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Sexuality in Porter's Short Fiction

by

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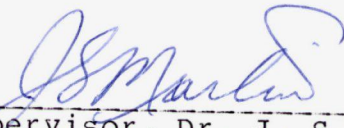
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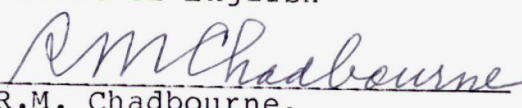
The undersigned certify that they have read,
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acceptance, a thesis entitled, "Sexuality in Porter's
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ABSTRACT

This study, rather than asserting a single thesis, studies sexuality in the short fiction of Katherine Anne Porter in terms of four categories which correspond to four chapters. Chapter One examines the immature and developing sexuality of children, adolescents and young adults in "The Downward Path to Wisdom," "The Circus," "The Fig Tree," "The Grave," "Virgin Violeta," "Old Mortality," and "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." The experiences of each of the central characters are individual but generally result or likely will result in the disruption of their mature sexuality.

Chapter Two discusses sexual ambivalence as indicated in the central characters of "Flowering Judas," "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," "Theft," and "Hacienda." Unlike the description of specific incidents which deform the developing personalities of the characters in Chapter One, the ambivalent attitudes of the characters towards sexuality examined here are revealed to be a response towards life in general and are often shown through Porter's symbolism.

Chapter Three groups together Porter's stories ("Rope," "That Tree," "A Day's Work," "The Cracked Looking-Glass") about childless couples. The marriages

discussed here are the bitterest in all of Porter's canon. In "Rope " sexual relations are used as a palliative. With the exception of the protagonists in "Rope," the men in this chapter feel emasculated by their wives, while the women reveal emotions ranging from disgust to ambivalence with respect to sexuality.

Chapter Four examines motherhood and its relationship to sexuality in "The Source," "The Journey," "The Last Leaf," "María Concepción," "Holiday." For Grandmother, her matriarchy is a compensation for the failure of sexual relations in her marriage; Nannie rejects both her marriage and her matriarchy; the motherhood of the women in the last two stories is a necessary and happy corollary to sexual relations.

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DEDICATION

In memory of: Harry Edwards Gibson, M.D.,
F.R.C.S. (3rd August 1909 - 12th April 1985); Hugh
Clavell Blunt (24th September 1908 - 23rd May 1986;
Elizabeth Marjorie Blunt (nee Campbell, 27th March
1916 - 8th September 1986).

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INTRODUCTION.

There are a number of stories in Katherine Anne Porter's canon that have nothing whatsoever to do with sexuality and therefore have been excluded from this study. "Noon Wine"--clearly one of Porter's major stories--has regrettably not found a place here because in the final analysis it is about the relationship of Mr. Thompson, not only to his wife, but also to Mr. Helton and Mr. Hatch. There is only the barest suggestion, because of Mrs. Thompson's poor health, that sexual relations between the couple are curtailed and only the barest suggestion that Mrs. Thompson may feel an attraction for Mr. Helton. "He" is also not represented here because the story describes the relationship between Mrs. Whipple and her mentally handicapped son and not the relationship between Mrs. Whipple and her husband. Although the protagonist of "The Martyr" clearly has a sexual relationship with Isabel, the nature of that relationship remains undescribed: the ironic focus is on Ruben rather than on the relationship between them. "The Leaning Tower" is also not represented because the interest in the story is primarily political: sexual misadventure receives only the slimmest hint, primarily in the cabaret scene.

The story cycle The Old Order is a series of

initiation stories and it generally, but not exclusively, describes Miranda's Bildung. To a greater or lesser extent, six of these sketches describe Miranda's sexual education, while the seventh story, "The Witness," is excluded because it is Uncle Jimbilly's description of the old order of slavery. Three of these sketches are analyzed in the first chapter of this thesis and three in the last. It should be apologetically admitted that not examining them as an entirety is doing violence to this story cycle. In defense of this action, I can only note that the perspective slightly changes in the cycle such that the portrait of Grandmother and Nannie contains observations and understandings that Miranda would never have been told nor could possibly have known, and which therefore could not have formed an intrinsic part of Miranda's development. Porter's description of Grandmother's erotic dreams is an example of this.

Finally, there are a number of Porter's works that ought to have been included. Ship of Fools has been ignored because its inclusion would have put the length of this study well over two hundred pages. Although "Magic" is clearly about sexuality, it has also been excluded because it does not fit into any of the four categories--corresponding to the four chapters--represented here. It may have been possible to analyze this story and suggest that the relationship between

the madam of the brothel and Ninette is the same as husband to wife, and therefore it belongs in Chapter Three of this thesis, but this solution seems rather contrived and unhelpful. In any event, the exclusion of "Magic" and Ship of Fools is one characteristic which marks this thesis as not an exhaustive study of sexuality in Porter's fiction.

This thesis is a thematic treatment of sexuality in Katherine Anne Porter's short fiction. Each chapter groups together various stories around a central theme, while the overall impetus for the thesis is developmental: taken as a whole, the thesis generally traces the sexual development of Porter's different characters as they move from cradle to grave. Because this study does not assert a single thesis but rather categorizes some of Porter's stories around a central idea, each chapter has an introduction which, I hope, will describe the central proposition better than any general introductory remarks.

CHAPTER I. SEXUALITY IN CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENCE
AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Childhood and adolescence in Katherine Anne Porter's short fiction is a time of initiation to and awareness of the most important rhythmic and vital processes of existence--birth, sex and death. The introduction of Porter's characters to the fundamental transition from youth to sexual maturity is almost always accompanied by a considerable amount of anguish and confusion: Porter's Bildungsromane customarily suggest an expulsion from the childhood garden of Eden into a post-lapsarian world, where guilt, sexual repression, and angst is commonplace.

In Porter's fiction, childhood is also the time when instinctual repression begins: inner needs are placed in conflict with conditioning and socialization and, although this conflict will surface later in adulthood, the exact effect upon the developing sexual instincts and emotional adjustment of children often remains implicit. For example, in both "The Downward Path to Wisdom" and "The Circus," the young children are taught shame regarding their physical being while remaining, for the most part, uncomprehending of the reason--sexual propriety--for the censure. Morality, in Western society, is often equated to a narrow kind of sexual morality which precludes a natural and

healthy interest by children and teenagers in their own and other's sexuality and which distorts sexual and emotional adjustment in adulthood; Porter's fiction is an uncomplimentary mirror of this conflict. Of all of the stories examined in this first chapter, only one, "The Fig Tree," describes an ultimately positive experience for the central character. "The Grave" seems, at least initially, not to be an altogether distressing introduction to sexuality, but Miranda has repressed this knowledge for some twenty years, implying the disturbing nature of her experience.

For Porter, adolescence and young adulthood represents a time when more developed sexual instincts can be further damaged by various incidents. In "Virgin Violeta" a young girl's developing instincts are initially constrained by her society and culture, and further damaged by a stereotypical, sexually predatory male. "Old Mortality" describes the destructive effect of the family's mythologizing of Amy--the apotheosis of the Southern belle--upon Miranda when she is eight, ten and eighteen years old. Granny Weatherall's entire life has been desolated through an incident in her girlhood.

"The Downward Path to Wisdom" describes the shredding of the sexual and emotional life of a very young child: Stephen is used as a pawn in the family's

squabbles and pitched battles. As in the archetypal expulsion from the Garden, Stephen's loss of innocence entails a sorrow that will never leave him. He is permanently and irrevocably damaged by certain cumulative events and formulative incidents in his early life.

The scene opens with young Stephen in his parent's bedroom. His vulnerability and uncomplicated demands for affection are stressed by his lying between his parents "like a bear cub in a warm litter" (Porter 369). His mother insists, as one would insist on the sleeping accommodations of the incommodious family cat, that Stephen be "put . . . out," since he is inconveniencing her by nibbling peanuts and scattering the shells. Stephen is ultimately expelled from his parents' bedroom under the threat of physical violence: his father raises his fist to him and shoves him out the door. Accountably--because of his parents' covert rejection of him (by sending him away) and explicit rejection ("'We'd be better off if we never had had him'")--Stephen feels "hurt all over" but is unable to relate his pain to his parents' dismissal of him (Porter 370). Stephen's presence precipitates a bitter and noisy fight between his mother and father. The child becomes terrified and to his "shame" he soils himself (Porter 372).¹ As has happened before in the face of his parents' violent quarrels, Stephen is

immediately taken to his Grandmother's house where, instead of receiving comfort, he is "handled with disgust" because of his toilet mistake and, instead of being given affection, he is given bread and jam.

Stephen's shame about his body is further compounded when, on the way to his first day at school, he leaves his fly open. The maid points out his lapse.

"Just look at yourself," said Old Janet
He looked at himself. There was a little end of him showing through the slit in his . . . trousers. . . . He remembered now how cold his knees were in cold weather. And how sometimes he would have to put the part of him that came through the slit back again, because he was cold there too. He saw at once what was wrong, and tried to arrange himself, but his mittens got in the way. Janet said, "Stop that, you bad boy," and with a firm thumb she set him in order. . . .

"There now," she said, "try not to disgrace yourself today." He felt guilty and red all over, because he had something that showed when he was dressed that was not supposed to show then. The different women who bathed him always wrapped him quickly in towels . . . because they saw something. . . . They hurried him so he never had a

chance to see whatever it was they saw. . . .

Outside, in his clothes, he knew he looked like everybody else, but inside his clothes, there was something bad the matter with him. It worried him and confused him and he wondered about it. (Porter 375-376)

As Adam and Eve learned shame of their nakedness and felt guilt for their sin, which is often symbolically read as a sexual sin, so Stephen learns humiliation for his body and feels "guilt," which will likely later result in a disruption in his mature sexuality. The contradictory signals that he receives from the parental substitute, the maid, also create a conflict in Stephen and reveal a repressed adult concern regarding auto-eroticism. He is told that he has done something wrong because he forgot to close the seam in his trousers, but when he tries to arrange himself, he is then told that he is a "bad boy." Stephen has learned that others feel his anatomy is disgraceful. He has also learned that there is an evangelical moral imperative: he ought to feel a similar sense of mortification regarding his body and its workings.

In the subsequent scene Stephen further learns guardedness regarding his physical movements. Stephen is in school and dancing with the other children. He is coltishly enjoying the purely physical action. Frances, his school friend, tells him that she does not

"like the way" Stephen dances. Frances' censure has the effect that Stephen does not "jump quite so high when the phonograph record started going dumdidddy dumdidddy again" (Porter 377). Progressively Stephen's enjoyment in being a corporeal creature is being eroded.

Stephen has also been badly spoiled by his elders. They have attempted to compensate for their lack of genuine affection through giving him things. His mother and father buy him off with peanuts; his Grandmother, with strawberry jam; his Uncle David, with balloons. Stephen, following the example set by his elders, attempts to buy the affection of Frances, firstly by giving her balloons that he has taken from his Uncle's supply, and secondly, by giving her lemonade that he has taken from his Grandmother's kitchen. Frances comes to visit Stephen and he entertains her with the balloons but she soon becomes bored with this activity and wants "liquish water." Stephen has spent his allowance and does not know "What he could do to please Frances that would not cost money"--again implying his first-hand knowledge of the marketability of love. Stephen settles on lemonade as a good substitute for "liquish water." George Hendrick has elucidated many of Porter's archetypal images and biblical allusions to the Fall in the incident of Stephen stealing lemonade. Stephen and Frances, like

Adam and Eve, eat of the bitter fruit--in this case, the lemons--from the tree of knowledge and, again, like Adam and Eve, they hide themselves from paternal censure "amongst the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8). Frances' face is "wise with the knowledge of why they ran" to hide themselves (Porter 381). Stephen uses the remainder of the lemonade to baptise the rosebushes in the "name of the father son holygoat" which implies the pagan basis of the Christian ceremony (Hendrick 99). "The Downward Path to Wisdom" is an initiation story where Stephen's fall from innocence to experience parallels the Fall.

The story concludes with the discovery that Stephen has not only taken lemonade, but also balloons. His uncle castigates Stephen as a thief and, because of that theft, Stephen is therefore like his father, who is, in the opinion of his in-laws, morally suspect. Stephen is in disgrace and his punishment is in being expelled from his Grandmother's garden and house. Stephen has been rejected by all the adults in his world and consequently his final silent litany--"I hate Papa, I hate Mama, I hate Grandma, I hate Uncle David, I hate Old Janet, I hate Marjory, I hate Papa, I hate Mama . . ."--is defensive (Porter 387, Porter's ellipsis). For Stephen, the downward path to wisdom is the path leading to his hatred for others and for himself--particularly his hatred for his body and all

its processes. It is a path that has been well traversed by his seniors.

In the sketch "The Circus," Miranda learns, like Stephen, to be guarded about her body, while also encountering further difficulties in determining the difference between illusion and reality in the specific context of relations between the sexes and the larger context--represented by the circus tent--of the world.

Miranda is sitting in the circus tent and admiring her attractive cousin, Miranda Gay, who is "a most dashing young lady with crisp silk skirts . . . and wonderful black curly hair above enormous wild grey eyes" (Porter 343). Miranda Gay is prototypically like a number of Porter's characters. She is reincarnated in Miranda's glamorous Aunt Amy or her cousin Isabel in "Old Mortality" and has similarities to the "other" woman, who is prettier and more vibrant than the central character of the story is, or feels herself to be. Another example is Violeta, who feels that her sister is more attractive than she. Women in Porter's fiction are often dichotomized into temptresses and plainer women as in, for example, "María Concepción," "A Day's Work," and "That Tree."² These more attractive women are usually attended by suitors, and similarly, Miranda also observes the "extremely handsome young men" who are paying court in the circus tent to her cousin, Miranda Gay. It is a very romantic

picture and, consequently, Miranda hopes "to be exactly like her cousin when she grew up." This idealized view of the courting ritual is contrasted with the darker side of sexual relations which Miranda does not understand but observes from her vantage on the bleachers. She notices that some "odd-looking roughly dressed little boys" are "peeping up" at her.

She looked squarely into the eyes of one, who returned her a look so peculiar she gazed and gazed, trying to understand it. It was a bold grinning stare without any friendliness in it. . . . As she gazed he nudged the little boy next to him, whispered, and the the second little boy caught her eye. This was too much. Miranda pulled Dicey's sleeve. "Dicey, what are those little boys doing down there?" "Down where?" asked Dicey, but she seemed to know already, for she bent over and looked through the crevice, drew her knees together and her skirts around her and said severely: "You jus mind yo' own business and stop throwin' yo' legs around that way. Don't you pay any mind. Plenty o' monkeys right here in the show widout you studyin dat kind." (Porter 344)

The sleazy and precocious voyeurism of the boys is in direct contrast to Miranda's idealized perception of

love which she sees enacted before her by her cousins (Hennessy 310).

Miranda, because of her youth, is unable to understand these adult concerns and to distinguish adult reality from childlike fantasy. When the clown on the high wire pretends to fall, Miranda is terrified because she perceives this clowning as reality.

The man on the wire, hanging by his foot, turned his head like a seal from side to side, and blew sneering kisses from his cruel mouth. Then Miranda covered her eyes and screamed, the tears pouring over her cheeks.

(Porter 345)

Miranda is further confused about illusion and reality when she perceives the dwarf, standing at the entrance to the tent, as "not . . . really human." When she grasps that he is indeed human and, moreover, an adult, she is chilled "with a new kind of fear" (Porter 345). The dwarf is an adult masquerading as a child, while the boys under the bleachers are children acting-out lascivious adult concerns. Miranda's dreadful experience with the circus contrasts to her family's enjoyment of the event, which they tormentingly exaggerate. Their delight and Miranda's terror underlines the disparity between illusion and reality--romance and sexuality--as perceptual. As Rosemary Hennessy observes, Miranda's "vision of the

menacing figure behind the face of life, and by implication, love, is much closer to the truth than the romantic version of the circus, which the other children and adults tell her she had missed" (309). While the child finds these actions and feelings, confusing and frightening, they will be stored as memories to be interpreted by an adult Miranda, who has selected these vignettes as psychologically significant for the woman, the child has become (Demouy 117). While her Grandmother says, "'the fruits of their present are in a future so far off, neither of us may live to know whether harm has been done or not,'" Porter suggests that the concrete illustration of the disparity between love and sexuality has been, for Miranda, both harmful and traumatic (Porter 347).

Added to Miranda's experience in "The Circus," the final two stories--"The Fig Tree" and "The Grave,"--of the story cycle The Old Order, are sequential in the development of Miranda's knowledge of the most important processes of birth, sexuality, and death. In the penultimate story of the series, "The Fig Tree," Miranda is terrorized because she mistakenly believes that she has buried a live chick. Miranda knows the form that death takes but she really does not understand its significance nor does she understand that death is not simply going "away forever" but that it may also include a cyclical continuance of existence.

Initially Miranda only understands that something is dead when it does not "move or make a noise" or it looks "somehow different from the live ones" (Porter 354). Miranda has also been socialized into believing that there is only a single way to deal with death and that is with a funeral and interment. (Her Grandmother tells her, "'It must be done this way and no other!'") So when Miranda discovers a dead chick, she hurries to bury it--to give it the proper funereal rites. Miranda then believes that she has buried the chick alive because she hears "'Weep, weep'" coming from the ground. She is horrified because she thinks she has transgressed her Grandmother's narrow dictums and transgressed by killing the chick. Great Aunt Eliza assuages Miranda's fears when she tells her that what she hears is "the first tree frogs" which mean that rain is imminent (Porter 361).

"Just think," said Great Aunt Eliza, in her most scientific voice, "when tree frogs shed their skins, they pull them off over their heads like little shirts, and they eat them. Can you imagine? (Porter 361-362)

This image of the tree frogs is a kind of asexual birth. It is also, for Miranda, a kind of rebirth, since her earlier experience with lizards told her they were dead when they "turned into shells, with no lizard inside at all" (Porter 354; DeMouy 139; Hardy 19).

Miranda has learned about the elusive nature of life and death: the chick is dead, the tree frog alive, and the outward appearance of death--the inert skin of a creature--can mean either life or death. As Great Aunt Eliza opens Miranda's eyes to an entire universe in a telescope, Miranda's new knowledge gained from her monumental relative, is also a liberating revelation (Nance 111).

The dual perspective of the mature Miranda selecting significant childhood events is most evident in the final sketch, "The Grave," where her memory of the events of that summer day are triggered by a visit to a Mexican market. In "The Grave" an older Miranda--her Grandmother is already dead--gains greater knowledge of life, death and its necessary corollary, sexuality. Miranda is nine years old and therefore still innocent of the physical changes which signal sexual maturity, while her brother Paul, at twelve years of age, is beginning the journey toward adulthood. Miranda and Paul investigate the empty graves of their Grandmother and Grandfather. (The land has been sold and consequently the graves have been moved.) The notice of the death of Miranda's grandparents and the presence of Miranda and Paul, as their youthful decedents, evokes the cycle of the generations (Rooke and Wallis 269). In the graves the two children find a screw head for a coffin and a ring,

the latter being most probably a wedding band. That Miranda's preference is for the ring is a symbolic identification of her femaleness both in its physical implications and marital aspirations. The cyclical nature of life is also suggested by the wedding band, which most probably belonged to Miranda's Grandmother, being claimed by Miranda: Miranda is at least a partial heir to her Grandmother's sensibilities. This idea is given further credence because Miranda, immediately after acquiring the ring, wants to go home and change from her tomboy overalls, which would have scandalized her Grandmother as it scandalizes the superannuated crones of the countryside, into her decorous feminine clothing--into the "thinnest most becoming dress she owned"--and dust herself with talcum powder. The ring is decorated with "intricate flowers and leaves" which suggests that it is a fertility symbol and therefore further identified with Miranda (Rooke and Wallis 270; Hendrick 69; Porter 363). Paul, on the other hand, prefers the dove. This dove is associated with death, because it is a coffin screw, and identified with Paul, since he hunts and kills doves as a pastime. This hunting and killing is gender identified in "The Grave " since Miranda does not "care whether she get[s] her bird or not" and only likes hunting because of the noise the gun creates and because she can "walk around" (Porter 364). The dove,

at least in this context, is primarily a male symbol, while the ring is primarily female.

Paul then shoots a rabbit and they discover that it was pregnant. He carefully skins it and exposes the womb. Miranda is "excited but not frightened." She wants

most deeply to see and to know. Having seen, she felt at once as if she had known all along. The very memory of her former ignorance faded, she had always known just this. No one had ever told her anything outright, she had been rather unobservant of the animal life around her because she was so accustomed to animals. They seemed simply disorderly and unaccountably rude in their habits, but altogether natural and not very interesting. . . . She understood a little of the secret, formless intuitions in her own mind and body, which had been clearing up, taking form, so gradually and so steadily she had not recalled that she was learning what she had to know. (Porter 366)

Miranda's epiphany is an understanding of birth, sexuality, and, as Cleanth Brooks observes, "her own destiny as a woman" (Hartley and Core 118). "The Grave" is an initiation story which introduces Miranda to the adult world of sexuality and birth and this new

knowledge is an archetypal fall from innocence to experience. That this knowledge is taboo--again evoking the Fall--is conveyed by Paul's insistence and Miranda's agreement that the godlike adults, particularly their father, should not be told of their new found knowledge (Kramer 334).

Miranda also learns from the dead mother rabbit the truth of the biblical pronouncement that "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16). She assimilates that birth is a precarious, bloody process--Miranda remarks on the "blood running over" the baby rabbits--and that life can be terminated not only by death but also by birth (DeMouy 143; Nance 109).

The final scene takes place in a market in Mexico. Miranda's memory of this childhood incident is triggered by the visual image of "dyed sugar sweets" in the form of baby animals which recall the image of the baby rabbits in their mother's womb and the olfactory stimulus of the "mingled sweetness and corruption she had smelled that other day in the empty cemetery." Miranda has repressed, in the grave of her mind, the sexual knowledge that she gained on that day. It "sank quietly into her mind and was heaped over by accumulated thousands of impressions for nearly twenty years." Miranda is so "reasonlessly horrified" at the exhumation of her childhood experience that she

immediately rejects and re-enters her memory of it. Miranda cannot accept the significance of the baby rabbits and their mother, nor absorb their importance and relationship to herself, as woman (Kramer 335). She recalls that she has always remembered that day as the "time she and her brother had found treasure," and with that recollection the "dreadful vision fades." It is replaced with the soothing and innocent image of her brother, "whose childhood face she had forgotten, standing in the blazing sunshine, a pleased sober smile in his eyes, turning the silver dove over and over in his hands" (Porter 368)

Porter's "Virgin Violeta" is a story about the painful beginning of womanhood for a young Mexican girl. While Miranda in "The Grave" or "The Fig Tree" is just becoming aware of sexuality as a force in the world, "Virgin Violeta" is a portrait of a direct and maiden encounter with love and sexuality (Demouy 30).

