
The Spectral Presence of (Un)dead Mother in Shirley Jackson's Short Stories*

Widmowa obecność (nie)umarłej matki w opowiadaniach Shirley Jackson

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Abstract. The objective of the article is to analyse how Shirley Jackson's interpretation of Gothic literature became a tool with which the writer could present the social and cultural changes of her time. Jackson uses elements of the Female Gothic to describe the situation of women in the 1950s in the United States. In the article, the author discusses Jackson's two short stories – *The Daemon Lover* and *The Tooth*. Focusing on the mother–daughter relationship, the author uses psychoanalytical theories to prove that women in the American author's writings attempt to oppose the social roles attributed to them. The denied longing for a mother makes it difficult or even impossible for the protagonists of Jackson's short stories to develop their own personality and achieve independence – and thus a significant position in society.

Keywords: Shirley Jackson, Female Gothic, psychoanalysis, social roles, *The Daemon Lover*, *The Tooth*

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Abstrakt. Celem artykułu jest odpowiedź na pytanie, w jaki sposób literatura gotycka w wydaniu Shirley Jackson stawała się narzędziem, za pomocą którego pisarka mogła przedstawić zmiany społeczne i kulturalne swoich czasów. Jackson używa elementów gotyku kobiecego do opisanie sytuacji kobiet w latach 50. XX wieku w Stanach Zjednoczonych. Autorka artykułu omawia dwa opowiadania Jackson – *The Daemon Lover* i *The Tooth*. Skupiając się na relacji matka-córka, autorka za pomocą teorii psychoanalitycznych udowadnia, że kobiety w tekstach amerykańskiej pisarki próbują przeciwstawić się przypisywanym im rolom społecznym. Wyparta tęsknota za matką utrudnia bądź nawet uniemożliwia bohaterkom opowiadań Jackson wykształcenie własnej osobowości i osiągnięcie niezależności, a tym samym znaczącej pozycji w społeczeństwie.

Słowa kluczowe: Shirley Jackson, gotyk kobiecy, psychoanaliza, role społeczne, *The Daemon Lover*, *The Tooth*

Shirley Jackson is one of the most important American Female Gothic writers of the 20th century. She is recognized mainly for her short story *The Lottery* about a horrific ritual performed in a New England village, and the novel *The Haunting of Hill House* considered to be one of the best Gothic horrors. Overall, Jackson wrote six novels, two memoirs and more than two hundred short stories, which focus mostly on domestic horror. Like her Gothic predecessors Edgar Allan Poe and Henry James, Shirley Jackson uses supernatural elements to show the depths of the human mind and terrors which hide there. Functioning as a representation of the emotional space – the home – houses in Jackson's stories turn out to be haunted, as in *The Haunting of Hill House*. As John G. Parks writes, "Jackson's gothic fiction is an effective mode for her exploration of the violations of the human self – the aching loneliness, the unendurable guilt, the dissolution and disintegrations, the sinking into madness, the violence and lovelessness" (1984, p. 28). Living during the 1950s, Jackson herself experienced the anxieties and fears of women of her times. Isolation and alienation prevail in her writing as she describes the difficult situation of women in post-war America. As a mother of four and a wife, she knew very well what difficulties women had to face – these of marriage and motherhood. In this essay I argue that the unfulfilled childhood needs and the inability to separate from their mothers limit the freedom of women in Jackson's writing.

In order to expose the inner and outer situation of women, writers such as Jackson used elements of the Gothic, thus creating Female Gothic, which is an examination of women as mothers, wives and daughters through woman's eyes; talking about the female experience using Gothic metaphors. The combination of strangeness and familiarity found in Gothic fiction serves as a means to express repressed fears and protests. Creating such a genre gave women a chance to speak out about their situation as outsiders to the society dominated by males. As Diana Wallace points out, "[t]he Female Gothic is perhaps par excellence the mode within which women writers have been able to explore deep-rooted female fears about

women's powerlessness and imprisonment within patriarchy" (2004, p. 57). The women of Female Gothic seek release from their identities imposed on them by society, history and morality. Facing what they have been repressing, Gothic heroines have to confront the problematics of femininity in order to free themselves. According to Maggie Kilgour, "[i]n the female gothic, the private world is turned temporarily into a house of horrors; the domestic realm appears in distorted nightmare forms in the images of the prison, the castle, in which men imprison helpless passive females" (1995, p. 38). The familiar image of home, domestic life and expectations following them, becomes defamiliarized. The strange world symbolizes oppression and isolation from the male society, but also from other women who suffer from the same problems.

