

WE CELEBRATE 100 YEARS OF SHIRLEY JACKSON WITH A PANEL OF EXPERTS WHO TAKE US DEEP INTO THE WORK OF THE AUTHOR OF *THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE*, WHERE UNSETTLING STORIES EXPOSE THE DARK SIDE OF DOMESTIC BLISS

THE WITCH OF NORTH BENNINGTON

by April Snellings

THE LATE 1940s ARE OFTEN CONSIDERED TO BE SOMETHING OF A PREGNANT PAUSE IN THE HORROR GENRE. Val Lewton, the decade's most reliable producer of quality horror films, made his last genre title in 1946, and the '50s-defining atomic-monster subgenre wouldn't get underway in earnest until *Godzilla* emerged from the Pacific in 1954. Ray Bradbury's 1947 horror collection *Dark Carnival* was barely a blip on the radar; Lovecraft was ten years dead by then, and the pulp industry was in sharp decline.

So perhaps it's not surprising that the decade's most shocking piece of fiction appeared not behind a *Weird Tales* cover, but in the esteemed pages of *The New Yorker*. The story's title, "The Lottery," was unassuming enough, and so was its author: Shirley Jackson, a 31-year-old mother and wife who'd just published her first novel.

For the bulk of the story, there's nothing to indicate that Jackson would one day be hailed by the likes of Stephen King and Guillermo del Toro as a master of psychological horror. The inhabitants of a pastoral community gather to draw lots in an annual contest, but only in the final sentences is the awful truth revealed: the "winner" of the lottery is ritually stoned to death to ensure the town's prosperity for the coming year.

Jackson's story prompted more mail than any piece of fiction published by the magazine before or since. Hundreds of letters poured in from readers who were confused, shocked or angry. Some wanted to know if such rituals were actually taking place in America, and where they could go to watch one.

Its creator was even more of a curiosity: an author whose bio described her as "the only contemporary writer who is a practicing amateur witch, specializing in small-scale black magic and fortune-telling with a Tarot deck."

Shirley Hardie Jackson was born in San Francisco, California, on December 14, 1916. She spent most of her childhood in an affluent suburb called Burlingame, and in spite of a prickly relationship with her mother, Jackson seemed happy enough until the family moved to Rochester, New York, when she was sixteen.

Already an introvert who preferred to spend her time writing in her bedroom, Jackson had trouble fitting in and struggled with her self-image — problems ex-



acerbated by her mother's lifelong attempts to mould Jackson into the kind of prim-and-proper daughter that the large-framed, wild-haired and intensely imaginative girl didn't want to be.

Jackson married future literary critic Stanley

Edgar Hyman in 1940, and the couple would eventually settle in the tiny Vermont town of North Bennington. Jackson split her time between writing and raising four children – and, if rumours are to be believed, studying the dark arts.

Much of Jackson's alleged witchcraft involved more of a winking eye than an evil one. Whether she was actually a practicing witch is still a matter of debate, but she was a serious and voracious student of the history of magic and the persecution of women thought to command it. She amassed a huge collection of books on the subject, not to mention an array of amulets, charms and black cats. The image stuck; one reviewer famously commented that Jackson wrote "not with a pen but a broomstick." She was jokingly said to have used black magic to break the leg of publisher Alfred Knopf when he displeased her. Another story has Jackson, a devoted Dodgers fan, attempting to hex the Yankees during the 1949 World Series. (It didn't work.) She even authored a non-fiction children's book called *The Witchcraft of Salem Village*, published in 1956 – the year before the names of the accused witches were finally and officially cleared.

Magical abilities aside, Jackson would go on to cultivate an unusual career.

She was a popular writer of humorous stories of domestic life that earned her high pay in

women's magazines – and of dark tales of gothic horror and psychological suspense.

It was her 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House* that would cement her reputation as an American horror legend. Jackson's best-known novel centres on Eleanor Vance, a desperately lonely young woman set adrift by the death of her overbearing mother. Eleanor agrees to participate in a ghost-hunting experiment in a foreboding manor, only to find that, once she's there, the house isn't inclined to let her go.

