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THE SEARCH FOR AUTONOMY IN THE WORKS OF KATE CHOPIN,
ELLEN GLASGOW, CARSON MCCULLERS, AND SHIRLEY ANN GRAU

Rice University

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THE SEARCH FOR AUTONOMY IN THE WORKS OF KATE CHOPIN, ELLEN GLASGOW, CARSON MCCULLERS, AND SHIRLEY ANN GRAU

by

PAMELA L. PARKER

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

THE SEARCH FOR AUTONOMY IN THE WORKS OF KATE
CHOPIN, ELLEN GLASGOW, CARSON MCCULLERS,
AND SHIRLEY ANN GRAU

PAMELA L. PARKER

This study examines the Southern female character's search for autonomy in the works of Kate Chopin, Ellen Glasgow, Carson McCullers, and Shirley Ann Grau. The first chapter discusses the historical and sociological factors which influence this character; in addition, the qualities of the character as well as her search are described. The second chapter reveals the origins of this character as she first appears in the works of Kate Chopin. Selective works of Ellen Glasgow and Carson McCullers are examined as examples which further develop Chopin's prototype. Chapters III, IV, and V provide in-depth analyses of Shirley Ann Grau's The House on Coliseum Street, The Condor Passes, and The Keepers of the House. Grau's works dealing with the South are the focal point of this study, for her works reveal the contemporary complexities and similarities of various female characters' search for self. The "Conclusion" briefly discusses the prototype's appearance in the works of William Faulkner, Walker Percy, Robert Penn Warren, and Katherine Anne Porter.
Collectively, these Southern women authors reveal the tragedy of the resuscitated myth of Southern woman as Southern belle. Although the search should ideally lead to an androgynous consciousness, most protagonists' attempts to realize their androgynous selves are thwarted by the conventional Southern society. Their search for self governed overwhelmingly by historical factors suggests a kind of historical determinism, for the characters' fates begin to appear predetermined by both their real and fictional predecessors. Yet the women who write these books have themselves successfully overcome their mythic roles through their writings. Perhaps by showing the reader how to fail in the search for autonomy, these novelists suggest simultaneously how to succeed. A new role model for the Southern woman must be developed. She must be an androgynous, autonomous person who understands the role of history in shaping her life and who understands that intuition and reason complement one another.
To Mère...

whose Southern-ness inspired this dissertation, 1897–1975;

and Kelly...

who, without restraint, gave happiness, support, laughter, and love.

I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation to my thesis committee, Joseph A. Ward, Jr., Susan Clark, and Walter Isle for their constructive criticism and professionalism; to Jo Monaghan, whose competence and expertise in preparing the manuscript was greatly appreciated; to Miriam, who made the gray days blue; to Janie, for her wit; and Alice, for her advice; and to my family for their confidence. Last, I am indebted to Shirley Ann Grau for her fiction and her friendship.
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Chapter One

AN INTRODUCTION

With the publication of I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition in 1930, the Fugitives attempt to define aspects of Southern literature which distinguish it from Northern literature. This reason for separating Southern literature from Northern literature has also been the subject of extensive literary and historical studies. Among these studies heralded at the time of their publications are such works as Donald Davidson's Southern Writers in the Modern World, Lewis P. Simpson's The Dispossessed Garden, and Walter Sullivan's A Requiem for the Renascence; among the historical studies are W. J. Cash's The Mind of the South, William R. Taylor's Cavalier and Yankee, and George Brown Tindall's The Ethnic Southerners. These critics have attempted collectively to define and delineate those aspects of Southern literature that distinguish it as a separate school of letters. It is generally agreed that one must examine the history of the South in order to understand its tradition of belles-lettres; in doing so, one must direct attention to the nebulous, somewhat vapid, but ever-present myth of the antebellum South. William
Taylor and W. J. Cash are only a few of the many historians who have attempted to define the complexities and contradictions of a myth which, according to Hugh Holman, functions as a major informing principle in Southern fiction.

Quite simply, this elusive myth and its informing principles romanticized a society that condoned human bondage. It lent credence to the patriarchal society of the domineering landowner. This stern "gentleman" is frequently perceived mythologically as a man who subjugated his slaves as well as his women and who became a hero during and after a war that left his plantations gutted, his lands barren, his women widows, and his slaves "free-jacks." Even after the total defeat and despair of the war, even after the social and economic chaos that characterized the Reconstruction Period, the Southerners held on to the pre-war myth. In fact, as late as 1883, Samuel Clemens reveals the attitude with which the ante-bellum South was revered in a conversation between a Yankee and a Southerner in Life on the Mississippi: "A young New Yorker once remarked, 'What a beautiful moon you have down here!' A Southerner replied, 'Ah, bless yo' heart, honey, you ought to seen dat moon befor' de waw!'"¹ Because "the Southern mind seems susceptible to mythology" as opposed to "pure abstraction,"² the post-war South, having failed to construct a new myth, simply resuscitated
Tindall feels that the resuscitated myth should be "debunked" in light of the recent Southern Bulldozer revolution, but he warns that the South should be examined in the context of its mythology. "The game of debunking myths, . . . starts in the denunciation of myth as falsehood, from the vantage-point of a rival myth." Tindall adds that

mythology has other meanings, not all of them pejorative, and myths have a life of their own which to some degree renders irrelevant the question of their correlation to empirical fact. . . . In the words of Henry Nash Smith, they fuse 'concept and emotion into an image.'

For Tindall, "the main burden of Southern mythology is . . . still the romantic plantation myth of gentility"; however, it must be remembered that there are other factors which contribute to the solidarity of the South; not all factors are mythological in origin. Richard Harwell proposes that the Southern white ruling class' shared sense of self-consciousness comes from the defeat they experienced in the Civil War:

With its whole effort directed toward war, with war a part of every household, of every life, the Confederate South achieved a unanimity of thought and action the section had never known before and reached a fully denied self-consciousness. Defeat created the solid South, political solidarity and an even deeper sense of self-consciousness.
Not only did the South possess a regional unity before the war, but Harwell implies that the war further strengthened the South's sense of solidarity.

Perhaps it is the influence of the South's mythology as well as its self-consciousness which defines it as a region with "a fairly definite social pattern--a complex of established relationships and habits of thought, sentiments, prejudices, standards and values, and association of ideas... . . . It is not quite a nation, but the next thing to it." If in the opinion of some critics the myth has lost its power to influence this region within a nation and its literature, one cannot assume that there is no longer a South, for as Harwell further suggests, "the self-consciousness of the modern South is a part of its fabric because the nineteenth-century South wove the self-consciousness into its warp and woof." Other forces which also shaped the self-conscious South, such as poverty, slavery, miscegenation, a sense of tradition, gyniolatry, agrarianism, guilt, climate, and location, have all at one time been woven into the historical fabric of the region to produce a unique area which to this day keeps its "tap root [firmly implanted] in the old South."10

In Southern literature, one may conclude, as indeed Allan Tate does, that "the distinguishing feature of the Southern school... is the peculiar historical
consciousness of the Southern writer." The Southern writer's self-consciousness leads him not only to place traditionally a great emphasis upon history, upon a sense of the past, but also it leads him to emphasize the community as opposed to the individual:

Another deeply embedded trait of the Southern novelists is their way of treating man not as an individual alone with his conscience or his God, . . . but as an inextricable part of a living history and community, attached and determined in a thousand ways by other wills and destinies of people he has only heard about.  

Frequently this community is a rural one. As Cash notes, the South "is determined not nearly so much by industry as by the purely agricultural conditions of that past." Often the actual landscape, barren or fertile, mirrors the agricultural sterility or productivity of the community. Some Southern authors express concern over this predominantly agricultural community that turns its back to progress (i.e., progress equated with industrialization) and remains primarily agrarian. The community's denial of progress has prompted many writers to express concern for a society that refuses to examine the present, let alone aspire toward the future. Even today one may drive through a small, Southern rural community only to witness the denial's result: disintegration of the very community which its inhabitants seek to preserve. Allan Tate also suggests another reason for the disintegration of the
community: the inadequacy or in some cases the total absence of religion.\textsuperscript{14}

Whatever its cause, Southern writers, like Southern literary critics, treat the issue of disintegration differently. Some write Gothic fiction in which a protagonist like Roderick Usher witnesses the real and psychological collapse of his own decadent world, while other protagonists search for meaning in hope of restoring the community spiritually; these protagonists strive to reconstruct the Southern community by providing a religious foundation as opposed to a mythic one.

All of the characteristics discussed above have come to be associated with the writers of the Southern Renascence. As Lewis Simpson suggests, Faulkner, Warren, Welty, Lytle, Porter, Gordon, Tate and Wolfe attempt "to arrest the disintegration of meaning and history through literary reconstructions of the past.\textsuperscript{15} Simpson further suggests that man's essential nature "lies in his possession of the moral community of memory and history.\textsuperscript{16} The above writers develop this notion by searching for "images of existence which express the truth\textsuperscript{17} concerning the essential nature of man. Quite recently another school of criticism has emerged which examines some of the members of the renascence as authors who subordinate the Southern myth, the sense of community,
to emphasize the personal drama of the soul, the inner experience. Stories and novels whose heroes and heroines find the individual's journey to moral decision or spiritual realization related neither to Bull Run nor Cousin Beulah appear at every stage of the renascence. 18

Katherine Anne Porter, James Agee, Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and Caroline Gordon are considered Southern writers who treat the inner experience as a spiritual one and who frequently structure their works around a revelation of a Catholic or Anglican redemptive vision. 19

There remains, however, another category of Southern authors writing at the end of World War II. Lewis Simpson advocates that,

at the end of the Second World War, European and American writers gravitated toward an emphasis on the intensely personal struggle of the individual to find some meaning in an absurd and undefinable world. Instead of the restoration of civilization, the literary mind began to assume the question of the survival of the integrity of the individual psyche as a paramount motive. Thus we see a shifting of the terms of the controlling conflict in the Southern literary imagination. The struggle between the moral order of memory and history tends to be transformed into a struggle between a gnostic society and the existential self. The Southern experience as interpreted in the imagination of the Southern writer tends to lose its character as a symbol of the moral order of memory and history and to become more nearly a symbol of the isolation of self. 20
In other words, as Simpson succinctly suggests, "the covenant with memory and history have been abrogated in favor of a covenant with the existential self."21

It is this final theory that this dissertation will examine. Although the application of the theory shall require some adaptation and may indeed result in a more complex definition of the existential search in which the protagonist engages, the study of the solitary soul in the works of Kate Chopin, Ellen Glasgow, Carson McCullers and Shirley Ann Grau should afford some insights into works frequently passed over or misunderstood heretofore. Shirley Ann Grau's works demonstrate as well as support most clearly the belief that gyniolatry still shapes the attitudes of society toward the Southern woman as late as the 1970's. For this reason, Shirley Ann Grau's works dealing with the South will be the focal point of this study, for her works reveal the contemporary complexities and similarities of various female characters' search for self in the South. Kate Chopin's works establish the origin of the female prototype appearing in Grau's works, while Glasgow and McCullers' works further this character's development. Thus the time period with which this dissertation concerns itself begins with the late nineteenth century, and continues through the late twentieth century; therefore, Simpson's suggested chronology of the two periods of the Southern Renascence is not applicable
in the case of these Southern female novelists.  

The fact that the above writers are women and more specifically Southern women may account for their early preoccupation with self, since their mythic roles were and are antithetical to the search for self. Per Seyersted notes,

if the process of existential individuation is taxing on a man and freedom a lonely and threatening thing to him, it is doubly so for a woman who attempts to emancipate herself from the state of immanence to which our patriarchal world has assigned for milleniums.

In the South in the late nineteenth century, the patriarchal society was alive and well despite the fact that the male population had been substantially decreased by the war; in addition, as Scott suggests, although "the idea of the lady was part of America . . . the Southern lady's image took deep root. Her role was unusually confining there and in time she became a distinct type of American woman." Scott further defines the Southern woman's confining role: she is a submissive wife whose reason for being was to love, honor, obey, and occasionally amuse her husband, to bring up her children and manage her household . . . . She depended upon male protection . . . . She was timid and modest, beautiful and graceful . . . . It was her nature to be self-denying, and she was given to suffering in silence.
Interestingly, this submissive wife was worshipped. As Cash, Taylor, and Tindall note, gyniolatry was indeed an informing principle of the Southern myth. An intelligent, educated woman living in the South at the turn of the century was sure to find her mythic straightjacket a rigid convention worthy of discarding, but her attempt to discard a worn-out role was complicated by the expectations of the society in which she lived. Although the myth began to fade, it never totally disappeared from the minds of Southerners. Southern women were slow to join the suffrage movement, and, when they finally did, their Northern sisters often found Southern women to be too "feminine" in appearance and far too "charming" to aid the cause in the Senate; in fact, the Northern women were appalled at the number of social invitations the Southern suffrage members enjoyed, and feared the socializing would undermine their cause. Even with the vote, the Southern woman continued to defer to man: "the high hopes and optimistic predictions of suffrage leaders were not fulfilled . . . . The traditional [familial] sphere was a comfortable and undemanding place," and that was and is the realm in which the Southern woman lives. Although the myth of the Southern belle lives on, it is "not as a complete prescription for woman's life but as a style which as often as not [is] a facade to ward off criticism of unladylike independence or to please men."
Fortunately, the Southern woman seems to have superficially the right to choose her role, but as contemporary journalists have proven by identifying Rosalyn Carter as the "steel magnolia," society still identifies the contemporary Southern woman with the antebellum Southern belle.

It is the debunking of this myth with which Chopin, Glasgow, McCullers and Grau concern themselves. Their protagonists' search for self, their struggle to break away from a society in which their role has been specifically defined by the gyniolatry that pervades the Southern community, leads the individual protagonists through similar stages. As the discussion of the stages below will demonstrate, these writers suggest that the search should ideally lead to an androgynous consciousness, that is one that reveals a synthesis of the masculine truth (i.e., reason) and the feminine truth (i.e., intuition). In most of the novels, the protagonists' attempts to realize their androgynous selves are thwarted by the conventions of the Southern community. Initially, the protagonists' searches lead to identities incorporating the feminine principle only, for their recognition of self involves the belief posited to some extent by the Southern community that joy, romance, love, sexuality, procreativity and intuition are the components of a complete self. Although this perception of self is
already fragmented, it becomes even more so when the framework in which the search for self occurs is limited by a community which for centuries prescribed the female's social role, one in which love and sexuality become inseparable, and joy and procreativity result only when there is a balance between idealistic love and inherent sexuality. Since the protagonists depend upon their intuition to guide them initially in their search, they soon become frustrated by the inflexibility of a rigid society and find themselves slowly slipping away from this society to assume and to accept finally an existence on the periphery of the Southern community. As Page suggests, Faulkner implies

> that if woman is prevented from achieving the normal fulfillment of her sexual drives, she will become engaged in a denial of reality in which she clings to an illusory view of life in order to overcome her sense of the inadequacy and abnormality of her real existence . . .

It is at this point in their search that their illusory view of the world may frequently lead them to assume an identity incorporating the masculine principle only. Reason, as opposed to intuition, guides their actions; in addition, they physically begin to act out the male role. They become farmers, businessmen; they dress in a masculine fashion and they learn to live without intuitive emotional responses such as joy, love, or
procreativity. After the second stage in the search for self, the protagonists become totally isolated from society. In this isolation, whatever distorted identity they may have obtained begins to disintegrate, as does the search for self, until there is nothing left in the lives of the protagonists. It is at this point the novels end.

Collectively, these protagonists demonstrate the complexity of the search for self in a region where myth continues to inform the roles of women. Perceived as an ideal, the Southern woman quite logically mimics the qualities of that ideal to find acceptance. The ideal as it exists in the South superficially appears no different than the North's perception of the "lady," or the historical, fictional perception of the lady in English letters. Yet, no region but the South develops a label for its lady, the "Southern belle." As Jones notes in the most recent study of Southern women, there are many factors which influence the making of the "Southern belle" which distinguish her from her sisters throughout the world.

The core of the South's self-definition is the white, Southern woman. "The identity of the South is contingent in part upon persistence of its tradition of the lady," and perhaps it is this persistence which has prolonged the idea. Also "southern womanhood has from the
beginning been inextricably linked to racial attitudes. Its very genesis, some say, lay in the minds of guilty slaveholders who sought an image they could revere without sacrificing the gains of racial slavery. Thus the Southern woman's extreme helplessness leads the Southern gentleman to strive to protect her. Perhaps this mythic figure did serve as a diversionary tactic for the slaveholders, for in her helpless and innocent state, she must assuredly be protected from the threat of the black man who must be suppressed and his environment restricted so that the Southern woman remained ignorant and innocent of the black man's life.

The desire to protect the Southern belle leads her to depend upon others for her physical survival. Since she did not concern herself with the financial aspects of operating a home, she directed her energies toward her family. Thus her emotional and intuitive responses provided her basis for living. But, when, at the end of the Civil War in the state of Alabama, for instance, there were 80,000 widows, women then became responsible for the economics and the practical aspects of maintaining a home. The war produced "a generation of women without men." These women had to become practical, and since intuition had failed them, they turned to reason in order to survive. Unfortunately, the South's self-consciousness denied the end of the Southern belle's mythic role and
continued to hail her as a paradigm of what the South stood for and stands for today.

It is this tragedy of a resuscitated myth that the writers in this dissertation demonstrate. Their characters reveal the stages in the development of the Southern woman's role. They reveal her existence as the Southern belle before the war in that their characters initially embrace the feminine sphere totally. They portray her after the war, as a masculine figure governed by reason. And in the end, they portray her as an isolated character frustrated that reason has failed her. These characters' search for self governed overwhelmingly by historical factors suggests a kind of historical determinism, for the characters' fates begin to appear predetermined by both their real and fictional predecessors. Yet the women who write these books have themselves successfully overcome their mythic roles through their writings. These women demonstrate success in their own lives, and perhaps by showing the reader how to fail in the search for autonomy, these novelists suggest simultaneously how to succeed. A new role model for the Southern woman must be developed. She must be an androgynous, autonomous person who understands the role of history in shaping her life and who understands that intuition and reason complement one another. She must
not learn to live without love nor to live without reason. Once and for all time, she must debunk the myth of the Southern belle.
FOOTNOTES


3 C. Vann Woodward, "The Search for Southern Identity," in *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), p. 6. Woodward uses this term to describe the industrial revolution which begins in the fifties in the South. He chooses the word *Bulldozer* because many historical sites were destroyed by the brutal indifference of massive machinery.

4 Tindall, p. 23.

5 Tindall, p. 23.

6 Tindall, p. 43.


9 Harwell, p. 23.

10 Cash, p. x.

11 Tindall, p. 2.

13 Cash, p. x.


16 Simpson, p. 70.

17 Simpson, p. 70.

18 Slavick, p. 3. In William Slavick's introductory remarks, he observes that one of Caroline Gordon's distinguishing qualities is that her characters are portrayed with such strength that they do not succumb to Southern, social pressures as do characters in such works as Losing Battles, All the King's Men, and Light in August.

19 Slavick, p. 3. Slavick notes that although Faulkner, Warren, and Welty value piety upon its discovery, Porter, Gordon, Agee, and O'Connor more adequately provide the Southern society with a religious perspective, one that permits the reader to experience vicariously the individual's encounter with grace.

20 Simpson, p. 91.

21 Simpson, p. 99.

22 Simpson, p. 70. Simpson divides the Southern Renascence into two periods: the 1920-50's and the 1950's through the present. His division is not arbitrary, for he clearly suggests that each period emphasizes different aspects of Southern literature.


25 Scott, pp. 4-5.

26 Scott, p. 177. A rather extensive and an amusing account of the suffrage movement in the South and the North's reaction to the activist Southern belle can be found in Scott's chapter "The Right to Vote."

27 Scott, p. 211.

28 Scott, p. 211.


31 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). Gilbert and Gubar discuss the myths which have informed women for centuries and trace the myths' influence in the works of nineteenth-century English, women writers.


33 Jones, p. 4.

34 Jones, p. 5.

35 Scott, p. 106.
Chapter Two

A CONSENSUS OF REALITY: THE SEARCH FOR SELF IN THE WORKS OF CHOPIN, GLASGOW, AND McCULLERS

In 1899, Kate Chopin published *The Awakening*, a novel which portrays the struggle of a young woman seeking autonomy. Edna Pontellier, a Southern belle from Saint Louis, discovers her newly-awakened being while living in the lush, tropical environment of southern Louisiana and in the society of Creole women whose "lofty chastity . . . seems to be inborn and unmistakable" and whose "freedom of expression incomprehensible."¹ Edna Pontellier is a Southern woman whose flight from her prescribed role as the submissive and gracious wife of Leonce Pontellier reveals that the traditional New Orleans Creole society cannot reconcile her newly-discovered autonomous self with her previous role as wife and mother.

