

Portfolio HPEN7002

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1 – Critically annotated bibliography

Title: A Survey of Postmodernism, as Seen from Theoretical Perspectives

This annotated bibliography could be part of a study of postmodernism, seen from various theoretical perspectives (cultural materialism, psychoanalysis, feminism). Since certain aspects of Shirley Jackson's writing can be regarded as having postmodernist traits, her works could be used as a practical case study.

Caminero-Santangelo, Marta, 'Multiple Personality and the Postmodern Subject', in *Shirley Jackson Essays on the Literary Legacy*, ed. by Bernice M. Murphy (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2005), pp.52-80

Drawing on depictions of female multiple personality disorder in several works of literature, among which is Shirley Jackson's *The Bird's Nest*, Caminero-Santangelo's argues that the postmodern subject defined by multiplicity lacks fundamental agency. The author agrees with Leys's proposal that the personality of the subject constructed by mimesis disrupts the traditional notion of gender, but argues that this model does not confer power, on the contrary, it stripes the subject of it. Instead, the author proposes that if the subject was constructed within the boundaries of discourse, by whatever process, it is from within the same boundaries, but from an "elsewhere", that a path must be taken towards an own definition of self, which thus escapes the control of a totalitarian instance. In *The Bird's Nest* Caminero-Santangelo reads the integration of Elizabeth not as victory of the humanist ideal, but as recognition of the partiality the postmodern subject must be aware of if she is to assume agency and surpass the boundaries of simple confinement within discourse.

Hattenhauer, Darryl, 'Shirley Jackson and Proto-Postmodernism', in *Shirley Jackson's American Gothic* (State University of New York Press, Albany, 2003), pp. 1-13

The text is an overview of main traits of Shirley Jackson's writing, which the author describes as "proto-postmodernist". This is a term taken from John Barth which he used to refer to fiction of the middle 20th century which already went beyond modernism (in Lyotard's terms, avantgarde modernism). Hattenhauer echoes post-structuralist ideas in arguing that her characters move from the condition of "creator or discoverer of meaning" to "captive of meaning" (p.3), her plots are beyond linear and unified, transferred to the realm of uncertain, even truncated and abrupt, and her narrators are unreliable. Her Gothic writing, including grotesque and fantastic aspects, is also seen as a manifest of early postmodern, as per Vijay Mishra's argument. Seen from a Lacanian point of view, the subject is constructed on transitioning from the Imaginary to the Symbolic (in some cases regression also plays a part) within a domestic environment. The text also focuses on biographical aspects of Jackson's life (such as interest in supernatural and magic) which are transferred into her writing.

Jacobson, Frederic, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *Modern Criticism and Theory A Reader*, 3rd edn., ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood (Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), pp. 542-554

As Lyotard, Jacobson also assesses the notion of the present time in the postmodern, but from a general historical and social perspective. He focuses on the notions of pastiche and schizophrenia to illustrate his view that the general cultural attitude in the postmodern age displays an attempt to dissolve the boundaries of genre, discourse and even history. The pastiche is explained as parody that does not relate to its original subject anymore because, from an extreme poststructuralist-ideological standpoint, its individuality was only an illusion. He concretizes this view by turning to the "nostalgia film", which only

gives the illusion of contemporaneity, but suggests a return to or revival of the historical past. He uses schizophrenia as a plastic way of understanding the distancing which the postmodern takes from the allure of meaning (which develops over a stretch of time) in favour of literal materiality (which exists in the eternal now). In conclusion, Jacobson sees the dominance of pastiche and schizophrenia in the postmodern age as a signifier for the society's tendency to remain suspended in a recycled present, unable to break with the historical past in an assumed and conscious way, and where art, reinforces instead of question, this material reality.

Lacan, Jacques, 'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious', in *Modern Criticism and Theory A Reader*, 3rd edn., ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood (Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), pp. 186-209

Lacan's exposition is an argument towards the idea that the "I" which we use to grammatically refer to ourselves and, implicitly, the conscious persona which we believe identical to our self, is a signifier construed by the unconscious to engage with its own Other (*l'Autre* in the Lacanian sense). The argument is built starting from Freud's concept of the unconscious, re-defined in linguistic terms. Thus, Lacan argues in a Jakobsonian spirit, the unconscious can be understood through the tropes of metaphor and metonymy, which are made known at the level of the conscious through their signifiers - symptom and desire, respectively. The solution he offers to the question of where the self is, is to locate it to the other pole of it being the object of thought – there where it cannot be thought of.

Lewis, Barry, 'Postmodernism and Fiction', in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 3rd edn., ed. by Stuart Sim (Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), pp. 169-181

The article starts with sketching an overview of the emerging of the concept of postmodernism in literature starting with the 1960s, representative names and critical resources, but the main part of the text constitutes a survey of what the author considers as main characteristics of postmodernist fiction. "Temporal disorder" involves a fictional melting of real past and present events and historical figures or a non-realistic sense of time. Postmodernist "pastiche" has its roots in parody but, as the author explains, its novelty arises from the "frustration that everything has been done before" (p.173) and the only thing that was left to do was rearrange fragments of classic genres. Going against classical concepts of novel construction, "fragmentation" is a reinterpretation of the conventional notions of ending or plot. "Looseness of association" is the means by which the original mechanical structure of a text is, more or less arbitrarily, disrupted. "Paranoia" is the state of mind of the character where they feel imprisoned in a system ran by someone else's rules. Finally, the "vicious circle" is what is perceived as the back-and-forth switch between the text and the real world. The author also provides illustrative literary examples of each of these characteristics.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois, 'Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?', in *Modern Criticism and Theory A Reader*, 3rd edn., ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood (Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), pp. 412-420

In his essay Lyotard is defining postmodernism as a natural continuation to modernism, both currents being seen from an epistemological perspective. The author sees his contemporaries' search for unity and community as a response to the avantgarde attempts of rebellion against what was established as real or valuable, but also in the context of the rise of capitalism and technological advances. He points out the examples of photography and cinema as technological challenges to painting and, respectively, literature in providing the audience with "reality" and "identity". Modernity appears, therefore, as the attempt to

redefine reality. The author defines here “the sublime” in a Kantian sense, as the contradictory emotion which arises in response to not being able to objectively represent something about which only an idea can be conceived - “the unrepresentable”. Modernism, exemplified in literature by Joyce and Proust, raises awareness that the unrepresentable exists, but does so by using conventional tools, such as recognizable form and language. Postmodernism takes one step further and renounces these tools and rules and defines its own, in terms of a distortion which puts the postmodern author and their work on different temporal planes. Absolute present does not exist in postmodernism and the last sentences of the essay are a call to society to recognize this new truth.

