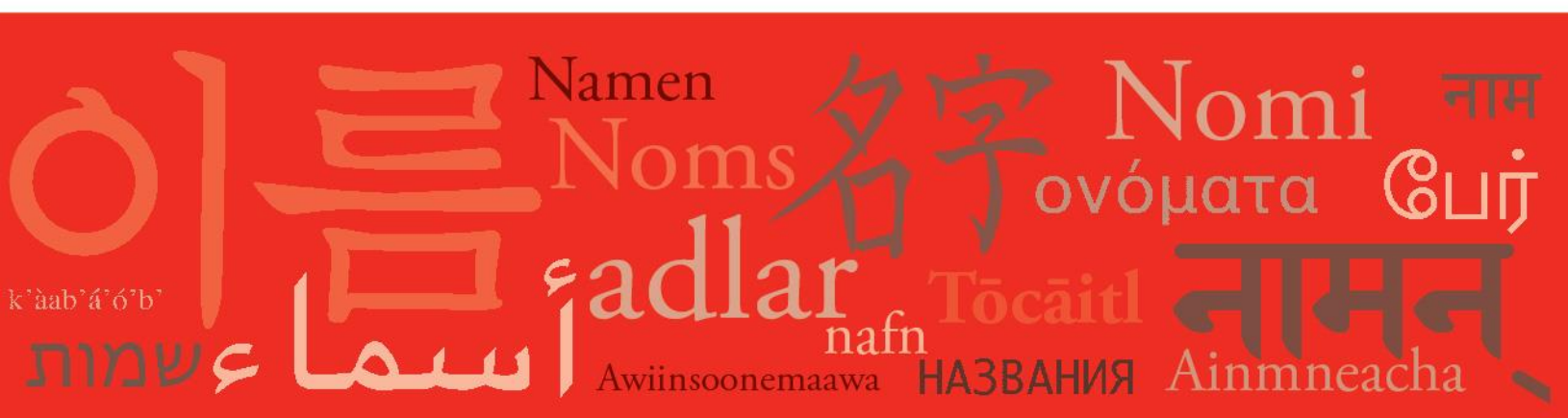


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The Essential Self of Natalie Waite in *Hangsaman* by Shirley Jackson

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Abstract

In light of a 2016 biography and 2020 feature film about writer Shirley Jackson, contemporary readers are rediscovering Jackson's work. One novel of interest is *Hangsaman* (1951). This is a book in motion, with shifting realities and narratives that are mirrored in the author's naming schemes. Moments of disorientation in *Hangsaman* originate in, and reflect, the inner life of protagonist Natalie Waite. There seem to be multiple *Natalies* who struggle at times to be whole, and at other times to be a different person entirely. Along with these vicissitudes in personality, the protagonist takes on variations on the name *Natalie*. At the point at which she is at the greatest risk of losing herself completely, Natalie adopts a new name, the gender-ambiguous *Tony*. Natalie is ultimately saved from slipping away and becoming *Tony* through the author's device of false starts, i.e., opportunities for characters to relive and rename events in a new light, in a different reality. Natalie's internal journey has been, all along, tracked by her public and private names.

Keywords: literary onomastics, *Hangsaman*, Shirley Jackson, Tarot, US fiction, Gothic novel

Shirley Jackson is the subject of a 2016 award-winning biography by Ruth Franklin, as well as the 2020 biographical film *Shirley*. Jackson's fiction is also back in readers' hands. Many people familiar with Jackson only know her short story "The Lottery," which appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1948 (Franklin 2016). *Hangsaman* was published three years later into a world expecting another "Lottery" (Rubenstein 1996). The critics' reception of *Hangsaman*, however, was mixed. Many reviewers found the book "too obscure" (Franklin 1996, 300) and "opaque" (Franklin 2016, 301). Others called it well-written and sharp (Franklin 2016, 301). A review in *The New York Times* sums up the mixed sentiments: "'Hangsaman' is a beautifully written and thoroughly exasperating novel" (Prescott 1951). Prescott even manages to malign the title by ignoring its reference to both an old English folk ballad and a Tarot card—two allusions that supply symbolic weight to the title. He instead scolds the word *Hangsaman* for being a nightmare for proofreaders. Ultimately, "[t]he first printing of *Hangsaman* did not sell out" (Franklin 2016, 303).

