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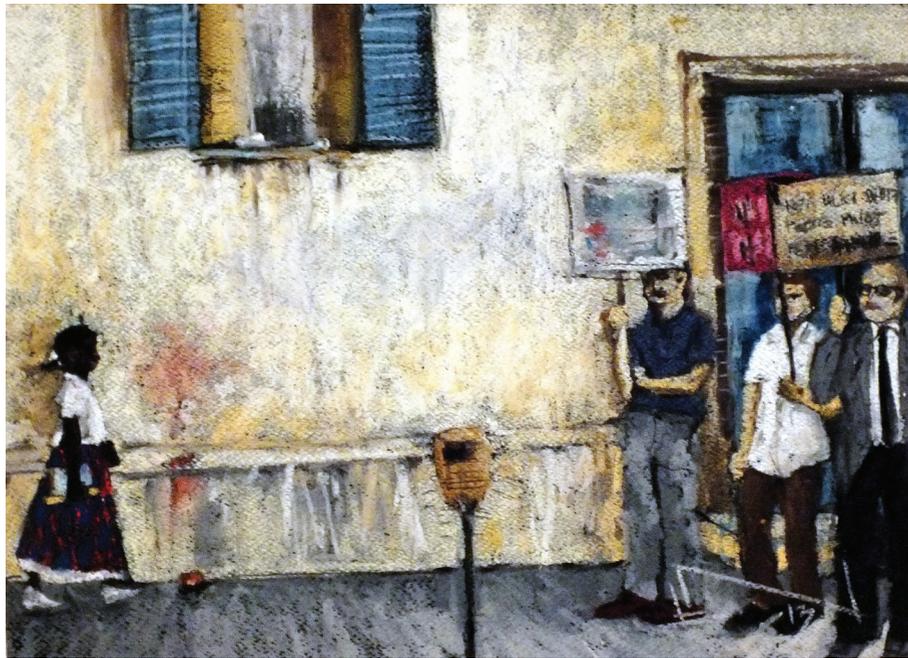
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# PAVING THE WAY FOR CHANGE: THE 1960s SOUTH IN SHIRLEY ANN GRAU'S "THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL" AND JOAN WILLIAMS' "SPRING IS NOW"

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*The memories of childhood have a strange shuttling quality, and areas of darkness ring the spaces of light. The memories of childhood are like clear candles in an acre of night, illuminating fixed scenes from the surrounding darkness.*

—McCULLERS, "THE ORPHANAGE" 37

Carson McCullers' words on the significance of childhood memories make it clear that she believes past experiences have the ability to shed light on the apparently dark layers of an individual's life. The use of anaphora also hints at the constant return of images that will eventually lead to some kind of revelation or epiphany. This seems particularly true when looking at the depiction of race relations in southern autobiographies. Indeed, as Ineke Bockting has shown, "No matter the outcome, the moment of sudden awareness of difference at [an] early age brings to the fore what Bloom call the 'moral superiority' of each new generation over the previous" (37). In an article that focuses on "adolescent responses to segregation," Melton McLaurin brings forward "two specific reactions to the problem of race relations": "The first is [an] initial awareness of race and its social significance. The second is [an] acceptance of [the writer's] racial community's attitudes towards segregation and the racial views upon which it rested; white youths signaled their acceptance of segregation, black youths denounced it" (7).

Fiction writers have also devoted stories to such reactions to segregation. Two of them, written by white southern women writers, seem to challenge McLaurin's contention that white youths accept segregation: Shirley Ann Grau's "The First Day of School" (1961) and Joan Williams' "Spring is Now" (1968) both deal with the integration of African-Americans in southern schools. Suzanne W. Jones, who collected Williams' story in the anthology *Crossing the Color Line: Readings in Black and White*, included it in the "Rereadings" section, feeling that the main character "eventually

