

MILLENNIAL MOUNTAINEER: THE RECONFIGURATION OF LITERARY  
APPALACHIA IN THE WORKS OF PINCKNEY BENEDICT, CHRIS OFFUTT, AND  
CHARLES FRAZIER

A Thesis  
by  
PAUL LESTER ROBERTSON

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APPROVED BY:

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Sandra L. Ballard  
Chairperson, Thesis Committee

---

Fred J. Hay  
Member, Thesis Committee

---

Thomas A. McGowan  
Member, Thesis Committee

---

James M. Ivory  
Chairperson, Department of English

---

Edelma D. Huntley  
Dean, Research and Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

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APPALACHIA IN THE WORKS OF PINCKNEY BENEDICT, CHRIS OFFUTT, AND  
CHARLES FRAZIER  
(December 2010)

Paul Lester Robertson, B.A., Virginia Commonwealth University

M.A., Appalachian State University (Appalachian Studies)

M.A., Appalachian State University (English)

Chairperson: Sandra Ballard

The specific focus of this thesis is on three novels emerging from what I argue is the latest period, or era, of “insider” Appalachian fiction: Pinckney Benedict's *Dogs of God* (1994), Chris Offutt's *The Good Brother* (1997), and Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* (1997). Significantly, these works *celebrate* (for lack of a better word) an untamed, violent, “backwards” (in the sense of refusing the dictates of mainstream American society) vision of the region. While this fictional vision has antecedents drawn from the several previous eras of Appalachian-themed fiction, Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier reinterpret and re-contextualize the very traits that provide a negative stereotype of the Appalachian region and its people. That is, they take the attributes that consistently define the “other” of mainstream American values: violent inclinations, refusal to embrace mainstream ideological/moral imperatives, and resistance to progress—and transform them into a positive, “heroic” or, more correctly,

“anti-heroic” vision of the region that proudly offers an almost militant counterpoint to their correspondingly negative vision of mainstream America. Such realignment of symbols confirms Anthony Harkins' point in *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*: “Although the hillbilly image has remained relatively unchanged, the meaning of these representations and the word itself have continuously evolved over the past century in response to broader social, economic, and cultural transformations in American society.”

In this “postmodern” age of shifting, composite identities, popular culture is experiencing a pronounced change in what it views as an ideal hero and an ideal world. Recent popular reinterpretations of the American hero emerging in film and print validate the positions of these Appalachian writers and their works within a larger American context. Such revision of what constitutes a literary (or cinematic) hero may help to explain the general popularity of such works as those examined here.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my grandmothers, Louise Ellis Robertson and Lois Updike McKee. I owe them a debt of gratitude for my upbringing that can never adequately be repaid. Also, this project would never have reached completion without the belief of my lovely wife, A. Simms Toomey.

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## I. Introduction

In the approximately 120 years since the appearance of a distinct Appalachian literature,<sup>1</sup> the region and its inhabitants have been used to exemplify several trends in the national consciousness. From the pathfinding frontiersman prototype of the Colonial and the Federal eras, through the rough outlines of the first fictional mountaineers contained in the semi-epic pastoral novels and short stories of the 1860s and '70s, to their emergence as fully fleshed protagonists in the 1880s, literary depictions of the region have engendered numerous interpretations and meanings in the national discourse.

“Appalachian” identity as a subject in American fiction spans several loosely defined literary periods. In his seminal work *The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction*, Cratis Williams locates the origins of the fictional mountaineer and his homeland in the Jacksonian period (roughly the 1830s). As Williams is quick to point out, such depictions are better viewed as proto-mountaineers, only marginally distinguishable from similar “old hunters, borderers, Indian fighters, backwoods villains, and rustics in buckskin” found up and down the American frontier dating back to the earliest colonial period (128). Furthermore, these proto-mountaineers are less primary characters and more “henchmen” assistants to the protagonists—the mountaineer is the scout, guide, and general facilitator “who attaches himself to distressed aristocracy” (109). In other words, despite his introduction to American

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction*, Cratis D. Williams places the first “full-length performances” of the mountaineer “in the early 1880s” with the literary output of Mary Noailles Murfree (128).

literature, the mountaineer is not a fully developed American character or archetype until the second half of the nineteenth century. And it is at this point that

the popular concept of the mountaineer, whose way of life became fixed in increasing poverty and ignorance at the same time life in the centers of culture was quickened by growing wealth and improvements in communications, crystallized into the stereotype reported by travelers and presented by novelists for the next generation. (Williams 124)

Williams attributes much of the interest in fictional mountaineers during this period to government attempts to combat the illegal moonshine trade of the region (125). Thus is born the popular interest in the not-necessarily ignoble criminality of the mountaineer and his region.

The mountaineer, according to Williams, could not emerge as a literary figure distinct from the frontiersman until the frontier itself had long since passed him by. Prior to this point, the two characters were practically indistinguishable. But elements that will characterize the fictional male mountaineer up until the present day are already gestating—his Celtic-ness (referred to, *ad nauseum*, as “Scotch-Irish” in this early literature), his “long, lean” appearance, and his “inexhaustible energy” (105). In Williams’s assessment, the antebellum mountaineer was of only the most marginal significance as a character in American literature of the period. At best, these individuals were perhaps seen as necessary workmen in the expansion of the national frontier. The earliest appearances of the mountaineer as a central character occur in travel narratives and “local color writing” beginning in the years immediately following the Civil War and continuing into the early twentieth century, a period of writing that according to Williams was most exemplified in the

work of Mary Noailles Murfree. Indeed, Williams posits Murfree as probably the single biggest influence on the sweep of Appalachian literature through the 1950s (152-53). Henry Shapiro goes even a step further by claiming that “Murfree’s *In the Tennessee Mountains* remained [in this era] the principal text used to understand the peculiarities of mountain life” (xv). This type of regionally focused literature was caused by “the standardization of American life that began with the rise of materialism following the Civil War” and “soon led to nostalgic interest in such eddies of the older rural individualism as could be found in the backwaters of our civilization” (Williams 135). In many of these works, the Southern mountains (not necessarily recognized as “Appalachia”) exist as an untrammelled wilderness, inhabited by the benighted “contemporary ancestors” of modern America who are either paragons of Anglo-Saxon genetic-purity, yet in need of the charity and social uplift provided by the organized Christian denominations of the lowlands, or potentially violent rubes with voyeuristic appeal to urban middle-class readers, or some variation of both (Williams 187, 194).<sup>2</sup> The authors of these works claimed expertise in depicting their subjects (Shapiro xiv). Williams also notes a turn-of-the-twentieth-century “stream of fiction about mountain boys ‘out in the big world’” and the “secure place” the mountaineer inhabited in “historical romance” (138, 151).

The violence-driven novels of contemporary Appalachian fiction examined in this study are in at least some aspects a throwback to this first era of local color writing, wherein “the fiction concentrated on the excitement and fear of the life of the mountain people—their

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<sup>2</sup> William Byrd II’s *The History of the Dividing Line* and Anne Newport Royall’s *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners in the United States* serve as examples of travel writing narratives in the Appalachian region. Mary Noailles Murfree’s *In the Tennessee Mountains* provides an example of local color writing. For a concise sampling of such genres, see *Voices from the Hills: Selected Readings of Southern Appalachia*, ed. Robert J. Higgs and Ambrose N. Manning (Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1996).

illicit distilling, fights, feuds, and romances” (Cook 12). The literary output of popular novelists John Fox, Jr. and Charles Neville Buck was characterized by “a strong diet of feuds” and “an examination of the relationship of Appalachia and America, and particularly of the opposition which seemed to lie at the heart of Appalachia’s otherness” (Williams 216; Shapiro 20).

Towards the middle of the twentieth century, fiction set in the Appalachian region consisted largely of the close knit family/community narratives, wherein the pastoral hardship of Appalachia provides an anvil for forging character. Williams described this fiction as a fusion of the “national trend” towards literary realism with “antiquarianism and increased emphasis on the folk quality of the Southern mountaineers” (335).<sup>3</sup> During the Depression, the mountaineer was briefly co-opted for the blatantly ideological proletarian novels of Olive Tilford Dargan and Grace Lumpkin, which focused on his degradation when funneled into the mills of the Piedmont (Williams 349-51). However, “mountain people themselves” begin to pen these works, such as James Still with *River of Earth* (1940) and Harriette Arnow with *Hunter’s Horn* (1954) (Williams 354). Then, in Appalachian fiction’s next chronological “phase,” the mountains transform into a sinister wasteland where the simple, yet stalwart mountaineer of an earlier century re-emerges as either an unreasoning, utterly regressed savage (James Dickey’s *Deliverance*) or as a tragic, Quasimodo-like pariah (Cormac McCarthy’s *Child of God*). At this point, however, the Appalachian character’s deficiencies and eccentricities and his disordered landscape stand in stark contrast to the broader expanse of American society: the attributes of “backwardness” and natural savagery are no longer dismissed with automatic prejudice.

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<sup>3</sup> Williams identifies the beginnings of these conventions in the (mostly) juvenile fiction of Mary and Stanley (Maristan) Chapman (336-42).

As Williams notes in the conclusion of *The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction*, post-World War II Appalachia “held a new fascination for writers who wished to emphasize ‘early American’ styles of living to their countrymen harassed with the demands of an industrial civilization and plagued with fears that civilization itself might collapse” (391). Thus, in at least one case, in the 1970s, the primitive lifestyle of the mountaineer is presented in an unqualified favorable way—Gurney Norman’s *Divine Right’s Trip*, in which Appalachia is reconceived as a damaged and exploited Eden, and her inhabitants are generous, loving people, living in communal relationship with their environment and each other, in dramatic contrast to the social fragmentation and confusion existing in characters from outside the region. The reverse side of the same coin occurs in James Dickey’s *Deliverance*, in which representatives of a soft, suburban America must come to grips with the challenges offered by both the Appalachian wilderness and the mountaineer and in the process inherit or reclaim the skills of such a mythic character.

In the final decades of the twentieth century, Appalachian literature synthesizes (in true postmodern fashion) all these previous elements to one degree or another. Works of romantic pastoral environmentalism (Barbara Kingsolver’s *Prodigal Summer*) exist alongside coal mining labor-related historical fiction (Denise Giardina’s *Storming Heaven*). But an important shift occurs in the number of contemporary published writers defining themselves as “Appalachian writers,” if not explicitly with that term, at least by accentuating a close, personal connection to the Appalachian region and its people to confirm the authenticity of their respective works. As interviews and personal writings show, Benedict, Frazier, and Offutt each claim this identity to varying degrees.<sup>4</sup> Essentially, 100-plus years of

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<sup>4</sup> Evidence of claims to an Appalachian identity by Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier appear in several interviews. See Douglass’ interview with Benedict, Palmer’s interview with Offutt, and Frazier’s own *Salon.com* hosted

Appalachian fiction as an identifiable literary category testifies to the evolution of that fiction from the province of “outsider” writers to “insider” writers. But while much of the motivations underlying outsider depictions of the region receive scholarly attention, as in the work of Shapiro, Williamson, and Harkins, the purposes behind “insider” regional representation have received far less critical treatment.

The specific focus of this thesis is on three 1990s novels emerging from this period, or era, of “insider” Appalachian fiction: Pinckney Benedict’s *Dogs of God* (1994), Chris Offutt’s *The Good Brother* (1997), and Charles Frazier’s *Cold Mountain* (1997). Significantly, these works *celebrate* (for lack of a better word) a vision of the region as a place that is untamed, violent, and “backwards” (in the sense of refusing the dictates of mainstream American society). This fictional vision has antecedents drawn from the several previous eras of Appalachian-themed fiction. Furthermore, Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier reinterpret and re-contextualize the very traits that provide a negative stereotype of the Appalachian region and its people. That is, they take the attributes that consistently define the “other” of mainstream American values: violent inclinations, refusal to embrace mainstream ideological/moral imperatives, and resistance to progress—and turn them into a positive, “heroic” or, more correctly, “anti-heroic” vision of the region that proudly offers an almost militant counterpoint to their correspondingly negative vision of mainstream America.<sup>5</sup> Such realignment of symbols confirms Anthony Harkins’s point in *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*: “Although the hillbilly image has remained relatively unchanged, the meaning of these representations and the word itself have continuously

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“Cold Mountain Diary.” For further discussions of personal regional identification by authors, see Holbrook’s “The Regional Claim.”

<sup>5</sup> “The highlander was also frequently in conflict with the standards and ideals of what might be somewhat nebulously called a lower middle-class culture” (Williams 210).

evolved over the past century in response to broader social, economic, and cultural transformations in American society” (3).

In this postmodern age of shifting, composite identities, popular culture is experiencing a pronounced change in what it views as an ideal hero and an ideal world. Recent popular reinterpretations of the American hero emerging in film and print validate the positions of these Appalachian writers and their works within a larger American context. Such revision of what constitutes a literary (or cinematic) hero may help to explain the general popularity of such works as those examined here.

### **The Literary Image of the Mountaineer**

Attempts at understanding the mountaineer’s place in the American consciousness are far from lacking. The “grandfather” of Appalachian Studies as an academic discipline, Cratis D. Williams, inaugurated such analysis with his exhaustive doctoral dissertation *The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction* (1961). Prior to Williams’s overview of the mountaineer in both literature and reality, the subject had received a modest degree of scholarly attention: Ruth Fretwell Lewis’s circa 1929 Master’s thesis “The Southern Mountaineer in Fiction,” John Angus McLeod’s 1930 Master’s thesis “The Southern Highlands in Prose Fiction,” and Carvel Collins 1944 dissertation “The Literary Tradition of the Southern Mountaineer, 1824-1900.” While each of these works can be considered a valuable early contribution, none approaches the exhaustive scope achieved by Williams. In his comprehensive sweep (of 1600+ pages), Williams covers the cultural perception of the Southern mountaineer starting with his antebellum “literary ancestors” through the Civil War, after which “the mountaineer becomes separated in fiction from the pioneer, the hunter, and the backwoodsman” (Williams 101). Williams’s thorough overview continues through

the travel writing and local color writing genres, up to roughly “the eve of the centennial of the Civil War” and the literary era of James Dickey and Cormac McCarthy and their depictions of the mountaineer as depraved backwoods savage (Williams 391). Although their work is beyond the time-frame of Williams’s study, he mentions a mountaineer precursor to characters found in the novels of Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier:

The feuds of the mountaineer and his struggle to reject values forced upon him by the invasion of capital with its attendant influences if he stayed in the mountains, or by values surrounding him if he migrated, lent themselves easily to manipulation by formula into the blood-and-thunder plot of the popular thriller that proved most remunerative to the skilled artificer.

(Williams 210)

Williams also identified the near-standard tropes of “mountain fiction” that arguably characterize even the most contemporary examples:

narrow religion, strange church customs, modal music, country dances and play parties, attitudes towards law, moonshining, feuds, superstitions, herb doctors, witchlike crones, sharp-tongued shrews, beautiful daughters, lack-wits, whittling loafers, delayed funerals, Alps-like foothills, valleys of criminals, courthouse battles between feudists, etc. (203-04)

### **Henry Shapiro**

Paralleling the content of Williams’s work, Henry D. Shapiro’s 1978 equally exhaustive dissertation-turned-book *Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness* sought to explicate, in specific detail, the role the Appalachian region and its inhabitants played in relation to a broader American society.



Perhaps even more importantly, Shapiro opened the theoretical door into the rationale behind fictional depictions of the mountains and mountaineers. He discusses at length the motivations behind the inextricably linked local color movement literature (as detailed above by Cratis Williams) and the home mission movement that sought to integrate an Appalachian population perceived as stagnated and unfavorably distinct into the monolithic United States national culture/society of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. Shapiro's repeated permutations of the "perception that the characteristics which set the mountain section of the South apart as a strange land inhabited by a peculiar people made Appalachia the opposite of America" is of central importance to my study (5).

### **J. W. Williamson**

In his 1995 study of hillbilly iconography in American cinema *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies*, scholar J. W. Williamson "extend[s] *Appalachia On Our Mind* into and through the pop culture that followed the period examined by Shapiro" (Williamson, "Remembering" 137). *Hillbillyland* invaluable defines six archetypes of the mountaineer outsider: the Fool (the "no-account" lazy "natural man" who never quite seems to grasp the dictates of civilization), the Frontiersman (the wild-man hunter who clears a path through the wilderness for the benefit of the very civilization he holds in contempt), the Social Bandit (the outlaw who fights righteously against civilization's oppressions, almost always to the death), the Good Old Boy (the contemporary popular culture merging of the Fool and the Social Bandit), and the Monster (the depraved enemy of society, who gives in to supposedly irresistible naturally inherent desires for sex and violence).

For the purposes of this study, Williamson's view of the hillbilly as social bandit is perhaps the most important. This is the archetypal construct chosen by this select group of authors—Benedict, Offutt, Frazier—as the foundation for their vision of the late twentieth-century Appalachian hero. Examples from Williamson's other character categories make appearances in the selected texts, but in subordinate roles to the primary social bandit hero. Furthermore, as detailed later, some of the more odious attributes formerly connected with the hillbilly stereotype are transferred onto the heroic mountaineer's numerous adversaries.

### **Anthony Harkins**

The most substantial recent work of scholarship concerning the hillbilly “icon” comes from Anthony Harkins. His *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (2004) seeks to integrate the scope of all the previous scholarship on the subject into one comprehensive volume. Additionally, Harkins takes the hillbilly and his social role up to the gates of the twenty-first century.

Of supreme interest here is the reality that precious few of these mountaineer portrayals, as discussed by Williams, Williamson, and Harkins, were produced by individuals who identified themselves with the Appalachian region. Writers like Mary Noailles Murfree, Will Allen Dromgoole, and John Fox, Jr. had only the most tenuous of personal connections to the region. Furthermore, these studies concern themselves first and foremost with what the *outside* (non-Appalachian) world attributes to the Appalachian region and its inhabitants, instead of considering this question: Why, exactly, do Appalachian writers choose to portray the region as they do?

With the very notable exceptions of Harriette Arnow, James Still, and Fred Chappell, few of the fiction writers prior to 1970 who took the Appalachian region as their subject

would associate their own identities with the area. The mountaineer remained an “other”—quite real they would argue, but kin to them in few ways. But to what symbolic uses do native Appalachian writers put their region when comparing it to a normative American identity? In what terms do native Appalachian writers couch Shapiro’s Appalachia versus America conflict?

### **Understanding America and the American: Richard Slotkin**

In his expansive 1973 book *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*, American culture scholar Richard Slotkin describes the archetypal American hero emerging from the Colonial years of our national history as a half-savage (Indian), half-European, or more specifically, a man possessing savage knowledge that he employs to protect and expand white European civilization: in other words, the very image of the nineteenth-century literary frontiersman and proto-mountaineer. As Slotkin confirms in his later (and equally impressive) book *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992), this American hero has mutated into the more modern image of the cowboy – rough hewn around the edges and possessing immense “natural knowledge,” yet still the embodiment of European-derived chivalry and ideological subscriber to the demands of “progress” and subjugation. In Slotkin’s description of this continuing myth of the American frontier, the American hero “defin[es] national aspirations in terms of so many bears destroyed, so much land preempted, so many trees hacked down, so many Indians and Mexicans dead in the dust” (*Regeneration* 5).

Equally important for the scope of this thesis is the further association Slotkin sees in the American Indian (or more correctly, the idea of the American Indian) as the embodiment of enmity to the ideals of mainstream “white” America. As the subtitle of *Gunfighter Nation*

implies, the Cowboy versus Indian paradigm remains in full-force within the national consciousness well into the present day.

### **Why Appalachia?**

As many studies of the media representations of Appalachia attest, the archetypical hillbilly and his highland home have supposedly resisted mainstream American acculturation since both were left behind in the wake of America's Manifest Destiny western expansion. For over a hundred years, since the very inception of the distinct hillbilly image, Southern mountaineer obstinacy in the face of the supposedly bounteous rewards of American citizenship has been looked upon as a deficiency—intellectually, morally, and/or genetically. But as questions of American society's moral sanctity were thrust more and more into the social discourse (as a result of political flashpoints like Vietnam, Watergate, and the persisting trickle-down economic ideology of Reaganomics), a figure and region that had for so long resisted, rebelled against, or ignored the dictates of such a society is well-placed to serve as an appealing, subversive rallying point for political progressives.

Many Appalachian scholars have decried this “exceptionalism” that idealizes the Appalachian-as-noble-savage identity, for example Jim Wayne Miller's “New Generation of Savages Sighted in West Virginia.” However, they fail to place these creations in their proper, broader context. While there is very likely an element of truth to the contention that authors like Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier are playing out their own middle-class masculine fantasies,<sup>6</sup> the probability that mainstream, middle-class American society over the past 30

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<sup>6</sup> This idea was posited in a personal conversation with J. W. Williamson and later confirmed by Pinckney Benedict himself in the radio interview for *In Their Own Country*.

years has no doubt exhibited a parallel craving for such symbols of defiance—Appalachian or otherwise—is difficult to discount.

In detailing an almost mythical confrontation between Appalachia and the authors' conceptions of a broader American society, Pinckney Benedict's *Dogs of God*, Chris Offutt's *The Good Brother*, and Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* offer a point of divergence from previous Appalachian literature (or the perceptions thereof) and further emphasize the emergence of a new era in Appalachian literature. Gurney Norman has stated that "most Appalachian fiction has wanted to depict ...the specific and concrete world of everyday people and local places" ("Frankenstein," 94). Furthermore, historian John Alexander Williams has described Appalachian literature as "a movement anchored in rather old-fashioned narrative realism" (*History* 18). In contrast to these assertions, these three contemporary Appalachian works include intense action and external conflict frequently played out against the background of a wider social upheaval. The deep, day-to-day subsistence struggles in older works like James Still's *River of Earth*, Harriette Arnow's *Hunter's Horn*, or Lee Smith's *Fair and Tender Ladies* lack depictions of the fierce physical and psychological violence characteristic of the novels of Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier. Violent external conflict and a degree of internal psychological struggle are necessary as the Appalachian hero contends with outside forces—it is through these avenues that his distinctions and differences from a broader hegemonic American society come to the fore. In many ways, it is his reactions to violence and conflict that define the modern mountaineer protagonist.

John Alexander Williams states that "in the new terrain of globalized market capitalism, the combination of exploitation and per/re-sistance, of crises and renewal, that

Appalachian history manifests may turn out to be instructive to every dweller in the postmodern world” (*History* 18). This statement applies in similar measure to Appalachian literature. *Dogs of God*, *The Good Brother*, and *Cold Mountain* in many ways depict exactly this struggle. The protagonists of these novels, and in some respects the natural environment of the region itself, do combat with these very forces of economic exploitation. Indeed, the persistence and resistance that Williams mentions are the very hallmarks of these literary works.

### **Variant of American hero emerging/what Appalachia represents**

As Slotkin’s *Gunfighter Nation* reveals, protagonists strikingly similar to those presented in the novels of Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier are not exceptionally Appalachian; in the post-Vietnam era which Slotkin labels as “Revisionist Western,” cynical, stoic, non-ideological<sup>7</sup> heroes are appearing in numerous environmental and situational contexts: Chuck Palahniuk’s 1996 novel *Fight Club* and the subsequent film adaptation, the off-shore “Spaghetti Westerns” of the 1960s and ‘70s, the *Mad Max/Road Warrior* film series of the 1980s, and the musical phenomenon of urban gangster rap in the 1990s are only a few superficially disparate examples of this mythically idealized desire for resistance and rebellion (violent if necessary) evinced by fictional and quasi-fictional representatives of justifiably disgruntled populations in American society. And the mountaineer has become a prime character in this societal rebellion.

The Appalachian heroes of Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier—Goody, Virgil, and Inman, respectively—are in many ways related to two heroic (or more appropriately, anti-heroic)

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<sup>7</sup> A better description of these characters might be “non-aligned,” as they have no allegiance to anything besides themselves and/or their immediate community.

trends in popular American media consciousness: the hard-bitten, anti-ideological frontier/western outlaw and the post-Apocalyptic outland survivalist.

Pinckney Benedict's *Dogs of God*, Chris Offutt's *The Good Brother*, and Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* also stand out as posited "insider" representations of Appalachia. What does Appalachia mean to these authors? What are their individual visions of Appalachia? What are the similarities in these visions? What are they attempting to say about the region and America at large? Why are the central male characters—Goody, Virgil, and Inman—constructed the way they are? What kind of broader meaning can be discerned from their attitudes and behavior? How do these characters compare and contrast with characters in earlier Appalachian fiction? Through these characters, what comments are these novelists making about manhood? How are the old degenerative stereotypes of the past being reinterpreted in these novels? What are these novels saying about the broader American society? Particular attention should go to their creation of a heroic male identity, especially how that identity is built on a "negative" stereotype of the Appalachian male as a "hard, isolate, stoic...killer" (a description from D. H. Lawrence used to describe the "essential American soul").<sup>8</sup> These questions are the ones this study will address....

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<sup>8</sup> From *Studies in Classic American Literature*. The full quotation was used as the epigram to Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence*.

