

LGBTQ Fiction and Poetry from Appalachia

Jeff Mann, Editor

Julia Watts, Editor

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Edited by Jeff Mann and Julia Watts, *LGBTQ Fiction and Poetry from Appalachia* is an immersive exploration of queer life within the confines of a conservative American subculture.

When combined with the experience of growing up in Appalachia, queerness—as defined by the collection, a blanket term for being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender—leads to a new subculture that can leave its members stuck between two worlds. Here, through fiction and poetry, select authors explore this phenomenon, with emphasis on lesbian and gay voices. Bisexuality is barely acknowledged, and only one trans author is credited.

Still, voices, themes, and subject matters vary dramatically between the book's pieces, and the undeniable queerness of each piece ties the work together. Each authentic and literary entry, whether it is happy or sad, carries an understanding of the way that life changes when navigated through a queer lens. Strong narration, careful diction, and crisp imagery mark the pieces.

Here, doris diosa davenport lays down no-holds-barred political poetry, combating the expectations of “people with vaginas” with language as raw as her subject matter. Elsewhere, pieces are darker, and abuse, homophobia, and struggle color many entries. Charles Lloyd's story “Wonders” explores incest, when a child's first attraction is directed at his cousin.

Other stories and poems focus on happiness, beauty, and hope. Dorothy Allison's poems, like “Butter,” explore trauma and moving on through rhythmic alliteration and smooth lyricism. Lisa Alther's poem “Swan Song” delves into first love and moving on through colorful nature imagery. And Jonathan Corcoran's heart-stopping short story “The Rope Swing” is about a boy's growing desire for his friend—a realistic portrayal of the fears that plague closeted gay teenagers. Sharp imagery and heavy suspense make the character's struggles immediate and intimate.

Through realistic characters and impassioned poetry, *LGBTQ Fiction and Poetry from Appalachia* explores the cross section of two often overlooked American subcultures.

TIA SMITH (May/June 2019)

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