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How to Make a Witch——
Shirley Jackson and Femininity

Chiho Nakagawa

Shirley Jackson, whose most famous works include "The Lottery" and *The Haunting of Hill House*, demonstrates her deep understanding of the mob mentality in many works. In "The Lottery," she spends most of the pages to describe a deceptively cheerful day in a small village in New England, only to show us a process—a random choice or a carefully planned procedure—in which a victim of stoning execution is chosen. In *The Haunting of Hill House*, a woman who participates in a haunted house experiment becomes gradually isolated until she has no choice but death. Jackson's protagonists almost always have to face hostilities alone amidst others, only to learn that they cannot find their place in this world. Their isolation and solitude become foregrounded with the backdrop of people's malice that cannot be clearly defined.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Jackson showed a particular interest in the history of the witchcraft in New England. Born on the West Coast, she spent most of her adult life in New York and North Bennington, Vermont, familiarizing herself with the climate and history of New England. She also penned *The Witchcraft of Salem Village* for children, before the scholarship on New England witchcraft in history started flourishing in the 1970s, when the study by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum was received with enthusiasm. A wife of a scholar and a successful writer in a small town in New England, who identified herself as a witch of Bennington, understood the dynamics of persecutions and

* This paper was presented in a slightly modified version at the 38th English Conference at Nara Women's University, November 27th, 2009.
knew how a witch was created.

I would like to argue that Jackson's last novella, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, is her attempt at understanding witchcraft trials. She shows us how a certain woman becomes regarded as a witch, and how that woman incorporates an identity as a witch. For Jackson, the woman who becomes singled out as a witch is not necessarily an eccentric woman who threatens others with her rebellion and knowledge, but an ordinary woman who just happens to possess multiple elements that lead people to persecution. I will show that Jackson's portrayal of witches and witchcraft accusations correspond to the findings of later scholarship on the actual cases of New England witchcraft. Lynette Carpenter's earlier paper also sees two sisters as witches, but I disagree with Carpenter's view of witches — witches as representing "female power" as Mary Daly and other essentialist-feminists claim. Instead, I will argue that two sisters, especially the elder sister, Constance, represent Jackson's more careful and ambivalent commentary on femininity and the male-centered world. In the novella, two main characters go through a kind of unofficial trial that forces them to become witches. Witches do not exist prior to a witch hunt; witches are born as a result of a witch hunt. In Shirley Jackson's world, like in seventeenth century New England, a woman chooses to identify herself as a witch when she finds no other way to survive. The ending of this novella explores a possibility of life as a witch, a fairytale like ending, yet its implication is not at all hopeful.

**The Witch of North Bennington**

Shirley Jackson enjoyed the reputation as a witch from the early days of her career. Jackson's association with witchcraft comes from her large collection of magic books and peripherals, but most strongly from her short biography written by her husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman, stating that she was an "authority on witchcraft and magic" in addition to a "practicing amateur witch" (104). Judy Oppenheimer's biography suggests that Jackson may have truly believed in magic and practiced it; however,
there is no proof or testimony of Jackson practicing magic. Her interest in magic cannot be denied, yet whether she was actually practicing witchery or not one can never know.

Besides being a writer and a (non-)practicing witch, Jackson lived her adult life as a mother and a wife of a literary critic and a literature professor. Jackson focuses on that side in her lighthearted essays, *Private Demons* and *Life Among the Savages*, telling about her family's life in North Bennington. Although in these two books she portrays herself as a cheerful and content housewife, whose only source of troubles are her children that create problems one after another, Jackson cannot hide altogether the darker side of her life. In particular, she feels the distance between her and "all the native Vermonters" (87). Jackson herself was born and raised in San Francisco, thus, her life in a small town in Vermont demanded a lot of adjusting and getting used to. Jackson was the only adult in the household to be in contact with other local people, while Hyman could concentrate on his job as a "prominent local educator" (178) while being proudly inconsiderate of all the everyday trivialities. Hyman also had frequent contact with other people, but they were students and faculty members who lived in an entirely different world from the town of North Bennington. While he lived in a very secluded community of intellectuals and students, she drove him, arranged all the daily chores, and managed the household. Jackson felt keenly not only their difference but also hostilities from locals, even though it could be due to her heightened sensitivity. Thus, Bernice M. Murphy points out that "Jackson would always be an outsider in New England" for two reasons: coming from the outside and being part of the academic community (106).

