

Tar Hollow Trans

Stacy Jane Grover

University Press of Kentucky (Jun 20, 2023)

Hardcover \$21.95 (144pp)

978-0-8131-9755-5

Made up of nine interdisciplinary, creative personal essays, Stacy Jane Grover's *Tar Hollow Trans* is about being poised between worlds. It makes the ordinary nowhere of Grover's experiences into a place worthy of habitation.

Growing up in rural southeastern Ohio as the child of an evangelical minister, Grover had no sense of herself as either Appalachian or transgender. What she did know was her connection to the land, her idyllic rural community, and a phantom shame that made her shy and created distance between herself and others.

A college education in the state capital introduced a new lexicon for her experiences. But when trying to find herself in these new structures, Grover became more aware of how legibility as an Appalachian transgender person relied on negation and the determination to create authority through rigid, prescriptive narratives and definitions of what's urban and Appalachian, queer and trans.

The book takes a while to find its footing, often directing explicit attention to the ways in which Grover could tell the story versus a more unwieldy, truer experience. Instead of the past being a site of inherent meaning that proves her identities, Grover muddies the waters, pivoting between personal recall and academic research. Musing on the ways she's learned to conceive of Appalachian and trans stories, she unearths a murkier personal account, lending a sense of discovery to this blend of social science and memoir.

In *Tar Hollow Trans*, structures crumble in service to authenticity, which exists beyond easy, expected narratives. "If there's any hope in identity as a project," Grover says, "it might be found in being bewildered, in forgoing knowability to bestow upon ourselves a complex interiority and wondrous possibility."

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (July / August 2023)

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