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The materiality of the female in Shirley Jackson's short fiction

Lydia Marie Pearson

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THE MATERIALITY OF THE FEMALE
IN SHIRLEY JACKSON’S SHORT FICTION

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Lydia Marie Pearson

June 2008
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Approved by:

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Date 6/6/08
ABSTRACT

Shirley Jackson's fiction continues to be placed within the gothic horror genre because of its supernatural and horror images. Additionally, psychoanalytic feminist theorists analyze her texts based on the anxieties and dislocation of the female's realities contained in her fiction. However, I contend the major focus of her work is her critique of the social norms constructed for women by an archaic and inauthentic patriarchal system of rules and domestic expectations for women that result in madness for the resisting female. Using a Materialist Feminism analysis, I am able to bring out Jackson's critique of the domestic roles for women. Specifically, looking at how her female protagonists resist the established norms, verbally, physically, and psychologically, in order to create self autonomy. This approach allows me to explore the ways Jackson uses madness as a form of resistance. Hence, providing a space where her female characters produce disruptions to the patriarchal norms. By doing this, Jackson feminizes madness, creating autonomy outside of the restrictive social norms for women.

My analysis opens an approach to the works of Shirley Jackson that provides novel ways of exploring and
understanding female resistance to her antiquated patriarchal system. Her works reveal challenges that women face even today in their attempts to establish autonomy in a male-dominated society.
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CHAPTER ONE

THE GOTHIC IN SHIRLEY JACKSON'S FICTION

Why is it that the majority of scholarly work on Shirley Jackson continues to situate her within the gothic? To answer this question it is important to understand the nature of gothic fiction and what elements of the gothic, critics find most important in asserting that Jackson's work is "best suited in the gothic genre" (Oppenheimer 92). Defining gothic fiction is extremely problematic. Gothic fiction is exceedingly "pliable and malleable because of history and human reactions to historical events" (Hogle 2). Most gothic critics agree that "the gothic" genre developed as a means of exploring the nature of evil acts by humans against other humans. Gothic texts are positioned in the tensions created from "deep seated social and historical dilemmas" (Hogle 3) and from barbaric and inhuman actions by people on other people during historical events like the French Revolution.

The literary form of the Gothic consists of three main subgenres: traditional, female gothic, and American gothic horror. Each of these subgenres retains certain traits of
the gothic tradition while diverging into their own spaces reflective of their unique elements.

Generally, literary critics of gothic fiction agree that traditional gothic fiction is an eighteenth-century literary movement beginning with Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*. Walpole situated his plots in old castles or ancestral houses haunted by ghosts. These ghosts held the key to uncovering a family secret that threatened to destroy the characters in the home. The haunting would cease only after the young, innocent female entered the uninhabited areas of the house of the house in search of the absent mother-figure. Often the apparitions and supernatural sounds would draw the female into the underground mazes and crypts where she would discover a decomposed body. The body symbolically represented the dead or absent mother-figure.

Characteristics of traditional gothic grew out of Walpole’s themes, characters, and use of the supernatural. Traditional gothic texts included gothic structures that ranged from uncivilized or uninhabited landscapes to ruined castles and gargoyles on manor houses. These gothic structures might contain gothic images like pyramid designs
on the floors of an old castle that draw upon familiar references to ancient civilizations (Hogle 3).

Expanding on Walpole’s supernatural haunting theme, traditional gothic texts included ghosts or apparitions reflected in mirrors, the undead rising from crypts; unnatural sounds in nature such as wind howling through ancient castles; moonlight shining unnaturally through fog caught in garden labyrinths; creaking floors with dusty foot prints; voices from uninhabited rooms. Generally speaking, these gothic symbols establish the link between past evils and present ones hidden in the gothic structures. Inside these spaces, secrets “hidden from the past (sometimes the recent past) haunt the characters, psychologically or physically” (Hogle 2).

Traditional gothic fiction incorporates a pure, innocent female protagonist (much like Walpole’s female character) who is both a heroine and a victim. She is sent to discover the meanings behind the supernatural events occurring in the family’s ancestral home. The distinctive way in which the female protagonist reacts to her role as heroine/victim, accomplishes her journey, and the resolution of the buried evil secret, differentiates
whether a text is considered part of the traditional or female gothic literary tradition.

In traditional gothic fiction, the female protagonist is trapped between the need to resolve the secret buried beneath the ancestral home and her fear of being pursued by a patriarchal male figure who desires her body for producing his children (Hogle 9). Walpole’s gothic secret is usually the discovery of the lost mother figure and the need of the family to “reconnect with the maternal origins for men and women” (Hogle 10). Thus, most traditional gothic texts follow Walpole’s model and resolve the secret and supernatural conflicts once the female has discovered the body of the absent mother and returned to situate herself in the role of the maternal figure in the family home (Hogle 10).

Toward the end of the Eighteenth century, traditional gothic fiction developed a gendered division. Male writers tended to usurp the “female” gothic genre from the female writers, by writing traditional roles for the female in direct contrast to the women gothic writers’ texts. Male writers developed plots around women who “transgressed social taboos” based on the male-constructed roles for women (Milbank 55). These writers tended to present females
as weak, insignificant, easy victims of the male desire for sexual satisfaction because they were viewed as fallen Eve's (Milbank 55). In response to the male writers' usurpation of the gothic, women writers developed plots that challenged the patriarchal roles for women. The women's texts portrayed the male as a "villain whose authoritative reach as the family patriarch . . . entrapped the heroine" and created the home as a prison in which the female fears for her sanity and physical safety (Milbank 55, Hoeveler 273).

These female-centered issues produced what Ellen Moers coined the "female gothic". The female gothic is a subgenre of the traditional gothic and a theoretical approach to traditional gothic texts. The first recognized female gothic texts are from the 1790's (Hogle 9). Most feminist critics credit Ann Radcliff and Mary Shelley with producing two distinctive female gothic texts. Both Radcliff and Shelley produced texts that challenged the male-controlled traditional gothic space, but with different focuses. Radcliff's gothic novels created a romantic image of women and their challenges in achieving autonomy in the patriarchal order. Shelley's gothic novels developed plots
surrounding the hatred and fear of the power of the female body to give both life and death (Moers 95, Kahane 106).

Radcliff’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* produces a romantic gothic plot with medieval themes of male chivalry, vulnerable heroines who need rescuing from a malevolent patriarch threatening to take her innocence (physically and psychologically) while seeking to imprison her within an isolated gothic house (Hogle 9). Radcliff’s female gothic incorporates the standard elements of the traditional gothic (haunted house, ghosts) but the difference is in the female protagonist’s journey.

Radcliff’s gothic stories are situated in a “primal gothic scene, with the female protagonist confined to a journey that results in her obtaining some power and property, through her own feminine agency, while still within the control of an antiquated and male-dominated world” (Hogle 10). Radcliff’s female gothic differs from traditional gothic in that she “allows her heroines’ independent property and the ultimate freedom of choice within the fervent worship of their fathers and an avoidance of all direct political action” (Hogle 13). However, the resolution still returns the female heroine/protagonist to a male-controlled world.
In stark contrast to Radcliff’s romanticized female gothic stories and traditional gothic texts, Mary Shelley’s female gothic stories focus on gender differences in class, education, oppression, socialization and victimization. The female gothic was an overt expression of self-loathing, inducing fear and anxiety about the female body. Borrowing supernatural elements from the traditional gothic, Mary Shelley produced gothic fiction that expressed women’s fears regarding the female body, their identity, safety and sanity, the dominance of the powerful male figure, and the absent or dead mother (Moers 93).

Shelley’s Frankenstein serves two important purposes in the transition of female gothic from a romantic male focused fiction. By portraying the birth process in a fictionalized form through the creation of the monster born to, and created by the male Dr. Frankenstein, she revealed the demoralizing nature of child birth to women. She also addressed the harm in allowing men to define and determine the norm for women in producing children and being mothers. She invented the “horror story of maternity” (Moers 93) when constructed by men who are represented as monsters (the mad scientist). Shelley’s story accentuated the patriarchal fear of the female body as a producer of life.
and death. For a woman to be a mother she must displace another mother. In Shelley’s fiction (and in later works by women writers of the female gothic genre), the mother figure must be extinguished before the new female can take her rightfully designed place in the male home. The transfer of womanly power is accomplished through the threatened incest actions of a father-figure or uncle upon the young female protagonist or through the absence or death of the original mother-figure. Additionally, the mad scientist’s creation of his monster from dead parts symbolizes the unstable nature of female positions in the patriarchal home. And, the abandonment of the monster created from dead corpses emphasizes the power of the male to ravish and use the female body, creating life, and leaving her to struggle with the psychological and physical trauma of the “afterbirth” (Moers 93).