Renewed interest in this under-selling book from over 70 years ago may have been sparked in part by the film, which finds the Jackson character writing about a tragic real-life incident that is echoed in *Hangsaman*. In 1946, a Bennington College student, Paula Jean Weldon, went missing while hiking in the woods of Vermont (Robinson 2006). She was never found. Although there is no actual missing person in *Hangsaman*, protagonist Natalie Waite is a college student who becomes lost in varying realities. Natalie increasingly struggles with an emotional sense of displacement until she is almost "lost" to a more malicious version of herself, an alter-ego. *Natalie Waite* is indeed *waiting*, for reality to come into focus, to find her essential self.

Jackson signals Natalie's disorientation throughout the book with fluctuating names for the teen. Natalie is called (by others and by herself) variations of the name *Natalie*, rarely drifting too far away from her original name. Enough variation exists, however, to acknowledge an identity that is split into multiples. It is in the book's final section that Natalie is at the greatest risk of losing herself. And it is then that she adopts a totally new name, the gender-ambiguous *Tony*, along with a separate *Tony* persona. Natalie ultimately reaches the point at which she is forced to decide who to be. She embraces the *Natalie* identity (and name) and rejects *Tony*.

Natalie is a heroine "who struggle[s] with questions of identity at the most basic psychological levels" (Wilson & Wilson 2016, 7). When we first encounter Natalie, we are told that she became "truly conscious" only in the last two years. She now lives "in an odd corner of a world of sound and sight past the daily voices of" her parents (Jackson *Hangsaman* 1951, 3). In the recent past, Natalie had glimpsed another Natalie "from the corner of her eye" (3) and became suddenly free to live "completely by herself" (4). She is first young, then she is reborn, and then she is alone. Natalie seems to be the creator of her own reality-in-flux. She creates new and different versions of herself in her head. She admits to conceiving of her family as a figment of her imagination. She, herself, has created them only a short time ago. Later, she continues to unravel at college, and Natalie begins to see the campus as a world she has created, with houses she can casually dismantle. All the people are "small moveable dolls" (173) that she can manipulate, "violating all the inhabitants" residing on the land she has created (174). Her struggle with her own reality includes seeing herself as both creator and destroyer of others' realities as well. She is godlike.

Is Natalie suffering from a personality disorder, or does she have an overactive imagination? Or might something more supernatural be involved here? After all, Jackson is known as a horror writer, and her fiction often makes use of demon figures (Bonikowski 2013). Dobson (2016) adds the possibility that Natalie is instead suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder from a sexual assault in the woods near her home early in the book. Clearly, something is not right.

Shifting forces are present right from the start in the names that Natalie encounters at home in her family. It seems that names can be easily created and discarded in the Waite household. Natalie's mother, Mrs. Waite, for example, lacks a name for Mr. Waite, Natalie's father: "[I]n so many years she had not found a usable name for her husband" beyond the pronoun "you" (26). In fact, Mrs. Waite herself is never given a first name. Natalie, in contrast to her parents' onomastic shortage, is given multiple names. Her father, for example, labels and relabels her throughout the book. To Mr. Waite, she is addressed in person or through his letters sent to her as *Natalie, my child; Natalie, my dear; my daughter; my little daughter; daughter mine; and my dear captive princess*. All his names for her contain the first-person possessive pronoun. Can Natalie actually exist in any way independent of her father? In one of his letters to her, he writes, "Remember, too, that without you I could not exist: there can be no father without a daughter. You have thus a double responsibility, for my existence and your own. If you abandon me, you lose yourself" (118). This is a tall order for a college freshman and certainly complicates Natalie's search for her essential self. As part of this search, she keeps a diary in which she addresses yet another version of Natalie, one who is hers alone: "Dearest dearest darling most important dearest darling Natalie—this is me talking, your own priceless own Natalie" (71). If she rejects her own singleness and creates multiples, and perhaps loses herself, she can possibly also disobey her father's orders and dismantle his existence.

