



A SURVEY OF GRADUATE-LEVEL STUDIES ON SHIRLEY JACKSON: FROM 2001 TO THE PRESENT

Gustavo Vargas Cohen¹

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RESUMO – O objetivo da presente pesquisa é mapear os estudos em nível de pós-graduação diretamente relacionados com a análise das obras literárias da escritora norte-americana Shirley Jackson realizados desde 2001. Pela primeira vez, estes estudos serão agrupados, registrados e brevemente examinados com a intenção de demonstrar a diversidade de aspectos criativos explorados e, ao mesmo tempo, construir um plano descritivo das principais pesquisas acadêmicas conduzidas a respeito deste tópico no século vinte-e-um em todo o mundo. Esta pesquisa, organizada na forma de uma revisão de literatura, deseja auxiliar na modificação do estado carente dos estudos sobre Shirley Jackson.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE – Shirley Jackson; Pesquisas de pós-graduação; Historiografia literária.

ABSTRACT –The objective of the present survey is to map the graduate level studies produced since 2001, directly related to the analysis of the literary works of American writer Shirley Jackson. For the first time, they are to be gathered, recorded and briefly examined with the intention of demonstrating the diversity of creative features explored and, at the same time, constructing a descriptive plan of the main academic research conducted on the subject in the twenty-first century all over the world. This survey, shaped as a review of literature of sorts, wishes to aid in reversing the currently underprivileged situation of Shirley Jackson's scholarship.

KEYWORDS – Shirley Jackson; Graduate-level studies; Literary historiography.

Introduction

American writer Shirley Jackson (1916-1965) was responsible for six full-length novels, two humorous family *memoirs*, four books for children, a juvenile stage play, some thirty non-fiction articles, numerous book reviews and four short story collections that, along with her uncollected pieces, yield *circa* one hundred separate short stories, the literary form which she

¹ Doutorando do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul na linha de pesquisa Literaturas de Língua Inglesa



proved more prolific. She wrote what is likely the most controversial piece of fiction ever published in the magazine *New Yorker*, the 1948 short story *The Lottery*. It resulted in hundreds of canceled subscriptions; it was later adapted for television, theater, radio and, in a mystifying transformation, even made into a ballet. She was also responsible for one of the greatest haunted house stories of American literature, *The Haunting of Hill House*, published in 1959. The novel was adapted to the big screen and made into long feature motion pictures; the most famous being the 1963 version entitled *The Haunting* directed by legendary Robert Wise and the homonymous 1999 version directed by Jan de Bont and featuring Liam Neeson, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Owen Wilson and Lili Taylor. Joined by Ambrose Bierce's *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* and Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man's Hard to Find*, Jackson's *The Lottery* is one of three short stories which are most anthologized in American twentieth-century literary history.

Despite her significant production, scarce criticism has been dedicated to the analysis of her *oeuvre*. Since her death in 1965, few critical materials have elaborated on the depths of her piercing social observations and on the diversity of her thematic and narrative choices. Officially recorded complaints regarding the scarcity of investigative studies date back as early as 1970, with Jerry Wadden's master's thesis pointing out that:

To date, Shirley Jackson has received little critical acclaim except for "The Lottery"; no one has written a book on her; and again, except for "The Lottery", she is only briefly mentioned in a few books of contemporary American literary criticism. Half of her books are now out of print. This lack of recognition is incredible in light of the fact that *The New Yorker* received more mail concerning its publication of "The Lottery" than any other piece of fiction it had ever published. (WADDEN, 1970, p.2)

Over forty years have passed and the circumstances presented in this passage have not been radically altered. There are, naturally, much more material today than in Wadden's time, but there is still far too much ground to be covered. Heed and consideration should be bestowed upon Lenemaja Friedman's *Shirley Jackson*, published in 1975; Judy Oppenheimer's biography of the author, *Private Demons*, published in 1988; Joan Wylie Hall's *Shirley Jackson: A Study of the Short Fiction* that, as the name suggests, is dedicated mainly to short story criticism and was published in 1993; and *Shirley Jackson: American Gothic*, that came out in 2003, written by Daryl Hattenhauer. Naturally, these are not the only works to investigate her life and literary production. A discussion of these texts, however, will be held elsewhere.