Traumatic memories become inaccessible after they are repressed from consciousness; therefore, the characters in Female Gothic narratives must explore labyrinth-like spaces to discover the secret room which is the answer to all their questions. Places symbolizing the repressed in Gothic fiction are usually dungeons, crypts, hidden passages, which stand for:

the womb from whose darkness the ego first emerged, the tomb to which it knows it must return at last. Beneath the crumbling shell of paternal authority, lies the maternal blackness, imagined by the gothic writer as a prison, a torture chamber – from which the cries of the kidnapped *anima* cannot even be heard. (Fiedler, 1997, p. 132)

The uncanny makes the familiar spaces strange when infantile complexes return to consciousness. Wallace argues that there are two main fears which are the source of the uncanny – “the fear of repeating the mother's life (and being ‘murdered’ by the remote but all-powerful father), and the fear of failing to separate from the mother” (2004, p. 59). Houses, as well as their inhabitants begin to seem hostile, there are no longer safe places and a well-known family.

Ellen Moers, who used the term “Female Gothic” for the first time, points out one of the main issues that are discussed through Female Gothic – the relation between a mother and her daughter who tries to achieve autonomy. Unlike Male Gothic which focuses on “masculine transgression of social taboos,” Female Gothic is a “narrative of the persecuted heroine in flight from a villainous father and in search of an absent mother” (Smith and Wallace, 2004, p. 2). During the formation of identity, a child wants to be separated from the mother and yet remain with her. In *The Gothic Mirror*, Claire Kahane sees Female Gothic as a kind of Oedipal narrative but with “the spectral presence of the dead-undead mother, archaic and all-encompassing” (1985, p. 334) who is like a ghost that signifies feminine problems the protagonist must face. The mother, who is at the same time a part of the self and “the Other,” needs to be isolated.

Separation from the mother equals the danger of getting lost, but it must happen in order to create an independent self. Otherwise, the self will be overtaken by the mother and she will merge with the daughter. As Roberta Rubenstein puts it, “[p]sychoanalytically, a female’s anxieties about [...] body image suggest that her body is (or once was) a battleground in the struggle for autonomy in the face of what she may experience as her mother’s consuming criticism, possessiveness, or withholding of love” (1996, p. 309). The mother, being distant whether because of her death or attitude, makes it difficult for the daughter to achieve selfhood. Sometimes the mother can become a Gothic double for the daughter, because of the strong relationship between them, which makes them seem as if they owned the same identity. As Kilgour writes, “[g]othic heroines seem notoriously infantile and passive” (1995, p. 33), they need to confront the image of their mothers in order to make their identities whole. The struggle for identity is reflected in the image of the house, which functions as the emotional, maternal space and mirrors the “ambivalent experience of entrapment and longing for protection” (Rubenstein, 1996, p. 312).

In the following parts of the article, my aim will be to demonstrate that Jackson’s stories focus on the protagonists’ relations with their (un)dead mothers. Both *The Daemon Lover* and *The Tooth* refer to the Greek myth of Persephone which is about a young girl deceived by Hades, who eats a fruit in the underworld and thus she will have to spend a few months with him each year, away from her mother. Another story Jackson refers to is a Scottish ballad titled *The Daemon Lover*. The ballad features James Harris, who returns to his ex-lover – now a married woman and mother – and lures her to run away with him on his ship. Seeing his riches, the woman agrees to go with Harris, but it soon turns out the man is a devil in disguise, who drowns the ship bringing death to them both. Similarly, in Jackson’s discussed stories, the protagonists are under the influence of a handsome mysterious man who brings about a change in their lives. As Walter Burkert writes, “to be carried off by Hades and to celebrate marriage with Hades become common metaphors for death, especially for girls” (1985, p. 161). The presence of a lover – whether real or imagined – who promises a new life leads the women to the meeting with their mothers whose influence they need to cast off in order to achieve autonomy.

