

## **Home, Journey and Landscape in Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*: the Mirroring of Internal Processes in the External World and the Literary Construction of Space.**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines Charles Frazier's Civil War novel *Cold Mountain* in the light of postmodern space theory. The basic premise of the paper is that the environment and landscape within the novel consists of a constructed space. This space reflects back (almost as in a mirror) the mental, emotional and psychological states of the two main narrators, Inman and Ada. Another central concept in the paper is that the normal antithesis between home and journey seems at first to be in play here but then becomes less obvious as the novel progresses. In the end, it appears that both characters have been on a journey through unfamiliar landscape, thus adding to the presumption of space that is constructed rather than essential in form.

### **Introduction**

At various times, Charles Frazier's Civil War novel *Cold Mountain* has been described as a spiritual quest for redemption (Gibson, 2006); an anti-Homeric odyssey (Vandiver, 2004); an attack on the cruelty of slavery (McWilliams, 2003); an exploration of the horrors of war (McCarron & Knoke, 1999); a story of cross-cultural bonding (Piacentino, 2001); an examination of masculine/feminine co-existence within the human psyche (Lee, 2003); and as a battle between Homeric epic and Heraclitean philosophy tract (Chitwood, 2004). While these are all legitimate approaches to the story of a Civil War deserter trying to get back to his love and his home at the base of Cold Mountain in North Carolina, they are also mainly literary and text level in form, using traditional critical methods and techniques. In this sense, these approaches assume that *Cold Mountain* is in the modernist literary tradition resulting in a well-told story that features realistic three dimensional characters within a found environment. The approaches study literary representation, intentional connections between *Cold Mountain* and previous literature, use of devices such as parallelism and antithesis, and metaphoric psychological symbolisms.

In this paper, I would like to use postmodern space theory to examine the literary construction(s) of space in *Cold Mountain* in terms of the novel's journey and landscape structures—and to attempt to determine how well these fictionally-built environments reflect

the internal processes of the two main characters, Inman and Ada. It is hoped that such an examination will allow the emergence of a meta-fictional structure in the novel that goes beyond the literal antiwar and romance themes. The key question to be examined is: How are the differences in the viewpoints, attitudes and approaches of the two main characters towards their respective environments a reflection of the characters' own internal disruptions—and at the same time a feedback loop from external to inner landscape? In other words, can we connect the external environment with the internal geography to create a meta-fictional spatial whole? Before delving into the particulars of the significance of such an external-internal interloping in the two main characters, a theoretical foundational base is set with an examination of postmodern space theory and its implications for literary critical analysis.

### **Postmodern Space Theory/*Cold Mountain* Landscapes**

According to Bhabha, the originator of the phrase “postmodern space,” the term refers to the “negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, opening out, remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference—be it class, gender or race” (1994, p. 219). Bhabha speaks of a “third space,” described by De Toro (1999) as “a liminal space ... a transitory space, a space other, a third space that is not here/there, but both” (p. 20). It can be argued that it is within this pattern of an interstitial third space that an examination can be made of how Inman's journey and the landscape through which he moves elaborates on concerns having to do with a literary discourse that involves race, ethnicity and gender as subjective, created concepts rather than fixed. Similarly, Ada's “journey” within herself, her growth and her multiple realizations can be viewed as flexible and fluid examples of this hyphenated space that serves as the boundary between outer and inner and has some elements of both. The result is a “new person”, a constructed identity, and the recognition of a web of identities, both personal and social within a special dimension:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in-between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood--singular or communal--that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 1-2)

In terms of such an approach to *Cold Mountain*, it is interesting to note the similarities between the present-day East/West, secular/religious binary systems dialogue (leading to inevitable stereotyping, misunderstanding and fear-mongering of the “other”) and the

North/South dialogue undertaken by many Civil War writers (leading to the stereotyping of entire societies as monolithic and filled with hatred of the “other”). Thus, it is not necessarily referring to an actual political divide but rather an attitude, approach or way of looking at the world that is infused with the structures put in place by others and which individuals must break down so that their own identities can surface.

It can be argued that the landscape (internal and external) in *Cold Mountain* does represent such a space, what De Kock (1993) called the space where “other” people were given the opportunity to tell their own stories rather than having someone else tell it for them and risk a mind-numbing stereotyping, something that was a danger not only to Southern blacks but also to Southern whites. We are all aware of the damage that the stereotyping of Southern blacks has done. But Southern whites were also stereotyped as a monolithic group or block ready to go to war to ensure that the institution of slavery would be allowed to continue.