McHale, Brian, ‘Postmodernism and Experiment’, in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale (Routledge, 2012), pp. 141-153

McHale’s essay is an attempt to reconcile Lyotard definition of postmodernism as ‘avant-garde impulse *within* modernism’ (p.141) and Jencks’ definition, as eclectic ‘double-coding in a nutshell’ (p.143). He makes the point that Jenck’s eclectic postmodernism can be experimental in terms of its building world-models within which spaces of thought and living are arranged axially. The other way around, Lyotard’s avant-garde modernism can be eclectic in the sense that the form of a literary work itself contains “the unrepresentable” and the analysis of the poem “China”, among others, from Frederic Jameson’s essay arguing his Marxist view of postmodernism is taken as an argument here.

Waugh, Patricia, ‘Stalemates?: Feminists, Postmodernists and Unfinished Issues in Modern Aesthetics’, in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, 3rd edn., ed. by Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (Arnold, 1996), pp. 322-341

Waugh focuses on common aspects feminism and postmodernism (a common ability to challenge what was previously defined as authority and uncovering contradictions in the structures of power) in an idea to suggest that if postmodernism announced the ending of humanism (by male postmodernists), feminism must continue the struggle of recognition from within. The author professes the idea that the postmodern apocalypse is understood from the male point of view as the nostalgia of return to an ideal autonomous, self-defined being, but this is a position which woman never occupied and can therefore never relate to. Post-structuralist thought has dismantled centrality and moved in a space previously reserved for “femininity”, while actual women attempt to establish an identity for themselves based on notions which have been deemed as irrelevant. Waugh suggests that the identity of woman can be built using postmodern aesthetics and intellectual products, because this is where her experience lies – outside of the center, rooted in the conflict between work and family, in the dispersion of self.

2.1 - Critique of a theory – Structuralism

To paraphrase Culler¹, structuralism can be regarded as a framework which provides the reader with tools to access their own understanding of literary works. As an “innocent”² reader, one is quick to pass judgement on a piece of literature in terms of like/not like and then move on with their day and their life. With the reader having knowledge of the tools and methods which structuralism puts at their disposal, reading has the potential to take a plunge beyond the appearance of “what is happening” and provide lucidity of assessment towards connecting singular pieces of writing to larger structures.

Terrence Hawkes makes a very interesting point concerning a natural inclination we have towards a structuralist thought pattern: “This ‘mental language’ manifests itself as man’s universal capacity not only to formulate structures, but also to submit his own nature to the demands of their structuring [...] To be human [...] is to be a structuralist”³. His argument, put simply, draws on Vico’s 18th century early modern idea that not only we live in a man-made world, but we are ourselves world-made people and a structuralist pattern is weaved into the fabric of these interactions. The idea that we *use* language to *describe* the world around us is an illusion, when considering that these notions we employ so gratuitously, like language and world, shape us inasmuch as we shape them. Barthes even takes this position to the extreme, as, in his opinion, “we never find a state where man is separated from language, which he then creates in order to ‘express’ what is taking place within him: it is language which teaches the definition of man, not the reverse”⁴. While for structuralism, the idea of resuscitation, if I may use this word to pass for “reconstruction” or “recoding”, certainly is at its core, it must happen in a state of awareness, where the text is kept at a critical distance, and the resulting structures are not emotional by-products, but a simulacrum, “intellect added to object”⁵. A certain inescapable subjectivity is nonetheless involved, but, as we will see, there would be no moving forward without it.

The most difficult aspect I come across when attempting to concretize the idea of twin structures, separated only by phenomenological interactions perceived by the self, is precisely the unavoidable move forward. The paradox of Achilles describes this difficulty entirely. In theory, Achilles can never win the race because the tortoise is always an infinitesimally small distance in front of him. In the same way, structural theory says we can never move out of, or beyond, our own language-defined, constructed self. Of course, in practice things work out differently, both for Achilles and ourselves. We clearly progress in inventing additional levels of abstractions and concepts, which did not exist hundreds or thousands of years ago and language itself is expanding to include new words for new things.

¹ Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005), p. XVIII: “it remains true for me that the goal of literary and cultural studies must be a poetics, an understanding of the operation of literary and cultural discourses”.

² For the purpose of this paper, I model my “innocent reader” in the image the consumer type, who doesn’t bother too much about the nature of the text, is not particularly in touch with their own reaction to and awareness of reading and takes a piece of literature at, what in their understanding is, face value – its belonging to a genre and its potential to “mean”.

³ Terrence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, 2nd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 3.

⁴ Roland Barthes, ‘To Write An Intransitive Verb’ in *Modern Literary Theory*, 3rd edn., ed. by Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Arnold, 1996), pp. 41-50 (p. 42).

⁵ Roland Barthes, ‘The Structuralist Activity’ in *Critical Theory since Plato*, ed. by Hazard Adams (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), pp. 1196-1199 (p. 1196).

The solution to this conceptual difficulty could be offered by one aspect of the definition of a structure, which Hawkes suggests paraphrasing Piaget for: "Structure [...] can be observed in an arrangement of entities which embodies [...] the idea of wholeness"⁶. Language, as the fundamental formative human structure, is therefore whole at any moment in time, not lacking in anything and existing in its own sufficiency. Taking into consideration the diachronic aspect of language at this point, each moment of time corresponds to a "slice" of language which is to itself self-sufficient but at the same time integrated in something larger, which continuously shifts and changes. But as in Achilles' paradox, where complex mathematics is necessary to see beyond the apparent paradox, classic structuralism might not be enough when looking closer at how exactly the jump between the "slices" occurs, if it is a jump at all we are talking about here.

Fry sheds a different light on the matter when mentioning in his course on literary theory, that "*langue* comes in belatedly in relation to *parole*"⁷. As *langue* and its rules can only be inferred from individual *paroles*, which are in themselves complete, the interaction between them can be intuited by considering them simultaneously, supplementing each other, not as an absolute point on the backdrop of an imaginary ether, but inscribed⁸ in a continuum which, in my understanding of how Fry frames the concept⁹, Derrida calls *différance*. On the one hand, an utterance, be it a word, sentence or, in an extension to structuralism, a whole work of literature, cannot be understood in itself because its very definition escapes autonomy. On the other hand, language cannot exist in itself, without individual utterances¹⁰. *Différance* embeds the concepts of linguistics and structuralism themselves into the complex fabric of arbitrariness, difference, relativity, paradox, even history, and in the act of reading, side of a coin, the other side of which is writing, we stretch this fabric, reform it and deform it in a way that does not allow for undoing. Not consequently, but inevitably and simultaneously, it stretches us accordingly. From this perspective, I understand interpretation as a necessary evil, a particularly subjective, if erratic, way to stretch the fabric, the subversive loophole in a non-written set of rules.

While interpretation did have its advocates in New Criticism, Culler makes the specific point that he does not regard semiotics, generally, and structuralism, particularly, as a way to yet another interpretation of a text. He takes a clean break from New Criticism, the single goal of which, he says, was a single and authoritative interpretation. The goal of a structuralist analysis, he says, is to shape the understanding of a text itself, by looking at it, seeing it literally and formally, and discovering a system of elements which acts metonymically regarding the proverbial words on the page: "critics can move through texts towards an understanding of the systems and semiotic processes which make them possible"¹¹.