Violeta's ardent adolescent feelings are in turmoil and that inner turmoil is contrasted to the outer textured peace of the opening household scene: Blanca, Violeta's sister, is quietly reading aloud the sentimental love poetry her suitor, Carlos, has written. Violeta's mother is chaperoning the propriety of Carlos' courtship of her eldest daughter. Mamacita fitfully dozes but is alert to any possible social transgression. (She, for example, immediately rouses

when Blanca's voice stops.) Violeta is quietly curled-up listening to the poetry and worrying about her sensible, and unattractive clothing, which seems to her a testament to her detention in epicene childhood. She is also thinking about the discrepancy between her feelings and the apparent feelings of others. This confusion is revealed when she muses that she does "not understand why the things that happen outside of people [are] so different from what she [feels] inside of her" (Porter 23). Violeta's inner turmoil is primarily sexual: she harbours a passionate attraction to her sister's suitor and to his poetry.

A conflict is created between Violeta's inner unsophisticated needs and the rigidly puritanical society in which she is growing-up. She feels imprisoned and unable to "breathe"--"something inside her [feels] as if it were enclosed in a cage too small for it" (Porter 26). Like Violeta's feelings about her clothing, and her family, she also feels bound and constrained by her convent school. The nuns' most important lessons are the proper female deportment of "modesty, chastity, silence, obedience," which her sister has apparently so successfully internalized but under which Violeta is chafing (Porter 23). She is taught, almost as an afterthought, the ancillary subjects of music, French and arithmetic (Porter 23).

In Violeta's church, as well as in her household

and culture, the cult of the virgin is central hanging emblematically in her living room is a crude picture of the Virgin Mary extending her hand over the head of St. Ignatius Loyola, who is grovelling in "ecstasy" at Mary's feet. Carlos, as a masculine representative of his society, adores the virgin: he "never moves his eyes" from the crude picture of Mary, except to occasionally glance at Blanca, his other chaste and ethereal object of adoration. Like Carlos' idolatry of the virgin, Violeta's father insists on purity and chastity in his daughters. He demands that Blanca's and, by implication, Violeta's sexual conduct be as irreproachable as "a lily" (Porter 23). The repression of inner sexual needs and the guilt felt for having those needs is seen over and over again in Porter's heroes and heroines. This repression is explicitly displayed in, for example, the failure of Grandmother's marriage (The Old Order), in the personality of journalist's wife ("That Tree), or in Mrs Halloran ("A Day's Work). In some of Porter's fiction--"A Day's Work," for example--religion is squarely targeted as a source of that repression. Similarly, "church" is, for Violeta, a "terrible, huge cage" (Porter 26). The similarities between Violeta and the Miranda of "Old Mortality" are also striking. Both girls are astonishingly romantic and sentimental; both are convinced that beauty will come to them as they grow

older; both girls feel imprisoned by their convents; both have a literary taste for the gothic and the gothic convent in their reading (Porter 24, 176; See also Demouy 31). (Miranda reads novels about young girls "immured" in convents, while Violeta's favorite poem is about ghostly nuns who dance with their lovers on shards of glass.) Like Grandmother in "The Journey," the face Violeta wears for her family and the outside world is different from her interior sexual feelings. Both Grandmother and Violeta also believe that their sexual thoughts are transparent to adults. While Grandmother memorized bits of poetry to quote if she was asked for her thoughts, Violeta, convinced that others can see her romantic attachment to Carlos, conceals her face in her mother's lap. Like Grandmother, her interest in poetry sublimates sexual desire (DeMouy 33). Violeta also has similarities to Elsa in the Ship of Fools and Miranda in "Old Mortality:" they all feel very ungainly, shy (Hendrick 38), and oppressed by their respective families.

Violeta longs to be free from her convent life--to experience love--and her first thought in order to escape from this repressive life and to satisfy her romantic and sexual impulses is to marry.

Life was going to unroll itself like a long, gay carpet for her walk upon. She saw herself wearing a long veil, and it would

trail and flutter over this carpet as she came out of the church. There would be six flower girls. . . . (Porter 24)

Violeta then decides that one must be much older to marry--like Cousin Sancha, who is "quite old" at twenty-four--and that rather than waiting to marry, her life must "begin at once" (Porter 24). She is "certain" that "something . . . tremendously exciting [is] waiting for her" but this tremendously exciting event upon which she waits is altogether a negative and unpleasant experience.

Carlos makes a pass at Violeta and this pass signals Violeta's metamorphosis from innocence to experience. Violeta's romantic and naive attitude does not match Carlos' assault. Carlos kisses her and Violeta expects "to sink into a look warm and gentle" but instead what she meets is lechery:

Instead, she felt suddenly, sharply hurt, as if she had collided with a chair in the dark. His eyes were bright and shallow, almost like the eyes of Pepe, the macaw. His pale, fluffy eyebrows were arched; his mouth smiled tightly. . . . Something was terribly wrong. (Porter 29)

Violeta initially recognizes his kiss for what it is--concupiscence--but because of her inexperience Carlos is able to evoke guilt in Violeta by convincing

her that that the kiss is a harmless, familial one, and that lust only exists in her thoughts. He tells her that she is only a baby and that she ought to be ashamed of herself (Porter 29). She feels that she has behaved "shamefully" and "immodestly" (Porter 30). Her accurate and developing instincts which tell her that Carlos's kiss is self-servingly sexual have been undercut, and her romantic notions of love and sexuality have been destroyed through the encounter. Violeta, as her name suggests, has symbolically been violated.

A kiss meant nothing at all, and Carlos had walked away as if he had forgotten her. It was all mixed up with the white rivers of moonlight and the smell of warm fruit and a cold dampness on her lips that made a tiny smacking sound. (Porter 30)

When Carlos leaves he bends to kiss Violeta and with "the sight of the macaw eyes coming closer and closer, the tight, smiling mouth ready to swoop," she becomes hysterical and releases her suppressed sexual energy, embarrassment and humiliation by "screaming uncontrollably" (Porter 31; DeMouy 35). Carlos' "macaw eyes" also align him with the image of a cage which is imprisoning Violeta. This incident in Violeta's life has changed her, and while she has matured that maturation is a harsh and unnamed "something dreadful"

(Porter 31). That Violeta has aged is also suggested by her later quarreling on more equal terms with Blanca, and by her feelings that "there was no longer so great a difference of experience to separate" her from her sister. Violeta's expulsion from the garden is irrevocable and she has been psychically and emotionally deflowered; she is no longer the chaste blossom but is rather tainted with a guilt that will never be obliterated.

Like Violeta, Miranda is labouring under and constrained by a particularly powerful and draconian sexual stereotype. Although Porter suggests the historical and artistic mythology of the South, the focus in "Old Mortality" is on familial mythology--the story of the life and tragic death of Amy. Through this focus on familial mythology, Porter is making both a Southern and a universal observation about men and women and their relationship to one of the most influential archetypes: the love goddess (DeMouy 147). The story is essentially explained through the perspective of Miranda, although Maria, her sister, is also occasionally a filter of experience. While describing the legend of Amy, the story explores the effect upon Miranda of her family's re-creation and remembrance of things past.

"Old Mortality" is divided into three sections, each section progressively revealing Miranda's maturity, and accompanying disenchantment with her family's mythologies and mythologizing. Miranda and Maria hear from their elders about the artistic inferiority of the present and about the superiority of the past: Jenny Lind sings better than Nellie Melba; Bernhardt acts better than Modjeska; Rubinstein is a better pianist than Paderewski (Porter 179). The little girls also hear about Southern historical events. While John Wilkes Booth had committed an act of which "no one, not even a good Southerner could possibly approve," the young girls reveal an admiration for the romantic, Confederate hero

. . . John Wilkes Booth, . . . handsomely garbed in a long black cloak, had leaped to the stage after assassinating President Lincoln. "Sic semper tyrannis," he had shouted superbly, in spite of his broken leg. . . . She [Miranda] knew a distantly related old gentlemen who had been devoted to the art of Booth, had seen him in a great many plays but not, alas, at his greatest moment. Miranda regretted this; it would have been so pleasant to have the assassination of Lincoln in the family. (Porter 180)

Porter firmly regionalizes "Old Mortality" through this

notice of the little girls'--and implicitly all Southerners'--covert admiration of Booth and through the sense of recalcitrant pride felt in the post-bellum Southern United States. The story is also firmly regionalized by the Southern equivalent manifestation of Aphrodite: the Southern belle. In "Virgin Violetta" the chaste and holy female object of adoration, represented by the Virgin Mary, is central to the Latin American culture and central to the relationship between the sexes. The belle is the Southern American parallel and Miranda's Aunt Amy is that apotheosis of the Southern female. The difference between the two acculturated views of women in "Virgin Violetta" and "Old Mortality" is that in Latin America marriageable women--clearly distinguished from the other kind--ought to be modest, innocent, and completely oblivious of their own and other's sexuality, while in the South it is expected that they will be mildly flirtatious--vaguely aware of their sexual power--while still maintaining a gay but nonetheless irreproachable sexual integrity. Both are bloodless, alabaster models, revealing the poverty of spiritual and sexual relations between the sexes. In the opinion of the elders of Miranda's family, none of the current generation could possibly resemble the divine, evanescent Amy. Miranda's Cousin Isabel is a handsome young lady but she cannot ride as well as Aunt

Amy--riding being an important component of the belle's accomplishments. Cousin Amy, although attractive, "would never equal" the beauty of her namesake (Porter 177). Similarly, Miranda and Maria are "'pretty as pictures . . . but rolled into one they don't come up to Amy . . .'" (Porter 197). However impossible it is for Miranda and Maria or any woman, Southern or otherwise, to match this ideal, they are expected to attain certain gender-identified standards of grooming and deportment. Their father tells Maria and Miranda that they are "disgusting" and to go away if they are not "prettily dressed," and "well behaved" (Porter 184). He immediately notices if the seams in their stockings are crooked and he insists that they keep their teeth white with a revolting mixture of charcoal and chalk. The presence of freckles is clearly a grave flaw in the Southern belle. In "The Fig Tree," Miranda must always wear a bonnet to protect her skin (Porter 352), while in "Old Mortality," Maria says that neither she nor her sister will ever be beautiful since they will "always have freckles" (Porter 177). A beauty in the South has certain codified features: she "must be tall" with "dark" hair, "pale and smooth" skin, and be accomplished in riding and dancing (Porter 176). The belle must also have a "mysterious crown of enchantment" which probably translates to the modern equivalent of sexual appeal (DeMouy 148). As her

father tells her, Miranda's riding is poor, and she will always be small and freckled: she will never ride like Cousin Isabel or look like Cousin Amy, much less equal the transcendence of Aunt Amy (Porter 196). She does not even have "a good disposition," as her sister tells her (Porter 177).

In Miranda's society the negative role image is represented by Cousin Eva who was "born" an old maid. She is dismissed by the family with the epithet, "Eva has no chin, that's her trouble" (Porter 183). Eva, in the family mythology, compensates for her plainness by campaigning for votes for women. It is observed that "'When women haven't anything else, they'll take a vote for consolation. A pretty thin bedfellow'" (Porter 183). This reveals that, in the opinion of the family, spinsters like Aunt Eva sublimate their sexuality by campaigning for votes for women and by engaging in intellectual pursuits. (Eva also teaches Latin in a seminary.) Miranda and Maria are provided with a female role image which they must emulate and a negative one which they must not.

The first section not only describes in general terms the Southern feminine ideal, but also outlines the tragic legend of Aunt Amy. As with all familial anecdotes, Miranda and Maria have heard the story so often that they feel their memories "began years before they were born" (Porter 174). Aunt Amy, a

Traviata-like figure, is flirtatious, strong-willed and sparkling. She has many suitors--the most doggedly devoted being Gabriel, whom she treats with merciless indifference and disdain. The legend has it that Gabriel caught Amy kissing her ex-fiance, Raymond, at a Mardi Gras ball. Amy's brother (and Miranda's father) Harry, avenged his sister's honour for this sexual transgression by firing a shotgun at Raymond. His action was considered most unchivalrous since, in the usual course of events, Raymond ought to have been challenged to a duel. "Raymond seemed vindictive about that, it was possible that he might choose to make trouble" and consequently Harry fled to Mexico to escape legal punishment (Porter 188). Although the "scandal . . . had been pretty terrible" (Porter 189), the humiliation experienced by the family and Harry's year-long exile seems unproportionally harsh for a kiss and a vain shot in the dark. Cousin Eva later suggests that Harry not only shot at but, indeed, managed to hit Raymond and that the reason for the shot was really Amy's attempted elopement (Porter 212). This explanation seems to fit the facts better than the family's description of the events.

During Harry's absence the romance between Gabriel and Amy finally seems to end but during a particularly grave worsening of Amy's tuberculosis, which she brought on herself through over-indulgence, she asks to

see Gabriel. Gabriel visits and announces that his Grandfather with his dying breath has completely disinherited him. Only then does Amy agree to marry him with her reasons for accepting him remaining uncertain. One explanation may be that, being the rebel that she is, she decides to marry him because he has no money. Another may be that she marries Gabriel to escape from the tyranny of her family. Perhaps she marries him because she felt she was going to die and she either did not want to die without experiencing the full rites of marriage or she believes her mother when told that marriage and its attendant rites and consequences--sex and children--will cure her of "greensickness" (Porter 182). Perhaps, as Eva later implies, she marries him because she was already pregnant by Raymond. Whatever the truth, these alternate explanations undercut the romantic version of Amy's story.

Amy clearly dies of an overdose of her medication, but the reasons for her suicide, as the reasons for her marriage, remain uncertain. Her suicide implies that she was not afraid of death, and therefore, the possibility that she marries because she was afraid she might die, seems less likely. If she was pregnant by Raymond, her marriage protected her from scandal, so her possible pregnancy also seems less likely. Amy may have also consciously or unconsciously fulfilled the

self-constructed destiny of the tragic maiden, who is, in her own words, "not long for this world" (Porter 182). Another interpretation, and one that I favour, is that Amy had attempted to escape from the oppression of her family through marriage, but she found that she had not only exchanged one silken bond for another but that she had lost her most prized possession--her virginal status as a Southern belle--in the bargain. That the family's despotism is an unremitting pattern is also contained in the story of Amy's mother, Grandmother in "The Journey," who had similarly traded her virginity--her "sole claim to regard"--for marriage to a silly wastrel (Porter 335). And while Miranda's husband, mentioned in Part III, remains nondescript, it is evident that Miranda has also escaped from her family into an unhappy marriage. Whatever the truth that lies at the core of the familial myth, it is clear that enough inconsistencies exist for Miranda to question both its validity and veracity.

Even without Cousin Eva's alternate reconstruction of the past that Miranda does not hear until she is older (Part III), she has all along questioned her family's memories of the past. The picture she sees of Aunt Amy is undistinguished to her eye, while all the adults who see the picture automatically murmur "'How lovely.'" Miranda's father insists that there "were never any fat women in the family" but Maria and

Miranda both know that Great-Aunt Eliza is "one solid pyramidal monument from floor to neck," while Great-Aunt Keziah weighs in at two-hundred-twenty pounds (Porter 174). Miranda and Maria in examining the family's legends or in their reading of novels about convent life while being "immured," learn about the disparity between illusion and reality--one of Porter's favorite themes.

They had long since learned to draw the lines between life, which was real and earnest, and the grave was not its goal; poetry, which was true but not real; and stories, or forbidden reading matter, in which things happened as nowhere else, with the most sublime irrelevance and unliklihood, and one need not turn a hair, because there was not a word of of truth in them. (Porter 194).

In the second part of the story, Miranda, aged ten, learns further disillusion with the chivalric legends of her family. Her father takes her to the race track, where she meets the incarnation of the family's fable, Uncle Gabriel. His life is indeed, tragic, but the tragedy is not the stuff of romance: he is a disreputable, vulgar, drunkard, whose fortune is tied to the success of his horses at the race track: his horses have not been running well. In the second part of the story, Miranda has also given-up hoping, as

she earlier believed, that "by some miracle she would grow into a tall, cream coloured brunette" (Porter 176). Miranda concludes that since she can "never be a beauty like Aunt Amy or Cousin Isabel," she will take, like many of Porter's female characters, her independence. Miranda has decided to become a jockey. Although Porter is ironically humorous here, Miranda's decision to be independent--however naive--mirrors the conclusion to the story, where she again decides she will make her own way in the world. As Miranda's romantic notions about Uncle Gabriel are destroyed when facing the reality, she also learns that horse racing is cruel and not at all romantic. Gabriel's horse, at a-hundred-to-one odds, wins but at a terrible cost to the horse. Miss Lucy is bleeding from her nose, her eyes are "wild" and her knees "trembling." Miranda is heartsick at the damage done to the animal.

Miranda stood staring. 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' stand a neck ahead. (Porter 199)

After her day at the races, Miranda rejects the notion of becoming a jockey.

Gabriel invites Maria, Miranda and their father back to his shabby hotel to celebrate his win and to see his drab second wife, Miss Honey. Miss Honey, vinegary and stiff, has been embittered by living in the shadow of her predecessor, Amy. As do other members of the family, Gabriel compares and measures everything in terms of Amy, and for his entire married life, he has compared Miss Honey, always to her disadvantage, with Amy. Miss Honey is allied to the horse Miss Lucy by the address of "Miss" and is allied to all Southern women because of the Southern courtly custom of addressing all women as if they were eternally chaste. As John Hardy pertinently observes:

The dubious nature of the compliment, which really amounts to denying the recipient her rights and dignity as a mature woman, to denying the virtue of sexual fulfilment, is underscored in this case by the association of horse and woman. Woman in a society whose values are so ordered, Katherine Anne Porter suggests, is not only not the rider but the ridden. Whether her name be Honey or Lucy, the exhausted and bleeding mount that bears drunken Gabriel as he plunges on in the mists of his absurd dream is emphatically

feminine. (32)

An intrinsic part of the allure of Amy and of the Southern belle is the promise of sexuality, while, contradictorily, any evidence of the existence of that sexuality is dismissed as evil and immoral. They ought to remain forever asexual--to remain forever free of the monthly changes that differentiate girls from sexually mature women and which generate an interest in sexuality. Cousin Eva reveals the practices and repressive superstitions of the South when she notes that Amy drank

lemon and salt to stop her periods when she wanted to go to dances. There was a superstition among young girls about that. They fancied that young men could tell what ailed them by touching their hands, or even by looking at them. As if it mattered? But they were terribly self-conscious and they had immense respect for man's worldly wisdom in those days. (Porter 215)

The ideal ought to be even more than metaphorically bloodless.

Miranda's Aunt Amy has fulfilled the Southern ideal of womanhood precisely because she did not live long enough to destroy the image: she did not live long enough to have children, and develop wrinkles. Nor did she live long enough to change her image from the

virginal belle to the image of the slightly frayed and meretricious flirt represented by Cousin Molly Parrington, Eva's mother. Molly has survived the bearing of children and outlived a number of husbands. She was a "noted charmer" in her day but is now tarred with the brush of being too bold and indiscreet. She attempts to prove her timeless desireability by dying her hair, lying about her age and continuing to collect masculine admirers like moths. Neither Cousin Molly, nor Miranda, nor Miss Honey nor any Southern female in Porter's view could possibly match the marmoreal corpse created in the minds of Miranda's family.

In the final section, Maria disappears from the story. Miranda has eloped from the convent and married when she was seventeen. She is now eighteen and returning home for the funeral of Uncle Gabriel who, in his parting and eternal infidelity, has requested that he be buried next to Amy, his wife of six weeks rather than next to his wife of twenty-five years. On the train Miranda meets Cousin Eva--the chinless wallflower--and hears a contradictory version of the Aunt Amy legend. In Eva is provided the alternative and negative role model as Eva, herself, provides an alternate reconstruction and re-creation of the past. Eva implies--despite her over-loud protestations that Amy was always "virtuous"--that Amy was pregnant by Raymond. Eva observes that it was "odd" when Amy "rose

up suddenly from death's door to marry Gabriel Breaux, after refusing him and treating him like a dog for years." Eva also observes that her death was "mysterious" (Porter 212).

Miranda identifies Cousin Eva's character as being twisted ("why was a strong character so deforming?") and on Miranda's further acquaintance with Eva these suspicions are supported. Eva, in describing the sexuality of Southern women, is really describing the circumstances and consequences of her unhappy adolescence. She projects herself on Amy's impulses when she observes that Amy was

simply sex-ridden, like the rest. She behaved as if she hadn't a rival on earth, and she pretended not to know what marriage was about, but I know better. None of them had, and they didn't want to have, anything else to think about, and they didn't really know anything about that so they simply festered inside--they festered. (Porter 216).

She tells Miranda that her young life was spoiled by her chin, and that the family is a "hideous institution that should be wiped from the face of the earth." Miranda realizes that Eva's reconstruction and memory of the past "is no more true than what [she] was told before, it's every bit as romantic" (Porter 216).

Cousin Eva's reconstruction of the past is as distorted as the accepted family legend.

The story concludes with Miranda's father continuing to be unforgiving that his daughter eloped. When Miranda first sees her father she is hoping that he has forgiven her: she throws herself into his arms but he actually and metaphorically holds her at arms length. On the other hand, Eva and Miranda's father are companionably conspiratorial. They have forgotten their sexual and psychological differences, and, by ignoring Miranda and leaving her outside their conversation, they reproduce the archetypal contest between youth and age, between fathers and children.

Miranda resolves that she will not be, nor become like either of the sexual stereotypes that inhere in her family's mythology: she "will be free of them." Her blood "[rebels] against the ties of blood" (Porter 220). She has decided, although she began her journey by wanting to emulate Amy, that she will not be like her famous Aunt. But they are both very similar in being oppressed and constrained by an impossible and unrealistic view of women held by the family. Both Miranda and Amy escaped the family through marriage: Amy married Gabriel, while Miranda eloped with an unnamed man. Miranda seems to recognize that "she had run away to marriage" to escape the tyranny of her family and her family's mythologizing. Amy, feeling

oppressed by her marriage--she had traded one bond for another--makes her final escape through death. Miranda's solution is less drastic: she will leave her husband because he was "smothering her in love and hatred." It seems that while Miranda had earlier and to a lesser extent attempted to emulate the love goddess, Aunt Amy, she may now attempt a paler version of Cousin Eva with her bitter independence, not uncoloured by profound ambivalence tending to hatred for her family. Miranda decides that she "hate[s] love" and hate[s] loving and being loved," which is both a repudiation of Amy's type of sexuality as it is a repudiation of familial love. She be "romantic about" herself, but as she says of Eva's memories, her creation will be "every bit as romantic." Miranda, in Part I of the story wanted to be jockey, later she wanted to be a tightrope walker, when she first meets Eva in the final part, she confesses she would "like to be an air pilot" (Porter 208), now she wants, in her "hopefulness" and "ignorance" to "know the truth about what happens to" her. All of her resolutions are romantic; all are likely to remain unfulfilled under the dead weight of familial fable, and sexual stereotype.

