked room out of curiosity. Natalie finds the "thought of anyone, especially these two girls, coming unbidden into her room...abhorrent" (114). Yet, she cannot object to their treatment any more than can the girls upon whom Anne and Vicki play horrible practical jokes (ruining a fur coat) do anything but "be a good sport" (133). Natalie has attempted to live within social structures, but loses hope of finding anything in reality except the petty and the sinister. Thus, her retreat from reality is well justified.

She begins relying upon fantasies, which offer her what her reality cannot, power and individuality. Throughout conversations with her father, for example, Natalie fantasizes that she is being questioned by an authoritative detective about the murder of her lover. She is a blood stained criminal who refuses to confess (or submit) to the Law. Her refusal to answer the powerful detective, who asks "Do you think you alone can stand against the force, the might and weight of duly constituted authority, against me?", becomes a self-assertion. She denies him a confession, answering "I may be in danger every moment of my life, but I am strong within myself" (9). In this fantasy

of not functioning within the Law (both by committing a crime, and then by refusing to confess to it, thus not admitting wrong) she experiences a sense of power. It is when speaking to her father that she imagines defying the Law, for the Father symbolizes the separation into external social structures.

This idea of herself as criminal, as withstanding interrogation and examination, is the basis of her mental retreat from the world. For the fantasies, by being secret, offer her an individuality and a refuge which reality denies her. Her mind is a place to hide and avoid detection, a retreat from the social authorities which limit, investigate, and judge her. Anne and Viki's examining of her room, because they "thought they'd find out what [she] was like" (114), encourages Natalie to retreat further into her imagination. For her fantasies are a secure place "beyond all the laughter beyond all the scrutiny her own dear home of a mind where she was safe, protected, priceless" (88). When Anne asks her if she makes her mind up about anything, again denying Natalie's individuality, Natalie thinks "In my own country I was accounted quite a killer" (118). She empowers herself by imagining she is criminal, for criminals ignore the laws which restrict societies, and Natalie feels that it is only away from these restrictions that she can be unique and individual.

Through other fantasies, Natalie tries to distance herself from an environment which is so immediately painful

and frightening. Extremely sensitive and self-conscious, she fantasizes about a future time when her present pain and awkwardness will seem trivial. She

transplanted herself to an archeological expedition some thousand years from now, coming unexpectedly upon this kitchen and removing layers of earth carefully...There would be no further fears for Natalie, no possibility of walking wrong when you are no more than a skull in a strange man's hands (23).

She imagines herself at

"eighty-four, forgetting, smiling sadly, thinking, did it happen to me or did I read it somewhere? I have forgotten, she would say, an old woman of ninety turning over her memories, which would be- please God- faded, and mellowed, by time" (56).

Her recent trauma is trivialized when she imagines a future when "the effort of life had been spent and all the problems solved" (35). This distant future gives her a a sense of control over a present in which she feels powerless. Dead and aged, both states of reduced consciousness and awareness promise Natalie relief from the harsh realities she faces daily.

However, as she abandons symbolic structures, so too

will she abandon linear time. She will want to take "these days and force them to solid, rich, tangible form, to hammer out this foolishness of time and make it into ...into..." (222). She will imagine that she had never lived through the month of May, "it was a fable, a month non-existing. . .something which might or might not happen after the unthinkable barriers of January and March" (215). So, instead of accepting time and extending it to its comforting conclusion (old age), she begins questioning its validity as the only way of ordering existence. She longs for a world whose structure does not precede her existence, one which is individual and in tune with her personally, and which allows her to express herself. She questions the month of May, for the word, 'may', also means a request, a 'please', and thus reflects her state of desperation.

As with the May/may pun, Natalie repeatedly leaves multiple meanings open. Before she fully rejects reality, she plays with other explanations for her existence. These various explanations show Natalie's refusal to accept a stationary position within the symbolic. Instead of simply identifying herself with the pronoun 'I' and accepting that "everyone only knows one 'I', and that is the 'I' they call themselves" (44). She allows the word multiple meanings. 'I' for Natalie sometimes incorporates the totality of her experiences, and leaves nothing outside of her experiences. For example, she questions whether all she sees is not her own creation. She imagines that when her door is closed,

the world outside it disappears. She wishes she was the "only person in all the world" (123), and thinks that perhaps she might be after all. At one point she even states that "her family only exists in her imagination any way" (58). Other times, 'I' refers to the others who call themselves 'I', and Natalie's existence is marginalized. She considers that her life could be someone else's dream, or a fantasy "in the musing mind of a salesgirl or waitress or prostitute or some drab creature to whom the life of a college girl named Natalie Wat seemed romantic" (194). These fantasies all concentrate on alternative explanations for her experiences, and illustrate the growing gulf between Natalie and the structures which organize reality.

As Natalie's separation from reality becomes more severe, so too does her inability to express herself via the words which she refuses to define singularly. When conversing with others, she misses sentences, and even forgets her own responses, thinking "I wonder what I said" (53). She will not be sure what words are spoken and what words are just thought. In Langdon's office, Natalie "heard the back of her mind gibbering obscenities, and thought that she might be saying them aloud" (130). Her secret journal entries do, for a time, allow her to bridge "the gap between the poetry she wrote and the poetry she contained" (29). As the novel progresses, however, the entries become less formed. For, as Natalie is increasingly unable to live within society's structures, so too is she increasingly

unable to use society's language in a representational way. Instead, Natalie hears and uses language's sounds and rhythms, ignoring its meanings. In doing so she is using what Kristeva terms the semiotic, sounds which do not represent object or thoughts, but which powerfully convey drives. Her attempt to vocalize her individual desires forces her to withdraw from syntactic structures which pre-date these desires and which, therefore, are not unique to Natalie.

