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A CERTAIN SOLID GROUND: THE MARY-MARTHA MOTIF
IN THE FICTION OF KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

BY

ROSEMARY MULVANEY DIETRICK

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
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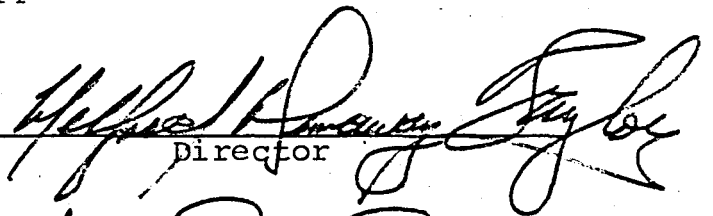
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in the Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter

by

Rosemary Mulvaney Dietrick

Approved:


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INTRODUCTION

She had spent years of strategic warfare trying to beat those people out of her life; then more years trying to ignore them; to forget them; to hate them; and in the end she loved them as she knew well she was meant in simple nature to do, and acknowledged it; it brought her no peace, and yet it put a certain solid ground under her feet. 1

The preceding passage from Katherine Anne Porter's Ship of Fools reveals the rebellious thoughts of a young American artist named Jenny, an almost autobiographical heroine, who inveighs against the pragmatic women in her past who had dedicated themselves to her "raising."² The willful Jenny suggests as do many of Miss Porter's memorable female protagonists, the author's empathy for the contemporary woman who must confront a complex society which demands that she stand up and be counted in one rank or another. Is she modern or old-fashioned? It is my feeling that Jenny and her idealistic counterparts are forever haunted by the memory of those moral monitors who, like those responsible for Jenny's "raising," had stood foursquare for "order . . . the only reality in a world without fixed authority or refuge."³ Katherine Anne Porter,

acknowledging the necessity of giving "true testimony,"⁴ presents both poles of modernity and tradition by faithfully re-creating the two familiar prototypes with the dispassionate coolness that is her hallmark.

Of her art in fiction, Robert Penn Warren says simply, "The luminosity is from inward."⁵ By this brilliance, I have been "moved and stimulated to speak [my] thoughts freely," for as Miss Porter further states, "the private reader too has always been welcome to his own notions of what he is reading, free to remark upon it to his heart's content, with no cramping obligation to be 'right' in his conclusions."⁶ Mindful of this graciousness regarding individual interpretation, I am encouraged in propounding my thesis that the heroines found in the fiction of Katherine Anne Porter recall the Biblical paradigms of Mary and Martha according to the Gospel of Luke (Chap. 10, Ver. 38-42).⁷

The use of Biblical paradigms in my critical approach seems appropriate to the fiction of Katherine Anne Porter, not only because her work, in many instances, is based on allusions from the Bible, but rather that her attitude is Christian in the use of words and symbols known to modern man. The Mary-Martha frame of reference seems particularly justifiable in the light of Ethelbert Flood's essay entitled "Christian Language in Modern Literature."

His argument, citing Miss Porter's "Flowering Judas," makes a plea for the understanding of the use of Christian tradition as a pivotal point from which the reader may proceed with ease. He comments:

. . . the Christian tradition is alive in modern literature in various ways. First of all, it determines modes of reflection and expression in the modern mind. Christian tradition here is neither true nor false; it is rather a fact of human consciousness, whatever lies buried in the history of twenty centuries ago. A writer, attempting to elicit response from his readership, can fashion a desired reaction by playing on the impressions the Christian tradition has made on the common mind.

Katherine Anne Porter used Christian language in this manner . . . with Porter's story as an example . . . [Christian] indicates the conscious use by a writer of words and symbols that define response because of the determinations of mind resulting from the Christian tradition. The fullness of experience such language can build readily provides a piece of writing with absorbant power. 8

Thus I feel that it is fitting and proper to reflect on these Biblical women while noting the striking dichotomy in Miss Porter's types of heroines. They fall very naturally into the categories represented by Mary and Martha of Bethany. The two sisters of Lazarus project the image of Martha, the practical woman involved in the physical necessities of life while the image of Mary is that of the thoughtful woman caught up in the intangible visions of the spirit. I shall illustrate, therefore, that those figures which symbolize the idealistic Mary and the pragmatic Martha are clearly

delineated by Miss Porter in her major short stories and in her novel Ship of Fools. Throughout my study, I shall refer to this suggested pattern as the Mary-Martha motif, the use of which, I feel, is Miss Porter's tribute to the unique quality of each woman's service to humanity.

Miss Porter, the artistic Mary, alternately fought and loved the dutiful Marthas who were so much a part of her heritage. The Mary figures are eternal seekers of experience, committing themselves to a quest for the ethereal Holy Grail of truth. The Martha figures are touchstones of reality, accepting the hardy destinies which come to them unbidden. The awareness of these gallant women in her usable past has created within the writer a conflict which Dorothy S. Redden contends is characteristic of most of her fiction. She notes that Miss Porter does not accept her heritage without qualification because "she is also in continual, if incomplete, revolt against it."⁹ Miss Redden cites the words of Miss Porter herself in describing "Noon Wine," one of her most successful stories. Miss Porter reveals that it was "a story of the most painful moral and emotional confusions."¹⁰ I agree with Miss Redden's observation that "this trenchant phrase is . . . appropriate to most of Miss Porter's work. . . ." ¹¹

The Mary figure as artist requires further definition. Common belief willingly assigns the artist, the master of creativity, a hallowed place beyond the pale wherein

ordinary men must dwell. The layman concedes in awe the artist's right to "a sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice."¹² Whether Miss Porter's Xanadu was Mexico, France or Germany, her right to romantic refuge although not challenged by society, was scornfully viewed by the Marthas in her past as "escapes." Like all the Marys of the artistic world whose talents are found in museums, concert halls, and libraries, Miss Porter's are easily recognizable. S. H. Poss admires in her "the standard equipment of the artist...abnormal sensibility and acute and unwavering perceptions."¹³ Paul Crume gives particular insight into Katherine Anne Porter, the artist, by noting the mercurial aspects of her approach to life:

This is ingrained in the temperament of almost all who create. They are cast in the picaresque pattern of character; that is, they are furiously interested in moments and in incidents, are impulsively swept along from momentary experience to momentary experience without much attention to the direction of life. This trait is associated with the power to experience deeply, to discriminate and savor the quality of experience, to observe wholly. 14

His assessment of Miss Porter seems truly perceptive as he continues, "A person possessed of this naiveté of the senses may find more to marvel at in the wind-bent sweep of a mesquite's branches than the average newspaper reporter finds in the routine murder of the night."¹⁵

Of all the critical canon, the most suitable evaluation of Katherine Anne Porter appears to be that of Robert Penn Warren, who ranks her as an artist worthy of the company of James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, Sherwood Anderson, and Ernest Hemingway.¹⁶ For some time, critics have been confounded by Miss Porter's fiction. The complexity of its style has evoked provocative phrases in a plethora of essays. Mark Schorer refers to her technique as a "cultivated sensuousity;"¹⁷ Marjorie Ryan deplores the fact that "the stories . . . are so nearly seamless that an analysis of them from any point of view is difficult."¹⁸ George Hendrick matter-of-factly concludes his comprehensive study by saying, "Miss Porter is correct in her self-estimation: she is an artist."¹⁹

Such a far-from humble self-evaluation is typical of both the artist and the Mary figure who must, of necessity, possess a certain arrogance, born of confidence in herself and in her talent. In flatly announcing that she considered herself an artist, Miss Porter said, "I'm one of the few living people not afraid to pronounce that word . . . even Hemingway and Faulkner don't say they are artists. I've often wondered why people interested in the mind and human heart have been intimidated. . . ."²⁰ In contrast, there is also the emotional Mary in Katherine Anne Porter who speaks out in an earlier statement which is an almost tortured testimony of her total commitment

to the art of fiction. She said, "I did not choose this vocation and if I had any say in the matter, I would not have chosen it . . . yet for this vocation I was and am willing to live and die and I consider very few other things of the slightest importance."²¹

Miss Porter's artistic credo so vehemently stated is indicative of the inner turmoil which bedevils a Mary figure. True, there must be complete dedication to one's craft and willing resignation to confinement within the artist's spiritual "pleasure-dome." Miss Porter's fiction, however, acknowledges her awareness of a very physical plane upon which both types of her heroines must tread. The dichotomy of the Mary-Martha motif allows each prototype to flourish in her own milieu. This is possible, of course, because Miss Porter, the idealistic Mary, has known so intimately in the past the realistic Marthas who symbolized the stability so often denied the restless intellectual. It is natural, therefore, to equate the Martha figures with the social structure of the author's beloved South where she was fondly "lectured and admonished"²² throughout her childhood. Jenny's wistful yearning for "a certain solid ground" seems to reappear in the words of Daniel Curley who comments on the osmotic strength Miss Porter derives from "this summer country of my

childhood, this place of memory."²³ However, he cautions, "This is her earth . . . and she strays from it at her peril."²⁴ We know that Miss Porter's many forays into other countries illustrate that she so dared; however, in her escapes to distant places, she is always sustained by the memory of the Martha figures of her native land who taught her the Southerner's secret of survival in the face of all vicissitudes.

In the stories that belong to these pragmatic women, she proudly recalls their gallant acceptance of sacrifice, portraying these Marthas as women of "strength, bravery, purpose, and responsibility."²⁵ The Martha image is synonymous with tradition, authority, and orthodoxy--guidelines that rigidly governed every aspect of a woman's life in that post-Civil War era. These heroines bowed to the male-imposed yokes; they did not complain, although they obviously chafed under the strictures. They proved themselves to be heroic pioneers, earning admiration and respect which was later recorded by an appreciative Miss Porter.

The focus of my study is on the fact that two types of women emerge from the pages of Miss Porter's fiction. There is sufficient evidence of a design, whether created consciously or unconsciously, that clearly establishes a dichotomy between the two images. I will group the protagonists in a collective pattern against the backgrounds of their individual stories. An integral

part of this method will be an analysis of the various works and a commentary on Miss Porter's technique of characterization and virtuosity of style.

The most obvious Mary figures appear in the novel Ship of Fools and in the short stories "Flowering Judas," "Old Mortality," and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider." In Ship of Fools, Jenny, an avant-garde American artist, attempts to impose her quixotic view on the misanthropic passengers aboard a German ship "on its voyage to eternity"²⁶ in 1931. In "Flowering Judas," Laura, a guilt-haunted idealist, is unable to believe wholeheartedly in a revolution in Mexico or to accept completely the meaning of life itself. In "Old Mortality" and in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," the sensitive Miranda follows a path which leads her away from the romantic illusions of childhood toward the realistic experience of maturity. Consequently, one conjures up a vision of the Mary prototype, a woman who is charming, witty, imaginative, spirited, and independent. Her sensitive qualities are enhanced by her physical attractiveness; her ethereal beauty is invariably irresistible to the male protagonist. However, William Nance calls her attitude toward love "the principle of rejection"²⁷ which she has honed to a fine art. This inability to feel deeply about another human being is the major negative aspect of the Mary personality. Outwardly, she often appears cold and selfish;

inwardly, there is a spiritual aridity which stifles all relationships. Thus the Mary image is alienated from the world, isolated within a brittle, sparkling shell.

In contrast, the manifestations of the Martha figure bespeak familial settings suffused with an almost smothering warmth. The Martha prototype is visible in three short stories grouped together under the title "The Old Order" and also in "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." In "The Last Leaf," a short story in "The Old Order" group, Nannie, the former slave, at age eighty-five, exchanges her white cap and apron for a blue bandanna and a corncob pipe while proclaiming "I've done my do, and dat's all."²⁸ In "The Source" and "The Journey," stories also listed under "The Old Order," Grandmother Rhea, a former Southern belle of pioneer stock, finds herself "with a houseful of children, making a new life for them in another place with all the responsibilities of a man, but none of the privileges."²⁹ In "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," Granny, the cohesive force that preserved "the hardy stock from generation to generation,"³⁰ faces death with ambivalent feelings about her past life on the frontier. To sum up, the portrait of the indomitable Martha prototype presents an image of self-sufficiency, loyalty, unselfishness, courage, and plenty of backbone to spare. The serenity of these women in the face of disaster served them well

in their primary functions of establishing homes and bringing up children in a wild country that could charm as well as threaten the human condition. These were truly Martha figures who dedicated themselves to duty as if their mission were ordained by God, fully aware that their concerns lay within the scope of the harsh "outer world of things."³¹ Their faces and hands testified that they had endured under hostile circumstances. However, their children often rebelled against their harsh domination and their inflexible attitudes which disavowed Tennyson's insistence in his Idylls of the King that "the old order changeth, yielding place to new." Narrow-mindedness and rigidity were often unpleasant Martha-like results of their own frustrations and anxieties when they found they could no longer comfortably label "everything by its right name."³²

We note, finally, that the Marthas viewed the changing world with some trepidation; however, they dug in their heels and resisted the deluge of new values. Their misgivings were to be mirrored in the rebellious Marys who were their charges. The Mary figure represents the modern woman's struggle with the complexities of her life which arise from the presence of Martha in her heritage. Today's Mary acknowledges her debt to the solid feminine world that sought to give her the strength of stability which would order her contemporary world.

Since the Mary figure is beleaguered by society's varying demands, the success or failure of the Marthas cannot easily be adjudged. One certainty can be established; by giving equal stature in her fiction to both types, Katherine Anne Porter asserts that the Mary-Martha motif is the warp and woof of life's texture. Society has need of that service which is unique to both women.

NOTES

¹Katherine Anne Porter, Ship of Fools (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), p. 186.

²Katherine Anne Porter, "Noon Wine" The Sources," in The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Delacorte Press, 1970), p. 471.

³Daniel Curley, "Katherine Anne Porter: The Larger Plan," Kenyon Review, 25 (Autumn 1963), 675.

⁴Porter, "My First Speech," in Collected Essays, p. 433.

⁵Robert Penn Warren, "Irony with a Center", in Lodwick Hartley and George Core, eds., Katherine Anne Porter: A Critical Symposium (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969), p. 66.

⁶Porter, "Noon Wine: The Sources," in Collected Essays, p. 467.

⁷Cf. also John (Ch.11; 12, 1-11). Although the episode recorded by Luke emphasizes the contrast between Martha's role as hostess and Mary's role as disciple, it is noteworthy to read the passage written by John which credits Martha's contribution as being illustrative of the stability of her faith. In effect, both women, therefore, are given equal stature in The New Testament.

⁸Ethelbert Flood, "Christian Language in Modern Literature," Culture, 22 (March 1961), 37-38.

⁹Dorothy S. Redden, "Flowering Judas': Two Voices," Studies in Short Fiction, 6 (Winter 1969), 203.

¹⁰Porter, "Noon Wine: The Sources," in Collected Essays, p. 479.

¹¹Redden, p. 204.

¹²Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan," l. 36.

¹³S. H. Poss, "Variations on a Theme in Four Short Stories of Katherine Anne Porter," Twentieth Century Literature, 4 (April-July 1958), 22.

¹⁴Paul Crume, rev. of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," by Katherine Anne Porter, Southwest Review, 25 (January 1940), 214.

¹⁵Crume, 214.

¹⁶Warren, "Irony with a Center," p. 51.

¹⁷Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," in The Rhetoric of Fiction, ed. Wayne Booth (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965), p. 21.

¹⁸Marjorie Ryan, "'Dubliners' and the Stories of Katherine Anne Porter," American Literature, 31 (January 1960), 464.

¹⁹George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 155.

²⁰Interview, Texas Observer, October 31, 1958, p. 6 (excerpted in Hendrick, p. 160).

²¹Elizabeth Janeway, The New York Times Book Review, April 1, 1962, p. 5.

²²Katherine Anne Porter, "Old Mortality," in The Collected Short Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), p. 219.

²³Porter, "Noon Wine: The Sources," in Collected Essays, p. 470.

²⁴Curley, p. 673.

²⁵Charles Kaplan, "True Witness: Katherine Anne Porter," Colorado Quarterly (Winter 1959), 322.

²⁶Porter, Ship of Fools, p. vii.

²⁷William L. Nance, S. M., Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 3.

²⁸Porter, Collected Short Stories, p. 351.

²⁹Porter, "The Journey," in Collected Short Stories, p. 336.

³⁰Harry John Mooney, Jr., The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), p. 19.

³¹Jean Alexander, "Katherine Anne Porter's Ship in the Jungle," Twentieth Century Literature, 11 (January 1966), 181.

³²Porter, "Noon Wine: The Sources," in Collected Essays, p. 472.

CHAPTER I

THE MARY FIGURES

"Jenny Angel: A Merry Sinner"¹

In reminiscing about the excitement of her early days in Mexico, Katherine Anne Porter recalls in an essay, "St. Augustine and the Bullfight," some of the fascinating sophisticates who were her friends. One immediately thinks of Jenny Brown, the youngest female protagonist in Ship of Fools,² as the author gaily comments, "I don't like gloomy sinners, but the merry ones charm me."³ Jenny is a blithe spirit indeed, an artist who paints "geometrical designs in primary colors like factured rainbows " (SF, 77). At first glance, her beauty, her gaiety, and her sensitivity seem perfectly suited to her lover's fond appellation, "Jenny angel " (SF, 43).

In the beginning of the novel, Jenny and David Scott, whom she in turn calls "David darling" (SF, 40), join two other Americans who, with about fifty first-class passengers of various nationalities, predominantly German, Spanish, Cuban, and Mexican, prepare to embark

from the purgatorial port town of Veracruz aboard the German ship, Vera, bound for Bremerhaven. Two days later in Havana, eight hundred and seventy-six Spanish workers from the Cuban sugar fields are stashed below in steerage, like human cargo. The Fatherland's pervasive atmosphere of unrest at that time has crept aboard the ship to add to the friction between the Germans and the unsympathetic natives of other countries. The passengers, for the most part, are a deplorable lot, indulging themselves by running the gamut of the seven deadly sins. Miss Porter exposes the face of evil that lies behind the masks of civility so politely presented at the captain's table. The story that belongs to Jenny and David is juxtaposed against the lives of about twenty other passengers.