## II. Appalachian Apache:

### The Mountaineer as the New American Indian

*“He had absolutely no regard for human life. I believe he was a cowboy.”*

*-Lance Corporal of Horse Steven Gerrard, describing the friendly-fire  
attack of his British army convoy by an American aviator,*

*“Wounded British...,” Guardian Unlimited, March 31, 2003*

*“We have Indians at home [the British Isles]...Indians in Cornwall, Indians in Wales,  
Indians in Ireland.”*

*-Roger Williams, “quot[ing] an eminent person,” 1652*

#### Introduction

If *Dogs of God*, *The Good Brother*, and *Cold Mountain* seek to portray Appalachia and a mountaineer hero as actively resisting “the standards and ideals of what might be somewhat nebulously called a lower middle-class [American] culture,” then certain symbols are necessary to represent the opposing sides in such a conflict (Williamson 210). In *Appalachia on Our Mind*, Henry Shapiro noted that in some of the earliest Appalachian-themed fiction—in which the idea of a progressive, homogeneous national culture was often in conflict with the idea of Appalachia and the mountaineer—there existed a “tension, characteristically expressed in the relationship between emblematic characters” (69). In similar fashion, a close examination of these three novels reveals the authors’ view of a conflict best couched in terms of hegemonic versus aboriginal—or even more simply and



with a better cultural resonance for contemporary America, “Cowboys” versus “Indians,” the symbolic manifestation that Richard Slotkin refers to as “the fatal opposition, the hostility between two worlds, two races, two realms of thought and feeling” (*Regeneration* 17). Benedict and Offutt (and in a more subtle manner, Frazier) embody the spirit of outside conquest which threatens Appalachia and/or the mountaineer as the consummate icon of the aforementioned “lower middle-class culture” American mainstream—the Western cowboy and the “structures of domination and control” that he represents (Tompkins 122). The trope of the “Wild West”<sup>9</sup> versus Appalachia actually appears relatively early in the formation of Appalachian literature. In Will Allen Dromgoole’s 1898 short story “Cinch,” “a mountaineer . . . corrupted by eight years of life in Texas” is “driven . . . from the mountains” after attempting a moral transgression against his former neighbors (Williams 189).<sup>10</sup> Only a few years later, John Fox, Jr. in *A Cumberland Vendetta* uses the West as a place of exile for the mountaineer (Williams 215). Indeed, Williams notes that in reality “feud leaders [of Appalachia] frequently ‘went West’” like so many Huckleberry Finns in search of new beginnings free from the encroachments of Eastern civilization (243).

The genetic and cultural co-mingling of the mountaineer and the American Indian has been acknowledged for some time. Cratis Williams recognized the connections between white mountaineers and American Indians, despite the frequent depictions of conflict between the two groups in early frontier fiction:

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<sup>9</sup> By “Wild West,” I mean the popular image of the Plains/Desert West born of dime novels and cinema.

<sup>10</sup> It is imperative to note that the “corrupted” mountaineer recently returned from Texas would not be a villain by contemporary standards. He merely wants to liberate his cousin’s wife from a psychologically and physically abusive marriage, albeit in a deceptive manner. But regardless of good intentions, to attempt the disruption of a marriage, no matter how dysfunctional, unequivocally transgresses the moral code of Dromgoole’s Appalachia.

Mountain families descended from mixed marriages are known to be proud of their Indian ancestry today, and though few novelists have identified Indian ancestry in their subjects it would seem from the meager evidence available that descendents of the mixed marriages of pioneer days have become amalgamated with the predominately Scotch-Irish character of the people.

(107)

The mountaineer and the American Indian (in addition to other minority groups) were clumped together for political purposes by Home Mission Boards during the late nineteenth century (Shapiro 41-42). Like other minority groups, they were viewed as sufficiently separated from mainstream national dictates as to require special benevolent attention.

The heroes created in *Dogs of God*, *The Good Brother*, and *Cold Mountain* bear little resemblance to their cowboy cousins, although at one point the mountaineers and cowboys “were basically similar types,” and “When it came to fondness for violence, a fierce independence, lack of education, a love of the outdoors—and many other characteristics—there was little to choose between the two” (Munn 13). Instead, they are examples of Appalachian manhood who are more akin to the Indian side of their mythic ancestry. The appearance of the mountaineer hero on the literary scene and in the popular imagination symbolizes either a sort of nostalgic “moving back” tendency or a defiant “staying put” determination: “mountaineers ... opted out of the true frontier mentality of domination and submission when they chose to stay in the mountains” (Cunningham 98). Simultaneously, popular country music performers—the icons of rural America in popular culture—have used “cowboy identification ... to deny or avoid the taint of hillbilly culture” (Malone 132).

The Western Cowboy is essentially our national figurehead—representative of American culture in both domestic and international perception, “*the classic American folk hero*” (Munn 13, emphasis original).<sup>11</sup> For instance, the National Football League’s Dallas Cowboys proudly flaunt their status as “America’s Team.” However, the Western cowboy is not a universally accepted favorable image: to more “progressive” elements in American society and abroad (those that stand in opposition to American economic dictates and expansive foreign policy), the American cowboy is now the craven, unmanly, and exploitative mascot of the industrialist, bureaucrat, and banker—supplanting the 1950s frontiersman as “projections of the national male purpose and its intent to take this continent and hold it and make it turn a profit” (Williamson 90). Readers can consider, for example, the use of the term “cowboy diplomacy” to describe disparagingly the unsubtle, unilateral approach to international relations characteristic of George W. Bush’s presidential tenure. The popular image of the cowboy (specifically the one cultivated by the Nashville music industry) now drives an expensive vehicle (likely an SUV or full-size four-by-four pickup), owns large tracts of land, amasses great wealth, and even enters the domain of politics—the aforementioned George W. Bush, perhaps the most controversial and polarizing president in recent historical memory, wears cowboy boots and emphasizes his Texas origins (despite the reality of his family’s carpetbagger pedigree). Emphasizing the negative connotations of the image—particularly from the international perspective—a British soldier, speaking of a horrendous “friendly fire” incident that occurred in the 2003 Iraq War, referred (with obvious derision) to the American aviator that strafed his vehicle in the following terms: “he had

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<sup>11</sup> See also Robert Scholes, quoted in Cunningham, who “attributes traditional ‘American’ expansiveness to a ‘prairie consciousness,’ a mentality conditioned by the absence of limits [mountains] on the liberal horizon; while side by side with this exists a mountain consciousness, more aware of limitations” (95).

absolutely no regard for human life. I believe he was a *cowboy*” (“Wounded...,” *Guardian* 2003, emphasis mine).

With the “cowboy” seen in contemporary times as the embodiment of negative characteristics associated with American hegemony—individualist consumerism, environmental subjugation, and willful ignorance of an interdependent human existence—progressive readers in the new millennium therefore crave the emergence of a hero from “outside” the dictates of modern, industrialized society, someone born of a mythical wilderness and intent on reclaiming its prerogatives. Formerly the “Wild West” was the place of mystery and freedom. But the American West has been subdued, “won,” and “tamed.” The original “noble savage,” the American Indian, is now confined to the reality of the reservation and the glory of stereotypical renderings on Franklin Mint chinaware.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, only a precious few embellished ethnic/cultural areas persist in exciting the imagination, areas that exist outside the middle-class perception of civilization; the hinterlands of Southern Appalachia is one of these.<sup>13</sup> Where else in this day and time could a hero and a way of life that reject a dependence on the trappings of modern life come from?

According to Slotkin’s thesis on the development of an American literary hero, the Old World European (not “American”) and the New World Savage (the Indian) combine, a “physical and spiritual miscegenation of bloods and spirits” producing “monstrous offspring of an unholy marriage between European and Indian” constituting a “‘bad people’...described not as half-Americans but as a blend of the Indian and the European”

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<sup>12</sup> “And it was precisely with the final effective removal of [American Indians] (though this was heartily collaborated in by the mountaineers themselves) that Appalachian identity as such began to take shape” (Cunningham 98).

<sup>13</sup> “Thus, as ‘the West’ literally closed in on them, Appalachians began falling prey to the fate they had helped impose on their Indian predecessors. Like the latter, they became stigmatized or sentimentalized as ‘children of Nature’” (Cunningham 106). See also Cunningham 134 for an association of dominant culture “paternalism” with both Indians and Appalachians.

(*Regeneration* 120, 262). Shapiro similarly noted that when Appalachian feuds of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became popular national news topics, mainstream American society passed a similar judgment, “identif[ying]...the more violent aspects of mountain life as European rather than American in origin” (106). Just as importantly, the specific European genetic and cultural stock supposedly possessed by these backwoodsmen was equally important in delineating them as noble savages. The mountaineer was not the descendent of effete southeast England burgers and their alleged Puritan descendants, but instead the product of “Borderer” or “Celtic” blood according to several sociological works such as David Fischer’s *Albion’s Seed* and Grady McWhiney’s *Cracker Culture*. In *Apples on the Flood*, literary critic Rodger Cunningham goes a step further in associating the Celto-Appalachian with the subaltern: “The ‘Celtic’ nations of western Europe are, of course, oppressed and exploited in various ways, as is Appalachia...” (xv). Thus, in both fiction and academic argument, the savage, free-spirited American Indian mingled with his Gaelic cultural doppelgänger and was supplanted in the upland wilderness of the southeastern United States by their progeny.<sup>14</sup> And according to Shapiro, by the first decades of the twentieth century, the mountaineers were firmly established in the popular consciousness “as a distinct ‘subrace’ of the American population” (186). The frontier archetype created by the cultural miscegenation of European frontiersman with American Indian produced the mountaineer hero, the (Off) White Indian who would later supplant both cultural ancestors in visions (both negative and positive) of the Appalachian region: “As the Native Americans were overpowered and displaced, they were increasingly depicted as pathetic, capricious, and

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<sup>14</sup> Cunningham also notes that such a connection exists on the opposite side of the Atlantic down to the present day, where “The parallel between ‘wild’ Irish [Celts] and ‘wild’ Indians has often been made—even, in naïve enthusiasm, by modern Ulsterman [British Unionists]” (72). To further the dichotomous connection, David A. Wilson discusses the latter group’s affinity for country music in “Ulster Loyalism and Country Music, 1969-85.”

stupid—characteristics which the brave pioneer-backwoodsmen were soon to inherit (Helen Lewis 5).<sup>15</sup> Cunningham is even more explicit, noting that the mountaineers’ “stereotyped image now took on the essential features of their dark twins, the Indians” and that “The Indian ‘threat,’ physical and psychological, to ‘America’ having finally been neutralized at Wounded Knee in the final days of 1890, ‘America’ was on the lookout for another barbarism [and therefore, barbarian] to subdue” (xxv; 107)—and that barbarian is the mountaineer.<sup>16</sup>

According to sociologist Helen Lewis, “backwoodsmen and Indians became cowboys and Indians” (5). Although referring to the westward push of American expansion, in which the cowboy took over the frontiersman’s independent pathfinding role in the popular imagination, Lewis’s statement just as easily (if unintentionally) applies to the current conflict detailed here. After the genuine Indian was subjugated and shipped westward “beyond the Pale”<sup>17</sup> both literally and allegorically, a ready replacement as counterpoint to the ideal American was found in the Appalachian-as-outsider stereotype. To the “cowboy” spirit of Manifest Destiny, the backward, recalcitrant Appalachian hillbilly became as troublesome (and frequently as menacing) as the Indian—a cultural insurgent on his “island of resources or mystery” (Helen Lewis 5). From the final decade of the nineteenth century through the middle decades of the twentieth century, to many Americans the Appalachian-as-outsider problem was as frustrating and bothersome as the Indian one of a century earlier;

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<sup>15</sup> In her 2002 thesis, Britt T. Long noted the same trend: “The grounds on which mountain people were declared uncivilized and continue to be looked at somewhat askance are many of the same grounds on which Indians were so regarded” (89).

<sup>16</sup> Cunningham’s full argument for the supplanting of the Indian by the Mountaineer in the Industrial American consciousness is elaborated in detail on page 107 of *Apples on the Flood*.

<sup>17</sup> “Beyond the pale” originally referred to the area of Ireland outside Anglo control and therefore populated by the Gaelic Irish “savages,” with the word “pale” meaning a border or boundary (“English pale”). I have been fascinated by the double entendre the phrase now implies—as in outside the realm of paleness—of the racialized-as-white American Middle Class.

only by virtue of his white skin and nominal Protestant Christianity was the mountaineer likely spared the same overt oppression and societal disdain characteristic of mainstream, middle-class America's attitudes towards the other members of what Shapiro repeatedly refers to as "the exceptional populations of America"—Blacks, American Indians, Mexicans, Catholic Irish, and Mediterranean immigrants. Nonetheless, eminent Appalachian scholar David Whisnant derisively refers to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the government agency charged with Federally-sponsored economic improvements in the region, as "a new Bureau of Indian Affairs" (130). Instead, numerous well-meaning educators and philanthropists laid a virtual cultural siege to the region, attempting to convert and uplift what they imagined as the "peculiar" yet virile and culturally pure mountaineers.<sup>18</sup>

As the politically radical spirit of the 1960s culminated in the full-fledged counter-culture "hippie" movement, which openly questioned the century-old agenda of the expansive, American "cowboy" ideal, symbols of cultural resistance were sought in marginalized groups both within and without the United States. Domestically, African-Americans and American Indians emerged as rallying points for counter-culture resistance to mainstream America: "At least since 1966, Native Americans and their culture had become important symbols of rebellion in the so-called 'counter-culture' of college-age White Americans" in much the same way as Enlightenment Europeans two centuries earlier were taken with "the fashionable notion of the good savage" representing "the natural nobility of man" (Slotkin, *Gunfighter* 590; *Regeneration* 235). As Armando Jose Prats points out in *Invisible Natives*, "the cynosure of the American rebel ... his ways held the promise of a free

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<sup>18</sup> "He [William Goodell Frost] noted that the isolation of the mountaineers from modern civilization meant that they had been uncorrupted by the 'lackadaisical effeminacy' which seemed to accompany modern civilization. He suggested that the mountaineers ... stood ready to enter the American population as a saving remnant ... 'to offset some of the undesirable foreign populations'" (Shapiro 120).

and joyous alternative to ... ‘sivilizing’ ways. The Indian remains the white man’s source of the wisdom denied to him by American civilization” (126). Slotkin affirms an almost identical sentiment in *Gunfighter Nation* by describing the “White agenda of cultural revision which once again construed Native Americans as ‘the Other,’ the opposite or negation of Anglo-American culture—only now that difference was seen as healthy opposition to a sick society” (630). Insurgent challenges to American dominance, like the Vietnam War, the domestic proliferation of militant leftist radicals in the 1960s and ’70s, and the American Indian Movement (AIM) takeover of Wounded Knee, became celebrated counter-cultural rallying points. In the search for images of resistance to the black suit, black-tie, white shirt Great Society, it was only a matter of time before the benighted Appalachian mountaineer, as cultural and even racial successor to the American Indian, was uncovered and put to use as a symbol of resistance to mainstream American values.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, we could argue that the placement of the mountaineer in such company is not particularly surprising. Instead, it is an instance of subversive contemporary Appalachian authors reclaiming and reconfiguring existing literary conceits about the mountaineer.

A watershed event in the formulation of Appalachia and the Appalachian as symbols of cultural resistance occurred with the 1971 publication of Gurney Norman’s novel *Divine Right’s Trip: A Novel of the Counterculture*. Norman himself claimed identity as both Appalachian and counter-cultural hippie, and within his novel occurs perhaps the first explicit instance in which the paradigm of the West and Westerner (cowboy) is set somewhat

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<sup>19</sup> Cunningham refers to the contemporary mountaineer as “the stereotypic *substitute* for the Indian in ‘enlightened’ consciousness” (115). In the context of the larger passage, “enlightened” clearly refers to modern, liberal, industrialized society. However, I cannot resist the subtle implication that the term could also refer to counter-culturalists and their pursuit of a higher consciousness—even if that was not Cunningham’s intent.



unflatteringly against a representation of the Appalachian region.<sup>20</sup> The novel's main character, David Ray Davenport, embarks on a symbolic reversal of America's westward expansion—a drug-saturated journey from California (the symbolic seat of 1960s hippie resistance) back to his birthplace in eastern Kentucky. Early in the novel, David Ray must contend with the very image of American expansion—the Lone Outdoorsman, a self-appointed militant protector of “westward settlement and civilization in general” (25). The Lone Outdoorsman's “Western” credentials only multiply from there: his grandfather “helped settle the place” (Phoenix, Arizona), which involved the apprehension of “Proud Person, the Apache renegade” (34). While sharing the same campground, The Lone Outdoorsman coerces David Ray and his romantic companion Estelle into viewing the hackneyed, pioneer-themed television serial *Westward, Westward*. In the course of this scene, the Lone Outdoorsman explains how his grandfather “and the others *took the country, and turned it into America*” (41, emphasis mine). Later, after returning to Kentucky, David Ray “rediscovers” his Appalachian roots. The interaction of his hippie friends and mountain neighbors in the novel's wedding epilogue reveal the overwhelming similarities in his by-choice cultural affiliation and his by-birth cultural foundation:

The Captain...recorded Maybeline Monday from the Organic Sunflower Commune in California, telling Mrs. Jennings of Jennings Branch that she was doing her own weaving now. And making quilts, and canning her own vegetables.

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<sup>20</sup> As mentioned earlier in the Introduction, Dromgoole's “Cinch” depicted a supposedly “corrupted” mountaineer returning from Texas to violate the mores of his East Tennessee birthplace. The corruption of this prodigal mountaineer is only problematic within the plot of the story and does not seem an adequate indictment of the “West” as a concept.

“We live in a commune, on the land, you see. We’re opposed to the nuclear family.”

“Lord, child,” said Mrs. Jennings. “I’ve been weaving since I was nine years old. And ever quilt in our old house is handmade. I had thirteen brothers and sisters, and then nine younguns of my own. We all live over yonder on Jennings Branch, you ought to come see us before you leave.”

(298)

At the novel’s conclusion, after David Ray is *literally* married to his girlfriend Estelle and the counterculture is *allegorically* wed to traditional Appalachia, he sets up residence in his ancestral eastern Kentucky home, determined (with immense symbolism) to “reclaim” the land from the ravages of industrial exploitation—essentially taking back a piece of that which the Lone Outdoorsman and his ancestors had forcibly taken.<sup>21</sup>

In their respective novels, Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier follow a similar route in associating their fictional Appalachian characters, and the region they inhabit, with behavior and values that oppose those of mainstream, commercialized, capitalistic America. These writers use American Indians, who have literary currency, as Slotkin points out, as “morally superior alternative[s] to ‘civilization’” and as “embodiments of a set of *alternative* values” (*Gunfighter* 629, emphasis original). While Benedict resorts to more complex allegories in establishing the subversive credentials of the region and its denizens, Offutt and Frazier choose to establish fairly direct parallels between their main characters and actual American Indians by having their characters physically and psychologically interact with American

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<sup>21</sup>In a 1978 essay, Rich Kirby succinctly notes the reality imagined by Norman: “A fair number of kids have decided (not unreasonably) that the Appalachian Region is Paradise Lost; this fact has given West Virginia a fair number of communes and short-lived organic restaurants” (242).

Indians or by having them resort to behavior stereotypically associated with American Indians (or a combination of both).

Although absent from *Dogs of God*, a belief in distinctly “Celtic origins” for Appalachia’s white population subtly appears in both *The Good Brother* and *Cold Mountain*, illustrating the conventions analyzed by Cratis Williams decades earlier: “Novelists, accepting the theory of origins of the highlander that best suited their fictional purposes, have sometimes presented him as...Scotch” (Williams 11, emphasis mine). In Williams’s *The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction*, this characteristic is perhaps the earliest attribute of the fictional mountaineer—although the term “Scotch-Irish” is almost always the preferred nomenclature, as opposed to the more inclusive and tribal-sounding term “Celtic” that has replaced it in contemporary literature. Such a transition may serve to further marginalize the issue of religion from these contemporary texts, as the label “Scotch-Irish” (or more politically correctly, “Scots-Irish”)<sup>22</sup> definitely carries sectarian connotations that prove problematic to those wishing to establish a “rebel” image for the Southern mountaineer—the contemporary “Scots-Irish” (or “Ulster Scots”) are perhaps the most loyal subjects to the British Crown, whilst the Republican Irish and the Scottish Nationalists are far more emblematic of rebellion.<sup>23</sup> The popular image of the savage Celt is a convenient way for Euro-Americans to embrace their own (real or imagined) “white Indian” origins—assisted in large measure by Mel Gibson’s *Braveheart*, a wode-spattered cinematic paean to Scottish nationalism.<sup>24</sup> After all those fiercely resistant proud Celtic primitives were

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<sup>22</sup> As my Scottish friends have pointed out, “‘Scots’ are a people, ‘Scotch’ is a whiskey.”

<sup>23</sup> According to Celeste Ray’s *Highland Heritage*, this “Celticization” of the Scots-Irish “is a blending of traditions that ancestors would find anathema” (47). I myself was heckled at the 2003 Grandfather Mountain Highland Games by a “native” Scottish musical troupe and their tour manager for wearing a soccer jersey associated with the Catholic Irish. So much for the spirit of pan-Celtic brotherhood.

<sup>24</sup> For a complete anthropological treatment of the self-conscious associations made by Southerners to their “Scottish roots,” consult the entirety of Ray’s work.

ruthlessly subjugated by those voracious English, their culturally defiant offspring fled to (where else?) the Southern backcountry, Appalachia, where we are assured such “White Indian” folkways have persisted in near undiluted form up until the present, “that the cultural patterns are largely derivative from the Old World rather than indigenous to the mountain environment” (McWhiney, Williams 14). As Shapiro points out, in late nineteenth-century “race theory...Scotch-Irishness became not only a heritage but a designation for particular inheritable characteristics. The mountaineers *were* [Scottish] Highlanders” (107, emphasis original).<sup>25</sup> Thus, the Old World White Indian lies domesticated, while the New World White Indian persists in his untrammelled state of ferocious nobility—the “fictional purpose” of such an association further establishes a linkage between the Appalachian hero and “aboriginal” resistance.

### ***Dogs of God***

In *Dogs of God*, the most subtle of the three novels in regards to overt American Indian connections, Benedict nonetheless makes important allusions to them. The primary means by which the author achieves this involves the use of totemic symbolism. Benedict names the dog of Inchcape, Goody’s crotchety landlord, “Tonto” (the Lone Ranger’s long-suffering Indian sidekick) and, for reasons elaborated later in this discussion, this animal has totemic significance for Goody. Furthermore, Goody’s beloved vehicle is a Pontiac hotrod, a car make whose American Indian connotations were emphasized in the film adaptation of Tom Robbins’s *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (1993).<sup>26</sup> Additionally, in the *Hidden World*

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<sup>25</sup> Again, this connection would be an historical “anathema.”

<sup>26</sup> As the protagonist Sissy Hankshaw narrates, “Right off, I don’t remember how old I was when I found out I was part Indian. My mamma’s family, a lot of them, had lived out West, in the Dakotas, and one of them had married a squaw. Siwash tribe. My pleasure in Indianhood and my passion for car travel might be incongruous if not mutually exclusive..... After all, the first car that ever stopped for me had been named in honor of the great chief of the Ottawa: Pontiac.....” Interestingly, the novel upon which the film is based is another iconic counterculture work by an author of (admittedly) nominal Appalachian origin.

Caverns tourist attraction, the center of a subplot in *Dogs of God*, the prominent feature of a “huge stalagmite” is named “the War Club” (43).<sup>27</sup> Benedict also implies that Indians are still a passive spiritual presence, overseeing what transpires in the mountains and perhaps adding to the eventual inexplicable withering of villain Tannhauser’s drug crop and the overall failure of his enterprise. Before Goody’s near-catastrophic auto accident, which he miraculously survives, “The death mask of a Shawnee chieftain, carved lifesize in the stone at the pinnacle of one of the aqueduct’s several arches, watched the car’s approach with opaque eyes” (89). Little Hogback Mountain, the location of Tannhauser’s vain attempt at a marijuana plantation and consequently the epicenter of Benedict’s final conflagration, has similar metaphysical resonance with its “plentiful” Indian mounds (108). Thus, Benedict in essence haunts the West Virginia landscape with an American Indian presence.

In *Dogs of God*, Western-imagery bearing villainous aspects abounds. The most prominent is the evil-incarnate antagonist Tannhauser, the would-be drug kingpin attempting to carve out an industrialized marijuana-growing operation in the West Virginia mountains. Benedict’s initial description of him combines a depiction of a ranch hand with that of the devil: “He wore tight-fitting blue jeans and a chambray workshirt under a long linen duster, and his feet, shod in intricately tooled cowboy boots, boomed like hooves against the thin roof of the locomotive whenever he shifted his weight” (70). Tannhauser’s indentured work force consists entirely of Latino labor, providing symbolic connections to both Western conflict with Mexico and immigration issues relevant to the modern Appalachian region. Significantly, Slotkin adds this very population to the list of the archetypal cowboy’s victims: “the *western* man-on-the-make...defin[es] national aspirations in terms of so many bears

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<sup>27</sup> As we shall see later, in Chapter Three, a case could be made that such a name subtly implies that the natural environment (of which the caverns are a part) is symbolically armed.

destroyed, so much land preempted, so many trees hacked down, so many *Indians* and *Mexicans* dead in the dust” (*Regeneration* 5, emphasis mine). Furthermore, Tannhauser’s chief henchman, Yukon, shares a name with the last major Western gold-rush in U. S. history—implying that having plundered the continent’s gold reserves, a process that began in Appalachia, such men of greed are cycling back to begin another exploitative enterprise. In a later scene, a violence-laced pornographic film provides entertainment for Tannhauser and members of his enterprise; in it, the male lead is

...dressed in a cowboy costume. He wore riding chaps, a gunbelt and holster, a polka-dotted neckerchief, and a drooping ten-gallon hat. He advanced menacingly...taking long slow strides...The cowboy snatched his Colt Peacemaker from its holster and with its barrel pretended to strike the girl a stunning blow on her forehead. (241-42)<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Benedict implies that women are potentially yet another target of the cowboy’s abuse and exploitation—as Tannhauser’s sadistic sexual behavior towards his Latina concubine Paloma later confirms.<sup>29</sup>

As part of the dual-threat to the Appalachian region, the interloper Carmichael (the Drug Enforcement Agency [DEA] agent assigned to pursue Tannhauser) also possesses Western origins and a desperate desire to return there:

Carmichael was not aware of any infraction he had committed, any offense, but still this assignment had the feeling of exile. [His superiors tell him] They’re enjoying themselves too much, the yahoos, the growers, the new

<sup>28</sup>A further “Wild West” connotation of this sexually sadistic scene appears on page 246.

