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砂糖與砒霜：酷兒化雪莉·傑克森《從此，我們過著幸福快樂的日子》中的巫術與日常生活

Sugar and Arsenic: Queering Witchcraft and Everyday Life in
Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

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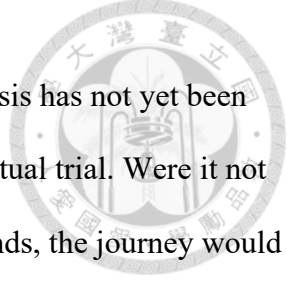
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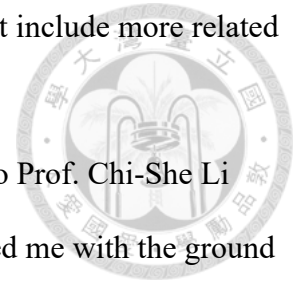


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text through the lens of disability studies are inspiring. I regret that I cannot include more related discussions due to the limitation of my topic and the length of the thesis.

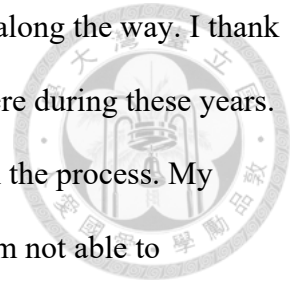


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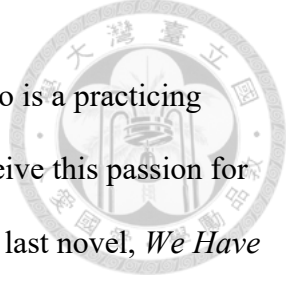


摘要

雪莉·傑克森在她第一本小說的作者介紹中被描述為「當代作家中唯一的業餘女巫」。眾多學者相信傑克森對超自然力量的興趣成為她在壓抑的生活中獲取力量的方式。作者生前最後一本小說，《從此，我們過著幸福快樂的日子》充滿易被判定為巫術的儀式描繪。然而，這些巫術般的儀式在故事中卻面臨失效。前例研究甚少處理儀式的失敗，也未能解釋此失敗與賦權意象共存的矛盾情形。本論文旨在透過酷兒理論與女巫、巫術，及獵巫相關的歷史研究詮釋此現象。文中分析將導向儀式並未失敗的結論，並論證故事中的儀式仍具有轉化力量，且此力量源於主角非傳統的日常生活實踐而非超自然神力。引言將介紹文本背景並進行文獻回顧。第一章建立文本、北美女巫歷史，及1950年代美國社會之間的關聯。同時，以歷史事件為引，本章節將以酷兒情動理論(queer affects)檢視“常模”(the norms)的霸權地位。第二章將探討巫術的力量源頭與家庭生活之連結。透過酷用(queer use)理論，本章將女巫般的日常生活形塑為魔法儀式的力量泉源，並以此抵禦常模。第三章將藉由酷兒負面性(queer negativity)的視角討論小說結局，並將之建構為在對抗常模的戰爭中所取得的勝利。而酷兒時間性(queer temporality)也將作為分析工具，討論顛覆常模的後續事件發展。最後，結論總結研究發現，並列舉本論文未竟之處及未來尚待探討之議題。

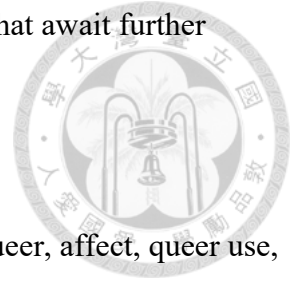
關鍵字：雪莉·傑克森，《從此，我們過著幸福快樂的日子》，女巫，酷兒，情動，酷用，時間性

Abstract



Shirley Jackson was described as “the only contemporary writer who is a practicing amateur witch” in the author biography of her first novel. Most critics perceive this passion for the supernatural as Jackson’s way of seizing power in a repressive life. Her last novel, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962) is filled with explicit descriptions of rituals that could be identified as witchcraft. Nevertheless, these witchcraft-like rituals fail in the story. Precedent studies rarely address this failure and have not yet directly explained the paradoxical existence of failure and empowerment. This thesis aims to unravel this complicated situation, drawing inspiration from queer theory and historical studies of witches, witchcraft, and witch hunts. My analysis leads to the conclusion that the magical rituals have not failed; instead, the transformative power exists and arises from the protagonists’ nonconventional daily practices rather than from supernatural force. The Introduction will first present a background and literature review of the subject matter. It will also make explicit the research question and explain how the chosen methodologies will contribute to the discussion. Chapter I establishes the connection between the novel, the history of witches in North America, and American society in the 1950s. Drawing on historical events, it then examines “the norms” as a hegemony to be challenged by queer affects. Chapter II will explore the power of witchcraft and the links between witches and domesticity. Under the framework of queer use, the chapter will establish living a witchy everyday life as the true power in magical practices capable of resisting norms. Chapter III interprets the bewildering ending of the novel through the lens of queer negativity and asserts the denouement as a triumph over societal norms. Queer temporality will also be introduced as an analytic tool for addressing what could happen following the subversion.

Finally, the Conclusion summarizes the findings and highlights questions that await further exploration in future studies.



Keywords: Shirley Jackson, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, witch, queer, affect, queer use, temporality

Table of Contents



Acknowledgements.....	i
Chinese Abstract.....	iv
English Abstract.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter I. Witches, Witch-Hunts, and the Haunting of Happiness.....	21
1. The Making of a Witch: Who are the Witches?.....	23
2. Witch Hunts of Two Periods: The Seventeenth Century and the Mid-Twentieth Century.....	27
3. Happily Never After: Queer Affects and the Heteronormativity.....	34
Chapter II. Magic, Home, and the (Anti) Housewife.....	43
1. Origins of Power: Prevailing Beliefs Regarding the Sources of Power in Witchcraft... 44	
2. The Ties between Witchcraft and Domesticity.....	49
3. The Rebellion in Everyday Life: Queer Use and the Domestic Objects.....	52
Chapter III. Radical Survival Beyond Linear Temporality.....	63
1. (Un)becoming the Ladies: Queer Negativity and Silent Resistance.....	65
2. “Who Knows Where the Time Goes?”: Queer Temporality and Non-Chrononormative Futurity.....	71
Conclusion.....	81
Works Cited.....	85

Introduction

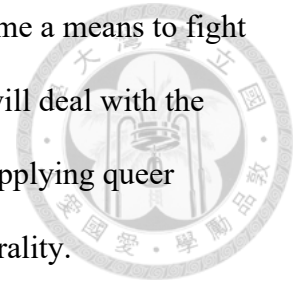
Shirley Jackson, whose name is most commonly remembered as the author of the horrifying short story—"The Lottery," was described as "the only contemporary writer who is a practicing amateur witch" in the author biography of her first novel (Franklin ch. Introduction). There are debates on whether Jackson really practiced serious witchcraft or that this declaration was only a marketing scheme.¹ However, there is a consensus that she genuinely had an evident interest in the history of witchcraft, and she was invited to write a historical children's book on the Salem Witch Trials.² Among all of Jackson's finished novels, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962) is the one where readers can find the most direct descriptions of rituals that would be identified as witchcraft.³ Nevertheless, in *Castle*, the magical rituals eventually fail. The previous researchers did not ignore the witchy elements in the story, and many of them read witchcraft as a means for Jackson's characters to gain power, yet the existing studies have not come up with an explanation that allows the empowerment and the failure of rituals to happen at the same time. This thesis aims to address this perplexing situation by bringing in aspects from queer studies and creating a space for queer theory to interact with the history and rituals of witchcraft. This dynamic leads to the conclusion that the real power hidden in the story is found in the sisters' adopting the living style of a witch. The paper will first establish connections among the novel, the history of witches in North America, and American society in the 1950s to contest the binaries of good and bad, desirable and unwanted, and normal and monstrous. After the normal is problematized and removed from its seemingly righteous position, I will move on

¹ The definition of witchcraft differs across time and cultures. According to the entry of "witchcraft" in the *Britannica Dictionary*, some common means to perform witchcraft include "incantations (formulas or chants invoking evil spirits), divination and oracles (to predict the future), amulets and charms (to ward off hostile spirits and harmful events), potions or salves, and dolls or other figures (to represent their enemies)." More detailed discussions on the definition of witches and witchcraft will be found in Chapter I and Chapter II.

² *The Witchcraft of Salem Village*. It was first published by Random House in 1956.

³ Hereafter, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* will be referred to as *Castle*.

to discuss how witchcraft rituals and the everyday life of witches can become a means to fight against norms under the framework of queer use. Finally, the last section will deal with the enigmatic ending of the story. It will read the ending as a positive one by applying queer negativity and discuss the sisters' survival through the lens of queer temporality.



Background

The works that made Shirley Jackson famous to modern readers are her horror fiction. *The Guardian* dubbed her “the US queen of gothic horror” when a new biography of Jackson hit the market in 2016 (Hughes). Modern readers may first encounter her name when reading Jackson’s infamously unsettling short story, “The Lottery,” in their English class and are reminded of her existence after watching the impressive Netflix adaptation of her scary gothic tale, *The Haunting of the Hill House*. However, Jackson’s body of work is too large to be contained in only one genre. Jackson also wrote a play, several children’s books, and most importantly, numerous hilarious domestic stories for women’s magazines. Among her publications are *Among the Savages: An Uneasy Chronicles* (1953) and *Raising Demons* (1957), collections of her domestic writing widely recognized for their popularity among both her contemporaries and modern readers.

Two biographies of Jackson: Judy Oppenheimer’s *Private Demons: The Life of Shirley Jackson* (1989) and Ruth Franklin’s *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life* (2016) are the main sources that provide us with information about Jackson’s personal life. According to the biographers, Jackson’s family background more or less explains this unusual synchronous success in the two polarizing fields of horror and domestic narrative. Jackson was born on December 14, 1916, in California. She is the first daughter of an affluent family. Her father

Leslie Jackson ran a lithography company and her mother Geraldine is a beautiful housewife with a proud ancestry. Jackson, however, was a misfit in this presentable family. Shirley Jackson, being not pretty, overweight, and deeply unconventional, could never meet Geraldine's expectation of having a sweet and beautiful daughter. This complex between the mother and the daughter would trouble Jackson throughout her life and was eventually transformed into a lurking tension that had never left her stories. In spite of the uneasiness she experienced at home, her uniqueness and her talent in writing were greatly appreciated after she entered Syracuse University. In Syracuse, Jackson met her future husband Stanley Edgar Hyman, who would later become a notable literary critic and a faculty member of Bennington College. The couple married in 1940. Hyman was alleged to be unfaithful and domineering in their relationship from time to time but he remained an important support of Jackson's career as a writer. Their marriage and the family life of raising their four children became inspirations for both Jackson's horror tales and funny domestic stories.

Unlike many women in the 50s, Jackson's housewife duty did not prevent her from achieving a successful career. According to Darryl Hattenhauer, from the 1940s to 1960s, Jackson "was ranked among America's most highly regarded fiction writers" (1). Her name was frequently listed together with big names like J.D. Salinger, Ralph Ellison, Flannery O'Connor, Allen Ginsburg, and so on (Hattenhauer 1). However, in her private life, she had always suffered from great mental and physical pain.⁴ *Castle* (1962), her sixth and last completed novel, was written under challenging conditions but it has become the most acclaimed of Jackson's novels by her contemporary critics (Franklin ch. 16). According to her correspondence with Jeanne

⁴ In her late years, Jackson suffered from anxiety and agoraphobia, and her significant overweight made her susceptible to high blood pressure and heart disease (Franklin ch. Introduction).

Beatty, the experience of writing *Castle* was extremely difficult (ch. 16).⁵ Initially, Jackson was inspired by a case that took place in Victorian England but was bogged down because she feared that her design lacked originality.⁶ The project was further deferred when she got colitis, a painful inflammation of the colon.⁷ The final and perhaps the most notable trial happened when she incidentally found out her earlier work, *Hangsaman*, was labeled “an eerie novel about lesbians” in the book *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (ch. 16).⁸ Jackson feared that the same tag would again be attached to her new project and distort the message she tended to convey (ch. 16). Jackson eventually overcame the situation by reflecting on her fear of the tag “lesbians,” and by confronting the fear, she rose above the plot of “two women murdering the man” and elevated the story to what Franklin describes as “two women who metaphorically murder male society and its expectations for them” (ch. 16).⁹ When the book was finally published, the reception was unprecedentedly enthusiastic (ch. 16).¹⁰

“The Lottery” enjoys incomparable fame, and *The Haunting of Hill House* secures a landmark-like position in the haunted house genre while *Castle* in comparison, does not seem that familiar to modern-day readers. However, the novel still attracts attention that it was adapted

⁵ Beatty was a housewife from Baltimore. She was a fan and later became a close pen pal of Jackson. Their correspondence in the early 1960s recorded Jackson’s struggles when she was writing *Castle* (Franklin ch. 16).

⁶ According to Jackson’s letter to Jeanne Beatty, Jackson was inspired by The Charles Bravo Murder. In 1876, Charles Bravo was poisoned by antimony, and the murderer was never found. Some believe Charles mistakenly took the poison he intended for his wife, Florence, a rich woman who was much wealthier than Charles but insisted on keeping her fortune in her name (Franklin ch. 16).

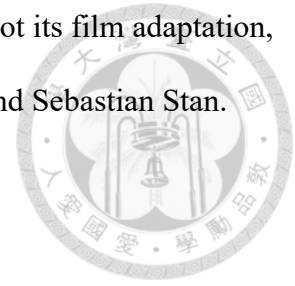
⁷ The illness led to dietary restrictions and her anxiety about leaving the house (Franklin ch. 16).

⁸ *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (1956) was written by Jeannette Howard Foster. The book maps literary works with potential lesbian attraction from Sappho’s poems in the sixth century BC to Patricia Highsmith’s *The Price of Salt* in 1952.

⁹ A detailed record of Jackson’s changes of attitude toward this subject can be found in one of her letters to Jeanne Beatty (Franklin ch. 16).

¹⁰ The novel received great success. Critics like Orville Prescott, John Barkham, Beatrice Washburn, Max Steele, Kenneth Burke, Guy Davenport, and Dorothy Parker paid high compliments to the book at its publication. The sales performance reflected the novel’s extraordinary reception. *Castle* hit the *New York Times* best-seller list and stayed there for five weeks (Franklin ch. 16).

into plays in 1966 and 2010; in 2018, this relatively low-key masterpiece got its film adaptation, directed by Stacie Passon, starring Taissa Farmiga, Alexandra Daddario, and Sebastian Stan.



Plot Summary

We Have Always Lived in the Castle tells the story from the perspective of Mary-Katherine Blackwood (Merricat), an untamed eighteen-year-old girl who lives with her docile older sister, Constance, and their disabled uncle. The rest of the Blackwood family members have been murdered at the dinner table by arsenic mixed with sugar six years before the story takes place. Due to this ominous event, the sisters are treated as outsiders, feared, and hated by the villagers. Despite the hostile villagers, the sisters and the uncle live a peaceful and abundant life on their estate. Constance keeps their life comfortable with her excellent house management and cooking skills; Merricat performs magical rituals in order to guard their quiet life and wishes that her reclusive fairy-tale days with Constance will last forever. However, regardless of the protection magic Merricat has cast, their tranquil life is still intruded on by their cousin Charles, who is interested in the wealth hidden in the house. Merricat's attempt to expel Charles ends in a fire. The villagers who put out the fire at first destroy the house out of spitefulness at the end, siege the sisters, and find out that their uncle is dead in the disturbance. A secret conversation between the sisters reveals Merricat as the culprit of the murder case six years ago. The two, however, decide to return to the ruin of the building and continue to live there while hiding themselves from all the other people outside. In the end, the house has become a legendary site in the village, and the sisters are feared and revered as witchlike figures who accept compensatory gifts from the villagers. No one but ignorant children dare to bother them ever again.

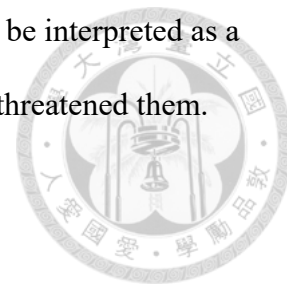
Research Question and Arguments

Despite Jackson's reputation as a witch, what is worth mentioning is that among the six novels published during her lifetime, *Castle* (1962) is the only story that explicitly depicts witchcraft rituals; however, magic and witchcraft, which are widely recognized as an access to acquire power, do not seem to be effective in the story. In my thesis, I would like to explore this conspicuous but confusing presence of witchy elements in *Castle* and try to figure out if empowerment through witchcraft is still possible when the magic fails.

I would like to argue that in the story, empowerment is not achieved through the magical effects generated by supernatural power, but through living like witches in their daily life. This understanding should be read with the insight of queer studies. By regarding the everyday life of the witches as a kind of queer practice, the failure of the magic will not sabotage the possibility of resistance. I believe that through constructing an abnormal monstrous everyday life of the witchy figures, Jackson exposes the monstrosity hidden behind the normalized everyday life and creates a way to resist such a life by living a witchy version of it.

Jackson's rejection and accusation of normativity unfold in three layers. First, the story challenges the relationship between ordinary and abnormal by situating the sisters' condition in the tradition of witch hunting. The persecution inflicted on the minority exposes that what is considered normal and the demands to comply with the majority can lead to hideous consequences. Secondly, the sisters' witchy lifestyle has transformed ordinary daily objects into potential means to subvert forced heterosexual family normativity and capitalism. By using ordinary things in extraordinary ways, the protagonists are able to expel the unwanted norms imposed on them. Finally, the main characters' rejection of external society has helped them

construct a unique version of everyday life. This rejection does not have to be interpreted as a tragedy; it even allows them to strike back and haunt the society that once threatened them.