Oppenheimer points out another element that made her an outsider. While Jackson came from a WASP family, Edgar Stanley Hyman was a Jew, which originally caused both Jackson's parents and Hyman's parents to oppose their marriage. In mid-twentieth century Vermont, unlike in Brooklyn where Hyman was from, a Jewish household might have stood out. Jackson told one of her friends that "The Lottery" was about anti-
Semitism, according to Oppenheimer (130-31). In the story which, according to Murphy, does "for small town New England what Deliverance did for backwoods Georgia" (112), a housewife, Tessie Hutchinson, gets chosen as a victim by yearly lottery. Jackson also offers other theories as to how to read this story in addition to an anti-Semitism reading, so the writer's intention is not clearly determined. Whatever exactly made Jackson write "The Lottery," to some extent the story reflects her experience of being excluded as an outsider in North Bennington.

The very same experience undoubtedly affects the last novella of Jackson, the novel about two sisters who stand alone against the whole village. Unlike "The Lottery," there is no cheerful surface to disguise the isolation of the main characters. The villagers do not accept the sisters, while the sisters do not even try to fit into the community. The inevitable ending in which the sisters take an ultimate refuge that no other people can reach also corresponds to Jackson's life in North Bennington when she became more and more isolated from the rest of the world.

A Damsel in Distress in the Castle

In reading We Have Always in the Castle, most readers will at first pay more attention to the narrator for her eccentricity; Mary Katherine (Merricat) Blackwood hates washing herself and eating in front of others. Although the reader has to wait until near the end of the story to learn that Merricat was the perpetrator of the family murders that happened before the beginning of the story, her deviation from the norm is clear with her narrative filled with daydreams. She is a little girl at eighteen, acting like a ten year old. Merricat's distorted worldview makes the reader uneasy and suspicious, yet the novella gradually reveals that it is not only Merricat's narrative that is twisted. The world in which Merricat and Constance live does not prove itself to be sane and safe. As Murphy notes, gradually Merricat's "paranoid worldview" is vindicated, not the "rather more optimistic, conventional hopes" of her sister's (122). The villagers persistently mock and torment the Blackwoods until they push
the sisters out of the comfort of their own home. The ending in which the sisters hide from the others and live in the burnt remains of the house does not simply suggest justice served to the murderer and her accomplice by the hands of the community. The villagers drive the sisters to that fate, eliminating a deviation and forcing them to become witches.

The novella opens with all the hatred towards the Blackwoods, targeted at Merricat. She feels herself under surveillance while she is in the village, to which she comes in only twice a week for her routine trips to a grocery store and the library. The villagers mock, glare at, and tease Merricat. Every second of Merricat's trip to the village reminds her how they hate her. The children chant:

Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?
Oh no, said Merricat, you'll poison me.
Merricat, said Connie, would you like to go to sleep?
Down in the boneyard ten feet deep! (23)

The children refers to the murders that her sister supposedly committed by poisoning sugar in the sugar pot. At first glance, this incident signifies that Constance's acquittal does not satisfy the villagers, and that they disapprove of the family for causing the serious criminal incident and for accepting the suspect in the family. It seems natural, then, for the Blackwoods to withdraw themselves into their own property and separate themselves from the rest of the world.

Yet the root of their feelings exits before the incident, as Merricat states — "The people of the village have always hated us" (6). Merricat feels relieved when she comes back to the gated entrance to the property of the Blackwoods, unlocking and locking religiously every time she goes out and comes in. The sign that says "Private No Trespassing" on the gate to the family property indicates the Blackwoods have been distant from the villagers for a long time. John Blackwood has closed off their private path to their house, causing great inconvenience to the villagers, because the Blackwoods own "all the land between the highway and the river" (5). He did it anyway just to please his wife who hated the "sight of anyone
who wanted to walking past [their] front door" (26). Their attitude reinforces the foundation of envy and jealousy from the villagers, in addition to their wealth.

