

A CRITICAL-HISTORIOGRAPHIC APPROACH ON THE CONTROVERSIAL RECEPTION OF SHIRLEY JACKSON'S SHORT STORY THE LOTTERY

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Abstract

The present text is an annotated review of the literature that surrounds the ideological phenomenon that stamped the controversial reception of American writer Shirley Jackson's short story *The Lottery*. The accursed story's critical fortune is presented and discussed, at an introductory level, in order to shed light on the episode that beleaguers its publication in the celebrated literary magazine *New Yorker* in 1948. The intention is, through a critical-historiographic approach, to help readers understand the reasons and causes that have stirred such widespread public outrage, such profuse resentment and such awed curiosity towards this ill-fated short story and its obscure writer.

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Keywords: Shirley Jackson; *The Lottery*; Historiographic criticism.

INTRODUCTION

In June 28, 1948, the celebrated American literary magazine *New Yorker* published the story that would cause the most widespread public outrage in its history, Shirley Jackson's short piece *The Lottery*. Astonished by its reception, the publishers remarked that it prompted more mail than anything the magazine had ever published and "readers responded to the story with an unexpected degree of anger, outrage, disgust, and confusion" (MICHELSON, 2006, p. 34). This uncomely response provided its author with a lasting reputation that would outlive her in many years. The present text wishes to present and discuss, at an introductory level, the history behind this phenomenon. The intention is to help readers understand the reasons and causes that have spurred such rave criticisms to the short story and given such a lingering detrimental label to its author, in particular, that she was a one-story

writer. The analysis is based much more on the critical reception of the text under scrutiny than on theoretical concepts, yielding thus an annotated review of the literature on it; a critical-historiographic approach ensues.

The storyline of *The Lottery* is actually quite simple. In a very small unnamed New England town, its inhabitants gather in the central square for the annual lottery. There is the familiar discussion of mundane events surrounding village life – crops, taxes and local gossip - intermingled with commentary, often questioning, often endorsing, the maintenance of the lottery. Every villager picks a blank folded piece of paper. When they are all through, they open it, and the one who gets the ballot with a black dot in it is the winner. That year, it was Mrs. Hutchinson who was to receive the prize, which consisted of being stoned to death by her neighbors, family and friends. Even her four-year-old son, Davy, is given stones to help kill his own mother.





What is commonly agreed about this story is that it represents Jackson's bleak view of human nature, along with all its disturbing elements at their peak. It can be viewed as a modern version of an ancient scapegoat ritual.

Taking into consideration solely the aspects grazed in this small retelling of the story, it is not surprising that elements such as 'familiar surroundings turned violent' and 'putting tradition above sanity' touched undesirable issues for mid-twentieth century American audiences. The prissy, prim readers of the *New Yorker* - as a discerning sample of the reading society of those times - would never openly condone their appreciation for such barbaric acts being conducted, even if fictionally, in towns just like theirs; notwithstanding, much of the hate mail received by the author and by the magazine editors not only spoke evil of the tale but some of them demanded to know where these lotteries were being held and mainly if they could go there and watch them.

HISTORICAL RECEPTION

The aftereffects of its publication set up a chain of events of capricious proportions, in this sense, its reception was downright histrionic. Even today, *The Lottery* is considered "one of the most anthologized stories in the U.S." (HWANG, 2009, p.104), together with Ambrose Bierce's *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* and Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man's Hard to Find*. To American critic Roger Miller, "it's a fair bet that James Thurber's *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* and Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery* are two of the most popular American short stories of this century" (1997, p.1). To American critic Monica Dickens, "it should be in every classic collection" (1983, p.1). To Judy Oppenheimer, Jackson's biographer, the short story is possibly the most chilling horror tale of all time (In: CALDWELL, 1988; DIRDA, 1988). Pulitzer Prize-winning book critic Michael Dirda, writing for the *Washington Post*, sensibly inquired:

