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"The Metal Face of the Age": Hesiod's Gold and Iron Ages on Cold Mountain

Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* is a treasure-trove of literary allusion. Among classical sources, its intricate relation to Homer's *Odyssey* has been studied in some depth;[1] also noted has been the homage it pays to the pre-Socratic philosopher, Heraclitus.[2] These are not, however, the only archaic Greek sources woven into Frazier's intertextual fabric: although referentiality to Hesiod is less direct and insistent than to Homer and Heraclitus, the Golden-Age topic from that author's *Works and Days* infuses Frazier's densely programmatic first chapter and recurs throughout the novel. This topic first appeared in pre-classical Greece but found its richest manifestations in the urbanized poetry of Augustan Rome; it is especially well suited to Frazier's expression of his protagonist's redemption from the brutality of war by return to the healing agricultural work ethic of his mountain home in western North Carolina.

One challenge faced by Frazier in his opening chapter is to launch his protagonist Inman on his homeward trek from a Civil War veterans' hospital, cast as an Odyssean war hero, while at the same time – paradoxically – justifying his desertion from the Confederate army through early soundings of the novel's pervasive anti-war theme. Thus we learn of Inman's having been "classed among the dying" after suffering a severe wound to the neck during the Battle of

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[1] Ava Chitwood, "Epic or Philosophic, Homeric or Heraclitean? The Anonymous

[2] Chitwood (above, n. 1); McDermott (above, n. 1), 102-103; 122-123.

Petersburg and "put aside on a cot to do so."[3] We see him given "but a grey rag and a little basin to clean his own wound" (4) and left to live or die without the intercession of medical professionals. Although these circumstances are understandable given the manpower and status of medical science at the time, it does not take much effort to imagine the disaffection of wounded soldiers so situated. We hear him narrate to a blind peddler his own particular "literary 'primal scene'" – the Battle at Fredericksburg – "a survivor's recollection of a specific battle experience so 'undeniably horrible' that it becomes the focal point of recurring nightmare and psychological trauma."[4] We are brought to quick understanding of the seared state of his soul when he muses that "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, with nothing much left of yourself but a hut of bones" (16), or when he writes home to Ada:

> Do you recall that night before Christmas four years ago when I took you in my lap in the kitchen by the stove and you told me you would forever like to sit there and rest your head on my shoulder?

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[3] Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997), 3. Subsequent references will be placed in parentheses within the text.

[4] Bill McCarron and Paul Knoke, "Images of War and Peace: Parallelism and Antithesis in the Beginning and Ending of *Cold Mountain*," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 52:2 (Spring, 1999), 274, quoting Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1975), 34.

> Now it is a bitter surety in my heart that if you knew what I have seen and done, it would make you fear to do such again. (17)

In his evident trauma, he represents a character-typology especially sympathetic to a post-Viet Nam literary sensibility: "thin and grim and held within himself" (335), longing for reconnection to normal life yet fearing that he is "ruined beyond repair" (333) or even immune from redemption ("You could be too far ruined. Fear and hate riddling out your core like heartworms" [315]), at once remorse-ridden and ready to kill again at any moment.

A flashback to an explosive incident of boyhood truancy gives us a further glimpse into the psyche of a hero who inherently prioritizes individualism over conformism. As McCarron and Knoke note, Inman's desertion at the end of chapter 1 is prefigured by the surfacing of his "lost memory" (2) of having acted up in school and then "stepped out the door and set the hat on his head at a dapper rake and walked away, never to return" rather than face a grim schoolmaster with "a big paddleboard with holes augured [*sic*] in it" (2).[5] In this way, a major leitmotif of the novel is established – the theme of conscious individual revolt, rather than passive acceptance, in the face of collective wrong. So the reader is prepared by the author to sympathize with Inman's decision to defect and return to love and home rather than be shipped back to Virginia to fight some more.

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[5] McCarron and Knoke (above, n. 3), 280; cf. Paul Knoke, "Symbolic Artistry in Charles Frazier's Cold Mountain," Notes on Contemporary Literature 29:2 (March 1999), 9. Significantly, perhaps, the lessons he walked out on concerned "grand wars fought in ancient England" (2).