The murders of the Blackwood family only have opened the door to the villagers' deep-seated feelings towards the rich family, as the persecution of the Blackwood family starts only after the patriarch of the family, John Blackwood, died. Arsenic poisoning killed John Blackwood, his wife, their son, Thomas, and Uncle Julian's wife, Dorothy, creating the void of the patriarch and a male heir. The one remaining male in this household, Uncle Julian, who is in a wheelchair, does not have enough physical as well as mental capacities to lead the household. Uncle Julian has not been regarded as a legitimate male even before the incident, for he lived in the Blackwoods' house with his wife since he has failed financially. Carpenter suggests that his invalid state "confirms the general belief that financial failure for men leads to powerlessness, dependency, emasculation" (33). All the burdens of the house are now on Constance's shoulder, in addition to tending and nursing of the invalid. Inside the house Constance is the only sensible adult; yet only inside. Constance is a damsel in distress locked inside the castle, inside of which her sensibility is limited. Merricat becomes the target of all the verbal abuse because Constance cannot go out. Thus, even when Merricat tells her sister or even Julian of the ordeals she experiences outside, those recluses are powerless in front of malicious men and children who tirelessly mock and tease the young girl who is all alone in the middle of hostile environments.

The Blackwood sisters become the targets because they are female and they inherit the vast wealth that the villagers envy. These two elements as the source of persecution correspond to the recent studies on witchcraft in late seventeenth century New England. Carol F. Karlsen argues that women who were to inherit property were more likely to be the targets of witchcraft accusations. Older women past childbearing age were also targets, yet in either case, Karlsen sees those women's possibilities of inheriting property and money considerably increased the
danger of being accused of witches. Merricat and Constance, unmarried women who now own the vast wealth after the patriarch of the family and the male heir died, can now be the likely targets of witch hunt.

Another study on Salem witchcraft, John Demos's *Entertaining Satan*, explains the cultural and psychological background of witchcraft accusations. He explains that many cases involved emotional clashes between the accused and the accusers concerning economic issues. The differences in people's emphasis either on "individualism," or the idea of self-help, or "neighborliness" resulted in complicated emotional issues (298-300). In this novella, there exist strong emotional reactions to the wealth the Blackwoods own. The male adults of the village find the lack of "neighborliness" in the Blackwoods unacceptable. One villager, Jim Donnell, says, "I can always tell people I used to know the Blackwoods. They never did anything to me that I can remember, always perfectly polite to me. Not that I ever got invited to take my dinner with them, nothing like that" (20). Another man mentions that the Blackwoods did not pay for the broken step he claimed he fixed, although he botched the job. These male villagers are clearly jealous of the Blackwoods' wealth — "their fine old private estate, with their fences and their private paths and their stylish way of living" (19). These men hate the Blackwoods for being rich and for not sharing any of their wealth with them. Unlike other rich families such as the Clarks, the Carringtons, and the Shepherds, whom the villagers do not accept wholeheartedly yet to whom they still smile, nod, and wave, the villagers have no reservation in their hatred towards the Blackwoods, because the other rich families contribute to the villagers in some way — for example, by donating a town hall, as part of their efforts to get along with them. Determined not to share any of their wealth with the villagers, the haughty Blackwoods have cultivated the villagers' hostility and hatred. The gap between the expectation of "neighborliness" on the part of the villagers and "individualism" on the part of the Blackwoods leads to emotional conflicts.

In the absence of a formal appeal system as in the seventeenth
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century, the villagers have no other recourse to accuse these women than verbally abusing Merricat twice a week until someone who can go deeper into the household arrives. Constance and Merricat live in a "castle," the word that indicates their sturdy and unshakable boundaries that their father built. This castle can be invaded only when it is cracked open by a male Blackwood. Then Charles Blackwood, John Blackwood's nephew, enters the Blackwood castle with the pretense of kindness. Charles can enter the house only because he is a Blackwood, but his values clearly side with the villagers rather than with those of Merricat and Constance. He does not only insist on bringing order into the house, in which Constance allows Merricat's childish fantasies and Uncle Julian's demented whims to dominate, but also seeing things from the perspective of monetary value. For Charles, Merricat's treatments of valuable objects—nailing a gold watch chain, the book that records who owes how much money, etc. onto a tree—seem almost blasphemous. Merricat manages to infuriate Charles extremely with silver dollars buried in her favorite place. He repeats; "It does not belong to Merricat, or anything like it. This is money" (128). Like jealous male villagers, Charles Blackwood is obsessed with money. Merricat observes; "perhaps Charles and money found each other no matter how far apart they were" (129).