<sup>29</sup> See Tompkin’s discussion of Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* for similar associations of the cowboy with misogyny, if not quite so overtly violent as that depicted in Benedict.

generation. Take some of the profit out of it. Some of the fun. Then we'll see about bringing you back to *the big show along the Rio Bravo*. (36, emphasis mine)

Thus, the Western Lawman pursues the Western Outlaw into a dark region outside the customary environment of both. Carmichael and Tannhauser are both Western imports: the cowboy outlaw and the cowboy lawman transported to an alien stage that simply destroys them both with little ceremony. Like Offutt's *The Good Brother* and Frazier's *Cold Mountain*, Benedict places the Millennial Mountaineer and/or the Appalachian region itself in a tripartite conflict, essentially thrusting him into a dangerous position between two distinct foes who also happen to be warring with each other over ideological and material concerns that lack little if any discernible relevance to the hero and his homeland.

In addition to the physical appearance of the characters and the symbolic use of canines, the most significant manner in which *Dogs of God* portrays an Indian/Cowboy conflict lies in the relentless references to the Vietnam War.<sup>30</sup> In the novel, the Appalachian landscape becomes interchangeable with that of Vietnam, and various characters emphasize literal and symbolic connections to that conflict. Benedict, while also using the subtle American Indian linkages, establishes a "native" insurgency element in both his setting and main characters by repeatedly associating various elements of his Appalachian drug war with the Vietnam conflict. Such linkages are crucial in placing the Millennial Mountaineer in his aboriginal resistance role and serving to solidify his position as a distinct opposite to the cowboy-American. Both Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation* and Armando Jose Prats in *Invisible Natives* posit a paradigm of cinematic Westerns as "scantly clad allegories" for the

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<sup>30</sup> In *Spaces of Violence*, James R. Giles notes a "a resultant Vietnamization of the United States" that followed the conclusion of the Vietnam War. His discussion focuses on Robert Stone's novel *Dog Soldiers*.

Vietnam War, with “Indians...as representatives of the cunning enemy” (Prats 260).

Benedict’s heavy usage of substantial and very direct Vietnam War imagery in *Dogs of God* serves to associate, albeit in an indirect manner, Appalachia and the mountaineer with the American Indian through the cultural trope of the American war in Vietnam. According to the later chapters in Slotkin’s *Gunfighter Nation*, the Vietnam War was in the American cultural consciousness essentially a Wild West story, with American troops in the role of cowboys/cavalry and the wily “aboriginal” Viet Cong in the role of Indians. In essence, “the Indian-war metaphor acquired new significance after 1960, when American engagement in the ‘underdeveloped’ world seemed to reproduce the basic elements of frontier conflict” (Slotkin 492). Such connections are integral to this “new Appalachian identity” promulgated by Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier, “an identity characterized by ... Appalachia’s similarities to the oppressed parts of the world” (Cable 81).

In Benedict’s Appalachia, the tools of American military might are arrayed in the service of the region’s enemies. DEA pilot Loomis flies his Vietnam-era helicopter with the same civilian-harassing impunity as he did during his actual Vietnam service:

They [Carmichael and Loomis] were maybe a dozen feet off the deck ... The boat lay directly in their path, oars loose in the rowlocks and trailing in the water. As they bore down on it, a man sat up in the stern. Carmichael, thinking that the copter would decapitate the boatman, squeezed his eyes shut.

(37)

When telling the story of an ill-fated military training exercise that used Appalachia as a surrogate for Vietnam, Loomis explicitly states a parallel between the natural environments of the two regions: “Apparently the fog here [in the West Virginia mountains] has exactly the



same consistency, same density, as what you encounter on the Mekong Delta” (207). At another point in the novel, Loomis also recommends a Vietnam-esque defoliation project as a cure for all forms of Appalachian malfeasance:

You know what you ought to do, you DEA guys ... if you really want to clear out the dope? ... Acquire a few squadrons of choppers, maybe a dozen heavy sections, and load us up with some kick-ass defoliant. Give us Agent Orange, or whatever new thing you might have, something even hotter. Let us loose to scald the hills with it. Just scald them and scrub them clean.... (42)

The ruined resort/prison-turned-marijuana-growing-operation El Dorado becomes under Tannhauser’s administration “Just like a firebase in Nam”—a central compound protected by a configuration of booby-traps and anti-personnel mines, and with its own improvised airstrip (175). El Dorado’s arsenal is rife with Vietnam-era associations: Claymore mines, M-16 assault rifles, and napalm (even if the latter is of a more improvised composition than the government-issued original). Furthermore, his Mingo Indian scouts wear “tiger-stripe fatigues,” a camouflage pattern born of the Vietnam conflict and still heavily associated with it (Benedict 64, 204).<sup>31</sup> Even Tannhauser’s weapons delivery service—the two pilots and their antiquated DC-3 aircraft—seem to have previous associations with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and clandestine struggles against Third World rural insurgencies, as their résumé includes “running weapons and personnel down to Cuba, Central America, that sort of thing” (Benedict 30). Such activity, including the ethnically/nationally ambiguous financiers Bodo and Tomo who are also passengers on

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<sup>31</sup> Tiger-stripe camouflage was associated, during the Vietnam conflict, with elite/covert units (many of which operated outside of traditional military parameters). In keeping with the Vietnam-as-Western theme, the John Wayne film *The Green Berets* (identified by Slotkin as a prime example of the allegory) features the heroes wearing just such a relatively uncommon camouflage pattern.

that plane, evokes the Vietnam War's Air America project—popularly believed to be a guns-for-drugs operation, and therefore an historical analogue to Tannhauser's operation.

### ***The Good Brother***

In *The Good Brother*, Offutt connects Appalachians with Indians both directly and implicitly in drawing distinctions between the sensibilities of his protagonist, Virgil Caudill, and those of the Western-oriented, paramilitary, white-supremacist “Bills” with whom he becomes associated. (The Bills are intended as obvious fictionalizations of the Montana Freemen who engaged in a lengthy standoff with Federal agents in 1996). Offutt implies rather overtly that white Appalachians and Indians share more commonalities than white Appalachians and any other ethnic group. Early in the novel (before the action moves from eastern Kentucky to Montana), Virgil's boss on the community college sanitation crew declares, “I never worked with a man yet who didn't claim to be part Indian” (Offutt 32). Once in Montana, Virgil repeatedly connects the local Indians he encounters with his own people back in eastern Kentucky: “Many of the customers were Indians and he was careful not to stare. They appeared sad, rather than fierce, reminding him of people from the deepest hollows in Kentucky. They dressed the same, too—quilted flannel shirts, jeans, and boots” (Offutt 132). At another point he experiences disgust when witnessing the disdain with which American Indians are viewed by the white employees and customers: “the saleswoman began to raise her voice and speak slowly to the Indians” (Offutt 145). He recognizes such an approach as “the same way people in Lexington had spoken to [him] when they thought he was a dumb hillbilly” (Offutt 145). Virgil is also such a second-class citizen when he descends from the mountains to visit the city, as confirmed by his shoddy treatment in a Lexington restaurant where the rude waitress “recognized him for what he was”—a

“hillbilly” (Offutt 90). Not surprisingly, Virgil evinces a strong empathy for the Indians when he realizes the basis for his acceptance in his new Montana home: “They had taken him for a Montanan and he was pleased until he realized that their mistake was based on his skin” (Offutt 145).

Offutt persists in drawing parallels between the situation of white Appalachians and Indians by connecting the logic of prejudice leveled by the Bills at the “mud people” Indians with denunciations common to Appalachian caricatures: “They just want to take. They can’t help it because that’s all they know. They’ve had everything in the world given to them, free land on the Rez, free food, even free houses. They won’t work. All they do is drink” (246, 250). Countless Appalachian stereotypes echo the same complaints. Even Offutt tacitly acknowledges the mountaineers’ mythic reticence towards labor in the following self-effacing exchange involving his deceased brother:

“Yeah, buddy. I always remember Boyd telling me what Jesus said to the hillbillies before he died.”

“What?”

“Don’t do nothing till I get back.” (36)

When Owen (a member of the Bills right-wing militia) espouses a tenant of their racist ideology, “Who gets all the government services in this country?...Mud people,” Virgil counters, “Folks where I’m from get a lot of government help...And we’re white” (Offutt 260). Thus, Offutt tacitly implies (proudly in the context of the novel) that Appalachians are members of the mud people, in opposition to the rabid “white” evil represented by the Bills and their ilk.

Although limited to only one passage in *The Good Brother*, Offutt explicitly acknowledges the Celtic roots of the Millennial Mountaineer. At the novel's climax, Virgil finally confronts Orben—the would-be avenger of a cousin killed by the former—and notes that “Everything about him [Orben] was familiar. His features were of the same rough mold as Joe's, the *Scots-Irish pioneers who'd settled the hills of eastern Kentucky*” (Offutt 296, emphasis mine). Thus, the physical characteristics of Celticness are recognizable at first glance and half a continent away from Appalachia.

Offutt places the Millennial Mountaineer, Virgil, into further confrontation with the West and the Cowboy image. Half the novel concerns Virgil's conflict with what seems to him a distinctly Western ideology, embodied most vehemently in the militantly paranoid, xenophobic ranching community (the infinitely more sinister variation of the aforementioned Lone Outdoorsman in Norman's *Divine Right's Trip*) that refer to themselves as “the Bills”—a reference to their dedication to the Bill of Rights. To represent their ideology and community, the group ridiculously appropriates apparel bearing the logo of the National Football League's Buffalo Bills, which in itself symbolically references Buffalo Bill Cody—a cowboy hero in the American pantheon of conquerors and subjugators. Significantly, the Bills' military and ideological leader is likened to another personality in white America's western expansion, “Frank is special, like Custer” (Offutt 277).

Offutt's *The Good Brother* also relies, in similar fashion to Benedict, on tacit connections to the Vietnam War in associating the Millennial Mountaineer with an American adversary and the Appalachian hero's enemies with the American role in Vietnam. The initials of Virgil Caudill causes consternation amongst the patriotically-obsessed Bills; during their initial interrogation of him they demand an explanation for the improvised grave marker

Virgil utilizes for the burial of his totemic possum (final material connection to his Kentucky home):

“It’s what you wrote on the shovel blade is why he wants to know.”

“I don’t get it,” Joe said.

“V.C.,” Owen said. “That’s short for Viet Cong.” (Offutt 209)

To complete the symbolic association, in the final conflict between the fanatical core of the Bills’ membership and Federal agents (a standoff in its general details remarkably similar to Tannhauser’s climactic undoing in *Dogs of God*), events transpire around Frank’s firebase “Camp Megiddo” and its imaginary “army of patriots” with “fifty-caliber machine-gun emplacements....antitank artillery....surface-to-air missiles” (Offutt 295, 306).

### ***Cold Mountain***

In *Cold Mountain* the only true male friendship Inman ever appears to have is with the Cherokee, Swimmer.<sup>32</sup> The implication is even that Inman’s substantial survivalist energy has a mystical origin in wisdom gleaned from Swimmer, “whose double Inman has become” (McCarron and Knoke 276). In *Cold Mountain*, Frazier imbues his protagonist Inman with Indian sensibilities acquired from close inter-community contact; Frazier’s vision of antebellum Appalachia has the Cherokee and white mountaineers fraternizing as social equals at a summer livestock grazing camp high in the mountains of Inman’s home country—“the bonding of a friendship between whites and Indians” (McCarron and Knoke 275). The white mountaineers and the Cherokees drink together, play stickball together, and

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<sup>32</sup> According to several sources, a Cherokee by the name of Swimmer actually served in the Thomas Legion during the American Civil War. Swimmer’s association, both historically and by Inman, with the Thomas Legion provides another Vietnam allegory: the Thomas Legion’s white commander, William Holland Thomas, is an historical counterpart to the fictional Colonel Kurtz of the film *Apocalypse Now* in the degree to which both accepted “native savagery” as a psychological weapon and suffered subsequent effects on their own psyche (see Hauptman, *Between Two Fires*, “Confederate Rangers of the Smokies: Wil-Usdi’s Eastern Band of Cherokee,” pp. 103-122).

gamble together (Frazier 19-21). As an adult on his war-ravaged trek homeward, Inman rests for a time in a gypsy camp that evokes in him “some feeling of kinship with the outcasts” (125). Inman also takes dinner with this menagerie of ethnic types (mirroring Slotkin’s analysis of *The Outlaw Josey Wales* as a countercultural allegory):<sup>33</sup> “The Ethiopian and the Indians joined in the meal as if they were all of a color of equals. They took their turns speaking, and permission to talk was neither sought nor given” (128). Finally, Inman’s ultimate recourse, should his beloved Ada reject his love upon his return, is to a Cherokee myth—to banish himself to another world located within the mountains themselves.

Inman’s attachment to Cherokee spirituality does not end there. While the antebellum Inman attends church like the other members of his mountain community, he also learned various elements of pagan Cherokee spirituality. Three years of the psychological trauma of war have compromised his beliefs in a traditional Christian God and mingled them with the spiritual beliefs of the Cherokee: “but [Inman] did believe that there is a world invisible to us. He no longer thought of that world as heaven, nor did he still think that we get to go there when we die. Those teachings had been burned away” (23). Yet Inman “hummed a little” snippet “of a sacred song” in the aftermath of a lethal encounter with Federal raiders and when later provided with a generous meal, he declares that “This meal needs blessing” (317, 347). He recalls that “the best sermon he had ever heard” was preached by Ada’s father Monroe and based on “a baffling passage from Emerson,” an essentially counterculture icon of antebellum America (77). Inman’s “own fears and desires” align with the Cherokee story of a peaceful village magically existing inside Cold Mountain, one that can only be entered by one who fasts and gives up the ways of violence (254). At

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<sup>33</sup> Kevin Grauke also notes the similarity, describing Inman as “Henry David Thoreau as portrayed by a *Josey Wales*-era Clint Eastwood” (56).

the climax of the novel, Inman returns to Cold Mountain in an aesthetic state: “Part from choice and part from necessity, Inman was fasting....He had not eaten bite one in the days since he had cooked the bear cub” (392).<sup>34</sup> Thus, Inman is fulfilling the requirements for entrance into Cold Mountain’s transcendent world of peace relayed to him in his youth by the elderly Cherokee “woman with the snake tattoos” (393). In the Zen Buddhist context of Cold Mountain referenced by Frazier’s Han-shan epigram to the novel—this fasting has led Inman to become “too empty for sense....He doubted that there was a man in the world emptier than he at the moment” (393-94).<sup>35</sup> Thus, like both the Cherokee and the Celt, Inman has created his own hybrid of Christian, pagan, and Eastern spirituality.<sup>36</sup>

Frazier also directly implies a Celtic origin to his mountain denizens. In attempting to classify the economy of Appalachian neighbor Esco Swanger’s household and speech, Low Country preacher Monroe labels him “some old relic Celt...what few thoughts Esco might have would more than likely be in Gaelic” (Frazier 57). Later in the text, fiddle music prompts Stobrod’s autistic companion Pangle to “get up and stomp out a dance of great mystery, ancient Celtic jerk and spasm” (333). Finally, Stobrod’s potent, unfiltered antebellum whiskey production is described as “differ[ing] only in minor particulars from the usquebaugh and poteen of [his] Celt forebears” (342).<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the overt connections to American Indians and Celtic ancestry, Frazier’s *Cold Mountain* also contains a subtle usage of the Vietnam allegory. The presence

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<sup>34</sup> As the later discussion of Inman’s totemic relationship to bears in a later chapter indicates, Inman’s fasting is also likely an act of penance for killing the cub (despite the compassion of the act in context).

<sup>35</sup> Han-shan, a Chinese poet of the Tang Dynasty, wrote a series of “Cold Mountain” poems. Han-shan was apparently a favorite of Beat Generation poets, further emphasizing the connections of contemporary Appalachian literature and the counterculture movement. See Suiter *Poets on the Peaks*.

<sup>36</sup> McCarron and Knoke refer to “a Confucius-like wisdom which Inman expresses in cathartic fashion” (280).

<sup>37</sup> In Frazier’s second novel, *Thirteen Moons*, the Celtic-Indian connections are even more overt and relentless. Frazier describes one of the primary Cherokee characters as “like some berserk battleground Celt, which he more than three quarters was” (18). Another character in the novel refers to many Cherokees as infused with so much “Scots blood” that they “might as well take to wearing plaid skirts and honking on the great pipes” (31).

of Inman's irregular (guerilla) warfare within Frazier's plot is the most direct reference to Vietnam's insurgency. Also, the Vietnam War was (like the national conflict in *Cold Mountain*) a Civil War with shifting, difficult to readily discern allegiances and fought by men with varying degrees of ideological commitment. Inman's distaste and final abandonment of supporting a cause in such a conflict only serve to mirror the attitudes of many Vietnam War veterans. Indeed, Inman's initial involvement and the behavior of other soldiers in the novel parallel "the destructive nature of an immature cult of masculinity that was an essential factor in the tragic U.S. involvement in Vietnam" (Giles 151).

Although not as explicit as Benedict and Offutt in using the cowboy-West for symbolic opponents of the Millennial Mountaineer, Frazier does unequivocally posit the West and Western imagery as negative prospects. Teague and his band of Home Guard resemble quite closely the literary convention of a mounted outlaw gang in their extralegal sadistic proclivities. Furthermore, the amoral preacher Veasey expresses a desire to become a cowboy, "going to the Texas and start fresh" because "There's a place in Judges where it talks about a time when there was no rule in Israel and every man just did what was right in his own eyes. I've heard the same of the Texas. It's a land of freedom" (152). Such a vision sounds much like the same justifications of Offutt's Bills. When asked by Inman how he expects to sustain himself in such a land, Veasey brandishes a pistol and declares that "I might train myself to be a pistolero of some note" (153). Late in the novel, an exhausted Inman briefly contemplates "Veasey's dream of Texas," then rejects it because "the war was out there too" (436). Thus, in essence, he would be following the same complicated path of exile and conflict experienced by Offutt's Virgil.



## Conclusion

The rugged Western individualist, using Slotkin's paradigm, has become the symbolic representation of American economic values and political domination—a figure of America's "own genocidal animus" (Prats 30). Both in internal and external perception, the United States is a cowboy nation; the twentieth-century idealized cowboy is the offspring of the nineteenth-century idealized frontiersman, both "projections of the national male purpose and its intent to take this continent and hold it and make it turn a profit" (Williamson, *Hillbillyland* 90). In keeping with these recent novels' portrayal of outsider conflict with the prevailing economic and political values of mainstream America, the villainous elements set against the Millennial Mountaineer are cast as representatives of the American spirit of ideological and material conquest.

The running philosophical commentary of Goody, Virgil, and Inman on the depredations and unreasoning hate evinced by various non-Appalachians resembles the cinematic convention of "the Indian articulat[ing] the wisdom often associated with the Other" (Prats 159). Specifically in Inman's case, he mirrors the Indian's ability to "identify *white words themselves* as their enemy" by his utter contempt for all political and ideological pronouncements issuing from both contesting governments (Prats 160, emphasis original). For Inman, there is no need to window dress mass slaughter; for him the issues of life and death are rendered in the most simplistic, common sense terms—to the doomed Federal masses swarming up Marye's Heights, "Inman's only thought looking on the enemy was, Go home"; to the wounded Federal raider expiring at his feet, "If you'd stayed home this would not have come to pass" (Frazier 13, 317).

Like the Indian, the Appalachian mountaineer “appears before us as if outside time—the opponent of all processes” (Prats 36). Even on the threshold of the twenty-first century, the mountains and the mountain hero still exhibit the characteristics attributed to them throughout the 150-odd years since his inception as a literary archetype. But like the Appalachian hero’s linkage to the American Indian, these archetypal characteristics are not the tools of apprehension and dismissal that they were previously when wielded by those seeking to justify their judgment of the region. Instead, these characteristics in the hands of self-professed Appalachian writers are posited as characteristic points of resistance, of opposition, of virtue to callous, adversarial mainstream society. As Williamson observes, the mountaineer (both past and present) is “meant to be taken seriously as a threat to American progress” (*Hillbillyland* 36). In essence, a reclamation and recontextualization of stereotypes occur, in which all the old points that made the Appalachian a villain to American progress become the points of distinction marking him a hero, a vision of man (like the American Indian) “before the corrupting sophistication of progress” (Prats 143).

The presence of authentic Indians in *Dogs of God*, the Mingo in Tannhauser’s service, “slim dark men who might easily have been brothers” is paralleled in Frazier’s *Cold Mountain* by the primary antagonist Teague’s “two great dark men so alike in their features that they might well have been twins” (Benedict 64, Frazier 183). Benedict describes them as “like stock dogs,” vicious servants of the men (Tannhauser and Teague) that are essentially their masters (70). The fate Inman assumes has befallen his childhood friend Swimmer—“Inman knew many Cherokee of the age to be fighting under Thomas, and he wondered if Swimmer were among them”—emphasizes an historical ambiguity that Frazier could not help but be aware of: was the Confederate allegiance of the remaining eastern

Cherokee an ultimately futile final act of defiance against the Federal government that had dispossessed them, or was it yet one more disastrous concession to the White Man in a different color uniform? (18).<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the implication is that perhaps some Indians are no longer Indian “enough” to represent resistance to the dominant “white” culture. Slotkin noted just such an historical trend: “The Indian hunter became quite rapidly the accomplice of the white entrepreneur in the destruction of the wilderness and the beings that derived existence from it” (*Regeneration* 49-50). Consequently, the Millennial Mountaineer is now the last, best manifestation of aboriginal defiance. As an icon of resistance, the genuine Indian has often been rendered impotent or complacent: the Mingoes serve Tannhauser; in Offutt’s Montana they are reservation-bound and pathetic; and in Frazier’s work, they exist only in Inman’s memory—most driven westward or vanished into another mystical world, with a scant few remaining to either resist or to serve the dictates of the White Man. Yet, when Ada and Inman consummate their love in an abandoned Cherokee cabin serving as a reminder of that people’s persecution and expulsion, their union and the offspring that will result from it quickens the resistance to the dominant society: “for a while that night, it was a place that held within its walls no pain nor even a vague memory collection of pain” (430). The continuation of a resistance to mainstream society is literally conceived in the ruins of the first rebels against that society.

In describing James Hall’s proto-Appalachian novel *Harpe’s Head: A Legend of Kentucky* (1833), Cratis Williams refers to Hall’s description of “a class of shiftless poor whites who followed in the wake of the real pioneer. It is from this class that many

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<sup>38</sup> Inman’s grim satisfaction at the activities of the Thomas Legion in combating the invasive Federals—“It was humorous in a way, those pale mill workers coming down so confident to steal land and yet losing the tops of their heads out in the woods”—is quite ironic given the fact that one of the Thomas Legion’s primary assignments was to track down Confederate deserters like Inman (18). See Hauptman’s *Between Two Fires* and Trotter’s *Bushwhackers*.

historians have insisted the mountaineer is descended” (101). In the preceding section of his dissertation, Williams mentions that the fictional mountaineer had “separated...from the pioneer, the hunter, and the backwoodsman” in the progression of American literature. Despite the obvious prejudice underpinning Hall’s description (and its later acceptance by unnamed historians), such a statement gets close to the inclinations of the contemporary fictional mountaineer as imagined by Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier. The mytho-historical Daniel Boone and his pioneer colleagues, both real and fictionalized, seem more likely the progenitors of the cowboy archetype as imagined by scholars of American culture like Richard Slotkin—adventurous, expansive, conquering. The Millennial Mountaineer is content merely to be left alone, with no burning desire for hegemony or an itching need to test himself against an unforgiving frontier. Instead, the mountaineer of contemporary fiction evinces his connection to the Indian archetype—the desire to live in relative equilibrium with his surroundings.

### **III. Implications of the Natural Environment in *Dogs of God, The Good Brother, and Cold Mountain***

*“But the mountaineer is ever king of his own domain...”*

*-Will Allen Dromgoole, “Cinch” (1898)*

*“Even the jungle wanted him dead...”*

*-Captain Willard in Apocalypse Now! (1979)*

By the extensive use of lengthy seductive descriptions of the landscape, Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier emphasize the importance of the natural environment in our contemporary era of Appalachian fiction. Yet this is not a new characteristic of the regional literature. As Cratis Williams points out, early pastoral Appalachian fiction was often “padded with interminable descriptions of the landscape” that extol the beauty of mist-covered slopes and “perpetuates the exaggerated height of the Southern mountains as reported first by travelers” (147, 145). These contemporary novels emphasize all aspects of the mountain terrain, both the breathtaking and the terrible. Benedict’s West Virginia landscape often seems more like a threatening green morass—more akin to a Third World jungle rather than the temperate hardwood forests we would expect; Offutt’s eastern Kentucky is a collage of protective ridges and almost inaccessible hollows; and Frazier’s western North Carolina possesses mountains so high and vegetation in such abundance as to seem part of a another world.

An extension of the Appalachian-as-Indian, American-as-Cowboy opposition influences the way that the natural environment functions in these works. First, the

Millennial Mountaineer possesses a profound link with his surroundings, like his Indian predecessor who “enjoyed a special and more-than-human relationship with nature” (Slotkin, *Regeneration* 119).<sup>39</sup> Second, nature itself violently challenges the outside invaders—quite simply, the villains cannot survive, much less subdue, this natural world. Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier embrace the trepidation that mountains elicit in the popular imagination and use such apprehension as building blocks in their statements of opposition to outside encroachment. A depiction of overgrown mountains (in both physical size and vegetative cover) provides the perfect setting for stories that challenge mainstream America because, as Williamson states in *Hillbillyland*, since the earliest days of Western Civilization, “mountains...seemed beyond mere logic and offered challenges to control” (18). Essentially, these authors re-visit a literary trope in which the mountaineers believe that trees are “sentient growths”—a convention that Cratis Williams identified in the early twentieth-century Appalachian fiction of John Fox, Jr., Neville Buck, and Jesse Stuart (339n).<sup>40</sup> In *Dogs of God*, *The Good Brother*, and *Cold Mountain*, the natural environment undoes the villainous American-as-cowboy, at least as much as any other opposing element such as the hero and/or other competing villains. Slotkin notes that in early Colonial accounts the American Indian’s relationship to nature was considered an important element of his identity: “the beasts of the forest, the trees, fire, and water were regarded as blood relations, as kin sharing the big house among them” (*Regeneration* 50). Like his literary forebear, the Millennial Mountaineer collectively created by these novelists is intimately and irrevocably connected to his surrounding natural environment: “his sense of identity *is not located inside*

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<sup>39</sup> See also M. Taylor Matthews quoted in Cunningham, the “mountaineer’s ancestors ‘represented genetic and cultural extraction from . . . a Celtic world which had not yet defined itself from its elemental womb of Nature’” (95).

