

Article

Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery,' and William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*

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Abstract: Shirley Jackson's, 'The Lottery,' is without doubt her most famous work. It is one of the most anthologized short stories in America. However, despite the popularity of the short story, very few critics have attempted to delve deeper into the story's meaning. Those few critics who have attempted to prove the story's message have done well in the sense that they have picked up on 'a' pattern, but have failed to see that there are also contrasting patterns which cross over and cut through each other. Shirley Jackson deserves far more praise than what she has received for the intricacies, the small details and the well thought out design of the story. When one discovers that Jackson admired William Empson's, *Seven Types of Ambiguities*, in which he argues the best authors (such as William Shakespeare) purposely create ambiguities in their writing so that the reader questions and wonders what the author might have meant, one can begin to understand that there is more to Jackson than what critics have argued, and even she herself has said about the story. It is clear that she had an admiration for Empson, as two years before 'The Lottery,' she wrote, 'Seven Types of Ambiguity,' in which Empson's book is the coveted object of desire. This 1946 story can be read in two opposing ways. I would argue that 'The Lottery,' can be read in five opposing ways. The three-legged stool of the story represents the three pillars or legs of society: economics, politics, and religion. Her story can be read as being anti-capitalist, anti-communist and anti-religious, most specifically making references to Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Jackson has done this to critique the idea that these economic, political and religious traditions were created to benefit humanity. However, over time, these systems have become corrupted by their leaders, so that rather than protecting their people, these structures of society are used to both punish their people and to invoke violence upon each other in the name of that tradition.

Keywords: Shirley Jackson; The Lottery; ambiguity; William Empson; economics; politics; religion

"Who will believe my verse in time to come/If it were filed with your most high deserts?/Though yet Heaven knows it is but as a tombe/Which ides your life, and shows not halfe your parts"
William Shakespeare, Sonnet XVII. ([Shakespeare 1609](#))

William Shakespeare's poetry and drama is a wonder of the literary world. His penmanship deserves this praise because no other writer has created such a substantial body of work, rich in symbolism, detail, construction and meaning. This is no slight feat. Critics have spent more than 300 years arguing whether Shakespeare was sexist or feminist, Catholic or Protestant, racist or not, homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual, a woman or a man and so on. One literary critic in the early part of the 20th Century identified that such disputes amongst critics were futile. This critic, William Empson, argued that the reason why Shakespeare's work presented such varied interpretations was because he intentionally created ambiguities so that one meaning was not final, and therefore, that other meanings were implied. William Empson's understanding of ambiguities has been fundamental

in the development of contemporary critical analysis. Not only has Empson influenced literary critics, he has also influenced literary writers. One of these writers is Shirley Jackson. Jackson's 'The Lottery' published in 1948 presents ambiguities in terms of the overall purpose of the story. These ambiguities are not coincidental. They are intentionally designed to criticize modern societies' political, economic, and religious aspects. Therefore, within 'The Lottery,' these ambiguities are not the result of Jackson's confusion, but instead her mindfulness.

Jackson's 'The Lottery' is set within Jackson's own time in a small fictional town in Virginia. The townspeople have gathered in the town square to partake in the annual ritual of The Lottery. Jackson sets the scene during the summer harvest, creating the sense that all is well within this community. However, the setting soon darkens so that the reader realizes that this is no ordinary lottery. The person who draws the winning slip of paper, does not win a prize, rather they are stoned to death by the rest of the community.

In a letter replying to the editor of the San Francisco *Chronicle* as to what the story meant, Jackson wrote, "I suppose I hoped, by setting a particularly brutal ancient rite in the present and in my own village, to shock the story's readers with a graphic dramatization of the pointless violence and general inhumanity in their own lives" (Franklin 2018). The editor of *The New Yorker*, Kip Orr, in response to the dozens of letters written in by readers as to the story's purpose wrote, "Miss Jackson's story can be interpreted in half a dozen different ways. It's just a fable. . . . She has chosen a nameless little village to show, in microcosm, how the forces of belligerence, persecution, and vindictiveness are, in mankind, endless and traditional and that their targets are chosen without reason" (Franklin 2018). Because of the ambiguities created within the story, it can be read from several different and opposing perspectives. Jackson does this to criticize a structure or 'leg' of society to show that these legs once intended to benefit all people, have now become corrupted to only benefit its leaders. The symbol of the three-legged stool presented in the story is representational of the three most important structures of a society. These three legs are symbolic of a society's economic, political and religious traditions. Jackson uses the symbol of the stool to show readers that a society's patriarchal leaders have corrupted their economic, political and religious traditions so that they no longer benefit their subordinates, rather they are used to punish them.

Shirley Jackson's, 'The Lottery,' is without doubt her most famous work. Published in *The New Yorker*, it received over 300 letters from readers who were baffled as to what the story meant. Since this time, it has become one of the most anthologized stories in American short story collections. In the last few years, Shirley Jackson's novels have been adapted for the screen. *The Haunting of Hill House*, a television series loosely based on her novel of the same name aired on Netflix in 2018. In the same year, a film adaptation of *We Have Always Lived in a Castle*, was released. Both adaptations received good reviews. However, despite the anthologies which contain 'The Lottery' and these screen adaptations, there is very little literary analysis regarding Jackson's writing. When one searches journal databases, a plenitude of article titles appears for the short stories of Poe and Hemingway. However, in comparison there are far fewer on Jackson's fiction. This presents a conundrum in the sense that her plots, characters and settings engage readers and viewers, but that very few critics are interested in delving deeper. Rather than admitting their failure in giving Jackson her dues, the literary critics who have researched Jackson have come up with various reasons for why Jackson has, "won surprisingly little recognition" (Hyman 1974). Coulthard points out that the critics of her era mistakenly believed that "the story seem[ed] such a transparent attack on blind obedience to tradition that little or no exegesis is necessary" (Harold Bloom quoted in Coulthard 1990, p. 226), signaling that they understood the story to have only very basic ideas. Others have attributed the lack of critical analysis to her gender. Hague states that "publications in women's magazines and two books that humorously fictionalized her domestic life . . . caused her devaluation by traditional male critics" (Hague 2005, p. 73). Betty Friedan, a leading second wave feminist wrote in 1963 that Jackson is to blame for this lack of recognition because she created the façade of being a housewife who happens to write, rather than showcasing herself as a great writer (Friedan 1963, p. 81). Jackson's

