

The Evil of Humanity in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" and "The Summer People"

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Abstract

Centered around the evil of humanity concerning backward customs, this paper analyze the indifference and hypocrisy among villagers and even their relatives, as well as their blind adherence to tradition. Base on the previous researches, the further scrutiny of the characters both in "The Lottery" and "The Summer People" by Shirley Jackson provide us with profound reflections. Through the dramatic events of senseless violence and behavior in people's own lives, Jackson's stories urge people to reflect on the ugliness of humanity described by the writer, and appeal to people in contemporary society to abandon bad customs so as to transform the evil of humanity into the good of humanity for we should live in a civilized and democratic society.

Keywords

Shirley Jackson; Evil of Humanity; "The Lottery"; "The Summer People".

1. Introduction

Prolific American writer Shirley Jackson (1916-1965), the Queen of Gothic fiction, has been influential with her life-inspired writings, the Gothic style of which is outstanding, often denoting something apparently beautiful and peaceful before the dark and chaos—the more exquisite and detailed description, the more set off the contrast at the end of the story. Reading her fiction can evoke intuitive feelings concerning the comprehension of the word "humanity," in that they rationally examine the filth in the depths of human soul, expose the cruelty of humanity, and call for the returning of humanity and the reshaping of democratic and civilized society. Since Jackson believes in the theory of sexual evil and holds the view that human beings are born evil, her masterpieces imply that the human relationships are full of lies, deception and hypocrisy, and the people are willing to murder others to achieve their own goals.

Previous studies of Jackson's fiction have mostly rested on feminism, criticism of human morality, and the appreciation of the book's Gothic style has also drawn academic attentions (Rubenstein, 1996; Hattenhauer, 2012). This style). However, such researches are not specific enough and they tend to analyse only one of her works or a single aspect of them. Thus, there is still a need for further study on the fact that multiple works written in Shirley Jackson's Gothic style often embody the same theme of the darkness of humanity and its implications. This study will combine "The Lottery" and "The Summer People," two representative short stories by Jackson, to analyse the the evil of humanity and its impact. The main concern will be the issues of the violence and cruelty of humanity, people's foolishness and ignorance and their blindly following traditions and customs.

2. Overview of "The Lottery" and "The Summer People"

Ever since the publication of "The Lottery" (1948), which stirred up the literary world at that time, Jackson's short stories including "The Summer People" as well have been analyzed from

different perspectives such as writing style, character personality, feminism, Gothic perspective and humanity. In "The Lottery" Shirley Jackson vividly describes an ancient ritual in a small village that brings out the cruelty and violence of humanity. Because of humanity to seek good and avoid evil, a great deal of research has focused on the rustic country scenes and the brutal violence of the tombola, which is essentially a massacre. Most scholars maintain a critical and negative attitude towards the lottery ceremony. Selected villagers are brutally beaten to death with stones instead of democratic and objective examination. This seemingly civilized society implies that violent acts can occur at any time and anywhere. Take M. Robinson (2019) as an example, in "Shirley Jackson's The Lottery and Holocaust Literature," he mentions that Jackson's story represents the scapegoat and death choice phenomenon in a small town in the United States. An abstract discourse on Holocaust related themes and topics.

There are also studies from the evil of humanity to explore, such as R. W. Perrett's (2022) "Evil and humanity". Instead of looking at the issue of offerings from a personal perspective, the villagers chose to stand in the united front and abandoned their own villagers. They did not hesitate to join the team of killing innocent people. In the face of the villagers who used to talk and laugh, they took an indifferent and unconcerned attitude to protect themselves.

As a result of the story's popularity, scholarly research on the status of women and symbolism in the text began to emerge. For instance, S. V. Lape (1992) has analyzed the topic of feminism in "The Lottery". Throughout Jackson's short life, she remained a staunch critic of social norms that limited opportunities for women, writing with keen insight against the narrowness, stubbornness and racism of humanity. The village is a typical patriarchal society. Women's opportunities and rights are severely limited and threatened. They had no names of their own, but were called "Mrs. Delacroix" or "Mrs. Hutchinson" Jackson, 2022, p. 332.) after their husbands. They usually run the house at home and respect their husbands.

The Studies on "The Summer People" is comparatively less and they focus on the evil of humanity. In this story, the author mainly describes a retired Allison couple who come to a rural village for summer every year. The scholars compared the friendly villagers and their happy lives at the beginning with the villagers' warnings and murders later on. In addition, critics will also analyze from the perspective of vulnerable groups, because the retired Allison couple has little strength to resist, the two elderly people in the face of villagers' warnings, intimidation, harm and thunder, they can only wait in the hut tightly held together helplessly. But wait for what? Was it a visit from supernatural demons, or an intrusion by local villagers?

