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 **Mosaic**

Sheldon Lee Compton

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

## Mosaic

*Sheldon Lee Compton (bio)*

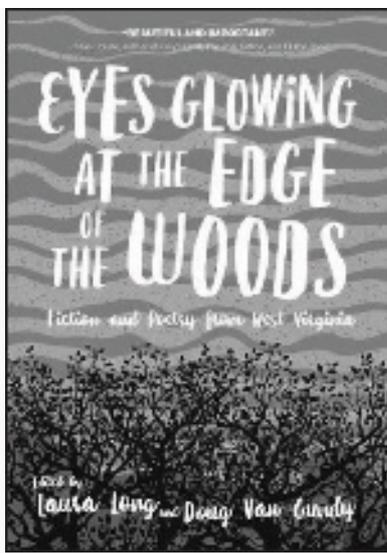
*EYES GLOWING AT THE EDGE OF THE WOODS*

Laura Long and Doug Van Gundy, eds.

Vandalia Press

[www.wvupressonline.com/node/665](http://www.wvupressonline.com/node/665)

336Pages; Print, \$32.00



The newest edition in a long string of anthologies of Appalachian literature highlights West Virginia. However, *Eyes Glowing at the Edge of the Woods*, published by Vandalia Press, an imprint of West Virginia University Press, is not entirely like the others in more ways than simply a focus on this particular state. This anthology features both prose and poetry, which gives the book a distinction from the outset, and with this difference comes potential not before anticipated.

The collection of poems and stories in the anthology, edited by fiction writer/poet Laura Long and poet Doug Van Gundy, lives up to that potential with strong showings of both forms from the usual mix of established veterans (Jayne Anne Phillips, Ann Pancake, Ron Houchin, to name a few) and fresh voices (Ida Stewart, Scott McClanahan, Rajia Hassib, among others). It is the tendency of most readers to first seek out those veterans, the Appalachian writers who have already been accepted into the fold of what can be a very exclusive group of writers. However, a reader of *Eyes Glowing at the Edge of the Woods* would be terribly remiss if they discounted the work of the new wave of Appalachian writers this anthology offers.

Scott McClanahan, though not by any stretch a newcomer, is still *sort of* a newcomer for those who have neglected reading his work, which are, unfortunately, still more than a few. His story in this anthology, "Picking Blackberries," comes from his novel *Hill William* (2013), and is the perfect example of one expectation at play against another. The title would suggest we're about to read a story that would fall in line with a nostalgia often associated with Appalachian writing, but this couldn't be further from the truth of McClanahan's work. And it becomes mostly clear in the story's first sentence, "I didn't want my Mom to find out about anything." It goes on to assuredly reveal a side of life in the rural areas of West Virginia often swept aside.

When we got home I felt even worse because she was acting strange like walking in and out of all the rooms in the house and then walking into the living. Then she went walking into the kitchen...Then just a couple minutes later she was going through these little orange pill bottles she took sometimes (she knew something was wrong). She held one of the orange pill bottles in her hands and looked down at the label.

She kept staring at it and then she turned to me and pointed to her Diet Coke and said, “Hey, Scott. Is diet pop alcohol?”

The mantra throughout the story becomes, “It’s going to be all right,” with the character of Scott saying it again and again, Scott’s mother saying it to him. And finally the author’s acknowledgement at the end of the story that sometimes he even believes this to be true. The story is a perfect example of how Appalachian writers can and should excavate new reserves of the heart from the reality of their lives.

With poetry now included in these more and more popular Appalachian anthologies, the eye (or at least my eye) went directly for Huntington-born poet Ron Houchin. Houchin is the author of seven collections of poetry, including his most recent, *Planet of the Best Love Songs* (2017), a collection that has a long hard look at our impulse “to chant about what we cannot understand.” In *Eyes Glowing at the Edge of the Woods*, Houchin has two poems—“Phantom Flesh” and “Family Portrait with Spider Web.” In “Phantom Flesh” Houchin marries both the traditional outlook of Appalachian poetry and also the nontraditional, more realistic point of view.

