

Writing Woman: Caroline Gordon's Struggle with Catholicism and Gender

Early twentieth-century writer Caroline Gordon led an eventful life. Gordon had a tumultuous marriage to well-known author Allen Tate. She taught writing at institutions like Columbia University and the College of St. Catherine, and she served as a mentor to younger authors who made a serious mark in American literature, including Walker Percy and Flannery O'Connor. She also served as a gracious hostess and friend to dozens of twentieth-century American authors, artists, and musicians. At the same time, Gordon was unsuccessful in carving out a place for herself in the literary canon. Despite the consistently fine quality of her work, critics and historians rarely discuss the full breadth of her achievements. Nonetheless, Gordon's life story is worth recovering and reexamining for what it tells us about this pivotal time for women. Caroline Gordon's troubled marriage, conversion to Catholicism, apparent renouncement of feminism, and the effect that all this had on her writing could be seen as symptomatic of the tensions that female intellectuals faced during the transition between first- and second-wave feminism.

Gordon expressed strong opinions on the implications and demands of being a female writer. She lived an atypical life for women of her time. She received a rigorous education, worked as a writer and teacher for her entire life, kept her maiden name upon marriage, and competed successfully with the men in her field. However, midway through her life she underwent a remarkable transformation. In the midst of marital troubles with her husband, Gordon converted to Catholicism. These two changes seem to have had a major effect on her opinions about the purpose and abilities of women. Post-conversion, she refused her right to vote, believed that women were unable to keep pace with men academically, and attributed all

of her intellectual gifts to male mentorship. Gordon disavowed her previous work and lifestyle with a speed and ferocity that is striking to the outside observer.

Virginia Woolf famously proclaimed that to be successful, an authoress needed a room of her own and some money.¹ Children were best avoided.² There are countless examples of American female authors who followed this advice, among them Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Flannery O'Connor, Emily Dickinson, and Zora Neale Hurston.³ Gordon was not among them. Throughout her life, she expressed disdain for the "cushioned" female author who ignored other feminine obligations, such as wife and mother.⁴ After her conversion to Catholicism, these opinions became only more pronounced. Nonetheless, Gordon's actions sometimes belied her words, as she struggled to balance her marriage and raising a daughter with her writing career.

These obstacles became enormous when combined with Gordon's divorce and conversion to Catholicism. Although not all Catholics of the time held the same beliefs on women, Gordon was attracted to a version of Catholicism that argued that a woman's duty was in the home and that women were made inferior to men. Official Catholic doctrine supported women's intellectual endeavors and desire for political involvement. However, the primary goal for women was always "to protect the dignity of the daughter, of the wife, of the mother; to preserve the home, the family, the child."⁵ Based on this and similar teachings, Gordon questioned her decision to write and doubted her own abilities. To some extent, Gordon felt that

¹Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1929), 1.

²Ibid, 13.

³Laurie Champion, ed., *American Women Writers, 1900-1945: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000).

⁴Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, n.d., Folder 1 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers #4127, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Henceforth, this archival collection will be abbreviated to "Ward Allison Dorrance Papers."

⁵Pope Pius II, "Papal Directives for the Woman of Today," Allocution of Pope Pius II to the Congress of the International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues, Rome, Italy, September 11, 1947.

she had failed both in her feminine roles and as an author, as each had hindered the other.⁶ Gordon's divorce and conversion to Catholicism changed her views on female scholarship, motherhood, gender roles, and marriage, drastically altering her ideas about female empowerment and her own life's significance.

Gordon Tries to "Have It All"

Gordon was born on October 6, 1895, on her mother's family plantation in Kentucky. Both of Gordon's parents were Southerners, and Gordon spent her childhood surrounded by family in rural Kentucky.⁷ Once she grew older, Gordon and her parents moved so that her parents could teach at a private boys' school, where Gordon was educated with the boys.⁸ After receiving an impressive education, Gordon entered Bethany College in West Virginia to study Greek.⁹ Among her contemporaries, she was an unusually well educated woman, and while at school, she developed aspirations beyond marriage and motherhood, deciding that she wanted to become a writer, the career that would occupy the rest of her life. After graduation, Gordon became a journalist for the *Chattanooga News* and became increasingly involved in encouraging female political involvement. She joined the Wheeling League of Women Voters and was an officer for several local women's community groups.¹⁰ These early experiences contributed to some of Gordon's distinctive characteristics: a keen intellectual mind, a willingness and desire to enter traditionally male-only fields, and a dedication to participating in her community.

