

Thomsen argues that the compulsion to be visible actively misrepresents the lives and communities of queer people whose relationships to their queerness do not conform to the kind of being queer that counts as being visible. In Thomsen's assessment, visibility is a strategy for limiting the complexity of queerness. In the pursuit of normative visibility, articulations of sexual difference serve to make queer people into a repetition of a heterosexual with the difference of identification. Visibility discourses turn queerness into a nonthreatening variation on the expectation of cis-heterosexuality rather than an orientation premised on refusing the inequitable distribution of resources in accordance with sexual, gender, and racial norms.

Taken together, these books encourage their readers to revisit how both the nominal mainstream support and punitive targeting of queer people have been used to reinforce systemic inequality. Visibility, as Thomsen explores, assumes the possibility and benefit of a single, collective understanding of queerness. And yet, as Lvovsky makes clear, queer life and its relationship with regulatory systems have long been animated by disagreements about what queerness is, and how queer people engage with public life. As these books demonstrate, it is not visibility but rather the opacity of queerness that has been most useful to queer people. Both Lvovsky and Thomsen speculate about some of the many ways this queer opacity has manifested, largely among white queers in the US. Thomsen especially considers how "collective queer political action" might begin from a place of opacity.⁴ The question of how all people marginalized by norms of racialized gender and sexuality can advocate collectively without assuming equal or shared experiences of marginalization and without mandating visibility has been and continues to be the animating question of queer coalition politics.

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Laurence Jackson Hyman (ed.) in consultation with Bernice M. Murphy, *The Letters of Shirley Jackson* (New York: Random House, 2021, \$35.00). Pp. 672. ISBN 05139 34641.

Laurence Hyman has selected some three hundred letters written by his mother (some abridged but most intact) to some twenty recipients. Jackson wrote an enormous number of letters, often at some length, though there are large gaps in the chronology where letters are no longer extant. As Bernice Murphy notes (in a first-rate introduction), some of her friendships were entirely epistolary. While some of her letters are run-of-the-mill, others are little works of art in their own right, rather than merely resources for understanding their author (or indeed other writers whom she knew well.) As Murphy suggests, Jackson was originally overlooked as a serious writer because she avoided conventional genre categories. While her novels are now regarded as Gothic classics, she also wrote two hundred short stories, plays and comic tales of motherhood (the forerunner of today's "mommy blogs") which were a staple of women's magazines. Her reputation has soared since her death, with two monographs,

⁴ On "queer opacity" see Nicholas de Villiers, *Opacity and the Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Barthes, and Warhol* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

a biography, the selection for the Library of America, several collections of essays, a plethora of journal articles, two volumes of unpublished or uncollected works, plays, a ballet, films, television series and a graphic adaptation of "The Lottery." The letters here begin in 1938 and continue until a week before her death in 1965. The volume is also liberally illustrated with a selection of her own cartoons, provided by her son Barry, who trawled through the eight hundred available in the Library of Congress. Many are sharply satirical at the expense of her husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman, notoriously unfaithful, apparently handless in the kitchen, a nondriver in rural Vermont and often portrayed here with his feet up. In contrast, merely reading about Jackson's activities is exhausting.

In three weeks in 1958, she wrote a children's play, three short stories and a third of *The Haunting of Hill House*, which she finished while unable to move because of a back injury. All this while wrangling four children and a Great Dane. The major breadwinner, she is frank about her money worries. In one week in winter the septic tank clogs, the plumbing gives up and the boiler dies, while one child has a brush with tetanus. As an image of the life of a working mother in the 1950s, and of the print culture of that decade, the letters are invaluable. What is not so valuable is the first chapter, dominated by love letters to Hyman. Fervent, needy and besotted, and also much occupied with the minutiae of living at home with her parents, these letters turned the current reviewer into a curmudgeon. Jackson wrote to her parents all her life and they frequently bailed out the improvident family, but there were tensions. Her father (ardently anticommunist) forbade her to read *The Grapes of Wrath*, formed a citizens' committee which compiled lists of names and addresses of local communists, and opposed her marriage to Hyman (Jewish and left-wing).