When conversing with her mother, Natalie transforms her mother's words into expressive sounds akin the semiotic. Natalie "discovered she could make a regular stirring pain [by pressing a sore tooth] that operated as a rhythmic counterpart to her mother's voice" (24). She hears only "silence and this thin bad voice going on" (45). She concentrates on the sounds of her mother's speech, for its meanings have "been debased by her [mother's] lifetime of lies and whimsey" (43). In the conversation with her mother, Natalie returns to the pre-linguistical mother-child dialect. This regression allows her to interact and communicate with her mother in spite of the way she has had to make her mother abject so as to enter reality. Conversing with her mother in this fashion also gives her access, if only temporarily, to a non-patriarchal space (maternal chora) where she is free from the frustration of being unable to exist in full relation to symbolic orders.

Throughout the novel, Natalie uses the semiotic voice to

articulate drives and desires un-expressible in the symbolic language structure. As the gap between herself and reality grows larger, she makes numerous statements that are void of meaning except to express her desire for a place of love and power. "Dearest dearest darling most important dearest darling" (91) she scribbles on her notebooks. The primary purpose of the poetics and alliteration of the phrase is not to signify a specific meaning, but to attempt, through sounds, to force language to communicate her desires. At Landon's party, she "closes her eyes briefly and says 'Someday someday someday Someday, someone, somewhere. Natalie please" (187). Again symbolic meaning is barely expressed, more prominent is her "voiceless yearning" (215) for what would be otherwise inexpressible. Some of her statements do not even come this near to meaning. She tells Elizabeth Langdon "Six proud walkers" (172). She "Whispers softly to the rough tree trunk 'I know, I know'"(174). And she tells her imaginary alter-ego, Tony, "meaninglessly, 'I saw three ships a-sailing'" (237). On the bus, Tony tells her words are not real. And Natalie, alone in the woods, thinks that "names [are] meaningless" (272). Indeed, she has trouble throughout the novel remembering that Natalie is her name and represents her, for she refuses to operate within a linguistic structure in which a sound identifies a specific object. This linguistic structure would require her identity to be fixed within its systems, and Natalie feels these systems do not allow her novel expression.

Her fantasies of power slowly become more psychotic. In order to destroy symbolic order, she imagines she is a giant terrorizing the campus, torturing the students, and finally eating a room of students "chewing ruthlessly on the small sweet bones" (223). In this graphic fantasy, the world becomes something she ingests and transfers to her own personal use. This horrific ingestion of the external illustrates "the collapse of the border between inside and outside" (Kristeva, 53). Natalie is no longer in any relation to symbolic orders, for the external is now posited only for the gratification of her primal needs (food). This destructive fantasy is the final step in her total rejection of reality. She has imaginatively broken the barriers of Law. She has questioned the structures of Time and consciousness. She has regressed linguistically to a pre-symbolic language. And finally she has destroyed the world. Instead of hiding in her mind she attempts to create "an entire country, telling its boundaries, describing its edges, enclosing it" (222). She feels this new country is a "beautiful exciting thing" (136), and indeed it does strongly contrast the college setting which Jackson calls "a factory" (63).

She creates for this world a figure of "perfect form"(93). Her imaginary companion, Tony, singularly offers to Natalie all she had hitherto lacked in human relations. Tony is maternal, pays her sexual attention, and is the friend she cannot find in reality. Tony embodies all of

Natalie's desires for someone "who is near me right now, who is thinking about me and who watches me and knows everything I think about and who is just waiting for me to recognize" (138). Natalie meets Tony one night when a tree "demonstrated that it was not rooted and perhaps not completely indifferent by disengaging itself from the others and coming towards her" (190). While Natalie finds the structures of reality, indifferent and unresponsive to her individual needs, Tony, in contrast, will be a creature who gratifies each of Natalie's desires. Given Natalie's encounters with predatory males (her father, Author Langdon), as well as the vaguely sketched incident of sexual assault (in which Natalie had been extremely passive), it is only natural that Tony be female. Yet, her androgynous name, the erotic overtones of their relationship, and the strength of her character (the women Natalie knows are weak) also feed Natalie's desires for a heterosexual involvement. Tony is sometimes an intelligent confidant and sometimes a mother to Natalie. She greets Natalie with "you come to me miserable and helpless and probably starving" (228). Then, as she reads to Natalie from a sexually explicit book, Natalie "found herself falling asleep, warm and happy" (231). Tony is a strange fusion of roles, not allowable in reality. She is the one-as-all, reminiscent of the infant's Mother who is world (food, sound, warmth, security) to the child. Furthermore, she belongs to Natalie only. For Natalie has created her "phantomwise, Never seen by waking

eyes" (245). Thus Tony, by existing outside of reality, offers Natalie freedom from the restraints of reality.

With Tony at her side, Natalie is able to transform every scene from the "heartless and unimaginative" (246), into an interconnected and meaningful place where "Natalie and Tony were the finest and luckiest persons imaginable" (228). Natalie speaks almost entirely in rhymes, sing-song rhythms, or wishes. She uses Tarot cards' meanings to represent the common objects around them. Using the cards, she attempts to impose objectively arbitrary sounds and meanings onto objects (a candle holder, a fire hydrant). Here Natalie is inventing a counter-structure, describing her world. A pawn broker's sign is "three of pentacles" and means "Nobility, aristocracy, Reversed, pettiness" (237). The cards, unlike ordinary cards which are "so dull and silly", do not give "sensible answers". But Natalie "likes the way they feel" (229). Natalie involves herself in attributing new unique meanings to everyday objects in an attempt to structure a world that is truly hers, a world which, like the cards, may be nonsensical, but feels good.

