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### Goldin-Perschbacher, Shana. 2022. Queer Country

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[See table of contents](#)

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Goldin-Perschbacher, Shana. 2022. *Queer Country*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 288 pp.

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*Queer Country* by Shana Goldin-Perschbacher is a long overdue intervention in queer studies, country music scholarship, and popular musicology. She describes queer country as a “socioaesthetic phenomenon” rather than its own genre or category (199). Within the contemporary

political and media contexts around country music and the emergence of critical voices in journalism and scholarship, now is an important time to re-evaluate the genre, especially by interrogating whose voices and narratives are represented. *Queer Country* achieves several objectives. Perhaps most important is the centring of queer, and especially transgender, artists in (re)interpreting country music (3, 71). She explores how queer and trans country and folk artists navigate country’s discourses around authenticity and sincerity, constructs an alternative historiography of country music that includes LGBTQ+ artists, and adopts a queer theoretical framework that understands “identity and genre as cogenerative” (23).

Goldin-Perschbacher uses a range of methodologies: analysis (of text, music, and image), historiography, and ethnography, all underpinned by a critical queer theoretical approach. Her use of ethnographic methods grounds the book’s more abstract theoretical arguments, ensuring that queer and trans artists’ perspectives are valued as necessary scholarly and theoretical contributions. She outlines her own engagement with country music and artists, demonstrating the twenty years of labour she put into writing *Queer Country*.

In addition to prioritizing artists who have yet to receive their due (such as Rae Spoon, Lavender Country, Amythyst Kiah, Mya Byrne, and Jake Blount), *Queer Country*’s overarching thread explores the tension between genre and authenticity. Drawing on the work of Robin James (2017), Goldin-Perschbacher discusses this tension within the context of discourses around essentialism and “post-identity” or “post-genre.” Essentialist identity categories have a racialized history

based in colonial categorization tendencies that were adopted by the recording and radio industries starting in the early twentieth century (9–11). These industries developed genre-based marketing categories (“Race” and “Hillbilly”) that marginalized and excluded Black artists, people of colour, queer, and trans artists from participating in commercial country music. While acknowledging that genre categorization in the music industry has created this exclusion and that genre legibility is an inscribed and iterative process, Goldin-Perschbacher argues that some queer and trans musicians have to engage with these culturally legible genre categories in order to access opportunities and financial resources. She takes care not to overstate her critique of essentialism, which would risk invalidating trans peoples’ identities. Instead, she focuses on highlighting different artists’ strategies for navigating precarious cultural terrain. Further, country music tropes, aesthetics, and portrayals of “sincerity” can be effective tools for artists to articulate queer and trans musical narratives.

In the first chapter, Goldin-Perschbacher begins by exploring the centrality of “sincerity” and “authenticity” to country music and problematizes the concepts’ ties to essentialism, showing that essentialism and authenticity are rooted in hundreds of years of colonial history and discourse. The second chapter discusses genre and (gender) identity, including a brief historiography of queer and trans artists across country and related genres, including folk, roots, bluegrass, Americana, and women’s music scenes. Goldin-Perschbacher demonstrates that queer and trans artists are often compelled to work across multiple genres, challenging the supposed rigidity

of genres in the American popular music industry. She conceptualizes genre and gender categories “as cogenerative” (71). Changes in artists’ gender expression relate to changes in genre and musical expression. For some artists, country or folk gives access to a culturally sanctioned “sincerity” for articulating their narratives, whereas for others the expectations and pressures to perform “authenticity” may necessitate a move away from country.

Goldin-Perschbacher continues to centre trans musicians in the third chapter. Here, country and Americana tropes of journey and rurality are used to explore political tensions between assimilationist politics as a mode for inclusion within the “normal” (a strategy that works through demonstrating the perhaps obvious point that queer and trans people are everywhere) and a more radical strategy to critique the very idea of “normal” (129–30). Goldin-Perschbacher discusses these tensions in relation to the idea of a “trans narrative” where “a person realizes that they identify as the ‘opposite’ gender, takes steps to transition into this self, and then feels a sense of arrival and completeness” (138). The trans narrative, however, can exclude the experiences of trans people who do not fit this narrative, including within medical and legal frameworks. Trans country and folk artists have deployed the aesthetic tropes of journey and rurality to interrogate the hegemonic trans narrative and express alternative understandings of selfhood (which do not have to be fixed) that better reflect “their embodied experience” (139).

Chapter 4 explores the racial tensions “between appropriation and essentialism” in country music (154). Here, Goldin-Perschbacher attempts to reconcile the rights

of “marginalized and oppressed people to self-definition” and with “protection from” misrepresentation through essentializing practices of cultural appropriation (155). She argues, “It may not help matters of misrepresentation for everyone to adopt the standards of essentialism that led curious white people of many eras to try on what they understood as the authenticity of Blackness” (171).

