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Coming Home, Staying Put, and Learning to Fiddle:
Heroism and Place in Charles Frazier's Cold Mountain

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of English
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Masters of Arts in English

by
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August 2004

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Keywords: Cold Mountain, Charles Frazier, Appalachian Literature, Southern Literature, Civil
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ABSTRACT

Coming Home, Staying Put, and Learning to Fiddle:
Heroism and Place in Charles Frazier's Cold Mountain

by

Heather Rhea Gilreath

In his novel Cold Mountain, Charles Frazier weaves an intricate web of human stories, all converging to make a memorable statement about love, war, life, and death. This study examines these stories and the mythological, literary, and folk models Frazier employs, and in some cases revises, to tell them. The first chapter explores how Frazier recreates Odysseus in Inman, his main male character, to depict the psychological trauma inflicted by war. The second chapter focuses on Ada, Inman's pre-war sweetheart, and Ruby, a girl with whom Ada bonds, as challenges to the male pastoral tradition. Ruby's father Stobrod as trickster, culture hero, and ultimate keeper/creator of songs is the subject of the third chapter. Because Appalachia so strongly influences each of these characters, whether native or outsider, this thesis will also discuss such sense of place and prove that these stories, though universal, could not take place just anywhere.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'm not a crying person, but I cry every time that I read Cold Mountain. And not only because Inman dies in the end, but because the story sinks to my “deep heart’s core,” as Yeats says. I was born in the wrong century with a bug for the Civil War and living the “old-timey way,” as I said when I was a child. My roots run deep in Appalachia, and I am currently restoring a nineteenth-century house and farm. No wonder, then, that Cold Mountain is a book of my own heart. My relationship to this novel is much like Inman’s is to Bartram’s Travels, and I often pick out passages at random and steep myself in them—descriptions of Civil War battles, as grisly as they are, vignettes of Appalachian life, with characters living much as my ancestors did, and depictions of both the hardships and rewards of farm life, which I am experiencing now. I find inspiration in every character, every painfully beautiful scene. This is my proverbial “desert island book,” although I would prefer to be stranded on some high and lonesome mountain. For this gift, I must first and foremost thank Charles Frazier.

Secondly, I would like to thank my thesis committee members, who have graciously offered their time and advice. Dr. Lloyd—Thank you for teaching this book in your Southern Appalachian Literature class and guiding me even farther into its profound depths. And thanks too for encouraging me to continue my dream of owning a farm. Dr. Holland—Thank you for all the “mythological” tips and especially for the shooting lesson, which not only brought me closer to Inman, but was also one of the most interesting “field trips” I have ever been on. Dr. Holmes—Thank you for “extending” your nine-month schedule and bringing my attention to grammatical issues, especially passive voice. My proofreading eyes and ears are sharper now.

Lastly, I must thank my family, whose spirit I feel in this book. I am honored to be a part of the Gilreath-Lockhart-Rhea web, and I only hope that I can be as strong a strand as you all are. Mom—Thank you especially for putting up with a daughter who likes “old stuff” and doing things the old-fashioned way, as romantic and impractical as this passion may be. Differences aside, you are my best friend. And Lance, my husband—Thank you for reading this book when I know you really wanted to read Isaac Asimov. Thanks for the constant encouragement and bursts of goofiness. Somehow, all my stress vanishes when I see you in the paint aisle in Home Depot with a bucket on your head. I look forward to beginning our very own long journey of restoring a house and practicing semi-self-sufficient living on our farm.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Though set during the Civil War, Charles Frazier's Cold Mountain is not about military, economic, or political affairs; nor does it convey the stereotypical nostalgia and glamour associated with America's defining moment. More than a nation divided, Frazier tells the story of a relationship divided, and in doing so he omits the politicians, military men, mills, and plantations that usually factor so prominently into the literature set during that time period. Frazier admits that he is "largely uninterested in the great movements of troops, the famous personality traits of the noble generals and tragic presidents," but in the people that history books leave out, the people who faced the war rather than conceived it ("Cold Mountain Diary" 2). As he explains, his inspiration for writing the novel stemmed not so much from towering bronze memorials or neatly groomed national cemeteries as from unmarked and anonymous graves on the side of a mountain. He offers, therefore, not the "marble" characters whose idealism, moving speeches, and brave feats on the battlefield so typically characterize the Civil War experience, but characters who are disillusioned by or isolated from the war, and who undergo individual struggles that seem as real and intense as those encountered behind mahogany desks in capital cities or on the front lines of great bloody battles.

In telling his human story, Frazier uses and in some cases refuses heroic models from myth, literature, and folklore. Frazier patterns Inman, the novel's main male character, after Odysseus, hero of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. War rips both men from home, and they both travel long and grueling journeys to return, meeting similar friends and foes along the way. Both too are "men of constant sorrow," suffering from homesickness, fatigue, hunger, and in Odysseus's case, divine wrath. Unlike Odysseus, who is a celebrated commander, mastermind of the Trojan horse, and a deeply religious man, Inman is a deserter who shows none of the stereotypical élan attributed to Homeric warriors (or Southern soldiers) and is largely disconnected from God. He is a quiet and reluctant hero who is perpetually harrowed by repulsive images of battle litter –nightmares that make him feel as if the world is irrevocably cruel and random. In fact, Inman's war-prompted despair distinguishes him most from Odysseus, who, like other Homeric warriors, believes strongly in *kleos*, immortal glory, and views battle as a noble path to death. Though plagued by other myriad physical and mental discomforts,

Odysseus never dreams about severed limbs populating a disordered world. For him, war and all its misery is over after the fight. In Frazier's "epic," though, war follows Inman home, tormenting his mind as mercilessly as the wound on his neck pesters his body. His tragic death in the end is a powerful statement about the psychological trauma caused by violence and the killing of fellow men.

Ada, Inman's pre-war beloved who awaits his return, undergoes a different, though equally challenging struggle in Black Cove, her father's farm at the base of Cold Mountain. When Inman leaves, Ada appears to be a stereotypical Southern belle—the charming, fair, and cultured young girl featured in the popular plantation romances of the mid-nineteenth century. Having been raised in Charleston, Ada wears dresses of silk and lace, speaks several languages, plays piano, and renders landscapes beautifully in watercolor. And like many other literary belles, she is tightly bound to her father, Monroe—a representation of the strict patriarchy governing the Old South. When Monroe dies and leaves Ada alone in Appalachia, she seems as doomed as her crumbling society. But with the help of Ruby, a local girl who has raised herself in the hills, Ada turns the farm from an enigmatic burden into a self-sufficient enterprise. Not only does Ruby teach Ada mountain lore and methods of farming, but more importantly, she reassures Ada that the world is an ordered place, even as war threatens to tear it apart. Learning the lesson that Inman does not—that the world is not merely a “heap of random sweepings”—is a powerful motivator for Ada to shed the superficiality of her former life and gain the deeper strength and resolve needed to be a farmer (18). Just as Frazier revises Odysseus and the Homeric epics, therefore, he also reshapes the Southern belle and the pastoral romance by creating a heroine with both external grace and internal grit and offering a female friendship as strong and enduring as the traditional love between man and woman.

The novel's most ironic hero is Ruby's father, Stobrod, an inept parent, disloyal soldier, and gifted fiddle player. In his egotism, laziness, and affection for thieving, Stobrod is in many ways easy to despise, as Ruby so fervently does when he returns from the war. Yet with his music, for which he develops a passion after enlisting, he converts the chaos of war and the spirit of Appalachia into fiddle tunes. In this way, he offers an invaluable gift by preserving the experiences and emotions of soldiers and mountain folk long after they die. And he, too, learns the lesson that escapes Inman: that life can be ordered and sense can be made out of the seemingly nonsensical. In his duality, Stobrod is a trickster figure, one who simultaneously

destroys and creates, one who is knave and rogue but also culture hero. Though Stobrod himself is a revised man, Frazier does little to change or challenge the traditional trickster motif, as he does with the Homeric epic and pastoral romance. Instead, he chooses the most unlikely character to be the novel's most enduring hero. And just as Inman's death emphasizes the horrors of war, Stobrod's survival celebrates the importance of music and storytelling as cultural unifiers rather than banes.

In the Blue Ridge Mountains, Frazier chooses an appropriate setting for his novel of personal tragedy and triumph. Historian John Inscoe incorrectly assumes, "Can the tale's Appalachian setting make any claim for its appeal? Alas, probably not. There is no reason to think that the same story, as beautifully told but set in some other part of the war-torn South, would have been equally as popular" (332). Appalachia, however, is not "war-torn" like the lowlands. Though it is a myth that Appalachia played little if no role in the Civil War, the Southern mountains nevertheless harbored individuals largely unfamiliar with the life of genteel farming, and the mountains were spared the widespread devastation wrought by battles or Yankees marching to the sea. Even Inscoe himself admits:

The war depicted [in Cold Mountain] is indeed very different from the war . . . which Robert E. Lee experienced. There are few if any plantations, slaveholders, or slaves on this home front. The many characters who people Frazier's saga are far removed from those who made up Margaret Mitchell's or John Jake's fictionalized Confederacy. With very few exceptions, these people are poor, leading lives of quiet—and often not so quiet—desperation. For all participants, the war has become one of disillusionment, of resentment, or desolation, and of brutality as they engage in a primal quest for sheer survival. (333)

The Appalachian setting, therefore, is responsible for Cold Mountain's appeal. Though Frazier could have, as Inscoe suggests, crafted a beautiful novel set in the Mississippi Delta, the coast of South Carolina, or the Georgia countryside, it would not have been the same story. Even if the characters were predominantly lower-class, salt of the earth, self-sufficient farmers, they would likely feel the terrible swift sword of war on the home front more than the mountaineers. Because of their isolation, the North Carolina mountains afford the perfect place for the

characters to escape war, and also for Frazier to create a believable story set during national conflict, but not about battles and politics.

As Frazier says of the mountain graves he finds, “The people in them were caught in the crossfire of two incompatible economies. For none of those...dead could have had much to do with either of the warring sides, no strong ties to slave agriculture or industrial capitalism” (“Cold Mountain Diary” 2). Likewise, none of Frazier’s characters own plantations or factories, nor do they exhibit zealous fidelity to Lee, Grant, Lincoln, or Davis. Though Inman enlists, his heart yearns for Cold Mountain, not victory, and he deserts with no regret or shame. Though an outsider, Ada too finds strength in Appalachia. She has no desire to return to Charleston, where the war has raged and left its scars, and even though she is starving on her farm, the surrounding mountains are a comforting cushion from war and a perfect place to transform. Stobrod and Ruby are also bound to Appalachia. More than anyone, Ruby is a product of the mountain landscape, and, like the plants she harvests for medicine, she becomes a human poultice for Ada and her greatest link to survival. Though lacking the strong sense of place felt by the other characters, Stobrod nevertheless becomes a cultural icon by preserving the experiences and essence of hill-folk in his fiddle tunes. Cold Mountain, therefore, is more than simply a place, a setting, but as Katherine Stripling Byer says, it is “the *ompholos*, source and center” of the novel. More than loyalty to a cause, loss of loved ones or property, Cold Mountain is the common bond between the characters. Just as this thesis will discuss Frazier’s use of heroic models, it will also explore how Appalachia shapes the characters’ heroism, and in turn, how their heroism shapes the novel’s Appalachia.

CHAPTER 2

“I’VE BEEN COMING TO YOU ON A HARD ROAD AND I’M NOT LETTING YOU GO”: INMAN, ODYSSEUS, AND THE HEROIC JOURNEY HOME

Like many modern storytellers, Charles Frazier turned to the Homeric epics when crafting his story of love and war in nineteenth-century America. Frazier remembers, “The story seemed like an American odyssey. . . . So I set out on Inman’s trail and followed it for five years of writing” (“Cold Mountain Diary” 3). In part, Inman’s “trail” is Odysseus’s in another time and place—a *nostos*, or homecoming, from foreign battlefield to familiar hearth with plentiful and grueling wandering in between. Both Inman and Odysseus have a woman waiting at the end of their journey—Penelope, Odysseus’s wife, who must fend off greedy suitors, desirous of her hand and the crown of Ithaca, and Ada, Inman’s pre-war beloved, who waits in the Blue Ridge and adjusts to her father’s death and the hardships of farm life. Likewise, on their journey home the two heroes meet similar characters, both wishing them well and doing them harm.

In *Inman*, however, Frazier does not create an exact replica of Odysseus, for Inman is neither king nor great warrior, and terrible memories of battles that have all the guts but none of the glory of the Trojan War plague him. Unlike Odysseus, a descendent of Autolycus, the archtrickster of ancient Greece, and one of the leaders of a great civilization, Inman appears to be “kinless,” and as an Appalachian, he is part of a society that is largely marginalized from the North and South, the two great American regions at war. Though practical, Inman lacks *metis*, the instantaneous wisdom that characterizes Odysseus. Fatigued and dispirited, Inman often finds himself at a loss for words and action and often attributes his survival to luck rather than craftiness. Furthermore, he is caught in an existential dilemma, understanding little of his purpose and lacking the divine support of hyacinth-haired Odysseus, favorite of grey-eyed Athena. And though Inman and Odysseus share the same goal of survival and homecoming, Inman’s yearning for home seems to surpass that of Odysseus, for Inman is bound by nothing—not even God—but his longing to return to his beloved Cold Mountain, where he can escape war’s evil pull forever. Even though he succeeds in his journey and climbs to the top of Cold Mountain, where he is reunited with Ada, his fate reflects more of his despair than reconciliation or rejuvenation. Though he enjoys a “redemption of some kind,” he never gets the chance to re-

integrate into a peaceful lifestyle, and he dies, like so many soldiers he has known, a rather common death—being shot by a stranger (334).

These differences suggest that Inman is a modern rendering of a classic hero. As a soldier of the American Civil War, he is on the cusp of modern warfare, which evolves from the hallmark open fighting of the Trojan War, the Crusades, and the American Revolution, to the more “furtive” strategies of trench building and gassing that begin with the Industrial Revolution. The latter techniques, though reflective of technological and military “advancements,” also backfire in that they wage a psychological war on the soldiers who must use them. No longer do men march single file across a treeless field into the enemy, but they must hole themselves up for months in damp ditches that breed disease and boredom. No longer are they killed one by one in hand-to-hand combat, but face extermination *en mass* by chemicals and bombs. Through Inman, Frazier shows how this military “revolution” takes the glory from fighting and adds instead mental anguish and inner turmoil. His recreated Odysseus, therefore, is the bearer of a somber message—that war follows you home.

Frazier’s negative tone towards war is evident from the beginning of Cold Mountain, as flies swarm around a wound at Inman’s neck: “The sound of their wings and the touch of their feet were soon more potent than a yardful of roosters in rousing a man to wake” (1). This opening could hardly be more different than Homer’s sweeping invocation to the Muse, to whom he pleads, “through me tell the story / of that great man skilled in all ways of contending, / the wanderer, harried for years on end, after he plundered the stronghold / on the proud height of Troy” (I, 1-5). From Frazier’s initial description of Inman, we see that he has run the gauntlet of war, been badly injured, and is greatly suffering from a deep gash that nearly severed his head. Yet he has conquered no city, masterminded no clever battle strategy, nor led troops to victory. He is merely one of the thousands of men caught in the great cloud of war, and he appears rather pitiful and forlorn, fearing that “he had seen the metal face of the age and had been so stunned by it that when he thought into the future, all he could vision was a world from which everything he counted important had been banished or willingly fled” (2). Lying on his cot, with oozing wounds, Inman experiences what historian Paul Fussell calls a “primal scene, a survivor’s recollection of a specific battle experience so ‘undeniably horrible’ that it becomes a focal point of recurring nightmare and psychological trauma” (qtd. in McCarron 1). In a dream, Inman’s mind recreates the horrors of Fredericksburg, where thousands of Union soldiers futilely stormed

the Confederate stronghold behind a stone wall. A negative energy breathes life into the mutilated slain:

the aurora blazed and the scattered bloody pieces—arms, heads, legs, trunks—slowly drew together and reformed themselves into monstrous bodies of mismatched parts. They limped and reeled and lunged about the dark battlefield like blind sots on their faulty legs. They jounced off one another, butting bloody cleft heads in their stupor. They waved their assorted arms in the air, and few of the hands made convincing pairs. Some spoke the name of their women. Some sang snatches of song over and over. Others stood to the side and looked off into the dark and urgently called their dogs. (10)

This grisly image of war suggests a considerable difference in the mindsets of Inman and Odysseus. First of all, it illustrates how Inman, as his name suggests, lives largely in his head and is often unable to loose himself from a tangle of war-made nightmares and flashbacks. As manifested by the crow that like a shadow follows him on his journey, Inman cannot free himself from his experience as a soldier, and such corrosive dream and memories soon hollow him out. Odysseus, however, is not such a man of psychological turmoil. He is no stranger to strife, but he lacks the inner dimension that defines Inman. We never see him remember with disgust the horrors of war that he surely experiences, nor do we see his thoughts dominate his actions. As W. B. Stanford notes, “the total portrait [of Odysseus] is that of a man well integrated both in his own temperament and with his environment. As Athene emphasized, he was essentially ‘self-possessed,’ fully able to control conflicting passions and motives. . . . Such was his inner harmony and strength” (79). Though Inman is a man of virtue and a skilled fighter, he can never achieve such harmony because of his plagued mind.