This new country, however, becomes just as frightening as the reality Natalie forsakes. The strange structure she has imparted to this world is based so completely on her own ever-shifting desires, that she loses all sense of stability. Tony names a toy, which "swings around and around endlessly and irritatingly, 'Hanged Man'" (248). Natalie, who is similarly experiencing the constant endless

motion and instability of the world she has created, defines the toy "'Life in Death, Joy of constructive death'" (248). Natalie has separated herself from reality, freed herself from society's structures, only to find herself threatened with imprisonment inside the self, a living death. Natalie experiences the horror of exclusively semiotic drives. She experiences nothing but her own erratic desires; love, fear, etc. Her complete rejection of symbolic orders means that "before things for [her] are- hence before they are signifiable- [s]he drives them out, dominated by drive [she] constitutes [her] own territory, edged by the abject...fear cements the compound...and what [s]he has swallowed up is an emptiness" (Kristeva, 6). This "land of oblivion" (Kristeva, 8) frightens Natalie who thinks "the sky too turns black and there is nothing above me and nothing below me and nothing in all time except me and what I want" (267). She is alienated, imagining that she is sitting on a "black rock...forever watch[ing] and end[ing] eternity" or that she is "dancing in the streets of a city where no one is alive" (268). The world she attempts to structure around only her own needs means a self-absorption and which negates the external. Her pure drives, unrestricted by the external, are horrifying.

It is then that Natalie becomes afraid of Tony, who is emblematic of her fantasy world. Tony tells her "so you invent someone smart enough to destroy your enemies, you invent them so smart you've got a new enemy" (261). At the

fair grounds, Tony is a "dark unfamiliar figure...walking easily through the trees and not by the path, seeming not to put her feet down on the soundless moss" (272). Natalie, frightened, tells herself "people are only afraid of other people, this must stop" (271). And so she leaves her "one antagonist, one enemy" (261). She returns to town thinking "I will never see Tony again, she is gone" (278). She "gives up inventing worlds" (261) because the one she invented threatened to absorb her, making her as helpless and defenseless as she was in reality. "One is one and all alone and evermore will be so; I will not" she says (275). Thus she abandons her attempt to force the external to coincide with the internal, for her internal desires dominated to such a degree that she found herself isolated.

Natalie's inability to replace reality mirrors the inability of replacing representational language with the semiotic. The semiotic is a drive. While it can force language to express individual meanings, it is not itself meaning. Natalie's world, based solely on her individual desires, is pure pleasure, without form. This formlessness becomes terrifying and restricting because it entails a regression to pre-consciousness. Yet, in Jackson's novel, rejecting these schizophrenic territories brings not triumph, but a keen sense of failure. As Natalie returns to reality, she thinks that she has been "found wanting...unacceptable, not worthy, and she put her feet down tiredly in the mud and thought 'What did I do wrong'"

(276). Jackson does not depict insanity as the problem. If so Natalie wouldn't feel as if she has failed when she abandons her schizophrenia to rejoin symbolic reality. Instead Jackson explores the feasibility of creating and living in these alter-realities. Natalie finds that she cannot replace human beings with her unreal Tony, and that she cannot replace Symbolic structures with alter-structures. In Hangsamen, Jackson offers no solution, for neither reality nor insanity is sufficient on its own. Natalie fantasy world beyond the symbolic results in a pre-conscious mental state similar to the one Eleanor, in The Haunting of Hill House, will actively strive for.

Chapter Two: BEFORE THE SYMBOLIC

"Eleanor, a creature so unfortunate as not to be rooted in the ground, but forced to go from one place to another, heart-breakingly mobile."

Natalie's fantasy world beyond the symbolic results in a pre-conscience mental state similar to the one Eleanor, in The Haunting of Hill House, will actively strive for. Eleanor is invited to become one of three assistants to Dr. Montague who is investigating "the causes and effects of psychic disturbances in a house commonly known as haunted" (4). At Hill House, she forms easy and close affiliations with the other guests, and achieves a tentative identity based on her sense of belonging among them. However, these relationships prove insubstantial. As her attempts to form more permanent attachments to the guests are rejected, she is left without an identity to defend against the house which slowly absorbs her. "Hill House, not sane" (3) eventually becomes the focus of Eleanor's fantasy of home.

The novel explores the ramifications of personal identity within the symbolic order. Self-identity, achieved through a separation from the maternal chora, involves the acceptance of physical restraints and limitations. Unlike Natalie, Eleanor never fully enters the symbolic order of

reality. She is too disgusted by these restraints, for she has spent her adult life as caretaker of her invalid mother's flesh, "lifting the cross old woman from her chair to her bed, setting out endless little trays of soup and oatmeal, stealing herself to do the filthy laundry" (7). This experience leaves her revolted by bodies (even her own). Because she associates bodies with dirt and filth, she feels her own separate identity as a burden, and longs for relief from physical realities, desiring absorption into a symbiotic relationship. Yet, she also fears this absorption, experiencing both the "desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject of the maternal chora" (Kristeva, 54). Whereas, Natalie fled restrictive realities by forging her own world, Eleanor's flight involves regression to a pre-conscious state. This pre-consciousness was the eventual outcome of Natalie's created world and was also what also lead her to abandon this world. However, Eleanor a more desperate character, welcomes this state as much as she fears it. She is older and thus less hopeful that reality will become less restrictive as she ages, a hope Natalie displayed by imagining herself to be an old woman.

