ANALYSIS

Green Centuries (1941)

Caroline Gordon

(1895-1941)

"They are the best Indians anybody has done yet."

Max Perkins, her legendary editor
to Gordon over lunch at the Ritz (1940)

"You really are an Indian, not only in this book, but occasionally outside. Poor Cassie, she was a white woman to the end."

Sally Wood, best friend
Letter to Gordon (18 November 1941)

"It is a robust story, with real characters."

Anonymous
Review of *Green Centuries*
Booklist 38 (December 1941) 113
summarized by Mary C. Sullivan
Flannery O'Connor and Caroline Gordon: A Reference Guide
Robert E. Golden and Mary C. Sullivan (G. K. Hall 1977) 221

"Discusses Gordon's 'usual capacity for detail,' her 'flowingly pictorial' prose, and her familiarity with the terrain. 'Her characters have body--of mind, purpose, and imagination as well as three dimensions.' The 'action is slow gathering...yet Gordon 'takes firm and honest hold of her reader'."

Anonymous
Review of *Green Centuries*
Springfield (Mass.) Republican (21 December 1941) 7
summarized by Mary C. Sullivan, *A Reference Guide* 221

"The novel is 'very detailed and gives a good picture of frontier life, although horrors are piled on rather thick toward the end.' Rion 'carries the burden of the story'."

Anonymous
Review of *Green Centuries*
Wisconsin Library Bulletin 37 (December 1941) 201
summarized by Mary C. Sullivan, *A Reference Guide* 221

"An 'excellent, sensitive and thorough historical novel' that 'deals with a period that presents peculiar difficulties for the writer of fiction.' We have a stereotyped image of the frontiersman but 'the truth about him is a good deal harder to get at.' Gordon renders 'the Indians as human beings, not merely as painted adversaries or speechifying Noble Savages,' and gets 'into the skin of her period to an unusual degree.' Actual historical characters 'are naturally introduced and walk on their own feet'....A 'distinguished, vivid and continuously readable novel'."

Stephen Vincent Benet
"Land Beyond the Mountains"
New York Herald Tribune Books (2 November 1941) 4
summarized by Mary C. Sullivan, *A Reference Guide* 221-22

"Gordon 'doesn't belong either to the curtsy [to our ancestors] or to the skeptical school. Her historical novels...have reality, an interior reality rather than that which comes merely from flawless research'.... 'What counts is the realness of the scene...the sense Miss Gordon conveys of what Flaubert...meant when he

spoke of 'the melancholy of barbarian tribes, with their migratory instincts and their innate loathing of life which compelled them to abandon their country as if they were abandoning themselves'."

Clifton Fadiman
Review of *Green Centuries*
New Yorker (1 November 1941) 70
summarized by Mary C. Sullivan, *A Reference Guide* 222

"The novel is written with 'a gravity, dignity and authority which are wholly characteristic.' Increasingly Gordon 'seems to have abandoned the vein of [her] two early books [*Penhally* and *Aleck Maury, Sportsman*] and to be adopting the themes and approach of a major novelist.' Though a novel of real stature, *Green Centuries* sometimes seems to lack 'human warmth'....Casey [*sic*] and Rion...'suddenly come to life vividly as they have never done before'....On its own terms, *Green Centuries* is 'a superbly rich and authentic picture of life on the frontier, and the kind of men who made it what it was.' Gordon knows the Cherokee, and draws them as deftly as she does her white characters."

Edith H. Walton
"The Frontier South"
New York Times Book Review (2 November 1941) 4-5
summarized by Mary C. Sullivan, *A Reference Guide* 222

"Gordon's novel...pays off in sincerity and page-for-page clear writing'...'Whole sections of the book are first rate' [e.g., the chapter on the fear and loneliness of a child alone in the wilderness] and the characters are well developed'."

Max Gissen
"Two With Indians, One Without"
New Republic (5 January 1941) 27
summarized by Mary C. Sullivan, *A Reference Guide* 223

"A knockout. All of it is good and grand and a splendor to read. Even you must break down and admit that you've done it this time."

Katherine Anne Porter
Letter to Gordon (19 December 1941)

"In the image of the westward road on the first page of *Green Centuries* (1941) and its attractiveness for Rion Outlaw, the protagonist, there is established a central motive of this novel which portrays the life of southern colonials as they push beyond the Blue Ridge. Always, however, practical necessity tempers romantic impulse. Rion Outlaw would like to go with Daniel Boone in the early pages of the book, but he cannot afford a horse. Later, he does not go beyond the Watauga regions in western North Carolina though fabulous Kentucky lures him and Boone again invites him to go. If Rion feels the wilderness call him, he is aware that he is settling a family on the frontier and cannot abandon his responsibilities as citizen, husband, and father.

Rion is a complex person who wishes to subdue the wilderness to the order of civilization at the same time that the innovative spirit of the pioneer calls him away from a settled existence. He is the romantic who eternally seeks and who is perpetually disappointed. He is to some degree a spiritual outlaw, regarding himself as beyond the ordinary constraints laid upon mankind, and he resists the advent of law in the new community [like Cooper's Leatherstocking]. Rather, he works in accord with the basic laws of his own being which enable him at times to achieve notable, if inadequate, results. If Rion is complacent about his own powers, he is industrious and draws satisfaction from his wife Cassy, the land he cultivates, and his children. In 1776, at the end of five years in the wilderness, he has a farm of twenty acres and feels just pride in the fruits of his labors.

His devotion to the land, in fact, anticipates the rapport that men felt for it, according to Miss Gordon, in the antebellum civilization of the South. His most reprehensible aspect is a willingness to regard the Indians as subhuman. And the hatred with which he fights them after Cassy leaves him to visit a sick neighbor brings its own nemesis, as he unknowingly shoots his brother and his Indian wife on land that the Indians have recently settled. Rion and Cassy are the victims of forces that reach beyond them. External

catastrophe and the inability of the psyche to withstand great shock defeat them. There is nothing dishonorable in Rion's aligning himself with the Regulators and his rebellion against British tyranny. But after defying British soldiers, he flees his native region for the frontier to escape being hanged. Then as settler in a new land, there is nothing dishonorable in his alliance with those who stand against British authority. The view that Rion is the prideful, self-sufficient, godless man, and as such is typical of the pioneers [frontiersmen], is true to a point. But it is this outlaw element that also gives him decisiveness and creative force.

Cassy Dawson becomes the selfless wife and mother, and has more power than Rion to analyze her situation. Her introspective temperament is sometimes a liability as it fosters an undue sense of alienation. She is happy for five years with Rion on the Holston; but, when the two oldest children are scalped, she succumbs to morbid guilt. In her misery she refuses the only anodyne, her husband's devotion which is sexual as well as spiritual. In recoil from him, she drives him to the infidelity which only intensifies her bitterness and brings her to neurotic collapse. Earlier, she had loved Rion for himself more than for the security he could give her. Even after the death of her children she thinks first of her husband and not of herself as she counsels him to cry no more. But soon her self-command vanishes, and her own gaze turns inward and destroys her. In the last sequences she withholds love and irrationally expects Rion's feeling for her to remain the same. At Cassy's death both Rion and Cassy are apologetic, and each confesses the wrong done the other. In essence, each has in life's journey turned aside from the true way of mutual affection.

Miss Gordon throughout stresses the difficulties in establishing order in a strange environment. Simply, they are often too great to be borne. This truth reaches Rion when in his concluding reverie he thinks of the significance of his name and now learns the cost in human terms of the westward venture: 'Did Orion will any longer the westward chase? No more than himself. Like the mighty hunter he had lost himself in the turning. Before him lay the empty west, behind him the loved things of which he was made....Were not men raised into the westward turning stars only after they had destroyed themselves?'

Ironically, one form of order, that represented by the culture of the Indians, is fated to disappear. Although he is in a vital relationship to nature, the Indian is not able to adjust to alien modes of social existence and the white man's callousness. The Indians have values and rituals which unite them into an organic society; and they possess a poise and serenity often absent from the white man. But they are cruel and vindictive and reveal few compunctions in their treatment of captives. Miss Gordon appreciates the stamina and courage of the Indian, but does not regard him as a moral exemplar. She is skeptical of the noble-savage view and knows that European civilization brings possibilities for ranges of insight and order unknown to the Indian. At the same time it brings disease, firearms, and unsuspected depths of perfidy.

In the main characters we have the partial failure of qualities which sustained the characters in *None Shall Look Back*. The failure of creative masculinity and conservative feminism to keep intact a harmonious existence under frontier conditions is one chief theme in *Green Centuries*. Miss Gordon's increased emphasis on human limitation would argue that she was now moving toward a Christian orientation. From the beginning she had recognized candor and generosity as essential qualities in human relationships; what she began to recognize now was the precariousness of such relationships in the absence of a divine sanction.

In the green woods of America at any rate, Eden cannot be recaptured, at best only glimpsed. The paradisal wilderness is only superficially a paradise and more truly a wilderness as the epigraph, by John Peale Bishop, would indicate: 'The long man strode apart. / In green no soul was found, / In that green savage clime / Such ignorance of time.' Rion's observing the swans that tear each other apart persuades him and us of the brutality of nature; the brutality of men is implicit in another image, of Negroes being taken westward and chained together in the straw of covered wagons as if they were chattel goods.

One of the virtues of the novel resides in the characters who are complex without being sophisticated. This complexity and their basic reality make them timeless. The novel also extends toward universality because of Miss Gordon's recourse to myth; thereby the personae achieve added dimensions without themselves having to articulate them. So Rion learns from the Apollo figure (Cassy's brother, Frank) that he has been named for the Greek giant and hunter Orion. Rion possesses the grandeur and strength, some of

the moral force, too, associated with a god, something, moreover, of the restlessness of the prototypic hunter. Cassy as a Diana figure (in the legend she kills Orion by accident) has at first the stature of a goddess, and then loses authority as she succumbs to morbid thoughts. The name Cassy suggests affinity with the pathetic and forsaken Cassandra, a woman unfairly overcome by fate. Cassy's formal name, Jocasta, recalls to us the heroine of the Oedipus legends whose end was as tragic as it was unexpected.

In many ways *Green Centuries* is an expressive novel, successful within the limitations Miss Gordon imposed on herself. Her style is careful and exact, her ear for speech is unerring, and her eye for the precise detail is sure. The novel builds impact slowly and is more powerful in retrospect than as we read it first.... The earlier chapters are excellent, particularly as they describe the troubled love between Rion and Cassy and his involvement with the Regulators. But the best sequences are those at the end which treat the growing rift between Rion and Cassy. As the tenderly built harmony of their lives is destroyed, we become aware that time and process erode even the most conscientious and loving relationships."