In addition to playing with naming schemes, Jackson amplifies the multiple realities of multiple names by making use at crucial moments of false starts or opportunities to "relive" an event in a new light (a different reality). In the Waite household, the days begin not when her parents, Natalie and her brother Bud sit down to breakfast together. It begins later, when Natalie enters her father's study to share her daily writing. There and then, they greet each other as if for the first time that day. Natalie's parents throw a party, and it too has an ambiguous start with the first guests, the Waites' neighbors Verna and her brother Arthur, arriving much too early. Verna and Arthur's presence signals the out-of-sync quality of the Waite existence, both out of time since these guests arrived before the party started, and out of place since Verna decides to sit on the lawn while the party was meant to be held inside.

Natalie travels home from college for Thanksgiving and experiences another false start. She acutely worries during the bus ride home how she and her father will greet each other. But Mr. Waite "had decided to do his real receiving of Natalie at some more appropriate time" (154), and his first words to her are from a conversation that seems already in progress. Despite a day and a half of interactions, Natalie never feels that the visit has begun. On her last hour home, though, she finds her father in his den. He greets her with "Natalie, my dear," and Natalie decides that "this is the real greeting" [158]. In other words, her visit only really begins once she steps back into her father's territory, his study. Mr. Waite controls place and time in that household. Natalie yearns to belong to her own existence and thus cuts short her trip to return to a place "less the exclusive property of her father, more the potential shining world of her own" (166), a world that she alone creates and controls.

For Natalie, even a birth is not a clearly delineated point in time. In fact, a do-over to correct past flaws might be the motivation for the Waites having had their two children. Natalie presumes that, in doling out their parental advice, "her father was trying to cure his failures in Natalie, and her mother perhaps trying to avoid, through Natalie, doing over again those things she now believed to have been mistaken" (164). Natalie's real birth (and essential start), then, might well have happened when she herself chose it to happen, in the recent past before the book begins. A crucial chance for revision happens the morning after Natalie is the victim of a sexual assault. At her parents' party, she meets and willingly follows an unnamed male guest into the nearby woods. Natalie has just proclaimed herself "wonderful" (40) to this stranger, a statement he takes as an invitation to lead her into the nearby woods and rape her. As she moves farther from her house, Natalie distances herself from the scene and views the man from another angle with another *Natalie*, as if what is happening is not happening to *this* Natalie. But some Natalie is indeed raped. The next morning, when Natalie wakes, she attempts to redo (or undo) the scene by suddenly being older, speeding up time: "Someday, she thought, it will be gone. Someday I'll be sixty years old, sixty-seven, eighty" (43-44). If Natalie does not give the rape a name, it did not take place. Or if an assault did happen, she will rename the victim as a third-person *Natalie*; it happened to another *Natalie*, or to a *Natalie* in the distant past. And since we never learn the name of the assailant, to Natalie his existence can also be in doubt.

Natalie experiences “moments of surreal contemplation of one’s own name and the awareness of the power of words” (Wilson & Wilson 2016: 7). In *Hangsaman*, the most overt connection between naming and reality is actually made by that early party guest, neighbor Verna. Verna boldly states out of nowhere to Natalie, “My name used to be Edith” (28). What follows is a long list of what *Edith* would not have been allowed to do or be as *Edith*, hence the need for the change to *Verna*. In contrast, Verna’s brother “Arthur wouldn’t change his name,” says Verna, disparagingly. “Little beast” (28). Natalie is being warned to be more like *Verna*, less like *Arthur*: “[N]ever rest until you have uncovered your essential self,” (29) advises Verna. In response, Natalie tells Verna, “I’ve often wanted to change my name,” but, Jackson adds, “untruthfully” (29). Since there is more than one *Natalie*, how untruthful might this statement actually be? A part of Natalie might be impressed with the idea of a totally new name, a chance to move further from herself than she has so far dared. Verna and Arthur starkly lay out different courses of action available to Natalie: change and thrive or remain as is and stagnate (or even suffer). Verna (the changer) in this case seems more alive than does distant Arthur, who never speaks or interacts with Natalie at all. The name *Arthur*, it should be noted, is reused later on as the first name of Natalie’s English professor Arthur Langdon. Jackson seems to suggest that, in Natalie’s world, a name that is not fully embraced can be repurposed for another, as if people can lose their names if they do not embody them properly.

