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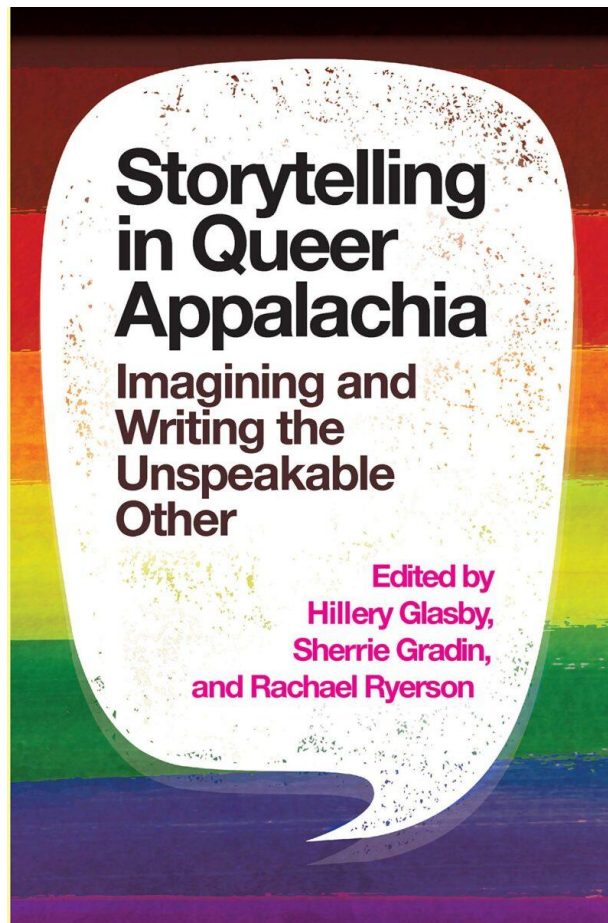
Issue: 4

Publication Date: October 2021

Stable URL: <https://constell8cr.com/issue-4/review-storytelling-queer-appalachia/>

Send My Love to the Family: A Review of Glasby, Gradin, and Ryerson's *Storytelling in Queer Appalachia: Imagining and Writing the Unspeakable Other*

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Glasby, Hillery, Sherrie Gradin, and Rachel Ryerson, editors. *Storytelling in Queer Appalachia: Imagining and Writing the Unspeakable Other*. First edition, West Virginia University Press, 2020.

When my wife and I see other queer people out and about, one of us will nudge the other and excitedly whisper, "Family!" It's a small tradition born out of the relative rareness of meeting other queer people in our towns. I think of it here because of that same sense of recognition and excitement carried in this collection. The mountains I have called home aren't in Appalachia. I came up in the foothills of the Cascades, on the Great Plains of Minnesota and Oklahoma, and, for a time, in the

Western Ozarks before writing this review on Anishinaabe lands, where Indigenous water protectors are [fighting](#) the construction of destructive oil pipelines, Enbridge Lines 3 and 5, in northern Michigan and Minnesota. Although my roots have yet to reach Appalachia, when I read this collection as a rural queer, I felt amongst family.

This collection of eleven essays looks through singular narratives of a homogenous Appalachia—white, cisgendered or heteronormative, solely masculine, repressive, or backwards—to see many experiences of Appalachian queer identity, engaging narratives of exile, return, and liminality as the writers demonstrate that Appalachia itself is “a little bit quare.” “Quare,” across the essays in this collection, is both a play on the regional pronunciation of “queer” and a gesture towards the deep-rooted experiences of gender and sexual differences even in the most presumably-cisheterosexual lives of Appalachians, a parallel usage to “quare” as a term registering the intersection of racial and queer identities. Quare and queer shift throughout the essays in this volume, invoking the experiences of mountain women, story-telling bachelor uncles, and academic queer theory, all braided together.

The collection begins with a letter, an intimate address to an expansive audience passing among disciplines and through Appalachian mountainways. In it, Amanda Hayes addresses readers, both Appalachian and non, in the wake of the 2016 presidential election and invokes the legacies of powerful women alongside cultural values of independence, commitment to family and the land, and loyalty to draw Appalachians back to their roots, writing: “We need to accept this [queerness], because, my fellow Appalachians, the reality is this: we’re here, we’re all a little queer, and we most of us ain’t a-goin’ nowhere” (35). Justin Ray Dutton takes up this hopeful, complex assessment of current Appalachian culture and the region’s potential futures as he disentangles Christian values from what he names “Appalachian Christian queerphobic rhetoric.” By changing the rhetoric or stories told about queer folks to recognize queer humanity, he writes, Appalachia can transform its dominant theology and create “a place of deep love and acceptance for queer humans” (55).