Following Shelley’s model, female gothic writers produced texts that provided graphic images of violence against women, often in the form of sexually perverse threats or acts of incest by an uncle or father-figure (Moers 93). The female gothic heroine combined the duality of an angel with a fallen “Eve” (Moers 91). The female gothic home symbolizes the body of the absent or dead
mother and the decaying power of the male. Where traditional gothic fiction presented patriarchal societies creating the home as the place where women (mother figures) provide the social order, the female gothic home symbolizes a prison (Kahane 106). Without the protection of the mother-figure, the domestic peace of the home is shattered. The female protagonist's fear of the male family members' sexual desires for her innocent body reveals the patriarchal father-figure as corrupt, driven by his need to consume the female protagonist's body (Moers 93, Kahane 106).

Additionally, the family home is destabilized in the absence of the original mother-figure because the female protagonist has no one to guide her development in to the status of "pure womanhood" (Moers 93) required by the patriarchal society. She is only aware of the sexual desires surrounding her, causing her to fear and hate her body. Her self-loathing stems from her lack of knowledge and education about her body and her role in the family home. Thus, her required loyalty to the social order of the home is challenged. Her reaction to the perceived horrors of sexual assaults from the evil patriarchal father-figure, forces the female protagonist to move toward the unfamiliar
and terrifyingly unreal or unnatural settings contained within the dark forbidding landscapes around or within the gothic structure (Moers 93).

These gothic landscapes intensify the supernatural appearances, raising the female protagonist’s conscious awareness of the real threat to her material body. Her growing awareness of the sexual threats (from the male world) contributes to the realization of the false (inconstant) empty nature of the domestic order and the powerlessness of women inside the home (Gilbert 13, Moers 93, Kahane 106). This realization produces the gothic structure’s evolution from a home to a formidable prison in which the female protagonist is trapped. At the same time, this transformation is problematic for the male. The home is no longer a sanctuary when it is a symbolic prison. The juxtaposition of the reality of a flawed patriarchal system, and the sexual consumption of the female inside the imprisoning home, subjects the female gothic protagonist to a driving need to produce answers for the absence of a mother-figure.

In female gothic texts, the journey to find the mother-figure is one of self-identity. It generates a heightened anxiety about the mother’s body and motherhood.
The female protagonist’s material worth is ascribed to her only once she assumes the original mother’s role in the home. This can only be accomplished when the secret of the original mother is exposed and expunged. This journey of self-identity is analogous to the growth from childhood to womanhood. Through this life cycle, the female gothic heroine discovers she is no longer tied to the mother-figure. The original mother-figure is weakened, destabilized, and emotionally unable to properly educate or control her children. The absent mother-figure is represented as an invalid. She is the absent figure, closed behind doors like Mr. Rochester’s insane wife in Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre (Gilbert 12). This psychological absence opens the way for the heroine to step into the mother-wife role. But, the mystery of the absent or dead mother-figure continues to haunt the female heroine until the original mother-figure is obliterated from the family home and from their memories (Moers 93).

Only when the heroine finds and removes the absent mother-figure’s unnatural presence is she able to return the home to the order prescribed by the patriarchal male-figure. Then, the female gothic figure becomes the victor. She assumes her rightful place as the wife of the man. This
new marriage symbolizes the taming of the male and cleansing the home of further threats to the female gothic heroine (Hoeveler 31, Milbank 54). This taming of the male figure creates what some critics call a masculine female. She is one who is reflected as "morally superior to men" (Hoeveler 31).

Though she is morally superior, she is still a victim. But, like the Biblical idea that the meek inherit the earth, the female gothic heroine will triumph because she is a victim. She "passively accepts the suffering and persecutions at the hands of a patriarchal oppressor and tyrant" because she believes that her reward will be justice (Hoeveler 31). The gothic villain will be tamed by the female heroine. She removes his power to harm her by her acceptance of her place within the social order of the home.

As British and European Gothicism advanced into the nineteenth century, American writers like Brown, Poe and Hawthorne transformed the traditional gothic horror into a "distinctively Americanized literature [that] focused on a national horror [based on] slavery" (Savoy 167). These writers produced a gothic horror that frustrated the ideas of the American dream with the real problems of slavery and
racial discrimination. They moved from European gothic fiction's focus on the individual female heroine, to a male figure. The male figures represented the destructive power of the dominant white culture within American society, personifying the psychological disturbances of the unvoiced Other.

The focus on national issues transitioned American gothic horror from the "romanticized" gothic produced by Radcliff and Walpole to a more realistic or nationalized gothic produced by American writers like Charles Brockden Brown, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allen Poe. By merging national and cultural themes with the supernatural elements of the European traditional gothic (ghosts, hidden secrets, and hauntings), American writers produced a new subgenre of traditional gothic called American gothic horror (Savoy 167). Taking on characteristics of the nation itself, American gothic horror writers attempted to balance the promise of the American dream and the unbalanced national past built on slavery. This national legacy of slavery and the creation of a freed slave population at the end of the Civil War resulted in gothic literature that was immersed in the horrors of racial discrimination (Smith 2). American gothic horror is mired in its "cultural and political
institutions" arising out of the unique history of slavery and racial inequalities and ghosts of the slave past (Smith 2). These ghosts continually surfaced as the "unvoiced other" needing to be heard, dealt with, and resolved, before the nation could heal from the evils of slavery.

American gothic writers like Poe and Hawthorne also incorporated a Faustian figure into their gothic texts (Smith 3). This male-figure sells his soul to the devil to achieve some type of materialistic pleasure without regard for the harm caused to others or his own self. This figure reflects the duality of sane and insane, the conscious and unconscious in American gothic fiction (Savoy 167). By juxtaposing good with evil, American gothic writers attempted to represent the "hypocritical influences of the past" on the nation, the denial of the legacy of slavery and continuing racial discrimination (Smith 6, Savoy 167).

However, with the influx of new technologies and European immigrants, new challenges were introduced to the national landscape. Gothic texts mirrored the racial inequalities and discrimination fostered and fueled by rising nationalism. This nationalism produced extreme and harmful social and cultural classes. As Americans spread out over the cultural and physical landscape, clashes arose
between the dominant white culture and the Other (Savoy 168). The Other became the classes and groups of people who did not fit within the constructed norms of the dominant white culture. They were feared and seen as a threat to whites’ enjoyment of the riches and individual freedoms promised in America – the American dream (Savoy 168).

As Eric Savoy documents, American gothic horror writers merged evolving distinctive regional issues with gothic modes and narrative structures, producing regional subgenres of gothic fiction (Savoy 168). As these regional gothic subgenres developed, racism became a color designation (Smith 2). American Indians, African Americans, immigrants from non-western European countries experienced the violence produced by a growing fear of the Other (Smith 2). In the South, “southern” gothic fiction focused on the growing fear of the freed slaves and the threat they posed to the American dream for whites (Smith 2). In cities, “urban” gothic fiction focused on the growing fear of non-western immigrants (Smith 2). And, as the desire for landownership grew, the western expanses of the United States developed, creating the “Frontier” or “Western” gothic (Smith 2). This form of the gothic incorporated issues surrounding the violence and discriminatory
governmental policies enacted on the Native American population (Savoy 182).

The most prevalent critical analysis of traditional, female gothic and American gothic horror uses psychoanalytic feminist theory. Especially in terms of Freud’s examples of the “Uncanny” – which is the “deeply and internally familiar (the most infantile of our desires or fears) as it reappears to us in seemingly external, repellant, and unfamiliar forms” (Hogle 6). Combined with the fear of the unknown but familiar, are the feminine issues located in texts considered under a female gothic lens. The female self, or lack of self, lends itself to a psychoanalytic and feminist reading.