most recent biographer, Ruth Franklin suggests in *A Rather Haunted Mind* that “Critics have tended to underestimate Jackson’s work; both because of its central interest in women’s lives and because some of it is written in genres regarded as either, “faintly disreputable” (in the words of one scholar) or simply uncategorizable” (Franklin 2017, p. 9). Others have blamed her husband, Stanley Hyman, for not being supportive as a family man. Elaine Showalter, a leading feminist critic, who has done some brilliant literary analysis on the trope of female hysteria in literature, is far from giving brilliant insights when she wrongfully accuses Hyman of being the weapon that prevented Jackson’s from reaching her full potential as a writer. In her *Washington Post* review, Showalter repugnantly writes that Hyman was:

one of the top 10 hostile husbands in American literary history: exploitative, bullying, controlling and selfish. He recognized her talent and encouraged her writing—as well he should, since her income kept them going for years—but he also kept her insecure and subordinate by flaunting his affairs with thinner women, pressuring her to write commercially saleable stories. (Showalter 2016)

Although there is evidence from Jackson’s letters that her husband was unfaithful and their marriage was not perfect, it is a skewed perspective to demonize Hyman in this way. Franklin herself says, “A biography would be incomplete without a full consideration of the life and work of Hyman, not only through the lens of their marriage and influence on her work, but also as an important intellectual and fascinating character in his own right” (Franklin 2017, p. 14). Because of this, Franklin divides her biography into two, by chronologizing Jackson’s life and how it interweaved with Hyman’s. Franklin goes on to write, “Hyman was a consistently insightful interpreter of his wife’s work. He bitterly regretted the critical neglect and misreading she suffered during her life time” (p. 15). It is likely that Showalter has criticized Hyman in this way to excuse the lack of critical analysis from a feminist perspective. In doing this, Showalter victimizes Jackson to her gender, which in my view is reductive. I am more inclined to suggest that Jackson’s lack of critical analysis is mostly due to her own actions. While alive, she downplayed herself as a writer, her writing process and her intellect. Jane Hu argues that “In trying to slot Jackson into one of her many roles—wife or author, popular genre writer or highbrow novelist, mother or witch—critics have repeatedly failed to account for Jackson as a total person, complex enough for sustained and serious study” (Hu 2018). Shirley Jackson was a woman of dualities; a mother with a professional career, a Christian married to a Jew, a capitalist with Marxist beliefs, someone who wanted recognition, but feared being in the public, someone who was angered by her parents’ criticism but sought their acceptance, someone who loved her family but often negatively characterized them in her stories. These dualities enabled her to see that the world is not only black and white, rather it is many shades of ambiguity. It is a pity that her lack of confidence in herself as a writer has meant that for more than 70 years her work has been largely misunderstood.

Her downplay of her writing process is most poignantly given in Jackson’s essay, ‘Biography of a Story 1960.’ Within the essay, she gives an in-depth recount of how the idea for ‘The Lottery’ came about and how quickly it was written. She writes:

I had written the story three weeks before [being published]. The idea had come to me while I was pushing my daughter up the hill in her stroller - it was as I say, a warm morning, and the hill was steep, and beside my daughter, the stroller held the day’s groceries- and perhaps the effort of that last fifty yards up the hill put an edge to the story, at any rate, I had the idea fairly clearly in my mind when I put my daughter in her playpen and the frozen vegetables in the refrigerator, and, writing the story, I found that it went quickly and easily, moving from beginning to end without pause. As a matter of fact, when I read it over later I decided that except for one or two minor corrections, it needed no changes and the story I finally typed up and sent off to my agent the next day was almost word for word the original draft ... I didn’t think it was perfect, but I didn’t want to fuss with it. It was, I thought, a serious straightforward story, and I was pleased, and a little surprised with the ease with which it had been written ... it was just a story I wrote. (Jackson 2013, p. 211)

This response, or as Franklin calls it in *Haunted Mind*, Jackson's "origin myth" (Franklin 2017, p. 15), downplays the story's technical sophistication in both meaning and the writing process. Franklin calls Jackson's recount an 'origin myth' because during her research, Franklin discovered that it was not at all true. Franklin writes, "A note in Jackson's handwriting on the draft of "The Lottery" in her archives indicates that she submitted it to MCA on 16 March 1948 ... [her agent] wrote to Jackson on April 6 that [the editor for New Yorker] liked the story but had "some reservations about it" and would send on a detailed critique" ... Jackson submitted the revised story on 12 April" (p. 255–56). Franklin states:

The revised copy in Jackson's archive reveals additional small changes- one or two by Hyman; others in response to marginal queries in one of the New Yorker's editor's, Gus Loblano's handwriting, asking her to make certain details of the process more clear. (In the first version of the story, she neglected to describe the actual drawing of lots.) Loblano also was concerned that the story's meaning was too opaque could she give [Old Man Warner] a few more sentences about the dangers of breaking away from established tradition? (p. 258–59)

Perhaps the reason why Jackson created this 'origin myth' can be found in her other non-fiction essays and lectures. In her lecture 'Memory and Delusion' she states, "the children around our house have a saying that everything is either true, not true, or one of mother's delusions" (Jackson et al. 2016, p. 373). In another lecture, 'How I Write,' she states, "I find it very difficult to distinguish between life and fiction" (389). She also states that, "I loathe writing autobiographical material because if it's dull no one should have to read it anyway, and if it's interesting I should be using it for a story" (191). The most remarkable statement that Jackson has written about her writing process is within 'Memory and Delusion' where she states that she:

cannot find any patience for those people who believe that you start writing when you sit down at your desk and pick up your pen and finish writing when you put down the pen again; a writer is always writing, seeing everything through a thin mist of words, fitting swift little descriptions to everything he sees, always noticing ... so a writer cannot see an off little gesture without putting a verbal description to it, and ought never to let a moment go by undescribed. (p. 376)

Therefore, although it seems foggy to make such clear assertions, it seems that when these statements are added together, it leads one to form the opinion that Jackson would not just deliver the story's meaning upon silver platter and would not feed her readers the answers upon a silver spoon.