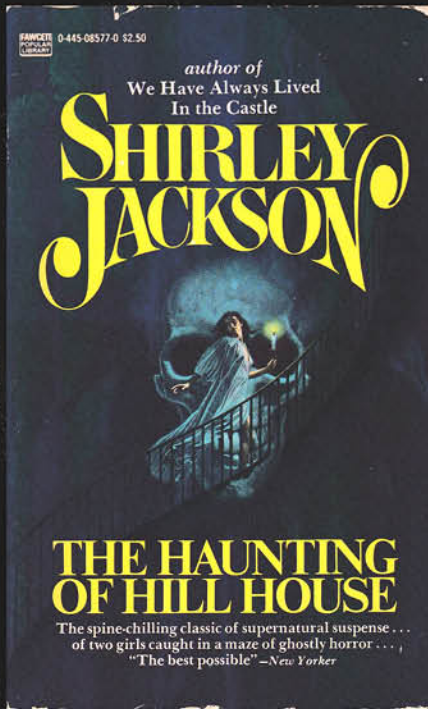
Hill House was a critical and commercial success. Hollywood shelled out \$67,500 for the rights – an amount equal to around \$560,000 today. Director Robert Wise consulted the author throughout development; it was Jackson who suggested the shortened title, and she expressed approval when Wise and scriptwriter Nelson Gidding told her they saw the house as something more akin to a mental institution than a haunted mansion. That wasn't what she'd intended, Jackson told them, but it was a fine idea.

Jackson made it to New York for the premiere of *The Haunting* in September of 1963, but only barely. The author who had written so masterfully of a woman trapped in a haunted house had become bound to her own; rather than ghosts, her jailers were debilitating colitis and acute agoraphobia. She would finish only one more novel: the extraordinary 1962 gothic suspense yarn *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*.

Jackson died in her sleep on August 8, 1965 at her Vermont home. Like American horror masters Poe and Lovecraft before her, she did not live to see her 49th birthday.

But Jackson did something Poe and Lovecraft hadn't: she wrote about the horrors faced by women in a society that allowed them limited control over their own lives (see p.19 for a look at five essential Jackson tales). Certainly there are eerie pre-Jackson masterpieces that deal with these issues – Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) comes to mind, and there was an entire tradition of gothic literature that addressed the dark side of domesticity – but she was the first canonical American horror author to write female characters who reflected the problems faced by so many of her readers.

To commemorate Jackson's 100th birthday, *Rue Morgue* has assembled a panel of experts to help us conjure a better picture of her life and legacy: writer and editor Sarah Weinman, whose work has been a driving force in the rediscovery of female-authored mid-century suspense fiction; noted book critic and biographer Ruth Franklin, author of *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life*; supernatural fiction expert Melanie R. Anderson, co-editor of *Shirley Jackson, Influences and Confluences*; and Bram Stoker Award-winning novelist Sarah Langan, author *The Missing and Audrey's Door*. Together, they reveal the unlikely author behind some of the most important horror stories in the American literary canon.



Black Magic Woman: Shirley Jackson at home in Vermont with her children.

IF YOU ONLY KNOW SHIRLEY JACKSON'S WORK BY THE 1963 MOVIE ADAPTATION *THE HAUNTING*, YOU NEED TO READ THESE FIVE BOOKS

BEYOND HILL HOUSE

by April Snellings

SHIRLEY JACKSON'S 1959 MASTERPIECE *THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE* CASTS ONE OF THE MOST FORMIDABLE SHADOWS in all of horror literature; besides cementing its author's reputation as the *grande dame* of American dark fiction and providing the source material for one of the greatest ghost movies ever produced (1963's *The Haunting*), it all but invented our modern concept of the haunted house narrative.

But Jackson's body of published work, which includes six novels, four children's books, two memoirs and dozens of short stories, is peppered with macabre standouts. Whether you're a devoted fan or a Jackson neophyte, here are five volumes that should haunt your bookshelves.

THE LOTTERY AND OTHER STORIES (1949)



Almost two decades before David Pinner wrote the novel that would eventually be adapted as *The Wicker Man*, Jackson penned one of the most unsettling folk-horror tales ever produced. "The Lottery," about a bucolic American town that comes together once a year for a barbaric stoning ritual,

lends its name to this collection, which also gathers 24 of Jackson's other stories. Some of them are humorous, but the author's trademark sense of menace is never far from the surface. Highlights include "The Tooth," in which a routine dental procedure leads to madness, and "The Witch," about a young boy who encounters a sinister figure on a train.

THE BIRD'S NEST (1954)

Sensational cover copy touted *The Bird's Nest* as "a savage struggle for sanity that made living a nightmare," but Jackson's third novel is a nuanced and intensely unsettling portrait of mental illness. The



story centres on Elizabeth Richmond, a timid young woman whose life is upended when she begins to receive threatening notes at work and her aunt accuses her of slinking out for late-night trysts she doesn't remember having. At first her psychiatrist suspects demonic possession, but he soon realizes that Elizabeth's identity has splintered into four distinct personalities. Obvious lines were drawn between *The Bird's Nest* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, but Jackson's novel is better read as the forebear of dissociative-personality narratives such as *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957) and *Sybil* (1973) than a direct descendant of Robert Louis Stevenson's iconic tale.