Upon publication of *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin, herself a Southern lady from Missouri and Louisiana, experienced society's rejection as had her protagonist. "When Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* appeared in print in 1899, the shock waves were felt from New York to Los Angeles."² The book was a disgrace. Mrs. Chopin's hometown paper, The Saint Louis *Republic*, observed that "In
her creations she commits unutterable crimes against police society, but in the essentials of art she never blunders. Like most of her work, however, The Awakening is too strong drink for moral babes, and should be labeled 'poison'. "3 From Boston to Los Angeles the reviewers called it a morbid and unwholesome book."4 The public opinion of the book quickly led the libraries to ban it. In the twentieth century, however, there are many critics who have acclaimed the novel as "an American classic that paved the way for the modern novel."5 It is seen as a novel "advanced in theme and technique over the novels of its day. The Awakening transcends its historical significance to remain a great reading experience."6

But amid the sprinklings of critical praise by critics such as Edmund Wilson, Larzer Ziff, and Kenneth Eble, other contemporary critics continue to find fault with the novel's protagonist and her struggle. George Spangler suggests that Edna becomes a pathetic, sentimental girl in the last pages of the novel,7 and Robert Arner states that her "suicide can be seen more clearly as an escape from the demands of art as well as from the children, an admission that she does not really possess the soul that dares and defies."8 Kauffman claims that "Edna kills herself solely because of the foredoomed emptiness of life stretching ahead of her,"9 and Wolff defines Edna as a schizoid character too concerned with
"pre-gential."\textsuperscript{10} These comments by Chopin's twentieth-century critics all seem to hinge upon value judgments concerning Edna's suicide. To deny the validity of the character's search through 275 pages of text and to judge that search by examining the very last pages of the novel as the key to understanding its complex message seems wrong-headed for several reasons. As Edmund Wilson suggests, Edna's death at the end of the novel "can hardly be called a suicide"\textsuperscript{11}; in addition, according to Anne Jones "a heroine's rebellious urge toward autonomy could be punished at the end or placed behind the veil of an acceptable formula in order for the southern woman writer to continue the acceptable profession of writing."\textsuperscript{12} We know that frequently Chopin was asked by her publishers to revise her works so that they might be more "acceptable" to the public, and it seems possible that Edna's suicide could be a contrived ending to undermine the real success of Edna's existential search. Whatever the significance of the ending of the novel, it becomes clear that a great deal of controversy questions whether Edna actually possesses the courage to deny society and to acquire autonomy.

In several stories prior to The Awakening, Chopin struggles with various characters who seek autonomy. The majority of these female characters are Southern women who either consciously or subconsciously strive to overcome
their mythic role. Like Grau, Chopin equates freedom of self with the integration of the masculine and feminine spheres and emphasizes the role of realizing one's sexuality in achieving a higher consciousness. When Chopin's figures fail to integrate both the masculine and feminine spheres, they frequently continue one-sided existences, revealing a stoic acceptance of their failure.

Such a character is Paula Von Stoltz in "Wiser Than a God" (1889). Paula is a very serious young woman who plans to follow in the footsteps of her father, who was a classical pianist. What she does not anticipate in her very practical scheme for success is romantic involvement. And when she does fall in love, she is forced to make a decision between a career and marriage. Her commitment to follow the desires of her family leads her to choose the former. Although George Brainard, Paula's pursuer, is a changed man when his proposal is refused, Paula's refusal leads her to a successful career as a concert pianist. Implicit in this brief story is the notion that if Paula chooses love and marriage she must give up her music, her career. Integration of the two is not an alternative.

Perhaps the integration of the two is not an alternative because Paula embodies the conflict inherent in a society which perceives woman as capable of "the labor of loving" only.13 George is the traditional Southern
gentleman who seeks complete devotion from his mate. Paula, herself a native Southerner, realizes that she cannot give of herself completely to her husband, for her commitment to music is a serious one. Neither Paula nor George can perceive a relationship in which Paula satisfies George's personal needs as well as her own. As the story ends many years later, we learn that Paula does indeed become a famous pianist who has closed her heart to all emotion. George, on the other hand, marries a Southern belle who proves herself a devoted mate.

According to Chopin in another story, "A Point at Issue!" (1889),"marriage... marks too often the closing period of a woman's intellectual existence." In this story, Chopin suggests that marriage was to be a form, that while fixing legally their relation to each other, was in no wise to touch the individuality of either; that was to be preserved intact. Each was to remain a free integral of humanity, responsible to no dominating exactions of so-called marriage laws. And the element that was to make possible such a union was trust in each other's love, honor, courtesy, tempered by the reserving clause of readiness to meet the consequences of reciprocal liberty.5

This type of union may work in theory, but fails in the story because the two "individuals" do not initially acknowledge the importance of the physical and emotional aspects of marriage. In the end, they recover from their one-sided vision to realize that they need to be close
physically. Ironically, Faraday accepts this aspect of the relationship because "my Nellie is only a woman after all," and implicit in his sexist observation is that he accepts the physical relationship not because he needs it, but because Nellie does. Obviously no true union of any kind as occurred here. In yet another story, Chopin continues to represent negative aspects of marriage. Louise Mallard, a Creole lady, in "The Story of an Hour" (1889) is secretly overjoyed to learn of her husband's accidental death. Her physical and spiritual metamorphosis occurs quickly after the news of his death: "'Free! Body and soul free!' she kept whispering." Upon discovering that the news of his death is erroneous through her husband's unexpected return, Louise dies "of joy that kills." With Chopin's characteristic de Maupassant twist, the story's ending suggests that real freedom lies outside the institution of marriage. In her earlier works, Chopin clearly portrays marriage as a denial of self. But it is not until 1899, that Chopin actually creates a character who goes beyond all traditional responses to marriage to emerge an autonomous soul. Edna Pontellier, heroine of The Awakening, is a twenty-eight year old Southern wife and mother who begins "to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her" (p. 33). The setting of the search
is southern Louisiana. At first, the protagonist's marriage seems sound. Initially, Léonce is the traditional protector and Edna the submissive but grateful wife. Freed from the stifling social setting of New Orleans, Edna responds to "the everlasting voice of the sea" (p. 14) on Grand Isle and discovers in the early pages of the novel that she is dissatisfied with her present role in life. Perhaps her dissatisfaction stems from her realization that she

was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels (p. 19).

Chopin goes on to describe this mother-woman as "the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams" (p. 19). The romantic ideal, Adèle Ratignolle, personifies the mythic figure of a "bygone heroine" and "mother-woman" and Southern belle. Edna chooses to deny this mythic role in order to define herself. As a "certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her, . . ." (p. 33) Edna accepts the challenge even though this challenge initiates a

beginning of things, of a world especially, . . . necessarily vague,
tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. How few of us ever emerge from such a beginning! How many souls perish in its tumult! (p. 34)

The initial fear and confusion of the search and its consequences are overridden by the sea's soothing effects upon Edna:

The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation.

The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace (p. 34).

This passage becomes a refrain throughout the novel, a placebo for the tumult of the search.

If ever we are doubtful of the author's sympathies in this novel, it seems that Chopin feels that women who are encouraged to wait for the "face and figure of a great tragedian" (p. 45) are basing their lives upon false hope. In the case of Edna, "her marriage to Leonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of Fate" (p. 46). Chopin suggests that Southern woman's blind acceptance of fate frequently precludes autonomy. If we are willing to respect fate blindly, then we are willing to accept society's definition of our roles. In doing so, we become one-sided; we acknowledge our feminine sphere
only and become "the mother-woman." The alternative is to become an artist like Mademoiselle Reiz and exist in an isolated world, outside the realm of the mother-woman. Mademoiselle Reiz is not feminine. She avoids contact with the sea, an erotic symbol. Her reaction is believed "natural" to the artistic temperament. She is eccentric and hard to please, a "most disagreeable and unpopular woman" (p. 152), a solitary figure.

It seems that Chopin has designated Edna as the one character who must try to integrate a little of both Adèle and Mademoiselle Reiz in order to possess "'the brave soul. The soul that dares and defies'" (p. 165). If successful in her search, Edna's autonomy is equated with the union of the feminine (i.e., Adèle) and the masculine (i.e., Mademoiselle Reiz) spheres, but as we soon discover, Edna's sexual awakening increases initially her emphasis upon the feminine sphere as evidenced by her dependence upon men. Robert and Alcée play important roles in Edna's search, for they satisfy her newly discovered physical desires. Although she may seem to go astray from the search for self in her involvement with Robert and Alcée, they do function meaningfully as catalysts in her search. After Robert's desertion, Edna comes to know a new kind of independence, "'To-day it is Arobin; tomorrow it will be some one else'" (p. 299). At least she comes to realize that totally sexual relationships are
also limited.

Before the final scene of the novel, Edna is faced once again with two alternatives: she can regain the life she lost with Léonce through an equally submissive life with Robert, or she can assume "the mother-woman" role of Adèle. The last scene with Robert is frustrating because Edna chooses to go to Adèle instead of choosing to remain with Robert. The scene with Adèle is equally frustrating, but Edna forces herself to remain to witness "the scene torture" (p. 288). She emerges from Adèle's claiming freedom: "'I'm not going to be forced into doing things ... I don't want anything but my own way" (pp. 291-292). Edna is confused about her new found freedom, and perhaps it is this confusion which leads her to return to the scene where she first awakened and became "the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence" (p. 70). She feels that she can "control the working of her body and her soul" (p. 70).

In this same heightened emotional state, Edna returns to Grand Isle. Perhaps Edna is less joyful at this awakening, for she has experienced the pain of the search as well as its joys, but she still appears, nevertheless, over-confident even though she recalls "the night she swam far out, and the terror that seized her at the fear of
being unable to regain the shore. She did not look back now, but went on and on . . ." (p. 302). This statement seems to suggest that she swims freely and no longer fears the water (i.e., Edna's swimming is symbolic of her successful integration of her newly-discovered identity). When she does realize that she is too far from the shore, "the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again" (p. 303). She seems to accept her destiny here and in the end becomes one with the sea.

Whether Edna commits suicide, as the majority of critics believe, or whether she over-estimates her strength and accidentally drowns, Edna does accept the challenge to search out a self-independent of the community. Since the ending may be contrived, as suggested earlier, perhaps the fact that Edna consciously strives to integrate her new found identity is the central idea of the novel. Whether she succeeds is another point to consider. Support for the former notion can be found in the author's own words in a fable she wrote when she was only eighteen:

EMANCIPATION, A LIFE FABLE

There was once an animal born into this world, and opening his eyes upon Life, he saw above and about him confining walls, and before him were bars of iron through which came air and light from without; this animal was born in a cage.
Here he grew, and throve in strength and beauty under care of an invisible protecting hand. Hungering, food was ever at hand. When he thirsted water was brought, and when he felt the need of rest, there was provided a bed of straw upon which to lie; and here he found it good, licking his handsome flanks, to bask in the sun beam that he thought existed but to lighten his home.

Awaking one day from his slothful rest, lo! the door of his cage stood open; accident had opened it. In the corner he crouched, wondering and fearingly. Then slowly did he approach the door, dreading the unaccustomed, and would have closed it, but for such a task his limbs were purposeless. So out the opening he thrust his head, to see the canopy of the sky grow broader, and the world waxing wider.

Back to his corner but not to rest, for the spell of the Unknown was over him, and again and again he goes to the open door, seeing each time more Light.

Then one time standing in the flood of it; a deep in-drawn breath—a bracing of strong limbs, and with a bound he was gone.

On he rushes, in his mad flight, heedless that he is wounding and tearing his sleek sides—seeing, smelling, touching of all things; even stopping to put his lips to the noxious pool, thinking it may be sweet.

Hungering there is no food but such as he must seek and ofttimes fight for; and his limbs are weighted before he reaches the water that is good to his thirsting throat.

So does he live, seeking, finding, joying and suffering. The door which accident had opened is open still, but the cage remains forever empty!
This fable is the key to understanding not only *The Awakening* but Chopin herself. The parallels between the fabled animal and Edna are apparent. Neither's fate is decreed, but both choose never to return to the comforts of a caged existence; instead, they dare and defy convention, "seeking, finding, joying and suffering." What lies beyond fulfillment of the search is a question Chopin chooses not to answer. But implicit in her silence is the attitude that the search for "the Unknown," although painful at times, is a search that leads to "more Light," symbolically suggesting that the search for self is infinitely more appealing than the caged, comfortable, conventional existence of a Southern belle.

Edna's role as a Southern belle is oppressively depicted. She is locked into a marriage that she does not want, and although she clearly informs Léonce that she wants to leave him, he ignores her demands. He is more concerned with society's perception of himself, and so he designs a masquerade which explains his wife's absence. Even Edna finds that society's expectations are the reason she permits the children to go to their grandmother's in the country. The stigma of her liberated life would be detrimental to the well-being of the children. Robert, whose expectations are also governed by society, leaves Edna because she would not permit herself to be viewed as his possession:
I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,' I should laugh at you both (p. 289).

There is literally no one in Edna's world who understands her plight. In the end, it is the Southern Creole society which denies the newly awakened Edna an acceptable position. Denied her autonomy, Edna flees from society to swim freely in the ocean. Ironically, it is her last, truly free act which destroys her. Society's denial of Edna's autonomy is consistent with the South's refusal to debunk the myth of the Southern belle. Edna becomes Chopin's paradigm of the Southern woman who fails to integrate herself.

Like Chopin, Ellen Glasgow is also concerned with the role of the woman in the South. Almost every novel of the twenty she wrote depicts one female character who epitomizes the Southern belle. Glasgow discusses the function of her writing: "though the chief end of the novel is to create life, there is a secondary obligation which demands that fiction shall, in a measure at least, reflect the movement and tone of its age." And indeed Glasgow's writings record a Southern history from pre-Civil War times to post-depression times, and always in that history is at least one female figure struggling to free herself from her role as a Southern woman. Like
Chopin, Glasgow's characters are concerned with propriety, and it is frequently this concern which denies them autonomy.

Glasgow further clarifies her role as a Southern woman novelist. She states she would write as no Southerner had ever written. . . . I would write of all the harsher realities beneath manners, beneath social customs, beneath the poetry of the past, and the romantic nostalgia of the present. . . . I would take as my theme those ugly aspects of life the sentimentalists passed over.22

One harsh reality for Glasgow was the "inescapable essence called Southern-ness."23 This essence defines the role of the Southern woman and limits her existence. Imprisoned in "romantic nostalgia" the Southern woman in Glasgow's fiction never wholly realizes an androgynous existence. Glasgow's characters seem to dwell either in the feminine sphere or the masculine sphere. Her attempts to integrate the two fail. But whether Glasgow's figures succeed or fail, the search for self is clearly a major concern of hers.

In her first novel, The Descendant (1897), Glasgow creates Rachel Gavin as a paradigm of what Glasgow refers to as the "New Woman." But Rachel Gavin is not strongly characterized and at times her artistic attempts are unbelievable. Although "the book clearly expresses the author's anguish of soul and her rebellion,"24 it leaves
much to be desired in the depiction of Rachel's character and the sincerity of her aspirations for autonomy. In her fifth novel, *Virginia* (1913), Glasgow clearly struggles
to unmask an ideology within which her contemporaries took shelter. Throughout her life she fought to free herself from the concept that there is an inescapable essence called Southern-ness or that as a consequence of heredity and childhood environment she was condemned for life to the attitudes and closed patterns of behavior which mark ... the 'Southern lady'.

*Virginia*, the protagonist, is a Southern lady. Together, she and her mother "embody the ideal of Southern women who in youth look toward a future in which love, marriage, and motherhood define the limits of their existence."  

The school which Virginia attends clearly demonstrates the "Southern-ness" of the female's education:

The chief object of her upbringing, which differed in no essential particular from that of every other well-born and well-bred Southern woman of her day, was to paralyze her reasoning faculties so completely that all danger of mental 'unsettling' or even movement was eliminated from her future. To solidify the forces of mind into the inherited mould of fixed beliefs was, in the opinion of the age, to achieve the definite end of all education. When the child ceased to wonder before the veil of appearance, the battle of orthodoxy with speculation was over, and Miss Priscilla felt that she could rest on her victory.
It is with these "fixed beliefs" that Virginia blunders through her life ignoring obvious signals which warn that Oliver as well as her children are slipping from her. Yet, her only acknowledged antagonist is time:

But time, her antagonist, had conquered. Minute by minute, with the slow wash of the tides on a beach, time had worn away her loveliness, her innocence, her flushed expectancy, her radiant belief in life, which was dimmed but never extinguished. One after another, like sands drifting, all the little graces, all the small things that made up the sweetness of life, slipped by and were gone. More slowly still, under those soundless waves of the years, the larger things also began to pass from her, the dependence of her children, the imperative desires of her husband, the multitude of daily services that had once filled the present emptiness of her heart. Nothing but constancy was left to her and constancy, when it has outlived its usefulness, is as barren as fortitude. Time had not crushed her, but, little by little, the years had nibbled away the very roots of her life.  

Virginia's life ends in nothing; "her dignity is only the dignity of dumb immobility."  

Glasgow clearly indict society in this novel for creating an environment which perpetuates "the worship ... of 'evasive idealism'." For Glasgow, Virginia is the incarnation of an ideal and the irony is directed, not at her, but at human nature which creates an ideal only to abandon it when that ideal comes to flower. She was not a weak character, but her vision was
that of the heart. Her strength was the strength of selfless devotion.31

The tragedy inherent in gyniolatry once again emerges in the writings of Glasgow. Virginia's "selfless devotion" denies her a chance to search for an identity independent of the community. She is one of the few characters examined in this dissertation who is totally obedient to social dictums. Interestingly, even a life lived according to tradition does not bring happiness—only constancy. Glasgow suggests that fulfillment lies beyond convention.

In 1925, Glasgow publishes Barren Ground, a novel that characterizes its protagonist as a woman who ignores social dictums to attain autonomy. But the critics' reactions as well as Miss Glasgow's observations suggest differing degrees of success for the protagonist. According to Frederick McDowell, "this excellent novel has as its central insight the paradox that Dorinda is both victor and victim in her struggle with the soul."32 Frazee identifies Dorinda as the archetype of the liberated woman,33 and Blair Rouse suggests that "Dorinda has sustained a wound which makes her triumph less than complete."34 Glasgow thought it her best book and recalled that it "was torn out of myself" and written "in one of those blessed pauses that fall between the 'dark wood' of the soul and the light on the horizon."35 Glasgow further declares
that "the only thing that mattered was her [Dorinda's] triumph over circumstances."\textsuperscript{36} Despite the controversy concerning Dorinda Oakley of \textit{Barren Ground}, no one denies that she learns to live without love, a fact that prevents Dorinda from achieving an androgynous existence. The pattern of the novel and Dorinda's search for self is predictable. Initially, Dorinda is totally feminine:

> a glow of expression, an April charm in her face. Her eyes were her one memorable feature. Large, deep, radiant, they shone beneath her black lashes with a clear burning colour, as blue as the spring sky after rain . . . . But the rich dark red in her cheeks lent vividness to her face, and when she smiled her eyes and mouth lighted up as if a lamp shone within. Against the sordid background of the store, her head in the brilliant shawl was like some exotic flower.\textsuperscript{37}

She also anticipates the joy that will come through a loving relationship:

> At twenty, her imagination was enkindled by the ardour that makes a woman fall in love with a religion or an idea. Some day, so ran the bright thread of her dream, the moving train would stop, and the eyes that had flashed into hers and passed by would look at her again. Then the stranger who was not a stranger would say, 'I knew your face among a thousand, and I came back to find you.'\textsuperscript{38}

When she does meet "the stranger," Jason Greylock, she recognizes "love with the infallible certainty of intuition,"\textsuperscript{39} and acknowledges love as "the secret ecstasy of the heart of experience."\textsuperscript{40}
In her search, Dorinda initially discovers that being in love provides a new way of looking at the world:

    Love! That was the end of all striving for her healthy nerves, her vigorous youth, the crown and the fulfillment of life! At twenty, a future without love appeared to her as intolerable as the slow martyrdom of her mother.

This observation clearly echoes Glasgow's comment that "love, marriage and motherhood define the limits" of a Southern woman's life. Dorinda desires nothing more than love. She becomes frivolous and foolish, and in her foolishness she conceives Jason's child. At the beginning of the novel, Dorinda's vision is clearly one-sided. She is an intuitive, emotional character responding to "blind instinct."

When she discovers that Jason has married another, Dorinda's transformation of character begins:

    'So it is true,' she said aloud, and the words, spoken without a thought behind them, startled her. The instant afterwards she began to come back to existence; she could feel life passing through her by degrees, first in her hands and feet, where needles were pricking, then in her limbs, and at last in her mind and heart. And while life fought its way into her, something else went out of her forever--youth, hope, love--and the going was agony.

