1990

With the Flavor of the South: The Influence of the Southern Tradition on the Writings of Shirley Ann Grau.

Judy Ann Tarver
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/5099

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
With the flavor of the South: The influence of the Southern tradition on the writings of Shirley Ann Grau

Tarver, Judy Ann, Ph.D.
The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1990

Copyright ©1991 by Tarver, Judy Ann. All rights reserved.
With the Flavor of the South:
The Influence of the Southern Tradition
on the Writings of Shirley Ann Grau

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Judy Tarver
B.A., McNeese State University, 1976
M.A., McNeese State University, 1984
December 1990
Acknowledgments

I wish to express my thanks to the following people, without whose help, I could never have completed this project: Dr. Ward Parks, whose encouragement was invaluable; Dr. Gaines Foster, who first reawakened in me a love of the South; Dr. Veronica Makowsky, whose patience and guidance I needed; Dr. Jack May, my wonderful major professor; and last, but not least, my family, who never gave up on me.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .......................................... ii
Table of Contents ........................................ iii
Abstract .................................................. iv
Chapter I. What Is Southern Literature and Who Is Shirley Ann Grau? ............. 1
Chapter II. Early Success: The Black Prince and Other Stories ................. 23
Chapter III. Cajun Country: The Hard Blue Sky .................. 40
Chapter IV. Life in New Orleans: The House on Coliseum Street ............. 54
Chapter V. The Penultimate Southern Novel: The Keepers of the House ....... 71
Chapter VI. Myth and Gold: The Condor Passes .................. 93
Chapter VII. Later Short Stories: The Wind Shifting West ................. 110
Chapter VIII. Search for the Past: Evidence of Love .................. 125
Chapter IX. The Latest Effort: Nine Women: Short Stories ............... 140
Chapter X. In Conclusion .................................. 153
Bibliography ............................................... 157

iii
Abstract

Since before the time of the so-called Southern Renaissance of the 1920's, critics have been debating the existence and the value of a literature of the South. Although they agree on little else, most would concur that such a literature would share certain characteristics: a belief in the importance of community and the past; a tendency to prefer myth, or a perception of reality, to reality itself; a religious sensibility, especially a pervading sense of sin and guilt; an emphasis on place; and the use of elements of the Gothic.

For thirty-five years Shirley Ann Grau has been writing fiction which demonstrates the influence of life in the South and of the Southern literary tradition. The few scholars who have commented on her writing tend to group her with other Southern women writers, especially for her early works, but no one has tried to define her Southernness or to show that it exists even in her later stories not set in the South.

Filled with regional overtones, her earliest works do emphasize place, but more importantly, they deal with the issues of community, myth, and the past in defining individual identity. Her later works experiment with non-Southern settings, but issues remain the same.

The results have ranged from the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Keepers of the House* (1964) to the rather disappointing
Nine Women: Short Stories (1985). In every book, however, Grau's Southern background is unmistakable. Though the characteristics associated with the South appear at times as ideals to be admired and envied, they appear at others as empty or even dangerous. A thinking, modern Southerner, Grau has continued to grapple with those old questions: is there a Southern tradition and is it worth saving? Her ambivalence about the answers to those questions reflects an uncertainty about the future of the South itself.
Chapter One
What Is Southern Literature and Who Is Shirley Ann Grau?

Although she is not generally recognized in the United States as a major author and her work has received little critical attention, since 1954, Shirley Ann Grau has produced works, three books of short stories and five novels, which merit scholarly examination. A careful artist, she has consistently avoided the more lucrative course of popular writing to concentrate on serious literature. She has also tried to avoid stereotypes such as "Southern writer" which could limit the significance of her writing to a kind of local color. At the same time, however, Grau is a Southerner, and to her credit, her writing demonstrates some of the best characteristics of the finest serious Southern literature.

In 1920 H. L. Mencken declared that the South was a literary wasteland, a "Sahara of the Bozart." In Dixie, as he so bitingly put it:

a poet is now almost as rare as an oboe-player, a dry-point etcher or a metaphysician. It is, indeed, amazing to contemplate so vast a vacuity. One thinks of the interstellar spaces, of the colossal reaches of the now mythical order (Mencken "Sahara" 136). Unfortunately, to a certain extent Mencken was correct. Before the Civil War, the issue of slavery had petrified
thinking in the South, resulting in a siege mentality that tolerated few deviations from defense of the system. After the war, romanticism concerning the Lost Cause may have helped to ease the pain of defeat and Reconstruction, but it did little to alleviate the literary quagmire in which Southerners had become trapped. World War I, however, proved to be a major turning point in the South's literature. Allen Tate explained that the "South not only reentered the world with the first World War, it looked round and saw for the first time since about 1830 that Yankees were not to blame for everything" (Tate "Southern Mode" 568). By the thirties, William Faulkner, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Katherine Anne Porter, and other important Southern writers were publishing compelling works of literature, and the rest of the world took notice. It was the beginning of what came to be called the Southern Renaissance.

Today critics disagree on whether this Renaissance continues or has already run its course. Some would even question whether or not there remains a South that is unique or at least different enough to deserve a special category for its writing, and others would question whether such a distinction is helpful or harmful. Contemporary Southern writers like Grau often shy away from categorization as Southern, and if what is meant by Southern is only local color, parodied in moonlight and
magnolias, the label is certainly not a flattering one. If, however, what is meant is the ability faithfully to capture and to demonstrate the characteristics of a region in literature whose subject, despite its treatment, remains all of humankind, then to be Southern is to follow, with a Southern flavor, a noble tradition of serious literature.

Before demonstrating how a writer is Southern, one must first try to explain just what the South is. In the twenties, the South, as a truly distinct and readily recognizable entity, still existed. The one-crop, cotton-based economy in those states which had once belonged to the Confederacy helped to keep per capita income forty percent below the national average (Roland 22). The area remained isolated physically, because of primitive transportation, and spiritually, because of the nineteenth-century mentality that persisted. Three out of four Southerners lived in rural areas; only one in ten lived in cities of more than 100,000 (Roland 24-25), and throughout the South, Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation sometimes even more harsh than that experienced before the Civil War (Woodward Origins 212).

By 1930, changes had begun, but major differences remained. The South, with twenty-nine percent of the country's area and twenty-seven percent of its population, still had less than five percent of the nation's big
corporations, less than ten percent of its wholesale firms, less than four percent of the leading life insurance companies, and less than three percent of the annual income from these companies (Webb 68). It was an area technically a part of, but in reality still quite different from the rest of the country.

Eventually, the economic and social climate associated with World War I and the influence of men and women educated outside the region made possible the South's entry into the modern world, a world which, as Daniel Singal explains, urged critical realism in literature as well as an exploration of the dark side of human existence. Spurred on by postwar disillusionment, its writing developed "a genuine tragic sensibility" (Singal 4). The tone of I'll Take My Stand, written by twelve Southerners in 1929, for example, expresses the unrest and the disconcert in modern society similar to that of Eliot's The Wasteland, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, and Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises. Allen Tate wrote that the Southern writer of the thirties stood at "a crossing of the ways" (Tate "Provincialism" 272), and thus suspended between two epochs, he could look both forward and backward (Tindall 12). As John Reed points out, since writers of the Southern Renaissance had lived and experienced life outside the South (Reed "For Dixieland" 59), they viewed the South as modernists. Education and
exposure to the outside world had broadened their perspectives beyond Dixie's borders, yet they observed the modern world through the eyes of Southerners because they were Southerners and had been brought up that way (Rubin "Notes" 32). A variation of this "double vision" still characterizes the best of Southern literature. In Grau's writings, for example, it shows up as an ambivalence toward the Southern tradition, at once upholding the best ideals of that tradition and condemning its falsities.

Today geographical regions of the South remain physically distinct. Lumping together areas as different as the tourist regions of Florida, the hill country of Alabama, the delta bottom lands of the Mississippi, and cities like Atlanta and New Orleans proves problematic at best. In addition, increased travel, industrialization, urbanization, and education have all helped to alter the "solid South" and make life there superficially like life anywhere else in the country.

The fact remains, however, that while there may no longer be one "solid South," as Michael O'Brien points out in his book The Idea of the South, a community South does in fact continue to exist, for people still imagine that they discuss "the same entity" even as they talk about quite different things (O'Brien 226-27). Because Southerners share a community of beliefs, they continue to see themselves as unique, just as others continue to see
them as different. The South, in other words, continues primarily as an idea, a myth, a way of perceiving reality.

Among the first examples of writing specifically concerned with the South were those of local colorists such as Lafcadio Hearn and Joel Chandler Harris, who wrote describing primarily the physical trappings of an area. A Southern regionalist like Grau, however, must also understand the peculiarly Southern way of perceiving reality. T. Harry Williams, speaking of the Southerner, said that "the quality that makes him unique among Americans" is the ability to create "mind pictures of his world or of the larger world around him -- images that he wants to believe, that are real to him, and that he will insist others accept" (quoted in Smiley 321). This tendency to view the world unrealistically thus becomes one of the hallmarks of Southern attitudes and one which helps define Southern writing. The use of myth can be very satisfying when it provides stability in a world of flux, but it can also cause stagnation and decay. Louis Rubin explains:

The art of these writers has been crafted out of a deep sense of familiarity with the complexity of community life, and they have been powerfully drawn toward that life; yet at the same time, they have experienced a momentous distancing from that community (Rubin Literary South 416-17).
Modern Southern authors, therefore, at times both
demonstrate this romantic myth-making and react against
the tendency which they see as capable of constricting the
South and its writing.

Other characteristics often found in Southern writing
grow out of the bias toward myth-making which marks the
Southern community: a strong sense of that community and
the role place has in defining it; an effort to render
characters and events in concrete detail often exaggerated
into the Gothic; a belief in the value of religious
experience, even, at times, an obsession with sin and
guilt; and a special awareness of time and of the past,
primarily as they exist in communal memory rather than in
history (Rubin and Jacobs 12).

In William Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust, Gavin
Stevens says: "It's all now you see. Yesterday wont [sic]
be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand
years ago" (Faulkner Intruder 194-95). With these words
he also suggests the almost supernatural associations of
Southerners with their past. Southerners who ignore the
truths of their society in order to exist in a community
of their own making, exhibit the Southerner's tendency to
use myth "to cope with the most disturbing questions,"
those of "deep contradictions in the culture" (Schneidau
7). For the Southern writer, myth, the "intelligible and
often self-conscious use" of the beliefs of a community or
a unique embodiment of a cosmic view to "express something felt by the individual artist" (Holman Handbook 283), both demonstrates the Southern tendency to create myths and provides a method by which that same tendency can be examined critically.

Before the Civil War, Southerners resisted the movement of the rest of the country away from slavery, a system doomed to obsolescence in the modern world. They preferred to remain in an imagined superior, genteel society. In truth, most Southerners actually owned few slaves or none at all, yet the myth of the Land of Plantations, "of antebellum grace and elegance," persisted (Woodward Burden 13). After the war, Southerners continued to depend on myth to deny the war's human tragedy and the guilt left by defeat. According to Lewis Simpson, the culture of the South after the war held that "what has been lost in history is merely apparent loss, that memory redeems the truth that historical interpretation has ruled obsolete or destroyed" (Simpson "Republic" 81). Local colorists depicted a heroic Old South with "quaint, whimsical, charming folks in mountain coves and Latin Quarters, on bayous and plantations" (Holman Roots 87), and happy "darkies" on the plantation led by benevolent masters. As Holman reminds us, "this literary fantasy" still persists today "in the guided tours, the reconstructed towns, the outdoor pageants of
the tourist's South" (Holman Roots 88).

Even for twentieth-century writers, the community of the South has seldom if ever existed as an actual physical place; it has existed rather as myth, that is, as something imagined, and intimately related to that myth is the Southern preoccupation with the past. Traditionally, Americans have tended to prefer the present and the future to the past. Alexis de Tocqueville stated:

I have shown how the ideas of progress and of the indefinite perfectibility of the human race belong to democratic ages. Democratic nations care but little for what has been but they are haunted by visions of what will be. . . . The American people views its own march across these wilds, draining swamps, turning the course of rivers, peopling solitudes, and subduing nature. This magnificent image of themselves does not meet the gaze of the Americans at intervals only (Holman Roots 9-10).

Many American works have reflected this view of Americans as obsessed with the present and the future. As C. Vann Woodward writes, "A Hemingway hero with a grandfather is inconceivable, and he is apparently quite as bereft of uncles, aunts, cousins, and in-laws, not to mention neighbors and poor relatives" (Woodward Burden 31). When Nick Carraway of Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby looks out
over Long Island Sound, he thinks of the old Dutch sailors and the first time they had laid eyes on this new land. His reflection is not actually upon the past, however, but rather upon the attempt of those settlers to create a future for themselves. R. W. B. Lewis suggests that Americans "saw life and history as just beginning, . . . a divinely granted second chance for the human race." In fact, "our national birth was the beginning of a new history . . . which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only" (Woodward Future 19).

Southerners did not share this obsession with the future and disregard for the past. Instead they seemed to concentrate primarily on the past. Often cited as reasons for this backward-looking tendency are those given in Woodward's The Burden of Southern History: poverty in the midst of plenty, failure and defeat in a country which prizes success, and guilt in a land of innocence (Woodward Burden 17-19). The unfortunate reality of a past, where progress was not realized and innocence could not be maintained, forced the South to develop a different sense of appreciation for the past. Edgar Allan Poe expressed it well in his poem "To One in Paradise":

A voice from out the future cries
"On, On!" -- but o'er the Past
(Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering lies
Mute, motionless, aghast! (Poe 353 11. 11-13)
For most Americans history may be as Arnold J. Toynbee said, "something unpleasant that happens to other people" (Holman Immoderate 41), but for the Southerner, William Faulkner was more nearly correct when he said, "There is no such thing really as was, because the past is" (quoted in Simpson Dispossessed 65).

All this preoccupation with the past may seem somewhat neurotic. Shreve in Absalom, Absalom! certainly thought so when he said, "The South. Jesus. No wonder you folks all outlive yourselves by years and years and years" (Faulkner Absalom, Absalom! 377). The purpose, however, is, or should be, not to exist in the past, but through the past to understand its effects on the present and to build a future. Robert Penn Warren's Jack Burden learns that by accepting the truth of his past, he is able to go "out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time" (Warren 438). Quentin Compson seeks an answer to the questions of the South and of himself through the past as seen in Thomas Sutpen's life.

In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Faulkner himself explained the writer's duty and privilege "to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past" (Faulkner "Nobel Speech" 3A). The beliefs of the Southern community about its past, therefore, should serve to help
human beings attain and maintain dignity in a modern world where opportunities to do so have become increasingly rare.

Of course, citing Faulkner leads to the inevitable question concerning this giant of American literature: is the South depicted in Southern literature since Faulkner representative of the true South or of Faulkner's South? Certainly, no Southern author since his time has been able to escape his influence; still the question may, in fact, be moot because a good Southern writer does not write about any particular South, an idea probably different for each writer, but instead writes about humanity, using the South as material. Historical novels can be set anywhere, but the Southern writer's preoccupation with the past is not just to provide costumes for the characters, but to take

the South as he knows it today or can find out about it in the past, and . . . see it as a region with some special characteristics, but otherwise offering as an imaginative subject the plight of human beings as it has been and will doubtless continue to be, here and in other parts of the world (Tate "Provincialism 292). Southern characteristics thus become a medium for discussing a universal subject.

The South as imaginative subject also consists of
place and community. Flannery O'Connor said, "Southern writers are stuck with the South, and it's a very good thing to be stuck with" (O'Connor 239). Shirley Ann Grau echoed these sentiments when she said, "I think that writers inevitably reflect the society. You just can't help it. You're a creature of your time and place" (Canfield 46). Place, of course, is the most obvious characteristic displayed by the local colorists: Spanish moss hanging from the huge excrescences of oak trees, heavy doses of dialect, and swamps teeming with critters of all kinds. Because the subject of the local colorist is inextricably tied to one particular place, the potential for universality in his writing is naturally somewhat limited. The regionalist, on the other hand, while limited "in space," is not limited "in time" (Tate "Provincialism" 286). If myth and the beliefs attached to it by a community are the "cultural glue" that holds a community together (Schneidau 8), place and its relation to time are important elements contributing to that myth.

Lewis Simpson explains that the Southern writer has available to him a storehouse of artifacts, visible and oral, invisible and silent, which result in a style of life, an "experience of a people who had deeply lived the aspiration to community" (Simpson "Reaction" 65). Because of the often phantasmic nature of this community, however, Southern writing, at least since the advent of the
Southern Renaissance, has often been at odds with that community. Such a dialectic exists in the searching explorations into the beliefs of the community seen in Southern writing. In All the King's Men, Burden's Landing professes the ideals of responsibility and leadership but is too dead morally to permit the exercise of these ideals. To survive as an individual, Jack Burden must keep the ideals and reject the community. Quentin Compson's search to understand Thomas Sutpen is an attempt to understand his community. His suicide, narrated in The Sound and the Fury, is proof that he cannot live with the truth hidden beneath the myth. Modern Southern writers, then, both reflect the myths of their communities and sometimes rebel against them as the only way to present an authentic picture of the South.

The difference between this Southern view of man and his need to feel authenticity and the existential view seen in other modern American writings is that Southerners have a community, even if only a mythical one, upon which to focus, and transcendence of the problems of the present is possible, if only in one's imagination. Often that transcendence comes in the form of a religious sensibility, with or without formal religion. Louis Rubin points out that Dilsey from The Sound and the Fury believes, and thus she endures. She is superior to her white employers, the Compsons, "who have no such firm
theological conviction," and, therefore, "are doomed to perish" (Rubin Far Away 206). Cass Mastern in All The King's Men learns to face the truth about himself and grounds the peace he receives from that knowledge in religious faith. Jack Burden does not become religious, but he does learn to tolerate the religious faith of the Scholarly Attorney and to accept him with all his spiritual obsessions.

Although the South is primarily associated with Protestantism, the main influence remains instead what Hugh Holman calls a "religious sense of man" (Holman "Introduction" xi) and an overpowering sense of evil, rather than any particular denomination or profession of belief. Post-World War II Southern writers may not accept the validity of the old fundamentalism, but they do affirm the value of the untroubled faith associated with fundamentalism (Rubin Far Away 210). The conflict, however, lies in the direct opposition of such an untroubled belief to the apparent absurdity of much of modern existence. As a result, in order to examine man's struggles between faith and experience, Southern writers have often resorted to Gothic trappings, what Tennessee Williams called the "externals" of fiction through which a "Sense of the Awful" could be communicated (Lawson 18). This desire to communicate "the Awful" provides one reason for the prevalence of ghosts in Southern fiction and seems
to be particularly associated with the South and the religious sensibility of the region.

The South, therefore, and its fascination with myths, the past, community, place, and religious consciousness, provide writers with a medium through which to create important fiction. While the strength of such a Southern influence may be weakening, it has by no means disappeared. It still provides critics with a useful tool with which to comprehend the literature produced by Southern writers, and no matter what the actual setting of her stories may be, Shirley Ann Grau is a writer for whom the South remains an essential influence.

On July 8, 1929, Shirley Ann Grau was born in New Orleans, a city which she claims was "the only really civilized city in the South" (Keith 11) in the thirties and forties. Her father, Dr. Adolph E. Grau was a fifty-five-year-old dentist, and her mother, Katherine Onion, a forty-five-year-old housewife, when she was born. Though she claims they were not rich, Grau explains that her family never really worked but did keep two residences, one in New Orleans, home of her mother's family, and one in Montgomery, Alabama, amid "a strongly fundamentalist Christian environment" (Donohue 10). Exposure to life in New Orleans, with its rich mixture of cultures, and to
Montgomery, the heart of the Deep South, provided abundant material for her literary creations. In addition, the effect of her eclectic religious background (a Presbyterian mother, a Lutheran father, and a Baptist and Episcopalian childhood) can be seen in her stories. Today she is officially both Baptist and Methodist though she claims to prefer Unitarianism or no church at all (personal interview).

Though he never explained why he left, Grau's grandfather had fled to this country from Prussia in time to witness the Civil War ("Grau" World Authors 590). This same grandfather kept an "eccentric house" with a large library and encouraged young Shirley to read, even sneaking her books, like those written by Thomas Hardy, which her grandmother thought were too mature for her (personal interview). In addition to reading, Grau grew up with "the usual family stories of births and wars and killing, of Indians and feuds" ("Grau" World Authors 590). In her grandmother's stories she could listen "to the soft Creole speech, to the stories of people long dead, of heirlooms given to the Cabildo, the museum in New Orleans, rather than sold; of an age which was disappearing" (Grau "Mansions" 100). Hers was a childhood which emphasized the importance of one's past and of storytelling -- a childhood amenable to a future Southern author.

