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Ryan Lee Cartwright. *Peculiar Places: A Queer Crip History of White Rural Nonconformity.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021. 272 pp. $95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-226-69691-1.

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Ryan Lee Cartwright's *Peculiar Places: A Queer Crip History of White Rural Nonconformity* is a clear and well-researched book, one that deploys insights from queer and disability studies to explore the contradictory place of white rural nonconformity. In an introduction and six chapters, Cartwright examines "deeply troublesome narratives in order to understand the ambiguous social circumstances that exist beyond the myths of both virtuous conformity and monstrous otherness" (p. 2). These narratives, from the opening mention of the Ward brothers and their depiction in *Brother's Keeper* (1993) and the "Home" episode of *The X-Files* (1996), which they inspired, to the ending chapter's discussion of *Brother's Keeper* and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), Cartwright locates in these narratives the role whiteness plays in the acceptance of nonconformity in the rural United States.

Cartwright examines reactions to the death of one of the Ward brothers, together with the resulting reactions, from the police to a documentary and an *X-Files* episode, which their situation inspired. This opening discussion demonstrates how *Pecular Places* "offers a way of thinking about the complicated and contradictory lives of people like the Ward brothers and the social formations they evince" (p. 2). Mapping these rural people and their nonconformity and their depictions, Cartwright traces how they demonstrate both idyllic and anti-idyllic views of rural life. Suggesting that these difficult (and often violent or horrific) narratives of rural people in the United States often support a kind of "anti-idyllic" view of the countryside, where danger and defiance lurk, Cartwright shows too how whiteness often operates to improve the situation of these nonconforming white rural subjects, situating them between idyllic and anti-idyllic views of rural life. Indeed, according to Cartwright, "to disturb the rustic idyll and the disciplinary power that attends it requires not simply locating same-sex sexuality and gender transgression in rural areas, but [also] understanding how and why rural white sexuality, gender expression, and disability have been granted the power to seemingly subvert the rural idyll" (p. 8).

In disturbing this disciplinary power, Cartwright supports these readings of the rural white subjects with a theoretically sophisticated introduction, whose framework offers a grounding for the six chapters that follow. In describing how whiteness serves as a "consolation prize for the nonnormative," Cartwright employs a queer-crip historical methodology, influenced by the work of Robert McRuer and Alison Kafer along with decades of critical interventions in disability studies. This methodology, according to

Cartwright, "must read historical texts imaginatively, infusing them with crip knowledge and queer questions that become pry bars." Queercrip, here, then signifies "a method of historical inquiry into the intersecting structural forces of disability, gender, sexuality, class, and race that constitute the circumstances" of these rural white nonconforming subjects (p. 15). And the subjects who "populate a queercrip history often live messy, contradictory lives, making them bad subjects of disability history and LGBT history" (pp. 15-16). Yet, as Cartwright argues cogently in the introduction and throughout the book, these subjects, narratives, and depictions deserve a full telling, even as "these deeply problematic histories of shared stigma create tension that is impossible for a historian to neatly resolve" (p. 17).

While the chapters that follow do not neatly resolve these figures, nor the texts that describe them or their positions, the book does offer spaces to navigate how these nonconforming subjects exist outside the binary of the idyll and the anti-idyll. Viewed in fuller contexts, horrific figures like Ed Gein and more ambiguous subjects like Delbert Ward help to highlight the power of whiteness to offer these nonnormative figures access to more privileged positions characterized by ablebodiedness or freedom from scrutiny. Chapter 1 offers a genesis of the anti-idyllic view of white rural poverty by introducing and discussing eugenic family studies. These "studies flourished in the 1910s and early 1920s, as professional and amateur researchers flocked to peculiar places populated by marginal people" (p. 26). Chapter 2 continues this discussion by examining the efforts of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and its Depression-era photography project, which, Cartwright notes, "sought to rehabilitate the image of the idyll that had been damaged by eugenic narratives of rural white social and sexual depravity" (p. 21).

Chapter 3 moves to a grisly subject, focusing on the case of Gein, the serial killer whose crimes served as the inspiration for the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974). Focusing on the longevity of the "psycho trans" trope, part of the effect of Gein's confession of his "feminine complex," Cartwright traces the anti-idyllic view engendered by coverage and discussion of Gein's case. He highlights how in various media responses to Gein's horrific crimes and their supposed root in Wisconsin itself the "anti-idyll, an optic focusing on rural white landscapes of psychiatric disability, physical disability, poverty, and sexuality, had come together" (p. 117).

In considering the continuing growth of the anti-idyllic view of rural life, Cartwright considers how "Americans 'rediscovered' poverty" with "tours to teach outsiders about poverty in majority-white communities of the central and southern Appalachian Mountains" (p. 119). Bringing a queercrip analysis to these spectacles of poverty, Cartwright explains how the "social conditions indexed by these poverty tours were more complex than rehabilitation narratives allowed" (p. 143). Cartwright connects these poverty tours with their often damaging effects to the rural subjects, introducing the peak of anti-idyllic feeling in the 1970s and horror films that united "the feeling of a regional poverty tour with the incomprehensible violence and gender ambiguity of the Gein legend" (p. 143).

It is precisely this peak of anti-idyllic feeling and its depiction in 1970s horror films that Cartwright examines in chapter 5, focusing on *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Deliverance* (1972). These "urbanoia" films "echoed the logic of eugenics and the visual symbolism of FSA photography, but they sited anti-idyllic stories in mountain hollows like those where white poverty had recently been 'rediscovered'" (p. 145). In the sixth chapter, Cartwright concludes with an investigation of 1990s depictions of rural LGBT as scenes of the anti-idyllic gaze. Concentrating on *Brother's Keeper*, the documentary focused on the Ward brothers, and *The Brandon Teena Story* (1998) and *Boys*

Don't Cry, Cartwright explores how these films seem to work at different purposes: ***Brother's Keeper*** is invested in the anti-idyllic view of rural white poverty, while ***The Brandon Teena Story*** focuses on transgender identity. Cartwright, however, shows how the murder of Teena and two other people were depicted as more anti-idyllic discourse outside of LGBT media.

These six chapters and introduction are well written and well researched, and the book will be useful for readers interested in queer studies, disability studies, or American studies.