

The Fifth name is חובר חבר [Chobher Chebher] which our *English* Translators render Charmer, which is the same with Enchanter. *Webster* upon this name is very tedious and flat, a many words, and small weight in them. I shall dispatch the meaning briefly thus: This חובר חבר [Chobher Chebher] that is to say, *Socians Societatem* is another name of a Witch, so called specially, either from the confociating together Serpents

The Witchcraft of Shirley Jackson by Deborah Markus

Quòd malignos Spiritus sibi associat. And certainly one may charm long enough, even till his Heart ake, e're he make one Serpent assemble near him, unless helpt by this confederacy of Spirits that drive them to the Charmer. He keeps a pudder with the sixth verse of the fifty eighth Psalm to no purpose: Whenas from the Hebrew, אשר לא ישמע לקול מלחשים חובר חברים מרנם, if you repeat לקור חובר before חובר you may with ease and exactness render it thus; *That hears not the voice of muttering Charmers, no not the voice of a confederate Wizzard or Charmer that is skilful.* But seeing Charms, unless with them that are very shallow and sillily credulous, can have no such effects of themselves, there is all the reason in the world (according as the very word intimates, and as *Aben Ezra* has declared) to ascribe the effect to the assistance, confederacy, and co-operation of Evil Spirits, and so חובר חברים [Chobher Chabharim] or חובר חבר [Chobher Chebher] will plainly signifie a Witch or a Wizzard according to the true definition of them. But for *J. Webster's* rendring this verse p. 119. thus, *Qua non audiet vocem mussitan-*

I conjure and command you, O Demons, all and so many as ye are, to accept this Book with good grace, so that whensoever we may read it, the same being approved and recognized as in proper form and valid, you shall be constrained to appear in comely human form when you are called, accordingly as the reader shall judge. In no circumstances shall you make any attempt upon the body, soul, or spirit of the reader, nor inflict any harm on those who may accompany him, either by mutterings, tempests, noise, scandals, nor yet by lesion or by hindrance in the execution of the commands of this Book. I conjure you to appear immediately when the conjuration is made, to execute without dallying all that is written and enumerated in its proper place in the said Book. — Conjuration from the Grimoire of Honorius

This is an awesome quote to start any book with. It can be found, appropriately enough, at the beginning of *Raising Demons*, by Shirley Jackson. Jackson is better known as the author of *The Lottery and Other Stories* and *The Haunting of Hill House*, which are about the only books of hers that are consistently in print these days. *Raising Demons* is firmly out of print, and I put off searching for it when I first fell in love with Jackson's work for the extremely stupid reason that I'd heard it was nonfiction. Given her interest in the supernatural, I figured it must be some arcane instruction book, or perhaps a history of demonology. The only magic I wanted was that of her voice as a writer of the strongest, most relentlessly absorbing fiction I'd ever read. So until a better-informed reader set me straight, I was self-denied the rare pleasure of laughing at Jackson riffing on her four children, the demons of the title.

Jackson's younger son was startled and then grimly amused as an adult to hear his mother compared to Erma Bombeck by members of a Midwest women's club who had read *Demons* and Jackson's other fictionalized family memoir, *Life Among the Savages* (originally subtitled *An Uneasy Chronicle*). Those ladies who lunched must have skipped everything else Jackson ever wrote, which could more aptly have been compared to Kafka, or better yet to Jane Austen if she'd smoked some really strong

tea. They must also have skipped the above quote. That wouldn't have been too difficult. The book wasn't in print very long, and when it was revived in the posthumous anthology *The Magic of Shirley Jackson* (now also out of print), the conjuration had somehow dropped by the wayside. Which is even odder than its having been present in the first place, since the collection was edited by Jackson's husband, who once described her as "the only contemporary writer who is a practicing amateur witch."