The reader soon learns that the relationship that exists between Jenny and David is fraught with both love and hatred. A similar liaison is described by Miss Porter in a letter to her nephew. She wrote, "There is a . . . school, to which I [have] long adhered . . . this is the Stroke of Lightning (coup de foudre) or 'love at first sight and the hell with theories' school."⁴ In discussing love affairs of this sort, she confesses that there is no rhyme or reason to such an involvement. She deplores the evanescence of this delightful madness, but her subsequent assessment of such pleasure is realistic and philosophical. Of the David Scotts in her

own life, she says,

If you ask me where they are now, whatever became of them, I must simply say that I think that question entirely beyond the point. Lightning makes the most familiar landscape wild, strange, and beautiful, and it passes. It was all my fault, though. If one ever treats a man as if he were an archangel, he can't ever, possibly, consent to being treated like a human being again. He cannot do it, it's nonsense to expect it. It begins to look as if I had never wanted it. 5

And so it was with the two young American painters who exemplify the theory that opposites attract. Jenny, beautiful, vivacious, and gregarious, has fallen in love with David, handsome, dour, and withdrawn. As they board the Vera, the reader hears, if they do not, the ominously imminent death knell of their affair. The "lightning" that illuminated their earlier, euphoric days in Mexico has deserted them, leaving in its wake an almost diabolical desire for mutual destruction.

Their shared interest in Indian and Mexican art no longer sustains them in their new isolated environment of the sea. The memory of the exotic Mexico they left behind is the sole reminder of happier days when they and their expatriate friends dabbled in Mexican art forms and national pastimes. Jenny enjoyed bullfights and revolutions with equal delight. The detached David was appalled by the abandon with which she flung herself into every passing cause célèbre. Jenny's philosophy was quite simple:

If you wanted things changed--always for the better, of course!--you just kicked over the nearest applecart, spilled the first available bag of beans. She believed warmly and excitedly in strikes, she had been in many of them, they worked; there was nothing more exciting and wonderful than to feel yourself a part of something that worked towards straightening out things--getting decent pay for people, good working conditions, shorter hours--it didn't much matter what. She had picketed dozens of times with just any strikers who happened to need pickets, and she had been in jail several times, and really, it was just a lark! (SF, 164)

This irrepressible Mary figure brings to mind Drewey Wayne Gunn's evaluation of the ambiance of a post-Revolutionary Mexico which welcomed an influx of American and British artists. He succinctly notes that in the 1920's, "It was a Bohemian time."⁶

If Bohemian is an apt label for Jenny, its connotation is totally out of the context of her proper Southern background. She is always painfully aware of those relatives of her native country. She is constantly reproached by the mental pictures of disapproving Marthas who, with pursed lips and narrowed eyes, condemn the lost sheep who has strayed from their fold. The family synonym for headstrong Jenny's leavetaking was "desertion" (SF, 186). Her relatives fashioned their own definition of the term "Bohemian;" it had to do with vulgarity and that was irrevocably laced with evil and, inevitably, "there you were, ringed with fire, and no way out."⁷ Although thousands of miles away from the family frowns, Jenny could easily reconstruct the dialogue among the gossips of her clan:

And moreover, they couldn't be fooled for a moment with all that nonsense about wanting to paint, to be an 'artist'. A young woman of good family leaves her home and place for only one reason: She means to lead a shameless abandoned life where her relatives and her society cannot restrain or punish her. Artist indeed! What was to stop her painting at home in the back garden? (SF, 186-87)

Jenny's struggle with her past adds another dimension to her already complicated life with David. The oppressive stuffiness of the pervasive Teutonic customs, faithfully followed aboard the floating Fatherland, the Vera, injects another abrasive note into the couple's rapidly deteriorating relationship. Jenny, always willing to live-and-let-live, succeeds in annoying all of her fellow passengers, particularly the stiffly correct Germans. They equate her openness with brashness. Frau Rittersdorf, a typically stolid German woman, denigrates her lithe good looks in her ever-present diary by noting that "she is a dry thing like too many American women . . . like painted wood . . ." (SF, 154). David, cruel lover and false ally, bemoans her free-wheeling personality:

Who wouldn't she take up with, he wondered. She'd run off with just anybody--if a band passed playing in the street, she'd fall in step and march with them . . . would say just anything she pleased to the merest stranger --did she ever really see a stranger? Listens to just anybody, as interested in the idlest silliest chatter as she is in the most intelligent talk--more so, damn it! (SF, 221)

David is the possessive, dominating male who would mold Jenny into an extension of his own colorless image. His influence has already caused her to discard her brightly-hued clothes for imperceptible beiges, grays, and whites. This plainness is reflected in her work; at David's urging, she has rejected her brilliant palette of oils for charcoal and India ink. His subtle destruction of her Mary-like personality is reinforced by constant verbal attack. Jenny of the quick wit and sensitive nature rises to the bait at every invitation. Thus their conversations are veritable fencing matches, expressing the hostility and frustration of two opponents involved in a bloody conflict. As they parry and thrust their way to the inevitable destruction of their love for each other, the reader winces at the ugliness of the pattern in their interminable quarrels. Charles Walcott likens the rapier-like dialogue to a "dance of mutual exacerbation."⁸

Miss Porter employs the symbolism of the dance more powerfully in a recurring dream sequence in which a frightened Jenny relives her day-to-day combat with David. Their vicious use of words as weapons is portrayed on a much more violent plane. The couple's love-hate relationship is ruthlessly laid bare in the horror of Jenny's frequent nightmare which recalls an incident she had witnessed in a small Indian village in Mexico. There is

sheer terror in the scene and, in the telling, there is sheer poetry. Jenny is mesmerized by the rhythmic writhing of the central figures engaged in a fight to the death. For full appreciation of Porter as stylist, the entire passage is quoted:

They swayed and staggered together in a strange embrace, as if they supported each other; but in the man's raised hand was a long knife, and the woman's breast and stomach were pierced. The blood ran down her body and over her thighs, her skirts were sticking to her legs with her own blood. She was beating him on the head with a jagged stone, and his features were veiled in rivulets of blood. They were silent, and their faces had taken on a saintlike patience in suffering, abstract, purified of rage and hatred in their one holy dedicated purpose to kill each other. Their flesh swayed together and clung, their left arms were wound about each other's bodies as if in love. Their weapons were raised again, but their heads lowered little by little, until the woman's head rested upon his breast and his head was on her shoulder, and holding thus, they both struck again. . . . Then with horror [Jenny] saw that their features were changing, had changed entirely--the faces were David's and her own, and there she was looking up into David's blood-streaming face, a bloody stone in her hand, and David's knife was raised against her pierced bleeding breast. . . . (SF, 144-45)

Finally, Jenny realizes that the daily encounters with David will become worse and worse; she admits to herself that, ultimately, they will "leave dents in each other" (SF, 169). In vowing that her ghastly nightmare will never come true, she says, "We aren't going to kill each other because I mean to get away before that happens" (SF, 169). Thereafter, Jenny and David embark on what Miss Porter refers to as "the

downward path to wisdom."⁹ Both achieve an unspoken awareness that their union has been a destructive one, doomed from the beginning. Neither Jenny nor David is strong enough to fend off the hatred that lurks threateningly beneath love's surface.

In an essay, Miss Porter considers hatred "The Necessary Enemy" which confronts all those who seek absolute bliss in a lifetime union. Whether she is speaking as a devotee of the coup de foudre school of love or whether she is playing the role of the devil's advocate for the state of matrimony, Miss Porter presents a strong thesis which suggests the heretical idea that, unfortunately, it is easier to hate than to love. She gently warns young couples that "Love must be learned, and learned again and again; there is no end to it. Hate needs no instruction, but waits only to be provoked" ¹⁰ Although incurably romantic, like the Mary figure, Jenny recognizes just in time "that faint smell of brimstone among the roses," ¹¹ and, as she had been taught in her childhood, calls it by its right name--hate.

When the young American lovers disembark from the Vera, the reader is confident that Jenny will go on to her beloved Paris--alone. It is doubtful that Jenny will ever resolve her inner turmoil. In an attempt to explain her background to a fellow passenger, she complains, "Oh, what a museum piece of an upbringing it

was! Yet I loved it, I believed every word of it, I still do . . . so I've never caught up with my generation. I'm bogged down in a whole set of ideal precepts and nowhere to practice them! My radical friends look upon me as a youthful fossil" (SF, 90).

One can only speculate how this modern Mary will cope with the Martha mentor always peering over her shoulder. Peaceful co-existence on the Left Bank of the City of Light seems an impossible goal. The reader knows with certainty that, for Jenny, there will be other giddy, reckless moments of abandon--brief periods when the Marthas will not be "exactly in her mind" (SF, 187). However, the reader is also positive that Jenny is resigned to the fact that the Marthas will always govern her life by remaining "in her bloodstream" (SF, 187).

"Laura: An Uninvited Revolutionist"

In the 1920's, a decade in which Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, and other American writers went to Europe, Katherine Anne Porter went to Mexico. All these writers were nourished by the aura of excitement on each continent. Rebels themselves, they could sympathize with the oppressed peoples whose desire for freedom led to massive political upheaval. The spirit of Mexico's revolution penetrated the fiction of Miss Porter who, as a woman and an author, had begun her own quest for independence. With the spirited Mary's zest for adventure, she rode on trains with soldiers armed with rifles and witnessed street battles between opposing troops. In an essay about Mexico, she categorizes herself as "a fairly serious young woman who was in the country for the express purpose of attending a Revolution and studying Mayan people art."¹²

Of her involvement in the violent turmoil of Mexico in those days, she confessed to an interviewer for McCall's, "I didn't do it on purpose, I just got drawn in because I was interested. I always used to say that if I were English I would be the Loyal Opposition. I am always the Loyal Opposition."¹³ Once again, she seems to restate a Mary-like position when she concludes by affirming, "I'm the dissenting party, by nature."¹⁴

The first glow of Miss Porter's love affair with

Mexico later faded into a phase of disenchantment in which the writer produced material illustrating her realization that romantic fervor cannot obliterate the realistic presence of evil inherent in civil turbulence. William Nance presents the irrefutable truth that undoubtedly contributed to the awakening of the radical North-of-the-border American who came, uninvited, to a Revolution:

The temper of rebellion is one of a number of related characteristics of the Mexican mentality which seems to have had a strong appeal for Katherine Anne Porter. This sympathy with the country, coupled with its remoteness from her home both geographically and socially, made it a likely place for her to carry on her romantic search for freedom. Such romantic searches rarely, of course, find their goals. Revolutions, successful or not, soon lose their initial exhilaration and seldom keep for long their purity of vision. 15

Both Colin Partridge and Drewey Wayne Gunn are of the opinion that Miss Porter's later days in Mexico evoked in her a feeling of disillusionment. They cite "Flowering Judas" as an excellent example of the reiterated theme of betrayal which is characteristic of the stories written during the latter part of the author's stay in Mexico. Colin Partridge sees the betrayal theme as the basis of Mexico's problems:

There is an interpretation of Mexican history that sees the misfortunes of the country as the product of continual betrayals by Spanish invaders, Mexican presidents, local generals, and imperial interests. . . . The principal leaders of change--Madero, Zapata, Pancho Villa, Carranza, Obregón--were all to die by assassination. 16

Betrayal is the very essence of the complex story "Flowering Judas" in which Laura, a convent-bred school-teacher from the United States, associates with a group of revolutionaries, serving them as messenger and friend. Dissatisfied with the void in her own life, she hopes to fulfill herself in cultivated dedication to another peoples' cause. Mentally, Laura makes the following admission: "Uninvited she has promised herself to this place; she can no longer imagine herself as living in another country, and there is no pleasure in remembering her life before she came here."¹⁷ However, Laura does not experience the expected, joyous thrill of heroism; rather, the atmosphere is one of gloom, melancholy, and despair. In attesting to the authenticity of the story's Mexican background at that particular time, Gunn reveals his own ambivalent attitude by saying, "It captures a sense of time and place, but the optimism of Obregón's regime is missing."¹⁸

Political intrigue surrounds the lovely Laura, who is coolly courageous as she goes about her duties visiting prisoners in dark cells, delivering messages to men in "mildewed houses" (FJ, 94) and borrowing money from "the Roumanian agitator to give to his bitter enemy the Polish agitator" (FJ, 94). In her essay, "Where Presidents Have No Friends," Miss Porter comments on the cynicism that must inevitably rise to the surface during a revolution:

Every foreign opportunist with a point to make can find the support of other opportunists in Mexico. The result is a hotbed of petty plotting, cross purposes between natives and foreigners, from the diplomats down to the unwashed grumbler who sits in the Alameda and complains about the sorrows of the proletariat. 19

However, all that is evil in the violent and clandestine search for "Land and liberty for all, forever!"²⁰ is embodied in the characterization of Laura's would-be seducer, Braggioni, the loathesome "leader of men" (FJ, 91). For Laura, "the gluttonous bulk of Braggioni has become a symbol of her many disillusion, for a revolutionist should be lean, animated by heroic faith, a vessel of abstract virtues" (FJ, 91). The crude Braggioni "bulges marvelously in his expensive garments" (FJ, 92). Joan Givner observes that, in drawing Braggioni, Miss Porter employs the art of caricature in order to render absolute malevolence:

He looms in the story, visually somewhat improbable but symbolically appropriate, like a giant egg in shades of mauve and purple. He is a living embodiment of the seven deadly sins and he is a complete caricature. . . . It is a carefully calculated effect and Katherine Anne Porter deliberately avoids humanizing such a monster. 21

Every fibre of Laura's being is repelled by the sensualist Braggioni for, in her nun-like garb, "she has encased herself in a set of principles derived from her early training" (FJ, 92). Although moral guidelines have been inculcated in her, she is guilty of the slothful sin of passivity. As the typical Mary figure, Laura will not deliberately act against evil, either one way or another.

She is also incapable of total commitment to love--spiritual or physical--with respect to the religion of her childhood, the students in her classroom, the three suitors who have admired her, or the cause of the revolution. Finally, although unable to accept even life itself, she is paradoxically fearful of death. Braggioni's nightly serenades have assumed an air of threat, and often, "Laura feels a slow chill, a purely physical sense of danger, a warning in her blood that violence, mutilation, a shocking death, wait for her with lessening patience" (FJ, 93). After the revolutionary leader leaves, she thinks, "I must run while there is time. But she does not go" (FJ, 101).

Laura, although aware of the necessity of a resolute choice between good and evil, is unable to decide because she is a protagonist imprisoned in stasis. This moral paralysis is decried in the Apocalypse:

I know thy works; thou art neither cold nor hot.
I would that thou wert cold or hot.
But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold
nor hot, I am about to vomit thee out of my mouth.
(Rev. iii.15-16)

The idealistic schoolteacher, therefore, is like a lost soul residing in a Limbo from which she will never be freed. By not wishing to become completely involved, she is the victim of acedia,²² a spiritual ennui, which makes her, in the mode of T. S. Eliot, a true "wasteland" figure. Critical consensus has noted the affinity of "Flowering Judas" to such poetry of Eliot's as "Gerontion"

which, of course, may have suggested the title:

In the juvenescence of the year
Came Christ the tiger

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering
judas,
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
Among whispers. 23

Ray B. West, Jr., notes that "Laura's world, then, is as barren and sterile as the world of Eliot's 'Gerontian'; it is a living death."²⁴ This horrible world is most graphically depicted in an impressionistic dream sequence. Manipulated by Miss Porter with her usual éclat and élan, the powerful dénouement offers the reader a Dali-like glimpse of hell. David Madden recalls the frame of reference of "The Waste Land" by observing that the author gives one "a sense of the fluid, surrealistic changes of the nightmare landscape as Laura clings to the 'stair rail, and then to the topmost branch of the Judas tree that bent down slowly and set her upon the earth, and then to the rocky ledge of a cliff, and then to the jagged wave of a sea that was not water but a desert of crumbling stone.'"²⁵

It is here that the ghost of Eugenio, the former admirer to whom Laura had brought dangerous narcotics, forces her to commit the sacrilege against Christian communion by urging her with the blasphemous words, "Take and eat. . . . This is my body and my blood" (FJ, 102).

The food, naturally, consists of the "warm, bleeding flowers" (FJ, 102) of the infamous Judas or red-bud tree from which Judas is supposed to have hanged himself. For Laura, who has no "viable faith,"²⁶ there will always be, in life as well as in death, "a hell without a heaven."²⁷

Laura is a heroine who exemplifies, to a great degree, many of the Mary figure's negative qualities. There is almost a petulant naiveté in her idealism for "she cannot help feeling that she has been betrayed irreparably by the disunion between her way of living and her feeling of what life should be, and at times she is almost contented to rest in this sense of grievance as a private store of consolation" (FJ, 91-92). Laura awakens from her dream, but she will always be "afraid to sleep again" (FJ, 102).

"Miranda: A Fiercely Burning Particle"

It is the custom of all Southern writers to consider their heritage cautiously, lest they be accused of perpetuating legend. Katherine Anne Porter, therefore, firmly distinguishes fact from fable as she gently draws family history out from beneath the protective shadows cast by moonlight on the magnolias. The evolution from illusion to reality may best be discussed in the light of the Miranda stories. Of this most appealing heroine, the most perfect proponent of the Mary credo, one critic says, "Miranda is the never-failing talisman in Miss Porter's work."²⁸ We are reminded that the author's insight comes naturally by her assertion, "I am the grandchild of a lost War, and I have blood-knowledge of what life can be in a defeated country on the bare bones of privation."²⁹ Of the Martha prototypes in her past, she adds, perhaps in pride, perhaps in protest, "my elders all remained nobly unreconstructed to their last moments."³⁰

In order to evaluate fully the influence of those relatives who molded the character of this romantic Mary prototype, Miss Porter gives her heroine the Spanish name Miranda meaning "the seeing one."³¹ Thus this family appraiser is appropriately endowed with extraordinary powers of perception, enabling her to see through all that is false in her historic memory. Miranda's goal, therefore, is also that of Miss Porter who, like Henry James, sought "knowledge--knowledge at the price of finally, utterly 'seeing through' everything."³²

In order to learn "everything" about Miranda, the reader will profit from an examination of two of Miss Porter's major short novels, "Old Mortality" and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," which deal respectively with Miranda as a child and as an adult. The "past is truly prologue" (The Tempest, II, i) as Miranda progresses from innocence to experience, from the sheltered world of a Texas farm and a New Orleans convent school to the harsh atmosphere of a Denver newsroom where an influenza epidemic and World War I are headline news. The spirited child Miranda, forthright and rebellious, becomes a cynical reporter who is simultaneously confronted with love and death.

The title "Old Mortality," of course, is borrowed from the South's most respected cultural influence, the literature of Sir Walter Scott. The choice is particularly apt because in Scott's novel of the same title, 'Old Mortality' was a sobriquet for one Robert Paterson, an itinerant stonemason who religiously sought out the graves of Covenanters killed by the last two monarchs of the Stuart line--his sole purpose being to revivify the history made by heroes. His zealous cleansing of moss from the stones and re-chiseling of the inscriptions can be interpreted in two ways. George Hendrick suggests that "Miranda cleansed the past just as Mortality renewed the stones. . . ." ³³ Thus did she expose to light the truth about the past.