THE SUNDIAL (1958)



This one's Jackson's *other* novel about unpleasant entities lurking in the parlours and passageways of a gothic manor. *The Sundial* concerns the Halloran clan, a family of over-privileged and relentlessly petty backstabbers who hole up in a garish mansion to ride out the apocalypse. Like much of Jackson's work, her fourth novel is heavy on ambiguity – the clan's power-hungry matriarch *might* have murdered her adult son and ghostly visions *might* portend global destruction, but those elements could also be chalked up to paranoia and cult brainwashing. Even the final, chilling passages are open to interpretation. *The Sundial* garnered comparisons to Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne, but it is entirely a Jackson original. It's a wickedly funny gothic nightmare that leaves readers wondering which idea is

more horrifying: that the apocalypse is nigh, or that the future of humanity rests in the hands of the Halloran tribe.

WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE (1962)



While it hasn't entered the cultural consciousness to the extent of "The Lottery" or *Hill House*, Jackson's last completed novel is considered by many to be her finest work. *Castle* tells the story of Merricat and Constance Blackwood, a pair of sisters who, along with an invalid uncle, have secluded themselves in their family's crumbling estate after the rest of the Blackwoods succumbed to arsenic poisoning. (One of the sisters, of course, is the murderess.) All of Jackson's novels bear elements of autobiography, but it's *Castle* that most explicitly addresses the agoraphobia that tormented the author in her final years. A masterpiece of gothic suspense.

COME ALONG WITH ME (1968)



Published posthumously, this volume collects sixteen of Jackson's short stories, three of her lectures and an uncompleted novel that centres on a widow who sheds her old life to move to a new town and set up shop as a medium. For all of *Come Along With Me's* talk about ghosts, though, this collection's most chilling entry is the short story "The Summer People," a tour de force of paranoia and dread about an elderly couple whose decision to remain in their rural vacation home after Labour Day has harrowing consequences. 🗝

HOW DID YOU DISCOVER SHIRLEY JACKSON, AND WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS?

SARAH WEINMAN: I'm pretty sure I first discovered her in high school, and it was from reading "The Lottery." If my memory serves me correctly, the high school that I went to staged a short production of the story, which was incredibly shocking and violently concluded. Seeing it played out on stage by high school students certainly creates a lasting impression.

RUTH FRANKLIN: So many people have a memory of, say, the first time they read "The Lottery," and I actually don't. Jackson was always there for me, in the culture. I always had "The Lottery" in the back of my mind somewhere. I do remember reading *The Haunting of Hill House* as a teenager and being captivated by it and by the whole idea of literary horror, which she does so uniquely well.

MELANIE R. ANDERSON: I read "The Lottery" for school. I don't remember what grade I was in, but I do remember my horror at the turn it takes at the end—the way the story stops at the first stones and leaves the inevitable end to your imagination.

SARAH LANGAN: I'd read "The Lottery" in eighth or ninth grade, and I'd like to say that's how I fell in love, but in truth that story didn't connect with me when I read it. I was young, and its themes have been revisited too often by too many *Twilight Zone* episodes and satires of the suburbs. What brought me back to her work was Stephen King's *Danse Macabre*. He acknowledged *Hill House* as an influence on *The Shining*. So I read both as a junior in high school, and I was particularly blown away by *Hill House*. It fuses the psychological with the physical, and that's scary because we all control our surroundings without knowing it. Our subconscious social cues directly affect the way people treat us, which in turn informs our own happiness. It's not that much of a stretch to imagine that, during a particularly dark spell, we might deliver all the worst cues and end up like poor Eleanor.

SOME OF THE BEST-KNOWN GENRE WRITERS OF OUR TIME READILY NAME JACKSON AMONG THEIR INFLUENCES. WHY ISN'T SHE MORE WIDELY READ TODAY?

SW: It's like with the female domestic suspense writers of the early and mid-20th century, where they're just not given the same kind of critical view as their male counterparts. Stephen King

A study in nightmare—by the most haunting writer of this generation

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THE LOTTERY

ADVENTURES OF THE DEMON LOVER

BY SHIRLEY JACKSON



“JACKSON HAS A KNACK FOR FINDING EVIL AND TERROR IN THE EVERYDAY MOMENTS OF LIFE.”