Money-hungry Charles, thus, helps his fellow men—the villagers—consequently, because in an effort to drive him out, Merricat causes a fire accidentally, opening up the house to the entire village: Charles is not so much of an instigator as a collaborator. Merricat brushes Charles' burning pipe off the table into the wastebasket in her frustration with Charles' gradual invasion of their household. Her attempt at kicking him out backfires first, for what Merricat calls "Charles' fire" brings all the villagers into their property, and gives them a chance to physically express all the frustrations and angers towards the Blackwoods. They enjoy the fire wholeheartedly, laughing and cheering. Soon after the firefighters from the village do their job—putting out the fire—the chief firefighter, Jim Donnell, initiates another job—demolishing the house
by throwing rocks at it. Chaos ensues; the villagers go into the house, destroying the furniture and tableware—anything they can find. All Constance and Merricat can do is to hide in the woods, because their house is no longer a castle with fortress and gates that can keep the outsiders off. Charles invites the villagers and mob violence into the castle.

The fire and the succeeding vandalism point at the moment when the dynamics of gender and class converge. The Blackwood family, now only represented by the sisters, has been excluded from the outside world, because they first excluded the others. Although it was John Blackwood's power that has created this divide between the family and the others, the sisters continue to avoid the villagers out of habit and also out of deep-seated prejudice against people who have less and belong to the lower class. They become openly hated because they are women, while they are still protected by the gates their father put up. The Blackwood sisters keep to themselves in the castle of women to protect themselves from the hostile outside world represented by those mean and vicious male villagers. When the gates are forced open by another man, the villagers— the lower class men— can finally go in to attack. Classes can be broken down when the gender boundaries are crossed over to lead them in.

The fire does not only create a chance for the villagers to attack the sisters, but it also achieves Merricat's original goals: to get rid of Charles and foil his plan to take over the Blackwood wealth. In addition, it creates a world without the values that are represented by men. Uncle Julian dies, while many valuables are burned, damaged, and lost in the fire. All the things the villagers envy are destroyed in this fire, including the house itself. The structural damage to their house hurts the sisters most, because they become "clearly visible from outside" (175). However, the weakness that the former house has—being receptive of and welcoming a Blackwood man—is fixed with the crumbled façade. The Blackwood house turns into a "great ruined structure overgrown with
vines, barely recognizable as a house" (213). The boundaries that their father built can only order the strangers to stay away with the power of money and the patriarch, but the new house or nest of the Blackwood sisters can repel everyone else.

Losing materialistic valuables, however, is not easy for the sisters, especially for Constance. Losing connections to the outside world, the world where men and money dominate, means also losing a civilized way of living and the privilege of their class. Especially Constance grieves over the loss of material objects — the clothes, tableware, linens, and all the things that make their life civilized. She blames herself for the fire; "What have I done to my baby Merricat? No house. No food. And dressed in a tablecloth; what have I done?" (199-200). Constance’s reaction illustrates how her values are grounded in the civilized, or androcentric and capitalist world, as well as her tendency to blame herself. Although by losing material objects, Constance and Merricat can literally disappear from the eyes of the villagers as they have wanted, but the loss also brings a grave sorrow to Constance, because her "femininity" is in tandem with the values represented by the patriarchal power.

Merricat is the only person who can propose different values and a new view to Constance, and the only person Constance listens to after Charles is gone. Until Merricat draws her sister into the world she lives in — the world on the moon, Constance cannot find happiness. When Charles brings a reporter to the house after the vandalism and fails at his attempt at recovering "silver dollars," Constance starts laughing and finally tells her sister; "I am so happy, Merricat, I am so happy." And Merricat replies, "I told you that you would like it on the moon" (211). Living on the moon here indicates living in the world in which all the rules and regulations of the civilized world do not apply, or living in the world without men like Charles, or a man who orders around women or coaxes them to gain whatever benefits he can get. Being free from them translates into living on the moon, not living on the earth any more, and there finally and truly Constance realizes that she is happy. This moment
of happiness also marks the moment Constance becomes a witch by learning to be wicked — feeling happy at other people's anger and frustration.

