

ANALYSIS

"The Captive" (1932)

Caroline Gordon

(1895-1981)

"The old book that the story is based on is called the *Wiley Captivity and the Founding of Harman's Station*. I thought it was such a wonderful story, and it seemed to me that the story was almost written, and I got the notion that I could finish it."

Gordon

Catherine B. Baum and Floyd C. Watkins

"Caroline Gordon and 'The Captive': An Interview"

Southern Review VII (Spring 1971) 447-48

"I feel sorry about the Indians. I have gotten quite a feeling for them, having been worrying with them now for some time--I have a pioneer lady out in the woods living more or less happily with the Indians after having all her children brained and her house burned and so on. I am imitating the style of Davy Crockett and if you don't think that's hard, try it some time....Nancy [daughter] was fussing about her food the other day and I caught myself telling her that little Indian children are never allowed to eat anything hot for fear of getting soft. Really, though, people don't appreciate the Cherokee as they ought to."

Gordon

Letter to Leonie Adams (undated, c.1932)

"'The Captive,' the Civil War stories, and a few others in the book [*The Forest of the South*], particularly 'Tom Rivers,' represent 'the highest accomplishment of that specialized fiction called 'historical'." Conviction runs through everything in the book; all necessary details of background seem fully known and are, therefore, treated casually....There are 'no standardized short story patterns in this book'."

Richard Sullivan

"Out of the 'Near South'"

New York Times Book Review (7 October 1945) 6, 26

summarized by Mary C. Sullivan

Flannery O'Connor and Caroline Gordon: A Reference Guide

eds. Robert E. Golden and Sullivan (G. K. Hall 1977) 230

"'The Captive' illustrates 'the growth of her resourcefulness in dealing with the past'; its particular brilliance is the 'subtle blending of the natural and the supernatural'....[It] illustrates the 'heightened connection between interior and exterior event, between environment and character which can only be vaguely suggested by the term symbolism'....[Gordon has an] 'extraordinarily keen insight into the caste structure of the South.' No prose writer except Faulkner 'has remained so purely identified' with the forest of the South for 'almost two decades'."

Vivienne Koch

"*The Forest of the South*"

Sewanee Review 54:543-47 (1947)

summarized by Sullivan, *Reference Guide* 231

"An anthology of Southern writing, containing 'The Captive.' Gordon's 'solid reputation is based upon her achievement in prose fiction, a form in which she has few superiors'."

Richmond C. Beatty, Floyd C. Watkins, Thomas D. Young, Randall Stewart, eds.

The Literature of the South (Scott, Foresman 1952) 864-65

summarized by Sullivan, *Reference Guide* 240

"Since Gordon's conversion to Roman Catholicism critics have been 'trying to find signs of a religious orientation in her later work.' Actually 'the Christian vision, a sort of seventeenth-century Calvinism, appears much earlier' in her work, notably in 'The Captive' published in 1932. Vivienne Koch discusses Gordon's 'significant use of the supernatural' in 'The Captive' but there is 'no attempt to offer a religious interpretation.' Such an interpretation of the story is 'not only plausible, but virtually inescapable.' In this story Gordon presents 'one form of the Christian vision of damnation and salvation, involving the familiar doctrines of original sin, predestination, justification by good works, and redemption through Christ's agony on the Cross.'

The Indians represent the 'forces of Hell'; Mad Dog is a 'literally diabolical figure'; Jinny's original sin delivers her into 'the hands of these demons' and she is thus doomed. Her 'fatalistic attitude at the beginning of the story' is some form of the idea of predestination.' The white youth 'may be a Christ-figure' and for her he proves to be 'a messiah' who comes to her in 'a kind of dream-vision and shows her the way to safety--a safety analogous to salvation,' if the Indian captivity is 'a type of damnation.' Jinny's physical hardships suggest 'the familiar "straitness" of the way to heaven.'

In the end her persistent poling of the raft across the river relates this incident to justification by good works in addition to faith. Finally, Jinny literally renders 'her thanks to the Deity for saving her from hell-fire.' Taken together these points 'cohere into a single allegorical pattern that compels attention....The basically Christian view expressed in the story is unmistakable.' Jinny is Everywoman."

Larry Rubin

"Christian Allegory in Caroline Gordon's 'The Captive'"
Studies in Short Fiction 5:283-89 (1968)

"Every narrative in...*Old Red and Other Stories* (1963) has the unmistakable ingredients of life itself, those sharp and singular details which one immediately recognizes as containing truths beyond the province of the mere 'angelic imagination.' Thus Miss Gordon's fiction moves toward abstraction rather than proceeds away from it, and is always symbolic rather than purely literal or purely allegorical. For this reason she never falsifies the world as, for example, Shirley Jackson does in order to serve the tyranny of intellect. Heart and head in Miss Gordon's work never come to blows; and neither betrays the steady, uncompromising senses, which are the primary means of fictional understanding. In other words, her artistic vision is whole and inviolable, which can be said of few modern writers....Few Southerners have matched the achievement of Caroline Gordon, Katherine Anne Porter, and William Faulkner."