That idea, that image of Shirley Jackson — the witch-writer-lady with her cats and her Tarot deck — originated while she was still young and newly successful, and has outlived her by several decades now. W. G. Rogers, an AP reporter, proclaimed famously and foolishly in 1949 that "Miss Jackson writes not with a pen but with a broomstick." (Later, the first mass-market edition of *The Lottery* specified that her broom was dipped "in adders' blood.") In the first (and only) full-length study of Jackson's work, Lenemaja Friedman sadly noted that "because people insist upon associating [Jackson] with witches and demons, her true literary worth becomes obscured."

Jackson herself made a few public comments about her interest in magic early in her career, lived to regret them, and close-mouthedly continued to write work steeped in the supernatural. People will talk, as Sappho wisely noted, and Jackson decided to let them say what they wanted to — they would anyway — and let her writing speak for itself. Which doesn't make it easy for those interested in the matter to answer with both plausibility and certainty a reasonable and compelling question: just what was the true nature of Shirley Jackson's relationship with witchcraft?

Whatever she thought of it in her personal life, she kept a level head when it came to her writing.

Her one essay at pure nonfiction (her family "memoirs" must be called fictionalized) was a book not about witchcraft itself, but about the people involved in hysterical accusations of it. Aimed at the younger set but fascinating reading for any age, *The Witchcraft of Salem Village* is underread, underrated, and brilliant. Jackson's biographer, Judy Oppenheimer, dismissed it as

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"definitely a lesser work...with an air of having been written on automatic pilot." Perhaps she was irked by the fact that Jackson could write so calmly and simply about the human side of witchcraft: the fear and fascination it engendered.

Or perhaps Oppenheimer didn't recognize that the "straightforward, unadorned" writing Jackson employs in this work was far more effective than any attempt at pathos or sensationalism. The bare fact that Dorcas Goode, who spent months in prison after being accused of witchcraft, was not quite five years old when the allegedly tormented cried out on her is quite horrifying enough not to need embellishment. So is the fact that her mother was accused on a whim, as an afterthought, and lost her life as a result of this dangerous gameplaying by adolescents. Shirley Jackson was a wise enough storyteller to simply present the facts and let the story tell itself.

She was also occasionally, irresistibly amused by the antics of the players, and writer enough to see the germ of a good story where someone else might see only anecdote. In the afterword to *The Witchcraft*, she mentions that "There are... many specimens of demonic handwriting. One of them, signed by the demon Asmodeus, is so badly misspelled that it is almost unreadable. This was explained by pointing out that it was not necessary for a demon to learn to spell. His job was to torment mankind." Funny enough, but Jackson took it one step funnier in an unpub-



lished story called “The Smoking Room.” A young college student working on a paper late one night is propositioned by the devil, “a charming young man.” The student, apparently Jackson herself, sneers at the bare, boring contract for her soul he offers; types up a snappier, more legalistic one on the spot; and tricks him into signing his own soul over to her — with an X, as he never learned to write. Just as things might have gotten ugly (it’s not nice to fool the devil), the housemother storms into the room, demanding to know what a man is doing there, and the devil slinks defeated back to hell. One of the few genuinely funny stories out there, and all thanks to a demonic factoid Jackson dredged up in the course of some decidedly unfunny research.

This detached ability to turn facts into a ripping good read supports her brother’s opinion that Jackson’s interest in witchcraft was, as he told Oppenheimer, “purely intel-

and Greek, and staggering under the weight of its own self-importance, would be suicide-inducing as a homework assignment, even given that half of it is testimony from witch trials and witnesses of ghosts. But Shirley Jackson clearly relished it. She read it for her own pleasure, and sprinkled her short story collection *The Lottery* with excerpts from it.