Inmna’s nightmare of Fredericksburg also shows that he has a significantly different view of war than Odysseus or other Homeric heroes do. War in any time and place means death, yet death for the heroes of the Trojan War brings with it *kleos*, or immortal glory. Furthermore, for such heroes, as described in the Iliad, there is a clean, quick separation between life and death—an intense, though brief moment of pain, and then a swift suction into the Underworld. In his book, Homer on Life and Death, Jasper Griffin notes that Homer “dislikes any account of men being gravely wounded but not dying; a wounded man either dies quickly or recovers and fights again” (90). There are no field hospitals, bloody saws, or piles of black limbs in Homer,

yet they abound in Frazier's world, where men remain tormented on earth even after they die, as depicted in Inman's dream. Stubborn wounds seem more common than mortal ones, and they often bring about a slow and agonizing death, as for Inman's ward-mate, Balis, whose leg "stub seemed not to want to heal and had rotted inch by inch from the ankle up. His amputations had now proceeded past the knee, and he smelled all the time like last year's ham" (3). Inman's own wound even takes on a personality of its own, as if it were a parasite living on the side of his neck: "Before it started scabbing, it spit out a number of things: a collar button and a piece of wool collar from the shirt he had been wearing when he was hit, a shard of soft grey metal as big as a quarter dollar piece, and unaccountably, something that closely resembled a peach pit" (4). As a soldier, Inman sees that "great wounds sometimes healed, small sometimes festered. Any wound might heal on the skin side but keep on burrowing inward to a man's core until it ate him up. The why of it, like much in life, offered little access to logic" (327). Inman too realizes the blindness of death, that it comes for good, bad, young, and old alike, so much that it becomes "a random thing entirely" (180). Such a grim philosophy characterizes Inman's internal world and leads him to conclude that war is not only hellish, but futile as well.

For Inman, fighting also lacks the glory of that depicted in the Iliad, whose heroes, even the minor ones, Homer often singles out as lone warriors fighting a duel and following a particular script, first exclaiming their name and lineage, and then battling until death. As M. I. Finley notes in The World of Odysseus, "No one who reads the Iliad can fail to be struck by the peculiar character of fighting. There are tens of thousands of soldiers on hand, yet the poet has eyes only for Ajax or Achilles or Hector or Aeneas" (74). For Inman, however, fighting entails a mass confusion of men, blinded by bodies, both alive and dead, hacking at each other with merciless rage, killing easily without knowing the names of their victims. He remembers the crater at Petersburg:

It was . . . as if hundreds of men were put into a cave, shoulder to shoulder, and told to kill each other. There was no room for firing muskets, so they mainly used them as clubs. . . . All underfoot were bodies and pieces of bodies, and so many men had come apart in the blowup and the shelling that the ground was slick and threw a terrible stink from their wet internalments. . . . They killed everybody that didn't run away. (124)

The collective energy of such fighting distinguishes it from Homer, whose descriptions are also full of gore, but which come in a list as if death truly was happening to one person at a time.

Not only does Inman harbor unsettling thoughts of battle, but he also exhibits no loyalty to the Southern generals—“[t]he allegedly godlike Lee, grim Jackson, gaudy Stuart, stolid Longstreet” (343). He views them, and the Federal leaders, as little more than “gang[s] of despots launching attacks upon [one] another,” and he hopes that he would be able to “judge himself by another measure . . . in a time when people weren’t dying so much” (343). To Inman, therefore, the “great celebrated warriors,” who have been passed down through the generations as kinds of Odyssean figures, are little more than bloodthirsty men, whose goal is to perpetuate slaughter until no man is left standing (343). With “Old Lee” Inman particularly has problems (8). When hearing of Lee’s famous statement that “it’s a good thing war is so terrible or else we’d get to liking it too much,” Inman just shakes his head, for “it appeared to him that we like fighting plenty, and the more terrible it is, the better. And he suspected that Lee liked it most of all and would, if given his preference, general them right through the gates of death itself” (8). Lee’s view that “war [is] an instrument for clarifying God’s obscure will,” however, troubles Inman more than his lust for battle and death (8). Inman sees such thinking as egotistical and flawed, for “following such logic would soon lead one to declare the victor of every brawl and dogfight as God’s certified champion” (8). For Inman, God seems a distant, neutral observer in the fight, and whichever side wins is more likely the one that kills the most foes, not the one handpicked by God as victor.

Such a theory not only alienates Inman from his comrades who view Lee as little less than God incarnate and their mission as a fulfillment of His plan, but it also separates Inman from Odysseus, who is inextricably bound to the will of the Olympic gods, who can reward or punish on a whim. As Jasper Griffin observes:

The Homeric poems are pervaded from end to end by an elaborate polytheism. The Iliad begins with the anger of Apollo and ends with the gods conducting Priam to Achilles and ordering Achilles to yield to him the body of Priam. The Odyssey begins on Olympus and ends with the intervention of Athena which makes peace between Odysseus and the kinsmen of the slaughtered Suitors. Action on earth is accompanied by action, decision, and conflict in heaven, and gods and goddesses intervene in the human world. (144)

Moreover, gods choose sides in Homer's world, and their shifting allegiance often steers the course of the mortals. As Griffin notes, "The world of the Odyssey [and the Iliad] is a world in which there is no place for chance . . . the divine is constantly at work, leading men and shaping their destiny—whether or not they are aware of it" (165). In the Iliad, for instance, Apollo sides with the Trojans, and his blow causes Patroclus to lose his armor and be slain by Hector, an act which then precipitates Achilles's reentry into the fight. Likewise, in the Odyssey, Odysseus is a favorite mortal of Athena, goddess of wisdom and warfare, who often guides him to safety and relishes his ability to outwit his opponents without her help. Yet Poseidon, whose son Polyphemus Odysseus blinds, despises Odysseus and sends countless obstacles his way to stall his progress. Being pulled between Poseidon's wrath and Athena's adoration, Odysseus's path, therefore, is largely paved by the gods.

Though Inman calls himself "God's most marauded bantling," he seems for the most part disconnected from his Maker, whether as a treasured son or tortured orphan (53). He never prays, blesses his food only once, and attributes most phenomena to chance, believing that "[t]he comeliest order on earth is but a heap of random sweepings" (18). As he believes that his fellow soldiers are narrow-minded in thinking that God is on their side, he neither looks for guidance nor support from a supreme being. Divine intervention, whether for better or for worse, therefore, is absent in Inman's experience.

Filling the traditional role of religion and faith in God, however, is Inman's relationship to Cold Mountain, which becomes both his tonic for war sickness and his spiritual center. We see that for him, Cold Mountain is a kind of personal *axis mundi*, or world navel, around which everything revolves, and his journey across North Carolina becomes a pilgrimage as well as a homecoming (Campbell 45). In his convalescence, he stares into "an open triple-hung window" and pictures "the old green places he recollected from home," where he left his antebellum sweetheart on his way to join Lee's army (1). For both Inman and Odysseus, who also "hungered for home and wife" while being tossed mercilessly by wind and wave, the vision of a future reunion overpowers the temptation to give up, to stop in one's tracks and waste away on foreign soil (I, 21-22). Obviously, Ada is vital to Inman's image of Cold Mountain, for he leaves her at its base on his way to war. Along with nightmares of monstrous beasts, composed of severed body parts and battle litter, he dreams of her, wrapped in mysterious beauty. In one such dream, he throws his arms around her waist and exclaims, "I've been coming for you on a hard road. I'm

never letting you go. Never” (102). Unlike Penelope, however, Ada is not Inman’s wife; their relationship is merely budding when Inman is called to war, and she has no formal ties to bind her to him. Whereas Odysseus has Teiresias’s assurance of his reunion with his wife, Inman knows that Ada may very well be gone when he returns. Certainly there will be no lot of suitors at her doorstep, for all eligible men are “off warring” or dead, yet she and her father, Monroe, a wealthy Charlestonian, will likely have given up an unforgiving rural life and returned to the city. All Inman can do is hope that she remains and that she will “know him in every feature” when he returns and will “rush across the yard and through the gate in a flurry of petticoats” and embrace him (312).

In addition to his love for Ada, Inman possesses a strong sense of place that links him to the landscape of Cold Mountain:

He thought on homeland, the big timber, the air thin and chill all the year long. Tulip poplars so big through the trunk they put you in mind of locomotives set on end. He thought of getting home and building him a cabin on Cold Mountain so high that not a soul but the nighthawks passing across the clouds in autumn could hear his sad cry. Of living a life so quiet he would not need ears. And if Ada would go with him, there might be the hope, so far off in the distance he did not even really see it, that in time his despair might be honed off to a point so fine and thin that it would be nearly the same as vanishing. (65)

To Inman, therefore, Cold Mountain is what Wilbert M. Gesler calls a “therapeutic landscape,” or a place of “restorative powers.” (735). As strong as any poultice or bandage applied to Inman’s wounds, memories of home work to draw out the pain caused by battle and become a mental salve that soothes his despair.

One of Inman’s first guides to the healing capacity of Cold Mountain is Swimmer, a Cherokee boy whom he meets while grazing cows in the Balsams. In their adolescent revels, Swimmer introduces Inman to a world of Cherokee myth, legend, and lore: the belief that animal characteristics—“wheeling grace, soar and stoop, grim single-mindedness”—can transfer to humans (15); methods of casting spells that would “produce misfortune, sickness, death” (14); and most importantly of his own belief that “Cold Mountain [is] the chief mountain of the world” (14). As Ed Piacentino observes, “Because of his high regard for Swimmer, Inman subsequently comes to perceive the Cherokee’s beliefs as relevant to his own personal needs of restoring

wholeness to his ‘lost self,’” and he takes them on as part of his “religion” (4). Subscribing to the pantheism of the Cherokee thus separates Inman from the God-based practices of Christians and allows him to become even closer to the landscape.

In addition to Swimmer, Inman meets an old Cherokee woman, with a colorless eye and “head as slick and white as a boiled bird egg,” who tells him of the Shining Rocks, a landmark on Cold Mountain that is the gateway to a land of peace and plenty (197). Eventually, Inman too looks to Cold Mountain as a portal to another place, where the terrors of war and hardships of earthly life are unknown:

Cold Mountain . . . soared in his mind as a place where all his scattered forces might gather. Inman did not consider himself to be a superstitious person, but he did believe that there is a world invisible to us. He no longer thought of that world as heaven, nor did he still think that we get to go there when we die. Those teachings had been burned away. But he could not abide by a universe composed only of what we could see, especially when it was so frequently foul. So he held to the idea of another world, a better place, and he figured he might as well consider Cold Mountain to be the location of it as anywhere. (17)

Inman’s confidence in the renewing powers of Cold Mountain is so strong that he decides “[i]f [Ada] would not have him” he would continue to climb up the mountain and see if the Shining Rocks “would open to him,” and if they would, “[h]e would walk right out of this world and keep on going into that happy valley” (312).

If faith in Cold Mountain provides Inman with spiritual strength, then his copy of William Bartram’s *Travels* is his “Bible.” Having “pulled it from a box of books donated by ladies of the capital eager for the intellectual as well as physical improvement of the patients,” Inman realizes that it is full of descriptions of the Blue Ridge, and just after reading a short passage, he begins “forming the topography of home in his head” (11). Attracted by its power to describe and conjure familiar images, Inman carries the book with him on his journey home, and along with his LeMat’s revolver and a few crumbs of food, it becomes an essential item in his haversack. He drags it with him across the state, and though it becomes “wet and dry and wet again for months,” it is still intact when he finally meets Ada. He relates to her “how it had helped sustain him on his journey, how he had read it many a night by the firelight of a lonesome bivouac,” and that in his mind, “the book stood nigh to holiness and was of such richness that

one might dip into it at random and read only one sentence and yet be sure of finding instruction and delight” (330). For Inman, Bartram not only takes the place of the Bible, but becomes a revelator, a diviner with the mystical quality of predicting and leading him into the future.

In fact, Bartram largely spurs Inman to leave the war. Lying in the hospital, reading its soothing lines and inhaling the rank odor of dying men, Inman’s “only thought looking on the enemy was, Go home” to the hills and Ada (9). So, Inman decides to desert the army and take his chances on the road towards Cold Mountain. Whereas Odysseus begins his homecoming as a decorated warrior, “formidable for guile in peace and war,” whose “fame has gone abroad to the sky’s rim” (XI, 22-23), and leaves Troy with a legion of ships and men, Inman begins his journey back to “the vast hump of Cold Mountain” as a deserter, a cowardly traitor in the eyes of many, who has long forgotten “the Cause” and has become disillusioned with war (2). He leaves only with himself and whatever meager rations his haversack holds. Unlike Odysseus, who has numerous men to lose on his journey, Inman has no one but himself. In this way, Inman seems quite the opposite from the conspicuous, successful Odysseus, but in fact Odysseus too is a lonely man. As W. B. Stanford notes:

The Iliad says nothing of Odysseus’s private life during the Trojan campaign. . . . There was no one, apparently, among his associates at Troy to whom he could open his heart and speak without suspicion or caution. Achilles had his mother and Patroclus to comfort him in his troubles. Agamemnon and Menelaus shared the familiarity of brothers. But Odysseus kept his inner thoughts and feelings to himself. In the Odyssey, too, even among his shipmates Odysseus is a lonely figure, more like Captain Ahab in Melville’s Moby Dick than the genial prince that the Ithacans had known before the war. (43)

In his Hero with a Thousand faces, Joseph Campbell notes that such solitariness is a crucial trait of the classic hero. The “call to adventure,” which propels a character onto the heroic journey, also separates him from others—loved ones, family, community (58). Answering this call, voluntarily or involuntarily, “signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown” (58). For Odysseus, the start of the Trojan War and call to duty begins his twenty-year absence from home, but it is not until his homecoming journey, where he is often alone, that his heroic traits stand out. There is no Achilles or Hector or Ajax with whom to support or contend. Likewise for

Inman, North Carolina's secession from the Union goads him to join the ranks of other lads from Dixie, but not until his decision to desert is he truly tested as a hero. Like Odysseus, Inman's journey will be the "axle of [his] life" (52), and to make it home, both heroes must become solitary wanderers, or "wayfaring strangers."

As suggested in his solo beginning and his introspection, Inman's isolation even surpasses Odysseus's, for Inman seems to have little connection to other people, even at home. As Martin Crawford notes:

Inman is an outsider by dint of the author's failure to provide him with anything but the most fragmentary of histories. We literally know nothing of Inman's social roots; he seems to have no family, community, or cultural affiliations. . . . We discover nothing from the narrative about Inman's company comrades, men from his community who have fought and died alongside him. . . . (190)

As a military leader, Odysseus oversees many men, and as a Greek king, he enjoys a role as ruler of a great civilization. Inman, though, is "salt of the earth," from Appalachia, a place "hidden" between the two more prominent geographic regions of America, and he seems to have fought his part of the war in a bubble, befriendng no others in his unit. Furthermore, he remembers only a handful of people from his past with any clarity, namely Ada and Swimmer. Whereas Odysseus has an impressive lineage and a family waiting for him at home, Inman appears to be severed from his family, making only two mentions of them, once when he remembers his father "driving cows down to the barn at dusk" (2), and another when he states that he can borrow money from his family to buy equipment for a sawmill (344). He offers no other details, no description of his boyhood home, no memories of his mother's cooking, nothing that a typical soldier would tend to cling to. Neither does he offer memories of their funerals or explanations of a feud or rift that has alienated him from them. In their obscurity, therefore, his parents are basically nonexistent, and we can hardly assume that they are waiting for him to return home with open arms. Likewise, the only "friend" he remembers from his youth is Swimmer, and Inman has lost touch with him over the years. Even Ada, with whom Inman is obviously in love, may have assumed him dead and fled the hills. Inman, therefore, has lived largely on the periphery of society even before he begins his journey home.

In his separateness, Inman may assume the role of classic hero, but if given the personal choice, he would shun it. After his reunion with Ada, he realizes that "what he knew he most

wanted was to disburden himself of solitude. He had become too proud of walking singular, of his oneness, his liveness" (331). As Katherine Stripling Byer notes, "Relationship is what [Inman] desires, not heroism" (116). Likewise, Odysseus does not savor his station as a lone man washed by wind and wave. As W. B. Stanford observes, "Odysseus had never wished to leave home. His sole aim in the Trojan campaign was to finish it successfully as soon as possible. He had never wished to be a wanderer, or traveler, or explorer . . . [and admits,] 'There is nothing worse for mortal men than wandering'" (86). Odysseus may relish the opportunity to prove his heroism, but he dreads the seclusion that comes with it.

Campbell explains that such a "refusal to the call" is not uncommon with heroes, but it does not mean that they will not eventually fill the role (56). Though Inman may reject the role of hero, his journey home has plenty of heroic episodes that closely parallel those of Odysseus. Whereas Odysseus's journey is split by a sojourn to the Underworld, Inman's begins there, in a fetid depository for the wounded and forsaken of battle, and his first step in returning home is a kind of reverse *nekyia*, a journey out of rather than into the home of dead and near-dead souls. Inman's time in the "Underworld" is characterized by a meeting with an elderly blind man who sells roasted peanuts and newspapers outside the hospital. This man, however, is not a great sage or "prince of those with gift of speech" like Teiresias, whom Odysseus seeks in the Underworld; neither does he offer a detailed prophecy of Inman's future (XI, 111). Teiresias can see clearly that Odysseus will be "shaken from [his] track, implacable, / in rancor for the son whose eye you blinded" and that he will eventually see the hearth fires of Ithaca (XI, 15-16), but all the blind man can say to Inman after hearing his account of war, is, "You need to put that away from you" (9). Although lacking the clarity and specificity of Teiresias's prophecy to Odysseus, the blind man's words of advice are remarkably true, for Inman, though facing physical imprisonment and impediments his journey, will above all be held captive by his discouraging thoughts.

Like Odysseus and other mythical heroes, Inman must cross a threshold separating past from present and marking the beginning of the heroic journey; and because he embarks from a representative Underworld, his threshold is a river—the Cape Fear, a flooded "smear on the landscape" that was "foul as the contents of the outhouse pit," but which, like the Styx, must be crossed in order to enter the world beyond death (65). Growing in the moist ground around the river are "strange and hairy" flesh-eating plants, mini-Scyllas that eat "fatback from the end of a splinter," or snap at the end of a man's finger (65). Such miniature ravenous organisms are not a

threat by themselves, but Inman fears that their habitat—the surrounding bog and flatwoods—is “only a step away from learning the trick on a grander scale” (65). Such an ominous premonition sets the mood of Inman’s journey—one that will be filled with scavengers, both men and animal alike, hungry for his blood.

