MYSTICAL READING: THE LITERARY JOURNEY OF CHARLES FRAZIER'S

COLD MOUNTAIN

by

MARSHA ELLEN FRENCH

(Under the Direction of Douglas Anderson)

ABSTRACT

In a novel about journeys, the literary journey of Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* encompasses all. As the two main characters, Ada and Inman, journey towards home and emotional openness and away from their respective pasts, they also journey towards a deeper relationship with books, and thus words, symbols, and composition. Through reading *William Bartram's Travels*, Inman gains guidance on his dangerous path. By trading her classical Charleston education for natural study, Ada gains independence and builds a relationship with her new home. Ultimately, these literary journeys pervade every aspect of the characters' lives as they transcend texts to mystically experience words, each other, and Cold Mountain itself.

INDEX WORDS: *Cold Mountain*; Charles Frazier; William Bartram; Nature; Journeys; Mysticism

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DEDICATION

Thanks, Grandma.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Charles Frazier's 1997 novel, *Cold Mountain*, is packed with journeys—journeys to home, journeys to love, journeys to survival, journeys across land, journeys towards land. Enveloping all of these journeys, though, is a more subtle, yet more powerful, trek: the literary journey. As Inman travels towards home and Ada travels towards self-sufficiency, both characters travel towards a deeper understanding of the role of books—and thus literary elements, words, and composition—in their own rustic lives. Inman's journey begins with his reclamation of a copy of the naturalist narrative *William Bartram's Travels* as a scroll. By engaging with this single text, the uneducated mountain man gains an appreciation for words and stories that allows him to overcome his past and sustains him on his journey towards home and emotional openness. Ada's journey begins from her classical Charleston education and the pages of her father's library. While references to these books are interesting, their only real significance is the foundation of Ada's reading skills; such classical study has no place in the world of Cold Mountain. Instead, as her life changes because of the death of her father and the raging Civil War, Ada transposes her reading knowledge to the world around her, allowing development of an independent future and a broader conception of knowledge as she takes a journey parallel to Inman's.

In both Ada and Inman's journeys, reading is not an isolated practice; it bleeds into every aspect of the characters' lives. While their journeys are far from smooth, ultimately Inman and Ada's development of a mystical relationship through reading

becomes both a marker of and guidance towards personal progress on their respective paths. By engaging in a style of reading that allows the characters to transcend their relative texts and tap into a higher spiritual power, Ada and Inman are able to achieve contentment and come into a powerful communion with words, with each other, and with Cold Mountain itself.

CHAPTER TWO

INMAN

Inman and literature are entwined from the very beginning of *Cold Mountain*. The first scene of the novel describes Inman using "the book" to settle his mind inside his dim, dark, hospital room. "The book" is actually a copy of the third part of *William Bartram's Travels*, which Inman found in a box of books donated to the hospital by "the ladies of the capital eager for the intellectual as well as physical improvement of the patients" (15).[1] As the novel progresses, this book becomes more than just intellectual exercise; it serves as Inman's spiritual advisor, his sacred text.

As a narrative, *William Bartram's Travels* is a significant complement to Inman's *Cold Mountain* story. Between the years 1773 and 1777, William Bartram traveled the American Southeast from North Carolina to Florida with the goal of documenting and collecting samples of plants and shells. While he experienced many trials—rough terrain, violent weather, illness, snorting crocodiles—Bartram's journey is also marked by countless interactions with helpful and interesting people. Most notably, Bartram became a favorite of the numerous Indian tribes of the Southeast as a result of their shared reverence for nature. Even more similar to Inman, Bartram's travels took place during the American Revolutionary War. While other Philadelphians were fighting for independence, Bartram rejected politics and battlefields for his walk in nature. Throughout the entire text of *William Bartram's Travels*, there is not a single overt reference to any of the current battles or his own political affiliation. Moreover, in his

[1] All *Cold Mountain* quotations from this point on are taken from:
Frazier, Charles. *Cold Mountain.* New York: Grove, 1997.

book, *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*, Edward J. Cashin remarks that Bartram, a known pacifist, constantly avoided any areas of the Southeast that were susceptible to violence; as Inman turned to nature for escape violence, so did Bartram[2].

While Inman possesses the third part of the *Travels*—which is primarily concerned with the mountainous landscape of North Carolina—all of the Bartram quotations in *Cold Mountain* come from chapter three. This chapter begins around May 19, 1776, just under two months before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In this chapter, Bartram describes fertile strawberry fields, mountainous views, ruins of Indian towns, and an Indian burial ground; he explicitly mentions nothing regarding this critical period in the war. Like Inman, Bartram's only observation of the effects of war is filtered through the landscape: town ruins and burial grounds. Both men remain remarkably depoliticized in the midst of two of the most significant wars in American history; to these men, nature is more fulfilling than battle.

When Inman finds the *Travels* in the donation box, the book is missing its front cover; "in an effort towards symmetry" he tears off the back cover and keeps "the book tied into a scroll with a piece of twine" (14). As soon as the back cover is ripped off, the book transforms physically from a simple narrative to sacred scripture. Once *William Bartram's Travels* becomes a scroll, it sheds its official title and becomes "the book," "his scroll," or "the Bartram scroll." Inman's use of this scroll closely resembles the traditional use of scripture in their everyday lives of believers:

> It was not a book that required following from front to back, and Inman simply opened it at random, as he had done night after night in the

[2] Cashin, Edward. *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000.

> hospital to read until he was calm enough for sleep. The doings of that kind lone wanderer—called Flower Gatherer by the Cherokee in honor of his satchels full with plants and his attention all given to the growth of wild living things—never failed to ease his thoughts. (15)

Instead of reading chronologically for entertainment or to pass time, Inman opens the scroll to a random passage and meditates on a single paragraph or sentence. Inman never engages with the text during the daylight hours; he only reads during darkness, both literally and mentally, with the goal of "brightening" his spirit and gaining "enlightenment." The reference to Bartram as a "kind lone wanderer" deepens the scroll's affiliation with sacred text as it echoes the traditional description of Jesus, also a type of "lone wanderer" whose acute spiritual knowledge sets Him apart from other humans. Furthermore, as Bartram pays all his attention "to the growth of wild living things," so does Jesus pay all of his attention to the *spiritual* growth of man, often considered "wild" in the Christian perception that man is predisposed to sin.

As he sets out on his literal journey back to Cold Mountain, Inman always carries the Bartram scroll. The first passage Inman reads describes the road of Bartram and the path of a creek:

> Continued yet ascending until I gained the top of an elevated rocky ridge, when appeared before me a gap or opening between other yet more lofty ascents, through which continued as the rough rocky road led me, close by the winding banks of a large rapid brook, which at length turning to the left pouring down rocky precipices, glided off through dark groves and high forests, conveying streams of fertility and pleasure to the field below. (15)

This passage condenses the entire *Cold Mountain* story down to a single Bartram sentence as it foreshadows Inman's journey home. Inman's wounded hospital stay is his "gap" between "more lofty ascents"—death or the battlefield. He chooses to travel through this gap, and his journey resembles the arduous course of the "rocky road" and the "large rapid brook" as he winds down "rocky precipices" and through "dark groves and high forests" until he ends in the pleasurable, fertile fields of Ada's farm. Beyond foreshadowing his plot, this passage becomes mystical as it allows Inman to transcend the page to experience Cold Mountain: "After a time, though, Inman found that he had left the book and was simply forming the topography of home in his head. Cold Mountain, all its ridges and coves and watercourses. Pigeon River, Little East Fork, Sorrell Cove, Deep Gap, Fire Scald Ridge" (15-16). Inman's imagined home is not a simple, sentimental domestic scene. Instead, the names he muses over create a fantastical setting reminiscent of daunting fairy tale journeys: "cold," "deep," "gap," "fire," "scald."

The Bartram scroll returns well into Inman's journey after he camps with gypsies and notices a beautiful woman who disturbs him as a reminder of Ada. Between the woman and the harshness of his travels thus far, Inman cannot sleep. As he lights a candle against the dark of night, Inman opens the Bartram scroll to alleviate the darkness of his mind:

> He tried to sleep, but he just tossed about on the ground. He lit a candle stub and poured the remainder of the wine into his tin cup and took his Bartram scroll from his knapsack. He opened the book at random and read and reread the sentence that first fell under his eye…Inman occupied himself pleasurably for quite some time with this long sentence. First he read it until each word rested in his head with a specific weight peculiar to

> itself, for if he did not, his attention just skittered over phrases so they left no marks. That accomplished, he fixed in his mind the setting, supplying all the missing details of a high open forest: the kinds of trees that would grow there, the birds that would frequent their limbs, the bracken that would grow under them. When he could hold that picture firm and clear, he began constructing the shrub in his mind, forming all its particulars until it arose in his thinking as vivid as he could make it, though it in no way matched any known plant and was in several features quite fantastic. (129-30)

This passage reveals that Inman uses the act of reading as meditation. Inman does not quickly consume sentences to garner a story; he slowly "fixes" his mind on each individual word, allowing the text to open into multiple layers of meaning. It is this disciplined, meditative approach that transforms texts into a mystical experience for Inman. In this first layer of meditation, Bartram's words open to transport Inman to a fantastic landscape.