"Is there any story in modern American fiction more widely known than *The Lottery*?" (1988, p.1). Professor Dale Bailey, of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, once speaking about the readers familiar with *The Lottery*, rhetorically asked "what college freshman is not?" (1999, p. 25). In an attempt to make sense of the commotion stirred by the short story, English novelist Patrick McGrath wrote, referring more specifically to the scapegoat-theme, that it is "the most vivid and terrifying expression of this idea in all of Shirley Jackson's work; which is why, of course, it is so famous. And its capacity to shock is as potent today as when the story first appeared more than fifty years ago" (2000, p. ix). It is, nevertheless, not so obvious for readers of other countries other than the United States that *The Lottery* became such a national staple to the point of actually becoming part of not only the American folklore but also their imaginary *subconscious* (Canada included).

So much so that in schools across North-America students read *The Lottery* as a "national classic" and teachers turn to it for various reasons other than its, admittedly, "spare, evocative prose" (LOOTENS, 1994, p. 160). Taking its vast academic usage, and its encompassing history also into consideration, one may arguably conclude that the story, though "initially controversial, (...) has [really] become a staple in U.S. classrooms" (O'NEILL, 2002; ZEITCHIK, 2009). In fact, it is "a scary favorite of English teachers across the nation" (SLATER, 2008, p.2). According to Miller (1997), it is almost impossible to graduate from an American high school without having been assigned *The Lottery* to read. Not only in America, but in unexpected places, such as the Atlantic Bilingual School in Puerto Cortés, Honduras, where Shirley Jackson is taught for 7th, 8th, and 9th graders (WIGFALL, 2007). Still regarding school accounts, in an essay about the literary legacy of Shirley Jackson, edited by Bernice Murphy, the following narrative is present:



About a decade ago, the coldly irate parent of a college student confronted me, the English Department chair, with 'I knew that some day I would have to face this nightmare.' Trying to imagine what assignment had so upset this well-dressed, well-coiffed, suburban matron - maybe Lolita, maybe Lady Chatterley's Lover, maybe Ulysses - I braced myself for what literary catastrophe I would have to defend. Girding her loins in righteousness, the aggrieved mother spat out, *The Lottery*" (In: MURPHY, 2005, p.1).

Sometimes reactions such as these were positively led to extremes, for good or for bad, for example, it has been insinuated that some people have become opposed to capital punishment after reading *The Lottery* (SILVERMAN, 2010). The term *provincial fascism* has been said to have been coined to describe the story (DALTON, 2006) – far-fetched as that may seem. Scholar David Michelson examined one hundred and twenty-seven letters sent to Jackson following the publication of the short story in the *New Yorker*; he sought to find explanations for people's reactions:

Based upon an examination of 127 letters written to the author after publication, I argue that the angry, outraged, and hostile responses result from incongruities between the author's representation of human social life, and aspects of human nature that are believed to aid in group survival — cooperation, fairness, and in-group amity. I discuss how mid-century American cultural values, such as the rhetoric of American moral exceptionalism, may have made the story's representation of human social behavior even more disagreeable to readers. Finally, I suggest that the story persists because it functions as a cautionary tale, which instills adaptive social values. (MICHELSON, 2006, p. 34)

The consequences of these occurrences were not necessarily gracious but rather, often unpredictable. According to *St. James Encyclopedia of*

Popular Culture, Jackson herself once wrote: "It was not my first published story, nor my last, but I have been assured over and over that if it had been the only story I ever wrote or published, there would be people who would not forget my name" (In: PENDERGAST & PENDERGAST, 2000). Regardless of how alternative history might have unfolded, things being the way they currently are, her name is not exactly forgotten – slightly marginalized in some instances perhaps, what makes her loosely accurate in her foresight. As a result, she became a denizen of that special, though generally unfair, *hell* reserved for writers remembered for a single work (DISCH, 1997; MILLER, 1997). To this day, Jackson features in Stanford University's *The Culture Guide Index* in the list of authors *Known Primarily for One Work* (SEWELL, 2010). This is, naturally, not without reasons. History has provided us with a series of often contradictory accounts that contend for the vindication of such phenomenon. Let us see now some of them.