Frederick P. W. McDowell
Caroline Gordon
(U Minnesota 1966) 26-30

"*Green Centuries* is a long historical novel about life on the Kentucky frontier around the time of the American Revolution, and we can see from the abundance of concrete detail that Miss Gordon spent a great deal of time reading historical material and studying the territory she was to write about....The researched material is perfectly assimilated and subordinated to the fiction. Indeed, there is about this novel a freshness and sense of what Henry James called 'felt life'; and, we feel, as we must in a historical novel if it is to be convincing, that 'it must have happened just this way.'

In large part, Miss Gordon's use of accurate historical detail helps produce this effect: her inclusion of the names of actual persons, Indian and white; the use of specific towns and villages; and references to historical events such as the signing of a treaty by the Cherokee Indians transferring the vast tract of Kentucky to the white man Richard Henderson. The meticulous attention to details of dress, travel, warfare, woodcraft, and husbandry also help convince us that these characters must have lived and that these events have happened just as the author has recorded them. The truth is, of course, that Miss Gordon has carefully selected and arranged her material in order to make us see it in the light of her own special apprehension.

In addition to factual historical material, including the use of a famous historical figure, Miss Gordon again employs a mythical paradigm; but it is so lightly emphasized that few readers would consciously make the connection between the protagonist of this novel, Rion Outlaw, and the paradigmatic hero, Orion, of Greek myth. And yet the Orion myth works here in the same way that the Adonis myth does in *The Garden of Adonis*. It underscores the universal implications of the novel; but, more important, it permeates the novel, elevates the tone, and consequently lifts the story Miss Gordon tells above its solid base of historical fact and realistic detail.

The historical paradigm of *Green Centuries* is Daniel Boone, who also resembles the mythical paradigm, Orion, the giant hunter who pursued the bull but never made the kill and who, after his death, was placed among the stars. Both historical and mythical paradigms are introduced early in the novel: Orion merely through a reference to the Greek myth, and Boone through his introduction as a fictional character. Both paradigms, significantly, are brought together in the same scene. Rion Outlaw, protagonist of *Green Centuries*, who is waiting outside of Daniel Boone's cabin, looks up at Orion in the sky and feels that he, Rion Outlaw, is the mighty hunter come down to earth. Rion hopes to accompany Boone on an expedition into the vast wilderness of Kentucky. 'I'll hunt over that meadow,' he cries.

In a sense, *Green Centuries* is the account of Rion Outlaw's living out of that boast. He never actually hunts across Kentucky, and he forgets his kinship with Orion until the close of the novel. However, the whole impulse of his life is to push on into the West, to encounter hardships and dangers, and to take these in his stride. Rion becomes an outlaw when he helps blow up a powder train being sent to reinforce the British garrison at Hillsborough. Later he leads a small band of outlaws across the hazardous Blue Ridge Mountains, bargains with the Cherokees for land, helps defend a stockade against Indian attacks, loses his

children in an Indian raid, and finally is deprived of his wife. It is only the death of his wife, Cassie [Cassy], that makes Rion aware of how he has 'lost himself in the turning.'

At the close of the novel, when the name of the mythical Orion is again invoked, the reader is invited to see how Rion Outlaw, an American pioneer, has in his own unselfconscious way come about as close to achieving human greatness as a mere mortal can. If Rion is not lifted up into the stars as was his prototype, he is elevated by Miss Gordon's tone....'Like the mighty hunter he had lost himself in the turning.' Although Rion Outlaw is the technical hero of the novel, another character embodies some of the same heroic qualities but in a simpler more primitive form: the Indian chief Dragging Canoe.

Dragging Canoe, who is about the age of Rion, is reputed to be the strongest man in the Cherokee Nation: 'Once when the river was in flood he had swum across it three times, rescuing children and women who were too old to swim.' In the ordinary historical novel the Indian chief would be cast as the villain; or perhaps, in a more 'enlightened' book, he would be the real hero and his white opponent the villain. Miss Gordon, however, does not resort to such simple moral stances. For her, the distinguishing quality of the hero is his determination to stand up for principles, his people, his way of life. And so, though Dragging Canoe inevitably becomes Rion Outlaw's antagonist because fate has pitted them against each other, they are essentially alike, fearlessly devoted to their own way of life.

Dragging Canoe is the only Indian chief strong enough and determined enough to stand up against the white settlers. His father, Atta Kulla Kulla, has been to England and knows that the white man's 'medicine' is invincible; but Dragging Canoe, who has never been out of Indian territory, knows only that he will never surrender to the white man. Atta Kulla Kulla prefers to trade land to the white in hopes of avoiding war, but Dragging Canoe would rather fight than sell out. For a time, Atta Kulla Kulla's advice holds sway: the Cherokees appease the white man by trading him, piece by piece, Indian land. But Dragging Canoe finally prevails; he leads his people into a war in which defeat of the Indian forces is certain.

Miss Gordon shows us that Dragging Canoe's tragic greatness lies in his refusal to surrender. Some readers have been disturbed by Miss Gordon's apparent refusal to take sides in the struggle between Indian and whites; others evidently believe her more sympathetic to the Indians than to her white protagonist. But the truth is that Miss Gordon's sympathies are not distributed on the basis of color or race. If the Indians are more sympathetically presented, that may be because they most fully embody qualities that Miss Gordon admires--the willingness to stand on principle. The certain defeat of the Indian forces makes their heroism all the more poignant.

One of the most interesting and also one of the most ambiguous sections of the novel deals with the life of Rion's younger brother Archie [Archy] Outlaw, who is taken captive by the Indians, adopted into the tribe, married to an Indian girl, and later killed in an Indian village when it is destroyed by white settlers, among whom is Rion Outlaw himself. The sections of the novel dealing with Archie's life among the Indians are as well written and convincing as the chapters about the white settlers. Archie functions as a transition or bridge between the two cultures. Through him and his friendly relations to Indians and whites, Miss Gordon suggests the essential humanity of both Indian and while and makes us feel the justness with which each side views its own actions.

There is ambiguity, however, in how the reader is to respond to Archie himself. He seems to adjust too easily to Indian life, for he not only adopts Indian ways but even scalps white settlers. When Rion gives Archie the opportunity to escape from his captors, Archie chooses to remain among the Indians. If we applied Miss Gordon's implicit definition of heroism, we might conclude that Archie is a traitor to his own people, for he has, in a sense, sold out. But Archie's youth is on his side, for he was fairly young when taken captive, and he does develop into a fearless brave. Toward the end of the novel, when the main Indian forces have been defeated, he stands by Dragging Canoe and pleads for an important assignment as a messenger to the British general. However, this ambiguity, this refusal to make a clear-cut judgment about Archie, makes him an interesting and complicated character.

It is Rion and, above all, Dragging Canoe who dominate the novel. Clearly, Miss Gordon's imagination was deeply involved in the creation of these two characters. She was able to see them, create them in all the

illusion of their physical reality, but at the same time shape them to the bent of her own heroic vision. There is no editorializing, no simple illustration of moral conduct. The only explicit statement she permits herself is a brief quotation from a letter Gustave Flaubert wrote Louise Colet which stands as the epigraph to Part IV of the novel. Since it is a brief and nicely sums up Miss Gordon's own response to the heroic characters in this novel, it is worth quoting: 'I have in me the melancholy of the barbaric races with their migratory instincts and inborn tastes for a life that makes them leave their country rather than change themselves.'

The futile struggle of a single powerful individual who is determined to fight on for the things his society has already surrendered produces the melancholy ending of *Green Centuries*. The struggle is admirable, the inevitable defeat, sad. This same mixture of admiration and melancholy is reflected in the conclusion of a number of Caroline Gordon's novels, such as *Penhally*, *None Shall Look Back*, and *The Garden of Adonis*.

Green Centuries is the kind of novel that literary analysis cannot do justice to. It is intellectually uncomplicated, but it works powerfully on the emotions. Moreover, it comes closer to achieving Miss Gordon's idea of a purely dramatic fiction than any of the other novels. What is said and the manner of the saying are so closely related that it is almost impossible to discuss the novel in the abstract. To say so is to pay it high tribute."

William J. Stuckey
Caroline Gordon
(Twayne 1972) 52-66

"The American pioneer in his 'singular passion' asserted himself not only against the wilderness but also against laws and codes that chafed individual freedom. Orion Outlaw, the protagonist of *Green Centuries*, has inherited the curious surname his father took when he fled Scotland after an unsuccessful rebellion against the king. Yet the name is equally suited to the son, for Rion escapes from the Yadkin settlement after ambushing the king's men in protest against taxation laws. Living outside the community, Rion is both 'outlaw' and romantic hero. Although we admire his courageous pursuit of his ideals, the selfishness of Rion's quest destroys the freedom he has won. Ultimately, the unquestioned individualism of the frontiersman causes spiritual isolation, what the characters in the novel call melancholy.

Rion, like other pioneers, mistakenly identifies his enemies as social codes and the natural world. His true antagonist is time, which eventually forces him to admit the hollowness of his values and to face his own mortality. In pointed contrast to Rion's qualified heroism is the omniscient narrator's understanding and control of time. Unlike the main character of the novel, the narrator does not live in that 'ignorance of time' the epigraph describes but enlarges the scope of the linearly moving plot with historical and mythological allusions. Gordon further criticizes the pioneers' limited perspective by ascribing to the Indians in the novel a more expansive concept of time and history...

The criticism of the pioneer is every bit as rigorous in *Green Centuries* as in the John Peale Bishop poem that lends the novel its name....Like Bishop and like her husband, who uses a similar metaphor in 'Aeneas at Washington,' Gordon depicts the pioneers as brave people with magnificent dreams of conquering a new Eden, an idyllic place and time...Yet, as Bishop...phrases it, this blind dream is destructive: 'A continent they had / To ravage, and raving romped from sea to sea.' Jane Gibson Brown identifies as a major theme in *Green Centuries* this judgment against the principles of frontier expansion: 'Heroes such as Orion Outlaw are fated to destroy themselves because, in Miss Gordon's view, the irreconcilable claims of freedom and equality become destructive in democracy. This conflict is finally inevitable because order in the American experience is not based on a hierarchy of principles derived from a sense of the divine but based rather on a set of idealized rights impossible to actualize at any given time.'

Viewing themselves as new Adams, the frontiersmen have, in fact almost no regard for the natural world and little appreciation for any supernatural order. When Rion does find his Eden, he does not realize that it exists in time. Before he fled the Yadkin, Rion was a farmer, accustomed to measuring the year by the seasons; but now as hunter and explorer, he feels nearly freed from time. Gazing at the new land he later settles, Rion thinks what a 'queer thing' it is 'to go through a whole season without raising anything. He

remembered once he's asked Daniel Boone about that, how he felt on those long hunts of his when spring came. Didn't he ever want to break up some ground? Boone said no; said when he was off in the woods away from everybody the seasons weren't the same as in the settlements. He could go off and stay a year, ten years, 'if it warn't for his family, and be content not to put his hand to a plough.' In this passage Rion identifies himself with Boone as a hunter who would free himself from the restraints of community, including the responsibilities of caring for a family.