Porter's view of dashed romantic hopes is also expressed in "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall." Porter has melded past and present into a brilliant omniscient

narration of Ellen Weatherall's thoughts on the last day of her life. Granny moves in and out of consciousness and in and out of the past such that her thoughts, memories, and the current events form a non-sequential, seamless whole. Sorting through and ordering the story--the business of apprentice criticism--it seems that her life has been, every twenty years, successively punctuated with a brush with death. George's jilting of her, when she was twenty,³ is representative of the psycho-sexual death of Granny's ability to love; Granny was again ill, when she was forty--"forty years ago"--with "milk-leg and double pneumonia" (Porter 80); when she was sixty she "came down with a long fever" and nearly died (Porter 82); her final brush with death is the one which will finally carry her away. Each of these near deaths is representative of the death of aspects of Granny's personality and role. From George's jilting she lost her girlhood and her ability to form a sexual and emotional bond with men: it was the most destructive and debilitating event of her life. Her illness from milk leg marked the birth of her last child--probably Hapsy, since Hapsy was the last of her children--and it therefore marks the end of her career as a childbearer; her illness from the fever, at sixty, marks the conclusion of her career as a nurturer; her final and ultimate death marks the end of all her careers as well

as the end of her career as the matriarch of the family.

When Ellen Weatherall is in her twenties, she is jilted at the altar. Granny is probably attractive and girlish--she describes herself as wearing a "Spanish comb" and having a "painted fan" and being "silly"--but her jilting irrevocably destroyed her youthful innocence (Porter 85, 82). It is implied that John, Granny's eventual husband, both actually and metaphorically caught Granny when George had jilted her:

The whole bottom dropped out of the world,
and there she was blind and sweating with
nothing under her feet and the walls falling
away. His hand had caught her under the
breast, she had not fallen. . . . (Porter 87)

That this incident is a metaphoric death of Granny's girlhood and her ability to love is indicated in the parallelism to Granny's actual death where her heart "[sinks] down and down" and death is seen to have "no bottom" (Porter 88).

Granny has attempted to repress the memory of her jilting: for "sixty years she had prayed against remembering him and against losing her soul in the deep pit of hell," but her insistence that she "forgot" George, is ironic and over-loud, conveying the converse: she has never forgotten the humiliation, and

loss of self-worth she felt at his rejection of her (Porter 84, 86; Hardy 94). Granny's psychic wounds are all too evident. She wanted both a husband and a lover in George and her feelings of guilt--of losing her soul in hell--are related to Granny's repressed emotional and concomitant sexual desire for the man who had not returned her feelings (DeMouy 49-50). Her sexual desire, in general, and her sexual desire for George, in specific, is clearly Granny's idea of the path to hell. Granny congratulates herself that she has repressed her love and desire for George for sixty years and consequently she is pridefully "easy about her soul." Granny has attempted to keep the chaos of her emotional and sexual feelings swept back into the corners of her mind, much as she orders her external world by carefully arranging her glasses jars, jugs, and cannisters (Porter 81).

George's jilting has taken from her, not only her self-respect, but also the possibility of a sexually and emotionally fulfilled life with her husband, and he has also taken away the final possibility of a meaningful death. Like the protagonist of "Theft," Granny acknowledges that it "is bitter to lose things" but because Granny pridefully feels that the repression of her sexual and emotional desires automatically gives her entrance to heaven, George's jilting has also taken

away the possibility of her union with the Eternal bridegroom. Her pride in the repression of her sexuality denies her an entrance to heaven.

Granny eventually marries John and begins her career as a childbearer. She has five children: Hapsy, George, Lydia, Jimmy and Cornelia (Porter 85). The naming of one of her children after her lover is a further indication that Granny's unrequited desires are smoldering just beneath the surface. Like Gabriel's marriage to Miss Honey in "Old Mortality," her marriage is a lifelong tribute to her infidelity. Granny's jilting has created an inability in her to form an intimate emotional and sexual bond with her husband. Like Miranda in "Old Mortality" the destruction of her mature sexuality is directly traceable.

The basic function of a husband for Granny is that of an impregnator--she has only had "fine children out of" her husband--but once his work is done, she believes that the children become a monument to her capability and success as a mother. Instead of being made from both herself and John, they are solely "made out of her" (Porter 86, 83; DeMouy 50; Hardy 94-95). This trait of viewing men as merely fecundators is also shared with Grandmother of The Old Order.

Childbirth and death are linked in a series of Porter's images, the first being where Granny sees her daughter, Hapsy, who died in childbirth:

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 (Porter 85)

The pain and the danger Granny Weatherall is feeling is also associated in her mind with the pain of childbirth (Nance 45). The association of birth and death is also indicated when she twice tells her dead husband to "get the doctor" because "Hapsy's time has come" or because her "time has come" (Porter 87, 86). Birth and death are for Granny equally painful and equally precarious, since she lost one of her own children, Hapsy, when Hapsy herself came to have a baby.

Granny's final years, between the ages of sixty and eighty are in the glory of her nonage. When Granny was sixty she feels "very old, finished" because her usefulness as a nurturer is over: she then almost consciously comes down with a fever but recovers and becomes the matriarch of the family to whom all turn to for wisdom:

She wasn't too old yet for Lydia to be driving eighty miles for advice when one of the children jumped the track, and Jimmy still dropped in and talked things over: "Now, Mammy, you've a good business head, I

want to know what you think of this? . . . "

Old. Cornelia couldn't change the furniture around without asking. (Porter 83, Porter's ellipsis)

But now that Granny is truly old she returns, full circle, to her youth. Dr. Harry unmercifully patronizes her by addressing her as "Missy" and telling her he has "never seen her "look so young and happy!" (Porter 80, 85). Cornelia, perhaps not the most reliable of witnesses, observes that her mother has become "childish" (Porter 82). Granny, herself, gives away that she has become childishly obdurate when she, for example, imagines that she could "pack up and move back to her own house."

Although Granny's life has remained sexually and emotionally unconsummated, and though her divine bridegroom--Christ--does not appear, she succumbs to her third bridegroom--death. Unlike Miranda in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," she willingly takes him into her bed by consciously blowing out her life's light (Hardy 96). That Granny's final vision has sexual implications of a synthesis with death is contained in the symbolism. Freud observes that dreams of falling are symbolic of a "surrender to erotic temptation" (Freud 393-395; see also DeMouy's discussion of "Circus" 131). Granny, just before her death feels "her heart [sink] down and down, there [is] no bottom

to death" (Porter 88). She yields to this temptation and reaches outward and "with a deep breath [blows] out the light" that is her life. Finally, in her death, she will achieve the sexual and emotional fulfilment she has denied herself in life.

One of Porter's favorite themes in her short fiction is the repression or distortion of the vulnerable sexuality of a child or youth. In "The Downward Path to Wisdom" Stephen, because of parental censure, is made to feel remorse because of being a creature of flesh and blood. Just as God created Adam and Eve of flesh and blood and knew in that instant of creation he had made creatures who would fall, and who would feel guilt and shame because of that fallible flesh, Stephen will also always feel guilt and shame in being a corporeal creature created from flesh that is pre-ordained as sullied and sinning. The castigation he receives for being human and making mistakes begins with censure of his body and its processes but extends further such that not only his sexuality is damaged but also his ability to love others. In "The Circus" Miranda's lessons are not very different from Stephen's. She learns to be guarded and closed about her physiology, while also subconsciously incorporating the damaging proposition that a disparity exists between love and eroticism in relationships between men

and women. Miranda, in "The Fig Tree," learns about the cyclical nature of existence, while in "The Grave" she grasps the frightening and precarious nature of fertility and femininity. In Stephen's and Miranda's stories, all of their events and epiphanies are stored--sometimes repressed--as memories and although the exact effects are left unstated and beyond the frame of the story, their respective experiences, while similar, also individuate each of them.

In Porter's short fiction, further damage is enacted upon the sexuality of adolescents and young adults by individuals, family, society and culture. Much like the Miranda of "Circus," Violeta and Miranda ("Old Mortality") observe the disparity between romance and reality, while unlike the Miranda of "Circus" the process of their internalization of the lesson is seen. Violeta directly encounters the sinister face of love through Carlos' symbolic rape of her innocence. Like Miranda, her romantic notions do not match the reality. In the Miranda of "Old Mortality," the focus is upon the psycho-sexual damage done by her family's wholehearted, didactic, approval of a particularly punitive and idealistic sexual stereotype. Because of the impossibility for Miranda of ever equaling the family's mental construct of the perfect female, she naively rejects a sexual and emotional connection to others and that choice is as much impelled by the

mythology of Aunt Amy, as her earlier hopes that she will grow-up to be like her aunt. Ellen Weatherall, like Miranda commits herself to isolation. Because Granny was jilted in her girlhood, her entire life has remained sexually and emotionally unconsummated. It is austere comfort that only through death she overcomes her sexual and emotional emptiness.

CHAPTER II. SEXUAL AMBIVALENCE: REJECTION AND DESIRE.

After the damage done by parental, cultural, and societal repression, examined in the previous chapter, Porter suggests that her central characters will take either one of two paths: he or she will move into a cheerless isolation from others or will have a love relationship that is emotionally and sexually a failure. Neither direction is a felicitous one. William Nance, in his book-length study (Katherine Anne Porter and the Art of Rejection) also has noticed a similar tendency in Porter's fiction for her protagonists to divide into these two groups: the first being a semi-autobiographical character, often called Miranda, who rejects the tyranny of love, whether it is familial, romantic, marital, or social; the second group includes those who are inferior and distanced by astringent and ironic narrational criticism (6-7). While Nance's book is most often insightful, his concentration on proving that a group of Porter's characters reject human connection is often at the expense of the more fundamental observation that this rejection is often in conflict with inner needs and desires. On the one hand, Miranda or her textual

sisters and brothers, reject love relationships and reject the sexual implications inherent in such relationships, while, on the other, they also regret that self-constructed isolation. Examined in the previous chapter of this thesis were the psychological conflicts and distortions created in children and adolescents, which will likely later result in sexual and social maladjustment, while in the four stories examined in this chapter these conflicts are not so much indicated through specific childhood incidents, but rather through the symbolism: a dissonance exists between the heroines' isolation and the symbolism which paradoxically requests but also repudiates an emotional and sexual involvement. The emphasis in this group of stories is less upon the deformation caused by early experiences and more upon the explicit portrait of the ambivalence each feels regarding sexual and emotional love. Within the stories examined in this chapter, the characters have virtually no past: the stress is upon the present events and current feelings of the various protagonists. In "Flowering Judas," Laura's recent life--since she has left the States and come to Mexico--is the focus.¹ With the unnamed heroine of "Theft" and Miranda of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" each

story only retraces the past twenty-four hours in detail and then moves forward in time,² while in "Hacienda" the story begins at the beginning and carries right through to the end.³ The reader is never certain of the reasons for the various heroines' rejection of love and relationships because their past is, for the most part, outside the frame of the story. What is evident is that they do reject but also desire love.

"Flowering Judas" is a portrait of a twenty-four-year-old American expatriate do-gooder, but rather than being a stereotypical spinster with a religious zeal for baptizing the heathen, Laura is devoted to furthering the Mexican revolution. But her dedication to the revolution, or to anything for that matter, is restrained and lacking in any kind of emotional commitment: although Laura, a lapsed Catholic, has replaced her faith in religion, with a faith in the revolution, her loyalty is austere and unemotional. Her vocation, however qualified, is suggested by her "nun-like" uniform--a blue serge dress with the sole adornment being a white lace-trimmed bib or collar. As a nun covers her gender and sexuality behind her habit and vocation, Laura represses her sexuality and hides her femaleness behind her uniform and her ascetic involvement in the revolution. She covers "her great

round breasts with thick dark cloth" and hides her "long, invaluable beautiful legs under a heavy skirt" (Porter 97). Her unimpassioned fealty to the revolution is also a psychological compensation for her repressed sexuality. Like the other women examined in this chapter, Laura, driven by fear and guilt, rejects love and rejects an affiliation with others, while also subconsciously desiring love and community.

That Laura's faith in the revolution is irrational and, indeed, an article of faith, is evident in Porter's unflattering characterization of Laura's revolutionary leader, Braggioni. He is a greasy, sexually rapacious, obese, opportunist, who has a love of luxury, specifically for diamond tie clasps, mauve silk hose, and fancy cologne, and a distaste for the peasants, who are to benefit from revolutionary change. Rather than being a representative of revolutionary idealism, Braggioni is symbolic of the most jaded and corrupt apprehension of the world. He is a secular priest gone wrong (Bluefarb 257). For public consumption he claims that the peasants are "his own brothers, while in private, to Laura, "they are stupid, they are lazy, they are treacherous" (Porter 98). It must require a large leap of faith for Laura to believe in and follow this revolutionary voluptuary, who is attempting her seduction.

Implicit in "Flowering Judas" are Laura's hopes

that Mexico and the revolutionary cause will fill a psycho-sexual need that she found lacking in her life in the States: she has come to Mexico looking for something but once here, she is unable to forget whatever it is--religion, family, psychological make-up--that made her life unsatisfactory at home. Rather than escape, she has brought with her an unknown "set of principles derived from her early training" in which she is "encased." Evidence of these principles is her insistence on hand-made rather than machine-made lace and the offering of the occasional prayer in church--both of which would clearly be considered reactionary, if discovered by her comrades. She finds the religious experience unsatisfying but continues the practice, further suggesting that she is searching for something which continues to elude her since she, herself, cannot alter her drive to reject her humanity and cannot recognize her need to love and be loved.

Both Dorothy Redden and Sam Bluefarb notice that Laura is static (27; 256). Her emotional and sexual development is arrested. On the most simple level she cannot accept the uncomplicated love her pupils offer her. Her students write on the blackboard "We love ar ticher" and decorate their words with chalk flowers

(Porter 95). Laura does not react to this proffered affection. The children "remain strangers to her," by which her appreciation only extends to their "charming opportunist savagery" and "their tender round hands" (Porter 97).

Though Laura has come to Mexico looking to fill a hole in her life through teaching and revolution, she carries with her that set of principles that doom her quest to failure. Laura has also possibly come to Mexico looking for romance and mature emotional involvement but, in an act of symbolic sexual aloofness, she withdraws when the suitor comes close to penetrating her inner being. Since Laura cannot respond to the simple expressions of affection from her students, it is not surprising that mature attempts also fail. One of Laura's suitors is a young captain with whom she consents to go horseback riding. Her initial consent to ride with him suggests--like her coming to Mexico--that she is looking to fill a lacuna in her life. But when the young captain attempts to touch her (he tries to help her down from her horse) she spurs the horse and bolts for home. She cynically dismisses his love letters as childish by observing that she "must send him a box of coloured crayons," presumably so he can decorate his expressions of affection, as her pupils decorated theirs (Porter 98).

Another of Laura's suitors is a young man who

serenades her underneath her window. Her maid advises, and she agrees, to throw him a flower. The maid tells her that this will make him go away. But Laura also seems to realize that, rather than permanently ridding herself of his attentions, the throwing of the flower only serves to encourage his romantic attentions. Again, Laura's actions request erotic involvement which she is unable to carry to completion (DeMouy 84-85).

She tells herself that throwing the flower was a mistake, for she is twenty-two years old and knows better; but she refuses to regret it, and persuades herself that her negation of all external events as they occur is a sign that she is gradually perfecting herself in the stoicism she strives to cultivate against that disaster she fears, though she cannot name it. (Porter 96-97)

This disaster that Laura fears is not actual death for, in her furtherance of the revolutionary cause, "she is not afraid to knock on any door in any street after midnight, and enter in the darkness" (Porter 94; DeMouy 82-83). Her greatest fear is the loss of her virginity. For a month of evenings Laura has patiently listened to Braggioni's toneless songs and observed his unctuous attempts at seduction and witnessed his obscene stroking of his guitar. Laura, in watching Braggioni, "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" (Porter 93; DeMouy 85-86). Braggioni represents the threat of "mutilation" which accompanies the loss of her virginity, and represents the guilt-ridden and morally "shocking" death of her maidenhood. Just as Laura is aroused by the danger inherent in her political activities, she is also titillated by the threat to her virginity that Braggioni poses. While Laura seeks out sexual and emotional fulfilment, she cannot forget herself--she always keeps herself firmly in control. She cannot and "dares not" allow her mind to "wander too far;" she cannot risk the loss of self which accompanies a sexual act or an emotional commitment (Porter 98; DeMouy 85). Yet Laura deliberately seeks out danger in Mexico and sexual attention from her suitors. Much of the burden of Laura's morbid fascination with sexuality and death is carried in Porter's symbolism in, for example, Laura sitting and cleaning Braggioni's phallic guns. Laura also tells Braggioni that, rather than attempting her seduction, he would be "happier" if he went and killed "somebody in Morelia" which allies sexuality and death, and which is an implicit observation that killing, for Braggioni, is more exciting (and likely to be more profitable) than the decimation of Laura's maidenhood (Porter 100).

Laura rejects all kinship with others--with her pupils, with her colleagues, with her suitors. They remain, for her, other.

. . . the very cells of her flesh reject knowledge and kinship in one monotonous word. No. No. No. She draws her strength from this one holy talismanic word which does not suffer her to be led into evil. Denying everything, she may walk anywhere in safety she looks, at everything without amazement.

(Porter 97)

This is one of Porter's clearest expressions of rejecting human connection. This statement also bears a resemblance to Goethe's inhuman spirit, who also endlessly denies ("der stets verneint"). She is compelled to endlessly deny involvement and this denial conflicts with her inner need for sexual and emotional fulfilment. She seeks involvement but withdraws when it is freely given.

Laura's final dream draws the various threads of sexuality, death and religion together and reveals that Laura is again asking for someone to fill those lacunae in her life. Just before Braggioni leaves, Laura confesses that she has failed to stop one of his jailed followers, Eugenio, from committing suicide. While Braggioni appears indifferent to Eugenio's death, it is significant that he leaves Laura and returns to his

wife, whom he had abandoned a month earlier in order to pay court to Laura. Whether his return to his wife is a genuine act of contrition or merely a temporary lapse is uncertain.⁴ Laura drifts off to sleep thinking that "it is monstrous to confuse love with revolution, night with day, life with death--ah Eugenio" (Porter 101). And while this confusion may, for Laura, be monstrous, this intermingling is archetypically central to old and new religions. Life is mixed with death in the primary Christian symbol of Christ or in the pagan symbol of the dying god. Sexuality and procreation --whether human, as in the pairing of Eugenio and Laura or vegetable, as in Eugenio represented by the flowering Judas tree--is also central to myth and mythopoesis of daily ("night and day") and yearly cycles. Eugenio, in Laura's dream, becomes the Christ-like dying god.

Where are you taking me, she asked in wonder but without fear. To death, and it is a long way off, and we must hurry, said Eugenio. No, said Laura, not unless you take my hand. Then eat these flowers, and held them to her lips. She saw that his hand was fleshless, a cluster of small white petrified branches, and his eye sockets were without light, but she ate the flowers greedily for they satisfied both hunger and thirst. Murderer!

said Eugenio, and Cannibal! This is my body and my blood. Laura cried No! and at the sound of her own voice, she awoke trembling, and was afraid to sleep again. (Porter 102)

The impetus for Laura's dream seems to be that she feels guilty: she suspects that Eugenio has died, not for the revolution, but because he was tormented with hopeless love for her (Hardy 74). Her betrayal is a betrayal not only of Eugenio but also of humanity--the human condition in which the separation between love and politics, life and death, light and dark is never unadulterated. She has not only betrayed Eugenio but also her pupils, the young captain, the typographer-singer, even Braggioni, because she cannot offer spiritual, sexual or emotional love through the giving of herself. Most importantly she has betrayed herself because she cannot cleanse herself by a genuine act of love or contrition. She cannot forgive herself for having inner sexual and emotional needs.

Eugenio's offering of his body has several symbolic meanings. Firstly it has a sacrificial and religious significance to which is accreted the further sexual implication of becoming one flesh. The death which Eugenio would take her to is the death of Laura as a virgin, which could only be accomplished at the sacrificial expense of her blood which is implied in the words, "This is my body and my blood" (Porter 102). As

a nun is the bride of Christ, Laura becomes the bride of a wraith.

Laura's dream also repeats the pattern of seeking a genuine connection--both sexual and emotional--to life but endless denials and withdrawals when presented with the opportunity. Laura asks three times for Eugenio to take her hand but he refuses. She also refuses, using her talisman, "No!," to go with him unless he offers his hand. She is insisting that Eugenio, like her other suitors, first make a commitment which she then can, driven by her fear of emotional and sexual involvement, repudiate.

While both Laura and Miranda reject kinship with others, Miranda's fear and rejection of love, in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," is more subterranean and only revealed through Porter's symbolism. As with Laura's final dream, the symbolism also reveals ambivalence.

"Pale Horse, Pale Rider" is unusual in Porter's canon: it is a genuine love story. Although it is a love story, it ends, as all the stories examined in this chapter, with a pervasive sense of isolation, loss and privation at the absence of love in the central character's world. While it is a love story specifically set in the belligerent modern world of 1918, the ageless Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse--war, pestilence, death, famine--are represented. The war is the Great War; pestilence, the influenza epidemic;

death, the "lank greenish stranger," is Miranda's nightmare visitor in her first dream; hunger is represented metaphorically in the hunger for both spiritual and sexual love. This spiritual hunger is also an ambivalent hunger that will return to her with his death and her movement back into the world.

As well as the usual sights of war--flags, soldiers in green uniform, dollar-a-year men haranguing the crowds--the sight of hearses carrying away influenza victims is common. Miranda observes that this "plague. . . [is] something out of the Middle Ages" (Porter 281). Miranda's identification of the plague as medieval associatively suggests the medieval millennial idea of the bubonic plague visited upon a godless and guilty society. The world of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" is certainly hostile and wretched: chaos and desolation are the rule and Miranda's love for Adam, the exception.

Adam, a second lieutenant on leave from the Engineer's Corp, is awaiting his imminent transfer to the trenches. Their romance, however sincerely Miranda consciously feels it, is nonetheless fragile and ephemeral, which is suggested by the short duration--ten days--of their acquaintance. To Miranda--the seeing one--Adam is fated to die in the war. In her sight, he is "not for her nor for any

woman, being beyond experience already, committed without any knowledge or act of his own to death" (Porter 283-284). Even though Miranda is convinced that he will die, she cannot tell him of her love, until she, herself, becomes ill with the flu. Adam, who has "never had a pain in his life," ultimately dies of influenza: in his selfless act of caring for Miranda, he catches the plague.