In presenting a character who flees the horror of a war that he did not really want in the first place and that was mostly outside his concerns, *Cold Mountain* creates such a “third space”—both in physical and emotional terms. Postmodern space theory allows the temporal and geographical space of the time to reach across and speak to our own space and time; shows us where the two protagonists are caught in the margins as it were and positioned in a geographical and metaphorical periphery in terms of where the power structure is centered (be it North or South); and provides a foundation or basis for the exploration of the novel that seems on the surface about events in the late stages of the Civil War but which can work within the context of the concerns we have in the early 21st century.

This blends in with Hall (1993) and his denoting of postmodern space as a type of unfixed, difficult to pin down psychological space. It is a space where things are in a constant state of flux, where objects are created and recreated as needed, and where things such as gender and identity become multiple, merge into one another, and never stand still for very long. There is an essential instability to these concepts, in other words: “Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power” (p. 394).

According to Soja (1989), critical thought is in need of spatialization so that it is not completely engulfed and devoured by language which is temporal (and which could be under the control of the very power centers that are trying to dominate and subjugate). He uses spaliativity as a way to expose a mental geography and thus “recompose the territory of the

historical imagination through critical spatialization” (p. 12). This leads to notions of simultaneity rather than linear time, of action at a distance as spatial similarities are introduced beside one another, and of a way of interpreting the way space, time and social or cultural identity interact in the making up of what we call a society. This fits in well with Bhabha and his “third space of enunciation” (1994, p. 37), which is a way to break down the typical barriers between the “I” and “they”, the self and other, center and margin, etc. As Bhabha put it, this concept:

[C]hallenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. In other words, the disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative of the Western nation ... as being written in homogenous, serial time. (p. 37)

Thus, cultural identity becomes something hyphenated, something that has nothing of the essential in it, something that is ambiguous and constructed as one goes along, and something that does not conform to the definitions put forth by those who wish to simply maintain their hegemony and control.

This also fits in well with *Cold Mountain*. Here, many of these themes emerge and we are presented with both male and female protagonists who contravene in one way or another much of the perceived and conventional wisdom with respect to the Civil War, its causes, its rationale, and its benefits. More importantly the stereotyping is contravened on an even higher level—in terms, for example, of the female protagonist not being able to survive without the male. (In fact, here we have two female protagonists—Ada and Ruby—surviving without any help). For his part, Inman contradicts the socially accepted interpretations of the reasons and causes of the Civil War: the typical binary construction with the North on one side and the South on the other. Because he does this (starting with his fleeing the hospital and thus the battlefield), he becomes the enemy of both sides and must traverse a landscape that can be inimical and hostile for those who are considered trespassers, for those who dare tilt against the elaboration of that space according to the social norms then in fashion and for the benefit of those in power. At the same time, Inman must battle against his own internal geography of the mind, the constructions he has put up that enable him to maintain a continuous identity and that allow him to “connect” to others like him. In other words, these constructed spaces are not merely the result of power structures that impinge on the individual but also the result of the individual’s internal battles to create a landscape that is familiar (or at the very least the individual thinks it is familiar). Throughout the novel, Inman is constantly questioning himself and his motives and tries to adjust the external world to his internal workings. This is somewhat blurred by the fact that Inman is actually travelling

through an ever-changing landscape and thus it becomes more difficult to determine what part of it he constructs and what part comes already constructed (or has been constructed by the power structures that can mobilize the type of destruction and creation needed).

In much the same way and within a space that is at once at quite a distance from Inman (at least at the start) and yet very close to him, Ada undergoes a similar transformation in the landscape of her mind and her emotional states. This is true even though she does not move from the base of Cold Mountain for the entire novel. Her identity and mode of existence nevertheless undergo a fundamental alteration—and this helps point out the notion that space is not something fixed and sempiternal, once created and thus outside the ability of humans to control. Rather, it is something that calls for a different approach to spatiality, the “socially produced space” that, according to Soja, exists alongside “perceived space” and “conceived space”—the “lived space” (1996).

Ada goes from being a “tourist,” an urban-minded dweller (brought there by her minister father), to that of a survivor off the land following her father’s demise. She does this through her own willingness to adapt, with the help of a guide, someone who leads her not only through the actual practical help and advice she needs for physical survival but also the “spiritual” guidance she needs to keep her psyche intact and her feet literally on the ground—especially considering she has lost not only her father but also Inman.