More formal education included "science, a lot of
math, literature, and languages" (Davis 40) at Booth Academy, a classical finishing school run by "two maiden ladies" in Montgomery (personal interview). The school was not accredited, however, so she returned to New Orleans for her last two years of high school where she attended Ursuline Academy, a Catholic boarding school for girls. She then went on to Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans where she wrote an honors thesis on Milton and graduated Phi Beta Kappa in English. In graduate school at Tulane, she expanded her literary interests, studying English literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and publishing several short stories in the college journal (Gossett 178).

While at Tulane, she also met James Kern Feibleman, a professor of philosophy, and on August 4, 1955, they were married. Feibleman's Jewish faith at first caused a small scandal within Grau's family; nevertheless, Grau defined her own parameters of a suitable mate and the marriage prospered. In addition to a son from Feibleman's previous marriage, they had two sons and two daughters. Since 1955, she has maintained two households: one in New Orleans and another in Martha's Vineyard where, she claims, "We pretend we live in the New England of ninety years ago" (interview). Grau's husband was the author of nearly thirty books, mostly non-fiction, before his death in 1988.

Grau's books have sold well and have been translated into dozens of foreign languages (Keith 14), and in Germany she is considered a bestseller (personal
interview). Still, critical reaction to her books has been mixed, ranging from ebullient praise for her early work to indifference and sometimes condemnation toward some of her later works.

Arthur Voss, writing about Southern writers, ranks Grau's best work with that of Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty, and Carson McCullers (Voss 350). Frederick Hoffman likewise groups her with these three writers because all "reveal the genuinely native particulars of a scene, while at the same time communicating their existence in time and commenting on it" (Hoffman 74-75). Among Southern authors, he ranks only Faulkner, Wolfe, and Warren higher.

Curiously, Voss and Hoffman both fail to deal with the themes of Grau's writing, as if to suggest that she has none. Paul Schleuter, who published a book on Grau for the Twayne author series, also condemns by faint praise, noting her "stylistic excellence" and her ability "to create vivid sensory images that echo in the reader's mind long after the work is finished" (Schleuter 7). By emphasizing an ethereal quality in her work and failing to attribute any significant message to her, Schleuter wrongly suggests that Grau can safely be relegated to minor status.

Even less favorable comments have included some often directed at women writers, calling her a "writing housewife" and "an author more appropriate for women's
magazines and clubs than for scholarship" (Schleuter 7). Alwyn Berland expresses this regret about Grau's fiction: "What is missing is the firm center, the center of a vision, and hence the conviction of why her characters behave as they do" (Berland 84). Perhaps these critics should take a look at Southernness, a tradition that helps to explain the actions and motivations of Grau's characters.

While reviewers almost always refer to Shirley Ann Grau as a Southerner and consider her early books to be examples of Southern writing, no one yet has tried to show that even the later works exhibit Southern traits, nor has anyone successfully defined just what makes any of her writing Southern. When asked whether she considered herself a regionalist or a Southern writer (a title she eschews), Grau replied, "Any label you think of is always at least half wrong" (Canfield 39). In one interview after another, she has expressed her distaste for classification, and when asked to define Southern writer, she has avoided the issue saying, "In all definitions you run into endless problems. . . . I don't see the very generality -- Southern" (personal interview).

Such reticence should not be unexpected in a serious writer. Because of her varied background, Grau has been able to recognize and acknowledge the drawbacks to being Southern, and one can appreciate her reluctance to having
her writing limited by indiscriminate labelling. At the same time, Grau grew up in the South and continues to spend most of her time there. In short, whether the setting of Grau's stories is south Louisiana or New England, the influence of the South and of the best Southern literature can be seen in the fiction of Shirley Ann Grau, in an ambivalence that sometimes appears as support for that Southern tradition, and sometimes as an attack for its ill effects.
Chapter Two

Early Success: The Black Prince and Other Stories

When asked once whether she preferred writing short stories or novels, Shirley Ann Grau answered:

It's easier to do a story because you can in a sense get your hands around it, you can get hold of it, the bones are more visible, it makes a more pleasing shape. You tend to see the skin, the structure, the shape of short stories more easily, and this is more pleasing to the aesthetic sensibility (Schleuter 106).

Perhaps for this reason, her first professionally published works were short stories. In 1955 when she was twenty-six, she published The Black Prince and Other Stories. It was "hailed by reviewers and readers alike as marking the appearance of a new and promising talent in the literary landscape to the south" ("Hard Blue" 3253). Time magazine called it "the most impressive U. S. short story debut between hard covers since J. D. Salinger's Nine Stories" ("Grau World Authors 591). John Nerber wrote in the New York Times:

One has to go back to Eudora Welty's first book, A Curtain of Green, for a comparable performance. . . . Miss Grau has the same unmistakable authority, the instinctive feeling for form and language (obviously
strengthened by a lot of hard work) and that pervasive relish for the wonderful particularities of human nature that are part of the equipment of the born writer (Ross 209).

The book was an immediate success.

Despite such early enthusiasm, however, a few objections did surface which have followed Grau's writing career. A lack of strongly structured plots and characters with little depth seemed to be the major criticisms. Alwyn Berland, for example, acknowledges her gift for "convincing gesture and idiom" and sensitivity to "the nuances of behavior" in her characters but suggests that Grau remains too detached, that she is too often like a "(gifted) fictional anthropologist . . . who never is able to forget in his own nervous system that he is a guest" (Berland 78-79). Paul Schleuter cites difficulty with probing characters in depth and with "demonstrating any overriding philosophical perspective governing her fiction" (Schleuter 141).

The somewhat excessive excitement about Grau's first book perhaps may be attributed to the period, the mid-1950's, just as the civil rights movement was beginning, but before the time when any fictional treatment of blacks immediately became propaganda for or against integration. In 1955 stories about blacks were still rather an exotic yet safe, because distant, subject. Schleuter believes
that Grau's stories dealing with blacks are generally better than the ones dealing with whites because they exude mystery, "echoes of folklore and myth" (Schleuter 107), and Grau seemed to agree with his description, at least for these stories. In an interview she explained that Carson McCullers is her favorite Southern writer because her characters "are always bigger than life" (Canfield 47). Similarly, she stated that the characters in The Black Prince are symbols and that blacks make good symbols because they are "larger than life and brighter colored" (Canfield 46). Grau's use of the term "brighter colored" to describe blacks suggests the possibility of her own early unconscious racial stereotyping, an influence of her Southern background.

If the elements "of legend-making" and "strong non-realistic qualities" (Canfield 47) attracted Grau to McCullers, they also formed a major part of The Black Prince. She herself said: "I was trying to create a kind of legendary, mythological time, a non-real approach, a storytelling in the legendary sense of storytelling" (Canfield 45). The title story, "The Black Prince" (originally published under the title "The Sound of Silver"), presents a genuinely mythic character in Stanley Albert Thompson, whom Mary Rohrberger calls "a supernatural power, a . . . dispenser of death and of everlasting life" (Rohrberger "Short Story 90").
Rohrberger equates the black man Stanley Albert with the "Black Man," Satan, whose name she extracts from the beginning letters of Stanley Albert's name (Rohrberger "Short Story" 90). The basis for such a mythical connection begins with the quotation from Isaiah 14: 12 which opens the story: "How art thou fallen from heaven, / O Lucifer, son of the morning!" (BP 418). Like Lucifer, Stanley Albert is powerful, charismatic, and evil, and while lacking the cosmic dimensions of Milton's Satan, he is, nevertheless, a fascinating villain.

Stanley Albert appears suddenly as a whistle, "distinct, soaring, mocking, like some rare bird, proudly, insolently," and explains that he has come "straight out the morning"; he then slips "around the tree like the last trail of night shadow" (BP 420) and disappears. He is the kind of supernatural character who can vanish, leaving no trace, one who always has a steady supply of silver coins with which to buy liquor and impress all around him although no one else in town has any money or knows how Stanley Albert gets his. He hypnotizes the girls with his big gold watch and causes the men in town to recommence a ten-year-old feud among themselves because they dare not fight with him. Only Alberta (who appears later in Grau's 1964 The Keepers of the House as a mythic character herself) seems able to withstand his attraction. His wooing of her, complete with showers of silver and
gold coins magically converted from wax drippings and whirlwind trips across the county taking only minutes, matches the larger-than-life image of Stanley Albert. He is handsome, but his shadow is ugly because he represents the attraction of evil within each person.

Such an idea, of course, is a very old one, but one made more exotic by the unreal or mythic qualities of the story. The reader is not surprised that a creature like Stanley Albert can be dispatched only with silver bullets made from the coins he spent in the bar every night. Stanley Albert and Alberta disappear, but their effects remain: every disaster to occur in the town, from houses that burn to babies who are born dead, is blamed on the absent two. "The Black Prince" is Grau's way of emphasizing "the human need to shape the inexplicable hazards of life into form and meaning," according to Louise Gossett (Gossett 188). More precisely, perhaps, by using the Southern preference for myth, Grau has explored a universal fascination with the allure of power.

In Writing the South, Richard Gray cited "The Girl with the Flaxen Hair" as an example of the tendency among Southerners to try to live up to an image they have created of themselves:

For time and again in Southern writing people are presented as "actors in a spectacle," to be judged solely by the brilliance of their role and the
excellence of their performance; and the heroic impulse is portrayed as a potential agent of redemption -- or, if not that exactly, then at least as a way of making life tolerable (Gray Writing 193).

The story thus deals not with mythic characters, but with the Southern preference for living in unreality, for believing in a mythic world.

The narrator of "The Girl with the Flaxen Hair" (a title which immediately suggests the Southern belle) is a young girl named Lily, and though not usually fanciful herself, she and her mother are enchanted by the idea of the more romantic world suggested by their new neighbors.

Mrs. Ramond, who has moved into the long abandoned old home down the street with her daughter Rose, claims that they keep very little furniture and cover what they do have with white linen slips in order to make the house cooler; ferns in the house also cool because of the mud. The truth, of course, is that the family has no other furniture, ferns are cheap, and dirt is free (BP 466), but Lily and her mother prefer Mrs. Ramond's version.

Mrs. Ramond also loves to tell stories about her famous father, the gallant Senator Winslow, a man who had once shot robbers in his house and then left the stain in the carpet "as a warning to other thieves to stay away from his house" (BP 471). Lily will not believe her own father when he reveals that the Senator had actually been
a crook who only barely escaped imprisonment, for she
"knew the Senator too well." To her the Senator was a
Cavalier image she had learned from Rose and her mother's
reiterated description: "He was tall, but not heavy, and
he wore a blue coat with silver buttons, and boots shiny
as water in the light" (BP 474).

Both Rose and her mother desperately seek the comfort
of myth over reality; therefore, Rose's father, a short
barber who prefers to play piano, receives almost no
recognition from Rose or her mother and finally disappears
and is never mentioned again. He simply does not fit the
image of the world as they want to see it. Mary
Rohrberger has pointed out that Lily's mother likewise
remains "enamored" of a misty Southern past (Rohrberger
"Short Story" 92). Like Mrs. Ramond, Lily's mother had
also lived in Jefferson City, and she still keeps a
perfect image of it in her memory that anyone who shares
that image can reinforce. The Ramonds seem so
extraordinary that Lily is surprised that Rose could
possibly bleed red blood: "Her blood was red -- red as
mine -- even if she was so pale and light-haired" (BP
475).

Rose is finally killed by a train while stealing coal
from the freight yard because she and her mother are too
poor to buy some, but somehow the ugly truth about the
Ramonds fades in Lily's recollection of them. Years later
she cannot remember her own father, the man who had tried
to make her face reality, but she will never forget Rose
or Senator Winslow with "his boots shiny as water in the
sun and his blue coat with the silver buttons" (BP 479).
The fact that the image of Senator Winslow, a man Lily
never met, has remained while that of her own father has
not, demonstrates the potentially destructive force of
myth-making as delusion. The Ramonds had tried to live in
a world of their own making, and, in true Southern
fashion, Lily also chooses a mythical version of truth
over reality.

Although, as I have noted, Grau does not like to be
classified as a Southern writer, she admits that she began
as a regionalist "with heavy, heavy emphasis on place as
dominating character" (Canfield 41). Ann Pearson claims
that "Nature is her [Grau's] vision, the focal point of
her best fiction," but Pearson also believes that her
"Nature" is completely objectified and thus becomes
meaningless, thereby making her fiction meaningless too
(Pearson 48). Nature and place are certainly important
ingredients in some of the stories in The Black Prince, as
they are in many Southern stories, but their purpose is
usually to situate them, to set them in a context of
community. "White Girl, Fine Girl," the first story in
The Black Prince, has an unforgettable setting: Clayton
County, a dry county in which the sale of corn liquor and
the "colored prison" (BP 397) are the two main preoccupations. When the state legislature or the supreme court are in session, the price of corn liquor goes up and blacks are not allowed to buy it, so the black part of town "on these nights hums with a restless aimless anger" (BP 397).

An underlying sense of frustration and oppression exists among these blacks, symbolized by the many black/white contrasts throughout the story. The prison for black men at Kilby is surrounded by white brick walls; the road to town is black asphalt with a white line "carefully painted" by prisoners from Kilby (BP 399). Like the fields that had been plowed wrong years ago so that now no one wanted to bother with them as they just keep getting drier and darker (BP 399), the injustice of the racial situation has existed so long that no one seems able to change it.

One of the first acts of Jayson Paul Evans, a recently released inmate of Kilby, is to kick a fencepost. Like the racial barriers which keep him and his community apart from the rest of society, the post is rotten at the core and gives way when he kicks it, but his gesture is an empty one. The fence remains, and so do the social barriers. In town, blacks sell moonshine liquor to whites, "the most important people, who had money and a taste for good corn" (BP 405), but the posters in the
Pair-a-Dice Bar show only white girls drinking Jax beer. Blacks have not yet entered the larger world inhabited by whites.

The whole sense of community among the people of this little town has been corrupted by the valorizing of white skin: Mannie has a light-skinned wife who lives in the black section of town while he prefers to stay in a room over the garage of the white family whom he chauffeurs, and Jayson Paul Evans seeks the company of an almost white girl with red hair because she looks like the girls on the posters. As the title suggests, in a society dominated by racial segregation, only white girls can be considered fine; the blacks in this society have been left without a sense of the worth of their own community.

John Bradbury has stated that Grau "shows an astonishing knowledge of Negro life and insight into their emotional difficulties" (Bradbury 131), and in "Miss Yellow Eyes," Grau does explore the feelings and conditions which made up the world for Southern blacks in the 1950's. Conflict arises because the black characters have been dominated by the idea that white is superior, or at least that being white means life in a superior world. Throughout the story light is associated with the white world of freedom, and darkness, with the constricted world for blacks. The cabs, for example, which pick up white patrons are light colored, but the cabs for blacks are
black with a white stripe superimposed, much as the lives of blacks are overridden by whites.

What comes through quite clearly is the failure of the white community to allow blacks to develop sufficient identity of their own to be able to withstand white pressure. Nothing in their community provides them with hope or a feeling of self-worth. Both Chris and Lena (Miss Yellow Eyes) are light-skinned blacks who look "like a white couple. . . . Unless you had sharp trained eyes, like the people down here do, you would have thought they were white and you would have thought they made a handsome couple" (BP 439). They plan to move to Oregon where they can "pass over" and live as whites. Pete, Lena's brother, is the darkest of the characters, "moody and restless and not happy" (BP 441). Their mother, a maid for a wealthy white couple, has never had any trouble with the police; nevertheless, she fears them. If a patrol car comes around, she hides behind the curtains, and she will walk all the way around the block to avoid coming near a blue uniform. When Chris is injured in the war, neither the church nor the local gris-gris woman can supply the solace that Lena seeks. As a Southerner, Grau would appreciate the potential benefits that a sense of community can give, but "Miss Yellow Eyes" demonstrates that conditions in the South in the 1950's had subverted those qualities for blacks.
Morris Henry, a black character who appeared earlier in the book in the story "The Black Prince," reappears in "One Summer," but the town no longer seems the same because this story is about the white inhabitants, and for them the advantages of community are more obvious. The narrator's name is Mac, but his mother always calls him MacDonald, echoing some mythical past: "it had belonged to her family" (BP 526). Everyone in town intimates his shared belief in some grand past; all call Mac's grandfather "the old gentleman," as if there were only one (BP 525). When the old gentleman dies, Mac's father, the town doctor, signs the death certificate, and Mac's reaction emphasizes the importance of continuity in the creation of a community. Someday he, a doctor, will likewise write out his father's name; then his son will do the same for him. Already, the maid has begun to call him "sir" because he has moved up one rung of the ladder in the community's hierarchy (BP 531). Tradition, the past which creates the present and allows a future, holds this community together.

In his comments on "One Summer," Paul Schleuter claims that the thunderheads which hang in the distance throughout the story "threaten imminently to drench and even kill some of those whose lives are totally dependent upon the weather" (Schleuter 119). Nowhere in the story, however, does Grau discuss farmers or others who would
depend so completely on weather. These are small-town people, and the thunderheads, like most good regional description, reinforce the story's unsettling mood — unsettling, in this case, because of a death and the frightful realization by a young boy of his own mortality. Though he tries to run away, Mac finally stops to listen to a mockingbird. Like the persona of Walt Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed," he finds the comfort of truth by listening to a "grey-brown bird," (BP 545), which represents his own soul, a soul nourished by his community and their appreciation of time.

The black characters of "The Way of a Man" never have the chance to obtain similar nourishment. The title is an allusion to the book of Proverbs:

Three things are hard to me, and the fourth I am utterly ignorant of. The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man in youth (Proverbs 30: 18-19).

Without the advantages provided by a positive sense of community, difficulty and violence permeate this story with a "convincing inevitability" (Gossett 179). The characters simply react because they have not been instilled with a code from any community. A woman abandons her son; then the father reciprocates by leaving the boy on her doorstep; years later the boy strikes out
in anger and accidentally kills his father. None of the violence, however, ever seems planned. The way of a man or a woman or a boy in such a society, lacking the vantage point of a community, remains as elusive as it was for the prophet long ago.

Set during World War II, "Joshua" is the most topical of the stories in *The Black Prince*. At that time German U-boats prowled the Gulf of Mexico off the Louisiana coast. Jean Ross has stated that "Joshua" is filled with "a skillful economy of dialogue and situation" and that "Grau effectively communicates the fear Joshua tries desperately to hide" (Ross 209). The story is a kind of bildungsroman in which Joshua Samuel Watkin, an eleven-year-old black boy from south of New Orleans along the lower coast at Bon Secour, must face his fear of death. A strong sense of place dominates the story, exemplified by a cold rain that falls all during the short winter and swamps so thick that even the natives will not go in after a man who had killed a girl:

Nobody talked much in the swamps. People got suddenly embarrassed and shy of their words and spoke only in whispers when they said anything at all, because the swamp was like a person listening. The grasses and bushes and trees and water were like a person holding his breath, listening, and ready to laugh at whatever you said (BP 562).
The somber and dangerous setting, provides a perfect background for Joshua to come face to face with his fear, in the form of a dead German submariner, and conquer it. The setting is Southern, but the story is universal.

According to Mary Rohrberger, "Fever Flower," a story which she considers the best in *The Black Prince*, should be associated with the "modern South" (Rohrberger "Short Story" 93). In this case, setting is not just background, but the theme as well. Maureen, a young child and the main character of the story, is associated with the tropical gardens which she loves so much. In the gardens, "the blooms were forced to grow to gigantic size in half the time; they were beautiful and exotic and they did not last" (BP 499). Despite her age, she has become an object kept by her parents for show and forced to bloom or mature quickly to relieve them of "the awkward growing years" (BP 495). Like Maureen and the garden, the exotic beauty of the South in the 1950's also seems doomed to perish under the pressure for expansion and change. With Grau's skill in creating "an atmosphere laden with exotic sensory stimuli" (Schleuter 142), she captures one of the modern South's great dilemmas: how to keep up with the rest of the world without losing that which has made the South unique and precious. At the end of the story, Maureen lies on her bed fretful and feverish, "beautiful and burning" (BP 501), suggesting an uncertain future for both
the child and the South.

The least successful story in *The Black Prince* is "The Bright Day," which opens with a quotation from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* -- "Finish, good lady; the bright day is done, / And we are for the dark" (BP 480). Both "The Bright Day" and *Antony and Cleopatra* deal with the good and bad in everyone, but no other similarity between the two stories is apparent. In "The Bright Day," good, hard-working people cheat Pamela Langley, an old lady, out of an inheritance that she does not need but they do. Perhaps the lack of any Southern characteristics makes this story so forgettable; perhaps the reason is more basic. The reader, after all, learns only enough about Pamela to agree with her industrious relatives that giving up everything to her would be fruitless. For whatever reason, though, the story fails.

