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Cold Mountain: An American Odyssey

The story of America's Civil War consists of great drama. Every year, new books appear on the market that document biographical information on essential figures and the battle plans of confrontation between the enemies. Because its legacy and aftermath are still a part of American politics, it is easy for many to overlook its larger, mythical dimensions. Abraham Lincoln, in his first inaugural address, recognized the events of the early war in this greater mythic context. In the speech, he evokes "the mystic chords of memory, [that] stretches from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature" (1). This interconnected thread of memory, the stuff from what comprises myths, united a community of people into a nation. In an attitude similar to that of Lincoln, Charles Frazier, author of Cold Mountain also sees the Civil War in a context much greater than simply a description of battles, strategies, and generals. Blending mythological patterns and historical events, he unites his reader and people of the past with a different type of mystic chord—not made of romanticized chivalrous tales, but of real human emotion, reliable historic accounts, and realistic depictions of life in the Southern Appalachian Mountains during the Civil War.

Cold Mountain is a remarkably accurate picture of life in North Carolina during the last years of the Civil War. The author tackles many important issues that faced the mountain people during the late 1800's. After a brief look at mythological aspects, the historicity of Frazier's

book will be explored. This investigation will include the accuracy of family folklore, of Civil War events, and the War's mental effects. Also, Frazier's depiction of the "self-contained" culture of the Carolina Mountains, and the life of women during the War will be examined for its authentic representation of life that Frazier feels was hidden in the Appalachians.

Cold Mountain's style and allusions add to the historicity of the novel by creating for the reader a far-reaching connection into the ancient history of man. Seattle Times critic Kay McFadden emphasizes that the work "is an old fashioned novel...because it contains traditional elements like character development, rich physical description and linear, easy-to-follow narration" (E1). Another part of the old-fashioned appeal stems from the fact that Frazier has patterned his work after The Odyssey. The book pays homage to Homer's epic poem through structure, theme, and many mythical echoes to the adventures of Odysseus. Frazier says in an interview with Curtis Wilkie of the Boston Globe, "When I heard the story [from my Grandfather,] one of the first things I thought of was a structure like The Odyssey. I didn't want to write a book about the generals and the battles. I thought of it in terms of The Iliad and The Odyssey: the book about fighting the war, and the book about the warrior coming home" (D1). Inman, the hero is struggling home to his Ithaca, Cold Mountain, which hides his Penelope, Ada. Inman's way is beset, as was Odysseus' with many encouragers and distractions. One of the most interesting parallels exists between the strange mountain "goatwoman" and that of the Swineherd. It is also not a coincidence that the classically educated Ada reads the works of Homer to her mountain friend Ruby. Frazier cleverly intertwines mythological images and works to develop Ruby's character in this passage:

Ruby had grown impatient with Penelope, but she would sit of a long evening and laugh and laugh at the tribulations of Odysseus, all the stones the gods threw in

his passway. She held the suspicion, though, that there was more of Stobrod [Ruby's often absent father] in Odysseus than old Homer was willing to let on, and she found his alibis for stretching out his trip to be suspect in the extreme.... She concluded that, all in all, not much had altered in the way of things despite the passage of a great volume of time. (140)

In addition to the mythic structure and themes, Frazier includes many individual allusions of archetypal images that add depth to his narrative. One of the most striking is Ruby's description of her conception. Stobrod told his daughter that he "had no part in the baby and that its cause was a tall blue heron" (194). This image echoes the conception of Helena between Leda and Zeus who comes to her in the form of a swan. Another powerful echo sounds at the end of the novel occurring on the side of Cold Mountain. Ada creates a makeshift grave marker from a "strong willed" locust branch for a murdered boy named Pangle. Frazier writes, "Ada's hope for her own construction, that someday a tall locust would stand to mark Pangle's place, and that every year into the next century it would tell in brief a tale like Peresephone's. Black bark in winter, white blossoms in spring" (383). This allusion calls upon the myth surrounding Peresephone, whose coming from the Underworld is signified in nature by the coming of the Spring—an important image to all of humankind that signifies the eternal cycle of rebirth and renewal.