Natalie has not yet embraced her own oneness. Is this a failure on her part or a survival technique? Does Natalie actually want a single identity? It seems she does. After all, the times when she finds herself in a liminal space, at the mercy of conflicting forces, she is unsettled. She prefers to be firmly in a space she controls. Otherwise, her identity unravels. Natalie, apparently aware of this disintegration, thinks to herself, “This is a party and I’m here already and I must remember that my name is Natalie” (27). Early on, Natalie befriends the wife of her English professor. She is invited to their home and there, Natalie experiences another reality-unravelling confusion about what can be said, what can exist in the professor’s house compared to in the outside world. At first Natalie is disoriented by being in the house with Mrs. Langdon. Natalie soon resolves the confusion this way: “The only solution was to lift the whole situation into a never-never land” (78). If new rules can be created for this new room and this new Natalie, she might well thrive. Eventually during that first visit with Mrs. Langdon, “something vague solidified within Natalie [...] so that she became less of a meek and submissive personality” (87). Eventually the Langdon house becomes the only place besides her childhood home “where everybody knows my name” (111). Natalie has made this couple’s home a part of her own kingdom. It is one of the places where she can be in touch with her essential self. The onomastic certainty she experiences there is in stark contrast to the scene in which she visits Mr. Langdon in his office at the college. Natalie is convinced that he will not remember her name to his wife that night: who was that student again? “Natalie? Helen? Joan?” (101). On the campus, she cannot rely on being her essential self.

Natalie’s world, with its existence-in-flux, comprises others with names similarly in-flux. Natalie takes a class “named” philosophy, taught by a **Mr.** Desmond: *Professor* by ambition, “although his thesis – ‘The Probable Intention of the Subjunctive in Plato’ – had not yet found a completion” (72). This **Mr.** is almost an academic doctor, and he is working, fittingly enough, on the probable and improbable, the subjunctive and conditional. Mr. Desmond is waiting, too. He also needs to end his existence in-flux in order to be complete. Mr. Desmond only makes one appearance, but he shows that Natalie is not alone in her waiting state. The names of several of Natalie’s fellow students also do not seem settled: for example, “the girl with bangs whose name might have been Winnie Williams” (97). And one student continues to call Natalie “Helen” (98). What does seem settled is the solid front of a pair of students called *Vicki* and *Anne*. These two are more securely named than *Winnie* or *Helen*, yet they always appear in tandem, as a unit and indistinguishable. They live together, in merged dorm rooms, and each year they spend the summer together on an island that one of the families owns. Others are confused by the name of this island – “It’s named something like Bide-A-Wee or Dew Drop Inn or Joe’s Place” – but the *Vicki/Anne* unit does not play name games: ‘Shangri-La,’ said Vicki coolly. ‘I didn’t name it’” (91).

The college offers up completely unnamed agents as well: a sleepwalker with no name; an unidentified thief (never caught); and seniors, in masks to disguise their identities, who haze the new students their first night. Girls at college tell stories of impersonations: tricks in which someone pretends to be a girl’s date, or mother, or the sender of an official invitation. These tricks lead to disorientation and suffering. Even the choice of cocktail at academic parties brings a confusing name to Natalie’s world. In a letter to her father, Natalie mentions the name of a drink she never heard of: *the martini*. “What do you suppose the name means? I know the names of most drinks have no sense to them anyway, but this one sounds like it had been named after someone; do you suppose he could have been a college president?” (126). Naming is crucial right from the first day at college. When Natalie is “called upon to name herself”

(169) during the hazing, “[s]he gave her name [but] (*was* it her name?)” (61). Ironically, Natalie tends to reject names that are straightforward and transparent. For example, the college is “located, with singular lack of imagination, on School Street” (182); Bridge Street leads to “with [an] odd literal quality” (182) a bridge crossing a river. Natalie finds these names are *too* literal, not the true names that would best define their essence. Perhaps a *School Street* with a school and a *Bridge Street* with a bridge are the equivalent of Verna’s brother *Arthur*: they are lacking personality and distinction, and they are merely placeholders rather than real names. That will not do for Natalie.