In both cases, whether ultimately successful or not, a third space is represented. And it is the meeting of this liminal space, the melding of these two “third spaces” that perhaps best describes the ambivalent relationship between the two protagonists. According to Xie (1997), this ambivalence and hybrid nature can best be seen in postmodern identity/societal terms:

Bhabha constructs a third space, an interstitial locus of meaning, between the indigenous and the European, the colonizer and the colonized. This newly emergent cultural space proves subversive to both the Western and the indigenous, allowing neither of them cultural and discursive continuity.... Bhabha's theory of postcolonial counterhegemony with its revisionary strategy opens up new spaces of reinscription and negotiation not only for resistance to present forms of imperialism, but for struggle against future forms of imperialism as well. Indeed, the world has witnessed many racisms and ethnocentricisms other than Eurocentric racism, although this has been the most dominant. (p. 17)

As well, it is this created space that is best for coming to understand how so-called social experiences can be brought into line with individual experiences, and how these merge to produce cultural identities. At the same time, this third space serves as the best way to avoid the stereotyping that humans tend to do at an almost subconscious level.

Interestingly, a warning against this sort of thinking came from none other than Joseph Conrad, who often wrote from his own peripheral distance from the center of empire. His

words seem very appropriate in helping to describe the dilemma faced by Frazier in detailing the geography and landscape traversed by Inman and in his attempts to avoid what Barthes (1977) labelled the stereotype's "sad affair ... constituted by a necrosis of language, a prosthesis brought in to fill a hole in writing" (p. 199):

The critic and the judge seems to think that in those distant lands all joy is a yell and a war dance, all pathos is a howl and a ghastly grin of filed teeth, and that the solution to all problems is found in the barrel of a revolver or on the point of an assegai. And yet it is not so.... The picture of life, there as here, is drawn with the same elaboration of detail, coloured with the same tints. Only in the cruel serenity of the sky, under the merciless brilliance of the sun, the dazzled eye misses the delicate detail, sees only the strong outlines, while the colours, in the steady light, seem crude and without shadow. Nevertheless it is the same picture. And there is a bond between us and that humanity so far away. (Conrad, [1896] 1947, pp. vii-viii)

While Conrad may have been describing the stereotyping of so-called savage lands, the latest group of "others" that helped take the mind of greedy and ambitious Europeans from the task of devouring one another (just like some theorists argue that the various nations will only stop trying to destroy each other when facing with an alien enemy), it seems appropriate to many of the encounters faced by Inman on his journey home: a large number of these encounters start with the display of a "barrel of a revolver" or "point of an assegai" and end up with a "picture of life, there as here." The "far away" that Conrad describes could just as easily be the unknown in the heart of Civil War America, the dangerous and at the same time stereotyped landscape that Inman traverses in the hope of returning to the familiar (which, of course, turns out to be not so familiar and in fact becomes the most dangerous part of the entire journey).

### **Home, Journey and Landscape in *Cold Mountain***

While most commentators admit that the novel's minutely-described landscape arises out of Frazier's intimate knowledge of the area, both from personal experience and from narrations passed down by his family, it is also true that this landscape is "at the same time culturally constructed, both by that accumulated learning itself and by alienating aspects of culture. The very business of survival in a landscape identifies ... the difference between connecting and alienating attitudes towards land. For Frazier ... this quickly comes down to a matter of personal integrity" (Gifford, 2001, p. 88).

In other words, forced as it may be, Inman's efforts to return to Cold Mountain and the woman to whom he was informally betrothed is a moral journey. In the novel, Inman says at one point: "This journey will be the axle of my life" (Frazier, 1997a, p. 55). The journey is filled with ambiguity and a lack of a moral center, a reflection of the terrain through which

Inman is moving. In the early part of the novel, as Inman stumbles along, he encounters several groups of people and undergoes a variety of seminal experiences. He sees these very consciously as some sort of tests and later says “how he might have done things differently in each case” (p. 95).

As set up by Frazier, both the landscape that Inman must pass through and that in which Ada attempts to survive is filled with two types of people: “those with destructive or creative ways of living in it: the murderers and the healers” (Gifford, 2001, p. 92). At the same time, there is the effect of the actual geography: “The creek’s turnings marked how all that moves must shape itself to the maze of actual landscape, no matter what its preferences might be” (Frazier, 1997a, p. 121).

As well as encountering ruthlessness and those who would like to kill him—both Federal troops and a vicious Home Guard on the lookout for Confederate deserters, Inman also runs into people who are gracious and kind, and those who possess genuine healing powers, such as the goat woman who has the knowledge to make medicines from plants. These can also be seen as shattered parts of Inman’s own identity, which he is trying to integrate once more, which he is trying to bring within himself so he can be whole again.

In commentary Frazier made on the writing of his novel he spoke of becoming “less and less interested in the war itself” and instead setting out to produce “a fictive world ... marked by change and threat and beauty” and the desire “to know what the world’s processes—human and nonhuman—were, how things looked and how they worked. Subsistence farming, vernacular architecture, herbal medicines, and the mysterious ways of wild turkeys, for example” (2001, pp. 314-315).