On the banks of the “broad ditch” (65) is a sign that reads, “Ferry. \$5. Yell Loud.” (66). After Inman does so, a figure as obscure as Charon appears on the opposite bank and “set[s] out rowing hard upstream . . . until it looked like he planned to just keep on going” (66). When the boatman reaches Inman’s side, however, Inman discovers that the dugout is “piloted by no ferryman but an apple-cheeked girl,” who proves to be the “threshold guardian,” beyond whom is “darkness, the unknown, and danger,” but also the green hills of home (Campbell 77). She is not, however, the typical guardian who Campbell describes as “more than content . . . even proud to remain within the indicated bounds” (78), for when taking Inman’s money, the girl exclaims, “I’ll start saving for a horse, and when I get one, I’ll throw the saddle over it and turn my back to this river and be gone” (67). Nevertheless, she recognizes her duty as temporary steward of the river, and agrees to carry Inman across through a deluge as “huge and urgent as breath from a drowning cow” (67). Midway across, they become the targets of distant gunman, and so throw “themselves into the river to let the current take them, bearing them up and away, spinning them off downstream” (69). At this point, the river mimics Charybdis, the “whirling maelstrom” that Odysseus narrowly avoids at sea (XII, 125-126), and Inman struggles with the current as it “boom[s] along at the speed of a millrace” (69). After hours adrift, however, the river deposits Inman and the girl safely at a bend. Inman then compensates her for the canoe, and she gives him “directions for finding the roads west” (70). He sets “off again walking,” having successfully survived his first test (70).

Not only is this episode a threshold crossing and one of several brushes with death Inman encounters, but it also reinforces Inman’s sharp desire to return home, for it illustrates how he uses the foreignness of his current situation to spark images of his final destination. Upon seeing the Cape Fear River, Inman is suddenly reminded of the rivers in the Blue Ridge, not because they resemble the Cape Fear, but because they differ so much from it. To Inman, the Cape Fear is nothing more than an obstacle, a wide, “shit-brown clog to his passage,” whose water resembles “molasses as it first thickens”; but “where he was from, the word *river* meant rocks and moss and the sound of white water moving fast under the spell of a great deal of collected

gravity” (65). In fact, the unfamiliar terrain that Inman crosses during the first leg of his journey—the scrubby flatlands of eastern North Carolina and the scanty hills of the Piedmont—not only encourages his homesickness, but also threatens him by harboring individuals who will significantly hinder his journey or attempt to kill him. These regions become what E. V. Walter calls “sick places,” and it is not until Inman reaches closer to the mountains will he be met with altruism and healing hands (qtd. in Gesler 735).

As Inman inches closer to home in these unpleasant landscapes, he faces more Odyssean trials. After crossing the threshold of the Cape Fear River, he stumbles upon a potential murder scene, where a man is contemplating tossing an unconscious woman into a gorge. Inman discovers that the man, named Veasey, is a preacher who, in an adulterous act, has impregnated this woman, drugged her, and thrown her across a horse like a sack of meal, “one limp arm swinging, a cascade of black hair brushing the ground” (87). Thinking of no better alternative, Veasey has decided to do away with her and the shameful reminder of his sin. Inman allows Veasey no such chance, however, for he returns the woman to her bed and ties Veasey to a tree with a note explaining his story.

This scene establishes Inman’s lack of *metis*, or gift for instantaneous wisdom, for from the moment he sees Veasey, rocking from “side to side on the bones of his ass” and crying, “Lord, Oh, Lord,” Inman is at a loss for action: “What to do? Inman wondered. Another stone in his passway. Couldn’t go back. Couldn’t go around. Couldn’t stand there like a penned heifer all night” (87). And after listening to Veasey’s pitiful story, “Inman [does] not know what to do next, and his thinking seemed all grainy and sluggish from lack of sleep and hard walking” (89). Odysseus, on the other hand, never suffers from such a loss; he is *polytropus*, “the man of many turnings,” the grandson of the archtrickster Autolykos, who is ever clear-headed and clever (Pucci 16). When approached by Athena, who is disguised as a shepherd, for instance, Odysseus immediately begins brewing a false tale of his past, in which he subtly illustrates his fairness—“Here is my fortune with me. I left my sons an equal part” (VIII, 330-31), his ability to seek revenge—“I killed / Orsilokhos,” who “desired to take away my Trojan plunder” (VIII, 332-34), and his desire for food—“All famished, but too tired to think of food” (VIII, 358). Odysseus’s defense mechanism is so successful that even Athena admits his guile is tantamount to her own: “Two of a kind, we are, / contrivers, both. Of all men now alive you are the best in plots and storytelling. / My own fame is for wisdom among the gods-- / deceptions too” (VIII, 379-83). In

Odysseus Polutropus, Pietro Pucci notes that such *metis* and trickery, or *doloi*, allow Odysseus to control the threats of the “empire of necessity,” which include “death, self-forgetfulness, dissemination (drifting away forever), and loss of self” (17). Furthermore, Odysseus’s *bie*, or ability to use cunning over strength as when he outwits the Cyclops, is perhaps his greatest attribute. Inman, however, often must resort to fighting to clear his pathway home. Not long after leaving the hospital, for instance, he encounters three men, “layabouts” near a country store, who step in his way. Though Inman wants to pass without trouble, they come at him with fist and blade, and seem bent on killing him. With his gift for hand-to-hand combat, however, Inman “eventually smote[s] the three down to their knees in the dirt of the street so they looked like those of the Romish faith at prayer” (58). Victory, therefore, comes not through negotiation or trickery but through brute force.

Though Inman is a skilled fighter, he does not embrace the chance to brandish his knife or fire his gun. In most cases, he wants to do the right thing, but he rarely has a clear idea of what that is. Such lack of clarity, therefore, creates loopholes in Inman’s sense of justice, but as Campbell reminds us, “mythology does not hold as its greatest hero the merely virtuous man” (44). And even if it did, a consensus on morality would likely never be achieved, for in both the Odyssey and Cold Mountain, justice is highly subjective and bound more by culture and circumstance than by any transcendent truth. The Olympic gods, for instance, who are products of a patriarchal society, argue with the Fates, divinities of an older, matriarchal culture, about the punishment of Orestes, who avenges his father’s death by killing his mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aigisthos. The Fates argue that Orestes commits matricide, a sin of the bloodline, and should therefore be put to death. The Olympians, however, favor abstract justice and conclude that Clytemnestra and Aigisthos deserve to die and Orestes rightly executes them. Likewise, in Cold Mountain, Inman willingly deserts the army, a crime punishable by death, yet he sees no need to continue fighting when his will and loyalty are gone. Furthermore, if the Home Guard finds him, he is likely to suffer from their warped sense of justice by being starved, beaten, or shot, not by receiving a fair trial. Justice, whether personal or dictated by higher authority, therefore, is ambiguous.

Veasey’s fate turns out to be different than Inman expects. As Inman predicts, the townspeople chastise and exile him, but rather than blame Inman for ruining his life, Veasey seeks him out on the road and exclaims, “I mean to thank you. You saved me from mortal sin”

(117). Severely regretting this “reunion,” but not wishing to kill a man who means him no apparent harm, Inman agrees to take Veasey on as a traveling companion, and after several days of walking, they come to a man trying to pry a dead bull out of a creek: “The branch, he said, was their water source, and its normal neutral flavor had taken on a certain tart rankness that had sent him walking up its banks looking for the reason” (161). Inman and Veasey offer to help, and they dismember the bull and remove its severed body from the creek, the man offers what seems to be a generous proposition: “Come eat supper with us . . . And we’ve a hayloft that’s good for sleeping” (163). Upon accepting the offer from this man, Junior, whose “little round mouth” recalls the ominous eye of Polyphemus, Inman and Veasey unknowingly agree to take a mini-*nekya* into the Underworld of Junior’s house, where lust and abuse abound and hospitality is scarce

When the men reach Junior’s house, a shack tilting severely to one side, Inman realizes the unpleasantness of his situation, for a group of harlots and children who have been “raised with little more guidance than a pair of feral hogs” are his hosts (164). The women, who are vile manifestations of the Sirens, offer their guests a putrid piece of unidentified meat and a dram of strong liquor, but seem more interested in convincing them to be sexual partners than in nourishing them. Lila, a “towheaded, ample-haunched thing in a cotton dress so thin and bleached from washing that a man could very nearly see the texture of her skin through its parchment-colored fabric” (167), climbs atop the dinner table and spreads her naked legs in front of Inman and asks, “How about that? What does that favor?” (173). Before Inman can respond, Junior bursts into the room and brandishes a shotgun, whose “raw hole at the end of barrel was black and enormous” and as portentous as Lila’s vagina (173). Both human and metal apertures seem a gateway to hell.

At this point, Inman discovers that his sojourn with Junior has been an utter mistake, much like the one Odysseus makes by going into the cave of Polyphemus. Junior, like the Cyclops, is clearly a subhuman, who lives by laws of his own making rather than those agreed upon by society, a “lout . . . who deal[s] out rough justice to wife and child, / indifferent to what the others do” (IX, 114-124). As Jenny Clay Strauss notes in The Wrath of Athena, Polyphemus commits “blatant violations of the normal procedures for welcoming strangers” and thus severely violates one of the most important aspects of Homeric etiquette—*xenia* (117). Junior likewise makes no effort to be sincerely hospitable and stops short of devouring Inman and Veasey by

turning them over to the Home Guard, who gives him “five dollars a head for every outlier” he turns in (174). Just before Inman and Odysseus leave on the “chain gain,” Junior stages a wedding between Inman and Lila, in which the “words *bound* and *death* and *sickness* were featured prominently” (176). Junior’s goal in this ridiculous ceremony is to humiliate Inman and showcase his power to imprison men and reduce them. As well as Polyphemus, therefore, he becomes like Circe, the witch that turns Odysseus’s men to swine.

Inman’s subsequent captivity under the Home Guard proves the lowest point of his journey. He sees no way out of this predicament and fears that he will end up rotting away in a prison or back in the grim line of battle. Now, more than ever, he realizes the futility of war and its ability to strip away hope and meaning:

Like the vast bulk of people, the captives would pass from the earth without hardly making any mark more lasting than plowing a furrow. You could bury them and knife their names onto an oak plank and stand it up in the dirt, and not one thing—not their acts of meanness or kindness or cowardice or courage, not their fears or hopes, not the features of their faces—would be remembered even as long as it would take the gouged characters in the plank to weather away. (177)

When the leader announces that “you pack of shit are just wasting our time” and decides to kill the captives in a quick volley, Inman feels that his fate is sealed, that his journey has ended, and that Cold Mountain and Ada will forever be beyond his grasp. Inman, however, is not mortally wounded from the fire. The Guardsmen merely knock him unconscious and bury him alongside Veasey and the other prisoners in a shallow grave. Again Inman has narrowly escaped death, but he attributes it not to the grace of a god or his own cunning, but to pure random luck. He could easily be as dead as Veasey, whose “face was locked in an expression of numb bewilderment” (180).

At this point, Inman is most clearly a “man of pain.” Jenny Strauss Clay offers this interpretation of Odysseus’s name, which “can mean both ‘Suffering-much-pain’ and ‘Causing-much-pain’” (61). Not only does Odysseus ache from homesickness, starvation, lack of sleep, and Poseidon’s merciless antics, but mortals who come in contact with him too suffer grim fates—to be devoured by the brutish Polyphemus, rent by nine-headed Scylla, or turned to stone aboard ship. Likewise, Inman’s journey is one of physical agony, where the pangs of hunger and

noxious war wounds incessantly torment him, but he also inadvertently drags Veasey along into Junior's "cave" and eventually into death.

The intensity of Inman's pain, however, soon diminishes, and he enjoys a type of resurrection, beginning with a semi-burial that parallels Odysseus's long slumber on the shores of the Phaeacian kingdom, where he lies "swollen from head to foot . . . scarce drawing breath, unstirring, deathly spent" (V, 479-81). Likewise, Inman feels that "dying [in the ground] seems easier than not" and resolves to remain in the makeshift tomb until he wastes away. A wild hog, however, begins feeding on the nearby carrion, and Inman suddenly wishes to "rise and bloom again" (179). He frees himself from Veasey, who "emerge[s] from the ground like a big hooked bass pulled up from a muddy lake," and experiences a rebirth of spirit and energy (180). Inman's release, though, is not by the grace of a patron goddess, as it is for Odysseus, upon whom "Athena showered sleep / that his distress should end, and soon, soon. / In quiet sleep she sealed his cherished eyes" (V, 517-519). Inman owes his life to the inaccurate aim of the Home Guard and a hungry feral pig.

For both Inman and Odysseus, this near death/subsequent resurrection proves a pivotal point in their journey, for soon afterwards they are given heartfelt guidance and renewed hope of homecoming. Odysseus is found by Nausicaa, who with Athena's urging, ushers him into the Phaeacian city where the king showers him with gifts and give ships and men with which to sail towards Ithaca. Inman too meets a "yellow slave," who though owning no house of his own, clearly displays the hospitality that Junior lacked (181). Risking being caught by his master, the slave nevertheless feeds Inman, tends to his wounds, washes his clothes, hides him in the barn, and draws him a map of a route to the Blue Ridge. In his genuine desire to see Inman make it home safely, the slave warns him of nearby marauders and in his selflessness refuses Inman's offering of compensation. As Ed Piacentino observes, "In the slave's eyes, Inman . . . is a human in need. In this instance, the more advantaged of the parties—the yellow slave, likely at some past time victim of dehumanization himself as a member of an oppressed race—freely aids the disadvantaged Confederate fugitive" (8).

The slave is the first in a series of "helpers" whom Inman meets after surviving the Home Guard massacre. Like Odysseus, who "undergoes various births and is fostered by several mother figures" (Pucci 14), Inman meets two women, who are reshapings of Circe and Calypso and representations of the "Mother Goddess." The first is a crone, an old goatwoman who lives

in the mountains and who “time [has] sealed away, yet [who] is dwelling still, like one who sleeps in timelessness, at the bottom of the timeless sea” (Campbell 111). Like Circe, the woman is witchlike, brewing herbs and raising livestock, yet her goal is not to seduce Inman, but to help him, and her luring is more out of maternal concern than womanly lust. She is not the typical mythological crone who suddenly metamorphoses into a beautiful young maiden and demands punishment for the hero who shuns her. Rather, when Inman looks into her eyes, he is “surprised to find that they were wells of kindness despite all her hard talk. Not a soul he had met in some time drew him out as this goatwoman did, and so he told her what was in his heart” (218).

The *xenia* of the goatwoman resembles that of Eumaeus, the shepherd of the Odyssey who provides Odysseus (disguised as a beggar) with food and shelter, even though he is unaware of his nobility. Likewise, when Inman tries to falsely explain that he has been furloughed, but has lost his papers, the woman laughs and exclaims, “Listen here, I lack all affiliation. I don’t care no more than spitting in that fire that you’ve run off” (217). Like the yellow slave, she sees Inman as a man in need and is willing to assist him, no matter what his background or philosophy. Furthermore, the goatwoman shows no interest in the war that rages in the valleys below her, where “[n]igger-owning makes the rich man proud and ugly and . . . the poor man mean” (217). According to her, the war is “a curse laid on the land. We’ve lit a fire and now it’s burning us down” (217). With her hospitality, disgust for war, and caravan full of herbs, therefore, the goatwoman is a guidepost to the nearby mountains, a personification of the therapeutic landscape where Inman plans to complete his healing process. As Terry Gifford notes, “in the goat woman [Inman] meets a profoundly symbolic figure of landscape-based healing qualities,” and it is with the strength he regains in her hut that he can continue his journey (4).

Calypso and the young maiden come in the form of Sara, Inman’s next acquaintance, who has lost her newlywed husband in the war and is raising their infant child alone in a dark hollow. Like the goatwoman, Sara exhibits *xenia*, offering Inman a plate of food even though she and her child are starving, and saying, “I’m not that far gone that I have to take money for what little I can offer” (238). Because of Sara’s youth and beauty, however, Inman is drawn to her sexually. When he glimpses “the fine gold hairs lying flat and soft against the skin at the sides of her narrow calves,” he wishes to “stroke [them] like the neck of a nervous horse one would seek to calm”; and when she begins nursing her baby, he tries “not to look but [can] nevertheless see

the round side of her breast, full and luminous white in the grainy light” (241). Sara gives Inman a chance to act on his desires when she asks him to “lay in bed with [her] but not do a thing else” (243). Although Sara’s request is innocent, Inman could nevertheless take advantage of her vulnerability and fulfill his long repressed libido. Yet he resists, and Sara becomes more of the promise of Ada than an actual lover, and before leaving her cabin, they “act out” a scene of domestic serenity: “they talked but little the rest of the evening, they sat side by side in front of the fire, tired from the business of living, content and resting happy, and later they again lay in bed together” (254). In Campbell’s words, therefore, Sara becomes “the incarnation of the promise of perfection; the soul’s assurance that, at the conclusion of its exile in a world of organized inadequacies, the bliss that was once known will be known again” (111).