The Gothic elements, which can be easily detected in both the stories, especially in characters' personalities, are associated with the events suffered by Jackson herself. The area where Shirley Jackson settled after her marriage was almost entirely devoid of friendly neighbors, and the locals treated her with a very isolated attitude. Jackson was caught in a spiral of anxiety and fear and became delusional and increasingly saw the world outside as malicious and aggressive. Both "The Lottery" and "The Summer People" were written during this period, and revealed the evil of humanity in Jackson's eyes, which will be examined the the next section.

3. The Evil of Humanity in "The Lottery"

The story takes place in a small American town in the middle of summer. The people of the village gather in the square for an ancient tradition - the lottery. At the beginning of the event, if the male head of the family is called, they have to represent the whole family to the front of the box to draw the lottery. It turned out that Mrs. Hutchinson's husband, Bill, had found the note with the black dots on it, the "lottery," Mrs. Hutchinson began to protest that Bill had not been raffled long enough, but to no avail. The second round of lottery in the family of four Mrs. Hutchinson, Hutchinson once wanted to let married eldest daughter also have this round of lottery, but failed to succeed. This time, it was Mrs. Hutchinson who touched the lottery with

the black spot. "It's not fair, it's not right" (Jackson, 2022, p. 302. Hereafter only the page number of this book referred to in parenthetical citations.), Mrs. Hutchinson protested, and people eager to finish the lottery threw stones at Mrs. Hutchinson. Wu Ronghui, Zhang Huan and Wu Chunxiao (2008) study on the story for a specific appreciation. The story opens with a glorious midsummer scene and ends with the hero's wailing. The contrast before and after is chilling. Shirley Jackson does not reveal the true meaning of the lotto in the novel - the sacrifice - until almost the last moment. The shock of "Lottery" is due to two factors. One the one hand, the author creates the emotional effect with strong contrast concerning the the initial part and the ending. On another hand, the author places an ancient ritual in a village in a modern civilized society, where there is a coexistence of democracy enjoyed by the majority and the senseless violence and widespread cruelty. Thus, there lies a perfect irony. The indifference and betrayal of villagers and relatives, people's ignorance and blind adherence to tradition, all embody the evil of humanity.

3.1. The Indifference and Betrayal of Villagers and Relatives

What catches the eye in "Lottery" is the human indifference between villagers and their relatives. Jackson emphasized the indifferent nature of human beings in "Lottery". She used the technique of whitestroke to outline the indifferent and selfish features of villagers without rendering them. At the same time, Jackson uses a third perspective narration throughout the story, not revealing his own subjective tendencies and will, but staying out of the way, describing the atrocious ceremony calmly and objectively. The narrative technique of the third perspective makes the whole story free from the restrictions of time and space, and more truly and directly reflects the cult ceremony in an ordinary town, highlighting the indifferent side of humanity in an all-round way.

There are scenes of human indifference with relatives and villagers. For example, when Mrs. Hutchinson tries to escape her fate by saying that Bill won the lottery, the other villagers immediately shout, "Don't cheat!" Bill said, "Shut up, Hutchinson" (p. 298). A simple word breaks the friendship between neighbors and the love and affection of husbands. One second she was laughing with her friends, and the next second she was put to death. The husband you can count on one minute, and the next he's trying to stop you from resisting. S.T. Joshi, (2005) also uses "The lottery" as an example to interpret horror stories between families.

And Hutchinson's cruelty to his daughter also reflects the indifference and hypocrisy of humanity. In the end, Hutchinson was stoned to death. In order to reduce the probability of winning, she proposed to let her two married daughters join the lottery list before the last round of drawing. Obviously, she did not have any protection for her daughter, only for her own life, at the cost of hurting her daughter. As the saying goes, "Even a vicious tiger will not eat its cubs." Let alone a mother. Thus it can be seen that in this village, not only the villagers have the evil of humanity, even the relatives are full of indifference and hypocrisy.

In a few words, Jackson captures human indifference. Martin Luther King Jr. (1963) once said, "In the end, we are not remembered for the attack of our enemies, but for the silence of our friends." When we need our trusted friends most in the face of difficulties and disasters, what we get is hopeless indifference. Jackson does not deliberately set off, but tightly grasps the human indifference and the context of the lottery, so as to present the story to the reader dramatically. This selfish indifference and schadenfreude is another reason why this modern town continues to perform this ritual. Jackson tells the indifference and selfishness of humanity in a few words succinctly in the tone of a third person, allowing readers to integrate into the novel to feel Hutchinson's despair in the face of other villagers' indifference and selfishness.

