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Sample MonkeyNotes

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Cold Mountain

by

Charles Frazier

1997



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by D. L. Cassie

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The novel is set around the fictional town of Cold Mountain in the southern Appalachians. The town is analogous to the area around the present day Waynesville, North Carolina, which sits in the shadow of the 6000+ ft. Cold Mountain. The people in the story run their farms the old nineteenth

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Inman – He is a Confederate soldier who deserts from a hospital after being severely wounded. He walks toward Cold Mountain, his home that he loves, hoping that when he arrives the beautiful Ada will have him as her husband. He meets danger of every sort along the way.

Ada Monroe – She is a brilliant, Charleston society woman who finds herself helpless on her father's farm in Cold Mountain after her father's death. She has feelings toward Inman and awaits his return. With the help of Ruby she learns the ways of the land and begins to plan her future.

Ruby – She is a nature-wise young woman that helps Ada learn how to run the farm. Her mother is dead and her father did not take much care of her so she is fiercely capable and independent.

Cold Mountain – Though it may seem absurd to list the setting as a character, the mountains are a primary force in the novel. The other characters interact with the land and are influenced in their feelings and actions by the land as much as they are by any other character. This is particularly true for Inman who was.....

CONFLICT

Protagonist – The protagonist is Inman, around whom most of the struggle and action centers. *Cold Mountain* is about his journey home from the ravages of the Civil War. He can be compared to Homer's Odysseus as he meets trials along his way, wanting to return to his love. He longs for his.....

Antagonist – The antagonist of Inman is the series of dangers he must survive. These come in the form of man (most notably, Teague), animal and nature. There are multiple antagonistic situations rather than.....

Climax – The climax occurs when Inman, who has survived being hunted throughout his travels, finally reaches Ada and finds himself at gunpoint rather than in an embrace. The climax lingers as.....

Outcome – The climax ends in tragedy. After planning their life of married bliss, Inman dies in Ada's arms after being shot by a young follower of Teague. The tragic events unfold quickly as the.....

SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Cold Mountain is at once a Civil War story, a magnificent love story, and the story of two parallel odysseys. The first is the odyssey of Inman, a wounded, disillusioned Confederate soldier who has failed to die in the hospital. He deserts and begins a lonely, dangerous walk across the devastated southern Appalachians. The thought of being reunited with his beloved Ada helps him endure the perils that hinder his way. He meets rogues and outlaws, and survives Teague's Home Guard more than once. In addition, he survives severe weather, rugged terrain and a close encounter with a bear. Along the way he helps people whose lives have been destroyed by the war. In return, he is saved from starvation by what meager offerings they share.

The second is the odyssey of Ada, a cultured outsider to the mountains. Her father has died and left her helpless on the farm he bought as a pastime. Esco and Sally Swanger, Ada's closest neighbors, direct a drifter named

Ruby to Ada's farm to help. Ruby agrees to stay on with Ada provided Ada treats her as an equal rather than as a slave. With Ruby's knowledge of nature and self-sufficient attitude, the two.....

THEMES

The primary theme is the desire for home. For Inman it is a journey to the home he knows and remembers. For Ada it is a longing to find one's place and establish a home.

There are two other major themes. The first is endurance, without which the characters would

MOOD

The mood of *Cold Mountain* is one of struggle and melancholy. There is a sense of another world where, though the geography seems familiar, the times are unfamiliar and lives are tough. Everyday farm activities involve toil and sometimes pain. Inman's daily activities are fraught with.....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Charles Frazier was born in 1950. He grew up in the Blue Ridge Mountain area of the southern Appalachians. He has a PhD in English and taught literature at several universities. He has authored a variety of books and stories. His works include:

Developing Communications Skills for the Accounting Profession – co-written with Robert W. Ingram, a professor in USC's College of Business Administration

Adventuring the Andes – a travel guide

The Geography of Possibility: Man in the Landscape in Recent Western Fiction – Frazier's PhD dissertation

Licit Pursuits – a short story

Frazier turned back to writing in 1990 and his first novel, Cold Mountain, won the....

LITERARY / HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The main character, Inman, is based on Frazier's great uncle, W.P. Inman who fought in the Civil War in Virginia. He was wounded and left the hospital to walk 300 miles home to the mountains of North Carolina. Frazier researched archives and war records to develop a base for his Inman character. Also, the characters Pangle and Stobrod are based on two real people, a fiddler and a retarded boy, who were backed against a tree and shot by Home Guard. The two lie in a double grave that Frazier came across while walking in the Smoky Mountains.

The characters in the novel are unique because the southern Appalachians have a history that was shaped by the land. Most of the people there were Scotch-Irish immigrants living on land granted to.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES AND ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 1 *the shadow of a crow*

Summary

The chapter opens as Inman, a Confederate soldier, awakens in the hospital with a severe neck wound. It was expected that he would die in the field and was taken to a field hospital where he was again placed with the dying. Failing to die within two days he was sent to a regular hospital. Here, in a room full of wounded, Inman gazes out a tall window, a portal to thoughts of the past.

