

A Re-Criticism of *The Lottery*

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Abstract

The Lottery by Shirley Jackson is a telling work that always attracts any reader's rapt attention and yet ignites her prompt curiosity. Many attempts have been made to explore the underlying meanings and construct new ones in and out of the story. This study, too, aimed to offer a novel insight into this classic American short story with emphasis on close investigation of the story's intrinsic elements by the New Criticism approach. The results have revealed that such elements as setting, characters, symbolism, point of view and language function in cooperative manner to establish selfishness as one of the central themes embedded in the story. To illustrate, the confined and isolated village demonstrates inwardness and self-preoccupation, the ritual of the lottery bears witness to blind faithfulness and resistance to change, and the black wooden box together with accompanying objects suggests the mystics of the ritual and the somberness of the village. Altogether, the indirect depiction of selfishness is attributable to all these negative qualities lurking in the village. The effaced narrator as well as diction employed to propel the story also helps portray such an abstract theme more vividly. At the end of the paper, New Criticism is recommended as an integral method for the instruction of English literature in Thai universities.

Keywords: *The Lottery*, New Criticism, Intrinsic Elements, Selfishness

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Introduction

The Lottery is a classic American short fiction which deals with certain aspects of humans and the society when they assemble together (Hattenhauer, 2003, p. 4). In the story, the various personalities, types of minds and social components, such as tradition, seniority and authority of people in a small village, are put on a front. To be more precise, this story reveals the realities of humankind especially those concerning their evil when they are confronted with fear, greed and violence to the fullest degree and most vividly. Readers shall find these elements on the surface *fictional*. However, if we should compare them with counterparts in our real life, they are astonishingly similar.

Indeed, the meaning of this story is not single, but multi-dimensional and somewhat complicated. A cluster of meanings, world views and opinions take their own shape and are intertwined. General readership can promptly notice this subtle presentation, and often come with various interpretations and doubts. Critics, on the other hand, are very keen to investigate this complexity much further. They attempt to disentangle all the parts of the story and even propose themes, subthemes or new meanings according to their interest. Most of the prominent criticisms relate the story to extrinsic values; for example, the history and social milieu the story is set in, the psychological reactions of readership toward the story, and such archetypal themes as old beliefs, traditions and scapegoat. It is found, however, that intrinsic elements *in* the story itself are individually assigned with special meaning and significant roles, all of which are inseparably interrelated to generate a unifying, central meaning. Meanwhile, they also direct the story in one *particular* direction. In other words, these elements are deliberately organized around the central meaning of the story, and carry their own importance. Thus, this current research,

alternatively, aimed to embark upon the in-depth analysis of the story's inherent components in order to make a new interpretation of this classic short fiction. It is also hoped that this enterprise would add another dimension to the study of *The Lottery*, indirectly securing and maintaining its place in the sphere of teaching and learning English literature.

***The Lottery* in History**

The Lottery by Shirley Jackson was first published in *The New Yorker* on June 26, 1948, shortly after the end of World War II. Immediately after its publication, the story triggered wide controversy among audience, for it was too daring to depict the evils of human mind. Audience at that time were too eager to know 'which town practiced this lottery' (Oakes, 2004, p. 174) while some of them cried an outrage against its publication. Later, however, this fiction was hailed by some critics as a perfect story which comprised realistic issues and good narrative techniques (Kort, 2007, p. 150). *The Lottery*, then, has been anthologized along with the works of Melville, Hemingway and Steinbeck, adapted into television movies and became a must-read for both general audience and students in America (Hattenhauer, 2003, p. 1). This story is also incorporated in English classes elsewhere, including Thailand.²

As far as the story is concerned, the title is named after the primitive ritual set in the story. The small village, which is thought to truly exist somewhere in the north of New England, America, has an annual ritual of lottery where the heads of every family and household draw a slip of paper in the black wooden box. The winner must be stoned to death as a

² In Thailand *The Lottery* is most often studied in English literature classes at university level. English majors are recommended to read it.

sacrifice.³ The villagers believe that this ritual will bring them prosperity, so they never desire to terminate or even change it. The climax of the story appears when Mr. Hutchinson is announced *winner* taking the deadly slip with a black spot on it, but his wife immediately objects to this fated result. The official of the lottery accepts her objection for no apparent reason and suggests a new draw. Brutally, this time Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson request that their three children take the same chance of being killed. In the end, the unexpected death of Mrs. Hutchison without any help in possession of the slip is the denouement of the story, implying that the lottery would continue in this village, unmercifully and interminably.