An even more pervasive leitmotif of the novel is its assertion that return to a simple, agriculturally-based life, in touch with the rhythms of nature, can teach a man to "wage peace and heal the wounds of war into white scars" (279). It is in this context that the author adduces Hesiod, a didactic poet who espoused a related theme 2700 years before him. There are two kinds of strife (*Eris*), Hesiod says, a baleful one and a beneficial one. The baleful one "advances evil war and battle mercilessly, and no man loves her."[6] The other is an emulous spirit that is "much kindlier to men. She rouses even the helpless to toil" *(WD* 19-20) – and it is only through honest toil that men can achieve a life of justice and contentment: "Baseness can be won easily and in abundance: the road to her is smooth, and she lives nearby. But the gods have placed the sweat of our brows between us and virtue" (*WD* 287-290). Although there are also elements of the pastoral and the Romantic in Frazier's limning of the symbolic landscape of Cold Mountain, his own emphasis on work (especially as embodied in the lessons brought home to Ada by Ruby's tutelage), compounded by a series of specific allusions to *Works and Days*, makes clear that Hesiod is one of the novelist's literary inspirations.

Frazier sets the scene for his first reference to Hesiod through his description of the hospital window that frames and constricts Inman's view from his bed but at the same time sends him in imagination back in time and space to his Cold Mountain home:

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[6] All translations from Greek and Latin are my own. Subsequent line references will be cited by abbreviated title and line in parentheses within the text.

> During his first weeks in the hospital he had been hardly able to move his head, and all that kept his mind occupied had been watching out the window and picturing the old green places he recollected from home. Childhood places. The damp creek bank where Indian pipes grew. The corner of a meadow favored by brown-and-black caterpillars in the fall. A hickory limb that overhung the lane, and from which he often watched his father driving cows down to the barn at dusk. (1-2)

Such pastoral scenes of childhood remembrance, however, are retreats from brutal present realities – not only from Inman's individual injuries, but also from the broader social upheavals that have put him where he is. Indeed, Inman's thoughts turn swiftly to generalization about the disordered collective ethos of his time, capped by grim prognostications for society's future:

> The window apparently wanted only to take his thoughts back. Which was fine with him, for he had seen the metal face of the age and had been so stunned by it that when he thought into the future, all he could vision was a world from which everything he counted important had been banished or had willingly fled. (2)

The "metal face of the age": the phrase readily conjures images of guns, artillery, shrapnel, bayonets, and the soulless violence of the Civil War. It takes no special deconstructive powers to understand the author's point. Yet encoded into this image is also the first of two clear references in the chapter to Hesiod's description of the ages of man, each of which was denominated by its own

particular "metal face," in descending order of both monetary and ethical value (*WD* 109-201).

The earliest was the Age of Gold, in which men "had all good things; spontaneously the grain-giving earth bore them fruit in ungrudging abundance, and they reaped their harvests in ease and contentment, rich in flocks and loved by the blessed gods" (*WD* 116-120). As time passed, the ages became progressively debased,[7] to the point where Hesiod laments of his own time: "For now is surely a race of iron; men are constantly worn down, day and night, by toil and misery, and the gods shall lay harsh cares upon them" (*WD* 176-178). After this unappealing description of the present, the poet turns to prediction of even worse things to come – dour omens and upheaval in all traditional value systems, among them that "the father will not be of one mind with his children, nor children with their father, nor guest with host, nor comrade with comrade; nor will brothers be held dear as before" (*WD* 182-184), and "one man will sack the other's city" (*WD* 189). Capping this descent into ethical blight is the ultimate flight from among humanity of the goddesses Shame and Justice: "Then off to Olympos will go Aidos and Nemesis, away from the broad-wayed earth, wrapping their fair forms in white robes, forsaking mankind for the race of deathless gods; and bitter pain will be left for mortals, and they will have no

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[7] The single exception to this degeneration is that the age of the heroes of Thebes and the Trojan War, which intervened between the Bronze and Iron Ages, was viewed as a brief renascence of justice and virtue.

defense against evil" (*WD* 197-201).[8]

The similarities between Hesiod's picture and Frazier's are indirect but real. The "metal face" of Inman's age is clearly iron, as was Hesiod's; it has spawned a proliferation of increasingly destructive iron or steel weapons and led to strife, egregious breaches of a proper hospitality code, and a sacking of cities characterized by the catchphrase "brother against brother."[9] Hesiod's famous prediction of the forsaking of mankind by Shame and Justice is pointedly recalled by Inman's adversion to a future world "from which everything he counted

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[8] *Nemesis*, here called goddess of "Justice," is, more particularly, moral outrage or indignation in the face of wrong and the retribution that proceeds from it.