The objective of the present survey is to map the academic dissertations and theses directly related to the analysis of Jackson's works produced since 2001. They are to be hereby gathered, recorded and briefly examined, for the first time, with the intention of demonstrating the diversity of literary features already explored and, at the same time, constructing a descriptive plan of the main academic research conducted on the subject in the twenty-first century all over the world.

Signs of an imminent revival? The second half of the twentieth century was responsible for the bulk of critical production on the writer, academic or otherwise, but even though it contributed with important exploratory pieces, its extent was certainly scanty in magnitude. This survey, shaped as a review of literature of sorts, wishes to aid in reversing the current picture and in the recuperation of time lost.

The Survey

Regarding research methodology, the present study was conducted through an ordinary query in selected university library databases and in institutional websites specialized in the collection of academic theses and dissertations. The procedure of data collection involved the gathering of information regarding the number of graduate level researches conducted on the subject; their year of publication (or defense); their advising personnel; their extent (through number of pages); their corpus (of one or more of Jackson's literary works); their theoretical affiliation; their thematic affiliation; their status regarding availability (if researchers can gain access to the full text or to restricted portions of it, or even to solely its abstract); their institutional source and place (department, library, university, city, state, country), and the actual site where they are stored (physically and/or online).

The table below shows the complete title of the research, its academic level (M standing for Master's thesis and D for Doctoral dissertation) and number of pages (when available), the name of the author and of the advisor (when available), the date of defense and/or publication (online or otherwise), and the locality and university where the research was conducted.

Table 1. Twenty-first century graduate-level research on Shirley Jackson (partial).

	Title of thesis or dissertation	Level (page)	Author (Advisor)	Date	Locality/ University
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01	Magic, madness and "The Judicious Administration of the Bizarre": the forgotten fiction of Shirley Jackson	D (220)	Stephanie P. Bowers (Prof. Douglas Fowler)	2001	Florida State University
02	Motherlands: Re-imagining maternal function in contemporary women's fiction	D	Lara Karine Gary (Joanne Fei Diehl)	2002	University of California
03	Journeys end in lovers meeting? : gender and the anti-domestic in novels of Jackson	M (75)	Jennifer H. Tomlinson	2004	University of Denver
04	The Tall Man in the Blue Suit: Witchcraft, Folklore and Reality in Jackson's <i>The Lottery</i>	M (144)	Håvard Nørjordet (Per Winther)	2005	University of Oslo
05	A Creature of Conformity: The Housewife in the Post-War American Liter. of Shirley Jackson, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton	M	Kathleen Coggshall	2005	Princeton, NJ: Princeton University
06	Ivory Towers and Ivory Soap: Composition, Housewife Humor and Domestic Gothic, 1940--1970	D	Jennifer Diamond (Prof. Linda Brodkey)	May 2005	San Diego: University of California
07	Shirley Jackson's <i>The lottery</i> a biocultural investigation in reader response 1948-2006	M (134)	David Michelson (Prof. Phil Rogers)	2006	State Univ. of New York
08	Echoes: A Novel	M	George Hulseman	2006	Un. of S. Flor.
09	"Frightened by a word" : Shirley Jackson and lesbian gothic	D (234)	Colin Haines (Rolf Lundén)	Apr 2007	Uppsala University
10	Bluebeard Revisited in Atwood, Carter and Jackson	M (87)	Kristine Bunde (Prof. Tore Rem)	2007	University of Oslo
11	The materiality of the female in Shirley Jackson's short fiction	M (73)	Lydia Marie Pearson	2008	California State Univ.
12	Haunted Detectives: The Mysteries of American Trauma	D (263)	Brian R. Hauser (Jared Gardner)	2008	Ohio State University
13	Patriarchal Power and Punishment: The Trickster Figure in the Short Fiction of Jackson, O'Connor, and Oates	M (75)	Heather D. Strempe-Durgin (Peter Betjemann)	Jun 2009	Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University
14	Looking for the gaze of love: paranoia, hysteria, and the masochism in the Gothic (Dacre, Bronte, Radcliffe, Jackson)	D	Chiho Nakagawa	2010	Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University



Of the fourteen studies found, eleven were conducted in the United States, two in Norway (University of Oslo) and one in Sweden (Uppsala University). Interestingly, Scandinavian countries seem to have a candid interest in Shirley Jackson's works, especially those concerning Gothic and supernatural elements. Specifically in the University of Oslo, Jackson's *The Lottery* is required reading in the disciplines ENG4365 and ENG2325, both entitled *The Short Story in English*, offered by the Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, on and off since 2004. Curiously, it was in the year of 2007 that two of the Scandinavian studies were defended. The following section presents data (organized chronologically) from some of the theses and dissertations shown in table 1.