<sup>40</sup> Williams did, however, contend that such a belief had no historical basis.

*his skin...it is located in the world with which he shares his being*" (Cunningham 97, emphasis original). And when threatened, that natural environment is an ally, if not always a wholly benevolent one.

### **Part I—The Millennial Mountaineer's Relationship to Nature**

One of the primary ways these authors establish an Indian-like connection between their Appalachian heroes and the natural world is through the use of totemic animal symbolism.<sup>41</sup> In *Regeneration Through Violence*, Slotkin refers to the early association of American Indians with animals made by Puritan writers during the Colonial period: "Like [Increase] Mather, [William] Hubbard refers to the Indians as 'Wolves' or 'lions,' *scarcely human beings*" (emphasis mine, 88). Each Millennial Mountaineer has one primary totem animal, and, in the case of Frazier's Inman, a secondary one.<sup>42</sup> And although this concept of totemism primarily applies to the Millennial Mountaineer, Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier also use animal connections to highlight the more unsavory characteristics of their novels' villains.<sup>43</sup>

#### ***Dogs of God***

The frequent appearances of canines within Benedict's *Dogs of God* evince significant distinctions relating to an Appalachian/West dichotomy. Goody's elderly landlord Inchcape is a listless yet prickly character in the mold of the old rawboned, lazy hillbilly stereotype of local color writing. Inchcape's somnambulistic yet imposing watchdog Tonto is an "immense Great Pyrenees"—a hardy breed associated with a mountainous region

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<sup>41</sup> I use the term "totem" in the sense of "the 'individual' totemism of the North American Indians," not in the sense of the collective, group totemism that Claude Lévi-Strauss seems to prefer (17). However, we could argue that since these heroes are, in a way, emblems of a collective mountaineer identity, it could follow that their individual totems are therefore collective totems.

<sup>42</sup> In *A Question of Class*, Duane Carr also discusses literary depictions of Southern poor whites (among whom he includes the mountaineer) as animals. However, in his study such associations are all negative.

<sup>43</sup> McCarron and Knoke identify Frazier's use of "character totemism and animal imagery" (274). It appears that no one else has applied the concept to Benedict and Offutt, however.

and a non-white, culturally defiant group of European mountaineers (the Basques of the Spanish/French borderland) (Benedict 16). Tannhauser's adopted canine is "a handsome, savage-looking malamute"—a dog associated (like Tannhauser's henchman Yukon) with the Alaskan (Western) gold rush.<sup>44</sup> Like the idea of the mountaineer as a hardened survivor toughened by the rugged dictates of his regional home, Tonto had to fight for survival in the difficult circumstances of his birth: "His mother ate every whelp in the litter but him. He was the only one of those pups that managed to stand her off" (Benedict 16). If Tonto is the totemic spirit of both Goody and the Appalachian region overall, then the plight of his infancy is instructive in Benedict's apocalyptic, Appalachia-will-survive paradigm—Tonto's mother (the expansionistic attitude that epitomizes aspects of U.S. history) cannibalizes her brood (all regional and cultural expressions emerging from the nation). Simply put, the mountaineer and mountains symbolized by Tonto will not assimilate into the larger nation.

In a more specialized sense, Tonto and the malamute (and the symbolism they carry—Tonto and his American Indian connotations, the malamute and his westward expansion associations) represent Goody and Tannhauser, respectively.<sup>45</sup> Like Goody, Tonto is friendly, if guarded: "Tonto raised his head and glared at Goody with deep cunning...Tonto's short tail thumped noncommittally against the floor of the porch" (Benedict 15-16). The malamute, however, is as pathologically and unreasonably vicious as his master, as equally willing to turn on another dog for no apparent reason—when Tannhauser psychologically tortures the anchorite character by urging the malamute to attack and kill the latter's companion dog: "It hit one of the hounds with its broad chest, knocked it

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<sup>44</sup> The origin of the name "malamute" itself complicates this reading, as it derives from the name of an Eskimo tribe credited with their breeding, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

<sup>45</sup> This is not the first time conflict between mountaineers and outsiders has been allegorized using canines. See Jesse Stuart's 1944 *Mongrel Mettle: The Autobiography of a Dog*.



sprawling. Then it clasped the hound's throat in its wickedly strong jaws" (Benedict 252). The malamute's behavior also mirrors its master's lack of loyalty for those in his respective charge—the cannibalism of the former ("eating the hound that lay dead in the pipe") reflects the latter's attitude regarding the disposability of his own people (such as when the mortally wounded migrant labor boss Ernesto is ignored during a boar hunt) (Benedict 192, 220-221). Like Goody, Tonto is nonplussed unless directly provoked—at which point he displays violence both swift and profound. When the harassment of flying pests becomes too much to bear, "Tonto darted his head forward with startling speed, clapped his mouth shut on the insect and swallowed. He shuddered and subsided, falling swiftly into a deep sleep that was to all appearances undisturbed by dreams" (Benedict 19). And his appetite for these insects has no limits, as his owner Inchcape explains, "He'll eat his weight in insects if you don't stop him" (Benedict 146). Goody's appetite for prize fighting is also similarly limitless, as both Tannhauser and Inchcape recognize (Benedict 267, 294).

Of all the heroes this thesis explores, Goody in *Dogs of God* possesses perhaps the least understanding of the natural environment. Initially, he blunders around the landscape in much the same fashion as the villains. When he battles the cane in the field behind his house prior to his discovery of Billy Rugg's body, "Goody calculated to the best of his poor ability where the nearest edge of the canefield lay and headed in that direction, anxious to be out in the sunlight again" (Benedict 11). His relationship with the Appalachian earth is solidified only in the final pages of the novel, during his mystical sojourn in the bowels of the mountain—a passage that serves as a sort of postscript to *Dogs of God's* overarching message of regional persistence.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Goody spends countless (it would seem literally

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<sup>46</sup> Goody's underground "vision quest" is remarkably similar to the one experienced by Gurney Norman's David Ray Davenport, although the former is far more brutal in both length of time and intensity.

“timeless”) days in some half-maddened state—encountering such Appalachian phenomena as the Mothmen<sup>47</sup> of West Virginia lore—while his “unearthly vision” leads him through his underground wanderings (Benedict 349). In conjunction with Goody, the novel’s mysterious anchorite figure—a nameless hermit with a muddled past and psycho-religious issues who roams through the action of Benedict’s novel—serves to establish a clear, intimate relationship between nature and mountaineers. While spying on Tannhauser’s caravan as it passes through his domain,

The anchorite smiled to think that the interlopers had brought dogs along with them for protection and that the dogs had failed to note his presence at all. He wondered whether the dogs were poor ones or *whether he had lost entirely the scent of humanity* in his long isolation *and was thus beyond detection*.

(Benedict 67, emphasis mine)

This self-mortifying ascetic has essentially severed all bonds with the outside, civilized world and reunited (for better or worse) with nature in a manner fully befitting his common noun name—an individual who has removed himself from the company of man and frequently seeks solitude in the wilderness. Goody’s mental and physical state at the novel’s conclusion combined with the possible demise of this anchorite implies that Goody may well take his symbolic place.

### ***The Good Brother***

In *The Good Brother*, Virgil covets his taxidermied possum, a souvenir of a drinking binge inspired by the memory of his murdered brother and the only vestige of his home region that he carries with him into his Montana exile. The possum “plays dead” to avoid

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<sup>47</sup> The peripheral character Peanut also dreams of these creatures (Benedict 163).

detection, yet is capable of surprising ferocity when cornered. Despite his peaceful nature, when cornered by the dictates of his family and community, Virgil exacts deadly revenge on his brother's killer, Rodale. Then, through a series of clever bureaucratic manipulations, Virgil assumes the identity of a long dead individual named Joe Tiller—in essence, killing his old identity and “playing dead” with a new one. In a final symbolic parallel, the possum is not native to the area to which Virgil has relocated.

On a literal level, Virgil possesses an intense, almost painfully felt connection to the natural surroundings of his homeland. Virgil craves the solitude and peace of the woods: “Among the oak and maple, pine and hickory, he had a sense of belonging that had always eluded him in the company of people” (Offutt 55). For Virgil the natural world is personified:

As a kid he'd supposed that all objects were sentient and had envied rocks their perfect existence. Nothing was expected of them. He and Boyd had spent hours discussing the imagined opinions of a tree, the road, or a cloud. Did a shovel enjoy digging? Did coal mind being burnt? Would a chunk of ash rather be a baseball bat or an ax handle?” (Offutt 55)

When suffering from a gunshot wound, Virgil describes the experience in terms reminiscent of the environmental destruction common to the eastern Kentucky landscape: “The dull pain was deep in his leg like the ache of a mountain after the coal was removed” (Offutt 200).<sup>48</sup>

Virgil possesses the ability to navigate his own forested “disorganized terrain” far more skillfully than the urban or Western environments he later encounters: “In the woods he could locate a tree he'd touched years ago, but in Lexington he was immediately lost” (Offutt

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<sup>48</sup> In a parallel, earlier in the novel “Pine sap ran like blood from a wound in the tree” (16).

87, 86). Such woods-savvy connects to another of Slotkin's points that emphasizes the connection of the modern mountaineer with the Indian: "Where the settlers could see only chaos and wilderness, the Indian eye and mind could construe an order, a kindred intelligence in all things" (*Regeneration* 27). Furthermore, Virgil reverses the modern-age conceit of an ordered urbanity versus a disordered woodlands: "Without animals or water, the cities had no underlying sense of organization" (Offutt 97). Only when Virgil recontextualizes these areas in terms of woodland familiarity does he succeed in navigating through them: "He was becoming comfortable with negotiating New Circle Road—go slow, read the signs, and be prepared to backtrack. *It was much like following game in the woods*" (Offutt 100, emphasis mine). Such a mental shift would be rejected by the Western villains of these novels, who repeatedly seek to reorder the natural world to *their* own dictates.

### ***Cold Mountain***

In *Cold Mountain*, Inman is allegorically represented by both the crow and bear (McCarron and Knoke 279-80). In the opening chapter, he recalls an incident from childhood: in a moment of schoolroom boredom, he flung his black hat out the window, and "It landed far out across the playground at the edge of the hayfield and rested there black as the shadow of a crow squatted on the ground" (Frazier 5). When this event results in Inman's decision to permanently forsake the indoctrination of formal schooling, he "set the hat on this head at a dapper rake and walked away, never to return" (Frazier 5). Thus, the hat-as-crow becomes his personal emblem, a badge of sorts—what McCarron and Knoke describe as a "parallelism" between "Inman's impending bid for freedom" from the Civil War that surrounds him and his earlier abandonment of the schoolhouse (280). Both symbolically and literally, he will from that point live in "the shadow of a crow." A later

scene uses this totem to hint at Inman's arduous journey ahead and his impending mortality: "All Inman remembered of another day's march was the white sky and that sometime during it a crow had died in flight, falling with a puff of dust into the road before him, its black beak open and its grey tongue out as if to taste the dirt" (148).<sup>49</sup> Inman even imagines shapeshifting (a mythological convention with both American Indian and Celtic significance) into his crow totem:

God, if I could sprout wings and fly, he thought. I would be gone from this place, my great wings bearing me up and out, long feathers hissing in the wind. The world would unfurl below me like a bright picture on a scroll of paper and there would be nothing holding me to the ground. The watercourses and hills passing under me effortless and simple. And me just rising and rising till I was but a dark speck on the clear sky. Gone on elsewhere. To live among the tree limbs and cliff rocks. Elements of humanity might come now and again like emissaries to draw me back to the society of people. Unsuccessful every time. Fly off to some high ridge and perch, observing the bright light of common day. (Frazier 299)

After these thoughts pass through his mind, the manifestation of his animal spirit appears: "A wet crow descended to a chestnut limb and tried to shake the water out of its feathers and then sat hunched and ill looking" (299). Inman's wish, in its way, is fulfilled at his death on

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<sup>49</sup> While this is perhaps the most detailed scene involving crows, these birds appear repeatedly during Inman's trek homeward. McCarron and Knoke state that "Self-control. Humility. Craftiness. Such descriptors of the crow match most of the best traits in Inman's character" (280). This will be discussed in the following chapter on the Millennial Mountaineer's characteristics.

Cold Mountain. His spirit is set free to dwell on that mountainside, away from the throngs of humanity that so poisoned his soul.<sup>50</sup>

Inman's secondary totem is the black bear common (at the time) to his Appalachian homeland. At one point, he "followed the smell of meat in the air, snuffing his nose and blinking his eyes with his head cocked up like a bear" (Frazier 124). And, as McCarron and Knoke recognize in their examination of parallelism in *Cold Mountain*, Inman dreams of himself as a black bear (Frazier 279). Later, he evinces immense regret over the death of a charging sow bear and the necessity of mercy killing her orphaned cub—but not before clearly establishing a deep totemic connection:

To his credit, Inman could imagine reaching up and grabbing the cub by the scruff of its neck and saying, We're kin...Inman could have an animal family if no other...What Inman did, though, was all he could do. He picked up the LeMat's and shot the cub in the head...(Frazier 354)

Similarly, for all his striving, all his hope for a future, death waits at the end of his journey (McCarron and Knoke 279). And in much the same manner as he reluctantly, but unhesitatingly, kills the young bear, Inman appears to accept the inevitability of his own death (having witnessed so much of it in his four years of war). All that he can and must do is return home to the Blue Ridge, "the center of his own world that [the mountaineer] primarily feels himself to have his being" (Cunningham 95). Cold Mountain is for Inman a "healing realm...a place where his scattered forces might gather" (Frazier 23).

Particularly important to any discussion of the relationship between the Millennial Mountaineer and the natural environment of his homeland is the manner with which, in *Cold*

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<sup>50</sup> See also McCarron and Knoke 280-81 for another explication of the relevance of crows in Inman's death scene.

*Mountain*, that environment enhances Inman's violent abilities. Such an ability also enters into the Millennial Mountaineer-Indian parallel. Slotkin identified in the early Colonial American consciousness a "belief that the Indians enjoyed a special and more-than-human relationship with nature, which gave them a kind of demonic power" (*Regeneration* 119). In decimating the squad of Federal raiders, Inman seems to move as if he were an extension of the landscape:

Inman followed behind, stalking them up the cove... This was to them a trackless wilderness... Inman drew nearer and nearer to them, and when he shot them with the LeMat's, he was so near he might have reached out and touched them at their collars with his hand. (Frazier 316)

Thus, like countless accounts of successful guerilla warfare, Inman and the environment merge seamlessly in a manner inconceivable (and ultimately fatal) to the interlopers.<sup>51</sup>

In *Cold Mountain*, Inman desperately needs the solace of his mountain landscape to heal his war-scorched soul (McCarron and Knoke 276). Although Ada is the personification of his redemptive hopes for romantic love and a renewed faith in humanity, it is the natural environment of western North Carolina (with which Ada has also managed, through necessity, to intimate herself during Inman's absence) that is his primary, overriding goal—like the Indian, the wilderness of his home is the "godlike agent for...regeneration" (Slotkin, *Regeneration* 223). If Inman, as a mountaineer hero, bears such a kinship to nature, then four years of vicious modern war over land already scarred by the most unnatural practices of both humanity and agriculture (slavery and large plantations) leave him desperate for such a re-connection, for a re-birth in the security of his arboreal home.

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<sup>51</sup> Cunningham notes this attribute in his discussion of the film adaptation of *Deliverance*, wherein one of the mountaineer villains "is initially seen moving *within* a wall of green, as if belonging to it, a 'living extension' of its threat" (125, emphasis in original).

Inman expresses his disdain for what to his mind is a disordered landscape, describing the Virginia/North Carolina Tidewater of his military service as “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” (Frazier 84).<sup>52</sup> The lowland forest that Inman moves through is a “sick and dangerous place,” not in the Appalachian sense of natural intimidation but in the sense of corruption and derangement (84). If the Millennial Mountaineer imagines the wilds of his homeland as a medicine of sorts,<sup>53</sup> then he conversely believes that nature altered is nature poisoned.

In *Cold Mountain*, a source of Inman’s animosity towards both the industrially-driven Union and the plantation-oriented Confederacy is the potential for natural devastation attributed to them both. Inman disparages the North as the land of a horrific money-obsession, a proponent of an industrialized “metal age” bent on domination. Early in the text, when reminiscing about Swimmer, a Cherokee friend from an earlier time who would likely be serving as a Confederate guerilla back in the North Carolina mountains, Inman imagines “Cherokee boys scalping Federals. It was humorous in a way, those pale mill workers coming down so confident to steal land and yet losing the tops of their heads out in the woods” (Frazier 18). While secretly observing the Federal raiders viciously interrogating the widow Sara as to the whereabouts of her non-existent money, he derisively notes, “That’s their nourishment” (Frazier 313). However, the lowland regions of Virginia and North Carolina that Inman moves through with disgust are tacitly imputed to possess such foul qualities of landscape owing to the slave-supported monoculture that exists there: “Inman

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<sup>52</sup> Inman disparages them as “trash trees” and refers to the Tidewater as a “Country of swill and sullage, sump of the continent” (Frazier 69, 70).

<sup>53</sup> Here I imply both the contemporary mainstream meaning of physical medicine and the American Indian meaning of spiritual medicine.



fared on through this territory, criticizing its every feature. How did he ever think this to be his country and worth fighting for?” (Frazier 85). Further into the Piedmont region, he still evinces disgust with the Confederate oligarchy: “Inman looked at the lights in the big houses at night and knew he had been fighting battles for such men as lived in them, and it made him sick” (Frazier 260-61). Every aspect of their comparative inferiority is imputed to man’s villainous inclinations. Esco Swanger, Ada’s neighbor in the Cold Mountain community, notes the human inequity characteristic of the Confederacy (a sentiment with which Inman would certainly agree): “Every man’s sweat has a price for it. Big flatland cotton men steal it every day, but I think sometime maybe they’ll wish they’d chopped their own damn cotton” (Frazier 46). Man blights the world, either through the deforestation, large scale over-cultivation, and theft of human labor of the Low Country South or the dehumanizing Northern factories. Inman’s condemnation of these two socio-political visions that have essentially crushed him, and countless others like him, for three years of war provide yet another explanation for Inman’s refusal to choose to align himself with anything outside his mountain homeland.

## **Part II—Nature as a Character Itself**

### ***Dogs of God***

The role of nature—particularly animals—in resistance to outside, “unnatural” invasion is explicit in both the title of Benedict’s novel and in the implications of the opening epigram:

I will appoint over them four kinds,  
says the Lord: the sword to slay, and  
the dogs to tear, and fowls of the

heaven, and the beasts of the earth,  
to devour and destroy. (Jeremiah 15:3)

As mentioned above, the totemic Great Pyrenees Tonto symbolizes the rugged character Goody. However, Tonto also represents Appalachia as whole, particularly in his affinity for and skill at devouring countless insects with an appetite that is seemingly never sated. With this in mind, Benedict foreshadows the novel's conclusion when Goody notes the takeoff of the DEA helicopter: "The sun spilled over its various closely fitted parts: steel, plastic, glass. *It looked like an insect*" (Benedict 21, emphasis mine). Benedict further ascribes insect qualities to modern machinery encountered by Peanut (an itinerant hustler peripheral to the plot) in a local garbage dump: "the bulldozer looked like a yellow hard-shelled insect" (Benedict 159). With the same insect connotations, the helmets worn by the DEA aircrew are referred to as "carapaces" (Benedict 116). Like Tonto's easy return to slumber, the pestilent interlopers are consumed, and the mountains return to their state of rest in which time is mostly irrelevant. Thus, like Tonto, the Appalachian region's ability to rise up unexpectedly and consume any external provocation—then return peacefully to its previous state—is central to the world inhabited by the Millennial Mountaineer.<sup>54</sup>

Benedict also attempts to anthropomorphize the Appalachian Mountains. While touring the Lost World caverns "tourist trap," the cave-obsessed character Dreama (a stereotypical hillbilly princess and the object of Goody's lust—if not love) comments to the tour guide that "It's like we're inside a giant body here, laid down in the earth and hidden from sight through the ages....and we're crawling through its body now like we were bugs"

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<sup>54</sup> As Benedict no doubt realizes (and Offutt confirms as well), dogs are a consistent presence in hillbilly iconography (particularly with violent connotations): "He [the hillbilly] nearly always possesses the wherewithal for physical violence—especially involving *dogs* and guns" (Williamson 2-3, emphasis mine).

(Benedict 97, 51). When Goody and Peanut fall into the watery cavern: “with a noise like a human sigh the earth beneath him collapsed, pouring into the abyss” (Benedict 328).

In *Dogs of God*, the antagonist Tannhauser seems to offend the very earth itself in his attempts at realizing a profit-filled latter day El Dorado literally cut out of the West Virginia forest. He drives out the “luddite” hippies and their sustainable—and profitable—organic marijuana farming methods to replace them with his own high-tech, standardized system, which ultimately fails (Benedict 180-82). He shaves out massive swaths of trees to construct his landing space. And he hunts the formidable wild boars of the region with unsportsmanlike abandon, using fully automatic assault rifles (Benedict 216-21).<sup>55</sup> He further mars the landscape with the detritus of modern warfare—claymore mines, trip-flares, and barbed-wire, the very type of implements that Inman, in *Cold Mountain*, would no doubt include in his contemptuous reference to the combat he experienced as “the metal face of the age” (Frazier 4). Tannhauser blasphemes by stating that “God doesn’t want to see what goes on here. God has no interest” (Benedict 251). But if we view God as manifest in the natural environment of the region, then Tannhauser has very much transgressed and will be punished accordingly. Significantly, all of his military technology fails, overcome by the environment:

...the flares had fired as a result of a change in temperature, in humidity....Sometimes wandering wild hogs set them off. And Peanut had described hitting a couple of trigger wires, maybe more, as he blundered into camp...the Claymores that should have cut him to ribbons, had not

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<sup>55</sup> Despite being “outgunned,” the boars still manage to inflict a fatal human casualty. See also the pursuit of the character Peanut by a pack of these creatures: “The house shuddered with the blows of their bulky bodies against its walls. He thought they might tear the whole house apart board from board, joist from joist, and bring it crashing down around them” (Benedict 164-65).

discharged. The multiple failures of their weaponry pained and humiliated Bodo. (Benedict 315)

Every vestige of modern society is treated with contempt by Benedict's mountains. Much as it does in Cormac McCarthy's *Border Trilogy* some years earlier, the wholesale devastation wrought on the trespassers and their technological tools evinces a desire (on the part of the authors, the protagonists, and perhaps the reader) for "the dereliction of modernity" (Monk 92). Thus, not only human interlopers fall prey to the uplands, but the trappings of civilization and society are also equally at risk, as described in Goody's discovery of an impromptu garbage dump:

He turned back to the sinkhole before him. It was funnel shaped, a hundred and fifty feet across its top, narrowing at the bottom, where the earth had collapsed into the caves below. The cavity was filled with greenery, jumbled thornbushes and shrubs and vines covering in lurid trumpet-shaped flowers, with here and there a stunted tree pushing its way up from the incline. Garbage lay scattered around the rim of the sinkhole, and down its sides: bundles of old newspapers, oil cans, plastic buckets with split sides, power mowers, discarded washing machines, refrigerators, a stove or two. At the very bottom of the pit, what looked like the bullet-holed trunk of an antique black Ford coupe poked out of the greenery. (Benedict 21-22)

The commonplace image of such a dump becomes a threat—the trappings of the Industrial Age like so many fossils slowly sinking into the earth.<sup>56</sup> Tannhauser's enterprise is

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<sup>56</sup> Although not strictly within the purview of this discussion, the amateur museum of antiquated toys and carnival automatons that Goody encounters in the local country store has similar implications of dereliction and abandonment (Benedict 60-61).

far from the first to suffer such a fate; only the intensity of the comeuppance differs, as the improvised shelter of the frozen timber train used by Tannhauser and his workers indicates:

The train sat rusting at the eastern terminus of a short spur of abandoned narrow-gauge siding, stranded there decades earlier by some timbering company's bankruptcy. It was covered in swaths of creeper and flowering sumac and masked by rusting hedges of wild rhododendron. (Benedict 65)

Like the tombstones in the neglected Civil War-era cemetery explored by the anchorite, the tools of the outsider's attempts at exploitation will stand only as "cenotaphs of a race that had...died out utterly" (Benedict 111).

In *Dogs of God*, El Dorado's transitory history serves as the most significant representation of the ultimate failure plaguing most organized human endeavor in the region. The compound of once-opulent buildings has at various times served as the locale for an antebellum health spa, Civil War hospital, battle site and prison, resort hotel, World War II prison-of-war camp, Cold War government retreat, and (in the present) a multi-nationally financed narcotics enterprise. As Tannhauser notes when ushering his financiers Bodo and Tomo through a tour, "Its history goes back in layers through time" (Benedict 178). Even during Tannhauser's tenure, the place remains a "gigantic ruin" (180). Benedict implies, through the past and future dereliction of El Dorado, that all these "civilized" incursions will come to naught.