[9] McDermott (above, n. 1), 106-107, 114, notes two ways in which Inman's encounter with the goatwoman recall the ancient Greek code of *xenia* (hospitality, guest-friendship), but in fact both the *Odyssey* and Frazier's novel can be read, in broad outline, as treatises on the proper or improper treatment of guests by hosts, as indices of relative piety or lawlessness, humanity or inhumanity. *Xenia* is honored in Nestor and Menelaus's receipt of Telemachus, as in Odysseus's kindly reception by Aeolus, the Phaeacians, and the swineherd; it is breached by the Suitors (as improper guests), Circe, and (most signally) the cannibalistic Cyclops. So, in Frazier, the Yellow Man, the goatwoman, Sara, the woman who was burying her baby, and Ada and Ruby are all typed as respecters of the code, in contrast with the marauding Federals and Home Guard (playing a subverted "guest" or "suitor" role) and the perverse and perverted (even, it is hinted, cannibalistic [172]) hospitality offered by Junior and Lila.

important had been banished or *had willingly fled*" (2, emphasis mine). There is modernizing euhemerism in Frazier's relegation of Hesiod's two female deities to common-noun status, but a vestige of the personification significantly persists: while *values* ("everything that he counted important") can arguably be "banished" from society, only people (or personifications) can "willingly flee." The author's choice of words makes plain that his phrase is indebted to Hesiod's image of the flight from earth of white-robed Aidos and Nemesis.

In case a reader missed the Hesiodic allusion the first time around, the author renews it a bit further on in the chapter. In the intervening pages, he has introduced the naturalist's guidebook that Inman will carry with him on his journey as a talisman of Golden-Age values, the mind-easing *Travels* of the botanist William Bartram, "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" (10). He has also retailed Inman's own memory of weeks spent at the age of sixteen pasturing heifers on "the high balds on Balsam Mountain," mingling in pastoral harmony with a band of Cherokee, feasting nightly on "enormous meals of fried corn bread and trout and stews of game animals" and "every manner of corn liquor and apple brandy and thick mead" (13) and absorbing "creekside stories" (16) from his new-found friend Swimmer – Cherokee tales of cosmogony, cosmology, and spells for protecting one's personal spirit against a variety of assaults.[10] This recollection of a long-past

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[10] Throughout the novel, Frazier's association of the classical Golden Age with Native American harmony with nature is apparent (see especially the Cherokee

Golden-Age moment of communion with nature becomes for Inman the effective antitype of his wartime "primal scene." Through it, the reader is again eased toward acceptance of Inman's coming desertion by the implication that, to achieve wholeness again, he must embark on a homeward journey that is not only spatial (taking him across the full span of North Carolina, east to west), and not only political (removing him from the state's political and military capital to its furthest mountainous reaches), but also temporal (extricating him from his bleak present back to an earlier, more innocent, phase of life).

The temporal aspect of Inman's journey is set in high relief when the author flashes forward again from nostalgic reminiscence to the Raleigh tavern where Inman, in the present, is drinking debased coffee ("mostly chicory and burned corn grits") at – pointedly – a corroding steel table ("the metal table was rusting in a powdery orange rind around its edges, and Inman had to take care not to scrub the sleeves of his new coat against the decay as he returned his coffee cup to its saucer" [12]), while reading a newspaper filled both with tales of Cherokee soldiers scalping Federal prisoners (12-13) and with dire warnings from the state to deserters and outliers. Jolted from his idyllic memories to the rude realities of the present, Inman muses:

> Anyone could be oracle for the random ways things fall against each other. It was simple enough to tell fortunes if a man dedicated

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myth of an idyllic town inside Cold Mountain [196-198] and the setting of Ada and Inman's reunion in a Cherokee village abandoned when its inhabitants were driven onto the Trail of Tears [306-344]).

> 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*. The way Inman saw it, if a thing like Fredericksburg was to be used as a marker of current position, then many years hence, at the rate we're going, we'll be eating one another raw. (16, emphasis mine)