Thomas H. Landess

The Short Fiction of Caroline Gordon: A Critical Symposium
(U Dallas 1972) 2

"In an interview on her story 'The Captive' (*The Southern Review*, Summer, 1971, p. 453) she has referred to 'the archetype operating right now' and goes on to say of her use of symbols that it is largely unconscious: 'I don't believe they're ever valid if they enter your head,' she comments, yet she is clear in her defense of the four-fold medieval allegory, a fairly conscious method of depicting the analogical dimensions of meaning. In the face of this apparent contradiction we must be content, I think, to surmise that Miss Gordon's creative imagination works in the two modes that we have been discussing, the primordial set of symbols remaining dark to her, but the Christian allegory knowable, because referring to familiar people in her life and to conscious beliefs."

Louise Cowan

"Aleck Maury, Epic Hero and Pilgrim"
The Short Fiction of Caroline Gordon: A Critical Symposium
ed. Thomas H. Landess (U Dallas 1972) 17

"Caroline Gordon's 'The Captive' has been either ignored or else misunderstood since its publication in *Hound and Horn* in 1932; and, on a cursory examination, the story with its apparent structural simplicity and its abundance of highly dramatic detail seems deceptively open to dismissal or misinterpretation. Certainly readers unfamiliar with Miss Gordon's work as a whole might tend to lump her with such writers as Kenneth Roberts, who have written engagingly, if somewhat superficially, of the American frontier; in

fact, as Vivienne Koch observes, the earliest critics maintain that the story should be 'commonly classified as a *tour de force* of the 'adventure' story genre.' Since Miss Gordon's conversion to Catholicism, however, Miss Koch and others have attempted to see the piece, written prior to that conversion, essentially as a Christian allegory almost sectarian in its emphasis.

An extreme example of these later critics is Larry Rubin who interprets the work as a 'Christian vision of sin, predestination, justification by good works, and redemption through Christ's agony on the Cross.' For Mr. Rubin, the Indians in the story are 'forces of evil (Mad Dog represents the devil incarnate),' whereas Jinny Wiley is equated with the old Adam. Furthermore, he suggests that the white youth burned and tortured by the Indians functions as a Christ symbol. Hence, according to Mr. Rubin, the story's ending, in which Jinny utters the simple, 'Lord God, I was lucky to git away from them Indians,' is to be understood as an expression of thanksgiving for salvation with 'Lord God' a 'formal ministerial usage.'

Both extremes--the earlier condescensions and the later theological analyses--do an injustice to the artistry of Caroline Gordon. The classification of 'The Captive' as a historical romance is, as Miss Koch suggests, a simplistic misreading. Indeed, it would seem that such an interpretation merely confuses the enveloping action of the narrative with the central action. Mr. Rubin, however, forces the various elements of the story into abstract theological categories, and in doing so, fails to reconcile the literal level with the archetypal pattern which is the central action of the narrative. His reading, then, is an oversimplification of quite another kind; for his exegesis, since he fails to notice the thematic significance of the wilderness or the use of ritual within the Indian tribal culture, a dismissal of the enveloping action as part of the story's organic structure. More importantly, the characterization of Jinny Wiley as a tough frontier woman is insignificant to his allegorical reading. But neither enveloping action nor depth of characterization can be ignored if, after long years of neglect and misunderstanding, the story is to be read correctly.

That Miss Gordon's historical sense is at work in her art is readily apparent. In an interview with Catherine B. Baum and Floyd C. Watkins, she herself acknowledges her dependence upon a genuine interest in the American conquest of the wilderness....As Miss Gordon further states, what she did was to take the historical story and fictionalize it. Thus she has made of the tale a work of art embodying myth, symbol, and archetypal action working up out of history and not down out of abstraction.

Basically, 'The Captive' is a narrative of endurance and initiation in which the main character, a spirited and over-assertive woman named Jinny Wiley, learns the code of the wilderness while she is held captive by a group of Indian warriors who are the true inheritors of the land. It is through this ultimate understanding of the mysteries of 'a sacramental nature' that she achieves a heroic stature and her own salvation. Living in ignorance of her proper role as a frontier woman, Jinny, through trial and suffering, is introduced by the Indians to the ultimate presences of a nature animated by the divine, a nature to which she must finally be submissive; and, indeed, she does receive the wisdom of the wholeness of nature, and her feminine function in the masculine world of the frontier is at last apparent to her.

The action of the narrative can be easily summarized. Jinny Wiley tells her own story of captivity and escape in the early American frontier. Living in a region near the Ohio River, she insists that her husband go into the settlement to sell ginseng and buy salt. During his absence, the unmanned home is mistakenly attacked by Cherokees who seek blood revenge against Tice Harman for his murder of an Indian brave. The Wiley house is burned, and all but the youngest child are killed and scalped. Jinny and the baby, who is later killed, are then forced to journey with their captors for days to reach a sacred and secret tribal stronghold, where the white woman is held for months, protested against the lust of the young warriors only by an old chief who claims her as a daughter and teaches her Indian skills and customs.