Even roads, perhaps the most prominent symbols of modern society, are ephemeral in the mountains, "rising oftentimes in lazy roaming switchbacks to the heights, where they lapsed and ended, *futile among the vegetation*" (Benedict 40, emphasis mine). Electricity, the lifeblood of modern civilization, is given similar disrespect, as when lightning decimates

a power transformer and nature fully displays its dominance: “Thunder followed hard on the heels of the lightning. The darkened house shook with the force of it...It echoed up and down the narrow valley, bounding and rebounding from the hillsides all around without seeming to diminish” (Benedict 198). On the first page of chapter one, Benedict foreshadows the later human desperation as the natural world rises against them: “The tall plants clashed and undulated as though something trapped among them were battling to get out” (9). The intimidating personification of nature continues when Goody enters the cane in search of an offending odor’s source: “The fleshy leaves brushed the nape of his neck, and he gritted his teeth against the unpleasant sensation, *like humid overfriendly hands on him* (Benedict 10, emphasis mine). Later, the anchorite similarly suffers in his passage through the underbrush: “the hooks and needles of barbed shrubs grabbing at his clothes, tearing the skin of his face, his hands,” a sharp contrast with the eventual ineffectiveness of Tannhauser’s man-made barbed wired fortifications (Benedict 120). Thus, the defensive characteristics of nature are decidedly superior to those concocted by men.

Extensions of nature even take on the characteristics of man-made weaponry, thus emphasizing the militant terms of the conflict between man and nature: “A big flying insect droned like a bullet past his [Goody’s] ear”; Benedict refers to the “neatly articulated armor” of a wasp’s “exoskeleton” (11). Later references to “a high breastwork of hills” and “the rampart of the forest” further the allusion to a military struggle (Benedict 21, 323). Perhaps most significant to the military allegory, literal representatives of military power face potential destruction, as when the DEA helicopter patrols the hills, “The topmost branches of the trees below whipped past with disorienting speed, the tallest threatening to slap against the hull of the little Defender airship, pull it from the sky, dash it to pieces on the hard-

packed earth below” (Benedict 33). At another point, the forest’s smallest residents evince a militant resistance to this unwelcome “stinking machine” of man as they again assault the helicopter:

Even here, forty feet off the forest canopy, insects dashed themselves against the lens that covered the lamp’s blazing element. They swam up the swath of light, throwing vast dancing shadows across the expanse of greenery below. Carmichael found it astonishing that they could climb so high against the dense wash of the copter’s rotor. (Benedict 120, 115)

At the climax of the novel, when an absurd mid-air collision claims both the DEA helicopter and the cargo plane that supplies El Dorado, the forest eats the wreckage much like the timber train of an earlier era: “The venerable Douglas DC-3...descended swiftly and uncontrollably...into the dark canopy of the trees, shedding parts as it went” (Benedict 326). Considering that the helicopter pilot Loomis had earlier recommended a military-sponsored mass defoliation of the region, Benedict posits that nature will always emerge triumphant from any such conflict.

In a rare moment of natural awe on the part of a Millennial Mountaineer’s antagonist, the nameless drug-running pilot of *Dogs of God* declares during a boar hunt of his quarry, ““If those things got organized in any kind of significant numbers, they could rule the world”” (Benedict 219). Thus, there is a recognition of nature’s power, coupled with a conceit that nature is somehow “unorganized” (at least by civilization’s standards) and therefore incapable of ultimately triumphing—a mistake that leads to Tannhauser’s downfall. This dogged, yet futile, persistence in which man vainly assumes he can somehow overcome nature continues in Loomis’s revelatory tale of the government’s attempt at “fighting the

fog”—using the West Virginia environs as a testing ground for besting nature through “cloud-seeding experiments” and other attempts at improving aerial navigation during heavy fog (Benedict 207). And even though these experiments “poisoned the livestock and ruined the crops,” nature still prevails as “no matter what they did, those guys were still flying around blind. They had a few midair collisions” (Benedict 207). Such thinking paints Tannhauser’s setbacks in an entirely new light, such as the discovery that El Dorado’s “cistern...had been *inexplicably* fouled” (Benedict 175). As his entire operation crumbles, Tannhauser blames his crop failure on “Something in the soil we didn’t count on....something up there, something in the land that killed it” (270). Thus nature turns against the invaders at multiple points, even if the invaders themselves never fully recognize or understand how nature is destroying them.

Benedict also vividly depicts instances in which the natural world, the earth itself, literally devours humanity. When Goody discovers the deceased Billy Rugg, “Other wasps ascended from the body and proceeded off in the same direction. A mob of flies hung over the cadaver as well. The air was filled with their intense murmur” (11). Later, one of the anchorite’s near-feral hounds nonchalantly gnaws on an exhumed human bone, further evincing nature’s contempt for humanity (113). Even the trees partake, as the overgrown and forgotten cemetery (the final resting place of some of El Dorado’s earlier residents) illustrates: “A willow flourished on the broken roof of a low stone vault, its roots thrust insistently into the dank interior” (Benedict 111). Thus, not only does nature destroy the disrespectful invaders and their equipment, but it also literally consumes them. Such instances are not coincidental, as recognized by the mountain natives: “‘The giant drew it down for nourishment,’ she [Dreama] said. ‘Or did you think it just got lost?’” (Benedict



55). As Sheriff Faktor himself later predicts “Tannhauser will be gone from the face of the earth. Expunged. His person, personnel, operation, equipment, and every living memory thereof eliminated. Tabula rasa” (Benedict 239). Tannhauser’s remains and those of his enterprise will be reclaimed by the earth.

Even little vignettes outside the main narrative of the novel allude to the ultimate reclamation of man by nature and the lack of proprietary sentimentality the mountain inhabitants display towards death, as when Inchcape describes the fate of two past prize fighters: “They put the one dead brother in a pit in a woods and covered him with lime. When the other brother finally died, they put him in it too. The lime melted them away to nothing” (265). Tannhauser’s henchman Yukon, beaten into a vegetative state by Goody and then abandoned by his compatriots, is “eyed suspiciously and hungrily by the great horned owl” that resides in El Dorado’s dilapidated ballroom (Benedict 334).<sup>57</sup> Earlier in the text, the same owl engages in a defiant altercation with the minor character Peanut in which “Perhaps...[the owl] thought that it had caught him [Peanut], and had visions of killing him and dining off his body for weeks and months to come” (Benedict 232).

The timelessness of the region breaks down both human endeavor and human thought.<sup>58</sup> The final thoughts of the aforementioned Peanut, before succumbing to subterranean hypothermia at the novel’s conclusion, allude to just such a state, “The cold water would preserve him. As long as it flowed, he would remain. For a hundred, a thousand years. Refrigerated. Perfectly preserved beneath the sheet of ice, waiting”

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<sup>57</sup> In keeping with the theme of a natural world bent on destroying Tannhauser and company, Frazier in *Cold Mountain* refers to the owl as the “Death bird” (146).

<sup>58</sup> In describing the work of Thomas Wolfe, Banner refers to “the idea of the mysterious connectedness of the mountain people with their *timeless* and powerful world” (85, emphasis mine).

(Benedict 341). During his underground sojourn, Goody glimpses a geologic perspective on earth's antiquity (and places his own age in its properly diminished place):

He entered a room where the walls were lined with the impressions of petrified bones, layer upon layer of them like lines of indecipherable typescript rising to the stone ceiling above. The fossil remains at the bottom were small, nearly microscopic, clustered in colonies like air bubbles, the rock as porous as sponge. (Benedict 348)

Such temporally defiant experiences are not limited to Goody and Peanut. Further emphasizing the subjugation of human conventions to time and nature, the anchorite says of the painful personal memories burned away by his self-imposed mountain exile, "Time was the only thing required to disperse it all..." (Benedict 78).

### ***The Good Brother***

While far from as extensive as *Dogs of God*, Offutt's *The Good Brother* includes several passages that emphasize a similar idea of nature's pervasiveness in the Appalachian region. Although providing a little more than a moment of absurdist distraction, the "drive-in movie lot" that shows "naked flesh twenty-five feet high gyrating among the dark hills" becomes the oversized memorial for all technological detritus slain and left to mold in the Appalachians: "the movie screen poked like a giant tombstone between the hills" (Offutt 50-51). Offutt implies that nature has agency, as when "The summer air produced a sodden force that cloaked sound and motion. You could yell and the moisture trapped your voice and held it tight" and "Treetops swayed as if clawing at the stars" (51, 61). And although not nearly as relentless and unforgiving as the depictions in *Dogs of God*, Offutt's natural environment has some threateningly defensive aspects: Virgil notes that the spikes on a

locust tree could potentially impale a man, and Offutt describes the hills as a “steep-walled maze” (55, 80). Further on in the text, the widow Brownlow’s shack that Virgil visits in search of illicit liquor sits in state of equilibrium between domesticity and natural ruin: “Tarpaper covered the house and an oak shoot poked from the roof. Green moss clung like velvet beneath the eaves” (56).<sup>59</sup> In the alcohol-inspired search for the stuffed possum mentioned earlier, Virgil visits Old Man Morgan—by far the most successful revenge-killer in the county. Morgan’s house is “tucked tight to the hillside,” and its owner declares that the enfolding “holler’s so narrow I got to break day with a hammer” (Offutt 67).

To emphasize both Virgil’s integration into the natural environment of Kentucky mountains and the sheer insistence of that environment, in the hottest days of each summer Offutt’s protagonist “opened his trailer to the outside world and hung wet towels over the windows and doorways. Insects treated his house as part of their domain. One morning he [Virgil] awoke to find a raccoon on his kitchen table” (92). Indeed, much of the dramatic tension between Virgil and the Bills community in Montana emerges from their respective comprehensions of the natural world. Virgil accepts the dictates of the environment and lives, quite happily, within its dictates. Virgil is both in and of the natural world. The Bills, conversely, believe that nature is to be subdued and retro-fitted for their human (ranching) purposes. Arguably, their uncompromising militancy and suspicion stem from their perpetual and futile attempts to subjugate the land that their forebears settled.

Given that much of the novel—including the climax—occurs in Montana, the Appalachian environment plays little part in and of itself in Offutt’s *The Good Brother*. However, the villains of that novel are just as offensive and exploitative in their attitudes

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<sup>59</sup> For both his protagonist Virgil and this minor character, Offutt borrows two prominent names from Appalachian history: eastern Kentucky author and educator Harry Caudill and controversial Reconstruction-era Tennessee governor William “Parson” Brownlow, respectively.

toward the environment as Benedict's Tannhauser. All their political rhetoric aside, an underlying motivation of the Bills militia group involves the continued subjugation of nature. Despite all the sympathy they might arouse in their conflict with the affluent Californians relocating to the supposedly pristine Montana mountain ranges, the ascendancy of these wealthy migrants only replaces one form of nature domination/exploitation (large scale livestock ranching) with another (tourism and vacation homes). The ideologically reactionary Bills bristle at and oppose any attempts for a natural reclamation, seeing such efforts as only an example of government tyranny. As one of them angrily states to Virgil, "My grandfather killed off wolves that bothered his stock, and now they're putting wolves back..." (Offutt 131). The one aspect that redeems Virgil's Montana love interest Bottree—a full member of the Bills—as an acceptable match for his own unassuming, accepting Millennial Mountaineer nature is her own respect for the natural world, a decidedly uncharacteristic trait in her family and community. During the fishing excursion that seems to instigate their romantic relationship, she offers an approving explanation for her release of an impressive trout specimen: "you can't keep them because it's protected. Catch and release is the only good law the government's got" (Offutt 232).

### ***Cold Mountain***

Frazier's work features prominently the temporal disdain expressed by the mountains. When walking the landscape of Cold Mountain after their reunion, Frazier describes Ada and Inman thus: "If not for the store cloth of their coats, it could have been any place in time at all. So few markers to show any particular epoch" (425). Subsequently, they discover a Cherokee relic, an arrowhead buried in a poplar tree. The discovery of an object from "Long ago. Or not long if one took the right view" leads the two lovers to encapsulate the entirety

of their lives in that one moment and that one object (426). They fantasize of bringing [their] children to that very spot, when they themselves are “bent” and “grey as ash” (426). The persistence of this arrowhead, much like himself, will counteract and stand in defiance to what Inman posits as “some metallic future world, the dominant features of which he could not even imagine” (426). Perhaps in a nod toward Inman’s earlier half-belief in Cold Mountain as some Cherokee version of an eternal paradise, Ada, Inman, and the mountain itself have escaped chronological constraints. Inman notes of a creek on Cold Mountain that it “looked black and bottomless and might well have been running in a deep vein that cut to the world’s core,” much like the interior of the mountain in *Dogs of God* (411). Frazier again emphasizes the timelessness of the mountains through his description of the “Many wet millennia of leaves underfoot” as characters walk through the wilderness (357). Merely picking up a handful of dirt produces “Fragments of charcoal and splinters of flint. Ancient fire and partial arrow points flawed and discarded” (379). We cannot mentally encompass the antiquity of the mountains, as Inman’s choice of a final hiding/resting place for the Federal raiders killed in the dense forest evinces. The small cave Inman selects

had also sheltered other men even earlier on. Their sign was scribbled on the walls ... odd angular marks from some lost pattern of writing. None alive now could look on it and tell alpha from zed. Other marks depicted beasts long departed from this earth or never here, mere figment residents of brainpans long since empty as an old gourd. (315)

Similarly, Ada’s companion Ruby selects a “round flat stone marked from rim to rim with all manner of odd scripture” as a hiding place for her father’s provisions (360). Like the figures in Inman’s cave this writing may well predate the Cherokee, or even “have come from some

race prior to man” (360). Like Benedict’s mountains in *Dogs of God*, these mountains outlast humans—both the individual and the collective.

Although the images of natural reclamation in *Cold Mountain* are not nearly as explicit or as numerous as in *Dogs of God*, perhaps owing to the former’s nineteenth-century, pre-Industrial setting, they nonetheless are in evidence. In its state of stalled dereliction, the goatwoman’s caravan bears a striking resemblance to the depictions of natural reclamation in the other novels: “The shakes of its arched roof were spotted with black mildew, green moss, grey lichen. Three ravens walked about on the roof and picked at something in the cracks. Vines of bindweed twined in the spokes of the tall wheels” (266). Frazier also describes the region as possessing a “junglelike rate of growth” (51). Ada notes “the strange and vegetal topography, its every cranny and crag home to some leafy plant...spreading tops of oak and chestnut and tulip poplar converged to make a canopy that crowded out the sunlight...azalea and rhododendron ranked up to make an understory thick as a stone wall” (53).

### **Conclusion**

In a theme already common in rural exploitation/horror flicks, the terrifying plight and/or eventual demise of the interlopers is always their own damn fault for even daring to penetrate the upland canopy. “Death by misadventure”—the corrupt Sheriff Faktor’s pronouncement on the violent death of the body found in Goody’s backyard—comes to apply to Tannhauser and his entire operation (Benedict 14). And the natural environment has played a pervasively central role in the Appalachian novel—from the earliest work of the local color writers, through the post-World War II realism of Arnow’s *Hunter’s Horn*, to more contemporary novels that fall outside the parameters of this thesis (like Barbara Kingsolver’s *Prodigal Summer*). The attitude of Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier towards the

natural environment and the humanity inhabiting it is perhaps best captured in a passage from *Dogs of God*: when the cavern tour guide Dwight informs fellow guide Janina of his theory of the mountain and the caverns underneath as a living entity, she responds, “‘It’s got a face, and the outside is what?’ Janina said, her brow furrowed, her mouth pursed in disgust. ‘Its ass? A giant’s ass? My God. We walk around out there. We *live* out there. What does that make us?’” (102). And while a mountain may be just such a living entity, it most certainly cannot be anthropomorphized into an easy, understandable familiarity—as an old coal miner in one of Dwight’s tour groups delights in refuting the guide’s attempts at just that: “I seen the shadows. And I seen the rocks. But you got no face in there. Maybe you think you do, but you don’t” (Benedict 55). Thus, mankind is reduced in his importance to either a symbiotic ally of the ancient mountains, or an unwelcome parasite that demands purging. For the Millennial Mountaineer imbued with an inherent respect for his natural environment, the mountains are a place of intimate understanding and comprehension that present problems only to the outsider unprepared to accept their unswerving dictates.

#### IV. From Sut Lovingood to a Savage Socrates:

##### The Characteristics and Meaning of the Millennial Mountaineer

*“...mountain people are a nation of adapters.”*

*-Rodger Cunningham, Apples on the Flood (1987)*

*“And every day without fail one should consider himself as dead.”*

*-Yamamoto Tsunetomo, Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai (1716)*

In his seminal work *Appalachian on Our Mind*, Henry Shapiro frequently reiterates the idea that from the earliest inception of a distinct Appalachian literature there exists “a tension between Appalachia and America” (5). The Millennial Mountaineer embodies that tension in his many manifest differences from mainstream American ideals. Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier subscribe to Shapiro’s notions that mountains represent “not progress but its opposite” and that the mountaineer “attained [his] identity by abandoning the millennial struggle on the edge of ‘the West’—yet without submitting to total absorption into the dominant culture of the metropole” (Shapiro 6, Cunningham 110). Much as the early local colorists labored to create fiction that depicts Appalachia and mountaineers in their untainted “natural” state prior to the integration of their supposedly pure white genetic stock and antiquated virtues into the broader American culture, so too do contemporary Appalachian



authors like Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier work to sunder that very connection—to once again delineate the region from a broader national culture.<sup>60</sup>

These are not, however, backward-looking novels. They do not cast a reverential eye on lost romantic values that were supposedly inherent in the Appalachians. These are not the literary equivalents of “back-to-the-lander” counterculturalists who poured into the region during the 1960s with intentions to salvage a piece of an ecological and anthropological American Eden. Instead, these authors depict the Appalachian region and the Millennial Mountaineer as transcending their encounters with the outside world. In some ways, the outside world is defeated during its incursion as in *Dogs of God* and *Cold Mountain*.

Sometimes, the Millennial Mountaineer discovers that his innate skills and his philosophical outlook on life endow him with a capacity to survive in the outside world—frequently with much more success than others who are less skilled and/or adaptable as in *The Good Brother* and *Cold Mountain*. In fact, these encounters with the world outside the mountains serve to forge the very identity of the Millennial Mountaineer—in the words of the poet Bob Snyder, “what distinguishes [Appalachia’s] people is the conclusions they reach after they have travelled around” (quoted in Cunningham 142). Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier choose to distinguish their Millennial Mountaineers from their mainstream adversaries in three distinct ways: physically, intellectually, and emotionally.

### **“Racing” the Millennial Mountaineer and His Adversaries**

Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier emphasize, to varying degrees, the “non-white” characteristics of their mountaineer heroes. This emphasis is another significant component of the dichotomy that divides “insider” Appalachian writers (those claiming origins in the

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<sup>60</sup> And such an undertaking need not be limited to these authors of violent, action-driven novels. The same agenda is arguably apparent in the works of Ron Rash, Dorothy Allison, and Barbara Kingsolver.

region) from “outsider” Appalachian writers (mostly the local colorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). As Cratis Williams points out, the attribution of “pure Anglo-Saxon blood” (or, at the very least, Scots-Irish blood) to the mountaineer is hammered at relentlessly in Appalachian themed fiction of the 1890-1930 period—either as a justification for outside uplift of the region and/or as a potential reinjection of true American “whiteness” to stem the tide of what these local color authors potentially saw as the mongrelization of America. Sociological novelist Lucy Furman was even more explicit when she stated, “I have always heard that, shut away here in these mountains, some of the purest and best Anglo-Saxon blood in the nation is to be found” (10). Because these contemporary insider works of Appalachian fiction seek to separate the Millennial Mountaineer as much as possible from middle-class white Americans, they choose to emphasize the very opposite—the “mixed” race quality of the mountaineer, if not in blood, then at least in sentiment, belief, and action. As I touched on in the second chapter, if the Millennial Mountaineer must be white, he will be one of the least “white” ethnic groups of northern Europe (Celts). Although a convention of early pastoral depiction of the region, Shapiro notes that “The identification of the mountaineers as [Scottish] Highlanders reinforced the sense of them as a romantic people, and located them securely in the heroic past” (91). Celeste Ray draws similar conclusions in *Highland Heritage*, although she applies her thesis to the South as a whole. Yet this Gaelicness will often be co-mingled with non-white, almost always American Indian, ancestry. This idea of hybridity as a hallmark of Appalachian fiction is not new.

Yet this hybridity, this cross-cultural melding, is not just genetic. It is psychological and ideological as well. Cratis Williams referred to the popular interest in “a strangely metamorphosed American” of the late nineteenth century, during the first years of definable

Appalachian-themed fiction. In the immediate wake of the countercultural reclamation of Appalachia, scholars including David Whisnant began making statements such as “Appalachian people know that historically their problems are in many ways similar to those of Blacks, Indians, Chicanos, migrants, and welfare families in the cities” (126). The authors of these novels see just such a connection and work diligently to associate their Millennial Mountaineer characters with subaltern ethnic groups. In such a way, the Millennial Mountaineer is much like sociologist Neal King’s contemporary cinematic action hero, whose “sense of betrayal by a corrupted world adds to their moral kinship with nonwhites” (66). As Benedict in *Dogs of God* emphasizes the hyper-Nordic complexions of both Tannhauser and Yukon to place them in a symbolically hierarchical racial relationship to their Mexican drones and near-mute American Indian bodyguards, so too does Offutt have the Bills revel in their American “whiteness.” Birch, the albino psychopath of *Cold Mountain*, symbolizes excessive whiteness. Birch’s repeated ramblings, the delusions of Tannhauser, and the paranoia of the Bills (particularly Frank) imply a deficient, inherent madness on the part of this white Aryan-American character, the “equation of whiteness with evil” (King 67).

In a reversal of the Appalachian stereotype, we might say that the pureblood Aryan is inbred to the point of deficiency. King sums up the conventions used by Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier in his book *Heroes in Hard Times* (his discussion of late twentieth-century action films): “Heroes are not as white as the criminals [villains]. They are more like no-breed mutts than Aryans and a blond hero is hard to find” (87). The nominal main character in *Dogs of God*, Goody, is fairly nondescript. Conversely, evil incarnate Tannhauser is fair and blonde, as is his henchman Yukon. *The Good Brother* makes the most blatant racial

associations: Virgil identifies (silently) far more with local Indians than with the white, racist Bills. In *Cold Mountain* Inman's only male friendship of note is with the Cherokee, Swimmer. Frazier even implies that Inman's substantial survivalist energy has a mystical origin in wisdom gleaned from his Cherokee friend (McCarron and Knoke 275-76). The attributes of these respective heroes parallel some of the most time-honored stereotypes of Indians. In keeping with that stereotype, each character is represented by a totemic animal.

### ***Dogs of God***

The fact that Benedict refuses to expend much text in describing the physical appearance of Goody, other than that he is slightly built for one in his exceedingly physical profession as an underground prizefighter, makes Goody seem like a mutt when compared to the lavish descriptions of his antagonists. In emphasizing his whiteness, Benedict describes Yukon as "light-skinned...pallid as soap...milky pale, veined with blue" so much so that it seems "blades of grass reflected on [his] flesh" and "He wore his blond hair long" (68, 266). As if to further emphasize the Teutonic origins of his very name and to provide a military allusion, Tannhauser has "close-cropped blond hair" (Benedict 70). He would not seem out of place at Hitler's Nuremberg Rally, as he possesses "features...pleasant enough but unremarkable in their regularity" and "a strong, good-looking face, square and well proportioned" (70, 173). Furthermore, Benedict's decision to name this primary antagonist after an opera composed by notorious proto-Nazi Richard Wagner also conjures up negative connotations of white supremacy. Tannhauser's appearance epitomizes King's description of the 1980s-1990s popular culture über-villain, the "whiter-than-white appearance of the most threatening criminals, who may seem to come from a race all their own. The genre [action films] reserves the clean-cut, blond and blue-eyed look almost wholly for the wildest bad

guys. The *vicious, looney killers* are not so much ‘anglo,’ or ‘caucasian,’ as WHITE. They embody every log-up-the-ass/Germanic Nazi/Aryan upper-class/gentleman-sadist, racist characteristic imaginable” (King 68-69). In keeping with this theme of a Naziesque “superman,” Tannhauser’s unnamed father refused to have his son’s extra fingers removed and instead refers to him as “*Homo novus*,” viewing him as a Darwinian leap (Benedict 289, italics original). Tannhauser, in his primal ruthlessness and his paranoia regarding who is and isn’t a real human being, seems to have fully accepted these beliefs about himself. Yet the implication is that with all his associated cowboy accoutrements, Tannhauser is most certainly an American. Jane Tompkins, in her cultural study of the Western film genre, notes that the archetypal cowboy is in essence an “Anglo-Saxon knight-at-arms” and therefore carries marks of his “racial superiority” (146-47).