Though Freud’s psychoanalytic theory centered on the Oedipal and Electra complex, in relation to the female and male relations with the mother, psychoanalytic-feminist critics use these to analyze the repression of patriarchal incest and the female’s fears of the body (Freud 240). Psychoanalytic feminist readings often address issues such as repressed memories, gendered identities, the original material mother’s body, female victimization, oppression and the fear of their bodies inside the patriarchy (Hoeveler xiv).
Using the psychoanalytic feminist approach, three main categories of problems arise. One is a form of Freud's uncanny in the juxtaposition of the repressed desires for the mother in the son and the daughter (Freud 240). Another is the extent of the female's conscious/unconscious awareness of the power of the father (Rubenstein 128). This awareness defines her social role — marriage and motherhood, as does the anxieties that result from the repression of the memories of the absent mother. Finally, in relation to the female gothic, a psychoanalytic feminist analysis provides strength for the argument by Moers and other feminist critics, that the female writer used the gothic space to advance her authority as a woman and provided an attempt to "authenticate" her right to be a woman writer in the gothic genre (Moers 93).

Merging psychoanalysis with feminism produces a complex analytic tool that helps to define the gothic while complicating it still farther. Psychoanalytic feminist theory works to present the play between supernatural images and events with repressed memories of gender identity. Especially inviting for analysis are texts with female protagonists who appear unaware of their own "self".
They are in crisis because they lack the original mother-figure.

The female gothic journey to discover the secret of the absent or dead mother is representative of the female gothic writer’s struggle to find a place in a patriarchal society that removes her status as a “female victim” (Hoeveler 3). The victimization forced upon females and represented in the gothic tradition reveal the lack of power and importance women had in Eighteenth Century societies (Hoeveler 3).

In most Gothic fiction, the “secret” surrounding the absence of the mother-figure undermines the psychological soundness of the family unit. Since both the male and female child must be affixed to the mother, her absence produces a disruption in the social order of child development. In Freudian psychoanalytic terms, this equates to the Electra and Oedipal stages of children’s sexual development (i.e. the desire stage) (Mitchell 30-33). This socially unacceptable connection with the mother-figure must be resolved before either gendered child can move into their rightful roles.

Primarily, the psychoanalytic analysis of the female gothic “explores the fears and guilt attendant on sexual
maturation” (Hoeveler 3) while feminist criticism explores how the texts “can be read as elided representations of the political, socioeconomic, and historical complexities of women’s lives” (Hoeveler 3). In other words, identity and agency in the material body of the female are shown to be the focus of gothic fiction.

In analyzing American gothic horror in terms of female issues, feminist critics assert that the individual female issues of European female gothic were left behind (Savoy 180). Instead, American gothic horror produced women as the cause of the civilized society’s evil nature. American gothic female protagonists are represented as “objects of abject desire” (Savoy 180). Their place in the American gothic fiction is symbolic of how they, as the “other,” were the root cause of the nation’s problems (Savoy 180). Women, like Hester in Hawthorne’s “Scarlet Letter” represent the evils of the female body and mind. Hester is the personification of the results of challenges to the patriarchal dominant culture and to the family structure. They are often described in “visceral images lacking real physical bodies” (Savoy 181). The observations are recorded by the male eye focusing on her beauty, age, usefulness as a woman but her physical form (material presence) does not
merit consideration (Smith 2). In most instances, the female is dying in absence. Her death is recorded in the voice and memory of the male family member (Savoy 163). In this way, the American gothic fiction incorporates some of the female gothic ideas in sustaining /representing the minority status of women in American societies (Savoy 180). Thus, the female becomes part of the psychology of the absent Other (Savoy 185).

Though critics place Shirley Jackson in the gothic genre relatively little critical work exists on her fiction. The majority of critical analysis centers around four of her novels: The Haunting of Hill House, The Road Through the Wall, Hangsaman, and The Bird's Nest. Gothic critics focus on the psychological and feminist issues in the "female anxieties and the contradictory pressures of domesticity" (Murphy 4) of these main Jackson novels.

Critics divide Jackson's novels into traditional gothic, female gothic, and American gothic horror. This division is made based on the types of gothic elements and themes found in the different works. Most gothic critics point to Jackson's gothic houses which produce the prison for the female protagonist. These houses are always situated away from civilized society in landscapes that are
lonely and frightening. Jackson's most supernatural novel is *The Haunting of Hill House*. It contains the haunted sounds (windows that crash open; voices of dead children calling to the female protagonist; hidden rooms and spaces in the overly large and geometrically misfit fireplace where the bones of children are discovered; and the ghostly apparitions of the menacing male presence (supernatural being) and the ghosts of his dead wives hanging from gothic structures.

Several female gothic critics suggest that *The Haunting of Hill House* constitutes a female gothic novel. They emphasize the "anxieties about selfhood and entrapment, represented through bizarre or exaggerated events that may or may not be explained as manifestations of the female protagonist's troubled imagination resulting from the dead or absent mother" (Rubenstein 130). Thus, the female must search out the "center of a mystery, while vague and usually sexual threats to her person from some powerful male figure hover on the periphery of her consciousness" (Kahane 334).

Images of consumption are also key elements of *The Haunting of Hill House*. Eleanor is "like a small creature swallowed whole by a monster" (Rubenstein 130). The loud
pounding on her bedroom door, in the night, harkens back to the nights when Eleanor's mother would beat a cane against the wall for attention (Rubenstein 127). This creates an anxiety in Eleanor because she feels responsible for her mother's death because "she knocked on the wall and called me . . . and I never woke up" (Rubenstein 213). And, the house is personified as someone "trying to get in and eat us" (Rubenstein 133) because it wanted to "consume . . . take us into itself . . . make us a part of the house" (Rubenstein 139). Psychoanalytic feminists contend that the female gothic produces a fear of consumption that suggests the female's "body is (or once was) a battleground in the struggle for autonomy in the face of what she may experience as her mother's consuming criticism, possessiveness, or withholding of love" (Rubenstein 128).

The consuming patriarchal figure within the house (the spectral image of the murdering husband/father) and the figures of the dead mothers/wives produce a final connection with the female gothic genre and psychoanalytic feminist perspective in the house itself (Rubenstein 137). Eleanor's longing to be one with the house and the being contained within the house (mother and father figures), reveals the powerful attraction the female gothic
protagonist experiences in seeking to be one with the mother-figure (here the house) and the anxieties and fears of the female body consumed by the male's desire to possess the female (Rubenstein 137). Many psychoanalytic feminists contend that Eleanor's choice to willing give up her body and soul to whatever the house (and the presence within the house) wants with her effectuates the final consumption of the patriarchal society of the female's identity and self (Rubenstein 137). Furthermore, by ending her life, Eleanor has exchanged (sacrificed) her own body (identity) to embrace and accept the demands of the patriarch contained within the consuming mother/house (Rubenstein 137). Thus, psychoanalytic feminists read Eleanor's apparent suicide as her only choice in determining her own fate within the gothic tradition.

The Road Through the Wall is categorized as American gothic horror. Its emphasis is on racial issues developing after World War II as Americans were moving to suburbs (Murphy 7). Critics observe Jackson's use of children to represent the continuing prejudices and stereotypes of communities against allowing "others" in (Murphy 7). When a little Jewish girl, from a poorer family, is discovered missing after a social event in the community, no one goes
to look for her. They didn’t “want Caroline Desmond safe at home” (Murphy 7). The “pleasure was in the feeling that the terrors of the night, the jungle, had come close to their safe, lighted homes, touched them nearly, and departed, leaving every family safe but one” (Murphy 7). What the American Gothic Horror critics are suggesting is that the Jewish family had no place in this community (Murphy 7). The White community connects the material body of the female Jewish child with the uncivilized jungle. Murphy concludes that the missing child provides the narcissism necessary to connect this society (in the form of the suburban community) with continued discrimination in the American gothic horror (Murphy 7).

Psychoanalytic and feminist critics assert that the multiple personalities (again a form of confused or missing identities), in Jackson’s female characters, “resist or challenge gender ideology by undermining any notion of an original self . . . creating a gender disruption that may allow for the female subject to construct identity and obtain agency” (Caminerio-Santangelo 57).