On the other hand, in keeping with the whole concept of the Mary-Martha motif, one might reflect on the message in the following passage from Scott's novel which describes 'Old Mortality's enthusiasm for his work:

He considered himself as fulfilling a sacred duty, while renewing to the eyes of posterity and decaying emblems of the zeal and sufferings of their forefathers, and thereby trimming, as it were, the beacon-light which was to warn future generations to defend their religion even unto blood. 34

It would appear then that the Martha figures might number themselves among those who believed that the old values could be preserved forever. One would expect the Marthas to feel that "as the guardian of the graves he ['Old Mortality'] is the guardian of the tradition."³⁵

And so Miranda embarks on her quest for truth. Who is right? The Marthas as vestal virgins of legend or the precocious, youthful inquisitor. Mark Schorer distills the dilemma in a skeletal outline of the story:

'Old Mortality' demonstrates the degree to which Miss Porter's is indeed a 'usable past,' for it is a story drawn not only from her own past, but, more importantly, depicts that past as immersed in another, the ancestral past, the romantic myth of a family tradition. The dead past, continuing to live in the present memory, changes its character, becomes in effect a lie, and yet many members of the family are content to live in the lie, to define their present selves in terms of that altered past. One character, Miranda, is not, and the story is the account of her long effort to detach herself from the beguilements of the legend, to define her destiny as a separate thing from her heritage, to move out of the past into a clear present. 36

The colorful fiction of the story centers around the

Scarlett O'Hara image of the incomparably beautiful Aunt Amy who inspired duels, married a man she didn't love, and promptly died of unknown, but suspicious causes. The family legend endeavors to support the fabulous Amy in every detail, faithfully refurbishing her tombstone epitaph, so lovingly penned by her bereaved husband:

She lives again who suffered life,
Then suffered death, and now set free
A singing angel, she forgets
The griefs of old mortality. 37

Miranda, in the first of the three-part story which opens in 1885, is a wide-eyed eight-year-old, entranced by the family's veneration of this paragon of Southern womanhood. Beauty was severely judged in those days; not only must one be fair of face and figure, but one had to comport oneself superbly on the dance floor or on horseback, always "with a serene manner, an amiable gaiety tempered with dignity at all hours" (OM, 176). Miranda, aspiring to such heights, found it "all very exciting" (OM, 176). Such dreams were immediately dispelled by her sister Maria who had been "born sensible [and] had no such illusions. 'We are going to take after Mamma's family,' she said, 'It's no use, we are. We'll never be beautiful, we'll always have freckles. And you,' she told Miranda, 'haven't even a good disposition" (OM, 177).

Cracks, however, appear early in the Amy legend because it soon becomes apparent to the little girls that

even under Aunt Amy's gentle disposition, there might have lurked a mean streak. The admiring family circle indulgently referred to this flaw as her capriciousness. Condemning her ardent suitor Gabriel as "dull" (OM, 181), she coquettishly flirts with an old beau at a Mardi Gras ball, thereby precipitating the necessity of adherence to the code duello. In defending the honor of his sister, the children's father ignores the proper etiquette demanded in such affairs, and takes a shot at the offending admirer. Deemed "the lowest sort of manners" (OM, 184), this recklessness forces him to flee to Mexico as refuge from the hue and cry of scandal.

The Marthas of Miranda's youth proved themselves strong in fair weather or foul. "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. This center had received a blow, and family nerves shuddered, even to the farthest reaches of Kentucky" (OM, 189). From that far away state, the clan's very own religious fanatic, great-great-aunt Sally Rhea, implored Amy to throw herself on the mercy of the Lord. A lapsed Catholic, married to a Presbyterian, and converted to the "Hard-Shell Baptists," Aunt Sally was ruefully accepted by the family as only one of the many eccentrics among them. It was often noted that "religion put claws on Aunt Sally and gave her a post to

whet them on" (OM, 190). Not at all daunted by this long-distance admonition, Amy roguishly conceded, "For my sins, I must go to heaven with Aunt Sally" (OM, 190).

Amy's heavenly début is set aside momentarily when she finally consents to marriage with the faithful Gabriel. Years later, the already independent Miranda appears to admire Amy's unorthodox choice of wedding garments. Much to her mother's chagrin, Amy had spurned traditional white for a neuter gray. In the lumber room, many years after the event, Miranda sits quietly at her grandmother's side inspecting "an immense cloak of dove-colored cut velvet . . . a silvery-gray watered-silk frock, and a small gray velvet toque with a dark red breast of feathers" (OM, 182). Amy's wicked delight in indulging in the unexpected takes a tragic turn a few months later when she suddenly and mysteriously dies, leaving behind a romantic myth which Miranda has already begun to view with more than a dash of skepticism.

Miranda, torn between loyalty to the mores that surround her and the insistence of her critical intelligence that all does not jibe with reality, slowly becomes unwilling to suspend her disbelief. More truth is revealed in Part II. In reproach to her loving relatives, Miss Porter now permits the cracks to widen in the legend of Aunt Amy. In "Notes on Writing," she confesses that "one of the most disturbing habits of the human mind is its willful and destructive forgetting of whatever in its past does

not flatter or confirm its present point of view."³⁸

Her fearless young heroine, who would boldly attack the devil himself head-on, must, alas, wrestle with him within her own soul. There is a wide streak of rebellion and romanticism in the ten-year-old Miranda; therefore, the objectivity of her mission is hindered. Like Amy, she hates dullness and now considers herself and her sister "immured" in a convent school in New Orleans. This lovely word entered her vocabulary after having read some gothic horror stories "about beautiful but unlucky maidens . . . 'immured' in convents where they were forced to take the veil . . . and condemned forever after . . . to divide their time between lying chained in dark cells and assisting other nuns to bury throttled infants" (OM, 193). Miranda's many "spiritual deficiencies" (OM, 194) hardly foreshadow life as a nun. Her histrionic displays of temper often deprive the two sisters of their Saturday trips to the horse races. Once, "she had . . . given way to despair over her arithmetic and had fallen flat on her face on the classroom floor, refusing to rise until she was carried out" (OM, 195).

The dreadfully even tenor of their days was happily broken by their father or various cousins who treated them to "blessed Saturday afternoons during the racing season" (OM, 194). The gloire of the horse, a major aspect of the chivalric code, is the pivotal point around

which the awakening of truth takes place. At last, the girls meet Uncle Gabriel, not the dashing beau of the legend, but rather "a shabby fat man with bloodshot blue eyes, sad beaten eyes, and a big melancholy laugh, like a groan" (OM, 197). The stricken girls have only a moment to exchange horrified glances before the running of the race in which Uncle Gabriel's horse is a hundred to one shot. To their delight, "Miss Lucy" gives her all, making the girls each a hundred dollars richer.

However, the race itself is only prelude to discovery --about victory, about legend, about life. In the winner's circle, the sensitive Miranda's joy fades as she observes "Miss Lucy's" bleeding nose, wild eyes, and trembling knees:

That was winning, too. Her heart clinched tight; that was winning, for Miss Lucy. So instantly and completely did her heart reject that victory, she did not know when it happened, but she hated it, and 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's stand a neck ahead. She felt empty and sick, . . . (OM, 199).

Uncle Gabriel's reaction to victory is drunken celebration. In a sodden salute to the past, he insists that Miranda, Maria, and their father visit "Miss Honey," his second wife, in a drab hotel in New Orleans' run-down Elysian Fields. Amy's successor does not respond to Gabriel's good news; it is obvious she has been through too many losing days at the track. Haunted by the "death-charm"³⁹ of Amy's legend, she is a pathetic figure as she

contemplates the hated Amy's kin. With her usual keenness, Miranda sizes up the situation. "She loathes and despises everybody in this room," thought Miranda coolly, "and she's afraid we won't know. She needn't worry, we knew it when we came in" (OM, 203).

And so the gossamer fabric of Aunt Amy's myth is rent in two. It is up to Miranda, at age eighteen, in Part III, to decide how she will evaluate these fragments. Having eloped from the convent school a year ago, much to her family's disapproval, Miranda finds this declaration of independence rather hollow because "the only feeling she could rouse in herself about it was an immense weariness as if it were an illness that she might one day hope to recover from" (OM, 213). In this final sequence, Miranda returns home to attend Uncle Gabriel's funeral. It is ironic, but appropriate to the legend, that Gabriel forsakes the grave of "Miss Honey" in Lexington, Kentucky, to be buried at the side of his beloved first wife. On the train, Miranda encounters unattractive Cousin Eva Parrington, a spinster feminist, who sets about dealing the death blow to the aura of mystery surrounding the Rhea family's femme fatale. She denounces Amy as a "devil and mischief maker . . . who went through life like a spoiled darling doing as she pleased and letting other people suffer for it" (OM, 211). Her fierce whisper is ominous as she asks, "what connection did this man Raymond

from Calcasieu have with Amy's sudden marriage to Gabriel, and what did Amy do to make away with herself so soon afterward?" (OM, 214).

Cousin Eva's litany of ugly innuendoes appears to be based on a personal vendetta. We are told that the coyly charming Molly Parrington "was an unnatural mother to her ugly daughter Eva, an old maid past forty while her mother was still the belle of the ball" (OM, 178). Eva concludes her revelation to Miranda by laying bare the cruel streak that ran rampant among well-meaning relatives who bedevilled the haples Eva about her "weak point" (OM, 211), her receding chin. "Hold your chin up, Eva," Amy used to tell me. . . ." "Can you imagine," she asked with a ferocity that seemed much too deep for this one cause, "people who call themselves civilized spoiling life for a young girl because she had one unlucky feature?" (OM, 217). She concludes her tortured outcry against the Marthas who would be do-gooders by saying, "Ah, the family . . . the whole hideous institution should be wiped from the face of the earth. It is the root of all human wrongs. . . ." (OM, 217).

Although the embittered Eva is ruthlessly accusatory in her condemnation, Miranda acknowledges the partial truths that exist in this final account. However, as the "seeing one," she rejects Eva's perspective as also being part of myth. Miranda's aversion to this last

scenario is coldly emphatic, "Of course it was not like that. This is no more true than what I was told before, it's every bit as romantic" (OM, 216). As a Southerner, she is aware of the necessity of exercising discrimination in determining what is true and what is false. The legends so lovingly nurtured must be carefully dissected in order to reveal truth. Katherine Anne Porter is adamant in her belief that the artist must always give "true testimony."⁴⁰ Robert Penn Warren defends her willing assumption of the role of skeptic:

The skeptical and ironical bias is, I think, important in Miss Porter's work, and it is true that her work wears an air of detachment and contemplation. But, I should say, her irony is an irony with a center, never an irony for irony's sake. It simply implies, I think, a refusal to accept the formula, the ready-made solution, the hand-me-down morality, the word for the spirit. It affirms rather . . . the arduous obligation of the intellect in the face of conflicting dogmas, the need for a dialectical approach to matters of definition, the need for exercising as much of the human faculty as possible. 41

And so having examined this legend of the past, or rather "other people's memory of the past" (OM, 221), Miranda comes to the conclusion that she has been duped. In accordance with the code of the Marys, she reacts in the usual manner—she rebels. "She would have no more bonds that smothered her in love and hatred" (OM, 220). Escape has always been the Mary figure's response to unpleasantness. "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" (OM, 220). She is typically confident that her quest is a noble one which will reap the final reward of self-knowledge.

The omniscient author reveals Miranda's heart-breaking naiveté in the final word of the powerful concluding paragraph which Harry Mooney, Jr., considers "one of the most eloquent, direct and meaningful passages in our contemporary prose."⁴² The idealistic Miranda is pathetic in her certainty that her own future will be vastly different. Her final vow is vehement:

I don't want any promises, I won't have false hopes, 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 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. (OM, 221).

In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," as in Shakespeare's The Tempest, Miranda eagerly contemplates the idea of a "brave new world" (V, i)⁴³ peopled by creatures who will aid her in distinguishing illusion from reality. As Edward G. Schwartz points out, however, the South's agrarian society, comparable to Prospero's enchanted island, has ill-prepared this modern Miranda for a "world of shifting values, of uncertainty, contradiction, and

anxiety."⁴⁴ Miss Porter's mature Miranda, thrust into "tawdry city-life,"⁴⁵ quickly acquires, however, the cynicism of a Prospero who knew enough of civilization to warn his daughter, "'Tis new to thee" (V, i).⁴⁶

A significant extension of the Mary-Martha motif appears in Shakespeare's lines regarding Prospero's interest in Miranda's recollection of her early childhood in far-off Milan:

Prospero: Canst thou remember
A time before we came unto this cell?
I do not think thou canst, for then
thou wast not
Out three years old.

Miranda: Certainly, sir, I can.

Prospero: By what? By any other house or person?
Of any thing the image tell me, that
Hath kept with thy remembrance.

Miranda: 'Tis far off,
And rather like a dream than an assurance
That my remembrance warrants. Had I not
Four or five women once that tended me?

Prospero: Thou hadst, and more, Miranda. But how
is it
That this lives in thy mind: What seest
thou else
In the dark backward and abysm of time?
If thou remembrest aught ere thou
cam'st here,
How thou cam'st here thou mayst.

Miranda: But that I do not. (I, ii)

It is interesting, then, to note that the peeresses or ladies-in-waiting who had attended Miranda in her infancy are the sole inhabitants of her memory. To Prospero's amazement, her backward look reveals nothing else that is knowledgeable about her early life in a great kingdom.

It would appear, therefore, that there is indication that the Martha figure is omnipresent in all periods of literature. The power of these pragmatic women is an integral part of the Mary consciousness and can never be erased from memory.⁴⁷

The past that was so pervasive in "Old Mortality" appears as a haunting transitional device in the opening dream sequence of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider." In what is often considered Miss Porter's technical tour de force, this short novel merges past, present, and future with a subtlety that is breathtaking. These three components, Mark Schorer says, ". . . cannot be separated . . . it is all therefore confused, dream-like, feverish, trancelike, hallucinatory, all a mixture of the actual and the imagined, the real and the dreamed, the past and the future both flowing through a misconceived present."⁴⁸

As Miranda lies asleep in her Denver rooming house, she returns in spirit to her childhood; she is plotting as always, her escape from the images of the Marthas whose "faces will beam asking, Where are you going, What are you doing, What are you thinking, How do you feel, Why do you say such things, What do you mean?"⁴⁹ We remember "Old Mortality" and a Texas farmhouse; here the rebellious Mary figure pays reluctant but tender homage to the past:

How I have loved this house in the morning before we are all awake and tangled together like badly cast fishing lines. Too many people have been born here, and have wept too much here, and have laughed too much, and have been too angry and outrageous with each other here. Too many have died in this bed already, there are far too many ancestral bones propped up on the mantelpieces, there have been too damned many antimacassars in this house, she said loudly, and oh, what accumulation of storied dust never allowed to settle in peace for one moment. (PH, 269)

Miranda's reference to death foreshadows theme as alluded to in the title of the story. Miss Porter will now provide her heroine with the ultimate truth, that revelation gained only in confrontation with the final destiny--death. It is only natural that, in establishing a frame of reference, the writer should turn to the Book of Revelation which offers hope, but also issues warnings in the form of dire visions. Using as metaphor the most dreaded of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Miss Porter creates an aura of horror from the title to the last paragraph. We are repelled by "that lank greenish stranger" (PH, 269) who visits Miranda in her dream and we are, of course, reminded of that frightful being from the Book of Revelation:

And I saw, and behold a pale-green horse, and he who was sitting on it--his name is Death, and hell was following him. And there was given him power over four parts of the earth, to kill with sword, with famine, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth (Rev. 6:8)

Other Biblical allusions support the story of Miranda, a victim of the influenza epidemic at the end of the First

World War. Plague and war, the natural appurtenances of the "pale rider," are powerful allies that simplify his mission. Variations of the terrifying symbols used by John the Evangelist in the Apocalypse evoke frightening verisimilitude in the delirious mind of Miranda who seems destined for death.

The frustration of this destiny is also foreshadowed in the opening dream which depicts a race between Miranda astride Graylie, who could "outrun Death and the Devil" (PH, 270), and the pale stranger who 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. . . ." (PH, 270). It is a weird race indeed as Miranda calmly guides Graylie over hedge and ditch, while intrigued by the persistent feeling of recognition of this odd caller who was "welcomed by my grandfather, my great-aunt, my five times removed cousin, my decrepit hound and my silver kitten? Why did they take to him, I wonder? And where are they now?" (PH, 270). As she contemplated her companion, "his pale face smiled in an evil trance" (PH, 270); suddenly Miranda has had enough of this fellow who has seemed so vaguely familiar. "She pulled Graylie up, rose in her stirrups and shouted, I'm not going with you this time--ride on! Without pausing or turning his head the stranger rode on" (PH, 270). Consequently, Miranda's resurrection is predicted even before the illness strikes that will place her on the downward path toward death.

As the awakening Miranda struggles back to reality, she remembers one word which accounts for the equally nightmarish qualities of the real world of her daily existence. The word "struck in her mind, a gong of warning . . . the war, said the gong and she shook her head" (PH, 271). Reality has been distorted in this time of hysteria by fear, suspicion, and hypocrisy. Miss Porter, the clever caricaturist, gives a Mary's eye-view of a world gone crazy as it swirls dizzily around her heroine. Miranda is always the true non-conformist who, like her quixotic sisters, has always marched to the tune of a different drummer. She refuses the Liberty Bond salesmen because she sees their patriotism as a sham, a shabby grasping for once-in-a-lifetime glory. She thinks but does not voice her condemnation of one self-styled patriot about to make his sales pitch:

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. But for once in his life he was an important fellow in an impressive situation, and he reveled, rolling his words in an actorish tone. (PH, 293)

Miranda's contempt for such false patriots is not limited only to these men. She loathes herself for being afraid to give vent to her feelings; she recognizes as hypocritical her own attempts at "doing good." Often she has donated her services to "a group of young women

fresh from the country club dances, the morning bridge, the charity bazaar, the Red Cross workrooms, who were wallowing in good works . . ." (PH, 275). Uncertain of the propriety of their good deeds, Miranda found that their "girlish laughter meant to be refreshingly gay . . . [had] . . . a grim determined clang in it calculated to freeze the blood" (PH, 276). For her, it had become cacophony, and the callousness of it all is embodied in the bitter eyes of one unappreciative soldier in a camp hospital, who silently damns the sweet, uncomprehending young ladies straight to perdition. Miranda's encounter with the young patient enables her to face up to reality. This chilling incident, she admits, is the summation of "my own feelings about this whole thing made flesh. Never again will I come here, this is no sort of thing to be doing. This is disgusting" (PH, 277).