Opinions have differed on her use of quotations from *Saducismus* to open each section in *The Lottery*: both the wisdom of it and whether or not it had really been her idea in the first place. Friedman thinks not in the case of the latter. The passages were, she insisted, “an attempt by the publicity staff to make the book appear mysterious and, therefore, more salable.” She mentions reviewers



“She saith, That after their Meetings, they all make very low Obeysances to the Devil, who appears in black Cloaths, and a little Band. He bids them Welcome at their coming, and brings Wine or Beer, Cakes, Meat, or the like. He sits at the higher end... They Eat, Drink, Dance and have

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lectual.” “She studied it like you’d study history,” he said. “I always thought it was a little tongue-in-cheek.”

It was certainly serious enough — intellectual enough — to push her through a great deal of reading that would have been tough going for someone less fiercely committed to amassing information on the subject. I haven’t been able to ascertain whether she read all of Joseph Glanvill’s 1689 tome *Saducismus Triumphatus: Or, Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions* or merely a great deal of it, but my own defeated efforts to plow straight through stand as exhausted testimony to the strength of her dedication.

This six-hundred-page work, available only in a facsimile of the original seventeenth-century typeface in which the letter *s* looks like an *f*, peppered with passages of untransliterated and untranslated Hebrew

criticizing the inclusion of these strange little quotes as having “no real bearing on the stories,” and seems to be of the same opinion herself.

Joan Wylie Hall corrects Friedman on both counts in a later dealing with Jackson’s short fiction, noting that “the Shirley Jackson Papers contains a folder (Box 20) with two pages of material typed by Jackson from the Glanvill book, including the first of the four passages cited in *The Lottery*.”

She also points out that this very passage is omitted in later editions of the book, though she believes that the excerpts as they originally stood marked important divisions in the stories.

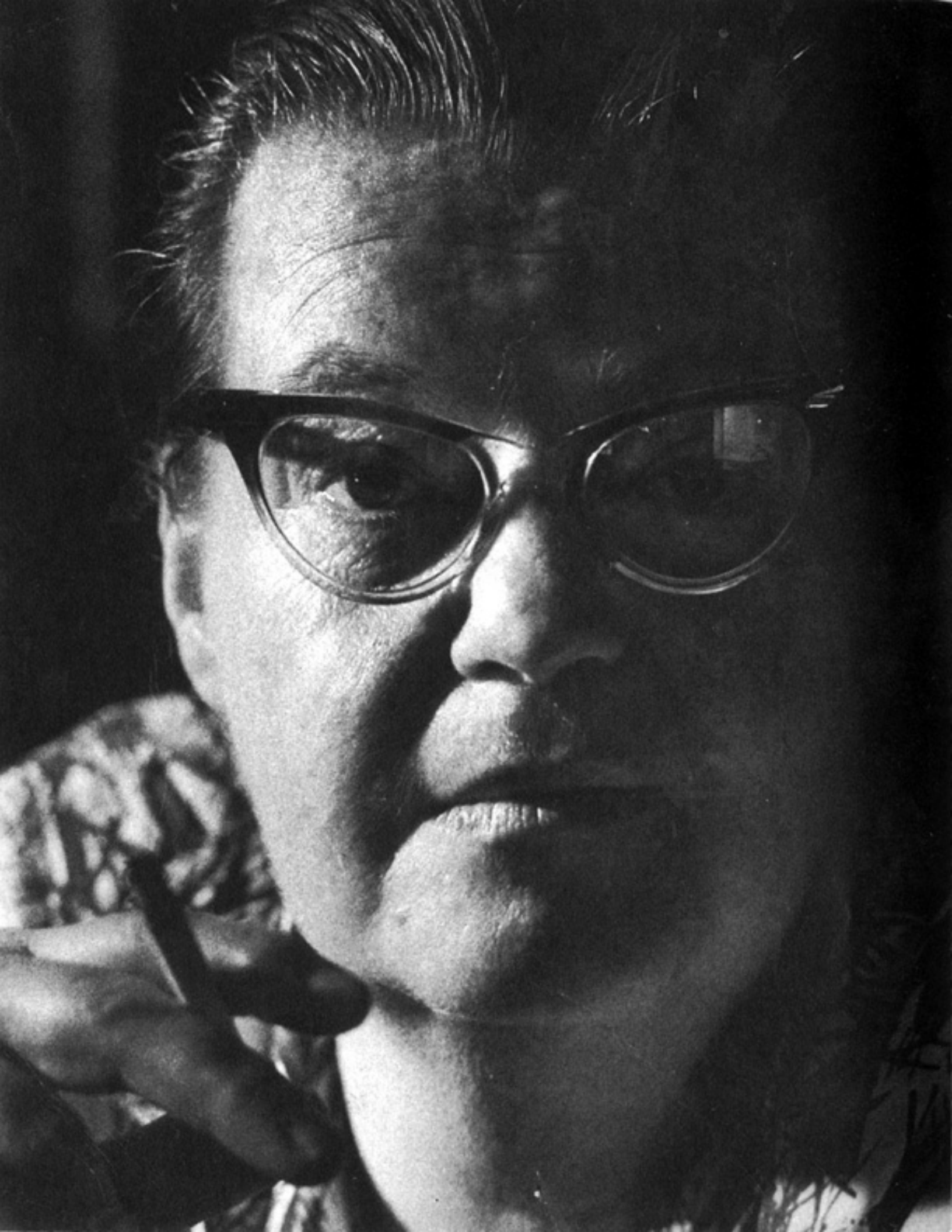
I find the excluded passage interesting for two reasons. First, it bears a striking similarity to Jackson’s own writing — not in tone but in content. The quote is from the testimony of an accused witch, describing the goings-on in which she’s been involved:

Musick. At their parting they use to say, *Merry meet, merry part.*”

That’s Jackson all over. Food, drink, and the company of witches. Homey and eerie all at once. Very like the first story in the *Lottery* collection, “The Intoxicated”: drink and conversation at a party where the talk turns briefly extraordinary. Preceded by that passage, as it was intended to be, the piece rings a little differently.

The *Saducismus* passage is also of interest in that the alleged witch it concerns was one Elizabeth Style, widow, accused by

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Richard Hill on behalf of his daughter Elizabeth Hill, an adolescent girl supposedly tormented by the widow. These names will sound familiar to readers of “Elizabeth,” the longest story in *The Lottery* and a piece that Jackson had once hoped to expand to a novel-length work.

The main character in “Elizabeth” is a familiar Jackson type: a once-ambitious woman who has not only settled for far less than she’d once dreamed of but is grateful for even so much; vaguely bitter, apt to look down on those around her; single, with little in the way of family and no close friends. This particular character is a sleazy literary agent who makes her money not by selling others’ writing but by charging naïve would-be authors for worthless editing and rewriting. Jackson gave her the name Elizabeth Style.

Style works for Robert Shax, a man whose surname is also the name of one of Jackson’s favorite demons (and one of her favorite cats). Jackson names the young

floozy Shax hires as a new secretary Daphne Hill rather than sticking slavishly to the source material and crowding the story with too many Elizabeths. The name of the judge in the real Elizabeth Style’s trial — Robert Hunt — is given to Style’s old uncle visiting from out of town and hoping pathetically to see his dear niece.

The choice of names for the two women is significant, but it’s not immediately obvious just how subtle that significance is. Hall takes names and roles at face value: “The physical torments to which Elizabeth Style subjects the teenage Elizabeth Hill... parallel Miss Style’s sarcastic jibes at Daphne Hill, an awkward young secretary.” There’s more to it than that, though. Daphne Hill isn’t a mere tender youth, helpless before a ruthless older woman. She’s attractive to, and attracted to, Shax, who is Style’s rather lifeless and embarrassed lover. And though Hall mentions Style tormenting Hill, Hill isn’t exactly all sweetness and light to Style. What’s more,

Hill’s presence at the tiny agency is a threat to Style, since Style’s position there is entirely dependent on Shax’s good will. A decade or so earlier, “there was no one around to tell Elizabeth Style... that if she got the job it wasn’t worth getting.” So now with Daphne Hill. But being the new girl coming in is still better than being the old one on the way out.