This textual experience succeeds in tempering Inman's mind to meditatively interpret his own past experience, much in the way that scriptural study often leads to profound personal insight. After thoroughly experiencing Bartram's flower, Inman applies the same meditative reading to a memory of Ada:

> He remembered her weight on his legs. The softness of her, and yet the hard angularity of her bones underneath. She had leaned back and rested her head on his shoulder, and her hair smelled of lavender and of herself. Then she sat up and he put his hands to the points of her shoulders and felt the underlayment of muscle and the knobby shoulder joints beneath the

> skin…Inman had leaned forward, taken her hand and rubbed across its back with his thumb. The fine bones running to the wrist from the knuckles moved beneath the pressure like piano keys. Then he turned her hand over and smoothed back the fingers when she tried to draw them in and make a fist. He put his lips to her wrist where the slate-blue veins twined. (130-31)

In this memory, Inman experiences Ada as Bartram experiences his shrub: from a detached, almost scientific, stance of appreciation. Inman never exclaims over his specimen's beauty or speaks of her features metaphorically; instead, he concerns himself with exploring and documenting Ada's anatomy in naturalistic detail—the "angularity" of her bones, the color of her veins, the "underlayment" of her muscles, and the "knobbiness" of her joints. This cold, blue description of Ada recalls one natural setting in particular: Cold Mountain. The coldness of this place is inherent in the name, and whenever any of the characters refer to the physical description of Cold Mountain, it is always in shades of blue. By mystically associating her with Cold Mountain, Ada becomes a synonym for home.

Inman's meditation continues beyond memory, revealing more layers in "a dream as bright as day" (131). Inman's dream literally sets the template for the rest of his meditative readings as it exposes all the layers of the text interacting in one space. The dream begins with Inman in a realistic world: "he lay, as he did in the ordinary world, in a forest of hardwoods, their boughs visibly tired from a summer of growing and just weeks away from the color and the fall" (131). Next, the imagined Bartram shrub enters the scene: "Mixed in among the trees were the shrubs he had imagined from his reading of Bartram. They were covered in great hallucinatory blossoms, pentagular in form" (131).

Finally, Ada appears "among the tree trunks and moved at about the pace of the rain toward him. She wore a white dress and was wound about the shoulders and head in a wrapping of black cloth, but he knew her from her eyes and from the way she walked" (131). Similar to the truthful Bartram flower existing at the heart of Inman's fantastical rendering, Ada's clothing is imagined, but her essence is still recognizable. As the textual elements mingle, Inman gains insight into his relationship with Ada. While he was previously too shy to voice his love and doubted its return, in the dream Inman accurately expresses his feelings and recognizes reciprocity in Ada's face: "she stood firm and substantial and he held her tight. He said, I've been coming for you on a hard road. I'm never letting you go. Never. She looked at him and took the wrapping from about her head and seemed in the look of her face to agree" (131). In the short term, the entire meditative process succeeds as, through "fixing" his mind on the text, Inman "fixes" his mind emotionally; the "bright" dream has illuminated the darkness of his mind and he is able to walk "through the day with some brightening of his spirit" (132). In the long term, the meditation succeeds as it allows Inman insight—or enlightenment—on how to behave towards Ada. When Inman is first reunited with Ada, he looks back to his meditation for what to say: "He did not know what to say, so he said what his dream in the gypsy camp had told him. I've been coming to you on a hard road and I'm not letting you go" (404). Thus, this first in-depth meditation achieves the effects of traditional scripture meditation: spirit-brightening and enlightenment.

The Bartram scroll reappears for the third time near the end of Inman's journey. After being delayed and disoriented by the Home Guard, Inman is at his most hopeless and weary state. When he wakes up in the middle of the night unable to sleep, Inman turns to the light of his candle and scroll: "When he woke sometime long before dawn

and could not get back to sleep, he dug in his pack and found a stub of candle and lit it. He unrolled the Bartram and held it to the yellow light and riffled through the pages until his eyes fell on a passage that caught his attention" (348-49). The passage Inman lands on is a description of a mountain scene. The first stage of Inman's meditation is similar to the previous two as he transcends the words to mystically experience the described landscape: "A picture of the land Bartram detailed leapt dimensional into Inman's mind. Mountains and valleys on and on forever. A gnarled and taliped and snaggy landscape where man might be seen as an afterthought" (349). The next phase of Inman's meditation differs from his previous readings as he dramatizes Bartram's sentiment. The Bartram passage concludes: "My imagination thus wholly engaged in the contemplation of this magnificent landscape, infinitely varied, and without bound, I was almost insensible or regardless of the charming objects more within my reach" (349). After Inman imagines Bartram's landscape, he quickly moves on to imagine Cold Mountain:

> Inman many times looked across the view Bartram described. It was the border country stretching endlessly north and west from the slope of Cold Mountain. Inman knew it well. He had walked its contours in detail, had felt all its seasons and registered its colors and smelled its smells. Bartram was only a traveler and knew but one season of his visit and the weather that happened to fall in a matter of days. But to Inman's mind the land stood not as he'd seen it and known it for all his life, but as Bartram had summed it up. The peaks now stood higher, the vales deeper than they did in truth. Inman imagined the fading rows of ridges standing pale and tall as cloudbanks, and he built the contours of them and he colored them,

> each a shade paler and bluer until, when he had finally reached the invented ridgeline where it faded into sky, he was asleep. (349)

As Inman fantasizes the passage, he demonstrates that his "imagination is so wholly engaged" in Cold Mountain that he, like Bartram, is "insensible" to both the landscape around him and on the page. Inman transcends his current situation to experience a setting "beyond his reach" both literally and figuratively as Cold Mountain is not only in the distance, but is now "higher" and "deeper than in truth." While Inman could surely find "charming objects more within [his] reach," he is completely focused on not just a faraway place, but an existence that, at this point, is only imagined. In this sense, the Bartram scroll not only succeeds in calming Inman to sleep, but in converting him into a believer in an optimistic end.

The Bartram scroll returns for the last time after Ada and Inman's reunion. With his fear and hopelessness finally dissolved for good, Inman offers his scroll to Ada as the key to his sustenance:

> He rose and went to his sack and pulled out the Bartram and showed it to Ada as if it were evidence of something. It was scrolled up and tied with a bow knot of dirty string and had been wet and dry and wet again for months now and looked grimy and ancient enough to contain the aggregate knowledge of a lost civilization. He told 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. Ada was unfamiliar with it, and Inman described it to her as a book concerned with this very part of the world and with everything that was important in it. He shared with her his view that the book stood nigh to holiness and was of such richness that one might

> dip into at random and read only one sentence and yet be sure of finding instruction and delight. (415)

After experiencing the power of the scroll, Inman is now a disciple; he is an absolute believer in the truth, or the enlightening and prophetic power, of Bartram and his landscape and evangelizes its importance to Ada. In an attempt to demonstrate the capabilities of his sacred text, Inman shares one final passage:

> Having gained its summit, we enjoyed a most enchanting view; a vast expanse of green meadows and strawberry fields; a meandering river gliding through, saluting in its various turnings the swelling, green, turfy knolls, embellished with parterres of flowers and fruitful strawberry beds; flocks of turkies strolling about them; herds of deer prancing in the meads or bounding over the hills; companies of young, innocent Cherokee virgins, some busy gathering the rich fragrant fruit, others having already filled their baskets, lay reclined under the shade of floriferious and fragrant native bowers of Magnolia, Azalea, Philadelphus, perfumed Calycanthus, sweet Yellow Jessamine and cerulean Glycine frutescens, disclosing their beauties to the fluttering breeze, and bathing their limbs in the cool fleeting streams; whilst other parties, more gay and libertine, were yet collecting strawberries, or wantonly chasing their companions, tantalizing them, staining their lips and cheeks with the rich fruit. (416)

This passage is significantly more complicated than those previous in that it serves as an oracle, reflection, and a literary coagulation all at once. As an oracle, this passage reveals that Inman's romantic journey is about to end. At this point we know that Inman has reached the end of his Cold Mountain journey, but we do not know how his journey to

Ada will conclude. Inman immediately picks up on the meaning of the passage: "all it seemed to be about was sex, and it caused his voice to crack and threatened to flush his face" (416). This sexual foreshadowing begins in the description of Bartram not just reaching a "summit," but a place that is a more peaceful and pleasurable natural experience than the journey. The "large rapid brook" that the scroll reveals to Inman in the first passage as "pouring down rocky precipices, glid[ing] off through dark groves and high forests" has now calmed into a "meandering river gliding through." While the rapid brook initially "[conveys] streams of fertility and pleasure to the field below," this passage reveals that the field of fertility and pleasure is now reached. This fertile destination—swelling green knolls, strawberry fields, abundant flowers, turkeys, deer, and, most obviously, the Cherokee virgins and the strawberry-stained antics—foreshadows exactly what makes Inman blush: the impending sexual relations between him and Ada. This sexual foreshadowing also occurs in the nature of the passage selection. Instead of manually flipping through pages to find a passage, Inman simply gives a gentle pull and allows the scroll to reveal its own significance: "he pulled the end of the bow and let the limp coverless book flap open" (415). In the consummation scene, Ada becomes the text as Inman pulls her personal "bow," allowing her now coverless self to limply open: "Then when she was undressed she held her clothes before her and half turned toward him…He leaned forward and pulled the clothes from her hands and drew her to him" (430). The description of Inman's interaction with the text further reflects his interaction with Ada: "He put his finger to a sentence which, as usual, began with the climbing of a mountain and went on for much of a page, and as he read it aloud he could not wait to reach its period…and it caused his voice to crack and threatened to flush his face" (415-16). After Inman physically touches the text for the first time, he begins to

have the same reactions waiting for the climax of the passage, and the climax of the mountain, as associated with a sexual climax.