In one sense, Constance has no choice but to adjust herself to the world in which Merricat lives in order to survive, turning herself into a witch living on the moon. When the sisters are deep in hiding, people start coming by, looking over the house and telling stories. They are not sure whether there are people living in it, or whether there are witches who capture children to eat. They start going in and out of their property, ignoring the gates. The boundaries Merricat and Constance have tried to protect are now completely gone, but they are now invisible. The sisters become the existences people fear. The villagers start bringing food to the front door, or what used to be the front door, as if they wanted to tame angry spirits. The offerings are their expressions of guilt for their witch hunting, but also the expression of fears toward the Blackwood sisters. By becoming completely invisible, instead of surrounding themselves with the awe-inspiring walls and gates, the Blackwood sisters finally gain power over the villagers. While living in the same place, their house is transformed from a high point of civilization to a midpoint between civilization and nature. Honor McKitrick Wallace points out that the ending point of this story lands on feudalism receded from capitalism. The Blackwood sisters become fairytale feudal lords that receive gifts from vassals in exchange for their protection, or for not putting curse on them. Thus, she says that the "fantasy of feudal economic relations exists in an already fantasized space outside of the networks of capitalism" (187). Rather letting people come and go freely than having a fortress around and locking the gates, they can completely separate themselves from the outside world in this fantasized space. They almost live in the middle of the forest, as witches do in many folktales.

Witches and Femininity

This process of witch making, however, does not confirm a positive
image of witches or "female power," as Carpenter suggests. Carpenter's argument in "The Establishment and Preservation of Female Power in Shirley Jackson's We Have Always Lived in the Castle" is in line with the essentialist-feminist views of witches as a symbol of female power and of the resistance to female oppression. According to Mary Daly, witches represent the "independence, strength, wisdom, and learning" (193) set against the church. The image of witches also expands to a symbol of oppositions to the civilization, too. For example, Catherine Clément argues; "the sorceress, who in the end is able to dream Nature and therefore conceive it, incarnates the reinscription of the traces of paganism that triumphant Christianity repressed" (5). For those feminists, witches offer alternative values to those of the modern world. In We Have Always Lived in the Castle, Merricat and Constance end up turning away from modern society. Until near the ending, however, they surely enjoy the civilized world in one of the nicest houses in the village, and never intend to throw away their lifestyle. More importantly, Constance and Merricat never represent "female power." Although Merricat and Constance do not possess any male qualities, they do not cherish "female power."

Constance no doubt demonstrates her talents in the traditionally feminine arenas. She cooks, grows herbs, vegetables, and flowers, and preserves food. Her labors are practical and realistic, "at someone's service." She secures her position in the Blackwood family by making herself indispensable, and upon entry of Charles, she is eager to please the new man in the family. As soon as he enters the household, he takes it for granted that he occupies the position of the patriarch; he demands Constance's service and regulates her action. He chooses what Constance does and what she does not do. Constance, who is the embodiment of femininity, does not resist him and makes herself available. Constance's femininity serves her to be a domestic servant, so that men can enjoy their money and wealth.

On the other hand, Merricat has killed before and keeps dreaming of taking revenge on people who are hostile to her. Wallace argues that
"both sisters develop alternative value systems to the economic standards implied by their father's fortune, with Constance establishing value in domestic terms and Merricat in magical symbolism" (180). Yet, in addition to the questionable value system of Constance, which I have mentioned earlier, Merricat's value system in "magical symbolism" is only based on her escapist and rejection tactics, without anything substantial to support that symbolism. She has enough aggression for both of them. She does what witches do; she puts curses on people, but hers are not beyond those of child's play. Merricat shows the fundamental lack in understanding the realities, continually escaping into the perfect world she imagines: on the moon, or the world where everyone loves her. Her way of escaping the real world is to pretend to be a witch and to imagine a different world. Her fairytale world does not value money or anything of monetary value, as her use of her father's gold watch chain and other valuable items in her spells indicates.