The philosophical outlook to which Inman "dedicates" himself here is conspicuously Hesiodic – the view that all of time is, necessarily, a linear series of falls further into depravity. The form of Inman's pondering also accords with its classical model's (as it does with that of his previous Hesiodic allusion), with recognition of a depraved present giving way to forecast of an even more outrageous era to come. Even Inman's colorful prediction of man's cannibalistic future has classical precedent. Hesiod himself alludes briefly (though in a passage separate from his description of the ages of men) to the taboo against cannibalism: "For Zeus has established this law for men, that fish and beasts and winged fowl may eat one another, for there is no justice among them; but to mankind he gave justice, which is by far the best" (*WD* 276-280). Ovid, however, in his systematic elaboration of Hesiod's ages in the *Metamorphoses*, posits a direct link between cannibalism and decline of civilized values: his relatively standard catalogue of Iron Age depredations ("War brandishes its clashing arms with bloody hand. People live on plunder; guest is not safe from host, nor father from son-in-law, and regard among brothers turns scarce…And last of all the gods, the maiden Justice forsakes the blood-soaked earth") is followed first by an attack of Giants

on Jupiter's throne and then by Jupiter's angry resolve to destroy mankind and replace them with a newer race. The catalyst for the god's drastic decision has been Lycaon's attempt to trick him into eating human meat: "…with sword-point he cut the throat of a hostage…, cooked pieces of his flesh, still half-alive, in boiling water, roasted others over coals. But as soon as he set them before me on the table, with vindicating flame I dashed his house down around cupboard gods worthy of their master" (*Met*. 1.226-231). Though Lycaon does not quite eat men *raw*, his cannibalism – Ovid's emblem for the ultimate human barbarity – has informed Frazier's selection of an example of excess shocking enough to trump even the atrocities at Fredericksburg.

Hesiod's description of the deteriorating ages of man became a standard classical topic, rehearsed notably by the fourth-century Greek poet Aratus and probably through his mediation brought to Rome of the first century BC, where Virgil, Horace, Tibullus, and Ovid all took it up with gusto to decry the evils of technology (mining, the smelting of metal, navigation and commerce) and yearn for the honesty and simplicity of the Italian agricultural past. In the hands of these Augustan Romans, writing at a time when hope was glimmering that their city would emerge from fifty years of recurrent civil war, the pessimistic Hesiodic motif was transformed by addition of an apocalyptic element: the notion that the Golden Age can be restored, with a cyclic turn of the Iron Age. Virgil's fourth Eclogue added a second apocalyptic element (omitted in his successors): the appearance (akin to that in the Book of Isaiah) of a "Wonder-Child" whose birth

will usher in the new era.[11] Expressing and at the same time undercutting the hopefulness of this apocalyptic element is recurrent use of the *adynaton* ("impossibility"), the figure of speech that suggests that even the laws of nature will be improved in the new era.[12] With these modifications, the Golden-Age topic became a primary vehicle for Roman expression of "hopes for peace in time of crisis."[13] It represented, in Kirby Smith's words, "the antithesis of present discomfort, the vision of unfulfilled desire reflected on the screen of the past"[14] – its function "always to hold up a mirror to present malaises or to presage a future return to the idyll."[15] Frazier puts the topic to similar use and, in doing so, draws

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[11] For a compact discussion of this transformation, see Robert Coleman, *Vergil: Eclogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 29-30.

[12] Sample *adynata* from the Eclogue include "Unbidden, the goats will bring home their udders swollen with milk, and the herds will not fear great lions; unbidden, your cradle will pour forth sweet flowers to delight you" (*Ecl*. 4.21-23).

[13] Coleman (above, n. 7), 30.

[14] Kirby Flower Smith, *The Elegies of Albius Tibullus* (North Stratford, NH: Ayer Co. Publishers, 2001), originally published 1913 by the American Book Co., at 1.3.35-48; for detailed commentary on the topics nature and history, see his notes at 37-40, 41, and 45-46.

[15] Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, eds., *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edition revised (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), *ad loc*. The opposite world-view, the Epicurean view of human history as progress, works from an

not only from Hesiod's more resolutely pessimistic linear version of the trope, but also from its more optimistic cyclic variant – making conscious allusion (at minimum) to the two pertinent Virgilian loci and to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Ruby in Frazier's novel is cast as an *enfant sauvage*. Neglected and abandoned for months at a time by her father, she fended for herself from the time she was three, absorbed practical "grandmother knowledge" from "any old woman who would talk back," later "puzzled out in her own mind how the world's logic works" (106), and by the age of ten "knew all features of the mountains for twenty-five miles in any direction as intimately as a gardener would his bean rows" (85). It is she who undertakes to impart her homespun know-how and survival mentality to Ada, an elegantly-bred Charlestonian left alone on her mountain estate by father's death and servants' defection. Ada has been educated liberally but as "impractically for the demands of an exposed life" (22) as might be imagined. Under Ruby's tutelage, she will be prodded toward grueling physical labor, exhaustion, practical competence, and (as she says) a state of mind "somehow akin to contentment" (258). Given Ruby's advocacy of work, it is not surprising that, on several occasions, she serves as modern spokesman for Hesiod and his Roman descendants.

