

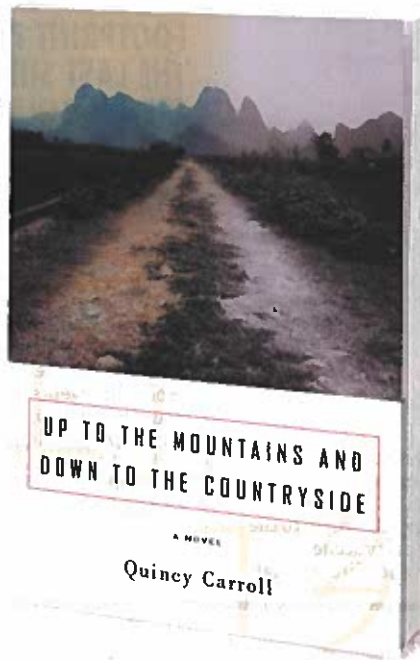
Into The Country

EXPAT ARCHETYPES PALE AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF CHINA'S COUNTRYSIDE

Everyone living in China has met that wide-eyed expat fresh out of college and looking to find themselves. They studied Mandarin in school, they're tired of life back home and want to discover the "real China." Everyone has also met the older expat, a shadow of what they once were and drained of idealism. They complain about everything, yet never leave. To many outsiders, these are the stereotypes for foreigners living in China. And in *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside*, author Quincy Carroll draws upon them to provide two polarizing views of living and teaching in rural Hunan.

The novel begins from Thomas Guillard's perspective, an immediately unlikeable 60-year-old man from Minnesota. Told in the third person, Carroll paints a vivid picture of a gritty bus station, and Guillard's growing impatience with China. Cigarettes and seed hulls litter the floor and men squat on their heels staring at him, and a cashier cannot understand him despite several attempts at various inflections of the town's name, Ningyuan. Readers, especially expats, will identify with the frustration but will quickly lose sympathy for Guillard as he reveals his brusque and unappreciative nature towards the one person who offers to help.

After Guillard boards the bus with empty pockets and only two weeks left on his visa, we are introduced to Daniel, a tattooed man with hair dyed fiery-red. He enters the chapter on a motorcycle, "carrying a brace of fowl at his hip and a rusty cleaver in the hand opposite, like



CARROLL'S OWN EXPERIENCE TEACHING ENGLISH MAKES THIS AN HONEST AND ENTERTAINING NARRATIVE

some brutish old woodsman, returning at dawn." Soon after, he meets up with a group of students who ask about his new tattoo—a symbol of the town where they live. He tells them he got it over the summer as a reminder of a place that's important to him. The kids scoff at the word "important," and Daniel defends the village, praising its natural beauty. After detailing an underwhelming summer in the States, a clear theme begins to form.

Guillard and Daniel come to work at the same school, along with a Canadian couple who keep to themselves and fight constantly. Readers gain insight into the world of teaching English and the bureaucracy involved, as well as a sense of what it means to be a "good" teacher, and the cynicism that can come from lackluster results in the classroom. Through conflict within the school, and events that occur within the walls of the tiny town, tensions arise between the central characters, and also between the locals.

Carroll's own experience teaching English in southern Hunan makes this work of fiction an honest and entertaining narrative, with his understanding of the culture and language widely apparent. And if readers tune in to his sometimes exhaustively descriptive prose,

they will be rewarded with a clear window into China's fascinating and beautiful countryside. **★ Jennifer Stevens**

Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside, Quincy Carroll, is available on Inkshares.com for 6.99 USD

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PRESS PLAY

STRANGER THINGS → From the production powerhouse that is Netflix comes this revivalist horror thriller. When Max Byers mysteriously disappears from a sleepy Indiana town, his mother, friends, and a police chief must confront dark forces in order to return him home. This is Grade A binge-watching material, so be sure to pack food and supplies.



SWISS ARMY MAN → Genius cult classic, or insult to the industry? From directors Dan Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, *Swiss Army Man* sees Hank (Paul Dano) returned to the land of the living by the dead—the corpse Manny, played by Daniel Radcliffe. This surreal and flatulent (you'll have to see it) story of friendship explores what it really means to be alive.