Even if Culler's encouragements seem to be addressed more to professional critics, the reader referred above can take the spirit of his words into their own reading activity. In the light of the idea of a closed

⁶ Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, p. 5.

⁷ Paul H. Fry, *Theory of Literature*, 2nd edn. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 127.

⁸ OED acknowledges "to inscript" to be a synonym, albeit rare, of "to inscribe".

⁹ Fry, *Theory of Literature*, p.136.

¹⁰ This inter-dependency without a beginning or end is summarized in a more apocalyptic fashion by Waugh: "There can be no experience outside the text. History is narratives. The End is the insight that there can be no ending, no beginning, no ground and no telos" (Patricia Waugh, 'Stalemates?: Feminists, Postmodernists and Unfinished Issues in Modern Aesthetics' in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, 3rd edn., ed. by Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Arnold, 1996), pp. 322-341 (p. 323)). She attributes this perspective to male postmodernists.

¹¹ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 13.

circle (for the purpose of this exercise) in the reader-text relationship, consciously staying away from interpretive inclinations lessens the risk of turning the text into an unwilling mirror for the reader. Staying within the formal aspects, deriving the structures in a text in as much of an objective way as possible, unwilling appropriation is avoided and a multi-dimensional space of parallel and evolving structures emerges. The formulation which might be closer to the theory put forth by Barthes, although less grammatically coherent, would be perhaps "the reader has the structural space emerge"¹².

As mentioned in an earlier paragraph, however, the structures within the reader are to be considered, as the hidden aspect of a structuralist assessment of a literary work. That is, in a desperate, blind and, most dangerous, self-professed scientific, stubbornness to stay within the theoretical limits, the reader might fall into to the exact opposite, in the trust that they hold the truth in the construction of their structuralist reading. Thus, while structuralism is certainly useful to be walked as a pathway to our own understanding, its limitations regarding realistic objectivity must be acknowledged. Barthes regards this way of reading, which can be understood as a form of interpretation, if not having interpretation as its goal, as necessary for the unfolding of history itself. He offers by way of trade-off a belief, which while fatalist, does not fail in imparting certain *joie de vivre* and, ironically, I suppose, conferring meaning to life: "he [the structuralist reader] knows that it will suffice that a new language rise out of history, a new language which speaks him in his turn, for his task to be done"¹³.

¹² Barthes exposes at length the idea that, when identifying the structures of a text, "we recompose the object *in order* to make certain function appear" (Barthes, 'The Structuralist Activity', p.1197).

¹³ Barthes, 'The Structuralist Activity', p.1199.

2.2 - Reading of a text – Structuralist approach of Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Chapter 1

Sometimes when I read a particularly challenging (or deceptively simplistic) piece of literature, I feel like Macbeth visiting the three witches in act IV, and hearing that "none of woman born shall harm Macbeth"¹⁴. It does happen over the course of time that a first interpretive impression is overcome by rereading and further research and it is my intention to demonstrate that the particularities of a structuralist analysis have precisely this power, of illuminating the text on the level of its building blocks, and shifting the accent, to phrase it in analogous sentence-analysis terms, from the subject (the static image – what the text is "about" – perhaps modulated, on the part of the reader, by an interpretative type of approach) to the predicate (the inner movement of the text and its relation to itself and the world outside).

The first chapter of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*¹⁵ already sets the stage for a showdown by conveying a feeling of uneasiness and lurking danger and gives the reader a taste of the novel's structural composition. Based on this chapter, I propose to read the novel as a structure of concentric oppositions which refines and develops along its course, personified in its characters, set in its scenes, and embedded in its form. It is important to mention at this stage that the circular structures I will look closer at in the essay are to be understood, maybe in a rather unusual manner, on Jakobson's horizontal axis of combination. This is however not only because, as Jakobson frames it, "for prose, metonymy is the line of least resistance"¹⁶ nor only because, as Gallop argues in a feminist reading, that "a metonymic reading construes metonymy as phallic"¹⁷, but I notice that by plotting the closed circles of the mentioned narrative aspects in the geometric horizontal plane, the systems of opposition offered by the novel can be discerned additionally as concentric and spinning inwards.

The very first sentence of the novel places the reader in the mind of and, implicitly, in a sympathetic position towards, Merricat: "My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood"¹⁸. One of the first mistakes, maybe even the biggest, which an "innocent"¹⁹ reader might make is to offer Merricat the benefit of doubt, in the sense of taking her words at half-impact. Even if Hawkes states in his overview of structuralism that "we thus invent the world we inhabit: we modify and reconstruct what is given [...]. None of us, in short, is innocent"²⁰, this first big mistake on this reader's part is easily forgiven – for how else might one take the words of an 18-year-old girl walking through a town full of people who, in their collective same-ness, are her antagonist: "I am walking on their bodies [...]. I sometimes thought when I wished all the village people dead that I might spare Stella"²¹.

¹⁴ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (1993) <<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/macbeth/full.html>> [accessed 2 January 2020].

¹⁵ Shirley Jackson, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (Penguin, 2006). All quotes are taken from this edition, hereafter referred to as *Castle*.

¹⁶ Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, 2nd edn. (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), p. 96.

¹⁷ Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 132.

¹⁸ *Castle*, p. 1.

¹⁹ See 2.

²⁰ Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, p. 86.

²¹ *Castle*, p. 10-11.

I find it only natural that, when reading against a backdrop of “norm” and “standard” at least, her words are easily lost in the sea of pre-conceptions about teenage girls, who, in their daydreams, mercilessly punish their adversaries for whatever crossings they might have had with the mistress in control of her dark fantasy. As we know, all these teenage fantasies tend to lessen or entirely dissipate when encountering the outside world. Over the course of the novel, we learn, however, that this is not Merricat’s case. The “innocent” reader’s expectation is thus let down and one might indeed argue, as put forth by Iser²², that this is where the art of the writer, confirmed by the reader’s failed expectation, reaches a peak. From a post-structuralist point of view, however, this would imply that the reader gives themselves over to the authority of the writer and the text is reduced to a simple “readerly” text, to quote Barthes for the concept, a text “which can only be read in the sense of ‘being submitted to’”²³.