Murphy and other psychoanalytic feminist critics analyze The Bird’s Nest and the Hangsaman from a psychoanalytic-feminist lens largely because of the lost or
confused self that results in multiple personalities or mental illnesses (Chesler 59). Murphy focuses on the mental illnesses suffered by the female protagonists who are "unable to distinguish between what is real and what is imagined" (Murphy 8). Jackson blurrs the lines between "fantasy and reality, sanity and madness" (Murphy 8) are a result of the constraints placed on women by society. From a psychoanalytic feminist approach, the "image of divided or multiple women, who could be several things at once, was used to suggest a potential threat to the precarious social order, and to the traditional gender relations that provided a domestic haven from the atrocities of war" (Caminerio-Santangelo 52-53). Psychoanalytic feminist critics focus on the resulting anxiety women might experience from not being "satisfied with the reduction" (Caminerio-Santangelo 53) of roles from being working women to a housewife again. Jackson’s two stories complicated this anxiety and society’s reaction to the problem. The result was the creation of women who responded by forming more than one personality. The male figures in Jackson’s more psychoanalytic fiction attempt to control and confine the women into one personality – the one most true to the expected norms of a patriarchal society.
So, what is the problem with these various approaches to Jackson’s fiction? Even though Jackson’s fiction lends itself to a psychoanalytic-feminist analysis in the gothic genres, these approaches do not go far enough. They do not discuss, what I contend is the major focus of her work, her critique of the social norms constructed for women by a patriarchal society. Many of Jackson’s short stories present relatable issues for women, particularly “The Lottery”, “The Beautiful Stranger” and “The Island”.

I will analyze these three texts in terms of Jackson’s portrayal of domestic and gender roles patriarchal societies construct for women. These socially constructed roles are identified through Jackson’s characters as mothers, wives, daughters, and specifically the subsequent relationships women experience with one another. These relationships generate conflicts for Jackson’s protagonists in their human relationships in communities and with Nature (the environment). Jackson’s work produces a critique of the patriarchal society that transcends the boundaries of the gothic. The social, cultural, political, historical, philosophical subject of her work is best suited to a Materialist Feminism analysis as I will demonstrate in the coming chapters.
CHAPTER TWO

THE FEMALE IN JACKSON’S SHORT FICTION

In this chapter, I focus on how the female protagonist’s material body, trapped within the interplay between the private and public worlds, produces a disruption of the norms for women in specific social settings. I also focus on why these disruptions are important and what this way of approaching Jackson’s fiction gives us in terms of her social critique of a patriarchal society. My analysis is grounded in materialist feminism’s perspective on woman’s life within the family (private) and the social (public) world in attempting to understand the ways in which women’s oppression is created and maintained by patriarchy. Jackson suggests ways women can resist the oppressive nature of the social norms constructed for them by the patriarchy. In particular, she establishes forums that empower women by enabling them to develop their own identities and an autonomous self (Hennessy 8) outside of the roles constructed for them by patriarchy and enforced or sustained by members of society.

Materialist feminism focuses on a range of issues from women’s identities and bodies, desires and needs to class
matters and the reproductive value of the female body (Hennessey 2). Specifically, I use Martha Gimenez’ approach to the patriarchal norms for the domestic or private world (home). Gimenez claims that the female’s domestic role in the family reveals the female as necessary for reproduction and proper etiquette education of the children, and that these are the only forms of her productivity within a capitalistic society (79). I additionally draw from Catharine MacKinnon’s analysis of the sexual dominance of the male figure (father/husband) which conscribes “fear, hostility, hatred and helplessness” (355) to the female within the private world of the home.

The female’s position as a mother and wife defines her relationships and interactions with her children and the male figure in the home, and produces a continuum of oppression that she teaches to her children. However, as my analysis reveals, Jackson’s female protagonists begin to realize that something is wrong within these relationships. I focus on how and why shifts occur in the female realities and sense of self. Primarily, I look at the ways Jackson’s female protagonists question and then challenge their socially constructed roles—seeking to find a way of “defining their own self-identity outside of the
patriarchal roles for women within society” (MacKinnon 355).

My analysis moves from the private world into the social or public world where the female protagonist disrupts the ordered society through her destabilizing relationships with other women, men of power, and the structure of the social governing laws. As Christine Delphy writes, Jackson’s female protagonists “revolt” against the patriarchy’s oppressive rules (Delphy 60). This revolt occurs when the female believes and/or understands that she can change (or at the very least) disrupt the natural order of the male dominated society. Usually the disruption occurs when the female has been removed from the influences of the social world through her own (unintentional) actions that cause others in the society (men, women, groups) to see her as different or unacceptable, and she is described as the Other or the outcast because her actions, though often unintentional, lead to some negative result within the society itself (Delphy 60).

The result of analyzing Jackson’s texts through Materialist feminism reveals that Jackson critiques the process of how social norms oppress women. Specifically, Jackson shows how the patriarchy constructs oppressive
gender and domestic roles for women, the escape from which offers two options, madness or acceptance of the female’s prescribed position within society.

The stories I am analyzing are “The Lottery”, “The Beautiful Stranger” and “The Island” as these stories illustrate three different ways women subvert patriarchal constructs and from three different female positions within the stories themselves. Tessie Hutchinson, Margaret, and Mrs. Montague are identified as mothers and wives (or in Mrs. Montague’s case—a widow) but not, initially, as women. They are introduced in relation to their roles within the private world (home), then as disruptions to the patriarchal gender and domestic norms when they step into the public (social) world.

“The Lottery” is a story about an annual lottery designed on the premise that a human sacrifice is required to sustain, and even help, the local village continually grow and produce, in terms of population and crops. This tradition was established by the first people who founded the village, over 77 years prior to the day of this particular lottery day. Each year, on June 27th, a winner is selected by drawing a marked piece of white paper from an old box (Jackson 291). The older male members of the
village institute the actual lottery rules and draw on behalf of their family as heads of households and heads of families. Only after the men have drawn, and one family is singled out, do the individual family members draw to determine their own fate. Though much of the rituals and instruments of the lottery have been lost or forgotten, the villagers do remember to use stones (Jackson 301) to sacrifice the lottery winner.

Though the lottery drawing appears random in nature, applying a Materialist Feminist analysis focuses on the productivity of members of society, the establishment and sustaining nature of the social hierarchy (especially in terms of the female or lower classes). The result of this analysis is that productivity and economics alone are critical to the survival of the village society as well as in sustaining the hierarchal order. This order asserts male membership primarily the caretakers and producers of the public power structures in the village. The female members fill the domestic role of producing children and educating them in the appropriate social norms based on the child’s gender.

Jackson associates a long standing tradition (human sacrifice) as representative of the establishment of a
patriarchal tradition that implements Social Darwinism (Mager 17, 149) by removing unproductive member(s) of the society. This provides for those remaining productive members to produce children and increase the village population. The villagers must also contribute to the economic advantage of the village. Therefore, members who are unable to work, don’t produce children, or do not substantially contribute to the economic, political or social stability of the society, are likely candidates for the sacrifice. The annual lottery provides a means of identifying the productive versus unproductive members of society, and a forum for removing them from the village population.

In the village society, Jackson presents several characters with flaws that should advance them to candidacy as potential sacrifices. Specifically, the Dunbars and Watsons, who are lower class, working families, the Summers the powerful middle class family, and two individuals: Old Man Warner and Tessie Hutchinson. The Dunbar and Watson families are the most likely candidates for this year’s sacrifice, based on several things:
1. After the first round of drawings, the village women focus on two families: the Dunbar or the Watson families.

2. The Dunbar father-figure is absent due to injury, implying the family is not productively contributing to the economics and population growth for the village.

3. The need for Mrs. Dunbar to step into the role of the male because of her husband’s injuries challenges her normal role in the society and requires a special dispensation be granted for her to draw as a male. This difference gives her implied power over the lives of the male members of her family. Arguably portraying the female as a liability, unfit to draw which affirms her lack of authority and power outside of the family home.

4. The absent Watson husband/father, for unspecified reasons, requires his son to draw for those remaining in his family—his mother. This appears to reference a flaw in their productivity within the social environment.

