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# An Examination of Setting in Six Selected Short Novels of Katherine Anne Porter

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AN EXAMINATION OF SETTING IN SIX SELECTED SHORT NOVELS  
OF KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate Faculty  
Central Washington State College

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of the Degree  
Master of Education

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by  
Laurel N. Piippo  
December, 1967

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APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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H. L. Anshutz, COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

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## CHAPTER I

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

This study will examine various aspects of Katherine Anne Porter's use of setting in six selected short novels. Chapter I will give a brief review of critical literature and explain the method of research. Chapter II will summarize the physical and architectural setting, examine the most typical aspects of the psychological and physical setting in each of the six novels, and discuss setting as a determiner of action. Chapter III will draw conclusions as to typicality of setting and kind of fictional world Miss Porter creates.

#### I. REVIEW OF CRITICAL LITERATURE

After consulting the criticism of Miss Porter's works available in the Richland Public Library, Richland, Washington, and the Mid-Columbia Regional Library, Kennewick, Washington, the writer concluded that no comprehensive study of setting in the short novels had been made.

George Hendrick's criticism includes a short biography of Miss Porter and brief essays stressing theme, symbolism, and historical background in each of her works.

H. J. Mooney, Jr., discusses style, theme, and character. One of his theories is that Miranda in Pale Horse,

Pale Rider, Charles Upton in The Leaning Tower, the peon in Hacienda, and Mr. Thompson in Noon Wine are victims of "the invasion of the private world by the reasonless forces of society at large" (6:42), and that Miranda and Mr. Thompson are heroic in their encounters with evil. The writer of this thesis finds evidence that evil is within the individual as well as without, after examining the physical and psychological setting of the novels.

According to Ray B. West, Jr., "Katherine Anne Porter and Historic Memory," "Miss Porter's experience, then, is not only of the fixed, almost absolute values of Southern society, but also of our relationship to them in the face of a history of movement and of change" (7:303). West relates Miss Porter's background and experiences to setting and character in her stories. In his article published by the University of Minnesota, West points out theme, legend, and irony in Miss Porter's works (8).

Writing about Katherine Anne Porter as a friend, Glenway Westcott quotes from her letters and conversations, revealing her opinions about writing and her literary technique. Westcott discusses the "epic quality" (9:40) of his favorite novel by Miss Porter, Noon Wine. His analysis of Hatch as a personification of both evil and of law and order reinforces that of this writer.



Comments about setting by Louis Auchincloss are that in Pale Horse, Pale Rider, "The vagueness of the site intensifies the nightmare quality of this admirable tale" (1:141) and that "Miss Porter became increasingly specific about her times and places as her work progressed" (1:143).

## II. METHOD OF RESEARCH

The method of research consisted of reading Katherine Anne Porter's fiction with particular attention to her short novels and short stories. Nine critical sources were studied and notes taken therefrom. The study was then limited to the following six short novels: Hacienda, 1934; Noon Wine, 1937; Pale Horse, Pale Rider, 1939; Old Mortality, 1940; The Leaning Tower, 1941; and Holiday, 1960. These six novels were examined in an attempt to ascertain typical narrative pattern, typical theme, typical point of view, typical character, and typical setting, using six shorthand notebooks to compartmentalize the fictional elements of the novels. The sixth notebook, labeled "Miscellaneous," contained observations regarding symbolism, use of time, irony, and ambiguity. It soon became apparent that the subject would have to be further limited; therefore a more comprehensive study was done on one aspect of the novels: setting. (Although the critical sources added to the writer's general understanding of Miss Porter's works,

none of them gave sufficient attention to this important element.) The writer attempted to note all quotations pertaining to physical setting first, then psychological setting and overall atmosphere, with the objective of discovering whether the fictional worlds in the six novels have enough in common to warrant a generalization as to typicality.

## CHAPTER II

### EXAMINATION OF SETTING

#### I. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Katherine Anne Porter's six selected short novels have definite locations in time and space. Four of the six are located in the United States, one in Germany, and one in Mexico. Noon Wine, Old Mortality, and Holiday are set in the southern United States, with Noon Wine and Holiday taking place entirely in a rural area of south Texas black-land farms. Also set in Texas near the Mexican border and in New Orleans, Old Mortality combines a rural and urban setting. Pale Horse, Pale Rider takes place in a western city surrounded by mountains. The Leaning Tower creates the atmosphere and scenes of Berlin, Germany; Hacienda is located in Mexico on a pulque hacienda about a day's train ride from Mexico City.

Time, as an adjunct to setting, is revealed in five of the six novels, either directly in subtitles, the first sentence, or by context clues. A sub-heading or explanatory note under the title Noon Wine states:

TIME: 1896-1905  
PLACE: Small South Texas Farm

Old Mortality is divided into three sections according to time in the sub-headings:

Part I: 1885-1902  
Part II: 1904  
Part III: 1912

The opening sentence of The Leaning Tower is almost journalistic in its statement of who-what-where-when-why: "Early one morning on his sixth day in Berlin, on the twenty-seventh of December, 1931, Charles Upton left his dull little hotel in Hedemanstrasse and escaped to the cafe across the street" (5:436). Context clues in Hacienda imply that the story takes place in the early 1920's: "Now that the true revolution of blessed memory has come and gone in Mexico . . ." (5:135). That Pale Horse, Pale Rider takes place during the autumn of 1918 becomes apparent in Porter's description of the war-time atmosphere, Liberty Bond drives, flu epidemic, and finally, the armistice. No clues of any kind are given as to dates in Holiday; the time is simply winter turning into spring.

The physical world created in Katherine Anne Porter's six selected short novels includes both rural and urban settings: a pulque hacienda in Mexico, two south Texas farms, city scenes in Berlin, New Orleans, and an unnamed city in the western United States. Rural scenes in Noon Wine and Holiday occur in a spring house, cow barn, milk house, hired man's shack, wagon shed, farmhouses, in fields, orchards, woods, neighboring farms, gardens, a small railroad station, front yard, near the creek, on two stumps

near a chinaberry tree, in a lane of mulberries, in a spring wagon, and at the Turnverein. Referred to in Noon Wine are a country hotel, a jail, and an insane asylum.

Scenes from Hacienda take place on a train, at a train station, in a peon's quarters, in patterned fields, the pulqueria, the vat room, various patios, a corral, a ruined monastery, courtyard, a mule car, the pig wallow, the fountain, and in the hacienda itself.

Urban scenes include restaurants, a convent, a race-track, a rooming house, and city streets in New Orleans; a hotel lobby, a cafe, a cabaret, several rooming houses, a barbershop, a pawnshop, store windows and streets provide background in Berlin. A city in western U. S. A. includes references to a geological museum and mountains, scenes in a theater, nightclub, cafe, newspaper office, county hospital, veterans' hospital, drug store, "Greasy Spoon," and on city streets. A train and a chauffeur-driven car are significant in Old Mortality.

Narrowing the scenes of action to areas or rooms within buildings, one notes that the scenes are laid in kitchen and dining rooms, bedrooms, the barnloft, the parlor, and a porch. Rented rooms are important in four of the six novels. In Hacienda there are more rooms than one could count: a peon's hut, a balcony, an upper terrace, an entrance hall, the upper-hall room fitted up as a parlor,

the billiard room, dona Julia's bedroom, and the grandfather's retreat. Minor scenes take place in a cloakroom, a newspaper office, and a bathroom. In all six novels bedroom scenes occur. Nobody, however, ever has any fun in bed. Bed is a place of defeat, death, decisions to die, and inability to see reality--a place of nightmare.

What does this add up to? On the surface it appears that Miss Porter has created an everyday world of a pastoral nature, ordinary domestic life, economic effort, familiar institutions, and some picturesque foreign scenes--on the whole a stable, orderly universe. A closer examination of the atmosphere she creates through her descriptions and of the crucial incidents that take place in certain settings leads to a different conclusion. Against a background of order, traditional values and standards, and daily routine, evil and violence predominate in Hacienda, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and The Leaning Tower; evil and violence predominate in the last section of Noon Wine and come to the surface as the focal point in Holiday. An act of violence in the past in Old Mortality is not significant, but the evil of unconscious dishonesty and hypocrisy predominates. The world of Katherine Anne Porter's novels is not a pretty world.

## II. SETTING AS AID TO OR DETERMINER OF ACTION

Physical setting is an aid to or determiner of action in Hacienda, Noon Wine, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, Old Mortality, The Leaning Tower, and Holiday.

The pulque hacienda in rural Mexico of the 1920's serves as the picturesque site of an ancient and unchanging feudal way of life which attracts Russian communists and other foreigners for the purpose of making a film. The pulque hacienda is described by Andreyev (5:142):<sup>1</sup>

They had chosen it carefully, he said; it was really an old-fashioned feudal estate with the right kind of architecture, no modern improvements to speak of, and with the purest type of peons. Naturally a pulque hacienda would be just such a place. Pulque-making had not changed from the beginning, since the time the first Indian set up a rawhide vat to ferment the liquor and pierced and hollowed the first gourd to draw with his mouth the juice from the heart of the maguey. Nothing had happened since, nothing could happen. Apparently there was no better way to make pulque. The whole thing, he said, was almost too good to be true.

With detailed description of this setting as background for her characters, Miss Porter reveals the way of life of the aristocrats who own the hacienda, the Indians who work in the pulqueria, the tragedy that overtakes some of the Indians who work in the film, and the behavior and values of the foreigners as well as the natives. That the pulque

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<sup>1</sup>Since all following references are to this volume, the text notes will simply indicate pages.

hacienda is a picturesque movie location accounts for the significant actions of the novel, including murder.

In Noon Wine the run-down South Texas dairy farm owned by the Thompsons plays a lesser role in determining action, although the dilapidated condition of the buildings and their transformation by Mr. Helton over a period of nine years provides partial motivation for the murder committed by Mr. Thompson in the second section of the novel. August heat, another aspect of the setting, pushes the action toward violence.

A rooming house in a western U. S. city stricken by a flu epidemic is the focal point for the first section of Pale Horse, Pale Rider. Propinquity does its work when Adam Barclay rents a room during his ten-day military leave in the same house where Miranda has lived for a year. How the lovers cope with their love and with Miranda's illness must be enacted in Miranda's room because there is no other place for them until the scene changes to a hospital room where interior rather than exterior setting becomes important.

Although physical setting is not described at all in Part I of Old Mortality, setting determines action in Part II when the Convent of the Child Jesus in New Orleans is pictured by Miss Porter as a place which does not lend itself to the romantic notions of the two little girls who therefore



desire to escape to a more glamorous setting. The race-track as setting demands the action and excitement of horse-racing followed by Miranda's reaction to the cruelty of winning. The de-romanticizing process continues through a change of setting from the racetrack to a cab. By the close proximity of Maria and Miranda to their drunken Uncle Gabriel, the cab journey through poorer and poorer sections of New Orleans provides a necessary background for later judgments made by the two little girls. A description of Uncle Gabriel and Miss Honey's room in a cheap rooming house contributes further to the act of judging. In Part III of Old Mortality, the family car sets the scene for Miranda's final judgment of the family legend and of the family itself (219-220):

She sat in the front seat with Skid, the Negro boys. "Come back with us, Miranda," said Cousin Eva, with the sharp little note of elderly command, "there is plenty of room."

"No, thank you," said Miranda, in a firm cold voice, "I'm quite comfortable. Don't disturb yourself."

Physical setting in The Leaning Tower is an all-important determiner of action throughout the novel. Kuno's descriptions of Berlin lead Charles Upton to come to Germany to study as an artist. The memory of the physical setting of his father's farm in South Texas as contrasted with the store belonging to Kuno's father causes Charles to become aware of the two sets of standards, the American and the

German. The "dark, airless, cold" room in his Berlin hotel forces Charles to seek new lodgings; the coldness of a dark December and the loneliness of a dull cafe give further impetus to his search for warmth, friendship, light for his work, and the intellectual light of understanding. Charles' search for another room leads him to observe through the eyes of an artist and to sketch the exterior world of the Berliners, a world of starving people which contrasts dramatically with the piglike opulence of the rich and the unapproachable unfriendliness of the streetwalkers on Friedrichstrasse.

The room Charles finds and decides to rent is described in detail, even to the little souvenir Leaning Tower, symbolic center of the novel, which he carelessly breaks. He observes the ludicrous inappropriateness of the scrambling cupids on the steep roof next door. The effeminate and orderly room combined with other places he has seen in Berlin encourage Charles to seek friendships among people his own age in his new lodgings. There is a possibility that setting causes a crisis in the rooming house: the landlady Rosa values her possessions--the rooms and their furnishings--so highly that she uses them as an excuse to berate one of her tenants, Herr Bussen, whom she regards as a lower class, badly brought up individual. The author hints that there may be a relationship between her constant

criticism of Herr Bussen and his alleged suicide attempt, which he insists is only food poisoning. Helping to save Herr Bussen's life brings Charles closer to the other three young men who also rent rooms, and as a result they decide to celebrate New Year's Eve at a new cabaret owned by Herr Bussen's friends. The cabaret suggests action appropriate to itself: drinking, joviality, verbosity, differences of opinion, hostility, repressed violence, girl-chasing, rivalry, envy, intoxication, sentimental conviviality, and an undignified return to the rooming house by taxi. The final scene in the story takes place in Charles' room, where once again his thoughts are influenced by the setting itself: the cupboard full of useless knick-knacks, including the repaired Leaning Tower, and the view of the useless cupids on the roof next door. The soft, formless feather-bed is appropriate for his final formless, soft-headed, and ineffectual attempt to analyze the significance of the Leaning Tower and the cupids in the light of his total experience.

In Holiday, setting plays a determining role in most of the major actions. As in The Leaning Tower the persona of Holiday comes to the south Texas farm home of the Mullers because of a romanticized description of the setting told her by a friend, Louise. As in Noon Wine and The Leaning Tower, weather plays a role in determining the state of mind

of the main character and the way she behaves. The narrator reacts more than acts in the first few pages of the novel, merely observing and recording her impressions of the wintry, bleak scene and the naked, oppressive appearance of the farmhouse. Through descriptions of the physical world as seen outside the narrator's window, Miss Porter shows nature in action, transforming the world from winter to the new life of spring, and its effect on the response of the narrator.

The large farmhouse of the Muller family suggests their way of life (415-416):

Father Muller did not in the least believe in his children's marrying and leaving home. Marry, yes, of course; but must that take a son or daughter from him? He always could provide work and a place in the household for his daughters' husbands, and in time he would do the same for his sons' wives. A new room had lately been built on, to the northeast, Annetje explained to me, leaning above her husband's head and talking across the table, for Hatsy to live in when she should be married.

The setting emphasizes a naturalistic world of growth, fertility, changeless routine within changing seasons, animal life, physical labor, exhaustion, and non-intellectual activity. Cycles of nature in plant and animal life suggest cycles of birth, marriage, and death in human life, all of which take place in the universe of the farmhouse. The parlor suggests formality, serious pursuits, and the traditional place where the dead lie before burial; the room serves all these purposes (422, 432):

Mother Muller sat but seldom in her parlor, and always with an air of formal unease, her knotted big fingers cramped in a cluster. But Father Muller often sat there in the evenings, where no one ventured to follow him unless commanded; he sometimes played chess with his elder son-in-law, who had learned a good while ago that Father Muller was a good player who abhorred an easy victory . . . .

Most evenings, however, Father Muller sat by himself and read Das Kapital.

. . . . .

Mother Muller lay in state in the parlor throughout the night, in her black silk dress with a scrap of white lace at the collar and a small lace cap on her hair. Her husband sat in the plush chair near her, looking at her face, which was very contemplative, gentle, and remote. He wept at intervals, silently, wiping his face and head with a big handkerchief.

Ottillie's room is appropriate to her way of life and the way she is treated by the rest of her family (427):

Sitting at the long table, I would watch Ottillie clattering about in her tormented haste, bringing in that endless food that represented all her life's labors. My mind would follow her into the kitchen where I could see her peering into the great simmering kettles, the crowded oven, her whole body a mere machine of torture.

The Turnverein suggests action appropriate to itself, as indicated in the quotation cited on page 89.

The orchard is an appropriate place for young girls to chase the bride after the wedding (424):

She then tried to slip away quietly, but the watchful young girls were after her, and shortly we saw her running through the blossoming orchard, holding up her white ruffled skirts, with all the girls in pursuit, shrieking and calling like excited hunters, for the first to overtake and touch her would be the next bride. They returned, breathless, dragging the lucky one with them, and held her against her ecstatic resistance, while all the young boys kissed her.

Nature in all its beauty and fertility determines the way of life of the Muller family and attracts their paying guest, the narrator, to walk, observe, and enjoy her surroundings. Nature is indifferent, beautiful, destructive in its treatment of humanity and in the response it exacts from the characters. (See the quotation from page 429 on page 93 of this study.) Setting, nature, and weather determine the course of events: destruction of the crops and many animals, death, the action of the family, and the response of Ottilie to the disaster. Ironically, the narrator regards nature and its demands as a cure for grief after the death of Mother Muller.

The storm and the death of Mother Muller make demands on Ottilie, who must stay up nearly all night feeding the family. (See pages 91-92 of this study.) The family goes forth to the funeral rites, ignoring Ottilie, forcing her to turn to the narrator for assistance. Setting determined action in that when the narrator takes Ottilie out in the spring wagon to join the funeral procession, Ottilie responds to the beauty of the spring day, as cited on pages 96-97.

So far this chapter has sketched in broad outline the geographical and physical limits of Miss Porter's fictional worlds and indicated in general how setting both aids and determines action. Setting alone--abstracted from character and action--is a static entity. Fiction is an organic unity

of people, places, and action. In often terrifyingly complex interaction, these three elements cooperate to produce a pervading atmosphere and illustrate truths of human life. To fully realize the subtlety and skill of Miss Porter's narration, it is necessary to examine each novel separately. It will be seen that Miss Porter's fictional world is a delicate balance of internal and external setting.

### III. ATMOSPHERE, INCIDENT, AND CHARACTER

#### Hacienda

Miss Porter uses setting to imply a timeless world of infinite, futile repetition of incidents in Hacienda. The sense of man's ephemeral yet eternal nature is brought out through her creation of a museum-like world of living dead: "The sun was shining when we left Mexico City, but mile by mile through the solemn valley of the pyramids we climbed through the maguey fields towards the thunderous blue cloud banked solidly in the east, until it dissolved and received us gently in a pallid silent rain" (137-138). Like a museum, "The hacienda lay before us, a monastery, a walled fortress, towered in terra cotta and coral, sheltered against the mountains" (151).

The economic center of life on the hacienda seems almost mummified, static, preserved for eternity in the formaldehyde of pulque:

We walked through the vat-room, picking our way through the puddles of sap sinking into the mud floor, idly stopping to watch, without comment, the flies drowning in the stinking liquor which seeped over the hairy bullhides sagging between the wooden frames. Maria Santisima stood primly in her blue painted niche in a frame of fly-blown paper flowers, with a perpetual light at her feet. The walls were covered with a faded fresco relating the legend of pulque; how a young Indian girl discovered this divine liquor, and brought it to the emperor, who rewarded her well; and after her death she became a half-goddess. An old legend: maybe the oldest: something to do with man's confused veneration for, and terror of, the fertility of women and vegetation . . . .