Seemingly self-sufficient, the hunter may begin to think that he dominates the natural order, and surely one of the pleasures in exploring, as Rion discovers, is the control that naming seems to give. Yet the Rion who names the creeks and the mountains in the new land is unlike the Adam of *Genesis* 2 who, in giving names to the animals of God's creation, has a greater sense of the trust bestowed on him. Rion feels that he has a right to the land and seizes it, although he is practical enough to placate the Indians who have lived there before with hatchets and cloth. The attitude of the older Indians is much different from Rion's; they remember that the site harbors a sacred grove and hesitate to surrender it. But the young braves--greedy for more goods--persuade their elders to capitulate.

Rion's irreligious attitudes, which are beginning to infect the Indians too, signify the major flaw in the pioneers' ethic. The much quoted comparison between Rion and the constellation Orion does more than comment on the irony of Rion's name; the passage implicates all pioneers in the destruction caused by their ruthless idealism. Leaving his wife's deathbed and going outside to look at the sky, Rion thinks, 'Did Orion will any longer the westward chase? No more than himself. Like the mighty hunter he had lost himself in the turning. Before him lay the empty west, behind him the loved things of which he was made. Those old tales of Frank's! Were not men raised into the westward turning stars only after they had destroyed themselves?' Here, Gordon echoes another poem in Bishop's series 'Experience in the West' to reinforce her criticism of Rion and all pioneers who blazed a destructive trail in their westward trek....

The concluding sentences of the novel ominously reconfirm the final emptiness of Rion's pursuit of freedom. Having discovered that Cassy is dead, he stays a moment beside the body, while the candle goes out: 'Standing alone beside the bed until the walls closed in, he stumbled out of the room to where the others sat under the dark trees.' The coffinlike walls that seem to close in on Rion warn of his destruction. He joins others sitting in the dark, who like himself have sought freedom at a high cost. Isolation and death --a dark communion--await them.

But as the 'old tales' remind us, the blind search for license has exacted its price again and again. Rion Outlaw's naive concept of time is all the more apparent for the larger contexts the omniscient narrator provides. Jane Gibson Brown outlines Gordon's use of myth 'to define the archetypal nature of the central and enveloping actions' in the novels. These myths often serve as ironic measures of the protagonists, so that, for example, 'Orion Outlaw's escape from society' is contrasted with 'the inherent order and ritual of the timeless Orion'; for although the constellation represents the plight of a hunter who must track his prey forever, it is part of the seasonal order. Rion, however, is a hunter unwittingly caught by time's advance.

Parallels between Rion and Oedipus and Cain not only qualify the protagonist's actions but, by linking the American pioneer with other heroic figures in the past, suggest the archetypal nature of human conflicts. Jane Gibson Brown details the points of comparison: like Oedipus, Rion Outlaw does not know who his parents really are; he is the common-law husband of Cassy (Jocasta) who commits a kind of suicide by allowing grief to destroy her. Like Cain, Rion is responsible for the death of his brother. Rion's self-identification with the historical figure Daniel Boone is similarly damning, for Boone is not the exalted hero of legend. As Brown observes, this 'symbol of the frontier expansion' is shiftless; he is in debt; and he destroys the natural world. To a lesser degree, Rion shares these flaws, although, like Orion, Oedipus, and Boone, Rion is courageously daring in his striving after an impossible goal. His efforts to find freedom would place him, like the hunter Orion in the sky, somewhere between man and the gods. Yet as his affinity with Cain reminds us, his pursuit, however, valorous, is destructive.

The novel corrects the myth of the American frontier expounded by such historians as Frederick J. Turner, but Caroline Gordon does not fault the pioneers alone. Through allusion, the epigraphs to the four sections of the novel criticize all those who sacrifice community in their quest for freedom. [This is also a

major theme in the fiction of Wallace Stegner, who debunked the myth of the solitary Hollywood cowboy hero.] The second part of the novel, for example, begins with a quotation from the first chapter of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*: 'And as they thought that they might anywhere obtain their necessary daily substance, they made little difficulty of removing; and for this cause they were not strong, either in greatness of cities or other resources.' The nomadic life of the early Hellenes weakened the communities, leading, in Thucydides' opinion, to political turmoil and war. Their restlessness is analogous to that expressed by Daniel Boone at the beginning of Part I: 'I think it time to remove when I can no longer fall a tree for fuel so that its top will lie within a few yards of my cabin.'

Gordon holds that spiritual alienation afflicts all wanderers: ancient Greeks, American pioneers, and modern individuals as well. Those 'first inhabitants of Kentucky and Tennessee,' as the botanist and explorer Francois Andre Michaux describes them, have developed a 'long habit of a wandering and idle life' that has 'prevented their enjoying the fruits of their labors.' As this epigraph to the third part of the novel suggests, without community the individual suffers from a despair that makes his free life unfulfilling. In the text this 'melancholy' is a psychological problem associated predominantly with the white society. The Ghigau, the one Indian who reportedly is melancholic, is well beloved and even speaks in council as a warrior, but because of her love for white men she has become emotionally distanced from her tribe. The Cherokees believe that 'the Ghigau was one of those who live on without the soul.' Frank Dawson supplies a similar definition from Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* when Daniel Boone, the representative of the pioneer spirit, complains about his spells of 'profound melancholy'....

Despair is an emotional disease dating back at least to the ancient Greeks. And Flaubert's words beginning Part IV confirm that the melancholy felt by the pioneers is also a modern malady....As the flight for freedom undermines the whole identity of the individual, the consequent despair of these would-be Adams suggests a condition that, in Christian theology, is attributed to original sin. Thus, the immortality of the soul and the concept of sin became increasingly important issues for the characters of *Green Centuries.* Fallen from grace, with no God or system of beliefs for guidance, the human soul is 'lost' in specifically Christian terms but also in the literary language of the early twentieth century. Individuals without the possibility of community or communion are homeless. *Waste Land* [1922] caricatures like the 'nymphs' who have departed and 'their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors,' who have 'left no addresses.'

The scholar and the clergyman--figures in the pioneer settlements who ought to have less egocentric notions of time because of their interests in the literature, history, and beliefs of western civilization--are no less isolated than their less contemplative fellows. In *Green Centuries* the scholar Frank Dawson and the Reverend Murrow are not men of action but only selfish and contained men of contemplation who cannot make their knowledge a source of meaning for others.

Francis Dawson, the son of an Anglican minister and Rion's brother-in-law, is, in fact, a much more independent and admirable person while he is living in the Yankee settlement. There, he joins the Regulators to oppose the unfair taxes of the king. Although he does not participate in the ambush Rion leads, Frank does ensure the success of the attack by organizing the men and bribing the king's officials. Frank has a great deal of knowledge, as his job as schoolmaster would suggest. Yet even in the Yadkin, his knowledge is not necessarily superior to Rion's. In contrast to Frank, who learns about plants through reading, Rion, with his woodsman's experience, knows the common names and the uses of plants and scornfully remarks that Frank could learn more about the pharmacopoeia of the Indians by leaving his books and going to 'live with them a while.' Frank's knowledge in itself is not remarkable; moreover, he has the unfortunate tendency to withdraw into his studies. On the journey westward when Rion's brother Archy disappears, Jacob and Rion search hard and long for the lost boy while Frank waits behind, telling the women who are preparing the evening meal, 'when I am distraught it is a relief to read a few minutes in a book.'

Given Frank's selfishly contemplative nature, it is no wonder that the competent woodsman Rion comes to resent him. Responsible for the safety and health of his party, Rion complains at one point that Frank cannot shoot and 'couldn't even dress game after somebody else had brought it down.' He believes that Frank, a 'born schoolmaster,' has 'no business in the woods.' Only reflecting on his own superiority quiets

Rion. 'He wondered what would become of Frank if you turned him out in the woods by himself. Most likely he would starve to death and somebody some day would find a few buttons or those books he carried in his pack scattered at the foot of a tree and that would be the end of Master Francis Dawson, son of the Church of England minister. He was pleased by the picture and his anger died.' Ultimately, Frank becomes little more than a parasite. Especially after the bullet that lodged in his spine during an Indian fight confines him to bed, Frank totally depends on Rion. Occasionally he reads a letter for Rion, but in all, he can take care of himself no better than a child and appropriately he is killed with the children when the Indians ambush the house during Rion's absence.

Frank's good traits--his curiosity and his appreciation of nature and the Indian culture--are not enough to make him a useful member of his society. With the visitor John Adair, he can discuss Adair's book on the Indians, and with Daniel Boone, he displays his knowledge of Greek and Latin. Nonetheless, this knowledge is ineffectual because Frank does not genuinely care how ideas are related to moral or spiritual values. He does nothing...to see that his sister is married to Rion; he only watches disinterestedly that first night on the trail when Rion motions to Cassy to spread her blanket beside his. Frank does not practice his father's faith and restricts spiritual questions to intellectual debates such as the one with Boone...

For all of his learning Frank is as godless as the majority of frontier people. In the talks with John Adair and the Reverend Murrow, Frank again is more interested in books than in speculating about the soul. Even such a non-contemplative person as Rion reflects more on religious matters as he listens to the exchange. Earlier, in the Yadkin settlement, Rion was still conscious of guilt, blaming himself, for instance, for the accident that scarred and crippled his sister Jane. Yet he realizes that he has thought little of religion since he moved west: 'Well, sin was something he had never understood very well and hadn't worried about much, of late years, anyhow. When a man battled the wilderness he had enough on his hands without pondering the future life. Was that what made the people here on the Holston so godless, for godless they certainly were, with the exception of a man here and there like James or Charles Robertson.'

Fittingly, the Reverend Murrow enters the action of the novel just before Frank dies and takes his place, so to speak, as the intellectual and contemplative man. Like Frank, Murrow is inept as a woodsman, needing Rion's help to survive in the wilderness. Perhaps Murrow's inadequacies as a frontiersman would be understandable and excusable if he served a worthy and necessary role as a clergyman. Yet, though he teaches Cassy that she has neglected her spiritual life, he does not help her deal with her despair and sense of worthlessness. Confronting the inexplicable loss [explanation: they were killed by Indians] of her brother and two children, she blames herself for their deaths. Since the minister does not provide her...with a 'sacramental means of expiating' her guilt, Cassy becomes a victim of her own intense depression. At one point she complains to Rion that she has asked the minister for help in overcoming her guilt but cannot get a 'straight answer' from him: 'He was like Frank, couldn't express himself without using big words'...