Contemplating *this* side of the coin, we can easily see the parallel to Macbeth – the author (in the position of the three witches) “deceives” the reader (in the position of Macbeth) with their *double entendres* and “word of promise” only to be broken as the novel unfolds. The “deception” deepens further when taking stock of the hostile attitude of the villagers, standing against the poor oppressed teenage girl: “Mrs Donnell was back there somewhere [...] she was one of the few who spoke [...] It was enough to feel them all there in back of me without looking into their flat grey faces with the hating eyes”²⁴. Speaking from an analytical point of view, at this point the novel seems to draw out two seemingly irreconcilable²⁵ opposites, facing each other, each backed by its own presuppositions, convictions and motivations, namely the safe familiarity of that which we, as readers, walk with, in the logic of first-person narration (personified by Merricat and her family, at a later point), against the dangerous unpredictability of everyone else (personified by the collective character of the villager). This will, of course, turn out to be not so cut and dry, because this novel is one which “as Kermode points out, make[s] use of what Aristotle calls peripeteia, or reversal, when a possibility is closed in a way that is unexpected, yet plausible and instructive”²⁶.

The *other* side of the coin would be to approach the novel in a manner dubbed by Barthes as “writerly”, where the reader does not just passively read out what the writer put in, but, in the spirit of the structuralist principles described, actively reads the text in the previously proposed circular structure²⁷.

²² Iser argues that literary texts will not fulfil the reader’s expectations. As a measure of engagement with the text, expectations are formed and reformed continuously: “expectations are scarcely ever fulfilled in truly literary texts. If they were, then such texts would be confined to the individualization of a given expectation, and one would inevitably ask what such an intention was supposed to achieve” (Wolfgang Iser, ‘The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach’ in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, 3rd edn., ed. by David Lodge and Nigel Wood (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 295-310 (p. 297)).

²³ Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, p. 92.

²⁴ *Castle*, p. 8.

²⁵ I will revisit this seeming irreconcilability in the later essay, where I intend to suggest that the oppositions which can be drawn from *Castle* do not necessarily pose us in front of an impossible dilemma of Lévi-Strauss type, but can be regarded as sharing a common nature in the relationship of co-dependency (also supportive of the idea of circularity) which develops as the story unfolds. Moreover, the resolving of opposites might point to a new approach rooted in feminist theory.

²⁶ David Lodge, ‘Analysis and Interpretation of the Realist Text’ in *Modern Literary Theory*, 3rd edn., ed. by Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Arnold, 1996), pp. 24-41 (p. 25).

²⁷ I simplified the reader approach in suggesting that the text itself offers the structures and the reader activity concretizes in creatively “catching on”, not considering previous reading experience. Culler proposes that intertextuality must also function on the reader side if they are to recode a particular piece of writing in a structuralist

Further along the first chapter, when Merricat describes the positioning of Blackwood Farm with respect to the village, the scenic manifestation of the idea can be discerned: "Past the town hall, bearing to the left, is Blackwood Road, which is the way home. Blackwood Road goes in a great circle around the Blackwood land and along every inch of Blackwood Road is a wire fence built by our father"²⁸. This attitude of withdrawal is central to the novel, encountered in its title and several times in the first chapter. Administratively speaking, however, Blackwood Farm *must* be part of the village. It is at the same time outside of it and, *because* of that, in the Derrida spirit, central, not only to its social existence, but to its basic definition as "village". A "writerly" approach must necessarily hinge on this aspect.

Additional support for building the approach is formally provided in the very first page of the novel: "The last time I glanced at the library books on the kitchen shelf they were more than five months overdue"²⁹. This way of beginning implies that the present time of the story is ahead of the present time of the storytelling. We start in our present, but the story has already ended. We must thus follow the entire path already drawn, along the circle (the novel), in order to end up at the same point we started. Structurally speaking, we are positioned on the horizontal time axis, which demands to be experienced backwards, while moving forward. This is one important implication of the idea of circle – you continuously walk forward, but somehow end up in the place where you started.

These are only a few considerations which can be expanded on to construe a complex model of *Castle*, built in a three-dimensional spacetime. Even if starting from a structural theoretical standpoint, an additional deconstructionist flavour can be added, not to show that the text crumbles under its own weight and ambiguity, but rather to see the oppositions and paradoxes concretizing in the reader's take as weaving the more realistic fabric of *différance* and the reader consciousness into it.

way: "Intertextuality' thus has a double focus [...] in so far as it focuses on intelligibility, on meaning, 'intertextuality' leads us to consider prior texts as contributions to a code which makes possible various effects of signification" (Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005), p. 114).

²⁸ *Castle*, p. 4.

²⁹ *Castle*, p. 1.

3 – Essay – Structuralist approach of Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

Reading certainly has many facets and is nothing less than work, or as Barthes would put it when the reader tries to make sense of a literary piece in a structuralist way, is an “activity”³⁰ nonetheless. From the “demiurgical”³¹ quality of repetition, to spikes and cants (its literariness, for the Russian Formalists), through words which might actually tell less than initially thought and “gaps” which act as creativity challenges and over to seeming crumbliness under its own weight, Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*³² is a rollercoaster which offers the complete experience. With so many options (theoretical, as well as textual) at one's fingertips, it is difficult to stay under the umbrella of one theory and keep a straight path without straying too much off to alternative interpretation and to the lure of a plethora of previous readings. I must try, in any case, and the umbrella I have chosen is the one of structuralism with elements of post-structuralism, while paying attention to how the composition of the text might echo in the mind of the reader. As the gothic is a looming presence in the text and the powerful female character is a given (although who that is and how “powerful” actually is to be read might remain a question), I will try to suggest that these approaches can be entwined together with an arguably concentric structure of the text, to show that *Castle* might just be an escape from and within the inside, its own loophole within the fabric of language and society.

To start with, I intend to build upon Fry's³³ depiction of Jakobson's system of axes for the poetic function and propose the structure of the novel as unfolding in the language domain along the one-dimensional axis of combination inflated to a geometric plane, where the second dimension is supplemented by intention (in the Jakobsonian factors of communication, code) on part of the character. As we will see, in *this* constructed geometric plane the structures of paired oppositions offered by the novel can be discerned as concentric and spinning inwards. The idea of a circle is suggested by the novel through its very nature at the level of character, scene and form. From the simple geometrical idea of flat circle, at least two important implications can be drawn and consequently applied to the aforementioned narrative aspects. First, the circle is a closed space. Communication can hardly occur between its finite, well-defined, inside and its infinite, unknown, outside. It is indeed highly questionable if, metaphorically speaking, life which exists inside has an idea that something like the outside exists, and even more so, if it has any interest in breaking through the frontier of its safe space. Crossing can only occur at all if knowledge of the other side is available, speaking for both the outside and the inside. If it can, however, either the very concrete separation line must be broken, while staying within the rules of civility, or it must be flown over, an act which involves knowledge of an at least 3-dimensional space with its own rules and spheres, at this level.

Second, because the circle is a closed space, whatever happens inside must be repetitive, if considered on a large enough scale. There must be certain aspects or concepts which, while under the internal impression of moving forward, are stuck within a finite space. This idea can also play out on several geometric dimensions, in the large multi-dimensional structure of *langue*, where then even the paths

³⁰ Barthes, 'The Structuralist Activity'.

³¹ Ibid. p.1198.