The potential dire consequences of unsettled naming are reinforced for Natalie in her encounters with Mrs. Langdon. Once a student herself, Mrs. Langdon is now a faculty wife, living in an unstable onomastic world. At times she is *Lizzie* to those who remember her as a student at the college. She is *Elizabeth* to Natalie in the Langdon home and *Mrs. Langdon* when encountered on the campus. Elizabeth herself is aware that, by marrying her professor, she has crossed a threshold and entered a new reality with onomastic consequences. For example, the biology teacher and his wife are *Mr. and Mrs. Watson* before she marries Arthur Langdon, and then *Carl and Laura* to her afterwards. How will Natalie ultimately resolve her current existence with multiple names? Elizabeth does not offer a positive role model; she tries to kill herself three times. Who in this world does possess the right name? Party guest Verna has successfully changed names; Verna’s brother Arthur doesn’t bother and loses his name to another character; and Elizabeth makes a mess of it all. How will Natalie ultimately resolve her current existence with multiple names?

It is tempting to ask how much Natalie resembles Jackson. Krafft (2015) finds connections between the early life of Jackson and her protagonist. Young Shirley Jackson was like many other mid-century US women who found it hard to breathe and create in the roles of homemakers and mothers. The challenge for women like Jackson was to be the creator of something outside of the home. Franklin’s biography of Jackson details a hostile mother-daughter relationship. Shirley and her mother were not close, and mother was highly critical of daughter. Shirley’s father was also unsupportive but more by his silence compared to the mother and her biting judgments (Franklin 2016). In Natalie’s case, Mr. Waite critiques every word of the daily writing he assigns his daughter; Mrs. Waite barely acknowledges Natalie at all. Franklin notes several times that Jackson’s mother was less proud of her daughter’s literary success and more critical of her housekeeping skills and weight gain. In fact, Natalie *Waite* could also be a sly reference to a young woman’s distorted sense of her own body (Rubenstein 1996), either not having the heft of reality or being too weighed down by multiple ones.

Jackson suffered later in life from extreme anxiety and agoraphobia and needed therapy to make it out of her house (Franklin 2016; Hague 2005). Natalie also spends days alone in her dorm room. As the book progresses, Natalie’s unravelling starts to accelerate, and at one point she breaks down in a kind of orthographic nightmare. She appears to wake up in a hospital room now as *Waitalie Nat* (150) and then *Watalie Naite* and *Naitalie Wat* (151). Ultimately, she arrives at “the frightful conviction, of perhaps being in reality no more than Natalie Waite, college girl, daughter of Arnold” (152). Of all the versions of Natalie, the one directly linked to her father’s existence has the worst outcome. She does not want to live as **that Natalie Waite**. “It was this [thought] that made her write her name crazily on everything, knowing and yet forgetting that her books and her clothes and her written sheets of paper would be gone with Natalie Waite, were only a part of a larger dream” (151). Something is coming to a head, and the tenuous hold Natalie has had on her essential self must finally be resolved. She heads back to college, and to *Tony*.