In the original trial, Hill was a thirteen-year-old girl who, for reasons we can only guess at this late date, leveled accusations at the older Elizabeth Style. By virtue of being female in the seventeenth century, neither of them had much power, but Hill had a little more clout than Style. She was young, and she had a man willing to go to bat for her. Style, a widow, was an easy target.

It’s clear whom Jackson’s sympathies lie with, especially for any reader of *The Witchcraft of Salem Village*. Jackson’s portrayal of accusers and accused in *Witchcraft* is sensitive to all involved; but the

bulk of her compassion is reserved not for the little girls who got caught up in the lying game, but for the accused, many of whom were executed simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Whether or not Jackson believed in real magic, she certainly understood who were the tormented and who the tormenters when it came to witches on trial.

It's a pity Jackson wasn't, for whatever reason, able to write the novel she had planned about Elizabeth Style. She did leave an outline behind, and so we can see that she would have expanded not only the length but also the witchy elements in the story. One day in Style's life was to be analogous to a witch trial. It isn't clear just how obvious Jackson would have made this in the book, but she's quite thorough in drawing the comparisons. Some are rather amusing, as in "Chapter 7: The torture begins," a section in which Style, a city girl originally from a small town, spends an evening with old friends, trying unsuccessfully to present herself as "a successful and happy business woman." Sounds like everyone's twentieth reunion.

Jackson also includes a chapter about the "discovery of the witch's mark", having a friend of a friend noticing the "entwined initials" inside Style's ring. Presumably, these initials are those of Style and her employer, not merely a demon but the devil himself in this work, and married to someone else while stringing Style along. But the most striking chapter headings and summaries are the last two, which bear reprinting in full.

"CHAPTER 14: CONFESSION AND SENTENCE: She admits total failure, and tells her friends she will go back and keep house for her father.

"CHAPTER 15: DEATH IN PRISON: She knows it is for good."

The storyline itself isn't particularly original. From Moll Flanders to Sister Carrie and all between, female literary characters seem legally required to be miserable — or worse, ruined in some way — should they dare to leave home and try to make a life in the big bad city. Leave it to Shirley Jackson to see such a character as a thwarted witch. And leave it to her, too, to have more than a smidgen of sympathy for the witch forsaken by her devil.

It should be obvious by now that witchcraft held more than a passing interest for Jackson; what may not be is how permeated, how soaked her work is in witchery. Take, for example, her first two novels.



They were typical early-career books, and Jackson saw them as such. "The first book is the book you have to write to get back at your parents; the book you always had in you. Once you get that out of your way, you can start writing books," she once told her daughter, though she herself took not one but two books to get her childhood out of her system. Both *The Road Through the Wall* and *Hangsaman* read as books an adolescent would fantasize about publishing for the pleasure of having her parents die of embarrassment. Potshots are taken left and right at whitebread suburbia and inept, wannabe-all-knowing parents.

And yet even here there be witches.

Natalie in *Hangsaman* is an unusual and sensitive teenager who, always careful to go through the motions of ordinary existence, dwells "fascinated" in an inner world of her own making. The beginning of the book finds her engaged in a dialogue with "the secret voice which followed her," that of an invisible police detective accusing Natalie of murder, though we don't yet know of whom. Natalie, pleasurably frightened, can't answer his questions satisfactorily and doesn't seem to be particularly trying to — she either knows she is guilty or has reason to think her innocence can never be proven. Backed into a corner, she tells herself, "Confess... if I confess I might go free."

This makes no sense in the context of twentieth-century law, where confession by a suspect generally guarantees anything

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but freedom. If we look at the witch trials Jackson made a study of, though, we see that once a witch was accused, confession was her only chance to save her own life. Pleading innocence was tantamount to suicide.