Thus the horror of war launches an attack on Miranda's integrity. This psychological assault, she feels, is war's most deleterious side effect. She is emphatic in her declaration that "the worst of war is the fear and suspicion. . . . It's the skulking about and the lying. It's what war does to the mind and the heart . . ." (PH, 294).

If there is any benefit at all to be derived from the war, it is Miranda's meeting of Adam Barclay, a handsome young Army lieutenant, who "was tall and heavily

muscled in the shoulders, narrow in the waist and flanks . . . his eyes were pale tan with orange flecks in them, and his hair was the color of a haystack when you turn the weathered top back to the clear straw beneath . . . he looked so clear and fresh, and he had never had a pain in his life" (PH, 279, 283). He is indeed the Edenic Adam and her view of him is totally idealistic. She thinks of him as "pure . . . all the way through, flawless, complete, as the sacrificial lamb must be" (PH, 295).

With the uncanny insight that is her lifelong hairshirt, Miranda knows he is followed by the shadow of death. His bright image is dimmed when she comes upon him unexpectedly as he waits for her in the local restaurant, The Greasy Spoon. ". . . she saw Adam first, sitting near the dingy big window, face turned to the street, but looking down. It was an extraordinary face, smooth and fine and golden in the shabby light, but now set in a blind melancholy, a look of pained suspense and disillusion. For just one split second she got a glimpse of Adam when he would have been older, the face of the man he would not live to be" (PH, 295). Earlier, she had admitted to herself, "She liked him, she liked him, and there was more than this but it was no good even imagining because he was not for her nor for any woman, being beyond experience already, committed without any knowledge or act of his own to death" (PH, 283-84).

The art of rejection is, as William Nance has illustrated,⁵⁰ the only belief to which the Mary figure can ever be wedded. Adam's portrayal as the perfect male adds to the nebulousness of his existence. Their relationship, overshadowed as it is by death, must be platonic because he is unreal. She finds aesthetic pleasure in his company, but "Adam, far from being a human lover who might successfully cross Miranda's barrier of isolation, is just another of her illusions of happiness."⁵¹ It is Nance's theory that "Adam cannot come out of his dream for he is a dream; there can be no real contact between him and the realities of life."⁵² The Mary figure has always been isolated, unable to enjoy genuine love because she cannot give up her selfhood in total commitment to another human being. And so Miranda must keep Adam at a distance.

We think of Miss Porter's published theories on marriage and can only speculate on their relevance to the permanence of Miranda's relationship with Adam:

My theme is marriage as the art of belonging-- which should not be confused with possessing-- all too often the art, or perhaps only the strategy, and a risky one, of surrendering gracefully with an air of pure disinterestedness as much of your living self as you can spare without incurring total extinction; in return for which you will, at least in theory, receive a more than compensatory share of another life, the life in fact presumably dearest to you, equally whittled down in your favor to the barest margin of survival. 53

It is probably the following passage, however, which has the most direct bearing on the intellectual Miranda who rejects the physical level for the spiritual plane:

All this is to be accomplished in a physical situation of the direst intimacy, in which all claims to the most ordinary privacy may be disregarded by either, or both. I shall not attempt to catalogue the daily accounting for acts, words, states of feeling and even thoughts, the perpetual balance and check between individual wills and points of view, the unbelievable amount of tact, intelligence, flexibility, generosity, and God knows what, it requires for two people to go on growing together and in the same directions instead of cracking up and falling apart. 54

Thus far Miranda has shown herself incapable of maintaining close ties with members of her own family, an unnamed husband with whom she eloped, and even with her present co-workers who flit casually in and out of her daily life. Miranda has always been among the ranks of the alienated Marys, isolated from the warmth of human relationships. The closest approximation of love in Miranda's life is expressed only in the twilight world of her trance-like declaration. "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" (PH, 304).

Ironically, the illness which brings them closer will ultimately separate them. Adam reassures Miranda that her love is reciprocated and proves his devotion by literally sacrificing himself in ministering to her needs

while remaining by her side as she drifts in and out of consciousness. Only in her dreams, it seems, can Miranda find the truth she has sought so diligently. The settings alternately frighten, soothe, and mystify the delirious voyager in these strange countries. As Miranda drifts away from reality, the tenets of her "raising" cause her to reflect, "I suppose I should ask to be sent home . . . it's a respectable old custom to inflict your death on the family if you can manage it" (PH, 298). However, with the stubborn independence so characteristic of the Mary figure, she resolves, "No, I'll stay here, this is my business . . ." (PH, 298). But her dream belies her dismissal of home because suddenly she craves warmth. ". . . --and her memory turned and roved after another place she had known first and loved best . . . there was the long slow wavering of gray moss in the drowsy oak shade, the spacious hovering of buzzards overhead, the smell of crushed water herbs along a bank . . ." (PH, 298).

The delicate warmth of "the summer country of [her] childhood"⁵⁵ quickly becomes oppressive heat and Miranda imagines herself in what Nance aptly describes as "a Rousseauistic archetypal jungle."⁵⁶ One recalls the famous painting, appropriately entitled "Le Rêve" (The Dream), in which the Fauvist, Henri Rousseau, depicts

an exotic jungle where strange creatures stare unblinkingly at the figure of a woman reclining on a red couch.⁵⁷

Miranda is mesmerized by the horror of the scene at the foot of her bed:

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. (PH, 299)

Miranda arouses herself in order to escape the obvious presence of evil in this nightmarish Hell. She and Adam attempt small talk in a futile effort to discover all there is to know about each other. The topics range from electrical engineering to swimming to religion. The religious allusions reveal that Miranda is Catholic and Adam is Presbyterian, that she knows a pagan prayer to Apollo, and that they both know the same Negro spiritual. Adam joins Miranda as she sings, "Pale horse, pale rider, done taken my lover away . . ." (PH, 303). Adam points out that there are forty verses enumerating the deaths of many members of a family, including the lover. Miranda reminds him of the song's poignant entreaty. "'Death,' she sang, "'oh, leave one singer to mourn--'" (PH, 304).

When Miranda again slips into unconsciousness, the reader is prepared for the fact that her subsequent dream will foreshadow the death of Adam, the lover. Reminiscent of her mention of Apollo, the god of archery and instrument of pestilence, the second vision takes place in an "angry dangerous wood" (PH, 304) where Adam is finally felled by a "flight of arrows" (PH, 305) despite Miranda's attempt to save him by flinging herself in front of him. Thus does the reader realize that it is Miranda whom the "pale rider" will leave to mourn the loss of her lover.

Miranda's hospital experience is a kaleidoscope of feverish hallucinations in which she experiences a death-like oblivion, a Beatific Vision, and a painful resurrection. As her "mind tottered and slithered . . . broke from its foundation and spun like a cast wheel in a ditch" (PH, 309), Miranda has her confrontation with death. She makes an effort at resignation and acceptance of this total barrenness:

There it is, there it is at last, it is very simple; and soft carefully shaped words like oblivion and eternity are curtains hung before nothing at all. I shall not know when it happens, I shall not feel or remember, why can't I consent now, I am lost, there is no hope for me. Look, she told herself, there it is, that is death and there is nothing to fear. But she could not consent, still shrinking stiffly against the granite wall that was her childhood dream of safety, breathing slowly

for fear of squandering breath, saying desperately, Look, don't be afraid, it is nothing, it is only eternity. (PH, 310)

And so Miranda, in what she presumes are her last moments of lucidity, prepares to abandon herself to the unknown. However, as "she lay like a stone at the farthest bottom of life" (PH, 310), there suddenly appeared a faint sign of hopefulness:

. . . there remained of her only a minute fiercely burning particle of being that knew itself alone, that relied upon nothing beyond itself for its strength; not susceptible to any appeal or inducement, being itself composed entirely of one single motive, the stubborn will to live. This fiery motionless particle set itself unaided to resist destruction, to survive and to be in its own madness of being, motiveless and planless beyond that one essential end. Trust me, the hard unwinking angry point of light said. Trust me. I stay. (PH, 310-11)

At this infinite moment, the tiny point of light, that is Miranda's will to live, poises lightly on the razor's edge between life and death, projecting a glowing vision that is her glimpse of paradise. Glenway Wescott, Miss Porter's lifelong friend, articulates the quandry of any writer in attempting to render an adequate portrait of heaven. He relates how Miss Porter, who had indeed herself experienced this same mystical vision many years before, was having difficulty in "re-seeing it with her lively, healthy eyes."⁵⁸ In response, to her request for his opinion, Mr. Wescott suggested that she simply let the reader interpret for himself his own kind of heaven. Miss Porter did not take her friend's

advice, however, rather, she waited a while in order to "re-see" heaven. Countless critics and readers join Wescott in his final assessment that hers was a "vision worth a year's waiting."⁵⁹

Aware of the hopeful Miranda of "Old Mortality" and the disillusioned Miranda of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," we know that this particular heaven will offer the composite heroine her own "brave new world." We return to the angry point of light and trace its progress to find Miss Porter's perfect paradise, designed so carefully for this, the most sympathetic of the Mary figures --Miranda:

At once it grew, flattened, thinned to a fine radiance, spread like a great fan and curved out into a rainbow through which 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. (PH, 311)

Not only is there unbearable beauty in this scene, but there is an atmosphere of refreshing serenity, a peace that Miranda has craved throughout her life. The Marthas who asked the incessant questions are no longer "tangled together like badly cast fishing lines" (PH, 269). It is the blessed silence that fascinates Miranda as she

continues to gaze upon such tranquil perfection. Miss Porter adds another dimension to her inspired rendering:

The small waves rolled in and over unhurriedly, lapped upon the sand in silence and retreated; the grasses flurried before a breeze that made no sound. 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. Their faces were transfigured, each in its own beauty, beyond what she remembered of them, their eyes were clear and untroubled as good weather, and they cast no shadows. They were pure identities and she knew them every one without calling their names or remembering what relation she bore to them. They surrounded her smoothly on silent feet, then turned their entranced faces again towards the sea, and she moved among them easily as a wave among waves. 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. (PH, 311)

Such ecstasy, however, is not to be Miranda's, not at this point in her life, because she has been called back to the land of the living. It all happened so quickly: "At once as if a curtain had fallen, the bright landscape faded, she was alone in a strange stony place of bitter cold, picking her way along a steep path of slippery snow, calling out, Oh, I must go back! But in what direction?" (PH, 312). With the return of pain, Miranda's resurrection is complete. She is loth to leave the brilliance of paradise for the "soiled gray" (PH, 313) walls of her hospital room. She resists the ministrations of those who would bring her back against her wishes.

"She struggled to cry out, saying, Let me go; but heard only incoherent sounds of animal suffering" (PH, 312). However, the doctor and the nurse, "their eyes alive with knowledgable pride . . . looked briefly at their handiwork and hurried away" (PH, 312). She rebels against "the precise machine of the hospital, the whole humane conviction and custom of society" which set her "once more safely in the road that would lead her again to death" (PH, 314).

Miss Porter expresses, in a letter to her nephew, a genuine concern that this irony should not occur twice in her own life. She pleads with him to let her have her second chance at paradise. She hopes he will be present by her deathbed so that he might say, "'Let my pore ole good ole aunt alone, Keep your busy hands off her! She knows what she's doing!' I want to be let die in peace and quiet. . . ." ⁶⁰ Her request is not strange because, of course, as has been stated, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," like all of the Miranda stories, is assumed to be autobiographical. Miss Porter evaluates her Denver experience of 1917 for a Paris Review interviewer:

It just simply divided my life, cut across it like that. So that everything before that was just getting ready, and after that I was in some strange way altered, ready. It took me a long time to go out and live in the world again. I was really 'alienated' in the pure sense. It was, I think, the fact that I really had participated in death, that I knew what death was, and had almost experienced it. I had what the

Christians call the 'beatific vision,' and the Greeks called the 'happy day,' the happy vision just before death. Now if you have had that, and survived it, come back from it, you are no longer like other people, and there's no use deceiving yourself that you are. 61

In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Miss Porter's heroine makes her transition from rapture to reality in much the same manner. "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 understand the language nor wish to learn it, does not mean to live there and yet is helpless, unable to leave it at his will" (PH, 313). Miranda's recollection of the radiance of her epiphany contrasts sharply with "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!" (PH, 314). Miranda's compassion for her friends forces her to acquiesce to their cheerful demands that she rejoice in her survival. "For it will not do to betray the conspiracy and tamper with the courage of the living; there is nothing better than to be alive, everyone has agreed on that; it is past argument, and who attempts to deny it is justly outlawed" (PH, 315). She finally turns to the letters they have kept for her; among them, of course, is the letter written in an unfamiliar hand, telling her that Adam had died of

influenza in the camp hospital. Knowing that she will have to live the rest of this second life with the knowledge that she was the agent of her lover's death, Miranda prepares herself for the role of the last mourner.

In order to exist in this gray world, she equips herself with suitable armor. Among the items Miranda asks her friends to bring her are ". . . one pair of gray suede gauntlets without straps, two pairs gray sheer stockings without clocks . . . one walking stick of silvery wood with a silver knob" (PH, 316). The list is appropriate to the chic, sophisticated Miranda whose mode of fashion one would naturally assume to be subtly understated. An aristocrat to her fingertips, the Mary figure has high regard for proper attention to "the art of the thing" (PH, 316). Sarah Youngblood keenly observes, however, that although Miranda is always concerned with outward appearances, she requests the walking stick "to help her, a kind of cripple, through her journey back again to death."⁶²

Miranda feels a kinship with Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha of Bethany. After all, Jesus brought him forth from the tomb.⁶³ Irreverently, she draws the inevitable comparison, "Lazarus, come forth" (PH, 316). With hollow flippancy, Miranda jests, "Not unless you bring me my top hat and stick" (PH, 316). If the Mary figure is to endure "the dead cold light of tomorrow" (PH, 317), she will do so in her own inimitable fashion,

with flair and with style. These are vanities to be sure, but now, for Miranda, what else remains?

NOTES

¹Cf. subsequent footnotes in each chapter. Quotations in all subheads will be documented in this manner. Allusions will appear in text.

²Katherine Anne Porter, Ship of Fools (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), p. 12.

³Katherine Anne Porter, "St. Augustine and the Bullfight," in The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Delacorte Press, 1970), p. 95.

⁴Porter, "Letters to a Nephew," in Collected Essays, p. 111.

⁵Porter, "Letters to a Nephew," in Collected Essays, p. 112.

⁶Drewey Wayne Gunn, American and British Writers in Mexico, 1556-1973 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), p. 85.

⁷Katherine Anne Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1952), p. 161.

⁸Charles Walcutt, "A Sargasso of the Sinister," in Man's Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1966), p. 149.

⁹Katherine Anne Porter, "The Downward Path to Wisdom," in The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.), pp. 369-87.

¹⁰Porter, "The Necessary Enemy," in Collected Essays, p. 184.

- ¹¹Porter, "The Necessary Enemy," in Collected Essays, p. 184.
- ¹²Porter, "St. Augustine and the Bullfight," in Collected Essays, p. 94.
- ¹³Roy Newquist, "An Interview with Katherine Anne Porter," McCalls, August 1965, p. 137.
- ¹⁴Newquist, McCalls, p. 137.
- ¹⁵William L. Nance, "Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico," Southwest Review, 55 (Spring 1970), 151.
- ¹⁶Colin Partridge, "'My Familiar Country': An Image of Mexico in the Work of Katherine Anne Porter," Studies in Short Fiction, 7 (Fall 1970), 604.
- ¹⁷Porter, "Flowering Judas," in Collected Stories, p. 93.
- ¹⁸Gunn, American and British Writers in Mexico, p. 111.
- ¹⁹Porter, "Where Presidents Have No Friends," in Collected Essays, p. 413.
- ²⁰Porter, "Where Presidents Have No Friends," in Collected Essays, p. 415.
- ²¹Joan Givner, "Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Caricature," Genre, 5 (1970), 55.
- ²²I am indebted to Leon Gottfried and Sister Mary Bride, O. P., for their perceptive analyses of Laura's problem of acedia. Cf. Sister Mary Bride, O. P., "Laura and the Unlit Lamp," Studies in Short Fiction, 1 (Fall 1963), 61-63; Leon Gottfried, "Death's Other Kingdom: Dantesque and Theological Symbolism in 'Flowering Judas,'" PMLA, 84 (1964), 112-24.
- ²³T. S. Eliot, "Gerontion," in American Literature Survey: The Twentieth Century, eds., Milton R. Stern and Seymour L. Gross (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p. 454.

²⁴Ray B. West, Jr., "Symbol and Theme in 'Flowering Judas,'" in Lodwick Hartley and George Core, eds., Katherine Anne Porter: A Critical Symposium (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969), p. 127.

²⁵David Madden, "The Charged Image in Katherine Anne Porter's 'Flowering Judas,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 7 (Spring 1970), 286.

²⁶Gottfreid, p. 124.

²⁷Gottfreid, p. 124.

²⁸Daniel Curley, "Katherine Anne Porter: The Larger Plan," Kenyon Review, 25 (Autumn 1963), 674.

²⁹Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before, p. 155.

³⁰Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before, p. 156.

³¹George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 62.

³²Porter, "The Days Before," in The Days Before, p. 19.

³³Hendrick, p. 72.

³⁴Sir Walter Scott, Old Mortality (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1900), p. 5.

³⁵A. O. J. Cockshut, The Achievement of Walter Scott (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 130.

³⁶Mark Schorer, "Katherine Anne Porter," in The World We Imagine (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), p. 267.

³⁷Porter, "Old Mortality," in Collected Stories, p. 181.

³⁸Porter, "Notes on Writing," in Collected Essays, p. 449.

³⁹Charles Allen, "The Nouvelles of Katherine Anne Porter," The University of Kansas City Review, 29 (December 1962), 89.

⁴⁰Porter, "My First Speech," in Collected Essays, p. 433.

⁴¹Robert Penn Warren, "Irony with a Center," in Lodwick Hartley and George Core, eds. Katherine Anne Porter: A Critical Symposium (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969), p. 66.

⁴²Harry John Mooney, Jr., The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), p. 24.

⁴³William Shakespeare, The Tempest, in The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare, ed. Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 123.

⁴⁴Edward G. Schwartz, "The Fictions of Memory," in Lodwick Hartley and George Core, eds., Katherine Anne Porter: A Critical Symposium (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969), p. 67.

⁴⁵John Wain notes that Shakespeare's Miranda "has never mixed in corrupting human society." It is necessary that Prospero, who has knowledge of the evils that often accompany civilization, attempt to caution his daughter. Porter's Miranda, coming from an idyllic, pastoral setting, will learn much as she makes her way in the newspaper world of a large city like Denver. Cf. John Wain, "Viewpoints," Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'The Tempest': A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Hallett Smith (Englewood Cliffs; N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 105.

⁴⁶Wain, Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 105.

