

4-1-2020

## Book Review - A Literary Field Guide to Southern Appalachia

Thomas C. Weeks II

*Augusta University*, [tweeks@augusta.edu](mailto:tweeks@augusta.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Weeks, T. C. (2020). Book Review - A Literary Field Guide to Southern Appalachia. *Georgia Library Quarterly*, 57(2). Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol57/iss2/15>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Georgia Library Quarterly by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

## Off the SHELF

### **A Literary Field Guide to Southern Appalachia**

edited by Rose McLarney, Laura-Gray Street, and L. L. Gaddy (University of Georgia Press, 2019: ISBN 9780820356242, \$24.95)

Filled with an abundance of natural and cultural wonders, from the flora and fauna to the colorful people who inhabit the land itself, Appalachia is a unique region of the United States. In *A Literary Field Guide to Southern Appalachia*, McLarney, Street, and Gaddy have compiled a love letter to the multifaceted nature of the southern Appalachians—that is, the Appalachian Mountains in the southern United States.

In this “literary field guide,” the editors have put together a compendium of poetry, art, and facts about the flora and fauna of the southern Appalachians. The book is broken into seven sections, one for each type of organism—from plants and fungi to mammals and insects. Each of these sections contains an entry for an organism found in the region, with information about its habitat and various notes on population, cultural significance, or other interesting scientific or historical facts. Also included is a sketch and a poem inspired by the organism.

While the book contains works by well-known authors such as Wendell Berry and Janisse Ray, it also includes works by lesser-known authors. Similarly, it covers species widely known throughout the region and species found only in

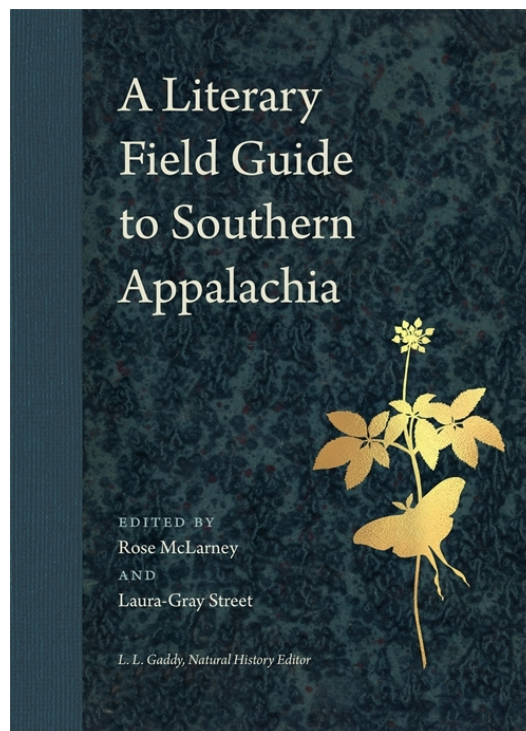
isolated locations. The most interesting part of the work is the poetry paired with each entry, so this review will take a look at some particularly poignant poems. In the entry for the American ginseng, Glenis Redmond writes in her poem “Living Jazz,” “No doctor's care for us, so with poultices we/ mishmash and make-do living jazz./ Ginseng, you sing loudest in June./

Hear us sing too. Read *sang...*” This is in reference to the belief in folk healing that ginseng (colloquially “sang”) is a remedy for injury and sadness.

Redmond’s poem connects the plant to its cultural significance in Appalachian culture. Similarly, Thorpe Moeckel takes an historical approach to the Oconee bells, a flower native only to the banks of Lake Jocassee in the Carolinas. Moeckel imagines the flowers narrating two girls plucking them and laying them on their dead relatives after a raid killed many Cherokee villagers in the area in 1760. He writes,

“Runner-stem by runner-stem, the sisters/  
unstitched us from the duff: leaf, flower, root/  
and all. June, Green Corn Moon, it was,/ *De ha lu yi*,  
and we were in capsule, mute/ as ever while the two maidens bent, fingers/  
still quivering, numb with numb... and with us/  
wrapped every corpse—there were a lot.”

Other notable entries include one for the eastern wood rat, commonly known as the pack rat, where Nickole Brown extolls the value of making do with what one has, of taking from life what one is given and creating something



useful—even beautiful—from it. Adrian Blevins, in his poem for the gray fox, catalogues lists of creatures once native to the Appalachians but now extinct there, such as the Carolina parakeet, the woodland bison, and the mountain lion. In this way, he praises the gray fox for her fortitude in staying strong in the face of competition with the non-native red fox and takes his own strength from this knowledge.

This book offers a unique look into both the natural and cultural history of a unique and

vibrant region of the country. The combination of poetry and natural history creates an understanding of the Appalachian region as a place tied to a sense of identity and belonging. This book is highly recommended for collections that focus on Appalachian or Southern history and culture or any library located in that region.

*Thomas Weeks is Reference and Instruction Librarian at Augusta University*