In fact, several commentators have noted the special place that landscape plays in *Cold Mountain*: Inscoc (1998) favorably in the way the characters relate viscerally to the mountains; and Crawford (2003) not as favorably, claiming Frazier spent too much time describing geography and landscape and not enough in the human relationships.

The argument presented here is that Inman and Ada’s relationship to the geography around them is as complex, if not more so, than any human relationship—and that it informs and infuses those human relationships by presenting a connection between the two sets of relationships that cannot be severed without dire consequences. As Way (2004) points out:

Frazier treats the environment as a character in itself, with as much influence as any other: Inman's struggles with an unfamiliar environment stir in him a degree of despair usually reserved for the complexities of human relationships; Ada and Ruby's dependence on their surroundings casts the environment in a stern maternal role as the agent of both punishment and reward. Such relationships on the individual level offer a

rarely acknowledged view of private life in the Civil War South that have important implications for the world at large. (p. 34)

There is a deep reminder in the novel that knowledge of the land can mean the difference between life and death. On top of that, once that struggle has been worked out, how the people and the land interconnect helps shape how they treat not only that world but the world at large. In other words, it is here at this level that people choose to be either destroyers or creators. Ransom (1930), writing about the hard-scrabble farmers in the south, said that this person “identifies himself with a spot of ground, and this ground carries a good bit of meaning ... he would till it not too hurriedly and not too mechanically, to observe in it the contingency and the infinitude of nature, and so his life acquires its philosophical and even cosmic consciousness” (pp. 19-20).

Interestingly, it is not words, not even the words of this particular novel, that help define how these characters are connected to and react to the landscape around them. They do not philosophize about the agrarian versus capitalist society; they do not provide fanciful poetic descriptions of the pastoral. Rather, this landscape is created and maintained only through the hard, scrabbling physical labour of these characters. The old notion about being one with the land is something lived and felt rather than verbalized. Thus, Inman must physically traverse that harsh landscape to find himself; Ada must abandon her book learning and dig at the earth to come to understand the cycles of life, and with them the true meaning of existence.

The only way that these characters can come to a true understanding of the world around them is to partake in it on the most basic level. They have to get physical with it, crack open the earth and scoop it up, learn the nuances of the seasons. If they don't, it will not be a matter of switching philosophical tack or theoretical approach. It will be a matter of dying.

Both Inman and Ada are thrown into an unfamiliar landscape with very little warning. It is the landscape that shapes what their reactions must be. For Inman, the problem is surviving in a world that is literally always changing around him—by the sheer fact that he does not stay in one place and is constantly encountering the “other”. For Ada, with the death of her idealistic romantic arcadian father, she is thrown into a space where people “lived by farming a little bit of their own land, and by open-range herding of cattle and hogs, by hunting and fishing, gathering and gleaning ... perhaps a rough, redneck version of Jefferson's agrarian ideal” (Frazier, 1997b).



Opposed to this is Ada's romantic dad and his approach to nature—as a type of idyllic image to be observed; as a painting that needs to have some sort of esthetic value, brushed clean of anything that might actually look like, taste like, or smell like the earth. It is here that the three types of space—the perceived, conceived and the lived—come into contact. Frazier (1997a) describes Ada's father thusly:

Monroe never developed much interest in the many tiresome areas of agriculture. He had held the opinion that if he could afford to buy feed corn and meal, why bother growing more that they could eat as roasting ears? If he could buy bacon and chops, why be drawn into the more inconvenient details of pork? Ada once heard him instruct the hired man to buy a dozen or so sheep and put them into the pasture below the front yard to mix with the milk cow. The man had objected, pointing out to Monroe that cows and sheep do not do well pastured together. The man asked, Why do you want sheep? The wool? Meat? Monroe's answer had been, For the atmosphere. (p. 23-24)

For someone like Ruby, the person who teaches Ada how to survive after her father's death has left her almost totally helpless, the treating of a rural landscape as a painting is completely incomprehensible: a painting is a painting; the earth is the earth. Ruby "listed as achievements the fact that by the age of ten, she knew all features of the mountains for twenty-five miles in any direction as intimately as a gardener would his bean rows" (p. 23). She can't understand why anyone would want to travel or try to get materials from outside the immediate area and that this type of activity "marked a lack of seriousness in a person" (p. 82). Not surprisingly, she believes "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" (p. 85). The use of expressions such as "assigned place" and "knowing one's place" comes across as Shakespearean in its chain of being connotations. However, while the Elizabethan world view called for an external and totally objective landscape vision that encompassed not only the physical world but also the spiritual world, the "being in your place" world of *Cold Mountain* in general and Ada's little corner of it in particular has little within it of objectivity and firmness. It is obvious that it is Ada who decides what kind of world she wants, merely by her utility and ability. One cannot simply wish a world into existence—as her father tried. But at the same time, one can bring into fruition a tolerable facsimile of that world provided one learns to "perceive" the "conceived" universe in a way that turns it into a "lived" space. This recognition and acknowledgement can only be achieved through the help of someone willing to pass down the knowledge, to take someone under one's wing, and to teach them how to really look at the world around them.