Ruby's belief that all tasks should be undertaken in "strict accordance with the signs" (104) is in the exact spirit of the "Days" portion of Hesiod's poem,

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image of a first age of men characterized by hard primitivism; a major proponent of this view is Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 5.925-1457.

which informs the would-be farmer not only of the correct seasons for each agricultural activity, but even of the particularly well- or ill-omened days for various mundane activities: "On the fourth day open a wine-jar" (*WD* 819). Ruby's plans are equally detailed: "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 and hang down" (104). The dismal consequences she predicts for any who disregard the signs are not dissimilar to those foreseen for unlucky planters by Hesiod: "But if you plough the divine earth at the solstice, you will reap sitting, achieving little with your hand, scarcely able to bind the sheaves, covered in dust, taking no pleasure" (*WD* 480-481). Although these echoes do not rise to the level of specific literary echo or allusion, there is similarity of ethic here – a shared ethic intentionally suggested by the later author.

Specific allusion does, however, appear in Ruby's expressed opinions of travel or commerce ("this business of carrying hats halfway around the world to sell"), however. She is deeply opposed to both:

> Her view was that a world properly put together would yield inhabitants so suited to their lives in their assigned place that they would have neither need nor wish to travel. No stagecoach or railway or steamship would be required; all such vehicles would lie idle. Folks would, out of utter contentment, choose to stay home since the failure to do so was patently the root of many ills, current and historic. (192)

Attribution of iniquity to vehicles of travel comprises direct, intentional recall of

the invective against navigation that became an integral part of Golden-Age figures in the Augustan period. In a follow-up passage to his ages of man, Hesiod says of just men, "Neither hunger nor ruin ever attend men who give right judgments; but in abundance they harvest the fields that have been their care. The earth bears them sustenance in plenty…They thrive always amid good things, and do not travel on ships, but the grain-giving earth bears them fruit" (*WD* 230-237).

Hesiod's Augustan successors build this sentiment into a motif of its own, recurrently inveighing against the hard hearts of those who drew the first pine tree down from the mountain top and hollowed it out for sea travel.[16] Ovid specifically points to the moral incompatibility of navigation and farming: "The pine had not yet been cut [in the Golden Age] and brought down from mountain home to flowing sea, to visit foreign lands, and men knew no shores except their own. Not yet were towns girt with moats and ditches…" (Ovid, *Met*. 1.94-100). Virgil, recasting Hesiod's didactic treatise on agricultural labor in his own *Georgics*, highlights this moral dichotomy when (in the tradition of Horace's *Satires*) he couples navigation with a host of other ills besetting urbanized, mercantile Rome. Unlike the farmer, he says,

> Some agitate the seas with oars, rush to swords, press into doorways and courts of kings. This one wreaks destruction on a city and its homes, so he may drink from jeweled cups and sleep

[16] Horace, *Odes* 1.3.9-12: "Oak and triple bronze encased the breast of the man who first entrusted fragile bark to savage sea"; cf. Virgil, *Ecl*. 4.32; Tibullus 1.3.37-38.

> on purple spreads; this one hoards riches and stands jealous guard over buried gold; that one gawks awe-struck at the Rostra…With relish they smear themselves with their brothers' blood…
> Meanwhile the farmer has furrowed the soil with curved plow; from this comes his year's work, from this he sustains his homeland and his little grandsons, his herds of cattle and his admirable bullocks. (Virgil, *Geo*. 2.503-515)

Virgil's agricultural world is exactly that idealized by Frazier throughout his novel, culminating in his three-page epilogue with multiple affinities to this precise section of the *Georgics* (see below). In the meantime, though, Ruby's comically xenophobic responses to French bonnets serve to bring the Golden-Age motif again to the fore.

The Golden-Age figure recurs again when Ruby forages through an icy mountainside for healing herbs to treat Stobrod's wounds. She finds several, but is unsuccessful in locating goldenseal (the gold standard of healing herbs),[17] at which point the author notes: "The herb had been scarce of late. Hard to find. She worried that people were proving themselves not worthy of healing and that goldenseal had departed in disgust" (304). The author wittily recasts a scientific phenomenon (ecological depletion through overuse) into mythological terms: the herb flees. The personification resident in the plant's conscious retreat from the criminality of men assimilates the herbal remedy to Hesiod's escaping goddesses

[17] Though the color of the metal in the herb's name may be accidental, it is not unpointed in this Hesiodic context.

and provides a clever variation on the Golden-Age theme. Its tone has been lowered to accord with Ruby's homespun style, and the pathetic fallacy borders on the comical; at first, the conceit may seem to merit only a wry smile and a footnote. In fact, though, this passage will prove a turning point of sorts in the novel, as the author proceeds from here to supplant Hesiod's linear view of ever-deteriorating generations of men with the more optimistic apocalyptic notion that the Golden Age can return, at least for some people, in some circumstances.