Eleanor's relationship with her mother does not resemble the positive merger Kristeva writes of. Instead, their bond is "built up devotedly around small guilts and small reproaches" (7). Her mother's death frees Eleanor from this negative maternal bond, and allows her to travel to Hill

House. Her journey to the house involves a casting out of her mother's laws and restrictions. Eleanor makes herself a criminal by stealing her sister's car to drive to Hill House. This theft is a direct transgression of her mother's law, for Eleanor sister says "Mother would certainly never have approved of me letting you run wild, going off to heaven knows where, in my car" (12). This theft gives her a sense of freedom from her mother, she thinks "laughing, no one can catch me now" (16). Likewise, she claims her mother's time structure to be obsolete; "Time is beginning this morning in June, but it is a time that is strangely new and of itself" (18). This claim too is a declaration of separation from her mother, for one of Eleanor's only possessions is a watch given to her by her mother.

During the journey, Eleanor, who remembers an "early childhood when it had seemed to be summer all the time" (15), regresses to a decidedly childlike disposition. She feels she is "running away to see the world" (17). She imagines herself "wandering off till she was exhausted, chasing butterflies or following a stream" (17). Adopting this childish outlook is an attempt to effect a separation from her mother. Eleanor thinks "I am going, I am really going, I have finally taken a step" (17). However, she will be unable to accept the consequences of this step (separate body), desiring instead a positive symbiotic union.

As she drives to Hill House, Eleanor imagines living in the various homes she passes. These fantasies each sanitize

reality because they are cartoonish and fairy-tale like alternatives to her mother's home which was "dark and narrow and [without] color" (111). She imagines that she lives in a house with "a pair of stone lions guarding the steps...Every morning she swept the porch and dusted the lions and once a week she washed their faces and manes and paws with warm water and soda and cleaned between their teeth with a swab" (18). A cottage she imagines living in has "white curtains and shiny floors and polished windows" (23). She thinks that if she passes through a row of trees lining the road that she will have broken the spell and be "in a fairyland protected poisonously from the eyes of people passing...of course once the palace becomes visible all the countryside outside will return to its proper form, fading away towns and signs and cows, into a soft green picture from a fairy-tale"(20). These spotlessly clean images show her inability to accept the "small ugly towns" she passes, and hence her refusal accept the dirty physical realities which replace the maternal unity.

Separating from the maternal chora is confusing for women who cannot identify themselves with other (Father). Eleanor, by separating from her mother, loses a clear sense of her own self identity. In each fantasy she is a different person; a respected owner of a pillared house, a fortune teller, a hermit. Once at Hill House, however, Eleanor attempts to fix a permanent identity for herself by forming relationships with the other guests, especially Luke

and Theo. She achieves a precarious identity by defining herself as a member of the small group Dr. Montague assembles to observe the house. At first, Eleanor feels she is "the fourth person in this room; I am one of them; I belong" (60), and that "the center of consciousness is, somehow, this small space where they stood looking trustingly at one another" (60). She thinks

"what a complete and separate thing I am, going from my red toes to the top of my head, individually an I, possessed of attributes belonging only to me. I have red shoes-that goes along with being Eleanor. I am holding this brandy glass which is mine because I am here and I am using it and I have a place in this room"(83).

Unlike Natalie, Eleanor uses the pronoun 'I' in this passage to willfully assure herself of her separate identity. This repetitive use of 'I', as well as the words 'separate' and 'individually', reflect the tentative success she has at locating herself as an individual, independent of her mother. However, this status is directly linked to her having 'a place in this room'. As long as she remains the close friend of the other guests, she will be assured of separation from the maternal. Natalie, when severing herself from human relationships, invented Tony, who then assured Natalie's identity as one related to another.

Though this attempt was ultimately unsuccessful, it does illustrate the dependence on attachment women retain from the maternal experience. Whereas men are able to fully detach themselves from the mother, women cannot for doing so would entail detaching themselves from their own gender identity. Thus without these relationships, Eleanor will no longer be able to identify herself.

Eleanor's relationships with the other guests slowly disintegrate, leaving her no defense against the house, and no identity worth protecting. At first, Luke is congenial and flirtatious, but when Eleanor earnestly attempts to get to know him, he mocks her by telling her trivialities and by reminding her of "afterwards when you go home..." (166). At one point, she asks him to tell her something of himself that is "beyond what [she] see[s]" (165). She believes his response will be an assessment of her worth, and waits for it, thinking "I will know how he holds me by what he answers" (166). He tells her he never had a mother. This confidence is un-satisfactory because (besides being obviously contrived self-pity) he tritely laments his motherless state, which for him, as a man, is not a threat to his self identity, while Eleanor is struggling to retain an identity when separate from the maternal. She eventually recognizes him as unable to offer to her the identity affirming relationship she desires and leaves him thinking "All I want is to be cherished and here I am talking gibberish with a selfish man" (167). Thus relationships, if not able to offer her permanent fusion (home), are wastes.

However, it is the schism which develops between her and Theo which is the most devastating for Eleanor. The two women form a close bond almost immediately. Jackson writes that Eleanor had "spent so long alone with no one to love, that it was difficult for her to talk, even casually, to another person without self-consciousness and an awkward inability to find words" (7). Yet, when she meets Theo she is "unable to stop talking" (42). "In no more than a half hour" she comes to "think of Theo as close and vital" (49). Her friendship with Theo, which each has likened to a blood bond (they call each other cousins out of affection) at first promises Eleanor a symbiotic merging. 'Theo', like 'Tony', is an androgynous name, thus Eleanor believes a merger with Theo will mean the fulfillment of all her desires, even her sexual ones. Theo tells her that since they "share a room and share [their] clothes" that they will be "practically twins" (158). Thus Eleanor, by resembling Theo is assured of an identity, and, as with the original mother/daughter union, a home. Eleanor fantasizes living near her one day "in an little house or maybe an apartment like hers...see[ing] her every day and searching together for lovely for lovely things" (213). This fantasy of positive and clean merging is ultimately unrealistic, for Theo does not want Eleanor to follow her home and has said so explicitly.