On the whole, *The Black Prince and Other Stories* is a remarkable first effort. Populated with mythical characters as well as real people inhabiting a world of unreality, it explores Southern society and the communities engendered or stifled by it. The stories criticize, without preaching, traditions in the Southern white community which separate blacks from society as a whole. White characters are also separated by their pretensions of a better existence or by their inheritance of a mythical past, but a shared spirit of community makes
the separation seem less real than it actually is. In *The Black Prince*, Grau implies that only the Southern community based on ideals can benefit its members.
Gaines Foster, professor of history at Louisiana State University, is fond of telling the students of his Southern American History class that if they come from south Louisiana, they are not really Southerners. Most of them immediately express shock, disbelief, or even anger, just the kinds of reactions to make a class lively, but how could Professor Foster make such a statement to begin with? Geographically, of course, south Louisiana could be considered nothing else but Southern, but, once again, the problem arises in trying to define just what the South is.

In an interview, Shirley Ann Grau discussed the difference between attitudes in south Louisiana and in the rest of the South, especially among different ethnic groups. She explained that the English and Scots, the predominant ethnic groups throughout most of the South, seem "very uptight about many, many things" while the French and Italians, dominant in south Louisiana, are more attuned to pleasure (Canfield 45). Most of the South is also dominated by Protestantism, but not south Louisiana. Grau continued, "When you get the rather extreme Protestant churchgoer, then you get a heavy dose of hypocrisy. . . . South Louisiana doesn't have that attitude" (Canfield 44-45). Of course, Grau does not
mention that Catholicism, which dominates south Louisiana, also stresses the presence and power of evil in the world and the guilt associated with it.

Her attempt to make Louisiana appear different from the rest of the South, especially after publication of *Keepers of the House* in 1964, seems to be a result of her own ambivalence about the South. If Louisiana, her home, is different, it can possess the good qualities of the South without suffering all of the problems.

If, however, Grau does intend that south Louisiana differ markedly from the rest of the South in attitudes and in beliefs, can a book like *The Hard Blue Sky*, set on Isle aux Chiens (that Grau identifies as Grand Isle, an island south of New Orleans that she remembered as a child) still be considered a Southern book (Canfield 42)? Indeed it can. Despite a difference in religion and a greater predilection to seek enjoyment, south Louisiana is part of the South. The acknowledgment of the presence of evil, the influence of place in defining the beliefs of community, and the importance of the beliefs and traditions which unite individuals in a community can all be found throughout *The Hard Blue Sky*.

Appearing in 1958, soon after the success of *The Black Prince and Other Stories*, *The Hard Blue Sky* also met with critical acclaim. Frederick Hoffman maintained, even as late as 1967, that it was Grau's best book: "a
faithful, a quite vivid record, true to the idiom of the scene and of its people" (Hoffman "Art" 107). John Bradbury has praised "her ability to project the individual scene, the uncommon character and the natural background" (Bradbury 131). In fact, nearly everyone who has commented on the book has stressed the vital role of setting. Paul Schleuter writes that "place" dominates the work (Schleuter 7). Moreover, he also correctly points out that this place is not just "nostalgic settings" and that it does not "overwhelm" the characters or the "deeper issues that govern their behavior" (Schleuter 25).

Because any discussion of unique setting can degenerate into a litany of what is merely unusual, we should appeal once again to the difference between local color and regionalism. The Survey of Contemporary Literature explains that regionalism is "a landscape within an art, not scenery-drawing for its own sake. Local color is the tourist view of whatever is quaint or picturesque or sentimental in the provincial scene" ("Hard Blue" 3254). Thus, a writer of local color stresses primarily the more superficial aspects of an area, whereas a regionalist, like Grau in The Hard Blue Sky, employs unique settings and dialect but moves beyond local color fiction to explore something universal, in this case, the spirit, the community, that defines a particular group of people.
To be sure, Grau relates all the unique characteristics of setting of Isle aux Chiens. The first four pages of the book describe the place itself with its three islands, all subject to storms, hurricanes, floods, and tides. Oak trees are bitten and twisted by wind and salt spray, while thick oleanders with their poisonous leaves and chinaberry trees, with berries that stink and rot in December, litter the islands. Most obvious of all, the weather, hot and oppressive, with the hint of impending disaster in the form of the hurricane with which the book ends, permeates the story.

Schleuter has stated that the weather actually "governs and parallels the actions" of the characters as well (Schleuter 8). The elaborate emphasis on nature thus not only creates a unique setting, but also defines one of the major conflicts of the story. When asked why she used the term "hard blue," Grau replied that the sky in south Louisiana during the summer is like "a teacup," like "hard porcelain" that "seems to be very close overhead" (personal interview). In addition, however, it seems clear that the sky with its threatening storm clouds and the rest of nature also provide major obstacles for the inhabitants of Isle aux Chiens. The fishermen there are poor; in fact, Grau herself explained that "a rougher, harder life didn't exist" (Canfield 42) than Grand Isle in the thirties. Life is a constant struggle, but the spirit
of this community insures that the people will continue to strive. The closer the hurricane comes, the more they work together.

Because Isle aux Chiens is an island of poor fishermen, inhabitants are very much attuned to nature's influence and exist at its mercy. Julius Arcenaux, for example, who owns the island's only store, claims an almost mythical association with nature:

I hear the sun come up in the morning; and I hear the leaves come out the stalk; and I hear the worms crawling in the ground. And when I sit and watch a moonflower open, I can hear that, me (HB 58).

No one on the island can explain just when he means, but somehow they understand and accept his statements as truth.

If all of the characters do not share Julius' ear for nature, they do all acknowledge its force. Alwyn Berland criticizes Grau because the story ends just as the hurricane, threatening throughout the novel, hits. The reader is left to imagine what happens to the island and its inhabitants during and after the storm: "There is so much more building up than there is denouement, so much more preparation than the event itself ever supports" (Berland 81). If Grau were writing simply local color fiction, such a criticism would be valid; however, since Nature forms chiefly a backdrop, not her main subject, one
should look more closely instead at the sense of community that exists in this setting. As the characters have done before, they will do again. Throughout the novel they have reacted to one difficulty after another by calling upon the strength provided by their community and its tradition. As Louise Gossett points out, "The novel ends just as the winds strike, for the storm would be an anticlimax to the waiting and the preparations" (Gossett 182). The people of this island have experienced hurricanes and other troubles before, and their reaction this time will be no different.

Shared experience and tradition have helped this community to cohere despite the vagaries of nature. The social values and customs of this area may not be typically Southern, but Grau's exploration of the ties that bind these people together set this book in a Southern tradition. Twentieth-century Southern writers have occasionally conducted what Louis Rubin calls a "searching and often agonizing critique" of the values of their communities in order to validate those that are worthwhile (Rubin 416). In south Louisiana those values might consist of shared times, good and bad, rather than the remnants of the antebellum myth, and of traditions of family rather than of one's class or race as they do in much of the rest of the South, but they do delineate a strong community.
The people of Isle aux Chiens are a tight-knit group in which almost everyone is related in some way to everyone else. Mamere Terrebonne (Mother Good Earth), whose name suggests her value to the community, is surrounded by relatives, her children's children. When she becomes ill, everyone on the island stops to tend to her even if that means time away from fishing, their only means of survival. When Al Landry (father of Annie, the main character) marries his second wife, Adele, the whole island comes; no one needs to send invitations; it is a "family affair" (HB 186). Inky works the large, expensive sailboat brought to the island when the owner's wife develops a toothache. He is an outsider, but even he can appreciate the powerful sense of cohesion among the members of this island community: "It made you dizzy, all the generations that had lived here and all the wind that had blown over them" (HB 206). Annie's father Al fears that if she marries Inky, this outsider may leave her in New Orleans and she will have to go on welfare just to get home: "That was the trouble marrying away" (HB 386). For these characters, security is assured only within the community found on Isle aux Chiens.

Perhaps the clearest example of the spirit that binds these people can be seen in the episode with Henry Livaudais. Henry, an eighteen-year-old islander who knows the swamp better than anyone else on the island, elopes
with a Yugoslav immigrant girl from a nearby island. He must sneak away with her and brave crossing the entire marsh because although she and her family are also poor fishermen from the same area, they are from the wrong community. Most people on Isle aux Chiens generally leave the Livaudais family alone because of their penchant for violence, but when they realize that Henry is truly in trouble, they all leave their work to go to look for him. Again the feeling of community forces them to take a stand together against an outside foe, in this case nature itself. Henry and the girl are never found, for not even Henry knows the area well enough to cross the entire swamp. When the Cajuns are unable to bring Henry back, they join together in the only other way they know to show the pain of their loss. They attack the island of the Yugoslavs, rekindling a feud between the two communities. Everyone is automatically involved. The men must take turns guarding the fishing boats and all must help to put out the fires set by the Yugoslavs.

Although nature does play a part, violence this time comes from the values of the community itself, not from nature. Louise Gossett explains that the characters "have never been part of the mainstream of Southern history"; therefore, "a loss of order or a sense of guilt" seen in the works of Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren do not pertain here (Gossett 194). Grau's island characters
"adhere to customs and principles sanctioned by years of repetition. This body of tradition is a core of stability within a volatile community" (Gossett 178). They accept the quirks of fate and act according to the beliefs of their community. Belle Livaudais, Henry's mother, accepts the fact that death comes to everyone. She is, therefore, more upset that no one was able to retrieve the body of her son than she is that he died. Pride and unity determine their actions, and Grau does not judge them. Instead, in The Hard Blue Sky, she demonstrates a profound respect for human life and for characters who are willing to fight together to preserve it, under whatever conditions it may appear.

This is not to suggest that because they will fight to preserve their community, that the characters do not long for a better life. Annie Landry, who is the most important character in the novel, dreams of escaping from the island and its dangers. She will sometimes wake to find herself staring at the doorknob in her room. Like a deadly tumor, it becomes "a knob growing inside her, growing and growing, deep in her stomach, growing and pressing on her insides and pressing on her lungs until she couldn't breathe" (HB 121). Only after she grabs the doorknob, symbol of all that keeps her restrained, and sends the door slamming against the wall can she move again.
The ever-present dangers on the island have also instilled a powerful awareness of death in her, symbolized by the "empty Gulf" at which she often stares and the cold deep within her that she must try to melt (HB 120). On one occasion she dreams of a coffin-like shadow with a penumbral face at the end of it. Afraid of the possible proximity of death at that moment, Annie goes out and catches an eel and then brings it into the kitchen, but she does not kill it. Instead she leaves it to thrash about, "refusing to die" (HB 124). The eel's struggles to live somehow reassure her, and she can go back to sleep; for like the eel, she too will not give up.

Another of Annie's recurring dreams involves three bright yellow balls rolling across the ground. The reader learns later that when she had been little, Annie had gone to New Orleans with her mother to the Holy Week services at the cathedral with its three gold domes, and she remembers this experience fondly. The yellow balls thus represent a happier time when her mother was still alive as well as her dream of escape made possible by going to the city. At the end of the story, she does indeed leave Isle aux Chiens with Inky to go to New Orleans, but she retains a sense of resignation that "things happened, . . . and you did whatever it was you had to do to meet them. And they went on past you" (HB 427). The dream of escape is tempered by her harsh sense of life's reality
learned in this community. Alwyn Berland criticizes Grau's depiction of Annie as a character because she "come[s] to us as given"; she acts "crediably enough, on the whole, but the reportage is so external that one never feels the necessity for [her] actions" (Berland 82). Actually, the explanation lies in the experience of life on this small island that has convinced Annie as well as the other characters here that they must endure, but, at the same time, that chances for a better life are slim.

In The War Within, David Singal stresses the existentialist viewpoint of modern Southern writers such as Robert Penn Warren, Flannery O'Connor, and Walker Percy, who "embraced the Modernist paradox that meaning could best be found through suffering and beauty through decay" (Singal 359). In The Hard Blue Sky, Grau has likewise created characters that endure suffering, but their stoicism is made possible because of the influence of their community rather than any personal code such as existentialism.

Belle Livaudais, for instance, dreams with her eyes wide open: "All the things she'd wanted to do. All the things that she'd wanted to happen to her. And hadn't" (HB 96). Nevertheless, she too learns to accept Henry's death and even to accept her husband's illegitimate child, perhaps because he is a child everyone else in the community seems to love, making it essential that she love
him too. Annie Landry tells her friend Cecile that she hates the way things keep changing. When Cecile suggests that sometimes things get better, Annie answers, "No, they don't" (HB 117). If she does eventually run away to New Orleans, she does so without enthusiasm. Experience has taught her to expect little. Adele, Annie's stepmother, tries to convince Al, Annie's father, to stop her from seeing Inky, but Al refuses because there is "nothing to do about it. Like the hurricane, no? Nothing to do" (HB 226). They must all simply go on. One scene seems especially reminiscent of Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat," in which the correspondent, realizing that Nature does not care about him, wants to throw bricks at the temple and regrets that there are no bricks and no temple. Cecile, after hearing of Henry's disappearance, hurls a brick as hard as she can at the sky, saying, "It don't even matter that we been alive" (HB 287). Still, she does not wait to see it fall because on Isle aux Chiens the most important thing is to survive. Like the characters of Crane's "The Open Boat," all they can do is work together to try to achieve this goal, but it is enough.

Paul Schleuter suggests that for the people on this island, "all existence is on a continuum of indifference" (Schleuter 34). The characters, however, do care a great deal, but their concern is colored by the reality of life here where feelings of determination and resignation
compete. Each year Mamere Terrebonne locks herself inside her shuttered shack to keep away the death that she associates with winter; the entire island hunts for Henry Livaudais; they all take turns guarding the island from retaliatory attack by the Yugoslavs; when the hurricane comes, the men take their boats inland to safe harbor while the women remain behind to save their homes. These are not the actions of indifference but rather of intimate knowledge or communal sense of what life means and has meant for generations and what it will continue to mean. Their sense of unity sustains them through otherwise unbearable difficulties. Louise Gossett explains that for all the shock and violence which inhere in the natural surroundings where they earn a livelihood and build their homes, they find life worth living; or if such a positive deduction cannot be made, at least neither the author nor they question whether it is worth living (Gossett 193). Their common understanding of the meanings of life sustain them through every difficulty.

In *The Hard Blue Sky*, Shirley Ann Grau demonstrates the Southern emphasis on community with an area not generally considered typically Southern. It is not the South of William Faulkner or of Robert Penn Warren, but it is a Southern community within which people share a common heritage of hardship, hostile nature, and living. Her
characters "have few illusions about life and face it as a struggle against uncertainty, anxiety, fear, danger, poverty, and death, but they do not consider it a terror" (Gossett 193). Their shared sense of pride and community created out of and in spite of a hostile environment allows them to endure.
Mixed reviews were the response to Shirley Ann Grau's second novel, *The House on Coliseum Street*, which appeared in 1962. The novel is short, around sixty thousand words, and, according to John Bradbury, exhibits "tighter structure" than Grau's previous books and illustrates "intimate realism" (Bradbury 131). Paul Schleuter also has commented on the "compactness and directness" of this novel (Schleuter 40). In addition, Schleuter suggests that because the book has fewer loose ends, the reader cares more about Joan, the main character, than he would care about the less defined characters of Grau's earlier books (Schleuter 49).

Some critics, however, have found problems with Grau's development of the characters of *The House on Coliseum Street* in general. Alwyn Berland condemns Joan's "dumb passivity" (Berland 82), and Thomas Williams, in a review published in the *Kenyon Review*, calls Joan "a truly dull girl" (Williams 184). Jean Ross cites the "depiction of Joan's withdrawal from life" as "the strength of this novel" (Ross 210), but she too finds fault with the characters:

the impersonality with which Grau has drawn her characters, though quite effective in evoking an atmosphere of sterility, is also a weakness in the
novel... Her characters seem less than real (Ross 210).

Though such detachment in a male writer might have been lauded, in Grau, it is cited as a defect.

Another possible reason for the displeasure among critics about these characters can be found in their apparent refusal to accept reality. Ivan Strenski asserts that myth is "a process by which 'consciousness frees itself from the passive captivity in sensory impressions and creates a world of its own'" (Strenski 26). Most of the characters in The House on Coliseum Street exist in just such a world of myth where delusions form a way of life. Joan, whose point of view Grau employs throughout the story, is certainly a confused young woman who has difficulty relating to the world around her. That distancing, however, forms a metaphor for the entire novel. The story examines the Southern preference for myth, for a world real only as far as one allows it to be, and explores Joan's attempt to break away from such a world, a feat she accomplishes, but with unexpected consequences. Once again Grau demonstrates her ambivalence toward the Southern tradition, particularly what Jack De Bellis refers to as "modern man's inability to find identification with the family as an institution" (De Bellis 691), for despite the cozy aura usually associated with the Southern family, Joan cannot find
comfort or identification in her family.

The story is told primarily as a flashback, so that Joan's past problems color her feelings about the present. Set in New Orleans in the 1950's, the story begins with Joan recovering from an abortion arranged for her by her mother. Haunted by images of the child she will never know, she experiences regret and disillusionment. The world around her, on the other hand, continues to drift along with a sense of tired gentility and an enduring past so that she floats in a current of "time, the everlasting river" (HCS 214).

Although the people on Coliseum Street are no longer wealthy, they still retain influence: "The owners of the houses had been rich. The memory of wealth is still a kind of power in New Orleans" (HCS 24). Even her own house seems to maintain a tradition, being just "like all the others on that street... narrow and three stories tall, white painted and black shutters" (HCS 12). In this community, conformity, reinforced by tradition, rules.

Aurelie, Joan's mother, gardens, not because she likes gardening, but because "it was part of a lady's life" (HCS 128), or at least of a Southern lady's life. She must, after all, keep up the pretense of the Southern belle; she must create a fiction to make her otherwise meaningless life bearable. Aurelie's only comment about Joan's father is that "he was entitled to
do silly things if he wished. Perhaps" (HCS 26), because, after all, he was "such a quiet dull man" (HCS 48). The truth is that he was a gambler and a crook who would have gone to prison if he had not died first. Aurelie also demands that everyone in her family appear every morning for a formal breakfast, a tradition which allows her to maintain her image of aristocratic control, although she really does not care what they do the rest of the time. When Joan is asked to resign from her sorority because she forgot to attend three meetings, Aurelie simply fixes things so that "everybody will forget it" (HCS 174).

Unfortunately, Aurelie's latest husband cannot match her expectations for him, so he gradually withdraws into alcoholic seclusion in a third-story room which he leaves only occasionally to make a "trip to the hospital to have his gentle little delusions replaced by heavy shots of vitamin B" (HCS 56). When he dies, she efficiently clears everything away as if he had never been there. His rooms are emptied "finally and completely. When Aurelie and her daughters left, they locked the door behind them. The spiders and the mice could take over" (HCS 216). Like the "beneficent spider" of Eliot's "The Waste Land," ethereal cobwebs will now drape all memories to disguise the truth and make it palatable. As Herbert Schneidau explains: "the ordinary man in society . . . cannot live comfortably
with the suspicion that his acts are meaningless; therefore, as Isaiah says, he hears but does not hear" (Schneidau 7). If Aurelie's husband retreated from the demands of life on Coliseum Street, Aurelie submits to them and conveniently forgets him as not belonging.

Joan's fiance Fred evinces a similar propensity for myth. He believes that "it's better to remember things than really see them" (HCS 218), and he likes to tell the story of what a great man her great-uncle Henry was: "He was a remarkable man . . . a pioneer. A man of real vision" (HCS 15). The truth proves to be less romantic. In actuality he did not do much of anything except "get to be governor on bought votes during the Reconstruction" (HCS 15), but in the South, and certainly in this community, memory often improves history.

Joan and those closest to her are not the only ones who insist on defining their own version of the truth. The entire neighborhood exhibits a kind of aversion to reality. On one occasion, a stray from the slums several streets over wanders onto Coliseum Street, and "the street closed up on itself, like a doodlebug rolling into a ball" (HCS 24). In this community one simply hides from ugly truth until it disappears, or at least until the police haul it off.

The most important examples of ignoring reality among those around Joan relate to her abortion. Aurelie
told the truth, at least as much of it as she could admit, when she explained to Fred why Joan had suddenly gone to the Pass (probably Pass Christian, Mississippi, a tiny resort community on the Gulf of Mexico about forty-five miles from New Orleans). Joan went to stay with her aunt because she was "very tired and nervous and a bit overwrought" (HCS 146). Joan realizes that those who know about the abortion are "all going to pretend that it hadn't happened. . . . They had to pretend. Always" (HCS 146).

