

Windows in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

Shirley Jackson's, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* utilizes symbolism throughout the novel in various objects, but one of the most poignant objects being the windows. The windows of the Blackwood home are referenced in numerous scenes throughout the novel pointing to how the two daughters exchange judgment with those outside their small family. The judgment from the villagers that Merricat and Constance receive from the villagers through these windows is reflective of the patriarchal society trying to control women, even when they are in the privacy of their own home. This struggle with these expectations of the patriarchal village can be seen as a thread connecting most Female Gothic protagonists.

One of the first moments we are introduced to this idea of windows in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* is when Merricat is walking through the village to get groceries. During this instance, she is seemingly by herself, yet the weight of the villagers' gazes on her makes her anxious each time she goes into town. She specifically notes on her way back, "... Miss Dutton, who never did her staring out in the open like other folks, but only looked out between blinds or from behind curtains," (Jackson 5). Miss Dutton being placed indoors and only looking from behind the blinds and curtains of a window highlight how even the women are casting judgment on other women from the safety of indoors where society wants them to be. Further, into Merricat's journey home from the grocery store, she describes the windows of some apartment buildings in a more metaphorical manner. These windows are said to be "...pale and without life..." as they stare down at Merricat from the second floor, (Jackson 6). Having the windows depicted in this way shows how windows in this world reflect the person who resides on the

other side of them, and according to Merricat those people are ugly and suck the life out of everything.

After Merricat arrives back at the Blackwood house, she mentions that all the rooms at the front of the house are used less than the back of the house since the front faces the village. Merricat comments that they hide behind the “stern, unwelcoming face,” of their home and stick mostly to the back rooms of the house to hide from the view of the village, (Jackson 20). The home becomes a reflection of the women’s feelings toward the village when it becomes this face trying to drive away from the judgmental eyes of the villagers. This sort of face can also be seen in other Female Gothic novels in the mysterious estate or castle that the female protagonist is often sent to live in. These estates become an entity in themselves that pushes away the rest of traditional society besides the main characters. It is as though its existence inherently rejects everything expected of a good home according to the patriarchal community.

Later into the novel, we see Merricat and Constance completing the exchange of judgment through back out through the windows of their home when Helen Clarke arrives at the home. The windows in this scene are illustrated as being these ornate and beautiful windows that add to the rooms when you look at them from the inside, but Merricat claims from the outside the narrow windows cause the house to have a gaunt appearance. This contrast in the windows comes across similarly to how the bad woman would be depicted in literature, from the outside perspective she is seen as unwelcoming and is judged by the world around her, while on the inside she is full of warmth and happiness as she can live more authentically. The battle of the good woman and the bad woman is prominent in numerous novels in the Female Gothic as it plays into the commentary on patriarchal society and its unreasonable expectations for women.

Much later in the novel, it can be seen how the village hates this bad woman, and in turn how the villagers hate the Blackwood home itself. When the house is on fire, the whole village comes and helps to put it out, but Jim Donell comes out of the house before proceeding to throw a rock through one of the front windows. There are a couple of interesting details at this moment and one is the most prominent characteristic of Jim Donell; how he is tall and wears a hat that says "CHIEF" across it. The fact that he is of large stature and dons clothing that explicitly states his high status in the village comes across like a massive patriarch sticker across his forehead. He is seemingly respected by the villagers as they follow in his footsteps almost immediately after he throws the rock through the window without much question of his action. He also represents the symbol of the male who traditionally tries to tear down the bad women in Female Gothic novels. Having him put out the fire in the home to turn around and crusade in the destruction of the Blackwood house shows that when a woman is stepping out of her place in this male-controlled community, the community doesn't want her to be her own demise but rather bring her down themselves.

Merricat and Constance leaving the villagers to destroy the house can be seen as the women allowing the villagers to think they won at the moment. As the two return to their destroyed home, they begin to clean up the house a little bit so that they can make it somewhat livable. In their cleanup, the windows with their shattered glass are closed off with cardboard nailed to the wall. By closing off these front windows and the windows on the kitchen door so that no one could really see in or out of the house. Compellingly, the reader gets to see how those of the outside world try to use the windows to still peer in and judge the women for how they want to live their lives, but their attempts are successfully thwarted by the cardboard. Since the village is no longer able to get the information, they want to be looking through the glass of the

windows, which forces them to accept the exterior of the home that is more unwelcoming than ever before. The destruction of the glass in the windows can be read as a symbol of the bad woman being attacked by society after being discovered and then the boarding up of the windows would be her rejecting society in return for the rejection they showed her.

The windows in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson can be seen as symbols of judgment being exchanged between the village and the Blackwood sisters. This judgment between the patriarchal community that resides in the village and the Blackwood sisters, who live a more unconventional life, can be found across other texts in the Female Gothic through the comparison of the good woman and the bad woman. The Blackwood estate itself becomes its own sort of person during the scenes of the novel as it represents the feelings of the women who reside inside of it, playing their shield from the village. Even when the shield of the bad woman is seemingly broken, the woman still haunts the society that hurt her; as the Blackwood house and the two sisters do after the villagers destroy the home. Fascinatingly, this use of the metaphor in the house makes this novel that much more of a Female Gothic novel in the end.