Review of:

The Food We Eat, the Stories We Tell: Contemporary Appalachian Tables

Edited by Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt, with Lora E. Smith. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2019. Pp. 207, afterword, contributors.

Review by: Judith Lanzendorfer

In *The Food We Eat, the Stories We Tell: Contemporary Appalachian Tables*, editor Elizabeth S. D. Enghardt collects fourteen articles and five poems on topics ranging from "Haute Appalachia: Wine and Wine Tourism" to "Terrain," a poem about how food is "home." Enghardt makes note of the contributions' timeframes—from the 1940s to the present day—and offers that "Mountains are here, in the pieces that follow" (2019:3, 5). Although time and metaphorical landscape may be used as focal points for interaction among the articles and poems, there are others that develop as well. The role of cultural memory, both real and imagined, emerges from the volume as an important factor in establishing Appalachian food, identity and culture. Beyond this overarching theme, sub-themes allow the texts to interact and contribute to the idea of cultural memory.

Two chapters, Lora E. Smith's "The Household Searchlight Recipe Book" and Danielle Elise Christensen's "'Good Luck Preserving': Canning and the Uncanny in Appalachia," both deal with cultural artifacts—a cookbook and canning jars—as ways to understand the past. Abigail Huggins's "An Education in Beans" and Karida L. Brown's "Garden of Eden," both about African American foodways, make extensive use of oral histories as evidence of life experience in the building of culture and identity. Brown's contribution may also interact with other essays in the collection based upon the themes of migration and immigration. Contributing to this theme, Daniel S. Margolies's "A Preliminary Taxonomy of the Blue Ridge Taco" focuses on the contribution of migrant workers' foodways in Appalachian culture, while Courtney Balestir's "Eating to Go" explores Appalachian migration to the Midwest. Suronda Gonzalez's "Cornbread and *Fabada*: Savoring a West Virginia Story" addresses Appalachian Spanish foodways, while Emily Hilliard's "'The Reason We Make These Deep-Fat-Fried Treats': In Conversation with Rosettes of Helvetia, West Virginia" centers upon Swiss rosettes (a type of florally-shaped deep-fried cooky), and Michael Croley's "What You Find and What You Lose When You Seek a New Home" focuses on the intersection of Taco Bell and homemade Korean foods. Each essay shows how Appalachian foodways, often stereotyped as just cornbread and beans, are in reality a complex tapestry of multiple cultures.

Another thread of discussion concerns processed foods; although most articles focus on homemade foods, what one "buys in" also has resonance in the creation of culture. Erica Abrams Locklear's "Setting Tobacco, Banquet-Style" discusses Banquet Foods' pre-made frozen chicken as a cultural "stand in" for homemade fried chicken. "Best Pal: Big on Hot Dogs, Hamburgers, and Quick Service," by Emily Wallace, addresses the aesthetic landscape of Pal's restaurants, while Robert Gripe's "Confessions of a Spear Packer" humorously discusses food contamination issues, via the accidental inclusion of a band-aid in an assembly line pickle bottle.

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While some contributions use humor, others are more serious in tone, often marking stages of life through food as a central focus of several, including Jeff Mann's recollections of childhood in "Chowchow." Annette Saunooke Clapsaddle addresses the role of elders in society in "My Great-Grandmother is a Cherokee…" George Ella Lyon's meditation on passing away may be found in "Clearing Your House," and Rebecca Gayle Howell's two poems, "How to Kill a Rooster" and "How to Kill a Hen," focus on the difficulty of death as an ever-present aspect of life. In each of these articles and poems, the reader is confronted by the passage of time and how Appalachian identity is formed through literal and cultural memory.

Although the opportunity for a multiplicity of conversations across sources can be considered a strength of this volume, some audiences may find the lack of obvious groupings and the loose collection of chapters difficult to use and understand. An audience unfamiliar with Appalachian culture—from migration due to the collapse of the coal industry to the often insular distrust of outsiders—may not easily see how articles and poems may be read as companions to each other. For this reason, the volume's organization of may limit the range and use of the text.

While the disparate threads in the articles and poems may be distracting to some readers, for those familiar with Appalachian culture, or other marginalized cultures, it is clear that there are many spaces where the texts can interact and serve as commentary on each other. Sub-themes noted in this review are just four of many ways that the texts can be put into conversation. Diversity in text style, methodology, and topic help to underscore the richness of Appalachia and may serve as an introduction for the student of folklore to continue to explore and expand the study of Appalachian foodways, culture, and identity.

The Food We Eat, the Stories We Tell: Contemporary Appalachian Tables is an important contribution to understanding the complexity of Appalachian culture, which is often caricatured and negatively stereotyped. This edited volume does much to address and correct misunderstandings through an emphasis on the breadth and depth of the regional population's foodways. Mountains are, indeed, in the volume, but memories, both literal and cultural, are as well.