The Lottery has produced considerable critique. In close relation to the meaning in the story, a number of prominent yet terrifying themes and subjects are established. For instance, Ann Dobie claims that this fiction embodies human sacrifice to reflect the ancient tradition that scapegoat is to 'remove the guilt of the people and restore their welfare and health' (2011, p. 64). The primitive ritual of lottery is also investigated as to what extent it is realistic or fictional (Foley, 2010, p. 84; Fowlie, 1997, p. 156). In particular, Richard Leonard points out the real existence of this tradition in American society which has considerable impacts on the people living with it, and it can still be felt today (2011, p. 107). Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren are specially interested in social issues. They argue that *The Lottery* 'deals indeed with live issues and issues relevant to our time' (cited in Bloom, 2001, p. 29). When people live together, there is a disguised (im)-balance between 'the blended good neighborliness and cruelty of the community's action' (Bloom, 2001, p. 30). Furthermore, the interplay between 'supernatural evil from those of

³ This practice can be dated back as far as the second century of our era, when Christians were stoned to death for their then barbarianism (Dorrel-Ferre and Dhainaut, 1985, p. 35).

personal madness [and] cultural and political brutality' is observed by Hughes, Punter and Smith (2016, p. 365). They regard such a phenomenon as the fear of being haunted while the haunted are also the haunting themselves. This is, they claim, a trace and influence of Gothic force (Hughes, Punter and Smith, 2016, p. 365). Other critics illustrate feminist dimensions. Notably, the fact that Mrs. Hutchinson is stoned to death without the help of anyone including her own husband bears witness to a society in which protection of women from becoming victims is far less than that of men (Werlock, 2010, p. 162).

Methodology

This research was carried out in qualitative manner. Two principal methods were in-depth analysis of the document i.e. the story, and the fabrication of an argument based on the analysis and references to related literature. In doing so, two main procedures needed to be taken. First, the New Criticism approach was employed to analyze the text. *The Lottery* was read in accordance with the principle of *explication de texte* or close reading—the fundamental of this approach. This principle involves meticulous investigation of any components in the literary work being studied, particularly its language and other elements such as setting, characters, symbols and tone, in order to acquire basic comprehension of the story for figuring out the overall meaning and criticizing it at higher level.

With this principle in mind, the more concrete reading process proposed by Ban Kah Choon and John Richardson (2001, pp. 27-39) was applied. They suggest three chronological steps for reading. First, **understanding words** requires that every single word, especially unfamiliar ones, be correctly understood. This is because words are naturally complex. They have both denotative and connotative meanings, and most of them

are polysemous. Moreover, some writers choose to deviate the meaning of words from their conventional usage; for example, death which usually denotes loss and sorrow gives, at times, a sense of freedom and peace in the works of Emily Dickinson. Next, **understanding sentences** looks specifically at how individual words are placed and related together, and what meaning is construed by that combination. Sentences in a story not only display the linguistic process that propels the story from start to end in language representation, but also help reveal the thought, tone and mood in the story. Take *stream of consciousness* as an example. Most often, this uninterrupted flow of ideas is reflected by lengthy sentences, sometimes one being longer than a page. Last, **understanding the text** aims to analyze the language together with typical elements in the story in order to grasp the overall meaning and critique any particular points. To summarize, all of these steps are followed in order and in collaboration to obtain the meaning of the story at all levels.

Finally, an argument was put forward largely based on the previous analysis of *explication* and recourse to related ideas. Since New Criticism places the greatest emphasis on the “organic unity” of structure and meaning’ (Abrams, 1988, p. 223), the argument in this research was centered on the central theme which was holistically presented by the story’s inherent components organized around it.