Literature Review

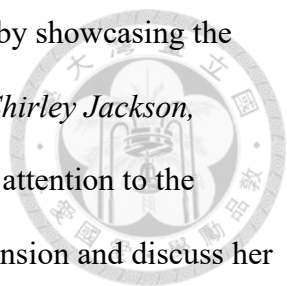
Jackson's literary achievements are rarely assessed without mentioning her interests in witchcraft and the supernatural. Her more "serious gothic novels" also hardly receive comments from critics without a reminder of Jackson being an author who provides entertaining domestic articles for women's magazines.¹¹ The earlier scholarly comments give Jackson scarce recognition. While their rather negative perspectives do not all arise from Jackson's love and passion for witchcraft and her commercial writings, their emphasis on these two factors suggests that the two elements were distracting and potentially detrimental to her recognition as an author of serious canonical works. In *Shirley Jackson* (1975), probably the earliest scholarly book devoted to Jackson, the author, Lenemaja Friedman, though enjoying Jackson's stories and praising her as "an expert storyteller and craftsman," labels Jackson as an entertainer too occupied with mysteries and fantasies and having no intention of dealing with the more complicated problems of humanity (161). Harold Bloom wrote a brief study guide on Jackson, focusing on her short stories. In its introduction, Bloom recognizes Jackson as having more ambition than being an "entertainer," and especially emphasizes her "authentic and even pragmatic" interests in sorceries, but still criticizes her as an author whose story can shock her readers only once and whose narration "stays on the surface, and could not depict individual identities" (10).

¹¹ She was a regular contributor to the magazines *Good Housekeeping* and *Woman's Home Companion*.

Recent studies show a more approving attitude toward the appraisal of her achievements. Critics are increasingly recognizing the complexity inherent in her horror fiction and are enthusiastic about granting her a place in the canons of American literature. However, her interest in witchcraft and the humorous domestic aspects of her writing still remain problematic for some scholars. Different from his predecessors, Darryl Hattenhauer feels compelled to elevate Jackson's reputation and endeavors to reintegrate her into the array of well-known and respected American canonical authors. He seeks to accomplish this goal by establishing Jackson as a "proto-modernist" who symbolizes the emergence of a new literary trend (Hattenhauer 2).¹² Concurrently, he deliberately decouples Jackson from the two factors that seem to hinder her canonization: her allegedly obsessive interests in witchcraft and her extensive volumes of writing on domestic narratives. He claims Jackson's persona as a witch to be an advertising gimmick and her "entertaining" domestic writing as fruits of pure commercial concerns (8-9). In *Shirley Jackson-Literary Legacy* (2005), Bernice M. Murphy provides a stage for already existing important papers in Jackson scholarship with the ambition to explore different possibilities when discussing Jackson's works. Murphy demonstrates a similar admiring attitude toward Jackson's accomplishment in writing but also does not want the attention of Jackson as a witch to eclipse Jackson as a writer. Murphy reads Jackson's relationship between witchcraft and the supernatural as the result of a promoting joke taken too far (13-14).

However, fewer and fewer critics attempt to solidify Jackson's importance by distancing her from her personal interest in the supernatural. Instead, they stress her position as the successor of a literary tradition and her female experience as how she differs from her

¹² Hattenhauer analyzes Jackson's writing with John Barth's term, "proto-postmodernism." Some traits of the proto-postmodernism include "disunified characterization, discontinuous plots, absurd settings, illegible narrative point of view, and (...) themes such as the divided subject, the seeming chaos of events, the incongruity of institutions, the undecidability of current epistemes, and the intertextuality of signification" (Hattenhauer 2).



predecessors. If Murphy's work aims to inspire future research on Jackson by showcasing the studies from the past, Melanie R. Anderson and Lisa Kroger in their book *Shirley Jackson, Influences and Confluences* (2016) pursue a similar goal—calling for more attention to the scholarly potential in Jackson's works—but they expand the temporal dimension and discuss her influences from her roles as a successor, her interactions with fellow writers of her time, and her impact on later artists (3). In *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life* (2016), the latest biography of Jackson, Ruth Franklin also begins her discussion by addressing the problem of Jackson's succession in literary history. She situates Jackson into the American Gothic tradition in which she becomes the heir of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Henry James, but at the same time, she also cleverly notes that Jackson's contribution to the genre lies in her focus on women's perspectives (Franklin ch. Introduction). Like many prior scholars, Franklin has faith in Jackson's writing and agrees that critics tend to underestimate Jackson's works. Nevertheless, unlike Hattenhauer or even Murphy, Franklin ensures that her readers do not forget Jackson's devoted passion for the history of witchcraft. She believes that Jackson claimed power through her connection with magic (ch. Introduction). After all, Jackson was a mother of four who lived under the repressive fantasy of ideal housewives and happy families during the postwar era. By providing this background, Franklin makes clear that just like her love for the supernatural, Jackson's domestic narratives are not to be downplayed. In fact, one should not ignore the continuity between her horror fiction and domestic narrative: her horror stories are “grounded in domestic” (ch. Introduction).

“Witchcraft” and “domesticity” were the formerly embarrassing elements in Jackson's life that seemed to prevent Jackson from claiming her deserved recognition in literary history. However, they are now treated by many recent studies as keys to understanding Jackson and her

works. In *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, these two elements converge. The approaches scholars have taken to analyze this story centered on but are not limited to feminism, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and queer studies. Lynette Carpenter reads it from the perspective of feminism and claims that Jackson's feminist consciousness is pioneering since the publication of this story predates major feminist publications, including Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, Andrea Dworkin's *Women Hating*, and Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (200). Andrea Krafft also reads the story with a feminist concern and establishes humor and laughter in the story as a means for the protagonists to create a new female community (108). Ashleigh Hardin, on the other hand, adds historical perspectives into the feminist frame, claiming this story to be a "narrative of containment" that deals with the duality of a woman and situates the novel within the containment culture during the Cold War era (111-13).

Roberta Rubenstein is one of the first who introduce psychoanalytic aspects into the analysis of Jackson's works. She sheds light on the story with a focus on Jackson's recurring motif of the mother-daughter bond and situates Jackson's works in the realm of psychoanalysis and Female Gothic by claiming that the contestation between mothers and daughters in her novels is the contestation between the boundary of inside and outside (Rubenstein 309). Kay Chronister follows the psychoanalysis tradition and reads the first-person narrative in *Castle* by applying Lacanian concepts of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real (131). Chronister conceives Merricat's worldbuilding as a way of indulging in the Imaginary (145). She also argues that Merricat victimizes her beloved older sister in this process of shying away from the Real (Chronister 145).

Dara Downey, in *It Comes from the 1950s!: Popular Culture, Popular Anxieties*, takes a different approach and situates Jackson's writing within anthropological thinking in the 1950s. She believes the story responds to the conflicts between individuals and the society of the era, and *Castle* serves as evidence that Jackson is more sympathetic to individuals, especially those who are often regarded as deviants (193-94). Shelley Ingram contends that Jackson navigates between myth, legend, fairy tale, and other folk narrative forms, and this reconstruction of folk narrative creates a space for the traumatized protagonists to alienate themselves from the community outside (72).

Most of the abovementioned scholars are aware that rituals and witchcraft in the novel are worthy of discussion, but only Alissa Burger's book chapter has given this topic full attention. The existing readings of witchcraft in *Castle* mainly follow Franklin's belief in what magic means to Jackson, that is, they treat Merricat's rituals as a means to gain control and power against the patriarchal society symbolized by Charles and the villagers.¹³ Congruent with this interpretation, many discussions on these rituals emphasize the purpose of solidifying the boundary between the sisters and the world outside.¹⁴ The materials used to perform witchcraft also attract attention in some studies because they seem to signify the superior class of the Blackwood family.¹⁵ However, most of the analyses on witchcraft in *Castle* are scattered across different papers and play only supporting roles in these discussions. Alissa Burger's book chapter "Casting a Literary Spell: The Domestic Witchcraft of Shirley Jackson" is by far the only scholarly study that has made Jackson's witchcraft the center of attention. Alissa Burger compiles the traces of witchcraft in Jackson's publication and explains that for Jackson, writing

¹³ Carpenter, Oates, and Elizabeth Nollen are some of the examples.

¹⁴ Rubenstein and Downey both stress Merricat's will to set a boundary.

¹⁵ More details can be found in Hardin and Hattenhauer's discussions.

is a magical practice and doing housework can also be a kind of witchcraft (100-01).¹⁶ Burger accurately elaborates that Merricat in *Castle* finds magical power in everyday objects and words, while Constance's excellent cooking is also a domestic witchcraft of its own (107). Nonetheless, the abovementioned studies have focused mostly on the empowering aspects of her magical rituals, but rarely have scholars directly confronted the fact that Merricat's protection spells actually fail. Also, only a few studies include Constance and her house management skills in the discussions of witchcraft.¹⁷

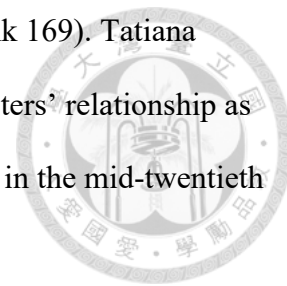
I would like to propose that the key to addressing these gaps in the discussion lies in the alliance of the two already existing domains that have contributed to Jackson's scholarship: the study of witchcraft and queer theory. The recurring struggle between the self and others and the tension between the deviant and the majority in her writing have drawn scholars to reflect on her works with inspirations from queer studies. The intersection of Jackson scholarship and queer theories is mainly found in research into *The Haunting of Hill House*, with some sparse studies on *Hangsaman* and *The Sundial*.¹⁸ Despite the very queer-related struggle Jackson encountered when she was writing *Castle*, only a few scholars have directly discussed the story within the framework of queer studies. Emily Banks's article is one of the rare examples. She analyzes the story from the framework of queer futurity and elaborates on how the protagonists escape the

¹⁶ She points out that the content related to witchcraft can be found in *Life among the Savages* (1953), *Raising Demons* (1957), *The Witchcraft of Salem Village* (1956), and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962)—that is, two collections of domestic narratives, one historical children's book, and the last published novel before her death.

¹⁷ Chronister is one of the few who have given an adequate length to deal with the failure of Merricat's witchcraft. Her explanation is that Merricat's magical system is Imaginary that tries to take over Real but the patriarchal Symbolic is still the one in control (Chronister 145). However, this interpretation cannot explain the legendary status the sisters achieve at the end of the story. Shelly Ingram in her book chapter also notes the failure of the rituals and interprets them as a partial success in her conclusion (72). Her arguments are constructed by analyzing the interplay between myths, fairy tales, legends, and folklore rather than discussing the rituals. More details will be provided in Chapter III.

¹⁸ For example, Timothy C. Baker's "'Not at all afraid': Queer Temporality and the School Detective Story" discusses *Hangsaman* and Emily Bank's "[Fall]ing [Out] of Line: The Sundial's Apocalyptic Queer Futurity" focuses on *The Sundial*.

patriarchal structure by extreme means of destruction and reinvention (Bank 169). Tatiana Prorokova-Konrad's book chapter is another case that directly reads the sisters' relationship as lesbianism and contends that lesbianism was labeled as a kind of disability in the mid-twentieth century (129).



I believe queer theory has more to offer to this story. Queer theory, like how witchcraft is often understood in the Jackson scholarship, is concerned with obtaining power and resisting a patriarchal society. By reading witchcraft and its failure within a queer framework, it is possible for the potential of liberation to remain when supernatural effects do not take effect. The convergence of the study on witchcraft and queer theory will also expand people's imagination regarding the possible sources of power, and it will make the resistance to patriarchy feasible in quotidian life.

Methodologies

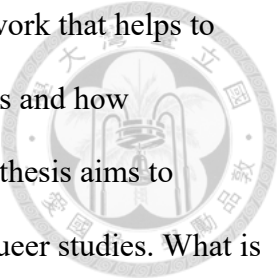
The fact that Jackson's *Hangsaman* was already labeled under the tag "lesbianism" as early as 1956 has made explicit the potential for Jackson's works to be read under the queer framework.¹⁹ Jackson herself was aware of this potential when she was drafting *Castle*. She was initially troubled by it, but eventually, the tag prompted her to ponder what she feared and what she wanted. As Oppenheimer puts it, "there had always been a very direct link for Shirley between the book she was writing at any moment and the life she was then living" (236). *Castle* is not only another piece of Jackson's work but a product of her reflection on her relationship with family, femininity, and society. Considering how her works are written with the consciousness of responding to her life, and how the word "lesbianism" influenced Jackson's

¹⁹ *Hangsaman* is commented as "an eerie novel about lesbian" in Jeannette H. Foster's *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (qtd. in Franklin ch. 16).

journey in writing *Castle*, I believe historical study and queer studies will be suitable methods to develop my arguments.

Shirley Jackson's writings are seldom discussed without mentioning the author. Jackson's reputation as a witch, her complicated relationship with her husband, and the repressive feelings she experienced in her community are believed to be indispensable factors that provide insights into understanding her writing. In consideration of the broad scope of imagination that can be evoked by keywords like "witches," "witchcraft," and "ideal family," I believe it would be preferable to narrow down the referents of these terms by consulting historical information. Historical study will contribute to the thesis in mainly two ways: providing the definition of a witch and conceptualizing the pressure of living in a homogeneous society. I plan to shape the image of "witches" in this thesis according to the records from the seventeenth century New England history, given the significant status of the Salem Witch Trials in American history. The studies examining how witches were portrayed in literature and popular culture around the 1950s will also be introduced into the discussion since these depictions may have influenced how Jackson perceived a witch.²⁰ The history of American society in the 50s, along with the historical representations of witches, will provide background for readers to understand what it felt like to live in a patriarchal and homogeneous society. The paranoid atmosphere of the Cold War era and the emphasis on family values during that time offer insights for readers to envision the overwhelming pressure of conforming to norms and maintaining a picture-perfect heterosexual family.

²⁰ The representation of witches in literature in this thesis would be confined to the 1950s since a comprehensive analysis of the topic will require another chapter and may not be directly related to the following discussions. More holistic representations of witches can be found in studies such as Ronald Hutton's *The Witch: A History of Fear from Ancient Times to the Present*, Rosemary Ellen Guiley's *The Encyclopedia of Witches, Witchcraft, and Wicca*, and Jonathan Durrant and Michael D. Bailey's *Historical Dictionary of Witchcraft*.



Queer studies, on the other hand, will serve as the theoretical framework that helps to explain how living everyday life contains the potential to fight against norms and how constructing everyday life outside of traditional paradigms is possible. This thesis aims to highlight the rebellious energy hidden in everyday life through the lens of queer studies. What is commonly known as the everyday life theory finds its origin in Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) and Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (1991). Ben Highmore's *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (2002) and *The Everyday Life Reader* (2002) compile insights from de Certeau and Lefebvre, establishing the theory as a significant field of academic inquiry (Chang 23-25). The everyday life theory under this framework invests much in examining the influences of modernity and city space. This framework delves into the influences of modernity and urban space and provides a means to theorize what was once considered mundane, domestic, and repetitive. However, as Lauren Berlant puts it, "everyday life theory no longer describes how most people live" (8) since the majority no longer experience the shocks of urban landscapes. Consequently, a new approach to understanding everyday life is needed.

What Berlant offers, then, is a bleak perspective on the ordinary's current state. She proposes in *Cruel Optimism* that we turn toward "thinking about the ordinary as an impasse shaped by crisis in which people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on" (Berlant 8). Berlant is not alone in emphasizing the efforts people need to survive everyday life and ordinariness. The study of everyday life now finds its incarnation in queer theory. Scholars like Sara Ahmed, Jack Halberstam, Elizabeth Freeman, and many others have developed theories inspired by and rooted in everyday life. The affective turn in queer theory inherits the awareness of everyday life and

examines it by reflecting on what it means to live “a good life.” My thesis relies on queer affects to make visible what people are fighting against in their quotidian experience. According to Berlant, it is the “cruel optimism” that turns people’s daily life into crises. Sara Ahmed on the other hand, attributes what haunts people and makes them unsettled in life to “happiness” in *The Promises of Happiness*. What they share in common is an awareness of how heteronormativity still dominates people’s imagination of what life should be. Queer theorists like Berlant and Ahmed argue that people are persuaded into believing a fantasy about life but trapped in the predicament of not being able to live up to these expectations and prescribed normativity (McCann and Monaghan 11).

Queer theory for a long time, has played the role of challenging normativity (McCann and Monaghan 11). The temporal turn in queer theory responds to the impasse of everyday life by situating the problem of a “good” life within the dimension of time, and by contemplating the dynamic among queer, the past, the present, and the future. Queer temporality reacts to the problem of time and normativity from two routes: one emphasizes negative affects and refuses to invest in the future,²¹ while the other embraces optimism and does not let go of the pursuit of a utopia.²² Jack Halberstam, for example, places his faith in the present and the potential of negativity. He finds the possibility of a paradigm shift from pursuing happiness to nonconformity in the pathologized modes of living in refusal and in failure (McCann and Monaghan 223). On the other hand, Elizabeth Freeman seems to lean on the more optimistic side.²³ She points out

²¹ For example, Lee Edelman in his book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), points out that queers are believed to be a threat to the future because they cannot give birth to children. In response to this logic, he encourages queers to abandon the heterosexual expectation of reproduction altogether, along with people’s obsession with the future, and instead focus on the present.

²² José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) for example, counters Edelman’s radical presentism with an opposing attitude. He believes that queerness is to be achieved in the future and people should not be content with the “here and now” (10).

²³ The vision she presents for queer temporalities in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* is that her project “is less to negate than to prevaricate, inventing possibilities for moving through and with time, encountering

how institutional forces make time a part of their means to discipline people into following normativity. However, she believes by reflecting on and moving with time, we invent possibilities that allow us to “counter the common sense of the present tense” (Freeman xv). The way to destabilize the normativity of presence, she contends, lies in “detour, delay, deference, asynchrony and stasis” (McCann and Monaghan 235).

The affective turn makes explicit the frame within which we live, while the temporal turn reflects on the alternatives outside the frame. In Sara Ahmed’s *What’s the Use: On the Uses of Use* (2019), she introduces the term “queer use” as a possible practice to dismantle the frame. By “queer use,” Ahmed means to “use something for a purpose that is ‘very different’ from that which was ‘originally intended’” (199). She believes that by refusing to use a thing properly, the potential to destroy and vandalize an imposed restriction is unlocked. Although “queer use” was not introduced as a term before Ahmed, many scholars had already noticed how objects are involved in the formulation of normativity. With this awareness of the influence an object can wield, the rebellious possibilities hidden in objects have never been alien to queer scholars.²⁴ Queer affects, queer temporalities, and queer use will help us identify in the text what norms need to be challenged, what the alternatives would be like once we abandon normativity, and how to undermine normativity in everyday life.

Chapter Design

pasts, speculating futures, and interpenetrating the two in ways that counter the common sense of the present tense” (xv).

