

THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF PLACE
IN SELECTED NOVELS OF SHIRLEY ANN GRAU

AN ABSTRACT FOR THE THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

by

Carole Aus

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS

Elise F. Knapp

Thesis Advisor

Norman E. Ziffert

For the Graduate Division

May 16, 1990

Date

WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIV. LIB.
181 WHITE STREET
DANBURY, CT 06810

Shirley Ann Grau has been regarded as a singular writer of fiction from her first collection of short stories, The Black Prince and Other Stories, through her five novels and two later short story collections. In 1964 Miss Grau's third novel, The Keepers of the House, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Despite this critical acclaim, little critical analysis has been produced on her works.

Part of the reason for this lack of attention is due to the fact that some critics have labeled Grau a "local color" or regionalist writer. What these critics fail to recognize is that Grau's work goes far beyond setting because she uses place as a controlling element centered on communities whose collective existence is in a state of disintegration. Thus place becomes the definitive protagonist embracing the quality of life of a particular community against which the actions and motivations of the characters are evaluated. For Grau it is crucial that the works are placed exactly where they are because of the accumulated values associated with place, thus making the characters credible.

This study examines Grau's development of place as a central controlling element in her first three novels, The Hard Blue Sky, The House on Coliseum Street, and The Keepers of the House.