⁶Caroline Gordon, letter to Allen Tate, November 13, 1955, Caroline Gordon Papers, Box 37, Folder 11, quoted in Nancy Lee Novell Jonza, *The Underground Stream: The Life and Art of Caroline Gordon*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 334.

⁷Ann Waldron, *Close Connections: Caroline Gordon and the Southern Renaissance* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1987), 20.

⁸Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 9.

⁹Ibid, 21-2.

¹⁰Ibid, 35-6.

Gordon came closer to her goal of becoming a writer when in 1924 she met Allen Tate, a poet of rising fame. Tate was a member of the Fugitives, a group of Southern intellectuals at Vanderbilt University and he was immersed in the wild literary culture of New York at the time.¹¹ Gordon and Tate became close almost immediately and had a passionate summer affair that ended when Tate returned to New York.¹² Gordon made plans to follow him and soon moved to Greenwich Village. That December, Tate and Gordon had a fight and separated, but several months later Gordon returned to inform Tate that she was pregnant.¹³ Unable or unwilling to procure an abortion, Gordon and Tate married, on the condition that they would divorce as soon as the baby was born.¹⁴ After the baby, Nancy, was born in September of 1925, Gordon and Tate chose to stay together, although Gordon never took Tate's last name.

Gordon continued to write, but her work was often interrupted by Tate's busy career and the demands of being a housewife. She attempted work on her first novel, *Penhally*, a story about a post-Civil War Kentucky family similar to Gordon's own family, but progress was slow.¹⁵ Gordon was determined that she would not be merely a career woman—she also wanted to be a successful housewife and hostess. In Gordon's opinion, too many female writers failed in their feminine duties, relying heavily on their families to support them.¹⁶ She viewed the “cushioned” female writer with disdain, believing that it was possible for women to succeed in all facets of life.¹⁷ In many ways, Gordon's desire to excel in her home and her career anticipated the feminist notion of “having it all,” and like many modern women, Gordon struggled to balance the two.¹⁸

¹¹Waldron, *Close Connections*, 26-7.

¹²Ibid, 32.

¹³Ibid, 40.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 68.

¹⁶Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, n.d., Folder 1 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Jennifer Szalai, “The Complicated Origins of ‘Having It All,’” *The New York Times Magazine*, January 2, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/magazine/the-complicated-origins-of-having-it-all.html?_r=0.

Writing to Ward Allison Dorrance, Gordon complained, “But in a few minutes I have got to stop writing and dress myself up and go to dinner at a dean’s house and spend the evening persuading the man who sits next to me to talk about himself and if I don’t do it with a fair degree of skill he will be telling people that Mrs. Tate is up-stage and conceited.”¹⁹

Motherhood proved to be a similar obstacle to Gordon’s career. Although Gordon wanted to be a good mother, she was also acutely aware of the time that a child required.²⁰ Gordon’s career and social life required significant time and mobility, which a child made more difficult. Nancy’s needs were often subordinated to those of her parents as they moved across the country, traveling towards financial stability and hospitable friends. Nancy spent significant portions of her childhood and adolescence living with her grandparents, great-aunt, and an assorted collection of family friends.²¹ Gordon would leave Nancy for anywhere from a few months to three years.²² In letters, Gordon referred to Nancy, if at all, as the “Fat Girl” and paid little attention to her daughter’s progress in school or society.²³ As a result, Gordon and Tate were shocked when Nancy failed the fourth grade—they had neither visited the school nor read her report cards—and when Nancy was expelled from her private high school for poor academic performance and promiscuity.²⁴ Gordon was also surprised and dismayed when 18-year-old Nancy married Percy Wood in 1943 and became pregnant soon thereafter.²⁵ When Gordon was concerned about her mothering of Nancy, she consoled herself by regarding Nancy’s tumultuous childhood as beneficial to her development, making her more independent.²⁶ Once again,

¹⁹Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, n.d., Folder 5 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers.

²⁰Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 64.

²¹Ibid, 115.

²²Ibid.

²³Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, n.d., Folder 1 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers.

²⁴Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 157, 211.

²⁵Ibid, 230.