Soon after leaving Sara’s cabin, Inman indeed encounters his beloved, who has gone up into the mountains with Ruby to search for Stobrod, Ruby’s father, who has also fallen victim to Teague and the Home Guard. Inman needs no disguise from a god, however, for three years of war and six months of “exile and brute wandering” (114) have left him “a rank stranger . . . a wandering pilgrim in [his] own place” (321), and Ada takes him for a “madman awander in the storm . . . likely as not to cut somebody’s throat” (320). Skill with a bow or knowledge of a marriage bed, however, do not give him away, as they do for Odysseus, for Ada asks the stranger no questions but recognizes a certain “timber of voice, angle of profile” that reveals his true identity (321). From that moment on, Inman realizes his long nourished hope of returning to Cold Mountain and Ada, and after the consummation of their reunion, he enjoys the clear mind that has so long avoided him:

it was pointless, he said, to think how those years (of war) could have been put to better use, for he could hardly have put them to worse. . . . You could grieve endlessly for the loss of time and for the damage done therein. For the dead, and for your own lost self. But what the wisdom of the ages says is that we do well not to grieve on and on. And those old ones knew a thing or two and had some truth to tell . . . for you can grieve your heart out and in the end you are still where you were. . . . All you can do is go on or not. But if you go on, it’s knowing you carry your scars with you. (334).

So Inman experiences a “redemption of some kind,” proving he may not be “ruined beyond repair” as he had once thought, and he focuses his newly enlivened attention on the future with

Ada, their plans for personal enrichment, and a vision for the farm in Black Cove (334, 333). As with Penelope and Odysseus, however, reunion and pleasant reveries of the future do not mark the end of the hero's story, for Odysseus must eventually carry an oar inland until "some passerby" asks, "What winnowing fan is that upon your shoulder?"; and at that point, he must make a great sacrifice to Poseidon (XI, 141-42). Frazier is less forgiving of his hero, for during the journey from the peak of Cold Mountain to Ada's house at its base, the Home Guard, this time led by a merciless man named Teague, finds Inman, and one of its members, a white haired boy "who looked as if his first shave lay still ahead of him" (351), shoots him. Upon hearing the gunshots, Ada, who is ahead on the trail with Ruby, turns and runs to the place where Inman lies dying and dreaming "a bright dream of a home" with "[e]verything coming around at once" (353). She pulls his head into her lap, and they embrace in a "scene of such quiet and peace that [an] observer on the ridge could avouch to it later in such a way as might lead those of glad temperaments to imagine some conceivable history where long decades of happy union stretched before the two on the ground" (353). As Terry Gifford notes, "This pastoral tableau is actually an image of 'Et in Arcadia Ego': even at the Arcadian narrative climax of the coming together of Inman and Ada, death is present—arbitrary, unexpected and ultimately unavoidable" (5). In this way, Inman's fate, though tragic and unexpected, actually emphasizes his own view of death, that "it seemed as normal to be shot as not," and that one's morality or redemption has nothing to do with being killed (327). During both battle and his journey home, he witnesses thousands of men blown to pieces—the same men that would later put themselves together as grotesque chimeras in his dreams and try to go on living, the same men that would likely be buried in unmarked graves like the one he pulls himself out of, never to be found by loved ones. In his ill-starred demise Inman succumbs to the random chance that he sees working amorally from the time he leaves to enlist.

Frazier forgoes the traditional and reader-friendly resolution in order to send a grim message about war. His lovers cannot simply live "happily ever after" because war has beaten and bruised one of them, so much so that he is "naught but [a] scar" in body and spirit (181). As represented by "a great number of crows, or at least the spirit of crows, dancing and singing in the upper limbs" of the trees, the war has plagued Inman's mind and has followed him home to take his life (353). His future with Ada is quelled, and his heroic journey stops short. He is never given the chance to cleanse his mind of battle or re-assimilate into a life free from war, where

one's aim is not at the heart of the enemy. Neither will he ever see a "time when people weren't dying so much," nor get the opportunity to "judge himself by another measure" (343). He travels so far just to be shot down in the snow on Cold Mountain. As angry as we may be at Frazier for "killing off" his hero, the man who only wanted to do right, who only wanted to go home and stop killing, the ending is actually stronger because Inman does not climb down Cold Mountain with Ada. If Frazier allows them to live out the future of their dreams, then he misses his aim with Inman's story: that war may make marble heroes of some men, whose "glory" becomes crystallized in the national imagination for centuries to come, but for most soldiers, whether on the winning or losing side, their experience is far from a victory.

CHAPTER 3

“WAR OR PEACE, THERE’S NOT A THING WE CAN’T DO OURSELVES”:

ADA, RUBY, AND FEMALE SURVIVAL ON THE FARM

While Inman journeys across North Carolina, Ada remains “cove-bound” at the base of Cold Mountain, where she balances the hazy, distant image of her sweetheart with the clear and present challenge of running her father’s farm (Frazier 139). Though she hopes that her pre-war love will return, Ada’s experience cannot simply be reduced to “waiting around for Inman”; nor does her dilemma closely resemble that of Penelope, Odysseus’s wife and queen of Ithaca who must ward off a swarm of suitors knocking at her door. Though raised as a “belle” who enjoys the luxuries of aristocratic living in Charleston, Ada is transplanted into Appalachia, a region where class boundaries are more blurred and where man has not tamed nature as he has in the cities or plantations. Furthermore, the Civil War spurs her servants to run off and claims most all men who would think of courting her. Ada, therefore, finds herself alone in the hills “in possession of close to three hundred acres of steep and bottom, a house, a barn, outbuildings, but no idea what to do with them” (22). She must, as Appalachian writer Artie Ann Bates puts it, “root hog, or die” (53). With Ada’s story, therefore, Frazier revises the plantation romance, often starring a genteel girl and a gallant lad who are married in the final chapters. Though cultured and fair, Ada essentially outgrows herself as a belle and becomes a strong, able, and independent woman. She too forges a friendship with Ruby, a local girl, that challenges the plantation romance’s ideal relationship—that between a husband and wife.

In the beginning, Frazier presents Ada as a stereotypical Southern belle who would more likely “die” rather than “root hog” if left alone on a farm. Even Ada admits her weakness and wonders “how a human being could be raised more impractically for the demands of an exposed life” (22). The belle of the Old South was more fit to sit on a pedestal than work in the fields. As Anne Goodwyn Jones describes her, the Southern woman was the “crown of Dixie,” symbol of the glorious South where fertile plantation fields spread for miles and honor and virtue ruled as it did for the knights and damsels of medieval England (qtd. in Prenshaw 73). Or in Thomas Nelson Page’s words:

She was indeed a strange creature, that delicate, dainty, mischievous, tender, God-fearing, inexplicable Southern girl. With her fine grain, her silken hair, her satiny

skin, her musical speech; pleasure-loving, saucy, bewitching—deep down lay the bedrock foundation of innate virtue, piety, and womanliness, on which are planted all for which human nature can hope, and all which it can aspire. (qtd. in Prenshaw 75)

The women Jones and Page describe are the heroines of the male pastoral tradition, made popular in the plantation romances of the antebellum era, such as John Pendleton Kennedy's Swallow Barn (1832), which idealizes the South as an Eden and depicts southern women as “flowers” in the garden of male patriarchy. According to Elizabeth Jane Harrison, this “garden archetype . . . served the southern white patriarchy—including its male authors—for over two hundred years as an effective metaphor of ownership of both land and labor” (2-3). The women, though “decorations” in the garden, were also viewed as possessions, just like the “virgin” land that the men farmed. After picking the appropriate beau, or having him picked for her, for as Gerald O'Hara informs Scarlet, “[f]or a woman, love comes after marriage” (36), a Southern woman should furthermore subscribe to the Cult of True Womanhood and assume wholeheartedly the role of wife and mother. Her place was in the home, as Rhett Butler puts it, “away from this busy, brutal world” (678).

The Civil War uproots the Southern garden, however, and literature begins to employ “damned” Yankees and freed blacks as threats to the aristocratic, agrarian ideal and the purity of the belle. In Gone with the Wind, for instance, Scarlett O'Hara is plucked from her life of leisure and courtship by secession and faces a series of obstacles that jeopardize her virtue, as when a lone Union soldier robs Tara and when she is attacked by ruffians on an Atlanta backroad. Older matriarchs, inextricably bound to their role as plantation mistress, often die, as does Scarlett's mother, of typhoid, and Captain Marsden's mother, who burns up with her torched mansion in Allan Gurganus's Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All. In her book The Southern Belle in the American Novel, Kathryn Lee Seidel notes that

After the Civil War, novels set during the period of the war and Reconstruction tended to allegorize the belle as a representative of the South. . . . The Edenic Garden has been devastated by war and Reconstruction; the pure flower of that Garden, the belle, suffers from the harsh, chaotic, forces set loose; increasingly, the belle's suffering is likened to that of the South. (18)

The new generation of romance novelists, writing during Reconstruction and espousing the theme of “reconciliation between the South and North,” envisioned a more positive fate for the belle by wedding her to a “northern soldier or gentleman to symbolize the healing of the Union” (Harrison 3). Even in this scenario, the Southern woman could assume her role in a patriarchal system after moving away from the devastated, defeated South.

Ada, however, follows none of these paths; she does not wither away in her own helplessness; she is not ravaged by invading Yankees or slaves run away from their plantations; and she marries no northern beau. In fact, once she moves to Appalachia and subsequently loses her father, her significance as a Southern belle is diminished, and she becomes a heroine of the “female pastoral tradition,” which Elizabeth Jane Harrison describes as an attempt to subvert the male pastoral by “rescuing the female protagonist from her role as plantation mistress” (13). In the female pastorals, such as those by Willa Cather, Ellen Glasgow, Wilma Dykeman, Margaret Mitchell, and Harriette Arnow, Harrison notes that “landscape itself figures prominently in the text, but instead of representing Southern womanhood, it is ‘re-visioned’ as an enabling force for the woman protagonist. Her interaction with land changes from passive association to active cultivation or identification” (10). Ada, like these women, extends her cosmos from indoors to outdoors and becomes an “active agent” on the farm. She proves that she is more than just a “lovely shell” by finding a sense of place and purpose in Appalachia and surviving both war and wilderness (Harrison 10; Seidel xv).

Crucial to Ada’s success, however, is Ruby Thewes, a local girl, who as her name suggests, is hardened but also valuable. Even “saltier” than Inman, Ruby has fended for herself in the hills since her father abandoned her as a small girl and thus becomes an earth mother for Ada by teaching her mountain lore, gardening techniques, and methods of canning and preserving food. A storehouse of Appalachian ways, Ruby teaches Ada how to tame the mountain landscape that is taking over her father’s farm. Ruby makes it clear, however, that she is not a nurse or servant, a Eurycleia, or more appropriately, a mammy, who will lace up Ada’s corset and empty her night jar, but that she is an equal partner in their attempt to revive the farm. By emphasizing Ruby’s role in Ada’s development, Frazier combines two categories of female pastoral: the plantation (as described above) and the “poor white” or “folk” tradition, which “re-imagine[s] the poor tenant farmer [or mountain girl] as an independent landowner [or partner in a farm]” (Harrison 13). In this combination, Frazier highlights a cross-class/cross-regional bond

between the lowland and highlands, a reconciliation that is not, however, sealed by a marriage as in the pastorals, but in a female friendship.

Ada and Ruby's relationship challenges the male pastoral, in which little time is dedicated to female friendships outside of superficial social circles. As Elizabeth Jane Harrison notes, "In male versions of the pastoral, bonding between women would digress too much from the romantic plot" (60). Women with their hoop skirts and charming personalities may color the story, but they are nonetheless flat, superficial characters whose sole purpose is to become the wife of the novel's hero. "By revising and reversing gender roles" and rescuing women from such confined, empty stations, Harrison suggests that female pastoralists "reject the code of chivalry central to southern society" (46). As Katherine Stripling Byer observes:

In the sections devoted to kitchen, garden, animals and the endless domestic and agricultural chores to which Ada and Ruby must devote themselves in order to survive on Ada's neglected farm during the dislocations of the Civil War, Frazier shows himself completely at home. This is just as much his world as the wilderness through which Inman travels. These are the scenes in which the novel's tenderness and humanity are most memorably revealed. (116)

Ada and Ruby's relationship, as Byer's analysis implies, is not based on fashion, gossip, and potential beaux, but on survival; therefore, they are able to forge a bond deeper than one made over teacakes and mint juleps. Though Ada and Ruby are not the sole heroes of Cold Mountain—as are many women in female pastorals such as Scarlett O'Hara, Alexandra Bergson of Willa Cather's O Pioneers!, Lydia McQueen of Wilma Dykeman's The Tall Woman, Dorinda Gray of Ellen Glasgow's Barren Ground, and Gertie Nevels of Harriette Simpson Arnow's The Dollmaker—their story is definitely not second to any of the men's. Whereas male characters in plantation romances "steal the script" from women, the men of Cold Mountain, namely Inman, share the script with the women on the home front (Harrison 43).

At first, Ada and Ruby appear the "divided heroine" of the doppelganger motif—"the strong-willed protagonist and her dependent foil" that Peggy Whitman Prenshaw describes as a favored motif in southern writing (81). Ada is the pampered belle, naïve to survival in the wilderness, and Ruby is the wise mountain girl who becomes Ada's friend and drives her like a mule until she succeeds. Unlike most female pairs, such as Scarlett and Melanie in Gone with the Wind, however, Ada and Ruby do not remain separated. In the end they become fused,

understanding each other's thoughts and predicting each other's actions, building a synergy so that they function more as one woman than two.

Before Ruby appears and makes possible Ada's transformation into a heroine of the female pastoral tradition, Ada is a helpless outsider, alone on the farm she has inherited from her recently deceased father. We first see her at odds with her food source, a garden that should be burgeoning with vegetables but is instead breeding weeds:

She looked off across the yard to the kitchen garden where the beans and squash and tomatoes bore vegetables hardly bigger than her thumb despite the fullness of the growing season. Many of the leaves were eaten away to their veins by bugs and worms. Standing thick in the rows and towering over the vegetables were weeds that Ada could not name and had neither the energy nor the heart to fight.
(20)

Ada is obviously no gardener, but even if she were, she would be incapable of preparing the harvest, for "[c]ookery had become a pressing issue," and "she was perpetually hungry, having eaten little through the summer but milk, fried eggs, salads, and plates of miniature tomatoes"—meals that "[f]or all the satisfaction they gave her, she might have just breathed air" (21, 27). The farm that once produced the meat and vegetables that filled her table is now going to seed because the hired help has run off or gone "warring" (39). Like the Yankee troops invading the Southern lowlands, nature becomes Ada's foe in this highland setting, where the surrounding flora, whose "junglelike rate of growth" threatens to encompass the house as "completely as the bramble-covered palace of Sleeping Beauty," gradually pens her in (39). The image of a fairy tale princess imprisoned in her castle is apt at this point, for Ada's only chance of survival seems to be if someone will rescue her.

While wasting away in her "castle," Ada quickly realizes that her list of accomplishments as a Charleston girl—"filled with opinions on art and politics and literature. . . . A fair command of French and Latin. . . . A passable hand at fine needlework. A competency at the piano. . . . The ability to render landscape and still life with accuracy in either pencil or watercolor"—are superficial and futile talents when put to use on a farm (22). These "skills" give her some pleasure, "but not enough to compensate for her recent realization that she could not weed a row of young bean plants without pulling half of them out along with the ragweed" (22). Ada displays this faithlessness in her former "attributes" by beginning to "shed" her belle "skin," an

act she will continue throughout the novel until she acquires a “want of delicacy in [her] aspect and costume” and assumes the spirit, clothing, and physical strength required for farming (257). Her first act of voluntary transformation, in which she abandons the hairstyles currently in vogue, however, accentuates more of her helplessness than her budding resilience. Since Monroe’s death, her hair has been increasingly full of farm debris, and she loses her patience for the “updos” of high society (25). She realizes that “[s]he could go about looking like a madwoman in a bookplate and it didn’t matter, for she sometimes went up to a week or ten days without seeing another soul” (25). Physical appearance, so crucial to a Southern lady of her time, becomes of minimal concern, and though the image of Ada over her “marble-topped washstand” with loosed hair full of leaves is rather pitiful, it is also one of her first steps towards freeing herself from the constraints of society (25). By “letting her hair down” and exhibiting a lack of concern for her appearance, she shows that she is turning her eyes from Charleston and focusing them on the farm, which is blind to braids and curls.

Adding to Ada’s dilemma is the fact that she is living in a foreign region, which is, according to her Charleston friends, “a place of wilderness and gloom and rain where man, woman, and child grew gaunt and brutal” and where “[o]nly men of gentry affected underdrawers, and women of every station suckled their young, leaving the civilized trade of wet nurse unknown” (42). The Charlestonians obviously subscribe to the popular hill-folk stereotype of the time, one that would later be utilized by local color writers such as Mary Noilles Murfree and Rebecca Harding Davis to create a “mythical ‘Appalachia’—a civilization fabricated during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a counterpoint to American modernity” (Crawford 185). Historian Martin Crawford notes:

Isolated, fatalistic, fearful, and prone to inexplicable bouts of violence, the Southern mountaineers offered late 19th and early 20th-century Americans the reassuring image of “otherness,” a psychological-cultural yardstick with which to measure their own increasingly anxious and status-conscious lives. (185)

Ada’s neighbors, especially Sally and Esco Swanger who live in nearby No Creek Cove, hardly fit this negative stereotype, but they nonetheless seem strange to Ada in their adherence to superstition and “old signs” (35). In their “otherness,” however, the Swangers become a foil not for Ada’s high breeding but for her helplessness. She turns to them for support after Monroe’s death and immediately realizes their self-sufficiency and toughness. As she does with Ruby, who

appears later, Ada associates the Swangers with the landscape in which they live. Esco, “tall and thin with a tiny head and a great shock of dry grey hair which roached up to a point like the crest on a titmouse,” has dark, strong hands that Ada likens to the boards he cuts from trees (33). Sally, long exposed to life in the mountains, is “shaped round in every feature” with “skin . . . as lucent and shiny as a tallow candle” and “greying hair . . . hennaed to the color of the stripe down a mule’s back” (33). Her pantry is full of preserves, chutneys, and canned vegetables, and her porch hangs full of leatherbritches, drying for winter consumption. And indeed when Ada visits them after Monroe’s death, they are breaking and stringing beans, showing a skill at gardening and putting up food that Ada lacks.