However, these two families survive the elimination round indicating there is someone significantly more flawed.
than these Dunbar and Watson families. Thus, we turn to the other family identified as not fitting the requirements for a viable family within this social world. Mr. Summers’ wife is physically absent the day of the lottery and is reproductively ineffective. However, his ownership in the coal business provides jobs for the villagers, strengthening his economic value in the society. Additionally, his wealth provides him with time to officiate at all the local social events, including the lottery (Jackson 294) and gives him authority to make changes to the lottery rituals. For instance, instead of using wood chips the people draw slips of paper from the black box (Jackson 293). Additionally, he merely greets each man as they step forward to draw from the box, rather than traditionally having to chant and formalize the ritual of the lottery drawing (Jackson 293). However, Mr. Summers has been unable to have a new box made even though the current box is shabby, faded and worn, essentially falling apart (Jackson 293). But, because it was "made from pieces of the original black box" even Mr. Summers, as powerful as he is, isn’t able to change that part of the lottery tradition (Jackson 293).
Of the two individuals, Old Man Warner is without a family. He is the oldest member of the village, at 77 years of age (Jackson 298). He promotes the lottery through his apocalyptic pronouncements regarding what will happen if the lottery laws are not followed unquestioningly. Mr. Warner warns that failure to follow the traditions exactly as written, will only serve to return the village to a time before the technological advances resulting in “living in caves” (Jackson 297).

The remaining candidate is Tessie Hutchinson. She questions the lottery system verbally, physically, and socially. Instead of attending to the business of the lottery she engages in her daily domestic activities in the home, which, in this society, was a primary job of the female. Even though she is late, she arrives before the first round of drawing begins. But she also arrives in the public realm in her domestic apparel rather than the expected public dress. She is wiping her hands on her apron (Jackson 294). Her appearance produces a disruption in the authority of the patriarchal norms (Dulan 247) by creating a disturbance that results in her being noticed. In this society, during the lottery, the woman’s place is behind her husband. Tessie’s appearance, her lateness, and her
verbal jokes, solidify her disruption to the ordered
routine of the lottery. Furthermore, she challenges the
male-dominated society by questioning whether they wanted
her to finish the job they prescribed for her (washing her
dishes) or leaving them in the sink (Jackson 295).
Ironically, Tessie was doing her domestic job and is
selected to die for doing it.

Through Tessie's selection as the sacrifice, Jackson
is challenging more than just the socially constructed
norms for women. She is challenging the patriarchal
tradition in its entirety. Tessie's language promotes the
realization that the tradition of choosing someone to die
so that the village can continue to survive economically, politicially, and socially is obsolete. Ironically, Jackson
indicates that much of the lottery tradition has been
forgotten. The villagers even hold the lottery on the wrong
day. The traditional day of sacrifice, in ancient
civilizations, pertaining to the fertility rituals and
attempts to insure that the gods were happy and therefore
would allow for a rich harvest, is on the summer solstice
which, depending on the calendar year, is either June 21st
or June 22nd. However, in this particular village, the
lottery is held on June 27th (Jackson 291) supplementing
Jackson’s challenge that the patriarchal tradition itself and the resulting oppression of women is outdated and can not be substantiated. In the same vein, Jackson shows that attempting to control and define women’s domestic roles through oppression, is patently and morally wrong. Even though Jackson allows Tessie the realization of the antiquated and oppressive nature of the lottery, it is too late to save her life. However, Jackson uses Tessie’s knowledge and material figure to disrupt the social norms.

In the end, Jackson gives Tessie a voice of dissent, of distortion and disruption that provides her a choice – a choice to challenge the system and point to the lack of authority and the oppressive nature of the lottery tradition. At the same time, Jackson allows Tessie to find a sense of self – even while facing her own death. Ultimately, Jackson shows us that there is no more use for the old patriarchal traditions. They are archaic, lacking in authenticity and authority, and require revising and change so they no longer produce death for women.

Having provided a context for how the patriarchal norms, that produce female oppression, are archaic and lacking in true authority, Jackson creates “The Beautiful Stranger” to show how the female’s realization of her own
power over her life, produce a strangeness that disrupts society. "The Beautiful Stranger" is a story about a woman who finds herself becoming increasingly estranged from her family, her domestic roles and her home. Margaret’s husband is returning from a business trip and, when he arrives, she is unsure whether it is her husband or someone else – a stranger. During her husband’s absence she has started evaluating her life with him, her fears, and her inability to create a home and persona that she recognizes as her own. She sees her husband as a stranger, someone whom she can enjoy, someone who considers her feelings and desires, who allows her freedom to choose what she wants to eat, drink, talk about, what types of activities she wants to participate in such as going shopping instead of taking her children to play in the park. Margaret gains an understanding of how she can construct her own reality when she hires a baby sitter to take care of the children and she goes to the city to buy frivolously expensive items that will sit on shelves in the living room. When she returns from the city, she finds the darkness has enveloped her home and she can’t distinguish her house and family from all the other homes in the shadowy darkness. There is a sense that Margaret has lost her mind but, in reality, I
argue she is the stranger — she has become someone unrecognizable to her socially-constructed self because she is no longer controlled or defined by her husband, or society’s, oppressive norms for the mother/wife.

The strangeness occurs from the moment Jackson positions Margaret in the public world of the train station. It is as if Jackson is creating a play in which Margaret attempts to pretend to be a wife, a mother, who has control of her family and her position within the family. Margaret fails to effectively present herself as the perfect mother. She is unable to control the children. Her husband arrives perfectly framed within the technological doorway of the train — completely in control of his part in the play, but Margaret’s presence on the platform disrupts the perfect flow of time and events for the family reunion.

Margaret is estranged from her private world as a result of the freedom and power exhumed through her husband’s absence from their home. In her time alone, Margaret realizes that she does not like her role within the family home. She prefers the chaotic sounds of the children playing to the silent fears contained within her own body and mind when her husband is in the house with
her. His absence provides for time for Margaret to change her behavior and attitudes towards her role within the home because she can assert her own rules, her own desires are fulfilled, creating a sense of self identity and power within the home. This change produces a distancing from the socially constructed family norms for Margaret. Through the stranger analogy, Jackson juxtaposes Margaret’s progression towards independence and her ability to control her environment with strangers. Having identified her husband as a stranger, Margaret no longer fears him. Instead, she begins to create the husband whom she desires. The man she creates provides for her needs and her desires. Margaret finds the power to escape the ordinary routine of feeding, clothing, educating, and playing with, the children. She develops a desire to explore – to create a home in which she and the stranger can be a family built on her definition of and desires for a family. As a result of this new awareness of power, Margaret moves into the public world of the city. She leaves the domestic world, in which men controlled the money, and enjoys shopping for small luxury items that are not necessities.

But, in attempting to reenter the private world, Margaret finds it dark and unfamiliar. Everything is
shadowy and consists of sameness. Even the lights in the windows are located exactly the same in every row of houses – the difference is that Margaret can no longer recognize or relate to the sameness of the domestic. She has rewritten her lines. She has entered a new world – a world that others who knew her can not enter for they do not recognize her. Margaret has constructed an identity of power and an autonomous self so that she has become the stranger. She is no longer able to stand within the private world of the domestic and be seen. Margaret has embraced the power to script her own identity beyond the socially acceptable norms for a female.

As in "The Lottery", Margaret’s ability to move outside of the traditions of social roles for women reveal that Jackson is critiquing the traditional outdated social norms created by a patriarchy that is oppressive and unresponsive to the growing needs and desires of women. Margaret desires more than being a wife and mother as society demands; rather she seeks to be independent and free to create identities and roles that produce an autonomous self.

However, Jackson shows us that Margaret’s change is so significant that society does not recognize her. The
patriarchy can not understand Margaret anymore and thus, they classify her as mad in order to be able to deal with the Margaret that society no longer controls.

Given that psychoanalytic feminist determine that a female who challenges the patriarchal social norms and power structures is either found mad or returns to her expected role within the society, Jackson shows us another woman who is considered mad by society. In reality this woman is able to control and design her own life even with her son and a female caregiver attempting to construct her world within the realm of the socially accepted madness.

"The Island" is a story about the destructive nature of relationships between women of two different social classes when forced to conform to the roles defined by the patriarchy. This story reveals how disempowered Mrs. Montague is when categorized as mad. Miss Oakes — considered normal, by society’s definition, constructs the world around Mrs. Montague based on the rules associated with women who are mad. The only escape for Mrs. Montague is to withdraw into her mind and to dream of an island where all the trappings of wealth and privilege can be left buried in the sand. In this "Island" the ceaseless noise of Miss Oakes' parroting of social norms and requirements for
Mrs. Montague’s socially designated madness can be forced into the blur of green leaves, trees and shadows (Jackson 86).