As for Inman, while he did not volunteer to travel, he did find himself away from the stability of the piece of land that he called his own. This could be seen (or at least this is how

Inman sees it as he tries to scramble back to it) as the one spot on the earth that was not always constantly changing and altering itself to suit the whims of others—the omphalos and oracle, as it were, where Inman went to refresh himself. In a profound sense, and not because it really was but because Inman had made it so, that piece of land represented Inman's Self, the center of his being; for him, everything else is Other. Thus, it is from the Other that he fled when he escaped from the hospital; it is through the Other that he must make his way to get back to his notion of safety. Along that way, he must learn the ways of the Other in order to return to his Self. If he does not succeed in learning the ways of the Other, he is doomed to perish, to remain lost forever in a landscape that might tantalize him into believing it was not Other but that would always betray him in the end. Or so he thinks as he sets out.

At the same time, Inman undergoes some serious changes— and these internal changes are strong signposts towards the postmodern approach to landscape shown in this novel. At first, Inman reacts like most would to these unfamiliar surroundings: fear, loss of hope, loss of self-confidence, and a belief that everything (including the physical landscape) is out to devour him. Hounded by Federal troops looking to eliminate Confederate stragglers and bloodthirsty Home Guards looking for traitors, he cannot help but view the landscape as hostile, ugly, out of phase, filled with the smell of fear and war:

It was a foul region, planed off flat except where there were raw gullies cut deep in the red clay. Scrubby pines everywhere. Trees of a better make had once stood in their place but had been cut down long ago, the only evidence of them now an occasional hardwood stump as big around as a dinner table ... What Inman wanted was to be out of there, but the river stretched wide before him, a shit-brown clog to his passage. As a liquid, it bore likeness more to molasses as it first thickens in the making than to water. He wished never to become accustomed to this sorry make of waterway. It did not fit his picture of a river. Where he was from, the word river meant rocks and moss and the sound of white water moving fast under the spell of a great deal of collected gravity. Not a river in his whole territory was wider than you could pitch a stick across, and in every one of them you could see bottom wherever you looked (p. 53, 64-65).

This is a result not so much of some intrinsic and essential ugliness in this part of the country but rather has more to do with Inman's own situation, his own view of what he cannot consider as part of himself. He is in the Other, in a state of unfamiliarity. This unfamiliarity feeds up from the landscape into even his thoughts on patriotism and the notion of a Confederacy as a unifying principle:

How did he ever think this to be his country and worth fighting for? Ignorance alone would account for it. All he could list in his mind worth combat right now was his right to exist unmolested somewhere on the west fork of the Pigeon River drainage basin, up on Cold Mountain near the source of Scapegoat Branch (p. 65).

Inman compares this landscape and its desolation to his recent experiences in the army: the nightmare visions of the battles; the brutal slaughter of the enemy, even if already wounded;

his own near-death wound; his recovery at the hospital; his escape. The environment becomes politics. It changes and transforms itself through the action of the human psyche—and through the action of political will on physical landscape.

Inman retreats into another vision—that of the writer William Bartram from the previous century. Through reading his *Travels*, Inman is able to fantasize an escape from the Other. He finds himself with the ability to create “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. He knew their names and said them to himself like the words of spells and incantations to ward off the things one fears most” (p. 11).

While both Ada and Inman seem to come to the same conclusions with respect to what home means to the self (at least after Ruby has shown Ada how to manage the landscape and geography so that it actually becomes her home rather than simply a piece of art to be admired), Inman does not have the luxury of actually being in that home. He has been forced from it and it has re-arranged itself around him—to become a strange place. He is now truly a stranger in a strange land.

To him, the world around him shows only fear and trepidation. It has become random and godless, lacking in any type of order. Or at least Inman sees it that way, envisioning even “the comeliest order on earth as a heap of random sweepings” (p. 18). When he is presented with the notion of predictability, he states that it’s a simple enough concept “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” (p. 16). He has lost his orientation and his will to live. At one point, he uses a series of hopeless words to describe how he feels both spiritually and physically:

Inman guessed Swimmer's spells were right in saying a man's spirit could be torn apart and cease and yet his body keep on living ... He was himself a case in point ... his spirit, it seemed, had been about burned out of him but he was yet walking. Feeling empty, however, as the core of a big black-gum tree ... His spirit, he feared, had been blasted away so that he had become lonesome and estranged from all around him ... It seemed a poor swap to find that the only way one might keep from fearing death was to act numb and set apart as if dead already. [*emphasis mine*] (p. 16)