Another link to the past is the significant role that oral tradition and family folklore plays in the historical foundations of this novel. As in many Southern families, ancestors have sought to preserve their history to future generations. With times filled with struggle and heroism, the human need to memorialize becomes very important. Amanda Dargan, president of the Queens Council on the Arts states that "historical events and periods, such as the Civil War, which had a

tremendous effect on southerners, provide material for many family stories...in a region that is known for its storytelling” (471).

The journey of Inman is based on a real event that occurred in Frazier’s family during the war. In an interview with David Streitfeld of the Washington Post, the author remarks on the story’s conception, “It ‘s like someone was saying, ‘Here’s a brief outline for a book; what do you think?’”(C01). Frazier’s father told him the story of his great-great-great uncle Inman. His father knew hardly anything about the real Inman. However, these facts were known: He was in the war, wounded badly, brought to the hospital and then deserted. Inman walked home, where he was shot in a fight with the local militia. Inman’s story can be verified according to the locals of Haywood County, North Carolina. Later, Frazier found Inman’s war records in the state archives—one paragraph of that detail the places where his relative was inducted, trained, and wounded. The author also consulted a book written by a veteran from the real Inman’s regiment. Frazier says he consumed this account of the unit’s history. “I could look at the dates [Inman] was present and accounted for, and assume what he was probably doing” (qtd. in Wilkie D1). There are also reminders of the Inman Family in the mountains of western North Carolina. Fred Brown of Waynesville points out, “There is an Inman Chapel near the Little East Fork River where James Anderson Inman, brother to the slain W.P. Inman, began a ministry at the turn of the century” (8 G). Frazier also knows the traditional site of Inman’s grave. He says of the site in an article written for Salon Magazine, “If [Inman’s] there he has a fine view to the forks of the Pigeon river, where once stood a Cherokee town called Kanuga, not a trace of it left but potsherds in the river sand. His long view is up toward Cold Mountain” (2).

If a reader is looking for a book filled with detailed accounts of the Civil War, Cold Mountain is not, claims the author, necessarily the book to read. Frazier states he never

attempted to write a Civil War novel. He instead focuses on the physical and mental toll the war had on its victims and participants. The author says in an interview published in the Irish Times, “I liked the idea of a man trying to make sense of things, of himself and of this situation he finds himself in” (qtd. in Battersby 62). Historian Shelby Foote remarked favorably on this aspect of the book, because “Mr. Frazier did not presume to step inside historical characters” (qtd. in Gussow C 9). However, historical accuracy is important. The terrible battle descriptions that Inman must carry within himself are powerfully done and accurately portrayed. These scenes are important to understand the condition of Inman’s soul and his need for peace.

Frazier’s descriptions of the battles are very accurate. Inman’s most disturbing battle experiences occurred at the Battle of Fredericksburg. Inman describes this battle as a sight that he wished he had never seen. Frazier recalls the battle:

A vast army was marching uphill toward a stone wall, a sunken road. Inman’s regiment was called to join the men already behind the wall, and they quickly formed up alongside the big white house at the top of Mayres Heights....After Inman’s regiment formed up, they dropped over the brow of the hill and into the withering fire of the Federals. They stopped once to touch of a volley, and they ran down to the sunken road behind the stone wall....The Federals kept on marching by the thousands at the wall all through the day, climbing the hill to be shot down...The Federals kept on coming long past the point where all the pleasure of whipping them vanished. Inman just got to hating them for their clodpated determination to die. (10-11)

Compare for accuracy this gripping account of this Battle, written by the U.S. Civil War Center. Frazier’s account of this horrific battle mirrors the reality of the battle:

The brigade of Brigadier General Thomas R.R. Cobb [occupied] the sunken road area in front of Marye's Heights. On Cobb's left flank was placed the 24th North Carolina in trenches extending the line another 250 yards. In all total, the Confederates placed 2000 men on that line with another 7000 men waiting just beyond the ridge. When the fog lifted, both sides could hear the battle raging to the south, it was then that Sumner ordered General Darius Couch to ready his corps for the attack. That lifting fog revealed to the Federals a ridge 600 yards west of the city, known as Marye's Heights. Between the outskirts of town and the heights was an open plain dotted with a few houses. Right outside of town, about 200 yards, was a canal that ran across the plain. There were only three bridges that crossed this canal and one had it's planking torn off, which made it even harder to cross. As the Federals looked up toward the heights they could see a stonewall at it's base. Running on the other side of the wall was a sunken road called Telegraph Road. The road had begun to sink as years of heavy wagon traffic displaced the dirt in the road. The Confederates then dug even deeper behind the wall, placing the dirt against the wall to protect against penetrating shots, allowing the troops to stand up behind it and fire but remain fairly safe against return fire. The entrenched Rebels behind the wall and all along the heights had a clear line of fire over the plain. Col. E. Porter Alexander, Longstreet's chief artilleryist, felt there was nowhere on the plain that his gunners could not hit. The Union troops were unable to see the Rebels, in the sunken road, as they gathered outside of town to begin the attack. The battle raged for hours. In all, seven Northern divisions had been thrown up against the stone wall. The

Union took over 7000 casualties, against only 1200 on the Confederate side. Not one Federal soldier had reached the wall. Dark came and the Federals fell back to regroup as best as they could. The Rebels remained entrenched along the heights.

(1)

Another aspect of the war that Frazier communicates to his reader is the attitude that a person, like Inman, who had witnessed terrible violence of the war, must have felt. Frazier writes that Inman was a man who had recently come to believe that “a man’s spirit could be torn apart and cease and yet his body [could] keep on living.... [Inman] was himself a case in point, and perhaps a rare one, for his spirit, it seemed, had been burned out of him but he was yet walking (22). Much of the author’s presentation of the war’s psychological effects were thoughtfully based on letters that Frazier read that were written by his Civil War Veteran great-great-great grandfather. In them, Frazier says, “I detected a weariness with the war and every element of it, and I tried to project what forms that weariness would take” (Stephenson C1). Frazier also speaks of Inman’s continuing nightmares. He writes, “No matter how [Inman] tried, the field that night [following the Battle of Fredericksburg] would not leave him but instead provided him with a recurring dream” (14). During the time of the Civil War, post-traumatic stress was not a diagnosed medical condition. However, there are accounts of people experiencing symptoms akin to the fictional Inman. John Talbott article in History Today details many eyewitness accounts that describe incidences of depression, dissociation, and other symptoms of combat fatigue. Unfortunately, due to the lack of understanding about this syndrome, Talbott claims that many of these mentally ill men “wound up at the end of a noose or in front of a firing squad regarded as cowards and deserters” (1). He writes of an incident strikingly similar to that of Inman’s, “In late November of 1864, Captain J. McEntire, a provost marshal, wrote of Private

William Leeds, a prisoner in his charge: ‘He had been strolling around in the woods, and had procured his food from soldiers...He has a severe cut on his nose and his eyes are in mourning for the loss of his character’ ” (1). Talbott goes onto say that the “evidence bearing on combat trauma in the Civil War is anecdotal....Traces usually appear in such narratives as soldiers’ diaries, journals, and letters home” (1). Interestingly, Inman’s recurring nightmares of Frederickburg are mirrored within another author’s work. “James Thurber often mentioned his grandfather’s awakening from nightmares of the Federal retreat from Frederickburg” (Talbott 1). This is proof positive that Frazier’s rendering of war, even down to the psychological effects of the war is an accurate depiction of the Civil War.

Another important historical element of Cold Mountain is the marauding presence of Teague and his Home Guard throughout Inman’s journey home. Frazier captures their vigilante presence in a quote from mountaineer Esco. He says, “Teague and his Home Guard [are] roaring around like a band of marauders. Setting their own laws as suits them, and them nothing but trash looking for a way to stay out of the army (45). Again, for verification of this idea, one must search Civil War narratives. John Borsden, contributor to the Chicago Times details such a massacre, “One such place is near the North Carolina-Tennessee line, at Shelton Laurel in Madison County. In January 1863, 13 men and boys from Tennessee were arrested in the wake of a pro-Unionist raid on Marshall. Their families were told the prisoners were headed for jail in Knoxville, instead they were massacred” (22).