    ... 'So this is the end,' she said aloud, and then very slowly, 'I didn't know I could feel like this. I didn't know anybody could feel like this.'

How often has this same observation appeared in Grau's
works? How frequently do Southern women characters bid farewell to youth and love? The answer is that many female characters come to a point in their lives when they must deny their intuition and emotions in order to persevere in a Southern community. They learn, if they are perceptive, that love, blind love, provides a false reason for living. Even though all their lives they are taught that men are to be depended upon, they soon come to learn that men offer no real hope for happiness. Frustrated in love, they turn to the world of reason to find a purpose for living. In doing so, these women ironically assume the qualities of the men who are responsible for the women's frustrations. Dorinda is such a character. She assumes a masculine role in her attempt to reclaim the sterile lands of the Oakley's farm, all the while constructing a barrier between herself and emotion, so that when she sees that she has bitten her lip so hard that blood falls on her fingers and she has not felt it, she knows that "nothing like that, nothing on the outside of herself, could ever hurt her again." 43

The juxtaposition of irony and blood in the above scene recalls Glasgow's statement that

the South needed blood and irony.  
Blood it needed because Southern culture had strained too far away from its roots in the earth . . .  
it was satisfied to exist on borrowed ideas, to copy instead of create.  
And irony is an indispensable
ingredient of the critical vision; it is the softest antidote to sentimental decay."44

Dorinda's ironic denial of her feminine qualities demonstrates her own lack of creativity in providing herself an alternative to the role of the Southern lady. She chooses to emulate man and to assume his equally one-sided vision. In her role transformation, she displays, no matter how distorted, her "vein of iron." "The vein of iron in her nature would never bend, would never break, would never melt completely in any furnace."45

When Dorinda recovers from her fall from innocence, "passion stirred again in her heart; but it was passion transfigured, recoiling from the personal to the impersonal object."46 While she is positively characterized as being interested in the logical progression of ideas from a beginning to an end, she is filled "with aversion" at the thought of love and lives a lonely life. These negative emotional deficiencies seem minor when Dorinda herself glows with triumph when Bob Ellgood perceives her with "impersonal admiration":

Just as if she had been a man, she thought with a glow of triumph. Though the sensation was without the excitement of sex vanity, she found that it was quite as gratifying. 47 And, she suspected, more durable.

She now dresses solely in overalls, and in general her coarsened features become "less appealingly feminine."
"The inexorable triumph of fact over emotion appeared to be the only reality."\(^{48}\)

When Dorinda continues her goal-oriented search for recovering the barren land and decides "Five Oaks" must be reclaimed also, the reader becomes aware of her true motivation--revenge. Despite her denouncement of emotion, it is hate, not reason, that transfigures Dorinda's character. She seeks to conquer Jason, not through his heart, but through his land.

To accomplish her goal, Dorinda knowingly marries a man whom she does not love and whose bed she does not share. In her marriage to Nathan, Dorinda chooses "the best substitute for love which is tolerance . . . ."\(^{49}\) When Nathan dies, Dorinda "remained unshaken by her loss,"\(^{50}\) and when Jason, her estranged lover, dies, she leaves him with "regret but not with grief."\(^{51}\) Dorinda appears emotionally impotent in the face of her tragedy. Inwardly she becomes "the psychological prisoner of the man who has betrayed her."\(^{52}\) In the final lines of the novel, Dorinda declares "Oh, I've finished with all of that, . . . I am thankful to have finished with all that."\(^{53}\) Perhaps Dorinda protests too loudly, for even after a life barren of emotion she realizes "that the only thing that made life worth living was the love she had never known and the happiness she had missed."\(^{54}\)
Glasgow seems to suggest that there is no substitute for love. Dorinda’s total negation of love and total acceptance of an impersonal life “maintains her in a dangerous pose—dangerous because [it is] suggestive of a strained artificiality, of extra-human behavior, or to the modern sensibility, of a burgeoning case of neuroses.”

Like her fictional sisters, Dorinda is neurotic in her denial of love. In her dogged determination to forget love, she “tacitly concedes its pervasive power; and by her very aversion to sexual emotion, she tacitly acknowledged its force.” In a materialistic sense, Dorinda does triumph over circumstance but fails miserably on a personal level. She denies her feminine existence and thus represents only part of a whole vision. Through this negation of herself, Dorinda embodies Glasgow’s ironic vision which clearly suggests the tragedy of a society that can only copy existing roles.

In later novels, Glasgow continues to characterize women who search for identity. In Vein of Iron (1935), Ada emerges as a strong figure who triumphs over many ordeals, but her success also seems qualified, for in the end she has only a worthless husband and a hope for a better tomorrow. Eva Birdsong in The Sheltered Life (1932), “embodies a myth and is its victim: she is the personification of the Southern Beauty: she is crushed by the
demands of that myth." Eva observes, "'when you've never been yourself for forty years, you've forgotten what you are really . . . I'm worn out with being somebody else--with being somebody's ideal." For Eva, autonomy never comes.

Once when Glasgow was asked to define feminism, she replied that it is "a revolt from pretense of being . . . a struggle for the liberation of personality." A great many of her characters do struggle for liberation. Unfortunately, none really succeeds in the sense that they are not victim and victor simultaneously. Glasgow's vision is truly ironic, for her characters who do reject the role of the Southern lady triumph over circumstance only. Their success is qualified, for "to include neither the heart's warmth nor the pleasure and comfort of the flesh . . . [is] in the end merely a matter of existing." Glasgow's characters find no real happiness in this life.

In the works of Carson McCullers, many characters also appear who possess "neither the heart's warmth nor the pleasure and comfort of the flesh," yet, McCuller's fiction is quite different from that of Glasgow and Chopin in that she belongs to the Gothic School in Southern literature. "There is something in the region, something in the blood and culture, of the Southern state that has somehow made them the center of this Gothic school of
McCullers seems to intuit "an underlying dreadfulness in modern experience."\(^{62}\) This dreadfulness of McCullers is frequently communicated to the reader through the use of the grotesque. Thus her female characters who become disillusioned in their search for love are often symbols of the grotesque and the violent as indeed Leonora Penderton and Alison Langdon are in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941). Leonora's concept of love is quite grotesque as she searches for physical gratification beyond the realm of her perverse marriage to her bisexual husband Captain Penderton. Alison's search is perhaps even more pathetic in that the frustration she feels from her inability to find love with her husband leads her to cut off her nipples with garden shears. Alison finally dies alone after a two-day stay at the asylum to which her husband commits her. Amidst the Georgia setting, no one in the novel discovers love; in fact, McCullers seems to suggest that love does not truly exist on this military base.\(^{63}\)

Leonora and Alison are very Southern women. They are products of the author's innate regionalism. As McCullers observes,

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No matter what the politics, the degree
or nondegree of liberalism in a
Southern writer, he is still bound to
this peculiar regionalism of language
and voices and foliage and memory.\(^{64}\)
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McCullers suggests that her work is predicated upon her "homeland."65 Leonora and Alison symbolically represent the distortions inherent in the sexuality of McCullers' Southern women. Alison is initially perceived by her husband as untainted, virginal, retiring. She is asexual and her asexuality leads her to desex her body metaphorically by cutting off her nipples. Leonora's unconsummated marriage leads her to search for sexual gratification elsewhere. She is sexuality personified, a nymphomaniac. As defined by her mythic role, the Southern woman cannot be both wife and lover. Leonora and Alison represent the tragedy of this vision.

In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), Mick is the young Southern adolescent who soon learns to distinguish between her ideal "inside room" and reality. For Mick, there is her "inside room" where romantic notions are entertained, and there is her "outside room," the real world where the drabness and stifling environment of a small, Southern town eventually destroy the "inside room." "Mick is defined by the extremity of her isolation and the fever of her fantasy life."66 Her fantasy life is predicated upon Mick's desire to be a Southern lady. She yearns for fine things and for a boy friend that will treat her like a princess. But when these things do not come to Mick, her sense of isolation grows.
In her first novel, "McCullers presents love as the only available anodyne to isolation..." and in a story where everyone except Singer fails to love completely, there is no relief for the four characters who choose as their love-object or "beloved" a deaf-mute who commits suicide. Mick grows even more isolated from the community after Singer's death. In McCullers' The Member of the Wedding (1946), another young Southern adolescent searches for love. Like Mick, Frankie also bases her search upon false hopes, and when her childhood illusions are destroyed and the wedding fails to fulfill her desires, she becomes "an unjoined person" and "a member of nothing in the world." McCullers' most tragic Southern female character thwarted by love, Miss Amelia Evans, appears in The Ballad of the Sad Café (1943).

McCullers tells the story of a strange and tragic love affair between a mannish giant of a woman, Miss Amelia Evans, and a hunchback dwarf, Cousin Lymon, that turns a small backwater town in Georgia into a stage of high, albeit bizarre, drama and romance. Miss Amelia differs from other characters discussed heretofore in that her femininity is denied her completely. She is raised motherless by her father, a strong, powerful man, who taught Amelia to be a man:

early in youth she had grown to be six feet two inches tall which in itself is
not natural for a woman, and her ways and habits of life were too peculiar ever to reason about. 
. Miss Amelia often tilted back her chair, tightened her fist, and felt the hard, supple muscles of her right arm beneath the clean, blue cloth of her shirt sleeves.

Miss Amelia is "tall, dark and unapproachable in a rough, masculine way." Her sense of identity is totally distorted, for she never comes to know the nature of her own femininity, and thus if a patient came with a female complaint she could do nothing. Indeed at the mere mention of the words her face would slowly darken with shame, and she would stand there craning her neck against the collar of her shirt, or rubbing her swamp boots together, for all the world like a great, shamed, dumb-tongued child.

Her ill-fated, ten day marriage to Marvin Macy further characterizes her distorted identity. "Amelia's unconsummated marriage to Marvin Macy suggests that her denial of feminine identity may prevent her response to physical love from any man." What is particularly interesting about Miss Amelia is that despite her failure to recognize her essential feminine nature, she still desires to love; in fact, her desire is so strong that she does not really care if the object of her love ever loves her in return. Amelia's beloved, Cousin Lymon, a dwarfed-hunchback, consumptive, estranged relative, symbolically represents the distortion
inherent in Amelia's identity which denies her femininity. Yet, even perverse love appears better than no love at all.

By learning to love she has become more human--more tender, gracious, amiable, perceptive; but also more obviously exposed to the inevitable strings of loneliness, betrayal and suffering.74

In learning to love Amelia becomes more emotional and less rational. Ironically, it is this acknowledgment of her love which paves the road to her demise and death-in-life existence.

McCullers tells the reader that "the value and quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself."75 Thus the love of a character such as Amelia, which is inextricably linked to the distorted way in which she perceives herself and is perceived, is a perverse love. It is "an unbalanced, disorderly love, containing in its single-minded intensity the seeds of its own destruction. It is a possessive irrational, nonreciprocal love and therefore tragic and doomed."76 As McCullers states, "the lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause him only pain,"77 and when Macy returns and Cousin Lymon joins forces with Macy, Miss Amelia experiences only pain from her attempt to maintain a loving relationship with Cousin Lymon.

Miss Amelia is initially the beloved. But in the face of first love between a man and a woman, between Macy and
Miss Amelia, it is she who cannot return his love. The townspeople are aware that the marriage is never consummated; it is never consummated because Miss Amelia is "sexless," as McCullers observes. For this reason, Macy, the frustrated lover, "comes to know a new, strange loneliness and it is this knowledge which makes him suffer," and eventually leads him to seek revenge. Miss Amelia's "sexless" character also dictates her frustrated, doomed role as both lover and beloved. For Miss Amelia, love becomes

a force which drives the lover into deeper isolation by driving him in on himself . . . . Eros, if frustrated leads to hatred and destruction . . . .

Thwarted by love, the once strong, supple, dark, masculine figure becomes "broken, soft, and sad." After waiting almost four years for Lymon, "Amelia hired a Cheehaw carpenter and had him board up the premises, and there in those closed rooms she has remained ever since."

Unlike Macy, who survives his unsuccessful role as lover, Miss Amelia does not. She withdraws from the community totally. She lives alone in her boarded-up building and becomes only

a face like the terrible dim faces known in dreams--sexless and white, with two gray crossed eyes which are turned inward so sharply that they seem to be exchanging with each other one long and secret gaze of grief.
Alienated from the forces of life, she becomes an idle, useless woman. "doomed to death and sterility, the sign of death in life."83 Prior to this withdrawal, Miss Amelia seeks to define herself, but her asexuality distorts the search and leads only to frustration.

Although Miss Amelia is perceived as a grotesque symbol of the Southern Gothic school of letters, she is, nevertheless, a product of the Southern society that denies her sexuality and her autonomy. She cannot live as a woman, nor can she exist as a man. As a predominantly masculine figure, lacking intuition and emotion, she remains apart from the community and successfully triumphs over circumstance. When she does try to love, it is an asexual, ineffectual love. Frustrated in love, she withdraws from the community and exists solely as a peripheral, neurotic figure like so many of the characters discussed in this dissertation.

Carson McCullers observed that the locale of her fiction "might always be Southern," her own reality created from the "voices reheard from childhood."84 Her vision reveals the tragedy of the Southern society which denies its women acceptable, alternative ways of life. The grotesqueness of McCullers' works suggest the nature of this society that lends credence to a myth which simultaneously portrays the Southern woman as the Romantic ideal and the mockery of that ideal because of her human
limitations. Inherent in this idealization of the Southern belle is the tragedy of the Southern woman's role in fiction. As an ideal, she has no real sense of identity and as a person her search for self is doomed in a community that cannot or will not accept her human limitations. Thus, the search for self is thwarted by the symbolic perhaps archaic role of the Southern woman as Southern belle. There is no liberation from pretense of being in McCullers' vision.
FOOTNOTES


3 Saint Louis Globe-Democrat, May 13, 1899. The Saint Louis Republic is quoted from Rankin, p. 173 (see Chapter VII, n. 38).


6 Eble, p. vii.


8 Arner, p. 166.


12 Jones, p. 39.

14 Kate Chopin, Complete Works, p. 50.

15 Chopin, p. 50.

16 Chopin, p. 58.

17 Chopin, p. 354.

18 Chopin, p. 354.


20 Chopin, Complete Works, p. 38.


25 Raper, p. ix.

26 Rouse, Ellen Glasgow, p. 77.


30. Santas, p. 83.


45. Glasgow, Ground, p. 133.
46. Glasgow, Ground, p. 188.
47. Glasgow, Ground, p. 225.
49. Glasgow, Ground, p. 300.
50. Glasgow, Ground, p. 345.
51. Glasgow, Ground, p. 345.
52. McDowell, p. 155.
57. Rouse, Ellen Glasgow, p. 110.
62. Williams, p. x.
63 Margaret B. McDowell, Carson McCullers (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), p. 56. McDowell suggests that "significant communication between individuals, involving their minds and hearts, is totally absent . . . ."


65 McCullers, p. 279.


67 McDowell, p. 34.

68 Graver, p. 297.


71 Graver, p. 288.

72 McCullers, Ballad, p. 17.

73 McDowell, p. 68.

74 Graver, p. 294.

75 McCullers, Ballad, p. 27.

76 McDowell, p. 91.

77 McCullers, Ballad, p. 27.
79 McDowell, p. 71.
80 McCullers, *Ballad*, p. 70.
81 McCullers, *Ballad*, p. 70.
82 McCullers, *Ballad*, p. 4.
85 Page, p. 35.
Chapter Three

THE HOUSE ON COLISEUM STREET

In Shirley Ann Grau's The House on Coliseum Street (1961), The Condor Passes (1971), and The Keepers of the House (1964), the "emphasis on the intensely personal struggle of the individual to find some meaning in an absurd and undefinable world"¹ structures her protagonists' lives. Joan Mitchell of The House on Coliseum Street, Abigail Howland Tolliver of The Keepers of the House, and Anna Oliver Caillet of The Condor Passes strive to preserve their individual integrity; all seek their androgynous identity² in a world where the order of memory and history inform society; and all suffer an isolation imposed upon them in their search for existential individuation. Even though Grau's setting is more contemporary than Chopin's, the time treated in the novel does not lessen the influence which the Southern community has upon the protagonist. It does, if anything, lend credence to the popular notion that despite the century, the South is an indigenous area not unlike a nation within a nation. The contemporary protagonist still demonstrates initially in her search that love and acceptance are foremost in securing some sense of self. Although this notion is entirely deceptive, it is a
concept perpetuated by the South's emphasis upon gyniolatry. This notion also reveals the rather one-sided character of a protagonist who recognizes only one side of her androgynous being, her intuitive, emotional nature. This emphasis upon the feminine principle initially distorts the search, for instead of striving to obtain a sense of self independent of the community or anyone for that matter, she begins defining herself in terms of others, primarily men. Since the male-female relationships end in failure, the protagonist frequently assumes the role of the male with whom she cannot find fulfillment. In the role transformation she becomes very business-like, void of emotion. She may lose interest in her outward appearance; she may even dress in a masculine fashion, revealing a sexless figure, one whose femininity is shrouded by a thin veil of reason (i.e., the masculine principle). It is during this period that the protagonist begins yet another stage in her development: her sociopathic tendencies emerge. Her socially and perhaps sexually deviant behavior elicits a response from society which forces her further and further from the Southern community. She no longer plays the traditional role cast for her by the community, and so she becomes a freak of sorts, a psychopath to some. This antisocial behavior is frequently responsible for the final stage in the disintegration of her search for self. She seems to precipitate this total disintegration by performing actions which
destroy not only herself but also the person and/or the community which has restricted and finally aborted her existential search. At the end, nothing is left except the painful memories of an unsuccessful attempt to integrate the masculine and feminine principles. She becomes a shell of a person existing on the periphery of a society which has denied any of her attempts to preserve her personal integrity. In Grau's works, then, the search for self is not independent of the Southern community. The community reveals a kind of strength and rigidity which defies the search for autonomy.

Joan Mitchell in *The House on Coliseum Street*, is the first protagonist of Grau's who struggles for autonomy. Joan does so in a novel which structurally mirrors the decay of her search and which symbolically establishes Joan as an outsider, not only in the community but in her own home as well, an individual who knows no freedom, and as is the case in most novels, "the problem of freedom is clearly related to that basic duality between Self and the World . . . ."³ Symbolically, Grau clearly develops this notion when she, through imagery, establishes Joan as an outsider. Structurally, this duality prevails as the novel mirrors the disintegration of the self through the four sections in which the novel is divided, while it simultaneously explores an ageless, inflexible society predicated upon myth, a sterile society whose self-conviction purports that aberrant
behavior can be negated by not acknowledging it. The "Introduction" of the novel portrays Joan after her abortion, the ultimate result of one afternoon spent with an economics professor at Tulane. Already the twenty-one year old protagonist has discovered that she has only superficially attempted to define herself, for she has searched for her identity in the faces of the men with whom she associates, and she has learned that she will be the only one who will remember the abortion; the others who know will simply choose to forget. Their denial and her acceptance of the abortion will only further isolate Joan from the house on Coliseum Street. Through the imagery in this first section, Grau clearly develops Joan's isolation. Joan's world is that of the Gulf, a plane of existence just beyond the four-lane coast highway where intuitively she responds to the moods of a world free from restraint:

She had been aware of it for some time. Even without looking she had felt its approach, had felt a change, that was really little more than a quiver in the air . . . . She could [now] see the rain, a grey haze like smoke . . . . She could smell it now too, the wonderful exciting smell of rain . . . .

Perhaps symbolically, Grau is equating the coming of the cleansing rain with Joan's new-found freedom, a freedom accorded by her absence from Coliseum Street. Joan "felt different here on the coast. The air seemed lighter and clearer, especially when a wind blew from across the Gulf . . . ." (p. 7). Joan's new sense of freedom is deceiving,
for inwardly she continues to contemplate the loss of the child, and eventually this contemplative attitude will evolve into a psychotic obsession which will destroy Joan's efforts to define herself.

Through dramatic irony, Grau portrays Joan. Joan is not what she appears to be. She outwardly appears to enjoy her solitude and to have suffered no emotional damage from the abortion, but inwardly she continues to imagine the appearance of the fetus, and when she is not thinking of the fetus, she daydreams while she reads poetry symbolic of the false hopes and dreams that have and will direct her search for self:

O western wind, when wilt thou blow
That the small rain down can rain?
Christ, that my love were in my arms
And I in my bed again (p. 5).

Joan acknowledges that the poetry is "silly," but even as she acknowledges this to be true, she also remembers and feels the airy quality of an empty womb--the unborn fetus--Michael--love--all aborted because of a simple phone call by Aurelie, Joan's mother. Without fully understanding the significance of true love, rather than the socially acceptable love provided by society, Joan continues to conceive of bliss in socially acceptable terms--the reading of romantic poetry. Aurelie's arrival will introduce the socially acceptable world, a relativistic world "where genuine feelings must be replaced by social and self-
deceptions.  