—Melanie R. Anderson

has been championing Jackson's work since he began publishing, and certainly in *Danse Macabre*. He has always been a huge Jackson acolyte. So there are efforts; it's just that I think it'll take something like Ruth Franklin's book, maybe more film and TV adaptations, and just more people saying, "She's a major American novelist." Not just a major American horror writer or a major American female writer, but just a major American novelist.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE SOME OF THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF JACKSON'S BRAND OF HORROR AND SUSPENSE?

SW: I'm not sure I can define it so specifically. It's more just that her way of telling a story is so infused by myth, but also what it is to be a woman, what it is to be in America. I mean,

there was a story, "After You, My Dear Alphonse," that manages on the surface to be kind of humorous, but then you realize it's essentially about casual racism. I love the way she conveys certain dark truths in a manner that seems at least palatable at first, and only later do you realize how deeply she's eviscerated you.

RF: I would definitely put ambiguity at the top of the list. You can never be completely sure that you've figured out what's going on or what she's all about. Like in *Hill House*, where she's so careful to keep those ghosts right on the edge the whole time. You can never be absolutely certain whether they're meant to be some kind of real supernatural manifestations or just psychological—and I would say "just" in quotation marks, because the psychological aspect is the most important part of it. So yes, I would say that that essential ambiguity is one of her top characteristics.

MRA: One, Jackson is a master of ambiguity. It's often possible to read her stories in two different directions—one is mundane, and the other is supernatural or malevolent. Two, Jackson has a knack for finding evil and terror in the everyday moments of life. Children are innocent, but might be demons. A bus trip can lead to nightmares from childhood. Houses shelter families, but they also can destroy those inhabitants. No one is safe in Jackson's fictional worlds.

SL: Now that I've had kids, I've got a dog in this race. There's this identity slip that happens after children, and Jackson captures that really well. You're so tired and you're so far away from who you used to be... I've always been an absent-minded person. I legitimately get lost driving to my house once a month, and I cannot remember the passcode to my writing space even though I've been going there for seven years. I'll just be working on one thing so hard that the rest is gone. Even street names become unfamiliar. I've always had this fear that when I have a place to be, it is the wrong place, or that the timing is wrong. I've somehow stumbled into another reality. This is a crazy fear! I know this! But it's always there... What Jackson does is invert that fear. Her characters are too embarrassed to say, "Hey! I'm in the wrong place! You've mistaken me for someone else!" And then time passes, and by the time they announce their dilemma, it's too late.

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU THINK JACKSON WAS INFLUENCED BY THE

SUPERNATURAL, HORROR AND SUSPENSE LITERATURE THAT CAME BEFORE HER?

SW: You see shadows of Edgar Allan Poe, and I feel like M.R. James is kind of lurking there, whether she admits to his influence or not. And really, the fact that she dabbled in Wicca – I think she was reading up a lot on those kinds of pagan rituals, mostly out of interest, but sometimes I think just to kind of mess with people.

RF: It's interesting, because she didn't talk very much about [her influences]. I never came across any writing in which she mentioned having read anything by Hawthorne or Poe or Lovecraft. There's a drawing included in my book in which she depicts herself holding a book by Lovecraft, but as far as I know, she didn't actually talk about him. As I think about it, she didn't really talk about her influences period, except to say how she loved the 18th-century writers like Samuel Richardson. I think, in a way, she wanted to seem as if she were *sui generis*.

MRA: Jackson's extensive library contained numerous books on the occult and the supernatural, and aspects of "magic" or the weird entered many of her stories, even her sketches of family life. Her novels *The Sundial*, *The Haunting of Hill House* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* show her familiarity with 18th-century gothic fiction, supernatural traditions in America, and the literature of psychical research societies and the contemporary fascination with ESP. In an essay "Experience and Fiction," Jackson described all of the reading that she did in preparation for *Hill House*, including reports from actual ghost hunts in the records of the British Society for Psychical Research. Her portrayal of the exterior of Hill House as a watchful, malevolent face echoes Poe's "House of Usher", and the psychological implications of the haunting for Eleanor are reminiscent of the governess in James' *The Turn of the Screw*.

SL: I don't know how influenced she was by other horror literature. She'd probably read *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, but I wouldn't say she has much in common with Stoker or Shelley. Jackson's a humanist. She's fascinated by people and how they act, both in groups and in isolation... I think she may have been influenced by Kafka – they've both got those veins of humour running through very dark stories about humans trapped by social constructs of identity.