Analysis

As aforesaid, each of the story’s basic components comes with its own special meaning and role. So, in order to first obtain basic comprehension, they need to be well understood prior to analyzing them for the acquisition of the overall meaning of the story. Now, important components are analyzed in-depth in isolation.

Setting

The place, time, atmosphere as well as other environments are all contributing to the development of the story on the one hand, and to its emotional climates on the other hand (Turner, 2002, pp. 8-9). To put it simply, not only does setting create a particular atmosphere of the story, but it produces a particular feeling and mood that affects the reader as well. In the story, the scene takes place in a tiny village with only three hundred people, the size of which suggests that the difference in ways of life and opinions should also be small. The lottery ritual is performed in 'the square [of the village], between the post office and the bank, around ten o'clock' (Cassill, 1978, p. 637). It is held on a beautiful day as described:

The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green. (Cassill, 1978, p. 636)

The two extracts above are from the very start of the story. The summer time should provide us a sense of enjoyment and cheerfulness as we usually experience in our real life. This is not always true, however. Jackson wisely crafted an irony out of it which the reader will not find until the end of the story. In fact, the setting foreshadows the time of sorrow, loss and fear that takes place as if there was nothing to worry about. The villagers simply participate in the ritual although they know one of them must die. This indifference derives mainly from the fear that if no one is sacrificed, their harvest would be minimal. The villagers dare not to change this long-held tradition, so it has become gradually ritualized and crystalized through time. This particular subtle presentation is highly valued especially by the New Critics (Qi, 2013, p. 166).

In a similar fashion, the town center can be regarded as ironic. Instead of being used as a common area where the villagers celebrate on any

laudable deeds, this place is reserved for the bloodshed ritual. The brutal purpose of this place is more apparent when the scene of the ritual involves the presence of little children. From the story, they even feel fun to take part in it. Jackson wrote 'the children assembled first, of course. [...] They tended to gather together quietly for a while before they broke into boisterous play' (Cassill, 1978, p. 637).

Symbolism

Above all, **the lottery** itself is symbolic and ironic. After finishing reading the story, readers shall find it absolutely different from the modern counterpart from which a winner gets a large sum of money. In contrast, the lottery in the story brings an annual death to the village with the belief that such sacrifice will give it prosperity in return. More ironically, this ritual should undergo changes according to the law of nature, but the changes in it are minimal yet representative. The alteration occurs only in such minor things as the substitution of slips of paper for chips of woods and the reduction of ritual procedures which were deemed long and perfunctory. Still, the evil of this ritual is the same and even seems to have been deeply rooted.

“Although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box, they still remember to use stones.”

(Cassill, 1978, p. 643)

This alteration and non-alteration is determined by both influential persons of the village such as Old Man Warner, the official of the ritual Mr. Summers and the postmaster Mr. Graves, and the general villagers who are submissive and blindly obedient to the ritual. It can then be said that the lottery represents blindness and darkness of the village partly due to the fact that the ritual hinders their freedom and intelligence.

Second, it is almost impossible to disregard the **box**, so indispensable an object that the ritual cannot be performed without it. Indeed, it is emblematic of the ritual. The interesting aspect lies in the description of the box that gives a strong sense of antiquity, resistance to change and mystery which in turn foreshadows the tragedy of the story. The box is described:

The black box now resting on the stool had been put into use even before Old Man Warner, the oldest man in town was born. (Cassill, 1978, p. 638)

For readers, the box seems even much more sacred and mysterious when its origin is identified.

There was a story that the present box had been made with some pieces of the box that had preceded it, the one that had been constructed when the first people settled down to make a village here. (Cassill, 1978, p. 638)

The keeping of the previous parts in the next generation of the box is seen as a way of passing and maintaining the ancient soul in order to make it more holy. This is one form of sanctification and mystification which is still found in current societies. Despite being old and also damaged, the box will never be replaced. This insistence suggests not only fear of change but also stubbornness of the villagers. The story does not mention why, but if the belief in supernatural power as indicated in the story 'Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon' is taken into consideration (Cassill, 1978, p. 641), it can be implied that the box as the emblem of the ritual cannot be changed; otherwise, prosperity will not come to the village.