THE DAEMON LOVER

The Daemon Lover (2005a) is a short story published firstly in 1949 in *Woman’s Home Companion*, a monthly magazine consisting of household articles, short fiction and advertisements. The text focuses on a woman who is waiting for her fiancé Jamie to come home. It is their wedding day and the woman becomes impatient,

so she decides to go out and look for her husband-to-be. The woman cannot find Jamie in any of the places she visits and the people she meets seem to hinder her from doing so. In the end, when she finally reaches Jamie's house, it turns out to be empty, as if the man never existed. *The Daemon Lover* has been discussed by Chiho Nakagawa, who writes about female paranoia in her work, and argues that the story "points to the source of fears – the system which puts a woman under strict surveillance to control her" (2008, p. 67). According to her, this story is a commentary on the patriarchal society which is a threat to women's independence. I will try to demonstrate that in *The Daemon Lover* Jackson presents a character who cannot meet her dead mother and – because of that – separate from her to become an autonomous being, since, as Julia Kristeva writes, "[t]he loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous" (1992, p. 27).

The story begins as the main character waits for her lover to come back home. She cannot decide which of her dresses to wear, stuck between a blue silk dress – "too plain, almost severe" – and a print dress which she sees as "too young for her" (Jackson, 2005a, p. 32). The woman wants to feel feminine and look good on her wedding day, yet she is worried about looking childish. In the end, she decides to wear the print dress, "made for a girl, for someone who would run freely" (p. 35) instead of the old blue dress in which "she felt comfortable and familiar, but unexciting" (p. 35). It seems that the character has a problem choosing between what she is supposed to wear as a mature woman and what she wants to wear. The scene is a metaphor of "the struggle of the daughter to separate from the mother" (Heiland, 2008, p. 62) in a sense that the woman tries to cast off what is familiar and imposed on her, and at last makes her own decision.

The protagonist does the final cleaning in a hurry because she wants everything to be in order when Jamie comes home. She changes the sheets "working quickly to avoid thinking consciously of why she was changing the sheets" (Jackson, 2005a, p. 33) and reassuring herself that no one would notice they have been changed. The woman also puts the clothes she wore the day before into the laundry hamper, deciding to use only fresh, new clothes. It seems that there is something in her life she wants to hide and get rid of, a problem she transfers into her unconscious not to bother her anymore. According to Freud, "the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious" (1915, p. 147). By starting a new life, the character tries to bury her past self, yet to really become a new person, she needs to confront her mother.

Although the character's mother does not appear anywhere in the story, "[f]or the daughter, the mother continues as a presence instead of becoming the necessary absence" (Anolik, 2003, p. 26). The psychoanalytical concept of transference

defined by Joseph Sandler, Christopher Dare and Alex Holder as “a specific illusion which develops in regard to the other person, one which, unbeknown to the subject, represents, in some of its features, a repetition of a relationship towards an important figure in the person’s past” (1992, p. 62), allows the woman’s relationship with Jamie to be analyzed to discover what her relationship with her mother looked like. Looking for the meeting with her fiancé, the woman is like a child who is longing for a reunion with her mother. Because of putting her lover into the mother-like role – of someone who would protect and love her – the woman is not able to define herself and stand on her own when Harris is gone. As Alison Milbank writes, the woman “laments not a lost object but the failure to find an object for her sadness, because she has not completely separated from the mother” (1994, p. 148).

The woman dreams of a perfect future with Harris,

when Jamie was established with his writing and she had given up her job, the golden house-in-the-country future they had been preparing for the last week. “I used to be a wonderful cook,” she had promised Jamie, “with a little time and practice I could remember how to make angel-food cake. And fried chicken,” she said, knowing how the words would stay in Jamie’s mind. (Jackson, 2005a, p. 37)

She imagines herself as a typical American wife from before the second-wave of feminism – not working, but staying at home and taking care of it and its inhabitants. We learn in the story that the main character is thirty years old, and feels even older, yet she has dreams like a young girl. To become an autonomous mature woman, the heroine needs to stop being dependent on her mother. Rubenstein writes that “[t]he tensions between »mother/self« and between »home/lost« connote a young child’s ambivalent desires and fears: both to remain merged with the mother (who becomes emotionally identified with »home«) and to separate from her, with the attendant danger of being »lost«” (1996, p. 309). Jackson’s protagonist is neither a girl nor a woman; she is arrested in the process of development and lost in society. As a result, the feeling prevailing the whole story is her anxiety.