²⁴ Berlant, for example, dedicates Chapter One in *Cruel Optimism* to elaborate on how a thing could be enlisted by cruel optimism and contribute to the fantasy that is doomed to fail people.

The thesis consists of an introduction, three body chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction will introduce the readers to the background and literature review of the subject matter. Additionally, it will articulate the research question and elucidate how the chosen methodologies will interact with the issue at hand. The body chapters will be organized into three parts: the first part aims to expose the normal as the evil worthy of abandonment; the second part explains how to tear down the undesirable normality, and the final chapter establishes what is to be expected after the destruction.

The objective of Chapter I is to review the related historical background of this text and problematize “the normal” with historical sources and theories related to queer affects. The chapter will begin with recounting the prevalent representations of witches and establishing the connection between the Blackwood sisters and the image of a witch. The infamous event of the Salem Witch Trials in the seventeenth century will provide grounds to situate Shirley Jackson’s motif of witches within a history that holds a long-existing enmity toward unconventional women. In the 1950s, the decade during which Jackson published most of her major works, the fear of the outsider and the anxiety of deviating from the norm resurged. These historical references will be discussed with insights from queer affects to challenge the connection among happiness, family, and society.

After problematizing normality, Chapter II will delve into the exploration of living a witchy everyday life. This lifestyle is considered an embodiment of queer use, wielding the power to subvert patriarchal norms. Prominent theories on witchcraft and its power will first be introduced. A study on the relationship between domesticity and witchcraft will then follow, emphasizing that witches’ rituals have long relied on using ordinary objects in unordinary ways and for unordinary purposes. While the theoretical works and the descriptions of magical rituals

make clear the subversive potentials hidden in everyday life objects, the textual evidence will then demonstrate how the protagonists use everyday rituals to resist capitalism and patriarchy.

Finally, in Chapter III, I aim to interpret the bewildering ending of the novel through the lenses of queer negativity and queer temporality. The theories related to queer negativity will first argue the ending to be an empowering situation for the sisters. Queer temporalities will then play a key role in answering what could happen after the subversion of the unwanted norm. I contend that what Jackson has depicted in this ending is an alternative daily life outside of patriarchal time and order. The sisters' decision to shy away from other people can be read within the framework of queer negativity. At the same time, this ending deviates from Halberstam's radical negativity and introduces a new perspective not covered in the framework of ultimate destruction. The story concludes with survival for the protagonists, achieved through negotiating a new relationship with time. By establishing a new everyday pattern that defies the regulation of linear time, they arrive at their "happily ever after" that does not subject to common imagination.


Possible Contributions:

This study aims to make contributions from three aspects. First, I wish to provide a new reading of Jackson's text; secondly, I also aim to enrich the studies of witches and witchcraft with a Jacksonian representation of witches; finally, I hope to start a further conversation between the study of witchcraft and queer theory. While Queer studies and witches are not new keywords in Jackson scholarship, current studies have not successfully connected them and made their alliance a key to solving the problem of empowerment and failure in *Castle*. I believe that this alliance helps fill in the gaps left by the preceding studies. Relying on the insight provided

by the novel, I also hope to raise awareness of the relationship between witches and domestic life. I contend that witches have a special relationship with domesticity—that is, they have the potential to subvert everyday life by breaching their housewives' duties and meddling with the most ordinary daily necessities. With this finding, I would like to provide a possibility for witches to receive more attention in queer studies. I believe Jackson's story has added witches' unconventional lifestyle to the sources of witches' power, which is usually ascribed to the supernatural. This discovery bridges between the study of witches and queer theory, as both believe that living a defiant life is how people find their subversive potential.

Chapter I

Witches, Witch-Hunts, and the Haunting of Happiness



If there were witches, the 1960s probably marks a period when they finally felt safe to walk out of the “broom closets.” In 1964, the American Broadcasting Company launched the phenomenal fantasy sitcom, *Bewitched*. The show aired for eight seasons and bestowed on American society with Samantha Stephens, a beloved witch who strives to convert herself into a typical suburban housewife. By the late 60s, witches would feel welcomed in a different manner—they were enlisted for more rebellious purposes. “It’s an awareness that witches and gypsies were the original guerrillas and resistance fighters against oppression—particularly the oppression of women—down through the ages,” said Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, the organization also known as “W.I.T.C.H.,” in its 1968 manifesto.²⁵ “Witches have always been women who dared to be,” they said, “groovy, courageous, aggressive, intelligent, nonconformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary” (Fahs ch. 8). For better or for worse, for domestication or for revolution, the 60s is a remarkable moment in U.S. history when “being a witch” can be, at least for some, desirable.

However, if there were witches, they would have been terrified into silence for centuries before they were able to experience everything that happened in the 60s. Those labeled as witches were in a much more perilous position throughout history. Starting from the fourteenth century to the last known witchcraft execution in 1782, around 110,000 people were tried for witchcraft and around 40,000 to 60,000 were executed (Lewis and Russell). It has taken hundreds of years for the witches to travel from the gallows to the feminist parades on the streets.

²⁵ People later on come up with other humorous acronyms for “WITCH”, including Women Incensed at Telephone Company Harassment, Women Intent on Toppling Consumer Holidays, Women’s Independent Taxpayers, Consumers and Homemakers, Women Inspired To Commit Herstory, and so on (Purkiss 9).

“Witches” were condemned as faithful servants of Satan, orgiastic seductresses, and malign murderers of children. For these accusations, they were hanged, burnt, and lapidated in the name of God, Nation, and Justice. However, historically speaking, some believe there probably has never been a witch. Ioan M. Lewis and Jeffrey Burton Russell put it this way, “Witches were not a persecuted minority, because witches did not exist: the people hurt or killed in the hunts were not witches but victims forced by their persecutors into a category that in reality included no one.”²⁶ The history of witch hunts is, in fact, the history of persecuting our neighbors next door.

This chapter aims to contextualize *Castle* within the historical context of witch-hunting, particularly in America. It seeks to argue that the oppression of minorities depicted in the novel manifests itself as a witch-hunt, as such hunts epitomize the conformity of the “normal” and the accompanying violence it entails. To begin with, it is necessary to first discuss who would be regarded as a witch. This chapter will initially attempt to construct an image of a witch by going through prevalent representations of witches in history and their interaction with the novel. The infamous witch-hunts in America will then be discussed, ranging from the infamous Salem Witch Trials in the seventeenth century to the McCarthyism, in which “witch-hunt” was a persistent metaphor that describes the confinement and oppression happened at the time. Finally, the injustice against sexual minority groups in the 50s will be extended to a discussion that situates the novel within the framework of queer affects and establishes the so-called normality as a force that tries to make our witches bend.

²⁶ However, this claim can be controversial. Marion Gibson has addressed the question of whether witchcraft was merely an imaginary crime against imaginary groupings. She suggests that this assumption be approached with careful attention, as some individuals actually identify themselves as witches (Gibson, *Witchcraft: The Basics* 117).

1. The Making of a Witch: Who are the Witches?

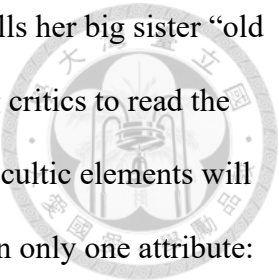
By pointing out the non-existence of a “real” witch, Russell’s words at the same time expose the fact that everyone has the chance of being forced into the category of “witch.”²⁷ With this premise, it is not surprising to find out that historians all emphasize the impossibility of pinning down comprehensive definitions of “witch” and “witchcraft” in their studies. The understanding of “witches” does not only differ in cultures but also varies in time. In this thesis, the referents of “witch” and “witchcraft” will follow the understanding in Western Europe and Anglo-America. The representation of witches in the Early Modern period and the modern witchcraft, whose practice was formulated at the end of the Second World War, will both be discussed.²⁸ Despite the difficulties of defining a witch, some recurring attributes of the word in different studies are compiled as follows to enable the analysis: first and foremost, witches are frequently imagined as the associates of Satan or other pagan gods, and witches worship them at “black sabbaths.” Secondly, they are practitioners of magic and often use it to do harm; thirdly, they have a special connection with nature; and finally, they are mostly women, especially independent women with professional knowledge who are rebellious against male domination.²⁹

Elements that remind readers of demons, magic, and herbalists can be found throughout the novel. The younger Blackwood sister, Merricat, performs multiple rituals that she conceives to be “magical.” She is accompanied by a black cat named Jonas, whose existence is easily associated with witches’ devilish familiars. Merricat self-describes the cleaning routine with her

²⁷ The term “witch” here refers to individuals who were brought to trial under charges of practicing witchcraft in early modern Europe and America.

²⁸ I am convinced that Jackson shaped her characters as a synthesis of both early modern history and postwar feminist fantasy representation. This consideration stems from Jackson’s reliance on books written during the early modern period for her study on witchcraft, the influential Salem Witch Trials that occurred in the seventeenth century, and Jackson’s own life in postwar America.

²⁹ This list compiles discussions from Gibson’s *Witchcraft: The Basics*, Ronald Hutton’s *The Witch: A History of Fear, from Ancient Times to the Present*, Ioan M. Lewis and Jeffrey Burton Russell’s *British Encyclopædia* entry on “witchcraft,” and Diane Purkiss’ *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*.



sisters as “a pair of witches walking home” (Jackson, *Castle* 69), and she calls her big sister “old witch” in their banter (75). Sufficient textual evidence has invited preceding critics to read the sisters as witches, as enumerated in the Introduction. However, the more occultic elements will be scrutinized in the following chapters. At this moment, I intend to focus on only one attribute: that is, the accused witches are often marginalized women. This is also the sole trait shared by innocent women accused of practicing witchcraft in the early modern witch-hunts, the witches in literary works who have genuinely done inexcusable evil deeds, and Jackson’s protagonists in *Castle*. The Blackwood sisters inhabit a marginal position in the village. Their estrangement from the majority eventually elicits fear and hate from the villagers. The resentment is so strong that it eventually develops into an intense confrontation, much evoking the imagery of “burning the witches.” Their marginal status firstly comes from their being women—more importantly, women who live independently and with the ability to endanger the stability of society.

Joyce Carol Oates describes witchcraft to be “the province of marginal individuals.” Being a woman already puts one in a marginalized position in comparison to being a man. The history between witches and the female gender is a long and unsolved one. In many feminist-oriented studies, women, especially marginalized women or any female figures who seem to live outside the reach of male society are labeled as witches because men feel threatened by the power they may possess, whether it be medical knowledge or the ability to give birth. Perhaps, it is as simple as that men are just afraid of women (Gibson, *Witchcraft Myths* 65). However, historians have warned that it is tempting to apply the radical feminist lenses on the issue but people risk going over the top in terms of establishing the history of witch-hunts as a massacre targeting women (Purkiss 2). This exclusive approach suffers from bias by exaggerating the number of executed female witches while neglecting the reality that many witches were often

brought to court based on accusations from other women, and that there were male witches. It is essential to acknowledge though, that the misogynistic impression surrounding witch-hunts does not arise out of thin air. David D. Hall once said, “Gender is the most reliable of all predictors of who would be singled out and labeled ‘witch’” (274). The infamous demonology, *Maleus Maleficium* (The Witch Hammer) also has an undeniable “relentless focus on women” (Gibson, *Witchcraft Myths* 116); according to Carol Karlsen’s calculation, “between 1620 and 1725, 78 percent of those accused of witchcraft were female” (47), and in England the number was about 90 percent (2). The story of *Castle* would be totally different if the survivors of the family were not two single women and a disabled old man.

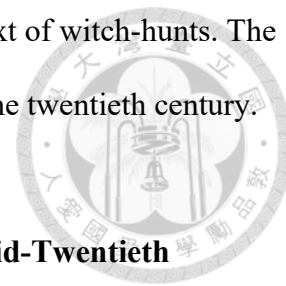
Being a woman also means that one would be marginalized because of different reasons from men. The word “marginalized” could easily lead to a stereotypical portrayal of an “old, frail, and economically impotent” person and this image is especially prevalent when discussing witchcraft cases in England (Gibson, *Witchcraft Myth* 79). However, In *Castle*, the Blackwood sisters are quite the opposite of the stereotypical “old hags”: they are young, healthy, and economically potent. The only remaining similarity in their story is that they are still the outliers of their communities. Based on Carol Karlsen’s research in *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*, Marion Gibson concludes that “at least some of the women who were accused of witchcraft seemed to have been targeted not because they were old, poor, and economically and socially dependent (...) but because they were sexually and socially independent and wealthy” (128). Gibson further emphasizes that being successful is exactly the reason for some women to be persecuted. The Blackwood sister’s thriving without a powerful male figure is unconventional and could stir the anxiety of villagers. The Blackwood mansion after the murder case is a vacuum of male domination. The everyday life in the house centers

around the two girls while the only male survivor is the deluded and disabled Uncle Julian, whose survival depends on Constance's attentive care. Their life is abundant and almost self-sufficient thanks to Constance's garden and the ample preserves left by the earlier Blackwood women. Their inherited fortune allows them to procure whatever supplies they desire from the townspeople, although this typically only involves a modest amount of meat, dairy goods, and other groceries (Jackson, *Castle* 16). Merricat once concludes that the people of the village dislike the fact that they are able to afford whatever they want (7).

Not to mention, the appalling case and Constance's detention as the primary suspect further marginalize the sisters. The villagers are paranoid around them because they are not only independent but also individuals powerful enough to pose a threat. The villagers fear the Blackwood sisters as the witch from the Grimm brothers' "Hansel and Gretel," who brings demise to people with food. The deceased Blackwood family members had been killed at the dinner table by taking in poisoned sugar, and the villagers since then have become sensitive when the girls get their hands around food (Jackson, *Castle* 8). Both the nameless witch in the fairytale and the Blackwood sisters prove that they not only survive without men but also endure and even pose a threat to men's survival.

Since readers have the privilege to follow Merricat into the life in the Blackwood house, there are plenty of other details that would associate the sisters with witches. However, for the villagers with no knowledge of the Blackwood sisters' daily lives, the only fact that they live as rich, independent, and sinister women is enough to incur the violence that destroys their manor. In the long history of witch-hunts, many women of similar positions were brought to the court. During the infamous Salem Witch Trials, for instance, the initial targets were women who did not conform to the traditional family structure or lacked the company of a male family member.

The animosity towards the two sisters finds its roots in the historical context of witch-hunts. The persecution observed during the witch craze lingers and will reemerge in the twentieth century.



2. Witch Hunts of Two Periods: The Seventeenth Century and the Mid-Twentieth Century

The Blackwood sisters maintain a tangible line between themselves and their community with the boundary embodied by the fence around the house. The community in the story is where the threat arises and what they want to run away from. This fear of society is neither rare in Jackson's works, nor is it fictional. Ralph Beliveau observes that "folk" in Jackson's writing "are capable of terrible, cruel, deceitful things" (31). The cruelty a community can inflict on an individual is most evident in the famous "The Lottery." The latent evil of a crowd becomes even more menacing when Ruth Franklin points out that the village in *Castle* bears a striking resemblance to North Bennington, the town where Jackson lived and had a family. It is also believed that Jackson had confessed to her friends that "Merricat's experiences in the village were based on her own" (Franklin ch. 16). The intense relationship between a person and their community, as highlighted by Jackson, is not an exceptional experience for the writer; rather, it is a prevailing tension that has haunted the history of America. The Salem Witch Trials happened in the seventeenth century might be one of the most iconic examples of the violence a community is capable of committing. The word "witch-hunt" received a new kind of attention during the Cold War era because it was adopted as the analogy to describe the fierce policy against Communist infiltration. These events in which "witches" play a role show how witches have become a symbol of the ostracized in the American lexicon and thus an antithesis of what is deemed to be normal.

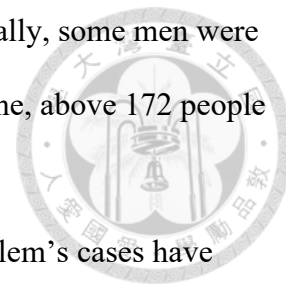
The cases in Salem set a landmark in American history. Though Salem is not the only town in the “New World” that is troubled by witches, the Salem Witch Trials inspire much more studies than others because of their political complexity, unusually detailed records, and another explicit reason: the exceedingly large number of people prosecuted (Gibson, *Witchcraft Myths* 23).³⁰ There were over one hundred trials, nineteen people hanged, and one pressed to death. In Jackson’s *The Witchcraft of Salem Village*, particular attention to its social context was paid. The book begins with Jackson addressing the difficult environment of a New World colony: the whole Essex County in the seventeenth century was troubled by the Indians and their political intensity with England.³¹ People were paranoid by the uncertainty in their lives; they followed strict religious doctrine and were intolerant of any activity that seemed to be pagan, including celebrating Christmas and Easter (Jackson, *Salem Village* 9). In 1692, a group of teenage girls from Salem Village managed to gather in the town minister’s kitchen and listened to Tituba, an Indian maid, telling them stories about spells, dreams, and their fortunes.³² The adults began to take notice when the girls started exhibiting eccentric behavior. The girls one by one, started to act hysterically, claiming that they saw horrible phantoms and claimed that some invisible power was torturing them. The townspeople came to the conclusion that these girls had been bewitched. At first, the children identified three witches for the adults: Tituba, Goody Osburn, and Sarah Goode—all marginalized figures in the village. The accusations have nevertheless, later on

³⁰ According to Lewis and Russell, what happened in Salem particularly embodies the political complexity of witchcraft cases. It “was the result of a combination of church politics, family feuds, and hysterical children, all in a vacuum of political authority.” The political nature of the event might explain why people recalled Salem when they needed an allegory for the political atmosphere two hundred years later.

³¹ The colony’s charter was revoked by England.

³² However, later studies argue that there is no proof of Tituba practicing magic. Previous studies claim that she baked a “witch-cake” for sick children, and some believe that she performed fortune-telling, but there is no evidence to support these statements (Gibson, *Witchcraft: The Basics* 60-61). More details will be discussed in the next chapter.

targeted more powerful and respectful women in the community.³³ Eventually, some men were among the accused and even a minister was hanged.³⁴ In the year 1692 alone, above 172 people were officially charged (Baker).