²⁶Ibid, 53.

Gordon's desires to achieve in her career and in the home were put in conflict, forcing her to make difficult choices.

Gordon's writing career faced social obstacles as well. When she first became involved with Tate, Gordon had hoped that the relationship would provide a path into the literary community, but the marriage proved to be a double-edged sword. While her relationship to Tate gave her access to the literary community, her role as Tate's wife limited her ability to engage with that community. Gordon did become involved in the New York literary scene, but she was mostly regarded as one of the wives rather than one of the writers.²⁷ She complained occasionally of the sexist attitudes of the group: most of Tate's writer friends were male, and women had to be extraordinary to even be noticed, let alone regarded as equal.²⁸ Gordon's confidence in her writing suffered under Tate's disregard, and she continued to struggle to balance the duties of housewifery and motherhood with her writing.²⁹ Gordon took a major step when she became Ford Maddox Ford's secretary, providing a true entryway into the literary world. Ford was a prominent writer and mentor with a vast web of connections, and he adored Gordon. When he discovered her talent for writing, he encouraged her to finish and publish her first novel, *Penhally*, in September 1931.³⁰ After this break-through, Gordon's career ran more smoothly and she gained greater respect from Tate and his friends.³¹

However, Gordon worried that her feminine voice was a weakness. She was very aware of the gender of her voice and insisted on sounding masculine in her works, which she defined as cutting extraneous detail and florid description.³² But the effort required to disguise her gender

²⁷Waldron, *Close Connections*, 39.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 71-2.

³⁰Veronica A. Makowsky, *Caroline Gordon: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 73.

³¹Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 99.

³²Ibid., 152-3.

exhausted Gordon and slowed her writing process. Describing her writing, Gordon explained, “I, for instance, have put in the last three days trying to get a passage written so that it will be hard enough and firm enough to hang my whole book on. This takes if I may say so, a kind of masculine virtue. (George Eliot is almost the only woman writer who has it. God knows Jane Austen didn’t.)”³³ It is unclear why Gordon felt such disdain for the female voice in writing. By that time, there had been many successful female authors, such as Zona Gale, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, and others, and the feminine voice was no longer a guaranteed liability.³⁴ It may have been a result of her predominantly male mentorship under Tate and Ford, who wrote with more masculine voices and may have nudged her in that direction. Perhaps Gordon truly preferred fiction written by men. Either way, Gordon’s distaste for her own voice made writing into a more difficult and time-consuming task.

Conversion to Catholicism Amidst a Messy Marriage

Gordon began to gain increasing fame from her writing. Her novel *Penhally* (1931) was not overwhelmingly popular, but it received positive reviews from critics, and her subsequent novel, *Aleck Maury, Sportman* (1934), was her most read work.³⁵ Gordon developed a reputation for her style and for writing about the South.³⁶ Unfortunately, as Gordon’s career took off, her marriage floundered. The first major conflict occurred in 1933, when Gordon discovered that Tate had had an affair with her cousin, Marion.³⁷ Gordon was able to forgive the offense; she either did not discover or chose to ignore Tate’s other affairs, of which there were many.³⁸

³³Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, n.d., Folder 5 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers.

³⁴Champion, *American Women Writers, 1900-1945*.

³⁵Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 99-100 and Waldron, *Close Connections*, 135-6.

³⁶Robert Brinkmeyer, *Three Catholic Writers of the Modern South*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 74.

³⁷Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 134.

³⁸Waldron, *Close Connections*, 236.

However, after Nancy left home to marry Percy Wood in 1943, Gordon and Tate's marriage became unstable.³⁹ Financial problems had been a constant in their marriage, but they began to apply more stress.⁴⁰ Tate began to have strange anxiety attacks that distressed Gordon, and she responded with fits of fury at his various transgressions.⁴¹ In the fall of 1945, Tate asked Gordon for a divorce. Gordon felt betrayed and upset, but she acquiesced, divorcing in January 1946.⁴² However, they reconciled in subsequent months and the pair remarried that summer, newly confident in the strength of their relationship.⁴³ After the experience, however, Gordon decided that she needed to have a life outside of Tate. She vowed to maintain more friendships, work more on her writing, and find sources of inspiration beyond her husband.⁴⁴

While weathering her stormy marriage, Gordon became interested in Catholicism and was baptized into the Church on November 24, 1947, the feast day of St. John of the Cross.⁴⁵ Her baptism came as a surprise to her friends and family, as she had not spoken of her plans, perhaps trying to avoid mockery or doubt.⁴⁶ Following her baptism, Gordon offered various explanations for her conversion in response to puzzled queries from friends. Gordon noted several times that all fiction writers were primed to become Catholics, because they had spent their lives trying to make their words into reality, like God's Creation.⁴⁷ Writing to Ward Allison Dorrance, she cited the Bhagavad Gita and Vedanta as her main inspirations.⁴⁸ Later, still writing

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid, 244.