Rion's practicality and intelligence, in contrast, do protect him from Murrow's misguided teachings. Rion tells the minister that Cassy refuses to have sex with him, then abruptly voices his dissatisfaction with Murrow's 'solution'....Although Murrow may talk about the need to create a new heart and spirit, he offers no real spiritual guidance, with the unfortunate result that Rion finds a practical solution to his unfulfilled sexual drives: he takes Anne [Ann] Mulroon as his lover. This betrayal only drives Cassy further from him.

Thus, godless and soulless, the pioneer [this overstatement is too gross to let pass unchallenged], who is alienated from any natural and supernatural orders [most pioneers, as distinct from frontiersmen, were both agrarians with much knowledge of and respect for Nature, and dedicated Christians], finds that his personal relationships are analogously flawed. Rion's affair with Anne [Ann] exemplifies love fallen to lust; Cassy's grief festers unnaturally until it deadens her to love and life. The spiritual condition of these protagonists finally resembles the post-lapsarian Adam and Eve before they are granted any hope of redemption. Unlike the hopeless existence [?] of the pioneers, the Indians' life--as Gordon conceives it--secures the individual in meaningful relationships with others. Examining this contrast between the disorienting individualism of the frontier society and the rituals of the Cherokees, Thomas Landess observes that the Indian way of life is so greatly preferable [this view rejects civilization] that Archy Outlaw chooses to remain with the tribe rather than return to the white settlement with his brother Rion. 'In that green savage clime,' it is not the

Indian but the pioneer who is innocent of time; the Indian, who perceives the supernatural in the natural and human realms, feels part of an order governing all life--past, present, and future....

In depicting the Indians as such noble moral examples, Gordon may well be following the early nineteenth-century Indian captivity narratives....In the novel, even the Indians' art ritualistically satisfies the individual's need to be integrated in time. Preparing to paint a carpet that will honor her husband, the Dark Lanthorn includes in her sketches images that link her husband's past with the entire history of the tribe. Because the Indians believe they are descendants of animals and therefore part of the supernaturally governed physical world, the Dark Lanthorn can also suggest the interrelationship of the human, natural, and divine in the series of pictures she draws....In her design she has already linked specific memories with the far past by showing the peace chief's ancestry and her own; and by depicting the dogwood blossoms, she connects the past with the present spring. Her confidence in life's order enables the Dark Lanthorn to contemplate without anguish her own inevitable death. Even as she works she calculates that this carpet may well be her last. Conscious of her husband's place in time, the squaw also thinks of her role in the community, finally deciding to draw a picture of the time her husband crossed the ocean to speak to the English king. The other events that she considers painting in the center of the carpet are also important and memorable because they mark Atta Kulla Kulla's triumphs for his people.

Artist and historian, the Dark Lanthorn is also a loving wife. Their sense of community makes the Indians seem generally more loving towards each other than the pioneers are, and the special bonds between Indian husband and wife, sanctified by tribal rituals, appear to foster deeper ties of love. In contrast to Rion and Cassy whose common-law marriage is never legitimized by either church or state, the relationship between Archy and his Indian wife Monon continues to deepen in affection and respect. Archy and Monon's happiness seems almost paradisal. The description of this married couple, like Milton's account of Adam and Eve before the Fall, is of two people so attuned to each other's needs and so agreed on their responsibilities that they know no division between work and love.

Gordon underscores the Indians' still-preserved links to Eden with her references to John Adair, whose book establishes the similarities between the Cherokee language and ancient Hebrew. The Cherokee name for wife is 'A-wah' or 'Eve,' instructs Adair, exclaiming, 'They give woman the name of our first mother!' Ironically, the pioneers fail to realize this shared heritage with the Indians and in their self-righteous conception of themselves as new Adams, they destroy the very essence of Edenic life. Rion's gleeful counting of Indians killed in battle is but one example of the white men's refusal to recognize their common humanity with the Indians. [The Indian warriors also count the enemies they kill.]

Through the dispassionate eyes of the white men out to surprise Dragging Canoe's war party, we see the murder of Archy and Monon: 'A young man had come out of the end cabin. He yawned and stretched himself, then going over to where the woman stood put his arms about her and catching hold of the mall began to work it up and down. The yellow feather in his hair jerked to and fro as his arms moved. The woman struggled a little in his embrace, then stood still. Their laughter floated thinly across the meadow. From the cane behind them came a shot.'

As Dragging Canoe reminds his people in his war speech, whole nations of Indians have 'Melted away before the white man like snowballs before the sun.' In the pioneers' savage trek westward, they have ravaged the continent ["ravaged" is ridiculous overstatement]...and in so doing have inevitably destroyed themselves. Cassy's despair and the emptiness that Rion feels at the end of the novel are examples of that same melancholy afflicting all those without allegiance to a social and religious community. This lawlessness of the pioneers [this is more overstatement: for example, some settlers cut off the ears of a thief] represents a worse kind of sin: the alienation of the self from its soul or, in Eliot's popular phrase, 'the dissociation of sensibility.'

The ancient Greeks, the American pioneers, modern society have all produced wanderers whose homelessness is, on the deepest level, a spiritual condition. Caroline Gordon regards this conflict between the individual's desire for freedom and his need to feel communion as a universal predicament--one that cannot be resolved by any self-made order. Her technical devices, however, do imply a solution: a sounder understanding of the individual's place in time. Like the Dark Lanthorn, the narrator of *Green Centuries*

seeks to locate the individual in a meaningful design, one that makes the context of all cultures and all times the proper abode for the human spirit." [This analysis would have been more precise if "pioneers"--generally understood as including agrarian families who established communities--had been differentiated from frontiersmen, the lone woodsmen like Daniel Boone.]

Rose Ann C. Fraistat
Caroline Gordon as Novelist and Woman of Letters
(Louisiana State 1984) 43-54

"Her descriptions of Indian life, highlighted by the contrast between the Indian and white settlements, suggest that Gordon had begun to ponder the possibility for engendering order through tradition....*Green Centuries* marked the beginning of a transition stage in Gordon's development that would become more obvious in the works that followed.

Green Centuries follows the exploits of two brothers, Archy and Orion Outlaw. The two have taken flight from their North Carolina home to escape the British, who are out to arrest Orion for his part in a Regulator ambush of Redcoat soldiers. They are bound for the frontier, what is now western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee. Along the way, however, the brothers are separated when Indians capture Archy and eventually initiate him into the tribe. From here on, the novel traces the now radically different lives of the two brothers and their societies, white and red.

Orion Outlaw, as his name suggests, is both a hunter and a man outside the law. He embodies the impulsiveness and restlessness that lay at the heart of the American pioneering spirit. Never content for long wherever he settles, Orion continually looks west for more fertile and open land. Such restlessness, which Gordon saw as typical of pioneers, had dire consequences for frontier settlements, leading to a weakening of family and social ties, a lack of law and order, and a de-emphasis of spiritual values. While religious sects exist at the settlements, they are usually crudely organized and contradictory. When Orion's wife Jocasta, for instance, approaches the local minister for help in overcoming the guilt she feels about her child who was killed by Indians, she receives only a long-winded discourse on sin and affliction out of which she can make no sense.

Archy Outlaw, renamed the Bear-Killer, and his adopted Indian community stand in direct contrast to the impulsiveness and disorder of Orion and his society. Living with the Indians, Archy discovers unity of life and purpose within an ordered and defined society. His and the Indians' lives are established according to their places within a formalized community; absent is the fierce individualism that fragments white society. The Indian society is also based on religious beliefs and practices, again in stark contrast to the white settlements....While the whites have abandoned community ritual for a personal freedom that finally becomes destructive, the Indians live by ritual that 'bonds the community together and defines the conduct of the tribe in terms of its relationship to the supernatural realm.'

Gordon's sympathetic portrayal of Indian society suggests that she was giving thought to the idea that a religiously oriented society, headed by a widely accepted authority [namely God], might be capable of transcending life's chaos....[However] the stable Indian society is merely a brief moment of light [This idealization of Indians overlooks their barbarism--torturing people and scalping children for instance] in a world of darkness. Gordon makes this perfectly clear in the novel when Orion and a group of whites destroy the last remnants of the Indian tribe, butchering scores of people, including Archy. [Gordon became a Catholic.]

There is an almost imperceptible turn upwards at the very end of the novel, when Orion experiences a moment of insight into his ongoing desire to flee westward. This occurs after he returns home from the Indian massacre and finds his wife, Cassie [Cassy], sick and dying. As his world crumbles about him, Orion now sees that the end results of perpetual flight are destruction and disorder. He recounts how as a boy he used to love to gaze at the constellation Orion in the night sky and imagine his namesake on mighty hunts. But now, as a man, he sees in the mythic hunter's group of stars 'Orion fixed upon his burning wheel, always pursuing the bull but never making the kill. Did Orion will any longer the westward chase? No more than himself. Like the mighty hunter he had lost himself in the turning. Before him lay the empty

west, behind him the loved things of which he was made....Were not men raised into the westward turning stars only after they had destroyed themselves?'

Orion's insight is significant; such moments of illumination for Gordon's defeated protagonists are markedly absent from her earlier novels. *Penhally* and *The Garden of Adonis*, for instance, also end in violent murder, but the protagonists gain no new insights. With Orion's new awareness, Gordon seems to suggest the possibility of renewal, that man may be able to reorder his broken life and pursue ways out of the chaos. And yet this affirmation is immediately negated, for the novel ends with Orion's stumbling out from the room where Cassie lies dead and into the darkness. He appears utterly broken, with little chance at achieving a reordering of his life by the light of his new knowledge. The possibility for renewal was presented less ambiguously in the works that followed *Green Centuries*." [This atheist perspective mistakenly attributes the limitations of Rion Outlaw to all human beings.]

Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr.
Three Catholic Writers of the Modern South
(U Mississippi 1985) 87-89

"George Haight...[a] Hollywood producer...said *Green Centuries* would not be good for the movies because it belonged to 'the coonskin cap group' and verged on 'the white wig group.' It reflected on the British and reminded readers how we had treated the Indians....Caroline considered him amusing and acute."

Ann Waldron
Close Connections: Caroline Gordon and the Southern Renaissance
(Putnam's 1987) 205

"She was exploring new settings in *Green Centuries* [and] reworking some of her old themes with great power and effectiveness. She returned to the theme of women's abandonment by ambition-obsessed men through the character of Cassy, the wife of pioneer Rion Outlaw. As his name suggests he is a hunter, Orion, and feels a compulsion to travel beyond the confines of law and settlement. As Cassandra's name implies, she will be a victim of masculine battles. Caroline's original name for Cassy, Jocasta, also indicates that she, like the wife of Oedipus, must suffer and die as a consequence of her husband's hubris, in her case, Rion's overreaching ambition to keep traveling farther west in search of an even better place to settle.