Adam's most definite characteristic is his sublime masculinity which is firstly indicated by his embarrassment over the wearing of a wrist watch: only "sissies" wear wrist watches. Adam's masculinity gives him an allegorical, unreal quality--he remains only sketchily outlined with few definable characteristics. He is gallant--so gallant that Miranda half-seriously muses that if they were to come a mud puddle, he would carry her over it (Porter 295). He gives off a manly odor of "scentless soap, freshly cleaned leather" and tobacco (Porter 295). He is also handsome: "tall and heavily muscled in the shoulders, narrow in the waist and flanks" with "hay coloured" hair (Porter 279, 278). He "love[s]. . . all sorts of machinery," driving his roadster and sailing, which are all gender-specific activities (Porter 285). He is, in short, a strong, physically attractive, potent, man of action.

Adam's masculinity is distinguished in Porter's fiction where men are normally characterized as weak

and selfish. Unlike Porter's usual males, Father Muller ("Holiday") is another character who is as strong and sensitive within his uncomplicated environment, as Adam is within his. The only other male who is not treated with tart disapprobation is Eddie in "Theft." Both Eddie and Adam have the proper masculine command and equipment to be attractive to the respective heroines.

Adam is not only different from Porter's usual characters, he is also firmly distinguished from the other men in the story who are weaker and less masculine. All the other men in the story are somehow flawed or damaged: they are at home and not at the front because they have a physical infirmity, because they have been injured in the war, or because of their age. They all suffer from a symbolic emasculation. The dollar-a-year men are home because in Miranda's understanding they are "potbellied baldheads, too fat, too old, too cowardly, to go to war themselves" (Porter 294). Although Miranda hates and feels oppressed by the war, in this statement she reveals that she would think Adam, and any man, unmanly, diminished, and therefore unworthy of her attentions because of a refusal or inability to serve. The fullest portrait of a man other than Adam is of Chuck Rouncivale, a sportswriter at Miranda's newspaper. Chuck is also characterized as slightly effeminate, firstly by being

rejected for war service--he has a bad lung--and secondly, by his interest in the literary arts. The "routine female jobs" at Miranda's paper are reporting on society and the theatre, the latter being Miranda's beat (Porter 275). Chuck does not like his job and would prefer to have one of these so-called routine female jobs. He has always "yearned to be a . . . dramatic critic" (Porter 290). That literary inclinations are effeminate, and that Chuck is not Adam's equal in masculinity is also implied in Adam's dismissal of literature. Adam, the epitome of virility, has never read an entire book that was not an engineering textbook: "reading [bores] him to crumbs" (Porter 285).

Adam, as his name implies, has a symbolic identification with the biblical innocence and purity of the first man. He is also identified with both the pagan and Christian God, in whose death, life is cyclically regenerated. Miranda thinks he is "pure . . . all the way through, flawless, complete, as the sacrificial lamb must be." Miranda and Adam are also like the first couple: "the simple and lovely miracle of being two persons named Adam and Miranda, twenty-four years old each, alive and on the earth at the same moment" (Porter 280). While Adam and Eve, unsullied and perfect, were born into a perfect world, Miranda and Adam, unsullied and perfect, spend their

last moments together in a world of chaos and misery, where funeral hearses, sleazy cafes, screaming newspapermen, weeping has-been vaudeville stars, and sinister Liberty Bond salesmen are commonplace.

Reinforcing the theme of carpe diem, Miranda and Adam, taking their happiness where they find it, go dancing in a smokey and meretricious dance hall. At a table nearby are a number of boys drinking bootleg gin and yelling incoherently. At the next table Miranda overhears a conversation whereby a young woman is describing an alcholic attempt at her seduction. This contrasts with Miranda's and Adam's purity of love. Like Adam and Eve, they are as yet untainted by original sin--a sin often interpreted as sexual. Others may interpret their relationship as sexual, as does the landlady, who implies that Adam's care of Miranda is sexual ("'Yes, you'll look after her, I can see that,' said Miss Hobbe, in a particularly unpleasant tone" (Porter 299)), but their relationship remains unconsummated by even so much as a kiss.

Miranda then becomes very ill, and, in her partial delirium, she has three more dreams. The first, which takes place in a jungle--"a place of death"--is malevolent and forboding. In this dream Miranda, as yet, does not reveal her more profound death wish: as in her initial dream, where she tells death to "ride on," she is still rejecting and stuggling against both

actual and sexual extinction which is indicated through her escape from the deadly jungle to the ship. The next dream has Adam as a symbolic Christ-like or pre-Christian vegetation figure, who, through his death, brings renewal and life.

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

He is also similar to St. Sebastian, who survived being shot through with arrows, only to be later martyred, much like Miranda survives the flu, only to die later and beyond the frame of the story (DeMouy 164). Miranda again indicates, here, that she has a death wish. As in both the myth of Cupid and Miranda's dream, the

arrows also have a phallic significance (Hendrick 79; Youngblood, in Hartley and Core 135; Freud 356).

Miranda's desire to die, and her desire to die by being pierced with an arrow, may suggest her unconscious wish for la petite mort. Miranda thinks that she "selfishly" wants to place herself in the path of the arrows, which further suggests her unconscious wishes for sexual gratification. In this dream, Miranda also reveals her ambivalence toward love and sexuality: as implied by the penetration of the arrows, she desires sexual involvement, but she also fears and rejects that involvement which is suggested in her symbolic killing of Adam, her love. Throughout "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Miranda's confidence in Adam's impending death implies a wish fulfilment. She is convinced that Adam will die at the front--that he is "committed . . . to his own death" (Porter 284). As Thomas Walsh notes, "the uncertainties of wartime alone cannot account for Miranda's insistence on Adam's death; her frequent premonitions betray her unconscious desire that he die for she fears love." Her fear and rejection of love are also revealed in this assertion: "'I don't want to love,' she would think in spite of herself, 'not Adam, there is not time and we are not ready for it and yet this is all we have'" (Walsh, "The Dreams Self" 65; Porter 292).

Miranda's final dream is again of death, but

rather than being of a deadly jungle, or a sexual assassination, death is "serene rapture," which again implies sexual desire--this time of a more pleasant nature. In her dream, Miranda sees her death as a sheer drop to oblivion.

She lay on a narrow ledge over a pit that she knew to be bottomless. . . . 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. . . . But she could not consent, still shrinking stiffly against the granite wall that was her childhood dream of safety . . .

(Porter 310)

As was noted in the discussion of "Granny Weatherall" in Chapter One, Freud identifies dreams of falling as sexual, and that succumbing to the sensation of falling is a succumbing to sexual temptation (393-95). Miranda does not yield to death and symbolically, she does not submit to her sexual desire. As inviting as death appears in Miranda's final dream or as much as she may subconsciously wish for sexual fulfilment, she returns to life because she feels that "somebody"--Adam--"was missing" from the world of death (Porter 311-12). Her return to life also suggests that her fear of surrender is stronger than her contradictory wish for sexual fulfilment. The irony is that she has come back to be

with Adam but he is already dead. She did not surrender to her deathly lover, and now the possibility of being with her earthly lover is also gone. Here, the rejection of sexuality in death, is the same as the sexual deprivation that Miranda will later feel when she returns to life.

Miranda, then, in her long journey back to health passes in and out of delirium. Like her earlier subconscious thoughts that the men who have not gone to war are somehow emasculated, her delirious thoughts show that, despite her insistence that she loathes the war, she has been infected by war propaganda, which parallels the motif of Miranda being infected also with influenza and with love.⁵ She sees Dr. Hildesheim as "Boche" who murders babies and poisons water.

Miranda's vision of the world has been forever changed by her vision of death: this world is only a pale and unhappy substitute for death. When she discovers that Adam has died, the world loses whatever happiness that was left. She goes through the motions of preparing to face the world and of telling the living that their world is better than the one she has come from. She becomes, like the grey and unadorned clothes she chooses to wear, the pale rider automatically travelling through the world in search of death--in search of "serene rapture" and sexual dissolution. One hesitates to make a general and

sweeping statement about the consciousness of sexuality in Porter's love stories, given that she has written only one--this one--but at least provisionally it seems that sexuality and love do not go together. When Porter portrays a relationship between men and women, with the exception of this story, sexuality is a disappointing and even destructive factor, while in this story the relationship is on the surface non-sexual--perhaps one of the reasons it remains a love story. Adam dies--he is killed off by Miranda's and perhaps the author's own unconscious wishes--before the love and by implication the sexual relations, can be consummated and then go sour. This purity of sexual relations between Miranda and Adam is contrasted to the symbolism in Miranda's dreams, where the images she sees request, however morbidly, a sexual involvement, but against which her unconscious mind also rebels.

While Miranda indicates but remains ignorant of her ambivalence, the protagonist of "Theft" comes to an partial awareness that she has both sought and repudiated love. Subconsciously, she, like the other characters examined in this chapter, remains unaware that her desire for love also includes sexual desire.

Porter's handling of time is also similar in both "Theft" and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider." Both stories

contain a deliberate sense of the dislocation of temporal sequence that, at first, gives a sense of the internalized random thoughts of the unnamed heroine. "Theft" opens in the morning; the protagonist has finished her bath and is in search of her cigarettes which were in her gold purse. The purse is missing and she retraces her actions of the past evening to determine whether it was in her possession when she returned home. That is the logic of her apparently random thoughts. She had it last night on her date with Camillo because she was going to pay for her ride on the Elevated. She meets a friend, Roger, and, because it is raining, decides to share a cab with him. She then takes a dime from her purse, which is her contribution to the taxi fare. Remembering that she had her purse under her arm when climbing the stairs stairs to her flat, she is invited for drinks into the apartment of another friend, Bill. Her purse is empty of money and she asks Bill to repay the fifty dollars he owes her. She returns, her purse still empty, to her own flat (Wisefarth, "The Stucture of Katherine Anne Porter's 'Theft'" 65). She remembers sitting down and reading a letter from a lover that she had been carrying in her purse throughout the evening. The next morning the janitress comes in to check on the radiator and the protagonist concludes that she has taken her purse. A confrontation ensues with the janitress

insisting that she has not taken it. She later confesses that she took the purse for her niece because the heroine is "a grown woman" who has had her "chance." The heroine is insulted at the implication that she is too old to have a need to have beautiful things. The janitress's parting accusation is, "'It's not from me, it's from her you're stealing it'" (Porter 63). The heroine's final thought is: "I was right not to be afraid of any thief but myself, who will end by leaving me nothing."

No less than "The Waste Land" is Porter's story about the different kinds of love and ultimately about the perversion and absence of love in the modern world. Ultimately the central character is alone and alienated--unloved and unloving. The initial sense of alienation is heightened by the dreariness of the rain and by her overheard conversations. The first conversation she hears between the three men while she is riding home in the taxi begins with one asserting the importance of love (he will only "marry for love") and devolves into a discussion of the relative size of male genitalia ("Aaah, shurrrup yuh mush, I got plenty"). In the second overheard conversation, the speaker--a girl with "pelican legs," wearing a transparent raincoat--is transparently concerned with herself: she tells her companion, "Yes, I know all about that. But what about me? You're always so sorry

for him . . . " (Porter 61 Porter's ellipsis). The distortion of the rain on the window of the cab which changes the shape of the outside world, the wild ride with the cabbie driving too fast, her alcoholic disorientation, and the unreal and disjointed conversations she hears all give a sense of nightmarish alienation.

In the story four men and the janitress are introduced and they are representative of different attitudes toward and different kinds of love. Camillo seems to be motivated by a kind of machismo self-love; Bill's motivation is generated by a kind of self-pitying narcissism; Roger is motivated by a languid and indifferent kind of love for his fiancée or wife; the janitress is motivated by kind of maternalistic, and viciously protective love for her niece; the heroine's love for Eddie and everyone seems to be motivated by almost a martyred kind of love in which she feels herself self-congratulatorily guided by a "baseless and general faith" in humanity (Porter 64). She tests this faith by leaving doors open and by leaving her things lying about--almost tempting or daring someone to take what she has left. She also leaves her emotions and feelings lying about for anyone to steal. The janitress takes her challenge by taking the purse and forces her into challenging her own actions and responsibilities toward others.

Camillo is the heroine's self-important lover who is characterized by Porter's typical deft and understated strokes. He observes the smaller courtesies toward the heroine, like seeing her to the El and paying her fare, but ignores the "larger and more troublesome ones" like seeing her to her flat (Porter 59). Thus he is able to preserve his self-image as a gentleman and protector of women. He also plays the stereotypical male role of devil-may-care hero by ignoring the damage done by the rain to his new biscuit-coloured hat. The protagonist unintentionally catches him attempting to preserve his new hat by putting it inside his coat. Camillo is a poseur and the heroine pities him for it. The hat, in this context and in the later context of relating to the heroine's other male friends and suitors, is a symbol of masculine sexuality just as her purse becomes symbolic of her femaleness (Stein 225; Nance 34, n.6; see also Freud 360-362). Camillo attempts to play a machismo role by nonchalantly wearing his hat for the protagonist's benefit--to preserve the masculine image which he projects for her. His sheathing of his hat is no less an expression of his masculine vanity--this time to preserve his own self-image.

Roger, on the other hand has no pretensions to masculine vanity. He hides his hat underneath his coat and tells the protagonist that he has done so. He is

non-threatening and asexual--his hat is hidden from her consideration--and so she can comfortably and companionably snuggle into the arm laid across her shoulders. Roger tells her, "'I had a letter from Stella today, and she'll be home on the twenty-sixth, so I suppose she's made up her mind and it's all settled'" (Porter 61). The use of "suppose" in the sentence suggests Roger's indifference to whether Stella comes home or not. Some commentators interpret Roger's statement to mean that his estranged wife has decided to return home; others interpret this as Roger's imminent marriage to Stella (Stein and Hardy; Nance 35 and Wisenfarth, "The Structure of . . .

Theft'" 68). Whatever Roger's relationship to Stella is, it is likely that his "long amiable association" with the protagonist is nearing an end since he will have either a new wife or the return of an old one. Camillo is not a serious contender for the affections of the heroine: Camillo is too self-important and finally too ridiculous to be a possible source of friendship and love for her; the feelings between Roger and the protagonist are epicene; while Bill, the last male she meets in the night, is too self-pityingly dishonest to be of interest to her. He is also marked by the absence of a hat, which suggests his symbolic emasculation. He certainly is portrayed as a weak, souless character. The protagonist discovers him in

his cups, and weeping into his beer over the treatment he has received by the world. He has been told that his play is bad; he laments the alimony payments to his wife; he callously resents the money he must pay for the support of his child. Even though he has just bought a new rug for ninety-five dollars, and has already been paid seven-hundred dollars for his play, he insists that he cannot pay the central character the fifty dollars he owes her. Although she has not enough money to eat for the next few days, she characteristically forgives the debt as she forgives all theft, whether the stolen object is "material or intangible"--whether it is fifty dollars, a purse, or her happiness.

The final male that figures in her thoughts is Eddie, her lover. Eddie's hats always seem "to be precisely seven years old" and appear "as if they had been quite purposely left out in the rain, and yet they sat with a careless and incidental rightness on Eddie." Eddie, unlike the other men in the story, has the proper virile equipment and wears it with a masculine self-possession and security which is consonant with his personality and appealing to the heroine. He is not vain like Camillo, nor androgynous like Roger, nor emasculated like Bill.

Eddie has, by inference, given her the purse for a birthday gift and consequently she is fond of it. That

it was a birthday present also reinforces the sense of time flying, opportunities missed, and loves, lost (Hardy 66). She had also carried his letter in her purse throughout the previous evening which implies its serious significance to her. That she has been carrying Eddie's letter around in her purse also suggests that he has filled the absence in her sexual and emotional life. From a fragment of the letter, Eddie seems to hold her responsible for the failure of their relationship ("why were you so anxious to destroy"). Although the heroine says to Roger that Eddie's letter made "up her mind," presumably that the relationship was over, it seems that Eddie holds her responsible for the failure, and her epiphany is precisely that she realizes her responsibility for the loss of love, not only in this particular context of the love affair but also in the general context of "dying friendships and the dark inescapable death of love" (Porter 64). She realizes that her laissez faire attitude to material and emotional things stolen or lost prepares the way for greater thefts and losses. She has stolen her happiness, and no other thief is responsible. Her purse is now completely empty. In a symbolically emotional and sexual rejection, she has removed his letter from her purse, torn it to shreds and then burned it. She now feels sexual and emotional desolation and depletion at her loss.

Like "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," sexuality in "Hacienda" reveals both a subconscious morbid fascination and repugnance. "Hacienda" is a story where some of man's greater taboos--homosexuality and incest--and some of man's lesser taboos--infidelity and adultery--are exposed. As in Ship of Fools, various people who can be read as being symbolic of various nations as well as various sexual inclinations are thrown together. In Ship of Fools, the characters are gathered together for a journey from Veracruz to Bremerhaven; in "Hacienda" the purpose is to make a movie. In "Hacienda," the narrator has no intrinsic purpose in the making of this film: her term in purgatory is limited. The other inhabitants of the hacienda are almost under an eternal sentence: a movie that was supposed to take three months to complete is in the eighth month of filming and it is very likely that it will never be finished. This narrator withholds, for the most part, moral comment and describes the events very much in the form of reportage, thereby attempting to maintain a distance between herself and the others. Although the narrator attempts to distance herself from the display of profound human erotopathy and decadence, she is implicated by her very selection of events she chooses to report. While the narrator does not make direct comment on the events, her creative consciousness

(unconsciousness?) has selected these events to describe, and in that selection reveals some of her most profound fears.

The narrator's introduction to the political, sexual and moral langour inherent in the hacienda is gradual. Her journey toward the hacienda by train begins comically, with the portrait of Kennerly, the extravagant fool, but becomes less so the nearer she comes to the hacienda. Kennerly is what later generations have come to describe as the ugly American. The story begins with an humourously ironic description of him.

It was worth the price of a ticket to see Kennerly take possession of the railway train among a dark inferior people. Andreyev and I trailed without plan in the wake of his gigantic progress (he was a man of ordinary height merely, physically taller by a head, perhaps, than the nearest Indian but his moral stature in this moment was beyond calculation) through the second-class coach into which we had climbed. . . . (Porter 135)

The narrator observes that "foreigners anywhere traveling were three or four kinds of phonograph records, and of them all [she likes] Kennerly's kind the least" (Porter 137). Kennerly, the American

location manager for the film, feels himself morally and culturally superior to the dark people of Mexico. The Indians are, in his sight, dirty, and disorderly and they smell; he is offended by the odor of livestock, children, and vegetables in the second-class railway carriage; he is furious, his responsibility being money and time management, with the Mexican sense of time and the bribes necessary to oil the movie-making machinery; he lives on a revolting mixture of luke-warm Mexican beer, American chocolate and California ("'God's country'") oranges, everything else in Mexico being "full of germs" (Porter 138).

But while the story opens with this comedy of the effulgent fool, there is a sense of movement from lightness into dark which is firstly reflected in the weather

The sun was shining when we left Mexico city, but mile by mile through the solemn valley of the pyramids we climbed through the maguey fields towards the thunderous blue cloud banked solidly in the east, until it dissolved and received us gently in a pallid, silent rain. (Porter 137-138)

When Kennerly mercifully falls asleep, Andreyev, one of the three Russian film makers, shows the narrator forboding stills of the hacienda. It is a pulqueria where the the building itself is as timeless

as the method of making the native liquor, as timeless--despite the glorious Mexican revolution--as the feudal relations governing its production, and as eternal as sin and damnation. "The camera [has also] caught and fixed in moments of violence and senseless excitement, of cruel living and tortured death, the almost ecstatic death-expectancy which is in the air of Mexico" (Porter 143).

This "death-expectancy" is juxtaposed to the story of dona Julia and Lolita, the respective wife and mistress of the owner of the pulque hacienda, don Genaro. Through this juxtaposition, the morbid sexuality of the triangle is immediately implied. Lolita is the central actress in the movie--acting and whoring being often considered synonymous. Dona Julia was "furious" when her husband brought Lolita into her house. Infidelity and hypocrisy are apparently built into the marital relations of the Mexican aristocracy: his wife expects him to have a mistress but not to bring her home. On her arrival, Dona Julia threatens to murder Lolita.

Don Genaro simply ran away at this, and left everything in the air. He went up to the capital and stayed two days.

When he came back, the first sight that greeted his eyes was his wife and mistress strolling, arms about each other's waists, on

the upper terrace, while a whole scene was being delayed because Lolita would not leave dona Julia and get to work. . . .

The women still strolled, or sat on the edge of the fountain, whispering together, arms lying at ease about each other's waists, for all the world to see. When Lolita finally came down the steps and took her place in the scene, dona Julia sat nearby making up her face by her round mirror in the blinding sunlight, getting in the way, smiling at Lolita whenever their eyes met. . . .

Lolita's deep throaty voice cooed at dona Julia. She tossed strange glances at her from under her heavy eyelids, and when she mounted her horse, she forgot her role, and swung her leg over the saddle in a gesture unknown to ladies of 1898. (Porter 144)

This passage clearly implies that this triangle between Lolita, don Genaro, and dona Julia includes a lesbian relationship between the two women. As well as the fondling between them, Lolita's deep voice and her forgetting the correct feminine gestures further imply an extraordinary sexual relationship.

The narrator also implies that, while one is

considered a wife and the other, whore, they are both in reality whores. Dona Julia wears clothes that look like they have been designed by a Hollywood costumer, with a taste for Chinese exoticism. Don Genaro's father observes that a "temporary association" with someone like dona Julia is a "part of every gentlemen's education. Marriage was an altogether different matter. In his day, she would have had at best a career in the theatre" (Porter 153). Dona Julia and Lolita are both best suited to the theatre (read: brothel).

Before the narrator has arrived at the pulqueria, what seemed like a perfectly ordinary journey is gradually a movement from light into darkness. The Freudian symbolism of the narrator's train which travels from the sunnyness of Mexico City into the overcast countryside, implies that her journey progressively reveals the darker side of sexuality and incrementally uncovers man's profound fears and forbidden impulses. The story, as well as the symbolism, moves downward in more focused concentric circles (DeMouy 95), beginning with the ludicrous Kennerly, moving on to Andreyev's photographs of the material hacienda, then to his photos of the illusive death-expectancy of the peasantry and then his verbal description of infidelity and Sapphism.