The Golden-Age topic, as previously noted, is based in the notion that human technology, despite its promise of progress, leads only to creation of new ways for men to assault and wrong one another. The Inman of the novel's opening chapter, scarred and burnt-out, is a natural proponent for this jaundiced view of unredeemed deterioration. As Inman's homeward trek nears completion, however, and especially when he is newly reunited with Ada, he increasingly entertains the daring thought that personal redemption may be possible (see, e.g., 314-315, 333, 334).[18] In the closing chapters of *Cold Mountain*, Frazier will ring many changes on the Golden-Age topic to enhance his theme that real happiness can be reached only through retreat from the "metallic face of the age" to the simplicity and harmony of an agricultural life where work and "the doing of it" (221) lead to a contented life. Indeed, the author underlines the thematic importance of work by excerpting the phrase "the doing of it" to stand as the

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[18] Brent Gibson, "*Cold Mountain* as Spiritual Quest" Inman's Redemptive Journey," *Christianity and Literature* 55 (2006), interprets Inman's redemption in Christian terms and makes an analogy to *Pilgrim's Progress*.

chapter title for Inman's encounter with the goatwoman, an eremite "root doctor" (215) who represents a life of harmony with nature.

The author signals the return of the Golden-Age theme by renewed reference to goldenseal. Ada and Inman, reunited and inching toward consummation of their relationship, have left their shelter in an abandoned Cherokee camp and gone out hunting and gathering. They find no wildlife, but they do come across "a stand of goldenseal," its leaves sticking out of the snow "on the lee side of a poplar so big through the trunk it would have taken five people holding hands in a circle to go around it" (337). It is an ancient tree, standing guard over a patch of the golden herbs that has as yet resisted any disgusted urge to flee this world for another. If we feel as if we have reverted to the forest primeval, we are right: this intuition is confirmed as the passage swoops back in time to an American stone age.

When Ada stands up again after digging up the goldenseal, her eye lights on an arrow buried in the poplar tree: "The wood was half rotted away, but still bound to the head with tight windings of sinew. Grey flint point, chipped in smooth scoops" (337). Inman and Ada fall to musings on its back-story: "A missed shot a hundred years back. Maybe more. Long ago"; Ada casts it, linearly, "as some relic, a piece of another world" – "an object already numbered among the things that were." Inman's thoughts, by contrast, quickly turn from its past to its future: "He described a future scene, he [*sic*] and Ada bent, grey as ash, bringing children to the tree in some metallic future world, the dominant features of which he could not even imagine" (338). Hidden in his prognostication of this

"metallic future world" is an off-whack variant of the Golden-Age topic.

The artefact in the tree is a relic of an American Stone Age, normally said to have pertained until European colonization of the continent, even longer among Native Americans. Its provenance, the author suggests, is a lapsed literary Golden Age, evoked here by that age's rough historical counterpart, the hunter-gatherer phase of a Stone Age. Though Ada is content to ruminate retrospectively on the linear progression from that age to the dramatic present, Inman immediately makes the conceptual leap implied by the Hesiodic topic, to wonder what the *next* age will bring, with its unimaginable dominant features, its as-yet-to-be-revealed "metal face." The question is indirectly posed: will the fifth age be progressively worse than the fourth (as Hesiod's linear view implies), or will time cycle back again to Gold?

The more hopeful answer is suggested by the presence of the children in Inman's vision, especially when the author continues his ponderings on them in the next paragraph: "He could not imagine whose they would be, but the children will stand entranced…" (338). The thought is odd: why would Inman not imagine the children he and Ada bring to the tree to be their own? He has already conjured up a grandchild, after all (315). The resulting twinge of anomaly suggests that something is happening here beyond the level of plot. What that is, I submit, is allusion to Virgil's *Eclogues* 4, where the apocalyptic return of the Golden Age was introduced into Hesiod's topic and linked with the appearance of a Wonder-Child of mysterious parentage. Indeed, attempts to pinpoint the identity of this child "under whom the iron brood shall first cease, and a golden race spring up

throughout the world" (*Ecl*. 4.8-9) has occupied classicists for centuries and will perennially. The perplexity expressed by Inman over the parentage of the children who will witness the coming age subtly injects Virgil's apocalypticism into the modern couple's examination of the buried arrow and prepares the reader to expect the cycling around again of the Golden Age on Cold Mountain.