realize[s] [her] misconceptions about race and difference” (xv). Grau’s lesser known story would certainly find its way in the “Misreadings” section for Grau pictures the wrongheadedness of southerners who try to fight change—the need for a rereading is suggested, but it is for the reader to decide what path to choose. “The First Day of School” and “Spring is Now” were penned by women who, like other women writers, embarked on a career against the odds: as Paul Schlueter explains, “Grau’s father had told her that he would not support her in graduate school unless she were ‘doing something,’ which he did not believe was true of writing” (19) while Williams met “considerable opposition from her family, who were skeptical of her ability to do anything substantial with her writing” (Morrison 367). The two of them thus come close to the situation depicted by Anne Goodwyn Jones in *Tomorrow is Another Day*, for they too “wrestled . . . with their own condition and character as southern women, with the expectations implicit in the ideal of the southern lady” (50). The topics they chose to deal with illustrate their position within their region as women and, most importantly, as commentators.

In both stories, the narrator is heterodiegetic, but description and focalization help make clear what is at stake in the situation and provide a glimpse of what is going on in the characters’ minds. Grau focuses mainly on the violent reactions of the whites, as she depicts the attitude of several characters by dividing up the narrative into sections. As for Williams, she presents the thoughts of one specific character, a white girl, who is both attracted to and afraid of a black boy she is trying to reach out to. Two characters stand out in Grau’s story: the schoolteacher and the little African-American girl who is to be the first to step into the newly integrated school. Although the little girl never makes it into the school, the female characters’ responses to the event are telling: a white mother wonders about her child’s future, the teacher feels that the South has gone out of control and the girl seems to bear the burden of the whole African-American community in spite of her young age. In Williams’ story, published much later than Grau’s, things are totally different: there is no violent outburst regarding the integration of black children into a Mississippi school but a lot of interrogation. The narrative relies on stereotypes about African-Americans and on the way a child perceives the world through them. The two stories thus offer contrasting views on the 1960s South while providing the reader with a fair treatment of the changes the region was going through. A particular look at the way three generations of women react to change exposes the interplay of what Flannery O’Connor has termed “mystery and manners.”

"THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL"<sup>1</sup>:  
THE VICTORY OF THE OLD WAYS

Published only a few years before Shirley Ann Grau's most famous novel, *The Keepers of the House* (1964), "The First Day at School" raises more questions than it answers. More than anywhere else in her fiction, Grau seems prone to "[telling] a story that has implications, and the implications could be symbols" (Cremeens 22)<sup>2</sup>. The confusion that pervades it is obviously a formal device intended to mirror that of the community it describes, but it turns out that all the characters could be interpreted as good and evil figures at various levels. For Grau the short story "depends on its delicacy, its perfection of line. Its value is in seeing the bones" (Keith 11). "The First Day at School" reads like a succession of snapshots that are all subtly interrelated to create a peculiar atmosphere that is at once mysterious and frightening. For instance, the second section has Mrs. Louise Vandiver, the wife of a policeman, pay a visit to the Police Department. The dialogue makes it clear, with its many understatements, that tension is setting in: thanks to simple questions and observations, Mrs. Vandiver conveys that trouble is inevitably on its way. The reader does not know the reason for such turmoil, but is made aware that the police will "have a busy day" (FDS 55).

As is often the case in Grau's fiction, the narrative opens with a detailed description of the place where the dramatic action will be set. In the present case, it is a school. The imagery used to describe it foreshadows the scene to come: two painters have come to refresh the front doors but "the paint was lumpy and too thin. It dripped and splattered on the concrete steps. When they had finished, there was a pattern of blue dots drying in the sun, their color a bit brighter than the ones that were spilled last year" (FDS 52). Two elements suggest that it is impossible to change things in spite of various efforts to hide the traces of the past: the texture of the paint is inappropriate to make the school look in good shape and the previous shade of blue is still noticeable. Thematically, these comments imply that it will be hard to alter the way people perceive desegregation because, even if the outside has been changed, the inside remains the same.