WHY DO YOU THINK "THE LOTTERY" WAS SO SHOCKING WHEN

IT WAS FIRST PUBLISHED?

SW: Because I think it bore a resemblance to many small towns all over America – this idea that there could be these secrets lurking within small towns, that people could be up to something, whether they're engaged in a conspiracy or they're *othering* people. This idea that you can live in a community all your life, and suddenly you're an other – we're dealing with this in 2016, so this really becomes a timeless, upsetting theme. I think it just made people really upset because they had to face the nastiness and the ugliness that lurked inside them.

RF: "The Lottery" gave readers a look at their own faces in the mirror, even if they didn't know that's what they were being shown, because of the way it reflected the concerns of its moment. The Cold War was just getting underway, the news of the concentration camps from Europe kind of burst onto the scene in 1945 and was just as quickly hushed up. This underlying cultural anxiety of the postwar years, I think, is what we feel as an undercurrent in that story as we read it, and the new sense that people had in those years after the war of the kind of inhumanity that people were capable of.

MRA: I think the shock of it comes from two things: one, it hits us in a vulnerable place by showing a peaceful small town descend into violence – violence that is accepted, socially sanctioned and universal in participation, including the children; and two, it holds a mirror up to the horrors of whatever time and place the reader inhabits.

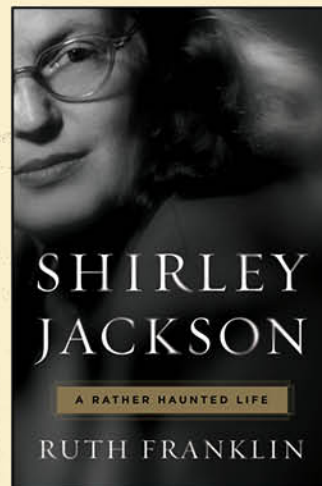
SL: I definitely don't get why "The Lottery" got the most hate mail *The New Yorker* has ever received, but I think it's got something to do with the fact that Jackson was a woman. There's something very unsettling to people about women who subvert the tropes of domesticity and female desire, even in the slightest of ways... But that's good; that's what every artist wants. It's the only way to catalyze change.

THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE IS WIDELY CONSIDERED THE BEST HAUNTED HOUSE NOVEL EVER WRITTEN. WHAT MAKES IT SO EFFECTIVE?

SW: Well, one, it's just really damn scary. You don't know what's going to happen to poor Eleanor. She's so drawn to [Hill House], and it's really at her peril that she is. It's a metaphorical thing, this idea of home. And even though it's a very wrong depiction – nothing quite is in good working order

SHIRLEY JACKSON: A RATHER HAUNTED LIFE

Ruth Franklin
Liveright/W.W. Norton



Shirley Jackson has been exalted by no less than Stephen King and Neil Gaiman as a formative influence on contemporary horror, so it's frustrating that she isn't as widely read today as they are. Hopefully Ruth Franklin's beautifully written, endlessly compelling biography will help change that.

Drawing from a cache of previously undiscovered letters, dozens of new interviews and an exhaustive review of Jackson's Library of Congress archive, Franklin constructs a meticulous and empathetic portrait of a writer whose work spanned two seemingly contradictory worlds. During her lifetime, Jackson was as well-known as a humour writer for magazines such as *Redbook* and *Ladies' Home Journal* as she was a creator of gothic, skin-crawling classics including *The Haunting of Hill House*. Much has been made of this duality, but Franklin's book illustrates a concept that's key to understanding the author and her work: in Jackson's stories – which often deal with female characters grappling with intense loneliness, paranoia and the fracturing or loss of their identity – home and family are slippery concepts. For her ill-fated heroines, the gulf between domestic bliss and madness-inducing horror is disturbingly narrow.

In some ways, *A Rather Haunted Life* is a corrective account of Jackson's life and work. Franklin had access to resources that were unavailable to Judy Oppenheimer when she wrote her 1989 Jackson biography *Private Demons*. The true value of Franklin's book, though, lies not only in its biographical information, but also in its critical evaluation and interpretation of Jackson's work and its remarkable insights into her creative process. It's a must-read for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of one of the genre's most under-appreciated writers.

APRIL SNELLINGS

or seems to function the way a good home is supposed to function – it's that allure for someone who has felt rootless her whole life. That's a really powerful idea. We all want to feel like we're attached somewhere, that we don't just flit from place to place. Haunted houses are really important in American culture, because a lot of houses are opulent and grand and deemed to contain secrets, but they also are places you're supposed to be able to live in. A good haunted house story will always endure.

