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## Book Review - LGBTQ Fiction and Poetry from Appalachia

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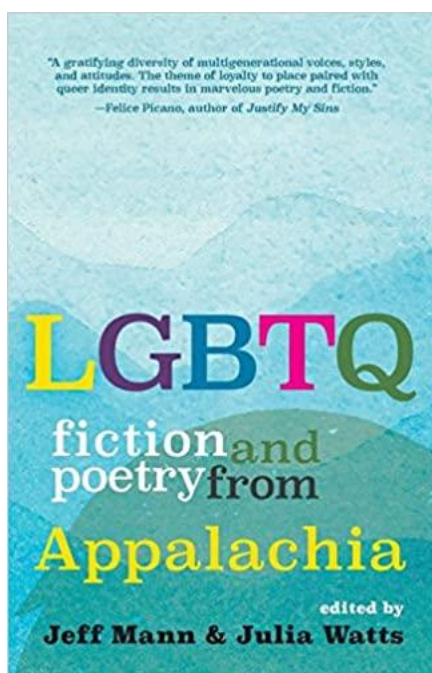
### **LGBTQ Fiction and Poetry from Appalachia**

edited by Jeff Mann and Julia Watts (West Virginia University Press, 2019: 9781946684929, \$29.99)

*LGBTQ Fiction and Poetry from Appalachia* contains fiction and poetry from 20 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) authors. The editors stated that a key requirement to be included in this anthology is that the contributors must be established authors with at least one book under their belts and identify somewhere on the LGBTQ spectrum. This book is a great introduction to LGBTQ literature, and the anthology provides an entry point for readers to learn about and follow authors of interest. The edited work is held together not only by the lived experiences of the authors, but also by the recurring themes of love of Appalachia, the land, and family, as well as an ambivalence regarding that love. Everything is presented through the lens of the LGBTQ experience; almost all of the characters dream of getting out of Appalachia, and many do. But they all come back.

An example of this can be found in the short story, "Saving," by Carter Rickels. This story follows the character Dean, a transgender man. In Kentucky, Dean lived with his grandmother for most of his life. They took care of each other. Recently, Dean moved to Brooklyn after putting his grandmother in a nursing home. Dean and his girlfriend come back to visit his

grandmother. His plan is to take the house and use it as a vacation home. Once he is back in Kentucky, he realizes what a state of disrepair the house is in. He could not turn it into a vacation spot (or even an Airbnb), and he realizes that none of his friends from Brooklyn would probably want to come to Kentucky for a vacation. He struggles with his decision to leave his grandmother in a nursing home and sell the land—the one thing his grandmother left to him. He considers returning to his childhood home, but he is hesitant and wonders what the locals will think of him.



Savannah Sipple's "A List of Times I Thought I Was Gay" provides a mostly lighthearted contrast to the heaviness of much of the book. Sipple lists 20 things that led her to believe she is a lesbian. For example, number 17 on her list is "every time I wanted to buy a new tie." The last item on her list reveals that she has accepted her identity: "20. The first time I

said I'll never marry a man. Then cried when I realized I didn't have to."

In all these stories and poems, the LGBTQ characters are ridiculed and/or feel a sense of otherness or not belonging. They all want to leave, but the land, family, and even Appalachian culture either keep them there or bring them back home. Recommended for public and academic libraries.

*Christopher Andrews is Reference Services Librarian at University of North Georgia*