⁴⁷In an essay, Samuel Taylor Coleridge suggests that Miranda might have recollected those women who had attended her by noting that they resembled reflections of herself in a fountain or pool of water. I submit that these reflections may have caused her to recall those figures which I call the "Martha figures" of her past. Cf. S. T. Coleridge, "An Analysis of Act I (1811)," Shakespeare: 'The Tempest,' ed. David J. Palmer (Nashville: Aurora Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 54.

⁴⁸Schorer, The World We Imagine, p. 272.

⁴⁹Porter, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," in Collected Stories, p. 269.

⁵⁰William Nance states that "the rejection theme simply excludes fulfillment through love." Cf. William L. Nance, S. M., Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 134.

⁵¹Nance, The Art of Rejection, p. 137.

⁵²Nance, The Art of Rejection, p. 140.

⁵³Porter, "Marriage is Belonging," in The Days Before, p. 185.

⁵⁴Porter, "Marriage is Belonging," in The Days Before, p. 188.

⁵⁵Porter, "Noon Wine: The Sources," in Collected Essays, p. 470.

⁵⁶Nance, The Art of Rejection, p. 146.

⁵⁷Germain Bazin, The Avant-Garde in Painting (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), Plate No. 223, p. 261.

⁵⁸Glenway Wescott, "Katherine Anne Porter Personally," in Lodwick Hartley and George Core, eds., Katherine Anne Porter: A Critical Symposium (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969), p. 35.

⁵⁹Wescott, p. 35.

⁶⁰Porter, "Letters to a Nephew," in Collected Essays, p. 121.

⁶¹Barbara Thompson, "Katherine Anne Porter," in Writers at Work: 'The Paris Review' Interviews (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), pp. 147-48.

⁶²Sarah Youngblood, "Structure and Imagery in Katherine Anne Porter's 'Pale Horse, Pale Rider,'" Modern Fiction Studies, 5 (Winter 1959-1960), 352.

⁶³Cf. John (11:1-57). The story of the resurrection of Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha of Bethany, reaches its climax when Jesus cries out, "Lazarus, come forth!" The following verse draws the obvious parallel to Miranda's present state: "And at once he who had been dead came forth, bound feet and hands with bandages, and his face was tied up with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'" (John ch. 11:44)

CHAPTER II

THE MARTHA FIGURES

"Grandmother Rhea: The Source"

Katherine Anne Porter pays frank tribute to her own grandmother in a tenderly executed essay entitled "Portrait: Old South." The following passage, from this treatment, painted in pastels, is evocative of lavender sachet:

In a family of willful eccentrics and headstrong characters and unpredictable histories, her presence was singularly free from peaks and edges and the kind of color that leaves a trail of family anecdotes. She left the lingering perfume and the airy shimmer of grace about her memory. 1

In her fictional re-creation of this powerful Martha figure "who was the only reality . . . in a world that seemed otherwise without fixed authority or refuge,"² Miss Porter assumes her usual air of detachment. However, although she utilizes memory, legend, and personal experience with the integrity of an artist, she is, nonetheless, always mindful that "the blood-bond, however painful, is the condition of human life in this world, the absolute point of all departure and return."³

In a series of six short stories, grouped under the

title "The Old Order," Grandmother Rhea dominates her family and Southern society. Her presence is positively felt in "The Source" and in "The Journey"; in the other stories she is either a peripheral influence or an ethereal reminder. The two stories concern an almost mythic Martha who is accorded respect, tinged with reverence, by all members of her plantation family, both white and black. Critics have noted the importance of the name Rhea because Grandmother Rhea is indeed the embodiment of the Greek Earth-Mother concept.⁴ This matriarch derived her strength from the land of Kentucky, Louisiana, and Texas; she placed her faith in this agrarian stability. The context of mythology offers another significant comparison between the divine Greek goddess and the legendary Southern Martha. Both women are associated with the creation of order. The goddess Rhea was descended from the Titans who are credited with creating order out of the shapeless mass of earth, sea, and air which was known as Chaos.⁵

The word "chaos" was anathema to the Grandmother; in her own ordered world, dust and dirt meant disorder; disorder meant confusion, and confusion meant chaos. Under the guise of a quest for annual relaxation in the country, she would leave their house in town to journey out to the farm for an inspection tour. Inside, no nook, cranny, or crevice escaped her eye. Outside, no garden,

canebrake, or orchard was safe from keen appraisal. No human frailty went unnoticed, nor unmentioned. Both moral and domestic slackness brought forth from the transgressor a firm promise toward immediate amendment. These protestations of firm purpose were instantly acted upon by the Grandmother who then supervised what must have been the greatest frenzy of housecleaning ever to take place in the Southwest. In "The Source," we are told that "every hut was thickly whitewashed, bins and cupboards were scrubbed, every chair and bedstead was varnished, every filthy quilt was brought to light, boiled in a great iron washpot and stretched in the sun . . ." (OO, 324).

These Martha-like activities were soon transferred to the main house where "the big secretaries were opened and shabby old sets of Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Dr. Johnson's dictionary, the volumes of Pope and Milton and Dante and Shakespeare were dusted and closed up carefully again" (OO, 324). This passion for cleanliness had pleasant benefits as the following passage illustrates: "Curtains came down in dingy heaps and went up again stiff and sweet-smelling; rugs were heaved forth in dusty confusion and returned flat and gay with flowers once more; the kitchen was no longer dingy and desolate but a place of heavenly order where it was tempting to linger" (OO, 324).

Although the annual trip to the farm was a family event, it was the Grandmother's authoritative but beloved presence that really counted so far as the black population was concerned. They had problems to be solved, complaints to be made, and injuries, both physical and spiritual, to be mended. They knew she would listen attentively and act wisely. The joy at her arrival, therefore, was mutual. "Hinry came running to open the gate, his coal-black face burst into a grin, his voice flying before him: "Howdy-do, Miss Sophia Jane!", simply not noticing that the carry-all was spilling over with other members of the family" (OO, 322). There seemed a tremendous resurgence of well-being in the Grandmother as she called out "greetings in her feast-day voice . . . [she had] an indefinable sense of homecoming, not to the house but to the black, rich soft land and the human beings living on it" (OO, 322).

Even though the Grandmother was involved in being a "tireless, just and efficient slave driver of every creature on the place" (OO, 324), she did not completely relax the ritual of discipline by which her grandchildren had learned to abide. Momentarily overlooked in the midst of the restoration process, they "ran wild outside" (OO, 323), but inevitably, "the hour came in each day when they were rounded up, captured, washed, dressed

properly, made to eat what was set before them without giving battle, put to bed when the time came and no nonsense. . . ." (OO, 324). True to the Martha philosophy, children had to be "raised" even if they were on "vacation."

Miss Porter recalls how much her own grandmother enjoyed the bedtime hour when she would gather her grandchildren about her to listen to their evening prayers. The solemnity of the occasion, however, was often broken by sibling rivalry:

. . . in our jealousy to be nearest, and to be first, we often fell fighting like a den of bear cubs, instead of christened children, and she would have to come in among us like an animal trainer, the holy hour having gone quite literally to hell. . . . Grandmother was rather severe with us about our quarreling. It was 'vulgar,' she said, and for her that word connoted a peculiarly detestable form of immorality, that is to say, bad manners. 6

Chafing under the Grandmother's traditional rules of good behavior, they sometimes felt she was a tyrant. It was a delightfully free afternoon indeed when Grandmother would walk out to the pasture to greet her old saddle horse Fiddler. The grand finale to this annual ritual of restoring order to disorder was about to take place. Grandmother's ride on Fiddler always signalled the end of their "work-vacation." Satisfied that the past had been polished and refurbished as a monument to the execution of duty and the maintenance of orderliness, the Grandmother turned her boundless energy elsewhere because "there was so much to be done at home. . . ." (OO, 325).

However, before she returned to town, this proud Martha needed the reassurance of her "yearly gallop with Fiddler . . . it proved her strength, her unabated energy. Any time now Fiddler might drop in his tracks, but she would not" (OO, 325). There is dismay and admiration in the author's narrative. We can only sense the presence of the young Miranda as she watches the Grandmother mount the faithful old creature:

Fiddler would remember his youth and break into a stiff-legged gallop, and she would go with her crepe bands and her old-fashioned riding skirt flying. They always returned at a walk, the Grandmother sitting straight as a sword, smiling, triumphant. Dismounting at the horseblock by herself, she would stroke Fiddler on the neck before turning him over to Uncle Jimbilly, and walk away carrying her train grandly over her arm. (OO, 325)

The aristocratic sweep of the Grandmother's triumphal exit is reminiscent of the pre-Civil War Martha figure who had loved luxury and leisure. Later, however, she found within herself a wealth of strength that enabled her to accept sacrifice with gallantry. In describing Grandmother Rhea's counterpart and her reaction to the demands made on the survivors of a war-torn South, Miss Porter says, "Grandmother . . . did not in the least like pinching or saving and mending and making things do, and she had no patience with the kind of slackness that tried to say second-best was best, or half good enough. But the evil turn of fortune in her life tapped the bottomless

reserves of her character, and her life was truly heroic."⁷

In "The Journey," the second story in "The Old Order" series, Miss Porter traces the saga of the heroism of Miss Sophia Jane from "the age of five to the great but unstated age at which she dies."⁸ In a style that is Faulknerian, the author moves backward and forward in time by employing the device of a quilting session presided over by the Grandmother and Nannie, her lifelong companion. The two women impart family history as they recall the significance of each scrap of fabric. As responsible Marthas, they position themselves "under the mingled trees of the side garden" (OO, 326) where they could command an excellent view of the children's world. Their disjointed conversation deals mostly with the past. They deplored the swiftness of the changing world and hopefully "insisted that each change was probably the last; or if not, a series of changes might bring them, blessedly, back full-circle to the old ways they had known" (OO, 327).

This emphasis on the past is questioned by the author for it was a known fact that their lives had been hard, exacting the last ounce of courage of each of them. "Who knows why they loved their past? It had been bitter for them both, they had questioned the burdensome rule they lived by every day of their lives, but without

rebellion and without expecting an answer" (OO, 327). Duty was an ingrained characteristic of the Martha figure. "The Grandmother's role was authority, she knew that; it was her duty to portion out activities, to urge or restrain where necessary, to teach morals, manners, and religion, to punish and reward her own household according to a fixed code. Her own doubts and hesitations, she concealed, also, she reminded herself, as a matter of duty" (OO, 328).

The very essence of duty was determined dedication to the rearing of the young. The Grandmother could never quite believe that she had given birth to eleven children nor that she had survived long enough to begin again with a series of motherless grandchildren. Oh yes, children and duty were synonymous in the minds of both women:

They relied with perfect acquiescence on the dogma that children were conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity. Childhood was a long state of instruction and probation for adult life, which was in turn a long, severe, undeviating devotion to duty, the largest part of which consisted in bringing up children. The young were difficult, disobedient, and tireless in wrongdoing, apt to turn unkind and undutiful when they grew up, in spite of all one had done for them, or had tried to do: for small painful doubts rose in them now and again when they looked at their completed works. (OO, 329)

As one of their "completed works," Miss Porter confides that her own grandmother was not the fierce disciplinarian she professed to be. Of her myriad lessons in proper behavior, the writer comments that all

these attempts were "love's labors lost utterly, for she had brought up a houseful of the worst spoiled children in seven counties . . . she never punished anyone until she was exasperated beyond all endurance, when she was apt to let fly with a lightning, long-armed slap at the most unexpected moments, usually quite unjustly and ineffectually."⁹ Slyly, in a perversely smug Mary-like pose, Miss Porter reveals that the grandchildren "were to be the worst spoiled of any."¹⁰

The Southern male, unfortunately, was the chief victim of a laxity in discipline, free to lead "a dashing life full of manly indulgences. . . ." (OO, 335). The young Southern woman, on the other hand, in strict adherence to the chivalric code, was enshrined on a pedestal, well beyond the reach of reality until her wedding day. Sophia Jane envied her husband-to-be: "Ah, the delicious, the free, the wonderful, the mysterious and terrible life of men!" (OO, 335). This nagging envy, however, was only the beginning of a suspicion she only privately acknowledged later. She began to feel that this reckless abandoning of oneself to the constant pursuit of pleasure tended to lead to weakness in character, a trait which the self-willed Sophia Jane could never forgive. After several years of marriage, she recognized in her husband many of the unpleasant faults which she had detested

in an older brother. The list was not an attractive one: ". . . lack of aim, failure to act at crises, a philosophic detachment from practical affairs, a tendency to set projects on foot and then leave them to perish or to be finished by someone else; and a profound conviction that everyone around him should be happy to wait upon him hand and foot" (OO, 335). The Grandmother tried to fight "these fatal tendencies . . . in her husband . . . in two of her sons and in several of her grandchildren . . . she gained no victory in any case. . . ." (OO, 335).

Miss Porter's indictment of the Southern male is commented upon by William Nance, who suggests that the Grandmother perpetuates this weakness of character by seeking compensatory affection from her sons:

The little satisfaction she does receive from the entire process of marriage and motherhood is related not to her husband but to her children. All else is pain and frustration, leading at best to indifference, at worst to a deep and ever-growing resentment against her husband and all men. With this as a foundation she is inclined never to excuse, always to exaggerate their faults. And of faults there are in abundance, since they have been spoiled by mothers who, like this one, let a compensatory sentimental love for their children undermine the strict code by which they attempted to raise them. ll

This inflexible attitude of the Southern Marthas toward men is evidenced in the Grandmother even after her husband dies of a wound received in the Civil War. She felt as if he had deliberately deserted her and so

"she mourned for him at first with dry eyes, angrily. Twenty years later, seeing after a long absence the eldest son of her favorite daughter . . . she recognized the very features and look of the husband of her youth, and she wept" (OO, 338).

The Martha figure in Miss Porter's fiction often stands alone. Perhaps, she was a victim of cruel circumstances or of her own efforts at independence. No matter the raison d'ê[^]tre, it is irrefutable that an indomitable pioneer Martha emerged in the characterization of Grandmother Rhea:

Not until she was in middle age, her husband dead, her property dispersed, and she found herself with a houseful of children, making a new life for them in another place, with all of the responsibilities of a man but with none of the privileges, did she finally emerge into something like an honest life: and yet, she was passionately honest. She had never been anything else. (OO, 336)

An example of Sophia Jane's candour comes to light during the quilting session. There is a wry blend of wistfulness and bitterness as memories of the past are held up for re-examination and re-evaluation. An old wound throbs for just a moment. As she fingers the smoothness of a scrap of satin, the Grandmother comments with more than a touch of asperity:

'It was not fair that Sister Keziah should have had this ivory brocade for her wedding dress, and I had only dotted swiss. . . .'

'Times was harder when you got married, Missy,' said Nannie. 'Dat was de yeah all de crops failed.'

'And they failed ever afterward, it seems to me,' said the Grandmother.

'Seems to me like,' said Nannie, 'dotted swiss was all the style when you got married.'

'I never cared for it,' said the Grandmother.
(OO, 336)

This peremptory dismissal of the subject is typical of Miss Sophia Jane who had "a love of luxury and a tendency to resent criticism" (OO, 334). However, if the Grandmother had continued in her "honest" exploration of that memorable wedding day, she would have recalled that it had been a momentous occasion with "the house jammed to the roof . . . there were forty carriages and more than two hundred horses to look after for two days. When the last wheel disappeared down the lane . . . the larders and bins were half empty and the place looked as if a troop of cavalry had been over it" (OO, 333). Times had not been so hard that the family had to skimp on the most necessary aspect of the chivalric cult, the lavishness of true Southern hospitality. Although the feast is not described in "The Journey," Miss Porter gives a factual account of Grandmother Porter's wedding in Kentucky "somewhere around 1850."¹² Her mouth-watering portrait of the wedding table matches that of the master, Thomas Wolfe. With natural feminine concern for aesthetic

beauty as well as culinary magnificence, she adds the necessary details of décor:

There were silver branched candlesticks everywhere, each holding seven white candles, and a crystal chandelier holding fifty white candles, all lighted. There was a white lace tablecloth reaching to the floor all around, over white satin. The wedding cake was as tall as the flower girl and of astonishing circumference, festooned all over with white sugar roses and green leaves, actual live rose leaves. The room . . . was a perfect bower of southern smilax and white dogwood. And there was butter. This is a bizarre note, but there was an enormous silver butter dish . . . containing at least ten pounds of butter. The dish had cupids and some sort of fruit around the rim, and the butter was molded or carved, to resemble a set-piece of roses and lilies, every petal and leaf standing sharply, natural as life . . .

All the children had their own table in a small parlor, and ate just what the grownups had: Kentucky ham, roast turkey, partridges in wine jelly, fried chicken, dove pie, half a dozen sweet and hot sauces, peach pickle, watermelon pickle and spiced mangoes. A dozen different fruits, four kinds of cake and at last a chilled custard in tall glasses with whipped cream capped by a brandied cherry. 13

Testimony to the fact that this Lucullan banquet took place before the war, of course, is given in a subsequent passage. Of the flower girl, "a lady then rising ninety-five who remembered the wedding as if it had been only yesterday," Miss Porter notes that "she lived to boast of it, and she lived along with other guests of that feast to eat corn pone and bacon fat, and yes, to be proud of that also. Why not? She was in the best of company, and quite a large gathering too."¹⁴

Miss Porter recalls with delight that her grandmother was a marvelous cook in good times and in bad. With the characteristic ingenuity of a Martha in the kitchen, she was able to "make do" with whatever ingredients were available during the post-Civil War period. With a few grains of real coffee and a mixture of sweet potato and dried corn, ground up and boiled, she was able to satisfy her family's "yearning for a dark hot drink in the mornings. But she would never allow them to call it coffee. It was known as That Brew."¹⁵ The ingrained Martha quality of associating food with social occasions earned her such a reputation as a cook that "it was mentioned in her funeral eulogies."¹⁶ Her love of mixing good friends and good food triumphed even in adversity. Miss Porter admiringly records that "her bountiful hospitality represented only one of her victories of intelligence and feeling over the stubborn difficulties of life."¹⁷

The Grandmother was undaunted to the very end of her life, which ended abruptly in west Texas. While visiting her son, she vigorously pursued a strenuous project in their garden. She returned to the house exhilarated with the flush of success," . . . saying how well she felt in the bracing mountain air--and dropped dead over the doorsill" (OO, 340), an individual being and a redoubtable Martha to the last.