As the character wanders through the town looking for her fiancé, she meets different people who seem to be trying to help her, but at the same time, they mock and indirectly criticize her. When she gets out of the taxi near Jamie’s house, she waits until the taxi drives off before heading to the house, as if she was afraid of being observed by the driver. A similar situation takes place when she “[stands] on the sidewalk so long that a woman, leaning out of a window across the way, [turns] and [calls] to someone inside to come and see” (Jackson, 2005a, p. 50). The main character feels observed and therefore, she also thinks the society is constantly judging her actions. The newsstand man also cannot help her and when he looks over the woman’s shoulder at the next customer, she “[is] suddenly aware of her over-young print dress, and [pulls] her coat around her quickly” (Jackson, 2005a,

p. 53). When she goes away, the two men take a look at her and laugh, which the character interprets as mocking. Discussing traditional Gothic works such as *The Italian* and *The Mysteries on Udolpho*, Christine Berthin writes that “anxiety surrounds the quest for identity” (2010, p. 72). This seems to also be true for Jackson’s character who is to be psychologically separated from her mother and constantly feels insecure. At the florist’s the woman learns that Jamie has bought chrysanthemums, commonly called “mums” which seems to be a foreshadowing of who she will meet at the end of her search.

Even though the people she meets talk to her, the communication is not too pleasant and definitely ineffective. After visiting the florist’s, the woman thinks to herself, “everyone thinks it’s so *funny*: and she [pulls] her coat tighter around her so that only the ruffle round the bottom of the print dress [is] showing” (Jackson, 2005a, p. 58). She tries to hide the print dress to avoid laughs and unpleasant stares, which she, in fact, causes because of the dress not fitting her age. However, the woman thinks:

Yes, it looks silly, doesn’t it, me all dressed up and trying to find the young man who promised to marry me, but what about all of it you don’t know? I have more than this, more than you see: talent, perhaps, and humor of sort, and I’m a lady and I have pride and affection and delicacy and a certain clear view of life that might make a man satisfied and productive and happy; there’s more than you think when you look at me. (Jackson, 2005a, p. 58)

On the one hand, she wants to be a housewife, on the other, she wants people to be aware of her entire personality, with all her talents and abilities. The woman does not want to be confined to just one role and it hurts her that she becomes alienated by not meeting the social expectations.

Later on, when the character gets to the building where Jamie lives, she notices that “Jamie’s name [is] not on any of the mailboxes in the vestibule, nor on the doorbells” (Jackson, 2005a, p. 41). What is more, she is not able to remember Jamie’s face and voice, as well as the features of his character. The reader starts to wonder if Jamie has ever existed, or if he is only a figment of the main character’s mind. In Serena Trowbridge’s reading of the original ballad *The Daemon Lover*, the sea where Harris’s ship awaits “appears as a threshold which the bride has been condemned to cross” (2013, p. 47) to enter the gates of hell. In Jackson’s story, leaving the house to search for Harris is for the protagonist like crossing the threshold which leads the woman to the place where she will meet her (un)dead mother.

The last person to help the woman in finding Jamie is a boy who points to the house, which Harris earlier entered. His loud behavior intensifies the woman’s terror as she investigates the entrance and finds out that again there is no list of names near the door. Climbing narrow and dusty stairs, she reaches two doors, out

of which one is closed. The other one opens and she sees an “empty attic room, bare lath on the walls, floorboards unpainted [...] filled with bags of plaster, piles of old newspapers, a broken trunk” (Jackson, 2005a, p. 66). In Gothic fiction, the house “embodies the legacy of the all-powerful parents lodged within an insecurely developed self” (Rubenstein, 1996, p. 315) and stands for the emotional notion of home. As Kahane writes, “the heroine’s active exploration of the Gothic house [...] is also an exploration of her relation to the maternal body that she shares, with all its connotations of power over and vulnerability of forces within and without” (1985, p. 338). Therefore, it is clear that the main character’s anxiety and lack of confidence stem from repressed childhood memories.

The empty house equals the absence of the mother in the protagonist’s life, which is also represented by the absence of her lover. Searching for the person who will give her a new life, the woman faces her past – something that prevents her from focusing on the future. In the room, near the wall she notices a rat, “its evil face alert, bright eyes watching her” (Jackson, 2005a, p. 66) which scares her and as she goes out, and her print dress tears. This ugly creature is the only living thing the woman meets in the house and even it symbolizes death. The torn printed dress, a young woman’s dress, can be read as broken dreams of an ideal marriage and perfect future with Jamie Harris. Discovering the absence of her mother, the character cannot meet her in order to separate from her and become a self-sufficient being. According to Carolyn Dever, “the mother is constructed as an emblem of the safety, unity, and order that existed before the very dangerous chaos of the child’s Gothic plot” (1998, p. 24). Instead of safety and encouragement, the empty house offers entrapment for the woman who remains forever in the same state. She comes back many times and knocks at the door, “but no matter how often and how firmly she [knocks], no one ever [comes] to the door” (Jackson, 2005a, p. 66). As Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace write with reference to Jackson’s novel *The Haunting of Hill House*, in the *The Daemon Lover* as well “Jackson reworks the Female Gothic’s desire for emancipation but locates this within the necessity of casting off the mother’s influence” (2009, p. 160).