Goldin-Perschbacher acknowledges one limitation of *Queer Country*: the “study skews toward white lesbian, gay and trans musicians” (16). That being said, she has built anti-racist and anticolonial critique into the core of her analytic and theoretical framework. One area that could be unpacked in more detail is the relatively short fourth chapter, “(Mis)representation, Ownership, and Appropriation.” The chapter explores complex issues around identity, essentialism, and appropriation. Goldin-Perschbacher argues that “trans and queer musicians and musicians of color may benefit more from acknowledgment of their status as skilled professional artists” rather than reinvesting “in essentialism” (171, 162). Yet some of these complex issues could be elaborated. For example, she discusses a 2019 interview with Rhiannon Giddens in which Giddens discusses musical hybridity and borrowing and argues that the key question is “why you’re doing it. It’s the authenticity with which you are approaching the music” (Giddens 2019). Goldin-Perschbacher interprets this as arguing “in favor of authenticity, which then causes her to reinvest in essentialism” (162). Although Giddens uses the word *authenticity*, authenticity and sincerity may not completely map onto essentialism. Giving more space to discuss the way

these terms relate and, in particular, Rhiannon Giddens’s use of *authenticity*, would have enhanced the concluding suggestion of a political strategy for trans and queer musicians and musicians of colour. Nevertheless, the fourth chapter contributes to the overall theoretical, ethical, and practical accomplishments of the book.

Much like Nadine Hubbs’s *Rednecks, Queers and Country Music* (2014), *Queer Country* has the potential to challenge widely accepted assumptions and open up new areas of scholarly inquiry into country music, pop musicology, and queer studies. Goldin-Perschbacher carefully unpacks complex cultural history and theory, demonstrating how artists have engaged with issues around genre, identity, sincerity, camp, and authenticity. Notably, Goldin-Perschbacher’s emphasis on artists who have been pushed to the margins by the country music industry shows her dedication to resisting the Nashville-based definition of country music. One of the book’s most poignant insights is that many queer and trans country artists often have “little choice” but to work across multiple genres due to a lack of mainstream industry support (14). Goldin-Perschbacher does not raise this point to deny musicians’ artistic motivations and agency but instead to problematize a romanticized “post-genre” or “post-identity” position (James 2017). *Queer Country* is a powerful call to action for readers to resist the marginalization of LGBTQ+ artists and to see country music as a “radical shared space” (199). 🍀

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L'ouvrage de Nicolas Prévôt présente les deux jours du rituel *deo bazar* dans la région du Bastar, en Inde centrale. Ce rituel en l'honneur d'une divinité de village et des divinités voisines, très répandu dans cette région, se tient toujours à l'occasion des marchés hebdomadaires – l'une des journées de ce rituel prend d'ailleurs place à l'intérieur du marché. L'ouvrage se déroule selon une logique chronologique et thématique. S'il aborde ce rituel principalement par le prisme musical, l'objet de la recherche n'est pas la musique en tant que telle, mais un ensemble de rituels associés à la possession, dans lequel la musique est essentielle. L'auteur met de plus un point d'honneur à tisser des liens entre le musical et d'autres pans culturels de la société. Le style est fluide et l'ouvrage structuré avec grand soin. L'index et le glossaire théma-

tisés en fin d'ouvrage sont également très appréciables.

Dans un compte-rendu aussi bref, il est difficile de rendre justice à l'ouvrage très riche de Nicolas Prévôt, tant les sujets qu'il aborde sont vastes et ouvrent sur des pistes de réflexion nombreuses. Il existe à ce jour peu d'ouvrages qui présentent des événements si complexes dans leur globalité. Plus rares encore sont ceux qui non seulement rendent compte de l'événement, mais montrent également la manière spécifique dont les liens entre divers éléments (musique, corps, émotion, alcool, conception de l'invisible, rapports sociaux, pour ne citer que ceux-là) se tissent à la fois pendant le rituel et en dehors de celui-ci. La forme et l'agencement rituel de ces éléments permettent ainsi, ensemble, de faire advenir un événement qui contribue à renouveler et à nourrir un fonctionnement social général dépassant largement l'événement en question. Au-delà de la description fine du rituel, c'est un système bien plus large que l'ouvrage permet au lecteur d'appréhender.

Dans les quatre parties du livre, de longueurs très différentes, se répartissent une introduction, une conclusion ainsi que sept chapitres. La première partie présente un grand nombre d'éléments de contexte qui permettent aux non-spécialistes de la région de se repérer sur le plan anthropologique et ethnomusicologique, et aux spécialistes de saisir la spécificité de la région étudiée. Des éléments économiques, historiques et politiques permettent de saisir la complexité du contexte indien et celle de la région de Bastar. Rapports entre castes et entre populations – castes locales, Adivasi (premiers habitants), ethnie Gond, phénomène de « sanskrisation » – sont replacés dans le contexte régional.