³² Shirley Jackson, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (Penguin, 2006). All quotes are taken from this edition, hereafter referred to as *Castle*.

³³ Paul H. Fry, *Theory of Literature*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 115-117.

which are perceived as straight, forward leading, lines, reveal their topological geodesic nature. But for that to be perceptible, a complete, and more importantly, *external*, theory of narrative *langue* would be needed, while all we have available at this stage are single *paroles*, digital samples of an analogue continuum which eludes us.

We can, nevertheless, localize a potential complex space underpinned by the idea of concentric circles present in *Castle* thus: I define the innermost circle to be the character circle, drawn by all the characters of the novel, but most representatively, by four of them: Merricat, Constance, Uncle Julian and Cousin Charles. It could be said that they stand for the corners of a square, exponents of ideas stacked up on a vertical, metaphorical axis, but I am cutting corners here, and, in the spirit of feminist theory perhaps, stretch out the square to the innermost circle within the space of the entire text. The middle circle I take to be the very concrete space where the story plays out, with its own inner structure represented by the Blackwood Manor and the village, two interdependent spaces, defined by the oppositional tension that exists between them. The outer circle would then be inscribed in the form of the novel itself. I am talking here not about its content, a rather controversial term, if we are to look at the different positions New Critics and structuralists take on the matter, but about the narrative devices employing temporality, repetition, and omission to infer, even if only in the reader's mind, the great circle containing the inner two I previously introduced.

Both types of communication outlined previously can be detected to occur between the three circles. Merricat, in her role of storyteller, stands on the border of the outer circle and can move physically between the Blackwood Manor and the village. The manor, as will be argued in a later paragraph, stands in a manner of speaking at the center of the village and encompasses within itself the kitchen where Merricat and Constance retreat at the end of the novel. It is also worth noticing in this context that her name is the concatenation of Mary and Katherine. Two names which are united into one, just as she can organize and reunite the village and her home within herself. She is the only one to possess this ability, however. Constance can only move in the closed space of the home and later takes her place alongside Merricat in the privileged center of the character circle. Uncle Julian is tolerated in his brother's house - it can be said that he stands on the border between the outer village and the inner castle, as having broken the separation line while staying within the rules of civility. Finally, Cousin Charles might seem to have moved into the Blackwood house, but not only that he is an outsider, but his relationship with language, expanded on in a later paragraph, reinforces the idea that he has not even crossed the border, like Uncle Julian has.

Looking closely at what I argue to be the innermost character circle, Merricat stands out the most. Not only because, as briefly suggested, she is the only one who can move across all the inner structures of the text, but also because, in her telling of the story from her perspective, the reader is positioned within her consciousness. Because of that, I believe, the reader can be lured into believing, if only for a short while, that she is just a harmless, if entertaining of dark thoughts, teenage girl. The first paragraph strikes one as quite peculiar in a first reading but, for an observant reader, quite telling, as well. What Merricat states in her own words and, on a side note, incidental to the story itself, is her age, hobbies and family: "My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood. I am eighteen years old, and I live with my sister Constance. [...] I like my sister Constance, and Richard Plantagenet, and Amanita phalloides, the deathcup mushroom. Everyone else in my family is dead"³⁴. What becomes obvious in the later chapters (at the very latest at the end of

³⁴ *Castle*, p. 1.

chapter 8, when she admits to having poisoned her family) is that she *speaks literally*. When the reader takes her words in through this idea, the dark fantasies she lays out in the first chapter stop being read from the outside, interpreted through the perspective of the reader with worldly knowledge and supported by Constance's mark like "silly Merricat", which softens the character to distortion. This defining moment in the reader consciousness is when the threshold of the text really has been crossed and she is no longer regarded as "a child who lives in a fantasy world sustained by magical thinking"³⁵. Her words gain the quality of hard concrete, any desire of the reader to humor her and her little protection magic is abandoned, and she shows herself to be the driving force which influences the direction of events, because her existence is within base language itself. "I wished they were all dead and I was walking on their bodies"³⁶: she is not idly wishing away; she lives in her words and her words live in her. From this perspective we can understand her not as the character whose mind has been broken by madness and psychosis, but as the strong-willed character through which language acts. The unexpected linguistics turns she employs, falling out of the otherwise common pleasantries, are at times humorous for the reader, who is thus more sympathetic towards her: "if Helen Clarke came into Elbert's Grocery [...] everyone told her "Good morning," and said the weather was better today"³⁷.

Understanding Merricat this way, we cannot help but feel the cold claw of a subtle realisation: Horror does not lie in the veiled threats of villagers. In the restaurant scene in the first chapter, Jim Donnel remarks "I could have sworn someone told me you'd be going soon"³⁸. The atmosphere³⁹ shifts here, and we reframe the scene to see that the villagers are the ones at the mercy of Merricat's contained fantasies. Turning our attention to his manner of speech, we see that Jim Donnel is moving away from the central horizontal axis of the Jakobsonian reference system. He is not speaking literally, is coding intention into his words and we can easily understand that this manner of speaking is fueled by hate, he is a pawn for his own feelings and thus, moving around the center of his hate, as she moves. Stella says that her leaving would bring "peace around here" and we can assume that to be so, as Merricat leaves the restaurant. It is worth noticing that this scene takes place in the village, the place of power for the villager, if not of origin. Merricat does not fail in decoding Jim Donnel's intention. To rephrase in terms of the Jakobsonian reference system, she maintains her position on the horizontal axis, moves forward, while the villager merely follows.

In chapter 2 when she returns home, a different, warm tone can be discerned in her storytelling. She is talking about food, tea, family: domestic business in a word.

Constance and I only used the room when Helen Clarke came for tea, but we kept it perfectly. Constance stood on a stepladder to wash the tops of the windows, and we dusted the Dresden figurines on the mantel, and with a cloth on the end of a broom I went around the wedding-cake trim at the tops of the walls, staring up into the white fruit and leaves, brushing away at cupids

³⁵ Roberta Rubenstein, 'House Mothers and Haunted Daughters: Shirley Jackson and the Female Gothic' in *Shirley Jackson: Essays on the Literary Legacy*, ed. by Bernice M. Murphy (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2005), p.127-149 (p. 138).

³⁶ *Castle*, p. 10.

³⁷ *Castle*, p. 4.

³⁸ *Castle*, p. 12.