For it is now that Tony appears. Natalie first mentions this out-of-nowhere “student” in a letter to her father as a “Tony Something” (138), someone interesting to know, who Natalie ultimately finds “terribly interesting” (150). Tony is female, a student at the college, and fascinating to Natalie. But is she real or another part of Natalie? Tony first appears at the end of another nightmare or hallucination. Natalie is being led on a fruitless midnight search for a “little girl” who is always just out of sight. In this dream-state, Natalie refers to plural *Natalies* and to herself as *we*. At the end of the episode, she finds herself barefoot and outside. She is then greeted by Tony: “‘Is there something wrong?’ asked the girl Tony.” (143). Tony is what Natalie is searching for. Tony promises to fix whatever is wrong with Natalie. Later, Tony is there again to greet (and save) Natalie in a scene set at a crowded party at the Langdon house. Natalie is struggling in that liminal space that she cannot tolerate because it does not contain her essential self. “Natalie sought hopefully for [...] the little swift precious moment that slipped her from a dull world into a bright one” [144]. After several fantasized attempts to leave the party, she is finally “directed to stand up” [146] (by Tony?) and go. Outside among the trees, one tree in particular “disengage[es] itself from the others and com[es] toward Natalie” (148). It is Tony, who had not been invited into the party. Tony only goes “‘where I [am] invited to go’” [148]. Yet with Tony and Natalie, it is unclear who invites and controls whom. Now that Tony

is more present in Natalie's life, the tension of singular vs. multiple is actually greater than before: "It was not pleasant sitting on the porch after Tony had gone; a spot where two people have been talking, however briefly, is not after that a spot for one person to sit alone" [149]. Natalie is in a reality that has become even less stable: she is on the edge of permanent madness.

While one can make much of Tony being a gender-ambiguous name for a woman, there is a parallel in Jackson's biography. Jackson's husband before they were married had designs on "an older woman named Tony" (Franklin 2016, 115). Here we have yet another author-protagonist connection. There is also a parallel in her fiction: Jackson makes use several times in her books of the demon lover trope, a figure (usually male) who mesmerizes and seduces victims and then leads them to their demise (Bonikowski 2013). The male demon lover candidates are multiple in *Hangsaman*: Mr. Waite, with his tight grip on Natalie; a recurring imaginary detective questioning Natalie about a murder; the rapist at the party; and now *Tony*. In the original draft of *Hangsaman*, the Tony character was in fact a male demon (Bonikowski 2013). The transition of Natalie to this *Tony*, though, might actually be harder for her to resist.

In this last section of the novel, with Tony a constant presence, Jackson intensifies supernatural and sinister imagery of fantasy and magic. Natalie and Tony spend a day together, and they recite lines from a Lewis Carroll poem from *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. They also make much of a deck of Tarot cards. Jackson highlights the thin veil between one and multiple, Natalie and Tony, in several ways here. At one point, Natalie muses about owning a deck of cards with the same, single image on every card. She asks Tony if such a thing is possible. "Someday," Tony said vaguely" (179). Tony repurposes the Tarot cards to play solitaire, although she complains that it is a dissatisfying deck with which to do so; she can never tell whether her "solitaire comes out or not" (178). They each have a favorite Tarot card. Tony's is the Page of Swords, a card that has also been interpreted as the Princess (one of Mr. Waite's names for Natalie) and the Watchman. These are both figures who aid communication by exchanging messages between hostile parties (www.tarot.com). Indeed, those warring factions within Natalie herself could be aided by liaison Tony. Natalie's favorite card is the Magician. She believes that she resembles the image on the card, yet another representation of her "self." And as a magician, she can magically conjure up illusions that seem real. She is, after all, conjuring Tony.

The Tarot card meanings are open to interpretation, and Jackson knew her Tarot. It seems likely that she also knew a specific guide to the Tarot written by Arthur E. Waite (Franklin 2016), given that his name echoes both that of Natalie's professor, *Arthur Langdon* and her father's, *Arnold Waite*. The Hanged Man is a prominent card in the Tarot deck, and as with the Tarot in general, it can be viewed in more than one way: right-side up or upside down (Franklin 2016). Apparently, it is very tempting to reverse this particular card, and by doing so transform death into salvation. This switching of perspectives and fates is something Natalie has experienced several times. A fate-in-the-balance is most crucially signaled by the title *Hangsaman* itself. It is a term that occurs in the old English folk ballad *The Maiden on the Gallows* (Urcia 1966) and quite possibly influenced Jackson's choice of title. The refrain of the ballad varies across different versions, but always refers to a hangman, hanger-man, or hangs-a-man (Urcia, 1966). The ballad presents the story of a young woman who is about to be hanged, visited by others in her life who might be able to save her. In some versions of the ballad, the woman lives, and in others she dies (Urcia 1966). Which fate will be Natalie's? And who is the force making the decision?