Last, **slips of paper** that always accompany the black wooden box intensify the mystery and darkness of the ritual. According to the story, these slips are in place of chips of wood that were used for generations.

Because of the growing population, slips of papers were more appropriate for the box. These slips are mysterious and sinister because they are 'made the night before with the heavy pencil in the coal-company office' in order to mark a black spot on one of them (Cassill, 1978, p. 643). Arrestingly, the fact that the slips which are prepared by Mr. Summers and are written with the pencil from his company indicates a small likelihood that the slip with the black spot will be taken by Mr. Summers. Under this circumstance, he is more prevented from taking the deadly slip than any other member of the village since he himself has seen and touched it. No one has this chance like him.

Characters

Maureen McLaughlin and Brenda Overturf argue that characters in *The Lottery* have fixed beliefs that reflect the theme of the story (2013, p. 116). Indeed, they all play a significant part in presenting diverse realistic characteristics of people and a pattern of society they gradually form. Seven characters are found very apposite, in my view. First, look at **Mr. Summers**. He is chosen to manage and supervise the lottery as well as other activities, such as the square dances, the teenage club and the Halloween program. In reality, appointment of the head or leader of a community is based on different criteria, depending on the values and traditions in that community. For instance, an animistic community reveres those who are believed to have supernatural power to contact spirits of natural beings like trees and animals. A well-to-do person assumes authority in the financially-deficient or business conglomeration. However the leader is chosen, he has substantial impact on the life of people in the community and the life of the community. It is very probably that Mr. Summers has been chosen as *acting head* of the villager because he is rich. He runs a coal company. The majority of the villagers are poor farmers who depend solely on harvest in

each season, so when compared to the general townsmen, Mr. Summers has more 'time and energy to devote to civic activities' (Cassill, 1978, p. 637). He is much respected by the villagers and important for them and the ritual. He has become the official of the lottery, running the first step to the last.

Mr. Summers seems to be a happy, jovial man. But, he is sorrowful. In the story, he is narrated as having 'no children and his wife [being] a scold' (Cassill, 1978, p. 637). This character is filled with conflicts and doubts. Due to his profession as a businessman, he should have seen developments in the neighboring villages, including the abolition of the lottery. However, he chooses to preserve this tradition with the minor change that he proposes to replace the original box and chips of woods with a new box and slips of paper, respectively. It is dubious as to why he keeps this deadly annual ritual although there will certainly be a death.

Second, **Old Man Warner** reflects blindness and resistance to change of old people. In the story he is the oldest man in town who has secured old beliefs and traditions all his life. As his name implies, he always cautions the villagers not to break the tradition fearing that their well-being will be ruined. He, too, takes part in the ritual, seventy-seven times in his life so far. He always remembers and instructs 'Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon' (Cassill, 1978, p. 641). Anyone who mentions a change of this tradition will be warned against by him. Old Man Warner even blames those revolutionists and warns them:

Listening to the young folks, nothing's good enough for *them*. Next thing you know, they'll be wanting to go back to living in caves, nobody work any more, live *that way* for a while. (Cassill, 1978, p. 641)

It can be said that Old Man Warner is absolutely loyal to his tradition, belief and the community he lives in. This characteristic is a strong, influential force

that unites and directs the villagers in one direction. However, such a force can lead to blindness, ignorance and devastation if it is not accompanied with morality and intelligence. According to the story, Old Man Warner's blind faith and narrow-mindedness play a crucial role in the continuation of the lethal ritual of lottery in the village. In our real life, there is a number of people who, akin to Old Man Warner, are stubborn and hard to change, yet ultimately patriotic to their homeland.

Third, unlike the two aforementioned, **the Adams family** is far more revolutionary. They suggest that the lottery should be eradicated. They try to converse with Old Man Warner, but their persuasion is in vain.

“They do say,” Mr. Adams said to Old Man Warner, who stood next to him, “that over in the north village they’re talking of giving up the lottery.”

Old Man Warner snorted. “Pack of young fools,”
(Cassill, 1978, pp. 640-641)

Then the wife immediately steps in to help convince the old man.

“Some places have already quit lotteries,” Mrs. Adams said.

