

# A view on the real language in shirley jackson's the possibility of evil

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## **The Real Language**

“The Possibility of Evil” by Shirley Jackson is an intriguing story about an older lady who attempts to save her town but in turn becomes a contributor to its corruption. The story begins with Miss Strangeworth, the story’s main character, on her way to the town store to buy groceries. Miss Strangeworth is well respected among the townspeople and seen as a matriarch of the community. As she takes her daily stroll, Miss Strangeworth greets and speaks to everyone she encounters on the way. During these conversations, Miss Strangeworth seems to genuinely care about her townspeople and enjoys their company, although this is not the case. In her town, Miss Strangeworth sees everyone she meets as evil and feels obligated to rid them of it. To do so, she writes a series of spiteful anonymous letters based on suspicion and opinion attempting to scare them straight. Unfortunately later in the story, Miss Strangeworth’s identity is eventually revealed after dropping one of her letters by the mailbox. When the letter is found it causes its reader to cut Miss Strangeworth’s prize roses, fueling the evil she hoped she would stop. Charlotte Bronte said, “The trouble is not that I am single and likely to stay single, but that I am lonely and likely to stay lonely.” Symbolism, character, and setting show that Miss Strangeworth criticizes the families in her town because she is secretly lonely.

Symbolism reveals Miss Strangeworth is lonely. Miss Strangeworth sends a basket of flowers to the new minister to decorate the church. Contrary to what many readers would expect she does not send roses but instead sends a basket of Gladiolus. Gladiolus are flowers that are known for symbolizing

infatuation, showing the reader that Miss Strangeworth had a crush on the minister. If Miss Strangeworth has a crush on the minister, this supports the claim that she is lonely. In her house Miss Strangeworth sleeps with white roses next to her bed; the color white symbolizes sterility. Miss Strangeworth keeps white flowers by her bed, the reader can infer they represent her inability to have children, which could be another contributor to Miss Strangeworth's loneliness. When Miss Strangeworth is at her desk writing her letters, she picks three different colors to write them in, two of them being pink and green. With these two colors, Miss Strangeworth writes four letters, two green sheets to Mrs. Harper and a pink sheet to Helen Crane and Don Crane. The color green symbolizes jealousy and pink symbolizes love and compassion, allowing the reader to infer that the pink letter written for Don Crane is a love letter and that she is also jealous of Mrs. Harper's Marriage because she wrote two green letters addressed to her.

Character also reveals Miss Strangeworth is lonely. While at her desk Miss Strangeworth writes two pink letters, one to Helen, and one to Don Crane. Even though what is in Don Crane's letter is unknown to the reader, the text says Miss Strangeworth is left, "wondering curiously if he would show the letter to his wife." (41 Jackson) Miss Strangeworth thinking that shows that she knows the letter she wrote to Mr. Crane was inappropriate, and that she should not send it, revealing that Miss Strangeworth is lustful. Miss Strangeworth's lustfulness further proves that Don Crane's letter is a love letter, and that Miss Strangeworth is secretly lonely. When Miss Strangeworth goes to the grocery store, the text says, "at last" after she

says good morning to Mr. Lewis even though he's lived in the town as long as Miss Strangeworth has.(5 Jackson)Miss Strangeworth and Mr. Lewis also attended the same high school and went multiple places together, but afterward they stopped speaking. Through characterization, this shows that Miss Strangeworth has known Mr. Lewis for a long time, but has been choosing not to speak to him until that day, revealing that Miss Strangeworth holds is stubborn and holds grudges. Miss Strangeworth and Mr. Lewis went to various places together, from this the reader can assume that during that time period they were dating. Based on the revelation that Miss Strangeworth is stubborn the reader can also infer that Mr. Lewis broke up with Miss Strangeworth and that she is still upset about it. With that information, Mr. Lewis can be penalized for Miss Strangeworth's loneliness, since there is never any mentions or hints that Miss Strangeworth has been in another relationship. On her way back to her house Miss. Strangeworth stops four times, to talk to Helen Crane, to talk Miss Chandler, another time to talk to Billy Moore, and lastly to think about Linda Stewarts. Each one of these times except for her conversation with Miss Chandler, Miss Strangeworth was either talking to or talking about a kid. Miss Strangeworth's actions reveal that contrary to what the reader is convinced to believe, she is compassionate and cares about the children that live in her town. Miss Strangeworth's is compassionate towards children because she wants to raise kids of her own. Usually when someone wants to be a parent they started mimicing parental behaviors to any kid they associate with. If Miss Strangeworth is playing parent to the children in her town, this further proves that she is lonely.

Setting reveals that Miss Strangeworth is lonely. Before her walk, Miss Strangeworth sends some gladiolus to the church minister. Gladiolus only grow in South Africa, which based on the setting of a little town and her house on Main Street means she had them imported. Meaning that not only did Miss Strangeworth have a crush on the new minister, she also went out of her way to show her affection towards him. Before Miss Strangeworth starts writing her letters she places a bowl of red roses on the window seal so the smell will linger across the house. The color red represents love, something that is provided with a family. If the scent of roses fills up the house, symbolically it has a setting of love due to its fragrance. With this information, the reader can infer that Miss Strangeworth leaves the roses out in the house to replace the love she lacks in the house due to her lack of family. It is made obvious to the reader that Miss Strangeworth's house is two stories. Usually, families of four or larger live in two-story homes. Since Miss Strangeworth lives in the house by herself, it is easy for the reader to assume that her solidarity is a contributor to her loneliness.

On January 14, 2008, in Madera, California a teen girl named Brittany Navarra murdered her ex-boyfriend's soon to be fiance. When Brittany was asked her reasoning for killing her ex's fiance, she responded with she was jealous and lonely. In the story, Miss Strangeworth sent multiple hateful letters thinking her words would get rid of the evil in her town. The current supports my claim because it shows that people have very irrational thought processes when they are lonely. Which explains why Miss Strangeworth

thought her actions were justified, even though they were just as evil as she believed her townspeople were.