Although Jinny occupies herself with thoughts of escape or deliverance by the settlers, she is ignorant of the region in which she finds herself and cannot discover the correct way out of the camp. She makes one abortive attempt to escape but is frightened by the wilderness and returns, preferring the security of living among her captors to the dangers of the unknown. Finally a warrior's growing lust for her becomes apparent at a time when a white youth is brought into the camp to be tortured and killed. The old chief, as a result of the warrior Mad Dog's prowess in battle and his successful capture of the boy, sells Jinny to the lustful victor as his wife. But the brave has no time in which to claim her, for he is sent out on a hunting

party for provisions. Obsessed with fear and revulsion, Jinny has a dream in which a vision of the dead white youth appears to her and leads her to the safety of the white settlement. On the morning after, when Jinny is left alone by the hunters, she runs from the camp, carefully tracing the path of the youth in the dream. Days later, after a severe journey in which the Indians nearly recapture her, Jinny makes a desperate river crossing and reaches the protection of a settlement fort.

Certainly, on the literal level, the narrative is a tale of dramatic adventure akin to the ever-popular sagas of the American colonial experience. However, a larger significance of the action underlies the surface movement. Indeed, the myth of the frontier is only a particular historical extension of the archetypal experience of an emerging culture, as old as time and life itself. The narrative actually begins with an expression of Jinny Wiley's fearlessness and impetuosity when she persuades her husband against his better judgment to leave her unprotected. This assertion of her will over Tom Wiley's is a kind of daring born out of her unwillingness to play the role of a submissive wife. Yet it goes against the dictates of the frontier, a community of hunters and woodsmen where women, as a rule, are never left alone....

This daring of Jinny's begins to emerge as foolhardiness when it becomes apparent that no other woman in the community would permit herself to be left so helpless against the constant threat of an Indian attack, especially in a time when the relations between Indians and whites are severely strained. But Jinny allows herself to be left because she is a proud frontier woman whose flirtations with danger reach the level of hubris. Even when she senses with the first owl hoot of the Indians the threatening danger closing in on her, she recalcitrantly refuses to change her course of action. Relying on self alone in ignorance of the accidental in nature, she proceeds...

Jinny is a woman of unfeminine pursuits and interests. She hunts with men and exposes herself unnecessarily to dangers with which no woman can properly cope. And she clearly cannot comprehend the masculine code of behavior in a threatening wilderness. Indeed, she understands even less the feminine need for protection in an environment antagonistic and hostile to human weakness. The Hog-Drovers Song, which her children sing and which she does not truly hear, is a corrupted presentation of the masculine protectiveness of woman. The Hog-Drovers are refused lodging in the song because the farmer's daughter they wish to court must be protected until her proper suitor arrives. The Drovers are several who seek an entrance into the household and the implied connotation is they are plainly up to no good. In reply to the question of lodging, the father, with the appellation 'No pig stealin' drover,' suggests that the crude courtiers wish to steal the virtue of the daughter; and, indeed, the young girl herself from the safety of her father's house. Thus, the guardianship of woman is a masculine role which Jinny refuses to recognize and to which she will not submit. This lack of submission to her own femininity has already exposed her to danger at the hands of Lance Rayburn, a rapacious suitor of her youth.

Both the Hog-Drovers Song and her recollection of Rayburn foreshadow the later withdrawal of chief Crowmocker's protection at a time when she most needs it, an event which finally reveals to Jinny the essential helplessness of women without men. Therefore, it is significant that even when, with the increasing danger of Indian attack, a neighbor comes to offer the protection of his household, Jinny accepts this shelter only on her own terms, out of an ignorance of Indian ways. [Her] final stubborn hesitation, an additional act of hubris, renders Jinny and her children vulnerable to the attack and brings about the destruction of the Wiley household. Joe, the eldest son, who is supposed to be the man on the place, is ironically too young to accomplish any of the earlier boasts he has made about his conduct in the event of an attack. As his mother sees him fall under the warrior's tomahawk, she knows that the last male effort to prevent her capture has been thwarted. Her seemingly cruel comment, 'I seen him go down and I knowed I couldn't git any more help from him,' is a tough, harsh but human response in a confrontation with one's enemies in the thick of the fight where there is no time for mourning. It is a perfectly logical and consistent statement for a woman in Jinny's circumstances to utter.

However, ultimately Jinny's loss of her son and her resulting helplessness point to the larger significance of her captivity. Indeed, she can no longer rely on herself alone but must seek both the companionship of the chief and the guidance of the white youth. But only after she has been utterly isolated and down on her luck can Jinny be initiated into the oneness of nature. Thus, she herself must suffer for her ignorance and hubris. Mad Dog's murder of her baby, Dinny, during the flight from the white pursuers to the Indian

encampment, removes the last trace of her past; and her inability to prevent the murder reveals to her the nature of her own weakness when confronted with forces beyond her control. Even the old Crowmocker, who claims her as a replacement for his lost daughter, eventually casts her into the worst possible bondage as the wife of Mad Dog. Thus, through a series of terrible misfortunes Jinny is educated into a knowledge of the code of the masculine frontier, the world of the whites. Yet it is ironic that those who hold her captive and threaten her most severely teach her the most important lesson of her life.