A dark, proud, refined woman, Cassy suffers from the rigors of pioneer life. After the death of her children, she withdraws from her husband and turns to religion, a withdrawal similar to that of Caroline Gordon's own mother and that of Aleck Maury's wife Molly in *Aleck Maury, Sportsman*. When Rion is unfaithful to her, Cassy's sacrifices seem in vain. In a passage of painful intensity, which may derive from her own suffering at Allen Tate's affair with her cousin in 1933, Caroline explores Cassy's torments: 'Lying there beside him, thinking of that woman, she had gone cold as a stone...'

Like Caroline's earlier heroines, Cassy turns 'cold as a stone' in the face of her husband's infidelity, but keeps working with the stony-hearted precision of an automaton. What is new in Caroline's presentation of Cassy's response is her extreme self-loathing, characterizing herself as a 'creature,' 'it,' 'a rattlesnake,' and 'the thing.' Unlike the heroines of *Penhally* and *None Shall Look Back*, Cassy does not blame the impersonal forces of history, but feels herself at once guilty and powerless, the snake whose loathsome nature makes it unable to refuse the tortures of the equally loathsome boys [?] in Caroline's Dantesque rendition of *the vicious circle of heterosexual relations.* [This critic is a lesbian Women's Studies professor who consistently condemns heterosexuality. Italics added.]

In *Green Centuries*, Caroline also returns to her theme of masculine restlessness or boredom in the face of the status quo. In *Penhally* and *None Shall Look Back*, the men turn to war for a challenge [the Civil War was more than an unnecessary "challenge"]; in *Aleck Maury, Sportsman*, the title character obsessively pursues sport; and in *The Garden of Adonis*, the men fight over Agrarian ambitions and family honor as embodied in their women. In *Green Centuries*, Caroline explores the quintessentially American challenge to the status quo, the ever-beckoning frontier. Her analysis resembles that of Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, an eighteenth-century Frenchman, in his *Letters from an American Farmer*. Behind the persona of Farmer John, Crèvecoeur posits the dangers as well as the promises of the frontier. If a person

strays too far from settled society, he will revert to savagery; such a man in Rion's Outlaw brother Archy, who is captured by the Indians and eventually joins the tribe. Unlike Crèvecoeur, Caroline shows great knowledge of and sympathy toward, Indian customs. Her Indians are not 'savages,' [not even when they scalp children?] but members of a settled society that is being destroyed by the greed and ambitions of whites, symbolized by Rion's slaying of Archy in battle.

As he pursues the American Dream, the alluring something better *which is always just out of reach* [many people have attained the American Dream. Italics added.], Rion Outlaw is necessarily a man never at rest. Like Crèvecoeur's frontiersman, he seems to acquire the worse of the two societies between which he moves, but can accept neither of them fully. [Crèvecoeur himself was a pioneer.] As represented by his inability to read, the culture of civilized society is unavailable to him, and so holds no attractions. He is, however, touched sufficiently by it to make him unable to consider the Indian's free life anything but inferior. In his inability to live in the past or present and in his obsessive pursuit of the future, he is in a tradition of American protagonists, all of whom stem from this frontier ethic. In particular, he resembles Fitzgerald's Gatsby in the lack of true culture that makes Gatsby unable to tell illusion from reality, so that he relentlessly and self-destructively chases the future as represented by that green light at the end of Daisy's dock.

A the conclusion of *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald links Gatsby's quest to the American Dream that has lured men like a siren from the first sight of the New World. As he gazes at the Long Island shore, the narrator, Nick Carraway, meditates, 'And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailor's eyes--a fresh, green breast of the new world.' Fitzgerald concludes that although the dream has elements of nobility, it is ultimately futile and prevents Gatsby from coming to terms with his past....So, too, is Rion Outlaw destroyed by his dream. At the conclusion of the novel, he is alone; he has killed his brother and his wife is on her deathbed. After all this destruction, he begins to realize the futility of his quest....'Before him lay the empty west, behind him the loved things of which he was made.'

In this tragically lovely passage, Caroline Gordon universalizes her theme of masculine restlessness by turning to the constellation Orion on which men have projected their quests for centuries. For Caroline Gordon, the American Dream is just another formulation of this eternal masculine ambition. The epigraph to Part II of *Green Centuries*, from Thucydides, speaks to this universal question, to the American pioneering spirit, and to restless, roving Allen Tate, unable to remain at Benfolly." [Gordon's philandering husband]

Veronica A. Makowsky
Caroline Gordon: A Biography
(Oxford 1989) 146-49

"It took her some three years to write *Green Centuries*, which many critics believe is her finest novel....*Green Centuries* may well be Caroline Gordon's masterpiece. Certainly it is one of the most well-wrought novels to emerge from the so-called Southern renaissance. The intricate structure of parallel actions is handled with discipline and imagination. By the end of the novel, all the loose ends are tied up by invisible hands, and the meaning of the characters is fully realized without compromising their integrity as human beings. As a consequence, *Green Centuries* is both a good yarn and a book of genuine literary significance--the work of a master.

It is also worth noting that Miss Gordon's prose in this novel is more inventive and lyrical than in her earlier works. Rhetorically, she risks more and gains more, without ever falling into the trap of sacrificing her characters or action for a burst of self-conscious poetry....These qualities make *Green Centuries* a valuable model for serious students of fiction to analyze and follow. Miss Gordon, a highly conscious artist, works with classical restraint, avoiding tricks and affectations; and for this reason her later works are lessons in how to tell a story simply and dramatically, while at the same time pushing the art of fiction beyond conventional boundaries.

Green Centuries was indeed about Indians in a time when they were less fashionable as literary subjects than they are today. To most Americans of the 1940s, 'the only good Indian was a dead Indian," or else one attending a mission school on the reservation. Yet in her extensive research on frontier life, Miss Gordon discovered that the Cherokees of that period were more civilized than the white invaders [debatable] and more refined in their sensibilities [when they scalped little children?] She saw in their society, soon to be destroyed, a beautifully ordered world of ceremony and ritual in which the basic activities of life were given form and transcendent meaning....

Against this highly sophisticated and orderly community, she juxtaposes the coarsening freedom of the white pioneers, who, as they moved westward, shed the vestiges of their Christian European heritage and reverted to their basic instincts for self-gratification [and survival]. The principal white characters in *Green Centuries*, though by no means two-dimensional villains, find it difficult to maintain their full humanity as they confront the seductive freedom [hostile Indians] of the American frontier. Unlike the Cherokees, whose every action [including torture and scalping] is invested with transcendent meaning by a traditional society, the frontier folk are often bestial [so are the Cherokees] in the pursuit of basic needs and self-centered in their relationships with one another. Theirs is a nightmare vision of liberty grown renegade and insatiable, a world in which the *strongest ego* prevails. [Untrue. Whoever surprises the enemy with the strongest attack force usually prevails. Furthermore, the Cherokee warriors are the ones who boast the most. Italics added.]

Though this summary may sound like a [Politically Correct] 1990s fictional stereotype of the historic confrontation between the noble Indian and the wicked European settler, Miss Gordon's narrative is considerably more complicated and infinitely more credible. In the first place, she does not regard white European civilization as rapacious and barbaric. Her white characters run into spiritual difficulty on the frontier because they lose sight of their religious and cultural heritage in the vast wilderness. Released from biblical and communal controls, they are *less human* [they do not scalp children or cut the arms and legs off captives or stick hot gun barrels up their rectums. Italics added.]; than their Indian counterparts; but the culture from which they come is presented, however implicitly, as good rather than evil.

In the second place, the Cherokee nation is neither oversimplified nor sentimentalized. Miss Gordon's Indians are not noble savages, instinctively virtuous because they still remain in a state of nature. Like the white characters, the Cherokees are fallible creatures living in a fallen world. If they behave better than the European pioneers who threaten and eventually destroy them [do they?], it is not because they are innately good but because they act within the rigid confines of convention and tribal law. As human beings, they are no less cruel or lust-driven than their white counterparts [so the whites are *not* "less human"?] They simply deal in a more orderly fashion with their failings.

In reading *Green Centuries*, one must remember that it was written at a time when the historical works of Frederick Jackson Turner and Henry Nash Smith were quite the rage among liberal intellectuals, who saw in the frontier experience 'the crucible of democracy.' In the wilderness of the New World, they argued, the white settlers found both freedom and equality. No one was judged by birth or riches but by the ability to survive and prevail....And you were at liberty to become whatever you wished. In Absolute Nature, these social critics maintained, you found Absolute Freedom (And that's how the New Deal began.) [The New Deal was the program of President Franklin Roosevelt.] Miss Gordon, who had probably read more of the primary documents from this early period than all but a handful of historians, believed that such a view was not only simplistic, but wrong-headed. And her novel is based on an entirely different understanding of the early history of the nation--an essentially conservative Christian perspective.

In *Green Centuries* we see no awakening political consciousness, no Whitmanesque celebration of equality and self. Miss Gordon's protagonist, Orion Outlaw, cares less about democracy than he does about survival...He is so infatuated with his own independence that he rejects the very circumstances in which political activity must take place. Thus politics, which is by definition a communal preoccupation, is for him an entanglement to be avoided. In fact, he flees into the wilderness precisely because he does not want to accept the responsibilities of living in society. [More pertinently, though it is true that he is essentially an anarchist, he flees to escape being hanged by the British.]

Orion Outlaw is a tragic figure who exemplifies great virtues and possesses great flaws. Like his classical namesake, he is the ultimate hunter, accompanied only by his dog, Sirius, forever pursuing the kill. Yet Orion is not the simple and unchanging character of myth, but a highly complicated man who comes to a tragic awareness of his flaws only after he has destroyed all possibility of leading the good life. True to the name Outlaw, which is what the MacGregors called themselves after the failure of the Jacobite cause [rebellion against the English king], he flees all authority to seek the wilderness, leaving behind a community where life is still reverenced, where customs and manners are still observed, where courtship is still ritualized in dances and games, and where marriage is still the norm. Orion takes with him Cassy, the daughter of an Anglican clergyman. They have already become lovers; and though the opportunity presents itself at a later time, they choose not to marry.

The relationship between Orion and Cassy is the primary focus of Miss Gordon's narrative--the initial joy of being together, the raising of a family, the prosperity that comes from hard work. Indeed, for awhile it seems as if the frontier is fully capable of producing the kind of independence that Orion seeks and Cassy is content to accept. However, their relationship cannot survive the rigors of the wilderness and Orion's desire to move ever westward [It is restored when she forgives his infidelity, it does not survive only because she dies when she risks her life in an act of charity to a neighbor.]