The exceptional scale and the unbelievably imprudent verdict in Salem's cases have bestowed upon them a distinctive significance in American history. Furthermore, the very phrase "witch-hunt" has since acquired a political connotation, symbolizing the community's infliction of violence. Gibson has concluded that witches in popular cultures owe a great deal to Americans' understandings of the witchcraft trials at Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692" (*Witchcraft Myths* 6). The witches of Salem do not only continue to exist in fictional works but further become a political metaphor. Richard B. Trask in his book equaled "a Salem Witch Hunt" to "a scapegoating position taken by people or groups emphasizing hysterical, blindly illogical and intolerant actions or expressions" (x); the term "witch-hunt" and the history of Salem acquired more specific referents in the 1950s.

Historians debate when and how the Cold War began and ended. According to Caroline S. Emmons, the Cold War began around the end of World War II and ended roughly in the early 1960s, indicating that the harsh atmosphere of political tension permeated the entire 1950s (xv). After the war, the former alliance between the U.S. and Russia was in danger. The Soviets and the U.S. entered into a rivalry to contest the dominating role in the world. Sensing the growing influence of Communism, the U.S. established the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1938; The FBI initiated investigations on people they felt might be susceptible to

³³ For example, among the accused women, Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse were both respected and faithful members of the local church.

³⁴ Among the nineteen executions in the Salem Witch Trials, five of the victims were men. George Burroughs was one of them. He was the minister of the town. The villagers were convinced that he was also a witch and executed him in 1692.

communist recruitment; in 1950, Senate Joseph McCarthy delivered a speech that escalated people's anxiety of potential communist infiltration; The document *Red Channels* released in the same year call out names of Hollywood actors, directors, and other people in the industry, condemning them of being left-leaning. Common people were involved in this anxious climate. A sense of distrust pervaded society: people secretly observed others, wishing to block any possible attack.

Writers who lived during the Cold War era identified similarities between the 1692 witch craze and the United States in the 1950s. Both periods were contaminated by animosity toward suspected "others" lurking in American society; the Communists had become the new witches under McCarthyism. Arthur Miller's 1953 play, *The Crucible* makes the parallel explicit. In his story, the accused witches are allusions to people who fall victim to Red-baiting (Franklin ch. 13). Besides Miller, William Carlos Williams' works also draw similarities between the same "xenophobic and distrustful hysteria that ran rampant in the United States" (Malburne-Wade 25). Similar to these literary minds, Jackson had also associated McCarthyian policy with the past of Salem. Jackson's family must have been greatly affected by the political anxiety of the era since Jackson's husband Stanley Hyman was reported to be a suspected communist and went under investigation by the FBI for "alleged Communist activity" for two years.³⁵ Whether Jackson and Hyman knew they were under investigation was unclear, but Jackson's alertness to the insidious hostility is manifested in her writing of *The Salem Witch Trials*. According to Franklin, the book was clearly responding to the political persecution going on at the time. Franklin describes it to be "the combination of political tension and fear of the devil—uncannily similar to the fear of Communism that infected 1950s America like an evil spell—formed an explosive mix that

³⁵ A mover accidentally found books by "Stalin, Earl Browder, Howard Fast (then the editor of *The New Masses*), and others" in Stanley's collection when the couple moved to Westport (Franklin ch. 11).

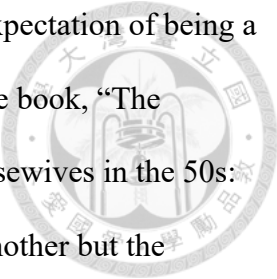
generated ‘uncontrollable hysteria’” (ch. 13). Its reference to McCarthyism was too explicit and Jackson thought “no contemporaneous reader could have failed to see” (Franklin ch.13). Stephanie A. Graves also pays attention to this parallel. She claims that “Given the period in which Jackson was writing *The Witchcraft of Salem Village*, it would be myopic not to consider the 1692 witch hunts alongside the rise of McCarthyism in the 1940s, which peaked with the Senate’s Army- McCarthy hearings in 1954” (Graves 217). The two events, both “sought to root out the threat of the Other in order to have a target upon which to displace their panic” (217).

Furthermore, Shirley Jackson had every reason to feel under pressure even if she was unaware of the investigation concerning her husband. The family was at odd in too many ways: Stanley Hyman’s Jewish identity sparked gossip in the neighborhood; Jackson, as the author of “The Lottery,” attracted unwanted attention; the couple befriending black people was also scandalous according to the standard of her community. In a draft of her memoir, *Among the Savages*, Jackson wrote that the couple considered moving because of, “a growing tension, a sort of irritable pressure which none of us could define” (qtd. in Franklin ch. 11). Another source of her anxiety, seemingly less political but equally stressful, is the family ideal in post-war America. For the generation that had experienced the great depression and survived World War II, “a house of their own and family togetherness was a promise of security and fulfillment” (Mintz and Kellogg 178). A family in the Cold War era, when the lurking conflicts between the two greatest powers in the war could “explode” at any second, meant “a secure, private nest removed from the dangers of the outside world” but also something that “needed heavy protection against the intrusions of forces outside itself” (May ix). Emmons concludes that in the 50s, “most Americans want to be part of a so-called nuclear family” (xxiii). However, this module of happiness had also become a source of pain. The hidden repression of women and the

explicit exclusion of queer groups in this picture of a happy family expose what is untold in the advertisement of a man, a woman, and their two children sitting in their backyard.

Much influenced by this popular opinion, marriage had become the primary concern for most women. The 50s not only mark the time when the age of marriage was particularly low and marriage rates were exceptionally high; it was also the era when the numbers of young women dropping out of school were accordingly large because “they feared that a college education would hurt their chances of marrying” (Mintz and Kellogg 179). Women were willing to make efforts and sacrifices to become housewives worthy of responsible husbands, good houses in the suburbs, and lovely children. The reality however, did not lift up to the promise every time. A poll showed that between one-quarter and one-third of couples who married during the 1950s eventually divorced and many of those who did not divorce were unhappy (194). Women’s unhappiness developed into an issue that is broadly discussed in popular magazines (194). Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg conclude that their widespread discontent could be attributed to several factors, including the conflict between women’s desire for individual achievement and their duty to take care of their families: “The result was a deep sense of ambivalence and internal turmoil toward both homemaking and career” (195).

Betty Friedan in her phenomenal book, *The Feminine Mystique* depicts the despair a woman could go through in detail while Friedan herself embodied the subject she wrote about. *The Feminine Mystique* is the pioneering work that problematizes the American housewife ideal in the 1950s. In its introduction to the tenth-anniversary edition, Friedan recalls, when a census taker visited her house as she was writing *The Feminine Mystique* and wanted to know her occupation, Friedan responded by “housewife” instead of “writer” (ch. Introduction). She turned down a scholarship and abandoned her academic prospect for a relationship; however, she ended



up in a troubled marriage in which she could not answer to her husband's expectation of being a submissive wife (Mintz and Kellogg 177). The prominent first chapter of the book, "The Problem That Has No Name" articulates the discontent of the suburban housewives in the 50s: they pursue femininity rather than education to become the ideal wife and mother but the question they eventually come to ask themselves is: "Is that all?" Tending to their families does not bring the same level of happiness as they were promised, and the demands of family life gradually drain them to the point where they feel the abandonment of their individuality is no longer justified. Friedan describes this dissatisfaction to be "the problem that has no name" and contends that it is shared by countless American women. Friedan argues that the problems do not lay only in "loss of femininity, or too much education, or the demands of domesticity." It is that women want a life outside of their family and home (Friedan ch. 1).

Witches in the popular culture of the 50s were not spared from this prevailing faith in family life. In the twentieth century, witches were no longer bound to die on gallows. People began to consider the existence of good witches, especially after L. Frank Baum published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1900 (Gibson, *Witchcraft Myths* 194). A more positive depiction of witches has become common in popular culture since the 1930s. However, this transformation does not come without a price. Gibson points out, "In order to be accepted, witches in popular culture often have to be framed by the traditional setting of marriage and family" (*Witchcraft Myths* 5). When witches were assimilated into the themes of "love" or "family" in popular culture, they often sacrificed at least a part of their magical prowess. One of the most representative cases in the 1950s should be the movie *Bell, Book and Candle* (1958). In the story, a witch, Gillian, falls in love with a man and marries him. In the end, Gillian attains a "happily ever after" ending, but her cat familiar leaves her, and she abandons her provocative black

dresses, replacing the African and Oceanic pieces in her art shop with much subdued collections (200).

From the seventeenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, even after, the community has continually served as the source of oppression in the narratives concerning witches. Violence and persecution are carried out in the name of driving out devils hidden within: in the seventeenth century, witches were the enemies while during the Cold War era, communists became the pollution awaiting to be cleansed. Jackson, who was most active in the 1950s, must have perceived the parallels between the pervasive societal pressures of her era and the historical witch craze that unfolded on the very same land centuries ago. These two events were not only political but were also deeply entwined with gender-related issues—whether it be the motives behind the persecution or the restriction imposed to uphold an established sense of normalcy. By incorporating historical references, the novel’s depiction of the villagers’ radical actions and the sisters’ vulnerable situation gains a deeper context within American history. Meanwhile, the narrative unveils the capacity for violence within society itself. The monsters may not be witches or communists, but rather the majority who assert their perceived right to determine who deserves to be targeted, who is marginalized, and what defines a worthwhile pursuit of happiness.

3. Happily Never After: Queer Affects and the Heteronormativity

It is disturbing when a witch has to give up her power in exchange for a family, and the message becomes even more disheartening when the woman seems to be content with this price. Nevertheless, while people were working on persuading women into believing in their domestication, the so-called “sexual deviants” were not even granted this option. The situation

was especially desperate for the queer groups under McCarthyism. The homosexuals were believed to be “more vulnerable to blackmail or extortion” and therefore were deemed susceptible to Communist recruitment. This belief caused sexual minorities to lose their jobs. In 1950, Deputy Undersecretary John Peurifoy delivered a speech in which he claimed that there were 91 homosexuals working for the government and that they were forced out in the name of being the “security risks” (Johnson 1).

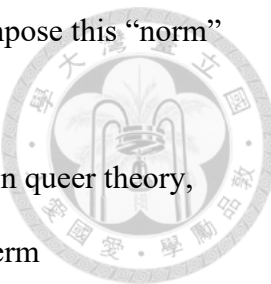
The bond between homosexuals and Communism does not stop here. McCarthy made a direct connection between the two by linking Communists to the morally deprived instead of those who believe in different political ideologies. Americans were convinced that Communists would be a threat to their precious family value and “free love.” People’s attitude towards marriage and family had become one of the FBI’s concerns, as rumors circulated that “opposition to marriage was ‘one of the tenets of the Communist Party’” and some actually believed Communists aimed to destroy “the family as a unit, because by destroying the family they destroy the basis of a free life” (Johnson 38). In the discourse in which homosexuals were associated with Communists, queers were easily regarded as a threat to families.

The story of *Castle* features two women who appear to share a relationship more intimate than usual, while one of the parties tries hard to drive away a man who seek to interrupt the connection. This dynamic easily falls under a queer reading, which could feel inappropriate when scrutinized under the political atmosphere of the 50s. Unlike the witches in popular culture who sacrifice their uniqueness and power to marry mortal men and enjoy decent family lives, the sisters eventually refuse to submit to the lure of a “normal family.” The “norm” however, comes knocking on their door in the name of “happiness.” In *Castle*, “happiness” is a recurring word that is too frequently associated with heterosexual normality. The villagers try to persuade the

Blackwood sisters into a “normal” way of living, and Charles attempts to impose this “norm” through the role he assumes in the Blackwood house.

In contrast to the “sexual deviants” is the heterosexual normativity. In queer theory, norms prescribe the proper formation of a family and a way of living. The term “heteronormativity” was first coined by Michael Warner to describe the hegemony of heterosexuality and heterosexual marriages. Stevi Jackson further explores the term and explains that heteronormativity is not only oppressive to queer groups but everyone falls victim to it. He elaborates, “Heterosexuality, while depending on the exclusion or marginalization of other sexualities for its legitimacy, is not precisely coterminous with heterosexual sexuality. Heteronormativity defines not only a normative sexual practice but also a normal way of life” (Stevi Jackson qtd. in McCann and Monaghan 11). Queer theorists have responded to the problem by dissecting how this desire for normality is built. For example, Sarah Ahmed discusses the role of affects involved, while Lauren Berlant frames the problem by situating it in the system of capitalism. The conversation between the theories and *Castle* will illuminate the confrontation of the Blackwood sisters with their community, exposing the dominance of compulsory normality and the failure of its promise.

Firstly, in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Sarah Ahmed elaborates on how people are hijacked by the idea of happiness. She points out that happiness is a vaguely defined word but has become everyone’s pursuit. Throughout the book, she argues against making happiness the ultimate answer to the struggle of life. Instead, one should embrace “a sense of possibility.” We should look up to “possibility” instead of “promises” that are falsely made by associating objects with a seemingly guaranteed future. Among all kinds of promised happiness, marriage and family received special attention. She explains, “If certain ways of living promote happiness,



then to promote happiness would be to promote those ways of living. Thus happiness promotion becomes very quickly the promotion of certain types of families” (Ahmed, *Happiness* 11). She highlights that people regard marriage as a key to one’s happiness (6); meanwhile, family is the “happy object” capable of directing people’s feelings towards somewhere good. Ahmed stresses that “a happy family” is “a myth of happiness, of where and how happiness takes place, and a powerful legislative device, a way of distributing time, energy, and resources” (45). A family is believed to be a source of happiness that needs to be reproduced and protected but this faith in family is of course over-glorification—Ahmed explains, “Happiness means here living a certain kind of life, one that reaches certain points, and which, in reaching these points, creates happiness for others” (48). Having a family does not in effect automatically make you happy.

Marriage will be the happy ending in other fairytales,³⁶ but in *Castle*, it is the lurking monster; the acceptance and recognition of society will be the ultimate goal of protagonists once wronged by their community, but for Merricat, the “normalization” is her worst nightmare. In the story, the potential heterosexual romance and the so-called normal life are the “happiness” needed to be exorcised. “We are so happy” is the line that ends the novel, and “happy,” a word frequently mentioned by Merricat (Jackson, *Castle* 47).³⁷ Ahmed has emphasized how ill-defined the word “happy” can be. She provides an abbreviated definition: “*Happiness is what we want, whatever it is*” (Ahmed, *Happiness* 15). Merricat has her own definition of happiness as well. When Merricat, Constance, and Uncle Julian are the only people living in the house, Merricat describes their life as “happy” and Constance agrees (Jackson, *Castle* 61). Nevertheless, their happiness differs from what other people expect from them. Helen Clark, a family friend who

³⁶ *Castle* is often read or compared with traditional fairytale narratives. For instance, Shelley Ingram has discussed the fairy-tale elements in the story and concludes it is a fairy tale that goes “wrong” (70-71).

³⁷ The ending line will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter III.

does not give up on bringing the sisters back to the world outside, calls Uncle Julian “eccentric.” This episode inspires Merricat to reflect on the word. From Merricat’s understanding, it is Helen Clark who is eccentric: “I was thinking that if eccentric meant, as the dictionary said it did, deviating from regularity, it was Helen Clark who was far more eccentric than Uncle Julian, with her awkward movements and her unexpected questions, and her bringing strangers here to tea” (26). Helen Clark persists in urging Constance to go outside, do some shopping, and have a little luncheon, believing these activities will make her “happy,” and that she ought not to give up on her right to be “happy” (27-28). However, Constance does not consider herself suffering in the first place (32).

Helen Clark’s words have limited weight on the protagonists but the arrival of Cousin Charles leads to substantial changes. The word “marriage” is never directly stated in the story, but Charles’ visit suddenly makes marriage a very likely path for Constance. Unlike Helen Clark who only visits them, Charles intrudes on their life and refuses to adopt the sisters’ way of living. Instead, his plan is to force a patriarchal family life on the sisters and make them normal. Merricat has a great affection for Constance, and the feeling is mutual. Their conversations frequently start with Merricat saying “I love you, Constance” and Constance replies “I love you, too.” It is possible that their intimacy be read as a romantic relationship.³⁸ Though Charles says his motivation to come to the sisters is that he wants to help them what he desperately wants is clearly the money: his father has left him nothing and he asks Constance to show him her father’s safe for so many times. Charles must have sensed that if he wants to become a family member with access to their money, befriending, or even marrying Constance is his only chance.

³⁸ Many scholars interpret the dynamic between the sisters as a romantic bond. Tatiana Prorokova-Konrad, for example, contends that the sisters are a lesbian couple.

To achieve this goal, Charles needs to “normalize” the Blackwood sisters. He intends to build a romantic bond with the one capable of being domesticated and expel the wild. Charles’ attempt is to replace Merricat and secure an intimate relationship with Constance. Charles first takes over Merricat’s job. When he says “So I am taking little Cousin Mary’s job away from her (...) You’ll have to find something else for her to do, Connie” (Jackson, *Castle* 72), he ostensibly refers to Merricat’s errand of doing grocery in the village. However, “the job” here is also likely to be interpreted as guarding Constance and keeping her company. He even threatens Merricat, “Come about a month from now, I wonder who will still be here? You (...) or me?” (80). Unfortunately, Constance does waver under Charles’ influence. She begins to believe in what Helen Clark wants her to do: face the world, live normal lives, be like other people, and have boyfriends (82). She blames herself and says “It is all my fault” whenever Uncle Julian and Merricat irritate Charles (84). Constance gradually becomes “unhappy” because of believing in Charles’ words.

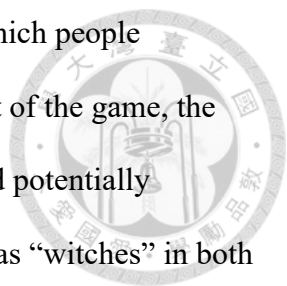
If Ahmed’s *The Promised of Happiness* helps clarify the uninvited position of “happiness” in the novel, Laurent Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* on the other hand, exposes the disappointment of a supposedly “happy” life. Berlant observes that Ahmed in *The Promise of Happiness* mainly works on a particular emotion: happiness, and she distinguishes herself from Ahmed by stressing “optimism” as the key affect that explains the dilemma people face. Berlant defines that optimism is to be found in attachment because attachment motivates people to pursue external satisfaction (1-13). Optimism is not equal to optimistic feelings; it is anything that keeps you believing in a fantasy. Optimism is thus cruel when it persuades you into believing and striving for an illusion that will never come true (Berlant 2). Berlant names “the couple form, the love plot, the family, fame, work, wealth, or property” the sites of cruel optimism (45). They are “scenes of conventional desire” that lure people into mistaking the

unachievable as conventional. Normality is aspirational in this context, but normality is in fact “an evolving and incoherent cluster of hegemonic promises about the present and future experience of social belonging that can be entered into a number of ways” (167). In the chapter “Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal: Post-Fordist Affect in *La Promesse and Rosetta*”, “normal” life also means the desirable “good life” but neither “good” nor “normal” is possible. Berlant terms this dilemma as “impasse”—in which everything is in appearance ordinary, but in effect filled with crisis. The Blackwood sisters do not live a normal life but the contemptible side of normal is exposed by other families living in the village and the Blackwood family before the murder case takes place.

