

# The lottery essay



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Shirley Jackson, the author of the short story “ The Lottery” is both a traditional and a non-traditional woman of her time. She is a wife to critic Stanley Edgar Hyman and a mother to four kids (Jackson, 922). She is a typical housewife. She does the house chores, takes care of her children, attends PTA meetings and entertains her husband’s guests at home. She is also a non-traditional woman during her time because she writes and gets published in the 40’s and 50’s when most successful writers are men. She also writes about themes that are not usually tackled during those times.

One such theme is the position of women in society. Lynette Carpenter describes Shirley Jackson as a “ champion of the persecuted and oppressed” specifically the women (Carpenter, 147). This is because Shirley Jackson’s writings depict women as victims of the patriarchal system — a social set-up wherein the power rests on men. Carpenter says that the goal of Shirley Jackson in her writing is to free herself as a woman, “ not to be weak and helpless and degraded and shut out” (Carpenter, 147). Hague who also studies Shirley Jackson asserts that Jackson successfully depicts the terrible position of women in the 1950’s.

In Hague’s analysis, Shirley Jackson’s female protagonists are mostly typical housewives who feel separated from the world, without strong identities and experiencing deep loneliness bordering on mental illness. Hague adds that mental illness is the protagonists’ reaction against the “ culture of repression, containment and paranoia”, in other words, their reaction to the patriarchal system (Hague, par. 4). In her most famous short story, “ The Lottery”, Shirley Jackson depicts women first as victims of the patriarchal system of the village then as fighters against the patriarchal system.

They are victims because the women in the village are expected to conform to the traditional image of women. Then they become fighters when they shake up the patriarchal system of the village. The traditional image of women in the village is to be housewives. The women have to be domesticated, weak, silent and powerless. They should have no position in the patriarchal society. They should just follow the tradition blindly and not question anything. When they do, they destabilize the patriarchal system and give a better position for themselves in the society.

When the men start to gather in the square for the annual lottery, they talk about “ planting and rain, tractors and taxes (Jackson, 923). Jackson focuses on the things that the men worry about, their work and their responsibility to the government. These are serious things that they talk about. The men also came first than the women like there is an unwritten rule in the village that when going to the square for the lottery, all men should come first and all women should come last. When the women arrive, they are described as wearing “ house dresses” and they do not talk about responsibilities, instead they gossip.

The women wear house dresses even if they are out of their houses as if they need to be constantly reminded that their place is in the house. Their work is to take care of the children and keep the house clean. No woman in the town has to worry about earning income and paying the taxes. All women in the village are housewives. This set-up is unfair to women because their work at home does not give them the independence and power that men have. Because they are dependent to their husbands, the women are treated as one of the possessions of their husbands.

Shirley Jackson shows this when the character of Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson arrives late in the square and some people from the crowd tell her husband, “ Here comes your Missus, Hutchinson” and “ Bill, she made it after all” (925). These comments may seem just a passing remark but they sound as if Mrs. Hutchinson should always be within the vicinity of Mr. Bill Hutchinson. The remarks sound like something bad happened to one of Mr. Bill Hutchinson’s things and now that the thing is running again then Mr. Bill Hutchinson should know that. It’s like saying, “ Bill, your computer is up and running again. ” Domesticating women also make the women powerless in the family and in the society.

We can easily see that the women of the village in the story are powerless in the first paragraphs. When the women call on to their children who are playing around the square, their children do not listen to them. The mothers called a number of times but the children do not obey them. But the children finally go with their families when the fathers call them. They laugh and play around when their mothers do not catch them but they instantly behave when the grown-up men speak (Jackson, 923). It is not only within the family that women are powerless but also in the larger society of this village.

The task of drawing slip of papers for the lottery is given only to the heads of the family who are all male. The exceptions are Mrs. Dunbar whose husband cannot participate because of a broken leg and Mrs. Watson who only has her son with her (Jackson, 925). The remarks of the people to the two women prove that the society look at women as powerless. As an instance, Mr. Summers asks Mrs. Dunbar, “ Don’t you have a grown boy to do it for you, Janey? ” (Jackson, 925) What Mr. Summers implies in this question is that for <https://assignbuster.com/the-lottery-essay-essay-samples-2/>

him, drawing a slip of paper is so hard for a woman and only a man can take it.

