

Honeypot: Black Southern Women Who Love Women

E. Patrick Johnson

Duke University Press (Nov 8, 2019)

Softcover \$25.95 (256pp)

978-1-4780-0653-4

E. Patrick Johnson's oral history *Honeypot* takes a unique approach to preserving the lives of black queer women who were raised in the American South.

Using a fictional framework to recount real-life oral histories, Johnson presents a world where he, as Dr. EPJ, is awakened one morning by the mysterious Miss B. She whisks him to the land of Hymen, where she tasks him with interviewing her sisters—all black, Southern, same-gender-loving women. Together, the pair travel the width and breadth of Hymen, allowing Miss B.'s extraordinary sisters to tell their stories in their own words.

Here, black Southern queer women are reimagined as denizens of a hive, each going about their lives as members of a huge, diverse community. Hymen fuses real and imaginary places into a dazzling new world, punctuated by photographs of the real-life locations that inspired parts of it.

More impressive than the setting are the women—all real people—who live there. Some of their stories are traumatic, as with Almah, whose childhood was abusive. Many stories, though, are joyous, celebrating the people, the work, and the faiths that made the women who they are. They are frank and sometimes explicit about their lives and loves.

Intimate details are also recorded, and poignant observations and interactions with the inimitable Miss B. come between each story. The interviewed women are the stars—women whose world Dr. EPJ can never be a part of. His reverent descriptions and singular framework showcase his subjects without overshadowing them.

Tragedies and abuse make parts of *Honeypot* difficult to read, but the book's creativity and importance make it worth the effort. These women's tales combine into a compelling story of hope, resilience, and love of all kinds.

At times devastating and always gripping, *Honeypot* is an innovative and educational glimpse into the lives of black Southern LGBTQ+ women.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (November / December 2019)

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