Her editors played a relevant role in the determination of her *monochromatic* reputation. University of Mississippi Professor Joan Wylie Hall addressed this concern in her novel-length study entitled *Shirley Jackson: A Study of the Short Fiction*. She claimed that Jackson's editors explored, negatively or otherwise, the issue of thematic unity in the writer's works in order to sell; that is, labeling the diversity and the thematic richness of the whole of her short stories so as to advertize them all as one big horror book, mainly due to the widespread beguiled success of *The Lottery*. Booksellers and editors have purposefully attributed to the collection where it was published a plethora of single-minded labels from the mildly misleading "the most eerie and haunting work of our time" (HALL, 1993, p.3) to far out excesses such as "a gem of satanic shock" (p.3). The majority of them, inducing readers to believe that Shirley Jackson was a writer of horror fiction and





nothing else, and that *The Lottery* was her undisputed and *single* masterpiece.

When inquired as to the editors' wishes, Jackson herself stated: "I won't write love stories or junk about gay young married couples, and they won't take ordinary children stories, and this sort of a thing is a compromise between their notions and mine, and is unusual enough so that I am the only person I know of who is doing it" (In: HALL, 1993, p.55-56). She could clearly distinguish her *serious* stories from the other ones such as what *The Lottery* had become, which were what editors incessantly asked for. At the same time, she complained about their unsanctioned marketing strategies that were, in the least, impairing, if not seriously disrupting her literary objectives.

The question of *niches* seems also to be a constant in some critics minds when to explain the whimsical and erratic outcome of that fatidic publication. Many of her stories were published in magazines intended primarily for housewives, such as *Mademoiselle* and *Ladies Home Journal*, which somewhat limited not only the reading public but also jeopardized the respect with which history (predominantly male-written history) would credit them. Furthermore, being looked upon as a horror writer did not really help Jackson's reputation as a serious writer, and again restrained the reach of her fiction. Oddly enough, she recurrently endorsed and hence sabotaged her own reputation by accepting, or at least not denying, much of the stamps she was often labeled. Many wished to know and/or understand her reasons – and probably still do – hence, the search for her inspiration as a venue for finding such elusive answers.

INSPIRATION

Many inquired as to the origin of the short story; some demanded to know what the events that inspired it were. Following the success of *The Lottery*, a sort of mythical image was created around

Jackson. At the time, she lived in the small town of North Bennington, Vermont. Her townfolk, in a gossipy fashion, suggested that once, when she was a child, Shirley herself had been pelted with stones and had, thus, gone home and written the story. Though (probably) not true, it indeed helped with the construction of the myth surrounding its author anyway. This was most likely the first seed in the foundation of the Shirley Jackson *myth*.

When finally Jackson herself was inquired as to what the story really meant, she is reported to have said: "well, really it's just a story" (In: KUNITZ & HARCRAFT, 1955, p. n). In a quite brief personal sketch produced for *Twentieth Century Authors* (edited by Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Harcraft in 1955), she stated that: "I very much dislike writing about myself or my work, and when pressed for autobiographical material can only give a bare chronological outline which contains, naturally, no pertinent facts" (p. n). This statement sheds doubt on the account that Jackson, years after writing *The Lottery*, told a friend that it was inspired by anti-Semitism (CALDWELL, 1988).

In 2010, literary critic and senior editor at *The New Republic*, Ruth Franklin, wrote in an essay included in the new Library of America collection that, allegedly, the idea for *The Lottery* first came when, in a given day, Jackson was pushing her baby daughter's stroller heading home; as soon as they arrived, she put the baby down in a playpen, laid the groceries on the kitchen counter and sat down and started writing *The Lottery* in a single thrust, from beginning to end. Ergo, the *New Yorker's* most shocking and bitterly-sweetly deprecated short story publication of all its history was conceived.

