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Interpretive Narrative Analysis: The Lottery

In “The Lottery” by the author Shirley Jackson, a town of three hundred children, husbands, and wives come together. Each husband picks one piece of paper from a worn black box. One man, Mr. Hutchinson, gets a paper with a black dot. Each member of the Hutchinson family picks out a piece of paper. Mrs. Hutchinson receives the black dot. Everyone gathers around her; children, husbands, and wives begin to throw rocks at her. She is killed by the people she knows, by her husband, and her kids. Through this story of bizarre community violence, Shirley Jackson opens the readers’ eyes to what is happening in the real world. “The Lottery” reflects on the subtle horrors that come about in the real world through the consequences of a person’s actions.

On the first read through, a reader might see only a dark ending to a piece of fiction, but upon further inspection, they will find a correlation to history repeating itself. “The Lottery” is showing what has happened throughout history which is filled with deadly consequences of human actions. For example the Spanish Inquisition in Spain from 1478 to 1834, the Salem Witch Trials between 1692 and 1693, and the Holocaust that took place in Germany from 1941-1945 (Ryan). Each of these gruesome occasions was enacted by a logical and organized program for making the world a better and safer place. That is the danger that brought nothing but bloodshed and lives lost. A quote from *Avengers: Infinity War* comes to mind:

THANOS. “[...] And when we faced extinction, I offered a solution.”

DR. STRANGE. “Genocide.”

THANOS. “At random. Dispassionate; fair to rich and poor alike. They called me a mad man. And what I predicted came to pass.”

In *Infinity War* Thanos might seem like the bad guy— which he is— but to himself, he is the savior of the universe. He succeeded in his mission, and was able to watch the sun rise on a grateful universe. This is similar to what Shirley Jackson is trying to convey in her story. When faced with a difficult situation people will jump to the quickest, most irrational solution. The most notable example of this is when Old Man Warner dismisses the young people of the neighboring towns and continues to pressure the township to continue the lottery. He wants people to fear what could happen if they stop when he says, “Next thing you know, they’ll be wanting to go back to living in caves, nobody work any more, live like *that* for a while” (Jackson 221-22). Warner is afraid that if they were to stop, then they would regress as a people and be forced to hunt and gather for food. Though it is highly unlikely that they would lose all sense of logic and go back to primitive times.

But they have lost something. The townspeople were stripped of something, becoming diluted, so much so that when they start to second guess, killing Mrs. Hutchinson with stones, Warner coaxes everyone along, “Come on, come on, everyone” (Jackson 225). Another example of characters not being critical enough is in *The Giver*. The protagonist and main character, Jonas, found out that his dad unknowingly killed a baby who was considered flawed. He thought he was “releasing” the baby to “Elsewhere,” a place that surrounds the community (Lowry). Just like the life and death consequences in Jonas’ society, the township lost something important in their tradition. Jackson gives the reader hope with that moment of hesitation in the people as if they had remembered the history behind their tradition. If they were to remember why they did

this horrible deed, then they might stop. On the other hand, some readers might argue that the townspeople would continue with the knowledge that what they are doing needs to be done. This stance is arguable, based on the premise that all humans have a moral compass; therefore, people would feel guilty when they do something they know is wrong.

This argument can also be said for the younger people in other towns who have disbanded the lottery which looms over the others as storm clouds would a meadow. There is no mention as to why this ludicrous tradition exists so why partake in a tradition whose rules have slowly faded over time. Shirley Jackson seems to have left this idea up to chance. The lack of information in the story supports this opinion.

Family plays an important role because it has everything to do with the fact that the next generation is sometimes killing off the older generation, the generation that is so deeply rooted in the lottery. “The emphasis on family only heightens the killing’s cruelty because family members so easily turn against one another” (SparkNotes). It is the head of the household who draws the paper, then it is the family as a whole who repeats the process. As important as the idea of family seems to be in the story it does not matter when it comes time to kill Mrs. Hutchinson. That shows that the bond that these families have, is not as strong as their tradition. Jackson does a fantastic job at making tradition the focal point of this story.

The one character that readers appear to get the most information on is Mrs. Hutchinson, but they are not in her mind nor are they in anyone else's. The reader is in a third person objective view. They read as if watching Jackson's story unfold from behind a one-way mirror, powerless to stop the inevitable ending from coming. She introduces so many minute details in the beginning of her story from the date, June 27th to the type of weather “clear and sunny, with

the fresh warmth of a full-summer day” (Jackson 216). She adds detail on the black box and the three-legged stool, all to enhance the readers' idea of what kind of world these characters are in. The story is twisted just like history, no one expected such a beautiful day such as September 11, 2001, to end in smoke, rubble, and the loss of lives.

In a nameless town somewhere, three hundred something odd people had gathered around one person— men, women, children— and killed her. She was killed by the people she thought she knew to be her husband and kids. Shirley Jackson does not keep it light and airy in *The Lottery*. Her story is powerful and raw just as history has always been, and will continue to be. Readers might see merely a dark ending, but it is a warning for history.

Works Cited

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