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Rachal Marie Le Bourhis
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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INDEPENDENT MOUNTAINEERS: TRACING A PATH OF INDIVIDUALISM
IN SELECTED APPALACHIAN LITERATURE, FILM, AND POPULAR CULTURE
SINCE 1950

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Rachal Marie Le Bourhis

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Rachal Marie Le Bourhis

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

James M. Cahalan, Ph.D.
Professor of English, Advisor

Ronald Emerick, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus of English

Resa Bizzaro, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of English

ACCEPTED

Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.
Dean
The School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Independent Mountaineers: Tracing a Path of Individualism in Appalachian Literature, Film, and Popular Culture Since 1950

Author: Rachal Marie Le Bourhis

Dissertation Chair: Dr. James M. Cahalan

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Ronald Emerick
Dr. Resa Bizzaro

This dissertation looks at individualism in Appalachia by tracing the development of independent mountaineers throughout Appalachian literature. Independent mountaineers have often been regarded in a one-dimensional manner as seen in a variety of sources including not only literature, but also film, television, and newspapers. I offer a new perspective concerning the stereotyping of Appalachia by addressing specific issues related to individualism, not only to suggest how individualism has been used against people in the region but also to show through historical and literary accounts that these stereotypes are unjustified. Exposing the stereotypes related to independence will allow me to address how Appalachian literature is a literature that calls for social change. This literature's characters and subjects act as an example or guide for how Appalachians, especially youth, can learn to regain and maintain their independence.

The types of texts that I look at consist of mainly prose selections by such Appalachian authors as Harriette Simpson Arnow, Lee Smith, and Gurney Norman. Poetry written by authors such as Jim Wayne Miller and Frank X. Walker are included along with a few documentary films. In addition, I open up the category of independent mountaineer to minority writers of Appalachia such as Crystal Wilkinson and Jeff Mann. Historical accounts are also brought into play in order to illustrate the tradition of

resistance in the region that the literature often incorporates. While some earlier pioneering works are alluded to, my focus is primarily on texts written since 1950.

I argue, in regard to independence in the region, that Appalachians are capable of asserting themselves successfully but are not so independent that they shut themselves off from society and its rules. Appalachians are not helpless victims or violently backward, but rather, they have always been a strong, independent people and still are today—all as shown in Appalachian literature. My exploration, in turn, shows the complexity of a region and people that have so often been pigeonholed into stereotypical categories concerning their independent characteristics and demonstrates how this literature strives to arm Appalachians against people and forces that threaten their independence.