³⁹ As William Empson phrases it, "'atmosphere' is the consciousness of what is implied by the meaning" (William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 18).

and ribbon knots, dizzy always from looking up and walking backward, and laughing at Constance when she caught me.⁴⁰

In relation to Merricat, Constance can be understood, in conjunction with the Blackwood Manor, as her drive, her structuring center in other words. Rubenstein⁴¹ defines Merricat as the “bad” side of the daughter who, in her twisted mind, turns Constance into a “good” mother to supplement the lack of the “bad” one who she has murdered. This idea holds if the reading is conducted on the background of “norm”, where the family must have father, mother and daughter. Parallels can surely be made, but irrespective of the traditional family roles, Constance identifies almost to disappearance with the domestic activities of cooking and gardening. While she does state several times that she might just leave the Blackwood grounds, her words are quite non-committal. This is still taken by Merricat as a quite concrete possibility and drive her to the state of feeling “chilled”, as she herself frames it when Constance approaches the topic. When Cousin Charles moves in, the echo of the outside to which she has been feeling drawn seems to entice her. She falls under his will at times, but quickly gains her grounding by recentering: “She opened her eyes wide suddenly, as though seeing her old Merricat again, and then she held out her arms to me. “Oh, Merricat,” she said, and laughed a little. “Listen to me scolding you; how silly I am.””⁴² She realizes that her self is not the one Charles wants to model into the liking of the village he comes from. She is powerful in knowing not where her “duty” lies, as Charles tries to work into her head, but where her defining center lies. The sisters are implacably bound to each other, each centering around and for the other, surrounded by the kitchen of the Blackwood home. This is the position they constantly yearn for and the end of the novel, implicitly Merricat, places them there.

Uncle Julian and Charles are the characters who hold a lasting relationship with a generic village, if not necessarily the one in the vicinity of the Blackwood home. Uncle Julian is simply tolerated in the house of his brother, but 6 years after the murder this gives him the privileged position of the outsider who has knowledge of the physical center of everyone else’s interest. In chapter 2 he tells the story of “a most fascinating case” to Mrs. Wright, herself the embodiment of the perfect listener, and in the aftermath of the visit we can observe that the certainty of his centering around the knowledge of the events must be supported by Constance:

“Constance?” Uncle Julian turned his wheel chair to face her. “How was I?” “Superb, Uncle Julian.” Constance stood up and went over to him and touched his old head lightly. “You didn’t need your notes at all.” “It really happened?” he asked her. “It certainly did. I’ll take you in to your room and you can look at your newspaper clippings.”⁴³

Cousin Charles is the intruder in the story and has thus a double significance. First, he stands as the opposite of Merricat in the character circle. He is everything she is not, yet his movements are rather centered around Constance, while always keeping an eye on Blackwood property. Even if he lives in the house and is part of the family, he does not belong to the safe haven the Blackwood home was until his arrival and moreover, he succeeds for a while not only to destabilize Constance, but also to bring the corruption of non-literal speech, tainting even Merricat. We notice that much like Jim Donnell in the first chapter, there are moments when he speaks as if she is not there, though his intention is not difficult to

⁴⁰ *Castle*, p. 23.

⁴¹ Rubenstein, ‘House Mothers and Haunted Daughters’, p. 138.

⁴² *Castle*, p. 79.

⁴³ *Castle*, p. 39.

guess: ““Oh, well,” Charles said to Jonas, “Constance likes me, and I guess that’s all that matters.””⁴⁴ His influence is sensed strongly by Merricat because his presence affects not only Constance, but the house itself, and it verbalizes within Merricat by throwing her off the balance of literal language: ““May I have sandwiches for my lunch? I want to go down to the creek.” “Sooner or later you’re going to have to sit at the table with him, Merricat””⁴⁵. She does want to go to the creek, but now it is she who is being pulled along by a new, corrupting, center.

Second, Charles is the character the reader could probably most identify with or rather, be identified with. I find Rubenstein’s reading of him also metaphorically descriptive of a reader holding a more traditional view on how a story speaks: “appropriating Constance as the submissive wife and mother and punitively controlling the “child’s” behaviour”⁴⁶. He tries to bring his own idea of order to the Blackwood home, in disregard of how things work or are intended to work by the family living there, but in doing that he remains on the outside. He cannot cross the frontier to the inside. In a similar way, readers sometimes attempt to “domesticate” what happens or why it happens by trying to bring all elements of the text together in the way they think it makes sense. His behaviour is responded to by Merricat with her burning down a layer of her home. We can say texts have their own defense mechanisms, after all. Merricat’s relationship with the house and its inhabitants is not homogeneous at all, however. Saying that she would rather burn down the house, her defining center, than to have the corrupting “demon-ghost” keep living there, is quite a simplification. The house as a sign gives off the feeling of wholeness, just like a story does, but picking out its layers, its inhabitants and their relationships to Merricat, we might just realize that when she says that “I brushed the saucer and the pipe off the table into the wastebasket and they fell softly onto the newspapers he had brought into the house”⁴⁷, this gesture not only has consequences, but also history.

In the light of these considerations, we can see, first, that neither of the characters can exist as they do without another and second, while each of them pulls the narrative thread into a manner which is more following of something than independent, what moves the story for all characters, after all, is the drive to return to order, even if the ideal order is slightly different for each of them. Uncle Julian’s ideal is the writing of a book, as a debt paid to his brother, perhaps, but the story slips his grasp and certainty of fact and he must constantly turn to Constance for reassurance. Cousin Charles wants a good life for himself and for that he needs Constance and the Blackwood fortune. Constance, torn as she might be, places herself as the provider of comfort for both Uncle Julian and her sister. Merricat, in the microcosm which is her home and her story, is entropy personified - she seems unpredictable and disintegrating, but she has her own internal sense of order for space and time, which relies heavily on Constance. None of the activities which make up her weekly routine are solitary, nor self-directed and everything circles back to Constance in one way or another. Thus, she cannot conceive of an existence without her sister, but in her mind, she *is* the order, as we can infer from the scene in the summerhouse: “Bow all your heads to our adored Mary Katherine”⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ *Castle*, p. 70.

⁴⁵ *Castle*, p. 69.

⁴⁶ Rubenstein, ‘House Mothers and Haunted Daughters’, p. 140.

⁴⁷ *Castle*, p. 99.

⁴⁸ *Castle*, p.96.

In the middle circle, where space and time unfold, a structure based on interdependence is the most visible. We have seen from the character side that character construction is bound to location, either the village or the Blackwood manor, and in the following paragraphs we will look closer at the location side. Merricat takes us through the whole village in chapter 1 and the descriptions she gives us are almost always in an oppositional relationship to Blackwood Farm and, almost on the same level socially, like its physical representative within the village, the Rochester house: "I could leave the library and walk up the street on this side until I was opposite the grocery and then cross; that was preferable, although it took me past the post office and the Rochester house"⁴⁹. Merricat explains that the Rochester house is where "our mother had been born [...] and by rights it should have belonged to Constance"⁵⁰. I see this house as a physical object (and representant of deferral of origin, in addition) which grounds her presence in the village and gives her the ability to move, within the middle circle, between this cold space of coded intention and home, where life thrives. This idea is reinforced by the employment of colour and atmosphere in her description of the village, as opposed to the Blackwood house. For example: "The houses and the stores seemed to have been set up in contemptuous haste to provide shelter for the drab and the unpleasant, and the Rochester house and the Blackwood house and even the town hall had been brought here perhaps accidentally from some far lovely country where people lived with grace"⁵¹. It is impossible, being within her point of view, to build an objective view of how the houses in the village might actually look like, and such a realistic representation would also defeat the purpose of a structuralist analysis. What is made clear from her words is that she sees the village as a grey, lifeless, unchanging place, as opposed to the space within the wire fence, where her protection magic is set up and life does not stand still but flows in familiar patterns.