In “Cold Mountain Diary,” Frazier describes the community to which Esco and Sally belong:

Fewer than 5 percent of their kind owned slaves, and most of them never worked for anyone but themselves. They were members of a small, old economy, existing in the seams between the two great incompatible powers. I don’t know a term for what they were—perhaps a rough, redneck version of Jefferson’s agrarian ideal. They lived by farming a little bit of their own land, and by open-range herding of cattle and hogs, by hunting and fishing, gathering and gleaning.

It was a very old way of life that had nurtured human beings for millennia, a life dependent on sparse populations and large tracts of common land. And on internal matters as well: the limitation of desire, stability, making do, a healthy suspicion of change for its own sake, extreme independence of thought and action, reluctance to acknowledge authority. Beneath it all, a hint of deep earth spirituality. (3-4)

This lifestyle is in stark contrast to the one Ada is accustomed to, for she grows up in the midst of one of the “great incompatible powers”; but as she lingers longer in Black Cove, she finds herself becoming more like the Swangers, like the native Appalachians—growing and killing her own food, building her own fences, assuming a “deep earth spirituality,” making herself steward of the land.

Though landscape, war, and culture contribute to Ada’s isolation, Ada feels most alone because she has lost her father, Monroe, for whom she has been a “knowledgeable companion . . . a lively and attentive daughter” (22). Until his death, Ada’s most important purpose has been to

attend to him, listening as he reads excerpts from Emerson and Wordsworth, painting still lifes for him, playing sonatas for him on the piano; as a loving and loyal child, she admits that she would have “follow[ed him] to Liberia if he asked” (41). Although not to Africa, Ada does follow him to Black Cove, North Carolina, where he moves to heal from consumption and to find a “mountain church of his denomination lacking a preacher, reasoning that useful work would be more therapeutic than [the] reeking sulfur water” of highland resorts (39). At the base of Cold Mountain, where he favors the “picturesque setting, the lay of the land” (45), he settles and builds a farm that is “more of an idea than a livelihood” (22). He does not, however, become a “mountain man,” for he hires help and “rents” slaves to plow the fields and tend the livestock, and he builds a large house—“tightly covered in whitewashed clapboards outside, dark beadboard walls inside, a deep porch all across the front, attached kitchen extending from the back, a great broad fireplace in the sitting room, and woodstoves in the bedrooms, a rarity in the mountains”—to replace the crude log cabin that had housed the former owners. And even after the war begins, he and Ada live a comfortable life, not much different than the one they lead in Charleston.

Their contentment ends, however, when Monroe dies quietly under the pear tree in the yard, a favorite reading place where Ada leaves him when she goes to paint the “newly opened blossoms on a rhododendron by the lower creek” (29). When she returns, he is dead, with eyes and mouth open and flesh that is “completely inert” (29). Selfishly, she wishes “that she could have gone before Monroe, though she knew in her heart that nature has a preference for a particular order: parents die, then children die. But it was a harsh design, offering little relief from pain, for being in accord with it means that the fortunate find themselves orphaned.” (29). Just as Inman notes that his journey home will be the “axle of his life,” so is Monroe’s death for Ada, for it propels her first into helplessness and then into independence (55).

Symbolically, Monroe’s death represents Ada’s break from patriarchy and aristocratic roots. Representative of the Old South’s male-dominated structure and the reliance of women on men, the father/daughter bond is a common theme in antebellum plantation romances. In The Southern Belle in the American Novel, Kathryn Lee Seidel describes the first fictional belle, Bel Tracy of John Pendleton Kennedy’s Swallow Barn:

[Bel] is motherless and has a father who dotes on her. She is exuberant, a bit vain, and rather naïve. She is talented as a horsewoman and skilled in music. Proud of

her aristocratic heritage. . . . Sheltered by her father, she has no mother to instruct her about what to expect from life. She is finally rescued from her fantasies by a stalwart lad, and the novel ends with their marriage. (3)

Likewise, Ada's mother dies during childbirth and leaves her with a pampering father who brings her up to be cultured and fair and completely dependent upon him. Once Monroe dies, however, the likelihood of a "stalwart lad" rescuing her and renewing her ties to patriarchy is slim. As mentioned before, most available suitors are fighting in distant battles, and Ada has no interest in returning "as some desperate predatory spinster" to Charleston, where she has been "dreadfully bored by suitors" and has "foolishly squandered the fleeting few years of courtship when young ladies were elevated to the apex of their culture, and men knelt in deference while all of society stood at attention to watch their progress toward marriage" (49). Furthermore, and most importantly, she is in love with Inman, a beau who is hardly dashing or patriarchal, and together they agree that they don't give "two hoots . . . as to how marriages were normally conducted. They would do as they pleased and run their lives by the roll of the seasons. . . . They would grow old together measuring time by the life spans of a succession of speckled bird dogs" (344). As Jan Zlotnik Schmidt observes of Ada and Ralph, the lovers in Ellen Glasgow's Vein of Iron, Ada and Inman dream of becoming a "new Adam and Eve . . . to vivify a survival ethic, and construct a new pastoral and a redemptive legend," one that does not rely on patriarchy or convention as its foundation (qtd. in Harrison 39).

In addition to Monroe's death, Ada's subsequent battle with the "macassared" rooster, who attacks her when she is desperately searching for eggs under the boxwoods, represents her break from patriarchy (25). With his "golden helmet of feathers" and "fluffed and swelled" neck, the rooster is a barnyard equivalent of a plantation sire, the *pater familias*, and when Ada stumbles upon him in the hedge, he is about to showcase his male dominance by preparing to tread a hen (25). Upset at Ada's intrusion, the rooster "launche[s] himself at her face, twisting in the air so that he arrive[s] spurs first, wings flogging away" and manages to slash her wrist with his spur (25). Pursuing her as she tries to escape, he seizes her dress, again showing his male dominance, and strikes at her legs. This mock rape scene proves that the maleness that had once guided and protected Ada, now attacks her and runs her off. Though a product of patriarchy, she is wounded and slighted by it.

The initial image of Ada as displaced belle, severed from patriarchy and struggling on a mountain farm, sets the stage for her development as a female pastoral heroine. “[T]he ground beneath her hands” that is at first an enigmatic enemy becomes by the end of the novel a source of her strength, and not only can she successfully tackle vegetable gardens, but she can also fell large trees (21). Historian John Inscoe comments that, “It is rather refreshing to see a home-front heroine as unabashfully helpless as Ada is” in the beginning (332). But even more refreshing is the fact that Ada decides to stay in Black Cove, even before she meets Ruby. Most belles who have lost their fathers and are alone and starving would likely return to the place they have been raised, to familiar ways and faces, but Ada rejects Charleston, where she would be in the midst of a crumbling society and beleaguered city and would have to “attach herself to friends of Monroe’s in some mildly disguised parasitic relationship” (49). “Even now,” she thinks as she weighs her options after Monroe’s death, “return to Charleston” is “a bitter thought . . . There [is] nothing pulling her back there” (50). She chooses instead to establish new roots in Appalachia, a decision that is crucial not only because it represents her rejection of “belleness” but also because it proves that she is forming a sense of place, a characteristic crucial to the female pastoral heroine. Harrison points out that the origin of the “female ‘pastoral impulse’” is “one in which the female character’s identity is tied to place” (84). Scarlett O’Hara dreams of returning to and reviving the “red earth” of Tara (1037); Alexandra Bergson establishes “autonomy” on the prairie where her family moves “through an empowering bond with nature” (Harrison 9); Lydia McQueen finds strength from the surrounding mountains to cope with a husband gone to war, a retarded child, and the hardships of providing for her family.

Likewise, Ada forms what Carole Ganim calls an “identification of body and mind, of nature and spirit, a paradigm of the female union between the concreteness of the physical world and the psychological, philosophical, moral, and political expression of this earth-based existence” (qtd. in Harrison 84). Whereas Charleston holds no promise for Ada, the mountains surrounding her farm do, and even as she is struggling to survive, she senses that from the mountains she may be able to tap the energy and inspiration needed to continue: “[T]his place, the blue mountains, seemed to be holding her where she was. From any direction she came at it, the only conclusion that left her any hope of self-content was this: what she could see around her was all that she could count on” (50). The confinement of the mountains is therefore

simultaneously frightening and strengthening, and Ada recognizes that the hills framing Black Cove harbor something deeper, more mysterious, more powerful than Charleston:

Liking this clouded, humped land, she found was an altogether more difficult and subtler thing than appreciating the calm voice of Charleston during an evening walk along the Battery with Fort Sumter off in the distance, the great white houses at one's back, palmettos rattling their leaves in a sea breeze. In comparison, the words this canted landscape spoke were less hushed, harsher. The coves and ridges and peaks seemed closed and baffling, a good place to hide. (27)

Likewise, the woman Ada eventually becomes is more profound than the one she has been before moving to Appalachia.

Coming out of the landscape that is so strangely appealing to Ada is Ruby, the person who will teach her how to mine the mountains' resources, discover their secrets, and ultimately revive the farm. Appearing as Ada is sitting by the window and "wondering sincerely and with some confusion what her next action should be," Ruby is not a stereotypical "knight in shining armor," but she is nonetheless the rescuer who will become the "rooting hormone" that Ada needs to survive (51). As Ruby nears the house, Ada notices that she is

thin as a chicken neck except across the points of her sharp hipbones, where she was of substantial width. . . . As a structure, she was stable as a drag sled, low in her center of gravity but knobby and slight in all the extremities. She wore a square-necked dress of coarse homespun cloth, the dusty color of blue that comes from dye made of the inside of ragweed galls. . . . She was a dark thing, corded through the neck and arms. Frail-chested. Her hair was black and coarse as a horse's tail. Broad across the bridge of her nose. Big dark eyes, virtually pupilless, the whites of them startling in their clarity. She went shoeless, but her feet were clean. The nails to her toes were pale and silver as fish scales. (51).

The fact that Ada compares Ruby to natural flora and fauna and farm implements—"chicken neck," "drag sled," "fish scales"—proves Ruby's connection to nature, a characteristic that Danny L. Miller calls "[t]he first and most obvious attribute of women in Appalachian fiction" (3). "Mountain women love the land and long for the security it provides," Miller notes, "land is perhaps nature's chief manifestation, and the mountain woman is almost inseparable from both

nature and earth” (7). Even the most romanticized Appalachian heroines, young girls that more closely resemble the stylized Southern belles of plantation romances, like those in the fiction of Mary Noilles Murfree, are described as “flower[s] or blossom[s]” (Harrison 86). Though Ruby is young, she has more of the spirit of a weed than a fragile bloom and resembles more of the gritty, tough-as-nails Appalachian heroines like Gertie Nevels of The Dollmaker, who, as Elizabeth Jane Harrison notes, is physically “large [enough] to dress in men’s overalls and shoes,” and who becomes the emotional center of her family when they move from Kentucky to Detroit (86).

We learn that Ruby’s closeness with nature comes from raw experience in the wilderness, for when she is just a young girl, her father, a “notorious local ne’er’do-well and scofflaw called Stobrod Thewes” (82), leaves her “high and dry” on the mountain to fend for herself (84). With no mother or relatives to turn to, Ruby sets out to forage for food and even ask for charity from neighbors, as Ada has been forced to do. At her lowest point, when she is starving and stuck in a briar patch, Ruby has an intense, almost mythical, bonding experience with nature:

she was spoken to by a voice in the dark. Its talk seemed to arise from the rush and splatter of the river noise, but it was no cannibal demon. It seemed some tender force of landscape or sky, an animal sprite, a guardian that took her under its wing and concerned itself with her well-being from that moment on. (83)

Ruby has since turned to this “guardian” as her only kin and most significant friend and has lived a life of pure survival, virtually isolated from the judging eye of society that Ada is brought up under. When she makes a list of her achievements, she does not like Ada mention any “cultured” skill, but values most “the fact that by the age of ten, she knew all features of the mountains for twenty-five miles in any direction as intimately as a gardener would his bean rows” (84).

In her years of solitary wilderness living, Ruby learns to tap nature’s secrets, allowing her to grow food successfully as well as heal bodies. She gains a keen knowledge of plants’ medicinal properties, and with goldenseal, yarrow, ginseng, and other native plants she can make poultices to cure wounds or teas to comfort aches and pains. When Ada asks her how she has come to know “such things,” Ruby replies that she has learned what she knows

in the usual way. A lot of it was grandmother knowledge, got from wandering around the settlement talking to any old woman who would talk back, watching

them work and asking questions. Some came from helping Sally Swanger, who knew, Ruby claimed, a great many quiet things such as the names of all plants down to the plainest weed. Partly, though, she claimed she had just puzzled out in her own mind how the world's logic works. It was mostly a matter of being attentive. (106)

This storehouse and mountain knowledge and skill in healing links her to typically older women in Appalachian literature, like Granny Younger of Lee Smith's Oral History and Aunt Genevy of Emma Belle Miles' Spirit of the Mountains. Of these women, Miles comments, "I have learned to enjoy the company of these old prophetesses almost more than any other. The range of their experience is wonderful; they are, moreover, repositories of tribal lore. . . . They are the nurses, the teachers of practical arts, the priestesses, and their wisdom commands the respect of all" (37). Ruby, therefore, serves Ada in the same way that the goatwoman does Inman; yet she becomes a permanent rather than temporary force.

"Capable of any and all farm tasks," including cooking, Ruby offers her services to Ada, and after Ada's accepts, she becomes truly invested in the farm and Ada's success as its co-steward. One of her first tasks is to make a "to-do" list of tasks to ready the farm for winter, which is composed, as Ada notes, "of verbs, all of them tiring. Plow, plant, hoe, cut, can, feed, kill" (80). Ruby too enrolls Ada in a type of "Survival 101," for which Ruby herself is the "principal text" (106). She begins immediately quizzing Ada about her surroundings: "Name me four plants on that hillside that in a pinch you could eat. How many days to the next new moon? Name two things blooming now and two things fruiting" (106). Furthermore, to equip the farm with food and tools that it lacks or will not be able to produce before the first frost, Ruby sets out to trade with the neighbors for "a side of bacon, five bushels of Irish potatoes and four of sweet, a tin of baking powder, eight chickens, various baskets of squash and beans and okra, an old wheel and loom in need of minor repair, six bushels of shell corn, and enough split shakes to reroof the smokehouse" (79). Even more important to Ada than Ruby's knowledge of nature and ability to negotiate trade with the locals is her belief in Ada, that "anyone else [Ada] might hire would grow weary and walk away and let her fail. Ruby would not let her fail" (81). Unlike the "diverse variety of characters" whom Inman meets on his journey, Ruby becomes a steady presence in Ada's life, providing her more than just a meal, a place of respite, or a small boost of encouragement (Martin 183).

Though Ruby's dedication to Ada resembles that of Eurycleia, who covers for Penelope while she (un)weaves her tapestry, or Mammy, who follows Scarlett to Atlanta, ranting, "Ah been knowin' you sence Ah put de fust pa'r of diapers on you. Ah's said Ah's gwine ter 'Lanta wid you and gwine Ah is" (548), Ruby is no servant or slave. She is Ada's guide, friend, and primal mother, but she demands "something on the order of equality" (52). From the beginning she makes it clear that she is "not exactly looking to hire out. I'm saying if I'm to help you here, it's with both us knowing that everybody empties their own night jar" (52). She furthermore chooses to live in the Black's old cabin, home of Monroe's former hired help, not because she is inferior to Ada, who will remain in the "big house," but because she is fiercely independent and does not "relish the idea of living with anyone" (71). As Martin Crawford observes, Ada and Ruby form a kind of win/win, symbiotic relationship, each giving and each taking:

Ada furnishes Ruby with a home, a purpose, and even some attempted measure of feminine refinement. Ruby reveals to Ada the skills necessary for survival in the mountains, including the crucial ability to operate the local barter-exchange economy. Both women forge emotional ties that compensate for their respective familial deficiencies, their 'kinlessness,' as Frazier terms it. (188)

The "kinlessness" Crawford mentions strengthens the bond between Ada and Ruby, for as Ada notes, Ruby has also been a "motherless child from the day she was born" (51). Ruby, like Ada, has never met her mother, and Stobrod has "little recollection" of her (84), so she has neither memory nor someone else's description upon which to build an image. Ada, however, has Monroe's "courtship story," which Robert O. Stephens notes is the most frequently told type of family lore, especially in long-established families, such as those of Southern sagas (10). The story of love, rejection, and ultimate reconciliation between Monroe and Ada's mother, Claire, therefore, not only gives Ada a sense of past but also links her to the South's patriarchal system, which is largely founded on man's pursuit of woman.

Ruby shows that she has no use for such a hierarchical system when she kills the rooster that has flogged Ada. In fact, ringing the cock's neck and stewing him so that "[by] dinnertime the meat of the rooster was falling from the bone, and gobs of biscuit dough the size of cat heads cooked in the yellow broth" is the first "chore" that Ruby does on the farm (52). By doing so she not only turns a noisome bird into a meal—a task that has eluded Ada—but she also provides a "clean break" from patriarchy for Ada as she wrings the rooster's neck. Near the end of the

novel, when Ada and Inman are reunited, Ruby further reassures Ada that love, not need, should guide her decision whether or not to stay with him. “War or peace,” she says, “there’s not a thing we can’t do ourselves. You don’t need him . . .” (325). From the moment Ruby arrives, then, she implies through her words and actions that the survival of both the farm and the women will depend upon a female force, not a male one.