At this point, Inman says that he doubts he will ever “heal up and feel whole again” (p. 18). However, as mentioned previously, while this is a fair description of Inman towards the beginning of the novel where it seems he has lost all hope and is merely wandering about in a landscape that wants to do him in, there is a slow change that takes place as he proceeds deeper and deeper into the unfamiliar landscape—and eventually becomes familiar with it, or as familiar as anyone can ever get with the Other. For it is not the landscape that changes but

Inman's approach to it—and that in turn “constructs” the landscape. He “had tried to walk with no hope and no fear but had failed miserably, for he had done both. But on the best days of walking he achieved some success in matching his thoughts to the weather, dark or bright, so as to attune with what freak of God's mind sent cloud or shine” (p. 343).

While at one point, seeing a golden sunrise, all he can describe is a “turdlike” snake (p. 53), things start to change when he steps in to save Veasey's pregnant lover. This releases him from the landscape he has been constructing and brings about another where he starts to appreciate the beauty in things, even in a string of “near dead” gypsy horses which, now “all looked beautiful to Inman, the grace in the deep curve of their down-turned necks” (p. 97). Then, he dreams of Ada and “walked all through the day with some brightening of his spirit” (p.102).

Inman experiences a retrogression to his previous state when he is betrayed to the Home Guard. He and several others are taken to be executed but he is only wounded and left buried in a shallow grave until some wild hogs root him out. When he emerges, the first thing he notices is that he doesn't recognize any of the constellations. While some have taken this as his inability to ever return to his previous life (Vandiver, 2004), other commentators believe this signifies Inman's construction of a new world where he can make a fresh start on a new life (Gibson, 2006), the postmodern state of flux that exists without a center and whose space is only margin.

Inman himself still doesn't recognize that a new life is possible at this point—even after a slave meets him as he waits at a crossroads and feeds him. Inman is still looking for signs that the universe is not a random place. He even uses the watermelon seeds as they fall on the ground to see if they will show him the way. That they don't leads him to assume that the “invisible world ... had abandoned him as a gypsy soul to wander singular, without guide or chart, through a broken world composed of little but impediment” (p. 182).

Inman takes a further step towards reconstructing his inner geography and aligning it with other humans when he encounters the goat woman and tells her he wants to marry Ada, even “though he realized marriage implied some faith in a theoretical future, a projection of paired lines running forward through time, drawing nearer and nearer to one another until they became one line” (p. 220).

Inman has started to see the order in things again, an order that has been hidden for a long time because of the war. This is the natural order of the landscape around him, a landscape that is becoming ever more familiar in its patterns, patterns resembling those of his Cold Mountain home—from creatures going through their natural cycles to the trees fruiting.

Despite this, Inman is still not yet prepared to accept his place in all this, because he feels “deeply at variance with such elements of the harmonious” (p. 218). This leads him to regress and the world around him again become mysterious, foggy, with no sense of direction, emphasizing the fact that it is his own interpretation of this universe that actually constructs the universe.

Although he fantasizes the sprouting of wings and flying off into some isolated mountain-top crag where “elements of humanity might come now and again like emissaries to draw me back to the society of people. Unsuccessful every time” (p. 236), the opposite happens. He is pulled back into human contact through Sara, the 18-year-old widow with a child. Inman realizes that “a woman had not touched a hand to him with any degree of tenderness in so long that he had come to see himself as another kind of creature altogether” (p. 245). Not only is the despair, hopelessness and randomness gone but Inman is actually reconstructing his belief in an after life. He sings a hopeful song:

The fear of the grave is removed forever.  
When I die I'll live again.  
My soul will rejoice by the crystal river.  
When I die I'll live again.  
Hallelujah I'll live again. (p. 250)

But the journey is not over yet—and the landscape (i.e. Inman’s lived space) can change very quickly back to despair, to darkness and loss of hope. In fact, as Inman draws closer to his home, he begins to hear “dark voices”: “A dark voice came into Inman’s mind and said no matter how much you might yearn for it and pray for it, you would never get it” (p. 315).