Throughout the novel, one can find other families that would be considered “normal” or “happy” according to the postwar ideal. Jackson has planted nuancedly these possible alternatives for Constance, Merricat, and Uncle Julian. However, none of these substitutes seems satisfying. The villagers are those who are constrained to normality but belittled by the Blackwood sisters for their dreary lives. The ordinary village in Merricat’s eyes is not only ugly but also malicious. Berlant mostly describes the “impasse” from people who are trapped in it while Jackson provides a perspective of the one who observes from the outside. Jackson targets villagers who live in big houses, run small businesses with their families, raise children, and form heterosexual families. The villagers are blessed with the “couple form, the family, work, and property,” those what Berlant has named “the sites of cruel optimism” (45). It is impossible to verify if these villagers feel themselves victims of the “good-life fantasies” but Merricat’s description persuades readers into believing that these people’s lives are impossible to lift up to any kind of fantasy. From Merricat’s point of view, the villagers are noisy, ugly, and loveless (Jackson, *Castle* 5-6). In comparison to the Blackwood sisters, the villagers are protected by their

conventionality; but that does not make their lives any more appealing than those whom they believed to be abnormal.

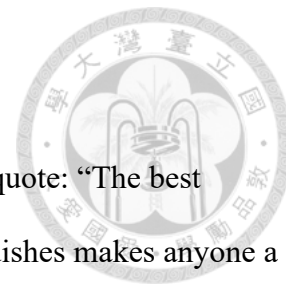
The Blackwood family, with every member alive, has been another “impasse” sugar-coated as a happy object. Uncle Julian always tells the visitor that they were “a large and happy family” (Jackson, *Castle* 33). However, there were always quarrels in Julian’s memories and their comfortable life came as the result of exploiting Constance. Berlant describes exploitation as a price people are forced to pay to stay in the game in any kind of reciprocal and transpersonal form, including families and nations (171). The labor of a “housewife” functions under such logic and Constance was the victim. Before the murder, Constance is bound by this volunteered exploitation with pent-up dissatisfaction. When the tragedy happened, it was Constance who was arrested as the suspect and the case looked bad for her because she “saw them dying around her like flies (...) and never called a doctor until it was too late” (37). Constance even told the police that “those people deserve to die” (37). Even though it is the other sister who commits the crime, Constance’s reaction entails that she at least does not love them as people worth saving. Julian’s memory also reveals Constance being the one taking care of every meal in the house, and the family relied on “various small delicacies which only she can provide” (35). Julian’s detailed memory at the same time reveals that on the morning of their “last day,” Constance was the first to wake up in the family. She got up early to work in the kitchen, and while other family members were idling, talking about music and climbing trees, Constance had been “working with the vegetables all morning” and still had to prepare lunch (49). In consideration of how hard Constance worked and how unappreciative other family members behaved, it will not be farfetched to infer Constance’s dissatisfaction when they were a big family.



However, while Berlant's theory revolves around the situation in which people experience discontent and exploitation but are afraid to risk being opted out of the game, the Blackwood sisters take action to get rid of it. Single, rich, independent, and potentially dangerous, Merricat and Constance would be susceptible to being targeted as "witches" in both the seventeenth century and mid-twentieth century America. They renounce the norms, together with the deceitful "happiness" people promise would come along should they assimilate. Franklin mentions that in her early drafts, Jackson compares the hard-working Constance to Cinderella (ch. 16). In *Cinderella*, the protagonist escapes her disappointing family of origin by marrying a prince. The Blackwood sisters are not interested in attending a ball and entrusting their fortune to a man. To end their miseries, they always take initiative. The upcoming chapter delves into the deconstructive acts of the sisters—that is, their witchcraft rituals. Magic and the origin of its power will be reconsidered with Ahmed's theory of "queer use," framing witchcraft in domesticity. The unique utilization of domestic items and activities will be further interpreted as crafts generating power to defy and destroy the oppressive family and normality imposed on Constance and Merricat.

Chapter II

Magic, Home, and the (Anti) Housewife



The internet credits Agatha Christie as the author of the following quote: “The best crimes for my novels have occurred to me washing dishes. Scrubbing the dishes makes anyone a homicidal category maniac” (“Agatha Christie in a Movie”).³⁹ The line between the ordinary tasks of domestic life and the profound impulse to destroy and kill becomes remarkably thin when the idea is voiced through the Queen of Crime. It is discussed in the introduction of this thesis that Jackson’s family life inspired both her humorous domestic articles and her horror stories. The story of *Castle* resonates further with Agatha Christie and her detective novels in another sense: *Castle* has been read as “a mystery or whodunit lacking only a detective to solve the crime” and when the book was first published, its dust jacket seemed to invite readers to perceive it just this way (Woodruff 152). However, when regarding it as a detective novel, readers not only notice the absence of a detective but also the lack of clear motivation. The sole clue provided to readers is that Merricat decides to commit the crime after being punished by going to bed without having dinner, and this incentive seems hardly satisfying. In *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life*, Ruth Franklin states that Jackson intentionally leaves the motives elusive. Franklin makes a list of unanswered questions in the story and how Jackson dealt with her mysteries:

Why do the villagers despise the Blackwoods? What happened to Constance in town that made her decide never to venture beyond the garden? Why is Uncle Julian fixated on the night of the murder, obsessively recording every detail that he can remember? And, most

³⁹ While this quote is attributed to Agatha Christie on multiple web pages, none of them specify the original source, such as the interview or book where the quote first appears. Consequently, there is a possibility that Christie is not the actual author.

crucially, what drove Merricat to murder most of her family? Early drafts give explicit answers to all these questions: regarding the murder, their mother treated Constance like Cinderella, forcing her to cook and clean in drudgery (ch.16).

But in the final version, “*everything* is left mysterious” (ch.16). If *Castle* is a detective novel, it is an anomalous one in which the revelation of the murderer and motives is bewilderingly subdued. Nevertheless, there is one thing that cries out for attention: the problem of “how.” The tools and the means to kill have always been in the light.

In some of Jackson’s stories, repressive domestic experience and responsibility explain cruel decisions. For example, Eleanor in *The Haunting of Hill House* after sacrificing her youth and private life to take care of her sick mother for years, intentionally ignores her mother’s distress signals and lets her mother die. In *Castle*, the blatant *modus operandi* declares domestic objects and chores as no longer simply the source of oppression. They are enlisted by the two sisters and transformed into methods to tear down the norm imposed on them. This is where magic should join the discussion. In this chapter, I would like to elaborate on how the Blackwood sisters uncover paraphernalia for their witchcraft within the fabric of everyday life and how their enlistment of domestic items and rules empowers them to overthrow the life they wish to escape. First, I would like to delve into a historical and anthropological discussion of witchcraft and its sources of power. A connection between witchcraft rituals and domesticity will then be established. Finally, I aim to illuminate how magical rituals in the story interact with the theory of queer use and how the queer use of domestic objects is repositioned as the genuine source of power that rebels.

1. Origins of Power: Prevailing Beliefs Regarding the Sources of Power in Witchcraft

The previous chapter explores the attributes of a witch, or at least the qualities that would make someone more susceptible to being accused as a witch. However, while scholarly studies on witches abound, the discussion about their crafts seems less vigorous. In the Christian world, witches were believed to obtain their power from Satan, and the details of their rituals are often treated with less attention. James Frazer's *Golden Bough* provides various records on magical rituals outside of the Christian world and attempts to offer a comprehensive theory that explains how magic functions in the mind of the practitioners.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, he concludes his study by underscoring that magic is mere superstition. On the other hand, modern witchcraft promotes creativity and self-love. Practitioners of magic are finally given a more powerful role, but the overemphasis on self could also diminish the importance of rituals. Rituals and their ingredients are stripped of power in all cases.

According to the information compiled by Marion Gibson, in early modern England, presumed witches would be prosecuted under the "Witchcraft Act" for performing crafts related to treasure-hunting, harming people, love magic, finding lost goods, conjuring or rewarding wicked spirits, using body parts in witchcraft, and so on (*Witchcraft: The Basics* 19-21).⁴¹ However, the spells to find the goods, the recipe for a love potion, and the rituals of conjuring a black cat familiar are often not the main focus discussed in these documents. The records frequently stress the sins of devils and the accused witches while thanking God for allowing the church to discover these crimes.⁴² In early modern Europe and America, the practice of witchcraft was very much positioned as a sacrilege regardless of the intention. Devils, Satan

⁴⁰ Jackson once wrote a term paper on witchcraft when she was at the University of Rochester. The assignment motivated her to read *Golden Bough*. The book had a great influence on her and also her husband Stanley Hyman. (Franklin ch.4).

⁴¹ The following content is derived from the Witchcraft Acts issued in England in 1542, 1563, and 1604 (Gibson, *Witchcraft: The Basics* 19-24).

⁴² Examples can be found in *Malleus Maleficarum*.

especially, are thought to be the source of a witch's power, and therefore the "credits" of the evil deeds were all given to demons. Details of rituals and practices are rendered relatively irrelevant when the power behind the scenes is believed to be some more frightening supernatural beings, and witches are only morally depraved puppets who make pacts with them. Michael Bailey has reviewed two famous books: Jonathan Nider's *Formicarious* (Anthill) and Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum* to discuss common rituals and spells in the fifteenth century ("Disenchantment" 387). Although he has found details of how witchcraft rituals were performed in the books, Bailey still comes to the conclusion that the forms of rituals themselves are not significant because "witches' access to and control over demonic power was made to rest entirely on an explicit pact with Satan" (386). Bailey pays attention to the case of witches raising storms by stirring water with brooms and comments that this action itself does not cause any desired result—it only signifies the witches' wish. If a storm happens, it is the devil who makes it happen (393).

Research on witchcraft in the Western context recognizes demons as the source of power in magic; however, James Frazer's phenomenal book, *The Golden Bough*, moves away from the Christian world and provides a systematic explanation for the rituals of primitive tribes. Frazer contends that magic is a cruder system than religion and is supported by false correlations. He first categorizes magical rituals into two types based on how they work: homoeopathic magic, which follows the "Law of Similarity," and contagious magic, which follows the "Law of Contact." The first is performed under the belief that imitating the desired results can make them happen. The second functions under the theory of believing an object's influence on things it has been in contact with, even when the two things later become physically distant. He maintains that both of them belong to the Sympathetic Magic, which means "both assume that things act on

each other at a distance through a secret sympathy” (Frazer ch. iii). However, Frazer has disparaged magic as a system that is built on “total misconception of the nature of the particular laws which govern that sequence” and if magic were ever “to become true and fruitful, it would no longer be magic but science” (ch. iv). Frazer then argues that magic is even more unsophisticated than religion. He understands religion as a “propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life” (ch. iv). According to Frazer, it requires a more complex mind to imagine agents superior to humans, functioning behind the seen world, while magic, on the other hand, is only a series of false associations. In this condition, magic is rendered lesser than religion and futile in itself (ch. iv).

When it comes to the time after the Second World War, modern witchcraft takes over the narrative of the early modern understanding in the Western world. According to Diana Purkiss, modern witchcraft is detached from Satanism and has transformed into an “invented religion.” While no single authority or person takes charge of the process, modern witchcraft “is not a unified set of beliefs; every interpretation is subject to reinvention by others” (Purkiss 32). She observes that modern witchcraft also provides “a real place for female creativity and imagination.” Modern witches choose their own goddess to worship and compose their rituals and practices by “appropriating” the traditions of ancient paganism. Purkiss also notes that modern witches are creative consumers of history and truth. Modern witches build their own worldview mostly through piecing together self-taught knowledge and history. Purkiss names them “the makers of their own truth” (44).⁴³ While practitioners of modern witchcraft place their

⁴³ However, Purkiss does not entirely agree with the idea of reimagining the truth. She acknowledges that modern witches’ passion and curiosity have brought some academic discussions into the popular sphere, but she also argues that this action “disrespectfully ignores academic protocols” (Purkiss 44).

faith in pagan deities, there is simultaneously a heightened emphasis on the power of the self: the self is seen as the source that allows magic to happen. Purkiss especially quotes Starhawk's words to demonstrate how modern witchcraft requires a witch to have faith in herself for the belief that "it is the mind that works magic" and one's mental power may have a stronger impact on the results of the craft than any props or words (qtd. in Purkiss 45).⁴⁴

When witchcraft is discussed under the system of Christian religion or Frazer's anthropological framework, a witch is either a medium or a fool. A witch's subjectivity is finally recognized in modern witchcraft, but the mentality of centering on the self also neglects the interaction between the practitioner and the materials involved. Merricat's practices revolve around two purposes: first, to safeguard the peaceful life of the surviving Blackwoods, especially the one she shares with Constance. Second, after the intrusion happens, her magic aims to expel Charles in order to regain her paradise. These rituals include coming up with words and keeping them secret, causing harm to objects that take the form of her enemy, and meddling with Charles' room by replacing his household items with a miscellany of glass, leaves, and branches. Her most iconic craft among all is deploying objects in the natural environment surrounding the house. These practices are not subjected to a Christian interpretation. As Joyce Carol Oates' sharp observation points out, Merricat's rituals do not resort to Satanic power, and she "is too willful a witch to align herself with a putative higher power, especially a masculine power." On the other hand, her rituals do seem to be manifestations reminiscent of Frazer's Sympathetic Magic, interlaced with a touch of the self-inventive spirit of modern witchcraft. However, I would like to argue that Merricat's magic goes beyond this categorization if one scrutinizes the materials in use and their disposal with attention. Power and significance lie in the precise

⁴⁴ Purkiss also warns that this kind of self-fashioning is still subjected to the influence of capitalism, consumerism, and solipsism (41).

execution of their rituals, emerging from the Blackwood sisters' ability to transform everyday objects, particularly domestic items, into their magical ingredients.



2. The Ties between Witchcraft and Domesticity

Witchcraft seemed to be a matter that belonged to the public area of the Church, entailing an eternal war between heaven and hell, good and evil. However, witches were in fact beings deeply intertwined in the domestic spheres: the quarrels between neighbors, the sick cattle, and the damaged dairy were often the grounds where the rumors of witchcraft sprouted. Everyday objects, the setting of neighborhoods, and households thus often played critical roles in the witchcraft stories when examined carefully. Purkiss sheds light on this unique nature and elaborates on the intricate relationship between housewives and witches. Historical records of the details in witchcraft trials then attest to the long-existing influence that domestic objects have wielded in the stories of witches.

In Purkiss's research, she brings magic back to the domestic sphere and blurs the boundary between the two. Purkiss discusses witchcraft cases in early modern England and argues that women of that period treated witchcraft stories as a way "to negotiate the fears and anxieties of housekeeping and motherhood" (93). Purkiss has chosen the conflict between an accused witch, Agnes Heard and her neighbor, Bennet Lane, as an entry point to develop her arguments. Bennet was convinced that Agnes hampered her spinning and dairy production after exchanges of food and daily objects. The trouble was solved when Bennet performed counter magic. Based on their case, Purkiss convincingly extracts witches from the religious context. She observes that "most historians see a witch as the church's Other, or as man's Other," but she points out another path of viewing witches as the "Other" of early modern housewives (Purkiss

97). Purkiss explains that a housewife's duty was to perform "culturation." This means, "in cooking, churning, spinning, skimming, washing and spinning," natural sources are turned into "clean, orderly, culturally useful objects" by a woman (97). When a housewife believes that the chores are disrupted by a witch, she would feel her authority being usurped. Purkiss terms a witch as the "antihousewife" and the "dark twin" of a housewife (97). I believe, in this context, witches were "empowered" due to women's fear of losing control in their households. The boundaries between a housewife and a witch are surprisingly thin. The domestic space is constantly in danger of being crossed by another woman who is ready to take over the household "in order to misuse it, to invert it" (97). Domestic objects, especially food, thus become items most susceptible to enchantment because of how easily they transgress the borders of households and even bodies.

Despite the fact that in witchcraft trials, the presence of Satan often stole the limelight and mitigated the importance of the rituals, existing records do show a noticeable intertwining between domesticity and witches. According to Bailey, the practices of magic can be roughly divided into "high magic" and "low magic" (*Magic: The Basics* 40). High magic typically requires extensive training, intricate knowledge, and expensive paraphernalia, aligning with the conventional image associated with the art of alchemy. In contrast, low magic entails simpler rites, austere utensils, and often little to no formal training (Bailey, *Magic: The Basics* 40). Though the distinction could be blurred, witchcraft is much more often categorized as low magic, commonly involving the use of "plants, stones, or basic household items" (40). In *Malleus Maleficarum*, a notorious manual claiming to identify witches and their sins, random descriptions of witchcraft rituals scatter throughout the books. Among them, a considerable number of alleged witchcraft crimes unfold in daily scenes and with the collaboration of

domestic tools alongside some more sinister ingredients. For example, pots are recurrent elements within these stories. A witch was discovered hiding the Body of the Lord in a pot with a toad. When questioned, she claimed that she could cause injuries to others with the dust of her ingredients in the pot (Kramer and Sprenger 114-17). In another case, a count suffered from sexual impotence because a witch buried a pot containing bewitched objects in his well (96-99).

The imagery of a witch riding on a broomstick also finds its resonance in the manual.

Concerning the question of a witch's transportation, inquisitors Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger explain that they anoint a chair or a broomstick with limbs from children who are killed before baptism, and these objects will carry them up into the air (104-09). Apart from objects, the spots to place charms are often within or at the border of a household; thresholds, for instance, may be the most conventional sites. A woman once had a minor conflict with her neighbor and felt sick shortly after the incident. A friend suspected that she was cursed and then found a waxen image pierced by needles, along with bags containing grains, seeds, and bones under the threshold of her house (137-40).