Betancourt stood in the door sniffing the air bravely. He glanced around the walls with the eye of an expert. "This is a very good example," he said, smiling at the fresco, "the perfect example, really . . . . The older ones are always the best, of course. It is a fact," he said, "that the Spaniards found wall paintings in the pre-Conquest pulquerias . . . always telling this legend. So it goes on. Nothing ever ends," he waved his long beautiful hand, "it goes on being and becomes little by little something else" (165).

An atmosphere of evil and corruption, timeless as the pyramids, timeless as man, is symbolized by serpent imagery within the world of pulque-manufacturing and agricultural life:

"Fresh maguey worms!" they cried in despair above the clamor of the turning wheels, waving like nose-gays the leaf bags, slimy and lumpy with the worms they had gathered one at a time from the cactus whose heart bleeds the honey water for the pulque" (138).

A world of indifferent nature sets the scene for human despair, a dead life caught and preserved by the cameras of the foreigners, who invade the lives of the natives with a more sophisticated evil than simple violence:



The camera had seen this unchanged world as a landscape with figures, but figures under a doom imposed by the landscape. The closed dark faces were full of instinctive suffering, without individual memory, or only the kind of memory animals may have, who when they feel the whip know they suffer but do not know why and cannot imagine a remedy . . . (142).

. . . . .

The camera had caught and fixed in moments of violence and senseless excitement, of cruel living and tortured death, the almost ecstatic death-expectancy which is in the air of Mexico. The Mexican may know when the danger is real, or may not care whether the thrill is false or true, but strangers feel the acid of death in their bones whether or not any real danger is near them. It was this terror that Kennerly had translated into fear of food, water, and air around him. In the Indian the love of death had become a habit of the spirit (143).

Kennerly, the American business manager of the film company, best conveys the feelings of alienation and rejection toward his surroundings: "'The water is filthy!' he said earnestly . . . . Isn't it horrible, the things they eat and drink?'" (138) "Beer was the only thing Kennerly could trust--it was food and medicine and a thirst- quencher all in one, and everything else around him, fruit, meat, air, water, bread were poisoned . . ." (141).

Sexual perversion is part of the corruption added to the evil of an already corrupt society by the foreign filmmakers when Lolita, the actress from Mexico City, and don Genaro's wife break the usual triangle of wife-husband- mistress and transform it into wife-lesbian-and-bewildered

husband, "who had no precedent whatever for a husband's conduct in such a situation . . ." (145).

Into this world, violence and murder erupt--but "erupt" is too strong a word--and are absorbed, swallowed up, disappear, into the ennui and indifference that pervade the atmosphere. Scene of the murder is Justino's hut, where the sixteen-year-old Indian boy had gone for the noon meal:

His sister was grinding corn for the tortillas, while he stood by waiting, throwing the pistol into the air and catching it. The pistol fired; shot her through here . . . . He touched his ribs level with his heart . . . . She fell forward on her face, over the grinding stone, dead . . . . Justino . . . struck through the maguey fields toward the mountains (148).

The world of custom and tradition combined with perpetual boredom quickly swallow up the enormity of sudden death, of brother killing sister:

The girl was nineteen years old. Her body had been sent already to the village to be buried. There was too much excitement over her; nothing was done so long as she was on the place. Don Genaro had gone, according to custom, to cross her hands, close her eyes, and light a candle beside her. Everything was done in order, they said piously, their eyes dancing with rich, enjoyable feelings. It is always regrettable and exciting when somebody you know gets into such dramatic trouble. Ah, we were alive under that deepening sky, jingling away through the yellow fields of blooming mustard with the pattern of spiked maguey shuttling as we passed, from straight lines to angles, to diamond shapes, and back again, miles and miles of it spreading away to the looming mountains (150).

The beauty of nature and the orderly arrangement of the fields contrast sharply with the unexplained mystery of the murder:

"Surely they would not have had loaded pistols among those being used in the picture?" I asked, rather suddenly, of the big man with the red-tasseled cord on his hat.

He opened his mouth to say something and snapped it shut again. There was a pause. Nobody spoke. It was my turn to be uncomfortable under a quick exchange of glances between the others.

There was again the guarded watchful expression on the Indian faces. An awful silence settled over us (150).

Sexual perversion in the form of an incestuous relationship explains the murder, according to Carlos Montana, native Mexican folk singer, whose reaction to the murder is quite in keeping with the atmosphere of coldness, alienation, and indifference that Miss Porter creates:

He was full of humanity and good humor about Justino and his troubles. "These family love affairs," he said, "what can you expect?" . . . I shall make a corrido about Justino and his sister." He began to sing almost in a whisper, imitating the voice and gestures of a singer peddling broadsides in the market . . . .

"Ah, poor little Rosalita  
Took herself a new lover,  
Thus betraying the heart's core  
Of her impassioned brother . . . .

Now she lies dead, poor Rosalita,  
With two bullets in her heart . . . .  
Take warning, my young sisters,  
Who would from your brothers part." (160)

When the narrator wonders why the peon Vicente did not let his friend Justino escape, Andreyev the communist offers an explanation which reflects the corrupt, perverted society of which he is a part: "'Revenge,' said Andreyev. 'Imagine a man's friend betraying him so, and with a woman, and a sister! He was furious'" (167-168).

Not even murder can relieve the atmosphere of apathy, and listlessness, for the interest of the characters cannot be sustained for even a day: Stephanov, Betancourt, and Uspensky call to the group arriving from the train: "They called to us, even before they recognized us, glad to see anyone of their party returning from town to relieve the long monotony of the day which had been shattered by the accident and could not be gathered together again." They need even more excitement than a murder to keep themselves from being bored! ". . . all our voices were vague with the vast incurable boredom which hung in the air of the place and settled around our heads clustered together" (151).

Nor can the excitement of revolutionary activity relieve boredom for very long, according to the narrator, who herself is intelligent, observant, sensitive, but detached, only rarely expressing an opinion. At least she is aware that the murder the previous day should have provided drama enough to last some time:

I said I should have thought there had been enough happening for the past few weeks . . . or at any rate the past few days.

"Oh, no," said Carlos, "nothing that lasts long enough. I mean real excitement like the last Agrarian raid . . . . There were machine guns on the towers, and every man on the place had a rifle and a pistol. They had the time of their lives. They drove the raiders off, and then they fired the rest of their ammunition in the air by way of celebration; and the next day they were bored. They wanted to have the whole show over again . . . ."

"They do really hate the Agrarians, then?" I asked.

"No, they love excitement," said Carlos. (165)

Porter here portrays a very Mexican phenomenon, the insatiable appetite for violence as a temporary relief from the bare struggle for survival of a peasant society.

The paragraph that epitomizes the understated horror of human indifference, lack of compassion and pity, the inevitability of a cycle of repetition, is stated by Kennerly:

"I thought of it all night and couldn't sleep--don't you remember," he implored Stepanov, who held one palm over his coffee cup while he finished a cigarette, "those scenes we shot only two weeks ago, when Justino played the part of a boy who killed a girl by accident, tried to escape, and Vicente was one of the men who ran him down on horseback? Well, the same thing had happened to the same people in reality! And--" he turned to me, "the strangest thing is, we have to make that scene again, it didn't turn out too well, and look, my God, we had it happening really, and nobody thought of it then! Then was the time. We could have got a close-up of the girl, really dead, and real blood running down Justino's face where Vicente hit him, and my God! We never even thought of it. That kind of thing," he said bitterly, "has been happening ever since we got here, Just happens over and over . . . . Now, what was the matter, I wonder?" (163)

The fact that no one thought of photographing the dead is perhaps the only redeeming feature of the cast of characters. None of them, including the narrator, expresses the slightest flicker of humanity at Kennerly's grisly suggestion, late though it comes:

"We can always do it again," said Stepanov.  
 "When Justino comes back, and the light is better" (163).

"Imagine," said Kennerly, pouncing, "just try to imagine that--when the poor boy comes back he'll have to go through the same scene he has gone through twice before, once in play and once in reality. Reality!" He licked his chops. "Think how he'll feel. Why, it ought to drive him crazy" (163-164).

Corruption and evil in the individual is matched by the corruption and evil of organized society, although, ironically, society has supposedly been improved by what the narrator calls "the true revolution of blessed memory . . ." (135). Don Genaro, who tries to invoke traditional methods of dealing with the problem of murder on his estate by taking custody of the murderer, runs into an even more deeply imbedded tradition of bribery when he goes to see the judge:

"I told him, Justino is my peon, his family have lived for three hundred years on our hacienda, this is MY business. I know what happened and all about it, and you don't know anything and all you have to do with this is to let me have Justino back at once. I mean today, tomorrow will not do, I told him." It was no good. The judge wanted two thousand pesos to let Justino go. "Two thousand pesos!" shouted don Genaro, thumping on the table; "try to imagine that!" (155)

Solution to the problem in a society supposedly cleansed by revolution is to see Velarde.

He was the most powerful and successful revolutionist in Mexico. He owned two pulque haciendas which had fallen to his share when the great reparation of land had taken place. He operated also the largest dairy farm in the country, furnishing milk and butter and cheese to every charitable institution, orphans' home, insane asylum, reform school and workhouse in the country, and getting just twice the prices for them that any other dairy farm could have asked.

. . . He fought counter-revolution and political corruption, daily upon the front pages of twenty newspapers he had bought for that very purpose. As an employer, he would understand what don Genaro was contending with. As an honest revolutionist, he would know how to handle that dirty, bribe-taking little judge. "I'll go to see Velarde," said don Genaro in a voice gone suddenly flat, as if he despaired or was too bored with the topic to keep it up any longer. He sat back and looked at his guests bleakly. Everyone said something, it did not matter what. The episode of the morning now seemed very far away and not worth thinking about (156).

Another facet of the inability of people to feel any genuine concern for one another is expressed by the alienation of don Genaro's grandfather, who rejects the china doll theatrical type his grandson married, and who belongs to the past:

He did not understand the boy and he did not waste time trying. He had moved his furniture and his keepsakes and his person away, to the very farthest patio in the old garden, above the terraces to the south, where he lived in bleak dignity and loneliness, without hope and without philosophy, perhaps contemptuous of both, joining his family only at mealtimes (153).

The architectural setting created by Miss Porter precludes warm, human relationships. There can be no genuine life in such a place, suspended in time, changeless, and cold. "An old Spanish gentleman had revisited the hacienda after an absence of fifty years, and had gone about looking at everything with delight. 'Nothing has changed,' he said, 'nothing at all!'" (142). Dona Julia says about the hacienda, "'We never really live here . . . It's really very ugly, but you must not mind that. It is hopeless to try keeping the place up. The Indians destroy everything with neglect'" (152).

In her descriptions of the rooms in the hacienda, Miss Porter uses such words as "cold," "chill gloom," "naked," and "drafty," to provide a fitting atmosphere for the characters who exist within, embalmed with torpor:

The room was cold. The round-shaded hanging lamp hardly disturbed the shadows. The doorways, of the style called Porfirian Gothic, in honor of the Diaz period of domestic architecture, soared towards the roof in a cloud of gilded stamped wallpaper, from an undergrowth of purple and red and orange plush arm-chairs fringed and tassled, set on bases with springs. Such spots as this, fitted up for casual visits, interrupted the chill gloom of the rooms marching by tens along the cloisters, now and again casting themselves around patios, gardens, pens for animals. A naked player-piano in light wood occupied one corner . . . our voices were vague with the vast incurable boredom which hung in the air of the place and settled around our heads clustered together (151).



Again:

In the drafty upper-hall room fitted up as a parlor, Andreyev turned off the mechanical attachment of the piano and sang Russian songs, running his hands over the keys while he waited to remember yet other songs . . . . He sang . . . for himself mostly, in the same kind of voluntary forgetfulness of his surroundings, the same self-induced absence of mind that had kept him talking about Russian in the afternoon (160).

Scenes within the hacienda contrast with the vitality and activity of the peons and animals outside. If one is willing to overlook the fact that the peons are laboring long after midnight, there is an air of wholesomeness and picturesque charm for an observer who does not care about people:

Figs grunted and rooted in the soft wallow near the washing fountain, where the women were still kneeling in the darkness, thumping wet cloth on the stones, chatting, laughing. All the women seemed to be laughing that night: long after midnight, the high bright sound sparkled again and again from the long row of peon quarters along the corral. Burros sobbed and mourned to each other, there was everywhere the drowsy wakefulness of creatures, stamping hoofs, breathing and snorting. Below in the vat-room a single voice sang suddenly a dozen notes of some rowdy song; and the women at the washing fountain were silenced for a moment, then tittered among themselves (162).

Two settings are skillfully combined to symbolize the stench of a rotting world, a world of perversion, exploitation, and endless routine. Sense imagery with which Miss Porter makes the reader almost smell the festering corpse of the world is created in the following description of dona Julia's boudoir and the pulqueria:

The air was thick with perfume which fought with another heavier smell. From the vat-room came a continual muffled shouting, the rumble of barrels as they rolled down the wooden trestles to the flat mule-car standing on the tracks running past the wide doorway. The smell had not been out of my nostrils since I came, but here it rose in a thick vapor through the heavy drone of flies, sour, stale, like rotting milk and blood; this sound and this smell belonged together, and both belonged to the intermittent rumble of barrels and the long chanting cry of the Indians. On the narrow stairs I glanced back at dona Julia. She was looking up, wrinkling her little nose, her Pekinese with his wrinkled nose of perpetual disgust held close to her face. "Pulque!" she said. "Isn't it horrid? But I hope the noise will not keep you awake" (161).

Miss Porter seems to indicate that the world of nature is fresh, impersonal, uncorrupted, and beautiful. Several references imply that distant mountains are a symbol of unattainable purity: the maguey spreads, "miles and miles of it spreading away to the looming mountains" (150), "intermittent sun-and-cloud light, looking out over the immense landscape of patterned field and mountain" (166), and "On my balcony there was no longer any perfume to disturb the keen fine wind from the mountains" (161-162). But within the world of the hacienda, the world of corrupt humanity, the atmosphere becomes unbearable, even to the detached and uninvolved narrator who has so coolly reported her observations: "I could not wait for tomorrow in this deathly air" (170).

Pale Horse, Pale Rider

Unlike Hacienda, which emphasized a more obvious and external setting, Pale Horse, Pale Rider emphasizes the internal or psychological setting. This, however, is intimately related to the external world. Consideration of internal setting, incident, and atmosphere is impossible without first commenting on point of view. A much more personal world is created in this novel than in Hacienda, with much of the fictional world revealed by indirect interior monologue of the main character, Miranda, and by limited omniscient author.

As in Hacienda, through mention of a museum as setting, Miss Porter lends a feeling of timelessness to a physical world that is eternal and changeless: "On two Sundays they had gone to the geological museum, and had pored in shared fascination over bits of meteors, rock formations, fossilized tusks and trees, Indian arrows, grottoes from silver and gold lodes" (285).

The world of nature as fresh, uncorrupted, and beautiful, and mountains as symbols of unattainable purity are used as setting in Pale Horse, Pale Rider: "Outdoors on the sidewalk "the air was sharp and clean in her mouth . . ." (292). "They walked out together into the fine fall day, scuffling bright ragged leaves under their feet, turning their faces up to a generous sky really blue and spotless" (278-279).

The distant purity of mountains seems more attainable in Pale Horse, Pale Rider than in Hacienda, perhaps because a personal world of love and warmth exists against a background of alienation, disease, fear, and war:

Once they had gone to the mountains and, leaving the car, had climbed a stony trail, and had come out on a ledge upon a flat stone, where they sat and watched the lights change on a valley landscape that was, no doubt, Miranda said, quite apocryphal--"We need not believe it, but it is fine poetry," she had told him . . . (285).

It is significant to note that, viewed from within a context of personal illness, the mountains recede, blurred by disease. "I wish I were in the cold mountains in the snow, that's what I should like best; and all about her rose the measured ranges of the Rockies wearing their perpetual snow, their majestic blue laurels of cloud, chilling her to the bone with their sharp breath" (298).

The story takes place during the flu epidemic toward the end of World War I in a western American city in the Rocky Mountain area. The world of disease and war intrudes on, and ironically, brings together the main character, Miranda, and her lover, Adam. They have known each other only ten days, and they met because Adam rented a room for his ten-day military leave in the same rooming-house where Miranda has lived for a year.

City streets interrupted by funeral processions form the outer setting; both outer and inner setting create an

atmosphere of disease from which the individual cannot escape: "At the first corner they waited for a funeral to pass, the mourners seated straight and firm as if proud in their sorrow" (278-279). Three funeral processions pass the couple as they walk, contrasting sharply with "the radiance which played and darted about the simple and lovely miracle of being two persons named Adam and Miranda, twenty-four years old each, alive and on earth at the same moment" (280). That both Adam and Miranda are aware of the presence of disease is indicated by their conversation:

"The men are dying like flies out there, anyway. This funny new disease. Simply knocks you into a cocked hat."

"It seems to be a plague," said Miranda, "something out of the Middle Ages. Did you ever see so many funerals, ever?" (281).

Inner setting is the physical state of Miranda, who, during the same conversation indicates awareness of her own impending illness when she says, "'I can't smell or see or hear today. I must have a fearful cold.' . . . 'There's something terribly wrong,' she told Adam. 'I feel too rotten. It can't just be the weather, and the war!'" (282-283).

Later in the novel when Miranda is overcome by illness and Adam is taking care of her, she says, "'You're running a risk . . . don't you know that? Why do you do it?'" (300).

Outer setting includes not only the immediate vicinity of Miranda and Adam, for the whole city is aware of and

affected by the epidemic, as indicated by speculations in the newspaper office where Miranda works:

"They say," said Towney, "that it is really caused by germs brought by a German ship to Boston, a camouflaged ship, naturally, it didn't come in under its own colors. Isn't that ridiculous?"

"Maybe it was a submarine," said Chuck, "sneaking in from the bottom of the sea in the dead of night. Now that sounds better."

"Yes, it does," said Towney; "they always slip up somewhere in these details . . . and they think the germs were sprayed over the city--it started in Boston you know--and somebody reported seeing a strange, thick, greasy-looking cloud float up out of Boston Harbor and spread slowly all over that end of town . . ." (284).

The twin evils of disease and war dominate and control the personal lives of Adam and Miranda. Miranda is an intelligent, perceptive, compassionate person, a main character with whom the reader wishes to identify; yet the exterior evil of disease intrudes and becomes an interior evil, causing the main character to present an ambiguity of behavior that is disturbing enough to evoke the word "evil." The evil, diseased world without becomes the evil, diseased world within Miranda herself as she sees disease and death around her, has premonitions of her own death, feels illness rising within her, yet allows Adam to remain close to her, with the result that he dies.

Miss Porter presents a psychological setting through the diseased eyes of Miranda's nightmare, a prelude to illness and eventual delirium. In the first scene of the novel,

one of the nightmare and premonitions, she dreams of a race with death:

Where is that lank greenish stranger I remember . . . ?  
The stranger rode beside her, easily, lightly, his reins loose in his half-closed hand, straight and elegant in dark, shabby garments that flapped upon his bones; his pale face smiled in an evil trance, he did not glance at her. Ah, I have seen this fellow before. I know this man if I could place him. He is no stranger to me.

She pulled Graylie up, rose in her stirrups and shouted, I'm not going with you this time--ride on! (270).