This lesson, an acceptance of her proper place in the pattern of creation, is first revealed to Jinny in rudimentary fashion during the flight through the woods, when old Crowmocker boils tea for her and the baby to get them to sleep and later when he applies a poultice to Jinny's swollen feet so that she can continue the journey. Implicit in this medicinal use of vegetation is the idea that nature can be employed as the ultimate restorer. In contrast to Crowmocker's use of nature as a providential aid to man, Tom Wiley has taken ginseng, itself a sweetish herb valued medicinally, into the settlement to sell for salt. The Indians, Miss Gordon is careful to show, use natural salt licks. Thus, this action of Wiley points to the fact that the white man exploits nature but the Indians, as true inheritors of the wilderness, accept gratefully that which is given to them. To be sure, when Mad Dog buys Jinny, the young brave gives the old chief silver brooches, but this exchange is only part of the formal rite of betrothal. And thus the silver is symbolic in its usage. Indeed, Crowmocker is really more impressed with Mad Dog's prowess in battle than with his gift, for the Cherokee chief is perhaps the last warrior who truly understands the rituals defining man's dependence upon nature, or he expects to have no heirs in his craft.

As the last of the true inheritors, Crowmocker's reverence for nature as restorer and the medicine man as its priest exemplifies the old chief's worship of the highest art of nature, an art beyond the capabilities of the mere warrior or hunter. Indeed, he understands the primary function of nature as the giver and sustainer of life itself. And it is through the healing power of medicine that Crowmocker understands the Great Spirit that informs the natural world....In contrast to Crowmocker's deeper understanding, Jinny herself possesses a kind of knowledge of the wilderness shown in her ability to identify the various trees, to mark the change of seasons, and to distinguish the unknown parts of the woods from the familiar. But this knowledge is superficial, a mere notation of external phenomena. She cannot know, as an intruder, either the essential spirit of the wilderness or the transcendent meaning of the trees, herbs, and animals she can correctly name.

However, the religious life of the tribe and the Indians' worship of the spirit of nature is manifested to her when Crowmocker explains the ancestral significance of the painted beasts on the cliffs walling in the encampment and also points out the burial mounds. As true inheritors and knowers of the wilderness, the Indians' piety toward their bestial and human predecessors is consistent with the larger view of nature as one family presided over by the Great Spirit. And although Jinny does not at first believe that the painted bear will crush any white who enters the sacred stronghold, she senses that the supernatural aspect of nature is something real and living among the tribe. Indeed, it is on the grassy knoll where all tribal celebrations and rituals are held that Jinny sits and gives her memory and imagination the freedom to keep alive the presences of her lost family and her past. In seeing the house and children whole and alive, she begins to participate in the spirit of nature with the knowledge that the dead are with her still. The Lance Rayburn episode (he has since died mysteriously) and the recollection of her late grandmother point to Jinny's gradual ability to hold communion with the dead. Moreover, the Rayburn memory reminds her of her loyalty and devotion to Tom Wiley, which foreshadows the desperate refusal to become Mad Dog's wife.

Apart from her leisure on 'the barren,' Jinny is made to do squaw's work, so that her captivity forces her to perform a purely feminine role, though at home she has not even finished weaving cloth for her children's clothes....The 'naturalness' of the Indian customs and her own particular role in the tribe serve to curb her impetuosity when she attempts an unprepared escape, making her realize in time that she is ill-equipped for such an extravagant gesture. Her return to camp is the first step in her acquisition of respect for danger and her acceptance of restrictions which later, at the proper moment, enable her to exhibit in her escape not foolhardiness but genuine courage.

Similarly, her experience at the Indian salt lick further enlightens Jinny, and she becomes heir to a knowledge of beasts denied to ordinary men. As she moves deeper and deeper into the unveiling of mysteries, she recalls tales which show the artificial, debased character of the white world. The episode of

Vard Wiley dressing up as a woman and chasing the old schoolmaster Daughter naked from the swimming hole reveals to her evils inherent in her own culture: violations of the basic order of nature. When she laughs at the tale, she feels strange sitting in the woods. Moreover, a dream vision of the Indian bone house, where her own spiritually dead people frolic, again reinforces her sense of the taint of original sin which man brings with him into the wilderness.