⁴¹Ibid, 242.

⁴²Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, n.d., Folder 1 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers.

⁴³Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, n.d., Folder 1 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers.

⁴⁴Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, December 6, 1945, Folder 1 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers.

⁴⁵Waldron, *Close Connections*, 259.

⁴⁶Makowsky, *Caroline Gordon*, 184.

⁴⁷Waldron, *Close Connections*, 259.

⁴⁸Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, n.d., Folder 2 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers.

to Dorrance, she credited the Gospel of St. Mark for her conversion.⁴⁹ St. John of the Cross, Jeremiah, and her religious neighbors, the Normans, were all offered as reasons for her conversion.⁵⁰

In addition, Gordon had maintained a strong friendship with Dorothy Day, who had converted to Catholicism and dedicated her life to social work in 1927. Day may have served as a source of inspiration for Gordon's conversion, as Gordon had written favorably about Day's impressive devotion to her faith.⁵¹ Conversions to Catholicism were also something of a trend among the literary culture during the 1940s and 1950s as wandering artists "sought an otherworldly ideal" offered in the mysticism and tradition of the Church.⁵² Gordon may have witnessed her friends' conversions and got caught up in the spirit of the time. She had been immersed in Catholicism while living with Tate in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s.⁵³ Catholicism had long intrigued Gordon as a potential way of life that could provide order to her often-chaotic existence.⁵⁴ In the years leading up to her conversion, Gordon faced no shortage of emotional turmoil: her daughter had left home, her marriage was deteriorating, and she and her husband were dealing with mental health concerns that caused additional stress. Catholicism may have been a source of solace. After her conversion, Gordon quickly became a dedicated Catholic, eager to share her faith with friends and to encourage other conversions. In the process, Gordon's beliefs became increasingly conservative, most noticeably with regards to women and gender roles. This shift obviously was linked to her change in religion, but her age, divorce, and Southern background were all possible influences as well.

⁴⁹Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, n.d., Folder 4 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers.

⁵⁰Waldron, *Close Connections*, 258.

⁵¹Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 168-9.

⁵²Paul Elie, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 97.

⁵³Makowsky, *Caroline Gordon*, 82.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

Post-Conversion Aversion to Writing

After becoming Catholic, Gordon downsized her career, which she believed was inappropriate for a woman. She embraced instead the ideal of feminine submissiveness, subordinating her desires and opinions to those of her male peers. Gordon had always been a stern critic of others' writing, describing some of her critiques as "cutting" as she raged against clichés, lack of detail, loose ends, and other literary evils.⁵⁵ After her conversion, she began to apologize when editing men's work. While editing one of Dorrance's drafts, she explained, "But I am a woman. It is hard for a man to take that kind of thing [harsh editing] from a woman. It takes an extraordinary amount of disinterestedness and artistic humility."⁵⁶ She also attributed much of her success as a writer to Tate and Ford, declaring that she could have never succeeded as a writer without their mentorship.⁵⁷ Writing to Tate in 1956, she stated, "Man is supposed to lead, woman to follow."⁵⁸ Gordon felt guilty about her insistence on writing as a career. She blamed many of her marital troubles on her writing, promising Tate that she would never write again and that their marriage would improve.⁵⁹

Gordon's conversion to Catholicism also had a heavy influence on her writing and her opinions on female intellectuals. Themes of Catholicism began to appear in her later works, in novels like *The Malefactors* (1956) and in short stories such as "The Presence" (1948) and

⁵⁵Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, 1951., Folder 5 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers and Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, 1948, Folder 3 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers..

⁵⁶Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, 1951., Folder 5 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers.

⁵⁷Waldron, *Close Connections*, 357.