3.2. People's Ignorance and Blind Adherence to Tradition

"The Lottery" follows the Shirley Jackson's usual Gothic style. At the beginning of the article, it describes a peaceful and peaceful village and a group of friendly villagers with brisk and playful words. At the end of the article, it reveals the mystery of the "lottery", which makes people gasp for breath. After reading the article, the reader feels pity for the fate of Mrs. Hutchinson, and at the same time, carefully recall that this poor and pathetic woman, her fresh life is in the "group violence" and "blind following" caused by the tragedy.

People have lost their sense of self and regard group violence as an orgy. The lottery activity in the novel originates from an old saying handed down by the town: "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon" (2022, p. 299). They believe that offering sacrifice to human beings can not only pray for the villagers' good luck, but also promote the harvest of grain. Therefore, the annual lottery activity is like a carnival coming, which makes the villagers excited. The tranquil village is a silent witness to the absurdity and crime of the world. Every year on this day, people come to take part in the lottery as promised. But no one realized that this ancient custom, itself with a certain degree of randomness, blindness, and inflammatory, everyone has an equal chance of being drawn in the lottery.

The venerable Old Man Warner has attended 77 such events. When some villagers began to whisper that lotteries had been abolished in some villages, Old Man Warner, the village's oldest man, promptly rebuked them: only "young fools" would do that. The old saying goes, "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon."; If you don't follow tradition, you'll get in trouble. Villagers just because of an old saying, let lottery activities from generation to generation, fully exposed their credulous group thinking of ignorance and ignorance. Faced with the horror of violence and the possibility that everyone would be sacrificed, they did not resist, blindly followed, and became the submissive and perpetrator of this evil activity.

The ignorance and blind adherence to tradition are actually the worst of the evils of humanity. The indifference and betrayal of villagers and relatives are all revolve around this point. For example, Mrs. Hutchinson clearly knew that her married daughter was taking the lottery with her husband's family. She even allowed her two married daughters to take part in the lottery to reduce the chance of winning for herself and her family. Even a vicious tiger will not eat its cubs. Maternal love is the instinct of animals, primitive and pure, great and selfless, mothers in order to protect their children, would rather sacrifice their own lives, rather than children suffer the slightest harm. But after years of group violence, Mrs. Hutchinson's heart had undergone a chemical displacement, in which affection and affection were replaced by coldness and selfishness.

Group violence has inadvertently distorted humanity, stripping it of civilization, of its capacity for thought and self-awareness, and of the goodness that sustains it. As if they had returned to primitive society, they became numb, cold-blooded and cruel, and eventually became a group of unconscious and aimless barbarians.

4. The Evil of Humanity in "The Summer People"

In addition to "The Lottery," another masterpiece entitled as "The Summer People" also deals with the same theme - the evil of humanity. Jackson experienced many twists and pains in her life. Her husband oppresses her; Her mother hurts her; The people around her bullied her. So the sense of suffocation that emerges between the lines of this article is largely rooted in her experience. There were almost no friendly neighbors in the place Shirley Jackson moved to after her marriage, and the local people treated her with a very isolated attitude. In addition to "The Lottery," several novels describing the violence and indifference of local villagers, such as "The Summer People," were also written during this period. She was caught in a spiral of anxiety and

fear. She fell into mental delusion, and increasingly saw the world outside as malicious and aggressive.

This story tells the story of a retired couple who have a summer house in the country mountains. Every summer, they come here from New York. Although life is far less convenient than in the city, the environment is beautiful and the people around are friendly. But as soon as they decided to break their years-long vacation pattern and stay one more month, local attitudes began to change. Even in the end, the villagers refused to give Allisons supplies, then they gradually lose all contact with the outside world, and finally like being locked in a cage by the villagers, waiting for the day of death.

Of course, this article shows the evil of human nature in both directions. First of all, the villagers' indifference and ruthlessness towards the Allisons. For example, the change of the villagers' attitude makes the Allisons finally find that the friendliness and kindness of the villagers is due to the business they bring to the village. When they couldn't make money because of weather and conditions, they didn't provide the Allisons with basic supplies. Even the villagers of the village want to drive the old couple away en masse and eventually threaten to leave them to their own fate. The second is the pride and disdain of the old couple for the villagers, who are stupid and simple people only as material providers. Think of yourself as a consumer, everything is self-centered.

4.1. The Villagers' Indifference and Violence towards the Allisons

An elderly couple, for the first time ever extended their holiday in a remote mountain village, but things are far from as they thought, everything is twisted. There seems to have been a subtle change in the attitude of the locals: first the advice was, "No one who lived by the lake lived past Labor Day" (Jackson, 1948, p. 330. Hereafter only the page number of this book referred to in parenthetical citations). Then came the warning, refusing to sell them kerosene, a necessity; Finally, some kind of threat, vandalizing their cars, cutting off their telephone lines, tampering with or stealing their mail. In the dark of the storm, the two old men clearly felt the danger approaching.

