

Reclaiming the Rural: Essays on Literacy, Rhetoric, and Pedagogy, edited by Kim Donehower, Charlotte Hogg, and Eileen E. Schell. Carbondale: SIUP, 2012. 280 pp.

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Over the last several decades, much emphasis has been placed on urban environments as focal points of education and composition studies, surfacing in works such as Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* and Bruce McCormiskey's and Cynthia Ryan's more recent *City Comp: Identities, Spaces, Practices*. The urban emphasis has even invaded popular culture through cinematic or made-for-TV narratives in *To Sir, with Love*, *Stand and Deliver*, *Lean on Me*, *The Ron Clark Story*, and *The Freedom Writers*. Even the 2010 documentary *Waiting for Superman* focuses on children from urban centers as it argues for a better educational system. But while urban literacy is rightfully garnering much disciplinary and cultural notice, discussions about rural education have attracted less critical scrutiny.

Bringing well-needed attention to an often neglected landscape, *Reclaiming the Rural: Essays on Literacy, Rhetoric, and Pedagogy* is valuable because it provides a series of passionate folkloric, sociological, historical, rhetorical, and educational perspectives on the significance of rural communities and economies. It brings balance to contemporary academic conversations on literacy without relying on nostalgic or disparaging depictions designed to solicit sentimental reactions or dismiss rural communities as obsolete or out of touch. The work is a continuation of the editors' 2007 SIUP collection *Rural Literacies*, and it expands that conversation in order to address several important issues. The book is successful primarily because of the thoughtful and thorough way it addresses the underrepresentation of rural communities in academic discussions of rhetoric, the manner in which rural communities are and have been represented politically and socially, and the attitudes and methods that educators, citizens, and organizations can use to promote a sustainable literacy beneficial to students and the rural areas they call home.

As contributors to the collection argue, rural areas have much to offer, but urban technological advancement and derogatory attitudes about the non-urban have convinced many that rural communities are dead end communities, a sentiment that has led to migration out of the pastures, fields, and farms and into what many perceive as an urban future with endless opportunities. As the title communicates, the mission of this volume is to "reclaim the rural," but before doing so, the editors first define what it means to be *rural*, a term traditionally conceived as opposite to the urban, the metropolitan, the cosmopolitan. Donehower, Hogg, and Schell move away from this conception,

claiming that the traditional urban-rural binary is false and that the rural should not be defined in terms of what it lacks, but rather in terms of its diversity and resources. These collected essays identify the existing connections among the rural, the urban, and the global—connections that have historically been ignored, diminished, or dismissed—and push the metaphor of sustainability as a defining component of rural literacy.

To accomplish this task, the editors divide the collection into three sections, “Land Economies and Rhetorics,” “Histories,” and “Pedagogies.” Together, these sections demonstrate the past, present, and future roles of the rural as a component in the global community. The purpose of section one is primarily to “describe the struggles rural residents and stakeholders face as they engage in debates over how to sustain themselves in a globalized world” (10). Marcia Kmetz discusses the concept of *ethos*, or as she calls it, “a habitual gathering place,” in the context of the Wind River water disputes, the laws of water use in the West, and the perpetual tensions that stem from those often unofficial regulations, which reflect the significance that water has played and continues to play in the formation of identity and the relationship between people and the landscape in that region (20). Cori Brewster discusses agricultural literacy campaigns whose main purpose involves the study of agriculture and the promotion of improved production methods through the teaming of rural community members with educational and political organizations. He argues that students need to know where food comes from and how it is made, but that they should also become adept at understanding and responding to the rhetoric of politicians and advocates whose policies manage the production, distribution, and consumption of food. This section is especially strong because it ties historical attitudes to present discursive practices and global outlooks.

Section two offers a significant conversation on the history of rhetoric in agricultural groups such as the Grange and 4-H, particularly in chapters authored by Carolyn Ostrander and I. Moriah McCracken. An important theme in this section is the representation of the underrepresented, including Native American and Chicana/o minority groups, women, children, and the rural populace in general. Jane Greer’s essay “Women’s Words, Women’s Work: Rural Literacy and Labor” is especially compelling because of her careful treatment of the words and insider perspectives of farm women, particularly those found in the autobiography of Myrtle Tenney Booth, who lived in Appalachia during the twentieth century. Greer highlights the manner in which these narratives challenge (mis)conceptions about the lives, literacies, and culturally constructed personas of the women represented in Booth’s autobiography. The presence of a wide range of individuals and groups in this section helps to disprove stereotypes concerning the lack of diversity in rural communities, and also demonstrates the capacities of rural communities to meet the needs of diverse constituents.

The individuals and communities represented in this section find solidarity and representation in rhetorical activism intended to keep their communities from crumbling under external pressures and negative attitudes.

Section two serves as a good platform for section three, which moves from community to classroom settings. As this section suggests, developing rural pedagogies makes sense because rural community members are increasingly pursuing a university education and the opportunities it provides. The editors' approach in this section unites administrators, teachers, parents, and students—particularly Robert Brooke's chapter "The Voices of Young Citizens: Rural Citizenship, Schools, and Public Policy"—inviting the rural sphere into the university in order to help people understand that rural life does not belong to a deficient past. Victims of diaspora from their own rural communities, students in Brooke's and other chapters are intellectually redirected to understand that rural by no means signifies "lesser" or "lacking." Like the Grange and other rural civic organizations, the classroom becomes a space where activism can take place, where teachers and students can engage in campaigns to help their rural communities achieve sustainability in a changing world. As Brooke argues, the "young voices" are the ones who will make rural sustainability possible, and they need the support of organizations, teachers, and citizens to employ effective rhetorical strategies that will counter the negative, life-draining attitudes currently affecting rural life (172).

When reading *Reclaiming the Rural*, one hears the voices of advocates for agriculture and the local, voices prompting us to imagine a future that establishes a connection with the past in order to move forward. This book is vital in identifying solutions to problems facing rural economies and communities today. Indeed, a work like this is what agrarian author and advocate Wendell Berry might call "a good solution," because it identifies methods in which students and teachers can harmonize with "larger patterns," namely "the whole complex of problems whose proper solutions add up to [. . .] the health of the soil, of plants and animals, of farm and farmer, of farm family and farm community, all involved in the same interested, interlocking pattern" (269). Sustainability is not simply something that farmers ought to worry about while the rest of us remain aloof; sustainable living applies to the complex network of relationships that exist in all spheres of life, whether rural, urban, or somewhere in between. The collection's message is not that we should forsake the global in exchange for the local, but rather that both are connected historically and rhetorically. *Reclaiming the Rural* demonstrates in a profound way that the rural does not become irrelevant simply because of current attitudes or the migration of its younger generations. As Donehower, Hogg, Schell, and their contributors demonstrate, the health of rural economies is significant across

time, space, and knowledge domains. Anything but inert or empty, rural communities are sources of life and spaces saturated with meaning.

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