"Nannie: A Bantu Woman"

The entry in the family Bible read "Nannie Gay (black): Born June 11, 1827."¹⁸ This vital information was ascertained when "Miss Sophia Jane Gay, aged ten, opened a calendar at random, closed her eyes, and marked a date unseen with a pen. So it turned out that Nannie's birthday thereafter fell on June 11, and the year, Miss Sophia Jane decided, should be 1827, her own birth-year, making Nannie just three months younger than her mistress" (OO, 328). This lifelong association began when the little black girl with the "round nubbly head and fixed bright monkey eyes" (OO, 330) first attracted the attention of the "prissy, spoiled five-year-old" (OO, 330) who initiated a relationship that ranged from plaything to playmate, to personal maid to children's nurse, to emancipated slave to voluntary companion.¹⁹

The black servant and friend to the Grandmother was a true Martha figure who was an integral part of the cohesive force that preserved a firm and hardy stock from generation to generation.²⁰ The reader recalls meeting Nannie during the quilting session in "The Journey." One is aware by now that the rapport between the two women is based on a mutual past of suffering and sacrifice. "During all their lives together it was not so much a question of affection between them as a simple matter of being unable to imagine getting on without each other" (OO, 330). However, the achievement of complete

characterization of Nannie reaches magnificently noble heights in "The Last Leaf," another short story within "The Old Order" group. First, a re-examination of "The Journey" is necessary as a vehicle for traveling the length of the road taken by Nannie and her mistress.

Nannie and the Grandmother follow essentially the same path through life; Winfred S. Emmons, in speculating on the inextricably woven quality of their characters, says, "The pronoun 'they' dominates almost a third of the piece."²¹ The flashback technique allows them to pick up the threads of their scattered memories as they stitch together scraps of fabric which conjure up fleeting pictures of the past. Nannie remembered well the auction block in Kentucky from which she had been purchased for the ignominious sum of twenty dollars. Once she belonged to Miss Sophia Jane, she moved into the big house, leaving her fieldhand parents behind forever. An extension of that painful scene is provided many years later in Texas when she and the Grandmother encounter Nannie's first owner, now eighty-five years old, a prosperous ranchman and a district judge. In the following exchange, Miss Porter indicts the cruelty of the "peculiar institution" as practiced by insensitive white masters at that time:

The judge . . . reeked of corn liquor, swore by God every other breath, was rearing to talk about the good times in Kentucky. The Grandmother showed Nannie to him. 'Would you recognize her?' 'For God Almighty's sake!' bawled the judge, 'is that the strip of crowbait I sold to your father for twenty dollars? Twenty dollars seemed like a fortune to me in those days!'

While they were jolting home down the steep rocky road on the long journey from San Marcos to Austin, Nannie finally spoke out about her grievance. 'Look lak a jedge might had better raisin', she said, gloomily, 'look lak he didn't keer how much he hurt a body's feelins.' (OO, 332)

The Grandmother seeks to alleviate Nannie's sense of injury and at the same time excuse the boorishness of the judge. Although she is Nannie's compassionate defender, the Grandmother is also the product of the white paternalistic tradition. This is evident as she responds, "Never mind, Nannie. The judge just wasn't thinking. He's very fond of his good cheer" (OO, 333). Thus does Katherine Anne Porter, with the integrity of an artist, subtly express her condemnation of slavery. Jan Pinkerton observes, "Long before the current spotlight of sociology was focused on the South, she [Miss Porter] had in her most personal way shown nuances in social inequality that many Americans are still far from comprehending."²²

That Nannie was not permitted a life of her own beyond the world of her young mistress is obvious in the arrangement of a marriage of convenience by her white owners. She and a young Negro on the plantation are offered as a unique gift--a matched pair of servants--to Miss Sophia Jane on her wedding day. The marriage of the two slaves produced thirteen children, ten of whom died and were buried in Kentucky. Nannie's major role in life, therefore, was that of surrogate parent to the children of Miss Sophia Jane's family; her own remaining

children are never mentioned.

In order to observe Nannie as a Martha figure of "oppressive maternalism,"²³ the reader might peruse a short passage in "The Fig Tree," another short story in "The Old Order" series. In the opening scene, the rebellious young Miranda, one of the greatest crosses any Martha was ever challenged to bear, resists Nannie's efforts to curb her usual high spirits:

Old Aunt Nannie had a habit of gripping with her knees to hold Miranda while she brushed her hair or buttoned her dress down the back. When Miranda wriggled, Aunt Nannie squeezed still harder, and Miranda wriggled more, but never enough to get away. Aunt Nannie gathered up Miranda's scalp lock firmly, snapped a rubber band around it, jammed a freshly starched white chambray bonnet over her ears and forehead, fastened the crown to the lock with a large safety pin, and said: 'Got to hold you still someways. Here now, don't you take this off your head till the sun go down.' (OO, 352)

Miranda, the chic sophisticate of the future, craves the romantic adornment of perhaps a straw shepherdess hat, certainly something less confining than a bonnet. One can only surmise the Mary-like workings of the willful Miranda's mind. She is adamant in her determination to question Nannie's authority. Docility is never a characteristic of the Mary prototype. She doesn't stamp her foot, but to the reader, a tantrum seems imminent:

'I don't want a bonnet, it's too hot, I wanted a hat,' said Miranda.

'You not goin' to get a hat, you goin' to get just what you got,' said Aunt Nannie in the bossy voice she used for washing and dressing time,

'and mo'over some of these days I'm goin' to sew this bonnet to your topknot. Your daddy says if you get freckles he blame me. Now, you're all ready to set out.' (OO, 352)

There is supportive evidence that Miss Porter's own nurse, like Nannie, must have been successful in preserving her from the fate of freckles. In describing his dear friend, Katherine Anne Porter, Glenway Wescott says, "She has in fact a lovely face, of the utmost distinction in the Southern way; moonflower-pale, never sunburned, perhaps not burnable."²⁴ One thinks of the autobiographical Miranda and the diligent Nannie; happily, the determined efforts of a firm Martha seem not to have been in vain.

The rearing of white folks' children was only part of the endless drudgery required of Nannie. She accepted her life of hardship as if it were her proper "place in the world. It had been assigned to her before birth, and for her daily rule she had all her life obeyed the authority nearest to her" (OO, 328). Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not significantly alter the course of her life, she felt deep down inside an indefinable sense of release. To Nannie, therefore, "Emancipation was a sweet word . . . [it] had seemed to set right a wrong that stuck in her heart like a thorn" (OO, 336). Upon gaining her legal freedom, she proudly declared to the Grandmother, "I aim to stay wid you as long as you'll have me" (OO, 336). Now she could choose.

The first of the two faithful companions to complete the journey of her life is the Grandmother. In "The Last Leaf," Nannie's bereavement is acute. It becomes painfully obvious to the rest of the family that her lifelong loyalty had been pledged only to the Grandmother. Suddenly, Nannie yearns for the independence she had willingly foregone for the sake of her mistress. The family, in its selfishness, has taken Nannie's years of servitude for granted. Not realizing that they had worked her beyond her endurance, they took no notice that "the old woman grew silent, hunched over more deeply . . . her spine seemed suddenly to have given way. They could hear her groaning at night on her knees beside her bed, asking God to let her rest" (OO, 348).

Providence provides her with a prelude to heavenly rest when a cabin becomes available, fortuitously located "across the narrow creek" (OO, 348), far enough from the main house. At last she would receive compensation for all those years of injustice. Nannie confesses to the children's father that she has always wanted a house of her own. This cabin appealed to her very soul. One follows the direction of Nannie's gaze with the aid of Miss Porter, who describes just such a house in an essay entitled "A House of My Own."

The writer recalls all the houses she has known in her past: ". . . In several parts of my native South, I admired and would have been glad to live in one of those

little, sloping-roofed, chimneyed houses the Negroes live in, houses quite perfectly proportioned and with such dignity in their desolation."²⁵ The last phrase is important in its indication that Miss Porter is indeed aware of white paternalism and, once again, "calls everything by its right name."²⁶ Her picture, however, is of Nannie's house and it adds another dimension to the reader's empathy for Nannie.

The children were a bit chagrined that this Martha could blithely pull up stakes and leave them to their own domestic inadequacies in the big house, but they good-naturedly set about fixing up the cabin "with a good bed and a fairly good carpet and allowed her to take all sorts of odds and ends from the house" (OO, 349). Miss Porter forces herself and her family to look upon a faithful nurse as a fellow human being, totally independent of the white social structure. However, their "raising" made it difficult. Again, she exposes through nuance. In the following passage, the family is completely oblivious of its own condescension:

It was astonishing to discover that Nannie had always liked and hoped to own certain things, she had seemed so contented and wantless. She moved away, and as the children said afterwards to each other, it was almost funny and certainly very sweet to see how she tried not to be too happy the day she left, but they felt rather put upon, just the same. (OO, 349)

Nannie luxuriated in her new life, throwing off the strictures of the past by exchanging her ruffled mobcap and white apron for a blue bandanna and a corncob pipe. She is pictured as having "a nobly modeled Negro face . . . a thick fine sooty black" (OO, 348) that evokes the image of African royalty. "She was no more the faithful old servant Nannie, a freed slave: she was an aged Bantu woman of independent means sitting on the steps breathing the free air" (OO, 349). There was indeed an aura of regality about her as she sat on her front doorstep, "having at her disposal all of God's good time there was in this world" (OO, 351), free to enjoy sunning herself in the daytime or smoking her pipe on summer evenings.

One day, Nannie's solitude was disturbed by her husband, known to the white grandchildren as Uncle Jimbilly. Their marriage had been dissolved by mutual consent; they never mentioned the children they had together--each spoke of "my children." For years, neither husband nor wife had given any thought to the other. Suddenly Uncle Jimbilly appeared on Nannie's doorstep, hinting he might like to join her. "Whut you doin' with all this big house to yoself?' he wanted to know" (OO, 351). But Nannie refused his obvious request and firmly took her stand, delivering a fierce ultimatum, "I don' aim to pass my las' days waitin' on no man . . . I've served my time, I've done my do, and dat's all" (OO, 351).

Nannie's "do" may be interpreted as her complete fulfillment of the commandments of God and her white mistress. She had kept her part of the bargain according to the mores of the time and the circumstances in which she lived. She had been assigned a certain role in that society and she had faithfully executed her commitment. As a dutiful Martha, she was entitled to her personal declaration of independence. Nannie, the dignified survivor of a lingering tradition, had indeed "done [her] do." Like Faulkner's Dilsey, she endured.

"Granny Weatherall: Strong Enough for Everything"

In her technically brilliant short story, "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall,"²⁷ Katherine Anne Porter presents the most pragmatic of her pioneer Marthas. Ellen Weatherall is a human dynamo of prodigious capabilities. As a farm widow, she has "fenced in a hundred acres" (GW, 83), dug the post holes herself, and nursed countless "sick horses and sick negroes and sick children" (GW, 83). Clearly, Granny is a woman who could "spread out the plan of life and tuck in the edges orderly" (GW, 81). In naming this courageous heroine, Miss Porter's play on words is obvious because Granny, at eighty years old, can look back upon a life in which she has indeed weathered everything. Well, almost everything. The story is not simply a quaint cameo portrait of an indomitable old lady, rather it is a grim tale of terror. In her skillful stream-of-consciousness style, Miss Porter traces, within a twenty-four hour period, the inexorable progress of Granny Weatherall's approaching death.

The critical acclaim for the virtuosity of style found in "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" is unanimous. Its technique is recognizably Jamesian, and as George Hendrick observes, "Miss Porter has learned her lessons from James perfectly. Her story has all the finesse, skill, and symbolism of the master himself; but although

she echoes James, the story is uniquely her own."²⁸ We note the purposeful pattern of reverie and hallucination which provide the structure for Granny's backward descent into the past; unlike "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," there is admirable compression. However, the framework for Granny's sensory confusions, in a story only ten pages in length, creates certain ambiguities which critics have explored with amazing ingeniousness.

This is Miss Porter's favorite kind of story. In her introduction to Eudora Welty's A Curtain of Green, she states in no uncertain terms,

Let me admit a deeply personal preference for this particular kind of story, where external act and the internal voiceless life of the human imagination almost meet and mingle on the mysterious threshold between dream and waking, one reality refusing to admit or confirm the existence of the other, yet both conspiring toward the same end. 29

The reader, therefore, is forewarned that "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" is not just a charmingly poignant story about a sweet old lady eighty years old whose time has come. The complexities of Miss Porter's technique are myriad.³⁰

Wry comedy marks our introduction to the delirious Granny as she summarily dismisses Doctor Harry who has come to minister to her in her last hours. Granny may be down, but she is definitely not out. To her wavering sensibilities, the doctor is a mere youngster whom she

remembers from years ago. "The brat ought to be in knee breeches. Doctoring around the country with spectacles on his nose! 'Get along now, take your schoolbooks and go. There's nothing wrong with me'" (GW, 80). When he returns later in the evening, she comments on the "rosy nimbus" (GW, 87) she sees around him, "You look like a saint, Doctor Harry, and I vow that's as near as you'll ever come to it" (GW, 87).

Not even the parish priest, who has come to administer the last rites of the sacrament of Extreme Unction, is spared the acerbity of her tongue. When informed of his presence, she retorts, "I went to Holy Communion only last week. Tell him I'm not so sinful as all that" (GW, 86). When he anoints her feet with holy oils, according to the liturgy, her reaction is comic prudery. ". . . and Father Connolly murmured Latin in a very solemn voice and tickled her feet. My God, will you stop that nonsense? I'm a married woman" (GW, 88).

Her longsuffering daughter Cornelia is the prime target for her barbed humor. In retaliation to Cornelia's whispered conversation with the doctor, Granny spiritedly assaults her faithful daughter. She thinks, in her reverie, "It was like Cornelia to whisper around doors. She always kept things secret in such a public way. She was always being tactful and kind. Cornelia was dutiful; that was the trouble with her. Dutiful and good: 'So good and

dutiful,' said Granny, 'that I'd like to spank her'" (GW, 81).³¹ For Granny, it seemed rather amusing "to plague Cornelia a little" (GW, 82). Cornelia's persistently tolerant attitude and her cheerful attempts to humor her mother evoke the old woman's criticism. "The thing that most annoyed her was that Cornelia thought she was deaf, dumb, and blind. Little hasty glances and tiny gestures tossed around her and over her head saying, 'Don't cross her, let her have her way, she's eighty years old,' and she sitting there as if she lived in a thin glass cage" (GW, 82). There is pathos in her final cantankerous comment, "Wait, wait, Cornelia, till your own children whisper behind your back!" (GW, 82).

As the reader is drawn, with Granny, into the inner recesses of her mind, important biographical facts emerge. At first the memories are pleasant and typically Martha-like. We learn, not surprisingly, that Granny is an orderly person, neat and practical, a woman to whom the following passage signifies sheer beauty:

It was good to have everything clean and folded away, with the hair brushes and tonic bottles sitting straight on the white embroidered linen: the day started without fuss and the pantry shelves laid out with rows of jelly glasses and brown jugs and white stone-china jars with blue whirligigs and words painted on them: coffee, tea, sugar, ginger, cinnamon, allspice: and the bronze clock with the lion on top nicely dusted off. The dust that lion could collect in twenty-four hours! (GW, 81-82).

With satisfaction, the energetic Granny recalls all the food she had cooked, all the clothes she had made,

and all the gardens she had created. "It had been a hard pull, but not too much for her" (GW, 83). In a revelation that could be interpreted as the motto of the Marthas, she notes with contentment that all of her adversities were worthwhile because "--well, the children showed it" (GW, 83). She is triumphant in her declaration, "There they were, made out of her, and they couldn't get away from that" (GW, 83). Granny is proud that she has raised children who have grown into upstanding young adults, despite the fact that she has had to do it alone, without the aid of the young husband whom she buried years ago. "Sometimes she wanted to see John again and point to them and say, Well, I didn't do so badly, did I?" (GW, 83).

Scenes shift rapidly exposing another facet of Granny's character, another aspect of her life, and a lifelong secret as yet unknown. Granny lives by the rule of thriftiness, as do all Marthas. In a scene in the orchard, she cautions her children, "I want you to pick all the fruit this year and see that nothing is wasted. There's always someone who can use it. Don't let good things rot for want of using. You waste life when you waste good food. Don't let things get lost. It's bitter to lose things" (GW, 84). In Miss Porter's clever exploitation of stream-of-consciousness, the initiated reader will note the foreshadowing of the word-motif of the above phrases.

The loss of things! What has Granny lost? Her restless unconsciousness now conjures up a beautiful day and a radiant young girl. "Such a fresh breeze blowing and such a green day with no threats in it. But he had not come, just the same. What does a woman do when she has put on the white veil and set out the white cake for a man and he doesn't come?" (GW, 84). Thus do we learn the private tragedy that has haunted Ellen Weatherall for sixty years. Her entire life of devotion as the stabilizing force in her family has not dulled the pain of being jilted at the altar on her wedding day by her fiancé George. With the fortitude of a Martha, Granny has kept this sorrow close to her heart, so that her children will be spared the knowledge of their mother's shame. And yet there was "the box in the attic with all those letters tied up, well, she'd have to go through that tomorrow. All those letters . . . lying around for the children to find afterwards made her uneasy. Yes, that would be tomorrow's business. No use to let them know how silly she had been once" (GW, 82).

Remembering her fiancé George is a painful experience for Granny. After the horror of this experience, she sought comfort in her marriage to another man, in their children, and in the religion of her childhood. In

keeping busy, she feels she has conquered her un-Christian hatred for George. However, as death draws closer, she becomes afraid that the Lord will know the real truth-- that her bitterness has not wavered one iota. Of that lost lover, she thinks, "For sixty years she had prayed against remembering him and against losing her soul in the deep pit of hell, and now the two things were mingled in one and the thought of him was a smoky cloud from hell that moved and crept in her head . . ." (GW, 84). It is obvious that Granny's love for George was genuine, although not reciprocated. She had "lost" her heart to George and the memory of her wounded vanity has been bitter gall all these years. She perversely wishes, with a touch of bravado, that someone would find George. "Find him and be sure to tell him I forgot him. I want him to know I had my husband just the same and my children and my house like any other woman. A good house too and a good husband that I loved and fine children out of him. Better than I hoped for even" (GW, 86).

A recurring image in her hallucinations is that of a beloved daughter who has died; in the story we are told that Granny says upon the birth of this last child, "It should have been born first, for it was the one she had truly wanted" (GW, 86). Assumptions have been made that this child Hapsy, possibly a diminutive for Happiness, was the child she wished she had had by George. Pursuing this idea, of course, brings up the often discussed theory

that George and Ellen had had an affair and that John Weatherall had actually saved her honor.³² This theory while plausible does not seem probable because it is propounded in the light of twentieth century mores, blithely dismissing the Victorian period in which Granny lived and the rules of the chivalric code which governed the life of a young Southern woman at that time. Finally, there is recourse to my original thesis of the Mary-Martha motif. Granny is the epitome of the Martha figure, stable and responsible, the antithesis of the spirited devil-may-care Mary who, on the other hand, might have endorsed such a coup de foudre love affair.