Another important element of Cold Mountain is Frazier’s presentation of the culture of his ancestors, the people of Appalachia. How accurate is it? The author did painstaking amounts of research so that his book would accurately portray the atmosphere of the period. Frazier says, “I did a lot of research, about three times as much as I did for my college dissertation. I wanted



the names of things people used, domestic utensils. Not to have people reaching for their dictionaries but by placing them in context, letting people know what these things were for. Yes, I wanted to create the world of the past, a past that seems to have been forgotten” (Battersby 62). Frazier feels that by recreating the past, he can help his reader to find their way in the present. “Everywhere,” Frazier ponders, “you have this sense that the world changes faster than you can accommodate yourself to. Looking back and seeing how you got to where you are is a useful way to combat disorientation” (McFadden E1). By capturing the essence of life in the mountains, he memorializes their contribution to the history of the American people.

Writing non-fictionally, Frazier directly addresses the historical background of his ancestors in an essay for Salon Magazine. He writes about the people of the mountains:

They were most likely old Scots whose ancestors only a few generations back had been exiled from their country in the years after the Culloden.... 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. (1)

In his fiction, Frazier captures the myth of the Appalachian Mountains but humanizes the inhabitants of the area so that the mountaineers aren't typical hillbillies, but thoughtful and sensitive people. Frazier's admiration and respect for the mountain culture is apparent to his reader. The “otherness” of the area is very visible. In an essay that defines the Appalachian myth, Dr. Henry D. Shapiro of the University of Cincinnati, supposes the mental image so many people still possess toward this region was created, largely by local color writers and publicity generated to support home missionary work in the 1880's. This myth contain several assumptions about the area that, in Shapiro's words, “functioned to normalize and make acceptable Appalachian

otherness, even if it did not convince everyone of the wisdom of the situation” (1100). These assumptions include a homogenous view of cultural behaviors and economic situations of the mountain area, which encompassed all of the mountain portions of the Southern Appalachians. These people’s beliefs were different and therefore, must be changed so that the “backward” people could be integrated into society like that of the northeast. A typical mountaineer was poor, uneducated, and dirty. They were seen as heathens. Frazier uses this theme in the character of Monroe, a refined preacher from Charleston who want to go into a mission field that was removed but not too far away. Frazier describes the attitude of outsiders through the thoughts of Ada:

All of their Charleston friends had expressed the opinion that the mountain region was a heathenish part of creation, outlandish in its many affronts to sensibility, a place of wilderness and gloom and rain where man, woman, and child grew gaunt and brutal, addicted to acts of raw violence with not even a nod in the direction of self-restraint. (55).

This was a common thought in the 1870’s. Many “civilized” people found it difficult to understand how people who lived so close to the centers of American population could be so different. Cold Mountain accurately depicts this viewpoint of society during the late 1800’s.

Frazier’s description of the religious activities of the mountain folk reflects a fundamentalist attitude toward Christianity. Frazier describes what the people of the community of Black Cove thought the role of a preacher should be. Ada’s father, Monroe, is preaching about death, a subject that is on his heart, using the pulpit to come to conclusions about his own mortality. This was unsatisfactory to the congregation of mountaineers. Frazier describes their fundamentalist attitude toward religion about in this passage:

After several weeks, grumbling in the congregation made it clear that death troubled [Monroe] to a greater degree than it did them. Many thought it was not a tragedy but a good thing. They were looking forward to the rest. Monroe's thoughts would sit smoother, some had suggested, if he went back doing what the old dead preacher had done. Mainly condemn sinners and tell bible tales with engaging zeal. Baby Moses in the bulrush. Boy David slinging rocks. (79)

This attitude can be confirmed in an interesting historical account of religious life in the North Carolina Mountains that was published in 1903. Compton's memories of his religious upbringing validate the Frazier's depiction of church life in the mountains. In his memoirs, The Life of Lucius B. Compton, The Mountain Evangelist or, From the Depths of Sin to the Heights of Holiness, Preacher Compton describes his childhood in the mountains. In a chapter titled "Conviction" he recalls:

My parents enjoyed good, old-fashioned religion - the kind which took the Bible at its word, and believed it without any "ifs," "ands," or "buts." They were content to believe it without any modern "fixing up." Consequently they taught us children that there was a hell which was hot, everlasting, and unquenchable. They told us that people who did not repent of their sins would spend eternity there. How well I remember the hellscare this intelligence put upon me when but a child. (13)

In addition to this picture of fundamentalist Christians living in the mountains, Frazier also creates his characters to be a people with a spiritual connection to nature. Each of the major mountain born characters relies on signs and omens to make decisions. These signs from nature are considered symbols and help extended from a higher power. For example, Inman thinks after

seeing a strange light in the sky, “This sign, though, as best he could tell, spoke of nothing but strife, danger, grief”(26). Ada’s neighbor Esco tells her that many signs they are noticing, including hoarding squirrels, wide bands on caterpillars, and bad-smelling yarrow root, indicate that a hard winter is approaching (47). Esco also addresses the signs in the county that point the arrival of evil times to the mountains. He says, “A man at Cove Creek claimed to have slaughtered a sheep, and among its internals no heart was found...a pig was born with human hands at Balsam...Esco’s thinking was that though they had so far been isolated from the general meanness of the war, its cess might soon spill through the low gaps and pour in to foul them all” (47). Mountain girl Ruby is constantly reminding Ada of the importance of using the signs of nature to perform tasks. Frazier illustrates, “In Rubys’ mind, everything—setting fence posts, making sauerkraut, killing hogs—fell under the rule of the heavens” (134). This fact seems paradoxical to the fundamentalist attitude that Frazier also depicts. However, it is not. Catherine L. Albanese of Wright State University confirms Frazier’s portrayal of the religious attitudes in the Appalachians. She writes that this dichotomy can be explained because of two major factors. The first is the influence that the Cherokee Indians had on this region. The second is the preference and love for nature that these people possessed. She writes:

With their enduring nature religion, some Appalachians continue to plant their crops by the signs of the zodiac and rely on other signs for direction in everyday life. Often dismissed as collections of folk sayings or superstitions, these affirmed correspondences (cradle signs, body signs, weather signs) possess strong implicit religious coherence. All are grounded on a natural occultism that sees the (anciently celebrated) tie between microcosm and macrocosm as contemporary reality. (1275)

It is interesting to see the influence that nature has on the people of this region even in today's modern world. Outsiders often see mountain people too mired in superstition and folklore. To those possessing this mindset, Frazier's message is clear. He wants his reader to develop an attitude like that of Ada's when she states:

[Ada] chose to view the signs as metaphoric. They were, as [she] saw them, an expression of stewardship, a means of taking care, a discipline. They provided a ritual of concern for the patterns and tendencies of the material world where it might where it might be seen to intersect with some other world. Ultimately, she decided, the signs were a way of being alert, and under those terms she could honor them. (134)

Frazier also deals with the political issues that faced the Mountains during the Civil War. He accounts for the reluctance of the people to be involved in the War because were members of what Frazier dubs a "self-contained" society. This attitude of isolation and self-sufficiency is best explained by Ruby when she ponders the necessity of an imported hat. Ruby states:

This business of carrying hats halfway around the world to sell made no sense to her.... There was not one thing in a place like France or New York or Charleston that Ruby wanted. And little she even needed that she couldn't make or grow or find on Cold Mountain. She held a deep distrust of travel, whether to Europe or anywhere else. Her view was that a world properly put together would yield inhabitants so suited to their lives in their assigned place that they would have neither need nor wish to travel." (243-244)

Frazier also describes the attitude of Ada's neighbors. "The Swangers had opposed the war from the start and had until recently remained generally sympathetic with the Federals, as many had in

the mountains” (45). He also illustrates what involved the mountains in the war. These people were fighting to protect their lifestyle and their culture. Inman, in a conversation with the goatwoman responds to the question of why he initially volunteered for the war. He says, representing his region, “I reckon many of us fought to drive off invaders. One man I knew had been north to the big cities, and he said it was every feature of such places that we were fighting to prevent” (275). Inman is not alone in having expressed that thought. Ken Burns in his companion book to the PBS series The Civil War quotes Shelby Foote’s similar answer to the same question asked of Inman. He replies with this anecdote: “Early in the war, a Union squad closed in on a single ragged Confederate. He didn’t own any slaves, and he obviously didn’t have much interest in the Constitution or anything else. And they asked him, ‘What are you fighting for?’ And he said, ‘I’m fighting because you’re down here’” (qtd. in Lippman 1F).