As Natalie and Tony wander through town, in tandem, they enter a coffee shop and sit side-by-side to look at themselves reflected in a mirror: "Natalie, on the right (the one on the right *was* Natalie?) [...] "Tony, (on the left?)" (186). Right and left in mirror images can be easily confused; so too can Natalie and Tony in their day alone together. Finally, Tony becomes the force who decides to head toward a place where "no one can trouble us" (199), where no one would know, care about, or remember their names. Tony promises that it is a place to resolve tension and fix wrongs. On the bus out of town, Natalie believes all the riders are actually doubles of the people she encountered earlier, emphasizing the distorted reality of mirror images. Natalie and Tony ride to the end of the line and debark, despite the driver's warning of "Change your mind?" and "Last chance?" (206). Soon, Tony leads Natalie, still willing but now on alert, into the woods. Tony is soon pulling Natalie into a place with "deep natural darkness which comes from a forsaking of natural light" (209). Natalie finally realizes that Tony is no ally but instead her antagonist, her enemy, her demon. Unlike her assault in the woods at the start of the book, in this woods, Natalie is alone physically but divided onomastically. The stakes are higher this time if what Tony intends for Natalie is death or madness.

It is here that Jackson quotes the lines of a second folk ballad: "*One is one and all alone and evermore will be so*" (214) from the first stanza of *Green Grow the Rushes, O* (www.musicanet.org). This lyric already appeared during one of several interrogations that Natalie has with an unnamed detective.

Whether in psychotic episodes or daydreams, Natalie drifts at various moments into dialogue with a detective as he questions her about a murder: a body was found, there was a knife, and she is the main suspect. Tellingly, she cannot answer the detective when he asks for her name. Natalie only knows that she is an *I*, which is also the only name that we can all claim. In these episodes, she is nameless, but she is also a *one*, an *everyone*. In the various detective scenes, in fact, Natalie is really both the interrogator and interrogated. She is in control, creating potential narratives for potential *Natalies* (Dobson, 2016). Jackson again quotes the line from *Green Grow the Rushes, O* -- “*One is one and all alone and evermore will be so*” - when Natalie is being led into the woods by the predator from her parents’ party. She survives then by creating a duplicate Natalie. The lines reappear now, in this wooded area with Tony.

This time, however, along this path, Natalie is able to become her essential self, and whole enough to break away. “I will not,” said Natalie, and ripped herself away” from Tony (214). Thus, the singular vs. multiple tension finally resolves into one Natalie, who can this time back away from the woods, the trees, the gallows and the hangman. “She had defeated her own enemy” (215). As she returns to “[t]he reassuring bulk of the college buildings [...] she was now alone, and grown-up, and powerful, and not at all afraid” (218). Natalie has been allowed to recreate and reverse that first traumatic reality in the woods. This time, she is stronger than the demon, even though this time the demon is a part of herself. She can break the seductive trance that Tony had induced. She can now defeat Tony. Natalie has rescued her essential self.

We are left wondering, though, if this is yet another one of Jackson’s false beginnings for Natalie. With the Tarot’s Hanged Man, after all, “the compulsion to turn the card so that the man is right-side up is virtually irresistible” (Franklin 2016, 291). Natalie is right-side up at the moment, grounded instead of hanged. But the reversal might come without warning. Which version of the card will be played next? As she defeats Tony and escapes from the woods to make her way back to the reassurance of the college and her fearless self, she utters these words: “What did I do wrong?” (215) Which scenario of *The Maid on the Gallows* will “come out,” like Tony’s solitaire with the Tarot cards: alive or hanged? *Tony* might be banished, but *Natalie* is still her own creator and destroyer. What name will Natalie create or destroy next?

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Notes on the Contributor

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