The presence and guidance of Ruby further precipitates Ada’s transformation from belle to farmer, for soon after Ruby arrives, Ada continues to rid herself of remnants of her past, both by choice and force. Ruby makes it clear that Ada will have to choose between such tokens of aristocracy as her piano and cabriolet, “[t]he two things [Ruby] had marked in her inventory of the place as being valuable and portable and inessential” (74). She further informs Ada that the “fine dapple gelding” will be “reduce[d] . . . to drawing a plow” no matter which item Ada chooses to keep. “He’ll have to work out his feed like anybody else around here,” she says, initiating Ada into her philosophy of farm living where every part of a homestead has a practical rather than aesthetic place (74). After debating for two days, Ada chooses to barter the piano, reasoning that “there would be little room for art in her coming life and what place she had for it could be occupied by drawing. The simple implements of pencil and paper would answer her needs in that regard” (74). After Ada’s decision, Ruby immediately turns the piano, an icon of leisure and high Southern society, into sustenance—“a pied brood sow and a shoat and a hundred pounds of corn grits”—and she furthers Ada’s education in self-sufficiency (75).

Though Ada gives up the piano more by Ruby’s volition than her own, she subsequently sheds her belliness by calculated choice, as when she dons the scarecrow in one of her ball gowns, “a dress of mauve silk, trimmed in lace dyed to match. It was cut close in the waist to suit her slimness. Monroe had bought the entire bolt of cloth from which the dress was made so that no one else might wear that color” (109). When Ruby gives her the “pleasant and somehow childlike task of making a big doll,” Ada rejects Monroe’s old clothes because she does not want to see everyday “the effigy of Monroe standing in the field” (188). Instead, she chooses to make an effigy of her former self, for this gown, which represents her life as a Charleston belle, is “the one she wanted to see standing in a field through rain and shine.” (189). Perhaps the most telling scene of Ada’s part of the novel, this scarecrow construction shows Ada, like Ruby, making something practical out of something aristocratic that is more for decoration than pragmatic use, and shows her present self, wearing a “fading print dress and a straw bonnet,” in stark contrast

with the girl she has been, so much so that she wonders “if an observer standing off on Jonas Ridge and looking down into the cove would choose right if asked to pick the scarecrow from the two figures standing in the field” (189). Furthermore, and most significantly, the color of the dress, which in certain light is called “ashes of roses,” suggests that Ada is a Phoenix who is arising out of the limitations of young Southern ladyhood to become a stronger, more self-sufficient woman, one more aptly akin to “the color of an old shuck” than roses (189). Ada shows that she is no longer a “straw goddess,” as Katherine Lee Sediel describes the belle, but a woman with more depth, more potential (164).

Eventually, Ada even sees the impracticality of wearing a dress. Following Ruby’s advice, Ada puts on a pair of Monroe’s old pants when, near the end of the novel, they climb Cold Mountain to bury Stobrod and his companion, Pangle. “I don’t relish the feel of a winter wind blowing up my dress tail,” Ruby proclaims when Ada looks perplexed at the idea of wearing trousers. But Ada quickly sees the benefit of pants as she is hunting a turkey and realizes that “she was glad she wore britches, for trying to be stealthy in long skirts and their underlying petticoats would be impossible, like walking through the woods flapping a bed quilt around” (318). And it is in these “britches” when Ada is reunited with Inman, who too has transformed into a person hardly recognizable. Seeing Inman rekindles her love for him, but it also emphasizes that she is not the Ada he has known before leaving for war: “She wanted to tell how she had come to be what she was. They were different people now. He needed to know that” (336). As John Inscoe notes, “by the end of the novel, [Ada’s] own life is expanding, with more scope and greater range, so that by the time she and her lover are reunited, she has undergone a transformation fully as profound as that inflicted on Inman by the traumas of war” (337). Wearing pants, therefore, is not only a practical choice for Ada, but one that represents her transformation from a belle who wears a frilly gown to a hunter/gatherer who wears trousers. And though she still loves Inman, she can fill the role of provider that a man has once filled.

Other changes in Ada are more subtle, as when she begins to add the phase of the moon to her drawings in addition to the time and date or when she becomes impatient with literary characters that have before intrigued her, wishing that [they could be] more expansive, not so cramped by circumstance,” as she has been in her former life as a belle in Charleston (259). She also begins to associate phenomena less and less with metaphors and more with reality. When she first meets Ruby, she views the “signs” as “an expression of stewardship, a means of taking

care, a discipline” (103), but by the end of the novel, in a letter to Inman, she notes that natural occurrences have ceased to have such meaning for her. “Working in the fields,” she writes, “there are brief times when I go totally without thought. . . . Should a crow fly over, I mark it in all its details, but I do not seek analogy for its blackness. I know it is a type of nothing, not metaphoric” (9). This latter view is closer to the one that Ruby holds. Ruby does not have the formal education that Ada does, so when she sees a kettle of bubbling apple butter or a “room” made of flat rocks, she does not, like Ada, see the Macbeth witches or the symbol for pi; she sees a meal and shelter. She does not link natural occurrences to literature or history, but to a great, highly ordered cycle. When Ada and Ruby stumble across a solitary heron, “staring so heedfully” into the river, for instance, Ada immediately thinks of Narcissus and tells Ruby a “brief version of the tale” (150). Ruby, however, rejects the analogy and says, “That bird’s not thinking about himself at all. . . . He’s thinking about what other thing he can stab and eat” (150). The food chain, not mythology, therefore, is how Ruby relates to this scene, a fact that distinguishes her self-raising in the wilderness from Ada’s pampered childhood. Likewise, when Ada suggests that dogwood leaves turn red earlier than other trees because of “chance,” Ruby quickly criticizes her hypothesis by saying that “people like to lay off anything they can’t fathom as random” (107). Ruby, on the other hand, surmises that “dogwood and sumac maybe turn red to say *eat* to hungry stranger birds” that will ingest their seeds and spread them for miles around in their droppings (107). Ruby, therefore, possesses a Darwinian philosophy—that nature is neither stagnate nor undecipherable, but is more like an evolving puzzle that can easily be assembled with careful observation.

Though Ada’s tendency to make analogies is poetic, Ruby’s lesson that everything in nature is ordered is one that is crucial to Ada’s development, for it gives Ada something to latch onto, a hope that she too will be able to tap nature’s secrets, predict its doings, and become self-sufficient. According to Ruby, “a world properly put together would yield inhabitants suited to their lives in their assigned place that they would have neither need nor wish to travel” (192). Though Ada would have at one time challenged this idea, she does not “bother arguing [with Ruby], for she figured that her life was moving toward a place where travel and imported hats would figure small” (192). Furthermore, Ruby’s lesson is one that Inman fails to learn, for at the end of all his warring and wandering, he still believes that life is governed by random chance, and he flails around, trying to make sense and find purpose.

Besides the exchange of knowledge and the teacher/student relationship, Ada and Ruby share bonding experiences that more closely resemble those of best friends or sisters. In one such scene, Ada proposes a hair contest after “watching Ruby absentmindedly plait Ralph’s tail in intricate patterns” (191). The contest is a way for Ada to offer, as Martin Crawford suggests, some kind of “feminine refinement” for Ruby (188), who has “never seen the back of her head before” (192). Another such incident occurs when Ada and Ruby climb into the barn loft, a diversion that resembles the childhood ramblings of Ada and her cousin, Lucy, who together would hole up in haystacks and giggle for hours. When Ruby sees that Ada is concerned about the appropriateness of sitting Indian style, she says, “I can do this because I have never been proper, and you can do it because you have recently quit being so” (227). In these light-hearted scenes, both Ruby and Ada validate each other. By braiding Ruby’s hair, Ada affirms that Ruby is a woman, though she has had to work like a man all of her life, and Ruby’s elation over her new hairstyle suggests that she needs the confirmation. Ruby, too, assures Ada that she is successfully making a transformation from belle to farmer. The fact that Ruby becomes more feminine and Ada less so also emphasizes a kind of compromise in their relationship and suggests that they are not the polar opposites as they are in the beginning.

By the end of the novel, Ada and Ruby have forged a friendship as deep and strong as Ada and Inman’s love. Ada makes it clear to Inman that “[w]hatever comes to pass between you and me, I want [Ruby] to stay in Black Cove as long as she cares to. If she never leaves I will be glad, and if she does I’ll mourn her absence” (337). As Martin Crawford notes, “By the end of the tale, the lives of the Southern low country-turned upcountry belle and the poor but infinitely self-reliant mountain woman are inextricably joined. Ada and Ruby have become virtually one person . . .”(189). Their relationship develops like those of characters in the novels of Ellen Glasgow, a vanguard in the female pastoral movement. In The Miller of Old Church, Glasgow describes Molly and Blossom:

The relation of woman to man was dwarfed suddenly by an understanding of the relationship of woman to woman. Deeper than the dependence of sex, simpler, more natural, closer to the earth, as if it still drew its strength from the soil . . . the need of woman for woman was not written in the songs and histories of men, but in the neglected and frustrated lives which the songs and the histories of men had ignored. (qtd. in Harrison 33)

In Glasgow's Barren Ground, Dorinda and her maid Fluvanna share a similar experience: "The affection between the two women had outgrown the slender tie of mistress and maid, and had become as strong and elastic as the bond the holds relatives together. They knew each other's daily lives; they shared the one absorbing interest in the farm" (qtd. in Harrison 33). Likewise, Ada and Ruby "outgrow" the roles of teacher and student and heroine and foil. The longer they know each other, the less different they become, and theirs is the relationship that permeates the novel as deeply as does the traditional love story between a woman and a man.

In this woman-to-woman friendship, Frazier continues the dream of the early female pastoralists, who, as Elizabeth Jane Harrison notes, "envision[ed] new class relationships and stresse[d] not individual but cooperative action" (10). Though the transformation belongs to Ada, the story is not hers alone. Ruby not only teaches her the basics of farming and self-sufficient living, but she successfully links Ada to Appalachia, crossing socio-economic and regional boundaries, and builds her confidence in becoming a "tall woman." And though in the end, both women become mothers and Ruby marries, ironically assuming the role that Ada should play as a belle, she does not enter into a conventional patriarchal system, for as governing force in her marriage, she gives her husband a "foot in the back when that was needed" (354). Nor does she lessen her vision for the farm—"one of plenty and how to get there" (339). In the end, therefore, Ada's and Ruby's is still a story of female triumph.

CHAPTER 4

TO “COME BACK FROM SOMETHING LIKE THE DEAD”:

STOBROD, THE TRICKSTER, AND THE WONDER-WORKING POWER OF MUSIC

Interwoven with Inman’s homecoming and Ada and Ruby’s survival on the farm is the story of Stobrod, Ruby’s scoundrel father who abandons her to enlist in the war, deserts, and returns a fine fiddle player. Frazier models Stobrod after the traditional trickster figure of myth and folktale, one who often assumes the role of thief, rogue, or buffoon, and for whom, as anthropologist Paul Radin observes, “no ethical values exist” (133). In his failure as a parent, selfishness, and blatant disregard for others, Stobrod easily fits this mold, yet as a fiddler and musical storyteller, he exhibits the other, more positive side of trickster—that of culture hero.

Radin speaks of trickster’s duality:

Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. . . . He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being. (xxii)

Likewise, Stobrod is a “destroyer,” “negator,” and hedonist who abandons his young daughter in the mountains and rides off to please his fancy. Yet in his ability to make art from experience, to inspire others, and enrich culture, he is vitally constructive. Music becomes for him a strong and guiding force, and through it he recounts the stories of war—the fear of battle, the discomfort of sleeping on the ground, the sorrow of defeat—and in this way, he validates the lives of soldiers, like Inman, who die before the surrender. Furthermore, he becomes an icon of Appalachia, his fiddle tunes helping to define a region and people, both in subject and style. His survival in the end, therefore, celebrates his “redemption” through music and his role as creator and preserver of history and culture. He may be the novel’s most enduring hero.

Stobrod does not appear until the latter third of the novel, but we get a thorough description of him through Ruby, who describes him as a “notorious local ne’er-do-well and scofflaw” who frequently leaves home to party, dance, and drink (82). As a father, Stobrod is clearly a disgrace. The “home” he creates for Ruby and himself is, as Ruby sourly notes, “little better than a roofed pen”:

It was tiny and had about it the air of the temporary. About the only thing distinguishing it from a gypsy caravan was its lack of wheels and floor. She had slept on a kind of miniature loft platform, just a shelf, really. She had an old tick for mattress that she stuffed with dried moss. Because there was no ceiling, only the geometrical pattern made by the lapped undersides of the roof shakes, Ruby awoke many a morning with an inch of snow atop her pile of quilts, blown by the wind between the curled edges of the shakes like sifted flour. (82)

Not only does Stobrod expose his daughter to the elements in their make-shift hovel, but he also deprives her of food. As Ruby tells Ada, “Feeding herself was [hers] to do as soon as she was old enough to be held accountable for it, which in Stobrod’s opinion fell close after learning to walk” (82). To Stobrod, Ruby is not a cherished child, but an “inconvenience” he could easily live without (82). He gives no thought to her well-being, and when he leaves for war, he takes with him the “old hinny to do battle” and leaves Ruby with no means to “plow the sorry fields” (84). He cannot even “recall the season it had been when she arrived” (85), and Ruby recognizes:

I never was anything to you. You came and went and I could have been there or not when you got back. It didn’t much matter one way or the other. If I had died on the mountain, you might have wondered a week or two would I show up. Like one coon dog of a many-numbered pack missing when the horn blows and dawn comes. Just that much regret and no more. (269)

Stobrod treats Ruby in much the same way as Pap treats Huck Finn—not really as another human being, much less a relative—and Ruby is practically an orphan even while Stobrod lives with her. Though, as Ruby admits, Stobrod “never laid a hand to her in anger,” he “had never patted her head or put his hand to her cheek in a moment of kindness” either (270). Stobrod’s apathy, therefore, seems even a firmer blow than his fist.

Stobrod’s failure at parenting emphasizes his selfishness and love of the material, two hallmark traits of the trickster, particularly that of primitive societies. Ruby insightfully observes that “an animal with a memory was about her father’s loftiest expression of himself” and that “he might happily have taken up dwelling in a hollow tree” (82). Radin notes that tricksters in their basest state are “amorphous, instinctual and unintegrated” and are definitely pre-human, if not pre-animal (133). Radin further describes trickster as “a hero who is always wandering, who is always hungry, who is not guided by normal conceptions of good or evil, who is either playing

tricks on people or having them played on him ” (155). Such “lifestyle” is reflected in the title of Donald Davis’s collection of Appalachian Jack tales: “Jack *Always* Seeks His Fortune.” Similarly, the Winnebago trickster, Wakdjunkaga, travels around the world only to seek pleasure, and he is so unconscious that he believes his body is disconnected from his mind. In one particular story, he tricks a flock of ducks into closing their eyes so he can wring their necks and roast them for dinner. Before enjoying his feast, however, Wakdjunkaga becomes sleepy and instructs his anus to keep watch and prevent any would-be thieves from eating his dinner while he takes a nap. Upon waking up, however, Wakdjunkaga realizes that his ducks have been reduced to bones and goes on to punish his anus by thrusting a piece of burning wood into its “mouth.” Obviously, Wakdjunkaga feels the pain he is trying to inflict on a separate entity and exclaims, “Ouch! Ouch! This is too much!” (Radin 18). This episode illustrates that Wakdjunkaga responds only to the most basic of impulses—pain, hunger, fatigue—and though he is a trickster, he is not “smart” enough to recognize that his anus is part of his body. Likewise, Stobrod lives largely to satisfy his id, particularly his voracious appetite for liquor. Even after he becomes a musician, he seeks a hedonistic lifestyle with “a collection of heavily armed outliers” who live “in a deep cave of the mountain like freewill savages,” wishing only to “hunt and eat and lay up all night drunk, making music” (226).

Stobrod, like many tricksters of mythology and folklore, is also a thief. Hermes, the Greek trickster god, for instance, “is the true patron of all robbery, whether perpetrated by heroes in the grand style or by poor devils” (Otto 108). As the “ingenious” and “crafty” one, he plays tricks on his brother by stealing his cows, and the gods entrust him with the task of freeing Io from hundred-eyed Argus and consider him as a means to secure Hector’s body from Achilles (Otto 104). Likewise, Jack, the Appalachian trickster, is known as “the clever thief,” as when he learns how to rob from a “trio of exquisitely ugly brother giants” and goes off stealing cows (Sobol, “Thousand Faces” 92). While other tricksters often steal to benefit others, outsmart the “bad guy,” or even get a good laugh, Stobrod usually steals because he is too lazy to provide for himself. Furthermore, his knavery rarely involves outwitting others, but is usually a simple case of taking without asking. Rather than grow his own corn to make his moonshine, for instance, Stobrod “would go out with a tow sack on moonless nights when the ears were ripe and steal corn,” from which he would distill “a greasy yellow liquor . . . unmatched in rawness and potency” (83). His name even results from his affection for looting: as Ruby explains, her father

is “a man so sorry he got his nickname from being beat half to death with a stob after he was caught stealing a ham” (234).

After moving to the cave, Stobrod and his fellow outliers become a band of thieves. In one episode, they raid a local planter’s house to punish him for owning slaves and thus starting the war:

They had come down on the farm at nightfall and tied Walker and his wife to the stair rails and taken turns slapping Walker about the face. They had gone through the outbuildings and collected all the food they could easily find—hams and middle meat, quantities of crocked goods, sacks of meal and corn grits. From the house they took a mahogany table, silver flatware and candlesticks, beeswax candles, a painted picture of General Washington off the dining room wall, English china, Tennessee store liquor. They had since decorated the cave up with the plunder. Washington propped in a niche of the wall, candles in silver holders. Table set with Wedgwood and silver, though many of them had eaten all their lives from table service made entirely of gourd and horn. (264)

Such piratical antics link Stobrod and company to Hermes, the “god of jolly and unscrupulous profit” (Otto 109). As classicist Walter Otto notes, Hermes’s role as thief carries a double meaning—one involving both profit and loss: “If one man becomes rich in a twinkling, another becomes a pauper in a twinkling. The mysterious god who suddenly puts a treasure trove in a needy man’s way, as suddenly makes treasure vanish” (109). Clearly, Stobrod and his friends feel that they are the “needy” ones who must shift power from the genteel to the lowly by humiliating Walker and making him a “pauper.” In their minds, therefore, they are making up for the unfair fact that the Civil War is a “rich man’s war and poor man’s fight.” Such subversive antics are common to tricksters, who either seek to protest a particular social custom or belong to a subaltern culture. Robin Hood famously “steals from the rich to give to the poor.”