When the Golden Age comes, however – and it makes an unmistakeable entrance onto the scene directly after Inman and Ada discover the flint arrowhead in the poplar – it does so in an idiosyncratically Frazierian form indebted more to the *Georgics* than to the *Eclogues*. The Golden Age of *Eclogues* 4 features easy living and a sudden onslaught of playful apocalyptic *adynata*:

> The earth will not feel the mattock, nor the vine the sickle; and the hardy plowman will free his oxen from the yoke. Wool will no longer learn to falsify its colors, but the ram itself shall exchange his fleece in the meadows, now for sweetly blushing purple, now for saffron yellow; of its own accord vermilion will cloak the feeding lambs. (*Ecl*. 4.40-45)

This pastoral Golden Age will thus be characterized not only by abundance, but also by such a fantastic perfection of leisure that humankind will no longer have to dye their coats; they will have only to pick one drawn from the correctly-colored sheep.

When Virgil switches genre, however, from bucolic to didactic – that is, when he turns from writing *Eclogues* to writing *Georgics* – he introduces two significant alterations into his topic. First, his new Golden Age is realistic and

work-driven, as we can readily see from his elaboration of Hesiod's image of plenty in the continuation of the *Georgics* passage quoted above:

> Meanwhile the farmer has furrowed the soil with curved plow; from this comes his year's work, from this he sustains his homeland and his little grandsons…There is no rest, but the season abounds with fruits, or increase of the herds, or sheaves of wheat, and it burdens the furrows and overtops the barns with produce. (*Geo*. 2.513 -518)

The second alteration is temporal, for in the *Georgics* Virgil has created an image of a Golden Age *within* the Iron Age, reserved to those who shun "the honors of the crowd, royal purple, … discord that spurs on treacherous brothers…" (*Geo*. 2.495-496), to pluck instead "what fruits his trees, his willing fields themselves have borne, of their own free will" (*Geo*. 2.500-501). The *original* Golden Age occurred at the beginning of time in a Saturnian era "even before the reign of Cretan Jove" (*Geo*. 2.535), but apparently whether one cycles back to the Golden Age or stays stuck in the Iron is now less a function of date of birth than of what in modern terms might be called a "lifestyle choice."

Virgil's didactic vision is the variant of the Golden-Age topic that most closely shapes Ruby's vision "of plenty and how to get there," shared by her with Ada through a map drawn in the dirt of their Indian hut. As in the *Georgics*, Ruby's version of paradise is work-driven:

> Trade for a team of mules. Reclaim the old fields from ragweed and sumac. Establish new vegetable gardens. Break a little more

> newground. Grow enough corn and wheat to suit their needs for bread. Enlarge the orchard. Build a proper can house and apple house. Years and years of work. (339)

So far, it sounds more like a Hesiodic Iron-Age reality than a Golden Age. Just as Hesiod envisions the salubrious effects of well-ordered work, though – your barns will be filled with food (*WD* 307), and "you will come to grey springtime still prosperous and will not have to look to others for help" (*WD* 477-478) – Ruby proceeds to enumerate the outcomes she foresees from her planned program. Having grown up hungry and foraging, and living now in straitened times, she imagines in loving detail a life of abundance:

> But they would one day see the fields standing high in summer with crops. Chickens pecking in the yard, cows grazing in the pasture, pigs foraging on the hillside mast. So many that they could have two bunches: bacon pigs, thin of leg and long of side; and ham pigs, close-coupled and stout, with their bellies swinging against the ground. Hams and bacon sides hanging thick in the smokehouse; a skillet good and greasy all the time on the stove top. Apples heaped in the apple house, jar after jar of vegetables rowed on shelves in the can house. Plenty. (339)

Ruby's vision is hopeful, but realistic: there is no place in it for fanciful *adynata* like those of Virgil's *Eclogues*. Rather, like Virgil in his *Georgics,* Ruby predicts the return of a Golden Age that is free from poverty and pain, but not from everyday toil. In fact, toil is its *sine qua non*, not simply a means to an end, but an

end in and of itself – for it is work that engenders virtue and contentment in humanity. Ruby, who has been introduced to the Greek classics by Ada's oral reading sessions, finds Penelope tedious and Odysseus an amusing reprobate (108), but she would have recognized a soul-mate in Hesiod. Change the name of Hesiod's addressee to "Ada," and Ruby might have voiced these sentiments in his stead: "But work, high-born Perses, ever mindful of my charge" (*WD* 298-299) – do not be like a drone, living off the work of others, "eating without working" (*WD* 303-306), for those who toil "are much dearer to the gods" (*WD* 309).