Mrs. Montague is a woman of means, born into wealth. The normal expectation of wealth is power. Power suggests an ability to control one’s social world. It also suggests the ability to dictate the rules for the private world she lives in and to demand a certain level of respect from those who provide for her care. In essence, wealth presumes a sense of freedom from the social norms prescribed for women in a patriarchal society. Wealth suggests the freedom to buy anything desired and to enjoy leisure time and, essentially, the ability to design one’s own daily life.

However, Mrs. Montague is submitted as mentally incapacitated. Her world is constructed not from a position of privilege but from mental incapacity. She is forced to abide by rules that her employee, a professional single woman, asserts to establish control and power over her.

Miss Oakes personalizes the employer/employee relationship with Mrs. Montague, enabling her continued control and manipulation of the situation that destabilizes Mrs. Montague’s realities and restricts Mrs. Montague’s power in her own home. It is as if Miss Oakes must compete
with Mrs. Montague to assert her limited power in the social world of the private home. Even though she lives with Mrs. Montague, Miss Oakes desires a home of her own, her own son, her own money and power because she knows it is her only way of surviving in the socially constructed world of the patriarchy. In her social position, a single, professional working woman, she is invisible. Thus, she inserts herself into the role of the powerful female in Mrs. Montague’s home to produce a self identity. As a result, she must remove Mrs. Montague, “kill” her or consume her space, absenting her from the environment in order for Miss Oakes to retain her identity (Showalter 212).

This relationship creates, for Mrs. Montague, a physical and psychological imprisonment based on gender, class and domestic norms. The only time Mrs. Montague appears to have control of the relationship is when they go for their daily walks. Miss Oakes does not like the outdoors because she is reminded or her social status - a hired companion. When they leave the penthouse for their walk, the hotel employees speak to Mrs. Montague. They open doors for her and are respectful of her position. They do not acknowledge Miss Oakes’ presence. She becomes the
invisible female figure who is powerless because of her social position (Chesler 63). This allows Mrs. Montague to control the pace and direction of their walks. She controls the public (social world) of the outdoors merely because of her social position and Miss Oakes' invisibility created by the reaction of others in the social world.

Mrs. Montague's fur coat and her rose hat establish her position as wealthy whereas Miss Oakes' ill fitting, poor quality, "gaudy red and yellow dress and functional hat remind her of her working class position" (Jackson 80). Her sense of power is restricted and she is extremely sensitive to the reactions of those they meet during their walk. Thus, she is not focused on the presence or actions of Mrs. Montague. She merely goes along with Mrs. Montague's direction.

As a result, Mrs. Montague attempts to draw Miss Oakes into the world of privileged female. She points out expensive blue bowls an expensive parrot (Jackson 84), both with no purpose, merely luxury items to sit on shelves and attract dust. Mrs. Montague desires éclairs in a bakery window but Miss Oakes focuses on the fact that they have flies on them and that they would make Mrs. Montague physically sick if she ate them(Jackson 88). Mrs. Montague
does not have to worry about whether something is suitable, or edible or even necessary. She can simply desire it and it should be hers for the taking. She does not have to worry about the cost of anything, whereas Miss Oakes constantly calculates everything in terms of its material value and her labor to produce sufficient funds to purchase it.

To escape from the constant calculating and businesslike nature of Miss Oakes, Mrs. Montague creates a beautiful island in her mind. A place where she can remove all the material trappings that are constant reminders of material value directly connected to her position and privilege. She is able to run naked around the island, enjoying the blues and greens of sky merging with water; the warm sun on her skin as she lies in the sand (Jackson 87). She can desire any food she wants and eat it. She can remove Miss Oakes high in the trees – in the form of a gaudy, noisy, parrot (Jackson 87). She can draw the face of her son in the sand and stamp it out – removing the power of both imprisoning beings from her island world (Jackson 87). Mrs. Montague is able to define and control this world. She is free to choose her life within this world.
Whether Mrs. Montague is mad or not is not the problem. It is how the madness, contained within a patriarchal world, is used by other women to follow the rules and class designations that sustain madness in society. This reveals the oppression within a male dominated society and the powerfully negative and damaging effects these gender and domestic “norms” create in women. Furthermore, the fact that Jackson uses a working class female, to create, and sustain the physical and psychological imprisonment or confinement of Mrs. Montague, serves to strengthen my argument that the powerful and negative damage from the patriarchal domestic roles for women oppresses the female physically endangers a female’s mental health. Within patriarchal society, the female’s material body and her psyche are sacrificed for the good of the family as defined by the male world.

Jackson’s stories illustrate how women challenge outdated and unnecessary patriarchal traditions. Tessie is doing dishes and forgets about the annual lottery event, arriving late and disrupting the ordered process of the event, sealing her fate as the sacrifice. Margaret is disoriented out in the public world of the train station performing her domestic roles of taking care of the
children and picking up her husband on his return from a business trip. This causes her to seem imperfect-- unable to perform her domestic tasks as a socially acceptable wife and mother, which results in her appearing to be unstable, ineffectual in the public world. Mrs. Montague is a wealthy widow whose life is controlled by her guardian son who insures that her basic necessities are taken care of, while Miss Oakes, the paid companion, imprisons her through regulating every moment of her daily activities.

These women are designed with character flaws setting them apart from the normal women of society. Their flaws are used to destabilize the socially accepted norms for their positions as wives, mothers, or privileged females, establishing a visible and understandable counter to those gender and domestic roles. Jackson’s social critique proposed options that females have in constructing their own identities outside of the social norms.

Analyzing Jackson’s short fiction in this way, we are able to see how Materialist Feminism proves a lens to identify and understand Jackson’s critique of the traditional roles for women and consider what happens when the female, in Jackson’s stories disrupts the patriarchal norms by resisting the prescribed female roles.
Since resisting the arcane patriarchal roles designates the female "mad" by society, Helene Cixous, Elaine Showalter and Sara Quay propose that "feminizing" the madness turns the focus away from the female body as the "unstable site of insanity" (Quay 213) to the oppressive nature of the patriarchal norms and the destruction on the female's health and quality of life.

Thus, what remains for discussion in Chapter 3 is the mad woman in Jackson's fiction. Applying feminist critics' Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's "madwoman in the attic", Helene Cixous and Elaine Showalter's ideology of "female madness as a means of escaping the patriarchal system of dominance" (Quay 213), read through a materialist feminist lens, reveals how Jackson's "The Island" and "The Beautiful Stranger" are representative of how resisting the patriarchal "madness" produces an autonomous female, outside of the restrictive social norms, giving rise to the question who is really mad? Is it the female or society?
CHAPTER THREE

FEMINIZING MADNESS: EMPOWERING THE FEMALE,
CREATING AN AUTONOMOUS SELF

In this chapter, I focus on how female madness is constructed by the patriarchal society and how feminizing the madness produces resistance and disruption of the patriarchal norms resulting in an autonomous female. Primarily, my focus is on how feminist critics Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Helene Cixous, Elaine Showalter, and Sara Quay argue for the “feminizing of madness” to show how Jackson uses madness in “The Island” and “The Beautiful Stranger” as resistance to the patriarchal roles for women. This resistance produces a female who, though considered mad by society, releases herself from the restrictive societal domestic rules to develop an autonomous self outside of the demands of the social world.

The mad female has been examined by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic. Their text laid the groundwork for exhaustive feminist analysis of the female author and literary characters trapped within the dualistic role labeled by society as angels and monsters. These terms represent the construction of the female by
patriarchal societies and by male writers as being without power—trapped within the expected roles for the female.

To contain their fear of the female and entrap the female within an unrealistic construction of what is female, men create two Eve's: the angel and the monster. The angel figure is perfect, pure, and symbolic of the female idolized in the cult of true womanhood (Cixous 334). The monster represents the Biblical Eve, fallen and dangerous to men because she disrupts the social order of the male dominated world through her narcissistic tendencies to desire self identity (Murphy 7). The monstrous female is more frightening to men because she is perceived as attempting to usurp power not granted her by the male dominated society (Murphy 7).