Wakdjunkaga, the Winnebago trickster, also satirizes his own culture by dressing as chief and committing countless social taboos such as calling a feast at the verge of a war party and breaking the sacred warbundle. As Paul Radin notes, “We have here, in short, an outlet for voicing a protest against the many, often onerous, obligations connected with the Winnebago social order and their religion and ritual” (152). John, the slave trickster, also protests against the larger social evil of human bondage by outwitting his master and subverting the oppressive

hegemony that his race is subjected to. Stobrod and his friends, however, act more like bullies than wily nonconformers, and their attempt at vigilante justice involves more brute force than trickery. Their expedition turns into an unleashed shopping spree for provisions and decorations that emphasizes their baseness and love of pleasure.

Crucial to Stobrod's ability to pilfer is his liminalness. As an outlier, he has removed himself from the war and society, and therefore he lives on a periphery where he can easily steal away." Like Hermes, who operates on the boundary between gods and men and between the living and the dead, Stobrod lives on the edge of civilization where he can both live like an animal yet enter into the human world to plunder. He becomes like a ravenous raccoon that has just found a tasseling corn patch and also like the agile Hermes, who, protected by Night, is "capable of breaking into rich houses...and doing his business there noiselessly" (Otto 115). In classicist Karl Kerényi's words, "Like every other trickster, Hermes, too, operates outside the fixed bounds of custom and law. I have described his field or operations as a 'no man's land, a sealed off Hermetic region between the fixed bounds of property, where finding and thieving are still possible' " (185). As mentioned before, though, Stobrod lacks Hermes's "nimble-ness and subtle cunning," and he is quickly caught at his own game by his keener daughter who notices that corn has been missing from the crib and sets a trap to catch the thief (Otto 104). In his dupability, Stobrod becomes like many tricksters, a source of comic relief. In the above mentioned story about Wakdjunkaga and his anus, Wakdjunkaga is simultaneously "sly" and "stupid," and his involuntary sado-masochism spurs both the audience to laugh and Wakdjunkaga to exclaim, "Correctly, indeed, am I named Foolish One, Trickster!" (Radin 18). When realizing that he has been outwitted, Stobrod, however, does not announce his stupidity or even devise a plan of escape, but he nonchalantly leans up against the crib wall, "[c]asual as a traveler propped against a roadside tree waiting for a stage to come by, whiling away the time absorbed in his own thoughts" (224). The subsequent exchange with Ruby is additionally humorous:

He looked at Ruby and grinned and said, They hell fire.

—You've run off from the fighting, no doubt.

—I was owed a furlough, being a hero as I was.

—You?

—Every battle I was in, I led the charge, Stobrod said.

—I've heard it told that the officers like to run the greatest shitheels to the fore, said Ruby. They get shut of them quicker that way. (224-25)

Though Stobrod has failed as a corn thief, he nonetheless tries to trick Ruby into believing a tall tale about his war experience, but her coldness and blunt response make him seem an egotistical buffoon. At the same time, however, his blasé attitude and ridiculous anecdote give him a certain roguish charm that negates the severity of his crime. With this humorous episode, Frazier assures us that Stobrod is not the same kind of villain as Teague or Junior. His greed is not for violence, and though he has neglected Ruby, he does not actively seek to reduce humanity.

Stobrod's amusing capture thrusts him into Ada and Ruby's life, and his reunion with his daughter affords him what he thinks is a sure-fire way of being cared for in his "old-age." Without offering an apology for stealing the corn, or more importantly for being such a poor father, Stobrod asks for a "promise of food, a dry barn loft in bad weather, and maybe now and then a little money" (269). He tries in vain to convince Ruby that he has done his "best" toward her, and makes excuses for his incompetent parenting skills by saying, "Times was hard" (269). Unfooled, Ruby snaps, "You didn't do a thing at all other than what suited you" (269). Accurately, she realizes that then and now, Stobrod is concerned only with himself.

Though still selfish, Stobrod returns to Ruby a different man than he is when he rides off on their mule to fight the Yankees. Not long after being snared in the corncrib, he showcases to Ada and Ruby his new talent for fiddling, which he has acquired during the war. Ruby reminds him that "[b]efore the war you never showed more interest in fiddling than would be required to get a free drink for playing at a dance," and he replies, "Some say now I fiddle like a man wild with fever" (230-31). He explains that "[t]he revision in him had come unexpected . . . near Richmond in the month of January, 1862" when a man asks him to play for his daughter who has been fatally burned while tending to the fire. Unsatisfied with his "repertoire of six tunes," all lively and fit for dancing, the girl asks him to make up a song more appropriate to the occasion, one that would more gently ease her passing (231). The simple request of a dying girl becomes for Stobrod like a door opening to another self, for he composes on the spot a somber melody in the "frightening and awful Phrygian mode" that comforts the girl and makes her mother "burst into tears and r[un] from her chair out into the hall" (232). Since that day, he informs Ada and Ruby, he has learned "nine hundred fiddle tunes, some hundred of them being his own compositions" (233). Unlike Inman, who becomes hollowed out by battle, Stobrod finds music

and leaves the war not a battered, depressed soldier, but a master musician and gifted storyteller, a role that will elevate him from “destructive” and “material” scoundrel to “constructive” and “spiritual” culture hero (Radin 124).

With music, Stobrod channels his lust for pleasure, a characteristic that has before relegated him to selfish scoundrel, into creative energy. He tells Ada and Ruby that after playing for the burned girl, “music came more and more into his mind” and that “many a night [he] wandered from place to place until he found a fellow working at a stringed instrument with authority, some genius of the guitar or banjo. Then he’d take out his fiddle and play until dawn, and every time he did, he learned something new” (232, 233). Furthermore, his old haunts—taverns and bars that he religiously frequented to satisfy his carnal desires—become places to find fellow musicians, like the “musical niggers that often played for the customers,” rather than havens in which to play cards, drink liquor, and be entertained by prostitutes (233).

Because his original fiddle has been stolen during the war, Stobrod explains, he has had to carve a new one from memory. And though the instrument he crafts resembles, as Ada notes, “a rare artifact from some primitive period of instrument making,” it is steeped with his personality, and his dedication to making it represents his newfound passion for music (228). Not only does he spend “weeks tramping the ridges to cut spruce and maple and boxwood” and sit “for hours on end knifing out fiddle parts,” he scours the mountain for a “great old timber rattler” whose tailpiece he severs and steals for the inside of his fiddle. To Stobrod, such a unique addition “would work a vast improvement on the sound, would give it a sizz and knell like no other” (229), and to emphasize this quality, he crafts the scroll into a “whittled head of a great serpent curled back against the neck, detailed right down to the scales and the slit pupils of the eyes” (228). The foreboding sound and eerie appearance of Stobrod’s fiddle make it seem even more “the devil’s box,” the name given to it by “the common run of preachers” who “oppose fiddle music as sin” (266). Such an association links Stobrod to Satan, the quintessential trickster of the Christian faith. He maybe a “revised” man, but his fiddle and the “dire keen of snake warning” in his music recalls his mischief (230).

Stobrod’s fiddle therefore becomes linked to his identity. Folklorist Alan Dundes notes, “The importance of identity can be observed in folk-tales. . . . Typically, the hero or heroine is recognized by the mark or wound that he or she received earlier. In the majority of tales, the recognition scene allows the protagonist to prove his or her proper identity . . .” (21). In most

cases, as Dundes notes, the “mark,” whether a bodily scar or external token, is crucial to the resolution of the story, usually the hero’s marriage or ascension to the throne. In the *Odyssey*, for instance, Eurycleia recognizes her master, Odysseus, by the wound on his foot that she nursed when he was a youth. Likewise, Odysseus’s bow, which he successfully strings and fires in front of the suitors, proves that he is indeed the long lost king of Ithaca. These tokens, therefore, allow Odysseus not only to gain the confidence of his servants and family but to reclaim his throne. In place of scar or bow, Stobrod has his fiddle. When lined up by the Home Guard to be executed, he and his companion, Pangle, assume a stance that reveals the importance of their instruments:

Stobrod held the fiddle before him in the crook of his arm. The bow hung from a finger and twitched slightly, in time with his heartbeat. Pangle stood beside him, and theirs was the proud and nervous pose men struck when having ambrotypes made at the start of the war, though instead of rifle musket and Colt pistol and bowie knife, Stobrod and Pangle held fiddle and banjo before them as defining implements. (291)

As Frazier implies in this passage, music is the duo’s weapon, replacing the stereotypical gun or blade through which soldiers would ordinarily showcase their patriotism and combat skills, and the musicians, though outliers, stand in stark contrast to the blood-hungry “law enforcement.” Likewise, when Ada and Ruby discover Stobrod barely alive after the shooting, he is clutching his fiddle, which he had gathered from the snow despite being shot three times. At this point, we see that his fiddle is part and parcel of Stobrod’s being, and like a limb, is nearly inseparable from him.

Stobrod’s fiddle becomes for him a source of power, a type of phallus, which according to Karl Kerényi, is “Trickster’s double and alter ego” (182). Hermes, notes Kerényi, is “often represented either by the phallus alone, set up as a ‘Kyllenic image,’ or by the ithyphallic herm,” a “pillar . . . upon a heap of stones by the wayside, to which every passer-by piously added one” (182; Otto 106). Wakdjunkaga too carries his penis around in a box on top of his head “as though he were carrying his own essential core about in it” (Kerényi 183). Likewise, Stobrod’s fiddle becomes the means by which he expresses and projects himself, the agent by which he is transformed from “ne’er do well” into creative artist (82). This phallic instrument, however, is not one by which he thrusts or forces himself on others. In this way, Stobrod’s fiddle and power contrasts with the patriarchy that Ada is at the same time escaping.

With fiddle in hand, Stobrod exhibits all the traits of a gifted storyteller, especially in his method of composition and performance. Playing the fiddle becomes second nature to him, “as easy as a man drawing breath, yet with utter conviction in its centrality to a life worth claiming” (234). Like storyteller Donald Davis, who claims, “I never learned a story, I just soaked it up,” Stobrod seems to passionately absorb music (qtd. in Sobol 20-21). Of one of his songs, he tells Ada and Ruby, “His fingers had stopped the strings and his arm had drawn the bow in the shape of the tune so many times by now that he no longer thought about the playing. The notes just happened effortlessly” (232). Learning and playing music, therefore, becomes an organic process for Stobrod.

One of Stobrod’s talents is his uncanny ability to translate people and places into music. His song, “Drunk Neggar,” for instance, is particularly evocative of its subject matter, as a “careening tune, loopy and syncopated, with little work for the left hand but the bow arm working as frantic as a man fighting off a deer fly from around his head” (266). In The Spirit of the Mountains, Emma Bell Miles describes the fiddler’s use of notes to conjure images:

Some of the best instrumental music is of a descriptive nature, reflecting vividly the incidents of every day life. Peculiar fingerings of the strings, close harmonies, curious snaps and slides and twangs, and the accurate observations of an ear attuned to all the sounds of nature enter into the composition of these. In the “cackling Hen” the cackle, hard, high and cheerfully prosaic, is very well rendered. . . . (165)

As Miles implies, a truly adept fiddler should not only be able to evoke emotions—sadness with a drone or minor key, for instance, or glibness with an upbeat tempo—but should successfully recreate specific scenes or objects as well. A fiddler playing “Cackling Hen,” therefore, should believably convey the essence of a hen to his audience and even perhaps convince them that they are standing in a barnyard.

Stobrod also showcases his talent as a lyricist with a song that takes “as its subject the imagined behavior of its speaker, which he would do had he the power to become one of a variety of brute creature. A lizard in the spring—hear his farling sing. A bird with wings to fly—go back to his darling weep and moan till he dies. A mole in the ground—root a mountain down” (300). And in the combination of notes and words, he truly displays his mastery:

There was a deliberation, a study, to their clamping of the strings that was wholly

absent from the reckless bowing of the right hand. What lyric Stobrod sang recounted a dream—his or some fictive speaker’s—said to have been dreamed on a bed of hemlocks and containing a rich vision of lost love, the passage of awful time, a girl wearing a mantle of green. The words without music would have seemed hardly fuller in detail than a telegraphic message, but together they made a complete world. (290-91)

Here Stobrod is clearly a creator, and in the same way that God breathes life into inanimate clay, Stobrod combines and vivifies melody and lyrics.

Part of Stobrod’s talent is also his ability to adapt songs to certain occasions. Walter Benjamin observes that “[t]he storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale” (qtd. in Bauman 2). Stobrod does the same with his music by mastering what Richard Bauman calls the art of “creative manipulation” (4). He first accomplishes this feat at the bed of the burned girl where he “mixes” what little he knows at the time about fiddling with the mood of the dying girl and crafts a song so appropriate as to simultaneously evoke comfort and tragedy. Furthermore, at the apparent eve of their own death, Stobrod and Pangle serenade their executioners with a song that foreshadows their fate and highlights their genius:

They consulted and twisted the pegs again to make the dead man’s tuning, and they then set in playing a piece slightly reminiscent of Bonaparte’s Retreat, which some name General Washington’s tune. This was softer, more meditative, yet nevertheless grim as death. When the minor key drifted in it was like shadows under trees, and the piece called up something of dark woods, lantern light. (290)

Just before the shooting, with “the full knowledge of immediate death,” Stobrod extemporaneously composes “Fiddler’s Farewell . . . the saddest song that had ever been made and had drawn tears from the eyes of all present, even his executioners” (314). He plays it solo as if a personal eulogy.

As shown in the above passage Stobrod, like many performers, has a magnetism that intrigues and inspires those around him. In describing folklore in general, Alan Dundes notes,

Folklore means something—to the tale teller, to the song singer, to the riddler, and to the audience or addressees. A given item of folklore may mean different things to different tale tellers or to different audiences. It may mean different

things to different members of the same audience; it may mean different things to a single tale teller at different times in his life. . . .” (33)

As such an “item of folklore,” Stobrod’s fiddle tunes (and Stobrod himself) are therefore infused with various meanings. For Pangle, a mildly retarded boy who gives “the impression of a china plate filled with biscuit and sawmill gravy” and who has “no talent in the world but his recently discovered ability to play the banjo,” Stobrod becomes “a man of deep lore, a wizard, a revelator” (262, 263). Soon after taking up residence in the outlier cave, Pangle “attach[es] himself to Stobrod out of being lovesick for fiddle music” and begins following him about, “always with the devotion of a spaniel awaiting food” (263). Pangle’s reaction to Stobrod is primitive, yet powerful, much like that of the proverbial kid in a candy store. Because to him, “the world had no order or succession, no causation, no precedent,” he cares not about Stobrod’s past, or even his future, but simply relishes “that feeling he g[ets] from Stobrod’s playing”; such elation is enough to motivate him to learn all of Stobrod’s tunes. In his innocence and kindness, his propensity to see the world as “new-minted,” Pangle serves as a foil for the cruder Stobrod, but more importantly, he amplifies Stobrod’s power as musician and storyteller by becoming his partner (262). Music becomes their shared language, and with it, they create a new world, one in which the notes of stringed instruments muzzle the thunder of cannon. Together, they aspire to leave their former cruel world behind, and like Inman, head off to the Shining Rocks to form a “community of two” (284).

Like Pangle, Ada enjoys Stobrod’s playing, but she senses a depth and symbolism to it that surpasses the value of entertainment. After hearing “Stone Was My Bedstead, a tune made up largely of scraping sounds,” for instance, Ada is moved “[m]ore so, she believed than at any opera she had attended from Dock Street to Milan because Stobrod delivered it with such utter faith in its substance, in its ability to lead one toward a better life, one in which a satisfied mind might one day be attainable” (266). Having heard from Ruby the details of Stobrod’s former life, Ada is awed that Stobrod could have morphed into such a talented musician. Perhaps because she has lost her own father, Ada recognizes that Stobrod “had come back from something like the dead, and that it was a second chance which few are granted” (269). Stobrod “does her good,” as Pangle says, not simply as a performer, but as “proof positive that no matter what a waste one has made of one’s life, it is ever possible to find some path to redemption, however partial” (267, 234). Against the backdrop of war that has claimed so many lives and inflicted so

much psychological trauma, Stobrod becomes a constructive, rejuvenating force. To Ada, he is not a deserter or coward, but a miracle.

Even Stobrod finds a message in his playing. He learns, like Ruby and Ada, but unlike Inman, that the world does not operate on a random schedule, but is rather a strictly ordered system. He recalls that his first composition “had become a thing unto itself, a habit that served to give order and meaning to a day’s end, as some might pray and others double-check the latch on the door and yet others take a drink when night has fallen. (232) Likewise, he tells Ada and Ruby, “What the music said was that there is a right way for things to be ordered so that life might not always be just a tangle and a drift but have a shape, an aim. It was a powerful argument against the notion that things just happen” (233). Through music, therefore, Stobrod learns what Ruby does through nature. He not only sees the purpose of life but understands that he can give it order and value by composing songs.