Their relationship breaks down because of the "compelling anxiety" (54) Eleanor feels at their prospective

union, an anxiety ultimately related to the contamination she feels inherent in physical bodies. At one point she is "shocked" that her feet are dirty thinking "it's horrible, it's wicked". Then she notices that Theo's feet are also dirty. She comes to associate Theo with her mother's body. Eleanor feels "uncontrollable loathing" for her, and "scrubs roughly at her hands and face... 'You're filthy' she says, hating to touch Theodora" (158). She then tries to separate herself from Theo who is "beastly and soiled and dirty" (158). Eleanor imagines destroying Theo, thinking "I hate her, she sickens me... I would like to hit her with a stick, I would like to batter her with rocks... I would like to watch her dying" (158). These images are a dramatic mirror of the process undergone when the child must make the mother abject in order to reject the maternal chora. Eleanor separates from Theo by imagining killing her, reflecting the separation from her own mother. For Eleanor says "It was my fault my mother died... no matter when it happened it was going to be my fault" (212). However, by focusing aggression towards her twin, Eleanor is also destroying her own identity. Soon after she eavesdrops on all the guests, only to learn that no one talks about her; they never mention her. Thus she is finally proved to have no identity to preserve. It is then that she hears the house calling to her "'Eleanor, Eleanor, come' and this was the call she had been listening for all her life" (215). Eleanor decides to leave a reality which denies her home and identity. Though

she will lose a separate identity, she will eventually become part of the house, thus achieving a merger which guarantees her a home.

Hill House exists in the "uncharted" (64), and is "disturbed, deranged, insane" (70). Hill House, like the chora operates as "a womb in which elements are without identity and without reason, [it] is a place of chaos" (Oliver, 46). To "come home" to Hill House, Eleanor must forsake reality entirely. Merging with the maternal and womb-like house, entails that Eleanor enter into a symbiotic mother/child bond. This bond exists prior to the normative structures of Language and Law and Time. Eleanor is terrified of this retreat, but she also experiences the intense joy and excitement of the chora's powerful drives. Because of her frail and unformed identity, she cannot resist the house which does not need her to accept the dirty human body in order to merge. She has "never been wanted anywhere" (209), and so allows herself to be absorbed by Hill House, to disappear inch by inch into the house" (201)

Hill House is "so motherly" (209), yet its maternal aspects are not reminiscent of Eleanor's dirty mother. The characteristics of the house instead resemble the maternal womb, where it is soft, dark, warm, and where the primal desires for food and sleep are gratified. The guests are "securely set into the warm luxuries of the house" (149). The rooms of the house are dark, many having no windows or "direct way to the outside" (100). Eleanor feels as if the

house has ingested her, as if she is "a small creature swallowed whole by a monster...the monster feels [her] tiny movements inside" (42). The guests quickly become accustomed to the "comforts of Hill House [where] "everything is "so soft and padded" (209). The food is praised by all and Eleanor sleeps "like a baby" (138).

The terror and pleasure of Hill House originate in this womb-like setting. Hill House threatens to absorb the guests, to re-establish the unity of mother and child, at a cost of personal identity. Only Eleanor is at risk, for only Eleanor has difficulties forming a personal identity within reality.

In order to have a separate identity, Eleanor would have to enter symbolic reality, represented by Hill House's tower. This tower is the only masculine feature of the house. It contains the library (books being the embodiment of linguistical structure). The Tower is described in phallic terms; "grey stone, grotesquely solid, jammed hard against the wooden side of the house" (112). The phallic is important for the child entering into the symbolic order. The child must replace the chora with the phallic in order to leave mother-as-world. Appropriately, at Hill House the only room with a view of the Tower is the nursery. However, the nursery is also the only room in the house with "an air of neglect", for Hill House operates within the pre-phallic semiotic realm. Eleanor cannot enter the Tower which she finds "hideous" (103). She mumbles only "my mother". She

stares up at the tower (which she cannot touch even from the outside) and thinks that she "will never look down from those windows" (113). Her inability to enter the Tower/library reflects her inability to enter the symbolic and forsake the mothering she desires.

The house itself defies the symbolic. It was built with no right angles. The builder "detested other people and their sensible squared-away houses, he made Hill House to suit his mind" (105). A cold spot refuses to register on the thermometer any abnormal temperature, for the house denies symbolic (scientific) Law. The house exists in a sort of time warp. The guests loose track of days, wondering "when is Saturday?"(151). "Civilization seems so far away...Is there still a world out there?" (150), Eleanor asks.

In Hill House, the guests all experience numerous psychic manifestations, and these hauntings operate entirely within the semiotic dialect. Kristeva writes

"The semiotic disposition is based on the primal mother-child relationship. It is the rhythms and sounds of their bodies together fused into one. Their bodies physically signal to each other before the onset of language proper, before the mirror stage" (Oliver 34).

The noises that the guests hear in the night have an unmistakable rhythm and intonation but are without symbolic

meaning. The "hollow bang...pounded regularly for a minute, than suddenly more softly, and then in a quick flurry" (131). Eleanor physically "rocks a little" to each crash (131). The "thin little giggle came in a breath of air through the room, a little mad rising laugh, the smallest wisper of a laugh, and Eleanor heard it all up and down her back" (131). Eleanor finds herself "lulled by the sound" of the "babbling, too low for words, too steady for disbelief, a little liquid gloating sound"(162). The hauntings voice desires and drives un-conveyable in representational language, and Eleanor physically responds to these noises.