The imagery describing the socially acceptable city reveals that unlike the lighter air of the Gulf, New Orleans is a "close windless . . . river town" (p. 7). It is a city filled with

oleander bushes with their glossy
thriving poisonous leaves. The grass
and vines grew so frantically you could
see them move the way you could see
the heavy white moonflowers open on
summer nights, the way they unfolded
in the heat, stretching until their
backs were broken and they flopped
open and died. And the sky was like
a teacup fitted overhead, close and
hard and shiny as china (pp. 7-8).

New Orleans is the world the self must confront. It is filled with deceptive beauty, boulevards and yards filled with the giant bushes profuse with white and pink blossoms framed by poisonous leaves, moonflowers pregnant with a summer growth that gives birth to heavy blossoms and a wretched back-breaking death, grass and vines which appear alive and frantically encompassing whatever object they choose to strangle, and finally the entire deceptive city is covered by a sky that is close and hard and unyielding. This is the world of the house on Coliseum Street. It is this world that Joan must return to after having undergone a traumatic affair, which, like the death of the moonflowers, has left her broken and vulnerable. She must return to a house filled with the past, a house where she was born and a house that her great-great
grandfather built, and a house that would be hers some day and that would forever remind her of all the people and all the decisions that were ignored because they conflicted with the rigid, defined world of the teacup.

In the "Introduction," Joan is revealed as a weak character whose responsibility for deciding the fate of her unborn is willingly delegated to a mother whose conventional behavior permits the mother to handle the situation efficiently and discreetly. It is only after the abortion that Joan really acknowledges that she was pregnant; she feels an emptiness:

And your body was so light and hollow that you wondered sometimes whether the wind would get inside it, behind it, and blow it over and over. It was so light, it was so dry . . . . Joan held out her hand and looked at it, and she felt a little tingle of surprise. It wasn't dry or withered, but it felt that way . . . (p. 5).

This emptiness pervails and gives structure to Joan's life when she returns to New Orleans with Aurelie and Fred, her old boyfriend who knows nothing of the abortion.

Upon their return to New Orleans, the house on Coliseum Street is described in such a manner that it assumes a life of its own. As is typical of Grau's works, the house is the center of the novel. Here all important decisions are made and all of its people come and go intruding in each other's lives while at the same time maintaining a discreet distance. It is a house that Joan
loves and hates, but a house which 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. Although Aurelie and her five husbands and her five daughters have all lived within the house, Antony Mitchell's presence always looms above the others:

the tiny fountain winked at Joan as they went up the front walk. The brilliant yellow tiles gleamed even in the half light of the evening (p. 13).

Since Mitchell's personal touch to each of his houses was a fountain, it is the fountain that Grau personifies in order to remind Joan of her father. Not only does Joan's father's presence comfort her, but the house and her room as well. The conflict created within the house is simply the result of the presence of those who do not carry the blood of the Mitchells. The house was constructed in 1840 by Mitchell's grandfather and the fountain by Mitchell after Mitchell and Aurelie married. Both structures have withstood the storms of human emotion.

Upon her return, when Joan finally has a chance to flee to the privacy of her room, she finds that her ambivalent feelings about her room have dissipated. She no longer hates the furniture, the musty smell. She actually aches with a degree of relief to be back in the house, in her room, yet even as she sighs with relief, she
grimly recalls the tradition for the planting of the camphor trees which line Coliseum Street. It is a tradition which she abhors and which she anticipates destroying by cutting the trees with an ax, but Joan knows that even she will not destroy the tradition even if its meaning is no longer relevant, for she does not yet possess the strength which will enable her to sever ties with the past. She thinks:

I shouldn't have come back. I should have found a way to go off somewhere. But I didn't. I'm back and caught just where I was four months ago. Where I said I wouldn't ever be again. I came back, I came back. Whatever happens, I did (p. 20).

Upon this note, the "Introduction" concludes, and Grau, in the following sections, prepares the reader for the events which lead to this moment and beyond. Already it becomes quite clear that Joan's attempt to define herself and understand her identity is thwarted by the presence of tradition. Her initial search to define herself begins symbolically in the month of June when the world gives birth and mankind also admires the forces of procreation.

The title of the first section of the novel is "June" which suggests spring, procreation, energy, and indeed it is in the month of June that Joan becomes pregnant, but the imagery of the opening chapter suggests not fecundity but sterility:
Coliseum Street was quiet. There was no traffic, there never was. The houses always looked closed and deserted, their galleries dusty and empty. No one ever walked by (p. 23).

Coliseum Street always appears the same; houses never change; they contain no life. The only life portrayed in this opening paragraph is that of the trees which have survived the decades, but trees whose roots are so established and fixed, that they destroy the sidewalks for the man on the street; the roots have and always will continue to crack the banquettes, but the community will not attempt to restrain them, to cut them back, or to even repair the damaged sidewalks. These trees and their roots are symbolic of the mythic South discussed in the Introduction. They are fixed, ageless trees continually uprooting the feeble attempts of society to establish some order independent of the moral history of the community. The only people who traverse these sidewalks are the people in society who openly reveal their meaningless existences; unlike the sidewalks corrupted by the trees, these people, tramps, are immediately restrained, removed visually from the views of the houses on Coliseum Street. The police come quickly and discreetly remove the obtrusive element in society; they come not because the people on Coliseum Street are presently wealthy, but because "the memory of wealth is still a kind of power in New Orleans" (p. 24). This first paragraph clearly
suggests that there is no new life; perhaps the opening even suggests that there is no life on Coliseum Street: there is only the memory of what life used to be.

The reader's introduction to Joan Mitchell reveals that Joan relates not to the houses on the empty streets but to the strays of society. She witnesses society's negation of the stray when "the street closed up on itself, like a doodlebug rolling into a ball" (p. 24). Windows close, people disappear and finally the stray falls on the pavement broken by the roots of the camphors, magnolias and oaks. When he falls, he does attempt to rise, but to Joan he seems to be absorbed by the broken concrete walk. When Aurelie enters and demands that Joan close the window--negate the stray's presence--Joan ignores her. Aurelie closes the window and Joan attempts to look through the glass, but like the community, it is "old" and it "distorts images beyond recognition" (p. 26). When the scene with the tramp ends, Joan goes outside to see if anything remains, even a shadow, but she finds nothing, only the wide-cracked sidewalk which seems to have swallowed up the stray who only wanted water--nothing more. The scene with the tramp foreshadows Joan's waiting outside Michael's house. She too is asked to leave by the police, and does so against her will. Unlike the tramp, she returns again and again to experience vicariously Michael's life.
Initially though, Joan does try to become a part of the society of Coliseum Street. She does so through the recognition and expression of her feminine qualities, intuition and emotion. She searches desperately for love; unfortunately "Joan is given no models for love . . . , for 'arrangements' and social pretense control her world," as is evidenced by her relationship with Fred. When Michael Kern calls unexpectedly, Joan begins her ineffectual search for love, and her distorted attempt to identify herself in the meaningless world of Coliseum Street, but even this seemingly private attempt to break way from the confines of her "arrangement" with Fred is intercepted by Aurelie, who listens on the upstairs extension:

   Joan had complained and screamed and ranted, but Aurelie had paid no attention. 'It's an old habit, dear', she said simply. 'From the time when I was married to Doris's father. I couldn't possibly get over it at my age now (p. 30).

The concept of change in this novel is simply epitomized in Aurelie's statement that she could not possibly change at her age; Aurelie is only forty, but she negates change of any kind, at any time.

Aurelie is an interesting character. Unlike the other works studied in this dissertation, Aurelie is the only strong, matriarchal figure depicted. She is a woman who has married five times and very likely may marry a sixth time. She is paradoxically propriety personified. She is
determined that despite the inner conflict her family may experience, appearances must be maintained, and so a formal breakfast must be attended by all no matter the crisis of the preceding night. While she concerns herself with outward signs of proper behavior, she keeps her fifth husband under lock and key on the third floor and maintains constant surveillance regarding the activities of her daughters. She never seems to demonstrate any real concern for her daughters; in fact, anger is the only emotion of which she seems capable. Her life seems mechanical, predetermined by her own past history. She suggests that she has done her duty by each of her husbands, for she has given them children, or in the case of Herbert, a home. Perhaps Aurelie demonstrates the tragedy of women unwilling to seek autonomy. Since she chooses not to depend upon herself, she turns again and again to men, the traditional providers. In her financially dependent state, she is hardly a figure worthy of emulation.

Interestingly, this matriarchal world in which Joan matures does not distinguish her from Grau's other protagonists who have no mothers. Aurelie's perception of life only confirms in Joan the belief that she can only find happiness in a relationship with a man, and for Joan that man is Michael. Her evening with Michael is revealing. Joan's dubious evaluation of Kern's intentions reveals the insecurity which a family of five fathers has fostered.
Understandably, she does not comprehend men nor the workings of the masculine principle. Her feigned independent attitude superficially conceals her submissive behavior: she permits the top to remain down on the convertible when she would rather have it up; she practices an intonation that she hopes will please him and indeed discovers an affected tone that brings a smile to his face. Later when they go to hear jazz, she tries to appear informed about the place, the music. She wants to suggest another place but abruptly Michael ends the evening. Joan had wanted to talk; Michael had only wanted a companion: "She chattered on the way home, gaily, as Aurelie had trained her to do" (p. 42) and convention demanded. Upon returning home, Joan suddenly realizes that Michael has a late date; it is an intuitive response, one which the fountain "echoes." Michael is surprised that she knows but recovers his confidence quickly.

In retrospect, the evening is almost perverse; the perversity arises to some extent because Joan has tried to play a game which is itself deceptive. The other player has attempted to do the same for different reasons. It is all superficial, shallow. Joan wanted to slip away momentarily from her conventional relationship with Fred, but instead she slipped into the world of patterned behavior taught by Aurelie herself the personification of a meaningless yet ordered community. Aurelie and her five daughters,
who serve as the traditional results of marriages which are condoned by a society which values money and convention and nothing more, offer Joan little sustenance for developing a sense of her own self. Michael seems just as superficial as the rest of the world; perhaps he is seeking revenge because Doris, Joan's sister, has rejected him, or perhaps he is seeking nothing--only flowing with the tide of convention of a windless river town where relationships seem to break apart as easily as the banquettes up-rooted by the trees on Coliseum Street.

Upon Joan's entrance to the foyer of the house, she sees a lamp from her childhood that she had tried to destroy; despite the fact that she had removed the beads one at a time and there had not been enough beads to re-pair it, it still remains. Joan then thinks that she will redo the room of her childhood "all over in blond wood and mirrors and black lacquer tables" (p. 45). She appears to hate the things that remain permanent and constant reminders of her unchanging life, but she never really tries to change them; however, later when she goes upstairs and confronts Aurelie, another permanent, un-changing fixture in Joan's life, Joan, not Aurelie, describes her own father realistically for the first time: he was a man who "was a gambler and a crook . . . . If he hadn't died right when he did, he'd have gone to Atlanta prison with all those other people" (p. 47), but Aurelie
sees him differently as "a quiet dull man . . . a very terribly dull man who was extremely quiet and soft spoken" (p. 47). Aurelie, emblematic of the world, negates Antony's true character; Joan, in her attempt to establish self, sees him as he really was, a crook but a man who loved his daughter, and who, although he did not provide for her spiritual growth, most certainly provided for her financial stability.

Joan, somewhat distressed by an evening that seems to suggest her failure to integrate herself successfully in the mating game, wants Michael to call again, and because she knows that he will not,

She felt sad. Very sad. And being sad felt good. It was a pleasure really. Like eating something you liked. A mild pleasure. The whole world took on a lovely grey tinge and everything was weeping (p. 53).

She plays Liebestod and dreams of dying and thinking that people will feel sorry for her, but she knows that even her fantasies are wrong: "I don't get anything right. Not ever" (p. 52).

This scene occurs over and over again in the canon of Grau and other Southern women writers. The stage is revoltingly set: the protagonist is consumed with the romantic notions that will eventually destroy her; melancholy music provides the mood for the dream-like trance which suggests that death is the only real
integration, that only through death will those around her finally respond to her. The end of the scene is always anti-climactic. The protagonist falls asleep crying and awakens the following day to a world unchanged by the previous evening's contemplations.

It is a day not unlike the night. It begins with a pretense of structure as Aurelie appears at a breakfast everyone must daily attend. The breakfast is a formality designed to create a familial feeling in the house, but in reality it is only a social amenity. According to Aurelie, her daughters have complete freedom otherwise; they may go and come at whatever hour and do whatever they choose, but they must attend the breakfast, and in reality they must act out their entire lives in accordance with Aurelie's prescription for living. Aurelie attends these formal breakfasts without Herbert even though her husband lives in the same house. He is an embarrassment to all. For the last ten years he has been an alcoholic and whenever Aurelie went for him, he was most polite and came most willingly. But he had to be fetched for each appearance, and after a few years Aurelie no longer bothered. So, bit by bit, he disappeared: first from the breakfast table, then from the main part of their lives (p. 54).

Finally, Herbert disappears altogether. He moves to the third floor of the house; his meals are brought to him and he has a phone to call the liquor store, but, otherwise,
the inhabitants of the house on Coliseum Street forget
that he is there. He lives in a world filled with
delusions, but Herbert totally withdraws: he never goes
out; he entertains himself with memories of his naval
experiences, and so, like the tramps on the sidewalk, he
becomes invisible, absorbed in a protective, delusive
void which permits him his only happiness in an unhappy,
conventional world. Like Herbert, Joan too seeks solace
outside the community in her dream world where Doris can-
not taunt her for her melancholy and Aurelie cannot
prescribe marriage to eliminate Joan's sadness: she re-
calls

the wonderful lovely sorrow . . . The
lost . . . 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 (p. 58).

Joan's thoughts are followed by another attempt to
define herself independently. To her mother's observation
that "a woman alone . . . is so very sad" (p. 59), Joan
responds by deciding to attend summer school. On her way
to enroll, she is reminded of an imprecise fear—which
seems to Joan to come for no reason at all, but the
setting Grau provides suggests a specific source: Joan
seems overcome by the untamed city's summer growth: "the
fierce June sun . . . the heavy rains," wild zinnias "like mad children crawling along on hands and knees," honeysuckle-like "creeping exploring fingers along the brick" (p. 62). This fecund, wild world in which Joan must somehow strive to establish order is overpowering. A couple walks by; she feels inadequate. She is reminded of her feminine ineptness, an attitude and way of life fostered by an overpowering mother whose influence always seems embedded in Joan's subconscious. Her inadequacy becomes even more apparent in the registration hall where

In the heat the smell of sex was almost tangible, almost hung in the air like smoke. She noticed that the beginning of every term—men and women thrown together in the same large hall, brushing elbows, brushing hips, until the air was full and you could almost hear the heavy breathing. She had always noticed that. The glance, the appraisal—she hated the girls for their coy peep from under the lashes; she knew what they were thinking . . . .

And no one, she thought, is trying me . . . . That was the way it always happened. She was nice looking, . . . . she had a lovely figure, lush and full. But there was something in her that repelled advances. She wondered about that. She even knew what it was, but not how to change it.

A certain directness, a businesslike manner, that was not very feminine . . . (pp. 66-67).

She appears superficially as both masculine and feminine, but the two principles are only overtly displayed; there is no real integration and, as the quotation suggests,
Joan does not know how to integrate her identity, to express her sexuality; instead, she chooses to compare herself to Doris or any other female who serves as a feminine stereotypic model in the New Orleans' society. In portraying Joan's inward feelings in this chapter, Grau stresses "the greater importance of the World which . . . [gives] greater weight to all the various factors which limit [Joan's] sense of freedom."\(^8\) Joan's perverse family life and rigid social environment place her in a vulnerable position, revealing indeed how limited Joan's options for living really are.

Exercising some semblance of freedom, however, Joan fills her summer with art, music, and a job in the library at night which no one else wants, but even there she is plagued with sexuality which seems to dwell just beyond her grasp; when she discovers a couple copulating in an upper room in the library, she curiously watches them and then, becoming aware of her fascination, she runs away, never to think of the incident again. Her attentions next turn to her regular, businesslike boyfriend, Fred. The relationship is unfulfilling; Fred seems incapable of expressing emotions Joan desperately needs to secure her position in the world. When she fails to elicit the proper consoling words, she is angry with herself because she has annoyed him. She places herself in the position of the offender. As with Michael, so with Fred, Joan tries to second-guess
his desires; she tries to please him although she is not sure what this entails. When at last her drunken stupor permits her and Fred to copulate on the front seat of the car, she does not feel waves of great emotions but rather sensations "like having the radio on . . . soothing" (p. 83). She is even moved to think of marriage, another way to secure Fred's attention, but fails to mention it. When Joan returns home, Aurelie feels pleased that her child has been mating. Her "motherly" feelings are interestingly juxtaposed with the unusual but sudden visible appearance of Papa Herbert in the backyard, naked and smoking cigarettes. Unemotional, unmotherly, Aurelie, as she handles everything, discreetly makes arrangements to remove Mr. Herbert to the sanitarium, simultaneously arranging her fifth divorce. Once again the aberrant behavior of someone like Herbert who has failed to integrate himself into the community is simply erased from Coliseum Street.

When Aurelie leaves for her annual visit to Tennessee, her absence seems to release Joan from some of the pressures which Aurelie imposes. Within a short time, Joan finds herself with Michael in an area once again permeated with the memories of her father, the area across the lake. Symbolically, they must traverse the bridge which separates New Orleans, the rigid world, from the wildness and unrestrained environment of the north shore. Michael even assumes an unrestrained attitude, a "sharp
animal grin" (p. 106); he surreptitiously leaves the city by back roads; together they go in search of stuffed owls, contraband; they drive further and further into the swamps in search of the forbidden objects. As they drive, Joan recalls how she as a teenager had awkwardly been initiated into the world of sex:

The whispers from the other cars parked a couple of feet away. The feel of sweat-soaked shirts, sticky with starch, and skins that were hot and burning to the touch. And the smells inside the car: of upholstery and gasoline and after-shave and the heavy musky odor of sex.

She remembered pain too, fingers that were clumsy and hurt and bodies that were awkward and stiff. And the terrible feel of frustration coloring everything. Those evenings that were more pain and uncertainty than anything else, but desperately longed for and pursued (p. 108).

The same old refrain, a suggestion that the act, the feminine act, is awkward and painful but desired above all else, echoes again as do Joan's constant memories of her father and the life they once shared across the lake. Although Michael has been forewarned that Joan will sooner or later begin to speak of her father, the old man from whom he purchases the owls remembers Anthony Mitchell and his grandness and fraudulence.

After this first stop on their way further and further into the swamps, Joan feels relief that there is no time when she must be home; for the moment she is free, free from Aurelie's world, a world of order and conventional
behavior, free to travel the roads her father knew, dusty, less frequented, hidden from the vision of the outside world. Anthony failed to integrate into that outside world; he, too, was constantly trying to establish an identity. Every time he built a house he installed a waterfall, a waterfall that would spring forth from the ground and sprinkle its droplets around it, and forever maintain a semblance of procreativity whereas Anthony could not. He had failed society in many ways and the fountains were obviously compensatory measures, expressions of inadequacy. But Joan feels no inadequacy today; in fact, she suggests to Michael that they should go and lie under the pines. Since Joan initiates the love-making, perhaps for the first time, sex is not "seen as dull necessity or joyless compulsion":

In the pines it was soft and clear. And fragrant smelling under the quiet hot day. The light was gentler too—not the purple light of the old closed house, but the soft filtered light of a bedroom with shades drawn (p. 115).

Interestingly, Grau does not follow this incident with further action or reaction. The moment was, as she recently observed in an interview, like one of those moments "with no meaning beyond the instant." What confuses the participant in one of these actions is "the mistake of trying to place enduring qualities on these fleeting moments," something that Joan had been doing
for years, but this time is different:

She did not see him on the campus. And he did not call. She had not expected that he would. It hadn't been that important (p. 118).

She even changes her route to school, so that she will not run into him. Joan's actions are confusing, for it is difficult to determine if she at last had an experience in which she did not respond according to the dictums of society; that is to say, that she does not apparently feel guilt or a need for Michael to reaffirm his feelings for her. Normally, Joan would perceive the aftermath of such an experience as a time of anticipated rejection. This time, however, the incident does not remain in her mind and her changing of routes to school may reflect a change within Joan. She asserts herself as well as permits the moment with Michael to slip from her memory. In this fashion, Grau closes the first section of the novel. Joan seems to have momentarily taken a step toward defining herself independently of Michael and the world, a step forward, which although positive, is so slight in degree that it seems hardly measurable in light of all the backward steps Joan has taken in this same section. But this is June, a time when late summer gardens are sown; some of these seeds survive the stifling heat of the city by the river; others shrivel before they mature, and as Grau continues her suggestive imagery in the following section,
the "End of Summer" will reveal that Joan, like the
shriveled seeds of the "ruined garden," will fail to
integrate, to define herself, to produce a whole person.