This last account does not seem very odd when one understands that many of Shirley's stories came out of the blue. The first draft of *The Intoxicated* came out just like that. One evening, her husband Stanley and herself were receiving a couple of friends for a game of Monopoly when



suddenly Shirley started to sell her property – which was quite odd given her competitive nature – and she quickly left the living room off to Stanley’s study and started typing. A few moments later she came back with a piece of paper in hand and began reading aloud to her audience. She attentively heard their comments and went back to revise the original draft. Later that night the story was ready for publication (OPPENHEIMER, 1988). The search for understanding went on. If the events that preceded the publication of *The Lottery* were not being very illuminating, critics again turned to the events that succeeded that uncanny day in 1948.

MESSAGE AND REACH

In an interview granted to Library of America in 2010, American writer, critic and Professor Joyce Carol Oates was inquired as to why the publication of the *The Lottery* in the *New Yorker* caused the outrageous stir it did; to what she replied that the magazine was, at the time, in 1948:

(...) far less than now a sort of bastion of proper middle-class/ Caucasian-American values. The magazine tended to be prim, prissy, self-regarding, its tone annoyingly arch. Jackson’s story suggests that ordinary Americans—like the readers of *The New Yorker*, in fact—are not so very different from the lynch-mob mentality of the Nazis. Of course, Jackson’s (...) is the art of radical distillation, like Flannery O’Connor, not subtly observed social drama like that of Henry James, Edith Wharton, or John Updike. (LOA, 2010, p.1)

Special attention should be devoted to this fear of identification with mobs that Oates alludes to, considering that, as previously mentioned, some of the letters Jackson and the *New Yorker* received that year asked to see where those lotteries were held and if they could come and watch them. That outwardly prim society, that felt and demonstrated disapproval of anything it regarded as improper was just not ready to welcome the radical

distillation of Jackson’s infusions of reality that were contained in her texts.

One of the main reasons horror stories appeal to readers is the fact that, in a symbolic way, they offer a chance of evincing emotions that people would not otherwise have the chance to, given the invisible bounds society inflicts upon them. Stories such as *The Lottery* are:

(...) an invitation to indulge in deviant, anti-social behavior by proxy – to commit gratuitous acts of violence, indulge our puerile dreams of power, to give in to our most craven fears. Perhaps more than anything else, the horror story (...) says *it’s okay to join the mob*, to become the total tribal being, to destroy the outsider (my italics)(KING, 2001, p. 43).

In his *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King claims that the indulgence in deviant behavior has never been done better or more literally than in *The Lottery*, where the whole concept of the outsider was but symbolically created by a black dot on a white piece of paper: “but there is no symbolism in the rain of stones which ends the story; the victim’s own child pitches in as the mother dies, screaming “It’s not fair! It’s not fair!” (2001, p. 43).

The message that outraged readers in 1948, when the story was first published in the *New Yorker*, and that, needless to say, still shocks readers today, warns us of the dangers of repressing our emotions – of course her fiction took the perils of *not hearing the signs* to a whole new level; furthermore, readers today are supposedly better informed and thanks to the ease of dissemination of information are also more familiar with the ailments of the mind and its effects both on an individual or a group. All things considered:

Shirley Jackson understood the cost of maintaining the false facade before that insight was commonplace. She gave it fictional flesh in a large body of work, and in particular in a short story of such succinct compressed power that it





cannot be read today without a shudder of horror and recognition; and no one who reads it ever forgets it. (McGRATH, 2005, p.x)