⁵⁸Caroline Gordon, letter to Allen Tate, January 11, 1957, Caroline Gordon Papers, Box 37, Folder 11, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, quoted in Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 345. Henceforth, this archival collection will be abbreviated to "Caroline Gordon Papers."

⁵⁹Caroline Gordon, letter to Allen Tate, November 13, 1955, Caroline Gordon Papers, Box 37, Folder 11, quoted in Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 334.

“Emmanuele, Emmanuele” (1955).⁶⁰ She included biblical motifs and religious morals or conversions in her stories. However, in the years after her conversion, Gordon began to believe that writing itself was inappropriate for her. She thought that intellectual work was unbecoming to a woman, writing:

You might, however, in charity, reflect that while I am a woman I am also a freak. The work I do is not suitable for a woman. It is unsexing. I speak with real conviction here. I don't write ‘the womanly’ novel. I write the same kind of novel a man would write, only it is ten times harder for me to write it than it would be for a man who had the same degree of talent. When you come down to it, dr. Johnson [sic] was right: a woman at intellectual labor is always a dog walking on its hind legs.⁶¹

As a result, Gordon became increasingly uncomfortable with her career as a writer. She believed that there was religious evidence against female intellectualism, exemplified by the epigraph of her novel, *The Malefactors* (1956), a quote from Jacques Maritain that Gordon admired: “It is for Adam to interpret the voices that Eve hears.”⁶² The quote would also serve as the inscription on Gordon’s tombstone. Despite her reservations about female intellectualism, Gordon was unsuccessful in her attempts to stop writing. “Emmanuele, Emmanuele” was her last work of fiction, but she continued to write semi-historical works about classical mythology and her family’s history, in addition to teaching. This inconsistency aggravated Gordon because of the conflict with her beliefs, but she had little choice: she and Tate had divorced again in 1959, leaving her devastated, and she had no other means of supporting herself.⁶³

Catholicism could not have been the only reason for Gordon suddenly adopting traditional opinions on gender. Catholicism offers several laudable examples of powerful women, many of whom Gordon admired. She was extremely interested in St. Teresa of Avila, a

⁶⁰Makowsky, *Caroline Gordon*, 200.

⁶¹Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, n.d., Folder 5 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers.

⁶²Caroline Gordon, letter to Jacques Maritain, April 19, 1956, quoted from *Exiles and Fugitives: The Letters of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, Allen Tate, and Caroline Gordon*, edited by John M. Dunaway (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 56.

⁶³Waldron, *Close Connections*, 350.

Spanish nun who founded her own convents and wrote several books after being inspired by God, and St. Catherine of Siena, a powerful political figure and writer who also acted at God's behest. Gordon wrote of St. Catherine, "I have a particular devotion to St. Catherine. She seems to me the most admirable woman that ever lived."⁶⁴ Catherine and Teresa are both examples of powerful women who did complex intellectual work. During Gordon's lifetime, Pope Paul VI promoted the two women to the prestigious title of Doctors of the Church.⁶⁵ Gordon perhaps felt that their work was justified because they were acting on the direct orders of God. In addition, Gordon was good friends with Dorothy Day and Flannery O'Connor, two female Catholic contemporaries who were both involved with intellectual movements. Day had started her magazine, *The Catholic Worker*, and was in charge of a large social activist movement and charity, while O'Connor was an accomplished fiction writer. If Gordon disapproved of their "unfeminine" activities, she never publicly commented on it.

At the time of Gordon's conversion, the Catholic Church was still grappling with the role of women. Throughout the 1940's and 1950's, the Church increasingly focused on the importance of marriage and the preservation of the Catholic family, which emphasized a more traditional model of femininity.⁶⁶ As Catholicism entered the 1960s, however, American Catholics began to question many of these values. Catholic women such as Katharine Byrne lashed out against the ideal of the "Happy Little Wife and Mother" who dedicated her entire life to seemingly blissful domesticity, arguing that it was idealistic, impossible, and cruel to

⁶⁴Caroline Gordon, letter to Ward Allison Dorrance, July 27, 1950, Folder 4 in the Ward Allison Dorrance Papers.

⁶⁵Franjo Cardinal Seper and Jérôme Hamer, "Declaration: On the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood," *Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html.