In the second section, Joan discovers her pregnancy
that will not culminate in creating new life, but will
function as the experience which will permanently sever
her connections with the world. She tries to ignore it
at first, and when she does acknowledge it, her reaction
to it is associated with fullness and with a vague notion
of what may be growing inside her. She cannot equate it
with a person; it appears "like a shrimp, or a piece of
seaweed," but for once Joan feels "content"; her body has
finally filled itself with an identity, a shape unlike any-
thing Joan has known before. It even seems to give her
an air of confidence; she decides to call Michael and tell
him although she has not seen or thought of him in weeks.
When he learns, his responses are so stereotypic that Joan,
the younger, less-experienced one, emerges from the en-
counter as the stronger. In the back of her mind she
thinks of the child throughout the conversation: the child
seems almost mystical, as does her response to it; she
questions it, feels it, anticipates its responses to the
movement of the earth, to her movement; she is proceeding
toward an integration of her androgynous being; she
utilizes reason and calm in dealing with Michael and
emotion and intuition in understanding her recently
acquired motherhood. She makes no hasty decisions; she leaves Michael bewildered at the drugstore while she quietly leaves to make her decision, alone, independent of the bungling, insincere economics professor who fears what society will say if the truth were known.

Joan's seemingly undisturbed, assured appearance in this scene suggests that she may be reaching a point in her life where she can find a self independent of the community; the catalyst for this behavior appears to come from the intuitive feelings associated with her pregnancy; her body obtains a fullness and contentness heretofore unexperienced, she turns, and it is this "morally irresponsible World"\textsuperscript{12} which she permits to rob her of "the tiny floating seaweed" of an identity. Perhaps, as DeBellis notes, Joan's life void of role models\textsuperscript{13} is responsible for her inaction; she has never had the chance to pattern a life since a pattern was never provided, and so she too assumes a vague, inconsistent personality based upon convenient arrangements and social pretenses. Her identity succumbs to the pressure of social conformity.

The abortion is handled with such ease and discretion that it seems to really not happen at all. The suggestion that "a sterile society's self-conviction that evil can be negated by not acknowledging it"\textsuperscript{14} certainly seems applicable in this instance, and Joan's almost trance-like response to the entire affair further clouds the actual
occurrence. When she does emerge from the abortion another aspect in the development of many of Grau's protagonists appears. Joan begins to remember things which elicit feelings of emptiness, half-heartedness. Life becomes stifling, tiring; Joan grows weary and notices that something is missing from deep within:

It seemed to her sometimes that the wind blew right through her. And it was in those long quiet nights, looking up at the stars through the haze of the screen wire, that she became aware of her body's emptiness. She had always thought of herself as solid. A solid lump. Like a piece of mud or even a roast in the oven. But now she knew she wasn't. That she was just a tissue of skin stretched around a frame of bone. Like a canoe or a tent. She had seen wind or rocks break them up, and it bothered her to be stretched so fine and delicate (p. 142).

This physical manifestation of emptiness symbolizes the hollowness of her character, now fragmented by the unnatural abortive act. Joan does not really choose to have or not to have the abortion; society does; the society takes what is a natural progression of events in the life of Joan and abruptly halts the progression, the evolution of a self struggling in its own way towards personal existence. Initially, Joan sought identity through the acceptance of others, primarily men. She, therefore, emphasizes her femininity. But the physical abortion--the socially prescribed abortion--strips Joan of her femininity. From this point on in the novel, Joan
does not articulate the loss of her natural intuitive
and emotional responses, but she remembers and she strives
"toward integration by identifying herself with the tiny
floating seaweed that was her child, . . . symbolically
admitting a need for wholeness . . . "

It is with this feeling of emptiness that she returns
to the house on Coliseum Street in the third section
"The House on Coliseum Street." She is astonished that no
one plans to remember the abortion; it, like the vagrant
at the beginning of the novel, simply fades away, leaving
not a trace of its existence. When she phones Michael to
tell him of her decision, he has almost forgotten the
problem, but he decides they should celebrate, a totally
selfish act on his part because the reason for the cele-
bration is that he will not suffer in the eyes of society.
At the perverse "birthday party" celebration, as Joan
calls it, she momentarily begins to think of herself in
feminine terms, but Michael does not respond to her needs.
He is simply relieved that he has not lost his job.
Symbolically, they end their perverse celebration by
visiting a transvestite bar; Joan drunk and vague cannot
distinguish between the men and women, and, when Michael
fails to respond to her as a woman, the bar's atmosphere
appears quite appropriate for the ending of a relationship
predicated upon pretenses and aborted by social con-
ventions.
Safe in her room, Joan vents some of the grief and anxiety that the whole experience has caused. She examines her body and the physical reminders of the abortion:

She crinkled her nose at herself. It takes so long to grow back, she thought; I didn't know anything about it. And anyway as soon as the hair grows back, there won't be a mark to show that it ever happened. Not a mark. And nobody will know. And nobody will be able to tell.

But it doesn't look nice now. It looks dirty and sick somehow, as if there were a disease. Or it looks a little like a mangy dog.

And it's no wonder Michael didn't want to come to bed with me, and me looking like this. He must know how I would look.

I wonder how long it will take. And this is so silly. I wonder if he knew I wanted him as much as I did. I wouldn't like him to know.

And it's so silly. Body running away with you like this. Running you so fast you can't sleep. And all you can think of is the mark of a man. The stupid silly mark of a man (pp. 163-164).

She feels dirty; she blames Michael's rejection on her sick look; Michael's flowers smell "faintly like a funeral" and Joan perversely responds to that by saying aloud "Happy Birthday." The world in which Joan must live is indeed absurd, undefinable. The memory and the semblance of the order of the Southern community provide no solace for her trauma; there is no one to whom she can turn; she can only try to integrate herself once again as she has just attempted with Michael, but the attempted
integration always occurs in stifling and rigid surroundings, and Michael's rejection, as well as the abortion, leads Joan down a new avenue in the development of her character. As with Faulkner's women, Joan too begins her illusory existence which results when

woman is prevented from achieving the normal fulfillment of her sexual drives, she . . . become[s] engaged in a denial of reality in which she clings to an illusory view of life in order to overcome her sense of the inadequacy and abnormality of her real existence. 16

Joan further develops her sociopathic tendencies which lead her to a peripheral existence. She exists just beyond the community; she no longer plays her prescribed social role, and so to some Joan appears psychopathic. She no longer eats dinner at home; she resigns from the sorority, claiming that she must instead turn her attentions to the Communist Party; she irregularly attends class. She is pleased that others perceive her as a "nut." She talks to Fred only on the phone and once in public; he thinks the baby was his and he notes how bad she looks and what a beating she must have taken, but that is all. He offers no real help to pull her back, to make her feel again. He does nothing, and so, Joan, void of emotion, empty in spirit, buys a car that symbolically takes her even further from society. She becomes an observer:

The secrecy was necessary to her. She wanted to move without anyone knowing
she was moving. She wanted to slip like a ghost through walls. That was one of her recurring fantasies—that she was a ghost and slid through doors and slid through trees and crept into houses and watched what happened there (p. 182).

She enters and leaves the house by the back stairs; she observes 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 (p. 184).

But juxtaposed to this observation that she really does not have to judge herself in relation to others is a figure lurking in the shadows of the night vicariously experiencing the hushed sounds of the couples on the campus. Stealing by them, reaching the car without being recognized "was a very comfortable feeling" (p. 185).

Joan's search for self is distorted; it is dark and surreptitious; its opaque quality clouds its meaning or perhaps its function; there seems to be no reason for the search in which she begins

to look upon herself as a separate person. She found herself observing her activities, being a little surprised with each discovery. She regarded herself with interest and detachment, as if she were a strange zoo specimen of whose behavior she did not entirely approve (p. 187).

But suddenly the reason becomes apparent. She is looking for Michael Kern, Michael Kern, the embodiment of
everything that she had at one time desired and the source of the wound that had stripped away her only feeling of "contentness." Her search is disintegrating into a fascination with the fixation that Michael Kern is the society that has thwarted as well as simultaneously distorted Joan's sense of self-consciousness. As she continues to watch him, she gradually exhibits more frequent, overt, self-destructive tendencies and illusory perceptions. She frequents bad parts of town late at night and stalks Michael and his girlfriend. Joan begins to imagine things in her mind, to cling to illusions and to deny reality, and, of course, Aurielie at last suggests Joan see a psychiatrist, but Joan refuses; in fact,

when she thought about it, it struck her as funny that she should be so happy in her role as observer. But she did not think about it very often (p. 197).

Since Joan's vision of what life should have been has ceased to exist, she seems to search for relief from this fall in her fascination with other people, like Michael and his girlfriend, who seem to carry on a relationship without devastating consequences. This distorted, vicarious, delusional existence possibly results because Joan has failed "to achieve sexual fulfillment through physical love" and to fulfill "the creative and sustaining role of motherhood" which is the only source of moral order in a community where familial and social decay exist. And so,
her "loss of the feminine role or her inability to live it with satisfaction results in her loss of life itself through an actual death or a death-in-life existence." As an observer of life, Joan soon imagines or realizes that Michael and his girlfriend have begun sleeping together. As soon as this becomes apparent, Joan sets about to destroy the relationship; she begins to return in kind what she believes Michael has done to her. She aborts their affair by simply writing a letter which suggests that if they continue to see each other, the girl's parents will learn of her actions. After this perverse act, Joan ceases to haunt the streets. If she cannot have her child or the child's surrogate, Michael, then Michael also must suffer isolation, frustration, unfulfillment. But her initial revenge brings her no satisfaction. She feels old, "old enough to be through with the hot drive of mating" (p. 203), and she still remembers the dead embryo:

And do you remember dying afterward? Like that. A circle. Slipping in and out of life. And did an embryo remember dying? Did my seaweed child remember? Drifting and surf pounding ....

Being one is so lonesome. With another heart ticking away inside. A different beat. A ragged pattern. The little ticking heart. The soft floating seaweed bones (p. 204).

Her profound sense of loss and emptiness becomes even more pronounced in the final section of the book, "Winter." Symbolically, we have watched Joan proceed through the
spring of her life when the imagery of the first section suggested the fecundity of the season as well as the girl, and we have watched Joan at the end of the summer when the ripeness and fullness of vegetation suggested the pregnant forces of summer growth as well as the growth of a fetus within Joan, and we have watched the once vibrant, contented Joan slip into a life-in-death existence when she returns to the house on Coliseum Street after the abortion. With winter, Joan slips even further from reality in an attempt to overcome her sense of inadequacy and abnormalness. The imagery of this opening section foreshadows Joan's inevitable doom; the winter is "bleak and desolate" (p. 209), but amidst the silence of the "bare" (p. 209) Southern winter, Joan attempts once again to integrate herself into the world, to distort once again that very integration by forgetting herself and attempting to conform to her predetermined social role in which her feminine need for physical love and motherhood establishes a sense of order in her otherwise morally irresponsible world; and so she calls Fred. Before he arrives, Joan feels her grandparents and her great-grandparents lurking behind her, "propping her up" (p. 210), aiding her in maintaining the old memory and order of the community. When Fred arrives and Joan broaches the subject of marriage and indeed proposes, Fred is appalled by her businesslike attitude, but her businesslike attitude
only conveys the confusion she is experiencing in trying to establish an androgynous identity; one moment she is feminine, intuitive, emotional; the next, she is reasonable, authoritative, "businesslike." Unfortunately, she cannot integrate the two principles; society will not permit it; the principles are socially antithetical because the only order the community can maintain is the one in which gyniolatry pervails. And so the male remains the businessman, while the female remains the vessel for child-bearing. Joan's overt actions to become a part of society again, however, do not inwardly affect her feelings of isolation:

Things happened as she slipped along. But not to her. She could feel them happening all around her. And sometimes she turned her head and looked to see what they were (p. 214).

When Mr. Norton dies, also an isolated figure existing beyond the community, his death symbolically represents and foreshadows Joan's social death. No one attends his funeral and he is buried at the back of the cemetery, alone. Mr. Norton never becomes a part of the house on Coliseum Street, and he dies alone without a ceremonious farewell:

The traces of Herbert Norton were gone. There were just two large rooms, dusky with their shutters drawn, humped with sheeted furniture. They had been emptied. Finally and completely.
When Aurelie and her daughters left, they locked the door behind them. The spiders and the mice would take over (p. 216).

Juxtaposed with Norton's isolation is Joan's isolation. The hurt and emptiness resulting from the abortion remain, but Joan plans to fill that void with another fetus and Fred will serve the function of impregnator quite conveniently, even though Joan thinks "it's a pity you have to have a man for it" (p. 217). Her obsession grows with filling the void: "I'm like a bitch in heat, she thought. Shameless groveling bitch" (p. 219). Her sexual activity really does not bother her, nor does the fact that "she knew Fred was not the right man at all" (p. 220). Nothing matters as long as "the ghost child" is followed by real children "one after the other. Like meteors flying off a sun" (p. 217). So caught up in her role-playing, Joan even begins to smile at the china teacup over the city, a symbol of conformity and restraint viewed with disdain in the beginning of the book. But suddenly the "peaceful and quiet" world ends. Michael reappears, shattering Joan's carefully constructed facade.

After seeing Doris and Michael together, Joan flees: "She could feel panic shaking her body like a chill" (p. 227), and when she witnesses Michael's eviction by Mr. Bryan she simply observes that all the women in that house have "had very bad luck with men" (p. 229). Her
past looms before her once again, spreading itself into every corner in the house:

The house had a definite smell, she thought. And all the cleaning in the world would never get it out. Because it wasn't a smell of dirt. It wasn't a smell of cooking. Or of anything in particular. 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.

People left their smells behind them . . .

It seemed to her sometimes that she could hear them too. That they left little sounds behind them . . . . Seemed she could hear the sounds of all their breathing. Left-behind breathing . . . (p. 231).

Joan's search for herself appears impossible against a backdrop of years of memory and of choices made by the inhabitants on Coliseum Street. Perhaps it is this sense of her decayed past that pushes her to the final self-destructive act: the telling of Dean Lattimore not only about the abortion but other actions of Michael which will surely destroy him. In the process of telling the story, "deliberately destroying a man" she totally loses touch with reality:
She knew it and it did not matter to her. She had no control any more. She did not feel vicious. She was not afraid. She did not feel anything at all. Except not part of herself any more (p. 236).

Her twisted "love" for Michael, father of the nebulous non-existent seaweed fetus, culminates in the abortion of Michael's career, his life. Only now that the "thing" had been settled, as "things" must be settled in the Southern community, could she begin to forget:

She was finished. She had done what she had to do. Now she could start to forget. The stand of pine and the soft needles. The early morning trip on the coast, with the bugs splattering on the windshield (p. 238).

On her way home, Joan recalls the tramp that had invaded that quiet, discreet society of Coliseum Street where "the sweet sick odor of rats" filled the air, noticing that "there wasn't anything left of it," of the tramp who had momentarily disrupted the pat, precise world of the South, and who had just as quickly been swept away in the process of trying to say something, to do something:

There wasn't anything left of the child either, that had lived in the world and walked about and nobody had seen it and nobody knew it was there, listening. Ghost child (p. 241).

Like the tramp, Joan, too, is swept away after violating a code of order in a society that fails to acknowledge aberrant behavior. Only a slight desire remains within Joan to integrate, but for Joan the integration is one-
sided; she admits a need for wholeness, but she fails to recognize that getting pregnant is only fulfilling the role developed for her by society: "she cannot reach conscious self-knowledge because she finds herself in a morally irresponsible world,"¹⁹ a world willing to acknowledge the separate principles of androgyne, unwilling to integrate them.

The house on Coliseum Street becomes in the end the controlling force of the novel. Like the Roman Colosseum, it is an arena where life's games are played. People frequently become spectacles; they engage in battles with themselves as well as the monstrous society dwelling within the confines of the structure; individuals striving for identity, searching for self-consciousness, are sacrificed like the Christians; their foiled attempts to attain autonomy disappear as the blood of the sacrificed Christians was absorbed by the red sand floor of the Colosseum, and like the house on Coliseum Street erected in the 1800's, the A.D. 82. Roman Colosseum has withstood the destructive forces of time. There have been since the beginning of time societies whose philosophies and structures have survived and remained unchanged by progress. The South in its way has also surmounted time and frequently denied reformation of any kind. The microcosm of the house on Coliseum Street reveals the Southern macrocosm which even presently aborts any attempt of a Joan to seek self-consciousness.
FOOTNOTES


6 DeBellis, p. 692.

7 DeBellis, p. 692.

8 Harvey, p. 133.


11 Personal Interview.

12 DeBellis, p. 692.

13 DeBellis, p. 691. DeBellis observes that Joan is given no models for love in a family with which she fails
to identify; therefore, her pregnancy, according to DeBellis, results from the confusion that Joan experiences having no one to guide her.

14 DeBellis, p. 692.

15 DeBellis, p. 692.


17 Page, p. 93.

18 Page, p. 94.

19 DeBellis, p. 692.
Chapter Four

THE CONDOR PASSES

In *The Condor Passes* (1971), Shirley Ann Grau tells an intriguing story about the rather bizarre life of a powerful figure, Thoman Henry Oliver and of the women who influence his life. These women are the subject of this chapter, for amidst the deceptive, stifling atmosphere of New Orleans, Grau develops many female characters who demonstrate the qualities of the prototype discussed in *The House on Coliseum Street*. An aspect of this novel which distinguishes it from *The House on Coliseum Street* is the black character, Vera. Vera is Stanley's wife, the elusive condor of the title, and she is depicted as the strongest figure in the novel. Although outwardly obedient to her white boss, she inwardly maintains a constant, androgynous identity. She has fulfilled her feminine role through marriage and her successful relationship with her husband, and she has integrated the masculine principle into her identity by remaining the keystone, the practical one in her marriage. She is a great deal like Margaret in Grau's *The Keepers of the House*. Like Margaret, Vera surmounts her outward submission to emerge in her private life a strong, independent person.
In contrast, the white women in the novel are weak, and Oliver's wife, Stephanie, is perhaps the weakest. Stephanie, "A good deal he'd made," who sounds like a basement bargain, is pressured by her family to marry Oliver: "'You should go down on your knees to the Blessed Virgin for a fine man like that,'" and "'He will give you everything you want, more things than you can ever imagine now'" (p. 96). Whereas Stephanie is a very dependent character who does not exhibit the ability to think for herself, she succumbs to the familial pressures and marries Oliver.

The marriage is a disaster. Oliver attempts to please his wife by giving her every material possession that she desires, and she in turn reciprocates by bearing his children. She has five children, but only two live—Anna and Margaret. Each time Stephanie bears another child, she weakens. Oliver is aware of her frail nature and grows more distant with each pregnancy "as if her himself were destroying her" (p. 103). Stephanie understands his feelings regarding her pregnancies and tries to conceal the painful process from him. And so without Oliver, Stephanie experiences the birthing process alone. When she is finally too weak to have any more children, Oliver seems to ignore her completely. His guilt renders him emotionally impotent, and Stephanie fearing his total
rejection and grieving from the death of her last child, dies from a broken heart.

Stephanie is not a major figure in this story; her character is hardly defined, but nevertheless, her prescriptive role finally leads her to withdrawal, self-denial, and death. Stephanie never becomes a whole, fulfilled person. She does not mature emotionally or spiritually. She is locked into a social structure which prevents deviation from the norm, and so she performs her role and nothing more. Her sterile existence mirrors her impotent marriage to Oliver. Anna and Margaret, the only visible products of Stephanie's marriage, live perverse, traumatic, finally self-destructive lives. Their mother's dependent attitude forces Stephanie so far from society that she passes completely beyond its control through death.

When Robert, Oliver's "adopted" son, asks someone to marry him, he initially finds a woman very similar to Stephanie. Nella is empty-headed and speaks in memorized phrases. Oliver is quick to see the similarity between Nella and Stephanie, and thwarts Robert's attempts to marry a weak woman. Instead, Oliver designs a dynastic marriage between Robert and Anna, Oliver's daughter. Unfortunately, Robert perceives Anna very much like he perceived Nella. He conceives of Anna as "seventeen and . . . a blouseful and . . . ready for a man" (p. 155).
His initial reaction is typical in the sense that he sees her as a sexual creature totally, but the conflict inherent in the Southern male's vision emerges when he also observes that "she was young and beautiful, and he had the feeling that at any moment she might turn into smoke and disappear" (p. 155). Anna also represents a Romantic ideal which is virginal, untainted, ephemeral. This latter observation of Robert's contradicts his initial observation. The conflict inherent in these antithetical views is defined before the marriage is consummated. Anna cannot fulfill a sexual role if she is to remain "an unravished Bride." Thus Robert's misconceptions concerning women and their roles in the Southern male's life lead him to distance himself forever from his wife, for he can never reconcile her sexuality with her traditional Southern virginity. Robert's sexual drives are satisfied by anyone other than his wife. Anna is too pure, and, therefore, Robert's sense of violation of that purity prevents him from achieving a harmonious relationship with her.