Hill House resembles the chora, the maternal womb, and offers Eleanor a return to the pre-bodily existence of infancy. In becoming one with the house, Eleanor, will be released from her separate body, recovering the infantile experience of the internal and external as joined. She eventually "give[s] over willingly what she never wanted at all" (204), her self identity. The hauntings slowly absorb Eleanor into the house, and into the symbiotic mother-daughter bond. Eleanor says the house wants "to consume us, take us into itself, make us part of the house" (139). She says she "hates seeing [herself] dissolve and slip" (160). Yet she also feels "unbelievably happy. . .I have been frightened out of my wits, but somehow I have earned this joy" (137). Jackson writes that

"Suddenly without reason, laughter tumbled inside of Eleanor; She wanted to reel, chanting, across the

stretches of the lawn, she wanted to sing and to shout
and to fling her arms and move in great emphatic,
possessing circles around the rooms of Hill House" (141)

The semiotic voice of the house is pure pleasure as well as pure horror. Its power attracts impotent Eleanor. Eleanor longs for this absorption as much as she fears it, thinking "If only I could surrender" (160). She feels surrendering to the house will make her a part of these powerful drives.

Dr. Montague says "fear is the willing relinquishment of logic" (159). When Eleanor finally admits "Now I am really afraid" (176), she does, indeed, lose logical patterns, for "time as she had always known time stopped" (178). She hears a great crash and supposes that it is the tower falling down. Hence, the symbolic order is destroyed and Eleanor thinks "I will relinquish my possession of this self of mine, abdicate willingly; 'I'll come'" (204).

Thus Eleanor enters into a symbiotic bond with the house. "I can hear everything, all over the house" (206), she thinks. She sits listening

"Somewhere upstairs a door swung quietly shut; a bird touched the tower briefly and flew off. In the kitchen the stove was settling and cooling, with soft creakings. She could even hear, with her new awareness of the house, the dust drifting gently in the attics, the wood aging" (223).

She hears the house clearly, and hears the other guests only "remotely, from a great distance." (223). "Funny, she thought, I can feel the whole house, protected and warm" (231). She says "I have somehow come inside [Hill House]...I am home I am home" (232). Once she is a part of the house's territory, she is relieved of her own "slow and heavy" body. She feels ethereal, "dancing soundlessly on the carpet" (228). She can also no longer distinguish fantasy from reality. She cannot remember "who [the others] were (had they been guests of hers in the house of the stone lions? Had one of them come riding down a green hill?))" (232). Merging with the house separates her from reality and makes it possible for her to fulfill her previous fantasies.

Eleanor hears lyrical refrains in her head. The difference between the words Eleanor thinks and the words she speaks show her detachment from reality, and her inability to express herself within structural language. "Journeys end in lovers' meeting, she thought, and could only say inadequately 'Are you looking for us'" (56). Like Natalie, she degrades ordinary language saying "I do not understand words and will not accept them in trade for feelings" (166). Language is associated with the disappointing relationships Eleanor encounters at Hill House; like these relationships, it leaves no room for security or identity. When she lies to Dr. Montague she thinks "How simple it is, how transparent, he believes every

silly thing he has ever heard" (148). Language, like other Symbolic structures, is, for Eleanor, without a solid foundation. (To use language the child must realize himself as a subject. Yet Eleanor, without identity cannot be such a speaking subject). Eleanor relinquishes herself to the house, and to semiotic expression which articulates without signing and signaling objects and thoughts rooted in the reality Eleanor is no longer related to. This semiotic language becomes almost entirely what she hears. She hears soft singing in her head

"Go walking through the valley
Go walking through the valley
Go walking through the valley
As we have done before..." (225).

She hears distinctly "a whisper on the tiny currents of air 'somewhere, somewhere'" (228). When she leaves reality, hence ordered language, she enters exclusively into this dialect and articulates the same powerful drives the hauntings articulate. This semiotic voice is exhilarating for Eleanor, who runs through the house able at last to vocalize her resentment of all the guests' flippant treatment of her.

When Eleanor's erratic behavior results in her being asked to leave Hill House, she can say only "I can't leave...Welled up alive, Welled up alive" (240). Indeed she

is welled up within the house. She feels "unfamiliar and awkward" at the threat of leaving, as she is back in her "blundering" body and again experiences her lack of identity within reality. She commits suicide in order to stay with Hill House and within its semiotic territory. Yet she thinks "in the unending crashing second before the car hurl[s] into the tree 'why am I doing this?'" (246). Thus she feels a sense of failure at her decision to entirely reject reality by abdicating from it (killing herself). She doubts her decision as surely as Natalie in Hangsman doubted her decision to return to reality.

Both of these heroines fail because in the end they accept exclusively either the Symbolic or the Semiotic. According to Kristeva, the Symbolic and the Semiotic need each other; they must combine. Natalie and Eleanor are both unsatisfied by realities which, structured wholly and prior to their existence, ignore their desires. However, Natalie fails to live exclusively within a world created to feed her desires. And Eleanor's attempt to live outside of reality structures involves a suicide she regrets while committing it. It is in Jackson's last novel, We Have Always Lived in the Castle, that she proposes a combining of reality and insanity, a dialogue between the symbolic and the semiotic. This combination is successful, and Merricat, the heroine of the novel achieves a livable alter-reality.

Chapter Three: THE GOOD SYMBOLIC

"Slowly the pattern of our days grew, and shaped itself into a happy life."

In Jackson's last novel, We Have Always Lived in the Castle, two sisters, Merricat and Constance, escape from reality into a fantasy world where they "are so happy" (214). Together they can create a fairy-tale castle out of their ruined mansion. The combination of Constance's practicality and Merricat's irrational desires makes this world possible. Shy, but very sane Constance restricts Merricat, giving order and routine to their life together. Merricat infuses this routine with significance. Constance embodies the symbolic language structure which gives form and order to discourse. Merricat is the semiotic, which ensures that this form is not one of empty signs, lacking all but representational meaning. They achieve a balance solidified by sacrifice and love. This balance allows the novel to end with the positive formation of a more perfect world. Their alter-reality is a sanctuary neither could have achieved alone.