The Blackwood terrain is described by Merricat as being surrounded by a wire fence, clearly cut off from the village, but this insistence on separation, both on the part of the house, and on the part of the village, only strengthens their interdependency. Administratively speaking, the house *must* be part of the village. It is at the same time outside of it and, *because* of that, in the Derrida spirit, central, not only to its social existence, but to its basic definition as "village". We cannot conceive of them existing in themselves. Each of them is constituted through the other, we cannot tell which more through which, which is contained in which, but they are moving in time together, in a circle without a point of beginning. What comes closest to a point of beginning, or origin, beyond reader imagination, is phrased by Merricat herself:

In front of Stella's there was a crack in the sidewalk that looked like a finger pointing; the crack had always been there. [...] Our mother told me once that the crack was here when she was a girl in the Rochester house, so it must have been here when she married our father and went to live on Blackwood Farm, and I suppose the crack was there, like a finger pointing, from the time when the village was first put together out of old grey wood and the ugly people with their evil faces were brought from some impossible place and set down in the houses to live.⁵²

There is no point in searching for a "transcendental signifier", an original cause for the interdependency bond between the people of the village and the Blackwood family because, as "we [the Blackwood family] have always lived in the castle", so the village came into existence in time immemorial together with the

⁴⁹ *Castle*, p. 3.

⁵⁰ *Castle*, p. 3.

⁵¹ *Castle*, p. 6.

⁵² *Castle*, p. 10.

crack in the sidewalk. Merricat does state that the villagers were “set down in the houses to live”, but this is also a clue to the constitution of the “castle” as such, even more so from the irrecoverable perspective of time past: “always” in conjunction with the present perfect. Kermode, in his reading of the inscription on the Earnshaw house in *Wuthering Heights*, says that “inscriptions of the kind I am talking about are interesting secondary clues about the nature of the writing in which they occur. They draw attention to the literariness of what we are reading, indicate that the story is a story”⁵³. Not only can we not pinpoint the origin, but we are not even supposed to.

The five months we witness in Merricat’s telling of the story break it down further in the repetitive cycle of weeks, days and, very important for her, meals. But the temporal routine existence is divided into is not feared by Merricat, on the contrary, it is cherished: “Thursday was my most powerful day”⁵⁴. The regular alternance of days and activities belonging to each day is a sign of the order she lives in and loses on Cousin Charles’ arrival and, together with rules of her own making, appears to support the logical order she imposes by and onto herself. As Downey observes, the regular return, marked by days of the week, to household activities can very well be regarded as ritualistic, involving repetition according to rules and strengthening the sisterly bond: “describing in loving detail the sisters’ unswerving cleaning routine, which entails an almost ritualistic visiting of each room in the house”⁵⁵.

The spatial difference between the village and the Blackwood house is marked on an additional level by a modification of how the characters speak when crossing the physical borders. As previously mentioned, Merricat speaks very literally most of the time, but there are times, inside the Blackwood home when Cousin Charles taints it with his presence, when intention is added to her words. As opposed to that, the villagers speak mostly with intent, in a code which is not at all difficult to decipher, neither for Merricat, or for the reader, as in the scene with Jim Donell we had looked at earlier. The need for interpretation, even though obvious and difficult to get wrong, is, if arguably insignificant, a present mark of the double entendre, in-built torment of language. The space where such a mark is present is the outside (the village seen as the consequence of the Blackwood home), where existence requires a point of reference, a set of rules internalized by everyone, being part of society. It is circling back and forth in the wagon of code, always just off the axis of referential language, on the outside of a stabilizing center. Living in the language and with the language is impossible because language is always externalized, as something which needs to be used, given meaning.

One special utterance is the rhyme the verses of which are repeated in several instances: “Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea? | Oh no, said Merricat, you’ll poison me”⁵⁶. At the beginning of the novel, village children sing in malice and ill will, basic yet intended contempt directed at Merricat. In the heightened scene of the burning of the house in chapter 8, much of the villagers’ vocabulary boils down to single verses of the song. The Blackwood land does not entitle them to delusional *use of* language anymore and reveals their nature with a vengeance. They are shown to be what they have always been – empty vessels, striped of any illusion of control, out of which a single echo of feeling is left to be heard. If Merricat was able to cross the border of the center to the land of the relative and the deferred, live a

⁵³ Frank Kermode, ‘A Modern Way with the Classic’, *New Literary History*, 5.3 (1974), 415-434 (p. 418).

⁵⁴ *Castle*, p. 86.

⁵⁵ Dara Downey, ‘Not a Refuge Yet: Shirley Jackson’s Domestic Hauntings’ in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. by Charles L. Crow (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 290-302 (p. 300).

⁵⁶ *Castle*, p. 17.

double existence as her routine demanded her to, the purity of language, even in the Blackwood haven, is not available to the villagers because they are not aware of it. As Merricat states in several places and several forms, they do not live in the awareness of bliss, absolute, simple: "wondering if there was anything in this woman I could speak to, if she had ever run joyfully over grass, or had watched flowers, or known delight or love"⁵⁷. Thus, it is only Merricat who can move out of the center into the outlands and only Constance who permanently lives in the center. Existence for the villagers is permitted only on the outside. Dare they cross, the illusion they live in is laid bare, and they are shown to be the shadows that they are.

The outermost circle containing characters and their living spaces inside is the text itself, represented on the two levels of story and its plot, a distinction made in Russian Formalist terminology as *fabula* and *sjuzhet*. Lodge⁵⁸ argues that the plot necessarily modifies the story and, might I add, the way it is perceived by the reader. Perhaps it would not have been possible to discern a circular structure in *Castle* had Merricat recounted the events parallel to their occurrence. From this point of view, an understanding of the formalist concept according to which content is form seems to take shape. In saying that the novel is "about" Merricat poisoning her family and getting away with it is simplifying the complexity of the whole structure to the point of irreognition. If a structuralist analysis is intended, it must look beyond what is "in" the text to see the text itself. Hawkes states that "the notion that literary works are ultimately *about* language, that their medium is their message, is one of the most fruitful of structuralist ideas [...] it postulates that form *is* content"⁵⁹. Rather than this idea reducing further inquiries into textual composition to a sigh of resignation, it allows, together with multi-faceted intertextuality proposed by Culler⁶⁰ and Kermode's⁶¹ suggestion for explaining the endurance of a classic, for perception of sub-structure.