While this passage looks to the future, the interweaving of battle imagery with the fertile scene roots it firmly in the past. The opening location resembles a general admiring his conquered lands, as the summit is not reached, but "gained," bringing connotations of winning. The admired land recalls the death of battle as it resembles a cemetery with its "swelling, green turfy knolls, embellished with parterres of flowers." Military terms continue to abound as the river is "saluting," the virgins are likened to "companies," the streams are "fleeting," and the "other parties" are "libertine." The passage concludes with these "other parties…wantonly chasing their companions, tantalizing them, staining their lips and cheeks with the rich fruit." "Chasing," "tantalizing," and "staining" red are not actions of tender love, but of forceful battle. The stamping of red berry stains on their partners also reflects two of the novel's other allusive texts: *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Red Badge of Courage*. By mingling these battle words and images with literary allusion and fertile reference, this passage suggests that Ada and Inman's love is not entirely romantic. On one level, their love story is inseparable from the battle story; without the Civil War, Ada and Inman would never have become romantically involved. On another level, this passage shadows the stains that will be made on both characters: Inman cannot escape his role as soldier while Ada will be left to bear his child by herself. The mingling with fertility reclaims these stains, though, and allows them to flourish more optimistically than in their literary counterparts.

Along with his mystical and prophetic experiences reading *William Bartram's Travels*, Inman demonstrates an appreciation for the power of words through recitation

and composition. One of the primary characteristics of *William Bartram's Travel's* is Bartram's happy insistence on naming all the natural elements around him; the pages of his narrative are often clogged with lists of names of flowers, shrubs, mountains, animals, and vegetables. As he reads his scroll from his hospital bed, Inman picks up on the significance of Bartram's naming:

> Such images made Inman happy, as did the following pages wherein Bartram, ecstatic, journeyed on to the Vale of Cowee deep in the mountains, breathlessly describing a world of scarp and crag, ridge after ridge fading off blue into the distance, changing at length as he went through the names of all the plants that came under his gaze as if reciting the ingredients of a powerful potion. (15-16)

After any time spent reading the *Travels*, Bartram's constant naming lulls the reader into a sort of natural trance; it becomes impossible not to focus on the importance of individual words and names as the narrative seems to be entirely constructed of words, not sentences. After noticing this compositional characteristic, Inman uses his personal meditation as a vehicle for conjuring his own Bartram-like spells: "Cold Mountain, all its ridges and coves and watercourses. Pigeon River, Little East Fork, Sorrell Cove, Deep Gap, Fire Scald Ridge. He knew their names and said them to himself like the words of spells and incantations to ward off the things one fears most" (16). Like Bartram, Inman finds power in names. By reciting these names like a mantra, Inman transcends the physical and is mentally transported home.

Inman practices this naming meditation again as he reveals his comfort in knowing the name of the star above him, Rigel, while traveling at night with Veasey: "One of the things Inman marked as a comfort was that he could put a name to the

brightest star in Orion" (116). After this statement, Inman's mind wanders to recall that knowing the name of this star also brought him comfort in the trenches. Inman's naming of the star is similar to his Bartram experience in that the significance is the individual word; his ability to focus on a name allows him to transcend the reality of a dark path or trench into the brightness of home.

This mysticism of naming is not only revealed by Inman's ability to partner word to thing but by his anxiety over not being able to do so, which occurs most notably after his resurrection from the Home Guard grave. As he emerges from the ground, Inman looks to the sky and realizes that he is lost:

> Inman cast back his head to the sky and found it did not look right. There were stars in it, but he could not reason out even one known constellation in the moonless sky. It looked as if someone had taken a stick and stirred it up so that no sense remained, just a smattering of light cast patternless on the general dark. (229)

The fact that Inman cannot even find the star in Orion that had previously provided him comfort creates great tension as, for the first time, the hero appears weak. Inman is not hopeless, though, as a "smattering of light," the established symbol for enlightenment and high spirit, is still above him. Inman's weakness resolves in the next scene when a slave gives him directions West:

> Go toward Wilkes. Taking that heading, there's Moravians and Quakers all the way that will help. Hit the bottom of the Blue Ridge and then cut south again following the foothills. Or go on into the mountains and follow the ridges back down to your course. But, they say it's cold and rough back in there. (232)

These directions effectively give Inman back his names, and thus his sense of place, as he responds, "That's where I'm from" (232). The slave continues to reorient Inman by drawing a map:

> Then he worked for some time scratching out a map in ink on a piece of paper, and when it was done it was a work of art. All detailed with little houses and odd-shaped barns and crooked trees with faces in their trunks and limbs like arms and hair. A fancy compass rose in one corner. And there were notes in a precise script to say who could be trusted and who could not. (233)

In its artistry, the slave's map resembles *William Bartram's Travels*: he provides specific landscape details, guidance towards the helpful and harmful, and orientational markings. Between the verbal naming of places and the documentation of place, the previous anxiety over dislocation dissolves. Without words, Inman is hopeless; armed again with his words, Inman is confident and strong.

The conclusion of the novel emphasizes the importance of naming one last time. After countless days of travel, Inman finally starts to feel the joy of nearing home. Inman's joy is not complete, though, until he reaches a mountain summit, which reveals a view of places to which he can match names:

> As he studied on it, he recognized the line of every far ridge and valley to be more than remembered…He looked out at this highland and knew the names of places and things. He said them aloud: Little Beartail Ridge, Wagon Road Gap, Ripshin, Hunger Creek, Clawhammer Knob, Rocky Face. Not a mountain or watercourse lacked denomination. Not bird or bush anonymous. His place. (355)

For the first time in the novel Inman is described as having "joy in his heart." This shift in his heart from empty to full because of naming reiterates the mystical power of words.

The mystical importance of words is not relegated to Bartram-esque naming; it is also demonstrated by Inman's repetition of Cherokee spells. After traveling through several nerve-wracking, dangerous days and nights, Inman begins to feel physically and mentally weary. As he walks, Inman's mind wanders back to the traditional spells of his Cherokee friend, Swimmer. One spell in particular stands out to Inman: "To Destroy Life":

> Swimmer had said that it only worked in Cherokee, not in English, and that there was no consequence in teaching it to Inman. But Inman thought all words had some issue, so he walked and said the spell, aiming it out against the world at large, all his enemies. He repeated it over and over to himself as some people, in fear or hope, will say a single prayer endlessly until it burns itself in their thoughts so that they can work or even carry on a conversation with it still running unimpeded. (76)

For Inman, these words retain power even in English, not in changing others but in changing himself. The spell does not destroy life, but it fixes Inman's mind on something other than the dangers of his journey. Furthermore, like a prayer allows a person to commune with God, Inman's spell allows him to commune with a higher power in order to gain comfort in his journey.

Along with the importance of speaking and reading words, Inman finds power in composition. While he does not write often, Inman's first encounter with Veasey marks another key moment in his redemption. Upon discovering Veasey attempting to kill his impregnated mistress, Inman's first instinct is violence: to strike out like Veasey himself.