Even the Indians finally are not exempt from this original sin. The Cherokee community itself is on the decline. As Crowmocker tells her, bees swarm out of season and the war whoop which used to mean joy now only hides the braves' fear. The game vanishes from the salt lick and the hunters must range farther and farther from the camp in order to obtain food. This shrinking of the wilderness, as Crowmocker knows and tells Jinny, is bound to result in strife between the Indians and the whites. The conservation of the wilderness is then, for the Indian an ultimate concern. Thus, they do not take pelts which are too thin, whereas Lance Rayburn gloried in their indiscriminate acquisition. Therefore, it is really this threat of a ruined creation which the whites present to the Indians. And old Crowmocker's prophecy of the vanishing wilderness points to the essentially feminine nature of the Cherokee nation....[very debatable]

It is evident that the Indians are violated by the whites; and yet they reply in kind, mistaking Tice Harman's house for the Wiley's, becoming perverse themselves and misusing a power which they derive from their closeness to nature. And in trying to adapt to the white man's world of bullets and firewater, they further debase the spiritual function of the hunt and other essential rituals. In trying to possess the wilderness, then, they begin to lose it. Jinny herself is caught between the evils of the two cultures. Although while living among the Indians she greases herself to remove the taint of her white skin, she is never formally brought into the Cherokee nation. Thus, she preserves and strengthens her own cultural heritage by putting to use only the best of Indian wisdom. When the white youth is brought to the camp to be tortured and burned, Jinny recognizes her own identity as white and her own helplessness to prevent the murder. One of her truest utterances comes when she confronts the boy face to face and says: 'I can't do nothing,' I said. 'I'm a white woman, but I can't do nothing. Christ!' I said, 'there ain't nothing I can do.' [The exclamation "Christ!" supports Rubin's identification of the boy as a Christ-evoking figure.]

And, indeed, there is nothing she can do for the boy. However, her understanding that she is utterly helpless prepares her for the salvation which comes to her in the dream. Moreover, she accepts herself for what she really is, a white woman in a dangerous, masculine world. Therefore, when Mad Dog buys her from the old Cherokee, she relies on the only help left to her in the nocturnal vision of the dead youth, who leads her out of the dark hostile world into the light. The light is symbolic of Jinny's knowledge that she must remain true to the providential scheme of things. Thus, she sticks to the water in escaping, although she often doubts the certainty of its path to safety. Similarly, she wastes little time in hunting rabbits with the old knife. Following a more feminine instinct, she boils wild greens and nourishes herself in order to keep up her strength. She does not, then, run wildly without rest, shelter, or food. She now knows the importance and the order of endurance.

In the last scene of the story at a river crossing, Jinny passes her final trial through her heroism and proper assertion of will. Like the white youth who in a vision shows her the path, an old man of the fort provides her with a way across the river on the raft. However, provided with this simple protection, Jinny must alone save herself. Thus, as the old man prays and the raft becomes unhinged, Jinny poles her way to safety. Miss Gordon seems to suggest two important concepts here. In both episodes, one with the youth and the other with the old man, there is the strong suggestion that both the masculine and the feminine working in a proper balance are necessary for a right order of being. Moreover, there is also the significant implication that one must work with the spirit of nature, that simple prayer is not enough.

Jinny acknowledges her newfound humility and the wisdom of nature in her last statement when she is safely inside the fort. Contained in the 'Lord God, I was lucky to git away from them Indians!' is her declaration that she has not relied on herself alone, as she formerly did. The word 'lucky' used in this context implies that Jinny knows something of endurance itself, that it is ultimately a matter of luck, even if one is submissive and properly diligent. In the end she has been lucky, just as Dinny, the children, and the white youth were unlucky. For all that she has accomplished in the tempering of her pride and the acquisition of wisdom, her luck, then, is only a gift bestowed upon her as a kind of grace [from God]. That

she has no thoughts of her family is logical enough, so soon after the desperate danger which she has faced. Jinny's period of mourning has been given its due on the barren. It is her lot to endure. And she has earned that prerogative."

Jane Gibson Brown
"Woman in Nature: A Study of Caroline Gordon's 'The Captive'"
The Short Fiction of Caroline Gordon: A Critical Symposium
ed. Thomas H. Landess (U Dallas 1972) 75-84

"Commenting on the archetypal nature of an incident in her short story 'The Captive,' she has deemed Jung 'much more interesting than Freud because...he believes that the archetype is operating right now'.... James Joyce's term *epiphany* and T. S. Eliot's *objective correlative* have meanings compatible with Gordon and Tate's symbolic naturalism."

Rose Ann C. Fraistat
Caroline Gordon as Novelist and Woman of Letters
(Louisiana State 1984) 99

"'The Captive' [is] based on a true narrative of Jinny Wiley, a white woman captured by the Indians and kept for years. 'I feel sorry about the Indians,' she wrote Leonie Adams. 'I have gotten quite a feeling for them, having been worrying with them now for some time--I have a pioneer lady out in the woods living more or less happily with the Indians after having all her children brained and her house burned and so on. I am imitating the style of Davy Crockett and if you don't think that's hard, try it some time...Really, though, people don't appreciate the Cherokee as they ought to'...."

When the Tates were desperate for money, she wired Perkins for a decision on the story. Perkins wired back that the magazine was turning it down because *it lacked story interest* [!]. Caroline was outraged. 'It is the story of what actually happened to a pioneer woman, told as simply as possible. The story starts with the burning of a cabin and proceeds through the tomahawking of a few children, the dashing out the brains of another, and torture at the stake to a sensational escape across a river in full flood'."