The Studies

Stephanie Patnychuk Bowers (2001) wrote her 220-page long doctoral dissertation, entitled *Magic, Madness, and "the Judicious Administration of the Bizarre": The Forgotten Fiction of Shirley Jackson* with the intention of helping redeem and restore Jackson's due literary merit, whom she calls 'a talented writer'. She examines the 1951 novel *Hangsaman* and the 1954 *The Bird's Nest*, plus fifteen short stories. Her focus is on the recurring themes and techniques the author craftily used. Early on her text, she admits that Jackson was a prolific writer of some acclaim in her own day who failed to achieve a potentially lasting fame, a circumstance worsened by her early death in 1965. She describes Jackson's narrative technique as a 'judicious administration of the bizarre', an expression borrowed from one of the author's characters when referring to the practice of witchcraft. Bowers uses a highly relativistic approach that approximates to a practical close reading mode of critical analysis. She argues that Jackson's recurrent concern was with the generic global struggle to remain intact under the burden of everyday human existence. To corroborate that, she divides the discussion of the short fiction into three component analytical parts, namely 'evil from within', that emerges from a tormented mind, 'evil from without', that stems from collective or individual maliciousness, and 'charms against evil', which seeks to keep these dangerous forces at bay. She argues that Jackson supplies her readers with a friendly means with which to confront the terrors of the human condition, the writers most relevant legacy to the fragmented modern times. Bowers's dissertation, defended in 2001, advised by Florida State University Professor Douglas Fowler, can be currently found at that institution's library.



Håvard Nørjordet (2005a) wrote his 144-page long master's thesis, entitled *The Tall Man in the Blue Suit: Witchcraft, Folklore and Reality in Shirley Jackson's The Lottery, or the Adventures of James Harris*, about the only collection of short stories published in its author's lifetime, the 1949 *The Lottery, or the Adventures of James Harris*. Nørjordet attempts to demonstrate the importance that the references to Joseph Glanvill's 1681 *Saducismus triumphatus* and the 'James Harris' ballad, found in Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882-1898) have to the reading and comprehension of the collection. He draws on recent short story theory, privileging aspects that negotiate the dynamics of the short story "composite" or "cycle" with Gérard Genette's notion of 'paratext'. According to him:

These paratexts, used as epigraphs and an epilogue respectively, not only allude to the central idea of the demon lover in various historical and religious contexts, thus emphasizing the importance of history, they also help underline and, to a certain extent, explain the mysterious presence of James Harris, a recurring character identified as a demon lover. These "marginal" texts also shed light on some of the book's thematic developments. In addition to these unifying devices, disruptive strategies are also discussed; the use of uncanny and fantastic elements serves to underline the fragmentary and distorted sense of reality in this complex composite. (NØRJORDET, 2005b, p.1)

His thesis utilizes Gothic theories and criticism and an essentially historicist-hermeneutic approach to *The Lottery*, in other words, literary allusions and other "re-enactments of the past" are entertained as seditious ways of questioning the reality of the book's present time frame, "a reality Jackson seems to have a fairly misanthropic view of" (p.1). He also sheds new light on a long held view that claimed that the presence of witchcraft and folklore in her tales is actually an effort to supply the reader with some historical understanding to the problem of the possibility of evil in Jackson's post-war America and, most importantly, are not meant to simply mystify her stories, as previous criticism had strongly suggested. Furthermore, the presence of supernatural elements aim to aid in the representation of a foreboding coloring of reality and not an escape from it, he argues. The full text of Nørjordet's thesis, defended in 2005, advised by Professor Per Winther, is available online in the digital publication section of the University of Oslo library.