At times, Joan is attracted to this unreal world where the past with its imagined grandeur can become more real than the shabby present and unpleasant reality can be willed away, but she finds little comfort in it. The images of the past "propping her up" are of "her grandparents and her great-grandparents lurking [my emphasis] behind her" (HCS 210), as if to destroy her. The house in which she has always lived has a smell that cleaning cannot remove:

It was the smell of everything. Of everything that had gone on in the house for the past hundred and twenty years. It was the smell of the people and the things. Of the living that had gone on between the walls . . . the smell of the generations being born. Dying. And being laid out in the front parlor with a sprig of sweet olive from the door in their clenched hand (HCS 230).
The smell is reality -- life and death -- a smell that no deodorizing flower or lovely delusion can remove.

No matter how much she might try, maintaining such a world of delusion proves difficult for Joan: "She felt curiously left out. Everyone else moved with such purpose. They all knew what they were doing and they didn't bother to tell her" (HCS 134). She cannot really associate with the world of her mother and often rides the trolley to obtain the comfort she seeks, for "she was afraid of so many things... She would head for the streetcar line and ride, back and forth, for an hour or so, until the noisy rocking ride comforted her" (HCS 61). The desire to be rocked suggests a desire to retreat into childhood.

Nevertheless, memories of her family history do not provide any genuine relief from her feelings of dislocation either. At one point Joan tells Michael Kern, the man who later fathers the child that Joan aborts, that her grandfather built the canal leading to Lake Ponchartrain. Michael replies, "I thought soldiers built it during the Civil War." She then becomes confused and answers, "It's just a story they tell in my family" (HCS 34). Moreover, in speaking of her father to Michael, she falls back on the same words Frank had used earlier in describing her great-uncle Henry: "a remarkable man" (HCS 109). In neither case was the description accurate, but it was a habit, employed
to avoid facing the truth.

Grau once stated that in this novel she intended to deal with sin, redemption, "and everything else one identifies with fundamentalism" (Schleuter 44). Actually, Joan's discomfort with the subject of sex does suggest a conflict between the myth of the Southern belle, who supposedly somehow manages to be both flirtatious and chaste, and the guilt so prevalent in Southern society because of associations with sex. Each new college term she feels that she can smell sex in the air with every person "sizing up" everyone else, but although she is very attractive, no one "sizes" her up (HCS 66-67). After her first date with Michael, she feels "very sad. And being sad felt good" (HCS 51). Even the flowers given to her on a date to celebrate a birthday are associated in her mind with the dying flowers of a funeral (HCS 163). She feels that her role as the Southern belle must result either in the death of her individuality or guilt for experiencing the forbidden pleasures of sex.

Even her job in the library illustrates her discomfort with the ordinary world of men and women away from Coliseum Street. Joan takes a job that nobody else wants, a job up on the sixth level where everything is stuffy and quiet because "she liked it up there. Liked the dusty quiet. Liked the emptiness" (HCS 191). She often goes into the study rooms on the top floor
that no one else ever uses even though they are not even finished. Seeking somehow to discover her own identity rather than the one prescribed for her, she goes there to "stand very still and listen and try to imagine things or remember things, she was never sure which. She was only sure that it was very important for her to do it" (HCS 73). Perhaps in this way, she can avoid the present, concentrating instead on the future or the past.

At one point, she comes upon a couple making love way in the back, in an unfrequented part of the library; she watches at first in amazement and then rushes away, not telling anyone (HCS 73-74). Both attracted and repelled by what she has seen, she remains unsure and confused. She feels that "things happened as she slipped along. But not to her" (HCS 214). Once more, others have violated her attempts to establish an identity of her own.

Joan's drifting from one meaningless experience to another finally results in her complete disintegration, and her abortion plays a large part in this collapse. Southern ladies do not have abortions, yet her mother "did not even bother asking her. She went ahead and arranged" (HCS 9). Aurelie and her aunt, quintessential Southern women, do it all with ease and confidence, then afterwards pretend it never happened. The incongruity forces Joan to face the consequences of her actions, and
of theirs, alone. She tries to understand: "listening to the caverns of emptiness inside her. Listening to her heart beat out, echoing in the arches of bone and flesh. The empty arches" (HCS 9). Enlightenment, however, does not come easily.

If Joan cannot model herself after her mother, maybe, she feels, she could be like her father, who she believes knew she would have to leave some day and provided for her: "He fixed it so I can go" (HCS 241). When Aurelie complains that Joan's father was "quiet and dull," she responds, "Like me" (HCS 109). Fred seems to function as a substitute father. He had known her father and also works in the same building in which her father had had his office. Joan, it seems, had never been allowed to see her father there, and she senses something lost: "I still wish he'd let me come down" (HCS 80). When she and Michael Kern later do make love, resulting in Joan's pregnancy, they do so near the place where she grew up with her father. For the first time, she is able to experience sex as a spontaneous act rather than as payment expected after a date, the feeling she had always had with her fiance Fred. Nevertheless, Joan's one act of unchoreographed sex is punished with guilt by her mother's quick actions to dispose of the evidence, the child. The attempt to create a role for herself by relying on the memory of her father thus ultimately fails. She simply does not
know enough about him to depend on him.

Certainly the abortion plays an important part in her subsequent dissolution, but it merely intensifies a problem of identity which has plagued her for some time. She describes herself as having always been solid, but she explains that she had felt solid "like a piece of mud or even a roast in the oven" (HCS 143). Dirt and a slab of meat do not indicate an elevated self-image. When Joan attempts to rebel against her mother, who believes that "a bookish woman is simply impossible" (HCS 57), she signs up for music and art courses at the college for the summer, but then she forgets to go to class (HCS 69) because she does not really care about them or herself as an artist. Like Edna Pontellier of The Awakening (1899), another New Orleans novel, Joan really just wants to be able to determine her own life. Obviously, Aurelie is able to maintain what Herbert Schneidau calls "the mythological consciousness" which can "abolish time, or at least make it stand still" (Schneidau 85). Joan, on the other hand, while she does hear the "rustling of time past," the "musty grandfathers, echoing from the St. Louis Cemetery," she also hears and cannot ignore "the rustling of the future time" (HCS 231). Unable to accept the ready-made identity of the Southern belle, she must find some way to define one of her own making.

In her doctoral dissertation, Pamela Parker
states that the house in which Joan lives and all the imagined past associated with it hold great power over Joan, to the point that "it so firmly implants in Joan a sense of the past, of her father's presence as evidenced by the garish fountain, that she will never be able to sever herself from its influence" (Parker 66). Without a doubt the jaded Southern community in which Joan finds herself manifests a commanding control over her, but one not impossible to discard. Ever since she was little, "she had wanted to get away" (HCS 18). The streetcar that she rides so often seems "as if it were reminding her always that she was about to leave for a marvelous place" (HCS 61). Her expressions of rebellion may be as ineffectual as the time she once had been in a ballet and "had been perverse enough not to learn the steps" (HCS 134), but they do suggest possibility.

As for the house on Coliseum Street, she comes to believe that it "wasn't there at all. Nor the people in it" (HCS 6). Maybe when she was a child, she could turn a globe and say, "I am here. Right here" (HCS 6-7), but now she no longer belongs here, and everything is different, including herself. By denying her abortion, those around her have confirmed their denial of her reality. Instead of becoming the raw material from which to create the present and the future, the past has become

the something that was lost, the place you couldn't
go back to, the dream you didn't want to give up in the morning and you lay tight in bed trying and trying to hold it and it slipped away, like fog, and you couldn't remember the smell or the color or the feel of it, what it was and where it had been. And that was the final end, when there wasn't even a memory (HCS 58).

Joan is left bereft of anything to hold on to: past, community, soothing memory. She must do something which, Pamela Parker explains, "forces her further and further from the Southern community" (Parker 60).

After anonymously destroying Michael Kern's relationship with a young coed by threatening to alert the girl's parents, she begins to stalk him, at first unsure of why she is doing so or what she will do later. As the rain water splatters on the windshield, she hears the drops as "dribble, dribble toil and tribble" (HCS 189). The words recall those of the three witches in Macbeth, forcing the reader to wonder whether Joan sees herself as a witch too, and will she too become an agent of power because of knowledge of events to come? Certainly, the closer she comes to her climactic performance at the end of the novel, the "firmer, harder, [more] impenetrable" (HCS 203) she feels. She finds that she rather liked being alone, it gave her a sharp clear feeling. This is me, she could say to herself in
the dark, and for the first time she would know exactly what she meant. She did not have to figure herself in relation to other people now (HCS 184). Like the witches who told Macbeth only part of the truth, when she calls on the dean of the college to tell him the story about Michael, she too does not tell the whole truth. She knows that she is "deliberately destroying a man" (HCS 236). With this last desperate act, however, she separates herself from the life around her once and for all: "now she could start to forget" (HCS 238).

Joan returns to the house on Coliseum Street, but finds that she has forgotten her key. She is locked out, literally and symbolically, because with her actions she has opened a chasm between herself and the life she had known. As she waits in front of the door, staring at her father's fountain, she curls up in a fetal position and watches the sun come up. Hers will be a new life from this point on.

The question, of course, is whether this new life will prove to be any better than the old one. Joan has replaced a life where delusions of the past make a mediocre present palatable with one of true, but stark reality. She has destroyed a man's career in order to make possible a new order for herself, but she lacks any foundation upon which to achieve it. Cleanth Brooks reminds us that
we live not in the minute-to-minute basis of the animals, but in the full and rich dimension of history inhabited by human beings. Moreover, we are products of the past. We have grown out of it, . . . carry a portion of it within ourselves. . . . It is foolish to believe that we can repudiate the past (Brooks 9).

Joan's rejection of all ties to her past makes hopes for a future dim.

In All the King's Men, Jack Burden learns that everything connects to everything else, like vibrations on a spider web that always alert the spider. Similarly, the past must connect to the present, and one must construct knowledge from it. If, as C. Vann Woodward claims, "Anyone who closes his eyes to the past is blind to the present" (Woodward Future xi), then Joan's revolt and the ensuing disquieting world it engenders do not offer much improvement over the one of her Southern tradition.

Shirley Ann Grau herself claims that The House on Coliseum Street is not regional. For her instead, "it has a very light background, and it certainly isn't southern in the sense that the deep South is southern" (Canfield 41). Because Joan repudiates the myth of her past, a Southern past, Grau's claim could be accepted as accurate, in a way. Because Joan fails to provide a better alternative, however, the values of a Southern
tradition, including its preference for imagined reality, remain possible. Herbert Schneidau explains the reasons why people might dwell upon the past. It is a way to find "meaning. What we want is transcendent -- not just more meaning to add to what we have already, but the key to the code" (Schneidau 176). If Southerners like Aurelie and some of the other characters of The House on Coliseum Street remember a past that differs with standard interpretation, it is because human beings require some foundation upon which to build their lives. If a satisfactory historical past does not exist, memory can provide one.

Grau's view of the world in this novel, therefore, proves to be rather uncertain: the traditional Southern mythical view holds comfortable but numbing delusion, while the alternative promises reality but little else. Speaking of contemporary Southern authors, Louise Gossett writes:

Although each author writes about the South which he knows and which therefore differs from that presented by others, each expresses or implies the existence of a moral and a social order from which man diverges at the risk of destroying himself, his family, and his community (Gossett 200). Through The House on Coliseum Street, Grau explores the modern Southerner's dilemma: can one eliminate the stifling limitations of certain attitudes toward the
past without shattering all hope for the future?
Chapter Five
The Penultimate Southern Novel:

The Keepers of the House

After the instant success of The Black Prince, Grau's books were received by critics with increasing indifference, and The House on Coliseum Street was "dismissed by most reviewers as melodramatic, contrived, and insignificant" ("Grau" World Authors 591). In 1964, that trend was reversed when Shirley Ann Grau published The Keepers of the House, a multi-generational Southern novel for which she received the Pulitzer Prize the next year. Generally recognized as her best book, Keepers of the House addresses the problem of racism, very topical in 1964, and also skillfully melds several characteristics that identify it as Southern: myth, community, the past, the Gothic, and religion. Nevertheless, Grau's reluctance to accept or to reject the Southern tradition and her insistence on dealing with the universal problems of hatred and evil, as well as her creation of strong, believable characters and masterful story-telling make the novel deserving of its excellent reputation.

The title comes from Ecclesiastes 12: 3-5, in a poem about old age -- "In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble . . ." -- and indeed the passage of time and its effects on the generations are a
major concern of the novel. Unlike her earlier books which "were total imagination," The Keepers of the House involves a central character "drawn directly" from her grandfather (Keith 14) while ideas for the book itself come from "places and events I knew in my childhood" (Grau "Essence" 15). "Howland," the main character's name, was her grandfather's surname, and Schleuter believes that the novel "'has almost exactly' her own family background" (Schleuter 53). Keepers is certainly not simple autobiography, however. Careful not to offend friends and members of her family, Grau deliberately used an atlas to scramble the geography and make her fictive state unlike any real Southern state (Schleuter 53). Still, the setting does seem to be a Gulf coast state, more like Alabama or northern Louisiana than the Louisiana of her earlier novels, especially since, as she admits, south Alabama, or north Louisiana, would certainly not have been open to the question of miscegenation (Canfield 45), whereas in south Louisiana "it was common as dirt. . . . In a little town down in Plaquemines Parish there are pages of the birth registry missing. You could just rip it out and there goes that" (Canfield 44).

Inevitably, critics have cited parallels between this novel and the works of William Faulkner, both to praise Grau's book and to condemn it for not being Faulkner. Similarities do exist in Grau's use of a plot
involving miscegenation, several generations, and differing points of view. In a review of *Keepers* for the *Survey of Contemporary Literature*, Richard A. Johnson states that the book "keeps alive Faulkner's vision of the South as basically a frontier society, and thus radically democratic and anti-traditionalist," in addition to showing the difficulty in "maintaining these qualities of character in a mid-twentieth century context of hostility to them" (Johnson 3981). Paul Schleuter also compares the novel to Faulkner, but adds that the novel demonstrates the ability of frontier values "not only to stand, but even more, to use a Faulknerian term -- to endure" (Schleuter 55).

Whether or not these critics are correct, any comparison with Faulkner, of course, naturally invites criticism that the author either slavishly copied the great Mississippi novelist or did not copy him well enough. For example, Frederick Hoffman in *The Art of Southern Fiction* complains that "there is a real story there, a genuine and an agonizing problem, but she [Grau] is many miles from Faulkner's superb treatment of it" (Hoffman *Art* 109-10). In actuality, though similarities do exist, they exist because both *The Keepers of the House* and Faulkner's novels explore the problem of evil in the South, not because of any imitation. Moreover, Grau's story is not just an exploration of guilt for past wrongs, but also a frank
treatment of a difficult situation in the present. Grau
told Jean Ross that *Keepers* goes beyond segregation to
deal with "the whole human plight of how do you cope
with evil" (Ross 211). Even though the book was written
during the height of America's civil rights movement,
Grau claims that it is "not about segregation in the
sense that James Baldwin plays are. It is segregation
as one of the many forms of evil." In fact, "if there
is a moral, it is the self-destructiveness of hatred"
(Campbell 5).

Despite Hoffman's claim that the book "is often
badly written and haphazardly put together" (Hoffman *Art*
108), *Keepers* is carefully structured and shows a great
deal of technical complexity. Throughout the story,
Grau shifts point of view from Abigail, to William, to
Margaret, and back to Abigail, though Abby remains the
narrator throughout. These shifts allow the reader to
view the community from several perspectives: past,
present, male, female, black, white; yet keeping Abby
as the narrator emphasizes their connection to one
another and Abby's key position in the novel.

Paul Schleuter likens the book to Greek tragedy
because of "the sheer scale of this novel, resulting
from Grau's sense of the mythic, [and] her awareness of
the intense patterns of meaning cohesively holding all
the other elements of the book together" (Schleuter 60).
Such praise, however, forces *Keepers* once again into
comparison with the works of Faulkner which often assume the scope of tragedy. The black characters of Grau's novel do not at all resemble the simple characters of the sentimental local colorists, but neither, as Lewis Lawson reminds us, do they suggest the "ancient guilt" spectred in Faulkner (Lawson 17). Instead, Grau's characters, both black and white, exemplify the substance, good and evil, of the community in which they live. In addition, in Grau's novel it is the women of the present who make the crucial decisions about how to fight the evil.

The people in this area, even those who live in town, feel very close to the land. The river running through the valley is the Providence River, named for William Marshall Howland's mother, but the name also implies the people's dependence on it. The granite outcroppings that glisten in autumn's light are "bones of the earth" (KH 3), and inhabitants rest from the heat of the day by "letting their eyes run over the soft turns of the land" (KH 5). For them, the land engenders maternal associations, and people here share a special respect for place.

Because family defines this community, blood relations are crucial. Whenever someone thinks of Will Howland, they always think of "the real Howland, best blood in the county" (KH 31). At one point Abby even decides that beetles still around in November must have
managed to survive so long by gathering the warmth they needed from the family house she considers home. When Abby's mother dies, she is buried in New Mexico, a fact the family thinks terrible: "Imagine her lying all alone way out there -- all by herself" (KH 171).

Such concentration on the family results in stories that are passed from one generation to another: "Everyone tells stories around here. Every place, every person has a ring of stories around them, like a halo almost" (KH 14). The image of the halo suggests the almost supernatural connotations associated with family and the community which grows around it and the tendency to improve it all, to create a hagiography, through memory.

Of course, in this Southern community, the supernatural more often displays itself through religion, in this case, strict Protestantism. When a memorial service is held back home for Abby's mother, the townspeople are not placated because Will Howland donates a stained-glass window to the Methodist Church, an idea that seems entirely too Popish. For a large wedding in town, everyone is invited except the youngest Lykes girl who "married a Catholic in his church and wasn't spoken to by anybody any more, even though they all liked her parents, with whom she lived while waiting for her first child" (KH 30). Abby's husband, John Tolliver, and his people are from upstate, and they do
not give parties, even when John and Abby get married: "Weddings were nothing so special for them -- they were serious religious folk" (KH 200).

For the women of this Southern community, strict boundaries define behavior. Abby justifies her mother's kindness toward Margaret, Will Howland's black mistress, by explaining that "my mother was a lady and a lady is unfailingly polite and gentle to everyone" (KH 149). Likewise, one must always be kind to drifters because "there was a saying that if you chased off a drifter you yourself would be hungry before the year was out" (KH 158).

Of course, the most stringent code for Southern women involves relations between blacks and whites. Will's mother, for example, had crocheted capes for all the babies around, black and white, capes that were identical except for the three tiny ribbon bows stitched on top that white babies received and black ones did not: "everything hanging on those three rows of ribbon. You had them. . . . You did not. . . . And that was your whole place in life" (KH 132). Abby, whose husband is a politician, learns to follow a prescribed order which enforces class and race distinctions when she makes the obligatory rounds at the hospital: (1) the grey ladies at the reception desk; (2) the director's office; (3) surgery patients; (4) ordinary illnesses; (5) obstetrics; (6) ward patients; (7) Negro wing, all
floors (KH 243).

Because of the strictures placed on race relations, being able to detect a person's background becomes crucial. Southern women pride themselves on being able to tell "blood and birth -- these were their two concerns, . . . spotting signs of Negro blood . . . [and] reciting the endless lists of genealogies in the Bible. It's a southern talent, you might say" (KH 143). Once a person's black blood is determined, however, one need not think about him any more. One could do what most white people did who "knew a Negro and dealt with him for years, and never found out his name. Never got curious about who he was, and what he was called. As if Negroes didn't need identities" (KH 233).

Will Howland, the patriarch of the family in The Keepers of the House, takes a young black woman as his mistress, and everyone knows it; but as long as he keeps his "wood colts" in the woods, no one says anything or even seems to care. Nevertheless, when Margaret's son catches pneumonia, Will must trick Dr. Harry to come to treat the boy, for as the doctor says: "Staying all night to treat a nigger kid -- ain't a patient I got will stand for that" (KH 148). Together they must all concoct a story that Abby was actually the one sick.

Only when the townspeople realize that Howland had actually married Margaret and that their children are
legitimate, do they turn against what remains of the family. Even the cousins from Atlanta who belong to the NAACP become indignant at the thought of his marriage. Because blacks in this community are not seen as people with identities, taking one as a mistress would pose no threat. To take a black woman as one's wife, on the other hand, would be to acknowledge her as a human being deserving of rights and dignity. The marriage of Will Howland, one of the most important men in the state, thus threatens the very basis upon which the community is founded -- the supremacy of whites over blacks.

Abby's husband, John, is a 1950's Southern politician and segregationist, but he is not a demon. He explains his racist comments during the campaign saying:

I'm a practical man. I've got to deal with things as they are. It's hell for them, but my saying so won't help them or me. ... You want me to be a knight on a white horse fighting injustice. ... But if I did, I'd be nothing but a politician without a job and a lawyer without a practice (KH 253).