Concurring with Foote is historian John McPherson who writes:

The western part of the state (North Carolina) resembled east Tennessee and West Virginia in socio-economic structure and unionist leanings....A significant unionist political movement began in 1863. In that year the Order of the Heroes of America, a secret peace society, attained a large following in piedmont and upcountry North Carolina as war weariness and defeatism grew. (695)

This passage not only illustrates the mountainlands political affiliation but also introduces the Heroes of America. It is also interesting to note the encounter that Inman has with a gesturing member of this secret society as he is journeying into the Carolina Mountains. Frazier writes, “Inman recognized the gesture as one of the signs of the Red String Band or the Heroes of America. A volunteer worker in the hospital had passed along information about such sympathizers with the Federal cause. They were all as bad as Masons for making up secret

signals” (300). Through this story and all of the other tales spun within the pages of this novel, Frazier’s love for the people of the mountains shines through. In an essay about the process he went through while writing Cold Mountain, Frazier eloquently writes of his ancestors:

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. (Salon 3)

By all accounts, Cold Mountain is a historically accurate elegy for the lost mountain life that belonged to a part of America’s ancestors.

“ ‘The times are making women strong,’ reflected Kate Burruss early in 1864” (qtd. in Rabel 112). Frazier’s rendering of women in Cold Mountain reflects this transformation that took place in the women of the time. In developing the characters, Frazier remarks that he “read a lot of letters and journals of really smart and independent women to try to get some of their personality and spirit” (Wilkie D1). The female main characters, Ada and Ruby are two very interesting examples of the transformations that took place within women of the time.

Ada Monroe is a complex character. Outwardly, she is an accurate portrayal of the quintessential Southern belle. Inwardly, she is different than many women of her time. Frazier says that she was “educated beyond the point considered wise for females” (30). Her educational emphasis focused on her mental capabilities and not on the remote possibility that she may one day be responsible for running a farm. The author writes that Ada, “All her life, . . . her father had

kept her back from the hardness of work” (31). Even her manner of dressing was considered outlandish in the mountains:

Ada stood at the edge of the graveyard looking altogether foreign and beautiful and utterly awkward. Everyone else wore woolens against the damp chill, but Ada had on an ivory-colored linen dress with lace at the collar and sleeves and hem. She seemed to have chosen it more by the calendar than the weather. (80)

In an essay that speaks to the southern belle mystique, Professor of Women’s Studies at the University of Florida, Anne Goodwyn Jones claims that “Southern lore has it that the belle... is the fragile, dewy, just opened bloom of the southern female; flirtatious but sexually innocent, bright but not deep, beautiful as a statue or painting or porcelain but, like each, risky to touch” (1527). Frazier captures this essence of the belle in Ada’s character. Because of her not so timid display of her knowledge, Ada’s character differs from Goodwyn Jones’ definition when she writes that the belle was, “a popular form of art, she entertains but does not challenge her audience” (1527). Frazier’s depiction of the belle, although differing slightly from Goodwyn Jones’ opinion, isn’t far off the mark. Ada’s strong personality and belief in individualism becomes an important and lifesaving characteristic for her throughout the story.

Another strong female personality is that of Ruby. She is the quintessential self-sufficient mountain woman. Ada describes Ruby as “capable of any and all farm tasks.... And though Ruby had not spent a day of her life in school and could not read a word nor even write her name, Ada thought she saw in her a spark as bright and hard as one struck with steel and flint” (67). Ruby is well acquainted in the ways of managing the land and of the necessity to support herself. East Tennessee State University Professor Margaret Ripley Wolfe confirms Frazier’s characterization when she suggests that women during this time were similar to Ruby. She states:



Appalachian females seem to have been less fettered by geographical isolation, social conventions, and the patriarchal family than during later decades of the century....Some evidence indicates that Appalachian women ...asserted themselves at religious and political meetings. Certainly, through their labor on the farms and in the homes, they made a vital contribution to family survival in a preindustrial economy (1526).