When witchcraft recorded in *Malleus Maleficarum* is still a combination of daily objects and ingredients with a darker tone, like toads, bones, or limbs of children, the rumors of witchcraft related to the Salem Witch Trials entail almost purely domestically rooted nature. Tituba, one of the first three accused witches, was believed to be a practitioner of magic. In some research, scholars are convinced that she baked a "witch-cake" to cure the children who claim themselves to be afflicted by witches and it is widely believed that Tituba performed fortune-telling (Gibson, *Witchcraft: The Basics* 60-61). A witch-cake is originally a tool used to reveal whether a person's illness is a result of witchcraft or natural causes, baked with rye flour and the urine of the bewitched person. The cake will be fed to a dog. If the symptom of bewitchment is

transferred onto the dog, then the illness is confirmed to be the consequence of witchcraft. It is also believed that Tituba tried to read the fortune for girls in the village. The fortune-telling is carried out by observing the shapes of egg whites dropped into water. The shapes suggest different objects and their related occupations. Young women consult the results of this practice to foretell the identities of their prospective husbands. Even though Gibson points out that there is no evidence proving Tituba had actually performed these rituals, the rumors are based on existing magical practices of that time (60-62).

These rituals performed with elements found in the kitchen naturally include Constance in the conversation. As “the housewife” in the family, she guards the cultivation with ease and grace, yet she is also the “antihousewife” who witnesses most of her family members die at the table, killed by adulterated sugar. In comparison to the charges imposed on the witches, the death and pain that ensue the trials, and the theological debates, the ingredients snatched from a pantry may seem only supplementary in the discussions. However, witches could be not the evil mistresses of anti-Christ but housewives who crossed a line. Instead of maintaining order in the house, they subvert it. The rituals and the materials involved are the solid proofs to testify this entanglement of the quotidian and the enchanted. The way a woman uses a pot, a broomstick, an egg, or a cake decides whether she is a housekeeper or a witch. This might be the true source of magic: the determination to bake a cake in a staggeringly different way. Things matter; what we do with things also matters.

3. The Rebellion in Everyday Life: Queer Use and the Domestic Objects

The previous chapter looks into the societal factors that force the label of “witches” on the Blackwood sisters. Villagers create a nursery rhyme, and children sing it to Merricat when

she visits the village for groceries. The verse goes as, “Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?/ Oh no, said Merricat, you’ll poison me./ Merricat, said Connie, would you like to go to sleep?/ Down in the boneyard ten feet deep!” (Jackson, *Castle* 16) When the mission of saving fire evolves into a carnivalesque unleashing of villagers’ long-standing hatred toward the girls, the mob proposes to put the sisters “back in the house and start the fire all over again” (108). The townspeople besiege them, chant the rhyme, hold hands, and “almost dancing together” (108). The menace inevitably situates the sisters within the prevalent imagination of witches being burned at the stakes.⁴⁵ The atrocity is way out of control, but the townspeople may not be entirely mistaken if they are wary of the sisters as threatening beings who practice witchcraft.

Among the traits attempting to define witches in the previous chapter, witches are defined by their intentions of doing harm through magical practices. According to the *Britannica Dictionary*, some common means to perform witchcraft include “incantations (formulas or chants invoking evil spirits), divination and oracles (to predict the future), amulets and charms (to ward off hostile spirits and harmful events), potions or salves, and dolls or other figures (to represent their enemies)” (Lewis and Russell). The sisters’ practices, especially Merricat’s, align with the listed intentions and the means. First and foremost, Merricat’s intent to do harm is fierce. She holds the deepest antagonism towards villagers and Charles. She likes to picture that when she comes into the grocery someday, she will “see them all, even the Elberts and the children, lying there crying with the pain and dying” (Jackson, *Castle* 9). She imagines that she would then step over their bodies and gladly help herself to the grocery. The enmity is, unsurprisingly, equally strong when the target is Charles. Merricat envisions that:

⁴⁵ However, while the prevailing belief is that convicted witches would be burned—and thus the most representative image of the history of witch-hunts is often women tied to stakes surrounded by fire—it is important to note that witches found guilty are actually hanged in England and North America (Purkiss 8).

I could turn him into a fly and drop him into a spider's web and watch him tangled and helpless and struggling, shut into the body of a dying buzzing fly; I could wish him dead until he died. I could fasten him to a tree and keep him there until he grew into the trunk and bark grew over his mouth. I could bury him in the hole where my box of silver dollars had been so safe until he came; if he was under the ground I could walk over him stamping my feet (89).

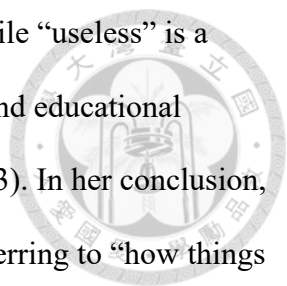
She then scratches a face on a stone and buries it, saying "Goodbye, Charles (...) Next time don't go around taking other people's things" (89). In Merricat's self-invented correlation, the things she deliberately chooses and how she deploys them will lead to the exclusion of these "outsiders"—the irritating people who strive to meddle with the sisters' way of living, and constantly try to force them into adapting what they believe is a "good life."

Merricat's magic will be regarded as a failure if we judge her from the stated intentions. She wishes that unwanted guests to be barred outside her house but Charles crosses the border successfully and overthrows Merricat's position in the household; she has done everything she can to drive away Charles. However, her efforts end in not only the banishment of Charles but the destruction of their beloved home by the violent villagers. It is easy to explain the failure if we adopt Frazer's point of view: Merricat's witchcraft is a series of mistaken correlations. One should not be surprised that these self-invented tricks are futile. However, when the ending of the story is taken into consideration, the failure and success in the stories could be perceived otherwise. When Merricat's intention is not understood at its literal level, and the result is analyzed based on the final outcome of this series of events, it could be said that the girls have achieved what they wanted: they live happily together; the villagers fear and respect them; they are "happy." Whether the ending is as optimistic as Merricat declares is a debated question that

will be further discussed in the next chapter, but it will not be farfetched to argue first that their magic, whether successful or not, is not powerless.

Furthermore, the power comes exactly from where the repression has been. The most famous witch literature of all time, *Harry Potter*, has contributed countless memes to the Digital Era. One of the most popular among them all may be the one in which Professor Snape yells in rage, “You dare use my own spells against me” (604 Rowling). This line aptly encapsulates the hidden potential within the tension between witches and housewives as elucidated by Purkiss. Domesticity may have once served as the source of pressure and oppression for women, but when needed, it could be enlisted by witches as their weapons to drive away the restrictions: it is not only about refusing to fulfill a housewife’s duty but messing up the duty.

In *What’s the Use: On the Uses of Use*, Sarah Ahmed directs her attention to the concept of using things and how employing them in unintended ways can lead to a path of rebellion. I would like to argue that what Ahmed terms as “queer use” could be the source of magical power in the novel, fostering genuine changes in the end. Through transforming everyday objects into the ingredients of witchcraft, the Blackwood sisters construct a life capable of resisting patriarchy and capitalism. This daily life, grounded in the experience of queer use, is what makes the ending of living independently from the normal society attainable. *What’s the Use: On the Uses of Use* unfolds by reexamining the word “use.” In the book, Ahmed contends that “use” is how we build a connection with a thing: we recognize a thing through its use, limit its potential by restricting it to a certain usage, but also gain a deeper understanding of an object when using it. However, even though she delves into various conditions of the word, such as “in use,” “out of use,” etc., she concludes that “useful” and “useless” are the terms that most commonly surface in discussions surrounding the concept of use. She describes “useful” as an assignment: someone



or something receives positive judgment when it is deemed to be useful while “useless” is a failure (Ahmed, *Uses of Use* 65). This discussion extends into biological and educational discourse while bringing in the utilitarian origin of modern universities (143). In her conclusion, Ahmed proposes a new path of use: queer use. She defines queer use as referring to “how things can be used in ways other than for which they were intended or by those other than for whom they were intended” (199). By queer using an item, we unleash its potential by not following an existing path that instructs us on what is “useful”: refusing the colonizers’ settler projects and heterosexuality as the “right ways” are both examples of queer use. Ahmed acknowledges that queer use would easily be viewed as vandalism of breaking something valuable and beautiful. However, the damages are necessary since queer use can be a matter of survival for those who are not accommodated in the current world. In *Castle*, witchcraft is performed by queer using objects to be found in everyday life and even by contorting a housewife’s duty. The whimsical disposing of objects in Merricat’s craft defies the value system assigned by Capitalism; food and cooking at the same time, become weapons with the power to dismantle the family life they are supposed to nourish.

In consideration of Jackson and Hyman’s association with Communism, Jackson’s novel is frequently read with class-consciousness. Several critics have emphasized the privileged status of the Blackwood sisters and pointed out that their family’s comfortable life is based on the exploitation of other villagers. Hardin stresses Merricat’s obsession with their property and argues that a great part of her rituals imbues objects that symbolize their social status with magical power (117). Hattenhauer also observes that Merricat has inherited her parents’ sense of superiority: she is protective of her wealth and oblivious to her family’s avarice (188). However, I am convinced that Merricat’s utilization of precious objects as her magical ingredients results

in the detachment of the two sisters from their class privilege. Resonating with Purkiss' observation, Merricat's magic revolves around everyday objects, especially valuable items. Queer using these objects as her witchcraft materials empowers her to resist the capitalist value system represented by Charles. During the process, these everyday items are often stripped of their economic "use."

Merricat does often appear proud of their ancestral house and the dazzling treasure hidden within, but for the sake of her magic, she does not mind sacrificing them. Merricat's witchcraft is based on "queer using" these objects. She nullifies their economic values by extracting objects from their straightforward "usefulness," and her process of granting them power usually renders them "useless." Merricat builds a circle of protection by burying things in the ground and nailing them to a tree. Ribbons, pennies, marbles, a box of silver dollars, a doll, stones, and her baby teeth are among the treasures she buries in their long field or near the creek. She imagines these treasures will become "a powerful taut web which never loosened, but held fast to guard us" (Jackson, *Castle* 41). Originally, Merricat chooses her father's lodge book as a component to form this protective power. The notebook was used to keep records of her father's debtors or people "who ought to, he thought, to do favors for him" when her father was alive (53). After the book falls from the tree, she then replaces it with a watch with a golden chain that also belonged to her father and does not mind breaking it during the process (76). The moment an object becomes Merricat's magic tool, it is removed from conventional categories as potential merchandise. Merricat decides to nail the watch instead of burying it, viewing it as an entity deserving of respect for its will and feelings. She feels sorry for the watch, having been long-hidden in her father's drawer, and believes "it had earned a place up high, where it could sparkle in the sunlight" (77). Becoming Merricat's witchcraft materials, the daily objects are free from

their original intended usage and even reduced to a useless status if one treats them as mere property. The objects that were once cherished for their capitalistic values now find their new significance in being broken, buried, or nailed to a tree.

Merricat's witchcraft might not have successfully barred Charles from their house but it becomes a resistance to the value system he embodies. Charles desires utility in things because he values the profits they entail. On multiple occasions, he exhibits excessive interest in the Blackwood father's safe. Even when the fire breaks out, his concern turns to the safe, instructing the sisters and Uncle Julian to flee while reminding them to "put the money in the bag" (Jackson, *Castle* 102). Meanwhile, the conflicts between Merricat and Charles are primarily fueled by Merricat's management of their belongings. Burying things underground deprives them of their usefulness from Charles's point of view. When he discovers the box of silver dollars buried in the garden by Merricat, he is overcome with rage. Rushing to Constance, he declares this behavior "outrageous," yelling that "it does not belong to Merricat, or anything like it. This is *money*" (88). The conflict escalates when Charles finds out that Merricat has nailed the watch to a tree. He laments the damage to the golden chain, protesting that he could have worn it or sold it because it is "a golden watch chain, worth possibly a good deal of money. Sensible people don't go around nailing this kind of valuable thing to trees" (77). Constance and Merricat however, cannot comprehend his rage. If Charles represents the capitalistic belief that things are only useful when they have economic value, Merricat's witchcraft provides a counterargument by making them useful while being "out of use."

Merricat's rituals may also seem like what Ahmed calls "vandalism" in a literal sense when the processes include burying, nailing, smashing things, and even igniting fire. The queer using of food further elevates the vandalism to another level: the direct destruction of the

patriarchal family. When Charles values things according to their financial significance, Merricat liberates them from it. Food in the story, on the other hand, sets the sisters free from the patriarchal family it is supposed to nourish. Purkiss establishes witches as “invert housewives” who turn household chores into malign scams. She particularly elaborates on food and its exchanges. A gift of food from a witch “breaches the boundaries of body (...) In the victim, it is an invader, the representative of a hostile power” (Purkiss 108). She also emphasizes the unique status of food to women: “it is a means of nourishing, sustaining and protecting—and therefore controlling—the bodies into which it is instilled. The witch’s food reserves this positive charge; instead of sustaining, it destroys” (108). Food in the novel is shrouded with this fearful quality. It is Constance though, who is in charge of food in the Blackwood family. Constance conjures up delicious and diverse dishes like magic. Alissa Burger praises Constance’s cooking to be a kind of kitchen witchcraft that feeds and thus tames the unruly Merricat since Merricat is dangerous when she is hungry.⁴⁶ Burger contends, for Constance, “food is a means of creation and sustenance, both in feeding the body and moderating Merricat’s behavior” (106-07). However, while she interprets Constance’s preparation of food with a benevolent perspective, and maintains that it keeps “the home and family in check just as significantly as Merricat’s ritualistic maintenance of its borders” (Burger 107), I would like to highlight its damaging aspect. Constance is capable of more; what she provides has the power to destroy.

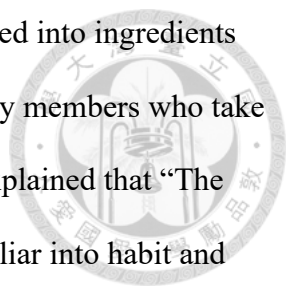
According to Uncle Julian, the last dinner of the murdered Blackwood family members includes “—spring lamb roasted, with a mint jelly made from Constance’s garden mint. Spring

⁴⁶ Burger does not further explain how “kitchen witchcraft” could contribute to readers’ understanding of Constance in her study. Kitchen witchcraft is a system of magical practice that emerged with the rise of Modern Paganism. Kitchen witches treat kitchens as their sacred places, and when cooking, they imbue “intent and will” into their dishes (Wigington). Constance would fit perfectly into the description of a kitchen witch, but due to the fact that this is a rather contemporary categorization and that Modern Paganism approaches discussions of witchcraft taking a route very different from the historically oriented study I have conducted, I do not intend to develop my reading on this point.

potatoes, new peas, a salad, again from Constance's garden" (Jackson, *Castle* 35). The menu suggests Constance as a dutiful provider of food, yet given the subsequent tragedy, it also raises the unsettling possibility that Constance and her garden might be responsible for the family's misfortune. The implication of Constance's acquaintance with poisonous ingredients is made obvious when Uncle Julian informs, "My niece can tell you of the most unlikely perils—garden plants more deadly than snakes and simple herbs that slash like knives through the lining of your belly" (30). What Constance is capable of doing with her food appears in an even more blatant method when Charles enrages Merricat in the later part of the story. Merricat recites a list of poisonous mushrooms and the symptoms of eating them to threaten Charles. Merricat learns all the knowledge from Constance (50-51).

Though, in contrast to Merricat, Constance is hard to analyze with that degree of certainty—Constance possesses the knowledge that could transform a dinner table into a murder scene if she pleases, but we cannot be sure if such thoughts ever cross her mind. What is certain, however, is that she provides Merricat with the tools. When Merricat was small, Constance gave her pennies and ribbons to bury. Merricat writes a word on toast with jam and eats it, believing it will form a magical protection. The jam and the toast are prepared by Constance. Finally, Merricat's most outrageous practice is putting arsenic into sugar and thus kills almost everyone in the house.⁴⁷ However, it is Constance who has brought the arsenic to "kill rats," and it is also her who prepares the sugar for blackberries. Like a dutiful caretaker and a housewife, Constance

⁴⁷ Harming targets with food laced with curses and poison is a classic hallmark of witches. The enduring figure of the evil witch who tempts Snow White with a poisoned apple might best represent the tradition of witches working with poisoned food. As Purkiss elaborates in her argument, many accusations condemning women for practicing witchcraft are based on exchanges of food and the ensuing misfortune (96). While the act of poisoning itself may not necessarily carry the occultic tone found in other rituals, the placement of poison in sugar would still align with the conventional conception of witchcraft, given the consideration of food as "a constant theme in depositions on witchcraft" (Purkiss 96).

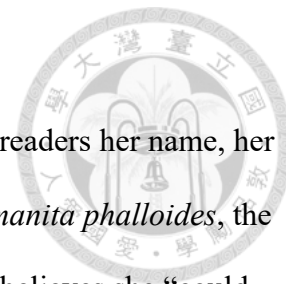


provides. It is only that the toyish treasures and the food she serves are turned into ingredients used to fend off outsiders and, more atrociously, to kill the ungrateful family members who take Constance's laboring for granted and punish Merricat. Sara Ahmed once explained that "The family involve knowledge of the peculiar, or the transformation of the peculiar into habit and ritual" (*Happiness* 47). The supporting example is about knowing how much sugar each family member would like to have in one's coffee. The poisoning is then the most ironic queer use of the knowledge of a family habit. The murderer knows precisely how each family member takes their sugar, enabling her to successfully spare her sister and kill the rest in one action: Constance never uses sugar. Merricat serves them just right. To borrow Purkiss' term, if Merricat plays the witchy role of antihousewife who disturbs the peaceful everyday life of a family in this scenario, Constance, the supposedly "good housewife" who should fear this interruption, becomes the beneficiary and an accomplice. The quality of a good housewife has transformed into the lethal arsenal of a witch, shattering the illusory happiness discussed in the preceding chapter.