This is subtle; *Road Through the Wall* is less so in the witching respect. On a

baptism of a “Picture in Wax, which was for [i.e. meant to represent] *Elizabeth Hill*.” In another case from the same book, a witch is able to sicken a woman he has never even met “from a Town some miles off” because he knows her name. And so on.

No author becomes so married to a subject, weaving it so relentlessly through her work, for reasons purely intellectual. There was an emotional drive at work when it came to witchcraft and Shirley Jackson, perhaps like the attraction Houdini had to the supernatural. “She wanted very much to find provable magic,” Jackson’s younger daughter told Jackson’s biographer. Which supports Jackson’s plundering the supernatural as a treasure trove of ideas; but what about the

apologized for. When the story opens, she’s in extreme pain because of a tooth that’s been troubling her for years. Why hasn’t she had it taken care of before?

Well, fear, for one. But beyond squeamishness, she seems to have neglected herself in favor of her husband and children, and they seem happy to let her do just that until she is in debilitating pain. Her husband grudgingly sees her off at the bus station, though she’s barely able to stand up, and instead of showing concern, expresses his annoyance that she hasn’t taken care of the problem sooner. “You had a toothache on our honeymoon,” he says “accusingly.” Two things come to mind here. The first is that in Jackson’s fiction, marriage is generally a lure for by the single and a trap for the married. Second, being hustled off with a huge swelling and pain that comes and goes bears a striking resemblance to many women’s childbirth experiences. This is especially pointed given that Jackson

The Postscript.

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closed-off little street in a narrow-minded suburb lives Mrs. Mack. “The children called her a witch, and the parents called her an unfortunate old woman, and she looked like either one, with her hair in strings and her shoulders bent, and her perpetual whimpering mutter.” One child has a brief, reluctant conversation with her, and is vastly relieved to be called by the wrong name, for “neighborhood lore” has it that “a witch could not put spells on anyone if she didn’t know their name.” And so little Mary Byrne is polite to old Mrs. Mack, “comfortable in the knowledge that some unfamiliar Sally would get her spell.”

Very nice. And very interesting that suburban neighborhood lore should be so well-informed in matters arcane. In, for example, the testimony of Elizabeth Style, accused witch, it is made clear that names are very important indeed to witches. When Style takes to tormenting young Miss Hill, she is able to do so with the help of the devil himself, who holds a mock

aura of menace in so many of Jackson’s witchy works?

Take “The Tooth,” an oft-anthologized story from the *Lottery* collection. On the surface, this is a tale of madness. A young wife — Clara Spencer — embarks on a seemingly mundane bus journey, travelling to the big city to see a dentist. She meets a strange man and, soon after, loses her mind. In fact, her having met the man — being able to perceive him, at any rate — seems to be proof positive that she’s already mad, since he is a magical being, and therefore must be imaginary. Except he isn’t; and though Clara’s sanity may be questioned, the real question is whether she was mad to throw her lot in with the demonic being she meets or whether she was nuts to stay in her previous passive existence for as long as she did.

Clara is a pale, worrying woman who seems to believe, like the good fifties housewife she is, that others’ needs are to be seen to and her own are to be ignored or

wrote a rather bitterly humorous piece — “The Third Baby’s the Easiest,” later reprinted in *Life Among the Savages* — about giving birth to her third daughter.

In “The Third Baby,” Jackson mentions taking a taxi alone to the hospital after fretting and making sure that her family will be all right while she’s gone. Between con-





tractions, she struggles to organize and communicate the myriad of household details that her family usually gets to take for granted:

"You'll have to take care of the children," I told my husband. "See that..." I stopped. I remember thinking with incredible clarity and speed. "See that they finish their breakfast," I said. Pajamas on the line, I thought, school, cats, toothbrushes. Milkman. Overalls to be mended, laundry. "I ought to make a list," I said vaguely. "Leave a note for the milkman tomorrow night. Soap, too. We need soap."