⁶⁶Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 95.

women.⁶⁷ The Church itself was shifting in a more liberal direction under the work of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, which advocated for a more welcoming Church. As part of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI specifically addressed women, declaring that they played a crucial role in supporting the Church in both the home and the public sphere.⁶⁸ Gordon was mostly opposed to Vatican II, though, as she preferred the original mass and felt that Catholicism did not need the changes.⁶⁹ After the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 and the rise of second-wave feminism, Catholic authorities responded by trying to involve more women in the laity and creating new roles for them.⁷⁰ Gordon was mostly opposed to these shifts, identifying more fully with the backlash against the liberalizing of the Church.⁷¹ Her views on women may have more closely resembled those of Phyllis Schlafly, who wrote that a woman's "most precious and important right of all" was "to keep her own baby and to be supported and protected in the enjoyment of watching her baby grow and develop."⁷² The younger Gordon could have never agreed with Schlafly, but the older Gordon may have.

Despite her conservative response to Vatican II, Gordon was liberal in other ways. She was a staunch supporter of Eugene McCarthy, a relatively liberal Catholic politician of the time, rather than Joseph McCarthy, the more conservative Catholic candidate.⁷³ As a Catholic, Gordon did not fall clearly on either end of the political spectrum. Her ambiguous affiliations were

⁶⁷Katharine M. Byrne, "Happy Little Wives and Mothers," in *American Catholic History: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Mark Massa and Catherine Osborne (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 160.

⁶⁸Pope Paul VI, "Address of Pope Paul VI to Women," Closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, December 8, 1965.

⁶⁹Waldron, *Close Connections*, 366.

⁷⁰James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 212.

⁷¹Waldron, *Close Connections*, 366.

⁷²Phyllis Schlafly, "What's Wrong With 'Equal Rights' For Women?" in *American Catholic History: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Mark Massa and Catherine Osborne (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 182-3.

⁷³Caroline Gordon, letter to Jacques Maritain, March 12, 1968, quoted in *Exiles and Fugitives: The Letters of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, Allen Tate, and Caroline Gordon*, ed. John Dunaway, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 93.

actually characteristic for the time. Catholic scholar James M. O'Toole wrote of Catholics that "most held a mixed collection of views on the issues that so enflamed the partisans of one side or the other," and Gordon appears to be one of these muddled Catholics.⁷⁴ Catholicism no doubt had a strong influence on her views on women, but Catholicism itself is unclear on the role of women. Gordon had some choice in how to perceive women, even within the Catholic framework, but she chose to view women as inferior.

Gordon's divorce from Tate also may have been a major influence on her opinions on women. In 1959, Tate and Gordon divorced again, this time permanently. The divorce was a drawn out and messy affair, driven by Tate's desire to marry his mistress. Gordon's Catholic views made her very opposed to the divorce, and she fought against it.⁷⁵ In the end, though, Tate and Gordon divorced, and Tate remarried soon afterwards. Immediately after the separation, Gordon was very bitter. She resented Tate, but there is some evidence that Gordon also blamed herself. She believed that her career had made Tate feel neglected and that she had not done enough to support him through his emotional problems.⁷⁶ Gordon held herself accountable for the collapse of the marriage, and her turn to traditional values may have been an attempt to repair her marriage, or later, to atone for it. In her mind, her aspiration to a writing career had resulted in divorce, so she decided to rely upon traditional gender roles and stereotypes to compensate for her guilt. Gordon could not solve her failed marriage, but she could apologize for it by changing her values.

Conclusion

⁷⁴O'Toole, *The Faithful*, 244.

⁷⁵Waldron, *Close Connections*, 352.

⁷⁶Caroline Gordon, letter to Allen Tate, November 13, 1955, Caroline Gordon Papers, Box 37, Folder 11, quoted in Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 334.

In the latter half of her life, Gordon found a new sense of order and wonder in Catholicism, but in the process, she lost confidence in herself. Her writing, once a point of pride, became a source of embarrassment and conflict, and she regretted her decision to attempt to balance her career and home life. Many of these changes are attributable to her conversion to Catholicism, but Catholicism is not the sole factor. Gordon's divorce from Tate also played a significant role. Regardless of the causes, Gordon's identity underwent a surprising shift. Although Gordon eventually found peace in her faith and separation from Tate, she remains an example of the conflicting roles that many women of her time faced.

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