Meanwhile, as Inman undergoes this physical journey through a hostile landscape, Ada undergoes a more psychological or inner journey. In fact, it is a journey that many feel is more transformative than Inman’s, one which Grauke (2002), for instance, says has allowed Ada to see deep into herself while Inman has spent his time battling external demons, and Polk (1997) describes as “richer and deeper” (p. 14). Ada is also the one who has been able to hold onto her faith throughout it all and the one who repels Inman’s doom and gloom when she states: “I know people can be mended” (p. 333). Interestingly, Ada herself acknowledges that there has been some sort of transformation when she thinks to herself: “Certainly neither she nor Inman were the people they had been the last time they were together. And she believed maybe she liked them both better now” (p. 335). Ada, thanks to the guidance of Ruby, has learned “self-confidence ... compassion, ‘other-centeredness’” (McCarron & Knoke, 1999, p. 278). At the same time, she has also learned how to deal with disruptions within the settled circumference of her life, including a group of women who have been

driven from their homes and hope to reach relatives in Tennessee. Frazier describes the reactions of Ada and Ruby towards these people:

Ada and Ruby saw the travelers off to bed, and the next morning they cooked nearly all the eggs they had and made a pot of grits and more biscuits. After breakfast, they drew a map of the way to the gap and set them on the next leg of their journey. (p. 136)

Inman undergoes a type of rollercoaster emotional ride as he journeys back towards the ideal. He undergoes as many changes as the external landscape. All that seems to change when he finally meets Ada and she touches him: “that loving touch seemed like the key to life on earth” (p. 331). Then, when they make love: “He had been living like a dead man and this was life before him” (p. 341). The landscape becomes benevolent, ordered, filled with meaning and significance and purpose. The description of Ada as she walks away towards the trees is a clear portrait of the construction of the landscape, of an inner geography:

When Ada disappeared into the trees, it was like a part of the richness of the world had gone with her. He had been alone in the world and empty for so long. But she filled him full, and so he believed everything that had been taken out of him might have been for a purpose. To clear space for something better. (p. 347)

This is followed in the next scene by Inman’s death at the hands of a boy with a rifle.

Interestingly, Frazier describes this by writing, “an observer up on the brow of the ridge would have looked down on a still, distant tableau in the winter woods ... A pair of lovers. The man reclined with his head in the woman’s lap” (p. 353).

Several different interpretations of the meaning of the death of Inman at the end have been offered. For example, Crawford (2003) theorizes Inman as a constructed outsider who fails to fit into the domestic unity and harmony created by Ada and Ruby (p. 189); and Vandiver (2004) also sees Inman as someone who has been the outsider throughout the book, and who has familiarized himself with unfamiliar landscape only to get lost in his own home geography (p. 141); Way (2004) sees his death as the obvious result of the random workings of the universe and the senseless violence that is rampant throughout. Others argue that the death is necessary in order to complete the cycle of redemption that they feel Inman’s journey has really represented. For example, Gibson (2006) argues that “the ending is a triumph in which a human spirit has been reclaimed. At the beginning of his journey Inman is ‘dead,’ despairing, empty, and hateful; by the end of the journey he has been given life, hope, fullness, and love. He has been redeemed by his love for Ada and by her love for him” (p. 427).

Knoke (1998) also puts a positive spin on what seems like a tragic ending. He points to several clues in the novel to back up his claim, including the epilogue which shows an

harmonious life for Ada, Ruby, the boy who shot Inman, and Ada's child from the night spent with Inman. For Knoke, other indications include

[T]he pastoral description of Inman lying peacefully in his lover's arms ... his happy reunification with Ada, the sexual consummation of their love, the healing of his spiritual wounds, his triumphant self-sacrifice for "family," and the pantheistic passing on of his spirit to his Cold Mountain "heaven" on earth. (p. 28)

Perhaps the final word here needs to go to Frazier himself. Once again, it seems to be associated with a physical event or series of events rather than something theoretical and abstract. The constructed landscape is visible for the writer. Frazier returns to this landscape in order to determine how he is going to end the book. He said as part of an interview for BBC radio (2000):

I finally went back up to that area where these events happened and I went to the place where the actual Inman had a gunfight with the Home Guard. I walked around. I spent a whole day wandering around just thinking, "How am I going to end this book?" and suddenly it seemed very clear that I had taken this man's short and very difficult life, had given him all kinds of experiences he probably never had, but that I owed it to him to keep his ending in some form that was fairly close to what really happened to him?

### **The Constructed Geography: Concluding Remarks**

Whether viewed as a spiritual quest towards redemption, the journey of the anti-Odysseus, or a vision of the destructive powers of war, *Cold Mountain* rests most securely on a basis of a socially and mentally constructed landscape and geography. A close analysis of the book makes that clear. For one thing, we have the split narrative of home and journey. One narrative represents the journey through a landscape that keeps changing seemingly depending upon the mood of the person involved in the journey. The other narrative fork represents the seeming familiarity of a home geography. Both of these are ultimately constructed and both turn out not to be what they originally seemed: the first dangerous and the latter safe.