Compare this to Clara in *The Tooth*:

"Mrs. Lang," she said, checking on her fingers. "I called Mrs. Lang, I left the grocery order on the kitchen table, you can have the cold tongue for lunch and in case I don't get back Mrs. Lang will give you dinner. The cleaner ought to come about four o'clock, I won't be back so give him your brown suit and it doesn't matter if you forget but be sure to empty the pockets."

Just the usual housewife's fretting. But it's more than that: both women are hustled off, alone, in pain and apprehensive, to medical professionals who will greet them with condescension and neglect.

Outwardly, Clara is passive and obedient as, having reached the dentist's office, she is shuttled from office to office and room to room, and referred to as "lower molar" rather than by name. Her identity, her selfhood is taken from her, as Jackson's is, more humorously, when she is checking into the hospital:

"Occupation?"

"Writer," I said.

"Housewife," she said.

"Writer," I said.

"I'll just put down housewife," she said.

Infuriating, but funny. But there is nothing funny about Clara Spencer's treatment. Her own experience of her pain is stolen by being denied, just as her name is. The prospect of more pain at the hands of those supposedly there to help her is denied: "You know it won't hurt, don't you?" one smiling nurse asks, as "great machinery" is wheeled into the room. And then Clara is put under. But not before she has time to remind herself to "remember the metallic sound and taste of all of it. And the outrage." After the extraction is over, she asks where her tooth is, and on being told it's been taken out, lies down and cries. All very strange emotions in connection with a dental experience. But very analogous for giving birth. Although in this case the person being born — reborn, rather — seems to be Clara herself.

Which brings us back to witchcraft. Clara keeps thinking about the strange man she met on the bus. Readers who know about Jackson's running character James Harris [Footnote: See *The Spook*, January 2001, "*The Lottery: The Adventures of James Harris*" — Ed.] know that this is he, the "daemon lover" she was fond of working into odd corners of stories when she wasn't giving him the center stage. In "*The Tooth*," he takes care of Clara — which is a good thing since no one else can be bothered to — but his caretaking is tinged with magic surrealism. He tells her strange fragments of stories about a beautiful place "even farther than Samarkand." He asks, in a restaurant the bus stops at, if she wants coffee, and when she nods he points "to the counter in front of her where a cup of coffee sat steaming. 'Drink it quickly,' he said." Later he buys her food, holds her arm to steady her on the way back to the bus, insists that she lean on him so that her head won't rattle against the window as it did before. Later, after they've left the bus, he finds her again. "'Look,' he said as he passed, and he held out a handful of pearls."

Consider all of this, and then consider the devil we meet in *Saducismus Triumphatus*. He dresses in black, always; James Harris is always in a blue suit, and can be identified in many of the stories he pops

up in by this if by little else. The devil in *Saducismus* appears, at night, to women who are alone and vulnerable: usually widows, usually older, usually poor; always socially undesirable, even outcasts. His overtures are vaguely sexual: one of the things he requires from his witches is that they "suffer him to suck their Blood." He offers them his protection and undreamt riches, though that protection is little more than the ability to harm and the occasional catered party, and the riches are often merely a sixpence. Which is still more than anyone else is offering these women. Which is pretty tragic.

Which brings us back to the definitely if vaguely sexual daemon lover, and to Clara, offered imaginary pearls and real coffee. And a chance at a new life. A new self.

On leaving the dentist's office, Clara steps into a restroom and is startled, on looking at a mirror full of women's faces, not to know which is hers. Then, finding it, she is angry and disappointed. She removes the engraved barrette holding her hair back and she is indignant to see that she's saddled with a tame name like Clara. She throws away the barrette, along with an initial pin she'd been wearing.

The importance of names to witches has already been mentioned. Clara is throwing hers away; now no one can control her.