A memory of his school days comes to mind. On this particular day the young Inman was not paying attention and flipped his hat out of the window of the classroom. It landed far outside like *the shadow of a crow* at the edge of a field. The teacher told Inman to get the hat and come back to be paddled. Inman stepped outside, retrieved his hat and walked away from the school for good.

Throughout the summer Inman has spent much time gazing and reminiscing. He decides to go outside and talk with a blind peddler who he has seen daily parking his cart across the road from the hospital. Inman is surprised to learn that the man has been blind from birth rather than as the result of some misfortune. The blind man explains that it would have been worse to have been able to see the world and then lose that gift. The man does not wish for a chance to glimpse the world. He challenges Inman to cite a time when one would wish for blindness. Inman responds with a recounting of the gruesome slaughter of the battle of Fredericksburg.

Inman returns to the hospital and seeks comfort, as he has done many nights, in his book. He keeps the coverless book, Bartram's *Travels*, curled up into a scroll. The images of nature he reads therein calm him and bring thoughts of his home, Cold Mountain.

Days later, his neck painful but healing, Inman walks into town. He buys clothing, ammunition for his pistol, knives, and a small pot and cup. He sits with a cup of coffee and a newspaper and once again recalls pleasant events from his past. He writes a letter about coming home then returns to the hospital.

When he reaches his room, Inman sees that Balis, the man who occupied the bed next to Inman and spent time translating ancient Greek, is gone. Balis has died. Inman flips through Balis' papers only to discover a confusing mess. There is but one line of Balis' writing that Inman is willing to accept, "The comeliest order on earth is but a heap of random sweepings."

That evening Inman double-checks his packs which are already filled with food and makeshift camping gear. He goes to sleep but awakens during the night. He dresses in his new clothes, takes up his packs, and steps out the window.

Notes

Inman has imagined throughout the summer that the window in his ward could lead him to other places. He often visits these places in his mind. His memory of walking away from a whipping at school foreshadows Inman's intent to walk away from the carnage of the war.

The multi-page description of the battle at Fredericksburg not only exemplifies this carnage, but also personalizes the historic massacre and draws the reader into Inman's mind. We come to understand how men cope with such atrocities by losing a part of themselves, and how Inman pines this loss.

The tonic for Inman's brooding is the writing of William Bartram. The poetic descriptions of the profusion of natural beauty in the mountains eases Inman into recollections of the features of his home, Cold Mountain. Inman will carry this book on his journey.

Bartram's *Travels* is the first of several works from the Civil War era that Frazier incorporates into his novel. In future chapters we will see other works through the eyes of the characters, which add credibility to the time setting of the story.

CHAPTER 2 *the ground beneath her hands*

Summary

Here we meet Ada, the second main character, writing a letter. She lives alone and helpless on a farm in the village of Cold Mountain. She had come there six years earlier with her father, Monroe. He was ill and they moved to the mountains for “cool fresh air and exercise”. Monroe assumed the position as preacher at a small mountain church. Though it took some time for him to realize that the mountain people were not ignorant as he expected, he was eventually tolerated and then accepted by the community. He didn’t need to run his property as a real farm because he had money coming from his investments in Charleston. So it was that after Monroe’s death Ada was “frighteningly ill prepared in the craft of subsistence”.

Ada sees that the farm has been neglected but is powerless to remedy the problem. Not knowing how to tend the garden or keep chickens, she finds herself going hungry in the fullness of the growing season. She decides to go in search of eggs. Crawling under a bush where she remembered seeing a hen, Ada is hidden away. Though she finds no eggs, she finds childlike comfort in her shelter. When the hen, followed by a rooster, returns Ada is chased out of her sanctuary in the shrubs.

Scraped and dusty, Ada returns to the house, puts on somewhat clean clothes and sits down near a window to read. She finds the view of the landscape gloomy and misses the sights and sounds of Charleston.

Still hungry, she goes for a walk to visit her father’s grave and stop at the post office. She then takes a “shortcut” toward home to pass by the Swanger place hoping that they, her nearest neighbors, might offer her some dinner. The Swangers are an older couple, very familiar with mountain ways. Their sons are off to the war, which the Swangers are opposed to. Esco Swanger talks of the brutality of a man named Teague and his Home Guard, and the looting done by the Federals. He doesn’t understand the war and sees the devilry of both sides. Esco and Sally Swanger just want their boys “home and out hoeing the bottomland.”

The conversation changed to omens of a bad winter. From caterpillars to mules the forces of nature foretell the evils of the war fouling the mountains. Ada listens intently to Esco’s predictions. He explains that Ada could see her own future if she takes a mirror and looks backwards into a well. Ada tries this and thinks she sees the silhouette of a man walking. The experience dizzies her, but she tells the Swangers that she saw nothing. Sally gives Ada a crock of blackberry preserves and Ada is on her way.

Close to home Ada opens the letter from Monroe’s solicitor that she had picked up at the post office. The letter explains the hard times imposed by the war and their effects on Ada’s income. She could realistically expect nothing. When she reaches her farm she settles into her favorite corner next to a stone wall. She falls asleep reading and does not awaken until the middle of the night. She then eats the entire crock of preserves and walks back to the house.