Inman resists this urge and instead gags Veasey and binds him to a tree. Inman then writes all of Veasey's crimes and tacks the account above his head:

> At that moment the notion that he should take out his knife and cut the man up had much to recommend it, but instead Inman prowled in his knapsack and took out his pen and ink and paper. He found a place where moonlight came down through the trees. In its blue beam he wrote out the story in brief, putting little headwork and no fine touches to it, merely pressing down what he had learned of the near killing into a paragraph. When he was done he skewered the paper onto a tree branch at head level just beyond the preacher's reach. (121)

Enlightenment and words are again intertwined as it is not until Inman finds moonlight in the darkness that he can compose Veasey's story and make the first step towards replacing weapons with pen and paper. Furthermore, Inman requires a "blue beam" of light in order to compose, bringing back the allusion to Cold Mountain. This association of Cold Mountain with the composition process combines Inman's literary and homeward journeys, thus making them one and the same. By choosing documentation over violence, Inman demonstrates the power of the written word; the recording of Veasey's crimes is harsher than any physical harm Inman could inflict. Veasey himself recognizes the danger of documentation as he begs Inman to shoot him instead of posting the account:

> --You've ruined my life, he [Veasey] said.
>
> --Don't lay that off on me, Inman said. I wanted no part in this. But I don't want to have to wonder whether in a night or two you'll be

> back out in that black gorge with her slung over your horse again, Inman said.
>
> --Then shoot me. Just shoot me here and leave me hanging. (121)
>
> Veasey would much rather deal with the consequences of a bullet than words; Veasey cannot deny his immoral actions once they have been transcribed.

Another facet of Inman's literary journey is the application of his reading skills to the natural world. As a member of a rustic mountain community, Inman is already well-practiced at reading nature for its scientific signs, such as when to plant and what weather to expect. As Inman travels, though, he becomes more adept at reading nature for mystical insight. This process begins with his mimicry of Bartram in naming his surroundings, but it deepens as Inman learns to transpose his meditative reading of the Bartram scroll to the natural elements around him.

At the beginning of his journey, Inman possesses a strong distrust of natural signs. Sitting in a tavern before setting off for home, Inman muses over the value of divination while looking at coffee grounds in his mug: "The black flecks swirled, found a pattern, and settled. He thought briefly of divination, seeking the future in the arrangement of coffee grounds, tea leaves, hog entrails, shapes of clouds. As if a pattern told something worth knowing. He jostled the cup to break the spell and looked out along the street" (21). Inman's consideration of divination in the first place, as well as his momentary willingness to get caught up in the "spell," reveals his latent capacity to accept the validity of mystically reading natural signs. At this point, though, Inman is not mentally tempered to appreciate the validity of sign reading, and he "breaks the spell." After shifting his attention from mug to street, Inman becomes equally fixed upon the flight of

vultures: “Above the dome, a dark circle of vultures swirled in the oyster sky, their long wimple feathers just visible at their blunt wing ends. As Inman watched, the birds did not strike a wingbeat but nonetheless climbed gradually, riding a rising column of air, circling higher and higher until they were little dashes of black on the sky” (22). Again, Inman’s thoughts reveal his capacity for reading natural signs as he transposes traditional coffee-ground reading to the nature around him. Inman admits his ability to make such a leap in mystical reading, but he quickly discounts such a method by insisting upon a negative interpretation:

> In his mind, Inman likened the swirling paths of vulture flight to the coffee grounds seeking pattern in his cup. Anyone could be oracle for the random ways things fall against each other. It was simple enough to tell fortunes if a man dedicated himself to the idea that the future will inevitably be worse than the past and that time is a path leading nowhere but a place of deep and persistent threat. (22)

At this early point in his journey, Inman’s mind is still fixed on the idea of a random and increasingly negative life, which results in a closed, tainted reading. Inman’s focus on dark, rather than light, signs confirms his unenlightened and un-uplifted state of mind: the “dark circle of vultures,” “dashes of black on the sky,” the brownness of coffee grounds. Only after he gains more experience with his Bartram scroll does Inman learn to let go of preconceived perceptions in order to lose himself in the mystical enlightenment of meditational reading.

As Inman’s journey progresses, his mind slowly opens to the mysticism of nature, although his experience with the Home Guard causes a temporary set-back in his ability. As he watches raindrops hit the ground, Inman searches for meaning with no avail:

> Inman stared down for some time onto the pattern the drops made to see if it held significance in the direction of augury, for he knew he needed aid, no matter from what strange fount it arose. The drops in the dust, though offered no ready sign, neither pictograph nor totem, no matter from what angle he viewed them. The invisible world, he declared to himself, had abandoned him as a gypsy soul to wander singular, without guide or chart, through a broken world composed of little but impediment. (231)

Inman actively practices divination, but he lacks the discipline of meditation. In his desperation, Inman only looks for a "ready sign"; he cannot "fix" his mind on nature, he only looks for the easiest possible sign.

Inman's stay with the Goat Woman marks his transition to seeking the complex, mystical lessons of nature. For Inman, the Goat Woman serves as a model of how to find solace in nature. Everything she needs, from the practical to the spiritual, is found in the plants, animals, and landscape of her mountain home. After passing several days in the company of the Goat Woman, Inman practices a patient and open reading of nature:

> Then he told her how this very morning he had found a late-bearing bush of huckleberries, dusty blue on their sunward faces, still green on their shady back halves. How he had picked and eaten them for breakfast and watched as a cloud of passenger pigeons darked out the sun momentarily as they passed over going to wherever they wintered in the remote south. At least that much remained unchanged, he had thought, berries ripening and birds flying. He had said he had seen not much other than change for four years, and he guessed the promise of it was part of what made up the war frenzy in the early days…But sooner or later you get awful tired and

> just plain sick of watching people killing one another for every kind of reason at all, using whatever implements fall to hand. So that morning he had looked at the berries and the birds and had felt cheered by them, happy they had waited for him to come to his sense, even though he feared himself deeply at variance with such elements of the harmonious. (276-77)

This experience marks Inman's first independent attempt at mystically reading nature. While he is not entirely confident in his ability—he fears he is at "variance" with his surroundings—he does succeed in interpreting the hopefulness of the certainty of seasons through meditation on a berry bush and a flock of pigeons. Light and dark imagery confirms Inman's in-between state of understanding as only part of the bush is illuminated and the sun is momentarily "darked." Overall, though, hopeful enlightenment is emphasized more than darkness and despair.

After leaving the Goat Woman, Inman remains hopeful and determined in his journey until he arrives at Black Cove and learns that Ada has trekked up the mountain to find Pangle and Stobrod. As Inman climbs the snowy path behind Ada, his desperation to finally reach her again impairs his reading mind. When Inman stops to read the creek, he realizes that he is too drained to focus on its words:

> The creek had the sound of voices in the rush of its water and the clicking of its bed stones against one another, and he thought they might tell him what had taken place there if he listened hard enough. But the voices shifted and blurred and the words had no meaning to him, try as he might to make them out. Then he reckoned he was not hearing voices at all, just

> words forming up in his head and even then he could not makes sense of them. He was too empty for sense. (392-93)

Like the previous stars in the sky, Inman's world is jumbled and senseless. As Inman continues to walk after Ada, his "emptiness" gives way to "darkness," and he begins to doubt that his journey will ever end successfully. Earlier, Inman would have given in completely to this darkness but, instead, he looks harder to nature and fights this voice:

> There was fact in what the dark voice said. You could become so lost in bitterness and anger that you could not find your way back. No map nor guidebook for such journey. One part of Inman knew that. But he knew too that there were footsteps in the snow and that if he awoke one more day he would follow them to wherever they led as long as he could put one foot in front of the other. (397)

Not only do Inman's natural reading skills allow him to read where Ada is traveling, they allow him to read hope as he sees his journey literally unfolding in the footsteps in front of him. Inman turns away from the dark voice to concentrate on the brightness of the prophetic snow.

CHAPTER THREE

ADA

Ada's lexical journey departs from a completely different place than Inman's. While Inman has only one mutilated book that he found by accident, most of Ada's young life revolved around digestion and discussion of literature. She has been educated formally to appreciate the literary greats from Homer to Keats, and, as her father was quite literate and wealthy, the bookshelves in Ada's home were always well stocked. As her mother died when she was very young, Ada's biggest influence was her father, Monroe. Monroe was an unorthodox preacher for the time as his spiritual study focused more on great literature than on the Bible. He was consumed by interpreting literature as a touchstone for living life and passed this educational ideal on to his daughter. One of the first glimpses of Monroe is Ada's memory of his recitation of Wordsworth upon seeing Cold Mountain for the first time:

> At that lonesome spot Monroe again called upon his favorite poet and cried, "That sick sight and giddy prospect of the raving stream, the unfettered clouds and region of the heavens, tumult and peace, the darkness and the light—were all like workings of one mind, the features of the same face, blossoms upon one tree, characters of the great Apocalypse, the types and symbols of Eternity, of first, and last, and midst, and without end." (54)

In response to her father's literary outburst, Ada "had laughed and kissed him on the cheek, thinking, I would follow this old man to Liberia if he asked me to do so" (54). The Wordsworth passage that Monroe recites is actually more profound than Ada realizes. Taken from Book VI of the autobiographical "Prelude," the lines recall Wordworth's crossing of the Simplon Pass from the Swiss to the Italian Alps in the mystical tone that Ada eventually wishes for her own experience with Cold Mountain. At the time, though, Ada brushes off such sentiment as her father's endearing idiosyncrasy. This response thus sets the stage for Ada's rejection of her father's lexical ways; Ada seeks a rustic response, not the posey of great literature.