Ironically, Stanley insisted that her parents save all her letters for posterity, hence the large number reproduced here. Letters to her closest friends are, however, few and far between – for example, Ralph Ellison who wrote *Invisible Man* in her living room, helped her move house by driving the dog on his knee, and assisted her in drinking castor oil and cream soda to induce labour (before realizing that she was not quite seven months pregnant.) Jackson had a real gift for friendship and numbered many literary figures among her friends (Bernard Malamud, Howard Nemerov, Langston Hughes and Kenneth Burke, for example.) Others have walk-on parts: Dylan Thomas came to dinner. Unfortunately, the volume has no index, though it is well annotated. The love letters are also difficult to read because they are largely unpunctuated. Jackson wrote in lowercase, overlapping words and inventing others, and her son reproduces the letters just as she wrote them. This may be authentically spontaneous and playful, but 150 pages of it is a tall order for the reader.

Jackson knew that she often wrote stories primarily for money and Hyman discouraged her more literary works in favour of the immediately remunerative. He refused a college teaching post because he only wanted to work in alternate years. Some stories sold like hot cakes. The government ordered 1,500 copies of *The Lottery and Other Stories* to go into all army and navy libraries. In 1949 her stories about children sold so well that they paid off ten years of accumulated debts. A contract with *Good Housekeeping* for eight stories a year and \$15,000 every three months was a game changer. Jackson nevertheless stuck to her literary guns (six novels), while also spending time on poker, bridge, cocktail parties, listening to bullfight music, attending baseball games and coping with hordes of houseguests. She was extremely versatile. While researching poltergeists for her fiction, she also contributed to a lighthearted book about new babies and their mothers. Many of her letters are extremely funny,

with a gift for well-shaped anecdotes and for perceiving the uncanny in the everyday. She had no shortage of material – from the “help” in the house who went suddenly insane in the middle of the night, to lunatic letters from fans, the pretensions of Hollywood directors (she refused to write a film for Lucille Ball), and the ins and outs of sixteen-year-old Laurence’s career as a jazz musician. Her insights into her own novels are fascinating and her accounts of the agoraphobia and depression of her later years unflinching. She wrote only three sharp letters, one to an uninvited guest who stayed for six hours, one asking her mother to cease commenting adversely on her appearance, and one to her husband reproaching him for belittling her continually and undermining her literary career. Alas, only the first letter was actually sent.

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Jessica R. Feldman, *Saul Steinberg’s Literary Journeys: Nabokov, Joyce, and Others* (Charlottesville and London: Virginia University Press, 2021, \$39.95). Pp. 322. ISBN 978 0 8139 4511 8.

A full-length monograph on the work of the artist Saul Steinberg is a welcome arrival. “The art world doesn’t quite know where to place me,” Steinberg once commented, and his vast *oeuvre* of line drawings, paintings and mixed-media assemblages has been accordingly understudied.¹ Steinberg confounded many of the categories by which the cultural field of the post-1945 US art scene was organized: he was an experimentalist in the modernist tradition and a successful commercial artist, one who drew cartoons for the *New Yorker* but also exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art. He also referred to himself as “a writer who can’t write” (33). This last enigma provides the starting point for Jessica R. Feldman’s *Saul Steinberg’s Literary Journeys*, which approaches his works as one might a literary text, teasing out the meanings of Steinberg’s literariness. In doing so, it reads Steinberg alongside two of his favourite authors, Vladimir Nabokov and James Joyce, identifying common ground between them: the mobilization of parody and spatial imagination. The case of the Nabokov connection is given extra weight by the fact that the two became good friends, after they both published regularly in the *New Yorker* in the late 1940s and circulated in the East Coast émigré intellectual community. They held a literary canon in common, comprising Gogol, Flaubert, and Joyce, and admired one another’s work. “A mind like his,” reported Steinberg of Nabokov in one letter, “serious and playful, is a rarity” (14). Steinberg never met Joyce, by contrast, but we know that he read him first in the 1940s after his emigration to the United States and did so periodically for the remainder of his life. In his own words, Steinberg “took confidence” from Joyce’s use of “the power of the microscopic elements” of his own biography, and from his ability “to do what he wants and still be great and magnificent.” By placing Steinberg in dialogue with these two novelists, Feldman shows how their deployments of parody and the spatial organization of their imaginations function across and between text and image, creating constellations of influence and mutual illumination.

¹ Jean vanden Heuvel, “Straight from the Hand and Mouth of Steinberg,” *Life*, 10 Dec. 1965, 66.