

## **Exploring Outer and Inner Worlds: Poetry Reading from *Mountains Piled Upon Mountains: Appalachian Nature Writing in the Anthropocene***

**Libby Falk Jones, Berea College**

Since moving in 1988 to Berea, Kentucky, I've enjoyed exploring the Appalachian landscape through writing and photographing. Learning to see the varied beauties of this land and reflecting on its myriad connections to me and my history is a continuing, deepening project. I'm pleased that three of my poems appear in Jessica Cory's rich anthology. All three began several years ago during my first residency at Hambidge Center for the Creative Arts and Sciences in north Georgia. Living alone in a small cabin for three weeks, I became especially attentive to both outer and inner worlds.

My first poem, "Night Falls on the Mountain," is included in the section, "Recount." As Cory notes, recounting an experience is a means of connecting readers to a special place. Writers in this section, she observes, "show that by fully immersing themselves in the experiences and reveries provided by the natural world, they are honoring not only nature but also themselves" (5).

### **Night Falls on the Mountain**

Now it is that time of evening  
when pink wisps shade  
unmoving clouds.  
The half-moon hangs  
like an empty basket.  
A whippoorwill calls,  
an owl murmurs.  
The crow of the afternoon  
is silent, but the creek  
tumbles on. I can hear it,  
faintly, like my mother's  
voice. Now it is time  
to go within,  
lower the shades,  
turn up the heat.

My second poem, "February Springtime in the Mountains," appears in the section, "Evolve." In this poem, focusing on nature's evolution, the "signs of seasonal transformation," as Cory notes (10), leads to reflections on inward change.

### **February Springtime in the Mountains**

Bush budding white, crocus unfolding,  
sudden red sheen on gray tree branches,  
two tiny spiders hatching near my desk –  
these invite suspicion, even pity.

What can they know, what signals  
deep in earth or sky have sounded?  
Not likely the morning mist  
that rises in air warm or cold,  
or the inevitable babble of the nearby creek.  
Perhaps the flapping of a heron's wings  
or a partridge's scurry or bears and rattlers waking up  
and liking the dry leaves I walk through daily,  
or the lift of the wind, or the rain brushing  
the cabin's tin roof, or the cracking open  
of my heart, these long silent days and nights.  
Magician or charlatan, the world whirls  
faster, faster than I can breathe.

My final poem, "Appalachian Spring," arose from my photography practice. Cory includes it in the section, "Celebrate," observing that "reasons to celebrate are perhaps not always easy to identify" (11). In my haiku, I hope to embody a moment of realization sparked by seeing the negative that makes possible the positive.

### **Appalachian Spring**

Rhododendron leaves  
curl in sun—oh, it's shadows  
that define the light—

Sharing these three poems with this year's Appalachian Studies Association participants is especially meaningful during this pandemic time, where experiencing the daily blessings of the nature's beauty has anchored me to a world of meaning, even of joy.

### Work Cited

Cory, Jessica, ed. *Mountains Piled Upon Mountains: Appalachian Nature Writing in the Anthropocene*. Morgantown: West Virginia UP, 2019. Print.

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### Session Information:

Sat. 10:00am-11:15am. PERFORMANCE: "Readings from Mountains Piled upon Mountains"

Convener: Libby Falk Jones

"Poetry Reading" Jessica Cory, Western Carolina University;

"Fiction Reading" Ellen J. Perry, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College;  
"Poetry Reading" Libby Falk Jones, Berea College;  
"Poetry Reading" Rosemary Royston, Young Harris College;  
"Poetry Reading" Bill King, Davis & Elkins College.