John likes Margaret and maintains a certain paternalistic attitude toward "black folk," yet he remains entrenched in the beliefs of this community. He cannot at all understand the marriage of his wife's grandfather to a black woman. It is completely
incomprehensible to him, "as incomprehensible as trying to chew up a stone" (KH 271). He leaves Abby and the children to face an angry mob alone. Still, his predictions about what would happen to him or to anyone who tried to change things proves accurate. Although in this Southern state, the winner of the Democratic primary is usually considered an automatic winner, for the first time in fifty years, a Republican will win the gubernatorial election even though no one really knows who the Republican is because no one will now vote for John.

If Will Howland belongs to "the best blood in the county," how does he come to violate a taboo so deeply embedded in his community? After all, in many ways Will Howland epitomizes the perfect Southern gentleman. He is quiet, gallant, kind, rich, and powerful. Usually, he maintains a low profile because in the South, as Daphne Athas says, it is "an old habit to speak of ambition at most in a subordinate clause, preferably in a phrase" (Athas 302). When the situation suits him, he can be "as courtly as a planter out of a novel" (KH 190), but he can and does on occasion exercise his considerable influence. He gets Abby back into college after her expulsion, for example, by simply making a few phone calls to several important people.

Like most other members of his community at their best, he loves the land:
The ground was solid. The sandy ground you knew so well you got to thinking of it as a person. Tricky, hard, not particularly agreeable. But the same, still the same, for you, for your father, for your children. And that helped. That was a comfort (KH 44).

As a young man, he had once accidentally got an old man's spittle in his face and then had reacted by merely wiping it off with a clump of grass. He knew then that he was, more than anything else, a farmer, a man one with the land.

Like other members of his community, Will also feels strong affection for ties with his past. He keeps an old water grist mill, much out of date and one of few remaining anywhere: "I reckon I'll keep it" (KH 50). He feels the pull of the past in the house which has sheltered Howlands for generations. The narrator explains that he felt the age of the house, felt the people who had lived in it peer over his shoulder, wondering and watching what he was doing. He felt them now. . . . He could hear their breathing, all of them, dozens of them, breathing together, deep and steady, the way they had been when they were alive (KH 134). Their presence supports and encourages him with the weight of ages.

The fact remains, however, that Will Howland
ultimately rejects the influence of his community when he accepts a black woman as his wife. Perhaps one source of his independence can be found in his mother, Aimee Legendre Howland, a Creole from New Orleans. This character illustrates once again the influence of Grau's New Orleans background, a background she admits is not typically Southern and may help to explain her reluctance to embrace wholeheartedly the Southern tradition. Aimee had caused quite a stir because she was Catholic and was married before a priest. Not bothered by loyalty to the Lost Cause, she had bought land and more land during Reconstruction: "She simply hadn't seemed to mind not belonging. She simply hadn't seemed to mind perching uncomfortably on the edge of her world" (KH 72).

As a young man, William would take the young ladies to burned out ruins where they would tell him stories "of raiding and valor and courage" (KH 14-15). He himself never did believe them because he knew about stories, but they were good to listen to anyway. While the people around him prefer myths of the glorious past, Will has always accepted them for the pleasant diversion they are. He later even shows disdain for the Lost Cause myth when he orders the New York Tribune for his daughter. The postmaster/feedstore owner suggests that "the way some people turn traitors, you wouldn't think their granddaddies got killed in the war." Will
responds: "Wasn't my granddaddy; 'twas my granduncle and I don't reckon anybody'll know whether he was glad to give his life for a cause or not. . . . I always kind of felt he wasn't so happy" (KH 29). That little speech caused a week of scandal.

Will thus appreciates the myths of his community but does not accept them as truth. At the same time, Grau's depiction of Howland makes him a kind of mythical character himself. During one scene he heads west to go deep into the forbidding swamp, alone. As evening approaches, the gnats become so thick that he must strip off his clothes and cover himself with mud to escape their fury. His is an archetypal trip into the unknown where he must become one with Nature to survive. Once he has escaped the swamp, he washes himself in the waters of a baptistry. Cleansed of all visible traces of his past experience and, symbolically, of the community's past as well, he sees Margaret for the first time. When she sees him, she does not think he is "flesh and blood" (KH 115). He is indeed human, and their life together is quite human, but years later he once again looms as a mythical character, this time in the circumstances surrounding his death. The area in which he lives seldom receives any snow at all, but on the day Will dies, fifteen inches fall, and he dies working alone in it.

If at times Will Howland appears larger than life,
Margaret, the woman who becomes his mistress/wife, matches his mythical stature. According to Schneidau, the idea of the giant in the landscape is an example of an "animal tradition of the mythological consciousness" (Schneidau 72), and Margaret is a tall woman who has lived most of her early life outside in Nature. When Will first sees her, she reminds him of the stories of Alberta, who supposedly roamed the hills with Stanley Albert (a myth Grau herself created in "The Black Prince"). In fact, Will wonders whether she is actually there at all: "if, soundless, she wasn't a part of the morning fog that twisted between the trees behind her" (KH 75). Somehow, despite her height, she appears fragile when she sits, but then "he saw that she wasn't sitting, she had folded herself into the earth. Her weight and size had passed into it. She perched, suspended on the very crust" (KH 117). She has become Mother Earth, an image Grau had referred to before with Mamere Terrebonne in The Hard Blue Sky.

At one point Margaret feels herself grow and expand, so much that she can see all the way to the Gulf:

She could feel too, great like her size. She could feel the earth move under her feet, breathing slowly as it passed from season to season. She could hear the sound the stars made in their rounds, as they passed by her hair (KH 105).
Intuitively Margaret understands what life will hold for her: "She saw it all. The generations of weeping that had been done, the generations of weeping that were to come. She could feel it all, feel the pulse and the heartbeat" (KH 105). When Will appears, she is not surprised, for she knew he would come; she had seen the signs: "a big red rooster that seemed to be everywhere, a shape in the branches of a hickory tree that was bluish-white and made a sound like a harp" (KH 118). The rooster, representing the man who will come into her life, and the harp-like sound, representing the divine qualities she will associate with their union, are archetypal images that aid in making Margaret one of Grau's best mythical creations.

With Margaret, Grau also evokes elements of the Gothic so often associated with Southern literature. Margaret's father had been part of a white construction crew that built the highway from the capital to the Gulf. The road had resulted in nothing but bad luck, from weevils that came that summer disturbed by the construction, to spirits loosed by the unearthing and destruction of an Indian graveyard. When Margaret's great-grandmother dies, the women form "a raggedy picket line of sound to keep the evil spirits away from the dead" (KH 99). The ghost of the old woman appears to Margaret saying, "Flesh and blood. Be with my blood" (KH 98), but Margaret is not frightened by spirits. She
tells the ghost, "Go back to your grave and quit pester ing me" (KH 103).

As Pamela Parker points out, Margaret is the strongest female character in the novel (Parker 142). Because she is recognized by neither the black community nor the white, she does not have to develop according to some standard, but can instead develop her own identity (Parker 139). Grau suggests, however, that trying to develop an identity without benefit of a community can cause its own problems.

Margaret's father had been a white man, but none of his blood shows: "Her father's blood, where would it be? . . . It would be inside maybe. Inside she would be white and blond-haired like him" (KH 85). Though not accepted by whites, she seems to believe that being white would be better, an idea no doubt fostered by observing the economic and social disparity between blacks and whites and one not counteracted by a strong sense of black community. The truth is that most blacks do not accept her either, not because her father was white, but because she is a Freejack, a descendant of a group of former slaves freed by Andrew Jackson in 1812 that has remained separate from the dominant black society. Abandoned by her father and later by her mother, shunned by most blacks and whites alike, she does not become a true member of any community. She is not subject to communal restrictions, but neither does
she gain any of a community's benefits.

While she is dark, her children are light, and she sends them all north to grow up as whites and to escape having "Negro" on their birth certificates. When one of her daughters, Nina, later marries a visibly black man, she disowns Nina, claiming the daughter is dead. Margaret had sent her children away and never let them come back "so they wouldn't feel the blame of being a Negro," and she had never gone to see them "so they wouldn't have the weight of their mother's black face. They were white and she had made them that way" (KH 221). For all Margaret's strength as a character and her certainty about her own identity, her low self-image stands as Grau's condemnation of the white community for giving her that image and of the black community for not fostering a better one.

As characters, the white women in The Keepers of the House are not as strong as Margaret. They maintain the attachment to the past that comes with being Southern and, according to Pamela Parker, keeps them from attaining autonomy (Parker 129). Abby's mother, Abigail Mason, gives up reading the Wall Street Journal which townspeople call the "Yankee press," turns to Shelley and Yeats, and finally marries an English professor. Parker claims that, in so doing, she seems "to embody the tragedy inherent in the contradictions of the romantic antebellum myth" (Parker 136). While her
abandonment of realistic truth for romantic idealism may seem tragic, it is perfectly in keeping with the Southern character.

Her daughter, the second Abigail of the story, also demonstrates the clear influence of her Southern background. She has grown up embodying the tradition of the Southern white woman — above the position of blacks but below that of white men. As a child, Abby had played with Margaret's (and her grandfather's) children, but always with an awareness that they were different. She does not really question when one by one, the children leave to go north. When she is in college and her grandfather seems to favor John Tolliver, she decides she loves John and marries him. Quickly they begin a family, and Abby seems content to be a politician's wife and a mother forever. When John leaves her, she is forced to realize that, up to now, she has always depended on men rather than on herself.

Abby's sections of the novel also demonstrate the Gothic in the form of ghosts and preternatural events that exist as a quite real part of her world. Shortly before the news breaks about her grandfather's marriage to Margaret, Abby experiences a kind of premonition. As she rushes along through the night in her car, the radio suddenly stops, and something seems to rush past her: "There'd been a message of some sort . . . for good or evil" (KH 247). Afraid that the message meant the
disappearance of her home, a house built by her great-great-great-great-grandfather, that it may "have disappeared like a ghost," she finally reaches the house. She finds that "fog covered the fields beneath it, so that it seemed to float without solid ground, just exactly like those fairy castles in a child's story book" (KH 246). The radio then once more inexplicably, resumes playing. This incident occurs shortly before she learns the news that will forever change her life. Her world and her past at this point still seem like a fairy tale, but that image will soon disappear like fog before the relentless sun.

The Gothic also appears in the entire story of her grandfather's trip through the swamp, a story she learns from his ghost. At the end of the novel, after John has deserted her and the children, angry, drunken townsment attack her home. They burn her barn and shoot some cattle, but before they can storm the house, Abby, helped by a black servant who had been with her and with Will Howland for many years, turns a shotgun on them and sends them into retreat. After she has successfully defended her home against the mob, she sees her dead grandfather and next to him, a host of ancestors: the original Will Howland, scalpless, the girl beaten to death by bandits, Cousin Ezra from the Civil War, the young Howland from the Wilderness Campaign, and all their wives. In effect, the past determines Abby's
vision of the present. As she says: "I feel the pressure of generations behind me, pushing me along the recurring cycles of birth and death" (KH 5).

Her past, like that of many Southerners, is usually a selective memory of the past. It consists of Howland heroes and acts of courage and cunning, but it ignores the injustices of slavery and prejudice that helped to create the Howland empire. Her family has kept the charred stair rail, for example, burned when bandits came into the house of her great-great grandfather, killed his youngest daughter, and built a fire in the house to cook supper. The stair rail serves as a reminder of the family's shared suffering and their daring as well as a warning to other would-be bandits because the Howlands had chased the murderers down and hanged them all.

Early in the book, before Abby begins the flashback that relates the whole story, she looks at the fence downed by the mob and knows she will not replace it, for she too wants "to remember" (KH 4). Nevertheless, she knows that the story of the Howlands does not mean only that of her grandfather, or even one that goes back to his great-grandfather; it includes as well the first Freejacks who also came to this area with Andrew Jackson, Margaret's relatives. She thinks:

They are dead, all of them. I am caught and tangled around by their doings. It is as if their
lives left a weaving of invisible threads in the air of this house, of this town, of this county. And I stumbled and fell into them" (KH 6).

She knows this, but the legacy of her community proves too strong to overcome. Abby may have cared for Margaret and played with her children, but they were black and therefore different, perhaps even inferior. Margaret is not one of the ghosts that Abby sees, for "she was not part of me" (KH 290). Abby resents Margaret's daughter Nina who chooses to live as a black as much as she resents Margaret's son Robert who chooses to live as a white man because both of them disturb the image she prefers to keep about her life and her community. When she thinks of Robert, who "came back jeering and hating" (KH 6), she realizes that she wishes he were dead. Robert Coles claims that Margaret's son is "the composite Northerner, the outsider, black and white, and the South has its reasons to fear and hate him" (Coles 18), and the reader does dislike him. His vengeance hurts everyone and helps no one, especially the other blacks in this community.

Maybe, as Abby believes, it takes two generations to kill off a man: one for him and one for his memory, but it takes much longer to destroy an idea, especially one which has defined a whole community. Apparently, "it's like this, when you live in a place you've always lived in, where your family has always lived. You get
to see things not only in space but in time too" (KH 248). According to Richard Johnson, the novel rejects both the segregationism of John Tolliver and the anti-segregationism of Robert Carmichael; both are beside the point because both ignore and thus help to destroy the importance both of building civilization and of doing so with full awareness of the harsh realities of the natural world (Johnson 3983).

The people of this community will now have the additional burden of dealing with a zealous bigot, the Republican who will become governor, instead of Abby's pragmatic husband, John.

Abby gets her revenge on the town at the end of the story, but her victory is a hollow one. Like Joan from The House on Coliseum Street, she winds up alone, curled in a fetal position. Joan had rejected her past and her community and was left with nothing upon which to build a future. Abby embraces the past with all its flaws, but her future is no more assured than Joan's. Perhaps no other of Shirley Ann Grau's novels so clearly demonstrates her ambivalence toward the Southern tradition. The attraction of a Southern past filled with romantic heroes must compete with the reality of a present stained with the injustices of that same past.
Chapter Six
Myth and Gold: The Condor Passes

Shirley Ann Grau's fifth book, an ambitious novel entitled The Condor Passes, met with popular success as a selection of the Book of the Month Club for 1971. Critics were less enthusiastic. Comments about the novel as a whole ranged from that of Luther Luedtke who said, "The Condor Passes is a strangely mute, hollow, and dispersive work, its rapacities and adulteries notwithstanding" (Luedtke 1516), to Denis Donoghue's curious statement that the book's "narrative voice keeps its mouth shut until it has something true and relevant to say" (Donoghue 28). Whether Donoghue meant his remark as praise or condemnation is unclear. Grau again also met with a common complaint against Southern writers that her book is not as good as those of Faulkner, as if every novel written by a Southerner had to compete with his. Once again Luedtke laments that "next to Faulkner's Dilsey, Grau's wise, enduring, and redemptive Black, Stanley -- presiding over the disintegration of yet another clan -- seems slightly hackneyed" (Luedtke 1516). The fact is that the character of Stanley is quite different and his role in The Condor Passes is not the same as that of Faulkner's Dilsey, so comparisons do little to aid understanding of the book.

93
Other objections have included the plot's similarity to that of *The Godfather* which appeared at about the same time, and Grau admits that "it's a little infuriating to find the parallel" (Schleuter 70), but *Condor* was essentially finished when *The Godfather* came out. Moreover, while *The Condor Passes* does involve a Mafia-type leader, the emphasis is not on his life as gangster as much as on the dissolution of a family.

Grau herself, who seldom reads criticism of her writing, said, "Quality fiction, 'literary' if you must, is part of the whole search for meaning. . . . It is symbolic, . . . it has something to say about life and hate and love and death" (Daigh 118-19). This novel does attempt to deal with serious and universal issues, and despite Grau's claim that it is "a lot less Southern" (Keith "Visit" 14) than her other books, *The Condor Passes* demonstrates the unmistakable influence of, and a dissatisfaction with, Southern tradition.

As she did in *The Keepers of the House*, Grau experiments with shifting points of view. The story moves from the perspectives of Stanley, a black man; to Thomas Henry Oliver, a Yankee outsider, known throughout the book as the Old Man; to Robert, the Old Man's Cajun son-in-law and adopted son; to Anna and Margaret, Oliver's daughters; to Anthony, Anna's critically ill son; and back to Stanley. With each new viewpoint, Grau examines the community, its decline and transformation.
The story takes place in New Orleans and in Port Bella, Mississippi, approximately two hundred miles from New Orleans on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. The setting, therefore, is obviously Southern, but surprisingly enough, Grau does not capitalize on the local color possibilities. The reader almost forgets the setting when the action occurs in New Orleans.

The Southernness of this novel is not indicated by place, but rather by Grau's use of myth in her attempt to create a mythic character, the Old Man. Nevertheless, through her deprecation of certain typical Southern myths and the attempts by certain characters to live in a world of unreality, Grau also exhibits uneasiness with this tendency.

Thomas Henry Oliver reigns throughout the novel as a character intended to seem of mythic proportions. Known even from his youth as the Old Man because of his demeanor as well as his bald head, he starts life as a poor boy from Ohio who quickly gains power and wealth in New Orleans by selling bootleg whiskey and running brothels. He is a gangster, ruthless and cunning, but the reader never views him as threatening, perhaps because his rise to power is told as flashback. He is first seen as an old, dying man able to breathe easily only in the controlled atmosphere of a greenhouse, the very artificiality of which suggests the falsity of the life he has adopted. Not until later in the story, does
one learn of his struggles to acquire power and wealth and then mostly by indirection.

Luther Luedtke accurately points out that in some ways Oliver resembles F. Scott Fitzgerald's mythic character Jay Gatsby because he seems largely untouched by the evil around him: "He remains peculiarly dispassionate toward his wealth and unsoiled by the carnality and sordid means which usually agglutinate to the ideal goal of perfect power and freedom" (Luedtke 1513). The young Oliver also resembles the young Jimmy Gatz because, when Oliver is young, he too spends his nights charting his future: "Every night before he fell asleep, he made plans -- abstract, detailed plans for the rest of his life" (CP 80). By making Oliver seem somehow innocent in the midst of evil, Grau thus de-emphasizes his gangster quality.

Once he gets his money, he wields enormous power. He arranges for Robert, the young Cajun who works for him, to marry his daughter even though Robert is already engaged to another girl. Oliver's vast accumulation of wealth and a convincing lie work the miracle. Thus, along with yachts, planes, automobiles, his own private air strip, and anything else he wants, he also collects the son he never had. People and things have become the same, at least to him. Grau implies that the acquisitiveness generally associated with the North, or with the New South's mimicking of Yankee rapaciousness,
destroys humanity and leaves only empty materialism in its place.

The forcefulness of the Old Man's character extends even to death, an inevitability he does not fear: "When the body fell apart at last . . . then the animal inside him would find endless doors opening on echoing corridors, wind-swept walks, ultimate distances" (CP 40). Having been very close to death, he can "see it for what it is" (CP 304). He is like the giant condor remembered from his youth in South America when he hunted gold. His hands are "old bony yellow hands, like birds' claws" (CP 18), and his eyes are "old bright eyes, hooded like a bird's" (CP 13). Indians would tell tales of how the condor was used to carry gold in its feathers for the trip of the dead to the next world. The condor of Grau's story is thus associated mythically with wealth and death, like the Old Man.

In fact, it is Grau's use of the condor as symbol that has generated the most controversy among critics of this novel. In his review of the story, Denis Donoghue, for example, said: "I can't see that the symbol does anything for the book, and Miss Grau comes back to it at the end for no good reason" (Donoghue 29). Paul Schleuter also protests that the symbol tries to be "too many dissimilar" things at once and ends up a burden on the novel, "an albatross" (Schleuter 84). Admittedly, the symbol of the condor does seem to change at the end
of the novel by becoming associated with Stanley, the Old Man's black servant. The purpose for this change, however, is to emphasize further the Old Man's connection with the mythical condor, not to introduce an entirely new meaning.

Although the Old Man becomes physically incapable of controlling life around him, his symbolic force in the novel continues through Stanley. When the Old Man has a severe coughing spell, Stanley holds him "like vestments across an altar boy's arm" ([CP] 27). The religious imagery here heightens the importance of the event as Stanley realizes: "It's my face I'm looking into. My own face I'm seeing there" ([CP] 27). Although Stanley comes to think of himself as a big black hawk watching everything, he is just an instrument driven by the Old Man's power. At times, Stanley wonders "is he inside me?" ([CP] 411). When Stanley chauffeurs the dying Oliver, he drives carefully "as if he were carrying something precious. Like the big black car was full of gold" ([CP] 416). The black and gold used here once again link Oliver to the condor and to myth.

Finally, at the end of the novel after the Old Man's death, Stanley's shadow, cast by two floodlights from the house, appears as black wings; and he feels very strange, "as if a part of him were missing." He puzzles, "Had the Old Man carried something away with him?" ([CP] 421). Grau seems to suggest that even in
death the character of the Old Man surpasses the ordinary.