Not everybody agrees about the unforgettable imprint of *The Lottery*, though. As far as 2001, when critic Harold Bloom published, as part of his *Bloom's Major Short Story Writers* collection, the parsimonious piece entitled simply *Shirley Jackson*, there was still some of that conservative ideology gliding over some American academic and critical circles – and that is not to say that it has stopped existing at present. This ideology, nonetheless, is translated in Bloom's first words in the introductory section of the book in which he already questions whether Jackson's most celebrated short story, *The Lottery*, will ever be regarded as canonical. His tone is somewhat of half-concealed disdain:

Like so many of Shirley Jackson's stories, "The Lottery" makes me brood upon the element of tendentiousness that renders her so problematic in aesthetic terms. Jackson always had too palpable a design upon her readers; her effects are as calculated as Poe's. Poe alas is inescapable: his nightmares were and are universal. This salvages him, despite the viciousness of his prose style, and absence of nuance in his work. Since he is greatly improved by translation (even into English), Poe has endured, and cannot be discarded, or even evaded. (BLOOM, 2001, p. 9)

Bloom makes a series of short-sighted comments in this passage above. Firstly, the *tendentiousness* he mentions, just as much as the *predictability* in some of her stories, are not supposed to be their highlights in the first place. It is the case of the famous short story *Charles*, originally published in the magazine *Mademoiselle*, in July 1948. In the first paragraphs of this *short* short story the cunning reader already knows what is the premise behind the plot, i.e., that the

naughty boy who does terrible things at school according to the narration of his classmate Laurie is, in fact, Laurie himself. The point Bloom misses is that that is not the most relevant aspect of the story, rather the relationship between parents and children regarding the latter coming to school for the first time is. Questions such as how blind the parents can be when it comes to their own children being the naughty ones are first and foremost at the center of the narrative, and not whether the story is predictable, palpable or tendentious as Bloom claims. As for the aesthetic value, in a story about the first experiences in school of a little boy and his narration of the things he sees one cannot expect elegant rhetoric. A child speaks as child speaks. Bloom also mentions that Poe's stories deal with universal themes and Jackson's not. Poe wrote substantially about persons afflicted by multiple personalities, people being buried alive and the untimely death of damsels. Jackson wrote substantially about life in the living room and in the kitchen, parents and children and husbands and wives' relationships. Which is more universal? (I do not which at any way, shape or form to detract from the brilliance of Poe's stories, it is just a case about what is more familiar to the average everyday reader).

Bloom goes on to say that although most of her stories are "crisply written and cunningly plotted", *The Lottery*, in particular, "scarcely bears rereading, which is (...) the test for canonical literature (p. 9). He ends his introduction by stating that:

Jackson certainly aspired to be more than an entertainer; her concern with sorceries, ancient and modern, was authentic and even pragmatic. But her art of narration stayed on the surface, and could not depict individual identities. Even 'The Lottery' wounds you once, and once only (p.10).



There are definitely layers of meaning that Bloom's proficient reading fails to access. These meaning can be accessed mainly through the knowledge of her other works that, taken as source of valuable information, serve as keys to breaking the dormant codes that lie in a single Jackson story. There is a self-contained intertextuality that allows for that access and that makes her stories complex and multi-layered.

Going back to the time of its publishing, or the period that followed immediately thereafter, the story was greeted equally with dismay and stupefaction. Jackson herself said that of the three-hundred-odd letters she received that summer, she could count only thirteen that spoke kindly to her, and they were mostly from her friends. Even her mother scolded her (POWERS, 2000): "the ending of this story came as quite a jolt to my wife and, as a matter of fact, she was very upset by the whole thing for a day or two after" (In: FRANKLIN, 2010, p.1) wrote one of Jackson's correspondents. When readers finally came to their senses and realized that the character chosen for death was a mother, they understood, not necessarily agreed, but understood that she was striking a universal chord there. What is important to bear in mind is that the letters of complaint she received were neither concerning the quality of her works nor her personal talent, but the contents of her stories and the underlying ideology that often times surfaced mercilessly in her writings and so poignantly touched many people's sensitive nerves.