Merricat's infatuation with magic and fairytale world may be a part of the manifestation of her rejection and denial of feminization. She resists growing up as a reaction to abuse and neglect she has perhaps suffered in the Blackwood household. Karen J. Hall even goes as far as to suggest that both Merricat and Constance are victims of sexual abuse by their father, but here I will only see the traces of abuse and its effects on Merricat. As a neglected and abused child, Merricat may have planned the murders in retaliation. In her favorite hiding place, she daydreams of sitting at the dinner table and of listening to all of her family talking lovingly of her. She imagines that one of her family members says, "Our beloved, our dearest Mary Katherine must be guarded and cherished" and orders her brother Thomas to give his dinner to her (139). Merricat was not at the dinner table at that doomed night, because she was sent to her room without dinner, and Merricat's narrative suggests that her parents have repeatedly given her that punishment. Although Merricat expresses her attachment to her parents, the tune her father used to whistle brings her shivers (67), suggesting that her father (and mother) disciplined their
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youngest daughter frequently. As if to resist her parents retroactively, Merricat rejects eating with others and washing herself even after they are both dead. She uses spells and magic words in her attempt to change the realities around her, for example, in order to chase away Charles. However, as Carpenter herself admits, Merricat's magic is ineffectual. Her "magic" and spells only prove Merricat's regression and escape into the world of fantasy, not her belief or her tie to female power. The only way to exist in the Blackwood household as a girl is to turn into Constance, for Merricat's older sister did not have any problem with her father or mother, being a perfect child. However, her being the perfect child consists of being a housemaid. Their brother Thomas, while there are not many references about him, was treated nicely and fairly. For example, in the morning of the murders, according to Julian, John went out for a business, Julian "entertained" his wife and his sister-in-law in the garden, Thomas was climbing up on the chestnut tree, and Constance was weeding the vegetable garden. Julian does not mention Merricat, either because he does not remember, or she was in her room. Only Thomas could act like a child in this household. Female children have to either be disciplined or work hard. Being a child is a privilege in the Blackwood family, allowed only to a male heir. In this family in which the gender divisions of labor are thoroughly observed, the murders brought about the anomaly, in which the entire Blackwood wealth is left in the hands of female children. After the deaths of her parents, Merricat enjoys what they did not allow her to do: rejecting to become a civilized woman and living in the world of fairytales.

Therefore, Merricat and Constance are never contemporary witches who believe in female empowerment. They cannot simply tap into their "femininity" as a source of power: being female is the cause and the result of their becoming witches. In other words, Shirley Jackson does not accept becoming a witch as a way to actively assert femininity. An agoraphobic domestic angel, Constance cannot use her "feminine" talents to take a stand against male values. Jackson herself became agoraphobic
after finishing this novella, and Oppenheimer introduces an episode in which her children ran errands for her, exactly like Merricat does for Constance. Constance may well be a Jackson herself foreseen, a failed domestic goddess.

When examining Jackson's "feminine" side closely, her complicated feelings surface. In an article on The New York Times Book Review, Harvey Breit introduces Jackson's reputation as a witch, and that some critic has said she wrote with a broomstick (107). However, once seeing her, Breit emphasizes Jackson's "day-side." He states; "All in all, Miss Jackson looks like a mother." Thus, Breit quips that she uses a broomstick alright, but she uses it "for household chores" (107). Breit believes that by focusing on Jackson's domestic side, the dark side of Jackson — witchery and magic — can be countered. She herself may have shared this feeling. In Raising Demons and Life Among the Savages, curiously enough, Jackson never mentions her routine as a writer. Because the target audience was supposedly women, for the essays first appeared in the magazines such as Good Housekeeping, Harper's, Woman's Home Companion and so on, she may have cut down the part of her life as a writer. She presents herself as quite a "normal" woman in the early half of the twentieth century, taking it for granted that her job would be primarily the family and the home. The reader can never see Jackson's reputation as the Bennington witch or her growing sense of isolation and depression in the descriptions of her busy life as a housewife. There is no mention of magic, writing, or depression. Her domestic side is her "day-side."