Ann Waldron
Close Connections: Caroline Gordon and the Southern Renaissance
(Putnam's 1987) 98

"'The Captive' is set on the Kentucky frontier in 1787.... Despite the fact that the women in 'The Captive' and 'All Lovers Love the Spring' are separated by 150 years, they share the same plight, *the withdrawal of masculine support* ["Tom didn't want to go." It is Jinny who urges him to go, he does not "withdraw" his support.] that forces them to a lonely independence in the precarious world *made by men*. [The wilderness was "made by men"?] Jinny Wiley, the pioneer, is kidnapped by Indians while she is alone with her children on her farm while her husband is off doing business, and Miss Fuqua, the spinster, is captured by her invalid mother after Roger Tredwell fails to claim her....*The stature of the protagonists diminishes with the South from the tragic to the pathetic.*" [This Feminist calls the heroic Jinny "pathetic." She equates the white men with the Indians because as a Feminist she sees all men as evil. Italics added.]

Veronica A. Makowsky
Caroline Gordon: A Biography
(Oxford 1989) 172-73

"She based her story on a captivity narrative she had found while doing research on the pioneer period. Attacked by a roving band of Cherokees and Shawnees who had mistaken her cabin for that of a noted Indian hunter, Jinny Wiley had watched her children killed and scalped before she was carried off into the wilderness. She lived with the Indians for about eleven months before finding her way back to a white settlement....After working with the story for a while, she found herself thinking that 'people don't appreciate the Cherokee as they ought to....The exploits of some of those pioneer women are things that occur usually only on battlefields....The state of mind of this pioneer woman, her life and her experience, are at the spiritual foundations of thousands of Americans.' 'The Captive' was her best writing, she said. 'I am willing to stake my reputation as a writer on it.'"

Nancylee Novell Jonza

"Gordon not only frees her protagonist Jinny Wiley from motherhood...but also transforms the captivity narrative into a symbolic chronicle of *maternal emancipation* [perverse Feminist spin] as she retells the story that an actual son told historian William Elsey Connelley about his mother. Interestingly, most of the captivity narratives written by women emphasize 'inevitably sundered families,' a theme not new to Caroline Gordon. The genre began in American in the seventeenth century...[Italics added.]

Captivity narratives offered women a way of being carried...into new territories: their forced flight freed them from the conventions that their culture constructed and that they often maintained. [Conventions that were replaced by the barbaric patriarchal conventions of an Indian culture.] In this new terrain, not only is woman free of domestic restraints and the traditional roles inherent in patriarchal family structures [This is a lie, as Jinny tells of how she must collect wood, cook, sew, submit to Mad Dog and so on: "I would have to do all the work around the camp from now on, the way Indian women did"; "I did a lot of work while I was with the Indians. It was hard on me..."], but free from racial and class constraints....[This Feminist believes that as a captive of Indians in the wilderness during the 18th century a white woman would be in a Feminist paradise--free of restraints, free of racial identity, free of traditional roles, free of children. Not so: "I wanted to get away worse than ever." Boyle sees the murder of children as part of a woman's liberation, like abortion, free of patriarchal family structures--unlike the Indian squaws. On the contrary, there were no Feminists in Indian tribes. This Feminist does not even know that Indian cultures are patriarchal. She learned nothing about Indians from Gordon's story.]

Gordon transforms Connelley's story by not portraying the Indians as a racially inferior people who must be civilized or exterminated and by envisioning Wiley's capture and stay in the wilderness as a powerful experience that affords her the space and freedom necessary to fulfill her 'heroic' potential... [This is] what happens when a woman is no longer able to rely on a man and no longer needs to uphold his family and culture....Once freed from her dependence on, and care for, others...Jinny evolves from captive to survivor....Having witnessed the murder of her children, Jinny's head is bent in sorrow, but *she looks serene and beautiful*....[Her face is painted with "red root mixed with bear's grease." Serene? She cries and fears getting burned at the stake: "I would think how I lost all my children and my husband and I would cry, dropping tears on the skin I was sewing." Italics added.] Rather than emphasizing her role as a mother, Gordon kills off all of Jinny's children and portrays her protagonist as a creative and independent survivor....[Contradicting herself, Boyle finally notices that Jinny is in fact put to work by the Indians--by men]: For months, she made bullets, gathered wood, maintained the fires, and cooked....

Her use of commanding language at the beginning of the story when she orders her husband to go for salt...brings on the destruction of her home....Rather than claiming that she discovers feminine submission and the appreciation of her place in nature and society, as [Jane Gibson] Brown writes, Jinny has learned to negotiate her way through the wild zones of her own consciousness. She learns to wait, to read and to interpret the actions of others, to study the natural world, and to trust her intuitions and the spiritual power that informs her dreams. By relying on those qualities that have been labeled feminine, by silently preparing herself for escape and accepting her dream of the Christlike and tortured young white man, Jinny extricates herself from Indian captivity. She does not gain the protected sphere of the fort, however, until she acts with the unbending strength and assertiveness that is labeled masculine."