Tannhauser’s use of almost exclusively Latino labor, controlled through violent coercion, also clearly implies a belief in his own racial superiority. These migrant workers are treated as and behave like a slave population: “dark-eyed and dark-complected” (in stark contrast to the already established extreme whiteness of Tannhauser and Yukon), they “moved quickly to get out of the way [of Tannhauser and his colleagues], eyes fixed on the ground...underfed, poorly shod and dressed” (Benedict 176).<sup>61</sup> Tannhauser even describes Ernesto, the Latino manager of his countrymen, as a “kapo”—the same term used for Nazi concentration camp guards chosen from among the prisoners. Despite the anchorite’s

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<sup>61</sup> Continuing the symbolic animal connections, the malamute (Tannhauser’s totemic counterpart) is a blue-eyed dog that uses extreme violence to dominate the wild pack that it leads.

seemingly advanced age, Tannhauser repeatedly refers to the anchorite as “boy”—a pejorative term for an African-American—while torturing him.<sup>62</sup>

### ***The Good Brother***

As discussed in the second chapter, Offutt explicitly states a genetic connection between his eastern Kentucky mountaineers and American Indians, in addition to the numerous sympathetic connections throughout *The Good Brother*. Offutt is similarly overt in describing the white-supremacist outlook of the adversarial Bills: a member purchases all the “Krugerrands out of South Africa” stocked by a Montana pawn shop (with all the Apartheid-era connotations that act implies), and the “Liberty Teeth” brochures published by the group denigrate non-white with gross cartoon caricatures and drawings of lynchings (161). To them, miscegenation is a sin of unfathomable proportions. When Offutt depicts the Bills as essentially “courting” Virgil as a member, he may well be referencing the supposed “white” Anglo-Saxon purity ascribed to the mountaineer in the early decades of the twentieth century and the associated hope that he could be used to reinvigorate the American race. Yet Virgil lacks the proper racial indoctrination; however, the Bills are more than ready to supply it.<sup>63</sup> Because Virgil has so easily dispensed with his true background information and essentially has no past, at least as far as the modern technological age is concerned, the Bills seem thrilled to have encountered a modern incarnation of their own exalted frontier ancestors. But the irony of all this admiration from the Bills is that Virgil

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<sup>62</sup> As one undergraduate student pointed out during a classroom discussion of the novel, the race of certain characters in *Dogs of God* is open to interpretation. Benedict could well be implying that the anchorite is an African-American.

<sup>63</sup> In discussing the work of Charles Neville Buck, Cratis Williams describes the author’s use of “the theme that the mountaineer is a thoroughbred who, when given the proper training...will become a winner” (232).

bears no relation to them: he is from the people (the mountaineers) left behind by the frontier, and as Offutt implies, not racially pure in either DNA or ideology.

### ***Cold Mountain***

Only twice in *Cold Mountain* does Frazier make implications about Inman's racial background. Sally Swanger, intent on creating a matrimonial match between Inman and Ada, notes that "The two of you'd likely make pretty brown-eyed babies"—not the blue eyes of Benedict's white/western malamute (Frazier 100). Late in the novel, Stobrod simply describes Inman as "that big dark man" (Frazier 427). The Cherokee Swimmer, with whom Inman bonds in their youth, symbolically passes on his American Indian identity to him with the gift of the lacrosse stick. Significantly, the stick is comprised of the material of animals whose attributes Swimmer wished to inherit—and which, along with his "Indianness," are inherited by Inman. Furthermore, in his desperate bid to return to his mountain home, Inman is frequently aided by "non-white" minority individuals with whom he experiences a reciprocal affinity: the river-running woman who is "dark about the head and skin so as to suggest Indian blood back a generation or two," the "jumble of people wearing about every tinge of skin there is....as outlaw and Ishmaelite as himself. Show folk, outliers, a tribe of Irish gypsy horse traders all thrown in together," and a literate "yellow slave" (Frazier 86, 124-25, 231). Inman briefly joins the nomadic, multi-racial, multi-ethnic troupe, "Thinking he might find some feeling of kinship with the outcasts" (Frazier 125). A benevolent slave refers to the disheveled Inman as "look[ing] like a dirt man," like one of the non-white "Mud People" so despised by Offutt's Bills (Frazier 231). As with Swimmer and the Cherokee, Inman is adopted by the African American slaves while recuperating from his second gunshot wound: "He spent time sleeping and being fed by the slaves" that hide him (Frazier

232). With the same significance of tribal acceptance conveyed by Swimmer's lacrosse stick, Inman completes his journey wearing the gift of "an old black hat stained dark about the brow band with slave sweat" (Frazier 232).

Frazier does not neglect to provide racial implications for the antagonists in *Cold Mountain*. Birch, the mentally compromised adolescent mascot of Teague's ruthless Home Guard detachment, represents the vicious nature of American "whiteness" through his albinism. Inman makes the symbolism explicit, assessing him as "American all through, white skin, white hair, and a killer" (442). Thus, like Tannhauser and Yukon in *Dogs of God*, the image of a pure, unadulterated physical whiteness is associated with unreasoning evil. Like Virgil in *The Good Brother*, Inman also associates with a movement explicitly advocating white supremacy—the Confederacy. Yet also like Virgil, Inman expends much effort trying to escape this group when he finds he cannot in good conscience subscribe to their ideals.

### **Physical Endurance of the Millennial Mountaineer**

The Millennial Mountaineer is capable of an amazing degree of detached physical endurance. In fact, fresh wounds and the scars of old wounds are the most consistent physical characteristic of all three Millennial Mountaineer protagonists. Potentially mortal injuries are never cause for panic on his part. Death has always been so close to him that its presence is, perhaps, acknowledged and then taken for granted. In regards to physical prowess, Cratis Williams noted that the reputed physical endurance of the mountaineer was a common element in early Appalachian fiction (235). Consider the physical violence that the fictional mountaineers of this study endure in the course of their respective narratives, how



such abuse displays what sociologist Neal King calls the “proof of sacrifice and suffering in a world gone wrong” provided by “the worked-over male body” (153).

### ***Dogs of God***

Benedict’s Goody is already a walking mass of scar tissue and healed broken bones, the byproduct of his prize-fighting career; he has a “scarred cheek” and a “welt on his nose” as reminders of his chosen profession (267). After taking a savage gang-beating at the opening of *Dogs of God*, he remains keenly aware of his surroundings and dispassionately assesses his own physical condition. But neither seems to be cause for undue concern, as he calmly notes: “*I try to rise, but there’s not much on me that’s in working order anymore*” (Benedict 4). He expresses more consternation that his boxing shorts are partially removed, shamefully exposing his backside. He triumphs in his fight over Yukon, despite two broken hands and a general pummeling; after his victory, his “manager” Inchcape marvels at Goody’s fortitude and seeming insensibility to pain: “Broke both hands and still won the fight” (Benedict 292). Even after further beatings at the hands of an enraged Tannhauser and an unsuccessful strangulation, Goody still manages to pursue his would-be assassin Peanut, and survive an unspecified amount of time wandering partially blinded through an underground labyrinth. Such feats of endurance parallel the perseverance of Appalachia and the mountaineers that fight against the relentless hegemonic belief that the region and its people could be, must be, absorbed into the national culture. As a bemused spectator of the climactic prizefight states, “we heard [Yukon] was really something, superstrong, but he’s not showing us much. We thought he’d take you apart first thing” (Benedict 280). Similarly, the nation at large has always underestimated the Millennial Mountaineer, the underdog. Yet

the mountaineer remains defiant and durable, in spite of all the exploitative economic suffering visited on him.

Benedict emphasizes the incompetence of Tannhauser and his crew, an incompetence born of physical awkwardness and sheer laziness—characteristics the very opposite of the Millennial Mountaineers. During Tannhauser’s boar-hunting “safari,” one “old boar” manages to upend Yukon, mortally wound the work gang boss Ernesto, and kill one of the pursuing hounds (185, 216-17). Only Toma manages a non-lethal hit in return. To emphasize simultaneously their sloth and panicked reactions, the party can only produce a loud yet impotent response: the “fusillade...issuing from the automatic weapons” of the hunting party “knocked limbs from trees, stripped the foliage from the limbs, shredded the stripped foliage” and yet “The hog pounded onward” (Benedict 217).<sup>64</sup> Tannhauser is, at best, nothing more than, as Peanut describes him, a “twelve-fingered minor league potentate with angry eyes” (Benedict 248). While the marijuana crop languishes, or is perhaps never planted in the first place, the only activities that Tannhauser’s administrative staff seem either capable of or interested in are “hunting the boars, or watching porn flicks, or screwing the screeching brown girls” (Benedict 249).

While the Millennial Mountaineer is rugged and fit, though a bit scarred, his antagonists often exhibit physical deformity or physical aberrations. Such physical shortcomings are most pervasive in *Dogs of God*: Tannhauser’s extra fingers, Yukon’s disproportionate and almost withered legs, Loomis’s burns and scars. Yukon has “a long torso and bandy legs,” a physique unlikely to serve him well in extended hand-to-hand combat (Benedict 68). To further emphasize the physical shortcomings that lay behind his

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<sup>64</sup> We could, consequently, see a symbolic connection between Goody and the Boar—despite apparently overwhelming odds Goody survives a supposedly unfair fight and leaves Tannhauser and company in a similar state of befuddled excess.

imposing exterior, Yukon is allergic to bees and therefore susceptible to defeat by the natural environment. Even though Tannahuser implies that his extra fingers are an emblem of his evolutionary superiority, the fact that they “felt boneless” to Bodo, which he notices upon his initial handshake with Tannhauser, is yet another allusion to Tannhauser’s ultimate incompetence (Benedict 173). There is no substance to his grandiosity, either in his enterprise or in his body. Although a minor character, Loomis’s villainy paired with his physical appearance implies that a mountaineer can essentially be rebuilt and reprogrammed to do service against his own people: “Loomis’s voice was almost mechanical, without noticeable accent or inflection. Mingled as it was with the slight static of the intercom line, it might have been the unemotional voice of the helicopter itself” (Benedict 33). Even though Loomis is a native mountaineer, his willing, even eager, military service has stripped him of his identity, especially considering the central role that the distinct accent of the region seems to play in Appalachian identity. Carmichael notes that, owing to some unmentioned accident or war-related injury, Loomis’s appearance is an “asymmetrical jumble” and that he smelled “as though his skin had been impregnated with gasoline” (38).

### ***The Good Brother***

Much like Inman’s introspection in potentially lethal situations, when Virgil is shot and seriously wounded by a Bills member, the language that Offutt uses to describe his reaction is nonplussed, almost analytical: “He was lying on his back, but it seemed impossible that he could fall from a standing position. His leg began to hurt and he touched it and found blood. . . . The pain grew, occupying his entire consciousness, and when it receded he understood that he’d gotten himself into a bad spot (180). At no point in the scenes that follow, does Virgil make any outburst based on his pain. Virgil’s physical endurance and

toughness equal that of Inman and Goody. In fact, he shoots himself in the leg to dislodge an existing bullet that cannot otherwise be extracted. During his recovery from this wound, he forces himself to “wean...from the heavier medication” (198). Bortree admires Virgil’s emotionally moderate and determined nature and contrasts it with that of the swaggering, over-bearing cowboys she has known for most of her life: “Most men I’ve met try to act tougher than they are. With you, it’s different. You don’t know how tough you really are” (Offutt 257). Conversely, the Bills are merely playing at war. Like the pathetic state of El Dorado, their Camp Meggido is similarly lacking in the grandness attributed to it by its inhabitants. Much like the ease with which Faktor’s deputies overrun Tannhauser’s compound, so too do government agents subdue the few militant members of the Bills. The Bills’ four by four truck that, owing to its prodigious supply of food, equipment, and military weaponry, looks like “a Conestoga wagon crossed with a tank,” associates Western iconography with military domination to contrast the Bills’ hoarding, survivalist mindset and its oxymoronic dependence on modern supply and technology with the “travel light,” live-off-the-land abilities of the Millennial Mountaineer. In contrast to the Bills’ ineptness, Virgil has exceptional physical abilities honed by his Appalachian upbringing: “Virgil had always been able to see well at night. It was more recognition than actual sight, the ability to know forms by their silhouette. Most people treated night the same as day only with less light, which was a mistake. The secret to darkness was not to blunder about, but to look carefully at what was there” (45). Although meticulously planning for his journey, Virgil travels west with only a few clothes and a duffle bag full of money, even forsaking a firearm until settled into his Montana exile. Like Goody and especially Inman, Virgil acquires what he needs only when he actually *needs* it—a model of self-sufficiency. Like Tannhauser and the Bills,

the Millennial Mountaineer does not tramp through the wilderness encumbered by technology.

Although the criticism of whiteness is not nearly as pervasive as in either *Dogs of God* or *Cold Mountain*, in *The Good Brother*, Offutt depicts physical deformity or infirmity as a characteristic of white, mainstream America and still includes subtle incidences of abnormalities that separate villains from the physical integrity of the Millennial Mountaineer. Offutt describes one of the more aggressive Bill members as marred by “a white scar [that] ran across his scalp and ended at his ear, the top half of which was missing” (209). This individual expresses a threatening concern over Virgil’s “Viet Cong” initials—thereby mirroring the deformity of Benedict’s Loomis and the latter’s persistent memories of that conflict. The misogynist and racist manager of the tire shop where Virgil witnesses the disparagement of American Indian customers tries to explain his baldness as a physical side-effect of coerced sex-as-payment encounters with American Indian women: “We got all kinds of payment plans....It’s from the tipi flap hitting the back of my head sneaking in and out at night” (Offutt 145).

### ***Cold Mountain***

Frazier’s Inman, however, trumps all his fictional compatriots for physical ability and endurance. Literally walking across the width of North Carolina after recovering from what was assumed by his military comrades as a mortal neck wound, Inman is attacked by dogs, beaten, shot again, left for dead again, and buried alive before making it home and receiving his third, fatal gunshot wound. Like Benedict’s Goody and Offutt’s Virgil, Inman stays in an almost perpetual state of injury or recovery from injury throughout the entire novel. Yet for all of this physical punishment, the Millennial Mountaineer seemingly defies mortality, at

least until his “mission” is complete, in the case of Inman. The Millennial Mountaineer’s persistent ability to survive these vicious wounds lends him an otherworldly quality and makes him into what the Japanese samurai handbook the *Hagakure* calls a “vengeful ghost,” the symbolic single-minded state to which all warriors should aspire,<sup>65</sup> bent on getting his spirit (and his seed) home. At a point wherein Frazier resurrects some of the time-honored physical stereotypes of the lean, gaunt, and disheveled hillbilly, Ada views Inman as a ghostly image of death: “She examined him and did not know him. He appeared to be a beggar in cast-off clothes, rags thrown over a rood of sticks. His face was drawn and hollow-cheeked above the stubble beard, and he stared at her out of strange black eyes shining deep in their sockets under the shadow of his hat brim” (Frazier 403-04). Offutt’s Virgil experiences a remarkably similar moment, when lamenting the idea that because he had switched identities for his Western exile his old self is essentially dead: “Virgil Caudill was gone and there was simply no grave, no marker” (166).<sup>66</sup> Yet when he inspects his visage, he notices a disheveled stereotypically hillbilly image much like that of Inman (Offutt 167). The image of the stereotypical hillbilly is, therefore, the image of a ghost: the ghost of an individual and the ghost of a society that he represents.

### **Emotional Complexity**

The Millennial Mountaineer is a unique creation when compared with protagonists of earlier Appalachian fiction, though he does occasionally inherit some of their physical characteristics: a familiarity with nature, a penchant for survival, and a skill set of violence. Yet, unlike the stereotype of the conservative minded, anti-intellectual hillbilly who disdains

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<sup>65</sup> Such single-minded, vengeful persistence of heroes thought dead is used in the films *High Plains Drifter* and *Pale Rider*, two films emblematic of Slotkin’s alternative, revisionist western genre.

<sup>66</sup> Yet there *is* a grave for Joe Tiller, Virgil’s alter ego. Virgil took the name after inadvertently discovering the grave of an adolescent who would be roughly Virgil’s own age (Offutt 81).

the new and the unfamiliar, the Millennial Mountaineer is nothing if not open to new experience and thoughtful consideration of those experiences. In fact, the Millennial Mountaineer directly refutes almost every aspect of the libelous trait of mental indolence ascribed to many mountaineer literary creations. Cratis Williams best describes such representations when analyzing the fictional template used by the godmother of Appalachian fiction:

Murfree's estimate of the temper of the mountain man's character has been as enduring in subsequent fiction as her log cabins and her crowd scenes at the crossroads or the county seat. The stubbornness with which the mountain man clings to notions that have become set in his mind, his absolute unwillingness to change his views, is part of his pride and is at the very heart of the conservatism that held him in the awful bondage of isolation and stagnation for over a century. (154-55)

In stark contrast, novels examined herein depict the Millennial Mountaineer in situations that force him to navigate unfamiliar territories and learn from them accordingly. The internal dialogs of these characters chart a depth of intellectual inquiry absent from Murfree's mountaineer. A willingness to interact with the world at large, instead of corrupting the mountaineer or transforming him irrevocably, makes him stronger. Indeed, within this interaction are the seeds of his survival.

Significantly, rational motivation is important to the Millennial Mountaineer—a reason to engage in any sort of behavior, particularly if it involves violence. The deranged ramblings and seemingly meaningless purposes of his adversaries deeply disturb him. “I do not understand you people,” Inman says after his hallucinatory enforced “marriage” at

Junior's compound. Virgil and Goody, at points in their respective novels, express similar sentiments—Goody is morally incensed that Tannhauser would kill him for defeating Yukon in a fair fight; Virgil cannot understand how the Bills have reached their xenophobic, anti-government positions with their own limited Montana worldview as a guide, in essence, like mountaineers of a century, or even fifty years, prior. The entirety of the American Civil War remains for Inman an incomprehensible mess of needless fatalities.

Another psychological aspect—or perhaps more correctly, a spiritual aspect—of these novels is the conspicuous reduction (in *Cold Mountain*), drastic variance (*Dogs of God*), or complete lack (*The Good Brother*) of organized Christian worship. Some prominent representation of mountain religious worship, no matter how far that representation may vary from mainstream American Christianity, is a frequent theme within much Appalachian literature: James Still's *River of Earth*, Harriette Arnow's *Hunter's Horn* and *The Dollmaker*, and George Ella Lyon's *With a Hammer for My Heart*, to name but a few. In *Dogs of God*, the crazed “holy fool” anchorite wanders through the text as a contemporary Lazarus, his ravings bearing little resemblance to any contemporary manifestation of denominational Christianity.<sup>67</sup> In *The Good Brother*, there are few references to formal religion and none relevant to Virgil himself, whose name recalls the “Virtuous Pagan” of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Ciardi 1298).<sup>68</sup> Instead, in Indian-like fashion, the protagonists of these novels seek spiritual refuge in nature (Virgil, Inman) or receive a spiritual trial/cleansing at its hands (Goody). In fact, both Virgil and Inman want seclusion (Virgil, his grandfather's cabin; Inman, a cabin on Cold Mountain), similar in desire if not severity to Benedict's anchorite.

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<sup>67</sup> It should be noted, however, that one of Murfree's stock characters was “the religious fanatic” (Williams 149).

<sup>68</sup> In Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Virgil the poet is barred from heaven (but not tormented in hell) for his pagan existence in life.



If the Millennial Mountaineer is a man of cold, hard reason, such an attitude directly relates to one of his most prominent characteristics—a non-ideological outlook on the world. Based on the behavior of his antagonists, ideology is simply another word for outright mental instability. Thus, Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier retain and, arguably, promote the archetypal mountaineers' view that government authority (indeed, anyone claiming—or demanding—authority) is not to be trusted. This literary perception of the mountaineer is not new, as local colorists depicted “his traditional role as [an] observer of, rather than participant in modern life” (Shapiro 184). The Millennial Mountaineer attempts to follow the letter of this creed, with varying degrees of success, in all three novels: the Drug War is not Goody's fight, the Culture War is not Virgil's fight, and the Civil War is not Inman's fight. The Millennial Mountaineer understands and accepts human nature, even if at times he is forced to battle with it. The drive and single-minded dedication to abstractions of his antagonists (Tannhauser, the Bills, the Confederacy/Union) are not comprehensible to the Millennial Mountaineer: Tannhauser's insistence on killing Goody for defeating Yukon, ostensibly because Goody is some sort of robot/alien/secret government agent; the Bills' conspicuous displays of racist belligerence and their ideological inflexibility towards the government; the mass-suicide of the Union assault at Fredericksburg and the vacuous attempts at philosophical gravitas of the Confederate command witnessing the slaughter. The Millennial Mountaineer must combat non-organic organization: governments, factions, and corporations. Inman sets himself apart from both the Union and the Confederacy.

All of the Millennial Mountaineer heroes are strikingly taciturn, a literary convention Cratis Williams recognized in early mountain fiction, “the taciturnity reputed to pass for the inherent dignity accorded the mountain-born” (253). Each contemporary hero lacks what

might best be termed “heat”—Goody comes closest in his lustful pursuit of Dreama and in his vengeful chase of the would-be assassin Peanut. His prizefights, like Inman’s Civil War combat, are imbued more with determination (and a degree of frustration) than any other emotion. Even when Virgil trashes his Montana cabin in a short-lived fit of loneliness and self-pity, his actions seem decidedly out-of-character, and the reader witnesses no other such outbursts.

### *Dogs of God*

Goody has a dim view of the human experience. In one scene he expects a gardener to throw a tomato at him while he jogs past her farm, when in reality, she only intended to offer it to him. He similarly evinces no surprise that there will be no referee for his climactic fight with Yukon; he is “used to that” and therefore willing to accept all the pitfalls an un-officiated match entails (Benedict 277). Only his own moral code and physical prowess will see him through—and by and large, the former is characterized by a sense of non-interventionism. For instance, Goody in *Dogs of God* considers intruding on a predator/prey drama between a feral cat and a chipmunk, but “In the end he decided to allow the two of them to decide their own outcome” (59).

Yet there is an active, almost intellectualized sadism evident in the Millennial Mountaineer’s enemies. After describing the horrific scenes of Civil War carnage that occurred at El Dorado, Tannhauser “seemed pleased” by the images (Benedict 178). The villains are believers in the zero-sum solution, as Yukon explains of the solution to their pot-growing hippie predecessors at El Dorado: “We tried for a while at first to get them to do things our way. Modernize,” and failing that, Tannhauser literally immolated this recalcitrant population with homemade napalm—to further the aforementioned Vietnam

connections (Benedict 181-82). Tannhauser's hubris is an integral cause of his destruction, particularly his attitude towards the natural world he moves in. He erroneously declares his hegemony to his forced labor upon their arrival on Little Hogback: "'You are on the mountain now. And there is no law on the mountain. None,' he said, 'but me and Yukon here...'" (74). In so doing, Tannhauser neglects the cause of his undoing. There *is* a law on the mountain. Natural Law, not man's law. Significantly, if Yukon is representative of the Western American, then his defeat by Goody symbolizes the overall triumph of the Millennial Mountaineer's ethos over the expansive Western ideal. And the population clearly mourns that passing, as the crowd at the prizefight forces its way into the ring "to get to the fallen Yukon, to touch him, to get a look at him, perhaps to dip their handkerchiefs in his blood" (Benedict 284). If the ideal of the ever expansive, exploitative American West is to be defeated, the Millennial Mountaineer will have a hand—or fist, in Goody's case—in its expiration. Tannhauser represents the worst aspects, the hypocrisy of the American capitalist system. Like the Confederacy that has ensnared Inman, Tannhauser controls a minority workforce with threats of violence and death. When dismissing the possibility of violent coercion applied to an actress in the aforementioned cowboy porno film, he declares, "This is America.... Everybody has a choice. It's a free country" (Benedict 245). Even Bodo, the apparently amoral financier of Tannhauser's operation, who seems to regret his involvement almost immediately after his arrival, describes Tannhauser's enterprise as "quite a nasty piece of work" (Benedict 167).

### ***The Good Brother***

In the some of the Bills' anti-government ideals, Virgil sees a degree of common-sense logic not dissimilar to that of his own home region. But he will not accept their more

extreme militancy and racism. When told that the Bills might “mobilize” for war, Virgil responds, “It’s not my fight” (Offutt 271). Virgil stays in Montana even as the impending showdown between the Bills and the authorities draws closer because “he had people [Botree and her children] to stay for” (Offutt 282). Personal loyalties are the things that the Millennial Mountaineer will risk his life for—not ideology. Virgil and his fellow mountaineers inadvertently conform to the lifestyle advocated by the Bills (complete separation from government bureaucracy) for “reasons [that] were practical rather than political” (Offutt 174). The matter is couched in completely non-ideological terms: “You either liked the current politicians or you didn’t, and it often depended on the condition of the road by your house” (Offutt 174). And for all the angry ideological energy expended by the Ty and the Bills, Virgil notes that “People at home [eastern Kentucky] didn’t worry about the government, they ignored it” (Offutt 176).

During his Montana exile, Virgil rejects the community dictates (authority) of the Bills, for despite all their independent-minded anti-government rhetoric, they essentially constitute their own self-policing community (Brinkmeyer 78-79). Virgil does not want to be a part of a community: “What [Virgil] wanted was his father’s cabin and to be left alone” (Offutt 75). As such, the Millennial Mountaineer really is an agent of chaos—in the sense that he opposes industrialized order and organization. As in Murfree’s template, Virgil and his family (and community) disregard any legal recourse for justice in Boyd’s murder. Although somewhat ambivalent about the endeavor, perhaps for moral reasons that remain vague and unarticulated, Virgil nonetheless dutifully sets about the extra-judicial killing of his brother’s murderer, Rodale. Indeed, he may well kill Rodale simply to keep his Kentucky community and family from pestering him to commit the act.

Virgil, much like Goody and especially Inman, displays the Millennial Mountaineer's nonchalance at the events of life—"a peculiar but nonetheless admirable stoicism, characteristic of the race" (Shapiro 91). Virgil lacks any particularly strong feelings when he makes the decision to assassinate his brother's murderer: "It occurred to him that if he was going to leave, he might as well go ahead and kill Rodale first" (Offutt 62). Later, when Virgil is playing poker and winning handily in his new Montana home, he recognizes that "He was playing well because he truly didn't care if he won or lost. He understood why Boyd [his brother] had been such a consistent winner" (Offutt 141). When one of their number is arrested during a minor traffic violation, Virgil notes with a hint of disdain that "The arrest had increased the Bills' sense of their own importance" (Offutt 255). Again, this observation is further evidence that ideology is particularly off-putting to the Millennial Mountaineer. This scene of self importance is followed with more invectives against "Jews" and "mud people" by Bills who politicize the arrest (Offutt 255).

Virgil "was both attracted and repulsed by the Bills" (Offutt 256). Up to a point, Virgil recognizes their shared rural-based "Americanness" and hence the attraction. However, the repulsion emerges from their emphasis on racism, on ideological purity, and on their incessant ramblings in reference to both. After becoming involved in the arrest of a Bills member, Virgil laments that the Bills' creed seems to be "all or nothing" in regards to their political stance; such thinking is "new to [him]" (Offutt 257). The Millennial Mountaineer embraces complexity; indeed, he understands that the world will never be free from it. And to think and act otherwise leads only to ruin.