Social Darwinism sustained these two female designations (angel and monster) in the idea that the natural female role is to produce life to sustain the human species (Gilbert 14). Male writers and patriarchal societies have reduced the female to her material sexual form, linking her feminine identity with her sexuality and subjecting her value to her material body (Chesler 62). Gilbert and Gubar assert that within the angel is the Other. The Other is the male-dominated society's
designation of the female as a witch, a supernatural figure, or the one not sane (18-19). These are the women who do not follow the norms and are categorized as mad by the patriarchy.

The female living behind the "angel" creature constructed by the male resounds in Helene Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa". Cixous, like Gilbert and Gubar, focuses on women writers trying to locate themselves within the male constructed world of authorship. The female must take possession of the space she writes in. This is the space where she can create her own identity through words and images that are purely female in nature, not constructed by the male (Cixous 336). In order to do this, Cixous asserts the female must "write her self" (337). Meaning, the female author must return to the material form "confiscated from her" (Cixous 337) by the male and which has been turned into something strange and unfamiliar to her. This space does not designate the true female (Cixous 338). It is a female figure sexually grounded to produce only those elements of life that the male world requires, primarily children and sexual pleasure for the male (Cixous 338).
Behind the male-formed female is the woman waiting to speak. She is waiting to be heard and to experience the inconstancy (Gilbert 12) of being woman. She is being the monster figure feared by the male and being the uncanny form (Freud 240) that must be devoured before the female can be constructed (Cixous 338).

In Jackson’s short fiction, the female protagonists struggle against the social norms, created in the patriarchy’s constructed social environments (family, relationships, and domestic roles), to produce their own self and gain empowerment to define and control their own lives in the patriarchal society. This empowerment is perceived as madness by society because society associates madness with “three distinct sites of female inconstancy: the female mind and body as unstable; female behavior that stands outside of that accepted by patriarchy as ‘normal’; and women who resist patriarchal socialization” (Quay 212).

Thus, madness provides a space where the female writer can explore her sense of self-awareness and growing need for her own identity (Quay 213). This “madness” extends beyond the psychoanalytic feminist theory of a resolution into madness (Chesler 63) and creates a challenge or resistance to the archaic domestic rules of the patriarchy.
In “The Island” and “The Beautiful Stranger”, Jackson usurps society’s categorization and definition of madness by writing Mrs. Montague and Margaret escapes from the imprisoning domestic space of the home. Jackson provides room for Mrs. Montague and Margaret to experience their domestic space as changeable on their terms. Mrs. Montague gives nice things to Ms. Oakes, her caretaker because Ms. Oakes doesn’t have nice things of her own. This giving is Mrs. Montague’s way of asserting her position as the woman with power and prestige based on her financial security (Jackson 82). Margaret also attempts to give expensive trinkets (Jackson 64) to the stranger who was once her husband (Jackson 64). In seeking out expensive nonsense gifts, Margaret shifts her female role. She exerts her independence by moving outside the normal expected role for her—housewife, frugal, stay-at-home mom. She is creating her own experiences through the power of purchasing items outside of her domestic role.

Jackson gives Mrs. Montague and Margaret time to grow into their sense of self and develop the autonomous self becoming a direct challenge to the patriarchy. When Mrs. Montague and Margaret challenge their false patriarchal defined roles (i.e. the good or angel figure) they are seen
as mad because of their inconstancy (Gilbert 16).

Inconstancy is certainly critical in considering the
dualistic nature of female identity. The male desires a
female he can put on a pedestal and not fear because he
controls her life physically and metaphorically. Through
his actions he is attempting to remove all the factors
within the female that are natural. They are the desire to
define one's own self without being confined to particular
roles and physical locations. The female as a whole person
struggles against the realities constructed by the male
power figures because the female knows there is a life
within her that is crying to get out. It is a life that
seeks its own voice (Gilbert 16).

Though Jackson gives us "mad" females in Mrs. Montague
and Margaret constructed on the socially acceptable version
(idea) of madness, she subverts madness using it to
challenge the social world of the patriarchy. In turn, we
are able to see how these two women create their own
identities in and around the social world constructed by
the patriarchy. An example of this in Jackson’s "The
Island" where Mrs. Montague, the original mother figure, is
replaced by her son's wife, in his life. Society would
require Mrs. Montague to lose "her mind" (Jackson 79)
because her socially constructed power position as mother has been consumed (replaced) by the new female figure of the new wife (Rubenstein 137). Mrs. Montague is further consumed by the control and dominance of the professional female care-taker (Cixous 335). This female, belonging to the working class, desires to “take-on” the male constructed role of a masculine female (Mitchell 150) in order to impress and assert her material body between the matriarch (here Mrs. Montague) and the male figure (her son) (Mitchell 150). This masculine female is attempting to fulfill her role in society as both an acceptable female who is empowered, by the patriarchy, to restrict and control the “angel female” (Quay 213) who is resisting or disrupting the social norms.

Though Mrs. Montague’s son is absent, his presence and power is confirmed in the actual figure of Miss Oakes, the professional caretaker whose physical presence and demeanor is masculine. This is an important turning point in Jackson’s story because the absent figure is normally the original mother who must be replaced in order for the younger more angel-like female to take her rightful place in society (Cixous 338). The original mother-figure is either absent or dead.
However, I argue that Jackson informs us of Mrs. Montague having “lost her mind” (Jackson 79) to show how the patriarchal definition of madness is damaging in its attempt to control the female. Mrs. Montague is not absent or dead but displaced by her absent son and his stand-in Miss Oakes.

The patriarchal norm of “madness” indicates that Mrs. Montague’s displacement within the social world of the private home is because her relationship as mother has been extinguished. Therefore, the patriarchy would assert that Mrs. Montague’s female anxiety is directly associated with being “killed” (replaced) as the original mother-figure. Her resulting anxiety and fear (Moers 97). When her position as mother is taken over by other females, essentially, Mrs. Montague society perceives her as dead, worthless. The only option provided by the patriarchal society is that she “goes mad” (Moers 91), since she can be an “absent-mother figure” (Moers 91) in her madness.

However, Jackson reveals the escape mechanism that Cixous and Chesler indicate are available for the female—a way of feminizing the madness. Jackson embraces Mrs. Montague’s madness as representative of Cixous’ call for the female to write herself through “hearing her body”
This produces a space where Mrs. Montague can create those images, realities, personalities that are what make her a woman—make her non-monstrous and unlike the patriarchal female. Being mad provides Mrs. Montague room to consider her life and provides her a way of not having to deal with the patriarchal mother-woman roles. She is left alone in her penthouse (attic) room to create her own reality. Though psychoanalytic feminism would leave Mrs. Montague alone in her madness, Jackson produces a new Mrs. Montague through her madness and she is an autonomous feminized female who is powerful in her socially perceived madness (Showalter 63).

Jackson writes Mrs. Montague as representative of the female writer, she creates a world free from any manmade structures or boundaries. Within this world, Mrs. Montague throws off all the material forms of control—tearing off her clothes and burying (Cixous 338) them, to ease away the unconscious stress of life lived as original mother-female in the patriarchal world (Cixous 338). She is "liberated" (Cixous 338) through her position outside of the social norms for her.

Mrs. Montague represents Cixous' female who uses her body to "write herself" (Cixous 338) by her ability to
replace the patriarchy’s stereotypical view of the female
body as being something negative with her own acceptance of
her physical body as beautiful and her sexuality producing
“access to her native strength” Cixous 338). Mrs. Montague
learns to speak her own version of her material self
(Cixous 338) by exposing her natural form to the strength
of her own mind and the power to express herself. She is
able to maintain control of the distractions of the
annoying social world represented by the professional
caretaker who is reduced to an annoying parrot, located
within the shadowy forms of the trees.

When Jackson returns Mrs. Montague to the patriarchal
world of her penthouse, Mrs. Montague returns a woman
empowered. She no longer needs the material items that are
provided by her son. Items like fur coats and food.
Instead, she immediately moves to the coloring book where
she turns the paper and begins coloring a barnyard in
bright blues and greens making possible an outward
manifestation of her creative choices for her own world
(Jackson 90).

Though perceived as mad and childish by the other
woman and her own son, Jackson’s Mrs. Montague resembles
Cixous’ “heterogeneous woman” (Cixous 345) because Mrs.
Montague is now a woman who controls her own femininity and body by being unafraid to construct her world in terms of her own language and realities. This is important because it provides Mrs. Montague a voice of her own. Her madness is a way of constructing her own reality and establishing her own voice. By giving Mrs. Montague madness, Jackson provides a forum in which Mrs. Montague is able to identify her own sense of self in a world controlled by the patriarchy.