In the novel's opening, Ada uses literature as Inman does: to escape. Upon losing her father, and lacking any family, friends, or domestic sensibility, Ada turns to Monroe's extensive bookshelves to pass the miserable, solitary hours. While Inman's literary escape is ultimately soothing, Ada's initial escape is, at best, mind-numbing, and, at worst, frightening:

> The books she had drawn from the shelves that summer had been varied and haphazard, little but recent novels, whatever she happened to pick up from Monroe's study…She could read such books and a day later not know what they had been about. When she had read more notable books, the harsh fates of their doomed heroines served only to deepen her gloom. For a time, every book she plucked from the shelves frightened her, their contents all concerning mistakes made by wretched dark-haired women so that they ended their days punished, exiled, and alien. She had gone straight from *The Mill on the Floss* to a slim and troubling tale by

> Hawthorne on somewhat the same theme [*The Scarlet Letter*]…to Ada it seemed good practice for her coming world. (34-35)

While she picks up the books for an escape, because of her literary background and sentimental attachment to the ways of her father, Ada cannot help but feel some sort of prophetic nature in stories. These books are clearly terrifyingly prophetic not only for the reasons Ada mentions, but because these devastated women reside in detached rural societies, just as she does. This horrifying prophecy provides the impetus for Ada's literary journey as she seeks enlightenment beyond the pages, a brightening of her future, a reversal of her literary prophecy. The first step in Ada's journey is a change of reading location to a window chair:

> At first, all she liked about the reading spot was the comfortable chair and the good light, but over the months she came to appreciate that the window's view offered some relief against the strain of such bleak stories, for when she looked up from the page, her eyes swept across the fields and rose on the waves of foggy ridges to the blue bulk of Cold Mountain. (35)

For the first time, Ada chooses nature over literature. This scene also brings back the light and dark imagery that marked Inman's progression with reading. For Ada, the books are dark—or "bleak"—for which the window with its "good light" and view of nature offers relief. Therefore, it seems from the beginning that Ada's journey will be away from literature and towards spirit brightening, enlightening nature. A few scenes later, after learning that she will receive no money from her father's Charleston estate, Ada finds solace in a mingling of sunlit nature and story:

> The wall ran north to south, and on this sunny afternoon its west face was warm with afternoon sun. An apple tree, a golden delicious, grew near it,

> and a few early ripening apples had fallen into the tall grass. Bees came to the sweet smell of rotting apples and hummed in the sunshine. The wall did not command a sweeping prospect, just a quiet view of the corner of a woodlot and a blackberry tangle and two big chestnut trees. Ada thought it the most peaceful place she had ever known. She settled herself into the grass at the base of the wall and rolled her shawl into a pillow. She drew the book ["a frontier adventure by Simms"] from her pocket and began reading a chapter titled How Blackbirds Are Taken, and How Blackbirds Fly. She read on and on and forgot herself in the tale of war and outlawry until she eventually fell asleep to the lowering sun and the sound of bees. (61-62)

This scene is the first time Ada leaves her library to read in nature, as well as the first time she feels any sort of comfort or optimism. Significantly, the description of Ada's surroundings is drenched in sunlight and the golden sweetness of apples. Just as the Bartram scroll provides Inman with light, so does immersion in nature for Ada.

Not long after this pleasant scene of nature and literature, Ruby comes into Ada's life and becomes intertwined in her literary journey. Ruby is the polar opposite of Ada: she has no formal education, never had a loving father, and finds all her entertainment and resources in nature, not books. When Ruby first starts to teach Ada to farm and work the land, she is dismayed that Ada takes books into the fields whenever they work. Although Ada has started to appreciate nature and even the work of farming, she cannot let go of her literature; she carries her books around like a security blanket. As Ada and Ruby work together longer, Ada finally starts to distance herself from her bookshelves: "Ruby counted her first victory when Ada succeeded in churning cream to butter. Her

second victory was when she noted that Ada no longer always put a book in her pocket when she went out to hoe the fields" (105). Although Ada no longer needs her security blanket, literature is not completely gone from her life. Instead of spending all day around books, Ada enjoys literature only before bed as a source of rest and entertainment. She begins the tradition of reading aloud to Ruby after all the chores are finished:

> The only moments of rest were after the supper dishes had been washed and put away. Then Ada and Ruby sat on the porch and Ada would read aloud in the time remaining before dark. Books and their contents were a great novelty to Ruby, and so Ada had reckoned that the place to begin was near the beginning. After filling Ruby in on who the Greeks were, she had begun reading from Homer. They usually covered fifteen or twenty pages of an evening. Then, when it became too dark to read and the air turned blue and started to congeal with mist, Ada would close the book and solicit stories from Ruby. Over a period of weeks she collected the tale of Ruby's life in pieces. (105)

This new literary routine introduces the concept of a lifetime as a story. By integrating Ruby's "life" story in episodes with the Homer episodes, the personal story begins to replace the literary story.

The next few evening reading scenes continue to develop Ruby's relationship with stories. Ruby, as her name implies, becomes a filter. As Ada reads, stories pass through Ruby, and she reflects them back in the context of reality. Through the light of Ruby, even the most fantastical stories contain realism. This reflection first appears as the two women conclude Homer, and Ruby decides, based on *The Odyssey*, that "all in all, not much had altered in the way of things despite the passage of a great volume of

time" (140). Ruby proves her conclusion by reading her life into the story and making connections between what she interprets as the scoundrel ways of Odysseus and the ways of her drunken father, Stobrod: "She held the suspicion though, that there was more of Stobrod 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, an opinion only confirmed by the current passage in which the characters were denned up in a swineherd's hut drinking and telling tales" (140). More subtly, Ruby proves her conclusion by the fact that she "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" (140). This reaction to the story is almost identical to Ruby's reaction to her own situation, which obviously is quite similar to *The Odyssey* in many ways. Not only does Ruby read reality into the text, but her reactions to a story similar to her own mirror her literal reactions.

As the novel progresses, so does the role of literature in Ada's life. She has already limited her need for literature to social moments between herself and Ruby, but, near the end of the novel, Ada reaches the climax of her literary journey when she finally realizes that she has almost no use for personal consumption of novels whatsoever. This revelation begins after Ruby has gone for the day on an errand and leaves Ada to burn the brush from their fields. After gathering the brush into a pile and setting it on fire, Ada pulls up a chair to watch her work and read from her copy of *Adam Bede*: "While it caught and burned she pulled the short chair into range of its warmth and sat to read Adam Bede, but the book did not go well. She could not keep her mind on it for she had to rise often to head off outrunners of flame that strayed across the stubble of the field" (327). At this point, nature has sufficiently replaced Ada's need for literature; Ada now has the knowledge to construct her own light and does not need her book. Moreover, by

producing the first spark, Ada creates the most natural of light: fire. The wild "outrunners of flame" are more satisfying to Ada than the predictability of yet another story about a rural girl who ends up alone and desolate.

Later in this bonfire scene, Ada's musings reveal more specifically why she can no longer focus on the book in front of her:

> So she had work as an excuse for not focusing her thoughts on the page. But, too, she had long since grown impatient with Adam and Hetty and the rest and would have quit the book but for the fact that she had paid so much for it. She wished all the people of the story to be more expansive, not so cramped by circumstance.
>
> What they needed was more scope, greater range. Go to the Indes, she directed them. Or to the Andes. (328)

Ada's newfound focus on work is only a motivating factor behind the diminished role of literature in her life. Now that Ada has become a fully developed woman who is self-capable and in tune with nature, she has difficulty appreciating the drama of page-bound characters; tending the flames and learning about and how to work her surroundings provides Ada with a much more fulfilling pastime. Just as she has moved above literature and the prophecy of her father's books, Ada wants her characters to transcend the page, to be "more expansive" than their author has allowed them to be. There is no randomness behind Ada's urgings for her characters to seek development in the Indes or the Andes. Ada has found such fulfillment in her mountainous home that she believes all characters can gain development by retreating to mountain ranges instead of European cities or small country towns.

The bonfire scene ends with one last literary musing from Ada. After expressing her impatience with the characters of *Adam Bede*, Ada closes the book (which remains closed for the rest of the novel) to wonder about the role of literature in the rest of her life: "She wondered if literature might lose some of its interest when she reached an age or state of mind where her life was set on such a sure course that the things she read might stop seeming so powerfully like alternate directions for her being" (328). Ironically, Ada's wondering seems to have already come true as she has already expressed disinterest in her novel, and, directly after her musing, she throws the book on the wet grass in order to find more delight studying a thistle, watching the sky, milking the cow, and stirring the fire, among other natural tasks. Now that she has found a significant rhythm and purpose to her life, Ada no longer needs to consult her father's bookshelves for advice.