THE TOOTH

The Tooth (2005b) is a short story first published in *The Hudson Review* in 1949. Its main character is a woman named Clara who suffers from a toothache and travels to New York to have it extracted. On the way, she meets Jim who promises her to be happy if she leaves her family and goes away with him. After she gets rid of the tooth, Clara leaves with Jim to start a better life. In this story Jackson again presents a character like Jamie Harris from *The Daemon Lover*, who appears in

woman's life and immediately seduces her. Discussing *The Tooth* in her book *Shirley Jackson: A Study of the Short Fiction*, Joan Hall writes about the main character:

Though she escapes from the dull routine of domesticity, Clara blindly advances into another kind of bondage. Toni Reed describes the victims of the archetypal demon lover as "women who have stepped outside the accepted perimeters of society in some way," as Clara does by abandoning her conventional life. (1993, p. 47)

Leaving her husband and child, Clara sets herself free, not seeing that the newly met man may be yet another oppressor to her. What is more, in this story, Shirley Jackson presents a woman who faces the repressed memory of her mother in order to become an independent, strong woman able to leave her husband and live as she wants to.

The story begins with Clara and her husband waiting for her bus to New York. She is nervous and constantly states "I feel funny" (Jackson, 2005b, p. 499). Clara's husband says that the tooth will probably have to be extracted, the thought of which makes her shiver. The pain is so strong, the woman says: "I just feel as if I were all tooth. Nothing else" (Jackson, 2005b, p. 501). The aching tooth can be read as a mother whose memory dwells deep inside the character's psyche and though it is hidden, it affects her life. As Rubenstein writes, "the central feature of Female Gothic is not an Oedipal conflict but, implicitly, a pre-Oedipal one, embodied in the daughter's search for / fear of »the spectral presence of a dead-undead mother, archaic and all-encompassing, a ghost signifying the problematics of femininity which the heroine must confront«" (1996, p. 312). Clara's husband points out that she has always had a problem with that tooth, even during their honeymoon. She is the one who feels the pain, yet the problem also influences their marriage.

Sitting at the back of the bus, the protagonist has an impression that the driver and other passengers are far away. "Inside the bus, travelling on, she was nothing; she was passing the trees and the occasional sleeping houses, and she was in the bus but she was between here and there, joined tenuously to the bus driver by a thread of lights, being carried along without effort of her own" (Jackson, 2005b, p. 510). The woman seems to be "locked [with her mother] into a symbolic relation, an experience of oneness characterized by a blurring of boundaries between mother and infant – a dual unity preceding the sense of separate self" (Kahane, 1985, p. 336). Clara feels that she has no power over herself, she lets things go their way without her interference, as if she was an infant dependent on her mother.

As the bus drives away in the night, the familiar streets seem strange to her in the darkness. The woman sees the journey as "the lunatic flight from her home" (Jackson, 2005b, p. 505). Moreover, as a result of the pain and medications she took, Clara is not fully conscious of what she is doing. She acts as if she did not

have any power over her life, moving without awareness. It seems that because of the tooth the woman cannot really make decisions on her own, and without getting rid of it, she will not be able to live normally. She feels “closed in alone with her toothache” (Jackson, 2005b, p. 509) – there is no one who could help her at that moment and the pain is something she needs to face on her own. What Clara has to confront with is “the maternal blackness to which every Gothic heroine is fatefully drawn [which encompasses] the mysteries of identity and the temptation to lose it by merging with a mother imago who threatens all boundaries between self and other” (Kahane, 1985, p. 340). Getting rid of the aching tooth is a chance to separate from her mother and make it possible for her identity to fully shape.

When they get to New York, she visits a restaurant and sits at a table. The waitress that comes to the table informs Clara that she was asleep, which makes both the protagonist and the reader confused with what is happening for real and what is only a dream. As the main character finally manages to reach the surgeon’s office, she feels proud of herself, as if doing this was a great achievement. She has probably never done anything on her own, always with her husband, and at last, she feels happy because of this small thing. According to Carol M. Davison,

the mother embodies and emblemizes the past in the Female Gothic and, more specifically, the daughter’s past. This association is logical, given her biological role as the site of the daughter’s origins, but it also incorporates the idea of the mother’s legacy to the daughter in terms of certain culturally defined roles and behaviours. (2009, p. 95)

As a girl, Clara was dependent on her mother, and then after marriage – on her husband. It is crucial for her to cast off her mother’s influence, so that she will be able to resist the imposed social roles and live as she wishes.