Anne M. Boyle
Strange and Lurid Bloom: A Study of the Fiction of Caroline Gordon
(Fairleigh Dickinson U 2002) 79-89

It is comical to imagine a naive Feminist like Boyle captured by Indians in the 18th century. The liberals who side with the Indians against the white settlers in their analyses of *Green Centuries* (1941) ignore the gruesome portrayal of Indians in "The Captive" (1932). In both fictions the scalping of children in the presence of their mothers is deeply moving, unless the reader is a Feminist like Boyle, who would be glad to get rid of her brats and set free to enjoy liberation as the squaw of a Mad Dog. Boyle disagrees with Jane Gibson Brown, who accurately refuted her Feminist interpretation 30 years before.

At first the interpretation by Larry Rubin of "The Captive" as a Christian allegory might seem farfetched, since Gordon is such a master at creating an illusion of real life and at making her Realist narrative seem literal rather than symbolic. In her mostly excellent analysis Jane Gibson Brown does not give Rubin enough credit. His allegorical reading does not account for everything but it will not seem forced if the archetypal imagery in the story is recognized as recurrently patterned in Gordon's fiction: the basic contrast between Christian civilization in the vulnerable white settlement and the wilderness of barbaric Indians, as in Hawthorne; the spiritual journey into dark forest, as in Dante; the cave of primitive consciousness, as in *The Odyssey*; dreams as revelation, as in Jung; water as spirit, as in religious rituals including baptism; the "monster snake" worshipped by the Indians but a traditional Christian symbol of evil, as in *Genesis*; light as perception of truth, as embodied in Christ: "The light was all around me"; and crossing a river to salvation, as in crossing Jordan River in black spirituals.

The "monster snake" god of the Indians is painted on a tree, implicitly contrasting with "the tree" of Christ, as His cross is often called, as by the Holy Rollers in Gordon's novel *The Strange Children*. Jinny resisting "the devil" Mad Dog in the wilderness is a parallel to Christ resisting Satan in the wilderness. The captive white boy burned at the stake repeatedly evokes the captive Christ, which makes the title of the story a reference to Christ as well as to Jinny: (1) When Jinny speaks to the boy with the exclamation "Christ!"; (2) when he saves her by making her realize that "They will burn me next"--like a sinner in Hell; and (3) when he guides her back to Christian civilization. Although she says she was "lucky," the allegory and the dream in which the boy guides her both imply that divine intervention facilitates her narrow escape. She refers to God repeatedly--"I wish to God," "God's sake," "God's sake, man," and "I hoped to God"--and her last line is a grateful invocation of "Lord God."

"The Captive" is the best fiction in the primarily nonfiction genre called Indian Captivity Narratives. The tradition of this genre has been mainly Christian in perspective, as in James Fenimore Cooper, one of the most popular fiction writers of the 19th century, who used Indian captivity for plots in his classic about the westward movement of the frontier, the Leatherstocking Saga, starring the idealized frontiersman Natty Bumppo, based on Daniel Boone and others. Jinny Wiley is contrasted to a few real captives such as Mary Jemison, who, eventually given an opportunity, chose to remain with the tribes that captured them. See *The Life of Mary Jemison* (1823) by James E. Seaver. The best authentic autobiography is *My Captivity among the Sioux Indians* (1872) by Fanny Kelly. The following quotations are intended to place "The Captive" in the context of its genre and tradition.

Michael Hollister (2020)

AMERICAN INDIAN CAPTIVITY NARRATIVES

"According to Kathryn Derounian-Stodola's Introduction to *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives* (New York: Penguin, 1998): 'Statistics on the number of captives taken from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries are imprecise and unreliable since record-keeping was not consistent and the fate of hostages who disappeared or died was often not known. Yet conservative estimates run into the tens of thousands, and a more realistic figure may well be higher. For some statistical perspective, however incomplete, consider these figures: between 1675 and 1763, approximately 1,641 New Englanders were taken hostage (Vaughan and Richter, p. 53); and during the decades-long struggle between whites and Plains Indians in the mid-nineteenth century, hundreds of women and children were captured (White, p. 327).' Alden T. Vaughan & Daniel K. Richter, 'Crossing the Cultural Divide: Indians and New Englanders, 1605-1763,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 90 (1980), 23-99; Lonnie J. White, 'White Woman Captives of Southern Plains Indians, 1866-1875,' *Journal of the West* 8 (1969) 327-54.

Donna M. Campbell
"Early American Captivity Narratives"
Literary Movements (2009)

"Stories, supposedly factual, of white people abducted by Indians. These narratives constituted a definite early American literary genre, and continued to appear from the colonial period to the last quarter of the 19th century. The subject matter was monotonously similar--sudden attacks on cabins and the burning of settlements, the scalping of men and women and the killing of children, horrible tortures of the captives

carried away alive and frightful sufferings as they went with the red men from one camp to another, sometimes starving, often beaten, occasionally (it was alleged) even eaten....