Evidence for the complexities and contradictions of gender norms in post-World War II America were also present in those letters. Undoubtedly, her literature carried domestic and gender ideology that were, as pointed out by Jessamyn Neuhaus (2009), received specially by women readers in contradictory ways. On the one hand the letters partially supported the assertions made by Betty Friedan (1971) that the *housewife writer* and

'domestic-humor literature' did reinforce the dictation of domestic gender norms. On the other hand, the letters demonstrated that the figure of the housewife writer represented a very specific strategic response to the rigid gender norms of Friedan's *feminine mystique*. Housewife writers did not offer answers to clarify the blurred and subverted lines between the work of the housewife and the work of the writer (NEUHAUS, 2009) – and perhaps nor should they. Just as much as a writer writes about whatever he or she chooses to, readers and critics also read and criticize in whatever manner they wish, as can be seen in the following section.

AMYRIAD OF INTERPRETIVE TAKES

Interpretation attempts at *The Lottery* took - and still take - the most intriguing shapes; from larger-than-life lessons to the search for meaning in minute details, from decisions about death penalty to unpretentious features such as if the "stool beneath the box, which is described as 'three-legged,' may or may not be significant as a symbol" (FRIEDMAN, 1975). It seems that whatever regard this story can only be dealt with in superlatives.

In an article published in *The New Orleans Review* in 1985, author Peter Kosenko brings a Marxist-feminist reading of *The Lottery*. In it, Kosenko explains that the lottery in the story represents an attack on the "essentially capitalist (...) social order and ideology" (p. 27) of the town in which it is set. Though he acknowledges that Jackson was not a Marxist, he claims the story clearly possesses Marxist undertones. His arguments border the debatable, especially because it seeks meaning in details that its author would most likely not have attributed meaning to. An example is the black dot found in the lottery's ballot. Kosenko believes there is an association between the *blackness* of the black dot and the coal business led by Mr. Summers, one of the organizers of the event and the man who drew the dot in the





blank slip of paper. According to Kosenko, blackness is associated to evil which, in turn, is associated to business and ultimately leads to an association with Capitalism. To him, “(The) most powerful men who control the town, economically as well as politically, also happen to administer the lottery” (1985, p. 27). In the story, the victor (and victim) Tessie Hutchinson, who holds the ballot containing the black dot, is forced to open it by her husband, Bill Hutchinson. The narrator exclaims: “It had a black spot on it, the black spot Mr. Summers had made the night before with a heavy pencil in his coal-company office” (2005, p. 301). To Kosenko (1985), at least at one level, the evil present in the lottery is linked to a disorder, promoted by capitalism, in the material organization of modern society.

A feminist reading of *The Lottery* is presented by Darryl Hattenhauer in his 2003 novel-length study entitled *Shirley Jackson’s American Gothic*. He claims the story primarily deals with the subjugation of women in an oppressive patriarchal society. He adds that “a married woman minimizes her chances of being selected by delivering babies early and often” (HATTENHAUER, 2003, p. 44). The way Hattenhauer puts it, within the story, the boys’ role is to (apparently leisurely) collect stones, the men’s, to discuss politics and farming and other so-called *important* matters, and the girls’ is to stand aside, looking over their shoulders; finally, the women’s role is to engage in gossip.

The scapegoat theme seems to be one with fewer dissensions among critics. In 2003, Seymour Lainhoff, using Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* as theoretical background, wrote that Jackson’s *The Lottery* is a “modern representation of the primitive annual scapegoat rite” (p.1) and that, according to the story, the rite still flourishes in some typical modern American community. To Lainhoff, there is a double purpose to the rite: “to exorcise the evils of the old year by transferring them to some inanimate or animate

objects, and with that (. . .) to appease the forces of the new year, to insure fertility” (2003, p.1). To Don D’Amassa, writer of the *Encyclopedia of Adventure Fiction*, “the lottery is also representative of the human tendency to choose a scapegoat, an individual or individuals who can be blamed when things go wrong and punished so that people do not have to accept any blame or punishment” (2009, p. 130).