In order to emphasize the central issue in the story, Grau is also careful to picture everything in color: the blue paint on the wall, "a girl wearing a bright-yellow dress" who is singing "Down in nigger alley ..." (FDS 53), "a yellow-painted parking meter" (FDS 54), "a very blond boy" (FDS 55), a "child with its blue eyes and fair skin" (FDS 58), "the cotton curtains [that] matched the pink-and-green patterns of the wallpaper" (FDS 65) and a "chrome yellow table" (FDS 65). The little girl

who has been chosen to be the first black child to enter the school is also described in color: “She was nine or so, and she was carefully dressed in a new blue-and-red print with two starched petticoats under the full skirt. Her hair was done in plaits with curled bangs on her forehead. Her brown face was calm and unsmiling” (FDS 65). The girl’s facial expression is an appropriate response to the comments made earlier in the story by white children who are expecting “[the niggers] to drive up with machine guns, in big cars” (FDS 56). The reader is aware that the children are reporting things they have heard about the impending integration of black pupils into their schools and that it might cause trouble. However, the initial plan, as Phil Holloway explains to his wife, is in fact that “they’re going to try just one girl, and they’re going to walk her right up to the front door, right up to those big blue doors” (FDS 57-58) or as “Some people’ve been saying [that] they’re going to send her up alone to pound on that big blue front door” (FDS 58). In both cases, it is the *big* blue door that seems to matter for it symbolizes the southerners’ narrow-mindedness and their desire to prevent change by leaving it closed.

Miss Holloway, the schoolmistress, seems to be emblematic of this attitude: “So little had changed in her life. She still lived in the house her parents had built in the ’80’s ... She kept her part unchanged, just exactly the way it had been when her mother died” thinking that “if her mother were to come back, she would be right at home” (FDS 59). This presentation already foreshadows the character’s response to the integration of black pupils into her class, for one of the things she requires of the children is that they have clean hands which they should “keep scrubbing ... until they’re white” (FDS 60). The schoolmistress’s reluctance to change can be felt in the show she puts on every year on the first day of school: she uses perfume, unlike any other day of the year, and wears “her opening-day dress” (FDS 57). She also has a set of expectations: “Ordinarily they came streaming toward her, the children, all those future years, running to her. And off in the distance, like sheep dogs, there would be the mothers, some of them swollen with child. And they would be her children; she could feel herself teem with life” (FDS 61). Unfortunately for her the past is not bound to repeat itself this year and she finds herself alone, locked out of the school and forced to drive back home. The situation has an uncanny quality for the schoolmistress who feels “so strange” and foresees her impending death: “Maybe she was going to have a heart attack or a stroke or something. Her mother had died like that ...” (FDS 62). Again, it is a repetition of a known past that is envisaged, as if life were an unbreakable circle: “Nothing is new, everything always returns except death” (Cixous 543). Baffled as she is, the schoolmistress symbolically

becomes an exile; she feels “old and confused by a world she no longer understood, a world her little children had taken over, had grown up in and taken over—she fainted very gently” (FDS 63). The repetition of “taken over” underlines the schoolmistress’s inability to find her place in a world that is now ruled by devilish children. It is the only gender confrontation in the story and it is clear that “Manhood [is] defined not in relation or opposition to womanhood and women, but between and among men” (Jones, *Work of Gender* 52). Miss Holloway finds herself helpless when faced with her former pupils, she can see “hate and fury and blood lust” (FDS 63) in their eyes and has no other choice than escape—even though she does shout to them “White trash,” confirming that gender and class intersect in that they are both social and cultural constructs<sup>3</sup>. Even if she is forced to leave, the schoolmistress asserts her difference; she might be powerless facing this crowd of angry young men but she knows where she stands.

The schoolmistress’s frustration stems from the fact that the school is not open, but a paradox remains<sup>4</sup>: she says “I’ve never had a Negro in my class” (FDS 61), and should thus rejoice in the fact that this will not change. Nonetheless, she resents the men who prevent the change by blocking the way for the little girl. The first day of school seems to be more important than anything else for the schoolmistress—she tells her nephew “I *will be* teaching this morning” (FDS 56, my emphasis)—though her annual ritual is broken. The narrative does not suggest any hope for her and the imagery used suggests she prefers death to change: “The very few seconds before, when the rising cold began to envelop her and she knew she was going to faint, she felt a tremendous relief. By the time her head touched the wheel she was feeling quite happy. The darkness was no more frightening than the daylight” (FDS 63). Nothing more is said about the schoolmistress after these sentences. She might have died or regained consciousness but what comes out of the last sentence is that she realizes that the unknown—the integration of her school?—constitutes a better prospect than what she can see around her. The ambivalent feelings that are presented here introduce the idea that change cannot be avoided and that no matter how defamiliarizing the process might be, it is needed for life to go on.