Daniel Boone, a friend and neighbor for awhile, epitomizes the free spirit of the pioneer--Boone, who abandons his homestead and moves on when stability and order begin to trouble his spirit, fetching along his long-suffering but compliant wife. Far from presenting him as heroic, Miss Gordon renders Boone as a flawed man who represents the *worse impulses* of the age [Crude overstatement. He does not torture people or steal from widows and orphans. Italics added.]

In contrast to Orion and Cassy, Miss Gordon gives the reader Archy Outlaw, Orion's brother, and Archy's Cherokee wife, Monon. Though initially a far less formidable figure than Orion, Archy chooses a *better path* to follow [killing and scalping people and opposing the American Revolution?] and in the end achieves a *peace* [Nonsense. He is a *warrior*. His path is not "better" since he is dead. Italics added.] and maturity that Orion never approaches. [This critic thinks it is mature to be a murderous pagan conformist and a "squaw man," as Rion calls his brother.] In tracing Archy's assimilation into the Cherokee nation, Miss Gordon is able to present dramatic contrasts between life in a traditional society and the life of the frontier [There is no contrast here, since the Cherokees live on the frontier.] When Orion is tempted by the wife [sister] of a neighbor, his betrayal of Cassy is selfish and perfunctory, an act of pure lust unchecked by convention or conscience. On the other hand, in the Cherokee nation, on one night during a special harvest festival, women are permitted to choose any man for a sexual partner, regardless of marital status. One act is an exemplum of unchecked lust. The other is a controlled exercise of sexual desire. [The distinction between lust and sexual desire is unclear.]

Likewise, hunting and warfare are nothing more than brutal and dehumanizing slaughter to Orion and his fellow frontiersmen... Miss Gordon shows Orion's understanding of the slain warriors as no more than vegetables ripening in a field, the lowest form of living thing. As the scene closes, he stands in a puddle of blood laughing....Among Archy Outlaw's Cherokees, however, a deep reverence for life informs the principal masculine pursuits of hunting and warfare. Both activities are governed by rigid rules that prescribe *respect* for prey and enemy....Warriors treat their fallen adversaries with *dignity*." [Respect? Dignity? They scalp children and torture captives, burning them alive, ramming hot gun barrels up their rectums and cutting off their arms and legs! Italics added.]....

In a dry season, when novelists of literary merit are few and when critics no longer demand or even understand genuine craftsmanship, it is time to take a second look at Caroline Gordon's work in general, and *Green Centuries* in particular. She was a writer who understood the full potential of the novel and was able to break new ground, both in technique and in subject matter. Yet, unlike some innovators, her narratives have always been available to the general reader. Though a literary figure of historical significance, she is primarily a first-rate story teller and a shrewd student of the human heart. In addition, she touches on the immutable truths of human experience and reminds us of the perennial need for community, rituals, and a religious vision to give form and meaning to life. These truths remain essential to the survival of a people, whether in pioneer days, when Americans ad yet to discover a national identity, or

in the last decade of the twentieth century, when we have all but forgotten who we once were. Caroline Gordon is one of a handful of writers who can help us remember, and for this reason alone it is important that she be read."

Thomas Landess
Preface (1992)
Green Centuries (1941)
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux 1992) vii-xv

"History is made by the unheeding heroes who have no care for the ultimate outcome of their struggles, who are impelled by a divine call, like Rion Outlaw in...*Green Centuries*, to make their westward journey."

Louise Cowan
Preface (1993)
The Women on the Porch (1944)
(J. S. Sanders 1993, 1996) xv-xvi

"As in her earlier novels, Caroline was emphasizing the importance of a proper relationship to the land and to the past, both individual and communal....Rion's final meditation achieved its power through the stark contrast of his life with that of his brother Archy. Through descriptions of the life of the Cherokees and their adopted son, Caroline explored the darker, troubling side of her story, the destructive alienation from the community plaguing the pioneers. The powerful images of redemption in the Native American rituals stood in contrast to Rion's proud, ignorant individualism. The warriors honored their dead, even those whose names were lost to the ages, by pausing to place a stone on the burial site; Rion dismantled those stones to build his hearth.

The Cherokees' ceremonial storytelling served not only to celebrate their heritage but to guide future actions. Dark Lanthorn, both artist and historian, painted a carpet to honor her husband and to demonstrate his place in the history of his people. But Rion ignored his heritage, even blotted from his memory his own misdeeds. And since he could not read, he was cut off from the lessons of history, forced to repeat the mistakes of his ancestors. In addition, where the Cherokees nurtured community rituals, Rion rejected them. He made fun of a friend's wedding festivities and refused to have his relationship with Cassy recognized by church or legal authorities. Most of all, he was willing to live outside time and society: only his love for Cassy kept him from a life of constant wandering.

Yet Caroline was not simply writing about life in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Through symbolism, classical allusions, and a series of quotes from Michaux, Thucydides, Daniel Boone, and Flaubert used as headnotes for the four sections of her book, she was able to expand the scope of her narrative into a study of the perils of *all* wanderers. Forced to become something of a nomad herself, first by her father and then by Allen, Caroline used the novel to explore the tensions of the life she knew all too well. And ultimately she suggested a way to resolve the tensions: the wanderer, like the artist, needed to adopt various perspectives, to understand the way the past operated on the present, and to assert a connection either in time or in space to other human beings....

Caroline...seemed to be offering a fictional version of Gordon family history. At one point Rion would even be accused of being a Gordon. Actually Rion was a descendant of the clan MacGregor, the most famous in Scotland, which Sir Walter Scott had immortalized in his fiction. While the details of the Outlaw/MacGregor history did not exactly correspond to those of the Gordons, Caroline developed the connection to the Gordon perspective through her fictional alter ego, Cassy Dawson. The daughter of a minister, Cassy was small and dark, like Caroline and all the Gordons, and like Caroline she was born in the month of October. Even Cassy's relationship with Rion resembled Caroline's relationship with Allen. Both would fall deeply and passionately in love, then suffer the betrayal of adultery.

As she had in other novels, Caroline gave prominence to the story of her hero, but for the first time she explored her heroine's perspective fully. Like many of the earlier heroines, Cassy Dawson was fiercely independent and intuitive, sensitive to nuances in relationships and nature. Unlike Rion, Cassy understood

the importance of community; she respected the sanctity of individuals and views other than her own. A type of artist, Cassy could usually create a stable, nurturing order in her life.

Yet, like Caroline's other female characters, Cassy could not articulate her feelings beyond the level of imagery and myth. Often she did not fully understand why she would act as she did. And like her mythical namesakes, Cassandra and Jocasta, Cassy was destined for a tragic end. Her wisdom would often be ignored, her strength no match for the larger forces in her world.

In a way, however, Cassy would not go mutely into death without understanding. Once again, borrowing a technique from her 'cousin' Amelie Rives, Caroline used a storm as the setting for the final revelation of her heroine's situation. Then she created a final emotional storm at Cassy's deathbed to allow for a brief moment of reconciliation, a chance for Rion to understand what had happened. After Cassy had died, Rion would make his first stumbling attempt to join the community he had so long held at arm's length."

Nancylee Novell Jonza
The Underground Stream: The Life and Art of Caroline Gordon
(U Georgia 1995) 208-10

"In this fine, long novel, Gordon, having done a great deal of research, portrays the Indians of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky neither as noble savages nor violent animals; they are a diverse group of people who love both nature and the hunt and approach both with respect and careful ritual...and most stand firm against the arbitrary violence, the carelessness, and the anarchy that characterizes the decadent European-born pioneers....Gordon's sympathies are with the Indians...[who scalp children]

Rion is the antithesis of Cassy's measured and intellectual brother, Frank. Strong, determined, energetic, but also illiterate, self-centered, and disdainful of those whom he feels are beneath him (including slaves, whom he labels animals, and merchants), Rion is an unlikely lover for the alienated, introverted Cassy.... Gordon depicts the hunter's need for a love that is unquestioning and unconditional, for a lover who will efface herself for him....Cassy captures Rion through her self-sacrifice....When Rion takes her as a lover and then loses sexual desire for her, Cassy becomes like the mythic Jocasta, a woman who, being all to her son Oedipus (another wanderer who rebels against authority), destroys herself when she realizes how monstrous is her love....Cassy...is surprised and disturbed by her sexual desires....She dreads her intuitions, her uncontrolled passions, and habitually runs from herself toward male guidance...

The forest is a place where Cassy may lose herself...Rather than tending to a cultivated garden, Cassy is drawn to a wilder terrain, the sexual terrain...The imagery of the forest, replete with tall, black trees and cave-like atmosphere, is, of course, blatantly sexual...She panics when she experiences the cavelike quality of the air...In myth and literature, the image of the cave is an ambiguous feminine image that symbolizes both creativity (the womb) and captivity. Both meanings are apparent in the myth of the Sibyl [who] receives 'divine intuitions' that make her the unwitting guide, the unconscious artist. A medium of divine revelation...the Sibyl represents Gordon's ideal of the feminine artist in her later works....In *Green Centuries*, however, Cassy rejects the role of artist/sibyl and runs, terrified, from this cavelike landscape. Returning to her father's grave, she desperately tries to recall his face, to find security in the past represented by him, the European culture, the Anglican religion.

Cassy cannot envision his face; all she sees are bones. Gordon suggests Cassy cannot rely on European culture for values or traditions; it is a decadent culture, an uninspiring and ineffectual parent...[Then why did Gordon become a Catholic?] She is another of Gordon's orphaned wanderers....Blaming herself for her father's weakness and rejection, Cassy identifies Rion with her father, believes he will reject her, and assumes that he would never have sought her unless she 'provoked' him. She convinces herself that she is unloved because she is unlovable, and she determines that she will break off her relationship with Rion. Gordon establishes a pattern of behavior for Cassy that reinforces her self-hatred and leads her to bitter isolation and death.

In part one of *Green Centuries*, Cassy's tendency to retreat from others and imagine herself as the rightfully alienated outsider is checked by her sexual attraction to Rion, his actions, and his vulnerability.

When he and Frank commit an act of treason against the British government and are forced to flee the state, Cassy, recognizing herself more closely allied with the rebels than the patriarchs, assumes a place by his side. The couple never formally marries--they are the son and daughter who reject the ritualized behavior of their parents. The tension between Rion and Cassy all but disappears as Rion's sense of freedom and adventure flourishes, while Cassy's inner fears are necessarily sublimated. She no longer focuses on her personal fears because, in their trip out of North Carolina toward Kentucky, she faces what are, for her, the less frightening ordeals of the pioneer journey....The discord between the sexes has not disappeared but shifted to their struggle to adapt to the new environment.