The change in attitude of the villagers led the Allisons to discover that the kindness and kindness of the people in the country was due to the business they brought to the village. The villagers were apathetic, and although they initially counseled the couple, they did not directly explain why they could not stay beyond Labor Day and instead simply refused to provide them with kerosene and other necessities. Even destroy their cars, cut their phone lines, and leave them to die. It is not difficult to see from here that the villagers are in a group. None of them give good advice to the old couple. Instead, they collectively ignore the old couple and use group violence to cut off their supply chain of daily necessities. Anyhow, the villagers are also selfish, when the old couple can bring them benefits, they will smile and welcome the old couple; And because of the reason of the following season, the town can not receive foreign tourists, they are completely unwilling to send kerosene for the old couple again, saying that "there is no one else to live by the lake, send kerosene once will lose money" (p. 332).

4.2. The Allisons' Arrogance and Disdain for the Villagers

The town is beautiful, the weather is comfortable, the lake is quiet, the fresh fruits and vegetables, everything makes the old couple very comfortable. But this is against the identity of the old couple as "New Yorkers," so when they feel and enjoy these wonderful things, the wording is always not willing to be simple and straightforward, not willing to praise others directly, but repeatedly pull out "we don't have in the big city, you have here" as a label, to reinforce the town has a "special beauty" (p. 331). Therefore, they themselves with a sense of consumer superiority, uphold the concept of "customer is God", look down on the villagers of the town.

Small town people are kind and simple, but these adjectives are always relative. The kindness of the villagers is due to ignorance, and simplicity is due to stupidity. So the old couple always hold the irritation in their heart when communicating with the local people. After they deal with these people who provide for them, they quickly flee back to their cabins. They are reluctant to communicate with the local people. In the end, life in the small town was simple. Every day, the old couple wrote letters to their son and daughter, played a loud radio that symbolized the hustle and bustle of the city, and then marked the New York department store fliers they were going back to buy. They seem eager to prove to the people of the town, "I have a good life."

In the eyes of the villagers in the town, the old couple is very proud. They are polite on the surface, but they can't hide their contempt. When there are only two people, they don't hesitate to comment on the stupidity and ignorance of the local "consanguine marriage". When they first wanted to break tradition with the villagers, they announced that they would stay in the town for an extra month. This shows the pride of the old couple to the villagers in daily life. They repeatedly emphasize that "the set in the city is of no use to the country people" (p. 331); Angry about letters and newspapers that don't arrive on time, telephone calls that are hard to get through, and requests for home delivery that are refused. Apparently they still have an urban attitude and don't want to blend in with local life. The old couple is also self-centered, they seem to talk kindly, yet every sentence starts with "I want..." "I've decided..." "I think..." So when the villagers first began to persuade elderly couples that "No one who lived by the lake lived past Labor Day." Because the timing of the vacation is related to the local seasonal weather conditions. They don't ask why, and even cursing in their minds, "You can wait and see next year" (p. 334). They are still based on their own needs, only for their own enjoyment, do not understand and respect the local living habits, the consequences can only be at their own risk. So it's not all the villagers' fault that the Allisons ended up like this, it's their own pride and prejudice that caused them to be hurt by the villagers. The old couple is so self-centered that they don't listen to other people's advice and feelings, and they end up here.

5. Conclusion

In some backward areas, people's blind obedience to old customs, to harm others for their own interests, people's cold-blooded are all the causes of human evil. The reasons behind the unbelievable collective atrocities described in both "The Lottery" and "The Summer People" have to do, above all, with the psychology of the participants. The collective delusion of the villagers and the audience, as well as their blind identification with the hosts and the villagers, lead them to lack the ability to criticise and discriminate, and to commit violence without being bound by a sense of guilt. In addition, the respective rituals in which the villagers and spectators participate are also a factor in the occurrence of collective violence. The enforced arbitrariness of the ritual of stoning normalises the act of collective stone-throwing, while the human evil of both the Allisons and the villagers of the town leads to a growing indifference to humanity. Jackson's intention in creating such a violent text is not to horrify, but rather to shape the text into a real social phenomenon in certain areas through the ritualisation of the narrative, thus revealing various social problems, such as the tendency to violence in the group mentality, while at the same time looking forward to the improvement of society. Jackson exposes the weaknesses of humanity while at the same time holding out hope for it. The violence, indifference and blind obedience that she satirises and criticises in the stories are in fact a warning to the world and a desire for change.

Through the dramatic events of senseless violence and behavior in people's own lives described by Jackson, this paper tells people to reflect on the ugliness of humanity described by the author, and appeals to people in contemporary society to abandon bad traditions, not blindly follow

others, love others, establish correct values in life, and transform the evil of humanity into the good of humanity.

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