One stop before the three travellers arrive at

their destination, the boy who is playing the lead in the film, boards the train. He tells that Justino, another boy who is also in the movie, has shot and killed his sister. The boy tells that Justino's best friend, Vincente, chased after Justino, and captured the fleeing brother. Justino is now in jail. The trio disembark and the remainder of the story, continuing the downward trend, is provided by the wagon drivers. According to them Justino had taken a gun from the film properties. At this point the incestuous relationship between Justino and his sister--which later becomes explicit--is only implicit in the symbolism. The driver explains that "a boy of sixteen loves to play with a pistol. Nobody would blame him. . . . The girl was nineteen years old (Porter 150, Porter's ellipsis). The obvious non-sequitur between a boy loving his guns and his sister's age invites the reader to make a connection which is found in the phallic symbolism of the gun and the sister's sexual maturity. A further disturbing implication is the tacit dismissal of the taboo against incest: his sister, rather than being a sister, is firstly an object of sexual attraction and therefore Justino can not be held responsible--his need for sexual gratification superseding any other considerations. Rather than being culpable, Justino's family is, according to the driver, merely "unlucky." Apparently incest and murder are also not unusual in

this family since this "was the second child to be killed by a brother" (Porter 150).

That the relationship between Justino and his sister is incestuous later becomes clear when Carlos, the musician who has been hired to write the score for the movie, writes a corrido.

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

Now she lies dead, poor Rosilita,
With two bullets in her heart. . . .
Take warning, my young sisters,
Who would from your brother part.

(Porter 160, Porter's ellipsis)

Later, when the question of why Justino's best friend, Vincente, caught him and brought him back, Andreyev observes that Vincente felt that his best friend had betrayed him.

"Revenge," said Andreyev. "Imagine a man's friend betraying him so, and with a woman, and a sister! He was furious. He did not know what he was doing maybe. . . ." (Porter 167, Porter's ellipsis)

At this point one wonders whether Vincente was

interested in Rosilita or in Justino since Vincente feels betrayed by his friend, who is interested in someone else--a woman and a sister. Pairings aside, the narrator points-out the flaw in the purported accident: she wonders why the gun, which is a movie prop, would be loaded (Porter 150). The response that she receives from the driver--he opens "his mouth to say something and [snaps] it shut" which is followed by an uncomfortable silence, and an exchange of glances--confirms her suspicion that Justino loaded the gun and deliberately shot his sister. It is suggested that Justino shot his sister because her attentions had wandered most probably to Vincente, but whether or not her affection for Vincente was returned, or whether Vincente had his eye on her brother is uncertain. Clearly another love triangle has formed with the exact relationships being uncertain. It is evident that one coupling is probably incestuous (Rosilita and Justino) with the other being either heterosexual (Rosilita and Vincente) or possibly homosexual (Vincente and Justino).

The final disturbing incident, which occurs just before their arrival, is a rabbit being chased by lean and hungry dogs. The narrator identifies with the rabbit--she tells it to "run!"--while a Mexican man identifies with the dogs. To read this incident as a metaphoric sexual contest, as DeMouy has done (107), is

probably overstating the case. What can be asserted without over-reading the incident is that there is a gender specific identification of the male with the dog (hunter) and the female with the rabbit (hunted). Other gender-specific roles are also suggested in "The Grave" and "Holiday," where Paul or the Muller men, enjoy hunting and killing, while Miranda and the Muller women do not. Extrapolating a little further, it is also possible to see the identification of the women with the victimized and the men with the victimizers, in this and these other incidents contained in Porter's fiction.

They finally arrive at the pulqueria. It is gloomy and "cold," with a "Gothic" ambience and an air of "vast incurable boredom" (Porter 151). They have arrived at the nadir where no further events occur: the most distinguished feature is an erotic ennui and a malevolent atmosphere. The stage has been set for absolutely nothing to happen. With their reputations preceding them, some of the characters stagily appear in the flesh: don Genaro rushes in and out, trailing clouds of dust behind him; his wife slithers on stage, and decoratively drapes herself and her lap-dogs over the furniture; Vincente, staring off into space, is seen framed in a doorway and, like a mannerist painting, captured and framed by Andreyev's camera. A few new characters are brought on: the great Uspensky

and his hangers-on are very briefly introduced; Carlos, the failure, is introduced by the citizen of the world and pop-cabalist, Betancourt. In Betancourt, Porter is very gently hinting at homosexuality through the physical description of his limp-wristedness and through his stereotypical bitchy behavior.

The neat light figure beside me posed gracefully upon its slender spine, the too beautiful slender hands waved rhythmically upon insubstantial wrists (Porter 139).

His bitchiness is characterized in, for example, his attitude toward Carlos of whom he says: "it's not only whiskers and the fat. He has, you know, become a failure" (Porter 157). Porter has also provided Betancourt with a lover--a "thin dark youth who was some sort of assistant to Betancourt. He [is] very sleek and slim waisted" (Porter 168). The ambivalence of his function and the physical description implies his relationship to Betancourt. Their relationship is also implied in their respective interest in fresco painting (Porter 165, 168).

Engulfing the hacienda is the omnipresent smell of the pulque. As well as being symbolic of the failure of the Mexican revolution--pulque is still made with the feudal economic relations in place and still sold to the peasants as a narcotic for their poverty and oppression--it is symbolic of the air and odor of dark

sexuality. This connection is first made when the narrator notes the smell of dona Julia's boudoir.

The air was thick with perfume which fought with another heavier smell. . . . The smell had not been out of my nostrils since I came, but here [in dona Julia's bedroom] it rose in a thick vapour through the heavy drone of flies, sour, stale, like rotting milk and blood (Porter 161).

This smell of the pulque through its relation to the smell of dona Julia's boudoir (perfume and something heavier), and to rotting milk and blood--children and menses⁶--is clearly a female smell which informs the air of the hacienda. That it is female is further confirmed by the legend of the discovery of liquor: a young Indian girl discovered it and after her death she became a half-goddess. The narrator thinks the legend has "something to do with man's confused veneration for, and terror of, the fertility of women and vegetation" (Porter 165). The "corpse-white liquor" provides "forgetfulness and ease by the riverful" (Porter 168). In these series of images is provided a linking of birth, death and the Stygian forgetfulness given both by the sexuality of women and the drinking of pulque.

The story does not move towards any kind of resolution: it merely stops. No one is concerned

about the death of the girl. The single regret voiced (by Kennerly) is that they did not film the murder, since a scene in the movie closely mirrors the reality, which raises the thematic question, rather sardonically, of whether art follows life, or life, art. Don Genaro is infuriated because he cannot get his property--Justino--out of jail. He is last seen roaring off into the darkness. The narrator decides she will leave the hacienda. Dona Julia and the Indian driver offer her two reasons to stay longer .

"Tomorrow, she said, "Lolita will be here, and there will be great excitement. They are going to do some of the best scenes over again." I could not wait for tomorrow in this deathly air. "If you should come back in about ten days.." said the Indian driver, "you would see a different place. It is very sad here now. But then the green corn will be ready, and ah, there will be enough to eat again!" (Porter 170)

Dona Julia offers as an inducement for the narrator to stay the impending arrival of her lover which contrasts to the modest desire of the driver for a full belly. One is a lascivious hunger, revealing the spiritual poverty of dona Julia's life; the other is a genuine hunger revealing the true poverty of the peasant. The narrator turns tail and runs for home. She must escape

the deadly air of the hacienda, where she has seen her own and other's basest fears dramatized on the largest screen possible. She has been both attracted and repulsed by the activities at the hacienda. Her abrupt departure is a strong statement of her rejection of the sexuality that she has observed and is an unconscious avoidance of her attraction for it. "Hacienda" is Porter's most emphatic statement of rejection of innermost sexual fears and taboos.

In these four stories all of the heroines conclude the action in isolated independence and sovereign solitude. All are left in the world with a feeling of absolute desolation: Laura, awakening from her dream of Eugenio, is terrified and unable to return to sleep; Miranda leaves the hospital--alienated and alone--in the "dead cold light of tomorrow;" the narrator of "Hacienda" is seen running from the "deathly air" which she will, however far she runs, take with her; the protagonist of "Theft" is left sitting in front of her cup of cold, sacramental, coffee, thinking about her responsibility for the absence of love in her life (Wisefarth, "The Structure of . . . 'Theft'" 70).

While all the heroines examined in this chapter conclude the action in isolation, this isolation is what they have both subconsciously desired and feared. All the characters here subconsciously reject, or have

rejected, as does the protagonist of "Theft," a sexual and emotional connection with others. On the surface Laura and Miranda appear quite different because Laura consciously rejects an emotional connection to others, while Miranda not only seeks but is involved in a love relationship. But both Miranda and Laura reveal profound ambivalence regarding love and sexuality. They both seek a psycho-sexual involvement with others. The pattern of Laura's life as well as her final dream suggests her unconscious quest for, as well as rejection of sexual and emotional love; Miranda has sought and found emotional love on a conscious level, while she, like Laura, also reveals in her dreams an unconscious desire for sexual dissolution. While they both unconsciously desire sexual love, they also fear it, which is symbolized by their unconscious death wish for the men who represent a threat to their emotional and sexual integrity. They both murder the men who could provide them with spiritual, and ultimately sexual love--Miranda kills Adam symbolically, while Laura fails to prevent Eugenio from committing suicide. Their subconscious wishes become, in reality, fulfilled. Both are trapped within a cycle of rejection and desire. Laura will continue to search for but steadfastly refuse emotional and sexual involvement. Miranda will travel through the world looking for her two ghostly lost lovers: the "lank

greenish stranger" to whom she did not surrender to in death and the slightly more corporeal Adam, to whom she did not surrender to in life. Her fear will preclude that she will ever find another Adam; while the "lank greenish stranger" will, however much she may struggle, ultimately find her. The protagonist of "Theft" finds herself, older and alone, with a symbolically empty purse and a lacuna in her emotional and sexual life, left not only by Eddie's absence, but by an entire past of self-constructed lost love: she wishes it were otherwise. She, unlike the other heroines examined here, begins to recognize that her past has consisted of an unconscious rejection of others and in that recognition lies hope. The artist and narrator of "Hacienda," who shapes and selects, has, by that very act, demonstrated her most profound fears, and demonstrated, despite the attempt to defensively distance herself from the action, that on a subterranean level she has an unwholesome kinship with the decadence and erotopathy that inheres in the hacienda. She represses and rejects her unwholesome desires, as indicated by her flight, but they will follow her because they are an expression of both her innermost desires and her innermost fears.

CHAPTER III. THE SEXUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN.

Given the sexual repression experienced by children and adolescents, it comes as no surprise that Porter's short fiction also explicitly describes the disruption of mature sexuality. As discussed in the previous chapter, many of Porter's mature female characters choose isolation, but that choice is never wholeheartedly internalized. While her characters may subconsciously regret the path they have chosen, there is nowhere as bitter or unhappy a state as that which exists between men and women who have chosen to marry. In her fiction, marriage, without the benefit of children, is almost always unrelieved misery. The only exception to this generality is "The Cracked Looking Glass." While Dennis and Rosaleen's marriage is not particularly happy, neither does it reveal the profound bitterness found elsewhere in Porter's fictional, childless marriages. This chapter examines Porter's characters who, childless and cast in pairs, are trapped within a relationship that is, at best, emotionally and sexually unfulfilling and, at worst, wretchedly brutal. All the couples examined in this chapter are also characterized as having unhappy sexual relations but, unlike Granny Weatherall, whose difficulty can be traced to her jilting, or Miranda, whose problem is related directly to her family's

sexual stereotyping, their difficulties are not related to a specific incident but rather to a general attitude. In "Rope" sexuality is used as a palliative for the emotional rawness that inheres in sexual stereotyping. In "That Tree" and "A Day's Work" the women find that the loss of their virginity is not adequately compensated: their sexual and marital relations do not justify such an important loss of self-worth, since society effectively ties value and morality to the maintenance of virginity. Because this narrow sexual rectitude is so profoundly ingrained, they are unable to countenance the loss of self--genuine unself-consciousness--which sexuality implies. While the journalist and Halloran are dissatisfied with their wives' sexuality, in "The Cracked Looking-Glass" it is the woman who is dissatisfied with the performance of her mate. But Dennis, unlike Miriam or Lacey, is not sexually repressed he is simply incapable. It is also of some note that Dennis, Halloran and the journalist all feel emasculated: Halloran and the journalist believe that their wives have effectively castrated them; Dennis feels--and probably is--functionally emasculated. It is also noteworthy that Lacey, Miriam and Rosaleen, to varying degrees, feel that sexual relations are unpleasant.

"Rope" is a virtually plotless short story in which Porter has very effectively preserved an objective, highly ironic distance in this portrait of a marriage that is sourly coming unglued. Although the story is written in the third person, Porter rarely gives the reader an objective description or discusses the characters' inner emotions (DeMouy 41). Porter's use of indirect discourse, whereby characters speak but are not directly quoted, results in the appearance of the narrative being "seamless and therefore ropelike" (Wisefarth, in DeMouy 212, n. 16). This rope attains a complex symbolism, to which various meanings are added as the story progresses: the rope is the rope to hang themselves; it is being at the end of their respective ropes; it is also the rope of contention, bound from innumerable strands of conflict and discord that has developed through their years of marriage (Hendrick 95; Johnson, in Harley and Core 91; Hardy 47).

The quarrel begins because the husband returns from town with the groceries but has forgotten to purchase the coffee. In its place he has bought an impractical and superfluous rope. From the rawness and ferocity of the couple's emotions it is apparent that their argument is not over the absence of coffee or the presence of the rope: their feelings of hostility and aggression run deeply. His wife uses this example of

his carelessness and insensitivity to pick a fight with him. In her sight, they are short of money and she believes that their money ought to be spent on things other than on the impulsive buying of a rope. On the other hand, when she does send her husband back to town to obtain the coffee she also asks him to pick up curtain rods, rubber gloves, a pot holder, and a laxative, none of which, with the possible exception of the last item, seem particularly vital.

Neither the husband nor the wife is more to blame for their bitter argument. The husband is revealed as being intractable: he will not let go of his rope--he wants it and he will keep it although he has no definite need or use for it. In her plans for dinner, the wife is also revealed as being equally uncompromising, as well as retaliatory. The steak must be eaten tonight because otherwise it will spoil, but the eggs have been broken--most likely by the husband's carelessness in putting the rope on top of the groceries. Rather than making the best of her choices--to break the eggs in a bowl and serve them tomorrow, as her husband suggests--she will punish him by cooking everything and serving him eggs and acrimony tonight, cold steak tomorrow.

In her attempt to create order out of chaos, the wife, is also revealed as being inflexible not only in food preparation, but also in the organization of her

kitchen. She insists that only brooms, mops and dustpans can be stored in the closet, while only jars and tins belong on the shelf (Porter 44). In this desire for order she is very like many of Porter's female protagonists--Granny Weatherall, Lacey, Grandmother ("The Source"), Miriam--who attempt to sweep chaos into the corners of their world. The wife finds that sweeping confusion back is impracticable, and the housework is never done to her satisfaction. Consequently she is angry and frustrated. Not only does the husband not help her with the housework, but he creates further disarray which she must tidy. (He leaves, for example, a hammer and nails in the middle of the bedroom floor.)

Essentially the wife's complaints about their marriage have as their underlying focus the sexual division of labour and her husband's questionable sexual fidelity. She uses the coffee and the rope as an excuse to vent her resentment and enmity. She is inconsistent in her demands on him to help with the division household duties--to help her order the chaos--because she is overwhelmed and therefore unable to assign priorities to the household chores. She firstly tells him that she is going to wash the windows while he walks back to town to pick-up the coffee. She then becomes more angry when he says that he is going

immediately since she then wants his help to air the mattresses. She wants to wash windows; she wants to air the bedding; she wants him get her coffee. Like the cooking of the steak or the cooking of the eggs she is inflexible and unable to assign an order of importance and whatever he chooses to do, it is wrong (DeMouy 43). It is just like him to "walk off and leave her to it" when the "housekeeping [is] no more her work than it [is] his: she [has] her work to do as well, and when did he think she was going to find time to do it . . . ? (Porter 47). His response is the usual charge that is brought into the sharing of housekeeping duties: his work brings in the regular money while her's does not. At this she becomes hysterical and runs to the bedroom.

Over and above the arguments about the division of labour, their argument also has the focus of sexuality and children. The husband is angry that she has picked a fight and he repeats the cliché that she would be less volatile and more manageable if she were barefoot and pregnant (DeMouy 42). In the husband's view if she "had a couple of children she could take it out on" she would not "heckle and tyrannize" over him (Porter 44). Implicit in his taunt is that she is somehow a lesser woman because she cannot produce children.

The husband also attempts to use sex as a palliative for her anger. He initiates sexual play

which fails because she has heard and experienced it all before. Sex does not remedy the bitterness of their situation.

He rubbed her shoulder a little. It doesn't really matter so much does it, darling? Sometimes when they were playful, he would rub her shoulders and she would arch and purr. This time she hissed and almost clawed. He was getting ready to say that they could surely manage somehow when she turned on him and said, if he told her they could surely manage somehow she would surely slap his face. (43).

The wife remarks on his faithlessness of the previous summer and this infidelity appears to be one-half of the basis for their argument. Last year he apparently had remained in town for the ostensible purpose of working, while she had gone out alone to the farm to make it habitable for the forthcoming season.

She had her notion of what had kept him in town . . . So, she was going to bring all that up again, was she? Well, she could just think what she pleased. He was tired of explaining. It may have looked funny but he had simply got hooked in, and what could he do ? . . . Yes, yes, she knew how it was with a man: if he was left by himself a

minute, some woman was certain to kidnap him.
And naturally he couldn't hurt her feelings
by refusing! (Porter 45)

DeMouy dismisses the possibility that the husband may have been unfaithful: the wife only "suggests" his faithlessness because she wants to express "her sense of isolation" (42). Hendrick, on the other hand, gives rather more credence to her statement by noting that "his casual affair" is another strand in the unraveling rope of their marriage (95). From the textual evidence it appears that this is a major, not a lesser, cause of her distress and anger. While it is clear that their frustrations and antagonisms have been building for a considerable length of time--no other explanation is possible in the face of the explosive bitterness of their argument--the importance of this particular issue of the husband's adultery is evident because it, unlike their other problems, has been unquestionably raised before ("So, she was going to bring all that up again"). That she has raised the issue again suggests that it has remained, and will remain, an unreconciled problem. The husband's extra-marital affair further suggests that he has separated love from sexuality. As the husband attempts to use sexuality as only a means to pacify his wife, his adultery similarly indicates that he sees a disparity between love and eroticism.

Although the husband is mystified at his wife's behavior, he does not attempt to understand her grievances, frustrations and resentments. He ascribes

her actions to nonsensical, female hysteria.

She could work herself into a fury about simply nothing. She was terrible, damn it: not an ounce of reason. You might as well talk to a sieve as that woman when she got going. (Porter 47).

DeMouy pertinently observes that although "she is the one who names specific problems, even if circuitously, [h]e resorts to name-calling and points out her 'real' role to her" (43).

The quarrel which has as its basis the sexual division of labour and sexual jealousy or faithlessness ends on account of nightfall--to be resumed in the heat, dust, and chaos of the succeeding day. Nothing has been resolved: hostility and anger has surfaced and then been repressed to be brought out again on the earliest possible occasion and for the slightest provocation. The husband returns from the store, with the coffee, the rope and his "his masculine pride still intact" (Hendrick 96). She greets him in her role as the traditonal wife. She has prepared supper for him; her face is "fresh," "smooth," and composed; she is coy and talks baby talk; she initiates sexual play by jostling and leaning against him.

The final line of the story masks layers of irony. She asks him if, "he knew how she was," and he responds, "Sure, he knew how she was" (48). It is clear that he does not understand, nor attempts to understand, what has upset his wife. He does not

recognise that the division of labour is unfair--that she feels overwhelmed by household chaos--nor does he recognize her concern about sexual fidelity as legitimate. Neither does she understand that her volatility is detrimental to solving their problems. Neither has learned the importance of flexibility. He would be "damned" if he would "spend his life humouring her," she will be damned if he does not.

In the form of a dramatic monologue, Porter employs in "That Tree" a masterful use of dramatic irony: between the journalist's perception of himself and the judgement of the reader exists a considerable discrepancy. This discrepancy is promoted through the objective narration and is not unlike the recorded, third person, conversation between the protagonists of "Rope." As William Nance observes, this "permits the ironic narrator to be constantly present, judging the speaker by his own words" (Nance 37). The female characters in this short story and in "A Day's Work" which is examined subsequently, are equally priggish, unforgiving, and sexually glacial. Their respective marriages and the marriage in "Rope" are also acrimonious and corrosive unions of opposites and not unlike the malevolent and destructive relationship between Jenny and David in Ship of Fools.

The story centres on the abortive marriage of a journalist who becomes successful--"an authority on

Latin-American revolutions and a best seller"-- subsequent to his divorce. The journalist has recently received a letter from his ex-wife asking for a reconciliation and this letter has brought back, in greater relief, the memory of the events which precipitated the failure of his marriage (Nance 37). He feels some guilt--"she had kicked him out and it served him right"--and consequently he also feels compelled to explain to "to any friends and acquaintances who would listen to him" the circumstances surrounding his marriage breakdown (Porter 66). His companion, who listens to his tale but is never identified, remains a "shadow" across the cafe table--only "his guest." His guilt and his compulsion to explain himself suggests that he, like the Ancient Mariner, is attempting to expiate his sins though the frequent recounting of his story. The identification of his companion as a guest also suggests an allusion to the Wedding Guest.

Prior to their marriage the journalist and Miriam had carried on a "chaste long-distance engagement which he considered morbid and unnatural" (Porter 71). He solves his temporary problem of celebrate bachelorhood by living in the interim with an Indian girl. This girl is very unlike his wife. She is a sensual, acquiescent female who "cheerfully" divides her time between posing for other painters, "the cooking pot, and his bed." She bears him a son but at the impending

arrival of Miriam he callously sends her and the child away with a only a dowry of a few sticks of furniture. While the journalist is sowing the remainder of his wild oats, Miriam is living in the Midwest, saving her money from her teaching job and filling a hope chest with linens and fancy underwear--both items suggesting her hopes for the marriage house and the marriage bed.

Immediately upon her arrival, Miriam's hopes are shattered by the reality of her position: her husband is little more than a romantic parasite and his house is little more than a hovel--no furniture, no water and none of the modern American conveniences that she had planned for and expected of marriage. That the journalist's house is gayly decorated with flowers in anticipation of her arrival is little compensation for Miriam. These flowers suggest an sexual initiation rite, but it is not an initiation in which Miriam will joyously participate: she silently sweeps "the gardianias aside to sit on the edge of their "lumpy," procrustean, marriage bed (Porter 72). Before their marriage the journalist imagines that he will initiate his wife into the wonder of love-making. He believes that all virgins, however austere their behavior, [are] palpitating to learn about life, [are] . . . hanging on by an eyelash until they [arrive] safely at initiation within the secure yet libertine advantages of

marriage. (Porter 73)

Miriam "upsets this theory." During their love-making she is inattentive with her mind "elsewhere" and she feels that once this "sacred rite" of the wedding night is "achieved the whole affair [descends] to a pretty low plane" (Porter 73). His wife spends most of the honeymoon in tears, particularly at the breakfast table and at night in the bridal bed. In short their honeymoon was a "dreary failure" and is only a prelude to the inevitable and general failure of their marriage. While the Indian girl had "cheerfully" cooked over a brazier, washed the clothes and dishes in an outdoor stone tub, and passionately warmed the journalist's bed, Miriam finds the conditions of her marriage unfair, onerous and inadequate compensation for the loss of her virginity (DeMouy 75).