It is interesting to note that the physical setting for the nightmare is bare of detail, and, in fact, is an uncertainty in the mind of the protagonist: "In sleep she knew she was in her bed, but not the bed she had lain down in a few hours since, and the room was not the same but it was a room she had known somewhere" (269). In a waking moment Miranda evaluates her rented room: "The noon sunlight cast cold slanting shadows in the room where, she said, I suppose I live, and this day is beginning badly, but they all do now, for one reason or another" (278). And later, when Adam goes to buy medicine for her, Miranda thinks: "When I am not here I cannot remember anything about this room where I have lived for nearly a year, except that the curtains are too thin and there was never any way of shutting out the morning light" (298). Through her sparse description of physical setting, Miss Porter

seems to imply that the psychological world of the individual has far more significance than the exterior world. The interior world of nightmare and disease in the final section carries with it an awareness of war and danger:

. . . her memory turned and roved after another place she had known first and loved best, that now she could see only in drifting fragments of palm and cedar, dark shadows and a sky that warmed without dazzling, as this strange sky had dazzled without warming her; there was the long slow wavering of gray moss in the drowsy oak shade, the spacious hovering of buzzards overhead . . . . Back of the ship was jungle, and even as it appeared before her, she knew it was all she had ever read or had been told or felt or thought about jungles; a writhing terribly alive and secret place of death, creeping with tangles of spotted serpents, rainbow-colored birds with malign eyes, leopards with humanly wise faces and extravagantly crested lions; screaming long-armed monkeys tumbling among broad fleshy leaves that glowed with sulphur-colored light and exuded the ichor of death, and rotting trunks of unfamiliar trees sprawled in crawling slime . . . . Danger, danger, danger, the voices said, and War, war, war (299).

Miranda's interior world of disease and delirium carries within it the subconscious prediction of Adam's death:

. . . she saw Adam transfixed by a flight of these singing arrows that struck him in the heart and passed shrilly cutting their path through the leaves. Adam fell straight back before her eyes, and rose again unwounded and alive; another flight of arrows loosed from the invisible bow struck him again and he fell, and yet he was there before her untouched in a perpetual death and resurrection. She threw herself before him, angrily and selfishly she interposed between him and the track and the arrow, crying No, no, like a child cheated in a game, It's my turn now, why must you always be the one to die? and the arrows struck her cleanly through the heart and through his body and he lay dead, and she still lived (305).



A room in the county hospital sets the scene for Miranda's lonely journey to the gates of heaven and return to life. Living in an atmosphere of World War I creates tensions that during her delirium are translated into fear of a man with a German name, Dr. Hildesheim.

Across the field came Dr. Hildesheim, his face a skull beneath his German helmet, carrying a naked infant writhing on the point of his bayonet, and a huge stone pot marked Poison in Gothic letters. He stopped before the well that Miranda remembered in a pasture on her father's farm, a well once dry but now bubbling with living water, and into its pure depths he threw the child and the poison, and the violated water sank back soundlessly into the earth (309).

But the world of horror created by a diseased mind evolves into a vision of heaven more beautiful than anything Miranda knew in life:

. . . Miranda, enchanted, altogether believing, looked upon a deep clear landscape of sea and sand, of soft meadow and sky, freshly washed and glistening with transparencies of blue. Why, of course, of course, said Miranda, without surprise but with serene rapture as if some promise made to her had been kept long after she had ceased to hope for it. She rose from her narrow ledge and ran lightly through the tall portals of the great bow that arched in its splendor over the burning blue of the sea and the cool green of the meadow on either hand.

The small waves rolled in and over unhurriedly . . . . Moving towards her leisurely as clouds through the shimmering air came a great company of human beings, and Miranda saw in an amazement of joy that they were all the living she had known . . . . They were pure identities and she knew them every one without calling their names or remembering what relation she bore to them . . . . The drifting circle widened, separated, and each figure was alone but not solitary; Miranda, alone too, questioning nothing,

desiring nothing, in the quietude of her ecstasy, stayed where she was, eyes fixed on the overwhelming deep sky where it was always morning.

. . . Miranda felt without warning a vague tremor of apprehension, some small flick of distrust in her joy; a thin frost touched the edges of this confident tranquility; something, somebody, was missing, she had lost something, she had left something valuable in another country, oh, what could it be? (311-312).

Miss Porter contrasts abruptly the world of heaven, of eternity, with the world of pain and ugliness to which Miranda must return, having indeed "left something valuable in another country":

Pain returned, a terrible compelling pain running through her veins like heavy fire, the stench of corruption filled her nostrils, the sweetish sickening smell of rotting flesh and pus; she opened her eyes and saw pale light through a coarse white cloth over her face, knew that the smell of death was in her own body, and struggled to life her hand (312).

For a time Miranda prefers the world of death and beauty to the world of life and ugliness to which she returns:

Closing her eyes she would rest for a moment remembering that bliss which had repaid all the pain of the journey to reach it; opening them again she saw with a new anguish the dull world to which she was condemned, where the light seemed filmed over with cobwebs, all the bright surfaces corroded, the sharp planes melted and formless, all objects and beings meaningless, ah, dead and withered things that believed themselves alive! (314)

Miranda "wept silently, shamelessly, in pity for herself and her lost rapture . . ." (314). She regrets that "the whole humane conviction and custom of society, conspired to pull her inseparable rack of bones and wasted flesh to its

feet, to put in order her disordered mind, and to set her once more safely in the road that would lead her again to death" (314). The world after near-death seems even uglier than it was before her illness: "Miranda looked about her with the covertly hostile eyes of an alien who does not like the country in which he finds himself, does not mean to live there and yet is helpless, unable to leave it at his will" (313).

The nightmare-delirium of psychological setting has similarities with the everyday world of exterior and interior setting, a world of extreme ugliness in its massive pressures on the individual and a world of extreme beauty in rare personal relationships.

Physical setting in the first section of the novel includes scenes in the newspaper office where Miranda worked. Instead of describing a large institution, Miss Porter concentrates on small units of space in which the individual attempts to create a small personal setting. Thus the area of Miranda's desk and the cloakroom become important points, one a place frequently violated by the intrusion of often hostile outsiders, the other a small place of refuge where friendship and honesty exist. Miranda hates having her personal world invaded by unwelcome strangers:

Every day she found someone there, sitting upon her desk instead of the chair provided, dangling his legs, eyes roving, full of his important affairs, waiting to

pounce about something or other. "Why won't they sit in the chair? Should I put a sign on it, saying, 'For God's sake, sit here!'" (271) . . . The two men slid off the desk, leaving some of her papers rumpled, and the oldish man had inquired why she had not bought a Liberty Bond. He was a pursy-faced man, gross-mouthed, with little lightless eyes . . . (272).

The younger man presents an equally unsavory appearance:

"Miranda, startled by the tone, met his eye; his stare was really stony, really viciously cold, the kind of thing you might expect to meet behind a pistol on a deserted corner . . . . Miranda frowned with nervousness, the sharp beginning of fear" (272). The external evils of war, extortion, abuse of power give rise to internal evils of fear, hypocrisy, and thoughts of violence: "Miranda, desperately silent, had thought, 'Suppose I were not a coward, but said what I really thought? Suppose I said to hell with this filthy war? Suppose I asked that little thug, What's the matter with you, why aren't you rotting in Belleau Wood? I wish you were . . .'" (273).

An atmosphere of repressed violence exists within the larger framework of violence far away at the front. An aging comic also invades Miranda's desk. "He stepped before her again and said without much conviction, 'If you was a man I'd knock your block off'" (289). Miranda refers to another Liberty Bond salesman as "'Just another nasty old man who would like to see the young ones killed,'" and adds "'the tom-cats try to eat the little tom-kittens, you

know. They don't fool you really, do they, Adam?" (294). But Adam, who is innocent, does not see the same world that Miranda does. Miranda realizes the hypocrisy, dishonesty, and fear which permeate her world. It is a world from which the compassionate and the tender-hearted, the honest and true-sighted wish to escape. "Miranda said, 'There's too much of everything in this world just now. I'd like to sit down here on the curb, Chuck, and die, and never again see--I wish I could lose my memory and forget my own name . . . I wish--'" (289).

Miranda cannot always bring herself to compromise her personal honesty in order to survive in a world she would reject, even though Chuck advises her "'Try to keep in mind that Rypinsky has got show business cornered in this town; please Rypinsky and you'll please the advertising department, please them and you'll get a raise. Hand-in-glove, my poor dumb child, will you never learn?'" (289).

A military hospital sets the scene for organized charity on an orderly, impersonal basis, with an atmosphere of hypocrisy and fear killing any possibility of genuine charity. Through a shift in point of view Miss Porter takes the reader into the minds of those who try to comfort the soldiers who have fallen victim to the violence of war:

" . . . we must do everything we can to make them contented, but I draw the line at talking to them. I told the chaperones

at those dances for enlisted men, I'll dance with them, every dumbbell who asks me, but I will NOT talk to them, I said, even if there is a war."

Miranda sees through the cold charity of society women "who were wallowing in good works," and she "moved in among the young women, who scattered out and rushed upon the ward uttering girlish laughter meant to be refreshingly gay, but there was a grim determined clang in it calculated to freeze the blood" (276). Miss Porter's description of the organized charity efforts designed to comfort the wounded remind one of the cold, organized charity described by Blake in "Holy Thursday." Yet Miranda must live in this world, even though she is not entirely of it. She, too, must adopt self-protective dishonesty in order to survive the pressure of a mass world that destroys individuality. Coming out of the hospital after her attempt to cheer a wounded soldier is rejected, Miranda meets a fellow charity worker:

After a short silence, the girl said in a puzzled way, "I don't know what good it does, really. Some of them wouldn't take anything at all. I don't like this, do you?"

"I hate it," said Miranda.

"I suppose it's all right, though," said the girl cautiously.

"Perhaps," said Miranda, turning cautious also (277).

Genuine charity and compassion are impossible on a large-scale, impersonal basis, Miss Porter implies. Large scale patriotic

drives inspire only fear, not patriotism. Miranda is afraid of losing her job if she doesn't buy a Liberty Bond for five dollars a week on an eighteen-dollar-a-week salary, clearly an economic impossibility. Her friend Towney, "quietly hysterical about something," shares Miranda's fear: "'My God,' said Towney, in the same voice, 'they told me I'd lose my job--'" (275).

A theater sets the scene for an impersonal, organized, very orderly and institutionalized appeal to patriotism. Miss Porter's description of the stage, the appeal, and the audience reveal the falsity, ugliness, and half-truths of the world Miranda perceives:

When the curtain rose for the third act, the third act did not take place at once. There was instead disclosed a backdrop almost covered with an American flag improperly and disrespectfully exposed, nailed at each upper corner, gathered in the middle and nailed again, sagging dustily. Before it posed a local dollar-a-year man, now doing his bit as a Liberty Bond salesman. He was an ordinary man past middle life, with a neat little melon buttoned into his trousers and waistcoat, an opinionated tight mouth, a face and figure in which nothing could be read save the inept sensual record of fifty years (293).

Battered once more by a war-oriented mass appeal

Miranda asked herself, Say that over, I didn't catch the last line. Did you mention Adam? If you didn't I'm not interested. What about Adam, you little pig? . . . Coal, oil, iron, gold, international finance, why don't you tell us about them, you little liar?

The audience rose and sang, "There's a Long, Long Trail A winding," their opened mouths black and faces pallid in the reflecting footlights; some of the faces grimaced and wept and had shining streaks like snail's tracks on them (293-294).

Comprehending the world as she does, Miranda ponders a universe of alienation:

Miranda, buttoning her jacket, stepped into the moving crowd, thinking, What did I ever know about them? There must be a great many of them here who think as I do and we dare not say a word to each other of our desperation, we are speechless animals letting ourselves be destroyed, and why? Does anybody here believe the things we say to each other? (291)

In an environment so hostile to individuality, humanity can survive only by establishing relationships on a personal level. In this personal world, Miranda attempts to communicate her knowledge of evil to Adam:

"Adam," she said, "the worst of war is the fear and suspicion and the awful expression in all the eyes you meet . . . as if they had pulled the shutters over their minds and their hearts and were peering out at you, ready to leap if you make one gesture or say one word they do not understand instantly. It frightens me; I live in fear too, and no one should have to live in fear. It's the skulking about, and the lying. It's what war does to the mind and the heart, Adam, and you can't separate these two--what it does to them is worse than what it can do to the body" (294).

In contrast with ugliness, fear, and hypocrisy, Adam represents the love, compassion, and above all, innocence which cannot survive because it is uncorrupted by evil. Adam is that aspect of Miranda's world which is as close to heaven as she will know outside of her encounter with death. Adam, unfallen and without sin, is described in terms of glowing health:

He was tall and heavily muscled in the shoulders, narrow in the waist and flanks, and he was infinitely



buttoned, strapped, harnessed into a uniform as tough and unyielding in cut as a strait jacket, though the cloth was fine and supple. He really did look, Miranda thought, like a fine healthy apple this morning. One time or another in their talking, he had boasted that he had never had a pain in his life that he could remember (280). He looked so clear and fresh, and he had never had a pain in his life . . . (282).

He is innocent in mind as in body, as Miranda discovers when she tries to share her knowledge of evil with him:

. . . "I hate these potbellied baldheads, too fat, too old, too cowardly, to go to war themselves, they know they're safe; it's you they are sending instead--"

Adam turned eyes of genuine surprise upon her. "Now what could the poor sap do if they did take him? It's not his fault," he explained, "he can't do anything but talk." His pride in his youth, his forbearance and tolerance and contempt for that unlucky being breathed out of his very pores as he strolled, straight and relaxed in his strength (294).

Miranda realizes his innocence when he says, "'If I didn't go, . . . I couldn't look myself in the face'" (295).

In addition to innocence, the world of Pale Horse, Pale Rider includes sacrifice, but not on the battlefield, as Miranda expects. Instead, Adam sacrifices himself in caring for her in a hostile world where her landlady threatened to put her out on the street, where there were no hospital beds available, and where her other friends could help only through frantic efforts to find an ambulance. It is Adam who stays with her, confined with the plague and his beloved in a rented room, coping with vomit and delirium and a few lucid moments of love:

"Adam," she said out of the heavy soft darkness that drew her down, down, "I love you, and I was hoping you would say that to me, too."

He lay down beside her with his arm under her shoulder, and pressed his smooth face against hers, his mouth moved towards her mouth and stopped. "Can you hear what I am saying? . . . What do you think I have been trying to tell you all this time?"

She turned towards him, the cloud cleared and she saw his face for an instant. He pulled the covers about her and held her, and said, "Go to sleep, darling, darling, if you will go to sleep now for one hour I will wake you up and bring you hot coffee and tomorrow we will find somebody to help. I love you, go to sleep--" (304).

Not only does love exist, but friendship also:

"Only Chuck Rouncivale, the sports reporter, and Ye Towne Gossyp were sitting on her desk today, and them she liked having there. She sat on theirs when she pleased" (284). Bill, her boss, attempts to help get an ambulance, and with Towney, comes to collect her after she has recovered. The combined efforts of Dr. Hildesheim and Miss Tanner bring her back to life, even though Miranda is not eager to return.

In addition to friendship, one finds compassion amid the ugliness, but the world punishes compassion, as Miranda and Towney discover:

Miranda and Towney had a great deal in common, and liked each other. They had both been real reporters once, and had been sent together to "cover" a scandalous elopement, in which no marriage had taken place, after all, and the recaptured girl, her face swollen, had sat with her mother, who was moaning steadily under a mound of blankets. They had both wept painfully and implored the young reporters to suppress the worst of the story. They had suppressed it, and

the rival newspaper printed it all the next day. Miranda and Towney had then taken their punishment together, and had been degraded publicly to routine female jobs, one to the theaters, the other to society. They had this in common, that neither of them could see what else they could possibly have done, and they knew they were considered fools by the rest of the staff--nice girls, but fools. (274-5)

Setting and time emphasize the irony of Adam's death. He died, not in a war, but at home, and only a short time before the armistice; he died, not from bullets, but from disease given him by the girl he loves. A deeper irony is that Miranda, who saw the truth about the world and the evil in it so clearly, never faced the truth about herself until she destroyed the one person who made her world bearable: Adam. She saw the evil in other people while she romantically refused to face the evil in herself until it was too late: ". . . knowing it was false she still clung to the lie, the unpardonable lie of her bitter desire. She said, 'I love you,' and stood up trembling, trying by the mere act of her will to bring him to sight before her . . . . She came to herself as if out of sleep. Oh, no, that is not the way, I must never do that, she warned herself" (317).

Like Hacienda, Pale Horse, Pale Rider ends with "death" as a description of the world. While the narrator in Hacienda can escape, she thinks, from the "deathly air" of the hacienda into another world, Miranda has nearly escaped from life into death and returned to life with "No

more war, no more plague, only the dazed silence that follows the ceasing of the heavy guns; noiseless houses with the shades drawn, empty streets, the dead cold light of tomorrow. Now there would be time for everything" (317).

The final paragraph indicates that Miranda must start life again in the same setting, with no more war or plague, in the same houses, dead and cold, without evil in them. The only evil she discovered was the evil within humanity, including herself. Miranda has survived evil and must live only to die again.

### The Leaning Tower

Repressed personal violence relieved by moments of love against a background of war and large-scale violence is an integral part of the psychological setting of Pale Horse, Pale Rider. Overt violence in the murder of Justino's sister and the violence against human considerations implied by economic exploitation add to the atmosphere of unrelieved evil in Hacienda. In The Leaning Tower Miss Porter uses setting to create an external picture of a decaying, orderly world and an internal setting of repressed violence that rises to a crescendo in the final scenes of the novel.

Miss Porter's use of the Biblical Edenic myth in Pale Horse, Pale Rider, with Adam described as a "fine

healthy apple" (280) in an evil world, indicates a serpent, implicit, not explicit. Serpent imagery in the form of maguery worms sets the tone in Hacienda. Also, in The Leaning Tower, Miss Porter uses worm-serpents to create an atmosphere of evil in the opening scene of the novel:

Early one morning on his sixth day in Berlin, on the twenty-seventh of December, 1931, Charles Upton left his dull little hotel in Hedemanstrasse and escaped to the cafe across the street. The air of the hotel was mysteriously oppressive to him; a yellow-faced woman and an ill-tempered looking fat man were the proprietors, and they seemed to be in perpetual conspiracy of some sort before open linen closets, in a corner of the dining room, along the halls, or over the account books behind a varnished desk in the lobby. His room was dark, airless, cold, and once when he had a supper there, small white worms had come squirming out of the liver sausage on his plate. It was too expensive for him, besides, and he had decided to change (436).

Thus, in the first paragraph, primarily through setting, Miss Porter creates an atmosphere in which it is clearly impossible for a sensitive human being to flourish. Not only are his physical surroundings cold and inhospitable, but the incidents which occur in them serve to reveal Charles' alienation. In his innocence, Charles does not seem to find it remarkable that no one spoke to him on Christmas Eve:

The cafe was dull, too, but with a look of thrifty cheerfulness, and Charles had pleasant associations with it. He had spent his first Christmas Eve in Europe there, among a small company of amiable, noisy people who all seemed, by their conversation, to work in the same factory. No one but the old waiter had spoken to him, but the others talked heartily among themselves . . . (436).

Setting further emphasizes Charles' alienation:

The streets were full of young people, lean and tough, boys and girls alike dressed in leather jackets or a kind of uniform blue ski suit, who whizzed about the streets on bicycles without a glance at the windows. Charles saw them carrying skis on their shoulders, shouting and laughing in groups, getting away to the mountains over the weekend. He watched them enviously; maybe if he stayed on long enough he would know some of them, he would be riding a bicycle and going away for the skiing, too. It seemed unlikely, though (442).

