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Haunted by Hill House: Shirley Jackson, Housewife Horrors

BIO

Patrycja Antoszek is an assistant professor in the Department of American Literature and Culture at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland. She teaches courses on American literature and literary theory. She published several articles on contemporary American novels and short stories and is the author of *The Carnavalesque Muse: The New Fiction of Robert Coover* (2010). Her professional interests include postmodernist literature, literary theory, contemporary gothic and psychoanalytic criticism. She is currently working on a book on the fiction of Shirley Jackson.

ABSTRACT

The fiction of Shirley Jackson, though recognized and frequently reviewed by mainstream press, was rather neglected by academic circles during her lifetime. While her short stories appeared regularly in *The New Yorker* (including the eponymous and now canonical "The Lottery"), she was also known and admired by the readers of mass women's magazines, such as *Good Housekeeping* or *Ladies' Home Journal*, where she regularly published domestic sketches recounting everyday struggles of a typical middle-class mother of four in postwar America. Her serious work, including *The Bird's Nest*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, or *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, combined disturbingly Gothic protagonists and claustrophobic settings with psychological terror and elements of the supernatural. As opposed to the mainstream male Gothic tradition, Jackson focused consistently on the unsaid and unseen of her culture to reveal the uncanny underside of the white, middle-class, female experience in America of the 1950s. Rather than celebrating Faustian figures, she populates her fiction with troubled, perplexed, and often emotionally unstable women, whose complex subjectivities and anxieties about the boundaries of the self serve to articulate the psychological reality of the era. My aim will be to demonstrate how the writer's personal experiences as a mother, full-time housewife and wife of a famous literary critic became translated into disturbing, highly original and provocative scenarios dominated by the familiar Gothic tropes of haunted heroines, enclosed spaces and female madness.