The conflict between these two is essentially a struggle that is contained and represented within the character of the journalist (Nance 38). He imagines that he is a free spirit living the ideal life of the artist and he speciously hopes that his life will "end by making a poet of him" (Porter 77). Miriam is the voice of his conscience, and as such she is a tangible representative of his unsuccessfully repressed conventional values, which also include sexual values. This unhappy marriage, is "a sort of allegory of the conflict within the protagonist's own mind" (Nance 38).

That she is his alter ego is suggested firstly by the fact that they were both schoolteachers--a fact which the journalist attempts to repress (Porter 72). It is also contained in his bald assertion that his

old-fashioned respectable middle-class hard working American ancestry and training rose up in him and fought on Miriam's side. He felt that he had broken about every bone in him to get away from them and live them down, and here he had been overtaken at last . . . It was as if his blood stream had betrayed him. (Porter 77)

The wife stands for middle-class, earnest, prim, Mid-Western values, while the journalist fancies that he is a romantic, Bohemian spirit who rejects traditonal values in favour of being a "cheerful bum lying under a tree . . . writing poetry" (Porter 66). That the journalist "never [gets] to that tree he meant to lie down under" is evidence--despite his insistence to the contrary--of the dominance of his conventionality over his romanticism. While in Mexico, the journalist is indulging in escapism rather than searching for poetic truth or beauty (Nance 40). The journalist spends his time in Mexico drunkenly "rehearsing" for lying under that tree by "lying under tables at Dinty Moore's. . . " (78). His time is divided between

hanging around dirty picturesque little cafes with a fresh set of clever talkative poverty-stricken young Mexicans who were painting or writing or talking about getting ready to paint or write. . . .

and

a gang of Americans like himself who were living a free life and studying the native customs. (Porter 77, 78)

One of the reasons that the journalist remains fascinated with his first wife is because he has never been able to get underneath her austere and practical exterior. Miriam never forgets herself. Even when they are dancing--often an image of lovemaking--he can "feel her tense controlled hips and her locked knees, which gave her dancing a most attractive strength and lightness without any yielding at all" (Porter 75). Here, the journalist reveals profound ambivalence regarding his wife's rectitude and his expressed desire for license. On the one hand he is attracted by her strength without yielding and on the other he is frustrated by her rigidity and angry that he has never emotionally nor sexually possessed her. Like Porter's heroines examined in Chapter Two of this thesis, he is torn between a desire for abandoned lovemaking and prim sexual morality which disapproves of that desire: he dichotomously perceives woman as either whores or wives. He rejects the whore--the Indian girl--as an

unsuitable mate for life, yet he is unable to form a good relationship with the puritan wife he marries. The journalist further reveals his ambivalence when he describes her nightclothing. She has the "most becoming nightgowns" he had ever seen which implies that he continues to find her sexually attractive while knowing full well that the reality belies the promise of passion. Notwithstanding her nightclothing she will remain sexually aloof and inexpressive, and he will continue to perversely find this aloofness appealing (Porter 68). If Miriam were to become like the Indian girl, he would most probably find her allure gone.

Miriam makes clear the nature of her feelings regarding their life together. She points out to him that his friends are ne'er-do-wells, looking for easy money; he is a bum; his poetry is bad; and his bed is vastly over-rated. She also makes it clear that she does not need nor want his protection. Before she had arrived in Mexico, he had imagined her as a trapped little bird in a cage that he was going to emotionally and sexually free and "once freed, she would perch gratefully on his hand" (74). Implicit in this image is his belief that he will not only sexually and emotionally free but also protect his little bird. His expectations, like Miriam's, are disappointed and this disappointment becomes clear to him one night in a cafe. A gunfight almost transpires between four, fat

revolutionary generals, who had come to the cafe to "get drunk . . . and pick-up . . . French whores." Every "right-minded Mexican girl just seize[s] her man firmly by the waist and [spins] him around until his back was to the generals, holding him before her like a shield . . . " (Porter 70). Miriam hides under a table and by this act she, in the journalist's mind, emasculates him by refusing his role of protector. It was the "most humiliating moment of his whole blighted life" (Porter 70). Miriam proves to him "once and for all that her instincts were out of tune" (Porter 71).

The story closes with the journalist's overly vociferous insistence that he will take back his wife only on his terms. He will attempt to re-make her into his image of the whore--the Indian girl--by not marrying her and by demanding that she "take whatever he [chooses] to hand her, and like it" (Porter 79). The guest, like the narrator and the reader, knows that this is bluster: he will most probably re-marry his wife. Romanticism has lost the battle to conventionality. The pattern of his life, whereby he has become successful, respectable and ultimately conventional in order to please his wife suggests that rather than the "poet" winning the battle, his alter ego--his wife--has triumphed. He has become everything she hoped. In a less ironic story the victory of a journalist over a poet would be the stuff of tragedy;

but this journalist is merely a poseur. Their reunion means that he will now walk Miriam's "chalk line" and that their marriage will likely become spiritually and sexually more constrained and unforgiving. His decision to reconcile implies that, rather than liberating himself, he will attempt to further repress his emotional and sexual needs and desires.

"A Day's Work" is Porter's most savage and sardonic story of marriage and, like all of the marriages in Porter's short fiction, the failure of sexual relations between Halloran and his wife, Lacey, is both symptomatic and causal of the general failure of their relationship. Lacey shares with Miriam a stringently puritanical attitude toward sexuality, which, from the first moments of its inception, preordains their marriage to irreconcilable antagonism. The marriage is also doomed because Halloran, like most of Porter's masculine characters, is a selfish, lazy, self-important little man, who blames his wife for the failure of his status to match his self-image. Certainly on an emotional level, and perhaps on a subconscious, sexual level, there is also a sadō-masochistic element in their relationship: Lacey is a masochistic martyr to her marriage; Halloran is assaultive; each psychologically and emotionally brutalize the other.

Lacey is a chronic complainer and her husband's

laziness and her overwork are tangible, self-evident reasons to complain. She enjoys the vicissitudes of her life which are Halloran's seven-year unemployment and the consequent necessity to wash other people's laundry. Lacey is also sexually repressed and this handicap is exposed within the first page of the story. She is ironing a chiffon nightgown, over which she exclaims, "'God's mercy, look at that indecent thing'" (Porter 388). That the nightgown is decorated with "cream-coloured lace" reinforces the irony of Lacey's name: she is a bony, uncompromising, sour woman, who uses her pharasiac, unforgiving faith as vindication for her emotional and sexual inclemency. According to Halloran, Lacey in her youth was attractive and, like the journalist's wife in "That Tree," her attractiveness contrasts to her underlying feelings of disgust for sex and sexuality: Lacey "had legs and hair and eyes and a complexion fit for a chorus girl" but her feelings of revulsion for the flesh and its processes are so deep-seated that she has never taken "off all her clothes at once, even to bathe" (Porter 398). Predictably the sexual relations between Lacey and Halloran have always been a failure: Halloran thinks that she is "hateful" because of "her evil mind thinking everything was a sin, and never giving a man a chance to show himself a man in any way" (Porter 398). Halloran feels himself emasculated by his wife.

Lacey is also very religious, and she uses her religion as a justification for denying warmth and understanding not only to her husband, but also to her daughter. Her daughter telephones, and is in some distress over her marriage. Lacey, masochistically reveling in her martyrdom, tells her daughter to "bear with the trouble God sends as her mother did before her" (Porter 394). Lacey also uncharitably tells her daughter that she will never be welcomed back home, and that "if anything goes wrong with [her] married life it's [her] own fault" (Porter 392). The irony of this claim is lost on Lacey, since she holds Halloran responsible for the failure of the marriage. Halloran, without the benefit of sanctimony and far less publically, in turn blames Lacey for his failure because she has unmanned him actually through denying him sexual relations and symbolically by denying him the opportunity to make easy money, to which he sees his manliness as being tied. Lacey would not allow Halloran to work in the numbers and protection rackets for McCorkery, a shady Irish politician whose campaign funds and livelihood are made from crime. Halloran missed his chance and is now on relief. At the time, Halloran acceded to her wishes because Lacey was pregnant with their only daughter and "it wouldn't do to excite her" (Porter 396). Implicitly Halloran is blaming her femaleness and her matriarchy, which has

castrated him, for his financial and social failure.

McCorkery married Rosie, a girl of easy sexual morals, and Halloran attributes McCorkery's success to his wife. Rosie is everything that Lacey is not. As is very frequent in Porter's female characters women, tend to be dichotomized into temptresses or wives. This duality is most evident in the contrast between María Rosa and María Concepción; the Indian girl and Miriam; Ninette and Madame Blanchard ("Magic"); dona Julia and Lolita ("Hacienda"). It is also realized in the characterization of Lacey and Rosie.¹ Rosie is apparently highly sensual, for the first time Halloran meets her she undresses him with her eyes and, unlike Lacey, she "knows how to loosen her corsets and sit easy"--clearly a comment on Rosie's sexual availability and highlighting Lacey's coldness (Porter 390-391). Lacey immediately knows the difference between herself and Rosie and she is insulted at being introduced to a woman of easier morals. Even Halloran admits that Rosie has "the smell of a regular little Fourteenth Street hustler" (Porter 391). Notwithstanding Rosie's implied promiscuousness, Halloran is convinced that McCorkery had "gone straight up the ladder with Rosie," while he had gone straight "downward with Lacey Mahaffy" (Porter 392). Like Mr. Thompson of "Noon Wine," Halloran attributes his lack of success not to his indolence or incompetence but rather to the wife

that he marries (Nance 65). Subconsciously he is also attributing his failure to Lacey's emasculation of him.

Halloran goes out to the pub, in search of a drink and a job from his friend McCorkery. True to Lacey's description, McCorkery is a gangster and his accompanying friends are little more than strong-arm hoods. Halloran gets drunk on McCorkery's whiskey, makes a fool out of himself, and is pushed out the door and into a cab, clutching some bills that McCorkery has stuffed into his hand. He believes that McCorkery has given him a job, while the money in his hand is tangible proof that he has been shown the door. He returns home to Lacey and an argument ensues. Lacey unimpressed by Halloran's claims of employment, tells him that he "can keep his dirty money" (Porter 404). Halloran, besotted and enraged, sees Lacey, not as one who will "save her soul in spite of" her mate, as she tells him, but rather as the incarnation of the devil. He hurls a flat iron at her, staggers downstairs and gibbers to the cop on the beat that he has killed his wife. Lacey, resurrected, appears at the top of the stairs with a welt over her eye. In a contradiction of Halloran's earlier assertion that he has never hit his wife (Porter 397), the cop on the beat observes, "That's a fine welt you've got over your eye this time, Mrs. Halloran" (Porter 405, emphasis added). This is

not the first time Halloran has assaulted his wife. Since the policeman knows Lacey from church and since she desires to preserve her good reputation as a god-fearing, long-suffering wife, she denies that Halloran has injured her and in this transparent lie--transparent because the policeman knows Halloran has assaulted her--exists Lacey's public display of her martyrdom. Maintaining the facade of the badly-treated yet loving wife she also fondly addresses the comotose Halloran: "Watch your big feet there, you thriving, natural fool." They get Halloran upstairs and into bed, where he passes out. Lacey then methodically wets and knots a towel and sadistically proceeds to beat her husband.

She walked in and stood over the bed and brought the knotted towel down in Mr. Halloran's face with all her might. . . . "That's for the flatiron, Halloran," she told him, in a cautious voice as if she were talking to herself, and whack, down came the towel again. "That's for the half-dollar," she said, and whack, "that's for your drunkenness--" Her arm swung regularly, ending with a heavy thud on the face that was beginning to squirm, gasp, lift itself from the pillow and fall back again . . . "For your sock feet," Mrs. Halloran told him,

whack, "and your laziness and this is for missing Mass and"--here she swung half dozen times--"that is for your daughter and your part in her. . . . " (Porter 405-406, last ellipsis is Porter's)

Sexual and emotional relations between Mr. and Mrs. Halloran are brutal, and this final brutality confirms the devastating hatred and enmity that inheres in their marriage. Like so many other heroines in Porter's fiction, it is also evident that Lacey is viciously bitter that she has traded her virginity--perhaps her claim to pristine sainthood--for marriage to a ne'er-do-well. There is a final multifaceted irony which shows that Lacey is not only a sanctimonious hypocrite, but that she has changed: her desire for sack cloth and ashes becomes a passion for sadism. Although McCorkery is no less a gangster than he was in Halloran's youth or no less a gangster when Lacey tells Halloran only a few minutes earlier that McCorkery's money is "dirty," Lacey has changed since she has now decided that it is no longer immoral for Halloran to work for him. She phones her daughter to tell her good news. This change in Lacey's attitude is related to her assault on Halloran. Lacey finds, after administering the beating to Halloran, sadism more satisfying than masochism: she no longer cares to indulge in self-mortification, and she no longer cares

to indulge in the financial deprivation, which is its necessary corollary. Throughout "A Day's Work" Lacey's avariciousness and parsimony is emphasized and it must have always been a battle as to whether her martyrdom was sufficient payment for her poverty: until her beating of Halloran she did not love money as much as she loved her hairshirt, Halloran. But the balanced has been tipped. She now prefers sadism and money, rather than masochism and its concomitant poverty: rather than being brutalized by Halloran, she now prefers to do the brutalizing. The final irony is that her selection--at least in terms of her husband's employment prospects--will be disappointed. Notwithstanding, the relationship between Lacey and Halloran has changed: it has inconceivably become more unrelentingly sinister and brutal.

Although "The Cracked Looking-Glass" is among Porter's best stories, unaccountably critics have devoted very little attention to it.² Most of this critical attention has focused on an analysis of Rosaleen's dreams as wish fulfilment and a method by which she makes the barrenness of her life more palatable.³ Most critics have noted but fastidiously tended to downplay the importance of the sexual incompatibility of this couple.⁴

"The Cracked Looking-Glass" opens on the evening of the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary of a childless Irish couple

who are separated by a thirty-year age difference. Dennis, of Irish parentage, was raised in Bristol, and consequently he has always felt in exile, whether in Britain or America (Hardy 48). Rosaleen, on the other hand, had felt a sense of community in her native Ireland, but now feels estranged and alienated in her adopted land: she is surrounded by "heathens," "bold" foreigners, and "sly, . . . mean" natives (Porter 115). Dennis retired a number of years ago to a small farm from his job as a headwaiter in a New York hotel. Unlike her husband, Rosaleen has had little chance to explore her youth outside a rural setting. She was married to Dennis when she was twenty-two, and except for the short time when she was employed as a domestic servant in a New York household, most of her life has been spent in a rural setting either in County Sligo, where she was born, or rural New England. Dennis, who is familiar with life in a large city but prefers life in the country, senses that, because of her limited experience, his wife may be unhappy and disappointed with the quietude of rural life and the routine of farm chores, and, most importantly disappointed with her marriage. He worries that someday "she would say . . . , 'It's no life here, I won't stay here any longer,' and she would drag him back to a flat in New York, or even leave him, maybe" (Porter 120). Dennis is sober-minded, rather dull, and happy to sit in his special chair, puffing on his pipe in the comfort of his warm farm kitchen. Rosaleen is an attractive, strong, lively girl who loves dancing "feast

day[s]," and "a bit of bright colour" in her clothing. Rosaleen, true to Dennis's fears, feels that she is living in a spiritual desert and she compensates for this emptiness through a time-worn re-hash of her tall tales, her past dreams, and her past experiences. Dennis, bored and irritated, has heard all of them before, until they are better known to him than the events of his own life (Porter 106). The only new topic of conversation between Dennis and Rosaleen is the recounting of her most recent dreams. The barrenness of Rosaleen's life is revealed when she tells a neighbour that her dreams are "all" she has "to go by" (Porter 122).

Not only is their life together spiritually barren, it is also sexually inclement. Dennis is impotent; Rosaleen is frustrated. When Dennis first met Rosaleen she was "a great tall rosy girl, a prize dancer, and the boys were fairly fighting over her" (Porter 106). This suggests that there is an element of male pride in Dennis's two-year pursuit and ultimate winning of the desirable young girl with many suitors. After their marriage, Dennis is not so certain that he has a bargain since he "began almost to wish that he had let one of those strong-armed boys have her . . . [but] after she had cooled down a bit, he knew he could have never done better" (Porter 107). Porter is delicately hinting that the sexual needs of a lively, girl were in excess of the ability of an older husband. This problem has increased over the years. Dennis is evidently aware of his current

sexual shortcomings since he wonders what Rosaleen thinks "of him now he was no human good to her. Here he was, all gone, and he had been so for years. . . ." (Porter 110). On the other hand, Rosaleen continues to appear to Dennis as sexually attractive--if not inspiring--as she ever did, since in his eyes she has not aged a year (Porter 106).

Not only is Rosaleen disappointed with her husband, she is also disappointed that she has no children. She feels the need for both a husband--in all senses--and children. She has neither. Unlike Grandmother in The Old Order in the final chapter, she is unable to compensate for the failure of the marriage bed through nurturing her children. Rosaleen attempts to compensate for her sexual frustration through re-living her past conquests of the masculine heart. These voids in Rosaleen's life are crystalized one evening when Rosaleen is milking the cow. This cow represents the dual aspects of nurturing and sexuality (DeMouy 65) which are being denied Rosaleen. The cow is just beginning oestrus and soon will be "running wild through the fields roaring . . . for another calf" (Porter 107). Rosaleen presses her head into the flank of the cow and admits: "It's no life, no life at all. A man of his years is no comfort to a woman" (Porter 107). Unlike the cow, Rosaleen feels that her most basic needs--a genuine husband and children--remain unsatisfied. The "slow mumur" of the milk hitting the pail effectively taunts Rosaleen since the cow, unlike Rosaleen, has no reason to "complain . . . about the things of her

life" (Porter 107).

Rosaleen's dissatisfaction with the sexual aspect of her marriage is evident in her dealings with other men. Four men--the salesman, Kevin, Hugh Sullivan, Guy Richards--are introduced in the course of the story and Rosaleen indicates sexual attraction toward each of them. The first and least important male is the salesman. The conversation between Rosaleen and the salesman is mildly flirtatious: the salesman flatters Rosaleen and she responds coquettishly. The salesman likely suspects that Rosaleen is sexually frustrated since among their topics of conversation is a discussion of how Dennis is failing in his old age: she tells him that Dennis "isn't up to himself" (Porter 118). In an effort to sell his goods, the salesman plays to Rosaleen's loneliness and frustration firstly by flattering her that she is still beautiful, therefore desirable, and secondly by suggesting that if she buys one of his pots fewer vitamins will be lost in the cooking process. Here, the implicit consequence of more vitamins would be the return of her husband's sexual potency. It will also have the added bonus of making Rosaleen more attractive since her hair will become more curly. Porter's astringent humour is in evidence when Rosaleen rushes to wash the "potatoes to cook in the pot that made the hair curl" (Porter 119). Rosaleen's alacrity is not for the isolated benefit of having a curlier hair-do.

Kevin, a young Irish boy who boarded with Dennis and Rosaleen five years ago, is the second sexual interest for Rosaleen. Rosaleen reveals her interest in Kevin through sexual jealousy. When Kevin shows Rosaleen a picture of his girl, tears come into her eyes and she tells Kevin that she does not approve of this "brassy, bold faced hussy" (Porter 108). Jane Krause DeMouy suggests that tacitly Kevin understands that he and Rosaleen are sexually attracted to one another. She interprets their gay banter as a form of sublimated love-making and by telling Rosaleen he has another girl he is committing adultery (DeMouy 68). It seems more likely that Kevin had not realized that Rosaleen was enamoured of him because when he learns of her more than sisterly interest in him, he leaves the farm almost immediately.⁵

Rosaleen, in her boredom and frustration, decides to go on an adventure. She manufactures a dream whereby her sister has become ill and she must therefore go to her. She is at least partially aware that she is looking for a temporary escape from her ossified rural life, while subconsciously Rosaleen is looking for romance. Significantly she buys a pulp magazine of love stories to read on the train, and she spends most of her time in New York at a movie house, eating chocolates, and weeping over the sentimental screen romances. The "way she entertains herself with the two romantic love movies, reveals what the real purpose of the trip has been all along" (Hardy 86). It

is also significant that Rosaleen's travels take her to the exact cities--New York and Boston--that Kevin had planned to visit when he abruptly left the O'Tooles' farm (Porter 109). Although he is unable to fully face the truth, her husband likely suspects that Rosaleen is looking for romance: he probably understands more about the real purpose for the journey than does she. Dennis castigates himself for "'thinking such thoughts about about [his] . . . wife'" but he cannot face the "great" or overwhelming "question" why she has gone to make her visit to Boston (Porter 123).

Rosaleen arrives in Boston and finds that her sister has either moved or died. She sits weeping on a park bench, and meets an equally unhappy young Irish boy, Hugh Sullivan. Much as the travelling salesman intuitively Rosaleen's sexual and emotional frustration, this boy also accurately interprets her subliminal message. After Rosaleen has given the hungry boy food and a ten dollar bill, she offers him a place in her home because he has a "right to live in a good Irish house" (Porter 128). The boy interprets this as a sexual advance and, like the other characters in the story--her husband, Kevin, her female neighbour--a certain amount of authority is given to their judgement. Rosaleen is scandalized because she outwardly believes that her motives are innocent, while inwardly she longs for physical and the concomitant emotional contact. This is suggested by the fact that she is not initially insulted at the boy's sexual innuendo, but rather is initially and immediately

flattered at his complement that she is a "fine woman" (i.e., that she is still sexually attractive). Porter has created a wryly hopeful quality in Rosaleen's thoughts when she fantasizes that "he would have made love to her if she hadn't stopped him, maybe." (The final "maybe," implying wish fulfilment, is emphasized since Porter has used this word twice before in the immediately preceeding sentence.)

