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2023 ASRF Schedule

Apr 25th, 11:00 AM - 11:20 AM

Susannah and Cold Mountain: Examining the Portrayal of Appalachian Culture in Opera

Savannah Bennett

East Tennessee State University

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***SUSANNAH AND COLD
MOUNTAIN: EXAMINING
THE PORTRAYAL OF
APPALACHIAN CULTURE
IN OPERA***

Savannah Bennett
East Tennessee State University



THE QUESTION:

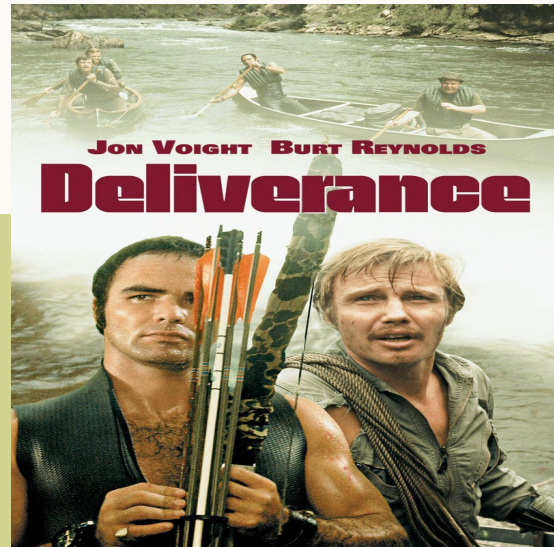
How is Appalachian culture portrayed in the operas *Susannah* and *Cold Mountain*?

“IMMEDIATELY, THE ANALYSIS OF THESE INTERVIEWS REVEALS RECURRING ASSUMPTIONS OF HOMOGENOUS MORALITY, POLITICAL VIEWS, RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, LEVELS OF EDUCATION, AND ECONOMIC CLASS.”

APPALACHIA IN MEDIA



Courtesy of Marion Post
Wolcott; New York Times



Deliverance (1972)



Wrong Turn (2003)



Courtesy of Mountain Dew;
Our Nostalgic Memories
(YouTube Channel)

http://reece.pastperfectonline.com/Search?search_criteria=hillbilly&onlyimages=false

CHARACTERS: *SUSANNAH*

SUSANNAH POLK

- Community outlier
- Independent
- Friendly > Distrustful
- Youthful > Matured
- Physically attractive

SAM POLK

- Community outlier
- Independent
- Not responsible
- Alcoholic
- Protective of Susannah
- Aggressive outbursts

REVEREND OLIN BLITCH

- Accepted “outsider”
- Moral leader of the community
- Focus on repentance and “saving the lost”
- Lonely > sexually repressed (?)
- Fearful of God

THE ELDERS

- Actionable community members
- Disdain toward Susannah
- Sexually repressed (?)
- Focus on repentance and “saving the lost”

THE ELDERS’ WIVES

- Not supportive of the outlier female
- Influence their husbands’ actions
- Characterize Susannah as shameful, and eventually, evil

CHARACTERS: *COLD MOUNTAIN*

W.P. INMAN

- Confederate deserter
- Facing guilt, regret, and shame
- Expresses his emotions very clearly
- Aversion to war/violence

ADA MONROE

- From South Carolina
- Educated, no experience in farm life
- Lost her father and missing Inman
- Lonely and lacking female relationships

RUBY THEWES

- Native to Cold Mountain
- Self-sufficient
- Lonely and lacking female relationships
- Lost her father, battles anger and hostility

STOBROD THEWES

- Native to Cold Mountain
- War deserter
- Recovering alcoholic
- Healing through music
- Misses his daughter

TEAGUE

- Leader of the Home Guard
- Incredibly hostile, aggressive, and violent
- Antagonist
- Epitomizes extreme moral beliefs

“CHALLENGING THE NARRATIVE”

ARISTOTLE’S DEFINITION OF VIRTUE

- The mean of deficiency and excess
- Embracing stereotypes while also providing opposing views
- Diverse portrayals of specific demographics

JOYS IN MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

- Oftentimes, marginalized demographics are depicted as struggling
- Acknowledge the struggle, tension, and historical facts while also celebrating joy, success, and contentment in marginalized communities

THE REECE MUSEUM

- To serve the region through exhibitions, **collections**, and community engagement
- Offering collections access
- Challenging visitors to embrace the many connections that Appalachia contributes to

SUMMARY

Stereotypes are not simply “good” or “bad.” They are complex worldviews that reinforce societal expectations. Such societal expectations shape our personal identities.

The exposure and eradication of perpetuated stereotypes is an achievable way to move toward a brighter and more accepting future.

Let us end perpetual cycles of hate and misunderstanding by encouraging content that moves **beyond stereotypes.**