Anna, even named after the Virgin Mary's mother, plays her Romantic, illusive role perfectly. "Ever since she could remember, Anna had planned her wedding day. Even her dolls were brides" (p. 159). The perverse zest with which Anna pursues the Romantic union is frightening; yet everyone seems to encourage her delusive drives. She is
showered with dolls, which she dresses in traditional wedding attire even if they are baby dolls. Even her mother's grotesque pregnancies do not hamper Anna's enthusiasm; she announces that her mother's children die because they had "bad blood" (p. 160), a fact revealed to her by her black maid and a fact she prefers to portray as a revelation from God. Anna's intent to plan a perfect marriage may be a subconscious reaction on her part to the abnormal conditions of her own childhood. She is surrounded with every material comfort available, but little if any of her emotional needs are satisfied. Her mother must devote all of her strength to procreation, and the Old Man is seldom home. Anna, instead of focusing inwardly and depending on her self to satisfy her emotional needs, focuses outwardly on society's prescription for a happy life—a perfect marriage.

When the dolls no longer serve a function, they are replaced with sketch books containing more marriage plans which are almost ludicrous except for the fact that they are realized. The manner in which she almost unthinkingly acquires the perfect household goods is bizarre. Whole convents and a china manufacturer work together to create the perfect environment for the perfect marriage. At sixteen, when she purchases the perfect house, the degree of her illusions becomes overwhelming. The result of her reading in the convent of Scott's and Dickens' Romantic
novels seems evident in the manner in which she chooses to pursue life. Like Lady Rowena, Anna will emerge with her Ivanhoe to silence the cries of social conformity.

Not all convents emphasized the reading of Romantic literature. Interestingly, as early as the nineteenth century in Missouri, the Sacred Heart sisters were teaching Hardy, Maupassant, and Sand. It was in this environment that Kate Chopin developed a healthy regard for the value of the integrity of self. It was not until her move to Louisiana that she experienced society's rather one-sided vision of the woman's role. Like Anna, Chopin learned to crochet, but she also learns the value of acquiring knowledge and defining her own role in society. For the most part, the convents of the North offered their students a chance to create for themselves their own world, but the heavy Creole Catholic influence in the convents of the South seems to offer their students only two alternatives: the world of Sir Walter Scott or the "black" world of sisterhood. The sisters of the North seem figures worthy of emulation while their Southern sisters are depicted as solemn figures dressed in black and embodying the notion of Penance. With such alternatives offered, Anna opts for the Romantic vision and by doing so sets the stage for her dissolution of self. "She felt part of the endless line of women who had gathered dowries in chests and boxes, sealed away against the coming of the unknown bridegroom" (p. 162).
Her feeling of belonging to a social continuum of women who strive for the same goals is "a comfortable and undemanding place." As Anna's own father observes, she does not think; she just blindly follows a goal whose value is never questioned.

Further insight is provided concerning Anna's unquestioning acceptance of her goal of a perfect marriage when Grau writes

Anna could never remember a time when she had not planned her wedding—and she couldn't remember a time when she had not gone to the Ursuline convent (p. 162).

If she is to follow the footsteps of her teachers, her life will be one of darkness, "stillness," and "cold formality" (p. 162), her wedding a solemn union with the ultimate bridegroom Jesus Christ. Although Anna's choice to pursue "a restless and anxious" union with a moral seems superficially more attractive, less restrictive, she, too, before her wedded life is over will discover that "darkness" and "cold formality" will dominate her life as well.

This section of the novel clearly reveals the complex network of various factors which contribute to the gyniocolatrical role of women in the South. Catholicism seems in no way to be an inherent aspect of a society predicated upon the worship of women, but the Church and its teachings of Mary-idolatry accentuate the Romantic notion of the Southern woman as pure and untainted. Unlike Grau's female
characters in *The Condor Passes*, Kate Chopin and Flannery O'Connor, two very Catholic Southern women writers, fail to emphasize the Catholic influence of the Virgin Mary in formulating the role of woman in society and, instead, portray the submissive Southern woman as Protestant or amoral. Thus her inferior role is designed by her society as opposed to her religion. Whether it be Edna in Chopin's *The Awakening* or Mrs. McIntyre in "The Displaced Person," these characters also emerge as individuals who have no identity until their marriage which is not so much a religious covenant as it is a social covenant. Thus, the reasons for emphasizing marriage may be very different amongst these writers, but the outcomes appear always the same whether it be a Faulkneresque character such as Miss Virginia Du Pre in *Sartoris* or Rosa Coldfield in *Absalom, Absalom* or Ellen Glasgow's Dorinda in *Barren Ground*; these figures find themselves lost and alone when they have either failed to marry or their marriages have failed. For these characters, the search for autonomy paradoxically begins outwardly through the character's attempt to marry, and generally is abortive before an androgynous identity can emerge.

In *The Condor Passes*, Anna tries to break away from the convent in order to focus completely on her marriage to Robert, but the tie to the convent is too powerful a tie to break, and so "she graduated in May with the rest
of her class, white dresses and bouquets of red roses" (p. 165). Anna also tries to break away from her past:

There were times when you put things behind you. Like giving away the dolls you'd kept all your life. Like opening doors to closed rooms . . . . After her mother's death--of a broken heart for the last dead baby, . . . the family said--her bedroom door was kept closed . . . . Anna and Margaret always tiptoed by it, hurriedly, just as they had done when she was alive . . . . One day that special shrine was gone . . . .

She learned that it was part of life, this putting things behind you. Her father had taught her that (pp. 165-166).

Anna does not willingly embrace this removal of the shrine, for even on her wedding day she remembers her "ghost" mother again. "It might have been a stranger. But then she thought slowly, it was a stranger. Her mother was dead . . . nothing of her left any more, except maybe some blood . . . " (p. 169). Unfortunately, Anna's willingness to review her past, to make it immediate, to search for consolation from a total stranger, a ghost, seems to alienate her from others.

After she lectured herself, she felt better. She always did. Because she knew that she was not like anybody else. Not like anybody else at all (p. 169).

Prior to her marriage, Anna begins to exhibit some psychopathic tendencies: she is different from everyone and therefore apart from everyone. Even her honeymoon is designed to protect Robert and her from the real world, as is true of Meg and John in Little Women, and yet Anna is
determined to make an impact on society: "If I died, people could see my reflection in these things. My mother left no reflection" (p. 170). The thought in itself is contradictory. Anna's mother's lack of action has forever imprinted her memory upon Anna. Anna's belief that her life will be different is deceptive, for Anna distinguishes her marriage from her mother's. Anna has planned everything to be perfect and thus believes it will be so. Yet her romantic delusions seem even more apparent when she, like her mother, is caught in the web of procreation. If society had permitted it, she would have furnished the nursery before she married.

Interestingly, sex, the aspect of her marriage which makes the nursery possible, is something that

she had tried to talk about . . . . And whenever she tried to express herself, she felt a loss . . . . If she could not exactly imagine the marriage act--she turned the phrase over and over in her mind: The marriage act--it was nobody's business but her own (p. 175).

Anna's inability to deal with a part of the marriage seldom if ever discussed by Scott, Dickens or Alcott mirrors her own inadequate foundation to deal with the real aspects of living. Of the twenty-four pages of text concerned with her marriage, only three brief paragraphs deal with a sexual aspect of her relationship with Robert, and to this consideration she is at "a loss." Her confusion over the matter of sex and Robert's inability to perceive her
simultaneously as sexual as well as virginal foreshadows the chaos which later dominates their dynastic marriage.

This Romantic idealism inherent in the myth of the South unfolds as Anna prepares for the wedding. It is to be a perfect day which will always be remembered for its perfection:

And what did you expect of a wedding? The bluest skies. The most transparent sunlight. A rainbow reaching from one horizon to the other in full prismatic simplicity. Crowds to line the streets, smiling, bowing: 'The beloved couple, how beautiful they are.' Castles and turrets and knights on horseback. Silent cheering, effortless movement, pageants, kings and popes and emperors, pomp and glory. And even more. A sign. A sign of favor . . . the essence, the memory. Dear God, let me remember . . . . Holy Virgin, let me remember from the moment I wake up. I've been to confession and I'm free of sin, state of grace. Does that help? Total recall, that's what I want. I want to keep one day with me totally until the day I die . . . (p. 176).

This imaginative account contains all the sentimentality and chivalry of a Scott novel, but the happenings of the real day are quite different. Through a great deal of foreshadowing, Grau sets the stage with all the destructive elements which will eventually dissolve the union of Anna and Robert. When Anna encounters Margaret at five o'clock in the morning, her "grubby" little figure remains a shadow which haunts Anna until later in the day. Margaret and Robert will later have an affair which will momentarily remind Anna of her unsuccessful marriage. Anna's next
psychological encounter is with death, a foreshadowing of the future death of her own son as well as the death of her marriage. Immediately following the marriage ceremony, Anna symbolically becomes a white virgin surrounded by the black habits of the nuns as well as the black of Robert's suit. When he observes "That's really the bride of Christ for you!" (p. 179), he does not comprehend the impact of such an observation. Anna eventually reveals her religious fanaticisms which lead her further away from the mainstream of society.

The aftermath of Anna's wedding undermines the seriousness of the covenant she and Robert have shared. She provides a real circus for the children so that they will always remember the wedding day, and the adults create their own circus with liquor, indiscretions, automobile accidents, and divorces; however, Anna's wedding night proceeds as Anna expects:

A to her first house a bride in white satin, just as she had planned. There was pain where she had expected it, and pleasure where she looked for it, and there was blood to prove her worth to her husband. She fell asleep, completely content. Robert was restless; he turned and tossed all night, jabbing her with elbows and outflung arms. He's not used to sleeping in a double bed, she thought reasonably, but he will learn (p. 183).

What Anna does not anticipate is that some day she will look back on this night and realize how wrong her "perfect" wedding night really was.
When the novel's focus finally shifts to Margaret, the reader has ascertained that Margaret, according to the Old Man, is more his equal, for she "thinks" whereas Anna does not. Margaret's physical appearance, not inherently feminine, may contribute to her somewhat different view of life. Although she too waits for Prince Charming, she decides that he will have to accept her as she is, "short and square . . . kinky hair and stupid brown eyes" (p. 189). Unlike Anna, who embraces the feminine principle totally, Margaret seems superficially more androgynous. She, at least, does not perceive life totally through rose-colored glasses, nor is she haunted by the ghost of her mother. Margaret's first sexual encounter is quite different from Anna's. It is at least spontaneous and passionate. Her rather bizarre observation following that evening that she will "get married without flowers, and I'll never have a single cut flower in my house. Only things in pots, slowly strangling to death" (p. 201) does not, however, reveal the consciousness of a relatively integrated individual. Margaret is always tilting with society for the sake of being different and also because she probably feels subconsciously that society, like the convent, strangles its victims slowly. The bronze ladies at the park symbolically represent women whose fate it is to watch life pass instead of living it. Margaret adds to her vision the rather perverse notion that
if a child is eaten, becomes a sacrificial lamb, then the bronze curse is released and "we'll be free, free, free, free" (p. 201). Her vision, bizarre though it is, may indeed depict a "cannibalistic" aspect of the Southern society: when the Southern woman fails in her role, she is frequently ostracized by an "exclusive, depersonalizing society" which forces her to become a "possession" of the frustrated community which failing to recognize the basic androgynous nature of mankind vents its anger and frustrations at her in an attempt to free itself from the tragedy inherent in their one-sided existence. Through scapegoating, society seeks vindication of its wrongs. Margaret's vision, real or perverse, conveys the disappointment she feels from her first sexual encounter:

She scowled into the dark. She'd expected so much; she got nothing. Maybe that was the wages of sin, maybe Anna had done better with her first man . . .

Disappointment like a nasty little worm crawled across her, leaving slimy spoiling trails . . .

She cried a few hot tears that hurt to shed and burned the flesh of her cheeks as they fell (p. 201).

Despite her more reasonable approach to life applauded by her father, Margaret also encounters the tragedy of the Romantic ideal realized and is angry with herself for her false expectations.

Her father, on the other hand, just at the moment that his daughters come to know lust, bids it a fond
farewell:

So this was the way it went, gentle. He'd never even considered the possibility of that. Nature fixed it for you: desire and ability went together. Neat and proper. He felt lighter now. A burden, a requirement, was gone . . . . At least he felt free (p. 21).

What exactly frees Oliver is his goodbye to urges which often involve emotional responses. At last Oliver is free from what little emotion he ever felt. His freedom comes easily while the bronze ladies must wait forever at the mercy of society for their freedom. Oliver's freedom is misinterpreted by the typical symbol of propriety, Helen Augustine Ware. Totally insecure in her world, Helen interprets her evening with the Old Man in emotional terms only. She feels rejected by his lack of interest. "She thought it was her fault. Which of course was the way a woman would think" (p. 212). Oliver observes that perhaps his sense of freedom "never comes to woman" and adds in a pious afterthought, "My dear, what a pity and a shame" (p. 212). No longer compelled by natural urges, Oliver can proceed reasonably and blindly throughout the rest of his life.

Unfortunately, Robert has not bid a fond farewell to his sexuality and discovers on his wedding night that in front of his own wife he feels sexually inadequate. He reasons with himself that his is the perfect situation:
A steady series of successes. Work bringing its rewards. Esteem and love. Increasing happiness. Bask in the approval of your wife's brown eyes . . . Me, the man of property, the successful businessman, growing distinguished gray hairs, the soft cushions of money all around . . . . And what the hell was bothering him (p. 216)?

When Robert continues to have difficulty understanding his anxiety over sleeping with his new wife, he clearly demonstrates the problems with a vision that perceives the love object as a "bride of Christ" and at the same time must consummate the sacred union. Dirty basements are the proper setting for a sexual encounter, and so "It was on Betty's body he consummated his marriage and from Betty Anna's blood flowed" (p. 218).

Anna, totally unaware of her husband's misgivings, perceives their marriage as a perfect one: "'Two loves put together, the way God intended them to be. I wouldn't want to live without you'" (p. 220). Interestingly, Grau juxtaposes Anna's dreams of perfection with a perverse setting for the beginning of the honeymoon. At Port Bella, Robert meets the night clerk, who is totally naked and apparently unconcerned about his appearance. The hotel is hardly a newlywed's dream, for all the people there are elderly. Robert is hardly the enthusiastic bridegroom: "He did not like people sleeping close to him. He could not stand being touched . . ." (p. 225). Fortunately, the honeymoon is interrupted and the couple must return to
New Orleans, for the Old Man is injured. The calm with which Anna handles the situation is overwhelming to Robert, and he perceives her as a nun, "starched wimple and black veil" (p. 230). Robert is thankful the honeymoon is over because "a couple more days of nothing to do and he'd have run out, over the hills and far away" (p. 235). The beginnings of Robert and Anna's union seem strange. They do, however, indicate the path this ill-conceived marriage will take. Anna will forever contain her emotions like a good nun, and Robert will seek sexual gratification in other women.

Margaret is one of the other women to whom Robert quite by chance turns for sexual gratification. Margaret seems less inhibited, more casual than her older sister, but although she may convey this casual demeanor, she is very much like Anna. She is methodical in her own way. When she decides to leave her first husband, she methodically marks everything that is hers. Margaret has an adventurous spirit, one that generally characterizes men, but Margaret is a paradox: at the same time that she seems less bound by the dictums of the Southern society (i.e., she travels and studies abroad and takes a lover), she, like Anna, designs a marriage which she needs. She is upset with herself for feeling this need for "god damn love" (p. 63):
To hell with love, Margaret thought. It's an ache in my stomach, it's a terrible feeling in my head, it's a skin-crawling fear that I've done something wrong. I've forgotten the password. And the frog isn't going to change into Prince Charming, the secret door isn't going to open. And the world is going to end any minute (p. 264).

Margaret desperately wants a different life from the one which society dictates:

'I want to choose too . . . .' To have what men have. To initiate, to choose. Not to wait, not always to wait. For the sleek, preening male. Because I need him. I don't want to need him (p. 267).

She wants a position with her father, but he denies her telling her "it's no place for a woman" (p. 268). When Margaret does receive some money of her own the reader is not sure what she would have done had Georges not called. But man beckoned woman and Margaret rushed to Georges in New York. Their agreement to marry is strange. Margaret keeps thinking "There had to be more, it couldn't all be like this," but she nevertheless replies "it's all right with me" (p. 272). "For five years Margaret was happy" (p. 273). She filled her life with the things that Anna filled hers with. She collected things and she remodeled her apartment three times, and when she was through with that, she began to collect men as she had collected Georges. As is typical of the Southern woman, when Margaret is beaten and her home destroyed, she seems to
bounce back incredibly well and continues to carry on, superficially revealing no emotional scars.

When she returns to the nest once again, her desire to exercise some control over her environment emerges: "How do you get rid of your beginnings, your genes" (p. 277)? she asks. But this desire is hardly a controlling one, for in the next line she instantly returns to her submissive position: "I'll find you a proper house, Papa, and I'll run it for you. I'll live with you like a dutiful daughter" (p. 278). Having left the nest to try a life on her own and having failed, Margaret comes home. She is an interesting figure, somewhat more spirited than her pristine sister, and yet she cannot surmount her environment. She tries at first to be different, to define herself independently of the smothering Southern society, but she fails and to this failure she responds by returning to her "blood," the scene of her birth. Margaret does display some typically masculine qualities: her drinking, her language, her lovers, her husbands. For Margaret to be different from Anna, she assumes personality traits similar to her father as well as Robert, but she cannot reconcile these masculine traits with her feminine traits, and thus she vacillates between the two extremes, never obtaining an androgynous existence.

Like Anna, however, Margaret recalls the convent and the role it played in her life. She remembers its
darkness as does Anna, and she remembers praying "Make me beautiful so that men stare at me on the street" (p. 279). She also recalls her mother and decides that she will run her father's house just like her mother, although neither she nor her father can remember what mother was like except that she thought that breeding was most important. When Margaret discovers that she is pregnant, her methodical almost maniacal drive to have everything in order, to buy another house, to refinish it perfectly before the baby is born reminds the reader of Anna, but when the birthing scene is described Margaret's relationship to her son is strange. She does not understand the process and has the baby as though she were laying an egg.

In a smothering, religious environment, Anthony, Anna's son, begins and ends his short, ill-conceived life. Anna's reaction to Anthony's fatal illness is that of religious fanaticism. Once again Anna turns to another source for strength, a way of life that she had learned much earlier. Even before Anthony's illness, Anna chooses isolation as opposed to integration. She closes her home in New Orleans and lives at Port Bella exclusively. She exists on the periphery of society, and with Anthony's illness, her self-imposed exile becomes even more tragic, for she assumes the responsibility for his illness. Like her mother, she too produces "bad blood," an observation that she had made as a child about her own mother. In an
attempt to atone for this "bad blood" she punishes herself. Her bizarre methods of punishment recall those figures of Flannery O'Connor's who in their desperation to find the one light submit themselves to extreme pain. Anna's world is so distorted that she both accepts and denies Anthony's illness. He is all that remains from her foiled Romantic vision of her marriage, and she tries desperately to hold onto him, smothering him as she herself was smothered by convention.

In his last days, the child tries to reach beyond "the blackout shrouded house" but finds his reach insufficient. To his failure he responds with laughter and to his mother he responds with cruelty, "maybe you should pray harder" (p. 312). But Anna remains stable, emotionless. As usual, she never even cries, and the child marvels at her self-control. With his death, "she accepted that hurt with the dumb stoicism of exhaustion. She did not pray for the recovery of his body" (p. 320). With Anthony's death, Anna slips even further into her stoic isolation. Her fever, a result of the ant bites, reveals her distorted sense of reality:

We are all guilty, she thought; 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? . . . That no prayer or
incense dispels. Thoughts like worms before the grave. She was dead, she was dying, she was alive. The shapes faded, the bells ceased, the flickering invisible candles turned back to air (p. 322).

Anthony's death symbolically introduces Anna's final emotional death. Her "marriage" becomes a business arrangement: "He was merely a business associate of her father's, an old friend . . . . She had loved God and she had loved her son . . . . Love was a burden she was glad to be rid of" (p. 322). And so like Grau's other heroines, Joan and Abigail, Anna watches with relief as the desire for love leaves her forever.

