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*Visibility Interrupted: Rural Queer Life and the Politics of
Unbecoming* by Carly Thomsen (review)

Shelby E. E. Vitkus

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tween Native Americans who try to keep alive the old ways and the younger generation scoffing at what they see as nonsense. Whether it is Indigenous Natives in North Dakota suffering exploitation or the struggle of Harold Peavey to stick to his beliefs in spite of reckonings, Eller's chapters conjured up this reader's tears and venom.

Eller, the author of numerous published short stories, is a storyteller, a Bard of the Badlands, but no mere regionalist. He writes with an angry scowl, then softens his narrative with snicker after snicker. This novel demonstrates Eller's justified anger in the tradition of two masters of the revolt-and-search motif, Edward Abbey and Kurt Vonnegut.

Hank Nuwer, emeritus
Franklin College (Indiana)

WORK CITED

Westbrook, Max. "The Themes of Western Fiction." *Southwest Review*, vol. 43, no. 3, 1958, pp. 232–38, www.jstor.org/stable/43470857.

Carly Thomsen, *Visibility Interrupted: Rural Queer Life and the Politics of Unbecoming*. Minnesota: U of Minnesota P, 2021. 213 pp. Paper, \$25.

Rural America has long been depicted as a region unreceptive and hostile to queer individuals. In popular culture those who occupy rural communities are frequently imagined as repressed, subject to violence, and longing to relocate to urban areas unencumbered by homophobia. In *Visibility Interrupted: Rural Queer Life and the Politics of Unbecoming*, Carly Thomsen challenges such metronormative conceptions of place and argues against promoting visibility discourses as necessarily progressive. As the first book on LGBTQ women in the rural Midwest, *Visibility Interrupted* draws on interviews with LGBTQ women in rural South Dakota and Minnesota to question "what [we can] learn from those who are imagined as out of place in rural America but choose to live there, and even claim that they feel happy, content, welcome, and supported by their neighbors" (ix). Thomsen encourages readers to reevaluate their

metronormative assumptions about rural queer life in an effort to “deconstruct the cultural templates that construct the rural, the queer, and the rural queer” (liii).

As one of two queer studies scholars focused on visibility politics and rural queer life, Thomsen diverges from Mary Gray by explicitly emphasizing LGBTQ women’s experiences in the upper rural Midwest; in fact, her text fills a notable gap in scholarship as the first book focused explicitly on this demographic. Thomsen’s analysis of the problematic aspects of visibility politics builds on Eve Sedgwick’s foundational text *Epistemology of the Closet* by underscoring the idea that “visibility must be examined in regard to possibility *and* regulation” and noting that many supporters of LGBTQ issues “celebrat[e] visibility as possibility while ignoring its regulatory and surveilling functions” (xxix). By representing midwestern LGBTQ women who have resisted calls to be “out, loud, and proud” (ix) in their rural communities, *Visibility Interrupted* likewise aims to resist the popular assumption that queer individuals should abide by the dominant narrative in which they publicly identify as LGBTQ in order to be considered authentic.

Thomsen challenges the universal call to celebrate visibility by both analyzing its problematic aspects from a theoretical approach and by gathering interviews from LGBTQ women describing how they see themselves conforming to or rejecting the cultural templates urban LGBTQ advocates uphold in the name of social and political progress. She begins her six-chapter book by establishing how metronormativity renders individuals who occupy rural communities unintelligible through the retelling of Matthew Shepard’s murder, discussing its iconicity within the gay rights movement to demonstrate how an especially egregious story of rural queer violence reinforces metronormativity by sowing mistrust in rural Americans’ treatment of LGBTQ individuals. Transitioning to questions of visibility for LGBTQ women in the Midwest, Thomsen concludes the first chapter by analyzing the media representations of Jene Newsome’s discharge from the military under Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, ultimately arguing that “gay rights groups assume that visibility is desirable and politically valuable across geographic locales” (32). Chapter 2 shifts to the individual by connecting readers

with a number of LGBTQ women who articulate how, in their experience, coming out, being out, and being visible do not necessarily align with LGBTQ advocates' universal calls for visibility.

Although readers are presented with a number of interviews in Chapter 2, a significant portion of *Visibility Interrupted* steps away from sharing personal experiences in favor of theoretical analysis. Chapters 3 and 4 approach the problematic nature of visibility politics from the perspective of critical race and capitalism. In chapter 5 Thomsen moves to social media to address how representations of rural queer life have remained relatively stagnant over time. Although there are a handful of brief interviews scattered throughout these chapters, readers encounter far fewer voices of LGBTQ women speaking from personal experience about these issues. However, by chapter 6 Thomsen returns to the individual as she discusses her related film project, a documentary titled *In Plain Sight*.

Because Thomsen analyzes the unbecoming nature of visibility politics from both a theoretical and an anecdotal perspective, readers are made to jump between dense theoretical analysis to conversational interview transcriptions. This structure at times feels disjointed and leaves readers wanting more engagement with the LGBTQ women Thomsen interviews in each chapter. Perhaps employing a consistent structure across chapters would create a more cohesive reading experience and make voices of LGBTQ women visible throughout her argument.

Shelby E. E. Vitkus
University of Nevada, Reno

Lisa Hendrickson. *Burning the Breeze: Three Generations of Women in the American West*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2021. 376 pp. Paper, \$21.95; e-book, \$21.95.

Burning the Breeze is a three-generation biography focusing primarily on Julia Bennett, the first independent woman in Montana to own and operate a dude ranch. Her achievement is the culmination of her assertiveness, financial desperation, and Julia's magnetic personality. Montana, after all, was the home of Jeannette Rankin.