### *Cold Mountain*

Contrary to the stereotype of the mountaineer possessing little more than a rudimentary grasp of the nuances of human existence, Inman at times seems like a walking philosophical treatise. In the course of *Cold Mountain*, he ruminates on the morality of large unit warfare, the almost metaphysical significance of female genitalia, and the ground-level implications of the on-going Civil War. Inman fights a war on two fronts—the lethal physical obstacles that impede his process homeward and the internal existential struggle to rebuild his blasted psyche. When Ada’s father, Monroe, the product of Emersonian New England enlightenment, takes as his prime theological focus the question “why was man born to die?” his mountain congregation eventually loses patience with what they perceive as an excessively thorough yet fruitless exercise. For the mountaineers, “Many thought [death] not the tragedy Monroe did, but saw it rather as a good thing. They were looking forward to the rest” (Frazier 79). Death, and perhaps the future overall, are irrelevant to the Millennial Mountaineer—such disdain is bred into his bones. Inman has long ago internalized such attitudes of his homeland: “he had long since decided there was little usefulness in speculating much on what a day will bring. It led a person to the equal errors of being either dreadful or hopeful. Neither, in his experience, served to ease your mind” (Frazier 270). Yet Inman does attempt an existential grasp of the world he has been thrust into for three years, but this “world scorn[s] understanding” (Frazier 228). To Inman, the whole world had gone mad—crazed men dancing jigs after/before inflicting death (Fredericksburg, the Home Guard execution); Birch’s absurdist religious commentary as the Home Guard doles out extra-judicial killings; the nonsensical behavior of Junior’s inbred brood.

Inman is not at peace with himself psychologically. But this internal strife does not prevent him from acting, from keeping his head unclouded by indecision or undue moral calculation. He is not content with the fact, but he does recognize that he is, simply put, a killer. And a very good one at that. Consequently, Inman evinces a desire for extinction of self, to merge into his surroundings: “Surely off in that knotty country there was room for a man to vanish” (355). The Civil War has left this Millennial Mountaineer a misanthrope. At Fredericksburg, Inman describes his compatriots after the battle as resembling “great apes” (Frazier 11-12). Inman, in response to Lee’s adage “It is good that war is so terrible, lest we grow too fond of it,” retorts that “it appeared to him that we like fighting plenty, and the more terrible it is the better” (Frazier 12). The Millennial Mountaineer has no especial hope for the future: “It was simple enough to tell fortunes if a man dedicated himself to the idea that the future will inevitably be worse than the past and that time is a path leading nowhere but a place of deep and persistent threat” (Frazier 22). In fact, this indifference to death is probably Inman’s most powerful attribute and serves to represent him as the previously mentioned vengeful ghost: “the only way one might keep from fearing death was to act numb and set apart as if dead already” (Frazier 22). The Millennial Mountaineer craves his own death, or at least stands ready to embrace it.

Although any vestige of Confederate partisanship was long since obliterated by three years of battle, Inman still evinces no love for the Union cause and rejects the authority of both sides. As Kevin Grauke notes in his discussion of Inman as a non-ideological, survivalist hero: “Both sides are equally horrible, leaving Inman with no allegiances but to

himself” (54).<sup>69</sup> Inman views the war as a near universal catastrophe; upon hearing of a war casualty that has made a young woman a widow, alone in a mountain cove, “Inman sat silent for a minute, thinking that every man that died in [the Civil War] on either side might just as soon have put a pistol against the soft of his palate and blown out the back of his head for the meaning it had” (Frazier 305). In fact, like Virgil and his desire to inhabit his father’s isolated nineteenth century cabin in *The Good Brother*, “All he could list in his mind worth combat...was his right to exist unmolested somewhere on the west fork of the Pigeon River drainage basin, up on the Cold Mountain” (Frazier 85). Some things are worth fighting for, but they are very specific and very simple. Ideology has become a form of “ignorance” (Frazier 85). Symbolically, Inman fears in the early stages of his journey home that the jumble of Tidewater roads has led him “farther south than he wanted” (70). Inman’s temporary allegiance to the Confederacy was, in a sense, a manifestation of allowing himself to go too far South—the Deep South of monoculture and slavery—instead of identifying with the unique contours of Appalachia. The mountains may be part of the South, but they are most certainly not akin to the Deep South.

### **Conclusion**

The Millennial Mountaineer is a complex character, noticeably distinct in many ways from the crudely depicted literary hillbillies that precede him. To use the description Virgil’s mother applies to her son in *The Good Brother*, the Millennial Mountaineer is “an educated hillbilly .... The best of both worlds” (Offutt 117). He retains his physical prowess, his stoicism, his general disdain for much of the world outside his beloved mountain homeland.

Yet the images of the inbred degenerate, the lazy porch dweller, and the intellectual

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<sup>69</sup> Grauke’s essay is intriguing, although I disagree with his overall reading of the novel as “a paen to survivalism and anti-governmentalism”—as if we would expect to find it in the personal library of one of Offutt’s Bills (56).



simpleton are gratefully discarded. Instead, the Millennial Mountaineer now possesses mental abilities that equal or exceed his physical abilities. He is constantly analyzing and interpreting his environment, whether at home in the Appalachians or elsewhere in exile. The Millennial Mountaineer is capable of great intellectual depth, tactical cunning, and empathy with individuals and groups that are as equally abused by mainstream, middle class society. The mountaineer is a complete, if complex, hero.

## V. “What Make of Predator”: Violence and the Millennial Mountaineer

*“Peace is mythologized as residing at the very heart of violence—the outlaw finds peace through destroying all obstacles...that interfere with his...free motion and the gratification of his desires.”*

*-James R. Giles, The Spaces of Violence*

### Introduction

Each novel goes to great lengths to emphasize the innate tactical nous of the Millennial Mountaineer. A mind for fighting, a mind that readily takes to the demands of warfare, particularly if the battles are of an intimate and/or guerilla nature, characterizes these heroes. Yet in these novels this quality does not imply, per the stereotype, that mountaineers make good soldiers: tactical know-how is inseparably connected to a mind that remains defiantly independent. In addition to an intellect suited for violent confrontation, the Millennial Mountaineer also possesses the physicality and stamina to both dole out and survive exceptional acts of violence—even if he is not a muscle-bound literary counterpart to the cartoon Li'l Abner. Murfree outlined the template of the male mountaineer that seems to influence even the works of Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier: “he is a ‘tall athletic fellow’...he is invariably a ‘striking figure,’ with ‘lithe, elastic’ movement” (Cratis Williams 154).

The early years of the twentieth century saw, according to Henry D. Shapiro in *Appalachia on Our Mind*, the reality of Appalachian violence related to feuds and moonshining relabeled more “positively” in the national culture as “lawlessness”—an

emblem of the mountaineers' independent nature (105-06). Almost a century later, the violence of the Millennial Mountaineer as portrayed by Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier is not an undesirable characteristic. The violence of their mountaineer protagonists is perfectly reasonable, especially in contrast to the systematic, ideological, and/or greed driven violence of their adversaries. At worst, the Millennial Mountaineer may participate in unfortunate or regrettable acts of violence—such as when Goody kills (or beats into a vegetative state) his fight opponent Rolly Benoit in the opening pages of *Dogs of God* or as when Inman remembers the countless Federal soldiers he shot down during the large unit battles of the Civil War's Eastern Theatre. But the authors nonetheless contextualize these and later mortal altercations as necessary instances of kill-or-be-killed, instances of the “clean violence” characteristic of the mountaineer (Banner 79).<sup>70</sup> The Millennial Mountaineer is not as unthinkingly quick to violence as the old stereotype. He will willingly use violence if necessary, but such usage is never unthinking, as all three novels are treatises on the thoughts and rationale behind the many types of violence people visit on each other.

While the temperament of the fictional contemporary mountaineer differs markedly from that of mountaineers in earlier fiction, it is the “off-mountain” villains of *Dogs of God* and *Cold Mountain* that display these characteristics. The Millennial Mountaineer lives and fights by an unarticulated code that excuses violence only for self-preservation and the protection of the land and people he loves. Conversely, antagonists like Tannhauser, the Bills, and malevolent Confederate and Union soldiers are willing to kill for any number of reasons: greed, psychopathic whim, racist ideology, and delusions of greatness. Corrupted locals like Loomis, Teague, and Birch (and perhaps even Virgil's deceased brother Boyd, had he encountered the Bills) are all too willing to serve the dictates of these outside interests and

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<sup>70</sup> Banner uses this term to describe an attribute of the mountaineer character developed by Thomas Wolfe.

add their own acts of sadism to the oppression of the Millennial Mountaineer and members of their own community.<sup>71</sup> In many ways the villains of contemporary Appalachian fiction resemble the violently depraved “absurdly dangerous film hillbilly” caricatures that stocked so many B-movies of earlier generations (Harkins 165).<sup>72</sup>

### *Dogs of God*

Unlike the cowboy, who is expected to fight upright and face to face with his adversary, squaring off on a main thoroughfare at high noon, the Millennial Mountaineer is not averse to fighting dirty when the situation calls for it, particularly when he is outmatched, or when the fight is fixed from the start. Although he intends to fight fair, even with an air of competitive camaraderie during the backwoods prizefight that opens *Dogs of God*, Goody nonetheless responds in kind to his opponent’s sneak attack that opens the match. As Goody takes down Rolly Benoit with a vicious tackle from behind that inadvertently seems to result in the latter’s death, he notes that “*He’s not expecting me—fair’s fair*” (Benedict 3, italics original). Violence is simultaneously a tool and a skill, like any other that a mountaineer character might use. Even his own anger that accompanies violence is viewed with detached utilitarianism: Goody says,

*“Usually I get mad sometime in the middle of the third round, and I let the punishment I’ve taken in the last seven and half minutes come back on the guy that did it to me. That’s how I have to do it. I can’t afford to wear an opponent down with pokes and jabs; the bones in my hands break too easily.”*

(Benedict 2, italics original)

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<sup>71</sup> Junior from *Cold Mountain* might belong in this list. But lacking more explicit geographic clues to his location, I cannot decide if Frazier intends him to represent either a corrupted mountaineer or the Southern Piedmont/lowland “poor white” often contrasted unfavorably with the mountaineer.

<sup>72</sup> See Williamson’s *Hillbillyland* for more complete details on this film genre.

Citing Colonel Walter E. Kurtz's envy-filled "confession" concerning the unfeeling ruthlessness of the Viet Cong from *Apocalypse Now!* (1979) as an example and thereby furthering the Vietnam connection, American culture and film scholar Armando Jose Prats contends that another characteristic of the Indian/savage/other in American consciousness is that he kills "without feeling, without passion, without judgment," what he terms "savage freedom's last excess" (261). In *Dogs of God*, Goody on two occasions explains such a non-judgmental, dispassionate approach to his *chosen* blood sport profession. In the hallucinatory flashback prologue, Goody explains to Rolly Benoit, the opponent that he has probably killed in the course of their prizefight, that "this whole thing was a surprise to me. I don't even live around here. They brought me up to fight you because some guys heard I was pretty fierce, and you're the local hero. *I never meant to hurt you this way*" (Benedict 5, emphasis mine). But, significantly, he did very much intend to hurt him—just not to kill him. Toward the novel's conclusion, villain Tannhauser questions a severely injured but victorious Goody in search of the seething hateful rage the former assumes necessary in the composition of a "real" human, as opposed to the "race of synthetic men" that he fears will undermine his enterprise: "Listen here...Did you hate the man you beat?" (272, 290). After again killing a man in the ring, Tannhauser's sidekick Yukon this time, Goody responds:

Hate who?...I don't hate anybody that I know of...I get mad when I'm in the ring, but I'm not sure it's at the guy I'm fighting, really. Yukon himself—I didn't hate him in particular *or have any other strong feeling*. I wanted to beat him. I wanted him to fall down. If he dies, I never meant he should. He kept getting up...But I wouldn't have stopped hitting him just because I thought he could die." (Benedict 290-91, emphasis and ellipses mine)

Indeed, after the injustice of Tannhauser's attempt to kill Goody merely for defeating Yukon, Goody completely succumbs to this anger. Despite his horrifically wounded state—two broken hands, a lengthy pummeling by Tannhauser's company, and an attempted strangulation—Goody is willing to kill his would-be executioner Peanut “with his teeth” if necessary (Benedict 313). While a full fledged fire-fight rages around them, Goody pursues him with single-minded intent of violence.

The violence in *Dogs of God* differs somewhat from *The Good Brother and Cold Mountain* in that it contains a point wherein, like another contemporary novel—*American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis—“excessive naturalistic documentation of violence inevitably takes on surrealistic overtones” (Giles 160). Benedict's novel achieves this feat by the end of the prologue. And future scenes of extended, hyper-detailed violence, each discrete within the text of the novel, reach and surpass this point repeatedly: the summary execution of Wallace Claymaker by Sheriff Faktor and his deputies, Goody's vicious triumph over Yukon in the illegal prize fight, and the culminating paramilitary assault by the corrupt local law enforcement on Tannhauser's compound that results in a spectacular air crash and the Sheriff's demise from an anti-tank rocket. In this way, the violence that the natural region sustains and then metes out towards its oppressors mirrors that of the Millennial Mountaineer. The mountain forest endures the clear-cutting for Tannhauser's runway; wild hogs are hunted for sport. Yet that same forest environment ruins Tannhauser's technology, and a boar kills a member of his staff. After weathering a graphic pummeling, Goody defeats Yukon with one powerful, well-placed blow with his “big right hand”—and like Tannhauser and his attempt at Appalachian marijuana farming, Yukon invites defeat because he is not

“screening himself as he ought to have been doing” and instead rushes forward full of misplaced self-confidence (Benedict 278).

Unlike Goody and his sense of measured fairness toward violence, Benedict’s Tannhauser engages in a litany of sadistic offenses, from burning numerous people alive and torturing prisoners with dogs, to rape. He hunts boars with assault rifles, simply because he can. He kills stray dogs in the same manner and for the same non-reason. Tannhauser’s behavior implies that an exploitative capitalist enterprise requires such a ruthless individual. But in Appalachia, such unreasoning sadism opens one up to death at the hands of the Millennial Mountaineer, the mountains themselves, or a combination of the two. Despite his sense of aloofness from larger ideological concerns, the Millennial Mountaineer does not allow the suffering of innocents. A villain’s failure to respect or understand the natural environment usually results in that same environment contributing to his downfall.

### ***The Good Brother***

Much like Goody and Inman, Offutt’s Virgil can *focus* his violence. Unlike a stereotypical mountaineer, the Millennial Mountaineer’s violence is never random or capricious. Instead, it is informed, based on attention, and therefore focused. Virgil even plans the revenge-killing of his brother’s murderer, Rodale, with the most lukewarm of emotions, as an act of duty rather than pleasure, the violent retribution that the police, Virgil’s blood-kin, and various and sundry members of the community demand (Offutt 38). Yet in carrying out one aspect of his plan, Virgil “hoped [that Rodale’s] dog wouldn’t die from being tranquilized,” as no life should be taken unnecessarily (Offutt 119).

Also like Goody and Inman, Virgil exhibits a pronounced lack of fear for his own safety. When Virgil’s community college work crew of fellow eastern Kentuckians are shot

at in broad daylight during their lunch break, by either a jealous husband or a protective father (the text is unclear), the event does not seem to make a traumatic impression on their day. The only character apparently traumatized by the event merely loses his appetite, for which he is accused of “act[ing] like [he] was town-raised” (Offutt 33).

Like Goody who explains the controlled emotion that enhances his fighting abilities, Virgil’s mother describes anger as a helpful potential tool: “At the right time it can be handy as a pocket on a shirt” (Offutt 48). And Virgil evinces an ability to discern the right time: when he confronts Taylor, the lazy, drug-addled womanizer on his garbage truck crew, with the threat of a beating (for essentially calling Virgil a coward because he has failed to seek revenge for Boyd’s death), Virgil refrains from the violence he *could* visit on Taylor because he “ain’t that hungry yet” (Offutt 55). The insult is too trifling for him to unleash his potential, but it does come close. Offutt uses language that prefigures Virgil’s lethal encounter with Rodale: “Virgil stood slowly. He was trembling, and sweat rushed down his body. His entire world had shrunk to a narrow cylinder of vision that ended in Taylor. He moved toward Taylor, who took two steps back” (54). When Virgil enters Rodale’s house and maneuvers into position for the murder, he allows that anger to take hold, allows his senses to charge his emotions for the completion of the act: “The sodden smell of dirty dishes, stale beer, and unchanged clothes hung in the air...Rodale was small and pathetic. He was beneath pity. He was an animal in a dank lair, the runt of an abandoned litter. He should have been drowned at birth” (Offutt 120). Sufficiently enraged, Virgil gives in to one isolated moment of violent excess—the only way he can achieve his goal—firing until “the hammer was clicking against an empty chamber...Rodale’s legs were twitching and part of his face was gone” (Offutt 120).



Like the other Millennial Mountaineers—Goody with his fist-fighting savvy and Inman in his guerrilla fighting abilities—Virgil possesses a tactical intellect. The entire revenge plot against Rodale is an act of almost military precision. He manages to comprehend the defensive appeal of both his eastern Kentucky home and the Western landscape to which he flees. Among his Appalachian mountains, Virgil “suddenly recognized the safety of living in a hollow, the security of flanking hills with one route in. There could be no surprises here. Everything came at you straight on. You gave up sunlight but you were shielded from rain, wind, and ambush” (Offutt 106). Out West, Virgil notes that “With so much land in sight, there were few surprises. He could see an enemy coming from a long way off. Nothing would take him by ambush” (Offutt 264). The difference, however, likely intentional by Offutt, is that the language of the Appalachian landscape implies that the Millennial Mountaineer will confront his enemies on his own terms; in the West, with so much open space, one can (as Virgil will) continue fleeing indefinitely. Virgil also displays an innate ability with the tools of violence, as he “had the sensation that the pistol was part of his body, that the bullets it contained were made from his marrow” (120). In plotting Rodale’s murder, Virgil creatively constructs an improvised silencer from a lawnmower muffler.

The Western man’s violence as depicted in *The Good Brother* mirrors that of Tannhauser in *Dogs of God*. The cowboy wages a literal war on the natural environment, a conflict which is alien and repugnant to the Millennial Mountaineer. Offutt is most explicit on this point, as Virgil notices after his arrival in Montana:

At a gas station he stopped behind a convoy that included a six-horse trailer and two pickups. One truck bed was filled with provisions and another held

the remains of several elk. Rows of rifles blocked each rear window. The outfit reminded him of a *military operation* rather than a hunting party, and he thought of men at home emerging from the autumn woods with a rifle in one hand and a gutted deer slung over their shoulders” (127-28, emphasis mine).

In other words, all the Western cowboy’s violent energy is directed towards the large scale, industrialized destruction of the natural world.

### ***Cold Mountain***

Frazier’s Inman is, by far, the most accomplished killer of the Millennial Mountaineers examined herein. Quite frankly, his tally of kills is incalculable for both the reader and the character; based on the text, he seems to have killed dozens of men during the Battle of Fredericksburg alone. Like the mytho-historical Sergeant Alvin York, the Millennial Mountaineer “carrie[s] his skills and his persona as a mountaineer with him wherever he [goes]” (Shapiro 263). The martial skills of the mountaineer come from either his Appalachian nature or his Appalachian nurture. Inman declares as much when contemplating his own prowess for the necessities of combat:

fighting had come easy to him. He had decided it was like any other thing, a gift....You had little to do with it yourself. It was more a matter of how your nerves were strung towards quickness of hand and a steady head so that you did not become witless and vague in battle, your judgment clouded in all kinds of ways, fatal and otherwise. That and having the size to prevail in the close stuff, when it came down to a clench. (Frazier 123-24)

Symbolically, Inman is one of the beasts on Sarah’s quilt that so disturbed his night of sleep with her; after placing the slain Federal raiders in their cave tomb, “Inman took a stick of

charcoal from the old fire at the cave mouth and sketched on the cave wall depictions of Sara's quilt beasts....His pictures fit in like near kin with the antique scratching already put there by Cherokee or whatever kind of person came before them" (Frazier 318). Thus, Inman is further credentialed as a new Indian, able to replicate the animals of their dreamworld.

Additionally, such "scratching" on his part seems to serve as a signature of sorts; as a predatory animal himself Inman has merely added a signature of sorts to the gory work he has done. When he notes that "In all their angularity they reminded him of how frail the human body is against all that is sharp and hard," he suggests that for better or worse he has become sharp and hard and by this point no human can stand in his way of returning to Cold Mountain (Frazier 318). Indeed, when Inman shaves for the first time in years (after the successful ambush) and examines his face in the mirror, he notes that "The eyes that looked back had a slit and sideling quality that he did not remember"—in other words, his eyes have primarily taken on the cast of a predator and in his own words his face is now a "killer visage" (Frazier 320). Inman himself notes, while tactically calculating his options during his final showdown with Teague and the Home Guard, that he is "back in the *familiar* terrain of violence" (Frazier 440, emphasis mine). Recognizing that he lacks any defensive options, his instinct is "to run in their midst and try to kill them all"—a strategy that very nearly succeeds (Frazier 441).

Like Goody and Virgil, Inman's mind constantly performs tactical analysis—as when he assesses how best to get through a gorge with little protective cover: the key is to move quickly (Frazier 111). He is in a constant state of intuitive alertness, especially in martial matters. In yet another tense, potentially violent situation at a roadside inn, "Inman's first

impulse was to tally [a potential threat's] weaponry" (Frazier 164). Inman's animalistic senses provide yet another defense, as "an itch at the back of his head" warns him of an approaching figure (150). Inman's totemic skills bestowed on him by the Cherokee Swimmer serve as symbols of his guerrilla abilities. Swimmer presents Inman with

a fine ball racquet of hickory with bat whiskers twisted into the squirrel-skin lacing. Swimmer claimed it would power its user with the speed and deception of the bat. It was decorated with the feathers of swallows and hawks and herons...the characters of those animals too would transfer to Inman—wheeling grace, soar and stoop, grim single-mindedness. (Frazier 21)

The stalking and killing of raiders evince such totemic characteristics:

Just out of eyesight of the men, [Inman] found a big hemlock with low-growing limbs, and he climbed up about ten feet into it and stood tall on the limb right up against the dark trunk like he had seen long-eared owls do when they're laying up in the daytime and seeking to stay hid. Three times he gobbled out the call of a wild turkey and then he waited. (Frazier 315).

When Inman's ploy results in the death of the first raider, the dying man "looked above him to see what make of predator had fallen on him with such weight" (Frazier 315-16). Inman stalks the others at ground level, killing them at close range.

Inman projects an air of violent potential, recognizing such demeanor as an effective deterrent. After placing himself in the tactically advantageous position in a tavern, "The others glanced at him frequently, a certain amount of worry in their looks. Their faces were mirrors in which Inman could see himself as they evidently did, as a man that might just shoot you" (Frazier 166). Thus the Millennial Mountaineer recognizes and appreciates his

potential for violence, his willingness to instantaneously resort to violence if necessary. Inman's calm, but honest, threats are his first line of defense. When first approached by the punished Veasey, "Inman pulls out his knife and held it point down, *his arm relaxed*. He said, You come looking for vengeance, I won't even waste a cartridge. I'll lay you open right here" (151). There is no shyness around firearms on the part of the Inman or Virgil. Frazier lavishes descriptions on the characteristics of Inman's personal weapon, the rather esoteric LeMat's revolver, and details Inman's relationship to it: "[Inman] drew [the LeMat's revolver] forth and it was like a tonic to feel the weight of the pistol in his hand, the balance and the sound when he pulled the hammer back" (Frazier 234).<sup>73</sup> Earlier in the text, "Inman tipped the big pistol up momentarily to catch its profile in the light, thinking how much he liked the air of urgency and focus it lent to a simple request" (Frazier 115). At another point, he merely "kept it in his hand for company" and notes that "there was a certain amount of serenity associated with simply holding the stout pistol and thinking what it could do in your service" (Frazier 123). When Inman is seen laying out his inventory of gear late in the novel, the LeMat's revolver and the Bartram's naturalist book are the most significant items present—the Millennial Mountaineer's intellectual curiosity and violent abilities side-by-side. We see his use of the one inextricably linked with the defense of the other.