As the novel progresses, Margaret, after another nightmarish marriage, becomes the Old Man's "second son." For Anna and Margaret, emotion and intuition no longer control their identities; instead, reason prevails. Margaret is the shrewd businessman that Robert once was, and Anna sets about restoring a town, initiating its "economic revival"; restoring houses is too domestic a task now. Unlike Anna's, however, Margaret's sexuality remains for a while. When Margaret copulates with Robert after many years, she controls the situation and yet later she regrets their encounter:

Then, in the midst of her laugh, something moved in her body, something completely unexpected. A roar, a jolt. Unpleasant and unfortunately familiar feelings: pity and, right behind it, love.
A mistake, Margaret though again and again, as the years passed. A real mistake. . . . He could only be a problem for her (p. 356).

Margaret's impulsive life soon gives way to reason totally: "But there was no reason to spend your time regretting. It was finished. If she still had twinges, well there was nobody to blame but herself" (p. 357). She, like Anna also bids farewell to love:

>This is what age is, Margaret thought, with the steady passing of years. A slow diminution in feeling, in activities . . . . While the self makes fewer demands . . . . Her interest in men lessened. She admitted them to her bed more from habit than from raging desire . . . . She could feel herself settling down into her life, pulling it up around her like covers . . . . The excitement, the hysterical amusement had disappeared-- . . . . In their place was a calm competence: I am eternal, nothing can ever happen to me. Wherever I am, everything looks familiar to me . . . (p. 365).

As Margaret and Anna reverse roles, become more manly, so do they reverse men. Anna takes over Joshua and Margaret Robert. Unfortunately, neither woman finds any real satisfaction in their new challenges. When the reader discovers them twenty years later by the deathbed of their father, they are no different from their old selves. Anna still retreats to Port Bella and Margaret still uses the language of a sailor. Unlike Stanley, the elusive condor, Miss Margaret and Miss Anna cannot simply walk away to a new life. They are like the birds in the incredible cage
Anna designs. They are trapped in a humid, restricting world where the sky is forever beyond their reach. They have become petty and small, and even in death they find a common ground for war, Robert. They both control his trust, and even though they may bicker, they will control Robert as they themselves were and are controlled by an inflexible society. They will continue to create cages for living things, paying society back for their own social captivity.

When the novel ends, once again the same theme is reflected in the lives of its characters: though the individual may search for an identity, that search is distorted, averted, aborted by the Southern society. Although everyone attempts to define himself in The Condor Passes, it is Margaret and Anna who seem to fail ultimately. Without a mother to guide them or a father at home, they are left to flounder amidst the stereotypes of the Southern society. Anna, caught in the web of a Romantic vision, plans a perfect life which ends tragically as a result of the conflict inherent in a world view which embraces only one side of an androgynous vision. Margaret plunges blindly through three tragic marriages and emerges from them only to bid love a fond farewell. Forced to assume different roles, Margaret and Anna reach again for identities which are extreme. Anna, a religious fanatic hermit, and Margaret, her father's "second son," present
alternatives to the Southern woman's style of life. She can become a social outcast, turning either to complete isolation or to a life predicated upon reason. There is no middle road. The fiction of Grau seems to suggest that if the Romantic vision is not realized, another vision, also one-sided, must serve as an alternative, an alternative in which love ceases to exist and intuition is denied.
FOOTNOTES


2Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970), p. 34. Scott presents the idea that "because of her physical allure and her capacities for creativity and serenity, woman [becomes] the embodiment of the Romantic dream." Incongruous with this notion is woman's sexuality. The antithetical notions regarding woman convey the tragedy inherent in the Southern male's perception of woman.

3Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), pp. 18-22. The Sacred Heart Academy in Saint Louis emphasized "mental discipline and intellectual vigor. The founder wanted the girls to be introduced to current events and scientific discoveries . . . ." She advocated that the study of literature provided a basis for judging as well as reasoning.


5Scott, pp. 99-100.
Chapter Five

THE KEEPERS OF THE HOUSE

In Shirley Ann Grau's Pulitzer-prize-winning novel, The Keepers of the House (1964), the novelist writes an exciting story in a tightly-structured novel. The region to which she directs her attention is once again the South, more specifically, Mississippi. Although the characters become almost secondary when the action of the novel turns to a relatively accurate portrayal of Southern politics framed by Southern bigotry, no one can deny the poignancy of Abigail Howland Tolliver's attempt to overcome the pressures of a community that seeks to destroy her and her homeland. Abigail, certainly a solitary figure by the end of the novel, reveals the conflict inherent in a Southern woman's search to emerge independent of her surrounding community. Abigail's two-hundred-year-old heritage in Wade County makes her "an inextricable part of a living history and community, attached and determined in a thousand ways by other wills and destinies of people [she] has only heard about." But her self-consciousness, that is to say her Southern awareness of her past and her relationship to it, does not in any way lessen the significance of Abigail's search for self.
Although this novel's focal point is not necessarily Abigail's search for identity, her unsuccessful search, like Joan's in *The House on Coliseum Street* or Margaret's or Anna's in *The Condor Passes*, lends further to the frustrations at an innocent character who is eventually destroyed. In *The Keepers of the House*, Grau makes no attempt to conceal the identity of the region of which she writes; she clearly, almost bluntly, informs the reader that hers is a story about the South that demonstrates that

the experience of evil and the experience of tragedy are parts of the Southern heritage that are as difficult to reconcile with the American legend of innocence and social felicity as the experience of poverty and defeat are to reconcile with the legends of abundance and success.2

The narrator of this tale of evil and tragedy is Abigail Howland Tolliver, and it is her search for self and her ultimate failure to define that self which magnifies further the tragic consequences of the confrontation between Madison City and the granddaughter of Will Howland. Abigail's failure to define herself (i.e., obtain an androgynous identity) is foreshadowed by the failure of other Howland women to attain identities independent of the community. Only Margaret Howland offers some hope for freedom from the suffocating dictums of Madison City.
Through Margaret Howland, Grau depicts a woman whose strength and individuality distinguish her from other Grau characters. Like Vera in *The Condor Passes*, Margaret integrates both reason and intuition into her existence. Unlike Vera, however, Margaret must overcome obstacles in her relationship with Will that Vera never encounters in her relationship with Stanley. The complexities of Margaret's interracial marriage are overcome by her sense of self, which in part stems from a childhood which taught Margaret to survive independently of others. Margaret's sense of self is a very private feeling, a part of a very private world which Will Howland has developed for her and a world which she relinquishes when she returns to New Church.

The only significant sign of unrest in Margaret's life is her children. Although Margaret's children are angry people, their anger seems minor when compared to Madison City's anger. The city's anger, which is predicated upon bigotry, emerges when they discover that Will Howland, a respectable, wealthy landowner in their own county marries a not-so-respectable mulatto and makes their covenant a legal one and their children legitimate. The townspeople's reaction is predictable: as long as "the wood colts" remain in the woods, Will Howland can live however he pleases. But when those colts leave the woods to proclaim their heritage, the Howlands, whoever
they may be, must pay for the very Southern Madison City's embarrassing position. Unfortunately, there is no one but a Howland woman and a Howland slave to pay Will Howland's dues. Together they become the keepers of the house, and Abigail Howland emerges only partially victorious over society, for she fails in her search for self. If Abigail's private fight to create a new self, one independent of her environment, does fail, she at least succeeds in saving the Howland land. Her sense of place, however, provides no real satisfaction, for she becomes an isolated, peripheral figure who in the end lives a hopeless and loveless existence.

The Howland women's lives are the focal point of this study. They demonstrate many of the characteristics of the prototype discussed previously. Grau notes that these characters are "Southern" women whose lives are governed by "blood" and "birth," and perhaps it is the influence of the history of their Southern community which denies them their autonomy. The influence of the historical memory of their community overpowers their attempts to remain independent of that same community.

The first Howland woman developed is Lorena Howland. There are no pictures of her. No pictures at all. He burned them one summer afternoon.

He was not supposed to have married her. He was not even supposed to have met her. She was not at any of the house parties and dances. She was not at the concerts
or the assemblies or the memorials.
She was not at the teas, or the
receptions, or the Sunday dinners.
That he met her at all was an accident. 3

Grau clearly suggests here that society's expectations
for Will Howland are not fulfilled. He married a nobody,
but for Will she epitomized the romantic notion of a per-
fect Southern woman:

Her face was round, her skin very
white. Her hair, which she had pulled
back over her ears into a crisp bun
at her neck, was straight and heavy
and black. William thought he could
see her glowing, and all the verses
of Poe, of which he was so fond,
began running through his head (p. 19).

How appropriate that a dutiful Southern man of arts' con-
cept of the perfect woman should be remembered now. Not
only is Poe famous for his description of perfect women
but for depicting perversity and mystery in his writing.
Lorena is beautiful, but beneath that beauty lies an
alcoholic mother, a "dead" brother and a father whose eyes
grieved for all living things. Will Howland marries this
ill-fated romantic ideal and they return to Madison City
and live in the old house.

Lorena dutifully provides Will with two children and
dies soon after the second child's birth. She assumes the
rather stereotypic role of the frail Southern woman who
cannot satisfy her husband's expectations. In Lorena's
pre-death delirium, her "luminous" eyes hallucinate and
it is those same "lifeless" eyes that Will remembers. A
new wing is added for Lorena and the children, and the wisteria which she planted continues to grow long after her death. She is a stock character who is quiet and submissive and whose ideal exterior conceals the frail interior which cannot support a life of child bearing. Lorena searches for no identity; perhaps it is too soon for her to be expected to do so in the middle of the nineteenth century, or perhaps she is simply too weak to try. Years later, her husband recalls her whisper of a life and her ephemeral quality, for "she'd glow in the night" (p. 25).

Annie Howland appears as a round character when compared to Lorena. She is kind, "noisy," and "capable." She marries a second cousin, lives in a "big white house on the tree-lined Atlanta street" and has a "jolly fat husband" (p. 25). She professes concern for Will:

Annie suggests society's disapproval of Will's first wife and echoes their desire for such an eligible bachelor to remarry. Annie is quick to come when her niece, the first Abigail, is about to marry. Together, Abigail and Annie work as a team. Annie fills Abigail with all the axioms of Southern living and teaches her the value of "blood" in
life. By the end of the wedding, Annie's sense of propriety gives way and she submits to the warm feeling of too much brandy and remembers her own grandiose affair and yearns for Will to have his own wedding. Years later, after the second Abigail's marriage, Annie dies, leaving behind many grown children who share her concern for propriety. Annie is a very "capable" woman who chooses to define herself as traditional and feminine. She directs her talents towards her home and towards her society. She is much stronger than Lorena, for Annie is a fecund, robust, and aggressive woman who can affect the lives of others. Amidst all of her prospering, she and her husband literally eat themselves to death symbolically suggesting that unrestrained prosperity can prove fatal as indeed it does with Abigail Howland and John Tolliver's own prosperous but ill-fated marriage. Annie is the paradigm of successful Southern womanhood.

Annie's niece, Abigail Howland, seems quite different from either Lorena or Annie:

She had no resemblance to her mother at all--she might not have had one, she was so much like her father. She was not a very pretty girl, but she was bright and gay and cheerful. And interested in the world (p. 26).

The figure which she chooses to emulate in the absence of a mother is her father. She appears in her youth quite reasonable and concerned with worldly things. She forces her father to subscribe to the "Yankee" press and Madison
City becomes upset with her selection of reading material. Their voiced concern early in the novel that "some people turn traitors" clearly foreshadows their actions at the end of the novel when they turn upon the second Abigail for her grandfather's "treasonous actions." At first Abigail appears a relatively independent woman. She graduates from high school "a tall thin girl, with long-blond-white hair" (p. 29) without any serious callers. She spends her time reading. Interestingly, Abigail soon decides her newspaper reading is too boring for her, and she begins reading poetry. Like Anna and Joan in Gray's other works, Abigail is clearly influenced by the material she reads. Her reading changes her from a rather reasonable young woman to a melancholic youth:

It was very elegant to have a young girl murmuring verse to herself of an afternoon, quite alone with only her wide bright eyes showing the excitement and the aching of seventeen (p. 30).

Fortunately, this Howland woman has a chance to educate herself and attends Mary Baldwin only to find a husband and to return to Madison City for the traditional Howland wedding. She is relieved to marry because "not being pretty . . . it worries a girl" (p. 31). Will is quite amazed with his own daughter:

She seemed not to have noticed, seemed never to have given it a wisp of consideration . . . . He saw endless unknown stretches opening up before him. She thought, she worried. Behind that
bland smooth face, those gentle eyes
... He had never before imagined
her as having thoughts or feelings of
her own. She had always seemed so
content ... (pp. 36-37).

The third Howland woman seems to take initially a
few steps forward toward a definition of self. She reads;
she has a chance for an education, and she even chooses
to marry a foreigner. She also moves away from
Mississippi. She appears more independent even if she
does marry. But in ten years, Abigail Howland Mason
takes a step backwards in her search for self. She, with-
out her husband, returns to Madison City to stay. She
brings with yer yet another Howland woman, Miss Abigail
Howland Mason.

Mrs. Abigail Howland Mason's life in Virginia is
not developed in the novel. We are told that she is unh-
happily married and that Mr. Mason returns happily to
England with the start of World War II. It is at this
point that Abigail returns home. She, as is typical of
the other Southern female prototypes discussed in this
dissertation, chooses to ignore the world, including the
war, and to read instead. She lives on the Howland land
alone. Her withdrawal from society is a smooth one. She
simply chooses to return to a basically rural, agri-
cultural setting where trees and fields populate the
horizon as opposed to Lexington's narrow streets and
cramped buildings. Madison City even seems to forget that
Abigail ever left because the town refers to both Abigail's as the Howland girls. When Abigail does receive a letter from her estranged husband, she burns it. By ignoring the war and ignoring his letters, Abigail successfully slips from the reach of society. Her tuberculosis becomes a symbol of Abigail's diseased state of being. She appears voluntarily to give up on life. Her return to the Howland place and subsequent isolated stay confirms this notion. When she later slips from her daughter's memory, we learn that she dies and is buried in Santa Fe. Ironically, at the time of her death, her daughter is given some scripture to read that is very similar to the passage quoted from the early Yeats at the beginning of the novel when Abigail Howland had yet to meet her future husband. When Will states "'they come in their season, . . . everything does'" (p. 135) it becomes clear that Abigail Howland Mason is "the lonely of heart [which] is withered away" (p. 29) and that her season is a brief one. Like her mother Lorena, this Howland woman's life is frail and fleeting. She attempts to break away from her heritage through reading, then marriage to a foreigner, followed by the move from Madison City; but all attempts fail. Like Lorena Howland, Abigail attempts to be a keeper of the house but fails. Abigail is the first Howland not buried on the property, but instead remains in New Mexico. Will believes that if she hated to travel alive, it would
not be proper to make her travel dead. Abigail proves to be not only weak-willed but also weak in spirit and body. Her daughter barely remembers her and the only memory that the town has is a stained glass window in the Methodist church.

Mrs. Abigail Howland Mason is not a strong character. She seems to have inherited some of her mother's weaknesses. She does, however, come a little closer to achieving some sense of identity. She is more educated and determined about what it is that she wants. But when she gives up her reading of the "Yankee" press to ponder Shelley and Yeats and finally to marry an English professor, she too seems to embody the tragedy inherent in the contradictions of the romantic antebellum myth. To marry for love is not sufficient. To believe in the Romantic ideal is even less beneficial. Her false expectations spell failure, and her life is a symbol of false hope. As a relatively young woman, she stops living in the real world and turns to the world of written words to act out vicariously the fleeting season of her life. Abigail's futile existence means little in itself but a pattern evolves in her life which clearly relates her to other Southern prototypes. Unless she learns to balance her emotions with reason, she will fail. A life predicated upon intuition alone is futile because it is incomplete. Whether the character be male or female, a balance of the two is necessary for
successful relationships and lives. The antebellum myth is based upon emotional, romantic notions that quite clearly draw the dividing line between the masculine sphere and the feminine sphere. To exist in only one sphere is to recognize only half of life, and thus Abigail's refusal to exist in the real world leads her to become a barren, psychopathic, diseased figure whose life ends in a foreign environment. Even in death, Abigail remains alone, isolated from the South which she so clearly held on to for a sense of belonging, as is evidenced by her return to the Howland place.

Margaret Howland, Will Howland's mulatto wife, is not influenced by the same things that eventually destroy Abigail Howland. Margaret is raised in the black man's world; she does not represent the white man's ideal and therefore does not face the same obstacles that the other Howland women face. Margaret is very similar to Stanley's wife, Vera, in The Condor Passes. Margaret seems independent and peaceful in her private world with Will Howland. Their relationship is not only fecund but personally satisfying. Theirs is a strong union. What is interesting though is that Margaret's place in the marriage is a submissive one, and yet Margaret's submission does not hinder the development of her character as an independent figure.
Margaret, like both Abigails, can barely remember her mother. To Margaret, her mother is "only a vague black shape and a name . . . a stark figure, lonely and slight. An outcast, by her own desire . . . part of nothing" (p. 66). Margaret's mother tries desperately to reveal Margaret's white blood through voodoo and buttermilk, but all attempts fail, and, when Margaret is eight, her mother leaves. Margaret, because of her white blood, is naturally separated from the black community. From the start of her life she is considered "different" and therefore forced to depend upon herself. Like the other Howland women, Margaret too seems destined to live out the role of her heritage. Whereas the Howland women are influenced by their sense of place and their sense of "blood," Margaret is influenced only by her blood: "Black outside" (p. 63) white inside. Her cross-breeding leads her to live a life away from the black community where "nobody bothered her; nobody noticed" (p. 73).

Margaret's life in the woods, her hollow tree trunk bed, her superstitions indicate that like the other Howland women, she too prefers an existence on the periphery of society. In addition, Margaret seems to play a mythic role. In Grau's, "The Black Prince," Alberta and Stanley emerge as mythic, black figures who become immortal in the memories of all. Margaret is much like Alberta, statuesque in appearance, moving by night, sleeping by day, and
dedicated to her man. But Margaret's role-playing does not restrict her development as an individual. If anything, it encourages or forces her to depend upon herself, and perhaps this is the primary difference between Margaret and the other Howland women. When one is neither white nor black, there is no community upon which to depend, and so Margaret develops her own identity independent of her black roots. Like Abigail Howland Tolliver, Margaret too encounters ghosts. Her grandmother's ghost begs her to be with "my blood" (p. 84), but Margaret, unlike Abigail, denies the requests of her ghost. Being neither white nor black, she owes the specter nothing.

Through her great-grandmother's death, Margaret finds even more freedom:

> Her body grew great and full, and she thought, I'll never be put in a box and lowered into the earth . . . . I won't ever get old and I won't ever die (p. 86).

The following spring Margaret becomes a woman, and she observes that "most girls that age were married. Lots of them had a child or two . . . " (p. 90). Margaret, as a member of the black community, also feels pressures to marry and to bear children, but she recognizes these pressures and deals with them in her own way. She does not wish to conform and announces silently to herself that she will leave her relatives. She grows even closer to the earth; she seems driven to investigate its wildlife,
streams, and vegetation and, like Will Howland, she
notices "the way things come into their seasons, the way
they appear and go each year at the same time . . ." (p. 92). She understands Will Howland's views in that she
intuits change and its necessity. Unlike the Howland
women, Margaret learns that life is not forever, not as
she had initially perceived it to be, and thus she does
not cling to her old ways. Margaret's ability to leave
behind memories of old faces and old social demands per-
mits her a freedom of which the other women in the novel
are incapable. She is an intuitive figure who knows that
something is going to happen to her:

I knowed you was coming, . . . Only
I didn't know what shape you'd have . .
. . The signs had been telling her and
now they didn't have to anymore . . .
She no longer had to watch and listen
(p. 96).

She becomes "a woman grown, and making her own way" (p.
97). She does not look back, nor does she seek escape in
the memories of New Church. She is a virgin figure tra-
versing the fields of Wade County to a new life.

Even though Will Howland at first responds stereo-
typically to Margaret as a "gal" claiming she's white, he
soon learns to love and to respect Margaret. "She bore
him five children all told. Three of them lived, two
girls and a boy" (p. 118). Margaret, despite her motherly
ties to her children, sends them away from the Howland
place one by one, none of them ever to return. She does
so to free them to live white lives. She is very practical as opposed to emotional in bearing and rearing her children. She goes to Cleveland to have each one of them to make sure that "Negro" does not appear on the birth certificate, and she and Will Howland marry, thus making the children legitimate.