For supportive evidence, we return to the story itself in which the omniscient observer injects Hapsy again and again into the stream of Granny's unconscious wanderings. Over and over, Granny implores the uncomprehending audience around her bed to send for her favorite daughter Hapsy:

It was Hapsy she really wanted. She had to go a long way back through a great many rooms to find Hapsy standing with a baby on her arm. She seemed to herself to be Hapsy also, and the baby on Hapsy's arm was Hapsy and himself and herself, all at once, and there was no surprise in the meeting. Then Hapsy melted from within and turned flimsy as gray gauze and the baby was a gauzy shadow, and Hapsy came up close and said, 'I thought you'd never come,' and looked at her very searchingly and said, 'You haven't changed a bit!' They leaned forward to kiss, when Cornelia began whispering from a long way off. . . ." (GW, 85-86)

The most acceptable interpretation, in my opinion, is offered by George Hendrick who concludes after a

re-reading of the above passage that the reference to "himself" meant "undoubtedly George whom she couldn't call by name."³³ Therefore, the cinematic blending of all these beloved figures reinforces the idea that Granny's feelings about George are ambivalent. Does a love-hate attitude exist? Does she, in her good Christian heart, feel disloyal to John and to God because, even after sixty years, she still harbors within herself a secret passion for her first love? Perhaps this is why she fears "the whirl of dark smoke. . . . That was hell, she knew hell when she saw it" (GW, 84). Over the years, however, Granny had found solace in the fact that "she had her secret comfortable understanding with a few favorite saints who cleared a straight road to God for her" (GW, 86). This naiveté, of course, fades as death makes its inevitable inroads on the doughty stamina of an eighty-year old woman who could still boast, "It was good to be strong enough for everything . . ." (GW, 83).

Death becomes a presence to be reckoned with as the day wears on. Miss Porter skillfully weaves its ominous being into the major threads of the story until its dominance becomes the major motif. The blackness of its pattern is contrapuntal to Granny's lively wit and optimistic concept of life which she equated with a "bright field where everything was planted so carefully in orderly rows" (GW, 84). Granny attempts to deny death's presence,

although "her bones felt loose, and floated around in her skin, and Doctor Harry floated like a balloon around the foot of the bed" (GW, 80). Whispers in the room become for her the sounds of "leaves rustling outside the window" (GW, 81) or "the swishing of newspapers" (GW, 81). Granny receives her most definitive warning of death's imminence after her avowal to tend to her old letters in the attic. "When she was rummaging around she found death in her mind and it felt clammy and unfamiliar" (GW, 82). The impact of the sensation of touch is quickly supported by the next image which is grimly picturesque. "A fog rose over the valley, she saw it marching across the creek swallowing the trees and moving up the hill like an army of ghosts" (GW, 84).

Granny remains undaunted, however, for the imaginary fog simply reminds her of the enjoyable memory of lighting the evening lamps in the house. "Lighting the lamps had been beautiful. The children huddled up to her and breathed like little calves waiting at the bars in the twilight. Their eyes followed the match and watched the flame rise and settle in a blue curve, then they moved away from her. The lamp was lit, they didn't have to be scared and hang on to mother any more" (GW, 84). Granny, mindful of her responsibility as a Martha, had bequeathed to her children the necessary quality of self-sufficiency.

We are reminded of the "lank greenish stranger" in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" when Cornelia inadvertently summons him to her mother's bedside. Miss Porter's metaphorical powers are awesome in the following passage:

Cornelia's voice staggered and bumped like a cart in a bad road. It rounded corners and turned back again and arrived nowhere. Granny stepped up in the cart very lightly and reached for the reins, but a man sat beside her and she knew him by his hands, driving the cart. (GW, 88)

Like Miranda, Granny recognizes the stranger; unlike the young influenza victim, however, she suddenly realizes that she has no choice, she must complete her ride with the driver of the cart. Granny's growing awareness is accompanied by what she assumes to be the thunder and lightning of a coming storm. By now, she is barely able to speak or focus her eyes. "Light flashed on her closed eyelids and a deep roaring shook her" (GW, 88). She knows now her time has come and, with true housewifely concern, she regrets all the chores that remain undone--an unclarified will, an unfinished altar cloth, and six bottles of wine not sent to Sister Borgia. "So my dear Lord, this is my death and I wasn't even thinking about it. . . . But I can't, it's not time. Oh, I always hated surprises" (GW, 88).

Although despair seems to be the keynote of the concluding passage, I suggest, despite the consensus of the critical canon, Granny's immortal soul is not

lost. A re-reading is necessary before further evaluation:

The blue light from Cornelia's lampshade drew into a tiny point in the center of her brain, it flickered and winked like an eye, quietly it fluttered and dwindled. Granny lay curled down within herself; her body was now only a deeper mass of shadow in an endless darkness and this darkness would curl around the light and swallow it up. God, give a sign!

For the second time there was no sign. Again no bridegroom and the priest in the house. She could not remember any other sorrow because this grief wiped them all away. Oh no, there's nothing more cruel than this--I'll never forgive it. She stretched herself with a deep breath and blew out the light. (GW, 89)

This second jilting, based on the Biblical account by Matthew (25:1-13), does not certify Granny's eternal damnation. This pragmatic Martha could never be judged as one of the five foolish virgins who missed the Divine Bridegroom because they had not sufficient oil in their lamps.³⁴ Granny had been prepared for any adversity throughout her life; it is unthinkable that this last task should not be faithfully executed. We can only hope that Granny's plea for a sign will be answered after she has performed her last gallant act, the blowing out of the light of her own life. This takes courage and faith --Granny has enough of both! Although we are not permitted to share Granny's hoped-for Beatific Vision, we look to the text for possible evidence that Granny, one of the most heroic of all the Marthas, might well be on her celestial way as she rides in the cart with the familiar driver. The road taken must surely be her prelude to

eternal happiness. ". . . [she] . . . looked . . . down the road where the trees leaned over and bowed to each other and a thousand birds were singing a Mass" (GW, 88). Could it be her "favorite saints" were also members of the choir?

NOTES

¹Katherine Anne Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1952), p.161.

²Katherine Anne Porter, "The Source," in The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1965), p. 324.

³Katherine Anne Porter, "Marriage is Belonging," in The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Delacorte Press, 1970), p. 191.

⁴Both George Hendrick and James Johnson have noted in great detail the importance of the symbolism inherent in Miss Porter's choice of proper names. Cf. George Hendrick, Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 54; James William Johnson, "Another Look at Katherine Anne Porter," in Lodwick Hartley and George Core, eds., Katherine Anne Porter: A Critical Symposium (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969), p. 91.

⁵Thomas Bulfinch, Bulfinch's Mythology (New York: Random House, Inc., n.d.), p. 15.

⁶Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before, p. 160.

⁷Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before, p. 158.

⁸Winfred S. Emmons, Katherine Anne Porter: The Regional Stories (Austin, Texas: Steck-Vaughn Company, 1967), p. 15.

⁹Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before, p. 159.

¹⁰Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before, p. 159.

¹¹William L. Nance, S. M., Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 94.

¹²Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before, p. 156.

¹³Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before, pp. 156-57.

¹⁴Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before, p. 157.

¹⁵Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before, p. 155.

¹⁶Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before, p. 157.

¹⁷Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before, p. 159.

¹⁸Porter, "The Journey," in Collected Stories, pp. 328-29.

¹⁹Emmons, p. 13.

²⁰Harry John Mooney, Jr., The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), p. 19.

²¹Emmons, p. 13.

²²Jan Pinkerton, "Katherine Anne Porter's Portrayal of Black Resentment," The University of Kansas City Review, 36 (1970), 317.

²³John Edward Hardy, Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1973), p. 16.

²⁴Glenway Wescott, "Katherine Anne Porter Personally," in Lodwick Hartley and George Core, eds., Katherine Anne Porter: A Critical Symposium (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969), p. 25.

²⁵Porter, "A House of My Own," in The Days Before, p. 172.

²⁶Porter, "Noon Wine: The Sources," in Collected Essays, p. 472.

²⁷Porter, "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," in Collected Stories, pp. 80-89.

²⁸Hendrick, p. 93.

²⁹Porter, "Eudora Welty and 'A Curtain of Green,'" in The Days Before, p. 107.

³⁰Edward G. Schwartz's comments on Miss Porter's "preference" for this technique clarify her use as stylist of the stream-of-consciousness manner. Cf. Schwartz's "The Fictions of Memory," in Hartley and Core, Katherine Anne Porter: A Critical Symposium, p. 74.

³¹George Hendrick points out the similarity between Porter's Cornelia and King Lear's Cordelia. Cf. Hendrick, p. 91.

³²John Hardy notes that the identities of Hapsy and of the baby have been the subject of much critical debate. He suggests a reading of the following criticisms: Peter Wolfe, "The Problems of Granny Weatherall," CLA Journal, 11, No. 2 (December 1967), pp. 142-48; and Joseph Wiesenfarth, "Internal Opposition in Porter's 'Granny Weatherall,'" Critique, 11, No. 2 (1969), pp. 47-55.

I would also add to the above list the names of Daniel R. and Madeline T. Barnes, "The Secret Sin of Granny Weatherall," Renascence, 21 (1969), pp. 162-65.

For Hardy's recommendations, cf. Hardy, p. 145.

³³ Charles Allen also shares this theory with Hendrick. Cf. Hendrick, p. 92; Charles A. Allen, "Katherine Anne Porter: Psychology As Art," Southwest Review, 41 (Summer 1956), 226.

³⁴ The Biblical account tells of the ten virgins who took their lamps and went forth to meet the Divine Bridegroom. As He was long in coming, they all became drowsy and slept. On hearing of His impending arrival, they all arose and trimmed their lamps; the five foolish virgins had come unprepared, without sufficient oil for their lamps. Since they had to go to procure oil, they were absent when the Bridegroom did come. When they finally arrived, however, the doors to the marriage feast were shut to them. The last verse is significant: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

CHAPTER III

MARTHA PLUS MARY EQUALS ARTIST

In her honesty as a Mary figure, Katherine Anne Porter reaffirms her gratitude to the Martha prototypes of her past, those elders to whom she owed so much, by saying, ". . . my feet rest firmly on this rock of their strength to this very day."¹ As an artist in the modern, fast-changing world, Miss Porter has often had to rely on improvisation in the shaping of her future. This ingenious Mary has been able to do so only because of the inner strength inherited from her forbears. Confidently, she left the well-ordered world of her past, the milieu that was so safe, in order that she might live in the uncertain ambiance of "the community of letters."² I submit that this passion for order, embedded in her spirit, was the primary motivation in the choice of her profession. Recalling my original thesis, it is easy to see in the artist Katherine Anne Porter the perfect embodiment of the Mary-Martha motif. She has attempted throughout her career to create in her fiction an approximation of order out of the chaos that is life. In an interview in Paris Review, Miss Porter observes,

There seems to be a kind of order in the universe, in the movement of the stars and the turning of the earth and the changing of the seasons, and even in the cycle of human life. But human life itself is almost pure chaos. Everyone takes his stance, asserts his own rights and feelings, mistaking the motives of others, and his own. . . .3

Of course, man's habitual assertion of "his own rights" has led to historical wars. On June 21, 1940, seven days after the fall of France, Miss Porter wrote what has been interpreted as her manifesto or statement of faith regarding her own art. In an introduction to the Modern Library edition of "Flowering Judas," she explains the paucity of her work by commenting that the interim years between World War I and World War II were not conducive to the nourishment of the artistic spirit. Nonetheless, she is certain of the immortality of art in spite of all of mankind's catastrophes:

In the face of such shape and weight of present misfortune, the voice of the individual artist may seem perhaps of no more consequence than the whirring of a cricket in the grass; but the arts do live continuously, and they live literally by faith; their names and their shapes and their uses and their basic meanings survive unchanged in all that matters through times of interruption, diminishment, neglect; they outlive governments and creeds and the societies, even the very civilizations that produced them. They cannot be destroyed altogether because they represent the substance of faith and the only reality. They are what we find again when the ruins are cleared away. And even the smallest and most incomplete offering at this time can be a proud act in defense of that faith. 4

The order that Miss Porter seeks can be found, she avows, in religion as well as in art. It is impossible not to see in this modern Mary the spiritual training inculcated in her by her grandmother. Her literature reflects this influence as does her philosophical belief. Although she has long forsaken orthodoxy and institutionalized religion, Miss Porter has a firmly fixed faith in man's ability to strive for sanctity whereby he might see in himself the divine image of God. She is of the opinion that the artist is the best agent to assist man in reaching that goal. She once wrote, "I agree with Mr. E. M. Forster that there are only two possibilities for any real order: in art and in religion. All political history is a vile mess, varying only in degrees of vileness from one epoch to another, and only the work of saints and artists gives us any reason to believe that the human race is worth belonging to."⁵

Despite the fact that she is a typically unorthodox Mary figure, we discover, with surprise, in the pages of her fiction that Miss Porter is rather partial to saints. Whether her relationship is reverential or not is undetermined. From the characterization of Granny Weatherall, we would adjudge that it is at least comfortable. Miss Porter treats her favorite saints with respect because they possess a certain intellectuality which she

would, naturally, find admirable. Nowhere among her frequent references to the saints is there a passage quite so intriguing as that in which she tweaks the nose of the venerable T. S. Eliot who castigated one of her favorite writers, Thomas Hardy. Mr. Eliot accuses Hardy of having "diabolic"⁶ tendencies such as those one might associate with an "untrained mind."⁷ There is witty malice of forethought in the following critical defense:

Untrained minds have always been a nuisance to the military police of orthodoxy. God-intoxicated mystics and untidy saints with only a white blaze of divine love where their minds should have been, are perpetually creating almost as much disorder within the law as outside it. To have a trained mind is no guarantee at all that the possessor is going to walk infallibly in the path of virtue, though he hardly fails in the letter of the law. St. Joan of Arc and St. Francis in their own ways have had something to say about that. The combination of a trained mind and incorruptible virtue is ideal, and therefore rare: St. Thomas More is the first name that occurs to me as example. Hardy's mind, which had rejected the conclusions though not the ethical discipline of organized religion . . . was not altogether an untrained one, and like all true Dissenters, he knew the master he was serving: his conscience.⁸

Both the unorthodox Mr. Hardy and the unorthodox Miss Porter had met years before when Miss Porter and her sister opened the big secretaries in the Texas farmhouse. The book shelves there contained many fine examples of great literature, so readily available in the literary atmosphere of the cultured Southern home. She told an interviewer, "Henry James and Thomas Hardy were really my introduction to modern literature;

Grandmother didn't much approve of it."⁹ It is understandable that, in the twilight of the "old order," a moral arbiter like her grandmother would not have welcomed a Jude Fawley or a Tess d'Urberville into her Victorian home. However, we know from the annual excursion of the Grandmother in "The Source" that she earnestly dusted the shabby volumes of the classics, and then allowed them to be eagerly perused by such an inquisitive reader as her granddaughter.

Thus it was natural that Miss Porter's searching young mind, nurtured by artists at a tender age, should follow the difficult paths laid out by such giants. This intellectual Mary was to aspire to great heights, struggling always to be true to the rigid rules of the perfectionist. She often uses in her fictive and personal writings the word "slackness" with a disparagement evocative of the disapproval of all the sharp-tongued Marthas she has known. They did not tolerate second-best; neither does Miss Porter in any word she puts to paper. In dismissing a popular writer who was obviously perpetuating the vice of "slackness" in his writing, she expounds with vigor on the necessity of coming as close to the artistic truth as is humanly possible:

But I tell you, nothing is pointless, and nothing is meaningless if the artist will face it. And it's his business to face it. He hasn't got the right to sidestep it like that. Human life itself may be almost pure chaos, but the work of the artist--the only thing he's good for--is to take

these handfuls of confusion and disparate things, things that seem to be irreconcilable, and put them together in a frame to give them some kind of shape and meaning. Even if it's only his view of a meaning. That's what he's for--to give his view of life. 10

Even in her early childhood, Katherine Anne Porter was clairvoyant about her future role in life. The intuitive Mary wrote a letter to her sister saying, ". . . I wanted glory. I don't quite know what I meant by that now, but it was something different from fame or success or wealth. I know that I wanted to be a good writer, a good artist."¹¹

Her achievement of the status of an artist is justified, of course, in the excellence of her fiction, but her personal writings also include critical commentary of the works written by those geniuses she admired as a child. If any one author can be singled out as the most luminous beacon which guided her own craft, it would have to be Henry James. Even a nodding acquaintance with the Jamesian style would be renewed after a reading of any of Porter's works. For example, the cleverly patterned chaos of the dissipating life-in-the-world of Granny Weatherall clearly shows the influence of James, the master of order-in-complexity. When asked to choose between Henry James or Walt Whitman regarding their relevancy to present and future writers in America, she replied,

For myself I choose James, holding as I do with the conscious, disciplined artist, the serious expert against the expansive, indiscriminately 'cosmic' sort. James, I believe, was the better workman, the more advanced craftsman, a better thinker, a man with a heavier load to carry than Whitman. 12

The keystone of the above evaluation is the phrase "conscious disciplined artist." Indeed each word alone has depth of meaning for Miss Porter whose own form and style indicate the exercise of a most demanding kind of discipline.

Miss Porter applies the yardstick of discipline to all those upon whom she casts a critical eye. Her essays on the works of women writers are to be applauded for their dispassionate quality. She is impatient with male critics like André Maurois who, in an examination of the writing of Katherine Mansfield, let himself be led astray by preoccupation with what he called her "pure feminine mysticism."¹³ Miss Porter objects to the clouding of the issues by the allusion to strictly feminine parameters. She responds, "Such as it was, her mysticism was not particularly feminine, nor any purer than the mysticism of D. H. Lawrence; and that was very impure matter indeed."¹⁴ She sees much to praise in Miss Mansfield's work and reminds the reader of the standards of her own quality of judgment by noting, "--and remember I am judging by her pages here under my eye--I see no sign that

she ever adjusted herself to anything or anybody, except at an angle where she could get exactly the slant and the light she needed for the spectacle."¹⁵ This is high praise from an artist who values her integrity above all else.