Betty Holloway is another character who appears to be aware of the necessity to accept change even though she does not feel directly concerned. When her husband mentions the little black girl, Betty thinks about the consequences of school integration and their influence on her young baby: “She stared at the baby’s lips pulling on the nipple, and she wanted to cry, though there was nothing to cry about because that would not happen to her child with its blue eyes and fair skin” (FDS 58). There

is an obvious contrast in Betty's mind between her child's future and that of a black child; she knows that her baby will never have problems going to school because it is white. Still, she feels the need to protect her home and her family's future—she thus reclaims her body and asserts her power within her household<sup>5</sup>. As soon as her husband leaves the house, she arms herself with a shotgun for fear that black people might try to break in—the most obvious reason being that her family shares the house with her aunt who happens to be the schoolmistress and that she probably expects the trouble to reach her. Again, the narrator does not provide any information about the outcome of the situation—Will Betty have to fight for her child? Will she need to open fire on intruders? The uncertainty of the future matches the feelings of disorientation that have invaded the little town.

The story reaches its climax with the last section, which is devoted to the little black girl's attempt to reach the school—a scene that might have inspired Norman Rockwell's famous painting "The Problem We All Live With" (1964)<sup>6</sup>. The uncanny is once again a central theme. When the girl's father looks at his child, he seems unable to recognize her: "The small face was set, the eyes great and luminous. It wasn't fear. He didn't know what it was. He just had an uneasy feeling that this was not his child at all. It was the eyes, he thought; she had her mother's eyes" (FDS 66). Freud's idea that "the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (124) is finely illustrated here as the father identifies his daughter's eyes with those of her mother. The use of the definite article instead of a possessive pronoun to refer to them reinforces the defamiliarizing experience he is going through. In addition, the little girl feels she has a mission and she is careful to set out her plan to her father, who has never seen her so determined: "Mother said let me out a block ahead . . . . It will be better for me to go alone" (FDS 66). This time, the connection between the daughter and her mother is made clear, but to her father something still does not sound right: "where did she get phrases like that, he wondered. Somebody had told her. They were not her words" (FDS 66). Like the white children at the beginning of the story, the little girl has appropriated the language of adults. She has become their mouthpiece but she has an extra part to play for she is also an instrument in the fight for integration. Things do not go according to plan: seeing white men "blocking the street, forming a thin raggedy line," the girl's father is invaded by fear—stories he had heard in his childhood and repressed come back to his mind—and he decides to take her back home. His wife's reaction upon their return is so harsh that the father starts thinking about his own racial background, though the reader might have expected him to

reflect on his masculinity: he is “wondering if it was true what his grandmother had told him: that he had white blood” and “felt frightened, as if his skin were white” (FDS 68). The implications of the situation reach deeper and what is really at stake is the man’s role as a father. This aborted first day at school has turned him into a failing father whose only response to his wife sounds childish—“You didn’t see them” (FDS 68)—as if he were suddenly reduced to the same status as his daughter, that of a pupil without a school. The little girl’s hopes are shattered but the narrator’s words suggest that this episode will have greater consequences than expected: “He spun the car around and headed up the hill, tires leaving blacks on the street” (FDS 67). Those marks will remain for the white men to see that their black counterparts have come and might try again.