Ada tries to consider her options. The times are too hard to expect to find a buyer for the farm. It would be humiliating to return to Charleston and be compelled to marry for support. As she sits wondering and confused, a girl approaches from the road.

The girl’s name is Ruby. Sally Swanger sent her. Ada sees that though Ruby is uneducated, she is bright and capable of farm tasks. She is there to help Ada, not as a hired hand, but as an equal, or in her words, “with both us knowing that everybody empties their own night jar.” Her first undertaking is to pull the head off the rooster that had chased Ada out of the bushes earlier and serve up a chicken and biscuit dinner.

Notes

Ada’s letter at the beginning of the chapter seems to answer the letter Inman wrote in Chapter 1. Though both letters are unsent, the reader gleans that Inman is coming home to Ada and Ada is waiting for him. Both

characters also have the view through a window to ponder. Ada's perception when gazing out of her window is a sharp contrast to Inman's window. It is difficult for Ada to like the fields and ridges of Cold Mountain whereas Inman sees in them home and comfort.

Brilliant and cultured in art and academics, but clueless to the ways of nature, Ada strikes a deal with the drifter, Ruby, her opposite, not only out of necessity but because of a feeling of happiness Ada feels with Ruby. Ada resolves that she must find her true self here in the mountains.

In this chapter Frazier brings reality to the setting with more 19th century literature. *Sword and Gown*, written by G.A. Lawrence a Southern sympathizer, George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, and a "troubling tale by Hawthorne" which we assume to be *The Scarlet Letter* are on Ada's reading list and underscore her crushed spirit. In addition, Ada's father twice quotes lines from Wordsworth that were likely influenced by Bartram's lyrical prose. These point to the mountains as the fundamental force behind the old life ways that Frazier elegizes in this novel.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Major Characters

Inman – Inman is a native of the Cold Mountain region. He loves his homeland. After meeting and falling in love with the beautiful, cultured Ada Monroe he enlists in the Confederate army. He is wounded in battle twice. The second, a neck wound, is expected to be fatal. Inman does not die but he has been changed by the horrors of the battlefield. He has no illusions about glory or patriotism and deserts the

Ada Monroe – Ada is a Charleston-raised socialite who is an anachronism on her deceased father's farm in the mountains. The war's new social and economic conditions have upended all that is familiar to her. She begins the story helpless and childlike, mostly due to her privileged and sheltered upbringing. She has no way of knowing that Inman is on his way home to her but wishes it were so. When Ruby.....

Ruby – Ruby is a drifter who comes to Ada and teaches her how to make a subsistence living from Ada's neglected land. Ruby is hard on the outside and fully capable of.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

Though the novel is a narrative, it borders on the expository in that there is no true dialogue. When characters communicate, it is largely through the author's explanation of what was said. Actual spoken words are offset from the text by dashes. No quotation marks or conventional indications of dialogue are used.

A linear storyline is not maintained. The narrative follows current events, and.....

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

The most outstanding theme is the desire for home. The entire story of Inman centers on this goal. When the landscape appears more like home, he is driven onward. When he thinks of being home with Ada, he perseveres. For Ada the desire for home is less physical. She is pursuing an.....

POINT OF VIEW

The point of view is that of limited omniscience, which alternates between the perspectives of Inman and Ada. As we see into the characters we find they each have a unique point of

Other Elements

COMPARISON WITH: *The Odyssey* of Homer

The story and characters of *Cold Mountain* have certain parallels to *The Odyssey* of Homer. Inman, like Odysseus is a soldier/warrior who is battle-fatigued and is trying to get home. Further, each obstacle, each rogue, encountered along the way teaches the wayfarer more about.....

QUOTATIONS - IMPORTANT QUOTES AND ANALYSIS

[Note: Page numbers are from the paperback, Vintage Contemporaries Edition, 1998.]

“It is difficult to believe in the dreadful but quiet war of organic beings, going on in the peaceful woods & smiling fields

-- Darwin, 1839 journal entry” (coverleaf)

This first of two quotes from the coverleaf describes the concept of survival of the fittest in nature. However in the context of *Cold Mountain*, “organic beings” can be expanded to include humans and what they must endure in a setting that would appear pastoral to

STUDY QUESTIONS / BOOK REPORT TOPICS

1. Why don't the Swangers take Ada in and/or take care of her?
2. Give examples where Native American or old life ways are presented as valuable.

What does this book say about the author's opinions of the Civil War?.....

In this study guide, we have tried to give an objective literary analysis based upon the information actually found in the novel, book, or play. In the end, however, it is an individual interpretation, but one that we feel can be readily supported by the information that is presented in the guide. In your course of literature study, you or your professor/teacher may come up with a different interpretation of the mood or the theme or the conflict. Your interpretation, if it can be logically supported with information contained within the piece of literature, is just as correct as ours; so is the interpretation of your teacher or professor.

Literature is simply not a black or white situation; instead, there are many gray areas that are open to varying analyses. Your task is to come up with your own analysis that you can logically defend. Hopefully, these booknotes will help you to accomplish that goal.

END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS

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