Through limited omniscient point of view, Miss Porter describes the setting as a young artist would see it. A world of ugly people and ugly scenes on city streets press upon Charles' consciousness:

He would wander on, and the thicker the crowd in which he found himself, the more alien he felt himself to be. He had watched a group of middle-aged men and women who were gathered in silence before two adjoining windows, gazing silently at displays of toy pigs and sugar pigs. These persons were all strangely of a kind, and strangely the most prevalent type. The streets were full of them--enormous waddling women with short legs and ill-humored faces, and round-headed men with great rolls of fat across the backs of their necks, who seemed to support their swollen bellies with an effort that drew their shoulders forward (442).

Chief object of interest of the strolling Germans were the "dainty artificial pigs" (442) made of food, metal, wood, etc., which adorn the store windows:

. . . the people, shameless mounds of fat, stood in a trance of pig worship, gazing with eyes damp with admiration and appetite. They resembled the most unkind caricatures of themselves, but they were the very kind of people that Holbein and Durer and Urs Graf had drawn, too: not vaguely, but positively like, their late-medieval faces full of hallucinated malice

and a kind of sluggish but intense cruelty that worked its way up from their depths slowly through the layers of helpless gluttonous fat.

The thin snow continued to fall and whiten rounded shoulders and lumpy hat brims. Charles, feeling the flakes inside his collar, had walked on with intention to get away from the spectacle which struck him as revolting (443).

City streets filled with repulsive, obese people contrast with streets filled with the hopeless and miserable poor:

They had stood there with their ragged shoes sunk in the slushy snow, starving and blue-nosed, singing in their mourning voices, accepting coins with grave nods, keeping their eyes fixed on each other as they beat time softly with their hands.

Others stood alone, and these the most miserable, each man isolated in his incurable misfortune. Those blinded or otherwise mutilated in the war wore a certain band on their sleeves to prove that they had more than any others earned the right to beg, and merited special charity. Charles, with his almost empty pockets, nothing in them except the future, which he felt he owned, saw a tall young man so emaciated his teeth stood in ridges under the mottled tight skin of his cheeks, standing at the curb with a placard around his neck . . . (441).

His surroundings are an object of intense interest to Charles, who came to Berlin to study as an artist:

He had hoped quite constantly he was going to meet some gay young girls, students perhaps; there seemed to be plenty of them about, but not one had given him the eye yet. He had stopped in a doorway and hastily jotted a few broad-bottomed figures, sagging faces, and dressed pigs, in his notebook. He sketched a specially haggard and frustrated looking streetwalker with a preposterous tilt to her feathered hat. He tried at first not to be seen at his occupation, but discovered soon that he need not worry, for, in fact, nobody noticed him.

These rather scattered impressions were in his mind and he was very dissatisfied with all of them as he folded up his map and pamphlet and set out walking to find a room in Berlin (444).

In a world cold and impenetrable as glass Charles realizes he is an outsider.

Through Charles' memories of the past, Miss Porter creates the American world of south Texas that he came from and the romanticized version of Berlin, as described by his German-American friend Kuno, that brought him to the alien city. By emphasizing setting and the places where Charles' and Kuno's fathers worked, Miss Porter brings out the contrasting American and German values: "Charles, whose family made their living, such as it was, from a blackland farm, wondered at the pride with which Kuno would lead him past his father's shop windows . . ." (437). And Charles,

used to seeing his father on horseback, or standing about the barns with the Negroes, looking at the animals, or walking the fields in his big boots, or riding on the cast iron seat of a plow or harrow, felt he would have been ashamed to see his father in a store, following someone about trying to sell him something (438).

Although Charles, as a child, realizes the discrepancy between his and Kuno's standards, he absorbs without criticism Kuno's romanticized picture of the best city, the best country to be: Berlin, Germany:

. . . Kuno's postcards, with their foreign stamps, coming from far-off places like Bremen and Wiesbaden and Mannheim and Heidelberg and Berlin, had brought the great world across the sea, the blue silent deep



world of Europe, straight to Charles' door. . . . "No, but if you don't go to Berlin, you miss everything. We waste time always in those horrid little places, Mannheim and so on, we have to visit with our dull relatives, of course, they are stuck to the necks there, but in Berlin . . ." and he would talk for hours about Berlin until Charles in his imagination saw it as a great shimmering city of castles towering in misty light. How had he got such an image? Kuno had said only, "The streets are polished like a table top and they are as wide as--" he would measure with his eye the street they were walking in, a very narrow crooked dirty little street in an old colonial Spanish city--"oh, five times as wide as this. And the buildings--" he would glance up, disgust in his face for the flat roofs lowering over them--"they are all of stone and marble and are carved, carved all over, with pillars and statues everywhere and staircases wider than a house, winding . . ." (439).

Kuno's description combined with Charles' imagination does not live up to the actual setting observed by Charles during his six days in Berlin. The world of reality cannot equal the world of dreams:

Charles, sitting in the cafe, trying to put his mind on the necessity for beginning a search for a cheaper room, thought, If it hadn't been for Kuno I should never have come here. I would have gone to Paris, or to Madrid. Maybe I should have gone to Mexico. That's a good place for painters . . . . This is not right. There is something wrong with the shapes, or the light, or something . . . .

. . . . .  
In his new, vague, almost shapeless misgivings, his half-acknowledged disappointment in the place--what was it?--he began to understand that he had come to Berlin because Kuno had made it seem the one desirable place to be . . . . still it was just those colored postcards of Kuno's and those stories, and the way Kuno had felt then, and had made him feel, that had brought him here (440).

The atmosphere of menace and indifference combined with a physical setting of ugliness and cold December weather drive

Charles into a search for new lodgings. In describing what Charles sees during his search, Miss Porter uses setting as an adjunct to the theme of initiation as Charles moves from innocence to experience:

He had never looked for a lodging before, and he felt guilty, as if he had been peeping through cracks and keyholes, spying upon human inadequacy, its kitchen smells and airless bedrooms, the staleness of its poverty and the stuffiness of its prosperity. He had been shown spare cubbyholes back of kitchens where the baby's wash was drying on a string while the desolate room waited for a tenant. He had been ushered into regions of gilded carving and worn plush, full of the smell of yesterday's cabbage. He had ventured into bare expanses of glass brick and chrome-steel sparsely set out with white leather couches and mirror-topped tables, where, it always turned out, he would be expected to stay for a year at least, at frightening expense. He peered into a sodden little den fit, he felt, only for the scene of a murder; and into another where a sullen young woman was packing up, and the whole room reeked of some nasty perfume from her underwear piled upon the bed. She had given him a deliberately dirty smile, and the landlady had said something in a very brutal tone to her. But mostly, there was a stuffy tidiness, a depressing air of constant and unremitting housewifery, a kind of repellent gentility in room after room after room, varying only in the depth of feather bed and lavishness of draperies, and out of them all in turn he fled back to the street and the comparative freedom of the air. (444-445).

The room Charles finds, described in detail, has thematic significances. Miss Porter seems to imply that German society of the 1930's is based on dead and dying values, cluttered with bric-a-brac of old useless notions and customs; nevertheless, it is an orderly world, carefully structured to preserve outworn traditions:

The room. Well, the room. He had seen it several times before in his search. It was not what he would choose if he had a choice, but it was the least tiresome example of what he recognized now as a fixed style, with its sober rich oriental carpet, the lace curtains under looped-back velvet hangings, the large round table covered with another silky oriental rug in sweet, refined colors. One corner was occupied by deep couches heaped with silk and velvet cushions, the wall above it adorned with a glass-doored cabinet filled with minute curiosities mostly in silver filigree and fine porcelain, and upon the table stood a huge lamp with an ornate pink silk shade, fluted and fringed and draped with silken tassels. The bed was massive with feather quilt and shot-silk cover, the giant wardrobe of dark polished wood was carved all out of shape.

A hell of a place, really, but he would take it . . . the price was no higher than he would be asked anywhere else for such a monstrosity. She agreed at once that he would need a plain work table and a student lamp . . . (445-446).

The central symbol for the decadent life of Germany is the "small plaster replica, about five inches high, of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. "As they talked, his hand wandered towards it, he picked it up lightly by the middle with his finger tips, and the delicate plaster ribs caved in" (446).

Charles, in an agony of embarrassment at having broken something his landlady obviously values very much, stares out the window. Again, in her description of what Charles sees, Miss Porter uses setting to reveal the theme that much of German life is impractical and ugly:

Charles, red and frowning, moved warily around the furniture towards the windows. A bad start, a very bad start indeed. The double panes were closed tightly, the radiator cast an even warmth through the whole room. He drew the lace curtains and saw, in the refracted pallor of the midmorning, winter light, a dozen infant-

sized pottery cupids, gross, squat limbed, wanton in posture and vulgarly pink, with scarlet feet and cheeks and backsides, engaged in what appeared to be a perpetual scramble to avoid falling off the steep roof of a house across the street. Charles observed grimly their realistic toe holds among the slate, their clutching fat hands, their imbecile grins. In pouring rain, he thought, they must keep up their senseless play. In snow, their noses would be completely buried. Their behinds were natural victims to the winter winds. And to think that whoever had put them there had meant them to be oh, so whimsical and so amusing, year in, year out (447).

A striking example, particularly to American readers, of an outworn and ugly tradition presents itself to Charles both on the streets of Berlin and in the rooming house where he lives:

In the first dozen squares he counted five more of those rather sick-looking young men with fresh wounds in their cheeks, long heavy slashes badly mended with tape and cotton, and thought again that nobody had told him to expect that (444).

Setting is an adjunct to character in four instances, the first when Charles meets Hans for the first time. Charles tries to evaluate Hans' dueling scar in terms of place and to understand the character of a young man who is actually proud of his scar:

"It will last," said Hans. Over his face spread an expression very puzzling to Charles. It was there like a change of light, slow and deep, with no perceptible movement of eyelids or face muscles. It rose from within in the mysterious place where Hans really lived, and it was amazing arrogance, pleasure, inexpressible vanity and self-satisfaction. He lay entirely motionless and this look came, grew, faded and disappeared on the tidal movement of his true character.

. . . . .

Charles, feeling free not to talk, was trying to see Hans in Paris, with that scar. Trying to see him in America, in a small American town like San Antonio, for example with that scar . . . . The people there would think he had got into a disgraceful cutting scrape . . . . They would think it a pity that such a nice fellow should be so disfigured, they would be tactful and not mention it and try to keep their eyes off it . . . . It occurred to him that nowhere but in this one small country could Hans boast of his scar and his way of getting it. In any other place at all, it would seem strange, a misfortune, or discreditable . . . . Dueling had been a respectable old custom almost everywhere [in America], but there had to be a quarrel first . . . . But what kind of man would stand up in cold blood and let another man split his face to the teeth just for the hell of it? . . . Still he liked Hans, and wished the wound were not there. But it was there, an improbable and blood-chilling sight, as if at broad noon he should meet in Kurfurstendamm a knight in armor, or the very skeleton from the Dance of Death (464-465).

The scar itself seems the dominant feature of Hans' room, moreso than the actual room.

On an elementary level, setting is an adjunct to character when Charles meets the other two young men in the rooming house. That Herr Bussen is a mathematician is revealed by setting as seen through Charles' eyes: "Charles, noticing the piles of papers on Herr Bussen's desk, saw written upon them only endless mathematical calculations which he could recognize but not read." Similarly, we learn about Tadeusz through setting: "Tadeusz' narrow room was crowded with an upright piano, and a small silent keyboard which Charles examined, touching stiffly" (473).

Setting reveals the character of Rosa Reichl, the orderliness of German life, and even introduces a touch of humor,

not often found in a Katherine Anne Porter novel, as Rosa invades Charles' quarters to set them to rights:

They seemed to look upon papers as an enemy of order, mere dust-catching nuisances. At home he had waged perpetual silent warfare with his mother and the servants about his papers . . . .

Last effrontery of all, the woman had unpacked his papers and his drawing material and his cardboard folders of unfinished work. Had she looked into them? He hoped she had a good time . . . . Everything was laid out carefully stacked with a prime regard for neatness and a symmetrical appearance. He had noticed before the strange antagonism of domesticated females for papers. They wanted to straighten them out, or better, hide them away in the deepest shelves of a closet. Why in God's name couldn't they let his work along? But they could not, under their curious compulsion; and neither could this woman, that was clear (453).

As in Hacienda and Pale Horse, Pale Rider, Miss Porter uses museums or museum-like settings to indicate permanence, timelessness and, in The Leaning Tower, order. The rooming house is furnished like a museum:

The table was large, though not plain, the lamp was good enough, but the straight-backed chair was a delicate affair with curved spindle legs and old mended tapestry in seat and back: a museum piece beyond doubt, Charles decided, and sat upon it experimentally (453-454).

Such a setting arouses antagonism and rejection on Charles' part:

No more chairs with tapestry on them and legs that broke if you leaned back in them. No more of those table rugs with their nasty sweet colors. If the corner whatnot should be knocked over, just once, there would be no more of that silly bric-a-brac and a good thing too, thought Charles, hardening his heart (458).

Setting provides the reason for Rosa to abuse one of her tenants, Herr Bussen, and introduces another aspect of setting, the atmosphere of cruelty, abuse of power, and repressed violence that exist not only in the city scenes Charles observes, but in the small cruelties practiced by one individual on another:

"Herr Bussen, Herr Bussen," Frau Reichl was crying, in a flighty, impassioned voice, her light Viennese accent slightly blurred, "you treat my good chairs like this, my beautiful old chairs I have had for so long--in spite of my other troubles you must add this? How can you, when you know I shall never have chairs like these again?" . . .

Herr Bussen, who began by defending himself half-heartedly, gave in and took his scolding dutifully as if Frau Reichl were his mother or his conscience. Yes, he knew better . . . even if she did not think so. His mother had such chairs too, he would not let it happen again . . . she was to excuse him this time if she could.

"Yes, this time," rejoined Frau Reichl, exasperated to a point beyond all grace, "this time," she said sarcastically in her sweetest tones, "and how many others, past and to come?" (454-455).

Rosa makes another cruel comment concerning Herr Bussen's use of her room after he comments, "in his loud Low-German, 'how that coffee stinks.'"

"Don't tell me you wouldn't like it just the same," said Rosa cruelly. "Just because you drink milk like a big baby and leave the dirty bottles under the bed. Shame on you, Herr Bussen" (459).

After Herr Bussen's suicide attempt or attack of food poisoning--a violent illness which Miss Porter never fully explains--the room itself is Rosa's first concern: "Get him to the

bathroom," cried Rosa, "fetch a doctor, bring water, for God's sake look out for the rug . . ." (471).

Although Herr Bussen protests that he is merely suffering from an attack of food poisoning, Rosa, Charles, Hans, and Tadeusz all seem to feel that it was a suicide attempt. Violence toward oneself is in keeping with the atmosphere of cruelty and abuse of power mentioned above. In more than one case deliberate malice and psychological force give rise to violent thoughts or actions, as in the case of Rosa and Herr Bussen.

Charles becomes a victim of intimidation, force, and threats when he attempts to check out of his hotel before finding another room, and he reacts violently to this kind of treatment. The wife of the hotel proprietor is disagreeable, uses her power to cheat him because he leaves after only eight days instead of staying a month: "Charles saw her face change again to a hard boldness, she raised her voice sharply and said with insolence, 'You will pay your bill as I present it or I shall call the police'" (449). The proprietor, "with a peculiarly malignant smile on his wide lipless mouth" (449), forced Charles to show his papers again, saying

"that will be necessary before you are allowed to go, let me assure you."

He seemed struggling with some hidden excitement. His neck swelled and flushed, he closed his mouth



until it was a mere slit across his face, and rocked slightly on his toes. Charles had been well prepared for the nuisance of being under constant observation, experienced travelers had told him he would feel like a criminal on parole in Europe, especially in Germany, at first . . . . They /the proprietors/ continued to look at him in a hateful silence, with their faces almost comically distorted in an effort to convey the full depths of their malice . . . . As the door closed behind him he heard them laughing together like a pair of hyenas, with deliberate loudness, to make certain he should hear them (449-450).

### Charles

meditated rather shapelessly on the treatment he had just received. He was a tall, personable young man, there was nothing wrong with his looks or his intentions, though at that moment, a trifle beetle-browed, hat over eyes, he seemed sullen and rather ugly. His first furious impulse to hit the fat man in the teeth with his fist had been overcome instantly by the clear cold spot in his mind which knew that this situation was hopeless, there was no chance for any sort of reparation, he could either keep quiet and escape from the two thugs or quite simply he would be in worse trouble. His anger remained and settled, took root and became a new part of him (450).

Later, in Rosa's rooming house, the three roomers practice small cruelties on each other and discuss how they can avoid Rosa's verbal cruelties. Tadeusz describes Herr Bussen as "'stupid beyond hope. Let Rosa take it all out of him. She won't annoy the rest of us so much'" (466). To Charles he says, "'You're the rich American who pays the rent for all of us . . . . You've got the real lace curtains and the best feather bed. But if you do anything tactless, remember, Herr Bussen will catch it'" (466).

The threat of violence or use of force overlays all of German society. Herr Bussen warns Charles:

"Ah, well," he said, "seriously, I advise you to observe our curious customs, and do nothing, not the smallest thing, to attract the attention of the police. I tell you this because you are unfamiliar with the country--they are not fond of outlanders here" (470).

Charles remembers that Kuno, along with a romanticized version of Germany, also had told him of the existence of power, force, and violence:

"There is a big war there, and they wanted to keep my mama and my papa and all of us there, but we had to come back" . . . they had almost got locked up in a prison somewhere, but some big important people came and got them out, and in the exciting but confused tale which followed, Charles forgot his quarrel with Kuno. "It was because my mother is a Baroness," Kuno said. "That is why we got away" (438).

Kuno also had told him

that if you didn't get off the sidewalk when army officers came along, you would be pushed off, and when his mother and he were walking together, she would always step into the street and let them by. Kuno had not minded this, he had rather admired the tall officers with their greatcoats and helmets . . . Charles remembered this for years; it was nothing related to anything he knew in his own life, yet remained in his memory as unquestioned truth, that part of Kuno's life lived in absence and strangeness which seemed to him more real than any life they had shared (465).

Even though the war is over in actuality, memories and expectations of war still prevail in the Germany that Charles visits, and a condition of readiness for war and violence exists in the atmosphere of the place and in the psychology of each character presented.

The nature of the world he inhabits disturbs Charles; outer setting and inner psychological setting combine to emphasize an elusive sense of evil:

The long nights oppressed him with unreasonable premonitions of danger. The darkness closed over the strange city like the great fist of an enemy who has survived in full strength, a voiceless monster from a prehuman, older and colder and grimmer time of the world . . . . There were the faces. Faces with no eyes. And those no-eyes, pale, lightless, were set in faces shriveled as if they were gnawed hollow; or worse, faces sodden in fat with swollen eyelids in which the little no-eyes peered blindly . . . (457).