The death of Ada's father not only provides the impetus for a shift in her response to literature, it also changes both the type of, and method by which, she acquires knowledge. Ada becomes a student of nature, and Ruby serves as her primary text and tutor. After failing one of Ruby's question and answer sessions where Ruby spontaneously quizzes her over natural elements, Ada asserts that although she does not yet have answers, she soon will by reading Ruby: "Ada did not yet have those answers, but she could feel them coming, and Ruby was her principal text" (137). At this point, Ada begins the transition of applying her classically developed reading skills to unclassical texts. While Ada is fluent in classical poetry and prose, Ruby is fluent in the natural:

> …Ada had soon noted that Ruby's lore included many impracticalities beyond the raising of crops. The names of useless beings—both animal

> and vegetable—and the custom of their lives apparently occupied much of Ruby's thinking, for she was constantly pointing out the little creatures that occupy the nooks of the world. Her mind marked every mantis in a stand of ragweed, the corn borers in the little tents they folded out of milkweed leaves, striped and spotted salamanders with their friendly smiling faces under rocks in the creek. Ruby noted little hairy liverish poisonous-looking plants and fungi growing on the damp bark of dying trees, all the larvae and bugs and worms that live alone inside a case of sticks or grit or leaves. Each life with a story behind it. Every little gesture nature made to suggest a mind marking its life as its own caught Ruby's interest. (137)

In her extensive knowledge of the minutiae of nature, Ruby is the Bartram scroll come to life. At this early point in their relationship, although Ada accepts Ruby as her "principal text" and admires Ruby's knowledge—"…Ada told Ruby that she envied her knowledge of how the world runs" (137)—she has not completely shed her dependence on classical education. Ada is skeptical of the usefulness of Ruby's expertise, referring to her knowledge as concerning "impracticalities" and "useless beings."

In tempering her mind to accept Ruby's natural knowledge, Ada struggles to break the mental mold of Monroe's education. While Ada admits that the crops are "growing well," she is hesitant to accept Ruby's assertion that this success is "because they had been planted, at her insistence, in strict accordance with the signs" (134). Monroe's dismissal of the legitimacy of such sign-based knowledge still influences Ada, but she is able to reconcile both "texts" by navigating her own blended viewpoint:

> Monroe would have dismissed such beliefs as superstition, folklore. But

> Ada, increasingly covetous of Ruby's learning in the way s living things inhabited this particular place, chose to view the signs as metaphoric. They were, as Ada 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 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)

Like any well-rounded student, Ada does not reject her father's teachings by subscribing whole-heartedly to sign-belief, nor does she reject Ruby's teachings by condemning her knowledge as "superstition" or "folklore." Instead, Ada chooses to take a bit from each of her teachers and studies Ruby's signs as a type of metaphor, which she can respect because they stand in logically for discipline and alertness, two ideas that are easier for the classical mind to grasp.

Along with measuring the legitimacy of Ruby's knowledge, Ada struggles to define the ways by which knowledge is actually gained. After remarking her envy of Ruby's knowledge, Ada asks her friend, "How do you come to know such things?" (137). Ruby's response is significantly different than the means by which Ada had gained her classical knowledge:

> Ruby said she had learned what little she knew 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 the 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.
>
> --You commence by trying to see what likes what, Ruby said.
>
> Which Ada interpreted to mean, Observe and understand the workings of affinity in nature. (137-38)

To Ruby, gaining knowledge through community conversation is the "usual way." Unsurprisingly, Ada resists Ruby's simplistic educational method by boiling her words into a convoluted maxim: "Observe and understand the workings of affinity in nature." Although this maxim does not entirely destroy the concept of Ruby's education, it filters her method through Ada's Romantic vocabulary. Ada is intrigued by Ruby's methods, but she has not progressed enough in her journey to entirely reject her background.

Along with the community, nature itself is one of the primary means by which Ruby acquires knowledge:

> In Ruby's mind, everything—setting fence posts, making sauerkraut, killing hogs—fell under the rule of the heavens. Cut firewood in the old of the moon, she'd advised, otherwise it won't do much but fry and hiss at you come winter. Next April when the poplar leaves are about the size of a squirrel's ear, we'll plant corn when the signs are in the feet; otherwise the corn will just shank up and hang down. November, we'll kill a hog in the growing of the moon, for if we don't the meat will lack grease and pork chops will cup up in the pan. (134)

Ruby claims that her knowledge comes from the "heavens," not God. In this context, the "heavens" does not refer to "God," as Ruby's only education, including the spiritual, comes from nature. For Ruby, "heavens" refers literally to the sky, or to the phases of the

moon. This dependence on the moon brings back light imagery, thus implying the true enlightenment of Ruby's knowledge. Ruby has learned to read nature, and by sharing such lore with Ada, she teaches her student to read nature logically and insightfully in order to reap its best products.

To illustrate her method of learning, Ruby poses a natural question to Ada: "Ruby pointed to red splashes of color on the green hillside of the ridge: sumac and dogwood already turning color in advance of other trees. Why would they do that near a month ahead? she said" (138). Ada hastily guesses that the cause of such a natural phenomenon is "chance," which Ruby quickly scolds: "Her [Ruby's] view was that people like to lay off anything they can't fathom as random. She saw it another way. Both sumac and dogwood were full of ripe berries at that time of year. The thing a person had to ask was, What else is happening that might bear on the subject?" (138). Ada's knowledge is primarily artistic and historical, thus the process of scientifically deducing a logical answer is foreign. After taking Ada step-by-step through the deduction process, Ruby shares her educational philosophy: "if a person puzzled all this out over time, she might also find a lesson somewhere in it, for much of creation worked by such method and to such ends" (139). Ruby's philosophy clearly echoes Inman's meditational reading: both espouse that lessons can be garnered by fixing the mind entirely on nature. Shortly after her lesson with Ruby, Ada practices such a natural meditation as she wanders the farmland alone:

> Ada stood still and let her eyes go unfocused, and as she did she became aware of the busy movements of myriad tiny creatures vibrating all through the massed flowers, down the stems and clear to the ground. Insects flying, crawling, climbing, eating. Their accumulation of energy

> was a kind of luminous quiver of life that filled Ada's undirected vision right to the edges. (139)

For the first time, Ada opens herself fully to nature and she mystically perceives the force of the life around her. In contrast to literature, nature entirely fills and excites Ada's visual scope.

Earlier in the novel, Ada has a mildly successful attempt at reading nature. At this point, Ada has not yet met Ruby, and her future is still very unclear. After stopping at the Swanger's farm on the way back from the cemetery, Esco claims that he can help clear up Ada's worries about her future: "Esco rubbed his hands together and grinned. I might be the only man in the county that can help you there, he said. It's claimed that if you take a mirror and look backwards into a well, you'll see your future down in the water" (48). To Esco, the well ritual is a serious method of divination. Although Ada agrees to lean over the well, she does not take Esco's ritual seriously as her still-dominant classical education rejects such practices as frivolous folklore: "Ada had agreed to the well-viewing as a variety of experiment in local custom and as a tonic for her gloom…she expected to see nothing but water at the bottom of the well" (48). Once Ada leans backwards, the complexity of the reflection initially overwhelms her:

> Ada tried to focus her attention on the hand mirror, but the bright sky beyond kept drawing her eye away. She was dazzled by light and shade, by the confusing duplication of reflections and of frames. All coming from too many directions for the mind to take account of. The various images bounced against each other until she felt a desperate vertigo… (48-49)

Like the scene later in the novel, the buzzing of living things overwhelms Ada as she

lacks the mental temperament to fix her mind on the message of nature. Ada manages to focus on the water momentarily before she becomes dizzy again and falls away from the well:

> What she saw was a wheel of bright light, a fringe of foliage all around. Perhaps a suggestion of a road through a corridor of trees, an incline. At the center of the light, a black silhouette of a figure moved as if walking, but the image was too vague to tell if it approached or walked away. But wherever it was bound, something in its posture suggested firm resolution. Am I meant to follow, or should I wait its coming? Ada wondered. (49)

While Ada is not sure of how to interpret her first natural vision, she is at least able to see it clearly. Ada does not dismiss this image as nonsense, and instead allows it to haunt her thoughts until later in the novel when she has enough practice to skillfully comprehend the natural image from the well.

As Ada continues to study with Ruby, her natural reading skills slowly improve. During one of her first experiences milking a cow, Ada successfully reads nature both mystically and logically:

> An owl hooted from the trees beyond the creek. Ada counted off the rhythm of that five-beat phrase as if scanning a line of poetry: a long, two shorts, two longs. Death bird, people said of the owl, though Ada could see no reason why. The call was so soft and lovely in the slaty light, like a dove's cry but with more substance to it. Waldo bawled at the gate, impatient, needing—as so much did in the cove—the things Ada was learning to do, so she took her hands from the ground and stood. (146)

In the first part of this scene, Ada applies her reading skills to the call of the owl. By

reading the owl's call like poetry, the animal call transcends reality to contain a more sophisticated meaning: to Ada, the song is not simply that of death, nor is it simply "soft and lovely," but it has "substance." The relative bawl of Waldo the cow demonstrates Ada's fledgling knowledge of how to work her surroundings as she now recognizes work codes.