In the journey part of the novel, that is fairly obvious in that Inman's moods seem to be reflected in the way he sees the landscape and in how it builds itself around him. The writer goes to great lengths to point out that, in the end, Inman sees only what he wants to see, what he has been programmed to see. And that is the ultimate reality, the ultimate special acknowledgement. We really get to see this in a physical way when, as he lies dying in Ada's arms, he goes on to describe "a bright dream of a home" (p. 353), once again trying to build up a landscape around him, only this time, it is an ideal one, a landscape resembling paradise (but in the form of the familiar world that he knows):

It had coldwater rising 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. (p. 353)

The connection between internal moods and external landscape is not as obvious in the Ada-Ruby home section of the narrative—until, that is, we realize that Ada is just as lost in the beginning in what should be her home territory as Inman in his unfamiliar space. As the product of an urban upbringing and someone who knows very little about what it takes to live in harmony with nature, Ada finds herself on the point of not being able to cope once her father dies. Her salvation is Ruby, someone who knows the natural world inside out (or at least her constructed corner of it) and who realizes that “cures of all sorts exist in the natural world. Its every nook and cranny apparently lay filled with physic and restorative to bind up rents from the outside” (Frazier, 1997a, p. 333).

The obviousness of the situation is reversed at the end. Now we have Ada who has learned just about everything there is to know about the little corner of the world around her. She has achieved a type of harmony and peace. Inman comes in at this point as the outsider. He comes with extraneous and external knowledge of the world outside.

One needs to ask: Would life have been as harmonious if Inman had been allowed to live and he and Ada formed the family here? I think that Frazier realized that this would have been a false construction at this point. No matter how much Inman and Ada loved one another, their views of the world were not all that compatible. Within Inman, there would always be that core of scars, the wounds from the force with it he was forced to create the environment around him in order to keep it from swallowing him up within it randomness. Thus, it seems as if his sacrifice is necessary to help maintain order and harmony—especially if that order and harmony does not really exist in the external world but is actually a product of human emotions and relationships. Gifford (2001) perhaps puts it best when he says:

Ada's learned humility in living with the processes of “burying and healing” leads to her inner nature learning directly from outer nature, which is ultimately, as it is for Inman and Ruby, a survival based upon the merging of culture and nature. In this state of living, “doing things right” is learned from reading the land as traveller or farmer so that the exploitation of people in the war becomes a metaphor for an unsustainable way of living on the land. (p. 95)

In Inman's travels, he moves about in what he considers an unfamiliar, hostile landscape—even though the geography is actually just another part of North Carolina. As well, his



reluctance to engage in the war indicates that the concerns of other parts of the South and the desire to maintain the institution of slavery are not as powerful in the area where Inman and Ada live. As Inscoe (1998) writes:

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

The amount of detail that Frazier places within the novel goes beyond the usual needed to set a scene or paint a description. By providing the reader with minute details of the landscape as Inman journeys through it, the reader also embarks on this voyage of discovery. This is emphasized more strongly through the use of the device of William Bartram's *Travels* as an overlay and as a way to compare the landscape through which Inman travels and the remembered landscape of his home.

The differences between the two main characters has been shown most effectively in the examination of the difference between Inman's journey and his approach to the landscape around him (as mentally constructed in all its emotive parts), and Ada's experience at the foot of Cold Mountain. In both cases, there was a mirror-like reflection of interior states with external ones. When the characters felt abandoned, hopeless, inadequate, the environment around them reflected those states. When the characters felt at peace or discovered ways to make use of the land, the space around them became more accommodating. Of course, this is not a case of pathetic fallacy but rather a case of post-modern constructivism, a world created out of the mental activity of the characters in all the important senses (other than the purely physical one, that of brute existence per se). As Way (2004) points out: "Inman longs for Cold Mountain and Ruby cannot imagine leaving it because they know it; they know how to match their desires with those of the mountain environment ... The meaning is embodied in an immediate environment and the knowledge gained by working that environment lead to a sense of place that can be felt in any region" (p. 53).

Interestingly enough, the story ends with a final page in which the reader is given idyllic scenes of domestic bliss. It features a pair of children dancing (Inman's son and the boy who shot him), a fiddle being played by Ruby's dad (recently himself an outsider), a story being told by Ada (about peasant lovers who die in each other's arms and become intertwined part of the landscape as oak and linden tree), and a poultice being administered

by Ruby. The bliss created in this scene is definitely not mythological. It has been constructed, forged “out of a traumatic narrative. For the reader must qualify the apparent idyll of their making music, dance, story and healing. Their resilience, their mountain people’s ability to make healing tunes out of hardship, is what is being celebrated here ... The narrative’s lovers have not died together intertwined by nature ...” (Gifford, 2001, p. 95). In a post-modern space, the use of myths and traditions serves only ironic purposes, as one more set of building blocks for the constructed universe.

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