The second section, “Queer Diaspora: Existence and Erasure in Appalachia,” picks up the threads of home and displacement experienced by quare Appalachians, both those who stay and those who leave. Matthew Thomas-Reid deconstructs “queer [kwir]” and “queer [kwar]” as queer youths are pushed away from embodied experiences of queerness [kwir] and into culturally acceptable but desexualized queer [kwar] roles. Likewise, Kimberly Gunter unwinds the oppositional binaries of urban and rural to consider how we might rhetorically read queerness through

analyses of place and class, including in the composition classroom. In further attention to space, history, and belonging, Adam Denney uses the folk mythology surrounding Lake Cumberland to negotiate what it means to leave one's home, what it means to be unable to leave, and what it feels like when one carries home in their body, even upon leaving. Throughout this section, the essayists ground their analyses of home, embodiment, and belonging in the ways students and instructors negotiate identity and belonging in the writing classroom to make room for or make possible queer-inclusive spaces.

Building on the concept of diaspora, the third section, "Both/And: Intersectional Understandings of Appalachian Queers," attends to the spaces, real and imagined, that make up Appalachia. In "The Crik is Crooked: Appalachia as Moveable Queer Space" and "'Are Y'all Homo?': Mêtis as Method for Queer Appalachia," authors Lydia McDermott, Travis Rountree, and Caleb Pendygraft meld narratives and rhetorical theory to show the subversive and agentic strategies of dis/identification used by Appalachian queers in a region that, as McDermott poses, can also "move and subvert" (114). delfin bautista closes the section by offering an intersectional approach to narratives that locate queer trauma in rural spaces and queer liberation in urban spaces, arguing instead that Appalachia and other rural areas are "sources of transgressive inspiration and resilience" that "are not only surviving but thriving" (148) and calling for more queer Appalachian narratives.

Finally, in "Queer Media: Radical Acts of Embodiment and Resistance," the collection returns to the focus on form from the opening letter, both telling stories and paying careful attention to the telling itself in perhaps the most explicitly rhetorical section of the book. Tijah Bumgarner's chapter uses the Appalachian Queer Film Festival to develop "rooted," intersectional narratives of Appalachian queerness in the midst of economic and cultural transitions. In Savi Ettinger, Katie Manthey, Sonny Romano, and Cynthia Suryawan's chapter, the writers similarly look to the writing center at a college that doesn't openly accept trans students as an interstitial space of self-creation. Finally, the creators of the erstwhile digital community Queer Appalachia draw on their experiences curating a social media space capable of expressing many facets of rural queer survivance to argue for storytelling as a form of community support.

This collection shines when it highlights the complicated histories of race, displacement, and diaspora including but extending beyond the white square Appalachian experience. Scholars in rhetoric and composition will find it useful for its situated discussions of queer rhetorical practices rooted in Appalachian cultures, particularly around dis/identifications, negotiations of individual and communal

identity, and composition practices that hold space for multiple identifications. This collection extends conversations about queer writing practices begun in texts like Banks, Cox, and Dada's *Re/Orienting Writing Studies* (2019) and Jaqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander's *Techne* (2015). Cultural rhetoricians will appreciate the depth with which the authors engage with narratives as a form of embodied theorizing, particularly in the chapters by Denney, bautista, and Bumgarner. Outside rhetoric and composition, scholars in cultural geography and gender and sexuality studies will also find its thick descriptions of Appalachian place-based queerness useful. This collection demonstrates that queer Appalachian practices are rich, responsive, and continuously evolving towards kinder, more just communities. Since the publication of this collection, some changes have rippled through Appalachian storytelling communities, like the exposé [published](#) in the *Washington Post* regarding mishandling of Appalachian stories and donations by the Queer Appalachian Instagram account referenced in this collection's final chapter. Struggles for nuanced, diverse, and justice-oriented rural communities and representation of those communities require an attention to the constitutive forces of settler colonialism upon the strict gendered and sexual norms queers fight and write against. In the fallout surrounding the Instagram Queer Appalachia, rural queers continue to reckon with the histories, presents, and futures of queer identity in the region. This collection, and hopefully the future collections it inspires, engages in the same struggle, all the while showing us paths back to the heart of quare Appalachia.

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