Unfortunately, the character of Thomas Henry Oliver does not quite reach the mythic dimension Grau intends for him. Unlike Jay Gatsby, he has no transcendent dream to justify his unsavory behavior, and the reader does not learn enough about his evil deeds to make him a believable monster either. Grau's attempt is worthy, but it does not quite succeed.

Perhaps part of the explanation for the failure of the character of Oliver can be found in Grau's uneasiness in this novel with myth, made evident in her depiction of others in this Southern community. When Oliver first comes to New Orleans, he learns that one of the favorite pastimes of the rich is to hold jousting tournaments and dress up as knights and ladies, an example of the somewhat ludicrous Walter Scott syndrome that dominated Southern thinking before World War I. To Southern whites, a black man would not fit in such a world; therefore, to the people for whom he works, Stanley or any other black becomes invisible, something they can ignore: "they look and don't see me" (CP 3). Furthermore, ignoring blacks helps to strengthen the ignorance necessary to maintain their illusory world.

One of Stanley's jobs each day is "to check the birds" (CP 1), to examine the big bird cage in the greenhouse and immediately remove any sick or dead
birds. For some reason the birds die, two or three a day, then swell up and smell in the damp and heat, a detail which suggests the decay in Southern society itself. Rather than admit something, in the bird cage or in society, is wrong, one simply denies its existence.

The women of this novel definitely embody and are victims of myth, the myth of the Southern belle. Anna, Oliver's older daughter, is the epitome of the Southern belle, both beautiful and feminine, and has spent her whole life without an identity of her own, preparing only to be someone else's bride. When she was six, she dressed all one hundred of her dolls as brides, and through the years she filled shelves in her room with sketches of her wedding, kept a whole Guatemalan convent busy sewing, crocheting, and doing needlepoint for her trousseau, and picked out a wedding dress from an illustration she had found in Ivanhoe.

For Anna, appearance has always been more important than reality. She believes that she and Robert, the young Cajun that her father chooses for her, will be the happiest couple in the world merely because, when she looks at him, "it was the same feeling she got sometimes during chapel when the Gregorian was particularly well done" (CP 179). She remolds a hotel in Port Bella as a summer home to look like "Ivanhoe's castle, but a lot more expensive" (CP 264), with a floor that had belonged
to General Beauregard and a garden copied from one at Mount Vernon.

Rather than the world of reality, her ideas of a husband and a home are better suited to the romance of the Middle Ages and to the Old South ideas of chivalry. She herself tries to live the myth of the Southern belle, to be both capable and fragile, but the lack of an identity for herself leaves her scarred and broken:

Her invisible arms reached out, scooping up her words, carrying them back inside. It was quite a while before she was certain that she had found all of them, collected them from the floor of air where they scattered like broken beads, and put them back inside herself where they belonged (CP 173).

Anna also loses her husband, who feels smothered by her unreal world, and her son, who leaves because she will not face the truth of his illness. Living the Southern myth thus costs her happiness and even the possibility for a complete self.

Oliver's second daughter, Margaret, is not beautiful, and although she also is exposed to the ideal of the Southern belle, she senses its inherent fallacies more than Anna. If the Southern woman is such a treasure, why does her aunt Cecilia say at the funeral of Margaret's mother: "Sad, sad, that poor man left with just two daughters" (CP 267)? When she thinks of her mother, why does she think of someone who did not
die in childbirth but rather "killed herself breeding" (CP 267)? Margaret knows that, for her, "the frog isn't going to change into Prince Charming, the secret door isn't going to open" (CP 264). Because she does not conform to the myth of the Southern belle, she is left without an honorable place in the fabric of her community. She may "want to choose. . . . To have what men have. To initiate, to choose" (CP 266-67), but as a woman there is no place for her. She must, therefore, cease to be a woman and become like a man; in effect, she does just this in the end by becoming the "son" Oliver had always wanted. When Robert returns from the war, he finds that "Margaret . . . [is] always there. The Old Man now had two sons" (CP 335).

The truth is that none of the white characters in the novel finds what they seem to want, and a pervading sense of sin and guilt often associated with religion in the South torments many of them. Anna had always been religious, but she begins to punish herself physically once her son Anthony becomes sick, praying for hours on her knees, flagellating herself, and allowing ants to bite all over her body. At one time Anthony had believed that she could "make a miracle happen" (CP 313), and she had tried, but after Anthony disappears, she thinks:

We are all guilty; all the two-legged people
tottering and strutting on the crust of the earth.
We never know what we do, never know what sin. All of us. Even Anthony. The lovely lost boy. All the forked creatures, stripped and naked. What did we do? (CP 322).

Influenced by a lifetime of religious negativism that pictures human beings as "forked creatures," Anna must conclude that love is "a burden" without which she will be better off (CP 322).

Robert, the poor Cajun who tried to escape his background by marrying Anna, is overcome by feelings of guilt. He cannot reconcile his survival in the midst of war with the death of his son, Anthony: "I had a son once, killed in his own front yard, with his mother in the house. I've been shot at and I'm alive. He was safe, and he's dead" (CP 330). Robert tries to escape by seeking out young girls, vicariously experiencing in sex the youthful love that Anthony will never know: "What you missed, Anthony, what we both missed" (CP 350).

Margaret has the same religious training as Anna, but because she is less traditionally feminine and less inclined to accept her role as the dependent Southern belle, the effect is less devastating. What she does learn is enough to make her first experience with sex disappointing: "She'd expected so much; she got nothing. Maybe that was the wages of sin" (CP 201). It was not enough, though, to prevent her from trying out
several husbands and innumerable affairs. Margaret simply falls outside the perimeters set up for the Southern woman. Her rejection of her religious tradition still does not prevent her from being affected by it. Her own son, Joshua, turns against her, imitates Anna, and later decides to become a priest. In the end, Margaret finally abandons the hope of finding love and just fills her days collecting and discarding expensive artwork. Like her father with his ceaseless procuring and her sister Anna decorating her houses, in the end Margaret believes in nothing. Each must futilely repeat gestures of meaninglessness, trying to fill their inner emptiness.

If the Southern community in The Condor Passes harms its members rather than nurtures them, Grau does not maintain that such need be the case. Stanley and his wife belong to a community from which they draw sustenance and hope. He has known Vera all her life and even grew up next door to her. Her mother, brother and his wife, and six grown children still live in the same place, and though he and Vera have since moved, they live only two hours away. For Stanley, the best thing about Vera is that she remembers "everything, and she could make him remember" too (CP 19). Remembering is important in maintaining a nurturing community; otherwise, Stanley and Vera might someday be as alone as the Old Man. Oliver and his family, it seems, do not
share memories, and their community offers them no comfort.

At one time the possibility for those memories did exist. For example, as a young man, Oliver knew the importance of stories: "the old men, full of Indian tales. Remembering for themselves or remembering for their grandfathers" (CP 63). He had the example of his wife's family, who were numerous and close-knit. When their first child was born, her family members swarmed everywhere, and Oliver regretted that his own mother could not be there: "She would have been so busy here and so pleased" (CP 102). When his wife's mother died, there were six priests in attendance -- all relatives. The Archbishop came to give his blessing, but no one made room for him: "Death was a family business and they had their own priests" (CP 167). With such feelings generated by close family ties to bind them together, why does the community still disintegrate and the family dissolve?

Grau has suggested that the answer lies in money: "They have an awful lot of money, and they have problems of personal identity, of love, and the problems are more evident as a result of the money" (Keith "Visit" 14). Money, however, does not seem to be the reason why Oliver sets out to sever his ties with the family. After his wife dies, her room is kept the same for a long time; then one day everything is new. Oliver
teaches his daughter Anna "that it was a part of life, this putting things behind you" (CP 166). Oliver, remember, is not a Southerner, and his extended family was one adopted from his wife, not one really his own. Without her, he is bereft of a past and a community. He resorts to more independent and less community- or family-oriented ways, and as a result, is left alone "with just a lot of images in his mind and nobody really knowing what they were about" (CP 20).

His daughter Anna, however, regrets the loss and the fact that her mother left nothing of herself but blood. Lacking the identity that comes with a past, Anna feels anger and frustration "for her not leaving me a memory" (CP 170). She tries to substitute a material past by buying a house nearly a century old, "a perfect circle of time" (CP 170), but the house has no connection to her own family or past, and she is left floundering. Margaret too questions her father's attempt to ignore the past: "Snakes shed their skins, leave them lying on the ground. How do you get rid of your beginnings, your genes?" (CP 277). Even Anna's son Anthony suggests a longing for familial tradition. When he gets homesick, it is, ironically, for his grandfather's house, not his own.

All of the Old Man's money and his attempt to obliterate the past cannot erase his family's longing for it and for the sense of community associated with
it. Anna had never told her son Anthony that he had leukemia, as if refusing to acknowledge its existence would make it go away. After he disappears into the Gulf one day, having rowed out alone in defiance of his mother, she never again goes out on the Gulf side of her house. "There's something here she doesn't want to see" (CP 383), a part of the past that will always lurk just beyond the sand. Robert goes down to the pier and cries out over the water for his lost son. Although he had eagerly given up his poor background earlier, now he begins to reach back for his Cajun past. He eats gumbo nearly every day, remembers fondly the "smell of oily bayous and decaying shrimp shells" (CP 238), and eagerly regales the young people at the yacht club with long Cajun stories. Even the memory of an act as simple as sleeping on the floor, something he had always done as a youth, becomes "something of great value" (CP 227) when he realizes he can no longer do it. After Anthony's disappearance, even Oliver himself insists on staying at Port Bella with Anna and the memory of Anthony rather than alone at his home in New Orleans, for he too misses something. All of them are haunted by the specter of a sick boy who just wanted a family, and all echo loneliness, seeking something they once could have had but did not appreciate.

The characters remain obsessed by memories (or their lack of memories) of the past, but the tradition
of the family -- the basic unit of community best able to unify and give meaning to the past -- has been destroyed. The many references throughout the novel to events incongruously resembling death reinforce this idea of a defunct community. The Old Man's loss of the urge for sex is like "the first death" (CP 210); Anna's wedding negligee feels to Robert like "dead leaves" (CP 216); Robert feels himself "shrive1 and die" before Anna's certainty that their marriage will be perfect (CP 220); the smells in the greenhouse, supposedly a place to grow things, are those of a funeral (CP 14); and Stanley refers to the blues as lying in bed "in that fish-colored light, when he could hear old man Death laughing right behind him" (CP 22). Although he is not a member of the family, Stanley's reference to Death ties him to Oliver and his ruined family through the term "old man." It also illustrates the danger that Stanley and other blacks run of losing their own Southern community tradition if they emulate too closely the materialism of the Old Man.

When one attempts more, the chances for failure are greater. In The Condor Passes Shirley Ann Grau undertakes to chronicle the disappearance of one of the staples of the Southern tradition, the family as a community which hands down the legacy of a meaningful past. Tradition in this novel, stripped as it is of any spiritual value, stifles the women characters, but the
lack of a tradition of close-knit community destroys them altogether. In addition, Grau's appreciation for the possibilities of myth comes into conflict with the reality of the problems associated with trying to live in a world of unreality. If the results of all these conflicts in *The Condor Passes* are less successful than in *The Keepers of the House*, one can still appreciate what the book does accomplish. The novel explores important issues and shows the continuing, if sometimes conflicting, influence in Grau's writing of a dominant Southern tradition.
Chapter Seven

Later Short Stories: The Wind Shifting West

Following The Condor Passes, Grau returned to her first form, that of the short story, in the collection entitled The Wind Shifting West, published in 1973. The Wind Shifting West consists of eighteen stories, some of which had appeared earlier in periodicals, and two of which show up in altered form in The Condor Passes and in Evidence of Love. The settings of these stories range from some that are obviously Southern to others which could be set almost anywhere in the Northeast to at least one that belongs in the realm of science fiction. Even in the stories not set in the South, however, the themes that have influenced Grau's writing throughout her career, themes associated with Southernness, continue to surface. Sometimes the effect of a community appears as a bulwark for the characters; at other times maintaining erroneous tradition or insisting on the truth of a mythical past forces the characters into an false and meaningless existence. Aware of the potential for richness in the Southern tradition, while conscious of how often that tradition fails, Grau explores life for human beings, but with the eye of a Southerner.

Religion and fundamentalism have not played a large role in the writings of Shirley Ann Grau, but their
influence has been noted at times in the earlier works and can be seen in this collection in "The Man Outside." The story takes place somewhere in the South, in moonshine country, where the narrator's mother is repeatedly offered large sums of much needed money by men who wish to set up a still on her land. She never accepts, though, because "she was a Baptist, and she took it seriously" (WSW 157). The reason for her financial woes begins with her husband's vision, a vision that tells him to go live alone in a shack about a mile from the house. He leaves her and the family to pursue his religious revelation, yet she continues to bring him food every day and to bear his children for several more years until one day he disappears completely. The husband's irrational behavior threatens the very lives of his family, but the mother's faith permits him his chance for transcendence and helps her keep her family together. Grau thus seems to attack radicalism in the name of religion, but at the same time, she seems unwilling to condemn the kind of rudimentary faith that underlies such religious belief.

Gothic and Southern are, to many people, almost synonymous. Grau herself has used elements of the Gothic throughout her writing career beginning with the supernatural antics of Stanley Albert and Alberta and continuing through the numerous ghosts who haunt so many of her characters. Ghosts reappear in Wind Shifting West
as well. In the story "Three," Ann, a young woman whose husband has died, tries to put her life back together. She finds another man, Ted, to love, but does not immediately accept his attention as love. Only after the apparition of Jerry, her late husband, begins to visit her and she learns that "apparitions . . . had messages, were restless" (WSW 83), does she understand that she may love again. A vision from her past thus makes the present bearable and the future possible. Jerry seems to live once more through her: "she could feel him restoring himself upon her" (WSW 87). As her life becomes more settled and she finally accepts Ted as her new husband, Jerry's existence solidifies, and Ann invites Ted to meet the other person she believes will share their lives: "the room shimmered and glowed all around her as she slipped her arm through his and led him into the living room to meet her husband" (WSW 99). The reader cannot be sure whether Ann suffers from delusions or whether Jerry does indeed exist, but either way, he is real enough for her. The reader's uncertainty parallels Grau's ambivalence toward the past.

Three other stories also contain suggestions of spirits so often associated with Gothic writing. In "The Man Outside," long after the vision-seeking father has disappeared and the mother remarried, a man appears on the road outside her house. She makes Mr. Benton, her present
husband, send him away, and she will not even look back. No one ever finds out who the stranger is: "We didn't know. And we didn't ask. Sometimes we would think that it was. And sometimes we would think that it wasn't. I guess we liked it that way" (WSW 169). Whether or not the mysterious man is the long-lost father, he is someone to be feared and avoided like the devil or bad luck. In this case, the enigmatic figure represents an intruder into a now established community who must be rejected.

In the story "The Land and the Water," several teenagers who had gone sailing have all died in a storm. The young narrator goes out the next day to the water's edge: "I got to thinking that something might come out of the water. It didn't have a name or a shape. But it was there" (WSW 125). Suddenly she runs back toward her house because something, she thinks, "had reached for me, and missed" (WSW 125). The "something," of course, is death, an idea more clearly indicated by the story's original title, "The Reach of Fog," but its monstrous depiction approaches the Gothic.

Finally, in "Stanley," the narrator (the same Stanley as in The Condor Passes) explains that at one time he would see ghosts everywhere: "ghosts in the shape of people he'd never met. Ghosts in the shape of old people he'd known who had died, ... spirits in the shapes of dark shadows and light shadows" (WSW 246). As is true for
so many characters in other Southern stories, memories of the past show up as ghosts in the present. Southern memories, of course, are supposed to provide support for coping in the present, but when they appear as ghosts, as they do here, their mission becomes clouded, as if Grau were unsure about their ability to console.

Seeing ghosts is a lesser sort of living in unreality. The eccentric, who also seems to live in a world of his own, is another element associated with the Southern Gothic, but one not seen too much in Grau's previous fiction. "The Lovely April" contains such a character, Richard Carlylsle Peters, a man everyone calls Mr. Robin. Although he was the son of a wealthy and important man, he had been severely beaten by some fifth-grade classmates. He never told who did it, but a week afterwards, one of the boys disappeared and was found later in an abandoned freezer behind the ice factory. Mr. Robin never returned to school, and the intimation is that this quiet boy killed his classmate because even as an adult "Mr. Robin did strange things sometimes, especially in the spring" (WSW 200). Despite such hints of a violent beginning, Mr. Robin remains a quiet, peaceful man, albeit an unusual one. When his mother dies, he goes to the narrator's small hometown because his father wants a tranquil place where friends will look out for him. Mr. Robin keeps a butler whose primary job is simply to look
after him. He claims to be one of the little people and one time shows up in church with a pancake and a fried egg on top of his head underneath his hat.

Of course, people talk, but they tolerate his eccentricities and protect him because this is the South, and true to the Gothic tradition, Southerners love eccentrics. The pew in which he sits is one which no one else ever occupies because it is a memorial to Jefferson Davis who had rested there when he came through the town during the war. When Mr. Robin's father finally does come to pick up his son, the narrator's mother takes out the "sherry and the little biscuits she kept for special occasions, along with the high silvery tones of her laugh" (*WSW* 212). She slips easily again into her role of the Southern belle. This particular story does not explore deep philosophical questions of human nature, but it does, through humor, illustrate some of the more stereotypical images of the South. "The Lovely April" thus enjoys the spectacle of the eccentric, but because Mr. Robin is such a likable character and those who care for him are treated so sympathetically, the story also serves as a critique of those who would judge such behavior too harshly or condemn too sharply others who tolerate it.

Reflecting once again the preference among Southern writers for myth, Grau stated in an interview with John Canfield that she had attempted myth-making in the story
"The Last Gas Station" (Canfield "Conversation" 46). Since the plot suggests science fiction, myth in this case would indicate the realm of fantasy. The gas station sits on a four-lane highway that runs straight north and south. Suddenly in the slow season, thousands and thousands of cars all begin to rush south. The gas at the station is used up, the cars stop, and the people begin to walk south until no one is left but the young narrator. Feeling utterly alone, he tells himself he will catch a ride with the next car, "if there ever is another car" (WSW 135). The story suggests the possibility of apocalypse where the reason for catastrophe remains completely unknown. Furthermore, the fact that the narrator is young with his future ahead of him and that everyone flees south suggests that the last real hope for mankind may reside in what the South can be.

"Homecoming" is a story which better reflects the influence of myth as usually seen in the South, a preference for a world of unreality. Paul Schleuter cites the story as a "bitter blow at southern sentimentality and love of ritual" (Schleuter 124). In the story, a young man goes off to war in Vietnam and wants to feel that someone waits for him back home, so he gives his ring to Susan, a girl he knows only slightly. She agrees to keep it, but does not wear the ring because she has no special feelings for him. When his parents learn that he has
died, they send her a telegram. Susan's mother expects her to mourn him as if they had been married. She calls friends and mere acquaintances over for a kind of wake, sets the telegram in a prominent place on the dining room table, and talks for hours about how brave all the young men were. Susan tries to play the role expected of her, but finally she rebels saying, "They weren't brave, they just got caught. . . . They don't die in glory. They just die dead" (WSW 50). Susan's mother and all those who cooperate in the wake-like charade resemble those deluded Southerners who maintain that the past was always better than the present, despite any evidence to the contrary. Still, Susan's lamentable insensitivity toward the dead soldier and toward others who have lost loved ones to wars not of their making suggests that sometimes only myths can make reality bearable.

"The Pillow of Stone" and "The Man Outside" are two stories obviously set in the South, and, in both stories, setting emerges more prominently than in the other stories. "The Man Outside" is set in "likker" country somewhere in the Bible belt. Everyone grows corn and practically every low swampy stretch that was wide enough and deep enough and tangled with old clumps of hackberry and poison ivy and swamp oak had one tiny little path cut into it . . . and at the end there'd always be a little still (WSW 156).
Although the exact location is not divulged, the reader knows it is not south Louisiana because this is Baptist country. "The Pillow of Stone," on the other hand, does take place in south Louisiana. The Gulf, shell beaches, flowers planted in old truck tires, jambalaya on the stove, oleander bushes planted near the house to keep off the summer heat, fishing boats, and the dialect all help to situate this story in Grau's home area.

If local color were the only thing to link these stories with Southern literature, Grau's more important contributions as a regionalist, someone who uses the characteristic influences of an area merely as a basis from which to explore human nature, would be negligible. Fortunately, Grau uses much more. The characters of "The Man Outside," for example, live in a community where people stay for generations because it is home: "Most people lived in a house until it was ready to fall down with termites and old age before they built another one a few dozen yards away and moved into that" (WSW 164). Every now and then a reform government comes into power and tries to eliminate the moonshiners. At one point, a stranger in town questions the narrator's mother, a staunch Baptist who does not believe in drinking, about her knowledge of moonshiners. She responds, "I am not a Judas Iscariot" (WSW 157). Even if she does not approve of their activities, she will not betray members of her
community to an outsider.