To other Howland women, Margaret is a masculine figure whose "size, strength, and physical endurance" (p. 117) distinguish her from them. She is a "silent, dark woman" (p. 171) whose strength sends her away from the Howland place when Will dies. She returns to New Church and the house with which Will provided her. When she goes to her death the same day as Will four years later, she is described as a woman

Who was tall as he was. Who could work like a man in the fields. Who bore him a son. Margaret who'd asked him for nothing. Margaret, who reminded him of the freemoving Alberta of the old tales. Margaret, who was strong and black. And who had no claim on him (p. 175).

Margaret emerges as a strong figure in the novel. Ironically, she is a mulatto woman whose freedom is socially limited simply because of her color, yet she seems to be the most independent woman in the novel. Despite her failure to integrate into a black or white community, she finds love and devotion and personal satisfaction in her relationship with Will Howland. She makes many sacrifices in order to prepare what she believes to
be the best environment for her children. Although she is somewhat submissive in her role to Will, he soon ceases to stereotype her. He grows to respect her and to act according to her wishes. Margaret surmounts the obstacles of her stereotypic role in her relationship with Will. Her freedom is a very private one and a very personal one. She defines herself and accepts her fate without weakening. She remains both intuitive and reasonable throughout the novel. When she returns to New Church, she does not return because she is weak. Rather, she returns to the scene of her birth because she and Will had planned her return upon his death. Margaret's definition of self may be a very private process, but it is an existence which she chooses and in doing so, she through the integration of the masculine and feminine sphere emerges as the only true androgynous figure in the novel.

Perhaps the most tragic figure is Abigail Howland Tolliver. Through her sometimes blind intuitive nature, she becomes a victim of the Southern society's anger, an anger that is predicated upon the belief in inequality. Typical of that anger is Wade County which after the war will "go back to sleep" (p. 139). It is a small, narrow-minded, bigoted town where the present has little effect upon the past. Women remain submissive and comfortable in their feminine sphere. The men remain domineering and proud of their masculine existence. There exists in
Madison City no understanding of true brotherhood, and a
blatant denial of civil rights. Everyone is prejudiced.
Even the Wade County blacks look down upon the blacks
from New Church, and it is in this atmosphere that Abigail
Howland Tolliver must fight to remain a keeper of the
house.

In the novel, Abigail is the first character that we
meet. It is winter in Mississippi and the end of one
life for Abigail—"I have the illusion that I am sitting
here, dead. That I am like the granite outcroppings, the
bones of the earth, fleshless and eternal" (p. 10). This
new life is in reality not so very different from her old
one:

I am alone, yes, of course I am, but
I am not particularly afraid. The house
was empty and lonely before—I just did
not realize it—it's no worse now. I
know that I shall hurt as much as I
have been hurt. I shall destroy as much
as I have lost.

It's a way to live, you know. It's
a way to keep your heart ticking under
the sheltering arches of your ribs.
And that's enough for now (p. 10).

Abigail's thoughts are very revealing. She is totally
alone and glad of it. She has already stepped beyond
society's reach, and although she will not feel very
much anymore, she remembers her past ancestry:

I feel the pressure of generations
behind me, pushing me along the re-
curring cycles of birth and death. I
was once the child going to bed
upstairs, whispering to reassure myself against the creatures of the night
.

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 (pp. 9-10).

These memories are, after all, the reason for her isolation. It was in defense of her ancestry that she gave up her social existence and many of her feminine qualities. She is, in a sense, an asexual character in this opening chapter who reveals that she is inextricably bound to the Howland land and that that tie is the most important after all. Since her husband and his sense of community overcome Abigail and deny her further identification as John Tolliver's wife, she turns to the land for a sense of who she really is. This attempt to redefine herself is only superficially successful, for Abigail denies her intuitive nature in the end, which in the beginning is the force which shapes her character.

As a child returning to the Howland place, Abigail's childish feminine nature perceives the world of Wade County as a world she had never left. Her memories are jostled by her return:

Sometimes I feel that my grandfather was my father. And that Margaret, black Margaret, was my mother. Living in a house like this you got your feelings all mixed up (p. 113).
As typical of the Howland women before her, she learns to detect race as

southern women do. It was a thing they prided themselves on, this ability to tell Negro blood. And to detect pregnancies before a formal announcement, and to guess the exact length of gestation. Blood and birth--these were their two concerns (p. 113).

"Blood and birth," are the two words which shape the life of Abigail and Southern women. It is their intuitive nature which permits them to understand these phenomena. Abigail is also schooled in the Bible. "It's a Southern talent, you might say" (p. 113). Clearly, Grau suggests that indeed a Southern woman's life is different from her Northern sisters.

The character of Abigail also clearly suggests that intuition plays a major role in the development of Southern women. They take great pride in their ability to know things, to see the future, and they also take great pride in their identification as "ladies": "Abigail's mother was a lady and a lady is unfailingly polite and gentle to everyone..." (p. 117). This observation and others similar to it lead the reader to forget that the setting of this story is the middle of the twentieth century. Abigail's dreams and expectations and education seem almost archaic; yet, if we subscribe to the notion that the South is a region which even in contemporary times continues to cling to the past, Abigail's story becomes a
mirror of reality.

As a mirror of reality, another force emerges in Abigail's story which may explain in part the treachery of the South which all of Grau's figures seem to encounter. As a child, Abigail is schooled in nature. She learns about rattlers, "back-country hunting, on foot, with lots of whiskey" (p. 119), birds of prey and hunting dogs that tore her pet coon to bits, the whelping of kittens, dogs dead from snake bites, the swamps and their mysterious corridors, the earth and its poisonous weeds and the choosing of the pick of the litter. This parade of endless natural experiences introduces Abigail to birth and death, the only two real seasons. She also learns that nature is not a benevolent force and that behind any tree, under any rock, or perhaps in the musty waters of the swamps death awaits. The South's terrain is very different from the North. Its lush vegetation and humid weather permit the earth to flourish. Whether it be a fecund field of cotton or a dank, hidden swamp, this natural environment is unpredictable and any attempt to penetrate its core may prove deathly. Certainly, the influence of such a fecund yet mysterious environment must affect its inhabitants. Perhaps they too may appear normal at first, but a closer look may reveal that they too are unpredictable, treacherous.

Amidst this mysterious environment Abigail continues
her development as a Southern woman and predictably
develops her romantic expectations concerning love:

I wrote long poems too, about stars
for eyes and clover breath and so forth.
I pulled the curtains in my room and
turned on one very small light and
stretched out on the bed and wrote on
a clipboard I held up . . .

'Let her be,' my grandfather told
Margaret, 'it's love and she's pining.'

I tried to glare at him, . . . I
flounced upstairs and started to write
an epic poem about unrequited love and
star-crossed lovers and all that.
Pretty soon I got tired of fitting words
into meter, so I read Romeo and Juliet
straight through again, crying at the
saddest passages (p. 139).

When Abigail falls in love she reminds the reader of Joan
in The House on Coliseum Street. She is moody and medita-
tive, and her immature behavior is accepted because "it's
love and she's pining" (p. 139). Abigail's childish
actions are not questioned; in fact, they are encouraged
because no one tries to correct her behavior. Annie helps
her prepare for college by seeing that Abigail dresses
properly, has a mink coat and drives her own car, but no
mention of studies occurs. Everyone seems concerned about
social mores, not actually learning something of value.

Abigail is not happy at college, but she does con-
tinue to grow in her blind romantic way:

the nights were so unbearably, hauntingly
beautiful that you wanted to cry. How
every patch of light and shadow from the
moon seemed deep and lovely. Calm or
storm, it didn't matter. It was exquisite
and mysterious, just because it was night
(p. 143).
Later, Abigail's memory of college days provokes in her a realization which all Grau's female characters seem to undergo:

I wonder now how I lost it, the mysteriousness, the wonder. It faded steadily until one day it was entirely gone, and night became just dark, and the moon was only something that waxed and waned and heralded a changing in the weather . . . . The glitter was gone.

And the worst part was that you didn't know exactly at what point it disappeared. There was nothing you could point to and say: now, there . . . . It wasn't even anything to grieve over, it had been such a long time passing.

That glitter and hush-breath quality just slipped away. The way most things do, I've found out. The way my mother's life did, gently, bit by bit, until it was gone and I didn't even have the satisfaction of mourning. And my love too. There isn't even a scene--not for me, nothing so definite--just the seepage, the worms of time . . . .

That's the way it happened with me, during the years. Things I thought surrounded me have pulled back . . . .

But it doesn't matter. Not really. Not to me. Not any more. I have come to expect no more than this. At least I am not disappointed . . . (pp. 143-144).

This moment brings with it the realization that a life lived solely for love is a life lived in vain. She goes on to suggest that, with this realization, all of the mystery and wonder of life are gone. As is typical, the character bids farewell totally to the feminine sphere, and ceases to love. It is difficult to understand why
these figures cease to love at all, but perhaps there is also the suggestion that life predicated upon false hopes and dreams entirely cannot sustain the blow of reality. Perhaps these figures become resentful towards a community that lies to them, and perhaps the disappointment is so strong that the character denies any further identification with a society that encourages the belief in a deceptive one-sided view of life, for these characters fear to fail twice.

It becomes clear then that these characters—whether consciously or subconsciously—in seeking their identities are doomed from the beginning. The initial step towards self-integration is one in which the character must engross her self in the traditional, feminine sphere of the Southern woman. And indeed, Abigail does so at college. "After my first real dance, I didn't sleep at all. I lay in my bed and shivered and remembered until I saw dawn break and sun pour in the window" (p. 144). She also has her first sexual encounter after almost drowning:

There's only one night like that—ever--where you're filled with wonder and excitement for no other reason but the earth is beautiful and mysterious and your body is young and strong (p. 147).

At the same time of recalling the beauty of the night, she also remembers that no one told her how easy it was to lose her virginity, "but then I hadn't even been taught to swim" (p. 147). Perhaps in reflecting, Abigail suggests
that she is never really prepared for life. She is not prepared for losing her virginity and her inability to swim metaphorically suggests and foreshadows her own floundering amidst the vindictive Madison City community. Abigail's father has not prepared her to face the hidden forces of the community:

He was always so quiet and reserved, never talked about himself or his business with me. As for me, I was used to that manner of his, and I didn't mind it at all--after all, there are lots of southern men who treat their ladies that way. It's quite pleasant, really (p. 150).

At times, Will "was as courtly as a planter out of a novel" (p. 151) as indeed her future husband is.

After her marriage to John Tolliver, Abigail begins her ritual of reproduction. Her ambitious, duplicitous husband encourages Abigail's efforts even when she fails to produce a son the second time. Responding to the pressures of her need to bear an heir for John Tolliver, Abigail "put [her] head down on the coarse hospital sheets and cried bitterly. I had wanted a boy so much, so very much" (p. 163). Abigail finally bears him a son and is rewarded with "a diamond broach from Cartier" (p. 177).

But the dutiful wife and the perfect family are not enough for John Tolliver. He wants everything, including the governor's position, and as Abigail is
sinking into the deceptive softness of early middle age, the comforting round of house and four children, the sentimental wifely role in state politics. Sherries in the morning (little giggles because liquor was still illegal in most counties), coffees in the afternoon, weekends with the proper people. Baby showers, wedding showers (p. 190).

In his bigoted, ambitious way, John Tolliver paves the road to his own family's destruction. Ironically, that same road is travelled by Abigail, and for her presently it represents something warm and sentimental:

I've always liked to drive alone at night. There is a sentimental brightness to things--it's a good deal like being drunk. I always see the world perfectly then, see it in all its great pathetic clarity. I become invincible, beyond life and death. With the hum of wheels under me, I can love the human race, as I never can at any other time. I can think great cloudy thoughts, and tremble with the power of life surging in me (pp. 191-192).

Later there is a faint foreshadowing of what is to come. It is Abigail's intuitive nature which discerns danger amidst the sentimentality:

something had brushed right by me--for good or evil I didn't know. Because I hadn't understood. I had rocketed through the night alone, something traveling with me. And I had come out all right. The empty roads had saved me from a high-speed accident. And my own spiritual denseness hadn't answered whatever it was that had called to me (p. 193).

When the danger becomes real, when the town learns that their founder and wealthiest citizen had legitimized
his "wood colts," Abigail is left alone to deal with their anger. "I was shivering with rage and fury. All my life I had been trained to depend on men, now when I needed them they were gone" (p. 215). The foundation of Abigail's existence is denied her in the end. There is no husband to lean on, but Abigail's sense of place and love for her homeland leads her to fight, along with Oliver, Madison City. In this battle she demonstrates shrewdness, cunning, skill and above all reason. She needs no one but herself, and through her redefinition of self she saves the Howland place. But her resentment for the community and its perpetuation of false values turns her into a revengeful creature who has given up her feminine identity to assume a vengeful, peripheral existence. She may successfully defend her home, but she has lost herself in doing so. Her desire to get even with the townspeople and thus subsequently to close the town bit by bit and to taunt Robert only strengthens her sense of isolation. By the end of the novel, Abigail is a woman void of feeling "Huddled fetus-like against the cold unyielding boards" (p. 240).

Abigail is a character shaped by society and by her ancestry:

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. When I look at the Providence
River, I don't just see a small yellow river that crests into flood every year and spreads its silt over the bottom cotton lands . . . .

That's the way it is with me. I don't just see things as they are today. I see them as they were. I see them all around in time. And this is bad. Because it makes you think you know a place because it makes you think you know the people in it (p. 194).

Inherent in her observation is the idea that a sense of time and place can be deceptive. All of the memories and souvenirs leads one to believe that this personal history would make life easier, but, if anything, these memories cloak the reality of the present. Unfortunately, the only thing which prevents Abigail from slipping into total obscurity are these memories. Since her love is denied and her position in the community is threatened, there is nothing more for her to hold on to but the Howland place.

Grau's Southern prototypes clearly possess a sense of place: they lose everything but their homes. All begin their lives in the romantic tradition; they listen to sad music or read mystical poetry. They live to marry and then to breed. Blood and birth inform their lives. When their men leave, the women frequently return home to spend their lives alone, existing just beyond the reach of society. In the process, they deny their intuitive natures and embrace the masculine sphere, because at least reason enables them to deny their disappointments in love and to welcome lives void of emotion. "It's a way to live
you know. It's a way to keep your heart ticking under the sheltering arches of your ribs (p. 10).

All of these characters demonstrate tragic qualities when they emerge at the end of the novels with nothing. Their search for self is for some a more conscious process than others, but nevertheless they strive to play out their mythic roles allotted to them by the Southern community. Tragedy results when a society perceives the white woman not as an individual but as an ideal and the white man as an individual who worships as well as tries to affect a union between an ideal and its perpetuator. This is the tragedy inherent in the antebellum myth. No true union can occur between an ideal and mortal man. Without a sense of the Southern woman's androgynous identity, society will continue to worship an ideal which is nonexistent, and the Southern woman in the history of the literature of the South will continue to fail to redefine her role and to shed her mythic straitjacket.
FOOTNOTES

1C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), p. 37. Woodward goes on to say that it is a trait of the Southern writer to treat his characters not as individuals but as a part of a community. Grau suggests that her female characters do at least try to develop a self independent of the community but that the sense of community frequently overcomes the desire to break away from the mainstream of the Southern community.

2Woodward, p. 21.

CONCLUSION

As this dissertation demonstrates, the prototype discussed heretofore appears in Southern fiction as early as the 1880's in Chopin's works, and continues to reappear as late as the 1970's in Grau's works. This character is a respectable white woman whose family probably at one time belonged to the planter class of Southern society. Her identity is shaped most frequently by the antebellum myth which informed the lives of the planter class in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to the myth, this character's only means of fulfilling her role in society is as a mother-woman. As a mother-woman, the character marries and bears children and concerns herself with blood and birth. If marriage should fail her or if she fails to marry, she may assume a death-in-life existence in which her neurosis resulting from a denial of her femininity may eventually lead to her death, or if the character does not completely withdraw from society, she may substitute reason for intuition and live a life void of emotion. Either as a death-in-life figure or as a figure governed by reason, she finds no real happiness.

Such characters appear in the works of several additional Southern writers. William Faulkner frequently depicts the Southern woman who has not fulfilled "the
creative and sustaining role of motherhood\textsuperscript{1} as a perverse figure who assumes a death-in-life existence. Emily Grierson of "A Rose for Emily (1932) is the victim of "an exclusive, depersonalizing society"\textsuperscript{2} that does not acknowledge her as a member because she fails to marry. As suggested earlier, a woman's failure to realize her sexuality may lead her "to become engaged in a denial of reality in which she clings to an illusory view of life in order to overcome her sense of the inadequacy and abnormality of her own existence."\textsuperscript{3} Thus, Emily's perverse marriage through death to Homer Barron suggests the deleterious effects of a society that refuses to acknowledge Emily as an acceptable member simply because she is never a mother-woman. Emily recalls Miss Amelia of Carson McCuller's The Ballad of the Sad Cafe.

Rosa Coldfield in Absalom, Absalom (1936), is another figure denied her sexuality. Rosa spends her entire life weaving a fantasy that explains her failure to integrate herself. She is controlled by the past. When she is fourteen she is very similar to Gruch's protagonists who dream of the men they will marry. Charles Bon is Rosa's fairy tale lover. During her imaginary affair of the heart with Charles, Rosa writes poetry filled with the elements of romance. When Bon dies and prevents her from fulfilling her desire to love, a confused, embittered Rosa, unable to let go of her fantasy world, replaces Bon
with Thomas Sutpen. When Sutpen also fails to provide Rosa with a means of fulfilling her fantasies, she turns to embrace a life void of emotion and filled with revenge. She symbolizes sterility, the sign of death in life. 

Kate Cutrer in Walker Percy's The Moviegoer (1960) also demonstrates the tragedy of a life predicated upon the feminine realm only. Kate, suddenly robbed of her husband-to-be, is depicted after his death as a neurotic woman futilely struggling to give her life meaning after her reason for living has been denied. Through pills, psychiatric care, and another engagement, Kate attempts to remain a part of society. When Binx finally decides that he will marry Kate and protect her and provide for her, she is greatly relieved. "What I want is to believe in someone completely and then do what he wants me to do." In the last scene of the novel, Kate receives instructions on how to ride the streetcar. Her fantasy is finally realized: Binx tells her exactly what to do. Kate personifies the impotence of a life dependent upon men. She possesses no real desire to seek independence. When one man fails, she simply turns to another.

Anne Stanton of Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men (1946) is a Southern woman whose life does not follow the prescriptive formula for love and marriage at an early age. At seventeen, she plans to marry Jack Burden. She thinks of him as her great tragedian and perceives their
relationship in romantic terms. When he finally returns to marry her, his cynicism is so overwhelming that Anne cannot marry him. Instead, she turns to the strength of her relationship with her father and chooses the role of the unmarried, unemotional woman. Later, when she learns that her father had accepted a bribe in his career, she becomes disillusioned with the men she had been taught to depend upon, and she then engages in a rather sordid relationship with Willie Stark. She associates with him because she does not care about herself. In the end, Anne marries Jack. Their relationship is not the passionate, romantic union that Anne had imagined it would be when she was seventeen. It is a relationship, however, that will provide Anne with the man that she needs in order to remain a part of the community. Anne's dependence upon men denies her autonomy.

Granny Weatherall in Katherine Anne Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" (1947) is another Southern woman whose life is destroyed when she is a young girl because she believed that she would marry for love. The man she is to marry never comes and the bride is left waiting. She does marry several years later, but it is a marriage of convenience and not of love. Sixty years later, when her husband is dead and Granny is near death, it is not her husband whom she remembers but the man who jilted her. On her deathbed, she relives her wedding day.
Upon seeing no bridegroom and remembering "there's nothing more cruel than this," she blows out the candle and dies. Her denial of reality leads to her death.

Love and sexual fulfillment are all that matters for many of these Southern characters. Denied these aspects of their Southern womanhood, they may turn to an illusive reality and live out an imagined existence, as do Rose Coldfield, Joan Mitchell, and Emily Grierson, or they may turn to reason in order to find the strength to survive within the community. As masculine figures, void of emotion, they face a solitary existence as Dorinda Oakley and Mademoiselle Reiz. Their third alternative is to continue their dependence upon men as do Virginia and Kate Cutrer and Anne Stanton. But these are the only choices available to them.

Perhaps by limiting their choices, these Southern writers mirror the limitations of a society which refuses to provide women respectable social roles as autonomous souls. Perhaps by showing us how to fail in the search for self, these writers show us how to succeed. As yet, there is not a character who experiences complete autonomy, but Shirley Ann Grau suggests that the New South (i.e., the South of the 1980's) has not yet been treated in fiction. When a book does deal with the New South, perhaps that book will develop a strong, independent,
androgynous Southern woman who will at last debunk the myth which has informed her role for the last two hundred years.
FOOTNOTES


2 Page, p. 99.

3 Page, p. 102.

4 Page, p. 108.


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