This open-ended story reads like a call to conscience and it meets Grau’s goal that a writer “must comment on man and his world,” for s/he “is an evangelist whose preaching is extremely subtle and utterly disguised” (*Essence* 15). Although the last words of the story—“In the morning when the sun came up bright and hard and yellow, the town looked washed clean” (FDS 68)—suggest that no trace remains of what happened on what should have been the first day of school, it seems that a lot has changed: the foundations of the community have been put to the test and questioned. In addition, the evolution of the politics of gender is obvious: women are trying to regain control of their lives in a man’s world. The choice of a black girl instead of a boy might have seemed more appealing for Grau to express her ideas on a process she wanted to be peaceful and, as Hélène Cixous explains, if the writer’s gender can be traced by the reader, it is “in the manner of spending, of valorizing the appropriated, of thinking what is-not-the-same” (*Reader* 43). Women’s rebellions are often quieter because men constantly bring their efforts down; yet, their actions remain meaningful because they successfully question the social order from which they emanate and pave the way for change. Joan Williams takes the same topic further by presenting the successful integration of a school and its effect on a young girl who was initially suspicious of difference.

### “SPRING IS NOW”<sup>7</sup>

#### OR THE BEGINNING OF A NEW SOUTHERN SEASON

In an interview with Patrick Samway, Joan Williams declared that “there’s always a change in the character. I write best, and mostly, from inside one character, and rely on interior monologue” (544-545). “Spring is Now” is a good example of such a technique and it illustrates the idea of change as the main character understands

that preconceived ideas are constantly challenged by actual events—reality being permanently reassessed by confrontations with the real. As in most of her stories, Williams uses a third person narrator coupled with narrated monologue. Dorrit Cohn has demonstrated that “in narrated monologues, as in figural narration generally, the continued employment of third-person references indicates, no matter how unobtrusively, the continued presence of a narrator. And it is his *identification*—but not his *identity*—with the character’s mentality that is supremely enhanced by this technique” (112). The use of narrated monologues enables the reader to share the character’s feelings while being an outside observer. For Williams, “it gives a reader a pleasant shock of recognition if a character does something the reader knows he would do in the same situation” (*Thereness* 21)—it would also be the case if the reader did not feel s/he would do it, one might be tempted to add.

Following Faulkner’s advice that “a good rule of thumb before writing a short story is to be able to tell in one sentence what it is about . . . You have got to write the first sentence of a story so that whoever reads it will want to read the second one” (quoted in Williams, *Faulkner* 256), Williams presents the central elements to be found in her narrative in the opening line: “Sandra heard first in Miss Loma’s store about the Negroes” (SN 113). The main character is named and so is the focal theme: race relations. In addition the verb hints at the various rumors that run through the story and come into conflict with Sandra’s personal impressions. The news about the arrival of black children in Sandra’s high school is brought by Mal Walker—a name that explicitly refers to a walking evil. Sandra’s first reaction is confusion mixed with curiosity as she inquires: “How many?” (SN 113). But the most obvious illustration of her wonderment occurs on her way back home as she reflects on Minnie, the family’s black help. After hearing one of the customers say “If your kids haven’t eat with niggers yet, they will have by Friday” (SN 114), Sandra cannot help but think that she has often eaten with a black person and that “Even Grandmomma had said she would sit down with Minnie, Minnie was like one of the family, though Sandra could not remember that her grandmother ever had” (SN 114). The question of whether or not her grandmother did eat at the same table as Minnie prepares the way for the presentation of the grandmother<sup>8</sup>.

Sandra’s grandmother is quite shocked when she hears the news that Sandra has brought home: “Grandmomma, resigned to one more thing she had not expected to live to see, let her hands fall to her sides” (SN 115). In spite of her apparent willingness to treat black people equally, the grandmother is shocked at the news that her grand-daughter will go to the same school as black children: “I sure do hate to hear

that” (SN 115). Sandra’s mother has a similar reaction of surprise: “‘Are you sure?’ Her mother, Flo, was frying chicken and stood motionless . . . . She and Sarah had similar pale faces and placid grey-green eyes, which they widened now, in worry. ‘I guess we knew it was coming,’ Flo said” (SN 114). The body language that is used here emphasizes the idea that something has been broken and to a certain extent it mirrors the situation at large: the South has so far relied on the tradition of white supremacy and it now has to face the end of an era. The death of the whole system is symbolically rendered by the color of the characters’ faces and their facial expression. The father’s reaction is more pragmatic.<sup>9</sup> He too believes that “‘it had to happen”” but he provides a justification: “‘The schools that don’t take them don’t get government money. I knew you’d be with them at the university. But I’m sorry you had to start a year earlier”” (SN 115). Sandra’s father is undoubtedly referring to the 1962 integration of the University of Mississippi here and, like other southerners, he is aware of the changes that have been made since the *Brown v. Board of Education* rulings.