Just as in the case of the scenic circle we looked at earlier, the beginning of the story circle is also almost impossible to pin down, an observation which is not reduced to this story alone⁶². Did the story begin, in its logic, 5 months ago when Merricat tells us that she last went into the village? Hardly, I would argue, because that moment 5 months ago did not occur outside a waterfall of events which we are told as the novel progresses. Does the story begin then at an inferred moment in time, when Merricat tells us that her mother "was a girl in the Rochester house"⁶³? That would also be quite strange because this fact is even outside of the story, as far as the reader is concerned. We must admit that not only can we not pinpoint the beginning, but we cannot say even if it is within the limits of the first and the last words of the text. We can only say that it is a point somewhere on the horizontal time axis, outside the circle of the 5 months which, while being read dead ahead, brings us to its beginning. This finite timeline might be said to be a plot device, but because of the hyperrealistic effect of being inside a character's consciousness (another plot device), a sense of origin is lost, and we suddenly find ourselves on the inside looking out.

⁵⁷ *Castle*, p. 16.

⁵⁸ David Lodge, 'Analysis and Interpretation of the Realist Text' in *Modern Literary Theory*, 3rd edn., ed. by Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Arnold, 1996), pp. 24-41 (p. 26).

⁵⁹ Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, p. 80.

⁶⁰ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 110-131.

⁶¹ "Charlotte Brontë remarks, from her own experience, that the writer says more than he knows [...] a narrative opens itself to us, and contains information in excess of what generic probability requires" (Kermode, 'A Modern Way with the Classic', p. 420).

⁶² David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (Penguin Books, 1992), p. 3-8.

⁶³ *Castle*, p. 10.

We crossed the frontier of the text and no longer have the advantage of perspective and structuring. Thus, while from inside the text, we can see a long infinite line along history, each event and character deferring its constitution to another, from the outside we can see circles which all turn around Constance, who in the end secludes herself in the kitchen of the Blackwood house, which has “always” been there. It might be said that this way of looking at the text brings us to a line of unanswerable questions, which we cannot help asking ourselves why we are even asking. Perhaps there is a limit to inquiring which should not be crossed, perhaps we took a wrong turn in our looking at the text or perhaps we just haven’t found the right question yet.

In his deconstructionist reading of *Wuthering Heights*, J. Hillis Miller⁶⁴ argues that repetitions which the novel promises, but never quite delivers, point to the idea that while the existence of a center of origin is implied, it is never quite spelled out. Following his model of thought, one might argue that *Castle* is the exact opposite of this. All the aspects of the novel I have looked at seem to put forth pairs of opposition, which, seen in the vertical plane⁶⁵, understood as entities in themselves, fueled by motives external to the story, do stand out facing each other. But when projecting them on the horizontal plane, where the unfolding of events in time is spelled out and followed through, the opposing facets disappear into an outlay of coexistence and inter-dependency, where a center of origin is not discernible, nor required. I do not believe this is because, as Hillis Miller sees in the not-quite-repetitions of *Wuthering Heights*, they are just “differentiations of the same”, turning out to be “phantasms”. As I tried to show, the pairs of opposites sure are genuine, seen from an outside located in the village, or in an interpretive reader perspective, but inside, in the Blackwood family kitchen and in the resolution of the novel, they turn towards each other rather than back from each other, in a symbiotic relationship of worship/be worshipped, as Downey⁶⁶ observes.

With its status of “castle” and the surrounding woods where Merricat sets up her protective magic, the Blackwood house cannot be overlooked as a gothic space. The different feel which Jackson confers the house, is that, if in traditional gothic fiction, the gothic house is a place of haunting and horror, in *Castle*, while keeping the villagers out, draws the sisters in, “as a refuge, a site of control and safety for women rather than of exposure and imprisonment”⁶⁷. The reunification of the (until now) opposites of dark gothic and homely kitchen adds an additional dimension to the structure I tried to lay out in my reading. Like the other circular structures, these two aspects turn in towards each other within Merricat when we stop reading them as opposites and read them as they are being told: “I am walking on their bodies, I thought, we are having lunch in the garden and Uncle Julian is wearing his shawl”⁶⁸. This statement is not a “but”, it is an “and”, a natural continuation not of a disintegrating character, but one built on what the villager,

⁶⁴ J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 42-72.

⁶⁵ I do not mean here the Jakobsonian axis of selection, but using this static image I try to make up in a plastic way for the “meaning” and symbolism which is added on top of what is “in” the novel, without considering the dynamic of interdependency I tried to depict.

⁶⁶ “In reversing the power dynamic, so that the community of suspicious townsfolk fearfully worship rather than torment them, the Blackwood sisters in *Castle* reappropriate the home’s dual status as fairy-tale refuge and Gothic prison, transforming it into an impenetrable if ruined fortress while transforming themselves into the very malevolent supernatural beings that terrorize more conventional heroines” (Downey, ‘Not a Refuge Yet: Shirley Jackson’s Domestic Hauntings’, (p. 291)).

⁶⁷ Downey, ‘Not a Refuge Yet: Shirley Jackson’s Domestic Hauntings’, p. 298.

⁶⁸ *Castle*, p. 10.

Cousin Charles or even the reader, perhaps, cannot conceive of a character to be built up on: both and at the same time.

Regarding Merricat as such, and Constance as the guardian of their gothic lovely home, in addition to the web of relationships I tried to outline, *Castle* could be read as supporting contemporary approaches to postmodernist feminism, as theorized by Waugh or Caminero-Santangelo, and consequently, profess Jackson as precursor for a problematic which nowadays is central to female self-definition. Waugh argues that there is a space precisely in the definition of postmodernist individuality, in the apocalyptic end of the secluded genius perceived by male postmodernism theorists, where woman can find and recognize what she already knows from experience: not "separation and objectivity [but] relationship and connection become the markers of identity"⁶⁹. Caminero-Santangelo proposes that if the subject was constructed within the boundaries of discourse, by whatever process, it is from within the same boundaries, but from an "elsewhere", that a possibility must be found for autonomy: "any counternarrative must strategically begin with the space opened by existing discourse and must work to reveal the fundamental assumptions and givens that are simultaneously revealed and obscured by such discourse"⁷⁰. If we admit the partiality of perspective and we allow the sisters the freedom of self-determination, be it in the kitchen, in the nature or in the gothic of what we see as charred remnants, without reading in the backdrop of "norm" we are so accustomed to, we might just glimpse through the text, read it and reside in its own constructed loophole.

⁶⁹ Patricia Waugh, 'Stalemates?: Feminists, Postmodernists and Unfinished Issues in Modern Aesthetics' in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, 3rd edn., ed. by Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Arnold, 1996), pp. 322-341 (p. 336).

⁷⁰ Marta Caminero-Santangelo, 'Multiple Personality and the Postmodern Subject', in *Shirley Jackson Essays on the Literary Legacy*, ed. by Bernice M. Murphy (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2005), pp. 52-80 (p. 57).