As her journey progresses, Ada's skill in reading nature for mystical insight is the slowest to develop. She tries several times to read birds, to read the sky, but she can never quite figure out what is being communicated. Towards the end of the novel, during her and Ruby's trip up the mountain to find Pangle and Stobrod, Ada attempts to read the coals of their fire:

> …[H]er only wish was to seek happier visions in the fire coals. She looked and looked but found none in either the liquid shapes of flame or the geometric scorings charred in the sides of the fire logs. But the burning wood made squeaking sounds like footsteps tramping in dry snow and even Ada knew what that betokened. More ready to fall. (390)

At this point in her journey, Ada can read nature logically, but she cannot read nature mystically. Ada's mystical answer is actually embedded in the logical: while the sound of footsteps tramping in dry snow does mean more snow will fall, it also foreshadows Inman's return the next day as he walks towards Ada in the snow.

An integral part of Ada's journey to read nature is her philosophy of metaphor and symbol. Although Ada's journey towards understanding her relationship with the emblematic is woven into her acceptance of natural learning, it is not until towards the end of the novel that she begins to concentrate more in depth on where symbols and metaphors fit in her life. Towards the end of the novel, after having successfully worked

side-by-side with Ruby for several seasons, Ada finally achieves the state of mind where she can mystically experience nature. Ada reports on this new phase in her life, ironically, in a letter back to her old phase—her cousin in Charleston:

> Working in the fields, there are brief times when I go totally without thought. Not one crosses my mind, though my senses are alert to all around me. 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. A thing unto itself without comparison. I believe those moments to be the root of my new mien. You would not know it on me f or I suspect it is somehow akin to contentment. (326-27)

Not only is Ada no longer overwhelmed by nature and is capable of meditating on its elements, she also no longer strives to translate Ruby's education through her Charleston vocabulary. At this point in her journey,Ada has fully rejected a metaphoric view of nature—a view that strives to turn the natural into symbols of something greater—and now, like Inman, she acknowledges the transcendent value in reading nature as a truth unto itself. While her Charleston society would likely deem a life without metaphor as a life without art, and thus a life without pleasure, Ada's metaphorless life makes her happy, "somehow akin to contentment." Ada now resembles the satisfied meditator, as she has found peace in her mind and her surroundings.

In one of the last scenes of the novel, as Ada and Ruby travel up the mountain in the dead of winter to find Stobrod and Pangle, Ada reaches the point in her journey where she replaces her classical with her natural education. During their trek, Ada and Ruby

encounter a frozen river, which leads Ada to recall how her father would interpret their situation:

> Where it ran shallower and slower, then, were the places prone to freezing. Monroe would have made a lesson of such a thing, Ada thought. He would have said what the match of that creek's parts would be in a person's life, what God intended it to be the type of. All God's works but elaborate analogy. Every bright image in the visible world only a shadow of a divine thing, so that earth and heaven, low and high, strangely agreed in form and meaning because they were in fact congruent. (376-77)

This passage encompasses Monroe's emblematic and Christian views of nature as he references Jonathan Edwards ("Every bright image in the visible world only a shadow of a divine thing"), the Bible ("…what God intended it to be the type of," "All God's works"), and, finally, his belief that all nature can be read like a poem, each element working as a metaphor for a part of a life. Ada continues her fatherly memory to remember a book of archetypes he kept handy:

> Monroe had a book wherein you could look up the types. The rose—its thorns and its blossom—a type of the difficult and dangerous path to spiritual awakening. The baby—come wailing to the world in pain and blood—a type of our miserable earthly lives, so consumed with violence. The crow—its blackness, its outlaw nature, its tendency to feast on carrion—a type of the dark forces that wait to overtake man's soul. (377)

This memory of Monroe's book blends his emblematic philosophy with literature as he literally possesses a decoder for what he sees are the metaphors of nature. Ada concludes her memory by finally rejecting the education and literature of her father:

> So Ada quite naturally thought the stream and the ice might offer a weapon of the spirit. Or, perhaps, a warning. But she refused to believe that a book could say just how it should be construed or to what use it might be put. Whatever a book said would lack something essential and be as useless by itself as the gudgeon to a door hinge with no pintle. (377)

Ada still leaves some room for interpretation of nature, but her interpretations are made "naturally"; she reads her surroundings in the context of what they mean for her life realistically, not what they represent divinely. Furthermore, she rejects the validity of books in everyday life, finally deciding that they are "useless." Ada no longer needs a book to filter her knowledge; she has transcended traditional text to know truth and reality through meditation on the surrounding elements.

Along with her literary and educational progression, composition of words takes on a new role in Ada's life. Upon moving to Cold Mountain, Ada not only sets herself apart from her mountain neighbors in dress and aptitude, but also in her ever-present journal. In the beginning of the novel, Ada is rarely seen without her journal, which she uses to record thoughts and illustrate peculiarities of her surroundings. Ada's journaling puzzles her new neighbors, and becomes motivation for teasing and gossip:

> Gossip had it that she went about with a notebook and pencil and would stare at a thing—bird or bush, weed, sunset, mountain—and then scratch at paper awhile as if she were addled enough in her thinking that she might forget what was important to her if she did not mark it down. (77-78)

The mountain people find Ada's drive to document a mark of a weak memory. The mountain people's condemnation of Ada's journal reveals that intimate, internalized knowledge of place is one of their primary values. As Ada progresses in her literary and

educational journeys, she continues to hold onto her journaling and documentation instinct; instead of assimilating to the journal-less ways of the mountain folk, Ada allows the nature of her journal entries to evolve. In the beginning of the novel, Ada most often pulls out her journal to paint or sketch in admiration of a beautiful aspect of nature. In fact, Ada's father dies in his chair while she is out painting "the newly opened blossoms on a rhododendron by the lower creek" (38). By the end of the novel, Ada's journal entries are much less motivated by natural beauty than by natural detail:

> When she was done eating, she paged through the journal—past the sketch of the heron, studies of dogwood berries, clusters of sumac fruit, a pair of water striders—until she reached the first blank page, and on it she sketched the scarecrow and above it the notched wings of the crow. She wrote down the date, and an approximation of the time, and then the current phase of the moon. At the bottom of the page she put down the names of the flowers in the scarecrow's bucket, and in an unused corner of the page she sketched a detail of aster blossom. (240-41)

Ada's illustrations are now significantly more specific and are motivated by the urge to document work (in this case, her recent success in constructing a scarecrow) instead by the urge to reproduce beauty. These later entries are also evolved in their emphasis on detail and science. In this particular entry, Ada sketches both the scarecrow and detailed images of the crow's wing and an aster blossom. She also notes the date, time, moon phase, and flower names. In its transition from impressionistic imaging to realistic recording, Ada's journal becomes her own Bartram scroll and marks her reversal of Inman's journey. As Inman uses a naturalistic work to garner metaphorical knowledge, Ada rejects the metaphorical for transcription of the naturalistic.

Ada's journal evolution parallels her progression towards an Inman-like importance of naming. Ada's journey towards naming begins with Ruby, as she routinely quizzes Ada over her surroundings. While these quizzes partly help Ada acquire natural knowledge and the innate intimacy for which she previously relied on her journal, the importance of naming also builds Ada's natural vocabulary. Ada cannot possibly comprehend her natural text if she cannot identify its most basic elements. Ruby's naming quizzes occur throughout the entire novel, becoming so integrated in Ada's progression that she begins to quiz herself silently. By the end of the novel, Ada reads nature as Inman reads his Bartram scroll: she focuses on an object, discovers everything she can on one level, then works her mind to provide context beyond the "page," or the element in front of her. While staying in the abandoned Cherokee village, Ada silently demonstrates her natural reading skill through examination of a wooden beaker:

> In the floor clutter she found an old wooden beaker. Or a bowl, more like. Its shape was somewhat indeterminate. It had a wide crack where the wood had dried, and the crack was patched with beeswax, cured brittle and hard. She looked at the grain and thought, Dogwood. She pictured in her mind the makings of the thing and the use and then the patching of it, and she decided the bowl might stand as marker for much that was lost. (408)

In this scene Ada reads nature realistically as she studies the grain to identify the type of wood, and she reads nature mystically as she transcends the present situation to imagine the "makings," "use," and "patching" of the bowl. Ada then extracts meaning from the realistic and mystical, as she allows the bowl to "stand as marker for much that was lost," paralleling the own significant losses in her own life.