Rosaleen is confusing the roles of mother, wife,⁶ and sister in her interaction with Kevin and the boy. Rosaleen had given birth to a baby a number of years ago, but it died within a few days of its birth. While Kevin is clearly an object of sexual interest for Rosaleen, she also thinks that had her baby lived he would have been like Kevin: Kevin is both son and lover (Porter 116). He is also like a "brother" to her (Porter 104). The confusion of roles is also apparent in Rosaleen's attitude to Hugh Sullivan: he might be "Kevin or [Rosaleen's] own brother" or her "own little lad alone in the world" (Porter 127). Rosaleen's confusion of roles is partially supported by her relationship to her husband: rather than being a wife to him she is confined and defined as a nurturing mother. As she affirms, "it wasn't being a wife at all to wrap a man in flannels like a baby and put a hot water bottle to him" (Porter 109). Rosaleen is forced into the role of nurturing mother to the man with whom sexual behavior is appropriate, while she is denied the appropriate nurturing role of mother to a child (DeMouy 66).

Rosaleen's confusion regarding the different roles masks her her sexual interest in Kevin and Hugh Sullivan. She represses these feelings because it is immoral both in her terms and in society's. One night while lying in bed thinking about the generic qualities of other unhappy marriages, Rosaleen projects her situation on others and the conflict between the outer imposition of morals and her inner needs is manifest. She imagines a mirror image--reinforcing the symbol in the title of the story--of her own marriage where a woman weds a man too young for her, and "he feels cheated and strays after other women till it's just a disgrace." Rosaleen feels cheated and it is apparent that, although she does not act on her impulses, she too would like to stray from her marriage. She comes closer to her situation when she observes that "when a young girl marries an old man, even if he has money[,] she's bound to be disappointed in some way" but notwithstanding, a woman "turns a perfect strumpet" if she "flirts with other men" (Porter 113). Rosaleen is not aimlessly musing about the constitution of justifiable adultery. Although Rosaleen represses her sexual desire for others, by her own definition she is a strumpet in her flirtations with men other than her husband.

Rosaleen not only represses her sexual desire within socially unacceptable situations, but it is also evident that she feels sexual ambivalence--at least in the early part of her marriage--within the socially acceptable state

of marriage. Dennis and Rosaleen discuss their wedding night:

When they were in bed Rosaleen took his head on her shoulder. "Dennis, I could cry for the wink of an eyelash. When I think how happy we were that wedding day."

"From the way you carried on," said Dennis, feeling very sly all of a sudden on that brandy, "I thought different."

"Go to sleep," said Rosaleen, prudishly.

"That's no way to talk." (Porter 113)

The lack of success of their wedding night is suggested by her "carrying-on," and it seems, at least partially, that society is responsible. The expression of sexuality is only appropriate within certain, well-defined limits and the suggestion is that Rosaleen, at least initially, was unable to dissociate inappropriate behavior from approved sexual behavior within a marriage. Rosaleen is very concerned about societal sexual mores and this is indicated not only by the repression of her sexual interest in other men but also by an incident she recalls from her youth. Just after Rosaleen has been thinking about her disappointment with her marriage, she remembers how she once had "let the entirely wrong man kiss her, she had almost got into bad trouble with him, and even now her heart stopped on her when she thought how near she'd come to being a girl with no character" (Porter 114). The juxtaposition of Rosaleen's thoughts

where on the one hand she is implicitly considering the sexual frustration of her marriage, and on the other, where she considers thwarted love-making, implies that her underlying desire for sexual gratification, most certainly within socially unacceptable situations and perhaps even within the approved state of marriage, conflicts with her conscious mind. Rosaleen is ambivalent: like Miriam and Lacey, Rosaleen finds sexual relations offensive but unlike Miriam and Lacey, she continues to desire sexual fulfilment. The failure of sexual relations between Rosaleen and Dennis is perhaps not fully ascribable to Dennis's incapacity.

Rosaleen's female neighbour is representative of societal strictures against extra-marital sex. Just as the Sullivan boy accurately assesses Rosaleen's subconscious sexual motives, the neighbour--however cruelly and unkindly--also speaks with authority about Rosaleen's extra-marital sexual interests. The neighbour's slow-witted son had helped Dennis while Rosaleen was away but he was frightened to go home on the night Rosaleen returned. He stays the night with the O'Tooles and the next day Rosaleen kindly walks him home to explain his absence. The neighbour accuses Rosaleen of sexual misadventure.

"A pretty specimen you are Missis O'Toole, with your old husband and the young boys in your house and the travelling salesmen and the drunkards lolling on your doorstep all hours--. . . ."

"A pretty sight you are, Missis O'Toole,"

said the woman, raising her thin voice somewhat, but speaking with deadly cold slowness. "With your trips away from your husband and your loud-colored dresses and your dyed hair--" (Porter 131)

Rosaleen's sexual attractiveness is paramount in her mind, and just as she was initially pleased that Hugh Sullivan thought she was attractive, she is initially more incensed, not because of the charge of sexual profligacy, but rather because her neighbour implies that she is unattractive and old, since she dyes her hair. She bolsters her flagging ego by thinking that the woman is jealous of her hair and jealous that "the men were everywhere after her" (Porter 132). The mirror that the female neighbour or the Sullivan boy hold up to Rosaleen is an accurate representation of Rosaleen's inner self, but the image that they present is so different from Rosaleen's self-image that she does not recognise the reflection as her own (Johnson, "Love Attitudes" 89). Rosaleen is everywhere trying to convince herself that she is still sexually desirable and that her girlish charms are still powerful. For example, on the train ride home from Boston, she indulges in wish fulfilment by imagining that Kevin was truly in love with her and that he "would have stayed if she had said the word" (Hardy 57; Porter 129).

The final object of Rosaleen's sexual attention is her neighbour, Guy Richards, and he is probably the greatest threat to Rosaleen's fidelity. Both Kevin and the Sullivan

boy are much younger than Rosaleen and she does, at least partially, consider that they are her sons or brothers, which would put a greater constraint--given the taboo against incest--upon her indulging in her unconscious wishes. As evidenced by Kevin's rapid departure, he likely is not sexually attracted to Rosaleen, while Richards on the other hand seems to be partially interested in Rosaleen. He, for example, winks at her or shouts out her name as he passes their house. He is the greatest threat to Rosaleen's fidelity because he is a mature man with no claims to being like a son or a brother to her.⁷ Rosaleen is very aware of Richards as a sexual being and she knows that it is "courting . . . danger to let him set foot over the threshold" (Porter 134). He dances and drinks and frolics most of the day through and Rosaleen, for all her heavy moralizing about Richards, would like as carefree a life. Rosaleen reveals envy of and interest in Richards when she vociferously insists that he ought to be more mature since he is "fit to have grown children . . . , the same as myself, and I'm a settled woman and over her nonsense!" (Porter 116). Rosaleen is not a "settled" matron of forty-seven and she finds the tedium of her life oppressive. While Rosaleen outwardly proclaims the impropriety of Richard's actions, a wink from him is enough to send her scurrying to the mirror. With perhaps a touch of heavy-handedness, Porter portrays Rosaleen as fantasizing that Richards forces his sexual attentions on Rosaleen.

"The bold stump! said Rosaleen to Dennis.

"If ever he lays a finger on me I'll shoot him dead."

"If you mind your business by day," said Dennis in a shrivled voice, "and bar the doors well at night, there'll be no call to shoot anybody."

"Little you know!" said Rosaleen. She had a series of visions of Richards laying a finger on her and herself shooting him dead in his tracks.

(Porter 116)

Yet when Rosaleen hears Richards driving past her house, in an expectation that he will stop, she immediately rushes to the mirror to primp and confirm her image as a young, and sexually attractive woman. It occurs to Rosaleen that she forgot to purchase a new mirror--one that would not distort her image--but as John Hardy observes as long "as she lacks a true mirror, one that will accurately reflect her face, she can imagine herself as beautiful as she pleases" (57). Richards does not stop and Rosaleen's belief in her sexual allure is devastated. This has been interpreted by most critics as an epiphany of Rosaleen's self-recognition: she sees that she is an aging matron, who has relinquished her claim to girlhood and as such it is a qualified affirmation and acceptance of her life with her aged husband (Hardy 59; Wisenfarth, "Reflections in 'The Cracked Looking-Glass'" 145; Marsden 29). "Everything," as Dennis says, is "going

to be all right" (Porter 134). But the question still remains if the boredom of a life with a dull, impotent--however kindly and understanding--husband is an appropriate life. It is also questionable if Rosaleen has, indeed, faced her situation. While Rosaleen has earlier admitted to Dennis that she does not put "the respect" on dreams she once did (because her dream of her sister proved to be false), this positive step is negated by her subsequent assertion that Kevin is not dead and he will soon come to visit. Rosaleen rather than making her dreams a rationalization and justification for her wishes and desires, now represents her wishes as truth without the mystical underpinning of a dream. That Rosaleen has not changed is also supported by the fact that the symbol of her distorted vision--the cracked mirror--continues to hang in her house. There are two images that are finally reflected from the looking-glass. The one, perceived by the reader from an ostensibly unflawed and regular surface, reflects the misshapen tableau of an aging, sexually frustrated, wife-mother admonishing her truculent child-husband to "wrap up warm [in] this bitter weather. . . ." (Porter 134). The second image, and the one that continues to be reflected in the still cracked looking-glass of the O'Tooles' house, is that of a vibrant, attractive, woman, longing for "places full of life and gayety she'd never seen," and yet still wondering "whatever would become of [her]" if anything should happen to her husband.

The sexual relations between the various couples examined in this chapter are all uniformly bad. In "Rope" a lesser emphasis is placed on these sexual relations between the couple, while a greater emphasis is placed upon gender-identified roles which not only disserve the emotional but also the sexual needs of each. As with the relations of Jenny and David in Ship of Fools, intimate relations are used, not as an expression of love nor respect, but rather to smooth over the surface of some very real problems that have arisen here from the ascription of certain traditional roles to men and women. In "That Tree" the journalist reveals ambivalence regarding his wife's sexual coldness. Outwardly he claims a desire for romantic, passionate relations while, on the other hand, his rejection of the Indian girl and his intrinsic conventionality reveal his subconscious approval of puritanical sexual morality. In "A Day's Work," the marriage between Lacey and Halloran is deformed, not only by Lacey's sexual prudery, but also by a profound impulse to sado-masochism. In "The Cracked Looking-Glass," Rosaleen is trapped within a marriage to a kindly but functionally impotent older man. She is unable to compensate for the failure of sexual relations and to compensate for her emotional isolation through the nurturing of her children. She sublimates her sexual and emotional wants through the mothering of her husband and through living in a self-defensive dream world. While Rosaleen may desire

sexual fulfilment, this desire is also complicated by Rosaleen's possible ambivalence regarding her sexuality: unlike Miriam and Lacey she desires sexual satisfaction, while similar to Miriam and Lacey she also finds sexual relations less than appealing.

Porter makes no suggestion that any of the marriage difficulties could be solved. Because none of the problems reach a solution, but are usually repressed, only to resurface later, she only points to a greater intensification of aggression, unhappiness and agony. As the journalist of "That Tree" observes and which is the masochistic logos of marriage in Porter's fiction:

He had fallen into the cowardly habit of thinking their marriage was permanent, no matter how evil it might be, that they loved each other, and so it did not matter what cruelties they committed against each other. . . .

(Porter 77)

Marriage, for Porter's fictional characters, is an unrelieved, eternal sentence.

CHAPTER IV. SEXUALITY AND MOTHERHOOD

With the exception of Nannie in The Old Order, Porter's female characters examined in this chapter all see motherhood as a beneficent, felicitous, experience. For Grandmother, the nurturing of her children is an antithetical compensation for the failure of sexual relations within her marriage: motherhood and sexuality are polarized. However, in "Holiday" and "María Concepción" sexuality and motherhood are complementary and necessary components of marriage. In "María Concepción" the female life of the central character is ultimately seen as an integrated duality of sexuality and motherhood; in "Holiday" life is a tumult whereby birth, pain, marriage, sexuality, death are intrinsic and various parts of natural existence. In all, children form an inseparable part. The perceptions of María Concepción, the indistinct Müller women, and Grandmother are contrasted to Nannie's understanding of her oppression through the demands made upon her nurturing femaleness. It is not until Nannie is nearing the end of her life that she is able to reject her patriarchy and arrive at a self-contained authenticity.

The sexuality and motherhood of Miranda's Grandmother and black Nannie are explored in three of the sketches in the story cycle, The Old Order. The

sketch "The Source" is devoted to Grandmother, while "The Last Leaf" describes Nannie; together they share the "The Journey." This structural arrangement suggests their partial separateness and their partial interdependence. Nannie's experience with sexuality and motherhood is partially a mirror of Grandmother's experience but the story also reveals differences between these two women which are mostly a factor of caste and colour.

That Grandmother feels an archetypal bond with the earth and its processes is contained in the first story of the cycle, "The Source." Every year she returns to her farm and the "black, rich, soft land" which is the subtle and ineffable source of her strength and unrelenting vitality. Her return is an annual rite of renewal and purification which includes frenzied cleaning, settling arguments, and restoring order to a farm threatening to disintegrate into anarchy in her year-long absence. Her indomitable will and formidable vigor, which is applied equally to all animate or inanimate objects in her care, forces chaos back into the corners of her world and provides strength both for the inhabitants and for herself in the forthcoming year. She is the matriarch of her family and her jurisdiction over everyone--male, female, black, white--remains unquestioned.

The intrinsic contradictions between Grandmother's

inner needs and the role she must play come into sharper focus in the succeeding sketch, "The Journey." Her female (and tyrannous) strength, self-sufficiency and her need for sexual fulfilment are in opposition to the role of women in the Southern old order. In Grandmother's apparently conventional girlhood she is "gay and sweet and decorous, full of vanity and incredibly exalted daydreams" but those daydreams are of a particularly erotic nature since they threaten to "cast her over the edge of some mysterious forbidden frenzy" (Porter 335). Like Violeta, outwardly she is a paragon of virtuous womanhood, while inwardly she is in a sexual turmoil. Her fantasies include having sexual relations with her future husband and being initiated into "the sweet dark knowledge of evil" (Porter 335). She dreams in her waking consciousness of experiencing passion, while her unconscious mind physically completes her sexual desire: "after frightful moral suffering which masked altogether her physical experience she would wake in a cold sweat, disordered and terrified" (Porter 335). While Grandmother both consciously and unconsciously aspires to sexual fulfilment, the society in which Grandmother was raised demands that women sublimate their sexual desire and keep their virtue intact. Grandmother recurrently dreams that "she had lost her virginity (her virtue, she called it), her sole claim to regard, consideration

even to existence . . . " (Porter 355, emphasis added). William Nance insightfully argues that the emphasis placed on a young girl keeping her virginity intact "indicates some of the ways in which her training distorted her developing instincts and helped prepare for a life of [sexual] frustration" (Porter 96). Like Miranda or Stephen in Chapter One, the socialization process has warped Grandmother's sexual instincts. Grandmother is ridden with fear and guilt over the aura of evil and mystery that surrounds sexual relations. Nance notes the "rich ambiguity" in the statement that she lived her whole youth "'without once giving herself away'" (Porter 336; Nance 96).

That Grandmother never achieves physical fulfilment in her marriage is further evidenced by her feelings regarding the nursing of her children: Grandmother nurses her children "with a warm sensual pleasure" that makes amends "for what she missed in the marriage bed, for there also something had failed" (Porter 334). Unlike childless Rosaleen, Grandmother is able to compensate for the failure of the marriage bed through the sensual nursing of her children and by expending her repressed energies through nurturing. "Breast-feeding gives Sophia a chance to erase her sense of inadequacy (as a non-virgin) with her new capacity for nourishing" (DeMouy 125). Grandmother's nascent quality of imperiousness can also be traced to

this failure of sexual relations and her compensation for this failure. While she was likely wilful as a girl, the first occasion where Grandmother refuses to submit to the wishes of her husband is in her defiant act of breast-feeding. Rather than having someone else nurse her children, as is customary, she insists on nursing them herself. She further scandalizes her family by crossing the colour barrier: she also nurses one of Nannie's babies. Grandmother is able to restore a kind of balance in her life through mothering. Her nurturing of children--both black and white--restores to her a kind of "naturalness and humanity" which the old order of slavery, studied decourousness and virginal purity denies (Flanders 53).

Rather than blaming her society, which has distorted her developing instincts, Grandmother holds her husband responsible for the failure of their sexual relations and this failure is the root cause of her feelings of hatred and contempt for men (Nance 95). This is obliquely indicated by the first notice of Grandmother's overt hostility toward men.

. . . whenever a child was born in the Negro quarters, pink and worm-like, she held her breath for three days, . . . (my ellipsis) to see whether the newly born would turn black after the proper interval . . . (Porter's ellipsis). It was a strain that told on her,

and ended by giving her a deeply grounded contempt for men. She could not help it, she despised men. She despised them and was ruled by them. (Porter 337)

Beyond the racial question, the implication is that Grandmother's contempt for men is "deeply grounded" in her subconscious. She blames her husband for her frustration and she is sexually jealous because men seem to experience the fulfilment that she lacks.

Grandmother, like most of Porter's female characters, is also antipathetic toward all men--not just her husband--because she feels they are weak and undisciplined. She finds in her husband (as she had earlier found in her brothers and would later find in her sons) that he is purposeless, impractical, undirected, dissolute and fails to "act at crisis." (This last phrase is also ambiguous and implies a Prufrockian sexual failure.) Just as the old South creates these kinds of men, Grandmother, as a member of the old order creates monsters of her own sons by pampering and spoiling them until they were "in all probability unfit to be any kind of husband, much less a good one" (Porter 333). She fights "these fatal tendencies in her brother," and "within the bounds of wifely prudence she [fights] them in her husband" (Porter 335). But Grandmother's prescription for changing men is merely symptomatic: she remains

ignorant, and indeed supportive, of both the roles assigned to men and women by the old order. Because of the chaste role of women in Southern society, Grandmother fails to achieve a satisfying physical union with her husband, and because of the indulgent role given to men, which she tacitly supports, she fails to achieve a satisfying spiritual union with her husband (Nance 93). Like the journalist's wife in "That Tree" she has traded her maidenhood--her most valuable possession--for marriage and the contract is one in which she feels herself the loser. She has lost her "sole claim to regard" in a union to a dissolute, indolent, impractical man.

The death of Grandmother's husband further pushes to the foreground her qualities of authority, self-reliance, and endurance. Grandmother becomes free to make her own decisions: she is no longer constrained by the "bounds of wifely prudence" nor "ruled" by those she despises. She emerges "into something like an honest life" (Porter 336). After the death of her husband, she is liberated from the female role of gentility: she builds fences, hand saws lumber, plants crops. But a disparity continues to exist between Grandmother's theory and practice. In "The Source" this inherent contradiction is firstly suggested by her romantic notions of "walking at leisure in the shade of the orchard, watching the

peaches ripen" and her actual practice of hard work and despotic organization. On Grandmother's final day on the farm she gives in to these romantic and quixotic notions by the sidesaddle riding of her favorite horse. This last ritual is a reaffirmation of her youth and a reaffirmation of the propriety of the old order where ladies are pastoral beings who wander aimlessly in orchards and decorously ride their beloved mounts. It is also a denial of her self-sufficiency and her single-mindedness. While continuing to dig fence post holes, Grandmother effectively defends the old order, although it is responsible for the failure of her marriage, and ultimately her society. She, for example, disparages her daughter-in-law for "unsexing" herself, as the "new woman" unsexes herself by earning their own living or asking for the vote. The character of Grandmother reveals the contradictions of the old order between the outer imposition of mores and roles--both male and female--which Grandmother partially incorporates within herself, and her inner needs of sexual and spiritual fulfilment which these roles deny.

Both Nannie and Grandmother are matriarchial tyrants; both are confined and defined by the narrow roles of their society; both achieve independence through the death of the person with whom they are most emotionally involved. Grandmother's emancipation was

forced upon her by the exigencies of her husband's death and is commensurate with her inner needs but discordant with her early training and socialization. Nannie's initial step to freedom is through Grandmother's death while she later makes a conscious choice of independence through rejection of her maternity and its incumbent and onerous duties. In the last part of her life, Nannie reveals from core to surface she is at peace with her independence and that her role of faithful family servant and surrogate mother is one that is no longer intrinsic to her being, and perhaps never was.

The superficial similarities of Grandmother and Nannie are initially stressed in "The Journey," while their innermost differences are suggested in Nannie's story, "The Last Leaf." The two women share the identical and biblical views of children who are "conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity" (Porter 329). Their symbiotic relationship is suggested in Grandmother's ability to recall dates, while the significance of this date is provided by Nannie (Porter 328-329). Nannie's owners marry her off with an eye to her breeding potential--"with an eye to the blood" (Porter 350) while the same could possibly be the delicate intent in Sophia Jane's almost simultaneous marriage to her second cousin (Porter 333). In "Old Mortality" the marriage customs of the

old South are elucidated: Amy is similarly married off to her second cousin, Gabriel. The match is approved because "it was not as if she would be marrying a stranger" (Porter 181). Marriages in the old order are evidently made with an eye to keeping the bloodlines unsullied through familial marriage--a rather unsettling notion (Porter 181). In any event, Grandmother and Nannie begin their "grim and terrible race of procreation" but with one fundamental difference: while Grandmother had eleven children, nine of whom survive, Nannie has thirteen children, but only three survive. Despite the children's "out-of-date sentimental way of thinking" that Nannie is "a real member of the family" (Porter 349) this harsh fact substantiates that Nannie is not an equal member of the family. Notwithstanding Nannie's inferior status, her life is easier and longer when compared to her parents who lived and died in the fields.

Both women have their self-worth attached to the value the old order places on them as objects. Grandmother's worth is valued in terms of her virginity and when this is lost in an unsatisfactory marriage she compensates through motherhood. Nannie's self-worth is attached to the purchase price she commanded on the auction block of the slave market (Hendrick 58). Her self-worth is about twenty dollars.

Despite the two women's symbiotic relationship, Grandmother is clearly Nannie's superior. Grandmother is at least partially as oppressive to Nannie as Grandmother's husband was to her. Grandmother and Nannie had fought on "almost equal terms" while Grandmother defends "Nannie fiercely against any discipline but her own" (Porter 333, emphasis added). Nannie has for all her life "obeyed the authority nearest her"--Grandmother (Porter 328). Nannie has also had her place in the world "assigned" to her just as Grandmother assigned her a birth date (Porter 328). Nannie acquires partial independence through the death of Grandmother, which is similar to Grandmother's freedom through the death of her husband by whom she too was "ruled." Nannie achieves final autonomy through her own efforts firstly by her rejection of the oppressive demands of the children and lastly through the rejection of her husband. After the death of Nannie's closest but also most oppressive tie--Grandmother--she decides that she does not care any longer if the children "love" her or need her. She asks for and is granted her independence.

After Nannie has left the children, she also completely rejects her husband's attempt to reestablish a relationship. Uncle Jimbilly approaches Nannie and suggests that her cabin is large enough for them both. She interprets his overture as wanting Nannie to care

for his physical needs in her usual role of nurturing mother. She has already discarded this role and consequently will have nothing more to do with her husband. She tells him, "'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'" (Porter 351).

