



Penhally

Caroline Gordon

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This narrative of a landed Kentucky family, traced over four generations, shows the decline of its patriarchal order, overwhelmed in the twentieth century by an irresponsible individualism. OThe best American novel I know.O_Ford Madox Ford. Southern Classics Series.

Penhally Details

Date : Published November 18th 1991 by J. S. Sanders and Company

ISBN : 9781879941038

Author : Caroline Gordon

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Lynn says

Even though Ford Maddox Ford highly praised Caroline Gordon's work, I found it a bit obscure. The many interior monologues demanded more attentive reading than I wanted to offer. Reading late at night as I do, it just didn't seem worth it to wade around in the prose trying to sort out flashbacks from foreshadowing. Gordon did offer an interesting look at Kentucky plantation culture as the Civil War and Reconstruction affected and finally dismantled it over the span of four generations.

Caleb Taylor says

Very perceptive look at the decline of a prominent Kentucky family from antebellum to modern times. The family is an example of the decline of the South in general. Very entertaining read, but the ending will make your eyes roll a little.

rachel says

What.

Jacob Russell says

Precursor to Gone with the Wind, and a better novel.

Doug Tattershall says

Margaret Mitchell had Tara. Caroline Gordon had Penhally. Both women wrote great books in the 1930s about the Civil War, centered around one particular manor house.

The similarities end there.

As she worked on GWTW, Mitchell's husband apparently asked her what she was writing about, to which she replied she was writing about her first marriage. Mitchell used the stories her grandmother had told her about making it through the Civil War as a setting for a novel about loving the bad boy. She came up with an entertaining, well-written soap opera and costume drama.

Gordon was writing about the loss of an agrarian culture--one connected to land and extended families rather than commerce and individualism--as her husband Allen Tate was doing for "I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition," published a year earlier.

She took on a weightier subject than Mitchell, and ended up with a weightier novel.

Penhally is a murder mystery, but not one that asks whodunnit. Instead, Gordon asks whydunnit. To answer the question, she takes readers across three generations and seven decades. The act itself takes no more than a paragraph to describe, but the explanation takes a novel.

Key to enjoying Gordon is enjoying her characters. She asks readers to sit down and get to know them. She doesn't simply make them seem real because they're flawed. She manages to make them likeable because they're flawed.