“Nothing but trouble in *that*,” Old Man Warner said stoutly.

“Pack of young fools.” (Cassill, 1978, p. 641)

Readers cannot know the reason for that suggestion. They may fear being killed in the lottery, or they are concerned about the development of the village and the villagers compared to that of other communities. Nevertheless, they still have to take part in the ritual, unavoidably. Steve Adams, head of the family, acquiesces to take a folded paper out of the black box. The revelation of him is when, after the announcement of the scapegoat, Steve Adams appears standing ready ‘in front of the crowd of the villagers’ to throw stones to the fated person (Cassill, 1978, p. 643). With this twisted surprise, Jackson was very wise to depict hypocrisy of human embodied

in this character. Psychologically, the Adams family are suppressed in the old tradition, and their oppressed mind always remains lurking and waiting to explode violently whenever it is shaken by fear.

Fourth, **Mr. Graves** reflects and intensifies darkness that lurks in this village. As his name already suggests, this man maintains and secures the lottery ritual to ensure that it is engraved in the minds of the villagers. He works as the postmaster, an authority in the village and automatically an integral part of the ritual. He works closely with Mr. Summers to supervise and run the lottery.

Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves made up the slips of paper and put them in the box. [...] the box was put away, sometimes one place, sometimes another; it had spent one year in Mr. Graves' s barn and another year underfoot in the post office. (Cassill, 1978, p. 638)

The engravement that Mr. Graves has continually done is his being indifferent, if not satisfied, to the death of victims. The cruelest scene of Mr. Graves is when he takes 'the hand of the little boy' to draw a paper and opens the slip in that hand without any hesitation and compassion, even though the boy is not the scapegoat (Cassill, 1978, p. 642).

Fifth, there is also lay people who reveal the darkness of human mind, like **Mrs. Delacroix**. Throughout the story she is narrated to display her misanthropy quite directly and consistently. In her first appearance, Mrs. Delacroix chooses to talk to Mrs. Hutchison who comes late for the lottery, "You're in time, though. They're still taking away up there." (Cassill, 1978, p. 639). Cruelly enough, she expresses satisfaction with her neighbor's management to attend the *deadly* ritual.

In sharp contrast, when her husband is about to draw a paper, she feels apparently overwhelmed with worry and fear. She even wishes the

ritual were held less frequently than it is actually done.

“Seems like there’s no time at all between lotteries any more,” Mrs. Delacroix said to Mrs. Graves in the back row.

“Seems like we got through with the last one only last week.”

“Times sure goes fast,” Mrs. Graves said. (Cassill, 1978, p. 640)

She continues to show her evil when the victim is announced. Even though Mrs. Hutchinson or Tessie calls for a re-drawing for her husband, Mrs. Delacroix abruptly says to her, “Be a good sport, Tessie” (Cassill, 1978, p. 641). Of course, this announcement gives the biggest relief of the year for her family. When everyone is called to give death to the fated person, she is too enthusiastic to kill her neighbor.

Mrs. Delacroix selected a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands and turned to Mrs. Dunbar. “Come on,” she said. “Hurry up.” (Cassill, 1978, p. 643)

Sixth, **the Dunbar family** adds another mystery to the story. Since the head of the family Clyde Dunbar has his leg broken, his wife Janey comes for the lottery. Again, no one knows whether Mr. Dunbar’s injury is real or not. It is taken for granted very simply. Mr. Summers is only interested in “Who’s drawing for him?” (Cassill, 1978, p. 639). This lack of investigation underscores the only brutal goal of the lottery that a human must be sacrificed regardless of any age, sex or other reason. The dark secret of this family is at last unfolded when Hutchinson is announced scapegoat. Janey immediately asks her boy to go tell the result to his father. Like the Delacroix family, the Dunbars feel heartedly relieved for another year. The difference between them lies in that the former directly reveals their evil mind whereas the latter seems to be concealing it. These two types of people are ubiquitous in real society and they co-inhabit the same community.