Shared beliefs bind her to them, just as blood binds a family. Her own mother had been German, and "the blood in her showed. Even mud on her looked clean" (WSW 158). In fact, only one thing apparently ever really worries her -- a son who went to France in World War I, married a French girl, fathered a child, and got killed: "that little French baby that had her blood and carried her name" (WSW 156). She will forever fret about a member of her family and her community separated from them.

The title "Pillow of Stone" alludes to the Old Testament story of Esau and Jacob. God tells Jacob, as he lies in the desert with his head on a "pillow of stone," that his "seed shall be as the dust of the earth" (Genesis 28:1-15). The Bible story stresses obedience to the father and continuance of the family. Grau's story similarly stresses the importance of family and community. The people on this island are a community; they are "all one family, all the children and grandchildren and into the fourth generation of the old woman who still lived in the largest and roomiest house on the island" (WSW 184). Ann Marie Landry comes as an outsider, but because of her own experience with the closeness of community, she easily becomes one of them. When the people hear that her father has died, they go inside "deferentially" so that she may proceed quickly to him (WSW 188).
Although a terrible storm rages outside, she says, "I will go, me. Or all my life my pillow is made of stone" (WSW 187). She knows that without her, "he will not rest," not until "the circle of his children" is closed (WSW 187). When Ann Marie had married, she had brought a sense of her past with her: her bedroom set, her linen chest, and her camellia bushes along with the black delta earth in which to plant them, things associated with her community. When she returns to bury her father, she arrives pregnant "with one to take his place" (WSW 190). The two communities have become one.

The only other story set in the South is "The Other Way," one whose anti-segregation message could seem dated if not for its emphasis on community. Sandra, a young black girl, has just recently changed schools and wants to return to her old one. She tries to explain to those who wait at home for her — her mother, her cousin, her aunt, her grandmother — that she is alone now, the only black child in an otherwise all-white school. They do not relent, however, because they know she is never really alone as long as she is part of them. She thinks of running off in the opposite direction, but "she felt the pressure of her people behind her, pushing her, cutting off her tears" (WSW 154). Then she sees a cat that is both black and white,
hugging the shelter of the houses. And so the moment passed, and when she looked up, the other way was gone. The street in front of her had only one opening and one way to it, and her feet put themselves on that path, and she walked home . . .

(WSW 154).

Like the two-colored cat that found protection in the houses, she is able to withstand the pressure at school of being a different color because of the bonds of community at home.

Most of the other stories in The Wind Shifting West are set outside the South, and in nearly every one of them the characters lack any sense of community and, as a result, suffer loneliness and alienation. The title story, "The Wind Shifting West," abounds with examples of sameness: Robert's trip to the cove every year to criticize his friend's care of his boats; Robert and his family's annual move to this same place; the light wind always blowing across the bay; the house which had belonged to Robert's grandparents. Carolyn, Robert's wife and the protagonist, feels trapped in a rut too. She says, "I'm always here, just about this same week, and you're always here, just about the same time" (WSW 6). All this banal repetition is based not on family or tradition, but on habit because the characters feel no sense of connection or community. In order to escape her
routine, Carolyn has an affair with her brother-in-law. They make love on his boat, but afterwards Carolyn realizes that they have nothing to show for it except "some weed on the anchor and some salt dried on our skin. There isn't ever much left, when it's done" (WSW 25). Her attempt to change has not helped because it is not based on any identifiable foundation.

In "The Way Back," the characters are not named, and the reader knows nothing of how or why they came to be together. We know only that they must return home separately after sharing a love affair. He gives her an acorn, the only memento she will have of their time together. The acorn symbolizes potential growth, but when she accidentally drops the acorn, she feels empty because she knows the relationship will not grow. Fortunately, the "sounds and movements of her body kept her from remembering: that kind of loneliness was the next thing to death" (WSW 225). The characters of this story certainly suffer from isolation, from a lack of the comfort that derives from a community.

Similarly, the woman in "Sea Change" has only her husband, and when she is convinced that he will die on this next plane trip, she finds herself "perched on a single spot, weightless and empty in herself." She searches for some meaning, but finds "that there was nothing on any side of her, that she hung like a point,
like a star in the empty sky" (WSW 180). Even in the midst of the throngs of a large city, she is alone once she is without others with whom to share beliefs or love.

The protagonists of "The Thieves," "The Beach Party," and "The Householder" also suffer isolation. In "The Thieves," the girl who helps the unknown cat burglar escape over the wall says, "If I had a wall I could climb over it, but I don't even have a wall. I don't have anything at all" (WSW 147). Freida in "The Beach Party" is an outsider: she is too young; she does not know anyone in the group except her brother, who ignores her; she will not go into the water; and her date has been arranged for her. When the others go off and leave her, she thinks, "They forgot me. But then I wasn't really there, was I" (WSW 81). She had been alone all along. In "The Householder (originally entitled "The Burglar"), Harry, the young husband who kills an intruder breaking into his house, afterwards stares "out the window pretending he could see something more than the reflection of his own face" (WSW 40). Though an effort to protect his family, his act of violence and its emotional effect have, at least temporarily, separated him from them. The change in title, in this case, draws attention to Harry as part of a community, rather than to the intruder.

Throughout the book, community is pictured as a desirable characteristic for the inhabitants of society.
In only one story, "Eight O'Clock One Morning," does community fail. On the first day of school integration in this town, trouble is brewing. The street is full of people, some carrying Confederate flags, some with mops. Though the white father in the story helps a black man attacked by a group of white teenagers, he compromises his commendable deed by saying, "'Niggers and white niggers.' As if that explained everything" (WSW 198). His community has ingrained in him the idea that white people are naturally superior to black ones, and if they sometimes act like animals, they are merely imitating what blacks do naturally. Like Huck Finn's Aunt Sally, who told Huck she was "glad no one was hurt," when in fact a black man had been killed, the father in this story has been deprived of part of his humanity by the beliefs of his community.

The stories of The Wind Shifting West make clear the continued move of Grau's fiction away from the obviously Southern story. Superficially, several stories appear to have nothing in common with Southern literature and suggest the author's discontent with things Southern. Nevertheless, the positive associations with community that dominate most of the stories and the importance of faith, the past, and myth, indicate that Shirley Ann Grau has not escaped the influence of the South.
Shirley Ann Grau's next novel, *Evidence of Love*, appeared in 1977, six years after *The Condor Passes*. The story is set primarily in New England and spans nearly a century from the 1880's to the 1970's. The rather drastic change in setting from her previous novels may have been influenced by a desire to escape the inevitable comparisons to William Faulkner that seem to plague any Southern writer, an endeavor to prevent the distraction for the reader sometimes caused by use of local color, or simply an attempt to continue to broaden the range of her writing. As she says, "Each serious writer with each successive book is describing another facet of his world of reality" (Grau "Essence" 15). From the beginning, critical response to *Evidence of Love* included praise for "the variety of incidents and settings" (Ross 213), and complaints that in setting the story outside Louisiana, Grau had tried to write something about which she knew too little (Schleuter 87).

Though set in different surroundings, *Evidence of Love* is more Southern than what Daphne Athas calls the "mere evidence, detectable in style" (Athis 306) of most contemporary Southern fiction. *Evidence of Love* consists of Southern thematic content, appearing, among other
Miss Grau is fully aware that the glamorous past may be a trap, but she also knows that family traditions which are rooted in the past may endow life in the present with an illuminating sense of time and a stabilizing sense of place (Eisinger 515).

Despite its non-Southern setting, therefore, this book still deals with topics common in Southern literature: the importance of a past relevant to the present and the influence of a family or community in creating that past. The characters in this novel deal with the past in different ways with varying degrees of success. Though Grau presents no concrete conclusions, the overwhelming impression echoes a Southern sentiment, the peril of rejecting the past, as well as a modern judgment, the difficulty of finding love in today's world.

The epigraph which begins the book is a quotation from Wallace Stevens' "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle":

... I pursued,
   And still pursue, the origin and course
   Of love, but until now I never knew
   That fluttering things have so distinct a shade.

Her choice of Stevens, a modern poet, reinforces the impression of the near impossibility today of maintaining ties both to the past and to love but also suggests how
tantalizing is the possibility of doing so. According to Mary Rohrberger, the verse is an indication of the actual "course the novel will take" (Rohrberger "So Distinct" 195), and indeed the characters all pursue completeness of some kind. Grau continues her efforts to view life from different perspectives since the story is told through three different narrators: Edward Milton Henley, his son Stephen, and Stephen's wife Lucy. Each seeks fulfillment, after his own fashion, but the book's title remains ironic because throughout much of the book, there seems to be little evidence of love.

The first narrator, Edward Milton Henley, recounts both the opening and the closing sections of the novel. His exploits are many and fantastic, but he does not completely succeed as a character. Like Oliver, the Old Man of The Condor Passes, he is a man of power. From the age of eighteen, he seems able to seduce any lover, male or female, though his only allure appears to be money, and we are supposed to believe that even after he becomes a loving grandfather, he maintains this mysterious ability. The opposing images in this case do not meld successfully into a fully credible character. Grau's difficulty in making him completely believable suggests her lack of sympathy with those who would totally reject their past, a view he clearly represents.

Though Edward's mother is not from the South, she
demonstrates many attributes associated with Southerners. She holds the same kind of grudge against the English that Southerners for so long held against Yankees. For example, she will not go to England because over a century before, the British had destroyed Great-Great Uncle Jonathan's farm, and she "would never forget what they did" (EL 11). When Edward is living in England, she simply pretends he is not, sending her letters to him through an aunt in France who forwards them. Mrs. Henley follows traditions of her past. When she gives birth to Edward, he is washed in a basin of cold water just as all children for three generations in her family have been. She also demonstrates a kind of religious fundamentalism. She considers her son's near fatal illness as a child "a trial sent by God" because she is obsessed "by the idea of purification of the soul through suffering" (EL 20).

Edward appears to continue his mother's tradition by taking her basin with him every time he moves his office: "My offices always look exactly alike. Why? Because it pleases me to have it so" (EL 5). He also admits that his mother did instill in her children a sense of morality and that he has always known "the Christian thing to do in any given situation" (EL 11), although he has usually chosen not to do it.

Henley's aunt, with whom he lives while he is in Paris, also embodies Southern tendencies. She is the
widow of "an unimportant soldier who had died in the Franco-Prussian War" (EL 21). Like all those Southern women generations after the Civil War, "all unknowingly, she had enjoyed deprivation immensely. In her singularly dull life a national catastrophe was, at least, something different" (EL 21). Her memory of a romantic past provides her with a buffer against the present. Henley thinks her eccentric but prefers his transplanted American aunt to those "ridiculous people" who belonged to the "international world of unemployed royalty" (EL 21).

All in all, Edward Henley's background should prepare him to understand "the sympathy of blood for blood, of aching chalky bone for aching chalky bone, of skin for familiar skin . . . the visceral sympathy of acquired identity" (EL 89). All the ingredients for a successful link with the past seem to be present, but Grau points out that problems can occur when reality differs from appearance.

The truth is that, despite the tradition of the sacredness of family and motherhood, Edward's mother is glad when her second child is a son because she will "never have to do that again" (EL 6). His parents seem to deal in abstractions rather than in actual relationships. They operate "in terms of pictures of each other. Recognized when seen, but not remembered out of sight" (EL 16). Every time he sees him, Edward's father acts as if
he were surprised to remember that he has a son. The tradition of family in this case has become empty with no meaningful connection to the present.

As a result of the conflict between the image of Henley's remote past with all its romantic possibilities and the reality of his immediate past with so little to offer, he rejects the past altogether to live forever in the present in an almost manic search for pleasure, for sensuality unconnected to tradition or ideals. He says, "Novelty and love are the same thing. To me" (EL 216). His only fond recollection of the Great House on the farm built by his grandfather is of movement, an ever-changing kaleidoscope of colors in the midst of darkness produced by a lantern in the hallway: "I never grew tired of watching the shimmering display of lights in the gloom" (EL 13).

He determines to repudiate his heritage and to prevent it from ever possessing anything of his. After the death of his sister, Edward decides to have a child, but one that will be entirely his, not his wife's. He finds a willing girl, pays her handsomely to bear his child, and then insists she disappear. He cannot understand why his wife objects to the arrangement: "To hear her talk, one would have thought it was her absolute right" (EL 41) to be the mother of his child.

To him, the child is a possession to be guarded, not
a person, and the child's mother is merely an object of convenience. Edward goes on to have several wives and many affairs and thinks of leaving the following epitaph: "Here lies one who laughed at his own jokes his entire life long" (EL 225), yet in spite of his Bohemian lifestyle, the reader remains unconvinced that his efforts to reject the past completely succeed. Throughout his life he remains haunted by the image of clearings in the forest near his grandfather's house, the purpose of which he can never explain. Those inscrutable empty spaces suggest the emptiness in his own life. As he himself admits, "I myself have had periods of difficulty remembering who I am... Times when it took an effort of will to wrap my identity around me" (EL 36). Life which accepts the past, even a marred past, as a prerequisite to the present and the basis for the future, is preferable to an eternal now. Furthermore, Grau seems to define identity here as a quality requiring the fullness provided by family or community and their connection to the past.

Edward's son Stephen rejects his father's hedonistic lifestyle and resolves to epitomize normalcy, but his life becomes instead a cluster of contradictions. Stephen claims not to believe in God, yet he becomes a Unitarian minister, perhaps reflecting his grandmother's religious fervor. The two quotations on his wall at prep school
echo further contradictions: "Know thyself" and "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of a Living God" (EL 62). His is not the untroubled belief of the fundamentalists, yet there is belief, one that constantly questions without finding satisfactory answers.

Forever seeking the certainty of a past denied to him, Stephen dedicates his life to a study of history, especially the classics. As Louis Rubin says of the character Cass in William Styron's novel Set This House on Fire, he is "a man who requires the stability of belonging to a place that is anchored in time and that possesses order and stability" (Rubin Far-Away 226). Stephen's greatest dream is to hold, perhaps even possess, a great book like the Wycliffe Bible, the original, not a copy. He would be able to feel all those who had touched it before: "That is the only immortality I believe in. The linkage of understandable human feelings" (EL 131). Such a belief connected to a work of the controversial John Wycliffe, a figure about whom historians remain quite divided, indicates Stephen's own uncertainty. Surely, he never really understands his own feelings or those of anyone he loves.

From his boyhood, Stephen attempts to order his life, to provide the kind of structure his father's life denies and his own background lacks. He knows that "ideals are so easy to lose sight of" (EL 93), so he fills journals
with detailed accounts of what he will do for the rest of his life and then tries to follow them. As Stephen looks at the volumes of his journal, he finds that it is "a bit like watching sand fall in an hourglass. You could actually see the passage of time" (EL 114). Yet, despite his valiant efforts, he cannot see his past.

His mother had been that nameless girl paid by his father to bear a child, and while he admits that knowing nothing of her is "annoying" (EL 115), he pretends not to care. When his son Paul goes to a great deal of trouble to locate the woman, Stephen wonders about Paul, "Was the presence of blood so important to him?" (EL 126). Paul, it seems, had found a painting that he believes is one of Stephen's mother because the picture looks so much like his father and the house in the picture looks just the way his grandfather's house did when Stephen was born. Paul has hired half a dozen agents to locate her paintings, and finally, the woman herself. He proudly announces, "She gave me this self-portrait, the one with Grandfather's house in the background" (EL 129). Stephen keeps telling himself that he is not interested, but the effort actually makes him dizzy, and on the day he dies, he can think of little else but his mother.

For him, everything has always been seen in terms of history, as if studying history could make up for his own absent past. Strangers become historical personages:
I meet a soldier named Harold and I see Hastings Field -- despite the fact that Harold is a corporal in the 101st Airborne. A woman named Ruth, and I see the stooped shape gleaning in the barley field at Bethlehem. . . . I have confused and tangled myself in so many lines of logic and thought and history (EL 62).

Even dealing with the insects around his home when he and his wife Lucy retire to Florida becomes a historical exercise; it is like "living in the midst of a battle. . . . Lucy and I had slipped back in time" (EL 107).

Perhaps the most telling example of Stephen's dilemma is the celebration held when he retires from thirty years in the ministry. Edward's girlfriend organizes a nineteenth-century Christmas fete complete with invitations hand delivered by a liveried footman in period costume, arriving in a horse-drawn carriage. Everyone loves it, except Stephen. His parishioners expect a sermon full of hope, peace, and love, but all he can think of is labor and pain: "My midwinter festival seems so bleak, in the dark of the year they are not lighting nearly enough bonfires" (EL 96). A bonfire would shed light upon the darkness, but in Stephen's nightmares, he is forever alone in a cleared circle, surrounded by fire. The light is there, but it blinds him so that he cannot see into the blackness. In spite of all his attempts to
manage without a personal past by studying the world's past, Stephen is tormented by the same kind of image that haunts his father. Edward's nightmares, it must be remembered, always find him in a cleared space too. Both men feel the inadequacy of a life without the tradition of a personal past and the feeling of love such a past can provide.

At the Christmas celebration, Stephen is able to complete his final sermon only when he realizes that the costumes worn by his parishioners are wrong: they should have been from 1840 when the church was built, he notes, and these are all from the late 1700's. Once again, he falls back upon history, but the trick works only partially. As he looks at the overhead lights that have been replaced with electrified candles, he muses: "The hundreds of tiny flickering imitation flames produced exactly the wavering uncertain glow that belongs in old places and old books, the feel of another time that makes time uncertain" (EL 101). Time and the past consist of more than dates and facts written in history books, and Stephen has only those. He greets the end of his life with the same words that T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock uses: "I grow old. I grow old" (EL 98). Like Prufrock, his life seems meaningless, and Stephen dies believing, "It didn't matter. Nothing did" (EL 137).

Though Stephen is a more acceptable character than
Henley because of his constant search for meaning, of the three narrators in Evidence of Love, Lucy is the most believable and the one with whom both Grau and the reader most sympathize. The elder Henley's search for an everlasting nonce of fun seems entirely too forced and frantic while Stephen seems to fear fun and to seek sanctuary in the past of others, making him "never at home anywhere" (EL 204). Lucy, on the other hand, cherishes her past and uses it to help make the present worthwhile. In On the Limits of Poetry, Allen Tate described a poet as someone who

is aware of the present, any present, now or past or future. For by experiencing the past along with the present he makes present the past, and masters it; and he is at the center of the experience out of which the future must come (Tate Limits xvi).

Like a poet, Lucy appreciates this connection between the past, present, and future, and Grau's sensitive treatment of her as a character indicates an approval of her view of life. Paul Schleuter points out that some reviewers have criticized the characters of this novel as "bloodless," but Lucy, he says, is a "full-bodied, full-blooded" personality (Schleuter 99). She earns this accolade by combining the vitality of Edward Henley with the substance of character of Stephen.

Lucy was born in Africa to English parents who had
gone there earlier to farm and who, despite their successful adaptation to Africa, never ceased being English. Her mother maintains a proper English decorum even when feeding chickens or battling a snake, yet she exhibits an impish delight in surprising her daughter's American acquaintances because she knows that since she comes from Africa, people in the United States expect her to be black. Lucy's father becomes an African farmer, but he would also have known how to appreciate Virginia, where Lucy meets Stephen, and Florida, where she and Stephen later retire, because he "had the soul of a nineteenth-century gentleman. Had he been able to afford it, he would have decorated his African landscape with decaying castles and secret grottoes and ruined choirs" (EL 199). In short, both of her parents embody a living Southern tradition and retain a love for their past, for each other, and for Lucy, while managing to live very much in the present.

Lucy too understands the importance of heritage. When her first husband Harold Evans died, she went with the body back to Michigan because "you returned people to their beginnings" (EL 192). Like Stephen, she studies history, but not, in her case, to evade the present. She simply wants to know more about the new country to which she has moved, and later she uses her new-found knowledge to write history books for children. She is thus able to
bequeath the past to the future. She can esteem the fanciful, something Stephen could never do. For example, she believes that she has seen something in Africa called a duppy: "a five-foot rooster sauntering across the yard. A low white thing like a pig in the nighttime shadows" (EL 192). Such an imagination allows her to detect evidences of love, however obscure. While Stephen views his home in Florida merely as a fortress against an onslaught of malevolent insects, Lucy thrives there. She spends hours adjusting the louvers of the house to admit or prohibit light in the rooms; she reads to children at the local library; she joins public affairs groups; she adapts.