Along with her journal entries, Ada's letters to Inman change in style and content over the course of the novel. In Ada's opening scene, she sits on her front porch composing a letter to Inman, which is affected by the flowery tone of the Charleston social scene:

> This you must know: that despite your long absence, such is the light in which I view the happy relation existing between us, that I will never conceal a single thought from you. Let such fears not trouble you. Know that I consider it a mutual duty, that we owe to each other, to communicate in a spirit of the utmost frankness and candor. Let it ever be done with unlocked hearts. (27)

In spite of the letter's assertion that Inman and Ada should practice complete emotional honesty, the affected language prevents any sort of honesty from shining through. Ada recognizes her letter's inadequacy: "Even more than the penmanship, she disliked the tenor of the letter. She balled up the paper and tossed it into a boxwood bush" (27). Ada diagnoses the problem of affected language as she remarks, "That is just the way people talk and has nothing to do with the real matter at hand" (28). After balling up this first letter, Ada does not again attempt to write Inman until near the end of the novel, near the end of her journeys. After trading her copy of *Adam Bede* for work and nature, Ada finds the inspiration to compose a new letter to Inman. While lying in the grass watching a lunar eclipse, Ada recalls a lyric of Stobrod's:

> She thought about the refrain of a tune Stobrod had sung that night, a ragged love song. Its ultimate line was: Come back to me is my request. Stobrod could not have uttered it with more conviction had it been one of the profounder lines of *Endymion*. Ada had to admit that, at least now and

> again, just saying what your heart felt, straight and simple and unguarded, could be more useful than four thousand lines of John Keats. She had never been able to do it in her whole life, but she thought she would like to learn how. (344)

Ada's evolved literary taste bleeds into her writing style. Ada no longer wants to write in the vague posey of Charleston society, she longs for the clarity and ease of language of Stobrod's simply honest mountain songs. Inspired by this thought, Ada again attempts to write to Inman:

> She went in the house and got her lap desk and a candle lantern and came back to the chair. She inked her pen and then sat and stared at the paper until her nib dried out. Every phrase she thought of seemed nothing but pose and irony. She wiped the pen clean on a blotter and dipped again and wrote, Come back to me is my request. She signed her name and folded the paper and addressed it to the hospital in the capital. (344)

When Ada first starts to write, Charleston still marks her composition; "pose and irony" are exactly the reasons Ada crumpled up her original letter to Inman. Ada fights through this writer's block, resists her background, and finally mails a letter that contains a single, straightforward, honest sentiment: "Come back to me is my request." With this letter, Ada circles back to the scene with her father's literary exclamation over the landscape. Like Monroe, Ada finds power in the words of another, but these words belong to a rustic musician, not a celebrated author. By composing and sending this letter, Ada effectively sheds the social affectations of Charleston in both diction and citation to become as clear and straightforward as her new mountain home.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FINAL TWO CHAPTERS

At the end of the third to last chapter, Ada and Inman's literal journeys finally conclude as Inman reaches his home and his love and Ada successfully hunts her first animal without the aid of Ruby. If these two journeys were the most critical, the novel could end here. Instead, there are two more chapters, as Ada and Inman's literary journeys have not yet concluded. As these literary journeys come to a close, the most notable change in Ada and Inman is that they engage often and readily in story creation. Previously, Inman notably lacked any skill or interest in story creation, while Ada struggled to find the right words until she finally took someone else's. Now, as a great writer must first become a great reader, Ada and Inman have become skilled enough in reading that they can now create stories, thus signifying the end of their literary journeys.

All of the stories that Ada and Inman create center on domestic life. Using their surroundings in the abandoned Cherokee cabin as inspiration, Inman and Ada's first story concerns the past:

> He held his hands to the warm hearth and counted back the winters it had lain dark and cold. He said, Twenty-six years since a fire was kindled here…They imagined the last fire that had burned in the hearth, and they cast the players they imaged sitting before it…It satisfied them to invent lives for the imagined family that were more whole by instinct than any they themselves could ever achieve with hard effort. In the story of the

> family, Ada and Inman gave them premonitions of the end of their world. (418-19)

This particular story embodies all the attributes of both Ada and Inman's literary journeys. First, they use meditation on an object—the fire—as entrance to the fantastical—the "whole" lives of their family characters. Then, a mystical prophecy emerges from the story—premonitions of the end of the world, which echo Inman's eventual death. As Bartram meditation brought Inman "pleasure" and natural reading brought Ada "much contentment," this joint creation brings both characters "satisfaction" as they are free to create realistic characters that are "more whole…than any they themselves could ever achieve with hard effort." Inman and Ada's characters are not only unbound by page, but are unbound by circumstance and situation.

The next story Ada and Inman create takes a flint point lodged in a tree as inspiration. The creation of this story starts much like the others: Ada and Inman encounter an intricacy of nature and meditate on the physical details. For this story, Ada and Inman focus on the flint point, examining in detail its appearance and theorizing when and why it was used. With the physical nature of the flint point detailed, Ada and Inman proceed to create a fantastical story: Ada, Inman, and their future children are the characters, and they imagine themselves returning to this spot many times over the course of their lives to mark the progress of the flint into the tree. While this story is more personal in that the creators are actually the characters, the story lacks detail overall. As Inman creates the story, he vividly describes Ada, but he adds that "he could not even imagine" the features of the future world (426). Inman also remarks that he "could not imagine whose they would be" in regards to the children visiting the tree (426). Towards the end of the story, it is revealed that Ada "could not fully envision that distant time" and

she refers to the supposed Ada and Inman characters as "the old couple" instead of by their names (426). Altogether, this lack of vision again prophesizes Inman's eventual death as Ada's vision and character have significantly more detail than Inman's. While Inman and Ada do not pick up consciously or mystically on what is to come, they unconsciously weave it into their story.

The second to last chapter concludes with Ada and Inman sleeping together for the first time, then creating yet another story. For this story, meditation on the past rather than nature motivates the creation: "When they had momentarily exhausted the past, they turned to the future" (433). This lack of physical grounding allows the story to become much more fantastical than the others. Together, Inman and Ada create intricate visions of careers, their wedding, the progress of Black Cove, their purchases, and even their retirement. The characters that Ada and Inman create for themselves are so unbelievable based on their established types that their story creates a feeling of tension; this is the first story that has no hope of coming true. While the entire story is uncomfortably romantic, one scene in particular stands out as the most off-putting:

> They would order books on many topics: agriculture, art, botany, travel. They would take up musical instruments, fiddle and guitar or perhaps the mandolin. Should Stobrod live, he could teach them. And Inman aspired to learn Greek. That would be quite a thing to know. With it, he could continue the efforts of Balis. He told her the story of the man in the hospital, his lost leg and the sheaf of papers he had left behind him at his sad passing. It's not without sense they call it a dead language, Inman said in conclusion. (433)

This vision places both Inman and Ada in the Charleston education that one never likened

to and the other worked so hard to overcome. Particularly for Ada, after journeying so long to get away from Charleston, a return to such a life would be a retrograde motion in a novel that constantly moves forward, and is thus impossible.

The final story is created in Inman's last moments of life. After he has been shot, Inman lays his head in Ada's lap and dreams:

> He tried to talk, but she hushed him. He drifted in and out and dreamed a bright dream of a home. It had a coldwater spring rising out of rock, black dirt fields, old trees. In his dream the year seemed to be happening all at one time, all the seasons blending together. Apple trees hanging heavy with fruit but yet unaccountably blossoming, ice rimming the spring, okra plants blooming yellow and maroon, maple leaves red as October, corn tops tasseling, a stuffed chair pulled up to the glowing parlor hearth, pumpkins shining in the fields, laurels blooming on the hillsides, ditch banks full of orange jewelweed, white blossoms on dogwood, purple on redbud. Everything coming around at once. And there were white oaks, and a great number of crows, or at least the spirits of crows, dancing and singing in the upper limbs. There was something he wanted to say. (445)

This final creation brings Inman's literary journey to a close as, instead of reading Bartram passages, he composes one of his own. The story lacks explicit emotions or character interaction, and, like Bartram, uses extensive listing of natural detail as a vehicle for deeper significance. As the dream is prefaced as one of "home" and all of the natural details are related to farms and fields, Inman seems to mystically transcend time and space to experience nature, Ada, and Cold Mountain all at once. The "brightness" of

this dream signifies that Inman ultimately achieves enlightenment through such a story as his spirit literally lifts out of his body.

After the line "There was something he wanted to say," the final paragraph of the novel shifts perspective. Throughout the entire novel, Ada and Inman are explored through a third-person omniscient narrator. In this final paragraph, though, Ada and Inman are experienced from the third-person distance of an "observer." The novel ends by claiming that, viewed from a distance, the final moment between Ada and Inman is "[a] scene of such quiet and peace that the 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" (445). In Inman's passing, the couple becomes a Bartram passage: they are observed from atop a summit, their story is recounted, and, if the reader possesses the proper temperament, meditation will open up an imagined "history," or story, based on the "text." Together, the narrative shift and the final sentiment pluck the reader from immersion in Ada and Inman's literary journey and make us do the meditative work to transcend text and mystically create our own fantastical version of that last "something" Inman wanted to say.

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