Knowing the story took more time than the two hours it took to walk home, one is armed with the notion that the story could be more complex than anyone has given her credit. This becomes especially true when we consider her admiration of William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. Empson was only 23 years old when this text was published in 1930. His overall argument in *Seven Types* is that the very best of poets instill ambiguities into their poetry, so that the reader finishes the poem wondering what the writer may have meant. The poems he venerates are among the most complex and intricate of English literature. Not only does he display his wide reading, he also analyzes the poems' most difficult sections back to a type of ambiguity. Undeniably, Empson was a genius. He states, "'Ambiguity' itself can mean an indecision as to what you mean, an intention to mean several things, a probability that one or other or both of two things has been meant, and the fact that a statement has several meanings" (Empson 1947, p. 5). In identifying that the most renowned writers create ambiguities, he criticizes all literary critics who have spent their careers debating what these poets may have meant. For Empson, these debates are otiose because, "Two people may get very different experiences from the same work of art without being definitely wrong," and that "there is no doubt that some readers sometimes do only get part of the full intention. In this way such a passage has to be treated as if it were ambiguous, even though it may be said that for a good reader it is only ambiguous ... while he is going through a critical exercise" (Empson 1947, Preface). Although Empson does not place himself above other

critics, he uses an allegory that a good reader is not just a “[child who] can play catch,” but are those “few children [who] are good at dynamics” (Preface). He understands that when two people read the same poem, the two people might interpret the poem in opposing ways. This is dependent on how intricately the two readers wish to delve into the poem and how the poem connects to the readers’ life experiences. Empson states, “Thus one speaks of the two ends of a stick, though from another point of view one of them must be the beginning” (p. 194). Empson demands that the reader, “must open his mind to [a word given in a piece of literature and] all their associations, so that the common factor may be as high as possible” (p. 90). What he means is that one must analyze each and every meaning conceivable in the hopes to finally come to an awareness and appreciation of the, “variety of things the [writer] may have meant” (p. 80). His awareness that writers can intend more than one meaning devalues those critics who have taken one side over another. Because of this, Empson’s Socratic method finesses all such debates.

Although critics like Showalter criticize Stanley Hyman, there is ample evidence that the couple had an admiration for Empson. In fact, Hyman’s nonfiction text, *Armed Vision* published the year before ‘The Lottery’ dedicates a chapter to Empson. Hyman argues that Empson’s literary analysis, “contains certainly the most elaborate and probably the finest close reading of poetry ever put down, the fantastic, wonderful almost endless spinning out of implications and linguistic possibilities” (Hyman 1970, p. 243). However, Hyman’s chapter dedication to Empson is not nearly as substantial as Jackson’s own writing regarding the English critic. Her short story, ‘Seven Types of Ambiguity,’ (Jackson 2011, p. 216) is direct evidence that Jackson was influenced by Empson. Written two years before ‘The Lottery’ and one year before Hyman’s *Armed Vision* Empson’s book is the coveted object of its two main characters. The narrator calls these characters ‘the man’ and ‘the boy.’ Set within a bookstore, a man and his wife, having saved money, visit the bookstore intending to purchase several famous literary collections. The man tells the bookstore clerk, Mr. Harris, “I sort of sound foolish, now. But I don’t know much about these things, like books . . . We were sort of hoping you’d be able to tell us . . . something like Dickens (Jackson 2011, p. 153). The boy, whom Mr. Harris refers to as “Mr. Clark” (p. 154) longs to buy Empson’s book. While the boy is listening to the man’s intention, he offers to take the man to the section of the bookstore which holds the classic collections. Once down the aisle away from Mr. Harris, the boy and the man spend some time discussing literature and the man’s lack of reading. The man is admirable of the boy’s reading and intellect, as he never had that opportunity in his own life. They then return to the counter with a list of collections the man would like to buy. The boy tells Mr. Harris not to sell *Seven Types* to anyone else, as he will soon be back for it. Once the boy has left the store, the story twists from an appreciation of the boy’s intellect to resentment. The man decides to buy Empson’s book and Mr. Harris agrees to sell it to him breaking his promise made only moments before. This climax is predictable but there is a curiosity as to the boy’s role within the store and story. One leaves the story asking, who has manipulated whom? This is because the story can be read in two opposing ways. One, the bookstore owner and the man are envious of the boy’s future, leading the owner to sell to the man. The other reading is that the boy, referred to by Mr. Harris as Mr. Clark along with the owner, have worked together and manipulated the man to buy this “scarce” and “good book” that would likely never have sold otherwise (p. 212). Therefore, Jackson creates contrasting ways of reading the story through purposefully and deceptively placed phrases. In Empson’s words, Jackson’s, “allegory is felt to have many levels of interpretation,” because she has “describe[d] two situations and [left] the reader to infer various things which can be said about both of them” (Empson 1947, p. 111–12). Therefore, it is most certain that Jackson knew exactly how to create ambiguities to leave the reader feeling suspicious in some way that they have been duped.

Armed with Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, it is clear that Jackson’s ‘The Lottery’ was deliberately intended to create a state of suspension in her readers. Ironically, the readers’ responses to ‘The Lottery’ were exactly how the characters within the story react to the ritual of lapidation—confusion, ignorance, aggression, and voyeurism. Many of the readers who wrote to *The New Yorker* wanted to know what the story meant. They were disturbed and horrified that these lotteries may have or

were still taking place in America. Others wanted to know which villages had these lotteries and if they could go and watch. Some were so disgusted and revolted by the story, they cancelled their subscriptions. Her critics and readers alike, “may know what has been put into the pot, and recognize the objects in the stew, but the juice in which they are sustained [has been] regarded with a peculiar respect because they are all in there too, somehow, and one does not know how they [have been] combined or held in suspension” (Empson 1947, p. 6).