This is also what the people imply when they say to the grown-up son of Mrs. Watson, “ Glad to see your mother’s got a man to do it” (Jackson, 925). The remark sounds like drawing a piece of paper is not a task for a woman because a woman is weak and a man should be the one to do it because a man is strong. The people are unconscious of this and only one character stands out to expose that the system of the society is unfair. The character is Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson.

Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson shakes up the patriarchal society by questioning the lottery system that is controlled by a man, Mr. Joe Summers. Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson starts complaining against the system when she learns that it is her husband, Mr. Bill Hutchinson who picks the paper with the circle on it during the first round of draw. At first, it seems an odd behavior because winning the lottery is a good thing and nobody will complain if he/she is chosen in the lottery because an award awaits the winner of the lottery. But after reading further, we find out that this is a different kind of lottery because the one that will be chosen will not be awarded with any prize but instead will be stoned to death by all the people of the village from the youngest to the eldest. Thus, when Mr.

Bill Hutchinson picks the paper with the circle on it, it means that the one that will be stoned will have to be someone from the Hutchinson family. Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson disturbs the prevailing norms because she reacts differently to what is expected of a woman by the society. As the oldest man

in the village Old Man Warner says, “ It’s not the way it used to be. . . People ain’t the way it used to be” (Jackson, 928). Shirley Jackson shows that Mrs. Hutchinson does not conform to the traditional image of a woman by giving Mrs. Hutchinson the trait of being brave and extroverted. She is not afraid of saying what is on her mind.

One instance that proves this is when it is the turn of her husband to draw, she yells, “ Get up there, Bill” (Jackson, 926). This produces an uneasy laughter from the people because it is a command from a wife that is expected to be passive and obedient to her husband. When she says this, it seems as though it is the other way around, that it is Mr. Bill Hutchinson who is obedient to his wife. When Mr. Bill Hutchinson picks the slip of paper with the drawing, Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson is more of a 21st century woman than a woman that is conforming to the traditional weak, passive image of a woman:

People began to look around to see the Hutchinsons. Bill Hutchinson was standing quiet, staring down at the paper in his hand. Suddenly, Tessie Hutchinson shouted to Mr. Summers, “ You didn’t give him time enough to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. It wasn’t fair! ” (Jackson, 927) The reaction of Mr. Bill Hutchinson is the one that conforms to the traditional image of a woman: silent and passive. But Mrs. Tessie’s reaction is the opposite. It is a reaction of deviance. She does not complain apologetically or gently, she shouts at Mr. Summers.

When Mr. Summers ask Mr. Bill Hutchinson if there are other households in the family, Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson yells again at Mr. Summers: “ There’s Don

and Eva. . . Make them take their chance! ” (Jackson, 927) Eva is the only grown-up daughter of the Hutchinson couple and Don is her husband. The rule of the lottery is that the married daughters draw with their husband’s family and not with their own family. In yelling this command to Mr. Summers, Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson is looked upon by her society as somebody who is disrespecting the prevailing rules of the lottery system.

In doing that, she is also shaking up the traditional image of a woman; that a married woman belongs to her husband. Peter Kosenko analyzes the character of Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson as a rebel. He says that Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson does not just fight against what she sees as the unfair officiating of the lottery but also fights against the traditional image of women: Tessie is a woman whose role as a housewife deprives her of her freedom by forcing her to submit to a husband who gains his power over her by virtue of his place in the work force.

Tessie, however rebels against her role, and such rebellion is just what the orderly functioning of her society cannot stand. (Kosenko, Par. 19). What this passage means is that Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson shakes up the order of the society of her village which is patriarchal in nature. She does this by rebelling against her traditional image of woman and wife. In studying Shirley Jackson’s short story “ The Lottery” with focus on women, we understand more about the nature of the discrimination against women and how patriarchy works in order for the discrimination to continue.

The patriarchal society gives unwritten rule for the women that they should obey; that women should be domesticated, weak, silent and powerless. But

the story shows that the rule is just a way for the patriarchal system to continue on functioning, for the power to continue to be with the men and for the women to remain powerless. If women want to end the discrimination and have a better position in society, they should destabilize the patriarchal system by questioning the rules set up by the powerful just like what Mrs. Hutchinson did in the story.