As in Pale Horse, Pale Rider the interior world of nightmare and premonitions is symptomatic of a nightmarish real world:

Charles, lightly asleep, dreamed the house was burning down, silently alive and pulsing with flame in every part. With no fear or hesitation at all, he walked safely through the fiery walls and out into the wide bright street, carrying a suitcase which knocked against his knees and weighed him down, but he could not leave it because it contained all the drawings he meant to do in his whole life. He walked a safe distance and watched the dark skeleton of the house tall as a tower standing in a fountain of fire. Seeing that he was alone, he said in wonder, "They all escaped, too," when a loud and ghostly groan was uttered in his ear (459-460).

On a conscious level Charles' feelings alternate between a sympathetic attitude toward the Germans and a fear of the atmosphere they create. Both feelings stem from his reaction to the actual physical setting:

Well, he was here, horribly disturbed and miserable really, he might as well face it, he had got a much harder blow than he expected from the place. At least he must try to find what he came for, if it wasn't to be just a wild goose chase (455).

Later, he thinks:

They were all good people, they were in terrible trouble, jammed up together in this little flat with not enough air or space or money, not enough of anything, no place to go, nothing to do but gnaw each other. I can always go home, he told himself, but why did I come here in the first place? (470-471).

Like Miranda in Pale Horse, Pale Rider, Charles finds himself in a world where compassion, though not actually punished, is not valued, and is even suspect. Charles has a kindly impulse: "He was really thinking of his fleece-lined coat, wondering if it would be good enough to offer to Herr Bussen and how to go about it" (474). Tadeusz makes it clear that such an offer would be impossible, and in so doing points up the difference between the American attitude of involvement and generosity as contrasted with the Germanic attitude of detachment. Tadeusz says, "'We have to realize that a man's sufferings are his own . . . . Poor Old Bussen, we are able to say, and it makes us feel better, more secure, in our own fortune'" (474), to which Charles counters, "'If we hadn't interfered today, he might be dead by now'" (475). Tadeusz feels that Americans "'are like beings from another planet to us'" (472). The "planet" of Berlin, Germany, is a hostile, alien world where it is impossible to sustain normal human life, Miss Porter seems to imply, even though it is an orderly, traditional world of set customs and values, as are the worlds she creates in

Hacienda and Pale Horse, Pale Rider. For example, Hans, the Heidelberg student whose dueling scar is healing, has his planned in accordance with tradition. Charles says,

"It is strange to have everything mapped out so . . . I haven't a notion where I'll be two years from now. Something might even happen to keep me from Paris."

"Oh, it is necessary to plan everything," said Hans, soberly, "or how should we know where we were? Besides, the family has it arranged. I even know the girl I am to marry," he said, "and I know how much money she has. She is an extremely fine girl," he said, without enthusiasm. "Paris will be my own, though, my holiday. I shall do as I please" (463).

The last section of the novel takes place in a proper, orderly setting where "You could bring your most innocent child here if you had an innocent child" (479), according to Tadeusz. An ironic contrast is drawn between the wholesome, middle-class cabaret where the four young men spend New Year's Eve and the atmosphere of near-violence, hostility, dislike, envy, and jealousy their inner feelings create. Occasional bursts of conviviality, community singing, and sentimental good will contrast with the discussion of racial superiority and plans for the next war. To illustrate, the cabaret is

. . . a small, freshly painted, well-lighted little place, full of tables covered with red checkerboard cloths, a modest bar, and at the farther end, a long table set out with cold supper. It could all be seen at a glance. There was a homemade air about the colored paper decorations, the feathery tinsel draped above the bar mirror, the rack full of steins and the small cuckoo clock.

It was hardly Charles' notion of a Berlin cabaret; he had heard about Berlin night life and expected something more sophisticated (479).

Tadeusz explains, "'This is going to be a nice-stuffy-middle-class-German full of rosy emotions and beer'" (479). In this setting of good fellowship Charles observes that Hans and Tadeusz "did not like each other, after all. And almost instantly he felt indifference tinged with dislike for them both, and an uneasy feeling that he was in the wrong company; he wished pretty thoroughly he had not come to that place with them" (480). Hatred of each other flares as the conversation turns to world affairs and they fight a verbal war: "'Europeans hate each other for everything and for nothing; they've been trying to destroy each other for two thousand years, why do you Americans expect us to like you?' asked Tadeusz" (483). Charles replies that Americans "' . . . are sentimental. Just like the Germans. You want to be loved for yourselves alone and you are always right and you can never see why other people can't see you in the same rosy light you see yourselves. Look what a glorious people you are and yet nobody loves you . . .'" (483).

Otto Bussen points out that the Americans are not so wholesome and kind-hearted as they appear to be:

"I do not think you really like anybody, you Americans. You are indifferent to everybody and so it is easy for you to be gay, to be careless, to seem friendly. You are really a coldhearted indifferent people. You have no troubles . . . Even if you get troubles, you think it is just a package meant for the people next door, delivered to you by mistake" (483).

Miss Porter enlarges the scope of her fictional world to include an examination of the reasons for violence and war contained not only in German and European life, but in American life also. The Germanic regard for power is expressed by Hans, who says that

"Power, pure power is what counts to a nation or a race. You must be able to tell other peoples what to do, and above all what they may not do, you must be able to enforce every order you give against no matter what opposition, and when you demand anything at all, it must be given you without question. That is the only power, and power is the only thing of any value or importance in this world" . . . . He turned halfway to Charles and said, "We Germans were beaten in the last war, thanks partly to your great country, but we shall win in the next."

A chill ran down Charles' spine, he shrugged his shoulders. They were all a little drunk, there might be a row if they didn't pull themselves together. He did not want to quarrel with anybody, nor to fight the war over again . . . (486).

But Charles finds himself drawn into the violence-oriented atmosphere and has his own ideas for winning the next war in which, Hans says, " . . . there will be no mistakes on our side" (487). "'Sea power,' said Charles, 'good old sea power. I bet on that. It wins in the long run'" (487). The world Charles comes from prepared him to enter the world of racial differences, intolerance, and feelings of superiority:

"I was brought up on Irish patriotism," said Charles. "My mother's name of O'Hara, and I was supposed to be proud of it, but you have a tough time being proud if you are called Harp and Potato Mouth at school where the others are all Scotch Presbyterians or of English descent" (484).

The world of childhood experiences, cruelty of mother to child, and racial intolerance have prepared Tadeusz, the Polish pianist, and Herr Bussen to play their role in a violent world of past and future wars. Tadeusz says, "'At Easter we ate only pork in contempt of the Jews, and after the long fasting of Lent naturally we gorged ourselves shamelessly . . . . Then I upchucked all my Easter pork, so the Jews had their revenge for once'" (490-491). In telling how he crawled upstairs one night, drunk, Tadeusz explains, "'The first obstacle I encountered was my mother. She stood at the head of the stairs holding a lighted candle, waiting without a word. I waved one paw at her but she did not respond. And when I put my head above the last step she kicked me under the chin and almost knocked me out'" (491). Herr Bussen's experience is hardly less shocking: "His mother had beaten him quite hard one day, without warning, when he was cracking walnuts and eating them. With tears he had asked her why, and she said, 'Don't ask me any questions. What is good enough for Martin Luther is good enough for you'" (491).

Charles discovers that his aggressive companions are not very different from boys he had known at home:

. . . Hans and Otto both seemed persons he had known before; Texas was full of boys like Otto, and Hans reminded him of Kuno. It seemed to him that the discussion was getting nowhere, and it reminded him of quarrels during his schooldays between the German boys



and Mexican boys and the Kentucky boys; the Irish boys fought everybody, and Charles, who was partly Irish, remembered that he had done a good deal of fighting in which all sight of the original dispute had been lost in the simple love of violence (428-483).

Thus, it becomes apparent that the world of repressed violence which Charles has entered and finds repellent is only somewhat less violent than the world he came from. Evil, Miss Porter implies, lies within the individual, and it is this inner evil which projects itself on and creates the ugliness and evil of the exterior world. The inherent evil of man expresses itself on the personal level-- "Charles felt a flicker of sharp hatred for Hans" (490)-- and is magnified on the national level, from the beginning of time and on into the future:

And even at that moment, like the first symptoms of some fatal sickness, there stirred in him a most awful premonition of disaster, and his thoughts, blurred with drink and strangeness and the sound of half-understood tongues and the climate of remembered wrongs and hatreds, revolved dimly around vague remembered tales of Napoleon and Genghis Khan and Attila the Hun and all the Caesars and Alexander the Great and Darius and the dim Pharaohs and lost Babylon. He felt helpless, undefended, looked at the three strange faces near him and decided not to drink any more, for he must not be drunker than they; he trusted none of them (488).

Unfortunately, the setting for the final scene is not conducive to clear-headedness, nor is Charles' drunken state. He

brought himself across the room to the Tower. It was there, all right, and it was mended pretty obviously, it would never be the same. But for Rosa, poor old

woman, he supposed it was better than nothing. It stood for something she had, or thought she had, once. Even all patched up as it was, and worthless to begin with, it meant something to her, and he was still ashamed of having broken it; it made him feel like a heel. It stood there in its bold little frailness, as if daring him to come on; how well he knew that a thumb and forefinger would smash the thin ribs, the mended spots would fall at a breath. Leaning, suspended, perpetually ready to fall but never falling quite, the venturesome little object--a mistake in the first place, a whimsical pain in the neck, really, towers shouldn't lean in the first place; a curiosity, like those cupids falling off the roof--yet had some kind of meaning in Charles' mind. Well what? . . . . What had the silly little thing reminded him of before? There was an answer if he could think what it was, but this was not the time (494-495).

The tower symbolizes the whole structure of German society, obsolete, sentimental, foolish, dangerous, ready to come crashing down in its fragility and rottenness. The cupids, too, ugly and foolish, cling to the roof and serve no purpose, symbolizing the dead, unwholesome attitudes of the German culture. But Charles, rolling himself into a knot on the softest featherbed in the house, is in no condition to think clearly:

There was something perishable but threatening, uneasy, hanging over his head or stirring angrily, dangerously, at his back. If he couldn't find out now what it was that troubled him so in this place, maybe he would never know. He stood there feeling his drunkenness as a pain and a weight on him, unable to think clearly but feeling what he had never known before, an infernal desolation of the spirit, the chill and the knowledge of death in him (495).

What troubled him so "in this place" is his intuitive knowledge of death, the same knowledge which oppresses the narrator in Hacienda, who must escape the "deathly air." The

same knowledge learned so cruelly in Pale Horse, Pale Rider by Miranda, who faces the ultimate fact of "the dead cold light of tomorrow" without love.

### Noon Wine

Instead of an atmosphere of evil and repressed or enacted violence which is a fundamental part of a whole society, as in Hacienda, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and The Leaning Tower, Miss Porter creates a wholesome rural world of domestic routine in Noon Wine. Setting is used to create humor and to delineate character in the first section of the story. An undercurrent of evil exists in the first section, but not until the second section do evil and violence dominate the scene. Unlike the atmosphere of the three previous novels, Noon Wine does not present an overall atmosphere of pervading evil. Rather, evil is personified by a hostile individual who intrudes on the personal world of the Thomp-sons.

A description of the setting, a small South Texas dairy farm in 1896, is almost a description of Mr. Thompson's character:

. . . the gate . . . had swung back, conveniently half open, long ago, and was now sunk so firmly on its broken hinges no one thought of trying to close it . . . . The door stones were brown and gleaming with fresh tobacco juice (223).

and

The milk house was only another shack of weather-beaten boards nailed together hastily years before because they needed a milk house; it was meant to be temporary, and it was; already shapeless, leaning this way and that over a perpetual cool trickle of water that fell from a little grot, almost choked with pallid ferns. No one else in the whole countryside had such a spring on his land. Mr. and Mrs. Thompson felt they had a fortune in that spring, if ever they get around to doing anything with it.

Rickety wooden shelves clung at hazard in the square around the small pool where the larger pails of milk and butter stood, fresh and sweet in the cold water (226-227).

Using the technique of indirect interior monologue, Miss Porter portrays Mr. Thompson's world as he sees it--a comic world in which he is the comic hero, a jolly good fellow, amusing, who simply cannot cope with his farm, the animals, the daily routine:

But from the first the cows worried him, coming up regularly twice a day to be milked, standing there reproaching him with their smug female faces. Calves worried him, fighting the rope and strangling themselves until their eyes bulged, trying to get at the teat. Wrestling a calf unmanned him, like having to change a baby's diaper. Milk worried him, coming bitter sometimes, drying up, turning sour. Hens worried him, cackling, clucking, hatching out when you least expected it and leading their broods into the barnyard where the horses could step on them; dying of roup and wryneck and getting plagues of chicken lice; laying eggs all over God's creation so that half of them were spoiled before a man could find them, in spite of a rack of nests Mrs. Thompson had set out for them in the feed room. Hens were a blasted nuisance (233).

Psychological as well as exterior setting is created through Miss Porter's description of the values Mr. Thompson lives by:

All his carefully limited fields of activity were related somehow to Mr. Thompson's feeling for the appearance of things, his own appearance in the sight of God and man. "It don't look right," was his final reason for not doing anything he did not wish to do.

It was his dignity and his reputation that he cared about, and there were only a few kinds of work manly enough for Mr. Thompson to undertake with his own hands. . . . God almighty, it did look like somebody around the place might take a rake in hand now and then and clear up the clutter around the barn and the kitchen steps. The wagon shed was so full of broken-down machinery and ragged harness and old wagon wheels and battered milk pails and rotting lumber you could hardly drive in there any more. Not a soul on the place would raise a hand to it, and as for him, he had all he could do with his regular work. He would sometimes in the slack season sit for hours worrying about it, squirting tobacco on the ragweeds growing in a thicket against the wood pile, wondering what a fellow could do, handicapped as he was (233-234).

Miss Porter's fictional world in which people are exploited or held in low esteem does not strike an unfamiliar note to the modern reader. Mr. Thompson's statements and attitudes toward the worth of other human beings and his stinginess are quite in keeping with the Texas-American setting of 1896, or probably 1966:

There was nothing wrong with him except that he hated like the devil to pay wages . . . . "Now I can't give you no dollar a day because ackshally I don't make that much out of it. No, sir, we get along on a lot less than a dollar a day, I'd say, if we figger up everything in the long run. Now I paid seven dollars a month to the two niggers, three-fifty each, and grub, but what I say is, one middlin'-good white man ekals a whole passel of niggers any day in the week, so I'll give you seven dollars and you eat at the table with us, and you'll be treated like a white man, as the feller says--" (224).

One finds little evidence to support violence as a dominant atmosphere in the psychological setting of the first part of Noon Wine. Instead, Miss Porter creates an ordinary world where minor instances of violence or threats of violence seem natural, even humorous. In disciplining his children, Mr. Thompson "became a hurricane of wrath. 'Get to bed, you two,' he roared, until his Adam's apple shuddered. 'Get now before I take the hide off you!'" (231) and in another instance, Mr. Thompson says, "'I'll tan their hides for them . . . I'll take a calf rope to them if they don't look out . . . My pa used to knock me down with a stick of stove wood or anything else that came handy . . . I'll break every bone in 'em . . . I ought to break your ribs . . .'" (240-241). These are everyday domestic threats, none of which result in action. In their happy horseplay the Thompson children find pleasure in violent struggles with each other:

They galloped through their chores, their animal spirits rose with activity, and shortly they were out in the front yard again, engaged in a wrestling match. They sprawled and fought, scrambled, clutched, rose and fell shouting, as aimlessly, noisily, monotonously as two puppies. They imitated various animals, not a human sound from them . . . (239).

Violence of a more serious and mysterious nature occurs in the first section, and like several other acts of violence which occur in the novel, is influenced by weather used as setting:

It was on a hot, still, spring day, and Mrs. Thompson had been down to the garden patch . . . she noticed how neatly Mr. Helton weeded, and how rich the soil was . . . looking idly about, saw through the screen a sight that struck her as very strange. If it had been a noisy spectacle, it would have been quite natural. It was the silence that struck her. Mr. Helton was shaking Arthur by the shoulders, ferociously, his face most terribly fixed and pale. Arthur's head snapped back and forth and he had not stiffened in resistance, as he did when Mrs. Thompson tried to shake him. His eyes were rather frightened, but surprised, too, probably more surprised than anything else. Herbert stood by meekly, watching. Mr. Helton dropped Arthur, and seized Herbert, and shook him with the same methodical ferocity, the same face of hatred . . . Mr. Helton let him go, turned and strode into the shack, and the little boys ran, as if for their lives, without a word (238).

Physical setting in section two of Noon Wine reveals the orderly nature of Mr. Helton's character through description of the changes he effected on Mr. Thompson's property, but indicates nothing out of the ordinary except the extreme heat of the day. An explosion of violence which destroys the lives of three men takes place in the most commonplace of surroundings when evil, personified in Mr. Hatch, joins itself to the less obvious undercurrent of inherent evil which, Miss Porter implies, lies within man:

Mr. Thompson was lolling in a swing chair on the front porch, a place he had never liked. The chair was new, and Mrs. Thompson had wanted it on the front porch, though the side porch was the place for it, being cooler; and Mr. Thompson wanted to sit in the chair, so there he was. As soon as the new wore off of it, and Ellie's pride in it was exhausted, he would move it round to the side porch. Meantime the August heat was almost unbearable, the air so thick you could poke a hole in it. The dust was inches thick on everything,

though Mr. Helton sprinkled the whole yard regularly every night. He even shot the hose upward and washed the tree tops and the roof of the house. They had laid waterpipes to the kitchen and an outside faucet . . . . While the stranger was opening the gate, a strong gate that Mr. Helton had built and set firmly on its hinges several years back, Mr. Thompson strolled down the path to greet him and find out what in God's world a man's business might be that would bring him out at this time of day, in all this dust and welter (243).

Into the inferno walks Hatch, and electrifies the very air with his presence. Mr. Hatch represents the orderly world of laws, banks, post offices, public opinion, public institutions, and proper procedures. Like Mr. Thompson, he wants to use Mr. Helton for personal gain; in both their worlds, such use is quite respectable. As Mr. Hatch points out, "The law . . . is solidly behind me" (253). He makes use of public institutions--and maternal feeling--to track down his prey: "Well, sir, about two weeks ago his old mother gets a letter from him, and in that letter, what do you reckon she found? Well, it was a check on that little bank in town for eight hundred and fifty dollars, just like that; the letter wasn't nothing much, just said he was sending her a few little savings she might need something, but there it was, name, postmark, date, everything" (253). That Mr. Helton has been a profitable commodity on the Thompson farm is proved by Miss Porter's description of setting (see above). Mr. Hatch's motive for hunting down Mr. Helton is profit:



" . . . Now fact is, in the last twelve years or so I musta rounded up twenty-odd escaped loonatics, besides a couple of escaped convicts that I just run into by accident, like. I don't make a business of it, but if there's a reward, and there usually is a reward, of course, I get it. . . . Fact is, I'm for law and order, I don't like to see lawbreakers and loonatics at large . . . (253). "I got the handcuffs," he said, "but I don't want no violence if I can help it. . ." (254).

Mr. Thompson senses intuitively that Hatch represents something distasteful and strange: "His joviality made Mr. Thompson nervous, because the expression in the man's eyes didn't match the sounds he was making . . . (243). And he wasn't laughing because he really thought things were funny, either, he was laughing for reasons of his own" (245).

Miss Porter expresses Hatch's withering influence on Mr. Helton symbolically and in terms of setting:

"Sweetenin', even a little," began Mr. Hatch, shifting his plug and squirting tobacco juice at a dry-looking little rose bush that was having a hard enough time as it was, standing all day in the blazing sun, its roots clenched in the baked earth, "is the sign of--" (249).