Last, the cruelest family in *The Lottery* is the **Hutchinsons**, who is accompanied with the saddest irony. After all the villagers have finished drawing slips, Bill Hutchison is found with the deadly slip with a black spot on it. When hearing the villagers' cry, his wife Tessie waits no more. She yells, "It wasn't fair" (Cassill, 1978, p. 641), and demands a re-drawing by giving the reason that her husband is forced to draw without enough time for the selection. At a glance, the love that Tessie has for Bill looks ideal and immense, but their love turns out not to be as great as we think. When the Hutchinsons are asked if there are any more members entitled to draw a paper, Mrs. Hutchison suggests her two daughters Don and Eva who already live with their husbands, and Mr. Hutchinson asks that his three children, Bill, Jr., Nancy, and little Dave should also take part in this chance. In fact, only the head of the family and the head of the household are to draw a slip, with the exception that a substitute can be made when they cannot show up on the day. From the moral perspective, Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson's suggestion that their children take part in the deadly ritual is the cruelest action. In this second drawing, among the Hutchinson family, Tessie has got the slip. Indeed, she is the last person to unfold the paper and most ironically, her husband Bill forces "the slip of paper out of her hand", and shows it to the villagers (Cassill, 1978, p. 643).

When everyone is throwing stones to her, Tessie screams once again, "It isn't fair, it isn't right" (Cassill, 1978, p. 644). This phrase not only echoes in the crowd who do not at all care about her life, but also painfully resonates in her heart. A moment ago she uttered this word to help her husband, but now for her life it was useless. Most sadly and ironically, no one including Bill offers help.

Narrative techniques

The other two significant components that enrich and intensify the subtlety of *The Lottery* are the point of view and diction. With regard to the former, the story is told in the **third-person point of view**, and this technique gives a special effect on the story and readers alike. Jackson chose not to tell the story by any characters, and it even seems that she assumed from time to time authority in telling it behind the speaker of the story. This technique is known as *the effaced narrator*.

Definitely, how the story is told frames the reader's perception and understanding to a large degree. The fact that somebody outside the story is chosen to narrate what happens on the lottery day as well as the feelings of the villagers illustrates the reality in a more impartial, though rather directed, manner. Dialogues are directly given by the characters in the story, and the descriptions of the setting and other related information is provided by the invisible speaker. This way of narration seems to mirror the nature of the human mind which is full of thoughts and feelings, into which no one else can penetrate. It is indeed the mystery of humans-the inside (thoughts) and the outside (actions) which can be either compatible or incompatible. That is to say, when one sees a person's external appearances and deeds, their perception or expectation may or may not be the same as the real attributes of that person. It takes some time to see the reality. For this particular point, the English saying *Don't judge the book by its cover* can explain this concept more helpfully. Jackson, too, completely understood this nature and attempted to portray it most concretely in her work.

Also, Jackson put herself in the story to voice her own concerns about this evil. This indirect way of inserting the personal views, according to Abraham Lass (1975, p. xviii), informs the reader of 'the relation in which

the narrator stands to the story'. From the story, it is quite apparent that Jackson was criticizing the lottery, the ritual that implants this evil into human mind more deeply. The tone of the description of this lethal ritual is critical though casual:

There was a great deal of fussing to be done before Mr. Summers declared the lottery open. There were the lists to make up-of heads of families, heads of households in each family, members of each household in each family. [...]; at one time, some people remembered, there had been a recital of some sort, performed by the official of the lottery, a perfunctory, tuneless chant that had been rattled off duly each year. (Cassill, 1978, p. 638)

Also, the tone embedded in the scene when the villagers are about to draw the slips of paper is dark and sinister:

The people had done it so many times that they only half listened to the directions; most of them were quiet, wetting their lips, not looking around. [...] They grinned at one another humorously and nervously.(Cassill, 1978, p. 640)