There is a touch of awe in Miss Porter's treatment of Virginia Woolf as she recalls the enjoyment she received from the writer's earliest novels. She decries the unfairness of the fact that Virginia Woolf's critical canon suffers in bulk beside those of her fellow artists, Joyce, Lawrence, and Eliot. In her inimitable slyness, Miss Porter suggests that Miss Woolf confounded the critics. She comments, "In 1925 she [Virginia Woolf] puzzled E. M. Forster, whose fountain pen disappeared when he was all prepared in his mind to write about her early novels."¹⁶ Miss Porter remarks that because of Miss Woolf's total devotion to art above all concerns, both spiritual and physical, the world marked her as a heretic. Miss Porter disagrees, "She wasn't a heretic--she simply lived outside of dogmatic belief. She lived in the naturalness of her vocation. The world of the arts was her native territory; she ranged freely under her own sky speaking her mother tongue fearlessly. She was at home in that place as much as anyone ever was."¹⁷

Katherine Anne Porter from Kyle, Texas, identified completely with Willa Cather from Red Cloud, Nebraska. Both writers were of the pioneer stock that had its roots

buried deep in Virginia soil. A reading of Miss Cather's fine short narrative "Old Mrs. Harris" in which she honors her own Grandmother Boak from Winchester, Virginia, invites comparison with "The Old Order" in which we are certain Miss Porter eulogizes Grandmother Porter in the characterization of Grandmother Rhea. Both heroines exemplify the true Marthas' concern for the rearing and education of the young entrusted to their care. It is obvious that Miss Porter reminisces as she notes that Willa Cather is the true child of these literate people who were "rock-based in character, a character shaped in an old school of manners, good morals, and the unchallenged assumption that classic culture was their birthright" ¹⁸ One senses Miss Porter's delight in having found a kindred spirit, not only in art but in soul as well. Willa Cather embraced "the belief that knowledge of great art and great thought was a good in itself not to be missed for anything; she subscribed to it all with her whole heart, and in herself there was the vein of iron she had inherited from a long line of people who had helped to break wildernesses, and to found a new nation in such faiths." ¹⁹ Miss Porter's nostalgia seems justifiable because, of course, she too was raised in the same milieu. The worlds of Miss Cather and Miss Porter were evocative of warmth and order and their works are the natural products of such environments. Miss Cather's

words were set down carefully, with tenderness, so that their placement would not interfere with the writer's tenuous web of communication with the reader. Of two of Miss Cather's collections of short stories, Miss Porter says,

They live still with morning freshness in my memory, their clearness, warmth of feeling, calmness of intelligence, an ample human view of things; in short the sense of an artist at work in whom one could have complete confidence: not even the prose attracted my attention from what the writer was saying--really saying, and not just in the words. 20

Miss Porter treasured the clarity of the poetic prose of Miss Cather because it is evident that both writers held old values in high esteem. The antithesis of this purity of form Miss Porter found, much to her displeasure, in the writings of Gertrude Stein. The new school of modern writers presided over by Miss Stein in her Paris salon naturally annoyed the disciplined Miss Porter who deplored the kind of writing "in which poverty of feeling and idea were disguised, but not well enough, in tricky techniques and disordered syntax."²¹

At first, she was willing to suspend judgment of the grande dame of the Lost Generation. In her essay entitled "Gertrude Stein: Three Views," she traces the dizzily circular path of Miss Stein's literary contributions. The piece, comprising three separate articles, dated respectively 1927, 1928, and 1947, illustrates Miss Porter's growing belief that Miss Stein was indeed a fraud. With mocking mimicry and telling satire, she

delivers a fatal coup de grace to the Stein legend in the last piece entitled "The Wooden Umbrella." Of all her criticisms, Harry Mooney considers this essay "by far the most trenchantly thought out and stated; its tone is a masterful and sustained mixture of levity and high seriousness, dignity and caprice. . . ." ²² The following comment is typical of the manner in which Miss Porter simultaneously offers biographical information and critical commentary: "So she and her brother drifted apart, but gradually, like one of Miss Stein's paragraphs." ²³ To those committed to the cult of Miss Stein, the name Katherine Anne Porter became anathema. However, others, who felt differently, said that it was time it was time it was time.

The reiterative style of Gertrude Stein's prose bordered on the precious, the mannered, and the eccentric. It is no wonder that Katherine Anne Porter, a stylist noted for her "verbal fastidiousness," ²⁴ would shrink from the miasma created by Miss Stein's peculiar use of words. Hardly any criticism of Miss Porter lacks the adulatory phrase, "writer's writer." This reference to her as a superb stylist, although meant in the most honorable way, has caused Miss Porter pain and has perhaps done little to widen the élite circle of her audience. The epithet should not be construed as pejorative in any sense. True, when Miss Porter writes of her beloved South, her own time, and her own people, she probably attracts a

larger audience. However, once the reader falls under the charm of the Porter mystique, it is more than likely that he will gladly pursue her luminous style through recondite symbolism and complex stream-of-consciousness for the sheer exhilaration of intellectual stimulation. It is well worth the trip.

Miss Porter considers the term "stylist" misleading because it suggests the cultivation of that which is "artificial and imposed."²⁵ In an interview she said, "The style is you. . . . Style is the man. Aristotle said it first . . . it is one of those unarguable truths. You do not create a style. You work, and develop yourself; your style is an emanation from your own being."²⁶ However, Harry Mooney is disturbed by the fact that critics have a tendency to sum up the total being that is Miss Porter by lavishly praising and dismissing her, in one breath, with that one word--"stylist."²⁷ The opening statement of an intuitive study by John Hagopian makes the matter-of-fact assertion that "paradox and ambiguity mark the woman and her work."²⁸ Miss Porter's style baffles even the able Edmund Wilson who confessed that "her writing . . . makes a surface so smooth that the critic has little opportunity to point out peculiarities of color or weave."²⁹

Of all those who have sought to piece together the mosaic that is Miss Porter's style, the most satisfying

assessment seems to have been made by Paul Crume. He evaluates her writing by saying,

Her approach is a curious blend of impressionism with the hardness and exactness of imagery characteristic of a writer who reports. Her technique is suggestive rather than direct. Her characters are drawn in very lightly, but through a phrase of dialogue, an action, a sentence of description, one becomes conscious of the whole covert character barely hinted in the narrative. . . . Only incidentally does she create the illusion of action. Actually her technique is to arrest action at a significant moment, to dissect out its pattern, its texture, its beauty. And the whole, warming satisfaction she brings to a reader comes not from dramatic impact but from the style and manner, the heartening goodness of words, old words newly used, the perceptive little glimpse of a fine mind and a fine hand working with the material. 30

Although Mr. Crume is speaking of style, one phrase could be excerpted as exemplifying the whole texture of the Mary-Martha motif. We note his reference to "old words newly used." Miss Porter explored the treasures of classical antiquity and kept in her mind's notebook such sources as the Bible, Aristotle, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Scott. Indeed it is this ability to draw from the past and to adjust to the demands of modernity that illustrates the contrapuntal theme of the biography of Katherine Anne Porter. It is my belief that she could not function with such consummate artistry if she did not have the foundation of traditional values which enrich her "certain solid ground." She once said, "All my past is 'usable,' in the sense that my material consists of memory, legend, personal experience, and acquired knowledge."³¹

In the semi-autobiographical Miranda stories we have enjoyed the sensuousness of her "summer country"³² with its exotic colors and tastes. There were "the smells and flavors of roses and melons, and peach bloom and ripe peaches, of cape jessamine in hedges blooming like popcorn and the sickly sweetness of chinaberry florets."³³ Miss Porter's thoughts of these delights were recollected in the tranquillity of far off places like Mexico, Bermuda, Spain, France, Germany, and Switzerland. One recalls Sarah Orne Jewett's advice to Willa Cather, "Of course, one day you will write about your own country. In the meantime, get all you can. One must know the world so well before one can know the parish."³⁴ In putting time and space between herself and her subject, Miss Porter gained a greater understanding of her past. As one must do with an Impressionist painting by the pointillist Seurat, she looked at the Marthas of her South from afar. Thus did she gain true appreciation. Of her time spent abroad, Miss Porter admits, ". . . it gave me back my past and my own house and my own people --the native land of my heart."³⁵

These excursions to other countries were foreshadowed early in her childhood. For an interviewer, she recalls the questing spirit of the Mary figure:

But, you know I was always restless, always a roving spirit. When I was a little child I was always running away. I never got very far, they were always having to come and fetch me. Once when I was about six, my father came to get me somewhere I'd gone, and he told me later he'd asked me, 'Why are you so restless? Why can't you stay here with us?' and I said to him, 'I want to go and see the world. I want to know the world like the palm of my hand.' 36

One must sympathize with the Mary figure in whom there are such warring forces--love of the stability of one's homeland and love of the excitement of foreign countries. However, it is my firm conviction that in order for Katherine Anne Porter to create great literature, it was her destiny to be a native of the South and an explorer of the world.

Sometimes there is poignancy in Miss Porter's rootlessness; one cannot help but empathize with her occasional bursts of desire for a sense of belonging. In describing her search for a house of her own, she says, "Indeed, I have lived for a few hours in any number of the most lovely houses in the world. There was never, of course, much money, never quite enough; there was never time, either; there was never permanency of any sort, except the permanency of hope."³⁷ Her essay subsequently reveals that she finally found a charming Georgian house near Saratoga Lake in New York; quickly, she became an ecstatic homeowner. The piece describes her loving restoration of this old house and her happy anticipation

of settling down amidst those lovely woods. The note appended to the essay, however, is a tag-line written by a Mary figure. It reads, "I lived there just thirteen months."³⁸

Miss Porter's personal writings indicate her acceptance of rootlessness as part of the artist's vocation. It has also been noted earlier that she views marriage and art as being incompatible. "Art is a vocation," she has said, "as much as anything in this world. . . . But we really do lead almost a monastic life, you know; to follow it you very often have to give up something."³⁹ That the inevitable by-product of this belief is loneliness is also philosophically accepted by the artistic Mary. Miss Porter confides in her nephew that she has experienced the pangs of loneliness many times. However, in a letter, she writes, "But I have got a life engagement, a work that has not been a substitute for other relations but has merely superseded them; I have something that will last me until I die, and my loneliness is only that of a naturally lonely person. I have never thought it a misfortune, but a part of my daily life most important to the work I do."⁴⁰

Three important observations might be made at this point, possibly needing no clarification other than their presence on paper. The Martha figures in Miss

Porter's fiction were married; the Mary figures were not. Katherine Anne Porter herself was married three times, each marriage ending in divorce. In her essay "Marriage is Belonging,"⁴¹ she cites two people who were able to survive the demands of this human institution--the artists Elizabeth and Robert Browning.⁴²

Miss Porter's ambivalence toward love is clearly expressed in the Mary-Martha motif. The Marthas offered love easily, but there were strings attached. It is against these accompanying bonds that the Mary figure rebels. She will not be smothered by love nor will she submit to the demands of love. We recall the young Miranda in "Old Mortality" who cries out in desperation, "I hate loving and being loved. I hate it" (OM, 221). She looks askance at the family that dares to invade her privacy under the guise of love. The sophisticated Mary vows to insulate herself from the rule of those who love her. Miranda vows, "I will be free of them, I shall not even remember them" (OM, 219). It is significant perhaps that Miss Porter underscores the ferocity of Miranda's youthful determination by italicizing her words.

We again see italicization of theme in Miss Porter's Ship of Fools. We are moved by this emotional thematic statement of the novel, but I also interpret it as an entreaty for understanding of the author herself. Her solitary life as an artist must, of necessity, seem bleak

sterile, but nonetheless, the mature Mary asks that the Marthas continue to love her. One of her many characters aboard the Vera, a Mrs. Treadwell (often identified as another Miranda figure) implores for the author, "Love me, love me in spite of all! Whether or not I love you, whether I am fit to love, whether you are able to love, even if there is no such thing as love, love me!" (SF, 480).

It is unlikely that such a plea would fall on deaf ears because, in the final analysis, both the Martha and Mary figures are much alike. The Martha's imprint on the Mary figure is indelible. The artistic Mary, who has absorbed the personality and training of her childhood, will always be a moral aristocrat. No matter how much she may wish to reject it, the Mary figure must accept the hard truth that both the Marthas and the Marys are alike in their belief in "firm moral values and instinctive feelings of right which have come to them from the stability of the past."⁴³

Both prototypes exemplify the nobility of the human spirit as it is tested in the crucible of life. Although the Mary figure must face a "brave new world" which is quite unlike her idyllic, pastoral past, she is not alone. Her spirit is imbued with the tone and strength of the Marthas responsible for her "raising." They have bequeathed the Mary figure and Katherine Anne Porter a "certain solid ground," an invincible vantage point which guarantees the endurance of an artist.

NOTES

¹Katherine Anne Porter, "Portrait: Old South," in The Days Before (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1952), p. 156.

²Myron M. Liberman, Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1971) p. 35.

³Barbara Thompson, "Katherine Anne Porter: An Interview," in Writers at Work: The 'Paris Review' Interviews (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), p. 161.

⁴Porter, "Three Statements About Writing," in Days Before, pp. 130-31.

⁵Porter, "Three Statements About Writing," in Days Before, p. 132.

⁶Katherine Anne Porter, "On a Criticism of Thomas Hardy," in The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter (New York: Delacorte Press, 1970), p. 5.

⁷Porter, "On a Criticism of Thomas Hardy," in Collected Essays, p. 7.

⁸Porter, "On a Criticism of Thomas Hardy," in Collected Essays, p. 7.

⁹Thompson, Paris Review, p. 142.

¹⁰Thompson, Paris Review, pp. 150-51.

¹¹Thompson, Paris Review, p. 147.

¹²Porter, "Three Statements About Writing," in Days Before, p. 123.

¹³Porter, "The Art of Katherine Mansfield," in Collected Essays, p. 49.

¹⁴Porter, "The Art of Katherine Anne Mansfield," in Collected Essays, p. 49.

¹⁵Porter, "The Art of Katherine Anne Mansfield," in Collected Essays, p. 51.

¹⁶Porter, "Virginia Woolf," in Collected Essays, p. 70.

¹⁷Porter, "Virginia Woolf," in Collected Essays, p. 71.

¹⁸Porter, "Reflections on Willa Cather," in Collected Essays, p. 31.

¹⁹Porter, "Reflections on Willa Cather," in Collected Essays, p. 31.

²⁰Porter, "Reflections on Willa Cather," in Collected Essays, p. 35.

²¹Porter, "Reflections on Willa Cather," in Collected Essays, p. 33.

²²Harry John Mooney, Jr., The Fiction and Criticism of Katherine Anne Porter (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), p.11.

²³Porter, "The Wooden Umbrella," [Third article in "Gertrude Stein: Three Views"], in Collected Essays, p. 264.

²⁴William L. Nance, S. M., Katherine Anne Porter and The Art of Rejection (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 213.

²⁵Thompson, Paris Review, p. 156.

²⁶Thompson, Paris Review, p. 156.

- ²⁷Mooney, p. 3.
- ²⁸John V. Hagopian, "Katherine Anne Porter: Feeling, Form, and Truth," Four Quarters, 12 (November 1962), p. 1.
- ²⁹Edmund Wilson, "Books: Katherine Anne Porter," New Yorker, 20 (September 30, 1944), 72.
- ³⁰Paul Crume, "Book Reviews: 'Pale Horse, Pale Rider,'" Southwest Review, 25 (January 1940), 217-18.
- ³¹Porter, "Three Statements About Writing," in Days Before, p. 123.
- ³²Porter, "Noon Wine: The Sources," in Collected Essays, p. 470.
- ³³Porter, "Noon Wine: The Sources," in Collected Essays, pp. 470-71.
- ³⁴William M. Curtin, The World and the Parish: Willa Cather's Articles 1893-1902 (Lincoln: Univeristy of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. iii.
- ³⁵Porter, "Noon Wine: The Sources," in Collected Essays, p. 470.
- ³⁶Thompson, Paris Review, p. 145.
- ³⁷Porter, "A House of My Own," in Days Before, pp. 172-73.
- ³⁸Porter, "A House of My Own," in Days Before, p. 178.
- ³⁹Thompson, Paris Review, pp. 148-49.
- ⁴⁰Porter, "Letters to a Nephew," in Collected Essays, p. 118.
- ⁴¹Porter, "Marriage is Belonging," in Collected Essays, pp. 187-192.

⁴²William Nance comments on this example by saying, "Finally, it is eminently fitting that the single example mentioned of a happy marriage is that doubly rare phenomenon, a union of two artists--the Robert Brownings." Cf. Nance, p. 234; Collected Essays, p. 192.

⁴³Mooney, p. 33.

CONCLUSION

After several months of study of such an important figure in twentieth-century literature, one should feel that one knows Katherine Anne Porter very well, as well as she herself sought "to know the world like the palm of [her] hand." Sadly, this is not so. Biographers, too, have been thwarted in their efforts to record factual information. Perhaps, only her contemporaries really know her, those who have had the pleasure of her company. Although she has stated that she never belonged to any particular group, she has had a wide circle of friends, among them revolutionaries, internationalists, booksellers, film makers, reporters, painters, and writers. These people knew Katherine Anne Porter, the individual. However, these relationships, in most instances, were mercurial, born of the time and place in which she found herself at the moment. On the other hand, there is evidence in her correspondence that there are many friends and relatives about whom she feels deeply. This is, of course, compatible with her image as a Mary figure who is always compassionate and sensitive to the needs of others.

It is this sensitive figure which I feel, much to my gratification, I have come to know well. This figure, which I have referred to as the Mary figure, is synonymous with the spirit of Katherine Anne Porter. This spirituality, although an elusive, ethereal quality, has at the same time an admirable strength which is the fibre of her being. I have felt this intangible presence; for me, it has established the necessary rapport in the development of this paper. The key to the quest of finding the real Katherine Anne Porter lies in the texture of her work. I have felt, but perhaps could not adequately define, the graceful contours of the pattern of her creation. The fabric is strong, the threads so firmly interwoven, one concludes that, like the Bayeux tapestry, her literature will endure as a monument to those human beings who have grappled with the human condition. Miss Porter's stories are of people from all walks of life who have been triumphant in survival or splendid in defeat. Neither her stories nor her protagonists are ordinary, just as no human being is average. Katherine Anne Porter salutes the fact that man is unique to himself and to society. She is concerned with his dignity and his intrinsic value to the universe.

I am particularly mindful of the fact that as a writer who happens also to be a woman, she has made a

valuable contribution to the modern concept of womanhood. In her fiction, she has traced the various roles assigned women in the past, and she has described with understanding the ways in which these women fulfilled their destinies. Miss Porter treats in a thought-provoking manner the modern woman's heritage and the subsequent complexities she must face as a result of her traditional past. An intellectual Mary, she forces the reader and society to acknowledge the truth that there are no easy definitions of what has been conveniently categorized as the "woman's role." She appeals to a thinking audience, an intelligentsia which, hopefully, in this present age, will grow in numbers. Perhaps, because of the stature of a writer like Katherine Anne Porter, the modern woman will encounter not apathy, but empathy.

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