The first day of school, which is devoted to registration, could have been as unfulfilling as that presented in Grau’s story, but the scenario Williams uses is much more intricate: in the first version of the story, published in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, the narrator observes: “‘At school, [Sandra] did not find out about Negroes. None were there and the teachers would answer no questions,””<sup>10</sup> while the final version reads “‘At school, she found out only that some Negroes had already registered. None were there and the teachers would answer no other questions”” (SN 118). The reader is in the same position as the school children for, like Sandra, s/he is on the look out for black children. One of Sandra’s friends talks about the charm of such a mystery, while people at the store are already discussing blacks who pass as whites to account for the general disappointment (SN 119)<sup>11</sup>—the second version of the text makes such observations more logical since the black students appear to be invisible, very much like Ralph Ellison’s famous narrator<sup>12</sup>. White anxiety over the question of miscegenation is thus reenacted<sup>13</sup>, bringing to mind the comment Sandra’s grandmother keeps repeating when she hears about school integration: “‘I just hope to goodness it’s girls!”” (SN 115). The scene somehow confirms Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s contention that “‘in the persistent war between ‘civilization’ and primal ethics the principles of honor, shame, and pride still had enormous strength. Certainly the guns that blasted the walls of Fort Sumter did not destroy the ancient code as well” (115). The fear<sup>14</sup> of infection present in Grau’s story is thus taken further here as Williams clearly names what southerners would perceive as evil in relation to the

situation—miscegenation—, while implying, at least at this stage, that black people might be present among the crowd though unnoticed<sup>15</sup>.

Both children and adults seem to be giving full vent to stories and rumors concerning black people; Sandra starts recalling things she has heard such as “Negroes never kissed one another. They made love without preliminaries, like animals, or did nothing” (SN 119-120). Sandra’s preconceived ideas are in keeping with White Supremacists’ belief that the blacks are not civilized human beings but primitives who need the presence of strong white figures to tame them and make them act properly—a widespread belief since slavery times that is mentioned in numerous slave narratives, among them Frederick Douglass’s and Harriet Jacobs’. Jokes about African-Americans are also popular at Miss Loma’s store and constitute yet another form of social contempt connected with the bestiality of African-Americans:

“You heard about the little nigger baby up in Memphis that’s two parts animal?” the salesman said.

“No!” Miss Loma said.

“It’s got a little dear face and bare feet,” the salesman said, and when Sandra went out, he and Miss Loma were laughing. (SN 120)

This scene offers a counterpoint to an earlier one Sandra witnesses at home when her mother and the black man who cleans the church laugh over a simple play on words:

“Morning, how’re you?” ...

“Pretty good, Johnson, how’re you?” Flo said.

“Good but not pretty.” (SN 116)

This episode is not only intended to make the reader smile, it also shows that African-Americans know how to manipulate words and that they are not as shallow as some southerners would like to think. Johnson’s short appearance thus has a message that will eventually help Sandra form an idea about the black community.

On the next day, Sandra does meet one of the black children in the now integrated school and soon finds out that he, Jack Lawrence, will be the only one (“the others had changed their minds” SN 123). The description that is given echoes the anxiety of the previous day: “The Negro was tall and light-skinned ... they always tried to send light-skinned ones first” (SN 123). The pupils start judging him because he does not speak much and they think that he might be retarded, but Sandra’s