Like the power of the effaced narrator, **language** is the author's effective tool to tell the story and 'enhance his power to convince' (Cassill, 1978, p. 1402). In *The Lottery* Jackson employed certain types of words in order to generate particular meanings and moods and help color the story at the same time. To be specific, a number of words, especially those concerning the key components in the story such as the lottery, the villagers and the box, direct and enrich the meaning of darkness, mystery, blindness and terror. For instance, Mrs. Hutchinson is characterized with such sentimental words as *hurriedly*, *grinning*, *quietly*, *defiantly* and *desperately*. All of these are her epithets which suggest unrest and discomfort and foreshadow the

tragic end of her life. Mr. Summers is accompanied with words that reflect his rigidness such as *soberly*, *formally*, *precisely* and *interminably*. These are indeed words that denote stiff and blind faithfulness to the ritual. Emotional fragility is seen in Old Man Warner with the extensive use of words denoting anger, including *stoutly*, *petulantly* and *snorted*. The general villagers are not described peaceful either; they prefer to *gossip* and *murmur*, yet they are *humorless* and *nervous* at all times. The ritual lottery has negative connotations of outdatedness and decrepitude as it often comes with *original*, *tradition* and *necessary*. It even contains lifelessness and discomfort because it is *breathless*, *tuneless*, *fussing* and *perfunctory*. The box as the emblem of the ritual always looks old, mysterious and sinister. It is described as *original*, *for generations*, *wooden*, *black*, *faded*, *shabbier*, *stained* and *splintered*. In sum, all of the words mentioned above arouse the feelings and emotions of some sort of darkness and evil of the lottery and the people who take part in it. The high proportion of these words even intensifies the dark and sad climate of the story to a higher degree.

Selfishness as the Central Theme

When the meanings of these individual elements are interpreted in a holistic way, it is found that they all work towards the presentation of selfishness in indirect or, at times, symbolic manner. Strictly speaking, this village is completely stricken with selfishness, and it is *this* evil which holds and propels the story from the beginning to the end. Prior to illustrating this argument further, the concept of selfishness should be clarified here. According to psychologist Bud Harris (2002, p. 1), there are two main kinds of selfishness: one is destructive since 'its practitioners are emotionally hungry for power, starved for affirmation, and driven to use and impose on us for self-serving ends', and the other kind is sacred

for it is involved in ‘making the commitment to valuing ourselves and our lives enough to pursue the decision to become people of *substance*.’ With particular regard to the first kind, Luciano L’Abate and Margaret Baggett explain further that selfishness can be exhibited in various forms ranging from criminal behavior, narcissism, egoism, self-centeredness, and self-involvement (1997, p. 233).

It is then, in my view, correct to conclude that selfishness (excluding the sacred one in Harris’s theory) constitutes darkness, evil and mystery. First, selfishness is blind and dark because it imprisons people in the enclosed territory of their sole interests and benefits. When they are affected by it, they “have no eye for empathy, compassion and love”, as Joji Valli puts it (2016, p. 19). Second, it is definitely evil since it forces, either consciously or unconsciously, those affected to do harm or even destroy the one who obstructs their way to success in what they want to achieve. Last, selfish people are mysterious partly because their inner evil is not recognized until there is an impulse for them to reveal it, or partly due to their secret and evil plans to deceive others.

In *The Lottery*, readers can perceive all these three attributes of selfishness in its elements. To reiterate, the setting hints and foreshadows a trace of tragic irony in the way that the brilliance of summertime turns out to be dark, sorrowful and depriving in the end; the symbols of the ritual of lottery, the box and slips of paper suggest blind faithfulness and mystery that all of these things are deemed holy, unchallengeable and unchangeable; and the language helps convey all of these representations of darkness to the reader more vividly. As far as characterization is concerned, each of the characters is found to be narrow-minded, ignorant, self-preoccupied and cruel in their manners. To be more specific, for the general townsmen, some may think that

the ritual of lottery-not the villagers-is the primary cause of the tragedy of the story because they have to believe and follow the old traditions. It is often argued that this blind faith ruins their life as they have no other choice. The key question is: why such blind faith and obedience? And, what is the reason behind that? The belief that "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon" (Cassill, 1978, p. 641) indicates that they fear the decreased productivity of crop farms if the lottery is not held every year. This is in fact the fear of losing their own benefits, in my opinion. They are not worried about anyone who will be killed from this ritual; they are solely interested in their wealth and well-being. Their selfishness is even more apparent when they have no compassion toward the victim, nor do they praise his or her life sacrifice.