When there is nothing else to destroy, or in the sister's case, when everything is mostly destroyed, queer use then becomes their means of establishing a new pattern of life. The world of the Blackwood sisters was turned upside down for twice: the first time with the poison; the second time, with the half-accidental, half-intentional fire. When other family members are removed from the sisters' lives, Merricat weaves her witchcraft with everyday objects. In the process, she breaks them, nullifying their capitalist values. This practice consolidates a value system that detaches the sisters from the capitalist life out there. Meanwhile, Constance though has not put her hands directly in occultic or violent acts, provides materials and knowledge for Merricat and shows no regret. Constance's offerings would build a warm family scene on other occasions, but in this universe, they become the essential elements for Merricat's intended lethal

consequences. Queer use destroys, but in the story of *Castle*, it also creates. Following the fire, the sisters manage to survive within the ruins of the once-grand house by scavenging, and queer use continues to serve as the key to their survival. The kitchen transforms into their bedroom, drawing room, and dining room; they fashion table clothes into dresses; and the deceased uncle's wheelchair is now a part of the barricade fortifying their home. After the destructive events, queer use is what allows their unique way of living to continue and to maintain independence. Yet, the claustrophobic ending that confines the Blackwood sisters in a liminal space between life and death, liberation and incarceration, teetering on the brink of both a happy ending and a tragedy, invites exploration beyond the energetic spirit of queer use. This ambiguous state raises questions about what awaits them after the destruction, and whether it leads to a utopia or a dystopia will be further explored in the next chapter.

Chapter III Radical Survival Beyond Linear Temporality



Castle begins with Merricat’s self-introduction, where she tells the readers her name, her age, the things she likes (her sister Constance, Richard Plantagenet, and *Amanita phalloides*, the death-cup mushroom) and dislikes (washing herself, dogs, and noise). She believes she “could have been born a werewolf” because the middle fingers of her both hands are the same length. The introduction concludes with her telling us, “everyone else in my family is dead” (Jackson, *Castle* 1). The passage is the only paragraph written in the present tense throughout the whole book, suggesting its content as a lasting and enduring fact. Like a movie scene, the following *mise-en-scène* in the narrative then immediately brings the library books on the kitchen shelf to the foreground. By drawing attention to their several months overdue status, the flow of time is reversed, and the narration brings its readers back to when the big house still stood in magnificence and pride. The rest of the story is told in the past tense, starting from the Friday before Charles’ arrival, describing Merricat’s life with Constance and Uncle Julian in their glorious estate. Readers then experience with Merricat the loss of her paradise, and finally, the regaining of it in the ravaged manor, but now only with Constance, as Uncle Julian dies in the disturbance. The adventure ends with Merricat announcing that “we are so happy” (146). The fairytale-like ending line, along with the present perfect tense of the book’s title, situates the story in an unfathomable time, hiding it somewhere outside of the linear timeline.⁴⁸ In this eccentric zone where time seems to go disordered, the sisters face a new situation and are given

⁴⁸ The word “castle” in the title is also worthy of discussion. The image of a castle first alludes to Merricat’s habit of viewing the world with a fairy-tale-like filter. For example, she imagines traveling to the village and grocery shopping as playing a kind of board game (Jackson, *Castle* 4), and she envisions Constance as a fairy princess (19). She might have also considered their large house as a castle. On the other hand, “castle” also carries a gothic connotation. Elizabeth Mahn Nollen situates the house in a gothic tradition and compares the story to William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily.” She contends that, like other gothic houses, the manor in *Castle* in the end is also controlled by female characters (99).

the chance to find their new way of living independently from external society. They cast off their old identities as the Blackwood daughters and obtain a happy ending, though the “happiness” greatly departs from what readers would expect to see in a traditional fairy tale.

The previous chapter elaborates on how the queer use of everyday life equips the sisters with the power to destroy the patriarchy in the house and shields them from the capitalistic value system. This chapter then aims to discuss the problem of survival, namely, what is to be expected after the destruction. Following the conflagration and the intense confrontation with the villagers, the Blackwood sisters return to the house and decide to hide in the ruins of the manor, never showing themselves in front of other human beings. They survive on baskets of food brought by villagers who feel guilty about the intrusion, the preserves hidden in the house, and their garden. In the end, the locals respect them and fear them as witches who may harm disrespectful children and soothe them with offerings. Critics have disparate opinions on whether this is truly a happy ending for both girls or if it is, in effect, a claustrophobic tragedy in disguise. Emily Banks conducts a holistic and inspiring study that reflects on the ending through queer futurity and world-making. She argues that Jackson’s “work dramatizes the difficulty of imagining life beyond the patriarchal domestic structure but also evokes the vision of a possible queer future, achievable only through the destruction of traditional concepts of lineage and production” (Banks 169). She concludes that the sisters eventually arrive at “the moon” in Merricat’s fantasy. “The moon” is associated with the era of space travel and symbolizes the possibility of reaching the “essentially unreachable places” where “we can undo the cultural structures that keep us earthbound” (183). Ruth Franklin’s quote echoes Banks’ discussion. Franklin comments on the denouement of *Castle* and writes, “The happy ending is severed not only from the marriage plot but from the world itself” (ch. 16).

I hold the same opinion with Banks that the ending depicts “new temporalities in which a livable queer future is imaginable” (184). However, I contend that it is not a situation as distant from the world outside as Banks and Franklin suppose. Though Banks stresses the possibility of reaching an alternative, the ensuing details of their days living on “the moon” receive scarce attention. With Jack Halberstam’s insight on queer negativity and radical queer passivity, I would like to read the ending as a victory claimed through their passivity. The refusal of the norm does not segregate the sisters from the village but creates a new role for them, enabling them to thrive in an eccentric manner. I would then analyze the new pattern of their days with Elizabeth Freeman’s theory on temporality, which contends that their true freedom is a result of casting away what Freeman terms as the chrononormative and chronobiopolitical time. They, in the end, arrive at “the moon” by following a new pattern of days.

1. (Un)becoming the Ladies: Queer Negativity and Silent Resistance

Whether the final status of the sisters is a “happy” one is a crucial question because it influences how one would construe the result of Merricat’s magic. If losing their house and living in its ruins are miserable, then Merricat’s endeavor is nothing more than a foolish attempt. This is a stance that several critics have taken. For example, Honor Wallace analyzes Merricat as an “insane woman” that the happiness she claims in the ending does not hold the slightest credibility (187). Another perspective also suggests that happiness is illusional. Ashleigh Hardin argues that precedent critics who read the ending as a positive one neglect the historical background. She understands the story as a narrative of containment that “stunted and silenced women” (113). I do not intend to deny the passivity and silence Hardin spotted in the story. However, I would like to read the ending with Jack Halberstam’s insight on queer negativity and

queer failure to argue that the denouement is, in effect, a victorious one. This reading not only proves Merricat's practices of witchcraft to have a transformative effect but also suggests that their situation could be given an interpretation with initiative. The empowering aspects of witchcraft discussed in my introduction and the ostensibly disappointing outcome of Merricat's practices will finally align.

Halberstam in *The Queer Art of Failure* proposes a new mold that falls outside of the prevalent pursuit of success. He reevaluates negative concepts such as forgetting, stupidity, and the failure of femineity, recognizing their latent power. The discussion is extended to pedagogical fields, reflecting on the possibility of refusing professional knowledge and what Gramsci terms as "high theory" (Halberstam 16). Failure is also endowed with a political potential to create alternative ways of life (18). Halberstam highlights José Muñoz's insight on the connection between queer and failure, suggesting that failure becomes utopian in its rejection of pragmatism and social norms. In Chapter Four of his book, Halberstam particularly elaborates on feminisms that take the path of radical passivity, and terms it as "shadow feminism." Shadow feminism "speaks in the language of self-destruction, masochism, an antisocial femininity, and a refusal of the essential bond of mother and daughter that ensures that the daughter inhibits the legacy of the mother and in doing so reproduces her relationship to patriarchal forms of power" (124). Building up his theory, Halberstam first targets the lineage between mother and daughter, contending that an interruption is necessary. He advocates that one should "lose one's mother" to enable "a relation to other models of time, space, place, and connection," that is, one should seek a path of "unbecoming women" (124). With this central idea of undoing, he aims to escape from the feminism that centers on a Western model. Rooted in the genealogy of "an antisocial, anti-Oedipal, antihumanist, and counterintuitive feminism," Halberstam draws inspiration, especially

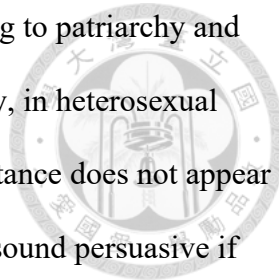
from Leo Bersani's "masochism," and responds to the self-destructive elements in different works. Through the analysis of Jamaica Kincaid's refusal of identities and colonization, Elfriede Jelinek's depiction of self-violation, Kara Walker's collage, J. A. Nicholls's art pieces, and Yoko Ono's performance, Halberstam comes to the conclusion that these texts demonstrate a "radical passivity" that unravels the feminist subject. The feminist subject in these texts "will not speak," but "only be spoken" (144). This passive voice stems from masochism and "might just be a transformative voice for feminism" (144). Its final phase would however, transfer "punishments definitively away from the body of the subjugated and onto the body of the oppressor" (144).

When the Blackwood sisters' reactions in the last few chapters are scrutinized under the context of queer negativity, their turning away from society can be established as a resistance instead of mere agoraphobia. The ruined house and the sisters' disposal of the remaining space resonates with Halberstam's appeal of ending the mother-daughter inheritance. By concealing their existence, the sisters further demonstrate a rebellion that is performed through silence and passivity. When Halberstam encourages his readers to "lose one's mother," he is addressing the Oedipal frame that he believes has a significant influence on women's studies (124-25). The appeal is stated as an academic concern but is supported by texts he enumerated as case studies. In those works, the protagonists "actively and passively lose the mother, abuse the mother, love, hate, and destroy the mother" (125). In *Castle*, the effacement of the immediate family, including the mother, the interruption of lineage, and the destruction of the inherited are embodied as concrete events. Merricat successfully murders her mother together with other family members she detests, and the destruction of the house highlights the final step of breaking away from an ancestral lineage.

The comfortable Blackwood manor guarantees a gentry living standard for the remaining family members, but it also shrouds them with the last breath of patriarchy. The luxurious house inherited from their ancestor stands between the sisters and their possibilities. As discussed in the previous chapter, the advantageous economic status of the sisters is conspicuous. Their superior living quality could mitigate the appropriateness of discussing them under the framework of queer theory since the concern of this field centers on people who suffer from the intersectionality of multiple underprivileged identities. For example, Ahmed has responded to Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and argues that the book dissects the unhappiness of housewives, but being "housewives" is eventually reserved for women whose families are wealthy (*Happiness* 50-51).⁴⁹ The fire, however, takes away what makes the sisters privileged. The fire and the attack by the villagers destroy most part of their ancestral house. The mansion is turned into a ruin, rendering their money useless. When they find the safe in the drawing room, they lock up the once-fancy space together with the safe and the portrait of their mother. They never open it again (Jackson, *Castle* 120). The only parts that are preserved and put "in use" are the kitchen, the cellar, the garden, and the woods, ensuring the sisters' sources of food, the minimal requirements for living.

Merricat starts the fire hoping that the action will expel Charles, the representation of everything evil about patriarchy. John Parks associates the fire with the intention of purging (27). The image of purification fits not only in the sense that the fire successfully drives Charles out of the sisters' life, albeit at a tremendous cost, but also in that the destruction ends their comfortable

⁴⁹ Ahmed draws attention to the fact that more than one-third of women at that time were not housewives. The suffering described in *The Feminine Mystique* is exclusive to women with economic privilege. At the same time, Friedan proposes the liberation of housewives from their families, but Ahmed explains that if the housewives were successfully "liberated," it would be other working-class women who have to take over the chores in their families (*Happiness* 50-51).



material life, forcing them to shake off the remaining possibility of returning to patriarchy and enjoying its luring benefits. The fire burns away Constance's interest, if any, in heterosexual romance and the world outside. Scholars like Hardin, who notice that Constance does not appear to be as dedicated to living a reclusive life with her sister and uncle, could sound persuasive if they draw evidence from earlier chapters of the novel. When Helen Clarke comes to tea, she invites Constance to step outside of the house. Merricat asks if Constance is going to do what is told, and Constance evasively responds by saying "I don't know" (Jackson, *Castle* 39). She even asks Merricat "Don't you ever want to leave here" (54). The implication of her considering leaving with Charles is further entailed by the silence after Merricat tells Constance it will not be kind to put Uncle Julian in a hospital, and Constance answers with, "But I'll have to if I—" (84). The fire reduces whatever is left unspoken in this sentence to ashes. Merricat starts the fire by swiping Charles' pipe into the wastebasket, but the fire ignites because Charles leaves the pipe burning. When the fire starts, Constance immediately identifies Charles' pipe as the cause. "I've asked him and asked him," she complains (101). This disrespectful recklessness and its consequence end Constance's wavering.

The following events testify to the girls' determination to invent a new life solely with each other. The first step is to block any potential intrusion and hide their existence from the world out there. Their rejection of the normative life concords with Halberstam's shadow feminism which, revealing a path that guards one's subjectivity while being passive. While the sisters do not go as far as practicing masochism, amidst the wreckage of the house, they remain apathetic to the help provided by acquaintances that could make their survival easier and insist on hiding themselves from any other living beings. Jackson seems to construe human nature with one of the bleakest views possible, but, different from what happens in "The Lottery," not every

villager in *Castle* participates in the violent action against the protagonists. The Blackwoods have friends. Dr. Levy, Helen Clarke, and Mr. Clarke help calm the villagers during the night of turbulence. They are also loyal friends who return to the house and propose to take care of the sisters. Helen Clarke knocks on the door and tells the girls that they can go to her house until people figure out what to do (Jackson, *Castle* 122-23). Mr. Clarke and Dr. Levy want to ensure the girls are not sick or hurt. Dr. Levy warns them “one of these days you’re going to need help. You’ll be sick, or hurt. You’ll *need* help” (129). Even Charles comes back once, apologizing and begging to see Constance once more (143-44). The two of them respond to every proposal with silence.

Shelly Ingram is one of the few scholars who address the seemingly unsatisfying results of Merricat’s craft and concludes that it is not a total failure. She frames the ending situation of the sisters as “legendary.” Unlike myth and fairy tales, for a legend to persist, a ground for its audience to test their belief is indispensable. The sisters might appear to be passive in their agoraphobic reaction, but the concealing of themselves and the acceptance of ritualistic offerings, which then become a habit embedded in townspeople’s everyday life, enable their transformation from targets of hatred into a local legend. In this process of negotiation, “there is agency (...) for the teller of the tale and for the character being constructed” (Ingram 72). What Halberstam describes as “canvas” resonates with Ingram’s insight. The sisters’ silence eventually turns into a basis for the dynamic between them and the villagers to change. As time goes by, their hiding leads to the “unbecoming” of Constance and Mary Katherine. Concealing themselves from the world outside, their complete absence invites villagers to come up with rumors about them, which endow them with a new voice and power. The villagers no longer refer to them by names but call them “the ladies.” Villagers leave food and notes at their

doorsteps to show penance for their violent deeds. Gradually, the sisters learn that their existence is uncertain to the outside world, and tourists would tell each other, “No one knows for sure if there’s anyone inside or not. The local people tell some tall tales” (Jackson, *Castle* 140). People began to fear them as witch-like figures who would give children “candy full of poison,” and would catch little boys and eat little girls (141). Halberstam once used the “funhouse mirror” to explain that a piece of artwork with its passivity entices a “negative projection of racial and colonial fantasy” (137). Molding the Blackwood sisters into cannibalistic creatures needed to be appeased with offerings reflects the villager’s guilty conscience and the indirect recognition of their atrocity. The two sisters are the encapsulation of anti-social subjects. They are spoken for, but this passivity endows them with a powerful and frightening voice. Reading the ending through the lens of queer negativity, the destruction of the house and the confinement of the sisters to its ruin are no longer pessimistic. However, the novel differs from most of the texts analyzed in Halberstam’s chapter due to the fact that the sisters’ passivity does not lead to self-sacrifice or ultimate destruction. The novel instead stresses the survival of the girls. Their passivity is compatible with living a “happy life.”

2. “Who Knows Where the Time Goes?”: Queer Temporality and Non-Chrononormative Futurity⁵⁰

Halberstam’s radical passivity is much related to masochism. He quotes Elizabeth Freeman and comments that masochism “represents a deep disruption of time itself” and reconciles “the supposedly irreconcilable tension between pleasure and death” (Halberstam

⁵⁰ The subtitle is borrowed from the title of a song written and sung by Sandy Denny. The lyrics describe a person indifferent to the passing of time, having “no thought of time,” believing that she will remain in the same place and not be affected by time (Denny 2:54). She has her lover near her, so she is not alone and has no fear (3:42-4:42).

144).⁵¹ Though Constance and Merricat do not resort to masochism, the status of them living in a wrecked manor and as characters of local legends shares a similarly intriguing relationship with the problem of time. Their passivity creates a ground in which they are benefited from villagers' imagination projected onto them. However, when the world outside no longer poses an impending threat, a new way of living awaits to be explored by themselves. The situation impels the sisters to form what Merricat calls, "a whole new pattern of day" (Jackson, *Castle* 125), a new "everyday life" that functions outside of the regulation of time. As discussed in Chapter II, while Sarah Ahmed and Laurent Berlant stress the controlling effects of affects that coax people into complying with the existing normality, the temporal turn of queer theory exposes the confining power of time when it responds to capitalistic logic. Elizabeth Freeman in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, elaborates on the intertwining of capitalism, time, and domesticity. It is through shattering the old rhythm of time and creating a new one that the sisters can establish a miniature community that seems to function independently from the rules of exterior regulations.

Freeman explains that the capitalistic mechanism of regulating time wields influence on people's conception of time and binds them to a prescribed schedule. She terms it chrononormativity. According to her:

Chrononormativity is a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts (...) Manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time. The advent of wage work, for example,

⁵¹ In Freeman's writing, she draws inspiration from Deleuze and argues, "Sacher-Masoch celebrate a suspension of time that preserves the object of desire indefinitely." She believes that S/M "produce a suspended temporality, that is, a temporality of anticipation, poise, readiness...in short, of attendance" (153).

entailed a violent retemporalization of bodies once tuned to the seasonal rhythms of agricultural labor” (Freeman 3).

Freeman lists Zerubavel’s “hidden rhythms,” Bourdieu’s “habitus,” and Butler’s “gender performativity” to support that repetition molds identity. Bourdieu’s work further suggests that through enforcing different forms of time—“delay, surprise, pause, and knowing when to stop”—the influence of these temporal manipulations extend to flesh and claim concrete embodiment (4).

