***Shirley Jackson: A Companion*, ed. by Kristopher Woofter**
(Peter Lang, 2021)

It was once *de rigueur* to start every critical piece about Shirley Jackson (1916-65) with the then sad truth that Jackson was not given her critical due and deserved greater attention. Happily, this is no longer the case, and the edited collection *Shirley Jackson: A Companion* joins other recent critical work signalling this change in Jackson's literary status. As editor Kristopher Woofter states in the Introduction to this collection, the 'primary objective is to offer a comprehensive critical engagement of Jackson's work, inclusive of those texts that have received less scholarly attention' (p. 11). It is therefore heartening that the collection opens with Jackson biographer Ruth Franklin drawing attention to Jackson's academic work, particularly an essay she wrote for college about Ernest Hemingway. Jackson criticism has yet to adequately explore her position as a reader and writer within a wider intellectual community, so Franklin's foregrounding of this element sets the stage for a collection that attempts to take a broad approach to a wide variety of Jackson's writings. It is also heartening that Woofter's Introduction focuses on Jackson's unfinished novel *Come Along With Me* (1968) and its only adaptation, which was produced for the PBS television anthology series American Playhouse in 1982. Both texts could use more critical attention, and this Introduction is a welcome start that also usefully frames the content that follows.

However, though this collection attempts to invite many different perspectives and approaches to Jackson's work, the result is a little uneven. There are some very strong pieces here that add much-needed analysis to the critical landscape, some even approaching what are often well-trod topics in Jackson criticism from completely new directions. For example, houses are a common critical focus, often explored in repetitive ways, but there are some pieces here that reinvigorate this topic. Luke Reid's chapter, 'Romancing the Nostalgic Future: Prophecy, Planning, and Postwar Architecture in *The Sundial*', builds from previous critical work by Darryl Hattenhauer and Richard Pascal to read the apocalyptic imagination in this novel through postwar planning and design, with some discussion of race and class (though Reid could have gone further in discussing both). Dara Downey's chapter, '"No One Can Ever Find Me": Gingerbread Houses in Shirley Jackson's Fiction', covers how Jackson's engagement with gingerbread houses and witch imagery comments on the interplay of private space and public intolerance of non-conforming women in postwar America. Similarly, Rebecca Stone Gordon's chapter on Theodora in *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) shifts the

focus of how critics usually approach characterisation in the novel, because '[t]o center Theo is to queer the text and to highlight how she represents the possibility of a fulfilling life outside dominant cultural norms' (p. 220). Carl H. Sederholm provides a much-needed extension of the existing literature on the intersection of Jackson's work with Stephen King's, an area that still requires further examination, as King has been very vocal about being a Jackson fan (see, for example, his dedication in *Firestarter* (1980) or his discussion of her work in *Danse Macabre* (1981)). However, Sederholm centres King's writing in the discussion, particularly the way King 'brings Jackson into his larger fictional project' (p. 67). It would be useful in general to have more work on the two authors that centres Jackson in the discussion, though any critical exploration of the textual relationship between Jackson and King is welcome.

Some of the strongest entries here cover texts or topics that have not been explored before, such as Daniel Kasper's analysis of editorial authority and the authorial voice in the two posthumously published versions of 'The Honeymoon of Mrs Smith' (1996), including a much-needed close reading of the texts. Kasper also explores class within the stories, a topic that needs more attention in Jackson criticism. The final section of the collection covers adaptations, and Will Dodson's chapter on *Lizzie*, the 1957 film adaptation of *The Bird's Nest* (1954), and Woofter's own discussion of the 1997 Hungarian adaptation of Jackson's short story 'The Bus' (1965) are real standouts. Michelle Kay Hansen's chapter on Jackson's cartoons, which to the best of my knowledge have never been approached critically before, is perhaps the most exciting entry, in my opinion. Hansen explores how Jackson's sparse-yet-lively cartoons betray both a desire for expression and a fragmenting of the self that were common characteristics of the plight of middle-class white women in postwar America. Stephanie Graves's 'Wicked Creature(s): Delirium and Difference in *The Witchcraft of Salem Village*' is the first piece of criticism I know of that focuses primarily on Jackson's 1956 history book for young readers, placing it within its publishing context and showing how Jackson's approach undermines the status quo of both the book series of which it is a part and standard readings of the Salem Witch 'hysteria'.

Graves's chapter also takes a personal approach, which is used sparingly and works well, situating Graves within the audience for the text as she tells of her personal interaction with the book as a young reader. There is another personal essay in this collection, Rebecca Million's 'Living an Aporia: Notes on Shirley Jackson's Home Books and the Impossible-Possible of Motherhood', that is not as effective at bringing the personal into the critical, for two main reasons. The first reason is a lack of enough textual evidence to back up certain claims, for example the assertion that 'it is difficult to locate the subject in Jackson's stories of

family life' (p. 161). Including some quotations from Jackson's writings immediately after might have helped to support this statement, particularly because Jackson herself carefully constructed a narrative 'I' that was intentionally distant from her fictionalised persona. The second reason is that the personal, when applied generally, can be problematically limiting. For example, Million describes the labour of childbirth as 'that moment where the woman is more fully embodied that [*sic*] at any other time in her life' (p. 164), a statement that denies the embodied experiences of many women who choose not to or cannot give birth, as well as people who give birth that are not women. With a more academic framework and more evidence, this essay could have retained the personal focus while better bolstering its own assertions.

There is a plethora of other pieces in this collection, too many to discuss in detail. Some are interesting and useful, while others are less successful at approaching common themes in Jackson criticism in fresh ways, including a few that completely neglect to engage with the existing critical history and attempt to reinvent the wheel. Some chapters lean so heavily on theory that they fail to present enough textual evidence from Jackson's work to support their theses. However, there is such variety here that the high points make the volume worth the attention of any Jackson scholar. Additionally, like other volumes in the Peter Lang *Genre Fiction and Film Companions* series (edited by Simon Bacon), the volume is visually interesting, with full-colour illustrations, including some of Jackson's previously unpublished cartoons, stills from adaptations, and a reproduction of the cover of *The Witchcraft of Salem Village*. A summary of the main topics of each chapter runs down the side of each page for easier searching. In all, this is a welcome addition to Jackson criticism that should be incredibly useful for Jackson scholars, while also offering pieces that general readers would appreciate.

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