Ironically, a close analysis of the characters of both Mr. Thompson and Mr. Hatch would reveal similarities in their personalities which might lead one to the conclusion that each is part of the same essential character: evil, though Mr. Thompson's evil is less apparent, carried within a framework of humor and love. Some critics feel that Mr. Thompson rises to heroic heights in his defense of

Mr. Helton. The world Mr. Thompson inhabits leads the writer to a different conclusion: Mr. Thompson is acting out the inherent impulse to violence that lies within Everyman in a world where degrading other human beings, exploiting Mr. Helton, uttering harmless verbal threats of violence towards one's children are accepted. It is a world where inhumane treatment of people in an insane asylum is accepted unquestioningly:

"You mean they had him in a straitjacket?" asked Mr. Thompson, uneasily. "In a lunatic asylum?"

"They sure did," said Mr. Hatch. "That's right where they had him, from time to time."

"They put my Aunt Ida in one of them things in the State asylum," said Mr. Thompson. "She got violent, and they put her in one of these jackets with long sleeves and tied her to an iron ring in the wall, and Aunt Ida got so wild she broke a blood vessel, and when they went to look after her she was dead. I'd think one of them things was dangerous" (247).

Psychological setting combines two elements: the evil within Mr. Thompson, which comes "from somewhere deep down in him," in conflict with his values based on the premise that "it would look mighty funny" to the neighbors:

Mr. Thompson sat silent and chewed steadily and stared at a spot on the ground about six feet away and felt a slow muffled resentment climbing from somewhere deep down in him, climbing and spreading all through him. What was this fellow driving at? What was he trying to say? . . . Mr. Thompson didn't like it, but he couldn't get hold of it either. He wanted to turn around and shove the fellow off the stump, but it wouldn't look reasonable. Suppose something happened to the fellow when he fell off the stump, just for instance, if he fell on the ax and

cut himself, and then someone should ask Mr. Thompson why he shoved him, and what could a man say? It would look mighty funny, it would sound mighty strange to say, Well him and me fell out over a plug of tobacco. He might just shove him anyhow and then tell people he was a fat man not used to the heat and while he was talking he got dizzy and fell off by himself, or something like that, and it wouldn't be the truth either, because it wasn't the heat and it wasn't the tobacco (250).

Mr. Hatch almost instinctively knows how to appeal to Mr. Thompson's concern for "his own appearance in the sight of God and man" (233): "And they's some people," said Mr. Hatch, "would jus' as soon have a loonatic around their house as not, they can't see no difference between them and anybody else (251). And later: "Now a course, if you won't help, I'll have to look around for help somewheres else. It won't look very good to your neighbors that you was harboring an escaped loonatic who killed his own brother, and then you refused to give im up. It will look mighty funny" (255).

A third force operating on Mr. Thompson, though he claims not to be influenced by it, is the heat: "The idea of drinking any kind of liquor in this heat made Mr. Thompson dizzy. The idea of anybody feeling good on a day like this, for instance, made him tired. He felt he was really suffering from the heat" (252).

Weather influenced the murder committed by Mr. Helton, according to Hatch. He " . . . jus' went loony one day in

the hayfield and shoved a pitchfork right square through his brother, when they was makin' hay. They was goin' to execute him, but they found out he had went crazy with the heat, as the feller says, and so they put him in the asylum . . ." (251).

Action rises to a climax in a setting appropriate for violence in a largely domestic atmosphere: "Mr. Thompson sat down again, on the chopping log, offering his guest another tree stump" (248). Setting, or a sense of place, is important to Mr. Thompson as he tries to exorcise evil from the place it has invaded; unfortunately, Mr. Thompson cannot exorcise the evil within himself in the climactic moment when he strikes out blindly against it:

"You're crazy," Mr. Thompson roared suddenly, "you're the crazy one around here, you're crazier than he ever was! You get off this place or I'll handcuff you and turn you over to the law. You're trespassing," shouted Mr. Thompson. "Get out of here before I knock you down!"

. . . and then something happened that Mr. Thompson tried hard afterwards to piece together in his mind, and in fact it never did come straight. He saw the fat man with his long bowie knife in his hand, he saw Mr. Helton come round the corner on the run, his long jaw dropped, his arms swinging, his eyes wild. Mr. Helton came in between them, fists doubled up, then stopped short, glaring at the fat man, his big frame seemed to collapse, he trembled like a shied horse; and then the fat man drove at him, knife in one hand, handcuffs in the other. Mr. Thompson saw it coming, he saw the blade going into Mr. Helton's stomach, he knew he had the ax out of the log in his own hands, felt his arms go up over his head and bring the ax down on Mr. Hatch's head as if he were stunning a beef (255-256).

After the murder of Mr. Hatch and the death of Mr. Helton, the grayness of death colors Mr. Thompson's world: "The buggy was gray with dust and age, Mrs. Thompson's face was gray with dust and weariness, and Mr. Thompson's face, as he stood at the horse's head and began unhitching, was gray except for the dark blue of his freshly shaven jaws and chin, gray and blue and caved in, but patient, like a dead man's face" (256).

Mrs. Thompson, the only character in the story untouched by inner violence, faces an unbearable world in the aftermath of violence:

. . . leaving the barn because she could hardly bear to be near Mr. Thompson, advancing slowly towards the house because she dreaded going there. Life was all one dread, the faces of her neighbors, of her boys, of her husband, the face of the whole world, the shape of her own house in the darkness, the very smell of the grass and the trees were horrible to her. There was no place to go, only one thing to do, bear it somehow--but how? (257)

Setting is no longer described in terms of humor or of overwhelming evil--there is nothing left but despair and rejection. Mrs. Thompson rejects the male world of violence when she remembers the account of Mr. Helton's death:

. . . even if they did pile mattresses all over the jail floor and against the walls, and five men there to hold him to keep him from hurtin himself any more, he was already hurt too badly, he couldn't have lived anyway . . . . "They had to be rough, Miz Thompson, he fought like a wildcat." Yes, thought Mrs. Thompson again with the same bitterness, of course, they had to be rough. They always have to be rough. Mr. Thompson can't argue with a man and get him off the place

peaceably; no, she thought, standing up and shutting the icebox, he has to kill somebody, he has to be a murderer and ruin his boys' lives and cause Mr. Helton to be killed like a mad dog (259).

Silently, by withholding comfort, Mrs. Thompson contributes to the destruction of her husband's world:

Even Ellie never said anything to comfort him. He hoped she would say finally, "I remember now, Mr. Thompson, I really did come round the corner in time to see everything. It's not a lie, Mr. Thompson. Don't you worry." But as they drove together in silence, with the days still hot and dry, shortening for fall, day after day, the buggy jolting in the ruts, she said nothing; . . . (262).

Physical setting broadens to include neighboring farms which Mr. Thompson visits in an attempt to cling to his values, his need to justify himself to God and man in a world that rejects him: "Since the trial, now, every day for a week he had washed and shaved and put on his best clothes and had taken Ellie with him to tell every neighbor he had that he never killed Mr. Hatch on purpose, and what good did it do? Nobody believed him" (262). The neighbors reject him, his own attorney is not glad to see him, and even the poor white trash of the area reject him. Loss of values destroys him: "He was dead to his other life, he had got to the end of something without knowing why, and he had to make a fresh start, he did not know how. Something different was going to begin, he didn't know what" (264). Even so, the impulse to rage, violence is still within him: "Sometimes the air around him was so thick with their blame

he fought and pushed with his fists, and the sweat broke out all over him, he shouted his story in a dust-choked voice, he would fairly bellow . . ." (262) and "Mr. Thompson was ashamed of himself, he was suddenly in a rage, he'd like to knock their dirty skunk heads together, the low-down white trash--" (263-264. His final unbearable rejection, brought about by violent rage, comes from both his wife and his children as he lies in bed, trying to think how he could have gotten rid of Mr. Hatch peaceably:

. . . the dirty, yellow-livered hound coming around persecuting an innocent man and ruining a whole family that never harmed him! Mr. Thompson felt the veins of his forehead start up, his fists clutched as if they seized an ax handle, the sweat broke out on him, he bounded up from the bed with a yell smothered in his throat, and Ellie started up after him, crying out, "Oh, oh, don't! Don't! Don't!" (266).

And his whole world disintegrates as fragments of violence overwhelm him:

. . . she was on the bed, rolling violently. He felt for her in horror, and his groping hands found her arms . . . . Arthur set the lamp on the table and turned on Mr. Thompson. "She's scared," he said, "she's scared to death." His face was in a knot of rage, his fists were doubled up, he faced his father as if he meant to strike him (266).

His two sons "watched Mr. Thompson as if he were a dangerous wild beast. 'What did you do to her?' shouted Arthur, in a grown man's voice. 'You touch her again and I'll blow your heart out!'" (266-267).

The capacity for violence, fighting, and anger seems to be an essential part of the life force for the male. When "Mr. Thompson had no fight left in him" (267) and had lost his basic value, the opinion of others, he is a dead man, and of course he is prepared for his final act of violence: "The shotgun was there to his hand, primed and ready, a man never knows when he may need a shotgun" (267). Thus, the story that began with Mr. Helton speaking "as from the tomb" (224) to offer his services as hired man, ends with two men killed and a third preparing to enter a tomb of his own choosing: ". . . he set the butt of the shotgun along the ground with the twin barrels pointed towards his head. . . . he lay down flat on the earth on his side, drew the barrel under his chin and fumbled for the trigger with his great toe. That way he could work it" (268).

Psychological setting plus a physical setting symbolically implying an inferno of hell in the August heat acts as an adjunct to character and action and brings the conclusion of Noon Wine to the same point as that reached in Hacienda, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and The Leaning Tower: death of an individual or death of a society, but death in some form, because the fictional setting created by Miss Porter is more conducive to death than to life in a world of exterior and interior evil.



Holiday

Like Noon Wine, Holiday takes place in south Texas on a farm, but the setting is handled differently because of a change in point of view. Miss Porter portrayed Mr. Thompson's dairy farm through omniscient author and indirect interior monologue of a lower middle class, uneducated, insensitive man whose main concern with his land was the frustrations and difficulties inherent in making a living from it. In Holiday Miss Porter shifts to an unnamed first person narrator, a young, intelligent, sensitive woman who observes closely and who responds to the beauty of the world around her. As in Noon Wine, an atmosphere of evil and violence does not become obvious until the final third of the novel.

The psychological setting of the main character is one of order and family standards. The "world of tradition, background, and training had taught me unanswerably that no one except a coward ever runs away from anything" (407). However, the narrator does want to escape from something in her world (never explained) and seeks to escape "somewhere for a spring holiday, by myself, to the country, and it should be very simple and nice and, of course, not expensive, and she was not to tell anyone where I had gone. . ." (407). "She" is Louise, the friend who serves the same fictional purpose as Kuno in The Leaning Tower, that of a friend who

induces the main character to go to a particular place because of a romanticized description of the setting. Like Charles Upton in The Leaning Tower, the narrator in Holiday is quickly disillusioned:

Louise had then--she has it still--something near to genius for making improbable persons, places, and situations sound attractive. She told amusing stories that did not turn grim on you until a little while later, when by chance you saw and heard for yourself. So with this story. Everything was just as Louise had said, if you like, and everything was, at the same time, quite different.

"I know the very place," said Louise, "a family of real old-fashioned German peasants, in the deep black-land Texas farm country, a household in real patriarchal style--the kind of thing you'd hate to live with but is very nice to visit. Old father, God Almighty himself, with whiskers and all; Old mother, matriarch in men's shoes; endless daughters and sons and sons-in-law and fat babies falling about the place; and fat puppies--my favourite was a darling little black thing named Kuno--cows, calves, and sheep and lambs and goats and turkeys and guineas roaming up and down the shallow green hills, ducks and geese on the ponds. I was there in the summer when the peaches and watermelons were in--"

The farm is

"Not far from the Louisiana line," said Louise. "I'll ask them to give you my attic--oh, that was a sweet place! It's a big room, with the roof sloping to the floor on each side, and the roof leaks a little when it rains, so the shingles are all stained in beautiful streaks, all black and grey and mossy green, and in one corner there used to be a stack of dime novels, The Duchess, Ouida, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, Ella Wheeler Wilcox's poems--one summer they had a lady boarder who was a great reader, and she went off and left her library. I loved it! And everybody was so healthy and good-hearted, and the weather was perfect. . . ." (408).

Reality encountered by the narrator is quite different from what Louise's description has led her to expect. She finds herself "Tossed off like an express package from a dirty little crawling train onto a sodden platform of a country station, where the stationmaster emerged and locked up the waiting room before the train had got round the bend" (408). Phrases such as ". . . bitter wind cutting through my thin coat" (408), "facing the wind and the desolate mud-colored shapeless scene and began making up my first letter to Louise" (409), and "tumbled brown earth and ragged dark sky" (409), give an impression of a cold, indifferent nature incompatible with human needs. Setting seems somehow both prophetic and symbolic of Otilie as she is seen later in the story. One of the Muller boys is described in terms that seem to fit Otilie, who is crushed under her burden of life: "He swung my trunk to his head and tottered across the uneven platform, down the steps slippery with mud where I expected to see him crushed beneath his burden like an ant under a stone" (409). The description of the spring wagon, which appears again in the conclusion of the story, also seems symbolic of Otilie:

Our vehicle was an exhausted specimen of something called a spring wagon, who knows why? There were no springs, and the shallow enclosed platform at the back, suitable for carrying various plunder, was worn away until it barely reached midway of the back wheels, one side of it steadily scraping the iron tire. The wheels themselves spun not dully around and around in the way

of common wheels, but elliptically, being loosened at the hubs, so that we proceeded with a drunken, hilarious swagger, like the rolling motion of a small boat on a choppy sea (410).

The description of nature seems to have a symbolic relationship to Otilie with its bleakness, crooked branches, and hint of spring which disappears in rain and greyness:

The soaked brown fields fell away on either side of the lane, all rough with winter-worn stubble ready to sink and become earth again. The scanty leafless woods ran along an edge of the field nearby. There was nothing beautiful in those woods now except the promise of spring, for I detested bleakness, but it gave me some pleasure to think that beyond this there might be something else beautiful in its own being, a river shaped and contained by its banks, or a field stripped down to its true meaning, ploughed and ready for the seed. The road turned abruptly and was almost hidden for a moment, and we were going through the woods. Closer sight of the crooked branches assured me that spring was beginning, if sparsely, reluctantly: the leaves were budding in tiny cones of watery green besprinkling all the new shoots; a thin sedate rain began again to fall, not so opaque as a fog, but a mist that merely deepened overhead, and lowered, until the clouds became rain in one swathing, delicate grey (410).

A sense of the past, not quite museum-like as in Hacienda, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and The Leaning Tower, but still indicative of permanence, order, and perhaps decay is given through nature description:

A dozen miles away, where Texas and Louisiana melted together in a rotting swamp whose sluggish under-tow of decay nourished the roots of pine and cedar, a colony of French emigrants had lived out two hundred years of exile, not wholly incorruptible, but mystically faithful to the marrow of their bones, obstinately speaking their old French by then as strange to the French as it was to the English . . . here again, listening to another language nobody could understand except those of this small farming community, I knew

that I was again in a house of perpetual exile. These were solid, practical, hard-bitten, land-holding German peasants, who struck their mattocks into the earth deep and held fast wherever they were, because to them life and the land were one indivisible thing; but never in any wise did they confuse nationality with habitation (413).

As the bleakness of winter disappears into the renewal of life in the springtime, the narrator's spirits are also renewed. Emotional harmony between setting and character is expressed in several passages:

We were approaching the farm along the skirts of a fine peach orchard, now faintly colored with young bud, but there was nothing to disguise the gaunt and aching ugliness of the farmhouse itself. In this Texas valley, so gently modulated with small crests and shallows, "rolling country" as the farmers say, the house was set on the peak of the barest rise of ground, as if the most infertile spot had been thriftily chosen for building a shelter. It stood there staring and naked, and intruding stranger, strange even beside the barns ranged generously along the back, low-eved and weathered to the color of stone.

The narrow windows and the steeply sloping roof oppressed me; . . . . But as we drew near the house, now hardly visible except for the yellow lamplight in the back, perhaps in the kitchen, my feelings changed again toward warmth and tenderness, or perhaps just an apprehension that I could feel so, maybe, again (410-411).

Passage of time is also indicated in the following quotation:

The catalpa tree at my window would, I noticed, when it came into leaf, shut off my view of the barns and the fields beyond. When in bloom the branches would almost reach through the window. But now they were a thin screen through which the calves, splotchy red and white, moved prettily against the weathered darkness of the sheds. The brown fields would soon be green again; the sheep washed by the rains and become clean grey. All the beauty of the landscape now was in harmony of the valley rolling fluently away to the wood's edge.

It was an inland country, with the forlorn look of all unloved things; winter in this part of the south is a moribund coma, not the northern death sleep with the sure promise of resurrection. But in my south, my loved and never-forgotten country, after her long sickness, with only a slight stirring, an opening of the eyes between one breath and the next, between night and day, the earth revives and bursts into the plenty of spring with fruit and flowers together, spring and summer at once under the hot shimmering blue sky (413-414).

The orderly cycles of nature form a background for the orderly, traditional world of the German farm family, the Mullers, from whom the narrator rents a room. The very fact that Father Muller rents a room in his large home to strangers at a time when important private family occasions such as birth and marriage are scheduled tells something about the materialistic values around which their lives are centered. The Mullers live in a world of male dominance, work dominance, where the entire family engages in a cycle of back-breaking farm chores and manual labor. Customs are based on an archaic, European way of life where at the dinner table "The younger men ranged themselves about on one side, the married ones with their wives standing back of their chairs to serve them, for three generations in this country had not made them self-conscious or disturbed their ancient customs" (415).

Children marry and bring their spouses home to enlarge the work-factory system of farming:

He could always provide work and a place in the household for his daughters' husbands, and in time he would do the same for his sons' wives. A new room had lately been built on, to the northeast, Annetje explained to me, leaning above her husband's head and talking across the table, for Hasty to live in when she should be married (416).

Miss Porter creates a world of intense family unity, solidarity, and oneness, somewhat resembling the family in Old Mortality. As in Old Mortality, there is a discrepancy between what the family professes to believe and its way of life, introducing an element of dishonesty and hypocrisy into the psychological setting. The Muller's world is a curious mixture of Lutheran-Christian influence which barely touches their lives in any fundamental manner, Marxist doctrine which is regarded as something holy and ideal by Father Muller, and the real values they all live by: a non-intellectual, biological and animal-like routine of ploughing, sweeping rooms, making beds, caring for chickens, preparing food, milking cows, and carrying loads, all dedicated to one materialistic goal: power, more land and more money. The mindlessness of this routine is broken only by Father Muller in the parlor where he reads Das Kapital and by the rest of the family, except Otilie, when they go to the Turnverein,

. . . an octagonal pavilion set in a cleared space in a patch of woods belonging to Father Muller. The German colony came here to sit about in the cool shade, while a small brass band played cloppity country dances.

The girls danced with energy and direction, their starched petticoats rustling like dry leaves. The boys were more awkward, but willing; they clutched their partners' waists and left crumpled sweaty spots where they clutched. Here Mother Muller took her ease after a hard week. . . .