In order to understand the ambiguities Jackson cleverly devised within ‘The Lottery’ one must look at the symbolic meaning of the stool. Disappointingly, the age group that has the largest body of online literary analysis are high school students. A vast number of these students have uploaded their essays on ‘pay to view websites,’ and summaries and analyses of the story appear on sites like *Schmoop* or *Sparknotes*. Many of these essays and websites discuss that the three-legged stool on which the black box sits is symbolic of the Holy Trinity: the Son, the Father, and the Holy Ghost. However, this seems too one-sided. Religion is not the only tradition that represents a civilized society. It is just one leg of the symbolic stool. However, it cannot be denied that there is a religious element within the story, most poignantly demonstrated in the pagan like ritual. Jackson takes a negative stance towards religion, but what religion or religions are referred to? According to Judy Oppenheimer, who wrote Jackson’s first full length biography in 1989, Jackson, “to a good friend . . . confided very matter of fact that [the story] had been of course been about the Jews” (Oppenheimer 1989, p. 72). However, later in the book, Oppenheimer changes this to the short story being about her own anti-Semitic community (p. 131). It is imperative to note that these two versions of what Jackson is reported to have said to her neighbor can be read quite differently. “About the Jews,” presents no bias one way or the other, whereas “anti-Semitic” presents the Jews as being an oppressed group. It is well documented that the Jackson family was taunted by the Bennington community because her husband and their four children were Jewish.

Her novel published in the same year 1948, *A Road Through the Wall*, is a satirical observation on her community. Within the story, the families living on Pepper Street express themselves as upholding white American ideals, meaning that those on the edges are marginalized. The Perlman family are the only Jewish family. Although in public they are accepted and treated as part of the community, behind closed doors the Perlman family are considered the best of the undesirables. When the Desmonds decide to start a Shakespeare reading club for the children to participate in, at first the intention is to have all the Pepper Street children involved. However, when Mrs. Desmonds suggests that Marilyn, the Perlman daughter, might take offence to a reading of, ‘The Merchant of Venice,’ they leave her off the list. In writing such a novel, it is clear that Jackson took offence to the hypocrisy of the ‘All American Family.’ On the surface these families adhered to the idea that all men are created equal, but in actuality such superficial politeness masked its age-old prejudice toward differences.

In Michael Robinson’s article, ‘Shirley Jackson’s The Lottery and Holocaust Literature,’ he uses the anti-Semitic version of Oppenheimer’s biography, which reads, “She told Helen Feeley the story was based on anti-Semitism and grew out of her encounters with one particularly prejudiced shopkeeper” (Oppenheimer 1989, pp. 130–31). This becomes the basis on which Robinson argues that “Jackson’s story belongs to an abstract discourse on Holocaust-related themes and topics” (Robinson 2019, p. 1). He makes an interesting argument by linking the story to other anti-Semitic literature published around the same time, most notably, David Rousset’s memoir, *The Other Kingdom*, printed in English the year before. Robinson argues that Jackson’s story like Rousset’s memoir does not explicitly connect to the horrors that took place within the concentration camps, but that the authors implicitly connect to the Holocaust through the scapegoating of an individual or group. Robinson attributes the scapegoating of the Jews to Tessie. He acknowledges Tessie’s “fruitless effort” (p. 2), and “cruel” (p. 17) behavior in trying to save herself. However, he sympathizes with Tessie because she represents the “systematic oppression of and violence against women” (p. 9) during the Holocaust. This violence has removed any semblance of human “dignity in keeping with the events Rousset witnessed among his fellow prisoners, her neighbors respond with silence or support of the selection process” (p. 12). Tessie has become animalistic in wanting to preserve her own life over her children’s.

Despite Robinson's well written and insightful essay, I disagree with his viewpoint that Tessie represents the scapegoating of the Jews. In the beginning, Tessie is presented as the protagonist. Readers delight in her showy personality putting the men in their place. However, when she reveals that she has the marked slip of paper, meaning she is the winner of the lottery, she becomes the antagonist. She complains that Bill was not "give[n] time enough to take any paper he wanted . . . It wasn't fair!" (Jackson 2011, p. 283). When this doesn't seem to work, she calls to have her married children draw. Tessie shouts, "There's Don and Eva, . . . "Make them take their chance!" (p. 299). It is a slight comment but it jars the reader and causes apprehension. Tessie is then shut down by the two men who must assert their dominance over her: Mr. Summers, the leader of the community and her husband. Bill Hutchinson repeats Summers instructions almost word for word, "My daughter draws with her husband's family; that's only fair" (p. 299). Because of Tessie's reaction, readers discern that something is not quite right about the lottery. Nobody likes a person who accepts the terms before the drawing of a name only to back out after they are chosen. These people are colloquially known as 'sore losers.' I believe that most readers do not empathize with Tessie, in the same way people have empathized with the Jewish people who died or were detained during the Holocaust. If Tessie is a symbol of the Jewish people killed during the Holocaust, why do readers feel disgusted by her actions? Robinson has homed in on the pattern of the text criticizing anti-Semitism. However, when this pattern turns on itself, he mistakenly supposes that Tessie's actions are minutiae and explainable when in fact her actions are the crux of the story's ambiguous meanings.

This is where Jackson has interlaced Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. It can be assumed that all cultures believe a mother should protect her children. When Tessie is willing to sacrifice her older children's lives to save her own, it signifies to the reader that the story cannot only be about the Holocaust. The blockade of one reading creates another in the opposite direction. Empson would state that this is an ambiguity, "because the context defines the two situations as opposites; two opposed judgments are being held together . . . to stake out different territories" (Empson 1947, p. 218). The two situations are that Tessie is representative of the scapegoat until she is that scapegoat. Once chosen she becomes the ferret hunting for another to take her place. At this point, readers must question Jackson's intentions; is she "deceiving us about either, or just making a [story] out of both? Is [s]he generalizing from two sorts of experiences, or finding a narrow border of experience that both hold in common?" (Empson 1947, p. 217). In my opinion, I believe that Jackson was aware of the hypocrisy of all religions, including Judaism. Yes, like most, she must have felt compassion for the Jews during the Holocaust, but perhaps she was also aware that those who are oppressed can very easily become the oppressor.