Constance may represents symbolic order in function (structuring behavior and experience), but she does not resemble the constricting symbolic order as seen in

Natalie's father or in Eleanor's mother. Constance gives Merricat stability and security. She tends the garden and cooks and listens to Merricat's wild stories. She divides their time; measuring it by their actions: eating or sleeping or cleaning. Though she curtails Merricat's fierce imagination, saying to her "silly Merricat", this restriction is never punitive. She meets Merricat's irrational love for her with genuine sacrifice, for she allows the police to arrest and try her for the deaths of the rest of her family, deaths Merricat was responsible for.

Merricat wanders through fields, which to her "look like oceans" (75), and sleeps in trees, "thinking of magic" (101). She needs Constance to frame her experience and give her the stability which Natalie could recover only by returning to reality. This stability, also assures Merricat a voice and an identity. Unlike the other two novels this is a first person narrative, for Merricat's voice and her conversations with her sister are viable in themselves. No narrator is needed. Merricat's strong voice and identity begin the novel;

"My name is MARY KATHERINE BLACKWOOD. I am eighteen years old, and I live with my sister Constance. I have often thought that with any luck at all I could have a werewolf. . . I dislike washing myself, and dogs, and noise. I like my sister Constance, and Amanita phallides, the death cup mushroom. Everyone else in my family is dead" (1).

Thus because of Constance (mentioned twice), and because of the ruin of the old symbolic order, her family's death, Merricat is able to name herself in capitals, something both Natalie and Eleanor have a difficult time doing. The pronoun, 'I', as with Eleanor's usage, is contingent on a relationship. Again, identity depends on attachment to others. However, unlike Eleanor's relationship with Theo or Natalie's with Tony, Merricat's relationship with her sister is stable and constant (Constance). Thus Merricat is able to name herself safely.

Before the Merricat achieves her sanctuary, she must forsake a society which is more threatening than the society represented in the two earlier novels. The villagers persecute the two girls mercilessly, even vandalizing their home one night. Sensitive Merricat does not over-emphasize the dangers of reality. Hiding on the porch, she watches as

"a wall of laughter rose and grew and then, at first the boys on the steps and then the other men and at last the women and the smaller children moved like a wave at [her] house...the drawing-room windows crashed, shattered by a lamp which always stood by Constance's chair...[she hears] Constance's harp go over with a musical cry, and the sound of a chair being smashed against the wall" (154).

It is the men who constitute the front line of the wave which vandalizes her house, and likewise, within her male-dominated family, it is the men who treat Merricat cruelly and unsympathetically. Merricat's mother, "a delicate woman inclined to be a little silly" (48), spent much of her time in her room with headaches, leaving Constance with the domestic chores and Merricat without a mother. Her father "took pride in his Family, in his position in the world...[and] never tolerated Merricat's wildness" (52), punishing her by constantly and sending her to bed without dinner. The most threatening figure of this patriarchal family is their impoverished cousin, Charles, who visits with the obvious intention of taking their money. He will join the villagers the night they vandalize the girls' house. Thus Merricat's retreat from such a reality is well justified.

Merricat's struggle to achieve identity and power by retreating from a reality which offers her neither, echoes the struggles of both Natalie and Eleanor. However, Merricat's struggles are effective because, unlike the earlier heroines, she physically destroys the systems which bind societies (family, language, economic law, time), going further than the purely mental destruction found in the other novels. For example, she poisons her entire family, except Constance; "putting death in all their food and watching them die" (161). Though she only imagines the grotesque deaths of the villagers, thinking of them "lying,

crying from the pain and dying of a burning black rot that eats away from the inside", she is "never sorry when she has thoughts like this; only wish[ing] they would come true" (12).

She destroys all traces of symbolic order. She withdraws her family's money from the bank and buries it in the creek. This defiance of economic law is much more permanent than Natalie's. (Natalie once wistfully questioned whether "money was actually a medium for exchange. . . perhaps payment would be insisted upon in blades of grass" (238).) Merricat will eventually burn the house, destroying the "layers of Blackwood property weighting it" (2) and cleaning Charles, and hence patriarchal rule from the house. Thus Merricat willfully destroys the material possessions left behind by her family (money as well as property), in an attempt to destroy all remainders of symbolic restrictions.

Other more ritualistic destruction is aimed at protecting her and Constance. She nails books (linguistic systems) to trees, transforming them into "safegaurds [which] so long as they were where [she] had put them, nothing could get in to harm [them]" (59). Words become magical spells which ensure that their life will not be overrun by the world kept outside their gate. She writes 'melody' in jam and then eats it. She says 'pegasus' into a glass which she fills with water and drinks, believing that "so long as these great words were never spoken aloud no

change would come" (63). By ingesting these words she changes them from agents of syntactic language into charms which free her and Constance from ordered society. Notably 'pegasus' suggests flight and freedom. Finally, she physically and permanently halts time when she nails a watch to a tree, breaking its chain link and then "twist[ing] the knob backward until there was a small complaining crack and the ticking stopped and could never start ticking again" (126).

In the wake of this destruction, Merricat can create "life on the moon" (211). In contrast to the village which is "unchangingly grey" (9), Merricat lives where "things were very bright, and odd colors" (21). The girls share a mental bond resembling the merging that Eleanor desired, except that both Merricat and Constance hold onto their separate identities. Hence each knows what the other is thinking, and conversation between them is never banal. The novel abounds with dialogue, whereas the other two novels had used dialogue only to illustrate the inability of the characters to communicate. Merricat and Constance can communicate their desires and fears to each other. Merricat says that they do not speak the villages' language. They "speak a soft liquid tongue" (23). Indeed, her conversations with Constance are strange. Yet meaning is conveyed through this odd speech, a meaning activated and infused by Merricat's desires.