Quentin Compson from Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury sought stability in the institutions and traditions of a community that no longer existed and committed suicide when he could not find it. Edward Henley settles for instability because he cannot reconcile the truth of the past with his expectations of it. Stephen lacks even that unacceptable past and must look to an artificial substitute in history. Like Quentin, they too fail to discover what they seek. Only Lucy appears at ease with life as she finds it. The traditions of her family create a firm foundation, a stability, while an appreciation for fancy and for myth supplies decoration to keep that stability interesting. In spite of its Northern setting, Evidence of Love seems to be an affirmation of the
Southern tradition at its best, of what such a tradition claims to be and can be, even if in reality it sometimes falls short of those claims.
Exemplifying her belief that a writer must not look back, in the stories of *Nine Women: Short Stories*, Shirley Ann Grau moves even further away from obvious Southernness than she did in *Evidence of Love*. She has stated that a writer must change or end up writing "parodies of himself" (Keith 18), and, of course, if writing is, "an endless unraveling of ideas, and endless exploration of the possibilities of life" (Grau "Essence" 15), as she claims, then such a move is understandable and perhaps even necessary. In this latest book, as she did with Lucy in *Evidence of Love*, Grau concentrates on the effects of the Southern tradition on women, whether or not they actually live in the South. Unfortunately, the results in this case are less successful, perhaps because Grau's faith in the effects of Southern tradition seems to have weakened significantly.

The stories contain little of the magic that can be found in Grau's other works, and the characters are treated with such authorial distance that the stories fail initially to absorb the reader. Quite contemporary, they are apparently far removed from *The Black Prince* or *The Hard Blue Sky*. On closer inspection, however, the distance may not be so great after all. The characters in
Nine Women, for example, all think about the past, an important concern in Southern literature, and like the characters of J. D. Salinger's book Nine Stories (a book whose title and whose theme of alienation are echoed in Nine Women), all face isolation in one way or another. One story involves an eccentric, and several are set in or near New Orleans, although the setting in each case is not emphasized. In short, as her writing has throughout her career, these stories reflect Grau's ambivalence toward the South. While some of the tales demonstrate an affirmation of that tradition, others question or condemn it.

As has been true in many of Grau's previous works, the quality that seems to dominate the stories of Nine Women is that of community. For the characters in "Home," two gay women, a community exists although not a traditional family. Ruth Sherry has pointed out that recent women writers "are often explicit in showing that friendships between women can be characterized by openness, trust, intellectual stimulation and long-term stability" (Sherry 7), the same positive qualities that should mark a community. Shunned by their biological families, they depend upon each other. Trouble develops when Vicki announces that she wants to have a child. She would like to have Angela's child, if that were possible, but because it is not, she will have one some other way.
Rather than face life without Vicki, with only loneliness, the "thing that crouched waiting in the shadows" with a "crackling" voice and a "swishing" tail, Angela agrees to help Vicki and promises that together they will rear the child. They will make a community of three.

In "Hunter," Grau combines elements of the Gothic with the idea of family closeness. Nancy Martinson's plane crashes and she sees death: "A yellow column of flame appeared in the aisle. Glittering, shining. The color of sun, burning like sun" (NW 22). Her daughter and her husband appear to reach out to meet the flame; then there is nothing. The reporter who finds Nancy yards away from the wreck swears that he inexplicably heard "pealing bells, bells of jubilation" (NW 25) just before spotting her. Days later when she awakens in the hospital, she realizes that both her daughter and her husband died, and she died too; she just did not escape earth. Somehow she slipped out of her passage to death. She muses with regret about the grandchildren she will never have: "It must be very pleasant to think of your blood continuing in an endless link to the future" (NW 39). All she can do now is just keep flying as often as she can, looking for the accident that will allow her to meet her family once again, and her closeness to them convinces her that they will be waiting.

For the stories "The Beginning" and "Ending," the
setting is standard Louisiana, complete with withered palm trees, azalea bushes, and big noisy roaches. Canal bridges open "to let gravel-filled barges glide past through oily water" (NW 11). The house in "The Beginning" is set high above the ground on brick pillars, surrounded by a tall iron fence with spear point tops. Though interesting and skillfully delineated, setting in both stories provides little more than local color. Both "The Beginning" and "Ending" instead seem to explore different views of the role of myth in the South. Can believing that one's own created world takes precedence over reality result in a nurturing community? "The Beginning," the first story in the collection, suggests that it can. Sounding very much like a fairy tale, the story's details about the characters and why they live as they do are vague, and many are revealed only indirectly. A young girl, who lives alone with her mother, tells how from the beginning, her mother would sing songs of love and perfection to her: "You are the queen of the world, the jewel of the lotus, the pearl without price, my secret treasure" (NW 6). Instinctively, she knows how to behave because her mother often reminds her: "Remember your father is an Indian prince and you are his only daughter" (NW 7). She grows up feeling special and never wondering why only women who have black faces like hers come to buy the clothes made by her mother. The myth created by the
girl's mother inures her to the truth so that when the kingdom at last fell and the castle was conquered, and I lost my crown and my birthright, when I stood naked and revealed as a young black female of illegitimate birth, it hardly mattered. By then the castle and the kingdom were within me and I carried them away (NW 17).

Myth and the love that inspired it have given her a strong sense of her own worth and have also enabled her to escape the harsh, bigoted world of reality.

The story "Ending" is the sixth in Nine Women. At first there appears to be little connection with the first story except the echo of the title and the fact that the characters are again black with one half-Indian. These people are quite wealthy and successful and have just finished giving a lavish wedding. Barbara, mother of the bride, seems to be a shallow social-climber. She thinks about the group with whom she had associated in college -- the paper bag society: "In college a girl was considered beautiful if her skin was the color of a brown paper bag, nothing darker" (NW 118). Myth, in this case, meant nothing more than believing that having the right shade of skin coloring would insure money and happiness.

Of course, in reality, everything has not turned out quite so perfectly. Her husband, for example, will not be returning, for they are getting a divorce. The big tree
roach that flies in the open front door to nibble on a piece of wedding cake dropped by some unknown guest seems to symbolize the decadence in Barbara's life that all her money and her proper skin color will not alleviate. At the end of the story, her world of myth has become as empty as her act of watching television with the sound turned off, and "Ending" thus suggests the darker side of ignoring reality. In both stories, reality makes essential the creation of myths to establish identity for the characters, but only in "The Beginning," where myth is accompanied by love, does the fantasy produce positive results.

"Housekeeper," a story also set in the South, provides another example of Grau's contention that neither money nor anything else can provide happiness if the love and security of some kind of community are lacking. Mrs. Emmons had served as housekeeper to Dr. Hollisher for years. An eccentric retired doctor, he did have a daughter, but the only time they ever got together, they fought. Dr. Hollisher, therefore, spends his time pursuing one interest or another: everything from chess played via short-wave radio to building unusual sailboats and never sailing them. The activities are followed with devotion at first but then abandoned as suddenly as they were begun. Mrs. Emmons, on the other hand, becomes a housekeeper only to keep busy after her children are grown.
and gone. She has a husband and a family upon whom she can count.

Apparently, according to the police report, one night, Dr. Hollisher simply got up, went to his dory, and rowed off, never to be seen again, as if something had called him. Like Anthony from The Condor Passes, who also rowed alone into the sea and disappeared forever, he seeks something which community should provide, but Dr. Hollisher does not really belong to one. In spite of all his money, education, hobbies, and activities, Mrs. Emmons, his housekeeper, alone cares that he is gone. Reminiscent of Lucy from Evidence of Love, Mrs. Emmons enjoys the benefits of her middle-class community, while her wealthy employer, like Lucy's father-in-law, lives and dies alone. With this story Grau implies that the kind of greed and materialism that earlier characterized the New South in its rush to become like the rest of the country threatens the Southern community today.

Though the idea of community continues to be viewed as positive, several of the stories in Nine Women suggest that the reality of what community has become is not.

"Summer Shore" tells of Katy Wagner, who gives an end-of-the-season party every year prior to going home just before Labor Day because she loves to see the whole family together: "children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren" (NW 126). For her, the summer house has
become more than just a place to live. It has become "a family enclave. It was a fixed point, a firm center for life to revolve around" (NW 130). Even putting away all the summer things repeats a tradition begun two generations before. Despite a marriage less than ideal, "this house" and the family she associates with it "protect" her (NW 146). Nevertheless, the traditions seem more like empty habit than anything nurturing. We do not learn enough about her family to see bonds with them as beneficial, nor do we know what she wants to be protected from. The heritage of community here seems to have become stagnant ritual, unworthy of passing on.

In a somewhat similar story, "Widow's Walk," Myra Rowland, an old woman whose husband has recently died, returns to her familiar summer vacation place. Though surrounded by familiar faces, old friends whose last names she cannot remember and grandsons who look like her late husband, Myra remains alone. Hers is the "widow's walk," the top of a narrow, steep climb with "walls on each side" (NW 79). Alone, in the midst of a community that does not comfort, she drinks and awaits her own death.

Indeed, it seems that one should just break away from his community when the beliefs have become warped or destructive. "Letting Go" begins with a quotation from Emily Dickinson:

As freezing persons, recollect the Snow --
First -- Chill -- then Stupor -- then the
letting go -- (NW 43).

Mary Margaret is named after her grandmother; one must
preserve family names. Every Wednesday, she goes to the
home of her parents for tuna casserole and a trip to
church for novena. The allegiance to family, however,
seems to be rather one-sided. When she got married, for
example, her parents did not attend: "There hadn't been a
single person of her blood. I minded that most, she
thought" (NW 50). They never refer to her husband Edward
by name; he is always "him" or "the slob." Finally, she
and Edward agree to a divorce, and Mary Margaret realizes
that she must let go of her little community, her family,
too, just as Joan did in The House on Coliseum Street.
She tells her parents, "You've had all you can have from
me" (NW 60).

Like the people in the Dickinson poem, she feels
first chill, when her parents refuse to attend her
wedding; then stupor, when they continue to ignore her
husband's existence; and finally the letting go, when she
declares her independence from them. The trouble with her
declaration, however, lies in remembering that it is
freezing persons who go through these stages -- persons
approaching death. Grau thus qualifies her support of
breaking away from the traditions of a community and once
more indicates her ambivalence toward them.
Significantly, the final story in the collection, "Flight," involves an old woman who feels that her community has failed her, yet who wants to go home before she dies. Rain outside her hospital room, "whispering, giggling" (NW 174), reminds her that each time a big rain filled the storm drains, she and all the other children would risk drowning by riding home-made rafts in the water as it rushed along toward the pump station. Their parents had all warned them; but riding the dirty, boiling waters, they shared a togetherness that made the danger seem inconsequential, and a "pride and excitement" as they experienced the "smell of freedom" (NW 194).

Willie May also remembers the boy she eventually married, John Denham, a boy she had seen every day when she was young, a boy who had ridden in the drains with her. He too was part of a close-knit community, a boy who "lived at home with his parents and his orphaned cousins and his grandmother" (NW 183). Still, Willie May had always felt like an outsider. She had married John because she could think of no reason not to marry him. When he returned from the war after five years, she was surprised because he had never seemed quite real, and when he finally left her for good, it took her several days to notice that he had not returned. From the beginning, the demands of family for her had seemed like a "trap" to insure that "you aren't ever free" (NW 178-79).
She remembers how she had run away when her mother had delivered a child so ill that it died almost immediately, but Willie May had later returned because "she had no other place to go" (NW 176). Her mother had told her, "You don't ever run away from your duty to your family. Not ever. Not until you die" (NW 178). Although she had eventually moved far away, those feelings of entrapment stayed with her. Only with death at hand could she escape: "Secure in her power and boastful of her strength, she raced the plane home. And won" (NW 202). Though she knew "by its smell" (NW 203) when she had reached her house, this was not her final destination. In her mind she would return to those days of childhood riding the floodwaters in the storm drains. Free at last, she would ride to the end "into the dark" (NW 204).

Unlike Lucy from Evidence of Love, she has never experienced anything from her community but repressive responsibility and guilt, even if other feelings were present. No wonder Willie May longs for escape.

Despite Grau's usual precision of style, of the nine stories in this collection, only "The Beginning" and "Flight" engage the reader's interest more than superficially. The nebulous but enchanting quality of "The Beginning" starts the book with a tale of a mother and a daughter who, despite great odds, support each other and survive with honor. "Flight" ends the book with
Willie May's inability to find comfort in her family, resulting in an unforgettable loneliness and desperate longing to be free. The stories in between, however, do not seem to have much to say.

The Southern characteristics that echo throughout the writings of Shirley Ann Grau are not absent from the stories in *Nine Women*, but the characters do not seem real enough to warrant the reader's effort. In each story, women, the traditional agents through which ideas of family and community are transferred, are examined. With love, compassion, and empathy, the mothers of "The Beginning," "Hunter," "Home," and "Housekeeper," embody community and provide a foundation for those who might follow. In "Ending," "Letting Go," "Summer Shore," and "Widow's Walk," tradition has become meaningless, and there is nothing to pass on but empty ritual. In "Flight," the restrictions inherent in tradition have become prison walls instead of comforting protection. Unlike Grau's more memorable female characters, the women in this book seem to exist with little motivation to tackle the problems facing them or with much hope that such effort can succeed. Perhaps Grau is suggesting that in the modern world the old values often do not work, but new ones have yet to be found. The meaninglessness felt by the characters of *Nine Women* has made them impotent, and, unfortunately, even demonstrating a Southern
tradition does not prevent most of them from also being dull.
For thirty-five years now, whether she meant to or not, Shirley Ann Grau has written stories reflecting her Southern background. At the core of her work has been the importance of the beliefs which form one's community and the past as it links to that community. Supporting the idea of community have been subsidiary ideas of myth -- both the kind of myth created in order to maintain the beliefs of a community and literary myth used by writers like Grau to move a story to a higher plain, beyond that of ordinary reality. The untroubled faith associated with fundamentalism, obsession with sin and guilt, and elements of the Gothic (especially eccentrics and ghosts) have also appeared in one way or another in her stories as evidence of the influence of the South and of the Southern literary tradition.

Whether or not the settings of her stories are Southern, Grau continues to examine the ideas that have marked the South as a region unique in America. Her conclusions seem to be that when the characteristics associated with the South form a foundation of ideals, one which supports its members through love and compassion and acts as a buffer against the harshness of the world outside the community, then the Southern tradition
succeeds. It fulfills its potential for good. When the tradition becomes empty form, however, void of any capacity to nurture or succor its members, it fails. Her stories reveal that she would like very much for the South and its traditions, its ideals, to survive. At the same time, many of those same stories suggest the frequency with which the Southern tradition fails and the increasing likelihood of continued failure.

As for the value of her work itself, some of her novels, especially The Keepers of the House and The Evidence of Love, along with a few of her short stories, are as rich and significant as anything currently being written. If the quality of her canon is uneven, the reason does not lie in a mistaken attempt on her part to repeat past success. When the obviously Southern setting of the early stories seemed to trap her into a mode, a niche, that of "Southern writer," she moved the settings and experimented with different styles.

The results have been varied stories with characters as strong and intriguing as Stanley Albert of "The Black Prince," Will Howland of The Keepers of the House, and Stephen Henley of Evidence of Love, all of whom certainly deserve a place of honor among literary creations. They are richly developed, engaging men. Equally fascinating have been some of Grau's female characters. Alberta, from "The Black Prince," seems somehow both real and mythic.
Margaret, of *The Keepers of the House*, retains her dignity despite the viciousness around her, and the reader can only grieve at her perceived need to disown her children in order to save them. Lucy, in *Evidence of Love*, affirms the idea that stability in a world of flux can come from community based on love and survives as a unique individual while those around her can only grasp at life's meaning.

If the characters of Grau's latest book, *Nine Women*, appeal to the reader less than these others, perhaps it is because today Grau too often sees the community, in the South as elsewhere, as based on little more than empty forms with nothing to pass down as a legacy worth keeping. Cut off from the past and its heritage, modern human beings are being denied the very strength and consolation they so desperately seem to need.

Grau herself has remained an author linked to her Southern community physically and spiritually. She continues to call Louisiana her home, and intent on creating serious literature, she has not ignored the influence of her Southern background. Nevertheless, because she is not always happy with the effects that influence can have, the writings of Shirley Ann Grau reflect an ambivalence shared by every thinking Southerner: can Southernness be saved, and, more importantly perhaps, should it be? The answer for Grau
seems to be that while certainly not perfect, the ideals of the South can supply comfort and hope and are worth preserving. The question remains whether or not they can last.
Bibliography


Castille, Philip, and William Osborne. Southern


Core, George. "Agrarianism, Criticism, and the Academy."


----------. The Black Prince and Other Stories. In Three by Three: Masterworks of the Southern Gothic. Introd. Lewis Simpson. Atlanta, Ga.: Peachtree, 1985. (All references to this book will be from this edition and will be designated BP.)

----------. The Condor Passes. New York: Knopf, 1971. (All references to this book will be from this edition and will be designated CP.)


----------. Evidence of Love. New York: Knopf, 1977. (All references to this book will be to this edition and will be designated EL.)

----------. The Hard Blue Sky. New York: Knopf, 1958. (All references to this book will be to this edition and will be designated HB).

----------. The House on Coliseum Street. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1961, 1973. (All references to this book will be to this edition and will be designated HCS.)

----------. The Keepers of the House. New York: Knopf, 1964. (All references to this book will be to this edition and will be designated KH.)

---------. Mississippi's Magic Coast." Holiday 17 (June 1955): 60-63, 145, 147, 149.
---------. Nine Women: Short Stories. New York: Knopf, 1985. (All references to this book will be to this edition and will be designated NW.)
---------. Personal interview. May 19, 1990.
---------. The Wind Shifting West. New York: Knopf, 1973. (All references to this book will be to this edition and will be designated WSW.)
"The Hard Blue Sky." In Survey of Contemporary


Rohrberger, Mary. "Conversation with Shirley and Grau and


------------- Introd. In I'll Take My Stand: The South


Rubin, Louis D., Jr., and C. Hugh Holman. Southern Literary Study: Problems and Possibilities. Chapel


Webb, Walter Prescott. "The South's Future Prospect." In


4814 Ponderosa Drive
Lake Charles, LA 70605
(318) 478-7508

Degrees:

Doctor of Philosophy; December, 1990
Major: English, Minor: History
Teaching Field: American Literature
Specialization: Southern Literature

Master of Arts; July, 1983
Major: English

Bachelor of Arts; July, 1976
Major: English, Minor: French

Educational Institutions Attended:

High School, St. Charles Academy, Lake Charles, LA
(salutatorian)
McNeese State University (BA degree, summa cum laude; MA degree, 4.0 average)
Louisiana State University (PhD degree, 3.9 average)

Experience:

1976-77 Lake Charles High School, Lake Charles, LA
Instructor of French I, II, III, IV; co-chairman of the regional Foreign Language Festival; sponsor of the French Club

1977-now Barbe High School, Lake Charles, LA
Instructor of English III (accelerated) and English IV; sponsor of Quill and Scroll, Creative Writing Club, Freshman Class, and National Honor Society; piloted state curriculum guide; member of committee which wrote first parish curriculum guide; chairman of English Department

1982-83 McNeese State University, Lake Charles, LA, Instructor

1986-89 parish contact teacher for Barbe High
member of parish textbook adoption committee
wrote proposal for and received grant from 8g funds for $49,371.00
wrote proposal for grant from 8g funds for $10,000.00

172
helped write Excellence in Education document for Barbe High
qualified as LTIP-LTEP evaluator

Major Areas of Study:

graduate areas of concentration in Southern literature, medieval English literature, the English Renaissance, and American literature before 1900; independent study with Dr. John May (alumni professor), Dr. Burl Noggle (alumni professor), and Dr. Gaines Foster (head of History Department)

Professional Organizations and Honors:

Louisiana Federation of Teachers, Calasieu Association of Educators, National Education Association, National Council of Teachers of English, finalist in Calcasieu Parish Teacher of the Year competition

Workshops Conducted:

1979 "How to Teach Allegory in Junior English"
1981 "Using the New Curriculum Guide"
1987 "How to Set Up a Computer Lab for English Composition"
"Teaching the Novel: The Great Gatsby"
"Using Word Processing in the English Classroom"

Professional Conventions:

1985 National Council of Teachers of English
1986 Louisiana Council of Teachers of English
1989 Southern Regional Conference of National Council of Teachers of English
1990 Louisiana Council of Teachers of English

Non-Academic Activities:

Member of the Lake Charles Messiah Chorus
Member of the Immaculate Conception Church Choir
Songleader for Our Lady Queen of Heaven Church Choir

Research and Publications:

Master's Thesis: A Secret Place above the Trees: Idealism in the Fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald
"A Secret Place above the Trees" in The McNeese Review
Dissertation: With the Flavor of the South: The Influence of the Southern Tradition on the Writings of Shirley Ann Grau
Candidate: Judy Tarver

Major Field: English

Title of Dissertation: With the Flavor of the South: The Influence of the Southern Tradition on the Writings of Shirley Ann Grau

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

November 16, 1990