Jackson's "night-side" occasionally comes through a crack in her "domestic" essays, however. Her "feminine" responsibilities and domestic chores, although depicted humorously, are sometimes overwhelming. Jackson describes an episode in which her nerves reach the boiling point. She is tired of "housework and cleaning and picking up after everybody" (232) and tells her children that she will not take care of them any longer. Yet as her oldest son accurately points out, her tension comes from the
pressure and unspoken discontent that she feels towards her husband's insensitive exaltation over his female friend's visit. Jackson puts down her ultimatum when the children suggest that they will behave, and when her husband receives the telegram saying his female friend cannot make it to their house because her car broke down the midway. Her husband's seemingly innocent comments about how tidy his friend is and how well she cooks grate on her nerves, pushing her to the point that she loses all her confidence in her "feminine" assets. Jackson's sense of failure in becoming a perfect domestic goddess seeps from her writing.

Further evidence of Jackson's ambivalence about being a housewife can be found in two similar biographies of Jackson written by Hyman and Jackson, illustrating a slight gap between the surface Jackson put up and the inner conflict she felt. In "Notes on Shirley Jackson," a short biography of his wife, Hyman introduces that Jackson does all the household chores, and states that she believes that "no artist was ever ruined by housework" while adding, "or helped by it either" (104). On the other hand, in her own autobiographical sketch, Jackson seems to oppose his view on her take on housework; "I don't like housework, but I do it because no one else will" (105). Hyman seems to be aware that Jackson was not enthusiastic about housework, yet he believed that she did not mind doing it. Jackson, however, clearly saw it as a burden.

I will not argue that Jackson was conscious of her discontent at being a housewife or that she wanted to give up housekeeping altogether. Like Constance, Jackson may have believed herself to be a perfectly happy woman who concentrates her energies and efforts on housekeeping. Yet Jackson portrays Constance as a hopeless failure. She cannot function without the help of others, primarily men, and to some extent of Merricat. Oppenheimer argues that Jackson splits her two sides into these two characters, Constance and Merricat, a domestic woman who is eager to please and take care of others and a fearless rebel (232-33). In that sense, Merricat may represent what Jackson is at the bottom of her heart. Merricat never desires to please others or serve others. Merricat would
never get frustrated over her man's comments on another woman's superior domestic skills, for she would never desire to please men. Her resistance to grooming, washing, cleaning, and eating does not of course lead to becoming a well-loved woman like Constance. Merricat resists with all her might to everything that tries to contain her and make her a woman. Her existence based on rejections keeps her a non-gendered child, onto whom Jackson probably projects her resistant self.

The key to understanding this novella and Jackson herself lies in the relationship between Constance and Merricat. Constance can run away from the world dominated by vicious men only with Merricat's initiative. The process in which Constance integrates the witch part into herself—running away from the civilization and finding happiness in that new lifestyle—may further indicate her femininity. Elizabeth Reis argues that some women who were persecuted as witches confessed their sinfulness and admitted being witches due to the cultural inscription of being Puritan women. Admitting their sinfulness simply followed the discourse of depravity (163), therefore, they were more "feminine." Here Constance may just again be following her "feminine" behavioral pattern: feeling guilty of failing to protect her family, and trying to please others, although this time, "others" is only Merricat. Constance acts as a mother and caretaker, while Merricat also supports Constance psychologically and sees her as an ideal woman. Merricat calls her a "fairy princess," and associates her with the colors "pink and white and golden" (28). Merricat participates in feminizing and depowering Constance, while drawing her into the fairytale world. Merricat, who can escape the real world filled with hateful men, takes Constance away into the magical world. Merricat also one time calls her sister a "witch," telling her, "old witch, you have a gingerbread house." To this, Constance brings her back to realities, by answering, "I do not. I have a lovely house where I live with my sister Merricat" (109). At this point she sees herself as a woman who lives in a nice house, rather than as an old witch with magical powers living in a fairytale house. Yet in the end Merricat makes
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her a witch, all the same. Constance perpetually repeats what she has learned to do: making her available and valuable to the person who leads the household in whatever situation she is in. Probably that is why this novella ends with such an uncomfortable note. If Constance is what Jackson has dreamed of becoming, she knew how it was hopeless to be the ideal feminine.

Shirley Jackson's last novella, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, illustrates her sense of isolation like many of her stories, and explores the way to live in isolation. Her depiction of the gradual retreat and disappearance of the Blackwood sisters suggests that the persecution of these women leads them away from the civilized world onto the woods — nature. Several sociopolitical elements that Jackson describe in the persecution — class, gender, and economic status — match the elements that historians point out in their studies of the seventeenth century witchcraft cases. Unmarried women without offspring who are about to inherit huge property become the targets of persecution in this novella, as many of the accursed of witchcraft in the seventeenth century. Jackson clearly understands what motivates people to persecute people, how they single out the targets, and how they start attacking them. She understands the dynamics of witch hunts.

