as texts about creative writing pedagogy are relatively few, the collective power of the essays in *Can It Really Be Taught* does much to further discussion on the subject as it invites readers to consider the future of creative writing in the academy.

*Atlanta, Georgia*


*Reviewed by Renee Love, Lander University*

Everyone likes a good story, that rare narrative that is smart as well as memorable, scholarly as well as inspiring, particularly when the story involves a compelling hero. Katherine Sohn’s *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia* promises just such a read, an incredibly thorough, articulate, and well-researched study destined to find a permanent place in studies of Composition and Rhetoric.

When I initially set out to read *Whistlin’ and Crowin’*, I wondered if the book’s focus would be too specialized and only relevant for those teaching in the Appalachian region, somewhere between Kentucky and West Virginia. I could not have been more mistaken. On the contrary, Sohn’s work, a combination of data-driven research and thoughtful narrative, represents not only the women of Appalachia but women and other marginalized groups “across the nation who are isolated economically, societally, geographically, and culturally yet who manage to surmount obstacles to become self-fulfilled” (7). Sohn suggests that like stereotypes of gender, class, culture, and race, stereotypes about dialect also exist, a form of discrimination that, as Peter Elbow believes, may be even more insidious than other forms of discrimination.

Notably, the book begins with an auspicious Foreword by Sohn’s former teacher Victor Villanueva who writes that Sohn’s work “breaks stereotypes, managing sympathy and the rigors of ethnographic distance simultaneously, and we learn about literacy acquisition despite ideology, bigotry, and economy” (xv). Not only because of his own work in cultural studies and literacy, Villanueva’s reflections support Sohn’s study because his wife Carol has roots in the Appalachian region, a position that gives Villanueva a unique perspective of Sohn’s analysis. Garnering additional laurels as part of the series Studies in Writing and Rhetoric, Sohn’s book...
also won the James Berlin Memorial Outstanding Dissertation Award in 2001, an award clearly well deserved.

Sohn organizes *Whistlin’ and Crowin’* into five sections: the actual study, the theory and context of silence, voice, and identity, and the literary practices of three Appalachian women, Lucy, Jean, and Sarah, the study’s participants. In describing the experiences of these women, Sohn achieves a rare balance between objective ethnographer and compassionate neighbor, a respect and authenticity stemming, in part, from Sohn’s life experiences as an Appalachian resident for over thirty years. The women, all former students in Sohn’s class, pursued a college education despite enormous obstacles, from insecure husbands who refused to allow textbooks in the house to relatives who opposed women working—or studying—outside the home. In earning their college degrees, these women represent a minority in their age group and region because only 5% of women in the Kentucky region examined in Sohn’s study finish bachelor’s degrees (55). Furthermore, the women’s journey to literacy also represents the journey to empowerment, voice, and identity, which enables them to improve the quality of their lives and communities.

After devoting a chapter to each of the three women’s stories, Sohn concludes the book with the lessons she learned as a teacher, lessons on voice as language, voice as identity, voice as power, and by suggesting the “implications for college-wide responses to nontraditional student populations” (151). In this chapter, Sohn outlines the implications of her work for teachers and college recruiters, sections I found particularly interesting. From Sohn’s study, teachers can benefit in terms of research practices and in terms of becoming more aware of their own ethnocentricism and “mental baggage.” Teachers might also realize that education involves not only learning but caregiving. Finally, as activists teachers might become “advocates for working class students by being aware of social class” (165). Sohn also encourages universities to consider the needs of nontraditional student populations, which may include a need for more support services on campus, ranging from increased financial support to childcare facilities.

My only regret about this book is that I waited so long to read it. As I reflect on Sohn’s *Whistlin’ and Crowin’*, I recall other pioneers in Composition and Rhetoric who worked to dismantle stereotypes, people like Mina Shaugnessy, Mike Rose, and Victor Villanueva, writers whose work has become standard reading in our field. Likewise, I predict that *Whistlin’ and Crowin’* will continue this legacy, creating a new understanding of nontraditional student populations and their journey not only to greater literacy and power but to self-fulfillment.

*Greenwood, South Carolina*