Stobrod’s role as orderer is perhaps best illustrated in his composition of songs reflecting his time as a soldier: “Touching the Elephant, Musket Stock Was My Pillow, Ramrod, Six Nights Drunk, Tavern Fight, Don’t Sell It Give It Away, Razor Cut, Ladies of Richmond, Farewell General Lee” (266). Partially, Stobrod’s desire to translate his military life into song is a type of “*speculum mentis* wherein is depicted man’s struggle with himself and with a world into which he ha[s] been thrust without his volition or consent” (Diamond xxiv). Historian James I. Robertson describes the importance of music for the soldiers of the Civil War, most of whom found the need to channel their anger, excitement, sadness and make sense of their situation:

Men left for war with a song on their lips; they sang while marching or waiting behind earthworks; they hummed melodies on the battlefield and in the guardhouse; music swelled from every nighttime bivouac. Singing was such a natural release of emotion that occasionally men hidden on outpost duty endangered themselves by raising their voices in song. (83)

Like Inman, however, Stobrod is hardly the stereotypical gallant Southern soldier, and though he voluntarily enlists at the war’s beginning—“to the surprise of one and all,” as Ruby remarks—he deserts, with little interest in or loyalty to “the Cause.” (84). In his involvement with the punishment of the plantation master Walker, he too implies that the war is a miserable burden rather than a necessary and glorious fight. From his war days, however, Stobrod does not take the immeasurable and onerous grief that Inman does. He takes instead the material for songs, and

from many of the same experiences that corrode Inman's spirit, Stobrod makes art. He acquires, as Joseph Daniel Sobol describes the Appalachian trickster, Jack, "a contagious optimism, an openness and a spontaneous creativity that allows him to found a new life out of next to nothing in tale after tale," or in Stobrod's case to make sense of the chaos of war in song after song ("Thousand Faces" 102).

His repertoire not only becomes an "autobiography of his war years" but one of the common soldier as well. With his tunes describing such events as "seeing the elephant," or being in a battle, and the quotidian activities of camp life, Stobrod becomes like a bard or minstrel of his generation. Folklorist Arthur Palmer Hudson notes, "The tradition of celebrating and commemorating historical events in song has persisted. In practically every collection of American folksongs there is a varying number devoted to events, movements, and causes of more than local interest, thus reflecting what we call history" (21). To use Linda Degh's description of Maerchen or folktales, Stobrod's songs are "like the zone rings on a very old tree trunk" though which "important events in the cultural history of man can be traced" (qtd. in Sobol 78).

As part of the tradition of recording history in song and story, Stobrod not only becomes a valuable preserver of events but of emotions as well. As Frank Warner, editor of Songs of the Civil War, notes, "The Civil War was a singing war, and the songs of that time . . . many of them sad and sentimental, some with a tough, battle-seasoned humor . . . tell us much that the history books may leave out, and let us share the moods of the soldiers in a way that the history books cannot do" (qtd. in Hudson 26). In the tone and tempo of his songs, Stobrod can relate the anxiety felt on the eve of battle, the excitement of a victory, and the pangs of homesickness. Though he deserts the army, he contributes something much more valuable with his fiddle than with his musket or bayonet. His songs become monuments that will survive long after all those who remember the war are dead.

In this way, Stobrod—he who has been transformed—becomes himself a transformer and culture-hero, the alter ego and most significant role of the trickster. Paul Radin observes that in "the overwhelming majority of all so-called trickster myths in North America," trickster is involved in the creation of the world or depicted as a great benefactor of mankind (155). He notes that "to the culture-hero cycle belongs such well-known episodes as those narrating the securing of fire, of flint, of tobacco, of food in general . . . the regulation of the seasons and of

the weather . . . the freeing of the world from monsters, ogres and giants; the origin of death. . .”(166). In the Winnebago trickster cycle, for instance, Wakdjunkaga realizes that he can make from his penis (power source) “useful objects . . . for human beings” (Radin 142). Prometheus likewise steals fire from the gods to give to humans and tricks the gods into requesting the less valuable parts of animals as a sacrifice. Hermes too is called “the giver of goods,” “the friendliest of the gods to men,” and the one responsible for sudden windfalls. And in one story, Jack, the Appalachian trickster, washes ashore on America with “all the world’s wisdom” and becomes, as Joseph Daniel Sobol describes, a powerful image of “the luminous sense of the potential of America” (“Thousand Faces” 104).

What these trickster heroes create, secure, and bring is what Joseph Campbell calls a “boon,” or a gift that “may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds” (193). Stobrod too offers his songs, gifts that may not be necessary to our physical survival, but nonetheless define us and energize us. Not only does he preserve the Civil War in song, but he becomes a cultural icon of Appalachia. Like his fiddle, an identifier of the man who crafts it, Stobrod’s music becomes symbolic of and inextricably bound to the region in which it is created. Stobrod’s songs have, as Richard Bauman says of all folklore, “their primary existence in the action of people and their roots in social and cultural life” (2). And though they may be gathered and distributed to a wider public, they nevertheless evoke a very specific place. Indeed, when Emma Bell Miles describes the music of the mountaineer, she notes that “The fiddler and the banjo-player are well treated and beloved . . . like the minstrels of feudal days” (147) and that particularly Appalachian memories “drift on their melodies: “the thump-chug, thump-chug of the batten as the mother’s shuttle went patiently to and fro . . . the laugh and leap of dancers bounding through Cripple Creek . . . wilder nights at ‘big meetin’ . . . the ripple of water and the drone of bees” (169-70). Storyteller Donald Davis says of storytelling (and music) that it “was part of the fabric of daily living. Most of it went on while the adults around me did their chores and led their children into doing the same. Storytelling was the oral accompaniment to cooking, housekeeping, gardening, feeding, milking . . .” (26). As such an integral part of regional life, stories and songs are undoubtedly infused with uniquely Appalachian experiences. In essence therefore, Stobrod becomes what Arthur Palmer Hudson calls “the voice of the landscape,” and his fiddle music, like the “Highland reaper’s song” of Scotland or the “monotonous but never oppressive music of Negro boys playing on homemade

flutes and pipes” in the deep South, becomes a sound so familiar, so appropriate that it blends seamlessly with its surroundings (3).

Frazier himself recognizes the power of folklore to define and describe a region or culture by incorporating it into Cold Mountain. Ruby, as described in the previous chapter, is a storehouse of mountain lore, keen to the secrets of nature. Like other hill-folk, isolated and fiercely self-reliant, she familiarizes herself with the flora, fauna, geography, and weather patterns of the Blue Ridge, so much so that she seems part of the landscape herself. The Swangers too introduce Ada to superstition: “It’s claimed that if you take a mirror and look backwards into a well, you’ll see you future down there in the water,” Esco tells her (36). Most related to Stobrod, though, is Frazier’s inclusion of murder ballads in the plot. The name of the woman that Veasey impregnates and contemplates killing is Laura Foster, also the name of the victim of Tom Dula, popularly known as Tom Dooley, the subject of one of the most famous Appalachian murder ballads. Sara, the solemn mountain widow that Inman boards with, sings her baby to sleep with “no lullaby,” but “the horrible story of Fair Margaret and Sweet William”:

*I dreamed that my bower was full of red swine,
And my bride bed full of blood* (253)

The haunting lyrics and “high nasal tones [of her voice] that hurt to hear in their loneliness” make Sara a truly Appalachian figure, one living daily on the cusp of death in a “lonesome little one-room cabin,” one who “would be old in five years” (238, 241). As Horace Kephart observes, these songs accurately evoke the hardship of mountain life:

Most of their music is in the weird, plaintive minor key that seems spontaneous with primitive people throughout the world. Not only the tone, but the sentiment of their hymns and ballads is usually of a melancholy nature, expressing the wrath of God and the doom of sinners, or the luckless adventures of wild blades and of maidens all forlorn. (336-37)

Even Inman’s death seems in accord with such music as not only a representation of the horrors of war but also of the fatalism of the Appalachian people.

As an Appalachian musician and storyteller, Stobrod joins the ranks of myriad others, from mothers who put their babies to sleep for centuries with ballads and folktales, to old loafers who sat for hours on the stoops of country stores and spun tales. As folklorist Joseph Daniel Sobol notes, each singer or tale-teller is like a “mountain stream,” that “joins up with many

others [in] a living, flowing system that we call the oral tradition,” and eventually “return[s] to the sea, that source and destination which the ancient writers called ‘The Ocean of Story’” (Jack Always 11). Each story and song, therefore, uniquely describes the people of “the land of do without,” as Horace Kephart calls Appalachia, but it also speaks of universal human experience.

In this larger fluid network, authorship and copyright is insignificant. Stories and songs are transmitted by word of mouth, passed down through the generations for so long that they become public domain and free for anyone to take and mold as he or she pleases. Stobrod too recognizes that every song he composes quickly becomes a “thing unto itself,” never to be fully possessed by anyone after it emerges from his serpent-shaped fiddle (232). This standard is the “rule” of folklore in all cultures. Even the Winnebago, who were highly protective of their stories, each family having one or several that they considered property, would “sell” the tales, called *waikan*, to storytellers who would alter them in their personal way. As Paul Radin observes,

a *waikan* passed, through purchase, from one gifted raconteur to another. This meant that its content and style, while they may have been fixed basically and primarily by tradition, were fixed secondarily by individuals of specific literary ability who gave such a *waikan* the impress of their particular temperaments and genius. (122)

Likewise, Joseph Daniel Sobol describes the evolution of Jack tales from one tale teller to another: “Each teller projects his or her own personal Jack: Chase’s takes on an aggressive, messianic trickster quality; Maude Long’s is a gentler, more generalized wonder tale hero; Ray Hick’s is deeply connected to his mountain environment; and Donald Davis’s is particularly alert and athletic, striving stubbornly for manhood” (“Thousand Faces” 85). Ruby perhaps most accurately describes the process: “there were many songs that you could not say anybody in particular made by himself. A song went around from fiddler to fiddler and each one added something and took something away so that in time the song became a different thing from what it had been, barely recognizable in either tune or lyric” (301). Ironically, therefore, Stobrod, who seeks always to pleasure himself, offers a truly selfless gift. Likely, time will forget his name and replace it with “anonymous,” but his songs will endure to be, as Richard Bauman says of folklore, “the highest and truest expression” of a people, a culture, and a nation (1).

As such an important asset to history and culture, Stobrod, like other tricksters, gains a spiritual significance. Psychologist Carl Jung claims that “[the trickster] is a forerunner of the

saviour” and that his “transformation of the meaningless into the meaningful...reveals the trickster’s compensatory relation to the ‘saint’”(203, 196). Likewise, Radin notes that trickster offers “the promise of god and man” (168). Of the Appalachian Jack tales, Joseph Daniel Sobol also says, “There are . . . tales . . . in which Jack takes on the mythic attributes of a shaman, or culture hero, by moving freely between natural and spiritual worlds, subduing evil, restoring harmony, and bringing back blessings to the community” (14). With his music, Stobrod not only bestows “blessings,” but he seems to resonate with a higher, transcendental chord. As Birch exclaims after hearing Stobrod and Pangle play before their execution, “Good God, these is holy men. Their mind turns on matters kept secret from the likes of you and me” (291). He becomes like the fiddler in Bryon Herbert Reece’s poem “Mountain Fiddler,” who takes his “fiddle / That sings and cries” and plays for the angels (Higgs 439) In this light, we see Stobrod as a wonder-tale hero, one who can work magic and commune with non-human spheres. He becomes a “primitive ‘cosmic’ being, a “*divine-animal*,” who up on the top of Cold Mountain, near the Shining Rocks, plays in harmony with an energy, a god, a higher power (Jung 203).

Like many tricksters, who remain unconscious of their contributions, Stobrod is likely unaware that he is leaving a legacy with his fiddle tunes. Ada, however, understands his significance. When she takes him for dead after finding Pangle in the bloody snow, she weeps for the loss: “Ada wondered about his hundreds of tunes. Where were they now and where might they go if he died” (304). At this point, Ada seems to be speaking clearly in Frazier’s voice, for Frazier explains that one of his strongest and earliest inspirations for writing Cold Mountain was a double grave containing a “fiddler and a retarded boy killed by Teague’s Confederate Home Guard” (2). In many ways, Frazier accurately recreates the execution: local lore says that the men were backed up against a tree and shot and that “the fiddler played Bonaparte’s Retreat before the triggers were pulled” (“Cold Mountain Diary” 2). In his story, though, Frazier changes the outcome by “saving” the fiddler, perhaps mourning all the songs that died with the actual victim. At first, it may seem perplexing, even unfair, that Frazier does this, that in effect, he chooses Stobrod—a selfish scofflaw, negligent father, and man so easy to hate—over Inman—a man who wants so desperately to stop killing and seeks only to go home to his loved one. As Stanley Diamond notes in his essay “Job and the Trickster,” such an ending will likely make the reader ask, “Why do the just suffer and the wicked flourish?” (xviii). Yet, as Ada senses, Stobrod’s songs cannot be lost, no matter how dishonestly and inappropriately he leads his life.

As tributes to Johnny Rebs, Billy Yanks, and a regional way of life threatened by the homogenization of progress, they will be coveted and collected by folklorists, historians, and musicians alike (Sobol, Jack Always 19). They will be the “stuff” of archives, as Richard Bauman says, and will be recorded on CDs and performed on stages (2). And as cultural unifiers, they will transcend the annihilative war in which they were created. Stobrod’s survival in the end, therefore, is not only a chance for him to keep living, but a celebration of all that he stands for, of all the songs that he will pass down to future generations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In the epilogue, which takes place ten years after the shootings on Cold Mountain, Frazier revisits Black Cove and offers a short but telling vignette of his main characters. In the first few lines, Frazier ambiguously describes two playful lovers, who “[e]ven after all this time and three children together . . . still . . . clasp[ed] each other at the oddest moments” (354). At first, it appears that Inman may have survived and that he and Ada are enjoying “long decades of happy union” together (353). We soon discover, however, that the lovers Frazier depicts are Ruby and Reid, the young outlier who witnesses Stobrod and Pangle’s execution, and together they have three boys “with full scalps of black hair and shiny brown eyes like little chestnuts set in their heads” (354). Inman, the novel’s most pervasive hero, the Odysseus figure, is absent from this scene. Indeed, the Home Guard boy mortally wounds him, and his bones lie buried as a reminder of the great and terrible war that afflicts the nation and wreaks incurable psychological trauma on many of its participants, especially those with his introspection and virtue. In trying to serve his country, he realizes that war does nothing but degrade humanity, making a mess of bodies and minds, and he deserts not because he is a coward, but because he wants to stop killing. Furthermore, he lengthens and complicates his journey home because he stalls to help others—to pull a decaying bull out of a man’s creek, to butcher a hog for a starving widow, to bury a grieving woman’s daughter. He is ever a Good Samaritan, but he dies in the end. Another deserter—Stobrod—a hedonist who lacks Inman’s moral filter and who also seems near death in the final pages, though, survives his wounds and becomes the grandfather of Black Cove Farm. We first see him emerging from “the barn where he had been milking,” a chore that contrasts his previous affection for thieving and suggests that he has relinquished his wayward and wanton lifestyle (355). Part of Frazier’s decision to sacrifice his Odysseus for the crude trickster is no doubt to illustrate the blindness of war and violence—that it does not consider one’s worth or morality when stripping life away. Yet in saving Stobrod, Frazier also saves a culture hero, a fiddler who offers a “boon” to society, as Joseph Campbell says (193). Indeed, we see Stobrod in the end not as a knave or negligent father, but as a musician who serenades his extended family with some “variant he had made of Bonnie George Campbell” (355). Above all, he is an entertainer, preserver of history, and cultural icon who nurtures with his music. In his

novel, therefore, Frazier significantly revises the nostalgic war tale and conventional love story and privileges a hero who becomes an artist during war rather than one whom war hollows out.

As with the male heroes, Frazier reshapes the expected fate of his heroines. Ada, we see, has bore Inman's daughter, conceived during their brief union on Cold Mountain, but she remains a single woman. As symbolized by the tip of her index finger, which she severs "as clean as snapping a tomato sucker" while felling trees, Ada at once loses part of herself that can never be recovered—Monroe, Inman, her belleness—but she also gains a hearty spirit and independence (354). Even without her father or her beloved, she survives and thrives. Her friendship with Ruby also endures, and Ruby chooses to make Black Cove her permanent home, even though she has a family of her own. So Ruby and Ada, we see, make parallel transformations and, in part, become each other's resolutions. Ada, the belle, who is supposed to be contentedly married at the end, is, in essence, a spinster with an illegitimate child, while Ruby, the unrefined orphan who would likely shun matrimony if even offered the chance, is now a wife and mother.

The final scene of the novel depicts Ada, Ruby, Reid, the children, and Stobrod gathering under an October sky for dinner, music, and storytelling. This picture of familial tranquility, in which the characters affirm their individual transformations, is also a uniquely Appalachian one. As Terry Gifford explains, "The last page leaves us with images of a domestic evening: these children dancing, a new fiddle tune from Stobrod, classical storytelling from Ada, and a poultice from Ruby. These are narrative icons of cultural continuity in the Blue Ridge Mountains" (5). Each hero, therefore, exhibits his or her bond to the region. In the loss of her finger and her choice to remain in Black Cove, Ada literally and figuratively becomes part of the mountains, and by telling of Baucis and Philemon, a story that recalls both the tragedy and endurance of her and Inman's love, she contributes to the oral tradition that forms the social foundation of isolated, pre-industrial communities. Ruby too continues to be an earth mother as when she heals Ada's wounded hand so "neatly you would think that was the way the ends of people's fingers were meant to look" (356). Stobrod remains the creative fiddler, offering more songs to define his region. Even Inman rests on his beloved Cold Mountain. The journeys of these heroes, therefore, whether covering a thousand miles or a few inches, whether ending in death or redemption, lead them to the mountains. Though Frazier depicts war's power to divide and destroy, he also affirms the power of place to heal and unite.

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