

A FEMINIST STUDY IN SHORT STORY ‘THE LOTTERY’ BY SHIRLEY JACKSON

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Abstract

This research examines Shirley Jackson’s The Lottery using feminist literary criticism. The study focuses on how patriarchal values, gender hierarchy, and female representation are constructed through characters, dialogue, and social structure in the story. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the analysis reveals that male characters dominate decision-making roles, while women are positioned as passive followers of tradition. The ritual lottery reflects a patriarchal system where women have limited agency and are socialized to accept oppressive cultural norms. The character of Tessie Hutchinson becomes the central symbol of resistance; however, her protest is ignored and silenced by both men and women, illustrating how patriarchal systems suppress female autonomy. The findings demonstrate that the story exposes normalized violence, inequality, and the marginalization of women in society.

Keywords: feminism, gender hierarchy, patriarchy, Shirley Jackson, The Lottery

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis The Lottery karya Shirley Jackson dengan menggunakan kritik sastra feminis. Penelitian ini berfokus pada bagaimana nilai-nilai patriarki, hierarki gender, dan representasi perempuan dibangun melalui karakter, dialog, dan struktur sosial dalam cerita. Dengan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian menemukan bahwa laki-laki mendominasi posisi pengambilan keputusan, sedangkan perempuan ditempatkan sebagai pengikut tradisi. Ritual lotere mencerminkan sistem patriarki di mana perempuan memiliki agensi terbatas dan terbiasa menerima norma sosial yang menindas. Tokoh Tessie Hutchinson menjadi simbol perlawanan, namun protesnya diabaikan dan dibungkam oleh laki-laki maupun perempuan, menunjukkan bahwa sistem patriarki menekan otonomi perempuan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa cerita tersebut mengkritik kekerasan yang dinormalisasi, ketidakadilan, dan marginalisasi perempuan dalam masyarakat.

Kata kunci: feminisme, hierarki gender, patriarki, Shirley Jackson, The Lottery

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature serves as a reflection of social realities, cultural values, and power relations that exist within a particular society. Through literary works, authors often embed ideological perspectives that reveal underlying structures such as class, race, and gender inequality (Toupin, 2024). One of the most significant approaches in analyzing such issues is feminist literary criticism, which focuses on how women are represented and how gender relations are constructed within texts. Feminism in literature does not merely highlight female characters, but critically examines the systems that marginalize women and normalize patriarchal dominance (Somekh & Lewin, 2005; Tickner, 2002). Feminist criticism has developed through several waves, each addressing different dimensions of women's oppression and rights. The first wave focused on legal equality, the second wave emphasized social and cultural inequalities, while the third and fourth waves expanded into identity, intersectionality, and representation. These developments indicate that gender issues remain relevant and continuously evolving (Robinson, 2019). In literary studies, feminist criticism becomes an essential framework to uncover how patriarchal ideologies are reproduced and maintained through narratives, characters, and symbols. One literary work that strongly reflects patriarchal structures is the short story *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson. Published in 1948, this story portrays a seemingly ordinary village that practices an annual ritual involving violence and sacrifice (Gross, 1987; Mon, 2020). While the story is often interpreted as a critique of blind tradition and social conformity, it also reveals deeper issues related to gender roles and power distribution. The social structure in the story places men in authoritative positions, while women are portrayed as subordinate and passive participants within the community. The representation of women in *The Lottery* highlights how patriarchal values are normalized within everyday life. Female characters are often depicted as dependent on male authority, particularly in decision-making processes (Gross, 1987). For instance, women participate in the lottery not as independent individuals but as extensions of their husbands or male family members. This reflects a broader societal pattern in which women's identities and voices are overshadowed by male dominance. Such representation raises important questions about agency, autonomy, and resistance within patriarchal systems (Kachava & Benito Sánchez, 2024). Previous studies on *The Lottery* have primarily focused on themes such as violence, tradition, and social conformity (Jackson, 1948). However, limited attention has been given to analyzing the story through a feminist perspective that specifically examines gender hierarchy and female representation. This gap indicates the need for a more focused analysis that explores how patriarchal ideology operates within the narrative structure and character interactions. By

applying feminist literary criticism, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how gender inequality is constructed and sustained in the story. Based on the background above, the problem of this research is formulated as follows: how are patriarchal values, gender hierarchy, and female representation depicted in Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*? Furthermore, this study seeks to identify the ways in which female characters are positioned within the social structure and how their roles reflect broader gender dynamics. The objective of this research is to analyze and interpret the representation of women using a feminist approach, particularly focusing on issues of power, marginalization, and resistance. To address these problems, this research employs feminist literary criticism as the main analytical framework, supported by qualitative descriptive methods. The study analyzes characters, dialogues, and narrative elements to reveal underlying gender ideologies. It is expected that this research will contribute to literary studies by providing insights into gender issues within classic literature and highlighting the importance of feminist perspectives in understanding literary texts. Additionally, this study aims to raise awareness of how literature can reflect and challenge societal norms related to gender and power.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative research design, as proposed by Creswell & Creswell (2022), which focuses on exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups assign to a social or human problem. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because it allows for an in-depth analysis of literary texts, particularly in interpreting gender representation, power relations, and feminist perspectives in Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*.