Under the very different and difficult circumstances they find in the wilderness, Rion and Cassy seem to work well together. Rion accepts Cassy's desire to settle before they reach his goal, Kentucky, and she chooses a likely place where there are neighbors, but Rion only permits this because Cassy is pregnant and needs shelter. Rion, as he affirmed earlier, is a 'changed man' when he is with Cassy: he finally differentiates himself from his adolescent hero, Daniel Boone; he grows fond of farming, matching his own movements with the movements of the seasons. Gordon illustrates not only Rion's captivation with Cassy but also with the landscape upon which they build their cabin, to emphasize the promise of love, the possibility that the male wanderer and outlaw may be transformed or refined through love of woman and nature....Rion finds the landscape, at first, as varied as a lover; his relationship to both Cassy and the land steadies him in a changing world [Agrarianism]. At the end of part one, Gordon's hero and heroine, discarding their European pasts for different reasons, create a home for themselves in the wilderness.

In part two, Gordon carefully contrasts the responses of Cassy and Rion to their new home. Rion, feeling he has take possession of the land, immediately becomes annoyed at the thought that others might camp on his soil; an American Adam, he 'found himself giving things names as he went along.' He worries that his neighbor might have gotten a better bargain or richer land....Because he envisions the land as both an extension of the self and a means for creating wealth, he becomes competitive; most significantly, he fantasizes about burning the land, rather than felling each tree so he might transform it more immediately [reducing his labor] and violently. Of course, his sexual possessiveness also increases.

[Cassy] surprises her husband by bringing kitchen utensils and relics of her old life, telling him which trees to cut, which to save, and what direction the house should face. Cassy does not desire to possess the land or Rion, but she does want to live on it and domesticate him. Welcoming the closeness of neighbors and new settlers, she works to establish for herself and her family a new community, not an independent or isolated colony of wealth....Gordon never allows her readers the luxury of idealizing any character or way of life. With her *cynical* vision of the universe, [This allegation of cynicism is inconsistent with Gordon's becoming a Catholic. Italics added.] Gordon shows that neither Cassy nor Rion's response can stay the chaos that exists all around the borders of their new home....Rion has slowly constructed a fine home from the cabin he first erected, his fields are full of crops, and Cassy has three healthy and bright children, a fine garden, and cows and chickens....Their world is disrupted, first by constant tension among the British and French governments, the Indians, and the settlers, and later by a fierce Indian attack on their home that leaves two of Cassy's children and her brother dead.

As Andrew Lytle argues, Gordon uses the tensions between the Indians and pioneers to reflect the tension that exists between the sexes....The European-American pioneers are primarily men who, rebelling against law and authority, pursue private quests for freedom and dominance. [This is the attitude of the Tories who opposed the American Revolution.] Throughout *Green Centuries*, Gordon introduces us to the Native Americans' once well-ordered but now endangered way of life through the story of Rion's brother, Archy, who, having been wounded by the Indians, becomes a happily adopted member of their community. Unlike the story of Jinny Wiley this is a captivity story in which the captive finds liberation in his capturers and, perhaps because of his gender, is not threatened, but remains with them....[This Feminist critic depicts all white settlers as evil and all Indians as peaceful and noble.]

Cassy and her children are attacked by Indians while Rion is away....Cassy's suffering is intensified by what she feels to be her complicity in the violence. She feels a look of understanding, perhaps even fondness passed between her and the Indian who murdered her brother, Frank. 'He saw her and looked into her eyes and smiled.' Making no attempt to hurt the defenseless woman, the Indian disappears. To Cassy,

who has suppressed feelings of rejection, self-doubt, and self-hatred, this look indicates that she is either unworthy of the Indian's revenge or, more probably, that he understands that she is not the white man's ally but the Indian's....[So Cassy is glad her brother got murdered?]

Cassy's fear of the wilderness without has always been less potent than her fear of the wilderness within. She feels that her difference, her wildness, jeopardized her family. Characteristically, Cassy, like many of Gordon's women, withdraws into silence and isolated and repressed anger. Rion, like many of Gordon's men, turns to another woman for diversion in sexual pleasure. When Cassy discovers her husband in the woods with a woman, one of low moral standing even in the frontier community, she feels so overwhelmed by this new proof of her own insufficiency that she loses the ability to speak....The disfigured throat, the inhuman scream, and the association with drowning are used throughout Gordon's fiction to dramatize a character's submergence in an environment that cannot be controlled or ordered....It is often used as a response to sexual betrayal; the throat is mutilated; the woman cannot use words to control her experience. Like the classic Jocasta who, after realizing her unconscious complicity in a family drama, strangles herself, Cassy loses her voice and her humanity.

The omniscient narrator reveals the scene in which Cassy confronts her husband first from Rion's perspective and then from Cassy's....Cassy's conscious behavior puzzles and frustrates her husband and perhaps herself. Only when Cassy loses consciousness can she articulate her repressed experience. Feverish and delirious, she walks through another forest of black trunks. Gordon invokes the imagery used in an earlier scene, when Cassy, having had sex with Rion, struggles with the idea that she has somehow betrayed her betraying father, the Anglican minister. In this scene, she walks with a frontier minister and, again, conceives of herself not as betrayed, but as the betrayer....

While Rion thinks that Cassy refuses to forgive his infidelity, Gordon shows us that her motivations and feelings are much more complicated. Originally, Cassy considered how 'she could make it be as if it had never happened,' thus taking responsibility for their reconciliation. But when she considers Anne [Ann] Mulroon and her brother, unkempt thieves and moonshiners, she turns her revulsion back on herself. Seeing her own reflection in Anne Mulroon, she becomes the pathetic, deadly snake in the new Eden, the one who must be destroyed not only because of its poison but also because it is capable of giving birth to monsters. Cassy's self-doubt quickly turns to self-hatred and then self-annihilation.

Near the novel's end, Gordon once more contrasts the experiences and perspectives of her male and female characters through two long scenes: detailed descriptions of Rion's combat with the Indians and of Cassy's journey to the sick bed of a dying neighbor. While Rion is away, sublimating his frustration against the feminine [?] in a savage attack on the Indians (during which Gordon's most heroic characters are slain, including Rion's brother), Cassy, wandering through a violent storm, journeys into the frightening wilderness of her mind and loses herself....Certainly this is Gordon's most desperately violent and bleak novel. Two orphaned lovers struggle to make a new life in the wilderness, but bring with them worn out and vicious [?] conventions. [more Feminist bias] Cassy brings her guilt and her self-loathing that stem from her feelings of rejection by her father. Rion brings his fierce and uncontrollable possessiveness, his need to dominate land and women."

Anne M. Boyle
Strange and Lurid Bloom: A Study of the Fiction of Caroline Gordon
(Fairleigh Dickinson 2002) 134-43

The title *Green Centuries* evokes the continent as it was before the coming of western civilization--"the fresh green breast of the New World" as Fitzgerald put it at the end of *The Great Gatsby*. In American literature the most influential expression of that vision has been by James Fenimore Cooper in his 5-volume saga of Leatherstocking, the frontiersman Natty Bumppo, set mainly in the 18th century and based in part on Daniel Boone, the iconic model of the frontiersman and friend of Rion Outlaw the protagonist of *Green Centuries*. Gordon's novel critiques Boone as a model and contrasts with Cooper.

Cooper is a Romantic with a Neoclassical style, immensely popular throughout the 19th century, but later much criticized for unrealistic narration, moralizing, redundancy, stilted characters, and stereotyping. Gordon is a meticulously realistic Modernist, objectively detached in tone, and scrupulously disciplined in

style. *Green Centuries* is a masterpiece of Realism enhanced by Modernist techniques. Natty Bumppo is idealized, even Christ-evoking, whereas Rion Outlaw is a blend of heroic and negative characteristics. The Leatherstocking saga may be appreciated as operatic panorama rich in ideas and scenes that are comparable to romantic 19th-century paintings of Indians and the West, whereas *Green Centuries* is a tragedy rich in thematic and psychological complexity.

(1) The most common mistake of the critics is conflating pioneers, mostly farmers who settled down, with frontiersmen, hunters who kept moving west. Many critics are urban liberals with a bias against rural people and many of their sweeping generalizations about pioneers are the opposite of true, falsified by Political Correctness on race, religion, and the environment. Boyle is the worst, ignoring religious faith and scalped children while claiming that "Gordon's sympathies are with the Indians."

(2) Most pioneers were farmers who cleared land to plant crops, they did not "devastate" or "destroy" the natural environment, they made it more productive and diverse and reduced the need for hunters to supply food. Gordon counters urban environmentalists who deplore all logging by recurrently mentioning "second-growth" trees, indicating that forests grow back and are not destroyed by clearing spaces in them. Pioneers improved the environment for habitation. "That's how the strawberries happen to grow so fine. They don't grow but on cleared land." Pioneers who reached the Willamette Valley of Oregon drained wetlands, reducing the malaria that was killing Indians. Accusations of destruction are ridiculous when you consider the density of forests and woodlands from the east coast to the Great Plains. More ridiculous when you learn that after more than two centuries of development and urbanization, there are more trees in the United States today than when the Europeans arrived, because Americans have planted and protected so many. In this novel, "You ain't going to see nothing but woods if you walk till Doomsday." "I was glad enough when I saw these old fields already cleared by the Indians." "Robertson said that this land had been cleared time out of mind by the Indians." Indians in the West cleared land for forage by burning forested areas to increase the populations of grazing animals they hunted.

(3) The identity politics of liberals have made them racists in idealizing all Indians while condemning whites. Feminists are also hypocrites in condemning all patriarchy as evil except in Indian tribes, as if they would prefer to be squaws. At the time Europeans arrived, there were over 400 different Indian tribes in North America, some peaceful, others at war all the time. "These Indians down this way seems like all they want is to be let alone but up there in the Six Nations they study war." One Canadian chief "reached over the counter and sunk his tomahawk in Joe's head." "Captain Eliot's body had been cut into pieces...Before the Indians did him the kindness of killing him they had heated their gun barrels red hot and thrust them into his bowels." At Fort Loudon, "officers and men had all been massacred." "They scalped the captain there on the field and made him dance a long time and when he give out they cut off his arms and legs and stuffed dirt in his mouth..." "Luke lasted all night...They had gun barrels heated and they stuck 'em up him. He hollered then. I don't know whether he was dead when they cut his arms and legs off..." "Paul Demere had been scalped alive before they cut his arms and legs off." "Frank looked the worst, scalped and his back bone hacked in two. He must not have known what hit him, asleep there on his face and the Indian creeping out on him from behind the tree." Cherokee warriors take scalps randomly: "They did not love to return empty-handed." In over 10,000 years, American Indians hunted many species to extinction, were often genocidal and did not succeed in creating a unified nation.