But in keeping with the trope of the Millennial Mountaineer's willingness to kill only when necessary, Inman draws a sharp distinction between the regretful fatal violence of his military service and the killings he makes in defense of his Appalachian home and its inhabitants under his protection. Inman's violent death, occurring after he has

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<sup>73</sup> Frazier's choice of such of weapon is curiously intriguing. The extremely potent pistol/shotgun hybrid *was* imported for the Confederacy in limited numbers. However, the weapon is essentially the nineteenth century equivalent of the sort of excessive supergun that might be carried by a contemporary action film hero. Interestingly (and without explanation), the excellent essay by McCarron and Knoke cited numerous times in this thesis contains a hand-drawn depiction of the LeMat's following the article's text.

singlehandedly wiped out almost an entire Home Guard detachment, serves an acceptable purpose:

instead of being the victim of a senseless politically motivated slaughter, Inman is shot to death only after successfully defending his home territory and his loved ones from Teague's Home Guard, and thus sacrifices himself for the worthiest of human, apolitical causes. Frazier, in short, has transformed horror into heroism and mindless violence into moral victory. (McCarron and Knoke 274)

Inman is not above moments of what might loosely be called violent enjoyment—it is the excess of the violence that he had witnessed, the utter meaninglessness of it that disturbs him. At the Battle of Fredericksburg, he recalls that “The Federals kept on coming long past the point where *all the pleasure of whipping them* vanished. Inman just got to hating them for their clodpated determination to die” (Frazier 11, emphasis mine). In the end, he only wants for these Federals what he wants for himself: “Inman's only thought looking on the enemy was, Go home” (Frazier 13). When three Union scavengers rob Sarah, the young mountain widow sheltering Inman, Frazier depicts them as two Philadelphians and a New Yorker to emphasize their wilderness incompetence. Inman methodically stalks and dispatches his clueless quarry with great skill and no moral compunctions. Although the killings themselves are enacted with Inman's customary stoicism, perhaps owing to the transgressions of these particular men—robbing a defenseless widow and young mother of her very means of survival—he allows himself several moments of what might be called subtle satisfaction at their demise. As his first victim lies supine, gut shot and breathing his last, “Inman put two fingers to his hat brim in greeting” (Frazier 316). Although the second

victim is killed outright, the third and final interloper receives a simple valedictory admonishment as he kneels mortally wounded before Inman: “If you’d stayed home this would not have come to pass” (Frazier 317). In that one brief statement, Inman sums up the solution—also unheeded by himself—that would have prevented the entire Civil War. In a final thought of contempt for these particular transgressors, Inman notes that during the war he had impersonally and regrettably “killed any number of men more satisfactory in all their attributes” (Frazier 317). In an act of what might be termed practical savagery and reminiscent of the manner in which the mountain environment devours interlopers (see chapter 3), Inman engages in secondary cannibalism: “The next morning before he set out on the road, Inman ate the brains of the hog, parboiled and scrambled up with an egg from the hen that had been eating on the raider from New York” (Frazier 322). Eating the bear cub, his “kin” tastes to Inman “like sin” (Frazier 356). Yet Inman is perfectly willing to eat eggs from a chicken lately feeding on the guts of a man, but to violate his geis and kill his totemic bear is almost too much to endure.

Like Goody and Virgil, Inman is adept at using controlled anger to his advantage—although Frazier chooses to display this more through his actions than any explicit thought or dialog. In the first detailed non-military fight of the novel, Inman defeats three attackers with nothing more than a farm implement. In overcoming them, he is merciless: “he eventually smote the three down to their knees in the dirt of the street...he kept at it until they all lay prone and quiet, faces down” (Frazier 75). When one of the seemingly defeated assailants dares pull a pistol on Inman, he reacts with more viciousness. After easily disarming him, Inman “stuck [the pistol] to the man’s head just below an eye and commenced pulling the trigger out of sheer frustration with the willfulness of these sorry offscourings” (Frazier 75).

When the weapon fails to discharge, Inman “beat the man about the head with it” (Frazier 75). Later, Inman engages in a form of pure vengeance against Junior, the lowly, domestically abusive stereotypical poor white who drugged him and then turned him over to the Home Guard. While chained to the other prisoners and unwittingly heading towards their executions, Inman admits that “other than to be set free, there was nothing he longed for more than to see Junior’s blood running” (Frazier 226). Inman survives the massacre with yet another severe wound and returns to carry out his vengeance. He achieves his retribution just as he imagined it—after Inman clubs Junior to death with a revolver: “There was no movement out of [Junior] but for the bright flow of blood which ran from his nose and cuts to his head and the corners of his eyes. It gathered and pooled on the black earth of the smokehouse floor” (Frazier 234).<sup>74</sup> Inman even holds a candle close to Junior’s shattered face for closer examination. Like so many of Inman’s justifiable acts of violence, Junior’s death is an act of vengeance for more than just himself, as the “ghost light” of an earlier victim of Junior “faded off and vanished” after Inman completes his mission (Frazier 234).

One of the most intriguing aspects of Inman’s relationship to violence is the way Frazier depicts Inman as Death incarnate. In addition to the crow imagery throughout the novel, the suit that Inman wears during his long journey home is “a black suitcoat of tightly woven wool that fit him perfectly, despite having been cut to the measure of a man who had died during its making” (Frazier 16). Thus, Inman is literally wearing a dead man’s clothes, as if he were already dead himself and merely meting out Divine justice on his journey homeward. Inman’s black clothes suggest “his discipline and severity, also his intensity, as

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<sup>74</sup>Inman could have quickly and easily dispatched Junior with a pistol shot (as no other men are in residence at the latter’s home), yet he chooses to bludgeon him to death—as if, like Goody, he desires a more intimate form of violence in this particular instance. Further study could examine the even darker shades of Inman’s character.



he threatens death to others and also has made of death an armour” (Harvey 82). Even prior to the war, Inman apparently preferred “strict attire” that made him “look like the law” (Frazier 81). Inman himself is not oblivious to his justifiably fatalistic state of mind:

Inman had seen so much death it had come to seem a random thing entirely. He could not even make a start at reckoning up how many deaths he had witnessed of late .... He had grown so used to seeing death, walking among the dead, sleeping among them, *numbering himself calmly as among the near dead*, that it seemed no longer dark and mysterious.” (Frazier 229, 230, emphasis mine)<sup>75</sup>

Twice Frazier describes Inman as “traveling under a black flag”; the second time he responds, “I’m under no colors” (218). Veasey believes that Inman is “a message from God saying no”—an observation applicable to the preacher’s own arrested attempt at homicide and to the very unjust and desperately savage world in which they find themselves (Frazier 113).

Inman is not inherently sadistic or hateful: “Before the war he had never been much of a one for strife” (Frazier 123). He truly wants only to be left alone, and for the innocents of the world also be left in peace. Only when these stipulations are violated does he seek recourse in violence. Although admitting that the thought of war originally held a promise of adventure even he was susceptible to, Inman laments that “War took a man out of that circle of regular life and made a season of its own, not much dependent on anything else....But sooner or later you get awful tired and just plain sick of watching people killing one another for every kind of reason at all, using whatever implements fall to hand” (Frazier 276). But

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<sup>75</sup> See the epigram to chapter 4. Such pronouncements make Inman seem a sort of samurai sage; statements like these would not seem out of place in *The Hagakure* noted in the bibliography.

the Millennial Mountaineer cannot allow an injustice to fester, even if it does not relate to him personally. Cratis Williams identified this dedication as a common trope, “the raging indignation of mountaineers at social injustice” (350). He may regret that circumstances force him to commit a killing, but he will never shrink from what he views as a violent necessity. Appalled by the attempted murder he has prevented, Inman warns the would-be murderer Veasey that he “merit[s] killing” for his crime of attempted murder and that he, Inman, “might...feel the need to do it” (114). Touched by the utter helplessness of Veasey’s would-be victim as he returns her to her home, Inman thinks to himself, “I ought yet to kill that shitpoke preacher” (Frazier 120). He advises the awakened girl, “Listen to me....That preacher does not speak for God. No man does. Go back to sleep and wake up in the morning with me just a strong dream urging you to put him behind you. He means you no good. Set your mind to it” (Frazier 121). Inman entertains “the notion that he should take out his knife and cut [Veasy] up” (Frazier 121). Veasey tells of the public humiliation and exile he receives after Inman left him trussed up in town with an explanatory note of his misdeeds although such penance may not be sufficient: “It is still a cloudy matter to me [Inman] if I did the right thing, letting you live” (Frazier 152). Upon realizing that the preacher is so pathetic after his righteous comeuppance, Inman “lack[s] the will to drive the man off” (Frazier 152). Junior becomes a target for Inman’s justice, with the implication that the punishment is not just for transgressing against the latter, but for facilitating the deaths of countless innocent men (Confederate deserters) who merely, like Inman, wanted to return to their homes in peace.

## Conclusion

Death is a constant for the Millennial Mountaineer—that which he witnesses, that which he doles out, and that which is wished for him. Yet like the slightly simplified Teddy Roosevelt admonition on the fortune card purchased by Goody from a carnival automaton, the Millennial Mountaineer will indeed “Walk softly but carry a stick” (Benedict 62). In no way does the Millennial Mountaineer seek trouble, but should trouble find him, he confronts it swiftly and with finality. This use of violence by the Millennial Mountaineer, or as in the case of Benedict’s Goody, the very centrality of it to his chosen profession is an “outward sign of their inner integrity” (Banner 87). Characters like Goody, Virgil, and Inman are supremely capable of using violence, of deploying their violent abilities to serve their own usually just ends. Goody lives by, even enjoys, a fair bare-knuckled fight between two equally matched men. Virgil reluctantly uses violence to satisfy justice and seems willing to use it in defense of those he loves. Inman abhors large-scale, ideologically motivated violence, yet is perfectly capable of meting it out to individuals that would oppress others. Yet the violence of the Millennial Mountaineer is never capricious, never violence for violence’s sake. Contrast such behavior with that of the Millennial Mountaineer’s adversaries (Tannhauser, the Bills, the Confederacy) for whom more recourse to ruthlessness is the only answer to their respective impending and irreversible downfalls. In the examples of Goody and Inman, the Millennial Mountaineer’s antagonists attempt to summarily execute him—he must be killed for who he is, a “synthetic man” according to Tannhauser (although not in the sense he believes), a deserter from a morally bankrupt and crumbling cause according to the Confederate Home Guard.

## VI. Conclusion: 1990-2010, The Era of the Millennial Mountaineer?

*This world it can't stand long*

*Be ready don't wait too late*

*You should know it can't stand long*

*For it is too full of hate*

*-Jim Anglin, "This World Can't Stand Long"*

*"Maybe it is exactly what it looks like, whatever it looks like. Maybe it's nothing."*

*-Pinckney Benedict, Dogs of God*

In her 1984 doctoral dissertation, Laura Leslie Banner observes that "For all of [his] youthful outrage at the romanticized view of Appalachia and its native population which had been promulgated by local color writers, Thomas Wolfe did not in his mature work reject, after all, either the beauty and power of the mountains or the basic literary assumptions which had informed the portraits of mountain people by Mary Noailles Murfree and John Fox, Jr." (79). In much the same way, Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier reject an overemphasis on pastoral themes evident in many works of Appalachian fiction. Their fictional worlds are not rich in natural beauty; many of their characters are not especially moral or well-meaning; nor are the social dynamics of the region particularly simple or straightforward. But that does not mean that these authors disdain all tried tropes of Appalachian fiction. The mountains are still tall and daunting, the mountaineer is still viscerally tied to his homeland, and the entire region is still a drastic counterpoint to the "outside world."

Appalachia and its inhabitants have played many roles in the unfolding of American sociological narratives: Fool, Demon, Warrior, Saint, Sexpot. But in most, if not all, these instances, the wardrobe and lines were provided by outside playwrights, even if some small vestige of truth lay at the heart of such a play's plot—as in the case of Alvin York or Kennedy's *War on Poverty*. In keeping with the post-Great Society, post-Vietnam, post-Civil Rights Movement, post-Watergate rise of identity politics in American society, the mountaineer—the formerly grossly caricatured hillbilly—has developed a speaking voice and a writing hand. This development hinges on Gurney Norman's 1971 serialized novel *Divine Right's Trip*, in which the idea of the hillbilly-as-counterculture nation is planted firmly in opposition to the white, middle-class power structure that had come to define the aspirations of the United States.<sup>76</sup> Each of the novels in this study allows a nod toward the hippie-era counterculture, showing just how Norman's innovative parallel persists in Appalachian fiction. In *Dogs of God*, Benedict refers to a group of "hippies" that had apparently resided in the area for lengthy period of time (before being literally annihilated by Tannhauser); Offutt's *The Good Brother* has Virgil striking up a friendship of sorts with a gone-underground member of the '60s radical Weathermen group; and despite Frazier's Civil War setting some 100 years prior to the Summer of Love, it is easy to see a precursor to Norman's hippie vagabonds in the "goat woman" that nurses an ailing Inman back to health. Yet when the mountain spits out Goody, his protracted experience mirrors a similar ordeal undergone by Norman's protagonist David Ray. However, David Ray emerges changed, re-born even—a literary parallel to what Norman no doubt felt was a needed reformation and purification of the counterculture movement that was already suffering

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<sup>76</sup>David Whisnant identifies a connection between "traditional Appalachian culture" and the counterculture (127).

decline at the time of his writing (MacFarlane 163-64). From Norman's point of view, Appalachia and the counterculture could symbiotically save each other. However, in Goody's case, mere survival is the only reward. Like, perhaps, the crazed anchorite before him, Goody has glimpsed the true, holistic nature of the mountains. They are neither benevolent nor malevolent, only unforgiving and immutable. Simply put, by the conclusion of the novel, Goody and the reader have experienced a taste of every sociological, anthropological, historical, geo-political, ecological, and geological aspect Benedict sees in contemporary Appalachia. At the turn of the Millennium, Appalachia and the mountaineer can only save themselves.

In "Uncovering the Trail of Ethnic Denial: Ethnicity in Appalachia," Patricia Beaver and Helen Lewis note that the 1990s have ushered in an era of regional scholarship focused on the "ethnic complexity" of the Southern mountains (51).<sup>77</sup> Therefore, it should come as no surprise that regional literature should follow suit. As of the 1990s, Appalachia has a self-conscious literary movement that places its concept of a unique Appalachian identity (with all its sociological and psychological characteristics) in opposition to a broader, debased American culture. In many ways, this identity is a subversive reinterpretation of the earlier outsider conception of Appalachia as a bulwark of early American vigor and virtue (and untainted Caucasian blood). However, as Appalachian authors/activists like Loyal Jones or James Still might focus on these regional virtues and "values," other writers have taken a decidedly more antagonistic view of Appalachia and Appalachians' relationship to the broader American society. Instead, they depict less a virtuous, comically rebellious relic

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<sup>77</sup>Beaver and Lewis describe the inhabitants of Appalachia at the time of large-scale European incursion (in the mid-eighteenth century) as "almost Indian-almost white" (54). Such an antiquated hybrid is precisely the identity that Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier impute to their protagonists.

and more an embittered, willfully violent, nihilistic guerilla outlaw—the Millennial Mountaineer of this study. In the works of Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier, Appalachia and Appalachian characters are less an alternative lifestyle being innocently martyred by the avarice of modern America and more a capable, unremitting rebel who will remain standing when the excesses of globalization and modernity have collapsed.

If American society is truly as bad as the commentary made by Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier, if we truly are headed toward some apocalyptic vision where a heartless, modernist superstate and its emissaries of greed attempt to conquer the last vestiges of some idealized natural humanity, then these authors place themselves in a role reminiscent of Orwell’s Winston in *1984*. Although members of the “party” themselves (the American Middle Class—and in Benedict’s case, the American Upper Class),<sup>78</sup> these authors assert that in the bleak future on the horizon, the “proles,” the downtrodden, the “dogs of God” are natural man’s final hope, and in conjunction with the living, breathing wilderness, they will devour their oppressors. Apparently, Appalachian-themed fiction experienced a similar period of unmitigated negativity in the 1890s, what Carvel Collins refers to as a literary period of “gloom” characterized by “sordid pieces” of fiction (70). But Collins refuses to posit a definitive explanation for this literary turn (71). Collins’s dissertation reveals that Appalachian fiction had previously experienced a rather wrenching shift from the merely benighted and bucolic to the depraved and the depressed, much as Lee Smith’s and Sharyn McCrumb’s work of the 1980s preceded the work of Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier. In the 1970s, James Dickey and Cormac McCarthy detailed the early skirmishes of an upcoming

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<sup>78</sup> If these authors affirm their own Appalachian identities and then pen such novels that indict the treatment of Appalachia by a broadly conceived United States culture, then they may well see themselves, like scholar David Whisnant, as “native intellectuals in a colony going through decolonization” and must speak out accordingly (134).

conflict, making no immediately discernable judgments on which side was in the right. Norman attempted to posit a peaceful, separatist resolution. However, by the end of these Millennial novels, it is obvious, in these authors' opinions, that war is well underway, and some sort of national implosion is imminent. Such a conflict will be a maelstrom of competing ideologies masking greed and naked desire for power engulfing the illusion of stable modern life.<sup>79</sup> These novels postulate that only the Millennial Mountaineer, by virtue of his disdain for the entanglements of modern life (both the material and the more intangible), will survive. Such detachment appears in Goody's reliance on himself and only himself for his existential satisfaction and his simplistic material existence, Virgil's refusal to subscribe to the Bills' dogmatic, racially motivated patriotism, and Inman's decision essentially to up and leave the Civil War in which he was a participant. Particularly in the cases of Inman and Goody, the mountain environment itself is an added protection. The invaders will pass from (and into) the earth. What the authors portend, to use Faktor's words from *Dogs of God* in reference to Tannhauser's fate, is the wholesale "tabula rasa" destruction of modern society (Benedict 239).

The Appalachian heroes of Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier (Goody, Virgil, and Inman, respectively) are in many ways related to two heroic (or more appropriately, anti-heroic) trends in popular American media consciousness: the hard-bitten, anti-ideological frontier/Western outlaw and the post-Apocalyptic outland survivalist, "the good savage...a tragic, doomed type" (Slotkin, *Regeneration* 204). Protagonists strikingly similar to the Millennial Mountaineer are not "exceptionally" Appalachian; a whole body of cultural studies criticism details the cynical, stoic, "nature"-knowing hero that appears in numerous

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<sup>79</sup> Although outside the purview of this study both for reasons of chronology and the regional identity of the author, such an idea reaches a crescendo in McCarthy's *The Road* (2006).



environmental and situational contexts tied to some form of national, sociological anxiety: Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996) and the subsequent film adaptation (1999) (repressed masculinity in the Information Age), the Amero/Euro hybrid "Spaghetti Westerns" of the 1960s and '70s (the moral ambivalence of the Vietnam War), the *Mad Max/Road Warrior* film series of the 1980s (the threat of nuclear annihilation), and the musical phenomenon of urban gangster rap in the 1990s (social nihilism) are only a few superficially disparate examples of this idealized, mythical desire for resistance (violent, if necessary) evinced by justifiably disgruntled elements in American society. And the hillbilly is a prime character in this societal rebellion. In *Hillbillyland* Williamson posits a potential hillbilly origin to this anti-authoritarian, anti-comfortable-middle-class movement initially sponsored by his own Counter Culture generation: the Disney interpretation of a fiercely authority-resisting television Davy Crockett (85).<sup>80</sup>

Like innumerable other American archetypes, past, present and emerging, the mountaineer can and has served ideological interests. So why not an ennobled, literary version of Appalachia and the hillbilly as thorn-in-the-side to American hegemony? Like Virgil's run through the snow-covered winter landscape of Montana, the Millennial Mountaineer is sometimes "the only color in a land of black and white" (Offutt 150). The Millennial Mountaineer is a complex, multifaceted character. He has the ability to embrace and confront complexity, and complexity often destroys his antagonists (Tannhauser, the

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<sup>80</sup> In reference to Olive Tilford Dargan's work, Williams notes that the mountaineer was becoming a potential counterculture, anti-capitalist icon as early as the 1930s: "Mountain character shaped in an atmosphere of permissiveness towards independence, justice, and freedom, as conceived by the founding fathers, moves easily toward Marxism when it is liberated by education from the stultifying limitations of superstition and prejudice indigenous to the mountaineer's colonial religious fundamentalism, and particularly so in the presence of fascistic controls in the hands of the capitalists" (351). But postmodern, Generation X thought rejects any submission to idealism. Community and justice must, for the Millennial Mountaineer, be formed and maintained organically.

Bills, the Confederacy). There is nothing culturally “pure” nor “isolated” about the Appalachia of Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier. Industrialization is present. Other populations are present. The schemes of economic globalization are present. It is how the mountains and the mountaineer confront these factors that forms the conflict, the action of these stories. We could argue that Benedict is in essence an heir to Charles Neville Buck, “whose recipe for a mountain thriller always included a generous pinch of aged mountain culture grated finely with a bit of outside sophistication and stirred vigorously into feuding and moonshining before they came to a boil” (Cratis Williams 241).

During the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, the hillbilly image went from dangerous obstacle to treasured and useful museum piece. An excellent example of this is the semi-mythical Sergeant Alvin York—all those violent, stubborn, unreasoning mountaineer attributes suddenly serving the greater national good.<sup>81</sup> In the case of the cowboy Tannhauser, the West is played out, “lost in the Pacific Ocean,” leaving Appalachia as a recursive frontier territory, one of the last wild places left on the North American continent (Frost, quoted in Cunningham 103). Thus, the lucre-hungry Western man is drawn to it: “The western frontier having closed, the dynamic of the ‘American’ character demanded that another frontier be found, another pioneering wave be launched, another ‘nature’ be subdued” (Cunningham 103). According to Shapiro, the earliest eras of Appalachian fiction sought to identify the mountaineer as an American outsider, then work diligently to integrate him into a standardized American culture. The contemporary era of Appalachian fiction seeks to draw as many distinctions as possible between the mountaineer and standardized American culture. The earliest era of

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<sup>81</sup> See the section in Williamson’s *Hillbillyland*, “Tol’able Alvin: *Sergeant York*,” pp 207-224.

Appalachian fiction sought to draw the mountaineer into America; the latest era seeks to extract him.

A further characteristic in these literary statements of resistance is the way that Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier associate this Millennial Mountaineer with other subaltern groups that have suffered at the hands of American dictates, namely American Indians, African Americans, and Third World ethnic groups. Shapiro speaks about a transition in American cultural conceptions which Norman's *Divine Right's Trip* and subsequent Appalachian fiction directly address, the "redefinition of American civilization as regionalist and pluralist, rather than nationalist in its nature, [that was] taken by those who accepted a vision of Appalachia as a legitimately discrete region and of mountaineers as a legitimately distinct people, and who subsequently identified the 'peculiarities' of mountain life as appropriate aspects of 'Appalachian culture'" (xvii). The Appalachian/hillbilly rebel stereotype has even come to supplant these other identity groups as an appropriated emblem of counterculture (alt-country, the literary movement itself) for affluent, educated white liberals (Aaron Fox 2005, Willman 2005).

The thematic elements of the Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier novels certainly have precedents in the body of Appalachian literature. *Cold Mountain*, although it flips the gender roles, is partially a romance of the genteel outsider (Ada) who falls in love with the mysterious and somewhat inscrutable mountaineer (Inman). *The Good Brother* and to a lesser extent *Cold Mountain* are contemporary iterations of the mountaineer thrust into the world at large and how he perceives and copes with the myriad differences. And there are examples of the retention of literary types from previous periods of Appalachian fiction—in *Cold Mountain*, the "simple-minded boy" (Pangle) and "the 'wild' person...who roamed

the woods” (Ruby, and to an extent Dreama). But in a divergence from their literary antecedents, Inman is never revealed as a fallen aristocrat in mountain exile,<sup>82</sup> nor are the sojourns of Virgil and Inman in the outside world capped with feel-good endings of material success and eternal happiness.

These authors have not shied from re-contextualizing all the characteristics assigned to Appalachia and the Appalachian in previous “outsider” depictions of the region. By contemporary American middle-class standards, this “new” literary hillbilly is indeed as lacking in material ambition, adept at violence, unemotive, and virile (to name some characteristics) as his literary predecessors a century earlier. He/she is indeed close to the earth, “simple,” and aloof to the allure of modern convenience. Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier (and many Appalachian writers both before and after them) readily subscribe to historian John Alexander Williams’s contention that Appalachia, and by association the region’s inhabitants, are an “‘alternative America’ projected onto the mountains and mountain people by reformers whose real purpose is to critique or change things in the nation at large” (9). In elaborating on the work of Murfree, Cratis Williams challenges those scholars who may take a dim view of the author’s depiction of mountain people by noting that while these portrayals are very much stereotypes, individuals very much like them did exist in the region: “Error rises when we accept him as the *only* mountaineer” (137, emphasis in original). A similar argument can be made regarding the works of Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier that, while their novels are very much populated with deranged and deformed characters, it is possible to find psychologically damaged, sex-addicted women,

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<sup>82</sup> Cratis Williams observes that “writers of mountain fiction have accepted the bounds [Murfree] imposed and never permit sophisticated men to marry mountain girls until the girls are discovered not to be real mountain girls at all or until they have been made worthy by education” (138).

morbidly obese purveyors of illegal entertainment, and death-driven young men interested in nothing more than drinking, fighting, and fucking. If Benedict, Offutt, and Frazier can justly be charged with any excess, it would be placing so many of these characters in a single work. Regardless, even the more recent works of Appalachian literature by Ron Rash (*The World Made Straight, Serena*) and Charles Frazier (*Thirteen Moons*) do not relent on these thematic elements. In the future, we may successfully argue that the 1990-2010 period of Appalachian literature is predominantly characterized by these very themes of stoic, outlaw men who steadfastly refuse to subscribe to the competing extremist ideologies they see tearing apart the world around them—men who in both belief and action challenge the middle-class, mainstream culture that seeks to oppress them.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Paul Lester Robertson was born February 1, 1975 in Roanoke, Virginia. He attended grade school in Bedford County, Virginia. He earned his General Educational Development (GED) degree in 1995. From 1992 to 1997, he attended Virginia Western Community College in Roanoke, Virginia. In 1997 he was accepted into the undergraduate English program at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. He was awarded the Bachelor of Arts degree, *cum laude*, in May of 2000, with a major in English and a minor in History. In the fall of 2002 he entered the Appalachian Studies graduate program at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, receiving an alumni fellowship to help finance his studies. In the course of the program, he served an internship at the Miners' Welfare Hall in Ystradgynlais, Wales. In May of 2004 he was awarded a Master of Arts degree.

Mr. Robertson began work on a second Master of Arts degree in English at Appalachian State University in the Fall of 2004. Simultaneously he has worked as a media archivist and digitization librarian for the Carol Grotnes Belk Library and Information Commons at Appalachian State University. He has also taught undergraduate courses in the Appalachian Studies, English, and Women's Studies departments.

Mr. Robertson temporarily resides in Boone, North Carolina. He is a member of Alpha Epsilon Lamda, the Golden Key National Honor Society, and the Society of North Carolina Archivists. He is the son of James Lester Robertson and Sharon McKee Jones, both

of Hardy, Virginia. He is married to Alexandra Simms Toomey, a fellow Appalachian Studies alumnus.