The object of this research is the short story *The Lottery* written by Shirley Jackson (1948). The focus of the analysis is on the representation of female characters, the depiction of gender roles, and the manifestation of patriarchal values within the narrative. The primary data consist of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, and narrative descriptions found in the text that are relevant to feminist analysis. Secondary data are obtained from books, journal articles, and other scholarly sources related to feminist literary criticism and gender studies. In terms of research setting, this study is categorized as library research since all data are collected from written sources without field observation (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). The researcher acts as the main instrument in collecting and analyzing the data, which is a key characteristic of qualitative research according to Creswell. The researcher interprets the text by applying feminist theory to uncover implicit meanings and ideological structures.

The data collection technique used in this study is documentation. The steps include: (1) reading the short story thoroughly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative; (2) identifying and selecting relevant textual evidence related to gender roles, female representation, and patriarchal practices; (3) classifying the data into categories based on feminist concepts such as marginalization, subordination, and resistance; and (4) organizing the data systematically for further analysis. To ensure clarity in analysis, operational definitions are established. Patriarchy refers to a social system in which men hold primary power and dominate roles in leadership, authority, and decision-making. Gender hierarchy is defined as the unequal distribution of power and roles between men and women. Female representation refers to how women are portrayed in terms of roles, characteristics, and agency within the literary text. These definitions guide the researcher in interpreting the data consistently.

The data analysis technique follows Creswell's qualitative data analysis procedures, which include several steps. First, the researcher organizes and prepares the data for analysis. Second, the researcher reads the entire data to gain a general sense of the information. Third, coding is conducted by identifying significant statements and grouping them into themes related to feminist issues. Fourth, the themes are interpreted to reveal patterns of gender inequality and patriarchal dominance. Finally, the findings are presented in a descriptive and interpretative manner. To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher applies theoretical triangulation by using multiple feminist perspectives to interpret the text. Additionally, close reading is used to maintain accuracy and depth in analysis. Through these methods, the research aims to produce a credible and systematic interpretation of feminist elements in *The Lottery*.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings based on textual evidence from Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*. The data are taken from narration and dialogue that reveal patriarchal domination, gender hierarchy, and the marginalization of women in the village society.

Finding 1: Male Dominance in Social and Ritual Authority

The first finding shows that men hold authoritative and decision-making roles in the lottery ritual. This is evident in the rule that only male heads of households are allowed to draw first (Ahmed, 2017). The narrator states: "The heads of households came first, husbands and fathers and oldest sons." (Jackson, 1948)

This quotation indicates that women are excluded from positions of authority unless they are widows. Even Tessie Hutchinson participates in the lottery only through her husband, Bill Hutchinson. This reflects a patriarchal social structure where women's identities are

dependent on male figures. From a feminist perspective, this supports Simone de Beauvoir's idea that women are positioned as secondary beings whose existence is defined through men.

Finding 2: Women's Internalization of Patriarchal Values

The second finding reveals that female characters internalize and normalize patriarchal oppression. Women such as Mrs. Delacroix and Mrs. Graves actively participate in the ritual without questioning its morality (Ahmad & Jadoon, 2025; Benstead, 2020). This is shown when Mrs. Delacroix picks up a stone to attack Tessie: "Mrs. Delacroix selected a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands." (Jackson, 1948)

Although women are also potential victims of the lottery, they still support the violent tradition. This behavior demonstrates internalized patriarchy, where women unconsciously maintain oppressive systems (Jinan & Shafiq, 2025). Feminist theory explains this as a result of long-term social conditioning, where women accept injustice as normal and inevitable.

Finding 3: Silencing of Female Resistance through Tessie Hutchinson

The most significant feminist finding lies in the treatment of Tessie Hutchinson. Tessie becomes the only female character who openly protests against the ritual. When she realizes she has been chosen, she cries: "It isn't fair, it isn't right," Mrs. Hutchinson screamed. (Jackson, 1948)

However, her protest is immediately dismissed by the villagers, including other women. The crowd continues the execution without empathy, showing that female resistance is ignored and silenced (Kachava & Benito Sánchez, 2024). Tessie's death symbolizes how patriarchal societies suppress women's voices, especially when they challenge tradition and male authority.

These findings demonstrate that *The Lottery* portrays a patriarchal society where gender hierarchy is deeply embedded in cultural traditions. Men dominate social structures, while women are marginalized and conditioned to accept oppression. Tessie Hutchinson represents a late but powerful form of feminist resistance; however, her resistance fails due to the collective power of patriarchal ideology supported by both men and women (Nisar et al., 2024; Ojeda et al., 2026). Thus, the lottery ritual functions not only as a symbol of violence but also as a metaphor for gender oppression, showing how tradition can be used as a tool to justify inequality and silence women.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the feminist analysis supported by textual evidence, this study concludes that Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery* reflects a patriarchal society that marginalizes women

structurally and socially. The findings show that men dominate authority roles, women internalize oppressive values, and female resistance is violently silenced.

Tessie Hutchinson's character exposes the injustice of this system, yet her death demonstrates how deeply rooted patriarchal traditions prevent meaningful change. Therefore, *The Lottery* serves as a feminist critique of social systems that normalize violence, suppress women's voices, and maintain gender inequality under the guise of tradition.

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