Frazier has already told us through the goatwoman that work and "the doing of it" are what keep men from "worrying too much" (221). They are also what keep men from succumbing to the allure of war, for it is "boredom with the repetition of the daily rounds that [makes men] take up weapons" (218). In espousing this theme, the author takes care to trace it back to its origins in classical didactic poetry, adducing both Hesiod's *Works and Days* and Virgil's *Georgics*, but ultimately mimicking the Virgilian conception not of linear deterioration but of a moral choice presented cyclically to men of all ages about how to live their lives.

By the time of the novel's Epilogue, set ten years into the future from the book's dramatic action, the state of plenty that Ruby has imagined will have come to fruition. Ada and her daughter, Ruby and her husband (the boy from Georgia), their three toddler sons, and Stobrod are celebrating autumn with a last picnic, feasting simply but amply on four chickens barbequed with hot peppers and

vinegar, "potato salad, corn, corn bread, string beans," and milk straight from the milking (354-355). They sing, dance, listen to Ada read aloud from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, then retire to bed to prepare for a morning that will "dawn as early and demanding as always" (356).

The peaceful contentment of the scene evokes the continuation of the *Georgics* passage quoted above, likewise set in autumn after the harvest. Now, as "he himself celebrates festal days" (*Geo*. 2.527), "his sweet children hang on his lips; his chaste house preserves its purity; his cows let droop their milky udders, and on the grass the fat kids tussle, horn to horn" (*Geo*. 2.523-526). The tableau of Frazier's Epilogue shares this passage's reference to the children, to the milking, and even to the tussling – though in Frazier, humorously, the fat kids who sport on the grass are not goats but Ruby's "stout" toddlers ("… Ruby worked them hard and played them hard. Despite the age difference, when they rolled around in the yard below the boxwoods, they looked alike as a litter of puppies" [354]). In case we were in any doubt about the chaste purity of Ada's house, the explicit Ovidian reference – Ada reads to them of Baucis and Philemon (*Met*. 8.616-724), emblems for piety to the gods and other men, and for finding Plenty in rustic poverty – implicitly adds that to the elements held in common between the ancient and modern passages.

Charles Frazier is a classically-attuned author who has drawn eclectically from archaic Greek and Augustan Latin models in crafting his story of war, love, and personal redemption in Civil War America. In his opening chapter, he adopts a Hesiodic motif expressive of a profoundly pessimistic view that human history

has been one long deterioration, and that all attempts at progress are doomed to bring only greater corruption. As the novel progresses, he continues to invoke the same motif on both serious and playful occasions. As his protagonist's physical and psychic homeward journey nears completion, though, he works into this gloomy motif the same "improvements" that Virgil and other Augustan poets had: the apocalyptic vision of a Golden Age that may return, bringing contentment in place of vain strivings and peace in place of war. So Frazier breaks loose from Hesiod's more resolutely negative moral stance and sets the scene for his protagonist's personal redemption. This redemption is effected by Ada but expressed most clearly in Inman's "bright dream of a home" while he lies dying in Ada's lap. This is an *adynaton*-laden vision in which all the seasons come around at once: "apple trees hanging heavy with fruit and yet unaccountably blooming" (445).[19] The keynote of Inman's redemption thus lies in the healing powers of connection to the land through physical toil that has been prefigured for Frazier most closely by Virgil in the *Georgics*, a work whose "primary purpose…was to enhance the dignity of labour."[20] Through these values, and regardless of Inman's death, Ada's estate in Black Cove becomes an *exemplum* of Golden-Age prosperity available to any Iron Age denizen who makes the moral choice to shun the *Eris* ("strife") that serves malignant, destructive ends and

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[19] Both Chitwood (above, n. 1, 242-243) and McDermott (above, n. 1, 122-123) have noted the Heraclitean nature of Inman's dream. It is a "single, unified continuum" (Chitwood, 242) made up of opposites in tension.

[20] Smith (above, n. 15), at 1.3.41.

embrace the one that, through the "sweat of our brows" (*WD* 289), leads to abundance and a life of contentment and simple virtue.