On the other side of the pavilion, Father Muller would sit with the sober grandfathers, their long curved pipes wagging on their chests as they discussed local politics with profound gravity, their hard peasant fatalism tempered only a little by a shrewd worldly distrust of all officeholders not personally known to them, all political plans except their own immediate ones (424).

For the narrator, however, physical setting is not a background for physical labor and daily routine, but is a healing agent. In the garden, the orchard, the mulberry lane, she finds peace of mind. Some of Miss Porter's most beautiful writing is found in these passages of nature description:

One morning I saw Hasty spading up the kitchen garden plot, and my offer to help, to spread the seeds and cover them, was accepted. We worked at this for several hours each morning, until the warmth of the sun and the stooping posture induced in me a comfortable vertigo. I forgot to count the days, they were one like the other except as the colors of the air changed, deepening and warming to keep step with the advancing season, and the earth grew firmer underfoot with the swelling tangle of crowding roots (418).

. . . . .

. . . and we would go down through the orchard, where the branches were beginning to sprout in cones of watery green, and into the lane for a short distance. I would turn again into a smaller lane, smoother because less travelled, and we would go slowly between the aisle of mulberry trees where the fruit was beginning to hang and curl like green furry worms (419).

. . . . .



The narrow lane, I discovered, led to the river, and it became my favorite walk. Almost every day I went along the edge of the naked wood, passionately occupied with looking for signs of spring. The changes there were so subtle and gradual I found one day that branches of willows and sprays of blackberry vine alike were covered with fine points of green; the color had changed overnight, or so it seemed, and I knew that tomorrow the whole valley and wood and edge of the river would be quick and feathery with golden green blowing in the winds.

And it was so. On that day I did not leave the river until after dark and came home through the marsh with the owls and night jays crying over my head, calling in a strange and broken chorus in the woods until the farthest answering cry was a ghostly echo. When I went through the orchard the trees were all abloom with fireflies. I stopped and looked at it for a long time, then walked slowly, amazed, for I had never seen anything that was more beautiful to me. The trees were freshly budded out with pale bloom, the branches were immobile in the darkness, but the flower clusters shivered in a soundless dance of delicately woven light, whirling as airily as leaves in a breeze, as rhythmically as water in a fountain. Every tree was budded out with this living pulsing fire as fragile and cool as bubbles. When I opened the gate their light shone on my hands like fox fire. When I looked back, the shimmer of golden light was there, it was no dream (419-420).

In contrast to nature as a benevolent, healing force, is nature as it has affected Ottilie, the over-worked deformed servant whom the narrator discovers is one of the Muller children. No explanation is given for the kind of disease or accident which did violence to her body and turned her into a human freak, but an act of violence it was. Setting is an adjunct to character in the description of Ottilie's room:

She drew me along after her, full of some mysterious purpose of her own. She opened the door of a dingy

bitter-smelling room, windowless, which opened off the kitchen, beside the closet where Hasty took her baths. A lumpy narrow cot and chest of drawers supporting a blistered looking-glass almost filled the space. Ottilie's lips moved, struggling for speech, as she pulled and tumbled over a heap of rubbish in the top drawer . . . (425).

. . . . .

She turned her head as if she had heard a voice and disappeared in her staggering run into the kitchen, leaving the drawer open and the photograph face downward on the chest.

At midday meal she came hurrying and splashing coffee on the white floor, restored to her own secret existence of perpetual amazement, and again I had been a stranger to her like all the rest but she was no stranger to me, and could not be again (426).

At this point in the novel the element of evil within humanity and evil in nature become apparent. Nature has done violence to Ottilie's body during her childhood; her family does violence to natural humanitarian feelings in their complete disregard for her as a human being. To them, Ottilie is a work-machine, a food-provider, almost never called by name, and never included in any family festivities: "Their silence about her was, I realized, exactly that--simple forgetfulness. She moved among them as invisible to their imaginations as a ghost" (427). The narrator attempts to resolve the conflict Ottilie's situation creates by finding excuses for the Muller family, whose world consists of suffering, work, and trouble:

It was not a society or a class that pampered its invalids and the unfit. So long as one lived, one did one's share. This was her place, in this family she had been born and must die; did she suffer? No one asked, no one looked to see. Suffering went with life, suffering and labor. While one lived, one worked, that was all, and without complaints, for no one had time to listen, and everybody had his own troubles (427).

.....

... and they with a deep right instinct had learned to live with her disaster on its own terms, and hers; they had accepted and then made use of what was for them only one more painful event in a world full of troubles, many of them much worse than this (428).

Psychological conflict within the narrator is echoed by nature in conflict, a violent and destructive storm:

Cloudy weather drove them home earlier than they had meant to go. The whole sky was lined with smoky black and grey vapor hanging in ragged wisps like soot in a chimney. The edges of the woods turned dull purple as the horizon reddened slowly, then faded, and all across the sky ran a deep shuddering mumble of thunder. All the Mullers hurried about getting into rubber boots and oilcloth overalls, shouting to each other, making their plan of action . . . . Even as Mother Muller, her half-dozen petticoats looped about her thighs and tucked into her hip boots, was striding to join them in the barns, the cloud rack was split end to end by a shattering blow of lightning, and the cloudburst struck the house with the impact of a wave against a ship. The wind broke the windowpanes and the floods poured through. The roof beams strained and the walls bent inward, but the house stood to its foundations (429).

The indifference of the Mullers to Ottilie is paralleled by nature's indifference to man when the storm destroys their crops, kills many of their animals, damages their buildings, and causes the death of their mother.

Inevitably, in the five novels so far examined, evil results in violence, and violence results in death. In the fictional world of Holiday, death is both incidental and yet crucial. It is incidental in that the world Miss Porter creates consists of an endless cycle of birth, marriage, death, work, planting, harvesting, all absorbed into monotonous routine of natural life; a life which cannot stop for death:

For a while they would visit the grave and remember, and then life would arrange itself again in another order, yet it would be the same. Already the thoughts of the living were turning to tomorrow, when they would be at the work of rebuilding and replanting and repairing--even now, today, they would hurry back from the burial to milk the cows and feed the chickens, and they might weep again and again for several days, until their tears could heal them at last (432-433).

Tradition and ritual help the family get through the ordeal of preparing Mother Muller for burial; the children wash the body which then lies in state in the only possible spot, the parlor, and the family observes the proper custom of sitting up all night with the body. Throughout the family crisis Ottilie's ceaseless round of labor goes on as she fulfills her machine-like duty of providing food:

The light burned in the kitchen nearly all night, too, and the sound of Ottilie's heavy boots thumping about unsteadily was accompanied by the locust whirring of the coffee mill and the smell of baking bread. . . . Ottilie brought in a fresh pot of coffee, her eyes bleared and fixed, her gait as aimless-looking and hurried as ever, and when she spilled some on her own hand, she did not seem to feel it (432).

Though Ottilie is the most shocking example of innocent suffering and family neglect, she is not alone in receiving lack of compassion in a world whose orderly arrangement does not permit such humanitarian feelings.

Hasty's

. . . new husband followed her, rather shy of his mother-in-law.

"Let me," he said, wishing to spare his dear bride such heavy work, and started to lift the great pails. "No!" shouted Mother Muller, so the poor young man nearly jumped out of his shirt, "not you. The milk is not business for a man" (430).

The death of Mother Muller, though it will be absorbed into the cycle of life, is crucial to the narrative. Although Mother Muller permitted her children, particularly Ottilie, to be exploited, such cruelty was part of the established order of the world in which she lived. Even though the Muller family forgets that Ottilie is a member of the family, Ottilie does not forget it and wishes to join the funeral procession. An inhuman world has not killed the humanness of Ottilie.

A psychological setting of nightmare and premonition is used in Holiday, but with much less significance than the same type of setting in Pale Horse, Pale Rider and The Leaning Tower. The narrator becomes aware of Ottilie's predicament through a dream:

Through my half-sleep I heard the howling of a dog. It seemed to be a dream, and I was troubled to awaken. I dreamed that Kuno was caught in the trap; then I thought he was really caught, it was no dream and I must wake, because there was no one but me to let him out. I came broad awake, the cry rushed upon me like a wind, and it was not the howl of a dog. . . . Otilie was sitting in her broken chair with her feet on the edge of the open oven, where the heat had died away. . . . At the sight of me she got up and came over to me and laid her head on my breast, and her hands dangled forward a moment. Shuddering, she babbled and howled and waved her arms in a frenzy through the open window over the stripped branches of the orchard toward the lane where the procession had straightened out into formal order (433).

The final scene of the book takes place in the spring wagon which seems to match Otilie's distorted physique, her indestructibility, grotesqueness, and usefulness:

The harness was still a mystery, but somehow I managed to join pony, harness, and wagon not too insecurely, or so I could only hope; and I pushed and hauled and tugged at Otilie and lifted her until she was in the seat and I had the reins in hand. We careened down the road at a grudging trot, the pony jolting like a churn, the wheels spinning elliptically in a truly broad comedy swagger. I watched the jovial antics of those wheels with attention, hoping for the best (434).

Physical setting of the world she experiences transforms Otilie's mood from grief over death to joy over life:

The knotted wrinkles of her face were grotesquely changed, she gave a choked little whimper, and suddenly she laughed out, a kind of yelp but unmistakably laughter, and clapped her hands for joy, the grinning mouth and suffering eyes turned to the sky. Her head nodded and wagged with the clownish humor of our trundling lurching progress. The feel of the hot sun on her back, the bright air, the jolly senseless staggering of the wheels, the peacock green of the heavens: something of these reached her. She was

happy and gay, and she gurgled and rocked in her seat, leaning upon me and waving loosely around her as if to show me what wonders she saw (434).

Although life triumphs over death in a world where nature is both indifferent and merciless toward man, the triumph is momentary and death is inevitable. As in Hacienda, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, The Leaning Tower, and Noon Wine, the final paragraphs of Holiday refer to death: "Well, we were both equally the fools of life, equally fellow fugitives from death. We had escaped for one day more at least. We would celebrate our good luck, we would have a little stolen holiday, a breath of spring air and freedom on this lovely, festive afternoon" (435).

### Old Mortality

Setting in Old Mortality is completely different in the first section, "Part I: 1885-1902," from setting in the five previous novels. Time is the major element in setting, with the past subordinating everything else, even character, to it. No rooms, houses, buildings, or lands are described. Instead, objects from the past are described with great detail. One has the impression that there must be a large, rambling house to hold the large family of grandparents, parents, cousins, aunts, and uncles, but it is never described, not in the smallest detail. As to place, the reader only knows that it is the South. As in the

novels previously examined, however, the overall fictional world created by Miss Porter in Old Mortality is one of tradition and order, and it is a dying order. It is a world of the romantic past which enchants two little girls, Maria and Miranda, through whose eyes Miss Porter tells her story, using limited omniscient point of view and indirect interior monologue.

Unlike the five novels discussed above, Old Mortality is not dominated by a sense of violence and evil. The one act of violence happened in the past and is not greatly significant; the primary evil is a subtle one, that of unintentional dishonesty and hypocrisy. Still, violence and a mysterious death are elements of the family legend which dominates the novel.

In a psychological setting of the past, the main characters, Maria and Miranda, absorb the legend from the adults, almost unquestioningly, yet they do notice a few discrepancies between what they are told and what they observe. Romantic illusion contrasted with reality, the mental journey from innocence to experience are the themes Miss Porter explores in Old Mortality, as in The Leaning Tower, and to a lesser degree, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and Holiday.



The world of illusion is introduced in the first paragraph by a description of a picture of Aunt Amy, always referred to as the family beauty. Maria and Miranda see her differently:

Quite often they wondered why every older person who looked at the picture said, "How lovely"; and why everyone who had known her thought her so beautiful and charming.

There was a kind of faded merriment in the background, with its vase of flowers and draped velvet curtains, the kind of vase and the kind of curtains no one would have any more. The clothes were not even romantic looking, but merely most terribly out of fashion, and the whole affair was associated, in the minds of the little girls, with dead things . . . . The woman in the picture had been Aunt Amy, but she was only a ghost in a frame, and a sad, pretty story from old times (173).

Another discrepancy between fact and fiction is their father's comment that "There were never any fat women in the family, thank God" and their "great-aunt Eliza, who quite squeezed herself through doors, and who, when seated, was one solid pyramidal monument from floor to neck? What about great-aunt Keziah, in Kentucky?" (174). The little girls detect very early in their lives the falsity of the adult version of life:

But something seemed to happen to their father's memory when he thought of the girls he had known in the family of his youth, and he declared steadfastly they had all been, in every generation without exception, as slim as reeds and graceful as sylphs.

This loyalty of their father's in the face of evidence contrary to his ideal had its springs in family feelings, and a love of legend that he shared

with the others. . . . Their hearts and imaginations were captivated by their past, a past in which worldly considerations had played a very minor role (175).

Miss Porter creates a sense of the past in its falsity through detailed description of the relics valued and cried over by the Grandmother:

The little girls examined the objects, one by one, and did not find them, in themselves, impressive. Such dowdy little wreaths and necklaces, some of them made of pearly shells; such moth-eaten bunches of pink ostrich feathers for the hair; such clumsy big breast pins and bracelets of gold and colored enamel. . . (175).

The physical objects from the past do not fascinate the two girls, and they

found it impossible to sympathize with those young persons, sitting rather stiffly before the camera, hopelessly out of fashion; but they were drawn and held by the mysterious love of the living, who remembered and cherished these dead. . . . the features stamped on paper and metal were nothing, but their living memory enchanted the little girls. They listened, all ears and eager minds, picking here and there among the floating ends of narrative, patching together as well as they could fragments of tales that were like bits of poetry or music. . . (176).

The world of illusion provides the environment in which Miranda, the more romantic of the two children, visualizes a future in which "she would one day be like Aunt Amy, not as she appeared in the photograph, but as she was remembered by those who had seen her" (177).

The world of the past is far superior to the world of the present in the eyes of the adults:

But the elders would agree that the first Amy had been lighter, more smooth and delicate in her waltzing; young Amy would never equal her (177).

.....

But there was always a voice recalling other and greater occasions. Grandmother in her youth had heard Jenny Lind, and thought that Nellie Melba was much overrated. Father had seen Bernhardt, and Madame Modjeska was no sort of rival. When Paderewski played for the first time in their city, cousins came from all over the state and went from the grandmother's house to hear him. . . . One old gentleman, however, had heard Rubinstein frequently. He could not but feel that Rubinstein had reached the final height of musical interpretation, and, for him, Paderewski had been something of an anticlimax (179).

In this instance Miranda shows a flash of eagerness to reject the adult obsession with the glories of the past: "Miranda, dragged away, half understanding the old gentleman, hated him. She felt that she too had heard Paderewski" (179).

But fundamentally, the world of old books, plays about long-dead kings and queens, and, most of all, stories about Aunt Amy and Uncle Gabriel provide the emotional climate in which the girls live:

Their Aunt Amy belonged to the world of poetry. The romance of Uncle Gabriel's long, unrewarded love for her, her early death, was such a story as one found in old books. . . . Aunt Amy was real as the pictures in the old Holbein and Durer books were real (178).

Through their constantly viewing the past as ideal, the girls learn that

There was then a life beyond a life in this world, as well as in the next; such episodes confirmed for the little girls the nobility of human feeling, the

divinity of man's vision of the unseen, the importance of life and death, the depths of the human heart, the romantic value of tragedy (179).

As in The Leaning Tower and Holiday, Miss Porter includes cruelty of mother to child as part of the evil that human beings must survive, in this instance psychological rather than physical cruelty:

Cousin Molly Parrington . . . was a noted charmer. Men who had known her all her life still gathered about her; now that she was happily widowed for the second time there was no doubt that she would yet marry again. . . . (177). She was an unnatural mother to her ugly daughter Eva, an old maid past forty while her mother was still the belle of the ball . . . (178).

Eva, shy and chinless, straining her upper lip over two enormous teeth, would sit in corners watching her mother. She looked hungry, her eyes strained and tired. She wore her mother's old clothes, made over. . . . When her mother was not present, Eva bloomed out a little, danced prettily, smiled, showing all her teeth, and was like a dry little plant set out in a gentle rain. Molly was merry about her ugly duckling. "It's lucky for me my daughter is an old maid. She's not so apt," said Molly naughtily, "to make a grandmother of me." Eva would blush as if she had been slapped (178).

The legend of the past contains cruelty also, in the way Gabriel is treated by his grandfather, who in a "last-minute act of senile vengeance" (191) cut him off with one dollar, and Aunt Amy, who never misses an opportunity to treat him badly, cutting her hair short when she learns he likes it long, changing to another gown if he compliments her, and flirting with other men. Amy's flirtatious nature results in violence and

a very grave scandal. The little girls used to look at their father, and wonder what would have happened if he had really hit the young man he shot at. The young man was believed to have kissed Aunt Amy, when she was not in the least engaged to him. Uncle Gabriel was supposed to have had a duel with the young man, but Father had got there first. He was a pleasant, every-day sort of father, who held his daughters on his knee if they were prettily dressed and well behaved, and pushed them away if they had not freshly combed hair and nicely scrubbed fingernails. . . . Well, this very father had gone to Mexico once and stayed there for nearly a year, because he had shot at a man with whom Aunt Amy had flirted at a dance (184).

This incident brings out several facets of the fictional world Miss Porter creates in Old Mortality: traditional standards which allow violence as a means of setting a trivial issue, a particular ritual surrounding the violence involved in a duel, a strong sense of family loyalty, and an atmosphere of tolerance and even blindness to Amy's complete selfishness in causing the crisis, which means that her brother is exiled in Mexico City for a year.

The world of family unity is fundamental to the psychological setting of this novel:

The scandal, Maria and Miranda gathered, had been pretty terrible. Amy simply took to bed and stayed there, and Harry had skipped out blithely to wait until the little affair blew over. The rest of the family had to receive visitors, write letters, go to church, return calls, and bear the whole brunt, as they expressed. They sat in the twilight of scandal in their little world, holding themselves very rigidly, in a shared tension as if all their nerves began at a common center. The center had received a blow, and family nerves shuddered, even into the farthest reaches of Kentucky. From whence in due time great-great-aunt Sally Rhea addressed a letter to Mifs Amy Rhea (189).

By ignoring the proper procedures for violence, Harry disturbed their ordered world: "It had been very wrong of him, because he should have challenged the man to a duel, as Uncle Gabriel had done. Instead, he just took a shot at him, and this was the lowest sort of manners" (184). Amy explained the incident to her mother:

"And now it seems that Gabriel went out at once and challenged Raymond to a duel about something or other, but Harry doesn't wait for that. . . . Harry simply went out and shot at him. I don't think that was fair," said Amy.

Her mother agreed that indeed it was not fair; it was not even decent, and she could not imagine what her son Harry thought he was doing (187).

Amy becomes the family legend which dominates the early lives of the little girls because "She had been beautiful, much loved, unhappy, and she had died young" (173). As in Hacienda and Noon Wine, circumstances of the death are mysterious and unexplained. As in The Leaning Tower, suicide--violence--is implied. Six weeks after Amy's marriage, her nurse writes:

"And I do not want you to think I was careless, leaving her medicine where she could get it. . . . It would not have done her any harm except that her heart was weak. She did not know how much she was taking, often she said to me, one more of those little capsules wouldn't do any harm, and so I told her to be careful and not take anything except what I gave her. She begged me for them sometimes but I would not give her more than the doctor said. . . (192-193).