However, this balance is disrupted by Charles, whose

arrival re-establishes patriarchal rule in the house. Physically he resembles Merricat's father, and begins wearing his clothes, sleeping in his room, and going over the financial records in his study, a room neither girl enters except to clean. He threatens to undo Merricat's destruction, digging up the silver dollars and yelling "Sensible people don't go around nailing this kind of valuable thing to trees" (112). He recommends punishment for Merricat, and Constance, who is related to symbolic realities by her role of structure giver, begins to be influenced by him. She questions whether they should not "face the world and try to live normal lives" (118). Charles represents symbolic restraints, and Merricat knows that her behavior and strange imagination will not be tolerated within these restraints. Thus, Charles is a direct threat to Merricat who insists he is "evil. . . a demon" (134). Eventually she destroys him with a fire that drives him from the house. This fire also destroys the house, ensuring that there can be no recovery of her Father's law. Natalie could return to the "bulk of the college buildings" (280), but Merricat and Constance can never return to the structures of society.

The novel ends with the girls living in "a great ruined structure overgrown with vines, barely recognizable as a house" (213). Merricat calls this structure "a castle, turreted and open to the sky" (177). She has purged society from her and Constance's life together, and the world they

forge is clearly superior to conventional reality as represented in the novel. Neither girl feels shame or failure at leaving this reality. Their bizarre fantasy world can stand apart and separate from society. Merricat even abandons clothes, wearing instead table cloths and gleefully becoming "a formal breakfast on the lawn, a formal dinner by candlelight" (201). When Constance tells Merricat that she is happy, Merricat responds; "I told you that you would like it on the moon" (211). Their world is a flesh model of the revolutionized poetry Kristeva praises.

Jackson and Kristeva both assess reality concluding that its structures are restrictive and threatening. Both turn toward an expression outside of linguistic systems, an expression related to maternal communication. Kristeva finds symbolic structure to be a necessity, the drives the semiotic voice conveys being too powerful to exist alone. Similarly, Jackson shows that the semiotic can be consuming and horrifying. However, Jackson offers a symbolic structure, in the figure of Constance, that not only gives order to semiotic drives, but is itself positive. The sacrifices Constance makes to ensure that Merricat's voice is not destroyed either by society or by its own savagery transcend Kristeva's views of the possibilities of the symbolic. Constance, who is always growing food and cooking meals, figuratively feeds Merricat's voice. In We Have Always Lived in the Castle, it is order and structure which make the semiotic possible. (Constance when discovering that Merricat has murdered her family even says that "it is all her fault" (53).) Thus the role of the symbolic, in Jackson's last novel, does not resemble any roles Kristeva allots it. For Jackson, the symbolic can be the very subsistence of the semiotic, and not only that which the semiotic exceeds.

CONCLUSION

Jackson's novels offer a persuasive critique of social reality. She shows family and community environments, which constitute this reality, to be based, not on love and fellowship, but on suspicion and envy. That hatred underlies social structures is also the theme of her most famous work, "The Lottery". In this short story, a small town and its families, which at first seem so familiar and so idyllic, are later seen ritually practising an annual stoning to death of one of their members, who is chosen randomly. All join in throwing the stones, even the family members of the chosen. The story shows the sinister nature of our social relations, for Jackson uses commonplace language (ie someone tells Tesse, who is chosen to be stoned, to stop complaining and "be a good sport") and familiar characters types (ie old men who grumble about changing times). Thus, Jackson is continually proving normal and seemingly benign realities to be threatening and evil.

Her novels describe women attempting to escape from these realities. Their various movements away from social structures describe the possible options for escape (movement to a place beyond structure, movement to a place prior to structure). Their desertion of social structures necessarily entails, in the conventional sense, the insanity

which is the focus of most of the published criticism on her work. However, it is reality, not insanity, which is the primary antagonist of the women. The fantasy worlds they delve into are not always successful escapes from reality, but these worlds are beautiful in themselves. The wistful visions and lyrical language of the heroines strongly contrast the petty society they forsake. However, even without such a comparison, their timeless, lawless, narcissistic realms are attractive and compelling.

Julia Kristeva is a suitable theorist for Shirley Jackson's work, for her symbolic resembles the harsh reality found in Jackson's novels. Likewise, Kristeva's response to this symbolic, the emphasizing of semiotic drives, mirrors the efforts of Jackson's heroines as they leave reality. Both Kristeva and Jackson resolve the loss of stability, entailed in the desertion of symbolic structure, by proposing a communion between the forces which order and the forces which desire. Jackson's resolution differs from Kristeva's only in that she allows symbolic structure, itself, to be transformed by desire and drive into something intrinsically positive.

Figuratively, Constance, is structure which is in tune with drives, which insures drives are fulfilled. It is the structuring and stabilizing dimension which Constance represents, not her physical presence, which insures Merricat a successful alter-reality. Merricat, who represents raw desire, and Constance are one character.

Their minds are "running exactly together, coinciding, [their conversations are] an echo of the way both their minds are going" (137). Natalie and Eleanor are as alienated from order or limit as they are from other people. In her last novel, Jackson shows that this order does not necessarily have to be external or at odds with unique desire. She offers the possibility of a fulfilling world which is insane only in that it denies conventional reality. Creation of an individual space which order~~s~~while expressing drives can be achieved personally.

Her protagonists are women because it is easier for her to describe disillusionment with reality through a woman's eyes, for women, as a gender, are already in a precarious relation to this reality. However, the implications of her texts extend to all of humanity (male and female).

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