It makes one marvel what Jackson may have seen in the media regarding the Jewish survivors at the time of writing. In November 1947, the United Nations had voted to divide Palestine; half for the Jewish Israelis and half for the Palestinians. Consequently, 1948 was a brutal year as the Israelis and Palestinians fought for control. If Franklin's finding about Jackson first submitting the short story in March is correct, sifting through the front pages of Vermont newspapers may provide answers. In fact, many of these front-page stories were predominantly about the Jews. The *Burlington Free Press* and the *Rutland Daily News* had headlines that read, "3 Mines Explode Under a Train in Palestine" (1st March). "14 dead, 27 Hurt as Jews Blast Arabs in Haifa" (4 March). "30 Slain as Jews Repulse Arab Attack" (6 March). "12 Jews Killed, Nearly 100 Injured As Arabs Bomb Jewish Agency Bldg" (12 March). Similar headlines appeared consistently from March to June, when a truce was called to halt violent attacks by the UN to which neither side was fully inclined to heed. It led one to question whether the 'The Lottery' not only criticizes anti-Semitism, but also the hypocrisy of the Zionists. This religious group who was persecuted in Europe during WWII has now become the persecutors of another religious group in the Middle East. Therefore, Oppenheimer's earliest statement that Jackson told a friend the story is about the Jews (presenting no bias one way or the other) is more likely than it just being anti-Semitic because no one reading can be argued without stretching elements within the story beyond their elasticity.

Nayef Ali Al-Joulán's article, "Islam in Shirley Jackson's, *The Lottery*," also detects the story's connection to the conflict between the Zionists and Palestinians during 1948. However, Al-Joulán does so reductively in concluding that Jackson must be anti-Islamic, as he believes her short story, "reflects Jackson's vague, confused, superficial, and stereotypical perception of Islam and Islamic rituals" (Al-Joulán 2010, p. 29). He argues that the black box placed upon the three-legged stool is reminiscent of the Ka'ba in Mecca, "known for the annual Hajj pilgrimage, one of the five pillars of Islam" (Al-Joulán 2010, p. 32). The fact that the townspeople are gathered around the black box Al-Joulán argues is similar to the circular movement of people around the Ka'ba. Where his argument is flawed is to suppose that Jackson is anti-Muslim because of the degradation of the black box over time. However, it is more likely that Jackson wanted to show the corruption of all religions over time, becoming, "shabbier each year; by now it was no longer completely black but splintered badly" (Jackson 2011, p. 293). What is most intriguing is how he connects the smooth stones collected by the young boys in the beginning of the story to the ones Muslims throw in defiance of the devil. During Hajj, Muslim pilgrims leave Mecca and travel to a nearby site at Mina. At Mina are three pillars. These pillars represent the site where Ibrahim defiantly threw stones at Satan. The stones that pilgrims use are described in the Quran as "smooth stones of small size from certain places in Mecca" (Al-Joulán 2010, p. 33). He then makes a connection to the larger stones such as those picked up by Mrs. Delacroix, to the ritual of stoning adulterers: "In Islam, the penalty for adultery (called Zina) is one hundred stripes if the person is not married and stoning until death if he/she is married" (p. 34). He points out that although this tradition is not, "stated in Quranic verse . . . Stoning to death is attributed to Prophet Muhammad's sayings (Hadith), and practice." The stones used are "of a handful size" (p. 34). Although it is difficult to agree with his other examples and overall supposition, it makes one question why Jackson chose to stone Tessie. Why has Jackson used stoning when this is not a form of capital punishment or pagan ritualistic killings in America or Europe? The typical form of killing in early America was by bloodletting or hanging. Lapidation is a Middle Eastern tradition.

However, it is deficient to argue that Jackson is anti-Islamic. It is a stronger case to argue that Jackson uses ambiguity to criticize the rewriting of religions by its leaders. She does this to remonstrate that religions are equally to blame for the violence enacted upon one another in the name of that religion. Jackson creates ambiguity, showing how the traditions of both religions have been corrupted, that they are no longer "what they use to be" (Jackson 2011, p. 297). One such example within the story is when Old Man Warner both criticizes the young as being "a pack of young fools, implying that the young members of the community have modern ideals that refute the tradition of the lottery. However, he then accuses them of, "wanting to go back to living in caves" (p. 297), thus implying that the young members' ideals are the opposite of modern. These inconsistencies disrupt a clear and fluid reading in one direction. It is clear that Jackson agrees with Empson's argument that the role of the writer is to demonstrate "the way in which opposites can be stated so as to satisfy a wide variety of people, for a great number of degrees of interpretation, is the most important thing about the communication of the arts" (Empson 1947, p. 220). Her intention is to criticize all, to make all feel a part of this story's narrative in a negative way. Jackson has cleverly created patterns so that readers feel each religion has been hinted at, but not quite sure of Jackson's purpose in doing so.

Aside from the possible Jewish and Islamic references within 'The Lottery' Jackson simultaneously inserts motifs that connect to Christianity. These three religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—stem from the same text, The Old Testament. Jackson uses ambiguity to inconspicuously demonstrate that these religions have become corrupted so that violence has often become the solution to miniscule variances of the text that birthed all three religions. Christianity is symbolized in the story through the naming of characters. The names can be disassembled into three components. First, there is the general reference to Christianity: Adams, who links to the first man, and Delacroix is the French word for, 'of the cross.' Interestingly, Jackson writes, "the villagers pronounced this name "Dellacroy"" (Jackson 2011, p. 291), demonstrating yet another way in which religious traditions have been corrupted. Then the second component refers to Unitarian Protestantism, alluded to in the naming of Mr. Martins and

Bentham. Martin Luther and Jeremy Bentham were two leaders of this religious movement in Europe. The third component travels across the ocean to America, with the naming of Tessie Hutchinson. Her name references Anne Hutchinson, English born but moved with her family to Massachusetts when she was 48. Anne Hutchinson was also a Unitarian, believing in one God, as opposed to the Holy Trinity. She was a Puritan who believed in the Covenant of Grace: that a connection to God did not need to be felt in a Church, but could be felt within oneself. These three steps of specificity, Christianity in Europe, then to Protestant Unitarianism in England and finally to antinomianism in America, demonstrate that over time, Christianity has transformed, moved and been adapted to suit the environment's economic and political agenda. What Jackson does by highlighting this transportation and adaptation of Christianity is to link it to capitalism. This is because Capitalism is said to have grown out of this individualized Christianity. Michelle Burnham argues that the Unitarian ideology connects to capitalism. She writes:

... the antinomian threat, which became increasingly embodied in the figure of Hutchinson, was the threat of an emergent model of subjectivity—a model constituted in terms of a covenant of grace theology that located religious authority in an invisible experience and, by doing so, divorced the realm of words and works from the world of things and grace. But this selfhood was constituted in terms of the relatively new world of mercantile capitalism, a world represented by the class to which the Hutchinson family, among others, belonged. (Burnham 1997, p. 344)

To condense this down, what Burnham argues is that people like Anne Hutchinson created a new type of America, no longer bowing down to the English king, to the clergy and the hierarchy of class, but to a new America in which one could achieve their own grace through the spirit within themselves. Although Anne Hutchinson was purged from her society, her beliefs are primarily what went on to differentiate colonial America from other English colonies. Meaning that one's spiritualism was more important than the instructions given by the religious leaders of a community. This type of thinking paved the way for capitalism in America, and its separation from England. Burnham concludes that Anne Hutchinson and antinomianism led to the, "massive expansion of commerce, facilitated largely by an exploding Atlantic trade and attendant colonizing ventures, led over the course of the early seventeenth century to the emergence of a new economic paradigm" (p. 349). Therefore, by creating characters who have overt Christian names, Jackson not only criticizes the foundation of a white American Christian identity, but also that this type of Christianity created the economic tradition of American capitalism.

It is evident that Jackson's intention is to create ambiguity so that reading the story from the perspective of one religious tradition is counteractive to her intentions. Instead, Jackson wants her readers to question how this ambiguity alludes to each religion's corruption by its leaders. Therefore, by cunningly placing signifiers from the three predominant world religions, she criticizes the violence committed in the name of that religion. The Quran, Torah, and The Bible all state that it is a sin to kill another. This principle which connects all three religions, as stated in the primary commandments found in each religions' primary text, has been overshadowed over time, adapted, changed and corrupted so that its members have committed heinous acts of violence against those they consider as 'other.' Jackson amalgamates motifs from each religion so that the characters and setting within the story connect with the three religions, highlighting that each is otiose, obtuse and impotent. Readers have an inkling that their way of life is being attacked in the story, but the attack is subtle, hidden in the dichotomy of casuistries. Empson writes, "what often happens when a piece of writing is felt to offer hidden riches is that one phrase after another lights up and appears as the heart of it; one part after another catches fire, so that you walk about with the thing for several days ..." (Empson 1947, Preface) This is exactly what Jackson intended her readers to do, which is exactly what happened at the time of publication. However, aside from the surface readings undertaken in high schools, most critics have not paid Jackson her due diligence for creating such a marvelous attack on "blind obedience" to the venality of religious dogma.

Although religion represents one leg of the stool, capitalism is symbolized by the second leg. Because capitalism is both an economic and political system, it becomes difficult to divide them. Therefore, capitalism will take one leg, then communism, its counterpart, will take the other. Within the anti-capitalist reading of the short story, Jackson criticizes 1948 America. This was only three years after WWII had ended. 'The Cold War,' was now a phrase with which most Americans were familiar. The American government strongly feared the rise of communism. The film industry was already being culled of its communist members which was initiated around 1947. American based companies like Coca-Cola advertised the stereotypical American family in bold colors, garnished in new clothing, wrapped to the hilt in the latest trends, over accessorized to support the capitalist ideal of mass production and consumerism. Because of the pressure to conform to the, 'American Ideal,' there was a growing dissatisfaction towards this oppression. Hyman during his university years was a member of the Communist Party. Although he later renounced his affiliation to the party, he continued to advocate communist principles. Within *Armed Vision*, he musters literary critics to examine texts using all strategies on hand, most notably Marxism. He writes, "the most enthusiastic candidate for the job [of critical literary lens] is Marxism, whose spokesmen have regularly insisted that dialectical materialism is an integrative frame able to encompass and use the newest advances in all fields of knowledge, and in fact must do so to function" (p. 388). Along with her husband, Jackson too was aware of Marxist principles. In fact, many of her other short stories that occurred in *The Lottery and Other Short Stories* could well be analyzed through an anti-capitalist lens. Stories like 'The Tooth,' 'Colloquy' and 'Daemon Lover' all involve female characters who are negatively affected by their capitalist society, as the "bourgeois sees his wife a mere instrument of production" (Marx and Engels 1848, p. 25), the wife being "a form of exclusive private property" (Marx and Engels 1848, p. 42) which in turn leads them to suffer psychological breakdowns. At the end of 'The Tooth' Clara Spencer has transported her mind from New York City to the hot sands somewhere north of Samarkand (Jackson 2011, pp. 270, 286). In 'Colloquy,' Mrs. Arnold leaves her doctor's office confused as to who or what defines reality (p. 146). In 'Daemon Lover,' an unnamed 34-year-old woman returns daily to where she thinks the fiancé who jilted her lives his new life with another woman. In comparison to the other stories in her collection, 'The Lottery' is remarkably antithetical. This is because the story is set outside, and from the point of view of setting rather than character. Unlike the other stories mentioned, 'The Lottery' relates to pillars or legs of society rather than female mindscapes. Capitalism features in her other short stories because her stories are set within America. However, 'The Lottery' goes further, as within the town, readers are not quite sure which political or economic system the people follow. Jackson has purposefully imposed ambiguities that invoke alternative readings, depending on the reader's own world views. She does this to show that it does not matter which political or economic system is being used, they have all been corrupted by their leaders who send their followers out in droves to be massacred in wars that have no purpose other than to garner more power and wealth to those leaders.