Where Mrs. Montague reflects the feminizing of madness (Showalter 63), I contend that Jackson uses Margaret’s perceived madness as a way of establishing our ability to see the harmful construction in the domestic side of her life and how Margaret becomes the stranger. Margaret is unable to recognize her own husband and in turn, is unrecognizable to society because she has moved outside of the accepted domestic roles for the married woman.

Interestingly, Jackson’s female protagonist “In The Beautiful Stranger”, Margaret, is characterized by psychoanalytic feminists Roberta Rubenstein and Tricia Lootens as unstable and teetering into madness as she becomes more and more estranged from her domestic surroundings (Rubenstein 131). Thus, Rubenstein and Lootens
leave Margaret alone, simply mad within the patriarchal construction of madness, mentally insane (Chesler 63).

However, I argue that Margaret is moving away from the patriarchal designation of female and moving towards the feminized female. Margaret’s strangeness and sense of lost self produces a way of visualizing her domestic role as a mother and wife in a monstrous light because she is constantly afraid of being physically and emotionally harmed by her husband. Male construction of time and rules begin to fade into the background and Margaret begins to loose herself in a world that is timeless and unfamiliar but peaceful. She is unable to ascertain her true place and purpose within the socially constructed domestic home life that her husband demands of her. Margaret’s fear and anxiety begins to fragment, separating her from the angel image of the female mother/wife (Gilbert 17) used by her husband to control her and, instead, provides a space in which Margaret can explore what makes her happy and empowered.

Margaret begins to see through her own eyes and begins constructing her own realities (Quay 221). As Margaret journeys away from her husband’s identification of her domestic world, the distance produces a sense of
strangeness. The husband's week long absence allowed Margaret time to create a daily routine that freed her from the fear and anxiety of her husband's control over her. Instead, during his absence, she had becomes a "wife alone with small children . . . enjoying the toys lying around" (Jackson 60) making her house a home. During her time alone, Margaret starts to reject the ordered process of her husband's constructed daily activities for her (Jackson 60). She contracts for a younger female to monitor her children so that she can take a trip into the city. This trip alone empowers Margaret. She leaves the domestic home and ventures out into the unknown city, alone. In the city she performs acts of exploration that test her new found self worth and freedom by implementing the ability to purchase items that would normally be considered luxury rather than the necessary items suited to her domestic status.

Rather than feeling afraid and unhappy, her journey into the city brings peace and joy; hope and a sense of self-fulfillment. Margaret is essentially moving through the process of self-definition by inserting herself into the patriarchal world outside of her normal role as mother-wife (Gilbert 17). She is no longer the angel or the
monster but a woman finding her way around a social world that no longer controls her through fear or anxiety.

The mere fact that Margaret now sees her husband and her domestic life as strange—reveals her altered view of herself, not through madness, but through a sense of autonomy. Margaret is no longer fated to inhabit the male-defined role but rather she is creating her own vision of her self (Gilbert 19).

Jackson reintroduces the new Margaret to her old world. Psychoanalytic feminists Rubenstein and Lootens interpret Margaret’s return to her domestic world from a viewpoint of madness because Margaret sees only the outlines of the surrounding houses and is lost outside of the home she should recognize because of the darkness (Lootens 151). Darkness is interpreted as Margaret’s inability to connect with her socially prescribed domestic role. Rubenstein argues that Margaret is no longer able to identify herself as a wife and mother (133). Though I give some credence to their interpretation of Jackson’s strange ending for Margaret, I contend that the darkness surrounding Margaret combined with her inability to distinguish her home from the shadows and images of duplicative homes equates to her finding herself outside of
the patriarchal dictates for her as a wife and mother. Margaret no longer identifies with the constraints placed on her by the social world of her husband because she has established a sense of self. She realizes that the fear and anxiety she lived with, as a result of her husband’s power over her, subverted her own sense of self. By moving beyond the prescribed domestic roles, Margaret is unable to recognize the old world because it does not fit her anymore. Additionally, the patriarchal society is unable to recognize Margaret as anything but mad because society is unable to deal with the autonomous female (Cixous 338).

In that respect, I argue that Margaret is free from the negative environment of her domestic home. She is free from the anxiety, fear, and the inability to define her own destiny. Now, however, Margaret stands alone, looking upon a society that can no longer recognize her because they can not accept the fact she represents the dark side of the mirror, the monstrous female, the patriarchal witch (Mitchell 64). Margaret has found and embraced the underside of the perfect angel. She is a challenge to the stability of her husband’s power and she is a disruption to his ability to create a private world that is what he
desires—and now, she represents the other—the woman in the mirror (Gilbert 19).

By feminizing the madness and monstrous female image (Cixous 338), Jackson creates female protagonists like Mrs. Montague and Margaret, whose growing awareness of the destructive nature of the socially prescribed norms require establish her own autonomy both within and outside of the patriarchal constructs for the female. Though society can only see the mad female (Chesler 69), Jackson reveals a society that appears mad and monstrous for constructing roles and norms for the female that confine them and for creating the madness in the female who does not submit to the abusive husband or controlling son.

Society requires women to be perfect, exhibiting angel-like behaviors and performing every task and desire of the male figure (husband, father and son). Essentially, as Mrs. Montague and Margaret find, creates intense emotional drain on the female. For, she is a stranger to herself (Cixous 336) and unable to express herself without being seen as monstrous, wicked, or evil, for not desiring the roles constructed by the patriarchy.

The necessary act of withdrawing from society into a world created of her own design leaves Mrs. Montague
perceived as childlike, petulant and unworthy of the beautiful things she has been provided by her son. Yet her withdrawal into her own world provides her power—her sense of self without the need to comply with the demands of the social world around her.

Just as Mrs. Montague’s withdrawal into the island world in her mind produces autonomy, Margaret’s act of moving beyond the constructed roles, into a world that she can control produces her own empowerment. Though she is unable to find her old home, Margaret is able to create a new home, a home where she is neither an angel nor a whore, but herself (Cixous 339).

In many of Jackson’s stories, the image of monstrous women is produced to reveal the underside of the pure angel woman required by society. Her use of the supernatural images of the female, the sounds and the disturbing events, produce a way for the female protagonist to enter a place where she can begin to understand her own worth. Jackson’s stories display the dualistic construction of angel-monster produced by the male dominated society and enables the female to finally “kill the angel in the house” (Gilbert 17) by finding a way of creating a female identity, free
from the insanity and madness of the damaging angel-monster of the mad female (Gilbert 17).

Ultimately, the woman writer writes the female self empowered outside of the male constructed world (Cixous 338). She becomes both author of void and image, constructor of power and creator of sanity out of which the female can find herself (Chesler 59). Though the male world will see the female as insane or mad, this is good because it represents the way the female is able to "challenge, co-opt, and subvert the expected social norms for women" (Chesler 59).

Thus the female "behavior defined by the patriarchy as 'mad' is the result of the repressed zone (inconstancy) of true womanhood” emphasis added (Quay 213). By feminizing "madness", the female is protected and able to reveal their true self (Elaine Showalter 169). The "madness" allows them to be above and outside of the falseness (inconstancy) of a female desired by a patriarchal society (Cixous 337). By constructing Mrs. Montague and Margaret as mad, Jackson gives us a way to see her texts removed from the gothic. There may be ghosts in Jackson’s texts but they are the ghosts of the haunted female, trying to find her own self, her own image, and her own place either in or out of
society. Thus, I would encourage others to revisit the numerous works of Shirley Jackson and begin to understand the nature of her work in terms of the negative and destructive nature of socially constructed gender and domestic roles for women traditionally accepted without question. I would encourage women critics, writers and readers, to explore the works of a woman who, herself, understood the oppressive nature of socially constructed norms. Jackson was the wife of a man who tried to construct her realities, her image, and who physically and emotionally abused her. She understood the nature of writing female (Cixous 336) and the difficulty women writers experienced in attempting to find their own voice outside of the angel-monsters created by the patriarchal literary community. This then is the true horror behind the gothic nature of Jackson's fiction.
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