feelings are different: “he seemed alone and she felt sorry for him” (SN 123). Soon, she inquires about “[asking] him to be in the car pool” (SN 124) but is met by the others’ hostility. Like her grandmother, they are suspicious about the boy and this creates antagonism—although Sandra does make efforts to picture the boy in a positive light. Thanks to internal focalization on Sandra, Williams shows how gender can operate in a racial context: it is because she is a young woman that Sandra can feel for Jack Lawrence and her attraction is, from the start, physical<sup>16</sup>. That Williams should have chosen a female character is not surprising in itself since as Cixous puts it “woman admits there is an other. [...] Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other [within]” (*Reader* 42). Even if here Cixous is concerned with coming to terms with bisexuality, her comments and ideas are methodologically suggestive for the analysis of the situation depicted in “Spring is Now” as the reader is allowed into Sandra’s inner/other world, which might well reflect Williams’ own feelings about the 1960s South<sup>17</sup>. The choices Sandra makes and her feelings for Jack Lawrence stem from her gender, so much so that they even seem to erase the racial difference<sup>18</sup>.

When the two of them have real contact, Williams resorts to an image: Sandra “was working the combination to her locker when a voice, quite deep said ‘Sandra, you left this under your desk’” (SN 124-125). At that stage, Sandra is indeed trying to sort out a combination, but it is also that of her feelings for the black boy. This episode already hints at his role in opening Sandra’s eyes to the meaninglessness of southern manners. Although the scene does not bring them closer, it unlocks a door in the girl’s heart. Later on, when they walk side by side, “she held her books against her, as if hugging herself in anticipation, but of what, she did not know. She had a curiously excited feeling to be walking beside anyone so tall” (SN 125). Again, Sandra’s attraction is obvious but it will only be fully confirmed when the boy is allowed to share in the car pool. On one occasion, Sandra loses the “heavy gold pin twisted like a rope into a circle” (SN 122) that her grandmother gave her for her birthday. Jack Lawrence is the one who first notices that Sandra is not wearing it and he initiates the search. The pin is eventually found (by the black boy) but in the meantime, Sandra and the boy have come closer and that proximity makes it possible for her to address one of her existential concerns<sup>19</sup> while laughing—much like her mother had with Johnson—with a boy she now recognizes as “a fellow student who shares her attitudes” (Wittenberg 104). In that “shock of recognition”<sup>20</sup>, Sandra decides to leave the pin in her purse for “like the adults’ ideas, [it is] antiquated and irrelevant” (Wittenberg 104)<sup>21</sup>. The heaviness of the pin is thus an image

of the burden white southerners have to bear when they find themselves unable to express their true feelings. The title of the story becomes clearer and it appears that Williams, just like Allen Tate before her, uses the season metaphor to suggest that “[s]pring brings with it [...] the hope inherent in that season, though hope of a qualified, grave kind” (Binding 44). Choosing to set her story during “the season of youth” enables Williams to say that if the past cannot be altered, the future is in the hands of the younger generation.

The two stories, though very different in the way the narrators handle the plot, both fit into the pattern of the conversion narrative: the main characters (the schoolmistress and Sandra) are “‘converted’ in varying degrees, from racism to something approaching racial enlightenment” (Hobson 2). Writing about topics that were still unpopular at that time, both Grau and Williams offer a gendered look at a contemporary issue and answer Hélène Cixous’s call to women writers in “The Laugh of the Medusa”: “Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man, not the imbecilic capitalist machinery” (877). In keeping with Cixous’s ideas, Grau and Williams make use of their characters’ sensory perceptions; the ideas that are expressed and the final revelations all stem from a physical reaction—be it revulsion or attraction. They confirm Grau’s idea that writers are “filters”: “The writer [is an] interpreter—not of himself, but of everything else” (Brown 9)—of his/her region, his/her community but, above all else, his/her time. Those texts are pre-texts in many ways as they foreshadow novels to come (Shirley Ann Grau’s *The Keepers of the House* and Joan Williams’ *County Woman*) while enabling their authors to tell about the South against the odds imposed by their culture. The two characters are, in their own right, early versions of the women to be found in today’s fiction as they are already showing their independent spirits<sup>22</sup>—in spite of societal pressure, they manage to move on.