The selfishness of the important characters is diverse. The officials like Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves never initiate to change this ritual for the sake of their townsmen, but instead they seem to take much pride in serving as the authorities who guard and supervise it to ensure its success. Based on L'Abate and Baggett's concept, these characters possess self-centeredness, a form of selfishness, in the way that they secure their position in the village. Thus, they prefer not to terminate this ritual but maintain it; otherwise, they will lose their power and importance. According to the story, the other responsibilities rather than the supervision of the lottery of these two men are not mentioned at all. Likewise, the fear of losing authority in the village is afflicted in Old Man Warner. As the oldest man, he inherently assumes some power and involvement in directing the villagers. He makes all attempts to preserve the lottery because it is the only event in which his self can be recognized. Moreover, this man is also found impossible to change; he blindly believes in the ritual no matter how it causes death. From the social perspective, these three characters

are remarkable examples that demonstrate the interplay between selfishness and faith to old traditions as a form of selfish empowerment.

The most noticeable and cruel selfishness for modern readers may belong to Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson. As aforesaid, they are so evil and selfish that they fail, unexpectedly, to maintain their love for their own children when their lives are at risk of being killed. This point constitutes the greatest irony of humans that Jackson deliberately transformed into a humanly important theme which can be found anytime and anywhere. This irony gives even more startling effects when Mrs. Hutchison is stoned to death by her own selfishness. Her final words, 'It isn't fair, it isn't right', should remind readers that selfishness itself is not fair (Cassill, 1978, p. 644). It is not right.

As far as literary evaluation is concerned, *The Lottery* is exemplary of this genre. Based on the three dimensions that M. H. Abrams proposed (1988, pp. 39-40), *The Lottery* is replete with mimetic, pragmatic, expressive and objective values. First, the story depicts selfishness of people in realistic manner and in various dimensions. The kinds of the characters, the village, and the traditions in this fiction are the representations of the real ones which can still be found nowadays—*mimetic*. Second, it is quite apparent that this story gives the reader lessons that selfishness is destructive, and blind faithfulness to ancient traditions can be disadvantageous—*pragmatic*. The lesson is well presented in the denouement of the story when one of the selfish villagers is killed, and the other selfish villagers still have to participate in this lethal ritual again and again. That is to say, their inner fear will never be eradicated. Third, as discussed earlier, this story is told by the effaced narrator, that is, Jackson expressed her views from time to time. This narrative method enables the reader to know the author's stance, which, in turn, shapes the story and affects the understanding of

the reader–*expressive*. Selfishness of people for her was detrimental. Last, the analyses of individual intrinsic elements illustrate that all of them are well organized to manifest the irony of the story–*objective*. Indeed, each of the elements contains its own meaning and significance to the story, and when combined together, they become the organic unity that presents the overall meaning.

Discussion

The Lottery by Shirley Jackson is replete with both intrinsic and extrinsic values, so it should not be discarded from English classes in Thai education. Students will not only learn its linguistic and literary techniques which could be a good model for their own writing and other forms of communication, but they also have a good opportunity to investigate the reality of minds of people and society in this story. The particular emphasis on the latter benefit may help reduce the wide gap of Thai education system that is now paying less and less attention to the moral dimension of students. At least, it is hoped that reading *The Lottery* will enhance more consideration of themselves and the society they live in.

The other related important issue is the instruction of English literature in Thai universities. The problem indeed concerns directly with the method of teaching this subject. As witnessed in general, the current methods place too much emphasis on criticisms of extrinsic values of the work being studied; for example, its history, the author's biography and social impacts, without adequate basic comprehension of the work. The inevitable adverse consequences are students' lack of thorough understating and, at times, misunderstanding or even misinterpretation of the work. Thus, this current research also aimed to call for closer attention to the text, including its inherent elements for more effective learning and teaching. As an alternative, it is hoped that the New Criticism

approach will help students acquire a clearer and more detailed understanding of the text and meanwhile prepare them step by step for more advanced analysis and criticism. Not only might this literary approach reduce the problems concerning basic comprehension, but it will also engage them via such an in-depth investigation to the text to a larger degree.

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