Through psychological setting of the past, Miss Porter gives the first version of the glamorous legend as

absorbed by innocent and largely uncritical children. In "Part II: 1904" her treatment of setting emphasizes physical places--school, rooming house, racetrack, city--rather than the past. Still, it is a world of discipline, order, rules of right and wrong, and standards and expectations; the scene changes to a Catholic Convent of the Child Jesus in New Orleans

where they spent the long winters trying to avoid an education. There were no dungeons at the Child Jesus, and this was only one of the numerous marked differences between convent life as Maria and Miranda knew it and the thrilling paper-backed version. It was no good at all trying to fit the stories to life, and they did not even try. They had long since learned to draw the lines between life, which was real and earnest, and the grave was not its goal; poetry, which was true but not real; and stories, or forbidden reading matter, in which things happened as nowhere else, with the most sublime irrelevance and unlikelihood, and one need not turn a hair, because there was not a word of truth in them (193-194).

Point of view determines setting, which is more concrete than in the first section because the little girls are less romantic and more interested in their present surroundings and present life, rather than in the dream-world of the past. Their attempts to make something sinister and glamorous of the convent fail:

It was true the little girls were hedged and confined, but in a large garden with trees and a grotto; they were locked at night into a long cold dormitory, with all the windows open, and a sister sleeping at either end. Their beds were curtained with muslin, and small night lamps were so arranged that the sisters could see through the curtains, but the children could not see the sisters. . . . All days and all things in the Convent of the Child Jesus were dull, in fact, and Maria and Miranda lived for Saturdays (194).

Psychological setting emphasizes the world of family unity and concern: ". . . some cousin or other always showed up smiling, in holiday mood, to take them to the races, where they were given a dollar each to bet on any horse they chose" (195).

Physical setting includes the adult world of restaurants and cabs:

These expeditions were all joy, every time, from the moment they stepped into a closed one-horse cab, a treat in itself with its dark, thick upholstery, soaked with strange perfumes and tobacco smoke, until the thrilling moment when they walked into a restaurant under big lights and were given dinner with things to eat they never had at home, much less at the convent (195-196).

The world of illusion and reality is revealed through focus on Miranda, the more romantic of the two children. She has exchanged the dream of being "a beauty like Aunt Amy" (196) for the notion of being a jockey which "came suddenly and filled all her thoughts" (196). In reality, however, she is a poor rider: "'You ought to be ashamed of yourself,' said her father, after watching her gallop full tilt down the lane at the farm, on Trixie, the mustang mare. 'I can see the sun, moon and stars between you and the saddle every jump'" (196). Her dream is destroyed at the racetrack when she discovers that the world exacts a cruel price for winning, and she also discovers the distance between her world and that of her father:



. . . she was ashamed that she had screamed and shed tears for joy when Miss Lucy, with her bloodied nose and bursting heart had gone past the judges' stand a neck ahead. She felt empty and sick and held to her father's hand so hard that he shook her off a little impatiently and said, "What is the matter with you? Don't be so fidgety" (199).

Through setting, another world of dreams is changed and almost destroyed when the illusion and the reality do not coincide. With their father at the racetrack, Maria and Miranda meet Uncle Gabriel, the romantic lover of Aunt Amy, who is

a vast bulging man with a red face and immense tan ragged mustaches fading into gray . . . a shabby fat man with bloodshot blue eyes, sad beaten eyes, and a big melancholy laugh, like a groan. . . . "Got the God-damnedest jockey in the world, Harry, just my luck" (197-198).

The discrepancy between the adult world of unconscious dishonesty and the clear-eyed innocent world of the children widens:

Maria and Miranda stared, first at him, then at each other. "Can that be our Uncle Gabriel?" their eyes asked. "Is this Aunt Amy's handsome romantic beau? Is that the man who wrote the poem about our Aunt Amy?" Oh, what did grown-up people mean when they talked, anyway? (197)

That the world of adults is unjust and not quite honest becomes apparent to both girls:

Maria and Miranda, watching Uncle Gabriel's lumbering, unsteady back, were thinking that this was the first time they had ever seen a man that they knew to be drunk. They had seen pictures and read descriptions, and had heard descriptions, so they recognized the symptoms at once. Miranda felt it was an important moment in a great many ways.

"Uncle Gabriel's a drunkard, isn't he" she asked her father, rather proudly.

"Hush, don't say such things," said her father, with a heavy frown, "or I'll never bring you here again. . . . The little girls stood stiff with resentment against such obvious injustice. They loosed their hands from his and moved away coldly, standing together in silence. Their father did not notice. . . (200).

Uncle Gabriel is dishonest also, when he urges them to visit his second wife, Miss Honey: "'She's always liked our family, Harry . . . I want her to see the girls. She'll be tickled pink to see them . . .'" (200).

Seeing Uncle Gabriel in his natural setting completes the disillusionment of the girls. When they enter the cab, "The air became at once bitter and sour with his breathing" (201). Traveling through New Orleans,

The little girls sat watching the streets grow duller and dingier and narrower, and at last the shabbier and shabbier white people gave way to dressed-up Negroes, and then to shabby Negroes, and after a long way the cab stopped before a desolate-looking little hotel in Elysian Fields. Their father helped Maria and Miranda out, told the cabman to wait, and they followed Uncle Gabriel through a dirty damp-smelling patio, down a long gas-lighted hall full of a terrible smell, Miranda couldn't decide what it was made of but it had a bitter taste even, and up a long staircase with a ragged carpet (201).

Setting also is an adjunct to character, revealing the personality of Miss Honey, who greets them

. . . with a heavy sigh, seating herself and motioning towards various rickety chairs. There was a big lumpy bed, with a grayish-white counterpane on it, a marble-topped washstand, grayish coarse lace curtains on strings at the two small windows, a small closed fireplace with a hole in it for a stovepipe, and two trunks,

standing at odds as if somebody were just moving in, or just moving out. Everything was dingy and soiled and neat and bare; not a pin out of place (202).

His horse having won at the track, Gabriel wants to exchange this atmosphere of neatly-arranged poverty for one of affluence, but Miss Honey says,

"I've lived in the St. Charles before, and I've lived here before," she said, in a tight deliberate voice, "and this time I'll just stay where I am, thank you. I prefer it to moving back here in three months. I'm settled now, I feel at home here," she told him . . . (202).

Having been brought up in a world where correct behavior and good manners are considered important, the girls recognize that Miss Honey's standards are very different from theirs:

. . . they had learned by indirection one thing well-- nice people did not carry on quarrels before outsiders. Family quarrels were sacred, to be waged privately in fierce hissing whispers, low choked mutters and growls. If they did yell and stamp, it must be behind closed doors and windows. Uncle Gabriel's second wife was hopping mad and she looked ready to fly out at Uncle Gabriel any second, with him sitting there like a hound when someone shakes a whip at him.

"She loathes and despises everybody in this room," thought Miranda, coolly, and she's afraid we won't know it. She needn't worry, we knew it when we came it" (202-203).

The standards of two different worlds clash during the final moments of their visit when Miss Honey asks,

"Do you take them to the races, actually?" she asked, and her lids flickered towards them as if they were loathsome insects, Maria felt.

"If I feel they deserve a little treat, yes," said their father, in an easy tone but with wrinkled brow.

"I had rather, much rather," said Miss Honey clearly, "see my son dead at my feet than hanging around a race track" (204).

Losing the romantic aura that surrounded Uncle Gabriel and Amy, losing the dream of becoming a jockey, seeing through the small dishonesties of their elders, and returning to the drab atmosphere of the convent is no tragedy. Description of the setting complements the emotional state of the characters:

The cab rumbled on, back to clean gay streets, with the lights coming on in the early February darkness, past shimmering shop windows, smooth pavements, on and on, past beautiful old houses set in deep gardens, on, on back to the dark walls with the heavy-topped trees hanging over them. Miranda sat thinking so hard she forgot and spoke out in her thoughtless way: "I've decided I'm not going to be a jockey, after all." (205)

The events of the afternoon were "already in the far past." They return to life in the convent, orderly, unromantic:

The lay sister opened the door on a long cord, from behind the grille; Maria and Miranda walked in silently to their familiar world of shining bare floors and insipid wholesome food and cold-water washing and regular prayers; their world of poverty, chastity and obedience, of early to bed and early to rise, of sharp little rules and tittle-tattle (205).

Part II concludes with the scene in the convent, the static world of the present. Setting for the final section of the novel, which Miss Porter labels "Part III: 1912," is laid in the train taking Miranda home to Uncle Gabriel's

funeral, home to the family and all its old values and legends and small dishonesties. While in the family car after arriving at her destination, Miranda makes a crucial decision to reject everything from her past. It is significant and ironic that while she is carried swiftly on a journey toward home, her inner self is moving just as swiftly on a journey away from the dead world of the past she has always known. She reaches her decision through her Cousin Eva Parrington, who describes the world of the past as she knew it, giving the legend of Amy and Gabriel yet another interpretation. As in the first two sections of the novel, Miss Porter shows the distance between adults and young people: "Across the abyss separating Cousin Eva from her own youth, Miranda looked with painful premonition" (208).

Although Miranda thinks she rejects family traditions and values, she is firmly held by what that world taught her: ". . . she had been brought up to treat ferocious old ladies respectfully . . ." (207). She makes judgments based on family values when Cousin Eva pries into her financial status:

"I thank God every day of my life that I have a small income. It's a Rock of Ages. What would have become of me if I hadn't a cent of my own? Well, you'll be able now to do something for your family."

Miranda remembered what she had always heard about the Parringtons. They were money-hungry, they loved money and nothing else, and when they had got some they kept it. Blood was thinner than water between the Parringtons where money was concerned.

"We're pretty poor," said Miranda, stubbornly allying herself with her father's family instead of her husband's, "but a rich marriage is no way out," she said, with the snobbishness of poverty. She was thinking, "You don't know my branch of the family, dear Cousin Eva, if you think it is" (213).

Cousin Eva recreates the family legend and describes the world in which it occurred, stripping it of all romance and telling Miranda, "Knowledge can't hurt you. You mustn't live in a romantic haze about life" (212). To Cousin Eva the beautiful world of costume balls, romantic flirtations, lovely women, hopeless love of Gabriel for Amy, and Amy's mysterious death was anything but beautiful:

"Those parties and dances were their market, a girl couldn't afford to miss out, there were always rivals waiting to cut the ground from under her. . . . you can't imagine what the rivalry was like. The way those girls treated each other--nothing was too mean, nothing too false--"

Cousin Eva wrung her hands. "It was just sex," she said in despair; "their minds dwelt on nothing else. They didn't call it that, it was all smothered under pretty names, but that's all it was, sex" (216).

Cousin Eva is typical of the adults from whom Miranda tried to learn the truth about the past in that she is unconsciously dishonest, creating a world impossible for Miranda to believe in. Eva says, "'Your Aunt Amy was a devil and a mischief-maker, but I loved her dearly'" (211). In reality she hated her, saying,

"Amy did away with herself to escape some disgrace, some exposure that she faced."

The beady black eyes glinted; Cousin Eva's face was quite frightening, so near and so intent. Miranda wanted to say, "Stop. Let her rest. What harm did she ever do you?" but she was timid and unnerved, and deep in her was a horrid fascination with the terrors and the darkness Cousin Eva had conjured up. What was the end of this story?

"She was a bad, wild girl, but I was fond of her to the last," said Cousin Eva (214).

According to Cousin Eva, Aunt Amy's world was simply sex-dominated:

"Well, Amy carried herself with more spirit than the others, and she didn't seem to be making any sort of fight, but she was simply sex-ridden, like the rest. She behaved as if she hadn't a rival on earth, and she pretended not to know what marriage was about, but I know better. None of them had, and they didn't want to have, anything else to think about, and they didn't really know anything about that, so they simply festered inside--they festered--"

Miranda found herself deliberately watching a long procession of living corpses, festering women stepping gaily towards the charnel house, their corruption concealed under laces and flowers, their dead faces lifted smiling . . . (216).

Miranda's reaction to Cousin Eva's destruction of the legend is "But why did she hate Aunt Amy so, when Aunt Amy was dead and she alive? Wasn't being alive enough?" (215), and "Of course it was not like that. This is no more true than what I was told before, it's every bit as romantic . . ." (216). After they arrive at the train depot, Miranda rejects the romantic version of the family legend she was brought up on in her childhood, she rejects her marriage, she rejects her family and her husband's family:

Miranda walked along beside her father, feeling homeless, but not sorry for it. He had not forgiven her, she knew that. . . . Surely old people cannot hold their grudges forever because the young want to live, too, she thought, in her arrogance, her pride. I will make my own mistakes, not yours; I cannot depend upon you beyond a certain point, why depend at all? (219)

As she walks with her father and Cousin Eva, listening to their comfortable talk with each other about a world that is familiar to them, Miranda realizes

"It is I who have no place . . . . Where are my own people and my own time?" She resented slowly and deeply and in profound silence, the presence of these aliens who lectured and admonished her, who loved her with bitterness and denied her the right to look at the world with her own eyes, who demanded that she accept their version of life and yet could not tell her the truth, not in the smallest thing (219).

Miranda's refusal to accept any longer the adult world is not noticed as she declines Cousin Eva's "sharp little note of elderly command" for Miranda to sit with them in the family car. She stays in the front seat, leaving the adults behind telling the old stories:

She knew too many stories like them, she wanted something new of her own. . . . She did not want any more ties with this house, she was going to leave it, and she was not going back to her husband's family either. She would have no more bonds that smothered her in love and hatred. She knew now why she had run away to marriage, and she knew that she was going to run away from marriage, and she was not going to stay in any place, with anyone, that threatened to forbid her making her own discoveries, that said "No" to her (220).

Miranda thinks that by rejecting her family and any one place she can declare her independence of the past that formed her



character. She is as romantic and unrealistic in trying to deny her background as she was in accepting all the falsehoods within it. "Oh, what is life, she asked herself in desperate seriousness, in those childish unanswerable words, and what shall I do with it? . . . She had been assured that there were good and evil ends, one must make a choice. But what was good, and what was evil?" (220). While the dishonesty of her family and the one act of violence in the novel cannot be considered evil comparable to the evil found in the other five novels, still their lies--conscious or unconscious--have not helped Miranda to learn the truth about life:

There are questions to be asked first, she thought, but who will answer them? No one, or there will be too many answers, none of them right. What is the truth, she asked herself as intently as if the question had never been asked, the truth, even about the smallest, the least important of all the things I must find out? and where shall I begin to look for it? Her mind closed stubbornly against remembering, not the past but the legend of the past, other people's memory of the past, at which she had spent her life peering in wonder like a child at a magic-lantern show (221).

Thus, Miranda rejects the past with all its romantic dishonesties. Ironically, she resolves not to be romantic about herself, she whose inner world all her life has been a romantic one, right from the moment she resolved to be a beauty like her Aunt Amy to her own romantic elopement from school into marriage:

. . . I won't be romantic about myself. I can't live in their world any longer, she told herself, listening to the voices back of her. Let them tell their stories to each other. Let them go on explaining how things happened. I don't care. At least I can know the truth about what happens to me, she assured herself silently, making a promise to herself, in her hopefulness, her ignorance (221).

Old Mortality is the only novel which ends without a direct mention of death on the last page, although it does end with a rejection of a world Miranda wants to feel is dead so far as she is concerned. And death brings her home, the death of Uncle Gabriel, the death of his romantic legend.

## CHAPTER III

### CONCLUSION

In four of the six novels nature is an impersonal, passive element which does not exert any particular influence on man. Nature contains neither good nor evil. In Holiday nature is not evil in itself; it is non-benevolent and creates evil, death, and havoc for man. Nature is evil in Holiday in that it twists and distorts one of the characters, Otilie, into a caricature of a human being. Nature is powerful and indifferent. Nature exerts an evil influence on man in Noon Wine through an inferno-like atmosphere of August heat which seems to bring out man's inherent impulse to violence. Psychological setting consists to a great extent in an atmosphere of death which permeates Hacienda, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, The Leaning Tower, and two-thirds of Noon Wine. The atmosphere of death predominates in the last portion of Holiday, and death is an important element in the narrative of Old Mortality.

Evil forms the basis for the fictional world of Porter in all six of her novels. Various kinds of evil include man's indifference to man, his exploitation of man, physical and psychological brutality to man, evil of sexual perversions, the impulse to violence, dishonesty and hypocrisy toward others and toward life, living by false and

dead values, emphasizing the material rather than the human aspect of life.

In Holiday and The Leaning Tower, the particular physical setting of the novel in which the main character finds himself is chosen because of a romanticized description heard from another person who takes no part in the action. Psychological setting of Old Mortality is a result of the same type of situation--the romantic past as described by other people becomes the world in which the main characters exist.

Setting in five out of the six novels is almost museum-like. The hacienda and pulqueria in Hacienda with the dead, archaic life led there have the quality of a museum; the rooming house in The Leaning Tower is a museum within the larger museum of the dead society which is Germany; Old Mortality, with its descriptions of relics and legends and customs from the past, forms a psychological museum which the main character must reject in order to survive as a personality; in Holiday the Muller farm and the way of life of the family is a museum-like preservation of customs from Europe three generations back. Actually the fictional world created in Holiday is rather like an ant farm, a biological museum showing birth, marriage, death, and unceasing physical labor of the ant-like people within who have about as much control over their destiny as an ant

colony stepped on by a huge, indifferent man--nature. In Pale Horse, Pale Rider, Miss Porter mentions a geological museum which serves to emphasize the indestructible timelessness of nature contrasted with the temporary and fragile existence of man.

Setting is an aid to characterization in Noon Wine and Old Mortality especially, and also in Pale Horse, Pale Rider and The Leaning Tower. Emotional harmony between setting and action and character is apparent in all six novels. Irony of setting is particularly apparent in Pale Horse, Pale Rider and Noon Wine. Setting is the hero of the narrative in Hacienda and The Leaning Tower.

This study gives ample evidence of Miss Porter's skillful use of setting (external and internal). She creates place with sure descriptive and expository strokes. The environment is real: its sounds, odors, textures, and geographical and historical authenticity provide a thoroughly believable world where equally believable people act out the human tragi-comedy that is Miss Porter's significant, if sometimes pessimistic, theme.

Setting as a time, place, milieu not only allows characteristic action, but causes action. It symbolically depicts the realities of the real world we as readers know. Often we are startled by Miss Porter into a more complete, more sanative, more objective awareness of the world we

lived in yesterday--are forced to reappraise the one we inhabit today. Returning to the everyday world (that is too much with us for us to be with it) the reader is apt to feel ill-at-ease, as though dropped suddenly into an alien universe.

The urbane clarity of her vision is complemented by the disciplined restraint of her style. With sure instinct she cuts through the film of prejudice that for so many of us distorts reality. We are forced to see life honestly--and see it whole.

Space and time permitting, this study of setting could be broadened to include interesting but peripheral issues. Further attention could be given to the similarity between Mr. Hatch and Mr. Thompson in Noon Wine; the significance of the "Kuno" for the dead friend in The Leaning Tower and "Kuno" the little puppy turned ferocious monster in Holiday; symbolism of light in The Leaning Tower and Pale Horse, Pale Rider; the emphasis on verbs of seeing in Pale Horse, Pale Rider and Noon Wine; Mrs. Thompson's near-blindness in Noon Wine; the use of time almost as geological layers in Hacienda; and the influence of Milton and the Bible on Miss Porter's philosophy and symbolism.

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