## ENDNOTES

1. Shirley Ann Grau, "The First Day of School," *The Saturday Evening Post: Stories 1962* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962). Hereafter cited in the text as FDS.
2. One of the symbols suggesting that the South is not ready to change is the reference to "The two Confederate cannons, the four pyramids of cemented cannon balls dripped and shone under the cloudy sky" (FDS 54). The past has been "cemented" and no matter what happens it will continue to "shine."
3. Anne Goodwyn Jones writes that "culture, rather than nature, constructs gender itself" (*Work of Gender* 56).
4. In usual Grau fashion, "the source of the conflict comes from within the character" (Grau in Canfield 41).
5. Such behavior follows a pattern Anne Goodwyn Jones established in connection with earlier novels by southern women writers (see *Work of Gender* 54-55). On the intersection of race, gender and class, also see Hobson 134-135.
6. Before Norman Rockwell decided to express his progressive social interests in his artistic contributions to *Look* in 1963, he had been a frequent contributor to *The Saturday Evening Post*, where he might had a chance to read Grau's "The First Day of School."
7. Joan Williams, "Spring is Now," *Pariah and Other Stories* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983). Hereafter cited in the text as SN.
8. Williams might have had in mind Faulkner's idea of presenting "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself" (Fant and Ashley 51) when designing the characters in the story.
9. He also does not seem to worry much about people's concerns about his attitude towards black people. For instance, he does not mind letting them sit in the front of his truck though others resent it: "Sandra opened the truck's door, thinking how many people made remarks about her father letting Negroes ride up front with him. He always answered that if somebody asked him for a ride, he gave it to them; why should they sit out in the open truck bed covered with dust and hit by gravel?" (SN 120)
10. "Spring is Now." *Virginia Quarterly Review* 44.4 (Autumn 1968): 631.
11. Williams, who had read and reviewed Grau's *The Keepers of the House*, has one of her characters make a similar comment on the best way of finding out a person who passes as white: "'I'll tell you how you can always tell a Negro ... by the blue moons on their nails'" (SN 119).
12. Although Sandra and her friends are said to be "watch[ing] for the Negroes" (SN 118).
13. In an article on the question of miscegenation in Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *My Heart and My Flesh*, Simone Vauthier writes that "[q]uite apart from its relevance as a social metaphor or cultural symbol, miscegenation was a good fictional subject in a

bi-racial society which frowned upon, when it did not forbid outright ‘marriage in black and white’. [...] The ideology of the authors can be observed in the solutions they provide” (33-34). Both Grau and Williams refer to miscegenation as a notion that still influences Southerners’ perceptions of otherness and, in the historical context of the Civil Rights Movement. Both authors seem to imply that the past is still alive when it comes to race relations and misconceptions.

14. Towards the end of the story, the narrator observes that “Sandra’s parents, everyone, lived in fear of something happening ... It’s going to get worse before it gets any better” (SN 128).

15. Grau does tackle the question at the very end of her story but it only has to do with the little black girl’s father who suddenly fears he might be considered a “traitor” in the black community because he has white blood (see FDS 68).

16. When Sarah describes Jack Lawrence upon coming back home, she says he is “clean” and “looks nice” (SN 124).

17. Discussing interracial friendship in the Samway interview, Williams explains that close contacts with African-Americans undoubtedly helped her become the woman she is (549).

18. During a football game, Sandra keeps wondering if Jack Lawrence is watching her. The following night, feeling he has not done so, “she [sleeps] with a sense of disappointment” (SN 126).

19. As mentioned earlier, “Sandra had heard that Negroes never kissed one another. They made love without preliminaries, like animals, or did nothing” (SN 119-120) but, significantly, after the episode in the car, she comes to her own conclusion: “Of course Negroes kiss each other when they make love” (SN 129). This realization, though trivial, proves that Sandra has gone beyond the racial stereotypes to which she was exposed to in the past.

20. Williams also plays on the idea by having the two bump heads while looking for the pin.

21. Sarah is thus one of those “[f]emale protagonists [...] strong in nature and independent in spirit” that Barbara Bennett has identified in contemporary southern fiction (442).

22. Barbara Bennett writes that “[t]he most attractive [...] female protagonist of today’s southern literature is [...] a woman who is an active agent in her own defense and welfare” (443).

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