The most notable literary critic who argues that the story is anti-capitalist is Peter Kosenko. He theorizes that the social structure within the short story "is essentially capitalist" (Kosenko 1985, p. 28). Kosenko gives five points that support his views:

First, the lottery's rules of participation reflect and codify a rigid social hierarchy based upon an inequitable social division of labor. Second, the fact that everyone participates in the lottery and understands consciously that its outcome is pure chance gives it a certain "democratic" aura that obscures its first codifying function. Third, the villagers believe unconsciously that their commitment to a work ethic will grant them some magical immunity from selection. Fourth, this work ethic prevents them from understanding that the lottery's actual function is not to encourage work per se but to reinforce an inequitable social division of labor. Finally, ... Jackson's choice of Tessie Hutchinson as the lottery's victim/scapegoat reveals the lottery to be an ideological mechanism which serves to defuse the average villager's deep, inarticulate dissatisfaction with the social order in which he lives by channeling it into anger directed at the victims of that social order. (p. 28)

I agree with four of Kosenko's points. It is obvious that there is a clear division of labor. Mr. Martin, Mr. Graves and Mr. Summers are the richest men who work the least, having employees to do the hard work for them. Jackson writes, the black box "had spent one year in Mr. Graves' barn and another year underfoot in the post office, and sometimes it was set on a shelf in the Martin grocery and left there" (Jackson 2011, p. 293). These three men are also the ones who set up the Lottery. Summers being the richest conducts the ritual, Graves brings in the box, and Martins sturdies the stool. Jackson also has the eldest man draw for their families. The men are in control and are respected by the community, whereas the women have little power or respect. Jackson writes:

[The women] greeted one another and exchanged bits of gossip as they went to join their husbands. Soon the women, standing by their husbands, began to call to their children, and the children came reluctantly, having to be called four or five times. Bobby Martin ducked under his mother's grasping hand and ran, laughing, back to the pile of stones. His father spoke up sharply, and Bobby came quickly and took his place between his father and his oldest brother. (p. 293)

As Kosenko argues, this is a capitalist patriarchal structure. Kosenko states, "[w]omen, who have no direct link to the economy as defined by capitalism—the arena of activity in which labor is exchanged for wages and profits are made—choose in the lottery only in the absence of a "grown," working male" (Kosenko 1985, p. 29). The third point, although less explicit than the others, is intriguing. Kosenko states that "[t]he village women reveal such an unconscious fear in their ejaculatory questions," "after the last slip has been drawn in the first round: "Who is it?" "Who's got it?" "Is it the Dunbars?" "Is it the Watsons?" The Dunbars and the Watsons, it so happens, are the least "productive" families in the village: Mr. Dunbar has broken his leg, Mr. Watson is dead" (p. 30). Therefore, there is an awareness amongst the villagers that when the male head of the family is not productive, his entire family is at risk of being chosen by some form of "a magical fear that their lack of productivity would make them vulnerable to selection in the next lottery" (p. 30).

Although Kosenko puts forth a strong case for the short story being anti-capitalist, the second point he makes is contestable. He states that the lottery itself, the choosing of a slip of paper, is democratic. This argument is somewhat flawed because the choosing of a slip of paper is by chance, not by democratic vote. This leads more towards communism, the principle that everybody has an equal chance. *The Communist Manifesto* states, "The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy" (Marx and Engels 1848, p. 26). Therefore using this principle, in a communist state everyone has an equal chance of drawing the marked slip. If it were a capitalist system, there would be a vote. The vote also implies that each has an equal chance of being drawn, but it is determined by the majority. Within a capitalist society, the majority is manipulated, which Kosenko recognizes, but it only goes so far as to manipulate all members to participate, not in the choosing of the 'scapegoat.' Furthermore, his argument that in a capitalist state, every person must participate is also flawed because within a capitalist state, whether one votes or not is a right of the individual and in fact children do not have to participate until they reach the age of adulthood. Whereas in a communist state there is, "An equal obligation on all members of society to work . . ." (Marx and Engels 1848, p. 49).

Another strong indicator that the short story is not just anti-capitalist is in the way the women are dressed. Jackson writes, "The women, wearing faded house dresses and sweaters, came shortly after their menfolk" (Jackson 2011, p. 292). If they had been capitalist women, they would therefore be draped in the latest trends, dresses, accessories, aprons and manicured hair, representing the Americanized ideal of nurturing mother and dutiful wife. Within 'The Lottery,' although fearful at first, after Tessie has been chosen, the women almost become as masculine as the men. Jackson writes, "Mrs. Delacroix selected a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands and turned to Mrs. Dunbar. "Come on," she said. "Hurry up." Mrs. Dunbar had small stones in both hands, and she said, gasping for breath. "I can't run at all. You'll have to go ahead and I'll catch up with you" (p. 301). It is difficult to align these descriptions of the women within the capitalist paragon of maternal and feminine beauty

under the control of their husbands. Rather, the appearance and mannerisms of these women are reminiscent of the communist women working in the fields or factories like their male counterparts. These women demonstrate the “Equal liability of all to work . . . especially for agriculture” (Marx and Engels 1848, p. 26).

Because of this jolting of a fluid anti-capitalist reading, Empson’s ambiguity manifests. An anti-capitalist reading is there, but there are puzzle pieces which do not quite fit the construct. In the words of Empson, what Jackson makes the reader consider is that “a single word, dropped where it comes most easily, without being stressed, and as if to fill out the sentence, may signal to the reader what he is meant to be taking for granted; if it is already in his mind the word will seem natural enough and will not act as an unnecessary signal. Once it has gained its point, on further readings, it . . . would tell you something different if you knew more” (Empson 1947, p. 3). The descriptions of the women and Tessie’s subsequent actions after drawing the marked slip ring true of Empson’s insight. Despite this, it can be argued that the likelihood of Tessie being the “scapegoat,” in both a capitalist or communist society is high. Her free nature, the gumption to mock her leaders and to disobey the rules would have her in the anterior of being voted to receive the stoning. However, the simple fact of the matter is that Jackson does not have the villagers vote. Aside from this, Kosenko’s argument and insights are analytical jewels. He is conscious of the puzzle pieces and tries to fit them into his argument, which is better than leaving the pieces out altogether. However, part of his hypothesis is flawed as they do not fit precisely. The picture is there but one section of that picture is distorted. This is because Jackson interweaves aspects of both capitalism and communism in order to prove that both in the hands of its leaders have little to do with equality and much to do with instilling fear into their subordinates so that they continue to live in a society that protects no one other than the corrupted leaders. Kosenko like many see that a Marxist state can undo the corruption of capitalism, the overuse and exploitation of natural resources and the increasing gap between the wealthy and the poor. However, such a system, although it is just and humane is unlikely to ever be implemented because of humanity’s incessant need to dominate and compete. Jackson’s story makes a marked division between what was the original intent of that political and economic tradition, how it has been vitiated by its leaders and how this has castrated a just and fair society.