The earliest narratives [are] simple, direct, and religious....The narratives became more 'literary'...Then hacks began to provide these narratives, supplanting pious individuals who were thankful to God for their rescue. Hatred is expressed for white men (especially Frenchmen and priests) as much as for Indians... Even more popular was the gory and sensational...The material becomes a melange of fact and fiction with salability rather than truth the main object. Charles Brockden Brown legitimized the captivity narrative in *Edgar Huntley* (1799) by transferring it into the realm of avowed fiction.

In the 19th century the problem of authenticity became a genuine, often insoluble one, especially as historians began to turn to these narratives as a basis for their chronicles. More objective were the editions prepared by Samuel Gardner Drake (1832 and 1839), J. Pritts (1839), Henry R. Schoolcraft (1844). Collections of narratives of captivity are to be found at the Newberry Library, the Huntington Library, and the Library of Congress."

Max J. Herzberg & staff
The Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature
(Crowell 1962)

"A single individual, usually a woman, stands passively under the strokes of evil, awaiting rescue by the grace of God. The sufferer represents the whole, chastened body of Puritan society; and the temporary bondage of the captive to the Indian is a dual paradigm--of the bondage of the soul to the flesh and the temptations arising from original sin, and of the self-exile of the English Israel from England. In the Indian's devilish clutches, the captive had to meet and reject the temptation of Indian marriage and/or the Indian's 'cannibal' Eucharist. To partake of the Indian's love or of the equivalent of bread and wine was to debase, to un-English the very soul. The captive's ultimate redemption by the grace of Christ and the efforts of the Puritan magistrates is likened to the regeneration of the soul in conversion. The ordeal is at once threatful of pain and evil and promising of ultimate salvation. Through the captive's proxy, the promise of a similar salvation could be offered to the faithful among the reading public, while the captive's torments remained to harrow the hearts of those not yet awakened to their fallen nature."

Richard Slotkin
Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860
(Wesleyan U 1973)

NONFICTION NARRATIVES

- 1682 Mary Rowlandson, *Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*
- 1684 Increase Mather, *Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences*
- 1696 Cotton Mather, *Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverances: The Captivity of Hannah Swarton and Hannah Dustan*
- 1697 Jonathan Dickinson, *God's Protecting Providence Man's Surest Help*
- 1706 Cotton Mather, *Good Fetch'd out of Evil: The Captivity of John Williams & Mary French*
- 1707 John Williams, *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion*
- 1707 Cotton Mather, *A Memorial of the Present Deplorable State of New England: Captivity of Hannah Bradley* (in 1697 & 1703)
- 1728 Elizabeth Hanson, *God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty*
- 1750 William Fleming, *Narrative of the Sufferings and Surprising Deliverances of William and Elizabeth Fleming*

- 1757 Peter Williamson, *French and Indian Cruelty Exemplified in the Life and Various Vicissitudes of Peter Williamson*
- 1758 Robert Eastburn, *The Dangers and Sufferings of Robert Eastburn*
- 1760 Elizabeth Hanson, *Narrative of the Captivity of Elizabeth Hanson*
- 1796 Susannah Willard Johnson, *Narrative of Captivity of Mrs. Johnson*
- 1815 Mary Smith, *An Affecting Narrative of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Mary Smith*
- 1823 James E. Seaver, *The Life of Mary Jemison* (willing captive)
- 1824 John Ingles, *The Story of Mary Draper Ingles and Son Thomas Ingles*
- 1832 William P. Edwards, *Narrative of Captivity of Frances & Almira Hall*
- 1839 Rachel Plummer, *Narrative of Captivity of Rachel Plummer*
- 1862 Minnie Buce Carrigan, *Captured by the Indians: Reminiscences of Pioneer Life in Minnesota*
- 1870 Sarah L. Larimer, *The Capture and the Escape or Life among the Sioux*
- 1872 Fanny Kelly, *My Captivity among the Sioux Indians* (illustrated): commentary
- 1896 John Rodgers Jewitt, *The Adventures of John Jewitt*
- 1897 Charlotte Alice Baker, *True Stories of New England Captives*
- 1954 H. H. Peckham, *Captured by Indians* (14 true accounts of survival)
- 1985 Frederick Drimmer, ed., *Captured by Indians: 15 Firsthand Accounts, 1750-1870*
- 1992 Carolyn Meyer, *Where the Broken Heart Still Beats: The Story of Cynthia Ann Parker* (willing captive)
- 1994 Lorenzo D. Oatman, Olivia A. Oatman, Royal B. Stratton, *The Captivity of the Oatman Girls among the Apache and Mohave Indians*
- 1995 Gary L. Ebersole, *Captured by Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Images of Indian Captivity*
- 1998 Kathryn Derounian-Stodola, ed., *Women's Captivity Narratives*
- 2000 Gordon M. Sayre, Olaudah Equiano and Paul Lauter, eds., *American Captivity Narratives*
- 2004 Grace E. Meredith, *Girl Captives of the Cheyennes: A True Story of the Capture and Rescue of Four pioneer Girls, 1874*
- 2005 Scott Zesch, *The Captured: A True Story of Abduction by Indians on the Texas Frontier*