MRA: I think it's her masterful use of ambiguity. Every time a reader grabs some purchase, the narrative shifts and throws you off balance, just like the house's weird angles and sloping floors and stairs affect the characters. By the end, the terror of Eleanor's deterioration is clear, but what is haunting Hill House is still shrouded in mystery. The power of a truly great ghost story is its undecidability. Jackson constructs every supernatural event in the novel as impossible to accept or dismiss. Was there blood in Theo's room? Was there a cold spot? Did the house shake itself to pieces and then return to normalcy? How many witnesses were there? Do they agree on the circumstances? Can these things be documented? This book entertains the folly of trying to collect evidence of the ephemeral.

SL: We sympathize with Eleanor. Poor girl, used and abused by everyone around her. It's not surprising she has a dark side, and it's not her fault that darkness breaks out despite all her efforts to contain it. I think that's what makes it so horrible – that her own body has turned against her. Of course Eleanor wants to be alone, [and] has fallen in love with an externalization of her own mind. Because at least she knows and has some control over that self-made hell. She's done with fresh hells. We're sorry for her because we identify with that choice, and we also know it's the very choice that will destroy her, reproducing the very prison that first her mother and then Doctor Montague confined her to, because misery is all she knows.

HOW DO YOU THINK JACKSON HAS HELPED SHAPE WHAT WE CONSIDER TO BE THE ARCHETYPAL HAUNTED HOUSE STORY?

MRA: I think *Hill House* was a turning point in haunted house fiction. In it, Jackson merged the two streams of haunted house fiction, one focused on the psychology or history of the inhabitants (i.e., Hawthorne and James), and the second focused on the structure of the house as a "bad place" (i.e., Poe and Lovecraft), into one really horrible place – Hill House. Throughout the novel, you just can't be sure what is happening because of, or to, Eleanor, or whether the house is a monstrous carnival showplace that preys on people like her. The two possibilities co-exist, and this anticipates novels like Richard



Welcome Home Sanitarium: Eleanor Lance (Julie Harris) finds refuge of sorts within the walls of Hill House in 1963's *The Haunting*, adapted from Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*.

Matheson's *Hell House*, Anne Rivers Siddons' *The House Next Door*, and King's *The Shining*.

SL: There's no shaping involved – she wrote the haunted house story. She understood that what we build is an embodiment of what we are. And those echoes rattling around, well, they're our own voices, the ones we cannot cast off.

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF JACKSON'S INTEREST IN WITCHCRAFT, AND THE FAMOUS BIO BLURB THAT CLAIMED SHE WAS A PRACTICING WITCH?

SW: I think she was kind of playing it up more than she was committed to practicing Wicca. I don't want to say it was a parlour trick, because I think it was more than that, but I think it's still not entirely clear how devoted a student she was to witchcraft, or whether it was just a curiosity she had that she found useful in transforming into fiction. I feel like the jury is still out on that.

RF: I think she very much saw it as a way of channelling female power, of giving voice to women and women's concerns – her own as well as her characters'.

THERE'S BEEN A REVIVAL OF INTEREST IN JACKSON'S WORK LATELY. WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?

SW: Jackson has an uncanny ability to be *au courant* while also being timeless. She was so good at fear, and fear just does not date. Humans have a tremendous capacity to be scared by the same things generation after generation.

I think horror also flourishes when there's tremendous uncertainty in the world. If all is calm and placid and peaceful, we don't necessarily look for horror as a catharsis. But now, when everything is in complete tumult, we want order but we also want to understand why things scare us, and horror fiction is a really good conduit for doing that.

RF: I think there's something timeless about her writing. It doesn't really have any signifiers – those little details that attach it to a particular time. But more than that, she's dealing with universal themes, and I don't think we ever get tired of talking about the things that frighten us. The things we fear provide such a unique access point to the human psyche that they always stay fresh and exciting.

MRA: I think the revival of interest in her work comes from the 21st-century realization of her 1950s anticipation of the debates to come over gender and domesticity and identity. Jackson creates very complex women characters who live on the margins, and she shows how their positions result from their limited choices in post-World War II America.

SL: There's a horror revival in general, which is great. I think the Shirley Jackson Award has helped keep Jackson's name out there and made the obvious connection between Jackson and her literary children – smart dark fiction writers. But she's also peerless. You want to read smart and scary without the gore? Read Jackson. 🍷