At the dentist’s, both the nurse and the doctor are very kind to her, “[t]he dentist smiled with the same tolerance as the nurse; perhaps all human ailments were contained in the teeth, and he could fix them if people would only come to him in time” (Jackson, 2005b, p. 517). The aching tooth is presented as something which badly influences the human body and needs to be gotten rid of. There comes a moment when Clara thinks that:

Her tooth, which had brought her here unerringly, seemed now the only part of her to have any identity. It seemed to have had its picture taken without her; it was the important creature which must be recorded and examined and gratified; she was only its unwilling vehicle. (Jackson, 2005b, p. 518)

If the tooth symbolizes the mother with whom the child is merged before they shape their own identity, the extraction means breaking away from the mother. Just before facing what she has been repressing into her subconsciousness, Clara realizes she

had never been really herself, but she has always carried her mother's influence. As Kahane writes, "the female child, who shares the female body [...] remains locked in a [...] tenuous and fundamentally ambivalent struggle for a separate identity" (1985, p. 337). Clara wonders what will happen to her own self, and how far down the tooth's roots go – she worries whether there will be anything left inside of her when she casts off her mother's control. It has always been there, and she cannot imagine her life without it, although it caused her pain. As Wallace writes, "[t]he Female Gothic has been variously read as being about the fear of sameness (engulfment by the mother) or the fear of difference either of the male (violence) or of the mother (separation)" (2013, p. 129).

After the dentist comments that the operation should have been done years ago, Clara is being told where to go and she almost asks the nurse "Into the vault?" (Jackson, 2005b, p. 523). Vaults in Gothic fiction stand for the unconscious, where the repressed memories are hidden. The woman goes through "labyrinths and passages, seeming to lead into the heart of the office building" (Jackson, 2005b, p. 524). Such spaces are also typical for the Gothic, they represent "the state of confusion and chaos" and "lead to gloomy imaginings of [...] absolute separation from the world of the living" (Mulvey-Roberts, 1998, p. 124). What is more, the vault found at the end of the corridors is a womb-like space, where Clara has to return to "meet" her mother. As Padmini Mongia writes, "we can view the Gothic fear as the fear of the beckoning womb-like spaces that demand a struggle over identity" (1993, p. 4). During the operation, Clara has a vision of herself running through a hallway at the end of which Jim – the man she met on the bus who seemed to offer her life with him in some Eden-like place – is waiting for her. She says that she is not afraid, which means that she feels ready to leave her family and go away with Jim – be an independent woman who makes decisions about her life.

The extraction of the aching tooth seems to change Clara Spencer both physically and psychologically. After the operation, she goes to the bathroom where looking in the mirror she cannot recognize her own face. Among the faces of the other women she sees, Clara is not able to say which one is hers. The barrette on her hair has her name engraved on it, which surprises her; she drops it into the ashstand. She does the same thing with a pin on the lapel of her suit with the letter C. The woman does not seem to remember anything about herself, her key and documents are gone. Everything that said who she was has disappeared together with the tooth symbolizing her mother whose "vacancy represents »the pre-Oedipal stage of one's first attempts to distinguish the *me* from the *not me*«" (Anolik, 2003, p. 30). After throwing off her old, torn stockings, Clara goes "purposefully to the elevator" (Jackson, 2005b, p. 537) and outside the building. Once she is released from her mother's influence, Clara is confident enough to become her true self and join Jim.

As the present article has tried to demonstrate, the discussed Shirley Jackson's short stories show that the unfulfilled childhood needs and the lack of separation from the mother limited women's freedom. The haunting presence of the mother in Jackson's fiction makes it impossible for the characters to become individual beings, which makes them psychologically entrapped and anxious. Without a chance for development and forced to be submissive, the women had to allow the men to decide for them. Clearly, women in Jackson's fiction struggle with the lack of independent identities. Jackson herself had to live with an overcritical and restrictive mother, who valued social approval over good relations with her daughter. This certainly contributed to the mental health issues of the author and influenced her works, where homes become Gothic prisons and mothers become spectral figures whose presence haunts their daughters.

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