The devil in *Saducismus* often anoints his new recruits with oil, in a mockery of the baptism ceremony. He doesn't rename them, but his welcoming parties are very like the parties thrown in honor of the newly born. Which Clara is.

Nameless and memoryless, Clara runs off hand in hand with her demon-protector, seeing not the city surrounding her but only hot sand under her bare feet. Perhaps not completely tragic, if one favors casting off the conventional life in exchange for freedom; but not exactly a reassuring ending, either.

It could not have seemed a happy one for Shirley Jackson. The biggest problem with deals with the devil is that the devil cheats. Riches dwindle into sixpence. Persecuting those who persecute you, as the witches of *Saducismus* sometimes confessed they had, often means being hauled

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thus, *Quae non audie*

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to ascribe the effect to the assistance.

into court or hanged. Clara Spencer sought a caretaker and ended up losing her mind.

Insanity was something Jackson feared greatly, and toward the end of her life her own crippling fears of ordinary things gave her good reason to believe she was indeed going mad. Perhaps in this early story she was seeking reassurance that the journey might not be all bad, might be a bizarre strike for freedom: not a housewife kidnapped by madness, but a witch who's willingly thrown herself into league with the devil — the daemon lover.

If that seems like a stretch, consider this: In *The Witchcraft of Salem Village*, Jackson describes Nathaniel Hawthorne's own retelling of the witch trials in his novel *The House of the Seven Gables*. For no obvious reason, Jackson mentions Hawthorne having an accused witch shout at her judges, "I am no more a witch than you are a wizard, and if you take away my life, God will give you blood to drink!" In "The Tooth," Clara's mouth is full of blood after her surgery, and she says — you guessed it — "God has given me blood to drink."

This element of fear in many of Jackson's witchy works supports her son's feeling that her relationship with the supernatural was uneasy at best. "I always believed she believed that she was in touch with a whole ungodly assortment of demons and characters," he told her biographer. "I don't think it was very pleasant for her."

Enigmatic always, Jackson leaves us with no easy answers to the question of her real relationship with what was probably, next to writing, the most passionate concern of her life. Did she love magic or fear it? Was witchcraft merely historically interesting for her, or was she hoping all the time to find a spell that would work?

Hazarding a guess, based on her words and works and what everyone else has said about her, I would say: none of the above. No simple or clear-cut answer will suffice, because she wasn't a simple clear-cut person, even to herself. She could very well have had a joyful or fearful relationship with witchcraft without ever once believ-

ing it really existed, because she was not stuck in the idea that something had to be empirically real in order to be emotionally relevant.

"I tell myself stories all day long," she wrote in a draft for a writers' conference lecture:

I have managed to weave a fairy-tale of infinite complexity around the inanimate objects in my house, so much so that no one in my family is surprised to find me putting the waffle iron away on a different shelf because in my story it has quarreled with the toaster... It looks kind of crazy, of course. But it does take the edge off cold reality. And sometimes it turns into real stories.

Those stories were a fictional aspect of her life that she took perfectly seriously. There's no contradiction there. Every fiction writer has to be willing to commit a great deal of time and attention to, and invest a huge amount of faith in, what is essentially nothing more than an exercise in make-believe — no matter how "realistic" the story might be. Clearly make-believe won out over "cold reality" in Jackson's book any day of the week.

And just as clearly no one will ever know what witchcraft really was for Shirley Jackson. If it were somehow possible to ask her and hope for a true answer (and she valued a good story far more than she did the truth — her lecture "Experience and Fiction," reprinted in *Come Along With Me*, is ample and entertaining proof of that), her reply might well depend on when you asked her and how she was feeling that day. Just as her writing depended on that. We have her writing (if only more of it were in print!), and we shouldn't ask for more. Anyone seeking safe certainty shouldn't be reading so enigmatic a writer anyway. ~

Deborah Markus is a writer, but we'll just put down "housewife."