On the other hand, *chronobiopolitics*, a term coined by Dana Luciano is enlisted by Freeman to explain the situation in which the regulation of time wields its influence beyond individuals and functions on the entire population (Freeman 3). In a chronobiological society, people do not only synchronize with one another but “with larger temporal schemae experience belonging itself as natural,” and in such society, institutions link “properly temporalized bodies to narratives of movement and change. These are teleological schemes of events or strategies for living such as marriage, accumulation of health and wealth for the future, reproduction, childrearing, and death and its attendant rituals” (4). These events-centered timelines lead to a teleological, future-oriented life plan. The emphasis on the future directs people’s attention to the problem of inheritance and situates human activity in a cyclical time.

Freeman applies Kristeva’s ideas to argue that woman “as a cultural symbol, comes to be correlated with the endless returns of cyclical time (...) with appeals to nature and eternity” (5). After the early nineteenth century, women’s labor has been devalued due to the rise of capitalization and modernity. When the wage system distances people from their homes and invites them into the external work fields, men devote themselves to businesses outside of the home, and women take up the responsibility of keeping the domestic space “innocent and

natural” (6). For example, Victorian Women and their efforts in keeping the house tidy and orderly are hidden behind the image of the “angel in the house,” that the machinery of household labor is magically hidden, and the “middle-class femininity became a matter of synchronic attunement to factory rhythms” (39). Freeman also introduces John Gillis’ contention of “ritualization of family life” to elaborate on the situation where family activities gradually replace traditional rituals, and the sense of time, usually experienced through the practices of rituals, is now incorporated into domestic time and thus becomes the responsibility of women (40). Women’s time is regulated by the needs of the family to prepare meals and activities, while the time in the family is subjected to the constraint of the wage system.

The fire marks the severing from two directions in time in the Blackwood house: the life the Blackwood sisters used to live and the life they might have—both the past and the future. When Charles almost succeeds in snatching Constance’s attention, indicating that the two need to talk and “have plans to make,” Merricat takes action by meddling with time. When she selects the ingredient she would use in the ritual of banishing Charles, her priority is to “stop [her] father’s watch which Charles had started” (Jackson, *Castle* 86). Merricat believes time has to be stopped if they wish to do away with Charles’ influence and return to their regular days:

I took up the watch and listened to it ticking because Charles had started it; I could not turn it all the way back to where it had formerly been because he had kept it going for two or three days, but I twisted the winding knob backward until there was a small complaining crack from the watch and the ticking stopped. When I was sure that he could never start it ticking again I put it back gently where I had found it; one thing, at least, had been released from Charles’ spell (87).

The procession of time is an aberrant situation associated with patriarchy, directly embodied by the deceased Blackwood father and this cousin who looks incredibly alike. The confining power, though, could extend beyond patriarchy to the days that are formed under its regulation. This is why when the sisters first set foot in their beloved home, which looks alien after the fire, Merricat describes that they “come back through the wrong gap in time, or the wrong door, or the wrong fairy tale” (114), and when they scavenge through the wreckage, Merricat announces that “Although I did not perceive it then, time and the orderly pattern of our old days had ended” (116).

The old days have revolved around taking care of Uncle Julian and completing chores according to the rhythm of the week. Julian as the only survivor of the attempted murder, embodies the past—the last breath of patriarchy and women’s unseen labors in the house. Julian has dedicated the rest of his life to remembering and writing down what happened on the day when he was supposed to die. He has a detailed collection of the news reports on the tragic event, and has himself stored loads of papers that draft down everything he remembers on the “last day.” His time has not proceeded, and his entrapment is also reflected in his calling Charles “John,” the name of the sister’s father (Jackson, *Castle* 71). A great part of Constance’s life is devoted to keeping this living history alive before the destructive event falls upon them. While Uncle Julian “works” on the documents—a job he deems important—Constance takes care of him by providing food and attending to his needs. Constance’s labor spent on taking care of Uncle Julian resonates with Freeman’s description of women maintaining a time zone independent of but also synchronized with the working time, providing service in a tranquil manner that almost creates the illusion of magic. Julian is old, delusional, and disabled,

exempting him from establishing another patriarchal order in the house, but he still wields its impact and enjoys its benefits.

On the other hand, when Julian is still alive, Merricat plans her daily schedule according to the day of the week: on Wednesdays, she checks the fence to ensure that the wires and gates still protect the house; on Sunday mornings, she examines what she calls “my safeguards,” including the coins in the ground, the book on the tree, and other treasures, to ensure that nothing bad can get in; Fridays and Tuesdays are the terrible days because she has to go into the village for books and for the grocery; she considers Thursday her most powerful, so on Thursdays, she goes into the attic and dresses the deceased Blackwoods’ clothes. On Mondays, she neatens the house with Constance, while on Saturdays, she helps Constance in the garden and adds food to the cellar (Jackson, *Castle* 41-42). Though the rhythm is relaxed, the existing pattern still suggests the remaining traces of what Freeman calls the chrononormativity, which organizes different tasks according to the days of the week. The schedule subject to the regulation of days is abandoned shortly after the turbulence. Among all practical concerns raised by Constance about “Where are we going to sleep? How are we going to know what time it is? What will we wear for clothes?” when they return to the burnt-down house, Merricat first addresses the question about time and asks “Why do we need to know what time it is?” She resolves the problem by telling Constance “Tomorrow I will guess for you what time it is” (127). Time’s precision is no longer important in their new life.

The clock of the past has been stopped, and so has the clock of the future. What Freeman terms as chronobiopolitical expresses a teleological planning that would direct people toward a future-oriented life project, leading them to fulfill the ends of “marriage, accumulation of health and wealth for the future, reproduction, childrearing, and death and its attendant rituals” (4).

Freeman is not the only queer theorist who holds a disagreeing mindset regarding the “future.” In *Cruel Optimism*, Laurent Berlant also warns her readers about the detrimental result of putting too much faith in the future. The “impasse” that she meticulously analyzes is deeply associated with the problem of time. When people hold an optimistic attachment to things, feelings, or objects, the attachment persuades them to believe in a promising future, but the exact attachment also prevents a better future from being obtained (McCann and Monaghan 224-25). In Jackson’s works, the distrust of the future and the unleashing of it might be best embodied in her characters’ wicked comments on children. Dara Downey observes that Jackson is not only interested in the motif of witches, but the witch from “Hansel and Gretel” particularly resonates with various witch-like characters in her writing (“Gingerbread Houses” 87-88).⁵² That is, these stories revolve around the themes of food and consumption, and her witchy roles often adopt a threatening attitude towards children. This malice against kids is congruent with Lee Edelman’s arguments in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). Edelman boldly appeals to the renunciations of letting “the Child,” a symbol of the future and reproduction, remain as a dominant role in society. Alternatively, he proposes a radical presentism that insists “the future stops here” (McCann and Monaghan 219-21).

In *Castle*, the existence of children does not lead to any positive meanings or imaginations, and the problem of their survival is treated cold-bloodedly. Whenever children appear in the scenario, they become a source of distress for the girls, who seek opportunities to get rid of them, even to eat them. Merricat in the very beginning, already shows her antipathy toward kids. When she shops in the grocery, she mumbles in her mind that “I always stood

⁵² One can find reference to “Hansel and Gretel” in Jackson’s *The Sundial* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Jackson has also written a play, *The Bad Children*, which is a direct adaptation of the Grimm fairy tale. In the play, the witch is depicted as a funny character obsessed with the improvement of her witchcraft, and Hensel and Gretel become greedy and insufferable children (Downey, “Gingerbread House” 90-91).

perfectly straight and stiff when the children came close, because I was afraid of them. I was afraid that they might touch me and the mothers would come at me like a flock of taloned hawks” (Jackson, *Castle* 7). In her imagination of inflicting pain and death upon villagers, she does not spare the children (9). While children stalk her and chant a mockery rhyme to taunt her, a vicious curse is uttered in her mind: “Their tongues will burn (...) as though they have eaten fire. Their throats will burn when the words come out, and in their bellies, they will feel a torment hotter than a thousand fires” (17). Children’s presence is again staged as an annoyance in the last chapter, and the sisters show no intention of tolerating it. When the Blackwood sisters begin to claim a new life in the ruin and appear to reach a balance with the villagers, children come. After the fire, the roles of the Blackwood sisters have changed. Adults frighten their kids into staying away from the house by portraying the sisters as monstrous figures that eat children:

“The ladies don’t like little boys,” the second woman said; she was one of the bad ones; I could see her mouth from the side and it was the mouth of a snake.

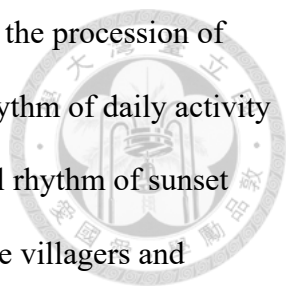
“What would they do to me?”

“They’d hold you down and make you eat candy full of poison; I heard that dozens of bad little boys have gone too near that house and never been seen again. They catch little boys and they—”

(...)

“They hate little boys and little girls. The difference is, they eat the little girls” (141).

In the end, Constance and Merricat play with this idea. Merricat wonders, “if I *could* eat a child if I had the chance,” and Constance answers, “I wonder if I could cook one” (146). The tokens of the future are transformed into the sustenance of witches.



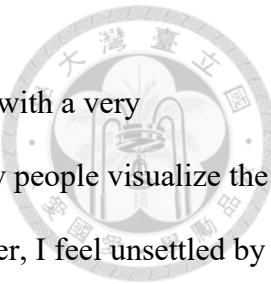
With no past, no future, and no clock, the sisters enter a zone where the procession of time is frozen, much like cans of preserves in the Blackwood cellar. The rhythm of daily activity no longer depends on the arbitrary time dictated by the clock but the natural rhythm of sunset and sunrise. The new tempo of life allows the sisters to remain unseen to the villagers and maintains their legendary image. The sisters have never spoken of the days of the week again. Instead, in the final chapter of the novel, Merricat describes the new pattern of their days: they are most active “in the very early morning because no one was ever around” (Jackson, *Castle* 132). She ensures first that the front door is locked, and she bolts the kitchen door to let sunlight in. Constance cooks breakfast for them in daylight, and they may sneak into the garden when it is safe (133-34). During the afternoons, people may come park their bicycles on the driveway and play on the lawn. The sisters will listen to their conversations in which they are turned into mysterious beings that would harm children (140). In the evenings, villagers may bring food to the sisters’ doorsteps with baskets. Merricat fetches the offerings when it is completely dark, and they feast on the gifts (138). In earlier parts of the novel, when Merricat feels unsafe, she shields herself with the fantasy of being on “the moon.” When she is hassled by Jim Donell, a villager who keeps suggesting the Blackwoods should move away with a teasing tone, she conjures the imagination of the moon to block the malice (14). She activates this mechanism when Charles takes control over their home and when they are beleaguered in the ensuing turbulence. In the end, the girls construe their situation as finally being on the moon (133). Through a thorough separation from the time and the norm outside, and the establishment of a new rhythm of their own, they find utopia in the relics of their past life.

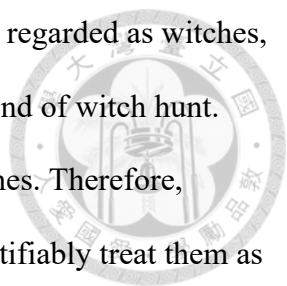
According to Banks’ interpretation, “the moon” is associated with the era of space travel and symbolizes the possibility of reaching the “essentially unreachable places” where “we can

undo the cultural structures that keep us earthbound (183). However, in the end, it does not require a rocket to reach the moon. One does not even have to leave the house or murder all the neighbors, as often happens in Merricat's imagination, to be on "the moon." When Constance describes their ruined house to be "a very happy place" (Jackson, *Castle* 133), and Merricat concludes the whole book by saying "We are so happy" (146), the "happiness" here no longer confines to the "compulsory pursuit" discussed in Chapter I. I would like to understand the word "happy" in this final scene as being able to survive without people trying to force them back to following the norms. The sisters embrace being feared as the child-eating "ladies." The image corresponds with the notorious personas of proud, murderous, witch-like women that villagers once hated. However, by passively hiding from the villagers, their evasive presence turns into a foundation that allows their legendary identity to emerge. Their departing from the regulations of external time and the establishment of a new rhythm then become the pillars upholding their unique way of survival. The Blackwood sisters, after all, claim a "happy ending" by insisting on living their life in their unique way and not yielding to normality.

Conclusion

The experience of watching the film adaptation of *Castle* concludes with a very complicated feeling. On the one hand, it is always a pleasure to observe how people visualize the words you adore and to be honest, the production is fairly executed. However, I feel unsettled by the fact that the movie tries so hard to fill in every blank that Shirley Jackson intentionally left unexplained. For example, the movie explains to its audience that Jim Donell hates the Blackwoods so deeply because he once tried to elope with Constance. Mr. Blackwood found out their plan and confiscated Jim Donell's car as a punishment. Merricat's magic is also portrayed with less subtlety than what is presented in the novel. In the movie, Merricat has a spell book. She learns her crafts from it, rather than inventing them herself. To explain the failure of her magic, the arrangement of the movie is that Merricat is interrupted by Constance, and therefore, she cannot finish casting her protective spells. While the adaptation makes the story more accessible to some audiences, I am afraid that it renders these witchcraft elements as a whimsical hobby that only serves the purpose of constructing Merricat as an eccentric child or adding some mysterious atmosphere to the work. This thesis aims to address the challenge of understanding the failure of witchcraft in the novel while acknowledging its empowering potential, as Jackson appears to believe in it. The study also examines witchcraft as an indispensable factor that influences one's interpretation of the story based on its success or failure. Introducing queer theory, the thesis initially reveals the threats that the sisters' practices aim to protect them from and then redefines the power that truly brings about changes in these rituals. The discussion concludes by arguing that the ending is an emancipated outcome, affirming that magic, in the end, remains effective.





In precedent studies, critics reach a consensus that the sisters can be regarded as witches, and that the ordeals they go through when confronting townspeople are a kind of witch hunt. However, Jackson has not directly declared the Blackwood girls to be witches. Therefore, Chapter I begins with a historical investigation that enables the thesis to justifiably treat them as witches. A more specific introduction to witch hunts in North America follows and contextualizes the story in an ancient tradition of persecuting the outliers. “The norms” which has the authority to define what is politically, socially, and sexually normal, and conversely, what is abnormal thus become crucial in the discussion. Focusing on affects, the chapter introduces the theories of Sarah Ahmed and Laurent Berlant to reveal that “the norms” are not as righteous as they appear. It emphasizes that the widespread pursuit of “happiness” and “normalcy” are, in fact, fantasies that trap people in a cycle of misery.

After problematizing the norm, Chapter II is dedicated to explaining the methods that dismantle unwanted regulations. This chapter focuses on magical practices and directly addresses their failure. It begins with a historical account of prevalent beliefs that elucidate the power of witchcraft. The chapter suggests that the sisters’ practices might transcend common categorization when scrutinizing the materials of their rituals and their usage through a queer perspective. This discovery is supported by Dian Purkiss’ research on witchcraft and domesticity. Historical documents containing records of witchcraft practiced with everyday objects will further amplify the discussion. The concept of “queer use,” as proposed by Ahmed, is then introduced into the chapter to argue that the sisters’ rituals are not futile; instead, they are given rebellious potential by queer use.

Chapter III discusses the elusive ending, maintaining that though different from what is traditionally defined as a “good ending,” the denouement is positive. Jack Halberstam’s “queer

negativity” serves as an initial framework to understand the sisters’ decision to hide in a derelict house. However, not exactly congruent with Halberstam’s theory that finds agency in self-sacrifice, the sisters in their passivity, strive to thrive. To survive and maintain independence from external society, they establish an everyday life pattern exempt from the governance of what Elizabeth Freeman terms as chrononormativity and chronobiopolitics. They form a new pattern of life, and by living it, they reach their utopia.

By juxtaposing the history of both religious and political witch hunts and theories on queer affects, I intend to point out a new pathway connecting this history and the studies of affects. Reading witchcraft as a kind of queer use, my goal is to contribute a fresh interpretation to understanding one of Jackson’s most acclaimed stories. Simultaneously, I anticipate that this reading will provide inspiration for the study of witchcraft by conceptualizing it and its relationship with domesticity through a nontraditional approach. Lastly, my analysis supplements Halberstam’s radical negativity discussed in *The Queer Art of Failure*. I hope that by emphasizing the survival of the protagonists, it becomes imaginable to consider possibilities other than sacrificing oneself to the utmost destruction when reflecting on negativity. Based on this thesis, I expect that in the future, I will be able to conduct more detailed research on the topic of female empowerment and witches. While witches have become a symbol of feminine strength and independence in modern feminist movements, in numerous works, especially YA stories, witches are still subjected to the norm of heterosexual romance, and their extreme power does not seem to be as rebellious as imagined. At the same time, given that my thesis focuses on magical practices, Uncle Julian, who is still a crucial character in the story, is not treated with as much attention. The role he plays in the remaining family, his disability, and his obsession with recording the traumatic event should be topics worthy of more investigation.

On “Goodreads,” a booklist titled “Female-Authored Weird Fiction” lists *Castle* as the fifth in the ranking. The novel is indeed weird, and the haunting ending even appears to be incomprehensible the first time I finish reading it. However, its weirdness and all its ambiguities that prompt me to revisit the story time and again. It will be a pleasure in the future if I have the chance to encounter more weird books with weird endings, where their unconventional protagonists defy domestication, survive persecution, and live a life—whether happy or unhappy—in their peculiar utopias.

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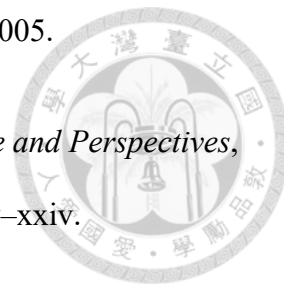
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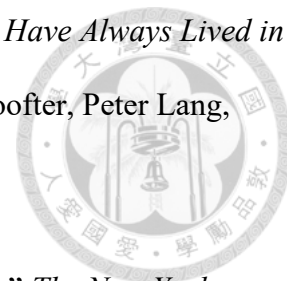
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