In the 2000 Modern Library edition of *The Lottery and Other Stories*, Patrick McGrath, writer of the introductory section, states that Jackson effects a ritualized scapegoating, one in which allows the release of a year’s worth of repression in a community that outwardly passes as placid and self-contained. The hypocritical placidity gives place to plain cruelty as it is converted into a physical form of expression that unites this unordinary New England community - men, women and children alike - around an event that reaches its climax in human sacrifice through stoning: “that is what it takes, she seems to say, to keep our towns pleasant and peaceful. That is the price we pay. And none of us is innocent in this regard, not even the children” (McGRATH, 2000, p.x). McGrath alludes to the fact that even the victim’s four-year-old son, Davy Hutchinson, is given stones to help kill his own mother.

Nonetheless, few are the themes in which common accord is found among critics. Rows still rage over Jackson’s goals. *The Lottery* represents the peak and the primal example of what a community can do when it channels its aggression towards a chosen victim - that can be random or purposefully selected, though the short story’s title suggests the former, the proficient Shirley Jackson reader understands several reasons that strongly point to the latter. These reasons, mainly political and ideological in nature, reveal what the author subliminally wishes to convey to her audience, or at least to the readership that is willing to listen, ponder,



and ultimately accept what she has to say; otherwise these messages are simply lost, hidden behind conservative or simply unconcerned modes of thinking. Those who are willing to listen might just be fortunate enough to share her underlying plans to have literature help re-model, for the better, human relations and society.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The publication of *The Lottery* was not Shirley Jackson's first association with *The New Yorker* magazine. As a matter of fact, it had started some five years before, as early as 1943, with the publication of the short piece *After you, my Dear Alphonse*, an elucidative tale of prejudice and of human nature. After that, a significant portion of her short fiction was published in *The New Yorker*, contemporary with the 'Chas' Addams cartoons. Other portions were published in magazines as improbable as

Mademoiselle and *Ladies Home Journal*, which only fed her dilemma in writing fiction marketable to such publications. None held much enthusiastic response, though. Their quality was, nonetheless, equal or superior to *The Lottery*. The range of her themes was immense, as fittingly noted by Murphy (2005), who said that despite all this prolific writing, the majority of critical discussions of Jackson's work focuses only on this one chilling story that is *The Lottery*. The investigation of these other pieces of fictional brilliance will be the subject of another study. The present study wished to submit this literary phenomenon to introductory level scrutiny, in order to kindle its debate. Hopefully readers are now acquainted with some of the reasons and causes that have stirred such profuse resentment and, at the same time, stimulated awed curiosity towards this controversial short story and her obscure writer.

UMA ABORDAGEM CRÍTICO-HISTORIOGRÁFICA DA CONTROVERSA RECEPÇÃO DO CONTO THE LOTTERY DE SHIRLEY JACKSON

RESUMO:

O presente texto é uma revisão de literatura comentada a respeito do fenômeno ideológico que marcou a controversa recepção do conto *The Lottery* da escritora norte-americana Shirley Jackson. A fortuna crítica deste execrado conto é apresentada e discutida, em nível introdutório, com o intuito de esclarecer o episódio que cerca sua publicação na celebrada revista literária *New Yorker* em 1948. A intenção é, por meio de uma abordagem crítico-historiográfica, ajudar os leitores a entender as razões e causas que provocaram tamanha afronta generalizada, ressentimento e curiosidade atônita para com este conturbado conto e para com sua obscura escritora.

Palavras-chave: Shirley Jackson; *The Lottery*; Crítica historiográfica.

Artigo submetido para publicação em: 14/07/2011

Aceito em: 05/09/2012

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