The ending in which these sisters become witches does not indicate Jackson's endorsement of witches as the symbol of female power. Witches do represent the force that opposes civilization and the community, but these witches do not draw power from their "femininity." The resistant energy and force comes from Merricat, who persistently refuses to grow up and to be a woman. Merricat controls and leads her sister, whose "femininity" makes her the epitome of obedience itself.

Jackson herself possessed an aspect of a "feminine" domestic woman throughout her life, especially in her married life. Contrary to her reputation as a witch, Jackson tried to keep herself functional as a mother, managing the busy household with four children. Jackson was a rebellious
soul as well as a domestic "angel of the house." Although her essays and biography suggest that Jackson wanted to present herself as a domestic goddess, who was perfectly happy to be a housewife, like Constance, her witch self occasionally rebelled against the idea of being a woman. If one sees Merricat and Constance as the split halves of Jackson herself, her split selves help each other, or more precisely, one half convinces the other to escape civilization together. Moreover, the coalition between Merricat and Constance is merely a repetition of the relationships between Constance and other family members, and between Constance and Charles, for Constance perpetually follows a powerful leader. In that sense, Jackson even lets her freer self to dominate her "feminine" self. The ending in which these two sisters become witches suggest Jackson's ambivalence about femininity or being a woman. The two sister witches indicate that Jackson could not embrace femininity to assert a life outside, or convince herself to find its own power in rejection of femininity altogether. Although Merricat's rejection of femininity can open up a perspective to assert a way of living outside civilization, conventional femininity has to provide a means to survive in that condition. Jackson did not accept or deny femininity in the figures of witches.

Therefore, Shirley Jackson's witchcraft story does not only indicate her understanding of witchcraft accusation; but also her reserved and ambivalent attitude towards femininity. The ending suggests that Jackson retreated more and more into the world of fantasy and fairytales, letting her witch self control her good mother self.

1) As Oppenheimer points out in her biography, these books give the impression that the Hymans did not leave Bennington between these two books, while in fact they lived in Westport, Connecticut temporarily.

2) In Jackson's world, pursuit of wealth is an attribute and obsession of men. In her essays, her husband demonstrates the obsession with
money, and continuously complains about expenses. However, according to Oppenheimer, both Hyman and Jackson were "lusty, unabashed consumers," who did not care much for making ends meet (134).

3) Constance's practice of preserving food can be considered a passive form of resistance. She makes jars of preserved food like other Blackwood women, but she cautions not to eat the preserved food made by them. The jars of preserved food proudly fill the cellar like a museum of the art of Blackwood women. They elevate a practical art to an impractical art.

4) Later in the novella, right after the villagers vandalize their house, Merricat tells Constance, "I am going to put death in all their food and watch them die" (161). Combined with Constance's response, "the way you did before," these words indicate that Merricat's act of poisoning functions as her means of retaliation to the people who bring harm to her.

5) Some may want to see Merricat's magic as the reflection of Jackson's interest in magic or of her witchery. Yet I would like to emphasize again that no one can know for sure that Jackson truly believed in it and Merricat's magic simply shows her childish fantasy rather than practical means to change the situation.

6) As I have suggested above, unlike Hall, I do not see Constance as a victim of the same kind of abuse as Merricat. Other than being practically a maidservant, I do not see Constance being a victim of any kind of abuse.

7) There is, however, a form of female existence, or a model of femininity, that is not the "angel of the house" in the Blackwood family as well as in the Jackson's family. It is that of John Blackwood's wife. She has broken free from the Blackwood women's tradition by not taking on the household work. She was in complicit with the male members of the family in neglecting her own daughters and in turning one of them into a housemaid. Oppenheimer's
biography also tells us that Jackson's mother did not engage herself in any household work and made her own mother to do it for her. Rather than rejecting her femininity, Jackson's mother seems to have focused on being pretty and pleasant with her femininity. Jackson seems to have given up this form of "femininity," as Merricat does in her rejection of bathing and grooming.

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