The “uneducated” Ruby becomes Ada’s mentor in survival and together they fight to survive during the war just as Frazier wants his sophisticated reader to be enlightened by the society that was contained in the mountains.

In addition to the characters of Ada and Ruby, there are other women in the book who are victim of the war. Perhaps the most memorable incident of violence occurs in a scene in which Inman kills three Yankee raiders who attempt to steal a hog from Sara, a young widowed mother. After a torturous raiding scene, the Federal raiders begin to walk away with her only valuable material possession. Sara calls out, “That hog’s all I’ve got. You take it and you might as well knock both of us in the head and kill us now, for it will all be the same” (314). Frazier says that incidents like this were common during this time. “There’s a book of regional history called ‘Bushwhackers’ that has that story, a very similar story (qtd. in Wilkie D1). Other sources also confirm incidents of Union raiding such as the raid on Sara’s farm that occurred during the war. The Diary of Alice Williamson of Gallatin, Tennessee details the occupation from of Gallatin and the surrounding region by Union forces under General Eleazer A. Paine. Like many others of the time, Alice Williamson is bitterly resentful of the Union raiding and occupation. She details an incident that details the occupation and the free reign that the invading troops seem to have toward the women who occupy the town:

**June 10<sup>th</sup>:** The country is overrun with Yanks: they are camped in the woods in front of us and have already paid us several visits killed sheep, goats and chickens. They come over to see us every few minutes in the day. Some came today and demanded their dinner at two o'clock but did not get it. They went off cursing us for being d\_\_n rebels. (25)

In another account of a Union raid, historian George C. Rable quotes the Diary of Virginian Kate Sperry. Rable notes that during the fighting in the lush Shenandoah Valley, the Union trampled over “lush farms, and indiscriminately raided corncribs, chicken coops, and pig pens” (169). Sperry glumly notes this of her newly occupied hometown, “I suppose we’ll have to consider Winchester Yankeedom—though I’d rather be in Devildom any day. [I feel] ready to condemn the whole herd and piously wish them in Hades....[The Federals] are the meanest set of poor white trash I ever beheld”(qtd. in Rable 169). Both of these instances confirm the violence and uncaring attitude that raiding troops had on women during the war.

Only through an understanding of Frazier’s major symbol, Cold Mountain itself, does one gain a complete understanding of the resounding chords that the author strikes with this image. Alluding again to Lincoln’s inaugural address, the President comforted his nation by encouraging them to wait until the “better angels” of human nature would reappear to contain the bestial instincts that seemed to rampage throughout the country during the war. In Frazier’s book, this anticipated kinder side of humanity does not appear. The reader is left to take comfort only, as Ruby, Ada, and Inman did, in the power of nature and of the mythic elements of journey, renewal and quest for peace and survival. The ever-present symbol of Cold Mountain contains a powerful image as a place of peace. The mountain is always present in the scene as a towering element in the landscape that the characters inexplicably look to for a source of strength

or as a constant and compelling vision in Inman's mind that motivates him to press onward in his journey. The myth that surrounds the mountain is explained in a flashback, narrated by Inman. He tells of a mysterious stranger, speaking to the troubled Cherokees of a world that exists on the mountain that is very different than their own. The stranger says:

Our land is not altogether like yours. Here is constant fighting, sickness, and foes where ever you turn. And soon a stronger enemy than you have faced will come and take your country away from you and leave you as exiles. But there we have peace. And though we die as all men do and must struggle for out food, we need not think of danger. Our minds are not filled with fear. We do not endlessly contend with each another. (251)

Because of Cold Mountain's accurate and highly literary rendering of the effects of Civil War had on its people, Charles Frazier creates a world that his reader can understand Inman's need for a place of sanctuary. Research confirms that the author's depictions of Civil War events and the War's mental effects are very accurate. Frazier's rendering of life in the Southern Appalachians and the portrayal of the life of women during the conflict authentically represent a society and place that Frazier feels reflects a bit of heaven on earth, quietly nestled in a blanket of fog in the mountains of his ancestral homeland.

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