By following the argument that Jackson’s intention was to create unresolved patterns or ambiguity, the short story also creates a pattern of it being anti-communist. This being the third leg of the stool. As already stated, the choosing of papers and the compulsory participation link to communist principles more than capitalist. Although there was a growing concern towards conforming to capitalist ideals, 1948 was at the cusp of this anxiety. Literature that protested the rigidity of McCarthyism would not come about until the early 1950s. The Mundt-Nixon Bill, which would have forced Communist Party members to register themselves as belonging to the party halted abruptly in May/June resulting from protestors taking to the streets. Although close to its publication, these events had not yet happened when Jackson would have been writing around March of that year. Within the story, once again, the naming of its leaders can be argued back to the three-legged stool. It has been stated that Mr. Martins links to the religious leg of the stool. The remaining two men, would then have to relate to the political and economic legs. Near the end of ‘The Lottery,’ Mr. Summers refers to Mr. Graves as ‘Harry.’ When the Hutchinsons draw, Mr. Summers instructs, “‘Harry, you help little Dave.’ Mr. Graves took the hand of the little boy, who came willingly with him up to the box” (Jackson 2011, p. 300). Could it be that she is alluding to the incumbent president, Harry Truman, the leader of capitalist America? This becomes weightier with the naming and physical description of Joe Summers. Joseph Summers, could very well be Joseph Stalin’s double. He too had a “jovial round face and a scold for a wife” (p. 292). Joseph Stalin, like Joe Summers controlled the coal mines. Coal mining in Soviet Russia was the main source of fuel for electricity. Millions of Russians sent to the gulags were forced to work in inhumane conditions, to mine for coal. It could be said of Mr. Summers and Stalin that they had other people working for them, so they, “had time and energy to devote to civic activities” (p. 292), which allowed them to manipulate others into submission and subservience.

However, where the anti-communist argument falls short lies once again with Tessie. She represents, like her namesake, the capitalist ideal of humanism, meaning the individual's needs come before the community's. Tessie is a law unto herself. Tessie appears to control her husband. She downplays his role as provider, by saying that she "Thought [her] old man was out back stacking wood" (p. 294), giving the sense that perhaps Bill is out of work, as he is at home during working hours. Tessie is the spearhead of the family, as it is her work that makes her late. When their surname is called, Tessie instructs her husband to "Get up there, Bill" (p. 297). When her community laughs at her jokes, her extroversion, and her blasé attitude towards the lottery, readers also snigger at her defiance. She stands out from the crowd because of her individualism, the idea that she is her first priority. If her community represents communism, then she must represent capitalism. However, as stated earlier, Tessie's 'sore loser' remarks after drawing the marked slip leaves a bitter taste. If she represents capitalism, readers feel disgusted by her actions. When Tessie is finally stoned, it is almost a relief, not that she would be killed, but that the reader has reached the end of the story. Readers feel relieved because the entire town is corrupt. The seemingly innocent community in the beginning of the story was a lie, as none of the town's members care one iota for another. The leaders, although they seem somewhat ill adapted, have created a society of belligerence that benefits no one other than those at the top.

Aside from the names, there are other aspects within the story that refer to it being anti-communist, anti-capitalist and anti-religious. From a bird's eye view, the setting would have three shapes. First the town square, then within it, the circle of people gathered around the triangular stool. The town square with its four equal sides lends itself to communism, like the Red Square in Moscow, or Tiananmen Square in China. The triangle represented by the stool appears on American money in the form of the pyramid, thus representing capitalism. Whereas the circle is a symbol of God, spiritualism, or religion. At either end of the square, sits the bank and the post office. The bank represents capitalism, and the post office represents communism. The scene is set between these two monopolies, these two opposing political and economic systems. For such a short story, "the language here seems rich in implications; it certainly carries much feeling and conveys a delicate sense of style" (Empson 1947, p. 5). These layers of interpretation that she has woven into 'The Lottery' are densely packed with rich layers of symbolism. She does this to criticize leaders for taking advantage of those they lead. Jackson also criticizes the followers for not rebuking such redundant acts of violence that serve no purpose other than to create hierarchies of power. It is a fair assertion to say that even in the 70 years since the story's publication, not many writers are able to paint several tones of meaning between the black and white within such a simple narrative.

To conclude, the critical analyses of Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery' to date, are correct, but only inasmuch as they identify a pattern that exists within the text. Where they are wrong is that they fail to see the counter-argument created by subtly placed words or phrases that prevent a fluid reading of that pattern. On Netflix, after finishing a British Sci-Fi series, I gave it a thumbs up. The following week, a question appeared on the screen asking me how many people I had told about this series. I replied '0,' primarily because Netflix had invaded what I felt was my privacy. I mention this anecdote because Netflix is aware that with word of mouth shows become popular. The more people are talking about it, the more likely others are going to watch it. Relating this to Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery' is easy. Reader responses to the story then and now want to know what the story means, because in some way, they know this story criticizes their way of living, no matter which side of the line they are on. This is why her story appears in almost every American short story anthology. It is because she was aware of Empson's understanding of how masterly writers like Shakespeare create unresolved patterns in their works that leave the reader or the audience questioning the author's intention. Because of her own downplaying of her authorial process, critics have left her under-analyzed. With the delight of her stories on the screen both big and small, it is clear that they are still relevant today, perhaps even more so than they were during her own lifetime. This is because the societies in her stories exist in reality and, no matter the shape, each has a center from which to look out, and this center or core is primarily the same. Within 'The Lottery,' Jackson criticizes the three legs or pillars of civilized societies,

religion, politics and economics. Through the ritual of stoning to death a character for no apparent reason, she highlights that leaders of these traditions have modified them to suit their own agendas, which is to create fear in their subordinates and to garner more power and wealth. This is no small feat. Jackson is undoubtedly one of America's finest authors. Critics must now appreciate Shirley Jackson as an extraordinary writer, who may have shunned publicity in her own life but truly deserves it now.

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