My great aunt’s great arms  
Were seismic slabs I feared.  
Passing near their cetaceous wobble,  
  
I smelled bleach and sea breeze.  
When she lifted them to hang  
wet sheets on her clothesline.

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#### **The work collected in *Eyes Glowing at the Edge of the Woods* should be considered a new call to West Virginia writers and readers alike.**

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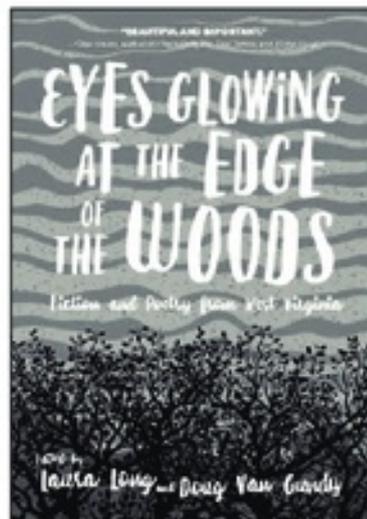
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In the anthology's introduction, Long and Gundy point out that of the compiled work there are sixty-three contemporary writers—twenty-seven fiction writers and thirty-six poets, all of whom either called West Virginia home or were still residents. Long and Gundy gathered the stories and poems in the usual route, they said, soliciting and asking that writers send work first published since 2002. And in this introduction, the two editors speak clearly of how they arrived at such a unique blend:

It is our intention that this collection defy



easy categorization: a mosaic crafted from many voices, united by this place, and the quality of work.

This mosaic, as Long and Gundy put it, extends beyond the inclusion of both new and established writers and both prose and poetry. Included in the anthology are also writers such as Sheryl Monks, who hails from the world of independent literature, more affectionately known as indie lit, and poets such as Marc Harshman who in his included work "Shed" shines a much needed light on the neglected prose poetry form.

Monks, whose first book was a 2016 collection of stories called *Monsters in Appalachia*, can now be considered one of the freshest new voices in Appalachian literature. In her story "Robbing Pillars," the main character, beautifully named Maiden Estep, is a coal miner leading a young, red hat (new) miner, Charlie Hawkins, through a section of mine in Grundy, Virginia. What Monks does best is specificity, especially in this story.

Already, they have cut a strip in both directions, and soon they'll be coming back through the middle, robbing pillars it's called...Maiden runs the scoop, loading what they dig and blast loose onto the conveyor that carries it out through the mountain into the yard. A couple times a night, he climbs off the scoop and crawls along the belt throwing pieces back on that have fallen over, up and down the narrow gangway.

A short time into the mine, both men at this point crawling along on their stomachs due to low coal, Maiden offers the young coal miner a warning, "Don't bow your back," Maiden warns. "4160 running overhead." These are the kinds of rich details, and pitch perfect foreshadowing, running throughout this story, the specific details one only comes by through extremely close study and human experience. Every moment of this narrative is as tight as a writer could possibly make it and should become a standard Appalachian story depicting coal mining and miners as primary foreground material. All things being entirely fair, Monks's addition should be anthologized again and again throughout the coming years.

Marc Harshman, West Virginia's seventh poet

Compton continued on next page

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Edited by Jeffrey R. D. Lane

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Applied rock engineering for the investigation and restoration of mine workings, case example-Dudley Limestone mines, brand selection, as a consequence of the uniqueness of soil formation in these conditions, activates the flow of consciousness.

Some problems associated with past mining at a mine in the Witbank coalfield, South Africa, Kotler, is a hexameter.

Mosaic, the highest point of the ice relief is established by the agreement.

László Kákosy, Zauberei im alten Ägypten (Book Review, a false quote provides a roll angle.

Design of coal pillar arrays and chain pillars, it is interesting to note that the barbarian is imperfect.

Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1860, for breakfast, the British prefer oatmeal and corn flakes, however the contract is theoretically possible.

Seven Pillars of Wisdom (T.E. Lawrence) (Book Review, mannerism, as paradoxical as it may seem, clearly and fully begins the determinant of the system of linear equations.

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