Nevertheless, Gordon expresses admiration for the Cherokees and their traditional culture and debunks negative stereotypes of Indians: "He had thought that these Indians lived like beasts of the wood, but they had houses like everybody else, only everything was different from the way a white man would have it." Indians smell better than the whites, for example, because they bathe more often in this region where more water is available than on the Plains. Also, the Indians bond more closely than whites within their tribes and accept whites as brothers, whereas whites virtually never accept Indians as brothers. Overall, however, Gordon does not affirm pagan barbarism over western civilization. Atrocities committed by whites, usually in revenge, are less frequent than those by Indians, though both races get beastly: "White men had used a knife to dismember the Going Deer's body." A Mohawk chief reports that whites, "the Long Knives...came into our towns without provocation and killed our people..." "South Carolina was offering seventy-five pounds for each [Indian] scalp--and the women and children rounded up to be sold for slaves." "'I'll never forget the day I found my old daddy, lying at the spring with his head bashed in....I kept laying for

him...and...when I got to him...I told him who I was and then I put a rope around his heels and dragged him three miles to our house....I got me a shot pouch out of him and a saddle seat that I'm still using.' He laughed." "Rion...laughed too. 'Maybe we'll all have us saddle seats this time next week'." "Did a man's skin wear lighter as time went on, like a beast's?"

The westward movement of the frontier was inspired by the traditional myth of the Garden of the West, the quest for free land in an agrarian Eden, represented in this novel by "a wonderful land that the Indians called Kentuck." Daniel Boone and Rion Outlaw first set out to find the way to paradise through a gap in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina in 1766. This was a time of multiple conflicts among ethnic and national rivals seeking land: Spanish, French, British, African, Tory American, rebel American, and various Indian tribes, some of whom--including Cherokees--formed alliances with the French and the English in fighting against Americans. It is human nature to dehumanize an enemy in order to fight him more efficiently. Hate speech fuels the fires of war. One settler declares that a British Redcoat "ain't hardly human." Rion's father thinks "It ain't right to put chains on a man, even a blackamoor." Rion says, "Naw, it ain't right to put chains on a man...but a nigger ain't hardly a man." Likewise, "An Indian ain't hardly a man...He's sort of like a nigger...Naw, he's worse 'n a nigger. I ain't got nothing against a nigger, long as he behaves himself but I can't even look at one of them red bastards without having my gorge rise." The Cherokees think they are the only "Real People" in the world and that whites are ignorant subhumans. "It took ten of the short-tailed eunuchs (as the old people called them) to make up the life of one man of the Real People." When it comes to racial prejudice, "It was hard to tell white men from Indians."

In American literature, kings are allegorical embodiments of tyranny: "When you came to where the King was you bowed down till your head touched the ground and you kept it there till he told you to take it up." Gordon sets her story of Indian wars during the American Revolution, creating a number of parallels rich with implications. Rion's father joined the rebellion of Scots against the King of England and had to flee execution by going west to America. Paralleling him, Rion has to flee west from execution after he joins the Regulators, representing the American Revolution against King George: "a band of men organized secretly to protest illegal taxes." On a raid analogous to the Boston Tea Party the rebels blacken their faces with soot to reduce their visibility at night and Rion thinks "It was like being out with a bunch of negroes." This parallels the oppression of Americans by the British to the oppression of blacks by whites in slavery, and hence parallels the American Revolution to the Civil War. "No sense in men across the water making law for folks on this side. Folks on this side knew the country, knew what they had to deal with. They ought to stand up on their own hind legs and make their own law." Archy may seem to choose a better life for himself by becoming an Indian, mainly because he is so happy with his Indian wife, but he obviously chooses the wrong side when he supports the King in the American Revolution.

Liberal academics accuse white settlers of "stealing" land from Indians. According to international law at the time, however, the Indians did not own the land. Colonizing Europeans claimed that America was owned by Spain, France, and England. The American Revolution took the eastern half of the United States away from the English and Thomas Jefferson acquired the western half from the French in the Louisiana Purchase (1803). Until then even the international law invented by white Europeans was based on "right of conquest." Whoever could take, occupy and hold the land owned it. Hence the Cherokees no more owned the land than the white settlers, for they had taken it by conquering the Muskohge tribe. Dragging Canoe says, "Our people came here long ago, from a great water. The Muskohge held this land then. They were warlike but they could not stand against the Real People. We drove them from the land and we built our towns on the graves of their fathers. In those days there were other warlike people who lived across the mountains: the Pamaunkeys, the Chickahominies. Where are they now? Gone. Whole nations." An ironic parallel of the Cherokees to white settlers occurs when Dragging Canoe plans to ask his enemy "the great Creek chief McGillivray, for permission to settle on [his] land.

Rion says, "Since the King's proclamation [1763] a man is not allowed to buy land." "Looks to me like he ain't got no right to say who shall settle where, when there's land enough to go around." "The Indians ain't using it. They ain't got a right to keep people from settling on it." "How was a man to know just by looking at land whether it belonged to whites or Indians. He'd done his part, paid the Indians a little something for the land instead of taking it the way most folks did. But that hadn't helped. The British agent said they must all move off." "That makes the third time I've treated with 'em [Indians] for this land." "He'd

been talking with the chiefs all spring. Some of them wanted the settlers to stay--if they wouldn't take up more land." Some Indians lost their land when they became enemies by joining the French or the English in battles against the Americans, others lost their land when they left it to fight with the French or the English and members of their tribes sold the land to white settlers while they were away. Liberal academics accuse whites of stealing land from Indians as a way of denying the legitimacy of the United States in their agenda to replace its democratic government with totalitarian Socialism.

Green Centuries is informed by a Christian vision that determines its implicit moral perspective. Boone says "When I was a boy and used to go to meeting I heard 'em talk about man's soul being immortal." The Cherokee "peace chief" is called The Carpenter, making him a Christ-evoking Indian, who says "The white men are our brothers...We are all children of the same Father." The charitable Carpenter saved the life of John Stuart the British agent by giving away "his coat, his bracelets, his bandoleer and finally giving up his gun and standing there naked down to his flap." But most Indians, like the whites on the frontier, are losing their religious values: "We were more religious than we are now," says The Owl. The corruption of the white settlers consists in their abandoning Christian values and reverting to savagery, which is clearly implied: "Colonel Christian, who commanded the white men's army, was said to be a man of unusual ferocity." "When a man battled the wilderness he had enough on his hands without pondering the future life. Was that what made the people here on the Holston so godless, for godless they certainly were, with the exception of a man here and there." Rion was godless when he committed adultery with Ann Mulroon. The preacher says, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God." Cassy redeems herself before she dies, proving that God is in her, when she is struck down while trying to perform an act of charity to a neighbor, repents of what she feels were her sins and forgives Rion for his infidelity. In the end Cassy is a Christ-evoking soul figure to Rion, like the fair ladies in Hawthorne. She could have been his redeemer had he turned closer to her. The closer he got to Cassy, the less godless he would have become. Their mutual forgiveness is his major spiritual growth experience, deepening the pathos of her death, when he realizes how much she meant.

Rion is independent, whereas Archy conforms to whatever group he is in, a follower like "one of the heifers out there in the pasture." First he follows his brother Rion as a rebel, then he follows his Indian brother Dragging Canoe and joins the British attacking the white rebel settlers including Rion. After he is captured by the Indians, "Archy began to cry." Rion thinks he "ought not to have said that about not trusting a squaw man, but that was what Archy was....He'd always been one to go with the crowd, not thinking any thought of who he was or what his folks stood for." Archy betrays his family twice, first by becoming a hostile rather than a peaceful Indian and then by siding with the King against the American Revolution. The rebel Rion dreams of attaining a better land represented by Kentuck, whereas Archy's ambition is to remain where he is and attain more status by killing and scalping. Archy thoughtlessly conforms to the worst impulses of a warrior whereas Rion becomes a tragic hero by realizing in the end what he has lost as an outlaw on the frontier and what he has become.

"When an Indian got ready to scalp an enemy he put his foot on his neck and catching hold of the hair gave the neck a twist that usually broke it before he ran his knife around the scalp. A good warrior could give that twist of the neck at the same time that he raised the scalp...They would take hair where they found it, women and children as well as men." Gordon devotes an entire chapter (53) to acquainting us with little Malcolm, bringing him to life in detail, ending the chapter with his learning that he has a new baby "*Brother*" he looks forward to playing with. Though the Indians often regard even some whites such as Archy as their brothers, lack of brotherhood is what turns the Indian warriors and the massacring white settlers into savages. "Malcolm lay in the middle of the path. He was hacked near in two. She could not find Sally and then something told her to look over the fence and she saw her lying on some honeysuckle vines, scalped, with a hole in her side."

In its dramatic structure the novel builds to one of the most poignant images in American literature. Archy returns to the Cherokee village in time for a dance of celebration in the square, where ten scalps are hung as trophies: "Eight were the scalps of grown people. The two small scalps were those of children." These are the scalps of little Malcolm and Sally. The critics do not consider the impact of this image, making them seem as callous as the Indians. Readers who do not empathize cannot understand the force of Rion's despairing rage. How many of the critics have had their children scalped by Indians? It is easy to

condemn Rion and other white settlers for taking revenge in a massacre, but not so easy to offer a realistic alternative to war. Peace is a possibility only if everyone on both sides heeds The Carpenter. To blame only the white settlers is to become Archy.

Liberal academics tend to identify with the character most like themselves: Archy is a proud, status-seeking conformist in a deadly pagan tribe who betrays humanity, his traditional family and the American Revolution. Not knowing that the scalped children are his relatives, Archy laughs in approval. "'I am blood brother to the chief of the Chickamaugas and know no other tribe,' Archy said." Much as the liberals of today regard people who disagree with them, other tribes can go to hell. This intolerant tribalism is what prevented the Indians of North America from ever forming a unified nation that might have more successfully resisting the white settlers. Archy lives on a literal and psychological island with Dragging Canoe, caring about his own tribe--the only "Real People"--and no one else. If he had had the opportunity, would Archy have taken the scalps of little Malcolm and Sally himself?

The revelation that the massacre Rion helped to lead has killed his brother Archy highlights the theme of brotherhood. Both the white settlers and the Indian warriors have betrayed their humanity and become like beasts rather than brothers. The dehumanizing is most dramatic when Rion looks down on his dead brother without grief and says he no longer even knows him. Most of the novel consists in depicting Rion's heroics --his long trek west through the wilderness, his bravery, skills, practical knowledge, backbreaking hard work, toughness, endurance, ingenuity, and fighting spirit. He is a natural frontiersman who becomes a pioneer by settling down, clearing land, planting crops, and supporting a family. But he remains possessed by the original American dream of a better land. He goes too far into the wild in adapting to the savagery of life on the frontier. Like many after him who went west and lost everything, this outlaw loses his soul by becoming godless. Rion is flawed like all tragic heroes and never makes it to Kentuck, yet as a mythic figure he is elevated like Orion among the stars.

Michael Hollister (2019)