Jennifer Diamond (2005) wrote her doctoral dissertation, entitled *Ivory Towers and Ivory Soap: Composition, Housewife Humor and Domestic Gothic, 1940--1970* (Erma Bombeck, Jean Kerr, Shirley Jackson), focusing on the post-World War II United States' socio-cultural *status quo* as scenery for women's domestic humor writing. This writing is seen as an original and important



tool for questioning gender roles, feminist issues, cultural practices and fictional creation. She argues that the New Critical approach contributed to *untheorizing* domestic humor and marginalizing genres, thus yielding disenfranchised writing practices that would not permit housewife humor to fulfill one of its most important roles, that is, to serve as a resistance agent:

Understanding that contemporary feminist evaluations seek to reconcile the critically acclaimed "other" work of writers such as Jackson, who also wrote gothic short stories and novels (...), I generate an understanding that "serious" writers of other genres can also be serious writers of personal domestic struggle. I argue housewife comedy as a genre haunted by mother figures and rooted in a female body coded as an abject body (a shared subjectivity with the student body). This dissertation asserts that housewife humor can be theorized through looking at the genre's haunted/haunting spaces that provide its powerful and sustaining aspects as well as protest the entropic, liminal nature of work required of women. (DIAMOND, 2005, p.1)

Diamond's doctoral dissertation, defended in 2005, advised by University of California Professor Linda Brodkey, can be found at that institution's library in San Diego, and is not available online.

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David Morton Michelson (2006) wrote his 134-page long master's thesis, entitled *Shirley Jackson's 'The lottery': a bio-cultural investigation into reader-response, 1948-2006*, seeking to understand the reception of Jackson's most controversial short story, *The Lottery*. His study offers a bio-cultural explanation for the fierce criticism received upon and after its publication in 1948. He also observes the manner in which readers react to the short story nowadays. He contends that the diversity of responses has rendered it underappreciated, and it may as well be elucidated through personality psychology:

I contend that the infamous, "instant and cataclysmic" response in 1948 is accounted for by human beings' innate attentiveness to cost/benefit rationalizing in social contexts, and by an antiauthoritarian tendency of our evolved human nature. I also argue that the socio-political climate of mid-century America was especially conducive to reinforcing these inborn propensities. "The Lottery" is still taught today because it is an instructive launching pad for discussing American and individual social values; multiculturalism appears capable of tempering strong moral responses to the story. (MICHELSON, 2006, p. iv)



Michelson's master's thesis, defended in 2006, advised by State University of New York Professor Phil Rogers, can be found in printed form in that institution's library at Binghamton, NY. Its online edition can be currently purchased at the website specialized in the collection of dissertations and theses *ProQuest*.

Kristine Bunde (2007) wrote her 87-page long master's thesis, entitled *Bluebeard Revisited in Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter and Shirley Jackson*, dedicating a whole chapter (the fourth) to Jackson's short story *The Honeymoon of Mrs. Smith*, in its two versions, aptly named version 1 and version 2. The objective of her thesis was to perform contemporary revisions of some stories, written by the authors mentioned in the title, which hold references to the fairy tale motif of *Bluebeard*, inspired by the homonymous 1697 French story by Charles Perrault.

My aim is to give attentive and close readings of these short stories, and to examine the effect the intertext of the "Bluebeard" tale has on them. I will do this within a reception study paradigm. These texts are complete works in their own right, but I intend to show that when they are read with the tale of "Bluebeard" in mind, something happens to the way in which they are understood. (BUNDE, 2007, p. 3-4)

She explains that she has chosen both versions of the same story not only because they were written by same author and are similar in several ways, but mainly because their differences may account for a good deal of interpretation on regards to one another. She explores notions of reality and myth, woman's invisibility, social differences, satire, submission and many other elements that eventually corroborate her investigative intent. She also acknowledges that although in the other stories she has studied the Bluebeard figure is overtly mentioned, in none of the versions of Jackson's stories it is openly stated.

Jackson's stories display the greatest discrepancy between the text and the myth of the intertext. While the two short stories by Atwood explicitly mention both the tale "Bluebeard" and the character Bluebeard, there is not the slightest whisper of either the tale or its protagonists in either version of "The Honeymoon of Mrs. Smith". Nevertheless, the fairy tale is present in the suspicions of a murderous husband. I have read these two tales as commentaries on society in America during the mid 20th century. (BUNDE, 2007, p. 83)

The full text of Bunde's thesis, defended in 2007, advised by Professor Tore Rem, is available online in the digital publication section of the University of Oslo library.