Nannie shows some similarities and some important differences to the protagonists of "Theft," "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," and "Flowering Judas." She, like the characters examined in the second chapter, rejects a relationship with men; unlike them, Nannie's choice to reject the incumbent duties and entailments of both marital and, in this case, maternal love is informed and wholeheartedly internalized. She understands what she is doing because of her age and experience, and she indicates no ambivalence regarding this choice. From core to surface Nannie is at peace with her independence: she is "no more the faithful old servant Nannie, a freed slave;" she is "an aged Bantu woman of independent means, sitting on the steps breathing the free air" (Hendrick 60; Porter 349).

Since marriage in Porter's short fiction is generally an unhappy experience, it is not surprising that Nannie rejects it; however, a surprise is evident in Nannie's rejection of motherhood. Katherine Anne Porter suggests that, on the whole, motherhood is a positive, beneficent experience. Frequently it is the

trade-off for an unsatisfactory emotional and sexual union or, as in the remainder of the stories analyzed here, it is the completion of a marriage. In "The Last Leaf," motherhood is oppressive and tyrannical.

The plot of "María Concepción" is elemental and simple: it is essentially a restatement of a love triangle (DeMouy 21). A young, pregnant, Mexican-Indian woman, María Concepción, discovers that her husband, Juan, is making love to an even younger girl, María Rosa. She resolves that the girl "has no right to live" but before she can act, her husband and his mistress run-off to war. María Concepción almost immediately delivers a baby, but the child dies within a few days of its birth. María Rosa and Juan return a year later and within hours of her return María Rosa also bears a son. María Concepción murders María Rosa, and takes the child as her own. María and Juan resume their life together. The simplicity of the plot, the nearness of the characters to the earth, and Porter's use of images to explore emotions (Allen, "Katherine Anne Porter: Psychology as Art" 225), all lend themselves readily to archetypal criticism.

María Concepción and María Rosa are representative of two halves of female duality: María Rosa is the temptress, while María Concepción, as her name suggests, is the virgin-mother. The initial imagistic portrait of Maria Concepcion, walking down the road

toward the market, suggests the deep satisfaction of her most basic but important needs. She is "entirely contented" with her maternal burden: it is "right inevitable proportions of a woman" (Porter 3). Unlike Rosaleen or Grandmother, a baby is not a compensation for the failure of sexual relations within marriage but rather a completion of her married life.

María Concepción is quiet, strong, and self-reliant. Juan's employer, the American archaeologist, is reminded of "royalty in exile" when he looks at her (Porter 7). Not only is she a proud woman, she is also financially self-sufficient. She achieves financial independence through her diligence in raising and marketing her chickens: she does not need Juan to supply her with her livelihood as she demonstrates during his year-long absence. María Concepción is an antithetical principle when compared to this husband. Like Porter's male characters, he is entirely unreliable--a noisy, faithless, cocksure, little man. His employer is kept busy rescuing him from sexual escapades, extracting him out of jail and out of the reach of firing squads (Porter 11). On the other hand, María Concepción lives quietly, sells her livestock, and faithfully attends church.

María Concepción is also sturdy and indomitable in her attitude to survival. She is the female principle of existence made corporeal which includes both the

life contained in her belly and death. That she also embodies the principle of death is conveyed in her implacable slaughtering of a chicken or the ultimate dispatching of her enemy, María Rosa (Hendrick 30). She is the archetypical "Terrible Mother" who will kill "so that new life may be generated" (DeMouy 23).

Just as María Concepción's mythic role is partially suggested by her livelihood, María Rosa's role of temptress is implied through the sensuality of her occupation: she keeps bees and sells the honey. The bees are described in voluptuous and sultry detail.

The delicious aroma of bees, their slow
thrilling hum, awakened a pleasant desire for
a flake of sweetness . . . (Porter 4)

Honey becomes symbolic of María Rosa's sexual authority and dominance. Juan thinks of her erotic appeal in terms of honey.

You know how she used to keep those clean
little bees in their hives? She is like
their honey to me. I swear it. (Porter 12)

Before María Concepción discovers Juan and Rosa in the cactus grove, she expresses a desire for some of María Rosa's honey which is a symbolic wish for greater sexual appeal--for a larger portion of María Rosa's erotic power. María Concepción feels that if she does not get a flake of honey she will "mark" her child.

Maria does not acquire her honey but, as George Hendrick remarks "what she saw, as she looked through the cactus, marked her baby and Maria Rosa for death" (30).

Each of the two women is represented by a dominant characteristic but each woman also exhibits recessive traits of her opposite number. María Rosa primarily represents the whore/temptress but initially she is described as being a sexually innocent "shy child" of "only fifteen years" (Porter 4).¹ That María Rosa's last name is the name of the flower is significant because Porter, in her Collected Essays and Occasional Writings, makes explicit what she perceives as the duality of this flower. Porter tells us that a medieval knight was reminded of his "lady, as well as the Blessed Virgin," by the rose and that this "sacred and profane love" has become polarized in Western society. The rose becomes "the favorite symbol" of both these aspects (147). Although María Rosa is primarily a symbol of the temptress, while also containing a semblance of innocent virginity, she also exhibits an aspect of maternity since it is she, and not María Concepción, who bears the child that survives.

As her name suggests María Concepción is primarily representative of the virgin mother, but she also incorporates to a lesser extent aspects of the

temptress--aspects of Maria Rosa. Prior to her marriage, Maria Concepción had not even resisted Juan's sexual advances "so much as Maria Rosa on the day that Juan had taken hold of her" (Porter 8).

On a literal level, Maria Concepción must "recapture Juan's sexual attention by obliterating her rival." Archetypically Maria Concepción absorbs the two vacancies of motherhood and eroticism through the death of Maria Rosa. Maria Rosa becomes the sacrifice on the altar of the goddess who demands sexuality, fertility and ultimate renewal through death (Demouy 23).

Until the murder of Maria Rosa, Juan had not been able to dominate this strong, independent female. For example, after Juan had returned from the wars he had gone to his jacal and attempted to "beat Maria Concepción by way of reestablishing himself in his legal household." She had responded by striking him back (Porter 13). To Juan, Maria Rosa is subserviant and therein lies her appeal and her difference as compared to his wife. Maria Rosa is a "girl with whom" he can do as he "pleases." He can for example "slap her and say, Silence, thou Simpleton! and she weeps" (Porter 12). "She pleases him more than any other woman" because he is able to dominate her. Maria Concepción, who is initially a strong, independent female, eventually becomes more submissive and

therefore more like María Rosa. Through her submissive attitude, she acquires more erotic power, at least in the eyes of her husband and her community (DeMouy 26). Juan feels that after his wife has murdered his mistress, after María Concepción's pleas for help, after her abject submission to him as if he were a god (she crawls toward him as he "has seen her crawl. . . toward the shrine at Guadalupe Villa" (Hendrick 33; Porter 14)), she has "become invaluable, a woman without equal among a million women" and that he will never again leave her (Porter 16). He feels himself in the dominant position, as he was with María Rosa. He exhibits his superiority through his role of protector.

"Oh, thou poor creature! Oh, madwoman!
Oh, my Maria Concepcion, unfortunate! Listen
. . . Don't be afraid. Listen to me! I will
hide thee away, I thy own man will protect
thee! (Porter 14, Porter's ellipsis)

Her community does not give her up to the authorities because the authorities are alien or 'other' to the Indian villagers. They also feel that María Rosa's death is just. It is the judgement of Maria Concepcion that Maria Rosa died from a surfeit of "honey and . . . love." And her community agrees. (Porter 19). The "forces of life," represented by her community, protectively gather around her and range themselves "invincibly with her against the beaten

dead" (Porter 20).

María Concepción, through the murder of María Rosa incorporates those vacancies of eroticism and matriarchy within her being. María Concepción's life becomes an integrated whole and the final image is of this integration. The body of María Rosa's baby has become part of her own: she cradles it "in the hollow of her crossed legs." As the baby is now part of her, she becomes part of the whole. She and her husband and her child and the earth are united and breathe together as one:

María Concepción could hear Juan's breathing.

. . . She breathed, too, very slowly and quietly. . . . The child's light, faint breath was a mere shadow moth of sound. . . .

The night, the earth under her, seemed to swell and recede together with a limitless unhurried, benign breathing. She drooped and closed her eyes, feeling the slow rise and fall within her own body. (Porter 21)

Like "María Concepción," "Holiday" is an exploration of the female experience with motherhood and sexuality.

"Holiday" is also unusual in Porter's canon of fiction because it is one out of two stories--the other being "Hacienda"--that is written in the first person. While "Hacienda" has underlying currents of menace, "Holiday" is a celebration of life and its processes--birth, marriage, sexuality, and death--which is singular in Porter's fiction.

As George Core observes, "Holiday" is a pastoral "return to the Garden, to a prelapsarian world forever green and innocent" (in Hartley and Core 150).

Core and Hendrick note that the sensibilities of the narrator are very similar to Miranda, while one critic has unashamedly identified her as Miranda (Core 151; Hendrick 108; DeMouy 167). This narrator has fled from a destructive and apparently insoluble problem to the farm of a German immigrant family--the Müllers--on the Louisiana/Texas border. The narrator's spiritual ravages, reflected in the desolate countryside, are contrasted to the fundamental and instinctual health of this peasant farming family. As the lifeless landscape changes from the austerity of winter to the vitality of spring, the narrator begins the process of healing her invisible psychic wounds.

This story has a triple focus, and the tension between these foci give the story its dramatic forward movement.² The story firstly describes a "psychic turning point" in the narrator's life (Core 150); secondly, it depicts a segment of time in the imperishable life rhythms of an agrarian family; finally it is a story about the estrangement and exclusion of one of the family members from this communal group. These characters in "Holiday" also describe three different approaches of man to his community. The first approach is that of the narrator. She feels

divided into many fragments, having left or
lost a part of myself in every place I had

travelled in every life mine had touched,
 above all, in every death of someone near to
 me that had carried into the grave some part
 of my cells. (Porter 417)

The narrator's experience with others has diminished her, while the Mullers represent a communal unity of "one human being divided into several separate appearances" (Porter 417). The third possibility is represented in Ottilie. Ottilie is the badly crippled eldest daughter. She is given the job of providing the family with food, but while her employment suggests nurturing, she is denied the warmth that would normally accompany this role. The narrator prefers to remain aloof from the family, but Ottilie is unwillingly isolated from her family and community by her infirmities. She belongs "nowhere" (Porter 417). Unlike the fragmented narrator or the organic unity of the Mullers, Ottilie is a self-contained--however wretched--"whole" (Porter 417). Porter's exploration of sexuality in this story is confined to the Muller's familial relations, and consequently this final discussion is also confined to an examination of the family, while ignoring, for the most part, the special relationship that develops between the narrator and Ottilie.

Like María Concepción's complete and comfortable integration of sexuality and motherhood, this family views sexuality as only one aspect of life, which is indissolubly linked to procreation, and ultimately to life's processes of marriage, and death. Unlike Grandmother, maternity is not a

compensation for failure in the marriage bed: it is an intrinsic part.

The family is essentially patriarchal, with Father Müller--"God Almighty himself, with whiskers"--as its head. The women stand behind the men at mealtimes and serve them and there is a clear division of labour on the basis of gender. The women care for the animals and milk the cows; the men are responsible for field work. This portrait of an old order reveals none of the contradictions and none of the frustrations of the old order in which Miranda was raised: the men are not weak and undisciplined; the women are not bitter and grudging. As Winfred Emmons observes, "in the Müller family there is the same sense of discipline and of order that pervades Miranda's family, without any hint that anyone would like to escape from this tyranny. None of the Müllers seems [sic] to feel that there is anything to escape from" (36). The portrait of husband and wife is gentle and loving. When Annetje looks at her husband they smile "with a gentle, reserved warmth in their eyes, the smile of a long and sure friendship" (Porter 416). Father and Mother Müller similarly have deeply loving relationship. During the storm Father Müller's first concern is for his wife and, in a family in which the emphasis is on endurance and stoicism, his open weeping over the loss of his wife is evidence of his profound love for her (Emmons 36).

The essential emphasis of "Holiday" is on the female province of maternity (DeMouy 167). The women are

continually seen to be gently caring for all babies, whether they are the offspring of the family or the animals. Even the unmarried girl, Hatsy, is involved with maternity, since it is she who shepherds the children at supper. Men are portrayed as carelessly callous toward life, since they "love to kill" and "love to hurt things" (Porter 427). Annetje is the most solicitous toward the animals while all the women are gentle toward human babies.

Their mothers handled them with instinctive gentleness; they never seemed to feel troubled by them. They were as devoted and caretaking as a cat with her kittens.

(Porter 419)

Sexual matters in this tale remain understated with only the barest hint of a bawdy celebration--but it is a celebration rather than a matter for shame and repression as in "The Downward Path," and "Virgin Violeta;" or obscenely distasteful as in "That Tree," and "A Day's Work;" or a downright failure as in "The Cracked Looking-Glass" and "The Journey." At Hatsy's wedding the innocent exchange of the bridal kiss--very "chaste and reserved"--is contrasted to the uncomplicated sexual wisdom of the wives. The women whisper teasing and homespun ribaldries into Hatsy's ear and achieve the expected result of her blushing from "forehead to . . . throat" (Porter 424). Sex and its results--birth--are indissolubly bound and are a subject matter for low but innocent jokes as evidenced by the

celebration at the birth of Gretchen's baby.

Over coffee and beer the talk grew broad, the hearty gutturals were swallowed in the belly of laughter; those honest hard-working wives and mothers saw life for a few hours as a hearty low joke, and it did them good. The baby bawled and suckled like a young calf, and the men of the family came in for a look and added their joyful improprieties.

(Porter 428)

This uncomplicated approach is not only evident in the joyful aspects of living, but also exists in their approach to life's miseries. The family have long ago forgotten their grief over Ottilie's unfortunate accident, just as their grief over the death of Mother Müller will soon fade. Her family "would visit the grave and remember, and then life would arrange itself again in another order, yet it would be the same" (Porter 432). Birth, death, sexuality, pain are all of a piece in the perdurable life of this family, and as such it is very unusual in Porter's fiction.

For Grandmother her matriarchy is both a compensation for the failure of her marriage but it is also a cause for her feeling less worthy since society effectively devalues women when maidenhood is relinquished in marriage.

Grandmother is entrapped within the contradictions and paradoxes of sexual stereotyping. On the one hand she is

unable to develop a sexually satisfying union because of the emphasis placed on virginal integrity, while on the other her enjoyment of her nurturing, which is a direct result of the loss of her virginity, is undercut because it is the cause of her devaluation. Grandmother is both a victim but also a perpetrator of the distorted values of the old order. She disparages women for being independent, and she raises her sons to be as weak and useless as were her husband and her brothers. She is also as oppressive toward Nannie as her own husband was to her. Nannie is unusual in Porter's short fiction because she rejects both marriage and maternity. In "María Concepción" and "Holiday" the successful integration of the role of mother and sexual role of wife is at the expense of self-hood. The women in these two stories are submissive and subservient to their mates, and Porter is suggesting that within marriage no other accommodation is possible.

CONCLUSION

Porter identifies family, culture, church, chance and stereotypes as the sources of sexual repression in childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, and in that identification she is clearly indicating that she wishes it were otherwise. In Porter's short fiction mature characters tacitly reap the fruits of this disruption of their sexuality. While Porter does not elucidate the reasons, it is clear that the heroines of "Flowering Judas," "Theft," "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," and "Hacienda," are profoundly ambivalent about their sexuality. Miranda and Laura both desire a sexual connection to others. Laura's desires are indicated both in the pattern of her life, by which she seeks emotional involvement and in her final dream where the death to which Eugenio would take her to is the death of her maidenhood. Like Laura, Miranda's dreams also reveal a death wish for herself, again implying a desire for sexual dissolution. Laura and Miranda also have a death wish for the men to whom they are attracted and this suggests that they also fear sexuality. The heroine of "Theft" comes to recognize her responsibility for the absence of love in her world: she comes to understand that, on an emotional level, she has rejected love while she subconsciously feels the absence of sexual love, symbolized by her empty purse, which her past actions have also precipitated. The protagonist of "Hacienda" escapes from the deathly air which suggests her

fear of the kind of sexuality she finds there, but as the artist who has selected these events as significant--much as Miranda in The Old Order sees various childhood incidents as significant--she reveals that she is also fascinated with the dark sexuality that is part of the hacienda.

Generally the sexual and emotional relations between childless couples are ferocious and their misery is unrelieved by the presence of children. The sexual relations, as sexual relations, seem to be satisfactory between the husband and wife of "Rope" but rather than being an expression of genuine affection they are used as a weapon. While Miranda observes and Violeta briefly encounters this disparity, "Rope" portrays the consequence of this separation of biology from love. This disparity is further evidenced by the husband's infidelity, since he has clearly separated love from sensuality by looking for sexuality elsewhere and remaining remorseless because of his success. Unlike the heroines examined in Chapter Two, Lacey and Miriam reveal no ambivalence regarding sexuality: they find the whole affair uncongenial. Miriam sees marriage, not as a beneficent emotional and sexual union, but as certain set of material conditions; Lacey initially sees Halloran, her marriage and sexuality, as her scourge, while later her role becomes the dispenser of personal but divinely sanctioned retribution. Halloran and the journalist believe that their wives have unmanned them, not only by their disinterest in sexuality, but also by nagging them

about their indolence. In "The Cracked Looking-Glass," Porter is suggesting that the emotional isolation that Rosaleen feels is not very different from the isolation that her unmarried heroines also feel.

Grandmother's marriage to her ne'er-do-well husband is not substantially different from the marriages examined in Chapter Three, but unlike these marriages, she is able to compensate for the emotional sterility and sexual failure through the nurturing of her children. The sexual and emotional relations between María Concepción and Juan, and between and the Müller women and their respective spouses are all characterized as successful. Porter is suggesting that these marriages work because these women are uncomplicated, closer to nature and therefore are happy with the traditional relationship between men and women.

Although Porter most often sympathetically portrays the difficulties of female experience, she is a creature of her time: Porter--like Grandmother in The Old Order--is illustrative of many of the conflicts and contradictions of an older order. "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" is almost universally admired by critics, and while it is technically excellent, Porter's characterization of Adam--the perfect man--is as circumscribed a stereotype as the family's construction of the perfect female in "Old Mortality." Because of this, I find "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" diminished in quality. While Porter is sympathetic to the earthy experience of María Concepción and the Müller women, these

stories are also a tacit approval of the traditional relations between the sexes, which essentially sees women as inferior, and consummately contented with that inferiority. Porter is ultimately suggesting that happy marital relations are only possible at the expense of women's self-esteem. Independence is only possible outside a relationship, but contradictorily none of Porter's characters, with the exception of Nannie, are happy with that independence. At the exorbitant price of maternal love, and love between the sexes, Nannie represents the only hope of accommodating independence and happiness. In Porter's fiction, you are damned if you love and damned if you do not.

Porter has often been accused of being a pessimist and while her fiction runs far short of ebullient optimism, the creative act, in and of itself, is an expression of hope. Porter's fiction, as well as the woman herself, displays unresolvable--given the society and culture of her time--and unresolved contradictions. Her artistic gesture which indicates some of the difficulties that she perceives and others which she does not encodes a plea for greater understanding and for less sexually and emotionally repressive relations between men and women, parents and children, society and the individual.

NOTES

Chapter I

¹ Joseph Wisenfarth believes that Stephen, instead of making a toilet mistake, has lost his breakfast. This reading is not supported by the text, since immediately prior to the accident Stephen wants "so badly to go to the bathroom" but is afraid to because the bathroom is immediately next to the bedroom, in which his parents' violent quarrel is taking place ("Negatives of Hope: A Reading of Katherine Anne Porter" 86).

² See also DeMouy's book, Katherine Anne Porter's Women, which examines Porter's fiction in terms of this duality.

³ That Granny was twenty years old is carried by her assertion that she has "changed her mind after sixty years" and would like to see George (Porter 86). Granny is in her eighties.

Chapter II

¹ There is only a brief notice of Laura's "early training" (Porter 92), while the story only moves into the near past of one month ago.

² The only notice of Miranda having a past other than Adam, is her demotion from news reporter to drama critic at her newspaper and the sense of Miranda's and Miranda's family's past association with death which occurs in her first dream, while the past of the

heroine of "Theft" is only suggested in the fragments of her letter from Eddie.

³ The only sense of the first-person narrator having a past is that she has changed since she last saw Carlos ten years ago (Porter 157). There is also a brief movement into the near past when the affair between Lolita and Julia is described.

⁴ Some critics, like Bluefarb and West read Braggioni's return to his wife as a genuine act of contrition, while others, like Hardy, see the washing of Braggioni's feet by his wife as a parody of the biblical story and Porter's treatment of Braggioni as ironic (Bluefarb 26; West, in Hartley and Core 127; Hardy 74). Walter observes that the text can support two different interpretations, the first one being that Braggioni's return to his wife is a "true spiritual change" or, the second, that it is merely a reconciliation which will be later followed by another desertion (35).

⁵ See also Walsh's essay, "The Dreams Self." He agrees that the reader is not to take Miranda at face value.

⁶ DeMouy interprets these to be the "smells of childbirth" (107).

Chapter III

¹ See DeMouy's monograph. She sees this duality

in many of Porter's characters, but does not see it as inhering "A Day's Work."

² The only article that I have found that solely examines "The Cracked Looking-Glass" is Wisenfarth's "Reflections in 'The Cracked Looking-Glass,'" in Hartley and Core. This story is briefly mentioned in Wisenfarth, "Negatives of Hope: A Reading of Katherine Anne Porter;" Marsden; Johnson; Warren, "Irony with a Center" in Robert Penn Warren, ed. Hardy has devoted a chapter of his book to this story; DeMouy has a substantial analysis; Hendrick devotes a few pages to an analysis.

³ See Hardy, p. 55; Wisenfarth, "Reflections in The Cracked Looking-Glass," p. 138-146.

⁴ See Hendrick, p. 106; Hardy, p. 54; Nance, p. 47.

⁵ Hardy also notes that the revelation of Rosaleen's sexual jealousy probably provoked Kevin's hurried departure (40).

⁶ DeMouy has noted that Rosaleen's attitude to Kevin and Hugh Sullivan is both maternal and sexual.

⁷ Cf. DeMouy, who views Rosaleen's attitude to Richards as partly maternal (66).

Chapter IV

¹ Cf. DeMouy, who sees the two women as polar opposites (66).

² Core notes the double nature of the story, in that it is both a "psychic turning point," while also being "a typical episode in the Müller's life" (Hartley and Core 150).

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