Colin Haines (2007) wrote his 234-page long doctoral dissertation, entitled "*Frightened by a Word*": Shirley Jackson and Lesbian Gothic, with the intention of examining representations and configurations of lesbianism in literary narratives. He selected Jackson's 1951 novel *Hangsaman*, the 1959 *The Haunting of Hill House* and the 1962 *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. His objective was, considering that the representations of sexuality between women in literature often tend toward the ghostly, the Gothic, to explore the ideological import of these representations. His study also sought the consequences of hiding lesbian motifs that way. Another important issue was that of subjectivity. Methodologically, he drew on theories of performativity and subjectivity as presented by feminist/queer theories, attributing special attention to the ideas of Judith Butler. His other themes involve parody, the abject, "compulsory heterosexuality", ideology, Louis Althusser, psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva. Haines's dissertation, defended in 2007, advised by Uppsala University Professor Rolf Lundén, is available at that institution's library and can be bought online through the same university's online shop.

Brian Russell Hauser (2008) wrote his 263-page long doctoral dissertation, entitled *Haunted Detectives: the Mysteries of American Trauma*, on the theme of how detectives in American motion picture narratives deal with supernatural elements. He specifically looked into movies from the 1990s, early in his text acknowledging that even though films containing these traces are not necessarily originary from this moment in time, it was in this decade that they started having a more remarkable and widespread reach. Among other topics, Hauser introduces the concept of the *chronotope* of the traumatized space, suggesting that spaces can be traumatized as much as people. He then applies this concept to Jackson's 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House* and its several film and television adaptations with the objective of demonstrating that influential haunted house tales such as that have contributed to undermining scientific research of the paranormal as a creditable field of inquiry and the paranormal researcher as an admirable calling. After discussing and analyzing a series of other topics, he concludes that the astonishing predominance of these kinds of narratives in the 1990s is due to a plangency between the mechanics of trauma and memory and the patterns of millennial thinking in the United States in that decade. His dissertation, advised by Ohio State University Professor Jared Gardner, relates to the areas of American literature, film studies; television studies; trauma studies; supernatural fiction; detective fiction; haunted houses; the uncanny and fake documentary. Hauser required that his full text not be available until December 14, 2013, therefore, at present, researchers who do not have access to



the Ohio State University library, where the printed copies are currently held, can only gain admittance to its online abstract.

Heather D. Strempe-Durgin (2009) wrote her 75-page long master's thesis, entitled *Patriarchal Power and Punishment: The Trickster Figure in the Short Fiction of Shirley Jackson, Flannery O'Connor, and Joyce Carol Oates*, with the intention of exploring the ways in which the male trickster figure behaves in the Gothic fiction of twentieth-century American female writers. She explores Jackson's 1949 short story *The Daemon Lover*, among others, to see how the trickster figure operates to maintain male standards and to force them upon female characters. Her literary analysis gives rise to broader topics such as society and its internal relations in post-second world war America. She uses the trickster figure also as lenses with which to view issues of gender politics and feminism. The full text of Strempe-Durgin's master's thesis, defended in 2009, advised by Oregon State University Professor Peter Betjemann, can be found at that institution's library in Corvallis, OR, and online in the digital service *Scholars Archive* of the same university.

Chiho Nakagaua (2010) wrote her doctoral dissertation, entitled *Looking for the gaze of love: paranoia, hysteria, and the masochism in the Gothic* (Charlotte Dacre, Charlotte Bronte, Ann Radcliffe, Shirley Jackson), focusing on the representations of masochism and subversion in Gothic novels by woman writers. Her study also revises the significance of paranoia and hysteria in the Gothic framework, arguing that that helps guide and administer the gaze. To her, the gaze is what produces the heroine's subjectivity and feeds the strength to deal with and to overcome patriarchal domination. Jackson's story is used to demonstrate a drastic solution in managing domination, which is, evading the men's gaze by retreating to a hidden place. Without it, she concludes, there is a manageable promise of life, achieved through the Gothic, outside patriarchy. Nakagaua's doctoral dissertation, defended in 2010, can be found at the Arizona State University library, and cannot be found online at present.

This collection of commented theses and dissertations, as other kinds of surveys, intends to help in the visualization of the variety of themes and approaches a subject can have. Its purpose was to allow future researchers to find the scientific contribution that dedicated scholars have to offer Shirley Jackson's scholarship more easily. It will hopefully aid in the view of what subjects have already been explored and what elements still need more investigative attention. Unfortunately, few of the researches shown here allow free access to their full text. Others are simply not yet digitalized and therefore unavailable for researchers who are not in their physical places of storage, namely their institution's libraries. Besides the fourteen graduate-level studies



presented here, there are at least two-dozen studies more that date earlier than the year 2000 and that must be surveyed, collected and examined in other studies.

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